

Complexity, Diversity and Ambiguity in Teaching and Teacher Education: Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching

Martina Riedler* & Mustafa Yunus Eryaman**

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey

Abstract

There is consensus in the literature that teacher education programs exhibit the characteristics of complex systems. These characteristics of teacher education programs as complex systems challenges the conventional, teacher-directed/ textbook-based positivist approaches in teacher education literature which has tried to reduce the complexities and ambiguities of the life in teacher education programs to something knowable, measurable and controllable. The increasing interest towards complexity in teacher education has brought with it some challenging questions which this narrative research study aims to address: what is complexity and ambiguity in teaching and teacher education? Do preservice teachers identify or do they experience complexity in classrooms? How do preservice teachers deal with diversity, complexity and ambiguity in their teaching practices? What kind of strategies do preservice teachers develop to deal with complexity and ambiguity in diverse school settings? How do preservice teachers define and interpret Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching to deal with complexity and ambiguity in culturally diverse classrooms?

Keywords: Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness, Tact of Teaching, Complexity, Diversity, Ambiguity, Teacher Education, Narrative Inquiry

***Martina Riedler** is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (Turkey). She earned her PhD in Art Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA) where she was also a Fulbright Scholar and received a masters' degree in Art Education and Studio Art from the University of Fine Arts Vienna (Austria). Drawing on critical theory and progressive education, Dr. Riedler's research emphasizes questions regarding museum education and democratic participation, memory institutions and collective national identities, the hidden curriculum of informal learning sites, critical theory in teacher education, and qualitative research methods in art education.

Correspondence: riedler@comu.edu.tr

**** Mustafa Yunus Eryaman** is the vice president of the World Education Research Association and professor of curriculum and instruction at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. He has served as Associate Dean in the Faculty of Education and as the Interim Chancellor at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. He is currently a visiting TUBITAK-DAAD professor at the Institute for International Comparative and Intercultural Education in the University of Hamburg. He serves as a council member in the European Educational Research Association. He received his MEd from the University of Missouri-Columbia and his PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Teaching as Practical Philosophy* (2008) and editor of *International Handbook of Progressive Education* (2015), and *Peter McLaren, Education, and the Struggle for Liberation* (2009).

Introduction

The students we teach are larger than life and even more complex. To see them clearly and see them whole, and respond to them wisely in the moment, requires a fusion of Freud and Solomon that few of us achieve.

Parker Palmer (2007), *The Courage to Teach*

Life in schools as it is experienced, even in the most ordinary of circumstances, is contextual, ambiguous and complex. Each momentary action characterizes a punctuation point in a constant transformation of school and classroom activities, creating a complex course of patterns that explicates our experiences in educational settings (Carr, 1995; Collins & Ting, 2014; Eryaman, 2007, 2008; Kiss, 2012). To understand teaching practice is to discover meaningful patterns in the flow of experience in the classrooms, while recognizing the possibility of transformation of these patterns in complex classroom circumstances due to the particular convergence of events at any point in time. Preservice teachers' teaching experiences in the actual classrooms often reveal a recognition of the vulnerability and turmoil because of their unfamiliar with the new teaching environment and expected practices.

One of the most important arguments of the positivist paradigm in teacher education is that scientific knowledge provides preservice teachers with an objective and better description of the life in schools so that the preservice teachers can develop a mastery of technical components that are applicable to all student populations and teaching contexts. Yet, the 'real-life' of teaching and learning in diverse classroom settings is different than the world simplified by the positivist paradigm in teacher education - teachers experience it as dynamic and complex, or more complex than the school life that are commonly described by the positivist paradigm and its techniques (Clarke & Collins, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Collings & Ting, 2014; Crowell & Reid-Marr, 2010; Davis, 2003; Davis & Sumara, 1997, 2001; Eryaman, 2008; Eryaman & Riedler, 2009; Jay & Jonson, 2002). For a long time complexity has been ignored by teacher education literature, in which traditional paradigm prescribed an objective and universal teacher education following deterministic and instrumental rules (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Collins & Ting, 2014; Davis, 2003; Davis & Sumara, 2005, 2007; Mamchur & Apps, 2009). But teachers live in 'situations of complexity' in culturally and linguistically diverse school settings. Consequently teacher educators gradually realize the constant transformation and change occurring in educational phenomena for which traditional paradigms based on mechanistic accounts are no longer valid. Rather than seeing complexity and ambiguity in diverse classroom settings as a provisional deficiency arising from preservice teachers' inadequate or partial understanding of classroom reality, or as something that has to be eradicated in order for objective teaching and learning progress to proceed, complexity and change have now been acknowledged as an emergence in the diverse educational settings teacher and preservice teachers help to co-create and in which they live (Collins, 2004; Eryaman, 2006; Florio-Ruane, 2002). Even though, we frequently hear the argument that teachers and preservice teachers live in an age of 'expanding complexity,' the issue of complexity and change in diverse educational settings is still peripheral in methodical and theoretical thinking in teacher education.

