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## **Teacher Education Provoking Curriculum: Curriculum Provoking Teacher Education**

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### **Positioning**

In this collaborative presentation we undertake to provoke and be provoked by new interpretive meanings around curriculum, based on our experiences as teacher educators. We provide a series of narrations about how each of us has come to understand ‘provocation’ within/of/about curriculum and how it is enacted, subverted, and mediated in the Master of Teaching (MT) Program, an inquiry-based and field-oriented program, by us, our students, administrative structures and the socio-cultural world in which we are embedded. Collectively, we are provoked to expand the notions of **provocation, disillusionment, nostalgia, despair and melancholia**. As you read we ask you to consider how this telling provokes you.

### **Working in the Midst of Program Change in Teacher Education as a Provocation**

The narratives that follow represent strands of experience and interpretation, told against a common background. They intertwine and echo each others’ motifs, not entirely coming together to form a unified and complete picture, but rather, suggesting ways that practice and experience in teacher education may be understood as a provocation—as a ‘call.’ The narratives can perhaps best be understood indeed as *currere*—that constant struggle to understand both the educational paths upon which we set to journey, and what that begins to offer in terms of understanding self, responsibility, and the work with which we have been entrusted as teacher educators.

Thus there is an overall picture here, framed by certain commonalities of background, and yet resisting closure as a complete work. Understood perhaps better as narrative possibilities, the five parts that follow suggest in Paul Ricoeur’s terms the difficult work of *mimesis* in narrative—the effort to

give meaning and shape to our actions (Ricoeur, 1983). The effort of mimesis is to link together, in a sense, background, our present understandings, and reconfigured hopes for understanding differently. All three moments require interpretive moves. And thus, although the background may be common to all of us, it may also be understood differently in terms of how, in Ricoeur's terms, it pre-figures our current practices and understandings. Likewise, with where we find ourselves presently, and what we might hope happens in future encounters. We can tell our stories together, but the voices are not necessarily singular. Both separate and together they illustrate how understanding lives in the dialectic of difference and moments of congruence.

All five authors represented here are responding to the provocation of a major change in a teacher education program. Approximately eight years ago, the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, partly by economic necessity and partly as a response to the question of what should constitute good teacher education, underwent a dramatic change. A "traditional" four year B.Ed. program, with its array of recognizable courses, was transformed into a two year after-degree program with a radically different philosophy and structure. Premised on the principles of being *inquiry-based*, *learner-focused*, *field oriented*, the program itself served as provocation—as a call to learn and teach differently.

Student teachers were no longer to be seen as mere recipients of received knowledge of teaching and professors as purveyors of expert knowledge from their chosen fields of study. With its core idea of teaching as practical judgement or wisdom, the task of both learning about and teaching about teaching became a challenge of how to link the particulars of experience with broader knowledge of education, teaching, and pedagogy, but not without the detour through biographies and interpretive engagement. Or, in Deborah Britzman's terms, it was not without the realization that pedagogic experience is also a "psychic event" (Britzman, 1998).

As the narratives show, even in the most ideal situation, to take up teacher education in the terms set out for the program would be a difficult undertaking. Although the context for the work we do is likely never "ideal," certain practical, institutional and cultural conditions, and the effects of power conspired to create a situation in which teacher education practice, rather than being assumed as a smooth function of the program, was experienced in ways that were disruptive of certainties and identities.

These narratives reflect that disruption and uncertainty, showing as well how background and context served as a provocation for each of us in our own work, and reflect our own biographies and orientations. Anne was one of the founders of the MT Program, and in addition to guiding it administratively, has provided much of the theoretical and philosophical understandings that underpin the program. Her own work in curriculum,

feminist theory, and professional practice has provided our group with a richer understanding of the possibilities and limits of practical wisdom, a theme of the narrative, *melancholia*.

Jo, Lisa, and Hans became faculty members when the program was becoming fully established in terms of numbers of students. Jo's narrative reflects a deep concern for her students' experiences which is derived from her understandings of enactivism and cognitive theory as a mathematics educator, and from her responsibilities as a "house leader," an administrative position in our program that requires her to deal with the immediacy of students' experiences in the program. The difficulties such responsibilities offer is the theme of the narrative, *disillusionment*.

