

# PREPARING TO TEACH: REDEEMING THE POTENTIALITIES OF THE PRESENT THROUGH “CONVERSATIONS OF PRACTICE”

Andrew Ek and Margaret A. Macintyre Latta

## ABSTRACT

A prospective teacher and a teacher educator enter into a yearlong conversation seeking greater curricular physicality and materiality within its enactment. Dewey's (1938) temporal educative relation of teaching and learning as an ever-present process is helpful, asking both parties to dwell mindfully at the intersections of teaching/learning situations and interactions. Attention turns to the lived curricular features and consequences of preparing teachers to teach as an ever-present process. The role and place of self-other negotiation is illuminated within curricular enactment, giving expression to teaching/learning as an ever-present process. Pedagogical significances are redeemed through greater teaching mindfulness of the temporality at play within the present.

## INTRODUCTION

One of us is a teacher educator (Margaret) and the other is a prospective teacher (Andrew). In our experiences within these roles, we increasingly see and hear little educative concern for the epistemological question “What counts as knowledge?” alongside the ontological question “What does it mean to be a teacher in classrooms?” Instead of grappling with these questions, curricular enactment in many classrooms proceeds through tightly controlled conditions with criteria that insist on pre-determined management modes with little time or space for teachers to ask what ought to count as knowledge or what teaching for student understanding might feel and look like in practice. At the same time, many teachers are keenly aware of embodied tensions and felt inadequacies. They struggle to articulate the underlying reasons but acknowledge dismissing some students, their ideas, differences, and questions. A detached survival mode takes over that teachers do not necessarily feel at ease with, but they become entrapped within it as they are distanced from ontological and epistemological curricular considerations. Thus, teachers' curricular practices are emptied of much physicality—mindful, responsive actions in relation to context, students, and subject matter;

and emptied of much materiality—mindful attention to contexts, students, and subject matter as resources for inquiry.

Pinar (2009) explains that the past 40 years of preoccupation with evaluative educative measures have led to “institutional neglect of the intellectual quality and character of the curriculum” (11). His portrayal of curriculum “severed” from teaching deeply resonates with what we are seeing and hearing. Teaching experiences today are predominately discussed in terms of learning outcomes, products, strategies, and standards. And, while we would agree that all of these considerations are worthwhile, attention drawn toward tightly controlling and ensuring circumstances can account for predetermined outcomes, products, strategies, and standards. So much so, in fact, that work with teachers to enable their lived understandings of teaching forces one to confront the foreignness of attending to the process of teaching from within the act of teaching (see for example Cochran Smith, 2001; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; and Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

O’Loughlin (2006) points to the foreign nature of attending to the process of teaching for teachers (and learners) as being of huge concern. She insists that the idea that, “experience can only be meaningfully talked about emptied of its physicality and materiality, so that only then can it be seen as an essentially knowledge issue, is one of the major mistakes of the philosophical tradition” (12). O’Loughlin argues that privileging cognition over the relations of the living being with its environment reinforces impoverished and dangerous views of ourselves. In doing so, she also warns of disastrous consequences when incorporated uncritically in the curriculum. We see these manifesting through 1) Repression of teacher and student self-understandings, 2) Disregard for pedagogical tone, and 3) Disregard for plurality and natality within curricular practices (Macintyre Latta, 2005a). Collectively, these lived consequences restrict and tightly contain ways to know and be in classrooms for both teachers and students. Severing curriculum enactment from its physicality and materiality promotes classroom practices void of epistemological and ontological considerations. The result is that little attention is given to assimilation, internalization, and integration of teacher/student thought, structuring curricular experiences that compartmentalize knowledge, separating pedagogy from content, knowledge from interests, and, thus, theory from practice. Seeking greater physicality and materiality within curricular enactment demands personal investment, confronting and challenging self-understandings, and cultivating the contextual conditions and criteria to foster and nurture the lived curricular consequences productive for learners and learning.

This paper maps out the curricular terrain of epistemological/ontological matters through our shared efforts as a teacher educator and prospective teacher to grapple concretely with the relations manifested through navigating self-understandings, pedagogical tone, and plurality and natality within teaching/learning situations. The resulting curricular enactment assumes that the teacher is “a partici-

part in an ongoing multi-referenced conversation” (Pinar, 2009, 11) and, as such, is inseparable from curriculum as lived. Opportunities to account for the pedagogical relationships that emerge and that make caring judgments en route offer what Siegesmund (2010) discusses as “a curriculum of care and responsible choice” (81). Epistemology and ontology are thus deliberately interwoven on an ongoing basis suggesting ways for “practicing theory and theorizing practice” (Bullough, 1997, 13). This is the terrain where pedagogical possibilities, interpretations, and contextual considerations are encountered and form and re-form “complicated curricular conversations” (Pinar, 2010). Our paper reveals the issues entailed in bringing teachers and students near to the ethics and complexities that come with being in relation within specific situations with other(s), experiencing curriculum as complicated conversations. It is a nearness that positions teachers and students to attend to the particular contexts and relations. It is a nearness that positions teachers and students to continually seek connections with their surroundings. The complicated curricular conversations that ensue encourage teachers and students “to reconstruct their own lived worlds through their reanimation of the material they study” (Pinar, 2010, 5), fostering curriculums of being in relation and caring. Importantly too, such curricular conversations orient education towards the student agency needed for learning and the associated responsibilities of teachers to create and sustain the necessary conditions and criteria found within the physicality and materiality of curriculum as it is enacted.