The increasing interest towards complexity in teacher education has brought with it some challenging questions which this narrative research study aims to address: what is complexity and ambiguity in teaching and teacher education? Do preservice teachers identify or do they experience complexity in classrooms? How do preservice teachers deal with diversity, complexity and ambiguity in their teaching practices? What kind of strategies do preservice teachers develop to deal with complexity and ambiguity in diverse school settings? How do preservice teachers define and interpret Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching to deal with complexity and ambiguity in culturally diverse classrooms?

Teacher Education as a Complex System

A complex phenomena is irreducible. It transcends its parts, and so cannot be studied strictly in term of a compilation of those parts. It must be studied at the level of emergence (Davis, 2003, p. 43).

There is consensus in the literature that teacher education programs exhibit the characteristics of complex systems (Bruce & Eryaman, 2015; Cochran-Smith, 2003; Collins & Ting, 2010; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Eryaman, 2008; Florio-Ruane, 2002; Jay & Jonson, 2002). In the literature, the main characteristics of teacher education programs as complex systems are identified as follows: (i) sensitivity to initial condition; (ii) disequilibrium; (iii) unpredictability; (iv) a non-hierarchic network structure; (v) feedback loops; (vi) a capacity for self-organization or self-regulation; (vii) a nested structure; (viii) diversity; and (iv) decentralized control (Darling, Clarke & Erickson, 2007; Gleick, 1987; Kiss, 2012; Mamchur & Apps, 2009).

These characteristics of teacher education programs as complex systems challenges the conventional, teacher-directed/textbook-based positivist approaches in teacher education literature which has tried to reduce the complexities and ambiguities of the life in teacher education programs to something knowable, measurable and controllable (Collins & Clark, 2008; Eryaman, 2007; Jay & Jonson, 2002; Kiss, 2012). Complexity theory, on the other hand, suggests that teachers and preservice teachers ought to be less instrumental and narrow; rather than thinking of teaching and learning as prescriptive and sequential, they could understand it as a web of progressive and transformative possibilities, where their responsibility is to allow learners to develop their own connections and insights through shared complex learning activities. When teaching and learning process is constructed in this way, it is the interactions among teachers, learners and ideas that drive learning forward, what complexity theory identifies as the principle of networked complex interactions (Collins & Ting, 2014; Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000; Eryaman, 2008).

Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching in Teacher Education

Preservice teachers go through a long apprenticeship of observation. They spend their entire elementary and secondary school education observing teachers teach. Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue that the stamina of traditional teaching practice originates in part from the fact that teachers are quite possibly to teach as they themselves were educated. Their past classroom experiences provide them with thoughts about what teaching subjects in real classrooms is like, how teachers and students should behave in schools. So, when teachers start teaching, they implement the practices and habits of their former teachers.

In fact, the kind of teaching that is based on the notions of Practical Wisdom, Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching requires preservice teachers to reflect critically on their practices and transform their prior beliefs to have practically wise and tactful ideas about what they should be trying to accomplish in complex teaching environments. Van Manen (1991) describes tact as an ability to be oriented and sensitive to learners in a way that enables teachers to take mindful actions in specific situations. "A tactful person seems to sense what is the right thing to do" (Van Manen, 1991, p. 126). The ability for wise action is developed through a process of thoughtful and critical reflection on past teaching experiences in order to enrich future experiences and develop a "pedagogical fitness" (Van Manen, 1991, p. 205). Pedagogical fitness is defined as "a cognitive and emotional and moral and sympathetic and physical preparedness" that manifests itself as a mindful orientation to learners (Van Manen, 1991, p. 205). Thus tactful teachers have the sensitivity, resiliency, and intellectual knowledge to understand situations, interpret their significant meanings, and sense what their role should be in terms of entering in or distancing themselves from the situations. In this study, tact is an important concept to analyze how preservice teachers critically reflect on their safe transition into their student teaching environment and transform their practices based on that reflection. Such a reflection and transformation process for both thinking and action might be similar to Kuhn's (1970) depiction of paradigm shifts in scientific societies. Preservice teachers have ideas that are not nearly

as elaborate as those of scientists; however, preservice teachers also function within frames of reference as scientists do, and they employ these frameworks to articulate their teaching plans, construe their experiences, and respond to classroom events. So when teacher educators ask for a completely different style of teaching, they are demanding preservice teachers to analyze and transform their own understanding in a totally different frame of reference. This task is not a simple one. Transformation might be easier if teacher educators could describe–indeed prescribe–the practices they wanted, but they cannot do so.