Lisa brings to the discussion the importance of historical perspective and understanding along with post-structural analyses of how images of school and practice play out in our everyday educational lives. The perspective she brings to our overall narrative helps to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of educational practices, but at the same time opens up possibilities for re-imagining them. This tension is explored in the narrative, *nostalgia*.

Hans' work in the program has, from the outset of his appointment, carried responsibility for working with partners in the field and in the last few years, coordinating the MT Program as a whole. That experience has, as reflected in the narrative, *provocation*, raised the question of what warrants our actions as teacher educators, and how we respond to both difference and the weight of history and traditions.

Darren's appointment to our faculty is the most recent and, as the narrative *despair* relates, he feels acutely the tension between the pull of the school and the possibilities offered by the university. He embodies that tension but is alert to the experiences of his students in the program, who are also caught in many ways between romanticized visions of teaching and the real difficulties faced by teachers in classrooms, between hope and what can become a kind of despair.

The discussions that follow also illustrate the task of interpretation that each of us took on individually and as a group. Responding to the invitation to participate in the Provoking Curriculum Conference, and writing our presentations and this paper, also provided an opportunity to both revisit and attempt to understand our experiences in different ways. Certain texts became key for our deliberations. Among those cited in the references, Stephen White's *Sustaining Affirmation* (White, 2000) was particularly helpful in thinking about how our own practical judgements and lives could be sustained without, on the one hand, appealing to certainty in terms of foundations, but on the other, allowing a "stickier" sense of commitment and understanding. In White's terms, practice has to

rest on something. In rejecting technical rationality as a firm foundation for teacher education practice, there is, nonetheless, something else that should harken our attention, something that helps frame the ethical and practical impulses of our work.

Thus, White's discussion of a "weak ontology" as a basis for action seemed to provide some hope and guidance for our own attempts to understand practice and what might constitute a curriculum of teacher education. His elucidation of the "existential realities" of language, natality, finitude, and sources, allowed us to begin to explore our experiences, as reflected in the narratives, in terms of how we speak and write about the meaning of teaching and practice; what possibilities exist for our "selves" and our students in the background of things; the responsibilities inherent in taking on the task of bringing new people into a profession; and always with the knowledge of our limits—and indeed the limits inherent in any program—however well conceived.

The themes of *provocation, disillusionment, nostalgia, despair, and melancholia* may provoke a sense of sadness, but that is not the intention (although to provoke emotion certainly is!). White's discussion of melancholia is helpful in understanding that the "melancholic turn" is not simply sadness, but that it "refers specifically to the redirection of attachment from the object to that which is constituted by this redirected force of desire," and that its significance lies in the "ambivalent reaction to loss" (White, 2000, p. 199).

That ambivalence may be experienced as "mourning" but it also opens up spaces for thought and possibly action, but in ways that may redirect attention, and, in fact, deepen the way that we live out our responsibilities as teacher educators.

## **Provocation**

(Hans Smits)

*No theory can exemplify itself;  
No representation can map itself;  
No language can predetermine its own meanings.*

(Toulmin, 2001)

*What now? Where does this leave us?*

(Caputo, 2000)

What follows is a narrative, derived partly from personal experience, and partly from institutional experiences. [\[1\]](#) It is a narrative in the hermeneutic

sense, an attempt to make sense of a “provocation” for thinking about curriculum in the context of a teacher education program. To be *provoked* is, in literal terms, to be called to something, to be summoned by something. There is also, in the etymology of the word, an interesting meaning of being provoked as a call to make an appeal against a judgement—historically, an appeal against ecclesiastical authority (*Oxford English Dictionary*, pp. 2324-25). But as my narrative will try to show, a judgement against which one makes an appeal is fraught with difficulty and uncertainty. The authority against which one might appeal—as in the case of teacher education—is both pervasive and persuasive in its ontology, that is, as to what counts as teacher education, and in its epistemological assumptions—i.e., the methods or form of rationality<sup>[2]</sup> that underpin an understanding of practice and the pedagogic assumptions underlying teacher education.