## A CONVERSATION OF PRACTICE

As a teacher educator and a student teacher, we agree to enter into an extended year-long conversation, seeking through it greater curricular physicality and materiality. We work alongside each other, searching for language and images of teaching practice that deepen and give expression to things of significance. Our conversation brings the research literature, its interpretations, and our lived experiences to bear on the act of teaching. We share an increasing appreciation for the difficulty and complexity of fostering teachers’ capacities to attend to the physicality and materiality of curricular enactment. The task becomes one of attending to the learning movement being created from within the movement itself, seeing the ensuing relational considerations, and simultaneously acting within the movement to further it. We are committed to the ongoing practice this will take to dwell mindfully at the curricular intersections of such situations and interactions.

A starting place for our conversation is Dewey’s (1938) notion of “preparation” and its temporal character in relation to teaching and learning for a changing world. Dewey explains:

When preparation is made at the controlling end, then the potentialities of the present are sacrificed to a suppositious future. When this happens, the actual

preparation for the future is missed or distorted. The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his [sic] future. (49)

We agree that there is much in Dewey's thinking about "preparation" that education discourses and practices continue to ignore. It is after all the particularities of individuals and contexts containing the curricular physicality and materiality that are often subsumed by predetermined educational agendas. This is not to say that the future is not important, as Dewey claims it "is not an Either-Or affair. The present affects the future anyway" (p. 50). But, if it is a teacher's responsibility to see and create the present circumstances to impact the future positively, then the present physicality and materiality of any given classroom demands attention. Dewey refers to this temporal educative relation as "an ever-present process" (50).

Our conversation thickens as we consider how Dewey's (1938) thinking about the present might counteract the shortsighted "persistence of presentism" that Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) (among others) argue has the epistemological/ontological stranglehold on education that both of us keep encountering in our roles as a teacher educator and prospective teacher. Presentism is mapped out by Hargreaves and Shirley as the consumptive fascination with short-term imposed teaching strategies concerned with representing learning effectiveness, rather than being concerned with teaching/learning as substantive engagement, in need of the physicality and materiality of interactions, deliberations, and debates with others/otherness. They argue that presentism persists because of a culture of quick fixes that permeates society at large. Drawing on Lortie's (1975) sociological study, *Schoolteacher*, Hargreaves and Shirley trace the role of presentism into current times. They describe presentism as "endemic," derived from the ways schools and classrooms are structured, orienting teaching primarily toward effective management of large groups of students from activity to activity, class to class, and grade to grade (2505–34). Over time, the lived consequences of large-scale education reform initiatives, oriented as such, have produced "adaptive presentism" that Hargreaves and Shirley reveal as positioning teachers and students to move from one activity to another with little to no room to negotiate meanings (2505–34). Many researchers describe this phenomenon as the "increasing intensification" of teaching (e.g., Apple, 1986; Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008) creating what Smith (2006) terms a state of "frozen futurism" in classrooms that actually masks the future "because the future already is" (25). Collectively, these researchers call the quality and substance of teaching and learning into question. Hargreaves and Shirley argue that the persistence of presentism is producing an "addictive presentism," stating, "When schools follow policy mandates and pursue the relentless quest for short-term gains, they evolve into such addictive organizations" (11). And, akin to Smith, Hargreaves and Shirley insist that such addiction denies the future, incapacitating attempts to see the costs. We join Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) in asking, What is entailed in delib-

erately attending to the present in ways that “bequeath to the next generation a world that will be worth inheriting?” (2534). To do so, we explore the physicality and materiality of the lived curricular features and consequences encountered in preparing teachers to teach as an ever-present process. We are increasingly mindful of Dewey’s (1938) caution about being so consumed by preparation for the future that the temporality at play within the present goes unseen. And, we are concerned that such blindness contributes to the endemic, adaptive, and addictive curricular translations to presentism that Hargreaves and Shirley warn about.

Dewey’s (1938) insistence on an organic connection between the personal and education that manifests in growth and learning calls for the attentive care we must bring as a teacher educator and prospective teacher to conditions that foster worthwhile future consequences. Thus, our conversation delves into the nature of the present that demands teaching reside mindfully at the nexus of situation and interaction. We envision the teaching presence demanded by such mindfulness of the present as prompting, accessing, and critically engaging reflexive interchanges across students, teacher, and subject matter. We anticipate students being asked to bring their understandings to bear on the collective negotiation that then reverberates to inform and reform individual meaning making in an ongoing movement of thinking. A growing conceptual understanding shapes our conversation as we relay how situation and interaction are inseparable, forming the necessary curricular terrain to be encountered and navigated through such engagement. Dewey affirms our conception, stating, “the immediate and direct concern of an educator is then with the situations in which interaction takes place” (45). And, as Dewey warns, what is too often disregarded is “the powers and purposes of those taught” (45).