The kind of teaching based on the notions of Pedagogical Fitness and Tact of Teaching requires preservice teachers to encourage students to develop their own ideas, respond wisely and critically to those ideas, and then translate those ideas to a better understanding of the larger social and political issues of social justice and equality. This kind of teaching requires many tactful social and moral-practical judgments. Evidence of student learning is obscure at best, and it is hard for teachers to judge their own success in the classroom. Sometimes a carefully wrought lesson misfires, and sometimes a lesson hastily thrown together is wildly successful. This ambiguity makes the frames of references of teachers and preservice teachers especially important. Teachers and preservice need to be able to draw on these frames of reference to interpret the situations they face, make sense of what happens in their classrooms, and make decisions about what to do next. These frames are likely to derive from the childhood experiences that these teachers had in their classrooms with their teachers.

An essential goal for preservice teacher education is to alter or modify these prior frames of reference. Preservice teacher education can be ideally positioned to nurture such an examination of earlier thinking and action (Loughran, 2002). It is located dialectically between the preservice teachers' previous experiences as student and their future practices as teachers in their own classroom settings. From these experiences, preservice teachers construct the principles that will guide their future experiences. If these principles are not transformed or changed during preservice teacher education, their own continuing practices as preservice teachers will reinforce the experiences, pushing them even more robustly into their prior conceptions of teaching and eliminating the possibility that these principles might ever change.

In this study, we aimed to explore the meanings, essences, practices and processes of educational “change” and “growth” in preservice teacher understanding over time through deliberation, dialogue, and performance in complex, ambiguous and diverse teaching and learning environments. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology of this study let us explore how preservice teachers conceptualized teaching in complex and ambiguous situations through their personal experiences while locating the preservice teachers and our own pre-understanding and preconceptions about notions of “complexity” and “good teaching” in diverse classroom settings within the theoretical discussion. There is a constant dialectical interplay between what the literature theorizes about “complexity” and “good teaching,” what research participants have as a prior understanding, and what the realities of the actual classroom are. This dialectical interplay between theory and practice through the narrative inquiry provided us with a frame to recognize how the preservice teachers were thinking about teaching, and the connections they were constructing between their actual classroom experiences and their course work.

Research Method: Narrative Inquiry

Our decision to explore the experience of preservice teachers has directed us toward the concept of human science research which, according to Van Manen (1990), “studies ‘persons,’ or beings that have ‘consciousness’ and that ‘act purposefully’ in and on the world by creating objects of ‘meaning’ that are ‘expressions’ of how human beings exist in the world” (p. 4). In narrative inquiry, the focus of attention is on the narration of human experience and the immediate resulting feelings through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Being that it is a

communication and understanding of action and experience, it could be considered to be metaphorical.

Connelly and Clandinin, (2006) define narrative inquiry as follows:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

In this study, narrative inquiry is employed as research method in order to explore how preservice teachers conceptualized teaching in complex and ambiguous situations through their personal experiences.

Research Setting and Participants

Setting

This study was conducted in a middle school English methods course at a Midwestern university in the United States of America. We interviewed the preservice teachers (participants) about their field experience related activities in this course. We further focused on participants' experiences in solving educational complex problems at the field experience component of the course.

Participants

This middle school English methods course consisted of six male and nineteen female students. The twenty-one preservice teachers in the course match the profile cited by Gomez (1996) in terms of who typically becomes elementary teachers—white, middle-class, English-only speaking females. Five male and sixteen female students were white-European American, and one male student and one female student were Asian American, one female student was an African American, and one female student was Latina. Five preservice teachers in the class participated in our study (see Table 1)

Table 1. Preservice Teachers and Their Backgrounds

Preservice teacher	Level of education	Gender	Ethnicity
Julia	Graduate	Female	Caucasian American
Jane	Undergraduate	Female	African American
Maria	Undergraduate	Female	Latina American
Helen-Young	Undergraduate	Female	Asian American
George	Undergraduate	Male	Caucasian American

All participants were “twenty something,” ranging in age from 20 to 26 years old. Only one student identified herself as a lower middle or working class student, and the others identified as a middle class student. We conducted a purposeful sampling strategy to choose the case participants for this study.

