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Being and Becoming an Experienced Teacher

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Being and Becoming an Experienced Teacher

by

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Abstract

This thesis inquires into what it is to be and to become an experienced teacher. Although becoming an experienced teacher in part depends upon acquiring epistemological knowledge, such as instructional strategies and content knowledge, this study explores the relational qualities of experience.

Drawing on the philosophical writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer and particularly his theory of *Erfahrung,* this thesis journeys into the existential and ontological questions that undergird the core themes of citizenship and identity stipulated in the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies. These journeys are methodologically supported by examining inner and outer pathways including conversations, autobiographical reflections, and readings.

Becoming experienced calls for teachers to embark on an existential quest with fellow travellers. This journey requires the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that embraces the otherness of the other. Encounters with otherness may unsettle our understandings of the world and engender an inner awareness of our own historicity. Insights gained from journeys with others contribute to our capacity to responsibly respond to the particularity of the children entrusted to our care and the cultivation of discernment—ethical judgments that are reflective, intentional, and contextual.

Erfahrung does not seek a fixed or final destination; rather to be and to become experienced recognizes the finitude and conditionedness of our understandings. Thus, to be and to become experienced is always on the way. Throughout this journey we are required to put our understandings at risk—honouring the vulnerability and precariousness of our factical lives. While co-venturing with others we are called upon to hear the voice of the other that occasions more fulsome understandings of others, the

world and oneself. Accordingly, being an experienced teacher orients us to a radical openness, which occasions the possibility of the not yet known. This thesis culminates in five touchstones that characterize Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung.*

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mom, who passed away prior to its completion. I am most grateful and appreciative of how she continually sought to understand and to live life. I cherish her warmth and generous way of embracing others and how she occasioned conversations. I am compelled to share her loving and generous spirit with her grandchildren.

Table of Contents

Prologue

It Started with a Phone Call

Just over two decades ago, in late June, I received a phone call from the principal of a large urban academic high school who offered me a teaching position. "I believe you deserve a shot teaching at our school," he said. I was awash in euphoria, and much of the conversation that followed remains a blur, though I do recall him mentioning that I needed to contact the Head of the Social Studies Department to discuss the particulars of my new job. When the phone call ended, I bounced around my apartment throwing celebratory fist pumps in the air. After years of university education, I had entered the teaching profession officially. *I had finally arrived*. My celebration was short lived, however, as I started to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the unknown. Or was that self doubt beginning to creep in?

The following week I met with Carol, the Department Head for Social Studies to discuss my teaching assignment and to tour my new school. She greeted me warmly, handing over several bags overflowing with books and binders: "Here are a few resources as you get ready for next fall." I remember thinking, '*A few?*' There was no further discussion regarding what was in the bags, but I took great comfort knowing that I was not starting from scratch. I had a point of departure. I could rely on the experts who had travelled before me; after all, as I have heard many times since then, "in teaching, it is not like you should have to re-invent the wheel!"

Carol gave me my teaching assignment for the next year: two Social Studies 13 classes and a Social Studies 23 class—in common educational parlance, the 'non-academics kids', or *you know*, 'those kids'; Social Studies 10, the 'academic students';

Career and Life Management 20 and Physical Education 10. It was not until several weeks later, while proudly telling a friend about my new teaching position that I became aware of the term 'a dog's breakfast.' As my friend acknowledged, yep—that is what they often give the newbie. But I was undeterred. It was great to have a job! And more pragmatically, I could now begin to pay back my substantial student loans.

Carol and I continued our discussion as we toured the school. Even though I had never been in this particular place or space, I was struck by how familiar it seemed, by how I knew my way around. As we poked our heads into a few classrooms, Carol quipped, "Really not much new to see here." Nope, the teachers' desks placed in the front of the classroom, the desks organized in rows, the bulletin boards, and the bookcases were all familiar. Given that we were touring the school, I thought it appropriate to ask about my classroom—where might I hang my hat—where was my place? Carol's response was noticeably delayed. "Oh," she said, followed by that awkward silence that precedes an unfavorable response. "Since you are the newest member of the department and we do not have enough classrooms for each teacher, you will be the "floater."

Prior to the students' arrival, many of the teachers with whom I was to share a room brought me into their space to show me where I could store my materials—usually a single drawer in a filing cabinet. As I looked around the classrooms I was 'to share,' the walls were fully covered in posters, photographs and articles. And it was not until classes started that I realized having one's own room carried with it a certain status and entitlement that was not easily surrendered. It is only in retrospect that I have come to understand how important it is to prepare a welcoming and inviting space that honours and reflects all those who gather there, teachers and students alike.

The main office was centrally located, the space divided into wings by subject areas: the math wing, social wing and so on. Given that the school opened in the early 1900s, each wing was lined with pictures of graduating classes from yesteryear. As we approached the main office, there were numerous display cases recognizing honours' students, and those who had earned other academic achievements.

At a staff luncheon during the first week, I sat beside a former football coach. After twenty-five years of coaching, he had told the administration that he was not going to coach this season. In his words, "he had paid his dues".

One day after the first couple of months of school, I met the principal in the hallway, and he asked me to contact his administrative assistant to schedule a meeting with him. I could not ignore the sudden surge of tension throughout my body—could he somehow detect that I was feeling overwhelmed? Was my sheer exhaustion that obvious? What had he heard about my abilities or lack thereof? Was I doing well. . . ok?

The first several months of my teaching career were fraught with paradox. I oscillated between feeling confident, knowledgeable, and generally that I was doing a good job, to feelings of inadequacy; indeed, at times I felt like an impostor. With only a minor in English, was I really qualified? My confidence was ephemeral, susceptible, vulnerable. I remember overhearing students from Mr. Stevenson's class—the veteran teacher, the well-known expert in the department, loved by all students—discussing, beyond enthusiastically, a concept that I had not even considered. Instantly I felt a surge of inadequacy. I needed to read more, to learn more. I thought to myself—'What else do I not know?' I felt precarious, relying too much on what others thought, administrators, colleagues, students and parents. Did I fear not being loved? Was I consumed with

narcissism? I had a flashback to my undergraduate degree, recalling my professors saying in that it is not important for your students to like you, but only for them to respect you.

While making my way down to the principal's office, I was filled with trepidation: H How much could he bear to hear? Would I really tell him the truth of my experiences, how I was really doing? What might be the consequences of telling the truth? My 'probationary contract' stipulated that I would not be eligible for a permanent certificate for two years. Coaching. Student issues. Planning. Assessments. Curriculum. Phone calls. Administriva. Meetings. Deadlines. Research. Report cards. Parent teacher conferences. There was just too much to think about—too much to do. How will it be possible to survive the next day, the next week, the next month?

The principal's kind, gentle and earnest demeanor did little to assuage my angst. Our conversation began with him acknowledging that he had heard some good things about me. 'Really?' I thought. How would he really know? I had scarcely seen him. What informal network was at play? He continued by acknowledging the many challenges that confronted beginning teachers. He then proceeded to relay several stories of his own beginnings, 'his life in the trenches.' He mentioned that new teachers are vital to the renewal of the profession, that we brought new ideas, energy and enthusiasm. Perhaps he was attempting to ease some of my burden. Of course he wanted me to feel cared for and supported; unfortunately, I was unable to find solace in that brief conversation. I felt guilty; I could not find enough generosity to embrace his goodwill gesture. I could not resist the temptation of likening our conversation to one of the many motivational speeches I had heard from coaches prior to a big game.

As I was leaving his office, perhaps sensing that I needed a little more encouragement, he said: “Don’t worry, after five years you will be an experienced teacher.” I then wondered what I was supposed to do in the meantime, *before* I was experienced? Was experience merely predicated upon time? Did he deny the truth of his own memories? Because he suffered as a neophyte, is it now the passage that all newbies must travel? Perhaps that is why the old adage of ‘sink or swim’ has proven so resilient. When suffering is experienced, is there an ethical demand for administrators to respond?

Leaving his office, I was engulfed by loneliness. Where could I go for assistance? How long could I survive as an imposter? How come Teachers’ College did not adequately prepare me for this onslaught? Ah yes, teaching is the best experience; one learns best by doing.

About this Thesis

Throughout my twenty-two-year journey as an educator, I have encountered time and again the embodiment of that advice from my first principal: “Don’t worry, after five years you will be an experienced teacher.” Although that conversation took place many years ago, I continue to be intrigued by the concept of *experience*, a term frequently discussed in education. In particular, the principal’s comment regarding experience is one I have heard many times since, and frequently in the context of teachers learning their way around in a particular approach. For example, school policies and procedures, curricular content and departmental expectations. And seldom, if ever, is the term ‘experienced’ used to refer to beginning teachers. I wonder, then, how the notion of experience might emphasize the importance of the cultivation of a teacher’s attunement that assists them in co-venturing with their students and the topics under investigation?

As I will explore in this thesis, perhaps becoming experienced involves a particular commitment to a specific kind of practice that is intentional, reflective and contextual. Moreover, becoming experienced, cultivating a pedagogical thoughtfulness and a pedagogical tact, is not bound to the adherence of prescribed methodologies. As Gadamer (1981) suggested, the notion of practice is contextual and reflective: "the knowledge that gives direction to action is essentially called for by concrete situations in which we are to choose the thing to be done; and no learned and mastered technique can spare us the task of deliberation and decision" (p. 92). Thus, teachers are called to respond to situations, to make judgments that are guided by the good that is not known in advance.

This thesis is grounded in my autobiographical experiences and understanding of social studies and working with teachers in a variety of roles. Part of this work entails inquiring into my own lived experience as a son, father, student, teacher, university instructor, mentor teacher, and a curriculum specialist. Another aspect of this study involves conversations blended with philosophical reflections on the nature of human understanding. However, although I am inquiring into my own lived experiences, it is not only my experience, but rather I am hoping they will be read as a way to articulate the nature of the lifeworld. Autobiography, as a form of educational inquiry, Miller (2005) concluded, is "[to] call into question both the notion of one true, stable and coherent self and cultural scripts for that self" (p. xi).

One of the salient contexts for this inquiry, which has been central to my life as a teacher, is the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005), with particular attention to its front matter that explicates the core concepts of citizenship and identity. My journey of inquiry embraces the works of several key writers who have influenced my

thinking, who have on several occasions interrupted taken-for-granted understandings, but also have inspired attention to the profound complexities and wonderments of living a teacher's life, Grumet (1976) captured the wondrous residue that nourishes and remains long after an astonishing journey, when she wrote, "the effect upon the subject transcends the immediate encounter: its season passed, a spore remains and grows roots . . . bringing forth new vegetation, nurtured by that singular, inimitable soil" (p. 33). Indeed, the "inimitable soil" both reflects the living character of a teacher's journey and the nurturance that is offered when living in relation with the particularities, a heightened attunement to the possibilities offered by the "fecundity of the individual case" (Jardine, 1998, p. 33).

The ensuing discussion is grounded in the experiences and understanding of Social Studies and my work with teachers in a variety of roles as we investigated the front matter of the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005). Specifically, we co-ventured into existential and ontological questions that undergird the Program's core themes of citizenship and identity. In addition, the front matter from the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) may be read in various ways. The stories of my own lived experience are intended to provide a way of understanding how the Program of Studies is often read, and how worries about it tend to be addressed. In particular, through this thesis, I am working to understand the array of ways that the Social Studies front matter is understood, expressed, 'read,' ignored, and worried over in the local lifeworld of educators, administrators, student teachers and practicing teachers in Calgary, Alberta.

The Social Studies Program of Studies

> Human civilization differs essentially from nature in that it is not simply a place where capacities and powers work themselves out; man becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves in a certain way because of what he has become. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 311)
>
> I hold that my own unity and identity, in regard to others and to the world, constitutes my essential and irrepeatable way of experiencing myself as a cultural, historical, and unfinished being in the world, simultaneously conscious of my unfinishedness. (Freire, 1998, p. 51)

Throughout my career as a student, a teacher, a teacher educator and as a educational consultant, I have been intensely interested in the complexities of citizenship and identity in general and how education addresses the topic in particular; perhaps more specifically, I am goaded by the opportunities for educators, along with their students to embark on an existential journey as an invitation to understand self, other and the world. In addition, I am evoked by the temporality of our lives—our inheritances—our traditions that often remain concealed. Furthermore, the many concepts in the Program of Studies, ideas such as 'diversity', 'race' and 'gender' possess a living character, are open to future possibilities, of becoming something beyond our ability to predict. How might we honour that our understandings of the living character of these ideas require renewal? How might we live well given that the questions and the corresponding responses to 'diversity', 'race' and 'gender' have yet to arrive?

My interest in the notion of identity was heightened recently after a conversation I had with a thoughtful, insightful and academically successful university student regarding the nature her high school social studies experience. She is currently studying theology, psychology and women's studies. Of particular interest to her were the ideas of identity, the complexities involved in becoming human and the global challenges that confront

cultures as they attempt to live harmoniously in an interdependent world. When I mentioned to her that the two core concepts of social studies are citizenship and identity, I was moved by her gesture, eyes wide open in astonishment and mouth agape, finally, after several moments she said, "I had no idea that social studies was about my identity." What made this comment more impactful was the fact the Social Studies Program of Studies core concepts are entrenched from kindergarten to Grade 12. How might it be possible to understand that after many years of study, a student was not aware of the Program's raison d'etre?

Travelling alongside the thoughtful works of Aoki has provided me provocation to understand curriculum theorizing anew. A recurring theme of his oeuvre is living well in the midst of tensionality, the tension between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience. Aoki (2005) contended that the dominant frame of curriculum theory has, for too long, centered its attention on the teacher, the student, or the curriculum. He criticized that these 'centers' are often limiting to the "scope and contextuality that allow entertainment of views of human and social acts we call education. Hence, I find it important to center curriculum thought on a broader frame, that of man/world relationships, for it permits probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human, to be more human, and to act humanly in educational situations" (p. 95). Indeed, what might it look like, sound like and feel like to have curriculum centered on man/world relationships that encourages an investigation into the deeper meaning of what it is for persons to be human? How might we investigate the vulnerabilities and contingencies of man/world relationships? Perhaps such a focus would encourage our students and us to continuously return to the profound and complex

journey—"to [probe] . . . the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human" (p. 95).

The Alberta Social Studies Programs of Studies front matter (2005) provides a framework for the Program's rationale, philosophy and foundations; specifically, it delineates the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that teachers are entrusted to teach and the corresponding outcomes that students are expected to achieve.

At its heart the program is the dynamic relationship between the core concepts of citizenship and identity within a Canadian context. In particular, students are to develop the requisite attitudes, values, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens who respectfully recognize and respect individual and collective identities. Students are to become engaged, active and responsible citizens at the local, community, provincial, national and global levels. Moreover, social studies will provide students with a variety of opportunities: to work independently and collaboratively to develop "an understanding of who they are, what they want to become and the society in which they want to live" (The Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1).

These experiences illustrate the notion of *Erfahrung.* The dialectic between inner and outer lives as we travel alone and in community accentuating the interdependency of our travels. The role of the other in our understandings of otherness as we confront other possibilities of being in the world. The responsibility evoked by natality and the limits of our planning reason, our hope for the young as they embrace their own existential quest—their role in their own becoming as they become knower in the world and that at some point we all, teachers and students alike are responsible for composing our lives,

and not just any life—our life. Friere (1998) suggested regarding vulnerability as he wrote about the unfinishedness of our lives "this unfinishedness is essential to our human condition. Whenever there is life, there is unfinishedness, though only among women and men is it possible to speak of an awareness of unfinishedness" and "this awareness necessarily implies our insertion in a permanent process of search, motivated by a curiosity that surpasses the limits that are peculiar to the life phenomenon" (p. 56).

The stories that follow illustrate the notions vulnerability and contingency as they unsettle our preconceptions; unsettle our ways of understanding teaching and of the world. In addition, they reveal the vulnerabilities and contingencies of teacher subjectivity in terms of and in relation to the 'face' of students in all their diversity.

Overall Focus and Research Questions

There has been, and continues to be, an epistemological orientation in the field of education that accentuates a particular understanding of teaching and learning, with an emphasis on pedagogical practices for disseminating curriculum content. In addition, assessment practices, often in the form of summative strategies, were implemented to assess student understanding of the stated curriculum objectives. Within such a construal of teaching and curriculum, to be an experienced teacher was perceived as one who had accumulated the requisite content knowledge; thus, to be an experienced teacher was associated and understood as possessing subject knowledge expertise.

Although knowledge of subject matter and corresponding assessment practices are important, the overemphasis on their accumulation can truncate a teacher's journey into the existential and ontological questions that undergird the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005). An orientation towards teaching that focuses on the

'epistemological' is a way of being—a way that frames our work as teachers, which often excludes certain kinds of questions, experiences, and historical inquiries, and influences what we can 'hear' as teachers. Moreover, the profoundly complex relational space between teachers, students and curriculum was often primarily oriented towards 'covering' the knowledge, skills and attitudes outlined in the Program of Studies.

Within this framework, the core concepts of citizenship and identity were presented as abstract concepts removed and isolated from the lived experiences of students. Such a focus resulted in pedagogical practices that threatened to foreclose on an inquiry into our understandings of pedagogy and curriculum that we had inherited, and at times, has become deeply engrained. While as educators we inherit particular philosophies and practices, they represent understandings and possibilities only—they were originally answers to particular questions within a historical context. These philosophies and practices are not necessities.

Social studies teachers today are challenged to work within the tension of an understanding of curriculum that overemphasizes content knowledge while at the same time creating opportunities to dwell in the existential and ontological questions that elude ontic certainty. The Program of Studies supports an approach to teaching citizenship and identity that transcends only cognitive knowledge and embraces, in Arendtian terms, a notion of responsibility for natality—and the responsibility for world renewal.

In this thesis, I am enquiring into the kind of relationship that calls forth a certain kind of practice and subjectivity as a teacher, a practice that is oriented to, and recognizes, as Gadamer (1981) suggested that "there is no formal criterion or rule by which to criticize or circumvent the remote context of habituation and orientation that is

part of any single practical judgment" (p. xxviii). I am interested in exploring subjectivity that honours and asks about the best way of life—that is, given a particular context, how ought we to live? Most importantly, I explore questions about what it means to become an experienced teacher. Within these questions, a teacher's existential journey turns towards a "conversation of the soul with itself as thinking in a process of endless self-understanding" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 5). Thus, our subjectivities as teachers are directed towards an endless task of a radical openness—openness to new understandings of others, the world and oneself, with a profound attunement to the contingency of a single case.

To honour the living historical character of teaching and curriculum and to respond ethically to the arrival of the new, Arendt (1993) suggested that because the world was constructed with mortal hands, it runs the risk of wearing out. Therefore, she wrote that in order "to preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew" and "our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new, that we, the old, can dictate how it will look" (p. 192). Becoming an experienced teacher, then, is to dwell thoughtfully in the generative tension that resides between the young and the old, between the puerile and the senatorial as a means to "preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world" (p. 192). Smith (1999) provocatively asked: "How are we to respond to new life in our midst in such a way that life together can go on, in a way that does not foreclose on the future?" (p. 139).

Accordingly, this thesis explores Arendt's and Smith's challenges to think about a pedagogy that invites, or indeed *requires*, a hermeneutic or interpretive engagement with understanding self, other and teaching. I propose a notion of experience as journeying, where we as teachers might venture into the existential and ontological questions of the human condition, and inquire into our cultural and social inheritances—the ancestral voices that inform our understandings of the world. To become experienced is to travel *with* others, and involves questioning our understanding of others, the curriculum topics and ourselves.

Gadamer (2004) suggested that to be experienced embraces the notion of venturing, an undergoing "experience is the experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart" (p. 351). Perhaps a challenge for social studies teachers is to maintain our understanding of the human condition as an open question, and know that things could always be understood differently. In addition, how might our journey as teachers bring our subjectivities into question? Being and becoming an experienced teacher is an awareness of the constraints and possibilities that locate us as historical beings.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1 discusses autobiography as a methodology for this thesis, followed by several explorations into the autobiographical pathways of this journey—a journey that has involved engaging with many fellow travellers who have supported my expanding understanding of others, the world and myself. I also begin to explore how Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung* can clarify these autobiographical reflections.

Chapters 2 through 4 further illuminate *Erfahrung* as a journeying and co-venturing with others. These chapters investigate being and becoming an experienced teacher, including both the vulnerabilities and contingencies involved in living a teacher's life, and the profound complexities of relations between self and other, while also engaging the social studies curriculum and encounters with others in the world. Specifically, Chapter 2 explores the vulnerabilities and contingencies inherent in the lifeworld. Our lives as teachers, our subjectivities and the curriculum we teach are all susceptible to becoming unsettled and to being understood differently. As we co-venture with students through curriculum topics and academic disciplines, our understandings of the lifeworld are often 'brought up short', and our expectations are frequently thwarted. Although journeying is fraught with risk and suffering, Gadamar's *Erfahrung* reflects an existential quest, which occasions a more expansive horizon, and more fulsome understanding of self and the world.

Chapter 3 illustrates the challenges that confront social studies as we co-venture with students into the curriculum topics. The front matter to the Program of Studies provides an opportunity for teachers to co-venture with students as they inquire into their experiences in the lifeworld. Inquiring and travelling into lived experiences is not merely a solipsistic journey, but rather as Arendt (1993) reflected, a journey that is embedded in relations with others, "for without reality shared with other human beings, truth loses all meaning" (p. 35). This venture calls for a comportment of openness, a receptivity to, and cultivation of, a pedagogical attunement that points to an ethical commitment, and calls for a teacher's responsible responding to the students in our care. Moreover, when we as

social studies teachers together with our students journey into the lifeworld, possibilities emerge for personal transformation and social commitment.

Chapter 4 examines and reflects upon several encounters with students, the curriculum topics, and otherness. These encounters provoked me to embark upon a journey to uncover many presuppositions that often govern our lives as teachers. Furthermore, inquiring into the lifeworld with students occasioned opportunities for a heightened consciousness about both human finitude and conditionedness. Encounters with others revealed the ways that teachers are affected by our own inner historicity—our own being and becoming—and how inquiring with others can orient us to possibilities not yet known.