Our conversation is immersive and animated. Gadamer (1992) characterizes such conversations as a “process of coming to an understanding” (385). The attention to other(s) demanded by participants in such Gadamerian conversations is integral to Dewey’s (1938) conception of an ever-present process. Thus, Gadamer’s language and imagery concerning conversation enables our task. We encounter in our conversation the importance of what Gadamer sees as the necessary openness and willingness to engage in process, with no one knowing exactly what will emerge, transcending distinct viewpoints (p.367–89). Therefore, as Gadamer concludes, our conversation “has a spirit of its own” (383). Our regular conversations over one year, which include Andrew’s student teaching experience in a high school English classroom, embrace these qualities and heighten our cognizance of the roles of communication, relationship, and interaction toward continuity. So, our conversation as a teacher educator and a prospective teacher becomes a reflective practice for navigating teaching/learning as an ever-present process. We embrace the lived consequences of doing so and a “conversation of practice” ensues, as Yinger (1987) calls it, returning conversation to its Latin root *conversari*, meaning to *dwell with*. This suggests

that conversation involves entering into and living with a situation and its participants. As such, conversation is not only a means of interaction, communication, and thought, but also a type of relationship with one's surroundings. (3)

Our conversation of practice draws upon time spent conversing about teaching experienced as an ever-present process, attentive to its curricular physicality and materiality as manifested through 1) written narrative interchanges reflecting observations of, and responses to, Andrew's teaching practice; 2) intersections with the research literature in search of theorizing language; and 3) artifacts from Andrew's teaching practices, such as lesson plans, statements of teaching philosophy, and curricular design and resource documents. It is the subject matter of teaching as an ever-present process that orients our conversation. It is understandings that we seek, "entering into a relation with what is meaningful" (Gadamer, 1992, 91). And, as Gadamer insists, the understandings gained through the medium of language are

Not based on transposing into another person . . . To understand what a person says is . . . to come to an understanding about the subject matter, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences. (383)

It is a conversation intended to enhance both of our understandings of teaching, and as a reader, we invite you into this conversation too. Thus, it opens into an enlarged conversation that we hope enables others to access the curricular terrain we encounter, making connections across thought and action in relation to the act of teaching as an ever-present process and the significances we find there. The epistemological/ontological negotiation gains greater visibility, tangibility, and texture within the temporal movement of our conversation of practice. Predominant themes and particular incidents emerge and significantly mark the terrain of our year-long conversation, characterizing the epistemological/ontological process and content of our communications in which past, present, and future are constantly meditated.

### EPISTEMOLOGICAL/ONTOLOGICAL BEARINGS OF AN EVER-PRESENT PROCESS

Our extended conversation elicits a common Deweyan (1934) confidence in process, as we both put considerable faith in the physicality and materiality of teaching/learning situations. Confidence in process is understood as an embodied, creative way of being, thus fundamental to both of us. One of us is a creative writer, and the other is a visual artist. We both draw on these experiences of adapting, changing, and building meaning, informing and forming our actions in the world. As we converse about the experience of teaching, these common lived understandings of the significances of creating meaning with other(s) surface. Andrew comments, "I very much value the intrinsic [discoveries] along the way as I write." I concur, similarly noting that it is the artistic materials that suggest the form an artwork

takes (Conversation, Artifact 5). These embodied understandings of the valuing process through reciprocal interaction and modification translate into teaching and learning. We agree that teaching needs to evoke a similar movement of thinking for all involved.

Our ongoing conversation of practice becomes a shared search, asking us to attend to teaching/learning relations of all kinds through constant mediation and participation across self and other(s). The adapting, changing, and building integral to embracing teaching as an ever-present process is the movement of thinking concretely sought, experienced, and examined. It animates teaching and learning for us and for our students. Such attention to the communicative, relational, and interactive elements insists on contingencies. We find that these inherent contingencies have significant pedagogical value. We are increasingly aware that for those who enter into teaching with a Deweyan confidence in process, epistemological/ontological reciprocity is assumed. The interrelated bearings of our contingent venture include 1) the significances of other(s); 2) self-understanding gained through the other(s); and 3) the transformative power of the other(s). The developing relations then suggest curricular modes and particularities, as we attempt to occasion the kind of present that “has a favorable effect upon the future” (Dewey, 1938, 50).

### SIGNIFICANCES OF OTHER(S): THE MATERIALS OF CURRICULUM

Relationships across students, teacher, and subject matter are the materials of curriculum. Andrew is committed to exploring the conditions of learning that enable him and his students to navigate these relationships and make meaning. He explains that,

It is beautiful to watch. Sometimes students fumble as they struggle for words to articulate their ideas. But, I take care not to jump on students, squelching tentative thinking. Sometimes I restate student ideas so that the thinking is given greater opportunity for inciting interactions with others. (Conversation, Artifact 3)