Data Collection and Generation

Consistent with narrative research methodology, we generated data from multiple sources including open-ended individual and group interviews, and the documents and writings that the preservice teachers and course instructor produced.

Data Analysis

Beginning data analysis was directly influenced by my research questions, since the narrative inquiry tends to respond to the research questions and data at hand. Data were thematized through the qualitative coding technique in order to ascribe related labels to sections of the data sources (Van Manen, 1990).

Both inductive and deductive coding ensued as transcripts of the interviews and documents were analyzed and categorized with both codes relating to the focus of the research questions and codes that emerged from data. When data collection was completed with each participant, we read his or her data file several times in order to develop the internal codes mentioned above. We then went through all the materials, sorting them according to the initial codes that emerged in our dialogues. The initial sorting was similar to the one described in Lincoln and Guba (1985). We cut and pasted a copy of the data file on my computer, so that, for example, we would have all the comments Maria had ever made about field placements on one Microsoft Word file, and all his comments on lesson planning on another Microsoft Word file, and so on. Some initial codes were common across the participants; others were particular to each person. 20 to 25 initial codes were generally sufficient to categorize all the data for each person.

In order to make sense of and reduce these categories, initial codes were turned into theme codes, which represented concepts that came from the interviews, and documents of the five preservice teachers. Narrative text, which came from the interviews of participants, was attached to each theme code by displaying color-coded pieces on index cards that could be physically manipulated. Such physical manipulation allowed for hunches about themes to be checked by being able to array data in different configurations and reorganize data across types of data sources and time in the semester during which the data was collected. This procedure for displaying data also allowed for quick and easy sorting in order to determine frequencies of occurrence. By way of example, theme codes were organized to look for the presence or absence of themes as the semester progressed across different data sources.

At this point in the analysis, there were three general themes developed. These three themes are: a) the transition of preservice teachers into an actual teaching environment, (b) learning how to deal with ambiguity and developing a sense of authority and care, and (c) understanding teaching as a student-centered and culturally relevant practice.

Findings

Our narrative exploration in this study helped us realize that preservice teachers learn differently and in various ways, and they gain different insights from the experiences provided to them. The five preservice teachers in the study came into the teacher education program with their own insights and viewpoints. They discussed how they defined being a good teacher in diverse settings and how they learned how to be a good teacher. They furthered the different ways they approached teaching and teacher education. Their practices gave a picture of how they were learning to transform or modify their teaching, as well as translating the pedagogical aims of the program into their teaching. As we began to document the students' experiences in the course and in the field

systematically, we recognized that these preservice teachers had much to teach us about their identities and their perspectives on the issues discussed in the teacher education program.

When we analyzed the preservice teachers' arguments on these issues, we noticed that most of them had extreme difficulty connecting their coursework to their field experience and thus found their teacher education program fragmented. This issue looked like most ubiquitous with the preservice teachers who did not have any teaching practice. They looked for genuine and realistic stories and practical strategies of teaching that could provide change in the culturally and linguistically diverse classroom settings. They did not want to be forced into an overwhelming endeavor where they had to try to save the world all by themselves. The preservice teachers tried to bring their prior experiences and stories to life by revealing the nuances of time, place, and interactions with the different characters, including themselves, who were part of the stories.

Our inquiry of these tensions and engagements helped us summarize the following conclusions and associated themes that define the partial characteristics of practical wisdom or what Van Manen (1991) called the 'tact of teaching' which the preservice teachers developed throughout their semester. These included (a) the transition of preservice teachers into an actual teaching environment, (b) learning how to deal with ambiguity and developing a sense of authority and care, and (c) understanding teaching as a student-centered and culturally relevant practice.

Preservice Teachers' Transition into an Actual Teaching Environment

Our analysis of the narratives of the preservice teachers' teaching experiences in the actual classrooms revealed a recognition of the vulnerability and turmoil that characterized the practice of preservice teachers in their first student teaching where they were unfamiliar with the new teaching environment and expected practices. Understanding what preservice teachers were experiencing was important for us to understand their frame of reference for their actions. Understanding the nature of being new was also important for preservice teachers who have been described as frightened, anxious, and vulnerable. Although their feelings were internal and could only be fully realized by themselves, the preservice teachers were not alone in terms of being understood and supported.