Finally, Chapter 5 culminates in five touchstones, which are not intended as a prescription or a set of methods, but rather point to the complex journey involved in being and becoming an experienced teacher. This venture calls for a particular kind of experience, a particular practice, and a passion to journey, to explore both the inner and outer pathways of our lives as we lead the young out into the world where they may seek freedom, embrace a journey of being-for-oneself, and the wisdom and responsibility to know what might be possible.

Chapter 1: Being and Becoming an Experienced Teacher: Autobiographical Touchstones

In reflecting on the notions of journeying and becoming an experienced teacher, I was struck by Smith's (1999) essay, *'Journeying: A Meditation on Leaving Home and Coming Home,'* which illustrated that a journey required an existential quest, in which we travel with others to understand the world, others and ourselves anew:

> Going on a journey . . . is not exotic, or romantic. It is not a form of tourism. It issues from something much more basic, even ordinary, but also very deep. The ancient Greek philosopher put it this way: Question: Why do you go out? Answer: In order to come in. Why would you leave home? Well, in order to come home, but in a new way, a better way . . . The most basic purpose of going on a journey, then, is the very ordinary one of learning to be at home in a more creative way, in a good way, a way tuned to the deepest truth of things (Smith, 1999, p. 2).

Smith begins by acknowledging that the word *journey* originally referred to one's daily work; in this sense, everyone is always on a journey. And applying this notion to education, I then wonder: what is our daily work in schools, for students and teachers? What does journeying demand from us? How might the study of curriculum topics issue a call to set forth on a journey? How might the lived experiences of students and teachers provide a point of departure? Smith (1999) observed that although going on a journey is a central aspect of human experience, there are several ways to interpret existential aspects of journeying as articulated by these motivations: "To answer a basic concern about existence, such as the meaning of suffering; To respond to an inner call" (p. 1). Furthermore, he reminded us that going on a journey for such reasons is "not exotic, or romantic. It is not a form of tourism," but rather leaving home offers an opportunity to come home "in a new way, a better way" (p. 1).

For Smith (1999), journeying is a dynamic engagement with others as he concluded that "Maybe this is the time to embark collectively on a new journey inward, not for the purpose simply of celebrating our personal or collective subjectivities, but for the more noble one of laying down the outward things that precisely enslave us. Then a new engagement with the world may be possible, one that is more friendly, honest and true" (p. 5). Perhaps a new engagement with the world requires questioning things as a means to cultivate a world that is "more friendly, honest and true."

While journeying, as a possibility to interrupt our quotidian lives, Smith (1999) called for an attunement to the voice of the other, to heed a call from the stranger. He explored the multifariousness of voices from Wisdom traditions—Buddhism and Taoism—with the hope of achieving a distance "by a form of ritual stopping, a stopping of ongoing engagement with the usual round of active cultural illusions, and gaining of what Tenzin Gyatso calls 'equipoise' . . . In Taosim, the aim is to find a 'stillpoint' where the finite and the infinite cohere" (p. 3). Thus, Smith encouraged making oneself available for "deeper insight into what the present moment holds" (p. 4).

Going on a journey presents an opportunity to garner a more fulsome understanding of the context of one's historical moment and cultural constructions, and to better understand one's cultural pathologies. How might education provide a dynamic of journeying, an opportunity for "leaving home, healing, coming back wiser, more compassionate—and applying it to the generalized condition of our lives [?]" (Smith, 1999, p. 2).

Exploring the notion of journeying invokes Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung,* as a way of becoming experienced, inspired by existential questions. In this chapter, I offer

autobiographical stories to elucidate being and becoming experienced, and investigate the inner and outer aspects of my life in education. Specifically, I explore the question: What is it to be and to become an experienced social studies teacher? Three autobiographical strands combine with the story shared in the Prologue to offer insight into the complex notion of being and becoming experienced: my life as a beginning teacher (see Prologue), an encounter with a former student, and my experiences as a son and as a father.

These autobiographical stories point to my journey in a world with others, and show how being and becoming a teacher is a dialogue with self and others in the world. The question of self and other is not a solipsistic or narcissistic venture, but rather involves a profound relation with others in the world. Accordingly, the stories also illustrate the nature of journeying—a dialectical story of self and other, and the complexity of being and becoming experienced.

Existential Roots of Autobiography: Autobiography as a Way into the Question

Pinar and Grumet's notion of autobiography and the method of *currere,* the study of one's own educational experiences, suggested an inquiry that honours the significance of an individual's everyday experience of the school curriculum. As teachers we have the capacity to learn from our experiences, to scrutinize our own forms, to explore the underlying assumptions and expectations that frame our conceptions of ourselves as educators, and to reconstruct them through thought and dialogue with others. Venturing, Pinar (2011) noted, "enhances subjective engagement with the academic knowledge and provides opportunities to reconstruct one's experience, in the process changing oneself and in some (not always) small way the social world one inhabits" (p. xiii). Similarly, Grumet (1976) suggested that *currere* embraces a notion of journeying, an adventure into

the unknown, an encounter with the world that is "a generative act, spawning new experience, a hybrid of objectivity and subjectivity, whose very birth modifies and extends and finally transcends its inheritance" (p. 34). Thus, *currere* is not restricted to introspection, "for that would assume that experience resides inside one's cranium, draping its walls with the voluptuous and decadent hangings of sentiment" (p. 38). But rather, investigating one's own educational experiences recognizes that we are in relationship with the world as described by Scheler: "No matter which realms of object we may distinguish—the realm of objects of the inner world, or the outer world . . . they all have an abstract objectivity. But a person is never a part of the world; the person is always correlate of a world, namely, the world in which he experiences himself" (as cited in Grumet, 2006, p. 50). As teachers we live our professional lives within structures that shape how we come to understand the world. How might our journeys assist us in unveiling the policies that ensnare us and reconstruct understandings of ourselves and the social that encourage us to initiate or pursue, in the words of Magrini (2012), "small world" changes in understandings of the other, the curriculum topics and ourselves?

Furthermore, *currere* is not merely self-study, a reflection upon one's private journey detached from the world, since this would underscore that the labor of understanding the other is never an innocent, disinterested reading of the other's offerings. Engaging the other involves a convivial, generous and loving spirit, as journeying with another is not solely an exercise in self-reflection. Rather, engaging the other involves a dialectic that is the basis of educational experience, the dialectic, which in the words of Merleau-Ponty, provides as opportunity to "slacken the intentional

threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice" (as cited in Grumet, 1976, p. 41).

Furthermore, venturing into curriculum becomes a historical and biographic site on which generations struggle to define themselves in the world. Inquiring into our lived experiences, Grumet (1976) observed, is to alert us to "the unobtrusive trap of habitual response that lies beneath their well-travelled paths. The seasoned traveler is oblivious to the danger. The path is well marked. He has been this way many times before . . . It is not merely a question of rerouting, adding a rest-stop, revising the itinerary. It is necessary to review the initial intentions, and destination" (p. 78).

An integral aspect of *currere* is a conversation complicated by our interactions with others as they bring their individuality, albeit one shaped by a multitude of factors and inflected by historical time and geographical place. Pinar (2004) suggested that "alterity structures and animates complicated conversation" (p. 188). Indeed, it is in and through our journeying with others that we as teachers may confront differences to our own understandings where the familiar may become unfamiliar. Furthermore, our travels with others to hear the other's voice involves the cultivation of an attunement that requires practice. Jardine (2006) reflected that being and becoming experienced is a venturing with otherness and as we travel we "become someone (not just anyone) as a consequence of how [we] carry [ourselves] in the world. With practice, [we] can become more experienced in experiencing things in their abundance" (p. xxv). Traversing the territory with others reveals curriculum in abundance, exposing us to new vistas, to more expansive surrounds illuminating new understandings, new possibilities.

Autobiography contributes to the notion of journeying, as venturing with others, and provides an opportunity for subjective and social reconstruction. These travels happen both in solitude and in solidarity. Travelling seeks movement; however, this movement is not experienced step by step towards true and tenable universals, but rather by nurturing an orientation, a disposition to the multifariousness of being, to beings that are always on the way to becoming. As Gadamer (2004) observed, "we cannot see the end but only the direction of the movement. The final goal of all our aims, toward which the restless activity of mankind is drawn . . . is only something we sense dimly, something we believe" (p. 211).

Moreover, through our travels we, as teachers, may cultivate a wisdom that manifests itself in a responsible responding, an ethical judgment to the children entrusted to our care. And a wisdom that welcomes an aporetic space that acknowledges that our current understandings are vulnerable and contingent, and reflect an ontological commitment that the future is pregnant with possibilities not yet known.

Being and Becoming Experienced as a Social Studies Teacher: Autobiographical Origins

> Tradition or what is handed down from the past confronts us as a task, as an effort of understanding we feel ourselves required to make because we recognize our limitations, even though no one compels us to do so. It precludes complacency, passivity, and self-satisfaction with what we securely possess; instead it requires active questioning and self-questioning. (Gadamer, 2004, p. xvi)
>
> Genuine experience is experience of one's own historicity. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 351)

My journey as an educator started twenty-two years ago. I vividly recall the initial excitement at the prospect of starting my first teaching assignment as a social studies

teacher at a large urban high school. After several years of post-secondary education, I was finally going to have my own classroom, a place and space to teach the young.

Within my first week of teaching a predominant ethos emerged within the school generally, and our department particularly. During our first social studies meeting, the central focus of the department was clearly articulated. Much of the discussion centered on how the grade twelve students had performed on the provincial standardized examinations in June of the previous school year. When compared to students throughout the province and across the system, the data reflected that our students' academic achievement exceeded the provincial average and ours was one of the top-performing schools within the entire system. These achievements garnered many accolades from school administrators and from the Parent-School Council, representing the larger school community. The school rankings were published in the local newspapers, and the resulting public attention may partially explain why there was an extended wait list of families hoping that their children would be granted admission.

Perhaps predictably, the central purpose of our weekly department meetings was to address student academic achievement. Our conversations focused on establishing structural and pedagogical consistencies from grade ten through twelve; assessment practices were to mirror those of the provincial examinations, which consisted of multiple-choice questions and a written component, the 'persuasive essay.' Teachers were organized into teams to analyze examinations, and to report their findings. Dates were established for common examinations. Resources and best teaching practices were shared. As a means to ensure student success, it was common practice for teachers to pre-test students' reading and writing abilities during the first week of classes to ascertain

whether students were placed in the appropriate courses, that is, the academic and non-academic streams.

Much of the department's professional development opportunities focused on teaching methods and techniques that addressed student weaknesses revealed primarily by examination analysis. Curriculum consultants from the Calgary Board of Education would regularly conduct half- and full-day workshops replete with step-by-step procedures—'how to manuals'—to assist teachers with a wide variety of curricular topics, the accompanying resources and corresponding assessment practices. Moreover, the materials were used to establish department standards, with the goal of ensuring consistency amongst all teachers. As a beginning teacher, I took comfort in the institutional structures and pedagogical supports, which provided me with a means to develop an understanding of the expectations within both our department and the larger school community. The opportunity to share resources and teaching methods with colleagues provided a strong sense of security, and a place of departure. Given that I had only recently arrived in Alberta, the workshops furthered my understandings of the knowledge, skills and attitudes defined in the Program of Studies. Furthermore, the department's pedagogical approaches were familiar, as they resembled many of my experiences throughout my education degree, both during on-campus instruction and school practicums.

Experienced teachers were assumed to have greater familiarity with the course content mandated in the provincial Program of Studies. As a result, experienced teachers were frequently assigned the senior-level courses. Experienced teachers were deemed 'experts' and garnered the reputation of being competent teachers, determined in large

part by how their students performed on the final examination. Frequently the measurement for teacher success was twofold: a class average on the final examination that met or exceeded the provincial average, and a classroom-awarded mark that was within five-percent of a student's score on the final examination, often referred to as 'alignment.'

Although it was not the sole criteria for success, this dissemination of discipline knowledge as prescribed by the Program of Studies was the predominant factor that recognized a successful high school social studies teacher. Thus, to be an experienced teacher was to be practiced in certain ways of knowing and doing. Given this particular pedagogical emphasis, department meetings became a source of angst for me. I frequently felt ill-prepared and believed I did not possess the requisite knowledge and skills to sufficiently prepare students for the impending examinations. In fact, many teachers declined to teach courses that had provincial examinations. As a means to address my concerns, I attended several workshops: how to teach using collaborative methods, how to teach critical thinking and reading skills, and classroom management techniques. After attending these workshops, the focus of which was often on techniques devoid of specific content knowledge, I frequently felt a surge of confidence and enthusiasm; these feelings, however, were short-lived.

Even though I was familiar with the dominant narrative, I started to feel submerged, confined under the pressures of particular understandings of teaching. There were several occasions during the first few months of teaching when I felt overwhelmed by its frenetic pace, unable to think beyond the present moment, consumed by thinking about Susan as she struggled to read, or Shayne's inattentiveness, or Katherine's tumultuous home life,

or Stephen's multiple and unexplained absences, and at times the overwhelming demands of preparing to teach: What am I going to do today, tomorrow?

It was here, in these living moments of teaching, when I was confronted with the realization that an ethical response to the students in my midst exceeded the efficient dissemination of content and the application of prescribed methods. It was here where I felt an intense obligation to respond to the uniqueness of each student entrusted to my care, a mediation that necessitated an ability to hear otherwise, a hearing that often interrupted my own images of the hopes and desires that guided my practice.

However, these same concerns provided provocation as I caught glimpses as to how discourses and practices within institutions become simply accepted as 'the way we do things around here.' Indeed, in order for our school to operate with a student population of more than 2000 and 140 staff members, appropriate practices and procedures required implementation. An enormous challenge for educators amidst the everydayness of schooling is to recognize that the sedimentation of certain given 'realities' necessitate a return to think them anew. After all, at one point current procedures and protocols were answers to particular questions, within a particular time and place. Adorno aptly captured this spirit in his observation that "The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar" (as cited in Butler, 2005, p. 3). It may not be the sedimentation of practices and procedures that are problematic, but rather the challenge is to be able to maintain a dynamic tension that keeps open the possibilities that things could be otherwise.

My undergraduate and graduate degrees in political science with a concentration in political philosophy provided respite, an interruption to the dominant ethos as my studies

called me to venture into the profound wonderments of being human. Much of this journey was explored through reading, writing and classroom discussion. The human condition was brought into question, but definitive answers were elusive; the outcomes remained open to future possibilities, and all this was outside the purview of final examinations. I became focused on how it might be possible to invite students to inquire into existential questions that explored human possibilities, to the multifariousness of living a life. I was reminded of Levinas as he stated, "before we can speak about a self who is capable of choice, we must first consider how that self is formed" (as cited in Butler, 2005, p. 85). I explored ways to invite students to consider how they had come to their current understandings of self, other and the world; in short, who and how had they become, and what were the future possibilities for becoming otherwise? And I continued to query into to how it might be possible to interrupt, to pause, and to create opportunities for exploring the existential complexities of citizenship and identity, rather than just 'covering the content' of these topics outlined in the Program of Studies.

Students often participated enthusiastically during classroom activities regarding the philosophical writings/thinking of Aristotle, Machiavelli and many others, but they frequently concluded that "although interesting, it wasn't the real stuff that they had to learn"—and, it belied a certainty that they had come to expect. Perhaps given my nascent understandings of teaching and curriculum theory, I was often unable to find a means to maintain an opening to further investigate the many complexities that resided in the Program of Studies. Although the predominant ethos in my department accentuated the importance of student achievement predicated on 'objective' examination criteria, there were many conversations amongst teachers who recognized and sought ways to dwell

within the tensionality of teaching in the present historical moment. Many teachers, for example, expressed concern regarding the disproportionate influences of standardized tests. Interestingly, when conversations about student assessment took place, teachers were often prefaced with a stern reminder that provincial examinations reflect only one means of gathering data regarding student learning; however, this acknowledgement did little to create space for alternative assessment practices within our department.

In response to the focus on standardized tests, teachers raised concerns that students were often reduced to a means to an end—to perform well on tests to ensure that the school's and teachers' reputations remained favorable. A conversation that continues to haunt me is one I had with a senior teacher many years ago; at the conclusion of our conversation, he said, "If the primary focus of my teaching continues to be preparing students to be successful on final examinations, I am going to lose my soul." Throughout my journey in education, I have heard this comment echoed on many occasions. And years later, I came across the poignant words of Musil (1990) that hearken to me the lingering residue of our conversation: "we do not have too much intellect and too little soul, but to little intellect in matters of the soul" (p. 131). How might curriculum theorizing, given the primacy of citizenship and identity as core concepts of social studies, create space for conversations that evoke more "intellect in matters of the soul"? And I wonder alongside Greene (1988) as she expresses her interest in pursuing human freedom: how might teachers "orient the self to the possible, of overcoming the determinate, of transcending or moving beyond in the full awareness that such overcoming can never be complete"? (p. 5).

Teachers realized that thoughtful teaching about citizenship and identity in social studies was not merely teaching students about the component parts of these core concepts, but rather called for relational and challenging existential encounters. Teachers discussed how thoughtful inquiry into these central themes would encourage a more fulsome understanding of the existential qualities and difficulties of teaching. How, given the specified outcomes and objectives articulated in the Program of Studies, might a space be kept open, a generative space for 'possibilities not yet'? Moreover, teachers understood that a particular discourse or multiple discourses both offer and deny openness and possibility. There were many instances where teacher practices did critically evaluate the dominant ethos, its limitations and the possibilities of excess, to see, hear and feel things differently.

My Introduction to Gadamer

Several years ago, somewhat serendipitously, I attended my first graduate class in interpretative studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. Although I was enrolled in another course, as I was making my way to class that fateful evening I bumped into a colleague who suggested that I join her and attend the class she was taking. All she said was, "I think it will speak to you." For some reason it did not take much convincing. Without further conversation she took hold of my arm and escorted me to class. As I perused the course outline, I remember thinking, "What am I doing here?" I had never heard of Hans Georg Gadamer and certainly had no idea what philosophical hermeneutics might have to do with education.

As the professor started to speak, I had the feeling of being re-awakened and presented with an opportunity to re-learn, of being pulled into the sway of something

recognizable but long submerged. His words enlivened and inspirited the pedagogical terrain. I recall suddenly being able to 'hear in a new key', becoming attuned to a narrative that loosened the hold of the dominant discourse to which I had grown so accustomed. I quickly gained a sense of the intellectually abundant possibilities of education coming into language, albeit in a foreign tongue, and felt a return of the many provocations that had inspired me from a very young age; specifically, my sheer fascination with being and becoming human, which significantly contributed to my desire to pursue a career as a social studies teacher. Throughout the evening's lecture I found myself nodding, not always in agreement, but rather recognizing that understandings of self, other and the world can be otherwise, that we live our lives temporally, the past, present and future stitched together; indeed, we cannot predict with exactitude how concepts such as citizenship and identity may be re-conceptualized and understood differently in the future. Although there were many intense moments of inspiration throughout the evening, at night's end when asked by another friend about the lecture's content, recounting the evening's discussion proved elusive.

This introduction to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics was a significant catalyst for me to embark on a journey into graduate studies in interpretative studies. Combined with starting graduate studies, I had been seconded to work in the Master of Teaching program (MT program) at the University of Calgary. The MT program's philosophy provided a stark juxtaposition to my own teacher preparation program, which had centered primarily on teaching as the acquisition of requisite discipline knowledge and pedagogical methods and techniques. By comparison, an apropos image of the MT program is that of a kaleidoscope, as the bits of colored glass tumble within its chamber

and reveal a multitude of reflections, constantly changing and emerging patterns; thus, the program oriented me to the livedness and the profound complexities of understanding the ever-evolving terrain of a teacher's life.

The MT program accentuated the fact that teaching and learning are complex tasks, undertaken in diverse and uncertain environments. It would be difficult to contest that pedagogical skills and subject knowledge are required to become an effective teacher. However, to thoughtfully respond to the contingencies and complexities involved in the lifeworld of teachers, the MT program called for the cultivation of practical wisdom that is intentional, contextual and reflective. The program's pedagogical philosophy is captured by van Manen (1997), who stated: "pedagogy is the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations" (p. 2). This underscores the ethical demands of teaching, of the necessity for teachers to cultivate an attunement that honours the complexity of responding pedagogically to particular children, in particular contexts, and necessitates a particular kind of practice.

Combined with my enrolment in interpretive studies and teaching in the MT program, I was encouraged, or perhaps more accurately, *compelled*, to journey alongside many interpretative writers/philosophers whose thought re-orients and points to teachers' lived-experiences that offer provocations to reflect: in the words of Merleau-Ponty, to challenge "plasticity of habit", to think against the grain of the everyday lives of teachers. Furthermore, interpretative frames such as Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the reconceptualists invite teachers to investigate our lived experiences as teachers, creating possibilities for attunement to understanding teaching as an experience of being in the

world; creating space for wonder and engaging in the contingencies of living a life—*a teacher's life*. I am reminded of the Greek word for wonder, *thaumadzein,* which means "to begin to philosophize. It is to stop and think; to pause and reflect; to allow yourself the alertness to be struck, surprised, and to respond without too much presupposition or judgment" (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 16). How might we, as teachers, feel enchanted to embark on a journey that occasions moments to pause, to be struck by the wonders of our lives, and of the world?

As I reflect upon my experiences in education, as a beginning high school teacher, teaching pre-service teachers at post secondary, and my role as a curriculum specialist, the dominant image of experience is often understood in subjective terms alone. A teacher is deemed experienced predicated upon the number of years they have taught. I wonder how the works of interpretative writers may provide an opportunity to inquire into the cultivation of a certain kind of experience that offers teachers and students a means to reflect upon the narratives that have come to govern our lives? Such an inquiry may provide an invitation to expand the horizons of our lives in general and our teaching lives in particular. I am moved by the words of curriculum scholar Grumet (1988) as she reflected on the existential possibilities of investigating our lived experiences: "As we study the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities" (p. xv).