Our conversation revisits Andrew’s attempts to teach as an ever-present process. Andrew explains that restating ideas purposefully positions all involved to dwell on the ideas presented a little longer so as to prompt further considerations. We agree that it is difficult work. However, we are mindful of instilling conditions for learners and learning that occasion the circumstances for teaching as an ever-present process. Attentive teacher/student listening and associated responses cultivate a context for learning that permits and encourages learner risk-taking over time. As Andrew reveals through his teaching practices growing awareness of the risks students are taking and the trust they are embracing in him, other(s), and the learning situation itself, we talk about what is to be gained by attending to other meaning making within the space created in-between. Andrew reflects:

Sometimes I see faces lighting up and I know learning connections are being made. Sometimes I know I must respond to a student gently. Sometimes additional time and space is needed for a student to articulate their idea. (Conversation, Artifact 7)

The judgments made in process are many, and necessarily made on the spot, at the juncture of what any given teaching moment brings. Andrew describes it this way:

It can be overwhelming if you think too long about what any given moment of teaching brings. But, I would generally say that surprises do not scare me. (Conversation, Artifact 7)

We encounter these learning junctures to become open, vulnerable, questioning beings. The receptive nature of active engagement also becomes clear. There is an interdependency created across self and other that is understood and valued. Andrew states, “The teacher is not the center of attention. In fact, teaching could not take place if this was the case” (Conversation, Artifact 16). The uniqueness that others and otherness bring are valued as catalytic and connected to sense-making of all kinds. The raw curricular materials live in the experiences of students, teacher, and the subject matter itself. Recognizing these raw materials and finding ways to build relationships that connect students, teacher, and subject matter is the kind of curricular work we envision. Navigating and promoting learning with such attentiveness is difficult. We both experience our conversation as invested in this task, making visible a movement of thinking. The connections can never be fully anticipated. Still, we are cognizant that making these connections visible is critical to furthering them in our own conversation, as well as with others.

## SELF-UNDERSTANDING GAINED THROUGH THE OTHER(S): SHAPING CURRICULAR THINKING

Our ongoing conversation foregrounds the way deliberation about the relationships made visible and generated through attention to students’ thinking is the indispensable condition for curricular thinking. Andrew talks about how this growing understanding influences his advance lesson planning and preparations for teaching, explaining,

I do not think of lessons as discrete products. I want my lessons to be parts of connected wholes. And, the students must be co-participants. Paying heed to who my students are and the relations they each bring is the only way to locate the potential of a given situation and the meaning to be made in that situation. (Conversation, Artifact 6)

We examine the uncertainties that one teaching moment holds, and how it might unfold. We practice how teaching moments must be embraced, positioning

Andrew to feel his way into each teaching situation. The multi-sensory engagement demands attunement to the physicality and materiality within the learning experience itself. Dewey (1934) offers anticipation as the connecting link, stating, “What is done and what is undergone are thus reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other” (50). Discerning how to respond/act becomes Andrew’s teaching task. Andrew reflects,

I increasingly look for fitting ways to grow student thinking. At any given moment in the classroom, now is not where I was five minutes ago and not where I will be five minutes hence. (Conversation, Artifact 23)

A deepening trust in the teaching/learning situation is evident as Andrew boldly navigates a giving and receiving curricular movement, attending to students’ moving minds. He understands that this trust and boldness is due in part to the thoughtful preparations he has given to content alongside watching and getting to know his students, as he creates the circumstances necessary to generate a movement of thinking. Andrew comments:

Knowing my content thoroughly is huge. There is a comfort and confidence that is assuring for me. And, this does not equate with arrogance at all. A deep understanding of the subject matter at hand allows room for discomfort. It is OK not to know. I attempt to model this. Knowing students is huge too. I need to know something about their worlds to find intersections and motivate interactions. The spontaneity and delight found as learning discoveries and connections are made, make it all worth it. (Conversation, Artifact 18)

Through revisiting lessons taught by Andrew, and observed by Margaret, we see the elemental spontaneity and delight described as “turning moments.” Andrew relays these turning moments, found by attending to process, as being fragile. In fact, fragility is the source of strength (Macintyre Latta, 2002). Margaret talks about one specific observation of Andrew’s teaching practice, stating,

You initiated and sustained a conversation with your students for over 30 minutes. This is a lot of work, and even more so last period of a day before a long weekend. I do think you prompted the students to be more cognizant of their writing. Helping students see how their personal writing is situated within the field of writing and other literary genres is worthwhile. So, I would keep practicing these kinds of conversations. There is an artistry to them that demands teaching habits and embodied ways of working. Students need to cultivate these habits/ways of working too. You really held students’ attention as you shared your personal writing efforts. A stillness surfaced as students studied and appreciated your work. I would suggest that you could maximize this moment with specific questions that would involve students making connections to your writing. But, instead, you told them what you saw and had utilized. It seemed to me that the conversation generated up till your shar-

ing had prompted many connections and elicited possibilities. Honing in on some specifics for student writing via your writing example may have provided more direct guidance for the latter part of the class. I would encourage you to experiment with multiple ways. Sharing your writing worked well, but perhaps inviting students to make personal connections would have grown a discussion structuring the remaining time for this lesson and suggesting where the next lesson might head more concretely for yourself and for each of your students? (Conversation, Artifact 10)