Throughout our conversations, the preservice teachers revealed how they acquired insight into their vulnerability in relation to their being new and inexperienced. For example, in our conversations, George stated that "I just feel scared that I'm going to do the wrong thing and that my students will not be engaged" and Julia mentioned that "to be honest, I was extremely nervous and scared that our lesson plan would fail and that the students wouldn't get involved with the activity. In addition, I had a difficult time addressing the class at first, and Marsha introduced the lesson plan for both of the class periods." Both described their feelings and experiences about their first student teaching.

Many preservice teachers further acknowledged capability differences between themselves and their cooperating teachers and understood and described what it meant to be new while still developing practical knowledge. Their perspectives were gained from many sources, including memories of their own past experiences of being students and insights gained through past field experiences and experiences in their teacher education courses.

Preservice teachers also recognized what it meant to be new by placing meaning on the information they processed as they watched, listened to, and worked with their cooperating teachers. They described being constantly tuned in to their cooperating teachers and reflected on what they saw and how they handled the uncertainty of classroom situations. It was in response to the messages received from cooperating teachers and teacher educators that the preservice teachers directed their courses of action. As described by Jane, "What I'm trying to do is get a feel for this early stage of how a classroom teacher behaves and what kind of teaching they practice or what kind of classroom learning they require" (Third open-ended Interview).

While most of the preservice teachers appreciated what they had learned in the teacher education program and the models of their cooperating teachers, they realized that they could not merely replicate the strategies, methods, and practices of their teacher educators or their classroom teachers. They learned from their teaching experiences that speaking with their own voices and finding practically wise and tactful strategies to let them fit into their unique classroom experiences were essential pathways to their own successes. Julia's statement about her growth in understanding teaching demonstrated how she began to see the importance of practical and tactful decision-making in her classroom teaching:

What worked for one group of students may not for another group and in that sense in each classroom all the students you have keep reshaping your beliefs, skills and theories as a teacher. At the beginning, I want to gain skills and move on, but you never get it right always in teaching. I learned that I have to get used to seeing my growth as a work in progress. (Julia, from the Field Notes)

As a result of the unpredictable teaching environment, most of the preservice teachers understood that they had to be attentive and exercise choices of what actions to take to facilitate learning. They also had to not to worry too much about failure in their first time of teaching the progressive and performance-oriented strategies which they learned in Professor Wesley's class in their teacher education program. For example, after his first student teaching experience, George stated that

I think I learned an important lesson through my experience in that class. When I become a teacher, it's important not to discard a lesson just because you tried it once and it didn't turn out so well. Sometimes the class just might be nervous or quiet because they aren't used to teachers stepping outside the box. Although you might be tempted to say that the lesson failed and throw it away forever in your disappointment, not only might it be successful in a different class, it might be successful in that same class if you try it again after the class has gained some experience with what you're trying to do. (George, Group Conversation)

George's reflection on his first and second teaching experiences demonstrates that he could have decided that since the progressive and performance-oriented strategies in his first situation did not work; he could have turned to the traditional-test oriented teaching methods for the rest of his teaching career. However, he realized that his failure actually turned out to be a success when he successfully taught the same strategies and lessons in his second and third teaching experiences. George understood that he had to see his growth as a work in progress. Many situations that the preservice teachers faced, were intimidating and caused them to be hesitant in assuming the responsibility to take risk. As they gained experience, they involved and engaged themselves further and gradually gained the confidence and ability to assume responsibility for their own teaching situations.

Professor Wesley, on the other hand, remained strong in his affirmation of what needed to be done and where attention needed to be directed throughout the semester. "A tactful person must be strong, since tact may require frankness, directness, and candor when the situation calls for it" (Van Manen, 1991, p.125). When the preservice teachers directed their attention away from the progressive and performance-oriented strategies and process-based lesson planning in his course, Dr. Wesley firmly challenged the preservice teachers about their traditional frame of reference in their class activities and assignments. Although Dr. Wesley was aware of the importance of understanding and being patient and sensitive to the feelings of preservice teachers, he also realized he had a limited period of time to transition the preservice teachers into their new actual teaching environment. Therefore, he needed to develop strategies constantly to move the preservice teachers forward in learning at a comfortable, yet steady pace. Dr. Wesley strategized new ideas and methods for learning by assessing where the preservice teachers were, where they should be, and where they needed to go. Knowing where the preservice teachers were involved understanding what responsibilities they were becoming safe and comfortable with, what responsibilities and strategies they were unsafe or struggling with, and how they were progressing overall. Having this sense of knowing directed Dr.