I am drawn also to curriculum theorist Aoki's image of a bridge, which he uses as both a noun and a verb to illuminate this space of difficulty and possibility, a place and space, and in dwelling that provides an invitation to understand differently. How might it

be possible to co-venture with students, to honour their singularity and the profound complexities of teaching? How might a bridge, a welcoming space between teachers and students, provide an opportunity for us to cultivate an attunement to hear the call of teaching?

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has been, and continues to be, tremendously influential in my travels as an educator. Specifically, I am provoked by his commitment and continual return to the basic practical and political questions about the right way to live. This journey is not to seek or to espouse a definitive and permanent foundation to guide our actions, but rather to point to the contingencies and frailties of our understandings, of the current historical moment, and of the traditions to which we belong. In part, Gadamer's theory of experience—*Erfahrung*—illustrated his commitment, as it calls for a journey, a venture, an encounter with the other in conversation as a means to elucidate more expansive understandings of self, other and the world. The journey's movement is both centrifugal and centripetal: one ventures out into the world and returns with the possibility of understanding anew. Furthermore, *Erfahrung* explicates a certain kind of journey that requires a return to the lifeworld of teachers, to question our lived experiences, to question the way we have come to know the world as a means to know the world in which we live as human beings. This questioning, as Gadamer (2004) insisted, required humility and a profound attunement to alterity, to be open to that which is unfamiliar, to live in tension and believe that things could be otherwise. In addition, *Erfahrung* involves a process that is essentially negative; our expectations are thwarted in the presence of the other, and our previously held understandings are no longer adequate to the particular context; indeed, we are brought

up short. Thus, going on a journey involves both risk and suffering. Risk invokes a sense of vulnerability, exposing our assumptions and beliefs about our lives, and our teaching lives. Central to Gadamer's (2004) theory of experience is the notion of suffering, which may be induced when we are exposed to our limited horizons. He contended that what one learns through suffering "is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity . . . experience is experience of human finitude" (p. 351). Although this journey may expose us to suffering, to our finitude, it may also open up greater vistas, to insights about our lives, the lives of our students and the curriculum we teach.

In addition, *Erfahrung* exposes travellers to the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of living life, but also the possibility of transformation in the interests of renewal. Journeying may provide an opportunity to cultivate an attunement to the world that contributes to understanding and re-understanding the profound complexities of the lifeworld, at least with a tentativeness that honours its complexities. Within the context of social studies, I wonder how Gadamer's theory of experience and of human finitude may encourage a sense of humility to create a space to understand citizenship and identity anew. How might a sense of humility point to the questionability of our understandings of the lifeworld?

Furthermore, central to Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics is the notion of application as it pertains to our being and becoming experienced. Significant, too, is the notion of judgment—discernment—"to apply what has been learned in a general way to the concrete situation" (p. 316). Thus, being and becoming experienced is not merely the application of general rules, but rather an attunement to the calls of the particular, the

singularity of the student entrusted to our care. This points to the importance of an eternal vigilance, to moments of undecidability, and to the aporetic spaces that call for experience. Moreover, perhaps our new understandings will guide our interactions with students and the curricular topics we encounter.

In pursuing the question: What is it to be and to become an experienced teacher?, I engage the work interpretatively. I want to return 'to the things themselves', to the lived experiences of teachers, with the hopes of returning the lives of teachers and students to their original difficulty, to the experiences of the lifeworld, to being face to face with the complexities of responding to Joshua as he struggles to write or Sally's difficult home life. Reflecting on the world interpretatively may present the possibility of cultivating new understandings and an attunement that may assist in nurturing a more expansive view of self, other and the world. In addition, coming to see things anew may expose teachers to the ethical weight of responding, of standing in relation, of taking action and honouring the particularity of a context and the necessity to exercise judgment that reflects those new understandings.

It is not my intention to develop an idealist or idealized concept of experience, but rather to illustrate that it lives as an aspect of phronesis, a deeply relational space that necessitates an encounter with otherness in which the self no longer remains the same. There is no culminating endpoint where one is deemed to be an experienced teacher; rather, to be experienced is to be always *on the way*. Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung* encourages us to embrace alterity as an invocation to bring into question our own prejudices, a provocation to new understandings. In addition, how might our new understandings be concretized in the life world of teaching as an ethical response to the

other? *Erfahrung,* Gadamer (2004), suggested involved "experience of one's own historicity," thus accentuating our belonging to the history of effects (p. 351).

Autobiographies: Remembering—An Inner Journey

> *The longest journey*
> *Is the journey inwards.*
> *Of him who has been chosen his destiny,*
> *Who has started upon his quest*
> *For the source of his being.*
>
> (Dag Hammarskjold, 1981, p. 82)

The above poem by Dag Hammarskjold was one of my mom's favorites. I affectionately remember my almost nightly routine as a young child of sitting and talking at the foot of her bed. I appreciated the apparent ease, receptivity, and attentiveness of my mom's way—her gentle probing, the nuance of her critique, "Oh, do you think so dear?" Her gentleness created a space that encouraged me to venture, to risk what I understood about the world and myself, and this generous space honoured my nascence. I remember feeling mom's 'look', her 'watching' which emanated a deep love, though perhaps a child can only catch a sense of the look's intensity. It is only now, as I catch myself looking that way at my own children that I have a more profound sense of the love that accompanies the 'look' and the 'watchfulness.'

Although my recollection of the specific details of our conversations have faded, I vividly recall the worldliness of the various topics—love, justice, truth. At some point in a conversation, it was common for mom to repeat the first two lines from Hammarskjold: "The longest journey—is the journey inwards." Only recently I have come to understand the labor that this provocation necessitates and the corresponding courage required to embrace the vicissitudes of such a journey.

I also fondly remember the conversations that took place around our family dinner table. It would be difficult to mistake my mother's parenting as authoritarian, since my siblings and I grew up with very few hard and fast rules; however, if we missed dinner, mom would declare, "our home is not akin to living in a hotel where you merely eat and sleep." And dinners frequently became an event, often lasting several hours. When mom moved her chair back slightly from the table, I knew we were about to settle into a long conversation. She would then light up a cigarette, perhaps hoping that the extra distance would provide the appropriate space for the smoke to dissipate before reaching us. And who were we to argue? She was the nurse in the family.

Mom had a certain way of being that encouraged conversation. Our conversations never seemed to have a formal beginning, and there was never an agenda *per se*; we just seemed to fall into conversation. What I do recall is an atmosphere, an ethos, and a warmth that imbued the kitchen. Mom fostered a welcoming space that provided a tranquil landing for ideas struggling to come into being. I came to appreciate the struggling, although I could not always live well with it; ideas clamor for equanimity. I often wondered how she could be so interested in what I—just a kid—had to say. What could I contribute to such worldly topics as love, friendship, death, freedom or truth? The opportunity to be with ideas and the wonderments of life were juxtaposed with many of my experiences in school, where it was not always possible to tarry, to honour not knowing. Conversations with mom often ended with just letting things be, leaving things to repose, a space that encouraged further rumination. It is here where I began to become conscious, to catch a glimpse of the finitude, the impermanence of my understandings of the world. The abundant possibilities for understanding the world anew rejected an

unexamined fidelity to previously held precepts. Perhaps it is analogous to pulling back the curtains, and permitting the sun to illuminate spaces once inhabited by darkness.

As a child, I did not understand my mom's love of reading. I found it difficult to endure the stillness and solitude that reading required. I needed to be on the move. Upon entering my mom's bedroom, I was always struck by the numerous books strewn over her bed and the floor. It was not until years later that I realized her favorite quotes emanated from her fellow travellers—Kierkegaard, Jung, Dostoyevsky, Gibran, to name a few. One of her favorites was from Kierkegaard: "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." This may partially explain her tireless journey to turn life back onto itself—her desire to make meaning of a past that stubbornly resisted the haste of a single rendition.

I used to think mom had a natural gift for being present with others, and for knowing just the right thing to say. I have now come to understand mom's gift differently; in fact, to refer to it as *natural* does not capture the thoughtfulness and humility with which it was cultivated. This may account for why so many people were drawn to her: family, friends and people she had just met. It was through a certain kind of venturing with others, a questioning, and a listening, that she heard and saw other possibilities emerge from our quotidian lives.

Her memory for words was thoughtfully cultivated and practiced. The threads of her interlocutors stitched together to accompany her articulations. Her memory was not a 'hard drive' for anything and everything, but highly discerning. Perhaps it was the cultivation of her memory that contributed to her capacity and willingness to hear, to listen and respond to the voice of another.

She frequently wondered why philosophy was associated with the esoteric, as an idle intellectual pursuit. I remember dismissive comments from friends and family that went something like, “Oh, there goes Nan again.” For mom, philosophy assisted her in determining what it meant to live a life, to live well. I have come to admire, and many times have tried to emulate the way mom sought to be with others, to be in the world, to live life. In mom’s illness the frailty of her body no longer allowed her to endure conversations into the night, but even then, her desire to engage in existential questions never waned.

All things aesthetic enchanted mom; they seemed to sustain her. Some of her greatest loves were poetry, religion, art, philosophy and politics. Perhaps her attraction to poetry, art, and music was that they neither seek finality nor prescribe immutable truths, but rather the contributions of poets, artists, authors and musicians point to the wonderments of the world and provide room and the possibilities of future becomings.

And though mom passed away in December 2011, I still can hear her ask, “Have you read Jung’s ‘Dreams Memories and Reflections yet?” “Have you had any dreams lately?” “Did you write them down?”

As a parent and teacher, I continue to reflect on those fond memories that have resisted permanence, new understandings of my mom, and the topics we discussed. And in the process of recollection, I have found myself transformed. As a parent I have come to appreciate the tension that mom must have felt, a tension that surfaces when ideas inevitably collide between a parent and child. How generous could she be—how much space could she extend to me as I attempted to find my way in the world? When are the

times that as a parent it is important to foreclose on certain possibilities? To exercise a parent's authority—No! That is not acceptable.

As a teacher, I am drawn to the profound complexities and responsibilities of standing alongside the young as they make their way into the world. At times, I am overwhelmed by the complexities and perhaps the impossibility of teaching, of being attuned to the multiplicities of the young lives that we greet each day, and the obligations that are inherent within those relationships. Moreover, I am struck by the impermanence and frailties of the concepts that govern our lives; as a teacher it is not possible to rely on simply abstract notions of love, compassion or trust, since they must be lived out daily responding to the singularity of each student. Perhaps as teachers we are challenged to respond ethically to the students in our midst, to establish a way of being that embraces the tension that resides between the young and the old, between the past and the future. Indeed, as teachers we live our lives immersed amongst norms and procedures—perhaps as Butler (2005) suggested, when norms that are always there "at an exterior distance" the pedagogical task is "to find a way of appropriating them, taking them on, establishing a living relation with them" (p. 9). Thus as we journey as teachers (and parents) with the young, we may establish a living relation with the norms that have come to govern our lives as an invitation to see them anew, and to welcome a future that has yet to be decided.

Journeying as teachers (and parents) calls for thinking. Gadamer (2007) described thinking as "the unending dialogue of the soul with itself which thinking is, is not properly characterized by saying it is an endlessly refined determination of a world of objects that we are seeking to know… rather, it is a way of language that constantly holds

itself open to the whole of Being" (p. 35). Perhaps as we continue our journey, our existential quests, we will engage in an unending dialogue with the soul that will constantly hold open the world to future possibilities.

What Do You Do When?

The school bell: a stubborn institutional tool that summons both teachers and students to class, and officially declares beginnings and endings. Although at times throughout my career I often resented its invasive demand, I, along with most of my students, acquiesced and accepted its routine presence. Not Sam.

Sam was a hulking seventeen-year-old grade eleven student, and by many indications, not interested in the edifying possibilities of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Day after day, he would enter class just minutes after the final bell. He sauntered in, dragging his heavy feet, his untied high-top shoes clapping as they slammed recklessly onto the floor. Finally, reaching his desk in the back row, I felt the weight of the other students' gaze, judging me, silently asking: aren't you going to do something? Was he taunting me, trying to raise my ire? Should I demonstrate my positional authority and publicly chastise him, put him in his place?

As Sam sat down, it was difficult not to notice how his extra-large body spilled over the confines of the undersized desk assigned to him. He instantly assumed a reclined position, his straight legs extended well beyond the front of the desk while his heels angled outward as if he was digging in, preparing his imminent resistance. Perhaps he was familiar with the common war metaphors used by many educators, comparing teaching to 'life in the trenches' and 'teachers being on the front line.' As he reached into his backpack, the sound of ripping Velcro pierced the silence that had descended upon

the class. Within minutes, Sam asked if he could go to his locker to retrieve a 'forgotten' book. If I let him go, what would that signal to the others? Most of the other thirty-five students were considerate, and oftentimes passionately involved, but I was consumed, and at times haunted, by Sam's overt resistance. As much as I tried to suppress it and look the other way, I secretly prayed that Sam would decide not to attend my class. Worse, was I starting to hate Sam? My responses to him exacerbated, at best, my feelings of self-doubt, and at worst, my sense of ineptitude.

One of my biggest fears that had lived just below the surface since Teachers' College was coming to fruition—losing control of my class—or in educational vernacular, my 'classroom management skills' were insufficient to the challenge. I remember many of my on-campus classes being dominated with variances of the question: What do I do when . . .? Perhaps there was an upcoming workshop I could attend.

What to do about Sam continued to infiltrate my thoughts long after the end of each school day. Regardless of the strategies I employed, Sam remained Sam. However, there was something that continued to gnaw at me: was it not my responsibility to get him to 'buy in'? After all, was I not accountable for covering the curriculum, and meeting the course outcomes? Regardless of Sam's unwillingness, I felt an overwhelming responsibility for his success or failure. If only I could motivate Sam, surely he would do well.

Many teachers can probably remember a student like Sam and the corresponding exasperation of attempting to do the right thing. Perhaps it is students like Sam that first interrupt the regularized routines of schooling. Nevertheless, we are called upon to

respond by an ethical commitment that aims at the good. The complexities of standing in relation are revealed daily as we attempt to respond to the uniqueness of each individual student.

Composing a Life: An Existential Quest

> A human being is not just something you automatically are, it is also something you must try to be. (van Manen, 2003, p. 5)

> *And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of children.*
> *And he said:*
> *Your children are not your children.*
> *They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*
> *They come through you but not from you,*
> *And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*
> *You may give them your love but not your thoughts.*
> *You may house their bodies but not their souls,*
> *For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,*
> *which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*
> *You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.*
> *For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*
>
> (Gibran, 2003, p. 17)

On February 3, 2012, our second child, Gabriel Edward was born. Within minutes of his birth I was holding him in my arms trying to deny the imperfections I heard in his breathing. Believing—hoping—praying that, given time, if I held him long enough, if I held him tight enough, the sound of his laboring lungs would subside. The complete elation of his birth was quickly dashed after a brief conversation with a medical specialist. I remember her sitting at the foot of my wife's hospital bed explaining what went wrong. "In five percent of the cases, babies who undergo this routine procedure—the injection of surfactant into the lungs—something goes wrong. In this case it was human error. The procedure that we performed on your son collapsed his lungs. Your son

is now very sick; as a result, we need to transfer him immediately to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Foothills Hospital."

Prior to our son being transferred, the nurse took my wife and me to see him. As we entered the NICU, the medical staff was just completing the preparations Gabriel's transfer demanded. Seeing him through a hermetically sealed incubator, which prevented any human or environmental contact, further accentuated the vulnerability of our son's condition. I was overwhelmed by the number of tubes, monitors, and sounds emanating from the various life-sustaining devices. The prolonged silence that had engulfed the space was interrupted when one of the nurses said, "He is going to get the best care possible. Babies are so resilient." I was struck by the ineffable; as I tried to comfort my wife, I could not summon the requisite words, and silently chided myself for my lack. Many of the expressions that flooded my thoughts were clichés I resented, utterances I could not bring myself to say or believe. I could only hope that repositioning the way I was holding her hand, to secure a firmer clasp, would convey what I could not say.

In the days and weeks that followed, we visited Gabriel daily as he struggled for his life. As I entered the NICU, I immediately tried to read the nurse's body language for hints of how Gabriel was doing. I hung on every word the nurses and doctors would or would not say. I often found myself frustrated by their measured responses. I needed to hear that everything was going to be fine; however, I realized that their words could not betray the tenuousness of Gabriel's condition. My energy and mood, my willingness to meet the demands of living life oscillated on the words and deeds of the nurses and doctors; in fact, it was more than their words—it was how they spoke, how they revealed their sense of care, how attentive they appeared. On many occasions we were greeted

with such words as: “We just do not know the outcome,” or “We do not know how he will respond,” or “After we run another test, we should know more,” or “We really do not know why there is still fluid in his lungs.” All the general rules of medicine, all the scientific theories, could not speak unequivocally to our particular son.

During our visits, I found myself for prolonged periods consumed by the monitors that were responsible for relaying Gabriel’s vital signs: What is his heart rate? What is his blood pressure? How many grams has he gained? Despite Gabriel being connected to the astounding successes of modern medicine, I still could not stop myself from being angry at its limits, but neither was I able to relinquish the possibility that eventually science would prevail.

Gabriel is now thriving, but the memories of those difficult months continue to infiltrate me. While changing his diapers, I witness the scars where the tubes were inserted to drain the fluid from his lungs. My sensitivity to the precariousness of life, the contingency of our understandings, a future not yet, and the finitude of my existence have been heightened. Perhaps most profoundly, all my goodwill was insufficient to alter Gabriel’s circumstances. Our separateness could not be transcended regardless of my desperate desire to do so. It would be difficult to articulate the vicissitudes that these provocations initiated; however, as an educator I am reminded that all my goodwill, all my planning, and all my hoping neither transcend nor alter the necessity that each child is pushed into the world and is confronted with the quest to nurture a sense of being-for-itself and belonging-in-the-world that living a life entails. In addition, I am reminded of the between space—the dialectical space where the possibility for a student’s being and becoming resides, and the awesome responsibility of honouring the indispensible tension

that lives between the young and the old, between students and teachers. This generative space is imbued with worldly complexities and an ethical demand confronts teachers to cultivate a pedagogical response in the most thoughtful way on each particular day, with each particular student. Gibran's words persist:

> *Your children are not your children.*
> *They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*

Autobiographical Reflections and *Erfahrung*

The stories I have shared in this chapter (and the Prologue) reveal many facets of my life, each of which presents the question of the meaning of experience. However, central to all the stories is the notion of a journey—perhaps more accurately an existential quest that involves the continual tension that lives between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Furthermore, as Gadamer (2004) suggested, becoming experienced "as a whole is not something anyone can be spared. Rather, experience in this sense inevitably involves many disappointments of one's expectations and only thus is experienced acquired," and "only through negative instances do we acquire new experiences" (p. 350). This leads me to ask, as social studies teachers how might we cultivate a certain kind of experience that assists us in critically co-venturing with students as we invite them to investigate, to venture into the ambiguities and contingencies associated with the themes of citizenship and identity?

As I continue to reflect upon my journeys as an educator, as a son, and as a father, I remain drawn to life's historical dimension, its temporality and to the multifariousness of possibilities. This quest initiated a venturing out into world and a historical return to past events and memories. Perhaps most notably, these autobiographical reflections illustrate

that understandings of others, the world and myself are garnered in relation with fellow interlocutors. It was while co-venturing with strangers that the familiar was rendered unfamiliar. In addition, identity is imbricated, simultaneously private and social, and shaped by a multitude of factors. It is this juncture, these various intersections that revealed new understandings, new possibilities, new ways of being, and at times surfaced memories of the world that had been forgotten or concealed. I hasten to add that these new possibilities, these new offerings often induced a suffering that revealed my finitude, the limits of my planning reason. Perhaps these intersections may contribute to nurturing a sensitivity to the world where the narratives that have come to govern our lives are revealed more porous, more susceptible and more vulnerable to be understood differently. Moreover, perhaps venturing with others may engender a humility that points to a radical openness, a spirit of generosity that welcomes the otherness of the other, and invites the arrival of a future not yet known.

My experiences as beginning teacher remain an important site of departure and the provocation for my continual return. Further inspiration for this journey was the confluence of experiences, teaching in the MT program and my enrolment into graduate studies. They provided an invitation and an inspiration to journey, a provocation to reconceptualize and transform understandings of teaching and of being in the world. New understandings carry an ethical weight, a weight that demands a response as "The purpose of his [her] knowledge is to govern his [her] actions" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 312).

As a son, I am struck by the offerings made by a parent. My mother's thoughtful and caring way invited me to dwell upon life's mysteries, not as a means to secure myself against the flux and unknowability of the lifeworld, but rather to embrace the vicissitudes

of our factical lives. This journey is not a passive acceptance of the norms that influence our lives, but encourages a pursuit of freedom and the ensuing risk, suffering and courage that venturing may precipitate.

As a father, I was confronted with the vulnerability and precarity inherent in living a life. As I stood by my son's life-sustaining incubator, I was reminded of the sheer limits of my capacities, as a parent, as a teacher, as a son. Regardless of those who accompany us on our journey, we are responsible for embarking on our own existential journey, in solitude and in solidarity, to compose our lives and to assume responsibility for our fellow travellers.

Although it would not be possible to definitely determine what led me to embrace Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, perhaps my life's meanderings have oriented me towards his theory of *Erfahrung,* which offered an understanding and a way of being. His work inspired me to embark on a journey with fellow travellers as a means to open up vistas and expand horizons that exposed more fulsome views of the landscape.

In addition, *Erfahrung* calls for the cultivation of an attunement, a conviviality that orients us to the voice of the other, an ethical relation that encourages the other to speak, to be heard. Hearing the voice of the other may act as a catalyst that brings to consciousness our temporal understandings, our own inner-historicity. Thus to be and to become experienced is an act of negation, a process, a dialectic where we may come to an agreement about a topic through dialogue with others. As social studies teachers this process calls upon us to co-venture with the young, to embrace the generative tension as we inquire into the core concepts of citizenship and identity. Rather than this journey culminating in defined objectives, a fixed destination, perhaps it may point to the

journey's unfinishedness, that the understanding of others, the world and ourselves is always *on the way*.