The appeal we are making to the authority of teacher education has been given more urgency in our deliberate attempt to challenge the overwhelming technical rationality embedded in current institutional practices. In the experiences being related here, teacher education, in all its manifestations—courses, field experiences, faculty and student identities—is being provoked by intentional changes in a program grounded in the Aristotelian conception of *phronesis* (practical wisdom). When such changes intend a shift from predominantly epistemological concerns (e.g., how is teaching learned, what theory and how should it inform practice) to ontological ones (e.g., who is the teacher, what does it mean to practice as a teacher, why and how is teaching a form of practical wisdom) anxieties are provoked. Such anxieties have less to do with choosing correct methods than they do in venturing out without the comfort of firm grounds for understanding and action. Or, in Joseph Dunne’s evocative use of the phrase, it is to anxiously venture “back to the rough ground” where smooth trekking is not at all guaranteed (Dunne, 1993).

Despite its pervasiveness, however, it is nonetheless difficult, in a day to day lived sense, to situate the practice of teacher education as a singular or unified target of provocation. There is still an ongoing tension between university-based teacher education programs and preparation, and what student teachers encounter in field experiences. And while there have been, within the last couple of decades, volumes of critique and articulation of alternative approaches to *university-based* teacher education, what happens in field experiences seems quite unperturbed by changes within university programs.<sup>[3]</sup> I would argue that this has, in part, been the experience at the University of Calgary, at least within the short term of program history.

Thinking about this more, the experience of provocation in teacher education, and what that implies for a curriculum—in the sense of how we should live the responsibilities of teacher education—can perhaps be

understood as working within a condition of “belatedness.” Taking her exploration of the experience of belatedness from Hannah Arendt, Levinson notes that, “the experience of belatedness alerts us to the increasing complexity of ontological questions” (Levinson, 2001, p. 14). Increasing complexity because, as Levinson notes, unlike the modernist dream that we can simply supercede the old with the new through our willing, our institutions, our procedures, and so on, we cannot simply put the past behind us. As she puts it, living in belatedness has “paradoxical effects.” One is that we ourselves are constituted as certain kinds of people, and it becomes a question as Stephen White suggests, of how language “has” us (White, 2000, p. 10) with the implication that we ourselves can never fully transcend our past and what constitutes us as persons.

## **Disillusionment**

(Jo Towers)

*You have nowhere else to go but to be where you are, and  
here you are inevitably homeless.*

*(Lilburn, 1999, p.93).*

The following three events happened within the same week in October 2002. The first two concern first year student teachers, both female, in their first few weeks within the Program. Each is placed with a partner teacher for a two-day-per week field experience that will continue throughout the first year of their program. The third event concerns a soon-to-graduate second year student teacher.

The first student teacher, Jane, comes to see me to express her dissatisfaction with her field placement. She describes her practising partner teacher as disorganised and unable to offer guidance on lesson planning, unit planning, classroom management and the structures of good teaching. Reading between the lines of her monologue I hear described a partner teacher who is willing to talk in depth about the aims of her practice and is trying to encourage Jane to take up curriculum broadly, generatively and in an interpretive manner.

The second student teacher, Carol, describes her partner teacher to me as well organised, with voluminous lesson plans and good classroom management. Carol’s complaint is that her partner teacher is far too busy organising classroom structures to communicate how she makes her efficient teaching possible.

Both Jane and Carol are dissatisfied with their field placements and have come to me as their House Leader requesting new placements. I find myself disillusioned with my role. What might I offer to these students? I am tempted to take the easy route, to just switch the two students and move

on. They, surely, would be satisfied with this solution. Jane would get an organised teacher and Carol would get a willing communicator. But I resist. I want to press each student teacher to see the limitations of their desires—I want Jane to recognise the possibilities inherent in her partner teacher’s exploratory practice and Carol to see the short-sightedness of her desire to be told how to teach. In short, I want each student teacher to resist locating teaching as a craft, and instead embrace teaching as *phronesis*, the exercise of practical wisdom.