Wesley in what topics or areas he selected for teaching, how hard he pushed or pulled the preservice teachers into situations, how he dictated the level of independence they could afford their practice, and how he should guide them in choosing what role they needed to provide to their students.

Most of the preservice teachers stated that they did not realize the relevance of Dr. Wesley's instruction of theories, methods and strategies and his challenge of their ideas and assignments until they started teaching in the actual classrooms. They further complained that they did not have enough opportunities to teach in the actual classrooms. Nor did they have enough time to discuss and reflect on the problems and issues they faced during their field placements in the teacher education course, thus overcome the challenges of linking theory and method to their classroom practice. For them, having student teaching earlier in the program would have helped them overcome their fear of failure.

Dealing With Ambiguity and Developing a Sense of Authority

Despite the tolerance for ambiguity and the recognition that each particular class can bring about transformation, most of the preservice teachers demonstrated that they acted by claiming their authority. They were conscious of set curricular and bureaucratic demands and of societal and institutional expectations. They knew they should set standards both in teaching and in behavior. In our group conversation, when I asked what made the key participants feel least like a good teacher, Helen-Young commented that she felt least like a good teacher, "when faced with an out of control student who cannot or will not respond to all approaches thereby placing themselves and other students at risk." During the following discussion she explained her point of view further:

I feared really anything that would put the rest of the class in jeopardy. I'm sure it would happen any time during my student teaching with a child and the other students in my care. For me, it's very frightening. It's not the repercussions, you know, and holding the teachers accountable and all that. It was that those kids are in my care. (Helen-Young, Third Interview)

Arendt (1961) describes the authority that exists when one takes on the responsibilities inherent in the care of others' children. She claims that the assumption of this authority and its inherent responsibility is essential in education. The fear of the potential for destruction to which Gordon (2001) refers, perhaps, lies behind many teachers' distress over the possible "jeopardy" of a loss of control in the classroom.

Developing a sense of authority requires the ability to hold one's needs in abeyance while heeding the other considerations that are important factors in the process of developing chance in practice and thinking and thus acting with phronesis. In consideration of this balance, and the balance between continuity and change, Gordon describes the dilemma as follows: "Perhaps the most important and difficult problem in education is how to preserve the new and revolutionary in the child while simultaneously conserving the world as a permanent home for human beings" (p. 47).

The equilibrium between traditional and progressive emerges in Maria's insistence on maintaining "things we all always do" while accepting the "wild and original" ideas that children might originate. Maria claimed, "Everybody suffers when the control is destabilized. It has to do with organization. It underpins the whole experience for students, if you have things down as routine, then the focus is on the [activity] itself" (Interview 3). At the same time, the boundaries that are set create the spaces for children to follow their individual paths, "As Dr. Wesley always tells us: it has to be [...] it has to be your students' agenda, not yours. You set the framework, and then you start the process of responding to them" (Maria, interview 3). Most of the preservice teachers stated that they encouraged individual responses but emphasized the initial establishment of boundaries and familiarity with routines as essential at the beginning of the teaching. For them, this boundary formation would later be able to withstand change without chaos.

Perhaps it is the fear of descent into chaos that makes control an important issue with many preservice teachers. While George, Julia, and Maria placed individual needs and experience at the

heart of their teaching, which allowed and encouraged both their creativity and that of their students, the schools they had teachers reading from scripts and demanding standardized answers from children. As Julia's reflection on her teaching in our interviews experiences revealed, content of teaching was broken and presented in small, incremental, measurable steps and conformity was rewarded. The urge to instill "one aspect" through schooling as a way of attempting to control change and ambiguity reflects Aries' (1962) description of expectation where "each person had to resemble a conventional model, an ideal type, and never depart from it under pain of excommunication" (p. 415).

Where there is a "zero tolerance" for breaking expectations of conformity, it is difficult to see where the opportunity for learning to work through conflicts and for the development of phronesis (practical wisdom) will arise. The administrators and teachers told Julia and other preservice teachers that the state and parents expected predictability and measurable outcomes and these expectations dictated much of what counted as education in this conception of school. This attitude was reminiscent of the Cartesian idea that whatever the problem, it could be solved if rendered into small and measurable pieces. That modernist viewpoint contrasts starkly with the view that attempts to explore life in its moral-political difficulty and complexity. The latter view urges preservice teachers to inquire into the complexities of pedagogy, taking into account those combinations of a concrete situation that make it a particular situation with its own setting of foreground detail within a socio-cultural background history.