Chapter 2: Living Well with the Inherent Vulnerabilities and Contingencies of Our Lives as Teachers

Although humankind may experience vulnerability in a myriad of ways, the latest ravages inflicted by a flood that struck the province of Alberta was yet another illustration of the inherent vulnerability of human, animal and natural life. It also revealed the limits and finitude of our planning reason and like the owl of Minerva who spreads its wings only at dusk—the commentators' insights are only available in retrospect—only after such calamity; indeed, it is often after the breakdown of our previously held norms, beliefs, or traditions that they come under scrutiny and we once again are thrust into a position where we must reassess how we ought to live. Butler (2009) captured the notion of vulnerability and its ensuing excess as she noted that events occur that exceed familiar frames that "trouble our sense of reality", and thus do not cohere with our established understandings (p. 9). Living with vulnerability is a reality of being human, it is not a problem to be fixed; it is not a problem that we can outrun. The prevalence of not knowing, of not seeing the incoming of something other reflects our factical lives.

Contingencies are abound as to how individuals, families and societies will respond to the many needs and concerns inflicted by the flood. Determining an appropriate response in the aftermath has spawned vigorous political debate regarding the best course of action to pursue regarding payment for damages, proposals for future infrastructure projects and the possibility of re-zoning residential housing that would restrict development in areas that were deemed to be in close proximity to floodplains. Contingencies also impact how individuals, communities and businesses are capable of responding to the damages. Physical health, sufficient financial resources and support from family and friends are a few factors that may assist in mitigating the effects of the

flood. Vulnerability and contingency reveal the interdependency of our lives, as Butler (2004) noted, "there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know" (p. xii).

As a social studies teacher I am drawn to the notions of vulnerability and contingency as they continually call upon me to respond. As teachers we are called upon to interpret the living academic disciplines and the narratives they espouse. The academic disciplines of geography, political science, economics, philosophy and history that are embedded in the Program of Studies are inheritances, are ancestral voices from the past that represent and capture human possibilities. Events that interrupt our quotidian lives challenge us to think anew, to interpret and to respond to what the current situation calls for: how might we proceed in the world that is fraught with vulnerability and contingency? How might we inquire into the core themes of citizenship and identity that embrace the notions of vulnerability and contingency?

Furthermore, the vulnerability of our lives prohibits our ability to predict in advance the incoming of something other, the incoming of something that may alter the norms that govern our lives. This illuminates a tension in the Program of Studies between two curriculum worlds, the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience. How might we as teachers live well within the tension that recognizes that we are not able to predict beyond the given, beyond this historical moment? How might we dwell in moments of excess, future events that belie our current capacity to understand? Butler (2009) elucidated the complexity and the ever-evolving lifeworld that occasions us to continually investigate other possibilities of living our lives, "In what sense does life, then, always exceed the normative conditions of its recognizability? To claim that it does

so is not to say that life has its essence a resistance to normativity, but only that each and every construction of life requires time to do its job, and that no job it does can overcome time itself. In other words, the job is never done once and for all" (p. 4).

Moreover, as teachers, we are called upon to become attuned to life's constructions, to our subjectivities that have come to influence our lives—our lives as teachers and to embrace the fact that no job is ever done once and for all. How might we keep possibilities open that would foster new understandings about others, the world and ourselves? How might we journey to invite the possibility to transcend our subjectivities and the current historical moment? How might we embrace what Lear (2006) referred to as a daunting form of commitment towards radical hope, a hope "that is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it" [?] (p. 103). In addition, as a social studies teacher I ask: how we might live with the possibility of life collapsing? In responding to vulnerability and contingency: how might we respond ethically to the Other?

As teachers, we are confronted daily with contingency. As least in part, how we respond to the students in our care is dependent upon a calling from them, from the other. Contingency illuminates the need to cultivate an attunement that recognizes the temporality, relationality and contextual elements that influence our pedagogical decisions, an ethical judgment that compels us to take note of our interdependence.

Grumet (1988) poetically captured the notion of contingency "For the source of light, like human knowledge, is always situated, here or there, rising or setting, or just breaking through as the clouds pass. The figure is never fully illuminated. Light moves

through time as well as space, and so clear seeing is burdened with all the limitations of human consciousness, always situated in spatial perspectives and temporal phases. Furthermore, our work, no matter what its form, is not the seeing itself but a picture of the seeing" (pp. 60-61). Butler (2009) depicted the vulnerability of framing by suggesting that frames do not hold anything together with any degree of permanence, but rather frames undergo "a kind of perpetual breakage" (p.10) and this breakage often unveils our taken-for granted understandings of the world.

The theory of *Erfahrung* embraces the notions of human vulnerability and contingency as it is oriented towards an ontology of human understanding. In particular, vulnerability is inherent in Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics as he noted that there is a constant task to establish new relations to the concepts that inform our lives and that we "must be aware of the fact that [our] own understanding and interpretations are not constructions based on principles, but the furthering of an event that goes far back" (p. xxiii). As we co-venture with students we called upon to place our understandings at risk and to embrace the possibilities to understand differently as Gadamer (2004) suggested a "Hermeneutic trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity" (p. 269). Inviting and opening spaces that reveal the vulnerabilities and contingencies of living life.

Gadamer (2004) suggested, our responses to the other calls for a moral knowledge that acknowledges that our actions and responses to others are predicated upon and are attuned to the tension between the universal and the particular. Contingency presents a challenge to respond ethically to what the concrete situation asks of us "one has to take account of the change in circumstances and hence define afresh the normative function of

the law" (p. 323). As teachers we are called upon to dwell in the generative tension that resides in the middle, between the universal and the particular. Each child represents a possibility to understand differently, to define afresh what the particular situation warrants.

The Vulnerabilities and Contingencies of Living a Teacher's Life

> It screamed downward, splitting air and sky without effort. A target expanded in size, brought into focus by time and velocity. There was a moment before impact that was the last instant of things as they were. Then the visible world exploded. (Galloway, 2008, p. 1)

The above excerpt from the opening chapter of Galloway's (2008) novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is repeated three times in the first chapter. Its repetition re-awakened me to the vulnerability of our lives—always unfolding in a time and place—in a particular historical moment where certain things are possible and others not, and still others are not yet determined.

The impending mortar strike presents a poignant portrayal, a stark contrast between the ordinariness of everyday life and the moment when that is shattered and performing many of one's day-to-day activities is no longer possible. Galloway (2008) pointed to the disjuncture, to the destruction inflicted upon individuals and cultures as he described the impending impact of an incoming mortar: "The moment before impact was the last instant of things as they were" (p. 1). After that moment it was no longer possible for the citizens of Sarajevo to live life in ways that had become customary; the 'norms' that had previously governed their lives are no longer recognizable. After that moment, amidst the destruction, it was essential for citizens to seek ways to reconstitute a life that would enable them to go on living.

> The siege of Sarajevo, as it came to be popularly known, was an episode of such notoriety in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia that one must go back to World War II to find a parallel in European history. Not since then had a professional army conducted a campaign of unrelenting violence against the inhabitants of a European City so as to reduce them to a state of medieval deprivation in which they were in constant fear of death. In the period covered in this Indictment, there was nowhere safe for a Sarajevan, not at home, at school, in a hospital, from deliberate attack. (Statute of the Tribunal, Stanislav Galic, 2003)

In 1992, Sarajevo was a city under siege. Its citizens lived under terrifying conditions as they experienced "unrelenting violence" and were "under constant fear of death" from mortar attacks and the pervasive threat of sniper fire. Galic's (2003) remarks captured the ubiquity of the terror: "there was nowhere safe for a Sarajevan, not at home, at school, in a hospital, from deliberate attack." How is it possible to live when confronted with such vulnerability?

Prior to the moment of impact, Galloway (2008) told of the cellist's fond memory of the firm and loving touch of his father's fingers as they gripped his shoulder tightly while posing for a photograph at his sister's wedding. "The fingers on his flesh told him that he was loved, that he had always been loved, and that the world was a place where above all else the things that were good would find a way to burrow into you" (p. 3). Perhaps the memory of a father's touch, this memory of an expression of love—is where hope resides for the cellist after the mortar impact, and that he may find a way for it to burrow into him. Prior to the siege of Sarajevo, the cellist knew how to be; he knew how to make music an actuality. "When he stepped on stage in his tuxedo he was transformed into an instrument of deliverance" (p. 4). The moment of impact provides juxtaposition. Immediately following 'that moment' when mortars decimated the Sarajevo Opera Hall, as Galloway (2008) described, the cellist "felt as if he were inside the building, as if the

bricks and glass that once bound the structure together became projectiles that sliced and pounded into him, shredding him beyond recognition" (p. 4).

Months later as the cellist sat by an open window of his apartment; he gazed across the street and observed the long line of people who had gathered to buy bread, among them many of his friends and neighbors. For a moment he considered joining them as it had been weeks since bread had been available to purchase.

> It screamed downward, splitting air and sky without effort. A target expanded in size, brought into focus by time and velocity. There was a moment before impact that was the last instant of things as they were. Then the visible world exploded (p. 1).

At the moment of impact, the cellist witnessed the violent death of twenty-two friends and neighbors. The day of the explosion, he could not bring himself to play, the enemy entrenched on the hillside stole his will to make music, his "tuxedo hangs in the closet untouched" (p. 4).

In that moment, the life of the cellist was irrevocably transformed. Given the physical destruction of the city of Sarajevo and the destruction of many aspects of his identity, how might the cellist adapt to the new realities thrust upon him? How might it be possible to initiate new routines, new attachments and new ways of being in the world, since it was no longer possible to live in a Sarajevo, as it once existed? How might he create a path to follow that has yet to be cleared—what might the future hold? I am reminded of the words of Lear (2006) as he discussed the notion of human vulnerability: "The concepts with which I would otherwise have understood myself—indeed, the concepts with which I would otherwise have shaped my identity—have gone out of existence" (p. 49).

Galloway (2008) recounted the tale of an Italian musicologist who, in 1945, recovered four bars of a sonata's base line from the remnants from the firebombed Dresden Music Library. The musicologist believed the recovered notes were from the work of seventeenth-century Venetian composer Thomas Albinoni, and he committed the next twelve years of his life to reconstructing the fragments into a composition known as Albinoni's Adagio.

Upon contemplating Albinoni's Adagio many years later, the unnamed cellist of Sarajevo was awakened to the contradiction "that something could be almost erased from existence in the landscape of a ruined city, and then rebuilt until it is new and worthwhile, gives him hope. A hope that, now, is one of a limited number of things remaining for the besieged citizens of Sarajevo and that, for many, dwindles each day" (p. 2). The hope that may reside in the possibilities of a future that is yet unknown, the hope that something could be "rebuilt until it is new and worthwhile" (p. 2).

The day following the mortar impact that killed his friends and neighbours, the cellist carried his stool and cello into the vacant street and sat in the gaping hole, a scar inflicted by the force of the impact. He committed to playing Albinoni's Adagio for twenty-two days—a day for each person killed. This despite the uncertainty: "He won't be sure he will survive. He won't be sure he has enough Adagios left" (p. 5).

Perhaps the space in-between the "moment before impact . . . the last instant of things as they were" and the "visible world explod[ing]" provides opportunities to re-imagine a world, to wonder how life can go on when old narratives no longer suffice to capture new realities. How might the well-travelled paths of the cellist prohibit him from reconstituting the narratives that had shaped his life, concepts by which he had once

lived? Perhaps remembering the past provides the determination to maintain particular ways of life, particular attachments to the world, albeit while understanding life anew. Perhaps he will live his life with a renewed sense of its frailty, of its profound contingencies. Perhaps the cellist will embrace the earlier contradiction that "something could almost be erased from existence in the landscape of a ruined city, and then rebuilt until it is new and worthwhile" (p. 2). Caputo (2000) reflected on the vulnerabilities and frailties of life, of making our way through life without grand codes or schemas that establish a permanent path to follow, as he observed regarding life's contingencies that "no rule or method has yet trod or shown the way. We live for the most part in the in-between world . . . and learn to cope with the shifting and elusive traces in the sand" (p. 7).

Although most of us in Canada have not had our lives devastated, or worse, destroyed by the ravages of war, most can attest to aspects of life being interrupted, to being thrust into new beginnings and endings. Often these interruptions, these disjunctures are beyond our wanting and doing, something happens that exceeds our ability to chart our own course, something that is beyond our capacities, with any degree of certainty, to predict the arrival of future events. The omnipresence of daily news stories provide constant reminders and the inherent tensions that point to the tenuousness and precarity of people's lives, and journeys into the world. Although individuals and societies have always had to respond to the vulnerabilities and contingencies of living life, current media technologies provide constant reminders of stories of a world in flux due to environmental degradation, the international financial crisis, and armed conflicts for national identity, a world where being is experienced in a multitude of ways.

As a social studies teacher I am entrusted to teach a prescribed curricula that has as its central themes citizenship and identity. My interest, background, and experiences of teaching social studies have drawn me to the complexities that are inherent within these concepts. As I reflect upon the cellist of Sarajevo, I am reminded of the profound complexity of the core themes of citizenship and identity as prior to the siege of Sarajevo, the cellist knew how to be, he knew how to make music an actuality, stepping onto the stage he was transformed into an instrument of deliverance. However, upon destruction of the concert hall, he "felt as if he were inside the building, as if the bricks and glass that once bound the structure together became projectiles that sliced and pounded into him, shredding him beyond recognition" (p. 4). Unlike the cellist, my identity as a teacher has not been shredded beyond recognition; however, there have been many occasions where my identity has had to reconstitute, to be transformed, as the field of education has been susceptible to changing narratives. And as Butler (2005) suggested, we cannot will away the necessity for "moral deliberation and the task of giving an account of oneself. Even if morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living a reflective way" (p. 10).

As I consider these themes, I wonder how we, as social studies teachers, might investigate these topics while acknowledging their vulnerability and contingency? How might we honour the complexities of citizenship and identity as possessing a living character—that remain open to future possibilities? How might we as teachers become experienced in living well within the tension between an old world and a world not yet? How might teachers embark on a journey that explores the existential realities which

living a life, a teacher's life—entails? How might teachers investigate the programs we are to teach that, as proffered by Grumet (1988), "cleanses a familiar scene, washing away the film of habit and dust collected over time so that it is seen anew" (p. 81)? How might teachers cultivate an attunement to the other that assists us in making ethical judgments, responding to the particularity of each student?

Unsettling Notions of Identity

Several years ago, while I was teaching a class of pre-service social studies teachers, we gathered around the following excerpt from Thomas King's (2003) *'The Truth About Stories'* as a provocation to discuss the concept of identity:

> There is a story I know. It's about the earth and how it floats in space on the back of a turtle. I've heard this story many times, and each time someone tells the story, it changes. Sometimes in the order of the events. Other times it's the dialogue or the response of the audience. But in all the tellings of all the tellers, the world never leaves the turtle's back. And the turtle never swims away.
>
> One time . . . a girl in the audience asked about the turtle and the earth. If the earth was on the turtle's back, what was below the turtle? Another turtle. And below that? Another turtle. The girl began to laugh, enjoying the game, I imagine. So how many turtles are there? She wanted to know. The storyteller shrugged. No one knows for sure, he told her, but it's turtles all the way down (p.1).

In preparation for our conversation I asked students to come to class with a brief summary of how they understood the notion of identity as expressed in the Program of Studies and to identify some of the problems that can surface as they considered how they might broach the topic with their students. How might teachers and their students inquire into the concept of identity?

The conversation that ensued was memorable. The students were from diverse academic backgrounds, including history, philosophy, political science, economics,

anthropology and religious studies, and their comments reflected the interdisciplinary nature of social studies. They observed that stories live in time, that they represent historical moments that require mediation as they are passed from generation to generation. Stories about identity often resist a definitive homogeneous account; rather they are often fluid and malleable, ever emerging and are frequently highly contested. Many students suggested that there are no metanarratives that encapsulates identity in the singular. Indeed, in the world, identity is lived in multiplicities and in time—susceptible to being transformed—susceptible to future possibilities.

Certain stories are told and re-told, changing form and content with each telling. Words and stories come from so many different tongues. During our conversation, students observed the many stories regarding the construction of gender and how they varied between and amongst different cultures and through time. In addition, many acknowledged the generational differences that existed between themselves, their parents and grandparents, and this provoked them to wonder about how their students might come to understand gender and how those understandings may influence future narratives regarding identity generally, and gender more specifically. In addition, as stories are told and re-told our identity is brought into question by its relation to the other, and as Butler (2004) noted this relation does not render us speechless "but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose. Somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must. Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we are not, we're missing something" (p. 23).

Many students expressed their frustration at being thrust into others peoples' stories, framed within a particular telling, cast into particular characterizations of what it is like to be this or that. They observed that narratives often highlight the binaries of 'this or that' and such binaries can foreclose and reject future possibilities. Rather, students recognized that identity is not contained within singular definitions, that to be a woman is 'this *and* that'—recognizing the importance of the coordinate conjunction 'and' as creating opportunities for excess, for difference. Miller (2005) pointed to this space, to a space that welcomed the unfamiliar, the multiplicities that may assist teachers and students in revising previously-held conceptions, "to enlarge our capacities to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools . . . to call into question both the notion of one true, stable and coherent self and cultural scripts for that self" (p. xi). Furthermore, being included in other peoples' stories created tensions between students' private and public lives, they revealed that being enframed in stories told by others often lead to suppression and injustices. Students concluded with the stark realization that they often possess little influence regarding the content and form as to what gets told and re-told.

Our conversation also took up the importance of language, and how academic disciplines are imbued with certain conventions and accompanying metaphors. In addition, disciplines bring forth both similar and different questions and responses regarding the notion of identity. Historically, many cultures espoused metaphysical certainties as to how life ought to be lived, transcendent forms provided images to which people ought to aspire.

Students filled the room with observations, questions, data and silence. Some echoed the words of King (2003), “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 1)—like the turtles, it is interpretations all the way down. And perhaps what partially explains my fond recollections of this activity can be largely attributed to the spirit of the conversation itself. Many teachers can attest to this experience of a conversation that goes well, its movement continually presses towards openness, towards a sense of wonderment, towards the mysteries of understanding self, other and the world. Frequently students will acknowledge that others’ comments jolt them out of previously held beliefs, beliefs that were often just there, that existed as givens. Moreover, time in these conversations is experienced differently in the sway of such movement, its presence largely unnoticed.

Ah yes, given the pragmatics of teaching, time will soon be up. Regardless of how well I perceived the conversation to have gone, it often proves difficult to live in conversations that continually attempt to hold open a space that honours the contingency and uncertainty of the lifeworld. Perhaps as a response to common expectations of classroom conversations, towards the end of class some students voiced their concerns and discomfort as to the indeterminacy of the notion of identity. Some felt the need to continue to seek firmer ground, a foundation that would afford and secure certain truths, to get to the bottom of the matter. As the class came to a close, one of the students, reminiscent of the girl in the audience, asked: “So how many turtles are there?” Without delay a student responded by reciting the words of the storyteller: “No one knows for sure . . . but it’s turtles all the way down”. Perhaps this reveals the tension that dwells in the middle, a space where our familiar stories intersect with the unfamiliar and this

fissure, this gap offers an invitation to understand differently. Moreover, this may reveal our own historicity, and in so doing the finitude of the truth about our own stories.

However, understanding the vulnerabilities and contingencies involved with the notion of identity, does not suggest that as teachers and students we foreclose on the future, that we abandon discussing and questioning identity, but the pedagogic task is a kind of a radical openness to possibilities. In the context of politics, Slavoj Žižek (2012) captured the ambiguous and uncertainty of what is yet to come:

> No hidden teleology is guiding us, where every intervention is a jump into the unknown, where the result always thwarts our expectations. All we can be certain of is that the existing system cannot reproduce itself indefinitely: whatever will come after will not be 'our future.' A new war in the Middle East or an economic chaos or an extraordinary environmental catastrophe can swiftly change the coordinates of our predicament. We should fully accept this openness, guiding ourselves on nothing more than ambiguous signs from the future. (pp. 134-135)

As I continue to reflect on that class and conversation, I wonder about the stories that are present and absent in the Program of Studies. Furthermore, how might a space be created for the multiplicity of stories, for a merging and furthering of stories? How can we, as social studies teachers, become experienced, as tellers and listeners, to cultivate a profound attunement to the truth about stories? How might the cultivation of an attunement to the truth about stories contribute to understandings about future representations of citizenship and identity?

Experience as a Beginning Teacher: Being Brought up Short

As a beginning teacher, I held an understanding that to become an experienced teacher, it was important for me to acquire the requisite disciplinary knowledge and the corresponding teaching strategies to ensure the smooth implementation of content. Furthermore, successful implementation would reveal itself through student achievement,

usually in the form of unit examinations and written assignments. I often perceived teaching as an application of theory—theory and practice. Becoming experienced has often been equated with an awareness, as Risser (1997) contended, that is "simply a passive reception of sensation somewhat analogous to the opening of a lens on a camera. One takes in experience and becomes experienced by virtue of the amount of experiences" (p.89).

I thought that an experienced educator was one who gathered and then possessed a wide array of adventures that would equip him/her with the necessary knowledge of how best to proceed. In fact, I remember wanting time to accelerate so that I, too, could be that teacher who moved seamlessly amongst students, knowing what to say and how to say it. If I just had the time to read one more book, observe one more class, attend one more workshop, it would put an end to the struggle I endured on a daily basis. Somehow, poised with the right techniques and the right strategies, I would be able to outrun the possibility of misunderstanding. Eventually the tentativeness of not knowing would subside; eventually the students' questions that revealed my thin understanding of the topics under discussion would be less piercing, less exposing, less revealing of my lack; eventually, I, too, would become experienced.

After a few years of teaching and acquiring additional content knowledge and a certain familiarity with standardized examinations, some things in teaching *did* become less strained, less burdensome, less uncertain. However, I realize now that becoming experienced in particular ways of knowing and doing has at times prohibited me from hearing and seeing things differently—foreclosing on other possibilities. Indeed, I

became more adapt at ensuring students were placed in the appropriate streams, in their proper place.