Later the same week I receive an e-mail from Liam, a second year student engaged in an extended field experience in a Junior High school. Liam has taken seriously our provocation in Year 1 to interrogate learners and learning, teachers and teaching and the lived curriculum, and he now begins to express his emerging identity as a teacher in the form of a critique of the “forty-six minute lesson,” the mainstay of junior high school timetabling. Unlike the Year 1 student teachers, for Liam, concern no longer lies in a need to develop classroom management skills or lesson planning techniques, though he recognises that the living through of both of these elements of the teaching repertoire is exacerbated by—and perhaps even occasioned by—the forty-six minute structure of his teaching life in Junior High school. His concern, rather, is centred on the impossibility of enacting the vision he understands us to be projecting. And yet, he is unwilling simply to abandon it.

As I struggle to decide how to respond to each student teacher, I find myself asking again and again the same question: What is it I wish to bring forth in my students? It seems that this question reverberates around the hallways of experience in this program. It is a troublesome question to ask—and perhaps an impossible (or at least elusive) one to answer—and living under its shadow is troublesome.

Many of us have rejected technical-rational responses to this question, so that we know that what we wish to bring forth is not students who can parse the terrain of the disciplines into forty-six minute sound-bites to be delivered with dispassionate efficiency, for as Solway (2000) reminds us, “education was never meant to be *efficient*. It was meant to be difficult, interesting, pleasurable, errant, prodigal in every respect, transgressive, personal, lengthy, demanding, and hospitable—but not efficient” (p. 5). We do not want to bring forth teachers who will slot comfortably into the new corporate image of schooling with its teleological aims and market perspectives. We do, however, want to bring forth in our students an attitude that will question the rationality of trying to foster inquiry in discrete, forty-six minute Junior High School chunks.

And yet, when we achieve what we hope for, when our students question the very basis of the rationality undergirding their experience in the field, we start to worry about our role in their disillusionment.

I wonder if we are complicit in what, borrowing from Solway, might be called educational clear-cutting. Solway describes how forestry and paper companies have set up border screens of trees, narrow strips of spruces cynically left standing along the roads to let us believe in a forest that does not exist. I join Solway in wondering whether this is “precisely what is happening not only to our trees but [also] to our students, of whom a few thin spruces may be left standing to disguise the truth that there is nothing, so to speak, behind them” (p. 10).

I wonder, is our program creating those few, thin spruces? For, when we graduate students who have resisted, in Dunne’s (1993) words, “the lure of technique” and have abandoned efficient solutions to intractable teaching problems in favour of inquiring into the deep difficulty of teaching and learning, what is there behind them? Where is the forest of inquiring professionals in teaching and teacher education, and if there is a forest, why is it so difficult to see?

## Nostalgia

(E. Lisa Panayotidis)

*We are what we remember ourselves to be .*

(Edward Casey, 1987, p.290)

Several years ago, while in a Professional Seminar class with twenty-two student teachers, I provocatively asked what they thought about the Alberta government’s stated goal to increase class sizes from twenty-five to thirty. I wanted to know what effect they thought this might have in the classroom and in their ability to teach thoughtfully and intentionally, at the early childhood, elementary and secondary school level. I asked: How might this impact on how you take up critical issues around curriculum: what counts, who is knowledge for, and who gets to say? My question was intended as a challenge, as a way to open a space for what I perceived was an increasingly unnamed problematic—the complex matrix of curriculum, politics, interests and power. For many students, that afternoon and in that particular place, curriculum was the monstrous entity to be “covered,” not necessarily “uncovered” and certainly not be “philosophized or analyzed to death” as one student noted. But for others, an ontological and epistemological emphasis, a deepened understanding of what might lie below the surface and in the margins, was exactly what was required.

It was a lively but heated exchange in which just about everyone was engaged, listening, conversing, testing their understandings, confronting their assumptions, beliefs and constructs, and questioning vacuous relativist and unsupported assertions. After some small group discussion, students came back to reassess some of their earlier understandings about

some of the possible implications of increased class sizes. A consensus was emerging among early childhood, elementary and secondary school specialists that the government's continual structural changes in Alberta classrooms would have far-reaching effects not only on pedagogical relations but on the meaningful teaching of their respective curricula. And then, one young woman, whose silence was markedly noticeable during the discussion, rose to her feet and exasperatingly announced that her peers were misguided.