Understanding Teaching as a Student-Centered and Culturally Relevant Practice

Culturally diverse classroom settings in which the teachers apply what they know in particular also has its influence and provides the parameters within which many teachers' live. These parameters both enable and constrain a teacher's impulse to act tactfully. State standards, mandated curriculum, and techniques provide horizontal knowledge, and policy defines boundaries. These technical, theoretical, and philosophical preconceptions both map out the territory in which teachers are able to move and place limits, but in some cases, these preconceptions interfere with that which the teachers identify as worthwhile. Julia explained, "because there's this standardized test push [...] What do you give up? You know, you can't let go of the needs and expectations of students that have to be considered for their success" (Interview 3). She expanded the thought, expressing her frustration with the feeling that "the weight of standardized tests" (Julia, interview 3) can prevent in-depth exploration and the quality to which she aspires. For her, there is something more to consider: "You know, it's not always the standards and mandated curriculum as Dr. Wesley told us several times. We need to encourage, care and give support to our students, and pay attention to their interests and cultural background" (Interview 3). For Julia, Maria and many other preservice teachers, there was an important background to be addressed against which learning is set and against which the individual student figures prominently:

Maria: But aren't you always translating your own expectations for a child based upon the knowledge you have of them? You present something global and you'll know that some children will take it to the nth degree and some of them won't, you know, meet the expectation. It's different for every kid. I mean there's a reason for them not to meet the expectation. They're not there yet, but there's something in the shared experience they will get. They will get something out of it. But it might not be those "objectives."

Julia: It's not the certain activities. It's the response you get from the children and what they're learning. (Group Conversations)

The children's responses indeed fuel the passion that these preservice teachers have for their profession:

George: And then there's the excitement of what we have been doing in our university class [...] It's got to be fun to teach the performance strategies. I saw kids got excited and found the strategies fun and you can really do some fantastic projects with these strategies.

Jane: Yes, it really is. But, it's hard to use them, it takes a lot of energy and I don't know, but I wouldn't give it up for anything. (Group Conversation)

The times in which the preservice teachers identified feeling most like good teachers were also linked with children's responses and taking energy while also energizing. George stated, "I feel capable when all the children engage, offer reflective responses about the topic at hand and then complete the expectations given or go beyond and take the dialogue beyond the classroom" (George, third interview). Helen-Young mentioned about a recent literacy activity:

The books and activities were very challenging and stretched the children. I was so pleased to see what they could do with the "push" and it was a point of celebration as it showed that whatever was happening with their reading activities seemed to be working very well. The children were all risk-takers and very eager to participate [...] When children are eager to stretch themselves, and feel safe doing so, it is a good reflection of good things happening [...] The children all worked together in groups, and felt capable of success. I always want to be a teacher that helps children meet with success, build on prior skills, desire to be learners, and take ownership for their tasks, etc. (Helen-Young, Third Interview)

For these preservice teachers then, the good in teaching to which they aspire is oriented toward what they consider is good for the children. This is a good at which they have arrived through their experience of children and the juxtaposition of the individual child against their understanding of children, curriculum and education in general. What counts as good is judged through how they see the children act within the classroom, both academically and in terms of characteristics that influence the ways in which they live with others. The engagement, play, performance, independence, and shared experiences are activities that are ends in themselves. They are pursued for the good found within them and are necessarily particular and thus in the realm of practical wisdom.

Most of the preservice teachers stated that they realized in their field placements that they would teach students who come from diverse backgrounds in urban as well suburban schools. They believed that they must be provided with practical opportunities to learn how to relate their instruction to the students' interests and backgrounds, and still promote social justice and a democratic vision of education in their classrooms.