However I often forgot to question whether streaming was the best thing to do: How might schooling be otherwise? I became more precise with grading essays as I became accustomed to the provincial rubric used for assessing the written portion of provincial examinations. But I neglected to discuss with students the reasons *why* we write—how writing might open understandings of self and other. I also became less attuned to the lived experiences of students: How did they experience the act of writing? What understandings did they have to offer? I was confronted with my neglect, as I asked Jeffery, a Grade 12 student to submit a long-overdue essay. Perhaps due to the fact that he was achieving honours, I had let things be. However, it was time to have him submit. As we discussed his paper, Jeffery started to cry, and through his tears, told me he was paralyzed with fear, that he didn't know how to write, that he just couldn't do it. I felt confronted by his tears, reminded that the act of writing *is* difficult, that submitting one's written thoughts as a school assignment involves risk that may induce feelings of vulnerability as students will be graded, they willed be marked. Furthermore, writing is a complex process that is not merely a problem to be fixed, to be eternally solved by a ready-made formula in order to achieve a grade. The challenges of writing did not belong solely to Jeffery, but rather to the act of writing—it is challenging. Amidst the tears we sat down together, as I listened to him reveal his struggles I was moved by the anxiety he felt of being graded, of being judged, of the anxieties that can burrow into our bodies that inhibit our ability to write. Perhaps at times, being graded, being marked is too much to bear, the vulnerability paralyzing as it induces a fear of being categorized as not making

the grade, of not measuring up. I was reminded that responding to Jeffery's anxiety required a particular response, a response that honoured and was attuned to his journey, his particular struggles with writing.

During classroom discussions, I could emphasize to students to take particular note of concepts because they were sure to surface on the upcoming provincial examination. In doing so, concepts were merely rendered things students *had to know*—they were severed from the lived experiences of students. In addition, I had accumulated many teaching resources and strategies that provided me ways to take up various topics. Methods and strategies became ways in general to implement course material, but often neglected an attunement to the students sitting directly in front of me—what might inform my choice for this particular strategy over another?

During our days as teachers, we are immersed in a myriad of relations with students, some that last mere seconds, some several minutes, and sometimes not a word is spoken. Relationships with students may leave lasting impressions on both teachers and students. Impressions and memories are created in a wide variety of ways—perhaps by the length of an interaction, or what is said or unsaid, or only a mere gaze, a telling look. As many teachers can attest, we are often unaware of our influence upon students. Regardless of our objectives or our planned activities, students have something to say as to how school and the world are interpreted. This is often highlighted when, by happenstance or at a planned get-together with former students, they frequently ask: "Remember that time when you . . .?"

I recall an interaction with a Grade 12 student whose comments interrupted my growing confidence as a social studies teacher. Kyle, an articulate and unassuming

student, had just withdrawn from a prestigious private school and arrived in my Social 30 class three weeks after the start of the semester. He was notoriously absent and when he did attend, he seemed disinterested. One day, I asked Kyle to stay after class so that we could have an opportunity to talk, and perhaps thinking he had no a choice in the matter, he reluctantly agreed. The conversation that followed disturbed what I had come to understand about good teaching: What is it to be an experienced teacher?

I expressed my observation that Kyle generally seemed disengaged, and asked about his unexcused absences. Without any sense of malice and with a certain degree of innocence, he reported that he *was* disinterested in the class and that he found the nightly assignments meaningless. My initial response was one of mild irritation; I clung to the activities that I knew were successful, believing that I knew best. Having just arrived, obviously Kyle did not know how and why the class was organized the way it was.

As we continued our conversation, Kyle expressed his view that large portions of the class were merely the dissemination of content, content he had already read in the textbook. In addition, many of the nightly assignments consisted of filling in graphic organizers, copying content word-for-word out of the textbook. After our lengthy conversation, I felt embarrassed and brought up short. Indeed, it had been along time since I had questioned or re-visited the purpose of the assignments in question. I had become overly dependent upon certain measures that represented successful teaching within my particular context, overall class averages, student achievement on provincial examinations, and the consistency between the classroom awarded mark and student achievement on the provincial examination. By these measures students had been performing well.

Kyle spoke about how his father subscribed to three daily newspapers—*The New York Times, The Globe and Mail,* and *The Calgary Herald.* Over long breakfasts, the two of them sat quietly as they read the morning papers. The lengthy drive to school then afforded father and son the time to discuss the morning news. At the end of our conversation, I asked Kyle if he would be interested in reading some other materials, things that may connect and contribute to his interest in politics, economics and philosophy. He agreed, and from then on, Kyle and I met regularly to discuss the readings, some of which were from a graduate class in political science I was taking. His observations, insights and further questions reflected a thoughtful, intelligent and passionate learner.

Max Scheler called to mind the contingencies and vulnerabilities of our planned objectives as defined by the Program of Studies. As I became consumed with teaching the topic—the 'whatness' of my lessons—I often became less attuned to Scheler's contention that our students and we are "correlate of a world." He observed, "No matter which realms of object we may distinguish, the realm of objects of the inner world, or outer world, of bodiliness . . . the realm of ideal objects, or the realm of values—they all have an abstract objectivity. They become fully concrete only as part of a world, the world of a person. But the person in never a part of a world; the person is always the correlate of a world, namely, the world in which he experiences himself" (as cited in Grumet, 2006, pp. 49-50). Moreover, it is not merely how I convey or present the course content that determines how students interpret the events; it is not merely my expectations that are in play but rather the complexities involved with how students may experience the topics. Kyle had something to say about how events were understood.

Kyle's candid comments about our social studies class and the assignments reminded me of Gadamer's discussion regarding his theory of experience. My conversation with Kyle made an impression because it brought me up short. To 'be pulled up short' is to have one's assumptions, expectations negated, thwarted, or reversed. Although Gadamer employed this phrase in the context of reading a text, its application appropriately describes my conversation with Kyle. Kerdeman (2003) aptly captured Gadamer's theory of experience and its resonance to my particular conversation: "Being pulled up short is not confined to times of profound upheaval; life is full of everyday kinds of shattering. No one, Gadamer declared, is exempt from being pulled up short. Experience in this sense belongs to the historical nature of man" (p. 353*)*. Being pulled up short, having my assumptions about what constitutes good teaching thwarted, in this case unconcealing something I had once dutifully considered.

In addition, my ensuing conversations with Kyle offered me the sheer pleasure, and a little guilt, of discovering the thoughtfulness and insightfulness of a seventeen-year old boy that would not have been out of place in my graduate-level seminar in political science. Furthermore, this interruption came from a student whom I had judged to be disinterested and disengaged from the world of social studies.

Competing Views of Experience in the Lives of Teachers; Common Narratives about Experience Journeying with the 'Inexperienced'

Several years ago, as part of a project entitled the 'Reflective Mentorship Program' under the auspices of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), I was assigned to work with twenty-five 'inexperienced' high school teachers located in an area of the city where students are often considered to have 'very high needs'. The teachers

were from a wide variety of subject areas: Art, Drama, Music, Social Studies, English, English as a Second Language, Mathematics, Science, and Computer Science. It was the first year of the program and there was no model in place to guide the work. Accordingly, I met with the school's administration team to discuss possibilities for structuring and articulating the contents of the program.

The principal was a strong advocate of devising and implementing a program in part due to the extremely high number of inexperienced teachers on staff, over one third of whom had less than two years of teaching experience. In addition, he expressed heartfelt care and concern about the exceptionally high turnover rate amongst his teaching staff, who were leaving the school and/or the profession within two years of starting their careers.

Throughout our discussion, the administration team regularly referred either implicitly or explicitly to the notion of 'experienced and inexperienced teachers' and expressed concern that given the context of their environment, they lacked a sufficient number of experienced teachers. As our discussion unfolded, the focus started to shift from devising and implementing a program to discussing the nature of teaching—specifically regarding three central questions: What is it to be a teacher? What is it to be and to become an experienced teacher? What are the conditions that can assist teachers to flourish, to become experienced?

Although the initial desire to establish a definitive program, to put into place prescriptions, was strong, we resisted this temptation. In an attempt to honour the lived experiences of the teachers who would be involved in the program, we decided that I

would engage in one-to-one conversations with the teachers structured around a single question: What are your wonderments about teaching?

Although the content of these conversations varied, some consistent themes emerged: several teachers acknowledged the tension between their own pedagogical beliefs that they wanted to guide their teaching practice, and their perceptions of the administration's expectations. Many teachers mentioned that they felt vulnerable due to their 'probationary contracts,' since the granting of a permanent teaching certification was significantly influenced by the recommendation of a senior administrator.

One first-year teacher said she forced herself to teach with her classroom door open as a means to stay true to her pedagogical beliefs. However, she feared that if an administrator happened to walk by, the noise level and students moving about her classroom would not resemble a smooth-running classroom; in fact, it might look chaotic. She queried, what would they think? A second-year teacher confessed that she going to keep her true pedagogical beliefs, what she really wanted to do in her classroom, in her "back pocket" until she received her permanent certification, which would grant her the necessary autonomy and security she felt was required to pursue her work in a particular way.

A second theme that emerged was that to be an experienced teacher meant that teachers had to possess the requisite content knowledge and teaching strategies that would ensure student achievement. Often, teachers internalized the behavior of disruptive or disengaged students; they suffered in silence, because they did not want to draw attention to their perceived weaknesses. Similar to my own thoughts as a beginning teacher, many of the teachers expressed their belief that they would eventually become

experienced and once they possessed the appropriate teaching strategies, very few problems would emerge. Deborah Britzman's (1991) discussion regarding a particular discourse of experience befittingly captured the sentiments of many of the teachers as she stated "the distinction between acquiring pedagogical skills and becoming a teacher by objectifying experience as a map. In this discourse, everything is already organized and complete; all that is left to do is to follow preordained paths. The problem is that when experience is perceived as a map, it is taken to order perception and guaranteed essential truths. For example, conventional wisdom such as 'we learn by experience,' or 'experience is the best teacher,' legitimizes the regime of a particular discourse on experience" (p. 7). However, although teachers often expressed a desire to follow "preordained paths", many believed that they would not learn to become thoughtful and responsive teachers solely by embracing the adage "experience is the best teacher."

Third, many teachers expressed a profound desire and willingness to learn about their chosen profession. Many attended teacher preparation programs that exposed them to inquiry-based learning, and they were familiar that inquiry-based learning undergirded the Programs of Studies throughout the province. And many wondered how they might learn more about this practice, which they had seldom had the opportunity to experience during their practicums.

In order to address some of their wonderments, several opportunities were organized. Some of the activities included in-school classroom observations, professional reading groups that gathered at lunch, visitations to off-campus sites to observe inquiry-based teaching, presentation of work at education conferences, enrollment in on-campus graduate courses, and engagement in team teaching, team planning, and interdisciplinary

teaching. Drama students participated in a collaborative project with an elementary school where the high school students worked with a grade one class to direct and produce the play *'Alice in Wonderland'*.

My involvement in the Reflective Mentorship Program, combined with my enrollment in graduate school in Education, heightened my interest in teacher education and teacher professional development. One of my first courses was 'Foundational Thinkers: Hans Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics,' which centered on Gadamer's (2004) magnum opus, *Truth and Method.* While reading Gadamer's works I was continually drawn to his theory of experience—*Erfahrung*—and its pertinence to education.

Many teachers who have enrolled in graduate classes are familiar with the need to coax their tired bodies to night classes after a day of teaching. And despite the fatigue that consumed my mind and body, by night's end, I often felt invigorated by the lecture and the conversations that followed. It was fascinating, liberating and, at times, devastating to be able to 'hear' pedagogical understandings, questions and challenges, in the words of curriculum scholar, Aoki, in a 'new key.' After ten years of teaching, my wonderments, and the profound complexities and mysteries that pervade the act of teaching were coming into language.

As my graduate course continued, I became increasingly conscious of its hold on me, of being pulled into its sway, compelled by its *truth*. I was often too quick to mimic and repeat phrases that I had come to appreciate. At times forgetting that the words and phrases we embrace are inheritances, they are passed down to us and the multifarious meanings contain shadows and ghosts that may point to other possibilities. Perhaps this is

a familiar aspect of learning, of being captivated by ideas that speak so poignantly to the topics we investigate. At times I wondered if my proximity required distance and additional critique that might create a space to assist me with finding my own voice.

Similarly, throughout my career as a teacher, there have been many pedagogical initiatives espousing great promise by well-intentioned educators, inclusive education, personalization of learning and formative assessment practices, to name a few. Typically these initiatives are imbued with particular discourses. Certain expressions carry a certain cache, a particular intellectual capital that often reveals one's commitment to the organization. However, perhaps it is important to remember the paradoxes of discourses, as they open up possibilities for understanding, they may simultaneously foreclose others.

My study of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics converged with my work with those 'inexperienced teachers'. In particular, I was drawn to Gadamer's theory of experience and his articulation of Aristotle's notion of phronesis that points to a sense of journeying that embraced a particular kind of practice, a practice that is deeply attuned and responsive to the particularity of the context. In addition, Gadamer (2004) acknowledged it as a moral knowledge that required one to respond ethically a particular situation one finds oneself, Gadamer (2004) observed, "the person acting must view the concrete situation in light of what is asked of him in general" and "knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring what the situation call for" (p. 311). Perhaps these theories embraced the fact that these notions demanded something from me, something that was not accessible through learning about teaching but evoked a sense of journey, an existential quest to study my being in the world with others. Moreover, they elucidated a world that sought to engage the perennial

questions of humankind concerning what it is to live life. Thus, my studies and travels with unfamiliar interlocutors introduced me to a world and exposed me to vistas that were far more expansive, far more abundant with possibilities than those to which I had become accustomed.

However, perhaps given my nascent understandings, it continued at times to be very difficult to articulate, to bump up against embedded narratives and practices. Frequently when challenged, I was unable to engage the dominant narrative critically, in a voice that could be heard as I struggled to become fluent in a new and emerging discourse. In fact, at times things seemed worse. My fledgling understandings oriented me to other ways of understanding, other ways of thinking about the complexities of living a teacher's life, but the necessary language to express alternatives was only just being cultivated, contributing to my feelings of vulnerability or worse, at times feeling ostracized.

My own sense of vulnerability also contributed to me worrying about the teachers with whom I was working, realizing my own struggles as a veteran teacher to engage in pedagogical practices that were unfamiliar and frequently dismissed. How might I support their journeys, their existential quests? During my many conversations with the teachers, in which many emotionally expressed feelings of inadequacy, loneliness and exhaustion, I was often reminded of my own experiences as a beginning teacher.

I was not prepared for the forthcoming hostility from my peers and at times utter dismissal of my pedagogical beliefs. Furthermore, I was unaware, in part attributed to my naïveté, as to how factious this group of teachers had become within the school community. On many occasions, other teachers at the school asked me: So what is 'your'

group all about? What exactly is your job? Others made comments about the fact that I did not have a teaching assignment, that I had time to philosophize about teaching, while they meanwhile had to live in the real world with students. This was made abundantly clear to me when a colleague asked: *Who the fuck do you think you are questioning the ways we do things around here?*

Although at times there were difficult interactions with colleagues, the work with this group of teachers was affirming, sustaining and intensely meaningful. As I continue my work in education, I have become increasingly sensitive to the demands of working on the margins, to the challenges of cultivating a sense of humility and the requisite 'tone and tact' that relations with others demand. In addition, akin to the beginning of each new school year, that nervousness of anticipation that imbues my body, the unknowability of what will come to greet me requires the cultivation of a profound attunement to others, to the young. Although something accrues as we practice our profession, it would be difficult to outrun the vulnerability and contingency of our understandings. Our interactions with students do reveal something familiar, there is a kind-ness; however, as we journey with a particular student, on a particular day in a particular context, our prejudgments are made vulnerable, they become susceptible to interruption by a singular call from a student. Gadamer's (2004) description of 'openness' thoughtfully captures an orientation and spirit that speaks to the work of teachers: "In human relations the important thing is . . . to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But, ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no

genuine human bond" (p. 361). Thus, becoming experienced calls forth a receptivity and generosity towards the otherness of the other, an ethical commitment that provides an opportunity to hear the other's claim, that allows them to really say something to us.

My work in the Reflective Mentorship Program combined with my graduate studies significantly influenced my work as a mentor teacher. I was reminded of the vulnerabilities that I often felt as a beginning teacher, and of my perceived need to keep them hidden. In addition, like many of the teachers I worked with, I had believed that learning the 'how to' of teaching would suffice in quelling the daily dis-ease I experienced.

We met regularly as a group to discuss questions and concerns brought forth by the teachers. Furthermore, Gadamer's notion of experience as *Erfahrung* had a significant influence on me and aspects of it surfaced during our group discussions. In particular, we inquired into the lived experiences as a means to investigate the predominant narratives, our belonging to traditions in education and particular inheritances that have influenced our images of teaching. Moreover, we explored the underlying assumptions and expectations that framed our conceptions of ourselves as teachers, as a means to assist in understanding some of the inheritances that held us in their sway and to remind us that these constructions can be understood differently. This dialogic space provided an opportunity, as Walter Benjamin has observed, "to brush history against the grain in order to uncover the dynamics, tensions, exclusions, and inclusions engendered by the activity of teaching" (cited in Britzman 1991, p. 1).

As we continued to journey together, and to inquire into the complexities of teaching, we embraced practices that elucidated the vulnerabilities and contingencies of

our work as teachers. Furthermore, our inquiry into curriculum theory oriented us to the tension that resides between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived experience. We discussed how a teacher's responsibility was more than the delivery of content knowledge as we became increasingly sensitive to the cultivation of an attunement that accentuated the relational space between teachers, students and the content we are entrusted to teach. Many of the teachers came to understand their role as a teacher differently and in many cases transformed their pedagogical practices and their identity as a teacher.

As we journeyed together we became ever more mindful of the profound complexities that are involved in teaching. To study the profession did not necessarily make things easier, but a questioning of things returned life—a teacher's life back to its original difficulty. Living well among students required the cultivation of an attunement, a practiced way of being with others that exceeded the sole grasp of defined methods that often proclaimed certainty as they attempted to quell the flux. Perhaps a radical openness to the lifeworld, points to, as Kerdeman (2003) suggested, that life is full of everyday kinds of shattering to which no one is exempt from being pulled up short. Indeed, sitting alongside side the young, alongside Darren with his frenetic need to be on the move, or Sara as she struggles to make new friends, or Bobby who dreams of one day of being an Astronaut are callings that requires a responsive response to our students' dreams and wishes. This also points to the thoughtful work of teachers and orients us to a co-venturing together as we interpret the world together. Perhaps the vulnerability and contingency of our journey together may pry a space open for meditation, a space for wonder and awe, for possibilities not yet.

In reflecting upon the *'Cellist of Sarajevo'* my experiences as a beginning teacher, my interactions with student teachers and my work as a mentor teacher I am the drawn to the notions of vulnerability and contingency. As a teacher we live our lives in the face of vulnerability, ever-changing circumstances and the contingency of our response to students requires a pedagogical attunement that honours a generous and thoughtful response to the students we teach. My interaction with others offers a perspective on *Erfahrung,* a venturing with others; a travelling that frequently reveals the limits of my own understandings. Perhaps becoming an experienced teacher as Gadamer (2004) suggested required movement, a movement where we come to understand differently, "It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (p. 296).

Gadamer's Theory of Experience—*Erfahrung* Responsibly Responding to the Students in Our Midst

In Gadamer's (2004) introduction to *Truth and Method,* he contended that people have long felt the necessity to seek understanding and pursue correct interpretations concerning practical and political questions about the right ways to live. Historically this pursuit has exceeded the constraints imposed by the concept of method as established by modern science. Specifically, Gadamer described how for judges and the clergymen, the contemplation and concretization of their decisions surmount the prescribed methods of modern science. He elucidated an essential tension between a text and application and the need for judgment, "whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application" (p. 309). This insight has particular import for teachers as we inquire into the living traditions of

our respective disciplines, and as we gather with students to interpret the curriculum and our understandings of the topics: How might our study of the living academic disciplines honour their vulnerability and inform the contingency of our response? How might we create a generous and generative space that does not truncate future possibilities?

Gadamer (2004) articulated that the hermeneutic phenomenon is not interested in subjecting the understanding of texts to scientific investigation, he writes "It is not concerned primarily with amassing verifiable knowledge, such as would satisfy the methodological ideal of science—yet it too is concerned with knowledge and with truth. In understanding tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truths known. But what kind of knowledge and what kind of truth?" (p. xxi).

Responsibly Responding to Our Students

As teachers we come face-to-face with students, with Jeffery, with Kyle and are called upon to respond, a response that eludes the certainty of prescribed methods, but rather calls for a responsible responding, for a pedagogical attunement that honours the contingency, the particularity and the diversity of the students we come to greet. Although there are many writing strategies that might assist Jeffery, his angst with writing revealed a constellation of concerns, most notable was his lack of belief in himself as a writer and as a thinker. My interaction with Kyle brought me up short, exposing my preconceived notions of students who arrive late to class or who do not attend at all, or who would not complete their homework. Despite Kyle not following many of the expectations that I had outlined for 'student success', Kyle was an exceptionally thoughtful student and his academic achievement outstanding. It was the

livedness, the lives of Jeffery and Kyle that created a provocation for me to reconsider the sedimentations of my pedagogical practices.

As Gadamer (2004) explicated in his theory of experience, he suggested that to become an experienced judge or clergymen requires a particular kind of practice, as one cannot rely on a completed knowledge, a fixed dogma. Rather, to become experienced is "always actually present only in the individual observation. Here lies the fundamental openness of experience to new experience, not only in the general sense that errors are corrected, but that experience is essentially dependent on constant confirmation and necessarily becomes a different kind of experience where there is no confirmation" (p. 352). In addition, given that in 'application' "there is no confirmation," risk exists in the concretization of judgment, to the particularity of the context. It is here, where there is no confirmation; no prescribed methodologies, no definitive strategies or completed knowledge that we as teachers may merely apply, but rather we rely on an openness of experience to new experience—to possibilities not yet known.