Andrew had also given thought to this incident. He responds,

Yes, I find myself reflecting on such moments. I was aware that I shortchanged the potential by telling rather than enabling students to make connections for themselves. I think partly why I take my writing to share with students is to model the writing habits and ways of working I intend for students to come to know, but, also, the sincerity is key to my teaching identity. I want my students to be sincere learners. But, I did not create enough room to see and experience their sincerity, only mine. (Conversation, Artifact 11)

The nature of sincerity sought within teaching/learning situations takes over our conversation. We talk about how sincerity is a lovely notion within teaching. In retracing Andrew's teaching experiences we share our growing respect for the sincere ground that we catch glimpses of and encounter, understanding that it needs to be constantly cultivated. We both relay a desire for who we are becoming as individuals to be inseparable from our teaching identities. We agree that student identities ought not to be separate from who they are becoming as individuals too. The process character of such becoming is what we are experiencing as the invigorating work of learning for teachers and students. Undeniably, the relational complexities gathering and ensuing as learning is generated deserve our sincere consideration. We recognize that such sincerity often prompts unanticipated lesson directions. We also experience the vulnerability of sincerity through its exposure of teachers and learners as risk takers. We concur that being sincere is about being interested, in the midst of a learning venture. It is a learning venture that is sometimes pleasurable, but also often challenging, and sometimes overwhelming. Andrew conveys his careful lesson construction, the attention to the evolving individual and collective thinking, and the reworking alongside the stops and starts, denoting the ever-present process he is trusting. It is trust that we decide achieves sincerity. Andrew meets and works with learning tensions, student resistance and discord, as inherent within the process, expected along the way, and as being productive. Thus, sincerity cannot be imposed. The sincere learning movement created is marked by the unique story of process that unfolds. Dewey (1934) cautions that all too often "resistance is treated as a disruption to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection" (45), perhaps an opportunity to call sincerity into question.

Dewey explains, “The activity is too automatic to permit a sense of what it is about and where it is going” (38). Our conversation discloses teaching as a sincere search that necessitates contact and ongoing communication. We understand more fully that without this intimacy of contact and communication sincerity in teaching and learning cannot be found. As these relationships between students and subject matter emerge and develop, the teacher’s capacity to orient practices toward learners and learning through fostering connections derived from an intimate understanding of students and situation is required.

As our conversation continues we increasingly resist the confines of understanding being private and autonomous. After all, we are making sense of teaching as an ever-present process is through engagement with other(s). Our ongoing conversation reflexively translates into a teaching commitment to respect the uniqueness as well as the familiar and shared qualities of others. We acknowledge that learners enter into relationships as historical beings. We recognize that learner differences of all kinds require all involved to continually confront and consider who they are and who they are becoming. We concretely experience the way knowledge cannot be fixed as we encounter the other within our conversation. We gain greater cognizance of how understandings and otherness are intrinsically linked with the unfolding of the self (Gadamer (1992)). Thus conceived, understanding always implies a pre-understanding, pre-figured by the determinate tradition in which the interpreter lives and which shape his or her prejudices. Every encounter with otherness therefore means the “suspension” of one’s own prejudices, investing in the meaning making of others as opportunities to enlarge and challenge one’s own understandings. Self-understandings are thus embedded in the social and public, disclosed in the communal negotiation of meaning making, destined for further negotiation in conversation. Moreover, sincerity arises out of such conversation with other(s), forming the ground we are both attempting to navigate and translate within enactment of the curriculum.

### TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE OTHER(S): MANIFESTING CURRICULAR SUBSTANCE/FORM

It is clear to both of us that discerning fitting ways to proceed within learning situations demands continual practice and caring attention to other(s). We acknowledge that Andrew addresses turning moments in his teaching with greater awareness of seeing with potential in students, context, and associated ideas and then acting on possibilities. We also acknowledge his heightened cognizance of the process of positioning students to do likewise. Andrew explains:

For example, I play with parameters for assignments. I deliberately interrupt many students’ ways of working when I do not script assignment expectations tightly. Some students freak out. My response is to provide a wealth of respon-

sive feedback as assignments are initiated. Students have awesome ideas. There is something about forming one's own ideas, which if supported, generates a learning momentum that can be very powerful. (Conversation, Artifact 12)

Andrew has a lived sense in his own life of the momentum learning can hold. He believes that creating and investing in learning situations as an individual/collective movement of thinking will enable students to gain a lived sense, too. It is a lived sense that he knows matters through fostering qualities such as care, interest, and pride in the students' thinking. And, it is a lived sense that tells him that there is much to be gained by listening and attending to multiple viewpoints, often enlarging and deepening one's thinking in transformational ways. However, Andrew also grapples with the issue of enabling all students to find and value these qualities for themselves. In conversation with Andrew, I comment on an observation of such an attempt:

I do think that the conferencing you have begun with students regarding their writing efforts is a wonderful idea and it provides important contact with students and their thinking. But, you will need to think about ways to make this a part of a classroom context where students see it as important and the conditions created allow for conferences and other work to operate productively. The learning space and all that are involved needs to support these efforts. I do encourage you to enjoy reading and responding to your student writing. This is actually one of my favorite things to do as a teacher. I really think it is a way to enable conversation in any learning situation. It allows you a window into student thinking and helps you see where the individual alongside the collective conversation needs to go and the potential's worth developing. And you may find that this window will contribute to the needed space for learning that you are seeking. (Conversation, Artifact 6)