It is evident that if teacher education programs are to prepare teachers to teach all students, to value different ways of knowing, and to develop pedagogical practices that result in the high achievement of all students, then the programs must afford them the opportunity to interrogate the beliefs and attitudes that they hold about themselves and the students that they anticipate teaching. Preservice teachers must be given the chance to examine how their beliefs and attitudes about students shape their understanding of teaching and learning. This being the case, then teacher preparation programs are, as Ladson-Billings (2001) wrote, obligated to

deal with social justice issues of race, class, and gender and not just in superficial, vicarious ways. Rather, an important component of preparing to be a teacher is interrogating the way status characteristics like race, class, and gender configure every aspect of our lives. (p. 6)

As the actual classrooms continue to become more economically, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, the need for teacher educators to prepare teachers for the diverse student population becomes more vital. The nature of this transformation is critically essential particularly considering that most prospective teachers will teach students whose ethnic, racial, language and economic background will be diverse, regardless whether they teach in classrooms located in suburban communities or in urban communities. Educating practically wise teachers with critical reflexivity may be a way to move beyond the superficial approach to dealing with issues of ethnicity, race, class, and gender. Providing preservice teachers with progressive strategies and practical opportunities to examine their beliefs and attitudes (some of which may be hidden) may offer them a clearer look at the expectations that they hold for their students.

Summary and Final Thoughts

One of the main questions for this study concerned how practical wisdom plays within the overall picture of teaching that engenders teaching literacy and how useful it may be for preservice teachers within their practice. An emerging question also revolved around how phronesis affects a teacher's responsibility to the good as viewed by many participants in the education of children. With such responsibilities often leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed, some preservice teachers raised a concern that a call for phronetic deliberation and progressive teaching might be just one more stress for the already overburdened educator. To the contrary, most of the preservice teachers indicated that it is worthwhile to spend their energy and deal with the stress of developing progressive, play-oriented tactful strategies.

If phronetic ways of knowing and acting are valued in educational circles as much as technical knowledge, teachers might be encouraged to exercise this more particular way of acting in accordance with their principles, values and personal philosophies regarding teaching. Schubert (1986) wrote that instrumental action governed by *techne* can be a limited reference in making decisions concerning education: "What is and what works do not provide adequate warrant for deducing conclusions of ought. Curriculum by its very nature is a matter of asserting 'ought'" (p. 126). Granted the authority to perform such curricular decisions and actions, to deliberate about their responsibility and to give weight to what they consider is worthwhile for the particular children and circumstances of their classroom, the burden of teachers' responsibilities might become less stressful. Besides this consideration, phronetic deliberation in the conceptualization presented in this paper is a way of living and becoming, not a strategy to be added on to a list of teaching techniques.

Today, overwhelming multiple responsibilities exist, but teachers in some schools are not permitted the authority to allow a way of living in classrooms that leads to actions that can fulfill their responsibilities in ways that are most beneficial to children. It is perhaps the frustration of the ability to live and act in a practically and critically wise way with children that contributes to the feeling teachers have of being overwhelmed.

Of course, within a situation that permits personal authority to the extent that there is a possibility that such authority could be abused, the question arises concerning who decides what counts as good. Here Gadamer (1975) emphasized that practical wisdom is dependent on the existence of the deliberation where private decisions are held up to the light of public scrutiny. The danger of personal judgment being in error decreases through a dialogic conversation within the community. Habermas argued (1988), though, that a "like-minded community" might intensify the possibility of "moral blindness," where the community is unable to recognize the existence of an ethical dilemma. A strong community, according to Habermas, encourages critical knowledge and dialogical conversation that lessens the possibility of such blindness and enriches the background upon which phronesis draws, thus increasing the possibility of it being a useful concept. In this light, teacher education programs and inservice teacher preparation programs organized by universities can provide critical knowledge and deliberative spaces for teachers, preservice teachers, and local communities, and thus minimize the possibility of such "moral blindness" in schools.

The usefulness of practical wisdom as a concept that embraces what is good to do within a community practice such as teaching depends, to a certain extent, on how those that are practically wise teachers can influence those that have not yet developed this way of knowing and deliberating. Gadamer postulated that phronesis is acquired through experience. Gadamer and others who have discussed the notion agree that it cannot be taught; it can only be learned.

Felman (1987) purported that while teaching is "impossible" conditions can be arranged in order to maximize the possibility that learning might take place. Eisner (2002) discussed the importance of pointing out salient features that might be conducive to such a possibility. Nussbaum

(1990) went further by positing that such learning can emerge through literature, which can highlight both the conditions and salient features of those conditions in concrete and complex ways to create vicarious experiences. If that is possible, then it might also be learned through the narratives of preservice teachers and teacher educators who act from this perspective. This study has sought, to some degree, to provide such teacher narratives, accompanied by interpretive inquiry that highlights some of the conditions, events, and dialogues that foreground the concept and its influence on teacher education and teaching practice.

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Miscellany

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