According to Gadamer (2004), to become experienced implies an orientation toward new experience. Thus, becoming experienced is the experience of human finitude when one becomes aware of one's limited and finite understandings. Indeed, our current understanding of self, others and the world represent a limited historical horizon, and the experience of human finitude provides an opening to transform, to transcend our current understandings. Perhaps this is a central aspect of education, the young in our midst and the curriculums we teach are susceptible to being understood anew.

Cultivating a Particular Practice

Gadamer (1981) noted that to become experienced involves a commitment to a certain kind of practice. He suggested that practice is deeply influenced by the modern notion of science: "When we talk about practice, we have been forced in the direction of thinking of the application of science" (p. 69). In addition, Gadamer proffered that the notion of theory "has lost its dignity" (p. 69). Paramount to practice is the demand to make an ethical choice, a choice that honours the particularity of a context. Therefore, an ethical application of the law, for example, is never merely the application of any universal but rather is considered just when it is concretized. "But the knowledge that gives direction to action is essentially called for by the concrete situations in which we are to choose the thing to be done; and no learned and mastered technique can space us the task of deliberation and decision" (p. 92). Gadamer repeatedly suggested that "deliberation and decision" carry an ethical weight as he asked the question of the good "about the best way of life or about the best constitution of the state" (p. 93).

I wonder how Gadamer's theory of experience and his corresponding notion of practice might contribute to understanding what it is to be an experienced teacher? How might his theory of experience orient teachers to their own existential quest? How might it orient our lives to the academic disciplines we teach? How might we become practiced in honouring the particularity of each student?

Specifically, philosophical hermeneutics may assist in providing an interpretative frame for teachers to return to their lived experiences, as a means to understand themselves, others, the curriculum and the world anew. Thus, a journey into our lived experiences requires that we continually cultivate a comportment of openness that

provides opportunities to embrace alterity, to keep open the possibility of a more fulsome horizon. During our discussion on the *'Truth about Stories'* students observed that their own understandings of stories often revealed particular perspectives, orientations that restricted other possibilities and it was in coming face-to-face with the other—embracing alterity that they we able to come to new understandings. Furthermore, students noted that to become a responsible citizen was to be engaged with other peoples' stories as Butler (2004) suggested, "I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start" (p. 46).

Truth and Method (2004) presented an inquiry into how understanding may be understood and not limited by certain particular perspectives of science and practice. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics also explicated a concept of experience—*Erfahrung*—that necessitated journeying, something one must undergo. He elucidated the concept of *Erfahrung* by delving into the historicity of understanding, an existential quest where one returns to their lived experiences as an invocation to understand anew. His ontological investigation into the historicity of understanding offered the idea that a person trying to understand a topic is always projecting their fore-meanings, always already imbued with particular ways of understanding. Therefore, "our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 266).

This interpretative space reveals the positive possibilities and accentuates the indeterminacy of the lives of teachers. Perhaps the vulnerability of narratives that we have long embraced revealed by the cellist of Sarajevo, challenges our notions of subjectivity and our capacity to reconstitute our private and professional lives when confronted with substantive change or upheaval. During my work as a mentor teacher I was reminded by the vulnerability of beginning teachers, of the tenuousness of their professional status and the challenges that confronted them as they attempted to reconstitute their professional lives. Embarking on their journey required enormous courage and commitment. Many of the teachers expressed the contradictions they were feeling—internally they aspired to certain pedagogical philosophies and practices, however, externally they felt inhibited by a professional ethos where they felt threatened, an ethos that was not always accepting of alternatives. They often expressed a desire to pursue pedagogical paths that would create opportunities for further 'inquiry'. Furthermore, their inquiries often sought to determine what was possible, a desire to surpass the given, to seek freedom, a freedom that was open to future possibilities.

As teachers we enter our classrooms always already in the midst of transforming a place into a pedagogical space pregnant with possibilities. Canadian curriculum scholar, Aoki (2005) aptly depicts this as he described the thoughtfulness of Miss O's intentions, a teacher who sought to establish a pedagogic space, even before the students arrived, she silently asked: Can I establish myself here as a teacher? . . . And when the pupils arrive, things and pupils arrange themselves, as it were around Miss O's intention. They become 'suitable,' 'teachable,' 'harmful,' 'difficult,' 'hopeful,' 'damaging'" (p. 159). How might Miss O's intentions be vulnerable and contingent while standing alongside her pupils that

are “difficult,” or “suitable,” or “harmful”: how might she be responsible to things being otherwise? How as teachers may we be awakened to the voice of the other?

A Teacher’s Existential Quest

As a means to understand differently, Gadamer (2004) suggested that the constant task is the investigation of understandings that dwell within. He asserted, “All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze on the things themselves” (p. 269). It was common during my frenetic days as a classroom teacher that I became reliant on certain pedagogical practices and had become accustomed to many of the school’s organizing structures and implicit and explicit procedures.

It was in and through my interactions with Jeffery and Kyle that reminded me that in my focus to ‘cover the curriculum’, I often deferred to methods and strategies that had proved successful in the past; indeed, I had forgotten to direct my gaze upon the things themselves, to the students’ lived experiences, to life as it is lived. Although there are many strategies and methods that are essential for teaching, I had, at times, defaulted, or in the words of Gadamer (2004), I was not “on guard against arbitrary fancies and he imperceptible habits of thought” (p. 269). It was during my discussion with Kyle that re-awakened me to the particularity of each student, to the uniqueness of their being in the world.

Journeying with Grumet’s (2006) evocative essay *‘Where Does the World Go When Schooling is About Schooling?’* provided an impetus to return to the lifeworld as she queries about the study of history, “What are the questions that history asks of the world and what kind of world does it find? What appears constant in human experience? Where

are the stories of the past that history hides?" Furthermore, she reflected that the disciplines that constitute the school curriculum, the stories told by novelists, mathematicians, playwrights and historians attempt to make sense of human relationships; however their narratives and formulae "do not capture the world and represent it to us. They point to it" (p. 48). Thus, she reflected, "we don't want to settle for someone else's version of the world . . . wef always have the possibility to pull back the edge of the curtain to see what lies beyond" (p. 50). Here, Grumet pointed to an interpretative space, a generative space for us as teachers to venture, to return to our own lived experiences, to the vulnerabilities and contingencies of our lives as teachers with the possibility of understanding differently.

As a means "to be on guard," Gadamer (2004) suggests that one must embark of a journey; the movement of this journey "begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones" (p. 267). Furthermore, he suggested that the hermeneutic quest is a questioning of things so as to reveal the influences of our own fore-meanings that may open an opportunity to dwell with the indeterminacies of living life. As a means to awaken us from the spell of our own judgments, to garner new understandings requires a journey, an existential quest that involves risk. Gadamer (1981) described how "risk never leaves room for the simple application of a general knowledge of rules . . . Furthermore, where it is successful, understanding means a growth in inner awareness" (p. 109). Similarly, Grumet (1988) contributed that risk provided a "deviation of our own reproductive histories, mine and yours, from . . . theoretical formulations that opens the gap for new theory to fill" (p. xvii). While working as a mentor with the 'inexperienced' teachers, I came to more fully appreciate the risk that is in play when trying to work

against established understandings, and also the enormous fulfillment in pursuing practices that honoured a complex inquiry into the lifeworld. Perhaps venturing, exposing ourselves to the risks inherent with journeying may assist us with cultivating a sense of freedom, a capacity to propose 'truths' that interrupt commonly held educational beliefs.

An existential journey with many fellow interlocutors called for a comportment of openness, openness to alterity that may render one's understandings vulnerable. However, embracing openness to alterity does not call for being neutral, for passively hearing the voice of the other. Rather, "the important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 269). It is through making one's understanding vulnerable that involves hearing the claim of the other that may reveal other possibilities. Gadamer (2004) wrote about the centrality of an ethical encounter with the other as he emphatically stated its importance: "If we do not learn hermeneutic virtue . . . if we do not realize that it is essential first of all to understand the other person if we are ever to see whether in the end perhaps something like the solidarity of humanity as a whole may be possible, especially in relation to our living together and surviving together—if we do not, we will never be able to accomplish the essential tasks of humanity" (Gadamer as cited in Krajewski 2004, p. 10). Similarly, De Beauvoir (1976) notes the importance of our encounters with others as she suggested "Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men" (p. 72).

While journeying with others, in cultivating an ability to hear the other, the hermeneutic task becomes a questioning of things. We prepare to have the other say something to us that we could not tell ourselves. Moreover, we ought to seek ways to

embrace alterity, in the words of Grumet (1988) to "invite endless problems of interpretation, not as impostors at the banquet planned for the truth but, indeed, as the guests of honour" (p. 60). Indeed, as Gadamer (2004) suggested, it is while travelling with others that may surface our blind spots, and provide the provocation to understand differently, as he commented, "It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes [one] deaf to what speaks to [one] in tradition" (p. 270).

What authorizes us as teachers to teach? Gadamer (2004) assisted here as he discussed the notion of prejudices, to rehabilitate authority and tradition. He suggested that there are legitimate understandings and thus recognized that voices from tradition may provide authority as to how we might understand as Gadamer referred to our belonging "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination," he wrote, "we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and the state in which we live" (p. 276). He contended that the Enlightenment jettisoned prejudices and disregarded the existence of legitimate prejudices, and asked, "What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?" (p. 277).

The importance of authority reveals the inherent tension between the teacher and students, between the teacher and the subject matter: "authority . . . properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority had to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge precedence—i.e., it has priority of one's own" (p. 279). Indeed, the topics of citizenship and identity understood under this concept of authority may orient teachers to acknowledge, "Our historical consciousness is always

filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 284).

For Gadamer, prejudices are an important part of experience, in that they provide the conditions for understanding; in fact, they make understanding possible. Prejudices place teachers in a between space, a tension-filled space with the possibilities of understanding differently. Furthermore, he challenges the discrediting of prejudices by the Enlightenment as he contends that the Enlightenment was "against prejudice itself". By contrast, Gadamer (2004) wanted to rehabilitate the notion of prejudices, understood as prejudgment and a necessity to living life. In addition, he discussed the importance of authority and traditions but emphasized their vulnerability and contingency. He described that to properly understand authority has "nothing to do with obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge" (p. 279).

Moreover, within the confining mould of tradition "there is always an element of freedom" (Gadamer, 2004 p. 281). Perhaps venturing with others may provide a space, a distance, a reversal of consciousness that engenders insights that orients us towards the world, towards possibilities not yet. Perhaps a reversal of consciousness may offer new vistas, new horizons and new ways to uncover one's inner historicity. Perhaps a reversal of consciousness may provide a catalyst to enact freedom, as Gadamer suggested "To have a world means to have an orientation toward it. To have an orientation toward the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one can present it to oneself as it is" (p. 440). Thus to be and to become an experienced teacher may orient us to the lifeworld, to encounter its multifariousness and to cultivate a capacity and the courage so we "can present it to oneself as it is." However,

this does not suggest that we can simply transcend our belongingness, our habitat, but "that [we have] another posture toward it—a free, distanced orientation" (p. 445). As teachers this may provide an opportunity for us to respond responsibly to the fecundity of the individual case—to respond in a manner that is more honest and more true.

In discussing prejudices, Arendt (1993) acknowledged the importance of prejudices as she described the essence of education is natality, the arrival of the young into the world. She suggested, "The disappearance of prejudices simply means that we have lost the answers on which we ordinarily rely without even realizing that they were originally answers to questions. A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments" (p.1).

Thus "understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (p. 291). As social studies teachers, we are mediating the topics we are entrusted to investigate and interpret with our students. Specifically, the academic disciplines offer answers to questions once asked, as we and our students inquire into the topics articulated in the Program of Studies, we embrace their contributions to the topic and also address them contemporaneously—how might these answers assist us in understanding the world? How might we understand the topics differently? Furthermore, as Gadamer (2004) noted that this distance between past and present is a tension that is not something that needs to be overcome, but rather how might we, together with our students, take up the task of understanding our traditions, our inheritances? Thus, to understand tradition is to allow it to say something to us, to come to agreement around a topic. As Gadamer wrote "It is not at all a matter of securing ourselves against tradition

that speaks . . . but, on the contrary, of excluding everything that could hinder us from understanding it in terms of the subject matter" (p.272).

The notions of vulnerability and contingency illustrate the complexities of our lives in general and our lives as teachers in particular. The cellist of Sarajevo revealed a particular vulnerability, the shattering of a way of life, the shattering of an identity to such an extent that it was no longer possible to go on living a life that he had grown accustomed. Although our lives are not often shattered in such violent a way, our identities as teachers are vulnerable, are susceptible to being unsettled in relation to the 'face' of students in all their diversities. Moreover, our capacity to go on, the capacity of our students to go on, to reconstruct our lives is not accessible by merely by the dissemination of content knowledge. The concepts of citizenship and identity are ones that particularly occasion vulnerability and contingency as they point to the complexity of curriculum; specifically, the uncertain and challenging contexts and vulnerabilities of teacher subjectivity in terms of those concepts. In responding to the notions of vulnerabilities and contingencies it surfaces the question: what does it mean to be an 'experienced' teacher in the realization that teaching about citizenship and identity calls forth something that cannot simply be contained as passing on disciplinary knowledge? Perhaps our journey with others may provide opportunities to further understand the vulnerability and contingency of the concepts citizenship and identity. Furthermore, perhaps embarking on a journey with fellow interlocutors may open up possibilities not yet known. Although Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* was not intended as a prescription for educators, his philosophical hermeneutics offers social studies teachers a profound and evocative calling that encourages an existential journey. To become

experienced, Gadamer (2004) suggested, requires a yearning, a willingness to journey as a means to continuously seek understandings of self, others and the world. As humans we are immersed in the history of effects that orient us to our inheritances, to the traditions to which we belong, to our families, our cultures and the world. It is our constant task to inquire, to journey with others as an opportunity to come to understand, to come an agreement regarding the curriculum topics.

Perhaps Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and his theory of *Erfahrung* represent an invocation for teachers and students to set forth on a journey in solitude and in solidarity to explore the existential aspects of personal identity while dwelling aright within the tension of the other and responding to the call of the other with an ethical appreciation that aspires towards the good.

Chapter 3: Teaching as Practice—The Challenge of Self and Other in Engaging Understandings in Social Studies

> The human individual is shaped in the process, in relations, in connections with Others. . . . The real place where culture happens is in personal interactions. Others, let us repeat, are the mirror in which I look at myself, and which tells me who I am. (Kapuscinski, 2008, p. 44)

Throughout my various roles associated with teaching social studies, a persistent challenge has been, and continues to be, engaging the self and other in understanding social studies. The context of my own experiences as a teacher and as a social studies consultant highlighted the complex relational qualities of those positions in relation to students as other and teachers as other. Although as a teacher there were several factors that often restricted inquiry into the curriculum topics with students, an epistemological orientation towards the core themes of citizenship and identity often limited venturing with students into the existential and ontological questions stipulated in the Program of Study's front matter. Similarly, in my role as a consultant, I was often perceived as *an expert*—the one who possessed the requisite subject knowledge and instructional strategies to ensure student learning. Perhaps predictably, my work with teachers was primarily oriented towards teaching *about* the curriculum topics and treating them largely as outcomes, with a concentrated focus on implementing the content and corresponding instructional strategies.

It is, of course, important that teachers are familiar with the curriculum—that we study the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes defined in the Social Studies Program of Studies (2005); however, in my experience, an overly determined focus on instructional practices to cover curriculum content frequently foreclosed upon opportunities to dwell with the legitimate existential and ontological questions posed by

the Program of Studies. The profoundly relational qualities of teaching, which call for the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement towards the other and the curriculum topics, were often left in silence. Foreclosure often contributed to silencing inquiry into teacher subjectivities, and denied the influences of the current historical moment and the possibility to transform underlying assumptions and intentions of being a teacher. Rarely were there opportunities to inquire into our everyday experiences as teachers that may have enhanced our capacity to reconstruct our understanding of our experiences. As Pinar (2011) suggested, it is through inquiry into our lived experiences that "can help us reconstruct our own subjective and social lives. We can be changed by what we study" (p. 2). Although Gadamer (2007) suggested that our previous understandings of the world are integral since they "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience" (p. 82), he wrote "the real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable" (p. 85). As teachers co-venture we invite opportunities to scrutinize our form and heighten our capacity to see what is questionable.

In this chapter, as a means to explore the curriculum topics with students in ways that honour existential and ontological questions, I explore Aoki's (2005) notion of critical co-venturing, which he described as a call for teachers to

> becom[e] involved with his [her] students, enter into their world as he [or she] allows them to enter his [hers] and engages himself [herself] with students mutually in action-reflection oriented activities. He [or she] questions students and themselves. Mutual reflection allows new questions to emerge, which in turn, leads to more reflection. In the ongoing process, which is dialectical, and transformative of social reality, both teacher and students become open participants in open dialogue (p. 131).

Venturing with students into the curriculum topics recognizes the history and agency of subjectivity and calls for the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that encourages relations with students that are dialogical and dialectical.

As we explore the core themes of citizenship and identity with our students, how might we inquire into the academic disciplines to provide opportunities to go beyond the accumulation of verifiable knowledge, to recognize the living character of the disciplines, and to honour their abundance? How might our inquiry challenge understandings of our subjectivities? Jardine, Friesen and Clifford (2006) suggested that to experience the abundance of things required us to nurture "[the] way we carry ourselves in the world, the way we come, through experience, to live in a world full of life, full of relations and obligations and address" (p. 100). Although we act, with what Gadamer (2004) referred to as "guiding images" (p. 319), we must constantly call our own understandings into question through our interactions with others. In addition, as observed by Schmidt (2006) philosophical hermeneutics seeks to understand the truth that the other presents and the task of hermeneutics is to meld this truth into one's life. As teachers, our co-venturing may occasion opportunities to come to an agreement regarding a topic and our new understandings may assist us in recognizing and acting in a manner that is more acutely attuned to the other and to ourselves. Co-venturing with students invites us to continually re-examine our understanding of the world, and as Gadamer (2004) observed "we see that the relationship of life to experience is not that of a universal to a particular" but rather the concept of life involves "life's reaching beyond itself" (pp. 59-60). Our interactions with others may encourage us to reach beyond the given, opening up to possibilities not yet known.

Co-venturing may provide opportunities to become experienced. As Gadamer (2004) suggested, "*Erfahrung* is something you undergo, so that subjectivity is overcome and [you] are drawn into an event" (p. xiii). The dialectical process of our journey may reveal that our own understandings and interpretations of the world "are not constructions based on principles, but the furthering of an event that goes far back" (p. xxiii). Perhaps co-venturing will orient us to an openness, to opportunities to surpass our present understandings, and to become experienced, since according to Gadamer, "the truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience" (p. 350).

Traversing the curriculum territory with our students requires practice that does not rely solely on strategies and techniques but calls forth relational qualities that orient our attentiveness as teachers to the other, to the world, and to ourselves as a means to maximize our "flexibility in our interchange with the world" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 71). Becoming experienced calls for an attunement to hear the voice of the other, a generosity and humility that assists us in responding ethically to the otherness of the other. Venturing calls for the cultivation of an ethical judgment oriented towards the good, and as noted by Jardine, Friesen and Clifford (2006), a practice "in which our thinking must find its thoughtfulness through the worldly work, in the face of the testy case that will slow thought down and test its resolve, its strength, its patience, and its worth" (p. 18).

Perhaps as we co-venture with students to interpret the world, we become increasingly sensitive to the finitude and the conditionedness of our interpretations and welcome life's precarity and ambiguity—recognizing that there are no fixed and uncontested end points, because understanding is always on the way. This intersection, this coming together with our students and the worldly topics, may occasion

opportunities to tarry over the topics, to contemplate what the topics proffer, and to expand our current understandings and remain provoked by the wonder and awe of living life. Huebner (1999) captured the beauty and possibility of venturing, of encountering the world with others, in his observation that "it is possible for us to meet this world and the other subjects which make up this world and to stand face to face with them—to feel wonder, amazement, a sense of mystery" (p. 5).

Co-venturing does not offer a safe and predictable passage, but is always rife with tension. Gadamer (1981) noted that the most authentic aspect of hermeneutic experience "always remains a risk and never leaves room for the simple application of a general knowledge of rules to the statements or texts to be understood. Furthermore, where it is successful, understanding means a growth in inner awareness . . . Understanding is an adventure and, like any other adventure, is dangerous" (p. 110). Co-venturing requires that we put our understandings at risk as we strive to respond to the particularity of the young in our midst, to discern what might be the best thing to do now. During our conversations with students we may come to embrace that our general knowledge of rules will not suffice when we come face-to-face with the unique needs of children. As Gadamer (2004) noted "ultimately, it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge" (p. 21). Perhaps, as Gadamer observed, our journeying with others will engender a growth in inner awareness that is attuned to the ethical weight of making a judgment. Furthermore, engaging in conversations does not culminate in an absolute position, but as a path of experience—an experiencing that continually points beyond itself.

The three stories that follow illustrate the challenges that confront us as teachers as we engage self and other in understanding social studies. In addition, my experience at a professional development opportunity for English Language Arts and Social Studies teachers where we inquired into students' lived experience further illuminated the complex relational qualities involved when engaging in the world with others. We recognized that co-venturing into the curriculum topics calls forth the cultivation of a pedagogic attunement that is sensitive to the ethical demands of each particular case. Our professional learning opportunity also highlighted Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung* as our journey elucidated that responsibly responding to students is not rendered secure by relying solely on methodological procedures.

Do We Have to Study Canada Again this Year?

As a high school social studies teacher, it was common to be asked by Grade 10 students on the first day of class: "Do we have to study Canada again this year?"

I continue to ponder this oft-repeated question, or perhaps more accurately I am drawn to the earnestness of the students' question, which points to a sense of fatigue regarding the study of Canada and the underlying hope that now that they are in high school, they should be able to move on. I wonder how students might see the study of Canada as something they could be done with, something that has been sufficiently covered so that it is now time to move on to the next topic? Has the study of Canada become an object, knowable by its *whatness*—the dissemination of events, facts, and names?