She went on to suggest that in the past, rural one-room school teachers taught thirty or more students at a time, at different grade levels no less, with vigour, enthusiasm, and a sense of commitment. The discussion, she noted, illustrated how city dwellers had lost the pioneering ethos and that sense of conquering the "wildness" of a large class. She spoke for close to ten minutes about the "reality" of the historical one-room school and the poignant loss of "educational and teaching excellence" with its demise. In her narrative no contemporary system or set of beliefs could ever hope to rival this nostalgic "Olden days." This ideal past offset the "apparent" deficiencies of the present, particularly as they affect the function of schools, teachers, students, and the curriculum. Her narrative constructed "a romantic golden age" in education, one that was seemingly more rigorous, sane, and conducive to the balance and orderly workings of regional and national interests. It was represented as a "certainist" and "stable" educational past and as a model to be emulated in the present.

In her narrative, "History was "singular," "fixed," "knowable," and hence "truthful," an unproblematic branch of knowledge that [simply and authentically] records and explains past events. There was little if any recognition about how our own viewpoints and predilections shape the choice of historical materials and our own personal constructs determine what we make of them.

In that moment I was provoked—called upon—as an "educational historian" to fracture this seemingly smooth narrative of the past, to interrupt the sentimental crafting of the mythical and memorializing "Olden days"—to mess up the secure boundaries which constitute history and the past, narrative and historiography, and the fragility of epistemology, methodology, and ideology. I wanted to make transparent the normalizing effects of heritage and nostalgia and their construction of a particular form of Western Canadian local and regional history that draws upon a romantic yet "wild" educational past. It is a past that "calls" to young teachers, luring them to a fabled rural past. The "call" of this past is reminiscent of the sirens call to Odysseus' sailors and other weary travelers who, lured by the sweetness of the song, were unmercifully cast against the rocks, powerless to steer out to sea and to the vastness of the possible.

In that moment, I was named the problem. In contesting the narrative I was

produced as an urbanite Easterner who could not grasp the significance of this place, who could not hear “the call.”

I wondered how I might raise with my students historian Keith Jenkins’ (1991) challenging statement that “History is the way people(s) create, in part, their identities,” and is thus always inescapably bound as an intertextual; an interpretive practice. How can I guide my students to consider how specific nostalgic histories about education come to be constructed into one shape rather than another—be it epistemologically, methodologically or ideologically? How do interests interact with knowledge and power to shape our thinking and acting in the world? How do our present assumptions, beliefs, and entanglements, determine how we narrate and interpret the educational past and its significance for our time? Finally, which particular educational past is narrated by whom and for what ends? What does it mean to claim the past in the service of the future?

## **Despair**

(Darren Lund)

*In the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope.*

(Charles Revson, 1976)

Standing as I am with one foot in the proverbial boat—the academy—and one on the shore—a high school teaching position—I find myself in an awkward and, in many ways, untenable spot to facilitate the education of emerging teachers. While my writings on the pedagogical potential of classrooms and schools as sites of personal and social transformation (i.e., Lund, 2001, 2002) invariably focus on themes of possibility, and of bridging theory and practice, the underlying tensions in my professional existence here seem irresolvable.

For the past six months I have straddled the tumultuous confluence of the streams of the classroom teacher and the academic researcher. In an unsecured academic position in a faculty with a deep and justified history of institutional insecurity, I remain on a surreptitious leave of absence from my school district as an emergency escape route back to the nostalgic comfort of the known world of the school. The looming axe of tens of millions of dollars in “differential” cuts to our university’s programs and jobs (Summerfield, 2003) casts a shadow on every assigned reading, every conversation with students, every aspect of my current teaching role.

The Division of Teacher Preparation has prepared a Handbook (2002) for each pre-service teacher that includes opening remarks promoting “a view of the teacher as knowledgeable, thoughtful and deeply caring about the responsibilities of this vocation” (p. 3), invoking a romantic notion of a

“calling” from the Latin “*vocare*.” Our students have university degrees, job experience, and few false ideals about the challenges of teaching, yet they do seem to share hopefulness.