Dewey's (1904) claim that theory does not always follow directly into practice is concretely understood by both of us. Teaching for transformation is a slow process and necessarily involves students finding ways to enter into learning as well as finding the supports and resources to continue to do so. Andrew feels the weighty responsibility this places on teachers. He knows he needs to create learning conditions that occasion these lived sensations. Dewey (1904) terms this "inner attention," and it is manifested through learning relationships across students, teacher, and subject matter. Thus, a teacher seeks ways to access inner attention, drawing students into the depth and complexity of subject matter. Dewey (1904) explains that "external attention" ignores the movement of thinking, the interplay of students' thoughts, images, and emotions, and instead focuses on recognizing pre-determined outcomes and responding in set ways. Seeing the "bearings" that foster "inner attention" becomes an orientation for Andrew to deliberately seek in his students. We talk about how seeing inner attention reorients the control of teaching and learning from being imposed by the teacher, to coming from within the learning situa-

tion itself. To do so, Dewey (1938) suggests that teachers foster learning “out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present” ensuring that “it is within the range of the capacity of students” and “that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and of production of new ideas”(79). Dewey (1938) further articulates the consequences of reorienting control in this way: “When external control is rejected, the problem becomes that of finding the factors of control that are inherent within (the learning) experience” (21). The significances of student interactions within learning come into greater focus for Andrew. Personal sense making alongside collective sense making is increasingly valued and deliberately sought by Andrew and, in turn, his students. Dewey (1938) describes this action as the purpose for learning growing and taking shape “through the process of social intelligence” (72). The recursiveness of this process becomes evident, as Andrew finds himself reminding students of past learning, figuring into current learning, and providing direction for future learning. Dewey’s (1938) principle of “continuity” is enacted as Andrew encourages students to attend to this recursive process, too. This validates and models for all involved that learning can vary in substance and form, and that there is much to be learned from the experiences of others, and through struggles as well as successes. Students are expected to contribute to the invention and creation of meaning and thus uncertainties are concretely experienced as givens within the learning process. Space for speculation, projection, the unanticipated, guides and provides lesson directions, arising out of the relational intersections occurring. The development of such thinking within situations allows for the discovery of potential. This manifesting character of curricular enactment is reliant on the capacity to see the relational intersections coming together in particular teaching/learning situations and concomitantly acting to further them.

Dewey (1938) emphasizes that, “We have no choice but either to operate in accord with the pattern [relational intersections] it provides or else to neglect the place of intelligence in the development and control of a living and moving experience” (p. 88). “No choice” as Dewey relays it here, entails openness. The character of such openness is attentive to, alongside a willingness and susceptibility to, address and invest in learning relations as catalytic within a movement of thinking. This is the necessary openness that needs to mindfully embody teaching as an ever-present process. It seems that the ongoing search, locating self within this movement, is the work of understanding. We find that it is such reflexive engagement that is generative. We relay how openness to possibilities resists closure, infusing teaching and learning with life and novelty, and acting as a catalyst for transformation of self and other. Transformation acknowledges the reciprocity of active engagement with everyone/thing changing in the process (Gadamer, 1992). A renewal of self in the world is fostered through new and/or enlarged understandings and perspectives, as relations are encountered again and again. This is the substance that is “ordered” (Dewey, 1934, 133) through form, manifesting the physicality and materiality of curriculum as lived.

## SEEING RELATIONAL COMPLEXITIES AS MODES OF INTERACTION WITH OTHER(S)

It is the physical and material relational workings of that in-between space of self and other that reveal the epistemological/ontological bearings of teaching as an ever-present process. We encounter the significances of other(s), self-understandings gained through the other(s), and the transformative power of the other(s) to hold the pedagogical significances and act as epistemological/ontological bearings, ordering and furthering the curricular movement. Thus, we look to the particularities of our students, and the contexts we find ourselves within, to suggest content, direction, and forms for learning. The primacy of these givens acknowledges the historicity and ensuing relational complexities already at play in all teaching/learning situations. The learning movement evoked is responsive, animated by the curricular intersections of situation and interaction. We are increasingly mindful that as teachers we must exist at this nexus, seeking the epistemological/ontological bearings, negotiating the mediating ground where the conjuncture of understandings is lived. Such a mediating ground attends to understanding what each encounter conveys. An elemental energy thrives within this, creating movement. It assumes learning be brought into being, concomitantly bringing self into being, too. Dewey (1934) conveys this active search occurring through the relational workings as modes of interaction. He clarifies that this is not a cause and effect understanding of relation, but is rather about “generation, influence, and mutual modification” (134). Contemporary thinkers relay this epistemological/ontological distinction as reorienting teaching from the “cause” of learning to the “context” for learning (Biesta, 2007; Green & Reid, 2008; Macintyre Latta, 2013). Orienting toward context, attending to means and ends in education as being internally rather than externally related, informs curricular enactment (Biesta, 2007, 10; Dewey, 1904). This reorientation is at the heart of teaching/learning as an ever-present process.