I wonder how students might understand, as an example, the connection between the Indian Act of 1876, enacted by the Parliament of Canada, and the current Aboriginal

issues confronting Canadian society—for example, the Idle No More movement, a partial response to the Canadian government's proposed bill C-45, which includes provisions that would allegedly undermine environmental protection and indigenous sovereignty. Or the revelations by food historian Ian Mosby that nutritional experiments were carried out on malnourished Aboriginal children during the 1940s and 1950s with the federal government's knowledge. I am struck by the Program's rationale that states: "Social studies provides opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens" (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1). As a social studies teacher I ask: How might we (teachers and students) respond to such events? What is the responsibility of citizens? How might our inquiry into current Aboriginal tensions offer possibilities for new understandings? How might our response reveal aspects of our own identities?

I am Just Teaching the Curriculum

As part of the Reflective Mentorship Program, a group of interested teachers gathered once a week during the lunch hour to discuss educational topics that surfaced within teachers' professional lives. Questions were brought forth regarding a variety of topics: assessment practices, planning, the isolation often experienced in teaching, feelings of being overwhelmed, and conditions that contributed to the challenges of teaching—class size, lack of preparation time, and co-curricular commitments. Teachers also shared assignments they had created, accompanied by student work. Often these initial inquiries provoked further study and frequently lead us to engage professional readings. On one occasion we read Aoki's (2005) essay *Teaching as Indwelling Between Two Curriculum Worlds,* in which he discussed the tension that resided between the

curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experience. As the conversation progressed, Shelly, a social studies teacher, emphatically asserted that she was just teaching the curriculum—that she remained objective and unbiased regarding contentious political, social, and ethical discussions. Her comment contributed to an animated discussion where some teachers rejected the possibility, or even the desirability, that we could or should remain neutral.

Our conversation paused after we read the first paragraph of Aoki's (2005) work, which then provided provocation for the next forty minutes:

> Even before day 1 of the term, our teacher, Miss O, walks into her assigned Grade 5 classroom. Because Miss O is already a teacher, by her mere presence in the classroom as teacher, she initiates a transformation of a sociocultural and physical environment into something different. Even before a pupil walks in, she silently asks: Can I establish myself as a teacher? And the classroom's desks, walls, chalkboards, floors, books, and resources jointly reply, albeit wordlessly, by what they are. They respond to Miss O's intention and presence. And when the pupils arrive, things and pupils arrange themselves, as it were, around Miss O's intention. They become suitable, teachable, harmful, difficult, hopeful, damaging. The environment ceases to be environment, and in its place comes into being a pedagogic situation, a lived situation pregnantly alive in the presence of people. (p. 159)

Andrea, a fellow social studies teacher who taught in the room beside Shelly, observed that several students would congregate in the hallway long after the second bell had sounded to signify the beginning of the next class—students who were not sitting at their desks were considered late. Andrea queried Shelly, "Why do you lock your door after the second bell?" As Shelly responded she became increasingly sensitive to and aware of her own bias. Deciding to lock the door "did establish [her] as a teacher" and students became teachable or difficult as a response to her policies and procedures. She stated that it was important for students to be respectful, and students who arrived late

disrupted the class already in progress. In addition, she said, in the "real world" students had to be on time.

As our conversation came to a close, we acknowledged what Aoki (2005) observed regarding Miss O: "Because Miss O is already a teacher, by her mere presence in the classroom as teacher, she initiates a transformation of a sociocultural and physical environment into something different" (p. 159). Indeed, although we may not always be conscious of the decisions we make as educators, how might we stay attuned and open to the possibilities that things could be otherwise? Drawing on the work of bell hooks (2003), we can ask: how might we commit to a radical openness, the will to explore multiple perspectives and change our minds as alternatives are presented?

Best Practices—My Work with the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

As a means of accountability for my role as a mentor teacher, at the end of each school year it was my responsibility to submit a report that specified best practices and successful strategies and techniques that I had incorporated in my work with teachers, administrators, and students. In part, my submission was to assist other mentor teachers as they searched for appropriate strategies; in short, strategies that could be universally applied—theory to practice. In addition, there was a repository for all mentor teachers to submit their best practices so that they could be accessed by teachers throughout the Calgary Board of Education.

During our year-end meetings mentor teachers gathered to share our findings and best practices. Reflecting on these meetings, I am reminded that a central focus of my work was often a pedagogical commitment to a particular endpoint, a definitive account of student learning that was often represented by a final project. Student success was

measured by student performances on standardized provincial examinations in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12. Accentuating best teaching practices and student success on provincial examinations as the sole measures of success often framed teaching and learning as outcomes—as measureable data. Within such a frame it was difficult to discuss questions that eluded ontic certainty, such as, 'How might we understand a student's desire to wonder, to inquire into the mysteries of living a life? How might we create space for students to 'just think' about the profound complexities of citizenship and identity?' Our focus on best practices turned our gaze away from the relation between teachers, students, and the topics of citizenship and identity.

The cultivation of a particular kind of experience emerged—an experience that was oriented towards a collection of strategies that could then be applied by classroom teachers attempting to give best practices an independent footing, often severing teachers from the relational space that calls for the cultivation of responsiveness, receptiveness, and flexibility in determining a course of action. An experienced mentor teacher was often perceived as one who had accumulated a vast array of teaching strategies. However, in strict adherence to teaching strategies, we often neglected conversations that inquired into the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement, a responsible responding as we embraced students in concrete situations.

Further Reflections: Keeping the Topics in Play with Students

As I continue to reflect upon the students' question about studying Canada, I would now like to ask my former students: Was there anything that you loved about the study of Canada? Were there any historians, philosophers, authors, or playwrights who opened up life to a sense of wonder? Did the study of Canada inspire you to seek further

understandings regarding our country's history, its future? Are there places where you might want to travel, to explore? How might we come to consider that our identity is not something already present, but rather is always in the process of becoming?

Perhaps the perennial question "Do we have to study Canada again this year?" reveals students' experience of a curriculum that accentuates and at times is overly determined by the *whatness* of the topics under investigation. Perhaps such an emphasis forecloses on journeying with the existential and ontological questions that undergird the core themes of citizenship and identity. How might such a focus impede teachers from becoming *Erfahrung*? A particular focus on the dissemination of information often neglects the voice of students and silences their experiences in the lifeworld. In addition, as suggested by Aoki (2005), such a predominant focus on content knowledge often elides an orientation that would encourage us to investigate our own relationships to the world and offer the possibility of revealing our hidden assumptions and intentions as teachers.

Erfahrung encourages openness towards students and provides them opportunities to put forth their observations, insights, and queries in a dialogic space that may bring forth a multitude of future possibilities. As Gadamer (2004) suggested regarding understanding, one "has to mediate with his own present existence if he wants to understand it and which in this way he keeps open for the future" (p. 336). Coming to an agreement may offer new horizons of understanding that contribute to a more fulsome understanding of our inner historicity. How might an overly determined focus on the *whatness* of curriculum turn our pedagogical gaze away from students' lived experiences

and away from co-venturing—a co-venturing that embraces a tactful leading out into the world?

As students study Canada, it is imperative that they come to understand the knowledge as defined in the Program of Studies. However, in learning about Canada, I am inspired by the ways that Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung* requires a sensibility and sensitivity to the contemporaneity of the academic disciplines of history, political science, and philosophy. The disciplines are not to be merely grasped by the processes of measurement, but by their truth. Gadamer (2007) illustrated this as he observed museum visitors recognizing many attributes and qualities of a sculpture's appearance representing a particular era. However, he suggested that "this recognition does not at all represent the real immediacy of a genuine experience of art. For experience in its deeper sense as experience is never merely a confirmation of expectations but a surprise of them" (p. 200). Similarly, an inquiry into the academic disciplines of history, political science or philosophy addresses us by the work's claim to truth: "In the moment of their uptake the work is realized, it speaks, its *Sache* (matter) emerges, one understands, one even says Aha!" (p. 193). Journeying may open up future possibilities since inquiry into the academic disciplines is not merely an affirmation of expectations, but invites us to venture on a path to unknown destinations.

Keeping the Topic in Play with Teachers

After my conversation with the Mentorship group, I was reminded of Gadamer's (2007) recognition of Heidegger's insight, who according to Gadamer, sought "to describe in terms of our self-understanding coming up against its limits, that is, as a consciousness in which history is always at work, which in really more being than

consciousness" (p. 23). Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics sought to overcome the primacy of self-consciousness. He noted the importance of surfacing the spell of our own understandings, which requires us to be attuned, to hear the voice of the other: "The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all of its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 271). It was often during these conversations that many of us teachers became deeply aware of how significantly our previously held understandings came into play. In addition, becoming experienced often induced a suffering as we became conscious of the narratives that governed our teaching lives; as Gadamer observed regarding the notion of suffering, "What a man learns through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but the insight into the limitations of humanity" (p. 351). It was during subsequent conversations that Shelly became open to studying how her identities as a teacher were shaped by effective history.

It was important for us to realize that our understandings of curriculum and pedagogy are contingent, vulnerable, and susceptible to being understood anew, and "every text handed down to us is but a fragment of meaning" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 336). Moreover, as our ideas are brought into play, they reveal that "play is more than the consciousness of the player, and so it is more than a subjective act. Language is more than the consciousness of the speaker, so also it is more than a subjective act" (p. xxxiii).

Those weekly meetings to study teaching challenged us to experience one another's claims. Gadamer (2004) observed that the importance of being open to the other involves experiencing "the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs . . . belonging together

always means being able to listen to one another" (p. 355). Our conversations were at times uneasy and uncomfortable, since they required us to be receptive to the address of the other, which often placed our own understandings in jeopardy before the other's claim.

Seeking Best Practices

As my work as a mentor teacher continued, the process of gathering best practices became firmly entrenched and commonplace, since as Gadamer (2004) noted: "The axiom of familiarity is that things must always have been this just as they are for us, for things are naturally like this" (p. 355). Such a strong orientation towards universalizing concepts in covering the curriculum often smothered opportunities to focus on our own journeying, on our own relation with students and the curriculum topics. Rarely were there opportunities for dialogue, a dialectic space where we could be reminded that we shape and are shaped by the world. Rather, as Gadamer suggested regarding knowledge, it "always means, precisely, considering opposites. Its superiority over preconceived opinion consists in the fact that it is able to conceive of possibilities as possibilities" (p. 359). In addition, Gadamer (2007) described dialectic as the art of conversation which included the art of having a conversation with oneself. This required that one must seriously question what one means when one says this or that. In seeking to understand, "one sets out on a journey, or better, is already on this journey. Our thinking is never satisfied with what one means in saying this or that" (p. 31). As teachers, dialectic may be understood as the art of conversation that includes having a conversation with ourselves that orients us to a heightened awareness of our not-knowing.

The focus on best practices often nullified the tension between theory and practice. The rich, provocative, and often troubling conversations that emerged during planning sessions with teachers and administrators were disregarded by the group, stultifying a journey that may "allow disclosure of the teacher's own unconsciously held assumptions and intentions that underlie his [or her] interpretation of Curriculum X" (Aoki, 2005, p. 121). Although methods are integral to teaching, it is important to maintain the generative tension that dwells between theory and practice. Aoki suggested that theory and practice ought to be tethered together as they exist as "twin moments of the same reality" (p. 120). As social studies teachers we are not merely applying theories or covering the material with appropriate strategies, but are responsibly responding to a call that requires a cultivation of a pedagogical tone and tact that welcomes and nurtures students' own becoming and hears the voice of students as they express their experiences and understandings of the lifeworld. In addition, keeping a topic in play, as Gadamer suggested (2004), exceeded application, as there "is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable" (p. 365). Moreover, a teacher "skilled in the art of questioning . . . can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion" (p. 365).

Theory and practice are continually transformed in a to and fro motion, a movement that honours the generative tension and recognizes that students and the disciplines have a partial say in how they ought to be treated. Thoughtful pedagogy does not cast students adrift as they set forth into the world, but rather calls forth a teacher's wisdom and discernment—exercising ethical judgments that are intentional, reflective, and situational. In responding responsibly to students, experienced teachers enact a sense

of "rightness, proportionality, and even the good" that is not discernable with exactitude, but rather "has to do with doing the appropriate, the fitting, and the needful at the favorable moment" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 205).

Challenges to Self and Other in Engaging Understandings in Social Studies: Co-venturing

> The human infant becomes a self, a being capable of speech and action, only by learning to interact in a human community (Benhabib, 1992, p. 5).

As teachers engage students in the themes of citizenship and identity we also bring forth our own understandings garnered from our lived experiences. This points to the complexities involved in embracing and ethically responding to students' understandings of the world. In my experiences as a classroom teacher, a pre-service teacher educator, and a curriculum specialist, a particular aspect of the Social Studies Program of Studies has initiated many discussions amongst educators and students:

> Students bring their own perspectives, cultures and experiences to the social studies classroom. They construct meaning in the context of their lived experience through active inquiry and engagement with their school and community. (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 5)

My particular interest here is in how social studies teachers might co-venture with students as they journey into the world. Perhaps if we as teachers are to keep the topics open to future possibilities as Gadamer (2004) suggested, much like the historian ought to be concerned with the whole of historical tradition, we "ought to mediate with [our] own present existence if [we] want to understand it and which in this way keeps open the future" (p. 340). How might teachers' and students' understandings of their experiences provide provocation to understand differently? Given the Program's emphasis on "diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society"

(Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1), how might teachers engage students in understanding diversity as it points to the complexities of citizenship and identity? What is the nature of the task that may open a space for teachers and students to co-venture into the world as a provocation to understand themselves, others, and the world differently?

During a professional development opportunity at my school, the Social Studies and English Departments came together to discuss the core themes of citizenship and identity. In particular, our discussion centered on the excerpt from the Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies cited above. Similarly, from the English Language Arts Program of Studies (2000) we discussed the following reference:

> Literature invites students to reflect on the significance of cultural values and the fundamentals of human existence; to think about and discuss essential, universal themes; and to grapple with the intricacies of the human condition. The study of literature provides students with the opportunity to develop self-understanding. (p. 1)

Our inquiry focused on the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that would assist us in thoughtfully inviting students to embark on an existential journey, to become aware of our own and our students' lived experiences. In addition, we discussed our understanding of the concept of lived experience. We focused on the idea that as teachers and students we are imbued with mediated experiences that reflect that we always already understand a world in particular ways. Butler (1993) described the activity that constructs identity as "a process of materialization [a persistent and reiterated acting] that stabilized over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface" (p. 9). Given these understandings we queried: How might we journey with students to interpret the world together so as not to foreclose future possibilities? How might we cultivate a pedagogical attunement that recognizes the vulnerabilities and precariousness of our lives as teachers?

How might we nurture responsiveness to our students and the curriculum topics that are not bound by the Programs of Studies or techniques and procedures?

Our discussion prompted one teacher to comment: “It’s a no-brainer to start an inquiry into any topic by engaging with the students’ lived experiences.” He continued by suggesting that as a means to foster a heightened awareness of the notions of citizenship and identity, investigating lived experiences was an essential point of departure for social studies and English teachers. Many teachers nodded their heads in agreement.

As the day unfolded, the complexities and tensions of engaging the lived experiences of teachers and students became increasingly apparent. A social studies teacher acknowledged that as soon as she opened up a discussion by soliciting students’ opinions regarding a particular topic, she could fill the whiteboard with their responses. She hastened to add that in many instances she was unable to discern what to do next. Often the proliferation of ideas, observations, and questions was overwhelming. She described how as the classroom discussion progressed, some students became intransigent, unwilling to listen, and unwilling to hear what their classmates were saying. Students would often comment that they were merely expressing their opinions, which they were entitled to do, or they were just stating the facts.

Another teacher commented that during a discussion on gender identity, a student unapologetically expressed his discomfort with effeminate-performing males and masculine-performing females, stating that he felt “it was just wrong—it just wasn’t natural.” The teacher expressed her uncertainty in caring for the topic, and asked how best to respond:

> Do I stop the class and admonish him? Do I ask to speak with him after class? Do I ask him further questions to seek clarification? Do I ask the class for other opinions? Do I give him a disapproving gaze and continue?

The teacher wondered how she might create opportunities that would enhance understanding and encourage students to venture with others to grapple with the intricacies of the human condition. She also revealed her insecurities as she was called upon to respond to students' comments that she deemed inappropriate. Her wonderments provided an invitation for us to explore the challenges of responding to students in ways that exceeded the knowledge located in the Program of Studies.

In addition, we discussed the ways that teaching is never a neutral act because it is always in the service of and always within a political, social, cultural, and historical context. Many teachers raised concerns about Bill C44, a controversial bill recently passed by Alberta legislators that provides an option for parents to withdraw their children from class when lessons on sex, religion, or sexual orientation are taught. In particular, teachers asked, "How might we understand the idea of *public* in public education?" Some suggested that perhaps public education should provide a space for disjunction, a space that offers alternative views to the values and beliefs espoused in the home. Others asked how we might take up the notion of diversity if we silenced differences. One teacher mentioned that he regularly avoided issues that he perceived to be controversial, and felt the need to explain to the students the source of his apprehension. He wondered how the students whose narratives were avoided would interpret his silence—would they feel their identity was somehow deemed inappropriate for conversation, for recognition?

Many teachers queried when it was legally required of them to provide parents with written notification for discussions regarding controversial topics. Another teacher asked, "What makes a topic controversial?" Moreover, the Program of Studies specifically addresses the importance of teaching controversial issues: "Studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society" (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 6). Among many other concerns expressed regarding Bill C44, teachers raised questions about spontaneous conversations that emerged through ideas, questions, and wonderments raised by students. How should teachers respond? What should inform our judgments?

In one English class, students were reading and performing Arthur Miller's (1953) *The Crucible,* a dramatization of the Salem witch trials that took place in the Province of Massachusetts Bay during 1692 and 1693. Miller wrote the play as an allegory of McCarthyism in the post-World War II United States, when a Committee on Un-American Activities was formed by the House of Representatives to identify disloyalty and subversive activities on the part of American citizens and organizations suspected of having communist affiliations. John Proctor, the play's protagonist, goes on trial based on accusations of being a witch and chooses to confess his alleged sins in exchange for his life. Proctor originally signs the confession proclaiming his guilt; however, upon realizing his confession was going to be nailed to the entrance of the church, he fears this public display will ruin his good name and therefore recants. As a result, Proctor, along with other Salemites, are led to the gallows to be hanged. When the teacher asked students for a response to Proctor's dilemma, a student responded incredulously and unproblematically, "Why wouldn't he just lie?"

As a group we discussed the challenges of keeping a topic open, keeping in play other possibilities. How might teachers and students come to understand the complexities of hearing, seeing, and feeling the topics differently? How might we feel addressed by the topics under investigation? How might teachers point to the complexities of coming to an understanding about lying that represents a belonging with others? In addition, how might teachers thoughtfully address the resistances that counter-narratives often induce from their students and themselves? In part, these questions point to the challenge of maintaining a tension between embedded understandings and the possibility of understanding differently.

I vividly recall discussing Middle Eastern politics with a Grade 12 class—specifically the long history of tension and conflict that continues to exist between Israelis and Palestinians. As anger and resentment quickly escalated between two students, I was unable to intervene in time to prevent the outbreak of a fistfight. After talking with each student separately and then together, I was under the impression that an amicable understanding had been reached. However, I was later informed that both students had been expelled from school when the fight resumed during the lunch hour.

Several teachers turned to the front matter of the Programs of Study to seek clarification about how the programs articulated the concepts of citizenship and identity. The Social Studies Program of Study acknowledges that citizenship and identity do not exist independently, but rather exist within a dynamic relationship: How might teachers understand the idea of a dynamic relationship? Furthermore, teachers observed that responsible citizenship

> emphasizes the importance of diversity and respect for differences as well as the need for social cohesion and the effective functioning of society. It

> promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance in students as they engage in active and responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level. . . . Social studies is integral to the process of enabling students to develop an understanding of who they are, what they want to become and the society in which they want to live. (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1).
>
> In addition, with the notion of identity, students will have opportunities to value diversity, to recognize differences as positive attributes and to recognize the evolving nature of individual identities. Race, socio-economic conditions and gender are among various forms of identification that people live with and experience in a variety of ways. (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1)

Similarly, the English Language Arts Program of Studies (2000) stipulates that "by studying . . . literature, students are able to reflect on ideas and experiences of citizenship . . . The study of . . . literature helps students to develop respect for cultural diversity and common values" (p. 1).

Although the ideas of diversity, pluralism, and democracy are articulated in the Programs of Studies, teachers questioned how these ideas might come to life, come to be embodied, to be lived out through the lives of their students. How did knowledge and understanding of the concepts discussed in class contribute to the formation of their identity? How did inquiring into the concepts of citizenship and identity govern the way students lived in the world? In particular, acting responsibly requires an attunement to particular contexts that each student must consider within a myriad of ever-changing circumstances; indeed, students are required to choose how they are going to live their lives. How might we understand that the values and beliefs expressed in class do not always condition the decisions that students make within and beyond the school community? How might we understand the notion of responsible citizenship as a practice of the need to respond to particular and ever-emerging local, national, and international

contexts? As students explore the themes of citizenship and identity, what might it mean for us as teachers to stand in relation with them—to *educere?*

The above insights, observations, questions, and mysteries emerged from that discussion exploring the lived experiences of teachers and students. Throughout our conversation many teachers recognized that elucidating lived experiences offered certain complexities for teaching in general and for the teaching of the core concepts of citizenship and identity in particular. Furthermore, teachers observed that there were no easy answers for how best to proceed, no methods that can be implemented that will alleviate the precariousness we often experience as teachers.

Many teachers felt enlivened by the profound existential and ontological possibilities that the Program of Studies invites. We recognized the importance of the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that would assist us in responding to the lived experiences of our students. During our discussion, teachers attempted to create invitations as to how we might think about responding to students who became intransigent or whose comments were deemed inappropriate, or how we might open up inquiries that were bound by provincial legislation; indeed, how might we engage in opportunities that do not foreclose upon future possibilities?