Required course texts such as *To Teach* (Ayers, 2001) and *The Courage to Teach* (Palmer, 1998) validate their hopefulness, offering an abundance of idealistic and inspirational reflections on the value—nay, the necessity—of hope within the teaching vocation. Beyond their own “callings” to the profession, they require altruism to the aspirations of others; Ayers (2001) explains: “Teachers must know and care about some aspect of our shared life—our calling after all, is to shepherd and enable the callings of others” (p. 139). But even within these lofty admonitions are buried subtle acknowledgements of the weighty anchors of despair.

Within the opening section of the last chapter of the required Palmer text, provocatively headed, “Gridlock, Despair, and Hope,” is a frank moment of acknowledgement of a grim sentiment. Palmer (1998) admits he can “sense the despair some faculty feel” about the impediments that limit the efforts of educators seeking progressive change; he writes of their despair: “It is hard not to share it. So I have been forced to ask myself whether the pessimists are right. If they are, integrity would require me to stop peddling false hope about the renewal of teaching and learning” (p. 164). Predictably, he advises fellow teachers to avoid the temptation “to indulge ourselves in the sweetness of despair” (p. 167). Instead, Palmer concludes, “we need only be in the world as our true selves, with open hearts and minds” (p. 183).

I strive to be an optimist in my teaching, but I have begun to question whether we are doing our students a service by “peddling” these and other beacons of hope in light of current political developments in our institution, the province and nation. The budget maelstrom that is about to lay waste to untold specific programs and positions at our university is emblematic of other social trends that do not bode well for the future of adequately funded education.

Some of my university students have asked me if I think teaching is a promising career and during those moments especially I am invited to engage in the very critical self-reflection I ask of them. How ethical is my role as purveyor of blind hopefulness in this demoralizing climate of budget cuts and the devaluation of the teaching profession? And how might I best continue to fulfill my task in this awkward space without much solid reason for hope myself, committed both to meaningful teaching and research, but unable to commit myself fully to either?

**Melancholia**  
(Anne M. Phelan)

**Through the day as if by an ocean  
Waiting here  
Always failing to remember  
Why we came...  
I wonder why we came.**

(Brian Eno, Theme song from 'The Son's Room.')

Are we doing our students a service by “peddling” false hope about the renewal of teaching and learning? Are we complicit in educational clear cutting, creating those few thin spruces to conceal the truth that there is really nothing behind them? Are we in danger of replacing felt passion with theoretical ambivalence about an educational past?

Are we inviting students to be dismayed about the inadequacies of current forms of education when we ask, “Why and how might teaching be a form of practical wisdom?”

One way or another, student teachers’ words resound with disappointment about the possibilities of their own teaching, the teaching profession and education more generally.

“I don’t know the kids that well and I’m not going to get to know them that well in the high school.” “Often the room is filled with an awkward silence.” “I cannot elicit meaningful discussions!” “I’m concerned with this code of silence, the dangerous solidarity of teachers... turning a blind eye to the weak.” Before too long, many start to believe that “the chances that tomorrow will be like yesterday are always overwhelming” (Arendt, 1997, p. 170).

A whole teratology of learning (Foucault, 1972, p. 223) is implicit in student loss and faculty expressions of ambivalence, a teratology of moral perception and desire. Desire is central to practical wisdom as it is desire that initiates and mediates action (Garrison, 1997). “Phronesis” is about obtaining the values that we desire, bringing about what we believe is good for students and society. Teaching involves figuring out what we desire, deliberating, trying on, trying out and changing one’s mind if necessary. Of course, difficulties emerge as we find our desires interrupted, thwarted, even dismissed, in the context of others’ desires—students, teachers, professors, institutional policies and cultural prohibitions. Not unlike our students, my colleagues and I have had to lose our stubborn attachment to program-wide inquiry, to “good practice” or “meaningful learning”; we find ourselves caught between unliveable passion and ungrievable loss (Butler, 1997). As one student expressed it, in the words of Kafka, “And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip: one flays oneself at the slightest opposition.” Of course many educators refuse the act of grieving and the shadow of the ego falls upon teaching and learning to teach as they blame the incompetence or naiveté

of others for their unfulfilled desires, seeking redress for the harms done to them. Narcissism abounds as they become the object of their own desires. Others do not engage the difficulty but succumb to the ‘simple and moralistic romance that we in education call ‘self-esteem,’ ‘role models,’ ‘childhood innocence’ and ‘teaching excellence’” (Britzman, 1998, p. 60).