## THE TURN AND RE-TURN TO SELF-UNDERSTANDINGS

Our conversation becomes meaning-full, acknowledging otherness through deliberately seeking connections by creating, responding, and relating alongside other(s). It affords us opportunities to challenge our assumptions, values, and beliefs. It fosters professional identities that are in touch with self as teacher, self as individual, our students, and the given learning contexts. Agency is gained through such connectedness. Dewey (1934) sees agency as central to human flourishing. To be fully human is to be alive, embracing thinking and feeling, seeing and acting. And to access such agency, the role and place of the other(s) is vital. It is the other that calls our very selves into question. It is the other that asks us to see fundamentally what is at stake within specific teaching/learning situations. It is the other that incites a turn and re-turn to self-understandings, acting on possibilities again and again in

an ever-present(ing) process. And, so, it is fitting that as our conversation of practice nears an end (at least for now) we return to our own evolving understandings of our teaching selves, giving expression to teaching as an ever-present process. An excerpt from our conversation gives voice to the present Andrew now finds himself immersed within during his first week of full time employment as a practicing teacher:

I have now been teaching for one week in my first job as a high school English teacher. One of the disadvantages of being a first year teacher is that I do not yet know what does and doesn't work for me, for my students, for my classroom. . . . The vast majority of lessons that I teach are being taught for the first time, and I try as hard as I can to link everything my students do into the process of writing, thinking, and becoming better at both. . . . Not all expected outcomes are visible/tangible, and not all outcomes are expected.

I shape my interactions with my students by putting the building of ideas and explanations at the very heart of my classroom. My students and I then form relationships through the work we do together, with ideas being the medium of relationship building. I am by no means an expert, and I spend a lot more effort than perhaps I should with maintaining these relationships (I do not regret this in the least), as teaching the way I do is a messy business. Fortunately, I am inexperienced enough, yet, to not see all the mistakes I make, which gives me just a bit more license to try out ideas that frankly might not work. If they fail, then they fail and it means it is time to try another approach. I tell my students constantly that I am not concerned with them giving me "Right" answers, only answers that are well-thought-out, that attempt to explain as much as they can, and that are supported by evidence.

I am slowly getting better at asking those questions of them, and of helping them find problems that are intrinsically motivating and also approachable, but at the same time, I am feeling an urge to switch over to a managerial style, complete with worksheets and multiple-choice tests. It is an urge to stick with that, which is safe and controllable. The thing that keeps me from doing that is that I know what motivates me about teaching: seeing the free interchange of ideas, watching them get built, torn down, rebuilt, torn down, and rebuilt until we exhaust our abilities. I relate to my students by sharing ideas with them, and I maintain my sanity in the classroom by explicitly structuring the starting points of discussion such that they produce as much material for that free interchange of ideas as possible. (Conversation, Artifact 21 & 22)

My response is first to praise the persistence envisioned by Andrew as he attends to teaching as an ever-present process. I then affirm Andrew's capacity to see with potential and invest in this potential by attending to what the communicative, relational, and interactive intersections of students, subject matter, and context bring to each teaching/learning situation. I explain,

The ever-presenting process that your teaching efforts are soliciting is overwhelming. But, the learning connectedness you are seeking for your students will be made more visible and tangible through such deliberate attention to other(s). This ever-presenting process looks for potential in other(s) and engages accordingly. Persist. It is your capacity to see/act on the potentiality of the present that I see instilling qualities holding promise for providing the sustenance for your teaching, and in turn, for learners and learning. I am increasingly aware that the task of preparing prospective teachers has much to gain from teaching experienced as an ever-present process. (Conversation, Artifact 23)

It is commitment to engagement with the other that guides the direction our conversation has been and is going. As such, it is a movement entrusted with the growth and wellbeing of other(s). Indifference to what is unique and particular cannot be ignored: "All this means that attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worthwhile meaning" (Dewey, 1938, 49). Dewey terms the terrain encountered the "human contribution" (245–71). We respect the ethical terrain such a movement of thinking enters. We share a sense of awe in what the present holds for the future; for the next moment of a lesson; for the potential we see in other(s) in the short and long term. Teaching as an ever-present process assumes that the future is the other, to be experienced with the other.

## REDEEMING THE POTENTIALITIES OF THE PRESENT

The attention to other(s) that our conversation of practice traces and embodies illuminates the significances of such attention. The present offers past understandings and holds future possibilities for all teaching/learning situations. As we seek further understandings of these relationships and their translations into teaching practices, our respect for the present deepens. As we hear in Andrew's experiences as a beginning teacher, it is a respect that concomitantly intimidates and incites action. Garrison and Rud (2009) convey such deepening respect as the humbling "reverent" ground of teaching. It is a respect that cautions both of us (a beginning teacher and an experienced teacher) that teaching as an ever-present process, disclosing and attending to the physicality and materiality of classrooms, must be revered as productive rather than disruptive for learners and learning, now and for our future. We understand that such a curricular movement is created at the intersections of learning situations and students' interactions. We experience how this concretely entails structuring what is encountered on a continual basis. Thus, shifting aims, emergent features, and qualities are expected. The opportunities to see and to act in these ways, to invest in the relationships emerging, and to make ongoing judgments form the epistemological/ontological terrain of teaching as an ever-present process. But it is just such lack of teachers' self-understandings concerning their teaching identities and practices that Lortie (1975) argued constrains

educational improvement. And Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) document how this has become increasingly problematic in shaping contemporary teaching contexts and discourses, warning that for the educators they studied in the Raising Achievement Transforming Learning (RATL) project, “this can lead to a displacement of their moral purposes and an erosion of their capacity to develop transformational change agendas of their own” (12). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) further insist that this results in “mortgaging teachers professional development and children’s lifelong learning along with the dedicated struggle to improve it, far into an ever-receding future” (13).

The ever-receding future Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) portray echoes Dewey’s (1938) warning concerning the nature of preparation in relation to teaching and learning for a changing world. The potentialities of the present in many classrooms have, and are, being sacrificed to a suppositious future. Moreover, as Hargreaves and Shirley document, its persistence permeates all aspects of our lives, consuming the work of teaching in ways that undermine learning. Thus, as Dewey suggests, the conditions for preparing for futures are missed, distorted, omitted, and shut out. Teaching becomes severed from curriculum, concerned with telling, covering, and imposing, in pre-determined ways and at pre-established paces. The question “Who am I?” in relation to other(s) (Smith, 1997) for teachers and for students cannot even be raised, never mind considered. However through navigating teaching as an ever-present process, we found the present to be productive as it disclosed the physicality and materiality located within the actual curricular experience.

Dewey’s ever-present process brings the past and future to bear on the present, and the personal challenge we each embrace as teachers and learners is to find ourselves continually in relation to it. Gadamer (1992) terms this process *foregrounding*: “Whatever is being foregrounded must be foregrounded from something else, which in turn must be foregrounded from it” (305). Foregrounding expresses Gadamer’s notion of prejudices surfacing in conversation acknowledging the specifically situated and historically conditioned nature of all understanding. It is this in-between space that we find ourselves within, navigating past and present, holding implications for the future. We must boldly enter the temporal in-between space to partake in curricular conversation (and life, for that matter). Engagement and a willingness to be challenged are required in order for prejudices to be provoked and examined. There must be room for learning to be a creative sense-making experience, thus getting nearer to the nature of teaching and learning as an ever-present process. Gadamer (1986) conveys such nearness as enlarging and deepening understandings. Moments of synthesis push forward into new understandings in an ongoing foregrounding movement. Gadamer (1992) refers to the range of vision at any one of these moments as a *horizon*, clarifying that “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices” (p. 306). The temporal confluence fuses horizons of under-

standing that push forward into new questions, new understandings, and inevitably, changing horizons. The complicated conversation of practice must embrace its temporality. Our extended conversation attempted to do so, living the language of practice through encountering, negotiating, studying, and articulating teaching/learning relationships. This is the ever-present process of teaching that invests in the future. It is the present within given teaching/learning situations that must be seen, encountered, and negotiated continuously as the preparedness integral to redeeming potential alive within it.

## CONCLUSION

For some time teacher education has been identified as critical to forming the necessary teaching identities embracing what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) term an inquiry stance. The conversation of practice we participated in throughout this paper assumes such an inquiry stance, revealing the formative nature of professional knowledge and the integral role of the other(s) toward informing, changing, and affirming teaching practices. Most importantly, it makes visible the process character of professional development that fosters conversations and collaborations attentive to the present and invested in student learning. It is clear to both of us that teacher education ought to model and instill these inquiry habits within teaching practices. Still, along with others, we continue to see that this is sadly lacking (e.g., O'Connell Rust, 2009; Schwab, 1970; Shulman, 2004; Phelan & Sumsion, 2008). Moreover, the future costs are all too apparent in classrooms today, as teachers and students find genuine concerted action to be impossible, neglecting the ethical realm of teaching and learning, disregarding the development of self-understanding, and curtailing contextually sensitive teaching and learning practices (Macintyre Latta, 2004; 2005a; 2005b). This makes the future that much more remote and ever more costly.

Teaching as an ever-present process is very foreign terrain to many educators, and a language of impossibility often subsumes attempts to think and act accordingly. Yet as we attend to Andrew's negotiation of his teaching/learning practices, we are reminded of how critical the role of hope is (see, e.g., Fishman & McCarthy, 2007) and the need to instill in educators deep, textured understandings of the important work of teaching as an ever-present process. There is something so vital and animated about Andrew's words and tentative understandings of teaching that speak to the contexts teacher education needs to insist upon. Teacher preparation must reorient curricular enactment toward being "intimately" and "necessarily" related within the processes of actual experience (Dewey, 1934, 38). It is the physical and material present of Andrew's classroom that is calling in his voice and experiences as a beginning teacher. Teacher education must foster and redeem the potentialities of the present as the generative ground of/for learning.

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**Andrew Ek** is the education director for the Nebraska Writers Collective and an adjunct instructor of computer programming at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. E-mail: andrewek@gmail.com.

**Margaret A. Macintyre Latta** is a professor and director of Graduate Programs and Research at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan. E-mail: Margaret.Macintyre.Latta@ubc.ca.