Others, however, seem to take a melancholic turn and succeed in redirecting their desires and attachments (Butler, 1997). Here, there is “some possibility of beginning to turn slightly, but significantly, differently. Just as the detachability of desire gives us the possibility of critical subjectivity in general, so in this dimension it opens the possibility of working melancholy into mourning” (White, 2000, p. 100). Mourning in this sense speaks to a complex, persisting disposition, within which we can attend more consciously to the kind of beings we are (White, 2000). We begin to cultivate ourselves in a different direction, beyond idealism perhaps and towards an understanding of our own critical subjectivity in all its limitation. In this sense, while melancholia suggests the limit to the subject’s sense of *pouvoir*, our sense of what we can accomplish, and in that sense our power (Butler, 1996), it is not a form of passivity but a form of revolt that takes place through repetition and metonymy (Bhabha, 1992). Might the melancholia induced in some by the Master of Teaching Program be a way to re-enchant the world of teaching and teacher education? Could it be the ground of radical novelty? Might it provoke?

Ironically, perhaps, one way to renew the world of teaching and learning is to begin to understand its difficulty. To do so is to attend to the rough ground of teaching as indefinite, indeterminate, complex, contextual and always mutable. Teacher educators who invite their students to engage the difficulty of practice

seem to proffer only their dreams for interpretation, and then no guarantee. They are interested in mistakes, the accidents, the detours, and the unintelligibilities of identities. . . they gesture to their own constructedness and frailties, troubling the space between representation and the real, between the wish and the need. They explore the twilight of experience in which every reading of the body is a misreading and every search for self leads to the other.” (Britzman, 1998, p. 60).

In a world that wants desperately to be sure of itself, practical wisdom offers no guarantees. However, it may allow us to elucidate a form of knowing and being that opens up tremendous possibilities for how we can think well in the presence of others and amidst the difficulty of teaching (Phelan, 2001).

## Notes

[1] Ricoeur counsels that hermeneutics, to be fully constituted as an interpretive practice has to attend to what he calls “texts,” “events,” “institutions,” and “personages”: he explains, “It follows that one of the aspects of interpretation is to establish the relations of insignification among these objects, to understand texts in terms of events, events in terms of institutions, institutions in terms of personages, by adding to them their parallels, intersections, and intersignifications.” See, Ricoeur, P. (1995). Pastoral praxeology, hermeneutics, and identity. In *Figuring the sacred. Religion, narrative and imagination* (pp. 303-314). Minneapolis: Fortress Press. While this short contribution to the *Provoking Curriculum* presentation cannot pretend to do full justice to such a hermeneutic task, it does take seriously Ricoeur’s reminder that hermeneutic work must not separate understanding and explanation from application: “Understanding and explication without application are not interpretation.” The idea of “provoking curriculum” and provocation, then, carries, or ought to, this idea that attempting to understand an experience, is also an attempt to affect practice.

[2] It is the form of “rationality” that is in fact in appeal, as a provocation in teacher education curriculum. I find Stephen Toulmin’s discussion helpful in his attempt to rescue an understanding of rationality from its modernist grip. He notes in an introduction to his book, *Return to Reason*, “Intellectuals in the year 2000—philosophers or social scientists—have inherited a family of problems about the idea of Rationality and its relations to those of necessity and certainty. But they tend to ignore the more practical, complementary idea of Reasonableness, or the possibility of living, as in pre-modern times, without any absolute necessities or certainties.” Toulmin, *op.cit.*, p. 1 (italics in original).

[3] It’s interesting that many programs have now caught on to the language of “practical wisdom” as a way to understand teaching. However, and this is germane to the argument in this paper, there is still a tendency to take schools as sites of field experiences as what exists, rather than something that might be taken up in a more questioning way. A good example of this is the recent book by Fred Korthagen, et.al., which offers a view of “realistic” teacher education, where what is real is what is equated with what exists in schools. See Korthagen, F., et.al. (2001). *Linking practice and theory. The pedagogy of realistic teacher education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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