Many teachers observed the risks involved in opening up topics for discussion. It is often during classroom conversations, when teachers come face-to-face with students and the lived experiences of our lives and the lives of students, and students become both challenging and wondrous. In addition, we recognized the vulnerability and the precariousness of our lives as teachers; inquiry into the world elicits multiple

understandings from students that require thoughtful responses not readily accessible through learned techniques or procedures.

Although there is much discussion in education regarding student engagement, teachers queried about teacher engagement. Specifically, teachers noted that our identities are implicated as we attempt to understand, that we, too, bring our understandings and misunderstandings into the life of our classrooms. In addition, we recognized that institutional structures and provincial legislation such as Bill C44 have influenced our pedagogical choices and our identities as teachers.

We observed that a significant portion of our work was oriented towards an end goal, towards objectives that were often measured by standardized examinations. Consequently, many pedagogical choices attended to preparation for achieving planned objectives, and such a dominant focus often contributed to foreclosing opportunities to engage students' lived experiences as we became preoccupied with covering course materials and preparing students for provincial examinations.

Our conversation provided provocation to explore underlying assumptions, expectations, and intentions that framed our conceptions of our identity as teachers. In particular, we discussed our own resistances, our own frustrations with particular students and particular topics. One teacher mentioned his sensitivity towards dismissive comments from students regarding differences—gender, cultural, social, sexual orientation. We discussed how we might complicate students' understandings of the subjects we are studying—how we might provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own resistances, their intransigence, and comments such as, "It is just wrong—it is unnatural," which often thwart further inquiry. We wondered how we might stand in relation with

students to keep the topics open, to keep them in play to future possibilities. We wondered how we might cultivate a pedagogical attunement to the voice of our students and to ethically respond to such a call. And we wondered how our own unfinishedness was a call to embark on our own existential journeys, and to continue to seek new understandings. In addition, we sought to understand how we might, in the words of Risser (1997), "move forward to a presence yet to be realized, to a self that is not yet" (p. 38).

Co-venturing into Lived Experiences: Opportunities for Small World Changes

In reflecting on that professional learning day, particularly the discussion concerning the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement, I am drawn to Gadamer's notion of self and other. As Gadamer (2004) noted, the challenge in part is attributed to the fact that teachers and students already possess "idea[s] of right and wrong, of decency, courage, dignity, loyalty [and] certainly in some sense images that he uses to guide his conduct" (p. 317).

The cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that embraces Gadamer's (2004) notion of moral knowledge may assist in understanding the tension that sits in the between space—a tension of application. In considering the dilemma facing Proctor, the notion of moral knowledge, of a sympathetic understanding, points to the importance of context and the many competing factors at play as Proctor stood in judgment from his peers. It accentuates that moral knowledge is not objective knowledge; indeed, no singular rule applies to discern when it is appropriate to forego one's good name. A discussion regarding what is in a name may evoke the multiplicities involved in the formation of one's name, its interdependency, and how it always belongs to several

communities and stories. Furthermore, knowing when to lie is immersed in uncertainty. There are no objective standards that releases one from the responsibility of making a judgment; one is called to respond and to act in a way that eludes extreme exactitude.

Gadamer (2004) observed the importance of understanding as an event; something happens that may give provocation to venture as "it is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked" (p. 298). Perhaps providing students opportunities to bring their lived experiences into language and play can awaken teachers' and students' understandings; as Gadamer suggested, "understanding begins . . . when something addresses us" (p. 298). Perhaps we might provide students with a meaningful engagement in the world by exploring identity through dilemmas such as the one confronting Proctor, or by gaining further insight into the narratives we have inherited, or reinterpreting the multiple factors that influence gender construction.

Gadamer (2004) observed, "Insight is more than knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive" (p. 350). Inquiring with the voice of another, into decisions made by others such as Proctor, may evoke reflection and further questioning of our own identity. Inquiry into our identity and our standing within a community eludes certainty but venturing into the topic with others may provide an opportunity to come to an agreement. Indeed, Proctor's dilemma is embedded in a story, in a time, in a place; his good name is dependent upon his actions but also on the actions of others. In addition, our understanding of our good name does not enclose itself around a fixed and stable endpoint, but rather summons us to continually seek the appropriateness of our actions as demanded by the ever-changing

contextual complexities of the lifeworld. As articulated in the Social Studies Program of Studies (2005), responsible citizenship and the formation of one's identity requires deciding, an action that aims towards the public good and nurtures an understanding of one's identity and what one wants to become. Gadamer (2004) noted, "Understanding means that I am able to weigh and consider fairly what the other person thinks. One recognizes that the other person could be right . . . understanding is not simply mastering something that stands opposite you" (p. 9).

Inquiring into the topic of identity, into one's good name, points teachers and students to an openness that does not seek a final destination, does not foreclose on future possibilities, but rather to how coming to understand is co-determined and takes place within sets of relations. Our belonging to a world assumes we are able to listen to one another, and the wisdom garnered from our travels and our interdependence with others may govern our future decisions to be more thoughtful, more ethical, and more attuned to the world. Similarly, teachers' struggles with Bill C44 revealed the tensions and parameters of controversial topics; the unfolding conversation supported Aristotle's (as cited in Gadamer, 2004) suggestion that teachers are not "standing over against a situation that [they] merely observe. It is something they have to do" (p. 312).

Moral knowledge points to teachers' sympathetic understanding of students as they embark on an existential quest—a journey that will expose them to the vulnerabilities and contingencies of the world. The study of the core themes of citizenship and identity invites a radical openness that welcomes possibilities not yet known. Perhaps as students journey into the world they will engage in discussions and actions that will determine future attachments to a world that calls for our responsibility. Indeed, world renewal

invites students to put forth ideas that may counter our current understanding of the world with a humility that welcomes the possibility that things may always be otherwise.

The importance of Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutics as a practical philosophy centers on his focus on the right way to live; he suggested that for individuals "the purpose of his knowledge is to govern his actions" (p. 314). In addition, "meaningful interpretation requires adaptation to the actual situation" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 95). This accentuates the existential thread throughout Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics, which suggested the notion of movement, "whether movement of human existence does not issue in a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment" (p. 104).

Co-venturing offers us, as teachers, an opportunity to embrace our own existential quest, a reflective and reflexive practice that occasions critique and opportunities to understand differently. As Gadamer (2004) suggested, the dialectical tension that existed between the familiar and the unfamiliar makes new understanding possible. As teachers we are called upon to make ethical judgments oriented towards and honouring the conditionedness and limitations of our planning reason. According to Gadamer,

> He must be mature enough not to ask that his instruction provide anything other than it may give. To put it positively, through education . . . he is constantly concerned to preserve in the concrete situations of his life and prove through right behavior. (p. 313)

Cultivating Pedagogic Attunement

> An adventure . . . interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breath and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 60)

In thinking about the role of social studies teachers, I am drawn to Gadamer's (2004) description of an adventure; in particular, his suggestion that the fascination of an adventure is that "it ventures into the uncertain" (p. 60). How might we create opportunities to co-venture into the uncertain and return with new understandings of others, the world, and ourselves? How might venturing with others into uncertain territories open us to life's mysteries?

At the heart of social studies are the concepts of citizenship and identity. Undergirding these core concepts are existential and ontological questions: What is it to be a human being? How should I live my life? What does it mean to be a good person? What is truth? How should people treat one another? The Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) stipulates that through an inquiry-based, interdisciplinary approach drawing upon the academic disciplines of history, geography, law, philosophy, political science, and other social science disciplines, students will become involved in the practical and ethical issues that face their communities and humankind.

Given that students bring their understandings of lived experiences to class—that they are always already beings in the world in particular ways—I wonder about the role of a social studies teacher. What is it to be a teacher? What might it mean to be an experienced teacher? How might teachers cultivate a pedagogical thoughtfulness that responsibly leads students out into the world—to *educere*? Perhaps this notion lies at the heart of education, teaching as leading the young out into the world, a leading where students "can truly learn what it is to stand, what it is to be in one's becoming" (Aoki, 2005, p. 394). Similarly, in discussing the notion of co-venturing, Huebner (1999) suggested that "to control [students], to think of creating or forming them, to manipulate

them as media is to deny their fellowship with the teacher" (p. 32). How might teachers cultivate a pedagogical attunement that orients them to ethically respond to the singularity of each child, to open the world for students to possibilities not yet known? How might teachers venture with students to inquire into the curriculum topics that continually open up possibilities to garner more fulsome understanding of self, others, and the world?

This existential quest requires a yearning, a willingness, a passion, or as Gadamer (2004) noted a "knowledge seeking soul" (p. 321); one's journey commences with putting one's own knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes at risk. Perhaps co-venturing into the current issues of the world may create an opportunity to embrace the multiplicity of perspectives and nurture an appreciation that people live with and experience race, gender, and socioeconomic conditions in a variety of ways. Thus, we as social studies teachers are entrusted to provide invitations for our students "to study people in relation to each other and to their world" (Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 1). Journeying with others may contribute to making the familiar strange and enhance an awareness of other possibilities and create an opportunity for understanding anew the other, the world, and oneself so as to live a life that is more attuned to its contingency, vulnerability, and frailty. A teacher's current understandings of teaching and the curriculum topics are not insurmountable barriers but rather represent positive possibilities—a catalyst for a generative curriculum—of a future not yet known. Gadamer (2004) observed that inquiring into our own understandings may elucidate that living life requires journeying, a sense of movement that uncovers that "human life . . . is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint" (p. 303).

The notion of co-venturing illustrates a certain kind of experience—an experience that provides opportunities for teachers and students to develop new understandings. Through the process of inquiry teachers and students engage in conversations that bring the topic into the open, and as Gadamer (2007) suggested, "We seek conversation not only in order to understand the other person better. Rather, we need if because our own concepts threaten to become rigid" (p. 371).

Co-venturing illustrates a certain kind of experience that calls for the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that orients teachers to hear a wide variety of experiences that often contradict our own. Perhaps the voice of the other will provide an occasion for reflection and reflexivity that reveals our own inner historicity and the effect of history. Furthermore, it is here where the generative potential may flourish as we garner more fulsome understandings of others, the topics, and ourselves. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 271).

Becoming experienced, Gadamer (2004) suggested, requires a particular attunement to oneself, others, and the world; specifically he described that it is necessary to cultivate a comportment of openness towards the voice of the other, to alterity, as one acknowledges that hermeneutic work "is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness . . . the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (p. 295). Indeed, it is this in-between, this intersection between self and other, where positive possibilities exist—possibilities for movement, to understand differently and to recognize that "understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event

of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (p. 291). The cultivation of receptiveness and attentiveness invites in an ethical friendship whereby "the consciousness of something alien still, as the feeling of life it is the first truth of self-consciousness" (p. 290). Embracing the voice of the other and venturing with strangers reveals the conditionedness and finitude of our lives.

Within a social studies context, teachers and students may engage the topic of inquiry by explicating how the topic addresses them; as Gadamer (2004) noted, "understanding begins when something addresses us" (p. 298). It is here where he articulated the importance of going on a journey—to venture, to risk one's previous understanding one must be attuned to the voice of the other, an ethical commitment that requires a convivial spirit where one attempts to understand that what the other is saying could be right: "If we want to understand, we will try to make his argument even stronger" (p. 292). Perhaps new understandings will contribute to a vibrancy of teachers' and students' lived experiences, an opportunity that may offer a more expansive understanding of the concepts of citizenship and identity. Smith's (1999) poignant observation encapsulated cultivating an orientation to the otherness of the other:

> How I will be transformed depends upon my orientation and attitude toward what comes to meet me as new: whether I simply try to subsume or repress it within prevailing dispensations or whether I engage it creatively in an effort to create a new common, shared reality. (pp. 33–34)

The Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) implies the importance of application in suggesting that by "engaging students in active inquiry and application of knowledge and critical thinking skills . . . the process enables [them] to question, validate, expand and express their understanding; to challenge their presuppositions; and to construct their

own points of view" (p. 6). Similarly, central to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is the notion of application. In particular, he suggested that

> a law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted . . . [and therefore a law] must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 309)

Likewise, the Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) recognizes that in order to act responsibly, to make reasoned and informed judgments, and to arrive at decisions for the public good, it is important for students to consider the ever-evolving and emerging ethical issues and their unique and particular contexts. A pedagogical challenge for teachers in teaching about the curriculum topics involves neglecting to address that students need to nurture discernment, an ability to ethically judge and to enact decisions for the public good. Gadamer's (2004) notion of application is a profound attunement to the particular, a wisdom that is oriented to the particularity of the context, a situational knowing. As he suggested,

> [It] is not about knowledge in general but its concretion at a particular moment. This knowledge also is not in any sense technical knowledge or the application of such. The man of the world, the man who knows all the tricks and dodges and is experienced in everything there is, does not really have a sympathetic understanding for the person acting: he has it only if he satisfies one requirement, namely that he too is seeking what is right. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 323)

When teachers thoughtfully engage students' lived experiences, students are invited to put forth their understandings and such offerings may provide opportunities for more expansive understandings of self, others, and the curriculum topics. In the words of van Manen (1997), "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (p. 62). Similarly, Grumet wrote (1988), "As we study the

forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities" (p. xv). Perhaps through the process of deliberative inquiry, the topics in the Program of Studies will resist closure and teachers may cultivate a pedagogical attunement that orients us to the world—a world of possibilities not yet known— and to the ways that our current biographical and historical understandings are conditioned, finite and susceptible to being understood differently.

As we co-venture into the curriculum topics we are presented with opportunities to understand that a topic lives and exceeds the subjective narrowness of our understanding. The nurturance of discernment, judgment, and insight may provide a pedagogical attunement that enables us to respond to the call of a particular student, to a particular topic within a particular context.

> The highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one's own home. I explained that most great works of the imagination were meant to make you feel like a stranger in your own home. The best fiction always forced us to question what we took for granted. It questioned traditions and expectations when they seemed too immutable. I told my students I wanted them in their readings to consider in what ways these works unsettled them, made them a little uneasy, made them look around and consider the world. (Nafisi, 2003, p. 94)

The above excerpt is from Nafisi's novel *Reading Lolita in Tehran.* In the novel, a university professor of literature offered her class a provocation from German philosopher Theodor Adorno: "The highest form of morality is not to feel at home in one's own home." Perhaps for many, the comforts of one's home are most familiar. We often speak about feeling at home in many circumstances as we engage others. However, students were provoked to engage literature as an opportunity to make them feel like strangers in their own homes, to question traditions and expectations that seem

immutable. How might engaging the other unsettle us and inspire us to reconsider our understandings of others, the world, and ourselves? How might we co-venture with our students to embrace the strangeness of the other?

It is this intersection where narratives collide and we question and reconsider the traditions and expectations that once seemed immutable, that our taken-for-granted ways often become unsettled. New understandings may make us a little uneasy as insights emerge, where familiar narratives that have shaped our understandings are rendered questionable. Familiar narratives that have come to frame our lives as teachers are often reified to deny the deep texture of our lives, since they often silence the ancestral voices that offer other ways of understanding and future possibilities. Perhaps engaging the voice of the other may assist us in breaking through the fossilization of our understandings. According to Gadamer (2007), the universality of the hermeneutic problem "is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being" and it is our prejudgments that "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience" (p. 74). Hermeneutic consciousness is to see and hear what is questionable, to hear what is possible. "But how do we know the guest we admit is one who has something new to say to us? Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us?" (p. 82).

Co-venturing invites and initiates intersections fraught with risk, complexity, and suffering. Furthermore, the tension that resides in the intersection may result in disjuncture and instantiate resistances that threaten or truncate existential movement. Gadamer (2004) suggested that the true locus of hermeneutics is the tension that resides in between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Such a quest, an inquiry into the lifeworld, is

"a deepening of one's sense of the basic interpretability of life itself . . . [as] the human world as a being a construction that can be entered and engaged creatively" (Smith, 1999, p. 39).

Not solely as the subjectivization of one's own experiences, but rather as an initial provocation to co-investigate as a means to further understand our own belonging to history through our interactions with others, text, conversations, and the study of the social science disciplines, we may open up opportunities to further understand ourselves and the world we want. Through such processes of inquiry we may summon ourselves into question. As Huebner (1999) noted,

> We must struggle to keep the young open to a world about them—available to new, yet unknown phenomena. We must be sure that when students meet parts of the world about them, they do not lock that part up in a prison of knowledge or conditioned responses. (p. 7).

As I continue to consider the teacher who suggested, "It is a no-brainer to start an inquiry into a topic by engaging the students' lived experiences," I am inspired by the interpretative works of Gadamer, who honoured lived experiences as an invitation to journey, as a provocation for teachers and students to co-venture in solitude and in solidarity to cultivate more expansive understandings of our individual and collective educational experiences. Engaging our students involves co-venturing into the abundance of possibilities where it is possible to transcend our current understandings; our conversations are "not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 371). In addition, becoming *Erfahrung* signifies

> Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this life. Thus, essential to an experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as its meaning. The mode of being experienced is precisely to be so determinative that one is never finished with it. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 58).

Journeying with students and the curriculum topics offers us as teachers possibilities to inquire further into our previous understandings, to realize that our experiences "cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as [their] meaning" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 58). Perhaps journeying with the young and the curriculum topics may provide provocation, in the words of Nietzsche, for us to allow experiences to last a long time.

Application: Priority of the Question

During our professional learning day, several teachers questioned how they might co-venture with students and honour the lived experiences of students and act as a provocation to further investigation. Many teachers articulated the limits of merely teaching *about* the core concepts. We discussed the challenges of co-venturing with students and not limiting teaching to teaching *about* the topics of globalization, nationalism, and ideologies, but rather how we might understand what Aristotle referred to as moral knowledge (*phronesis*)—a knowledge that is "clearly not objective knowledge" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 314). How might social studies teachers co-venture with students to cultivate moral knowledge? How might the cultivation of moral knowledge assist students with developing a sense of self and foster judgment regarding decisions about the public good? How might we provide opportunities for students to cultivate an

attunement to themselves, others, and the world that acknowledges and responds to ever-changing and emerging contexts?

In his philosophical hermeneutics Gadamer (2004) articulated the importance of engaging in the world and embraced a dialectic relationship, an interaction between teachers and students and the curriculum topics to explore their abundance. Curriculum understood as a "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2004, p. 188) acknowledged the living character of philosophy, religion, and political science in all of its renderings and future possibilities—curriculum so understood is ontological. Perhaps this points to the core of the educative process and welcomes the tension that resides in the between space of an old and a new world as teachers and students co-venture, orienting them toward possibilities for human and social transformation.

The notion of practice also surfaced during our conversations in contrast to the application of methods. Specifically, we discussed that the tension that resides between theory and practice calls for the cultivation of our judgment—our capacity to make pedagogical decisions, since in the words of Aoki (2005), theory and practice are not dichotomized but rather are "twins moments of the same reality" (p. 120). Similarly, Gadamer (1981) suggested that practice consists of thoughtful discernment that requires choosing between possibilities and in so doing, "practical reflection is effective, which is itself dialectical in the highest measure" (p. 81).

As I consider Gadamer's words, I am drawn to how the Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) influences what students become and what they do through the central topics of citizenship and identity. Immutable laws do not bind human civilization, but rather we must continually seek the good in practical and political life. Thus, teachers and

students co-venture to interpret the world, to determine our identity and our responsibilities in living with others in community.

For Gadamer the hermeneutic problem is one of application; familiar traditions must be continually understood in a different way, and he acknowledged the tension that resides in the relationship between the universal and the particular. Within the context of social studies, this tension surfaces in the relationship among teachers, students, and the social science disciplines embedded in the Program of Studies. The living academic disciplines offer interpretations of the human condition that must be interpreted anew, as Gadamer (2004) suggested: "Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself" (p. 296).

In describing the tension between the universal and the particular, Gadamer (2004) suggested that ethics pursue the questions of what is humanly good, of what is the good in terms of human action. He was concerned with the cultivation of moral knowledge, and suggested that unlike the natural environment, human civilization requires the cultivation and the nurturance of human capacities—that is, a moral knowledge where humans strive in their actions to develop an orientation to the good. Furthermore, the human sciences resemble the moral sciences as their investigation focuses on what man knows of himself. Gadamer suggested, "But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge of himself does not seek to establish what is. An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different" (p. 314). This points to a generative space that welcomes future possibilities. Indeed, the living disciplines may be understood anew. Accordingly, Gadamer suggested that the laws

governing human institutions and guiding human behaviours are contingent and therefore susceptible to change.

Gadamer (2004) elucidated the task of moral knowledge as determining what the concrete situation requires—what action is best to pursue in each particular case? As social studies teachers, we are confronted with the responsibility of responding to the particular students in our care. Gadamer suggested that the right course of action, knowing what to do, is not known independent of the situation. Prior to the arrival of the young, there exists an ambiguity, an uncertainty as to what the singular case may demand, as "there can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole" (p. 321). Moreover, Gadamer emphasized that the application of moral knowledge is not possible to achieve with the extreme accuracy of mathematics and noted that to demand this kind of exactitude would be inappropriate as it would deny the ethical demands of the particularity of the context. For us as teachers, responding exactly "has to do with doing the appropriate, the fitting, and the needful at the favorable moment" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 205).

Although co-venturing with students provides opportunities for teachers to inquire into our own understandings of the world, Gadamer (2004) suggested that the importance of authority does not reside in blind obedience, adhering to the other without critique, but rather that authority has to do with a teacher's knowledge:

> Authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher . . . the prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who presents them. But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 281)

As educators we are immersed in the world. The world of teaching places us alongside the young who are becoming—Daniel, who struggles to read; Harpreet, who thrives in mathematics; and Joshua, who is determined to be on the move—and the singularity of each particular student asserts itself upon us. As social studies teachers we are to care for the living disciplines, the living inheritances that portray aspects of the human condition—its mysteries, wonderments, beauties, and sufferings, replete with contestations.

Gadamer (2004) observed that the hermeneutic problem is "distinct from 'pure' knowledge detached from any particular kind of being" (p. 314). Moral knowledge is not an objective knowledge but rather is focused on what humans know of themselves. As teachers we belong to the traditions we are attempting to interpret and as such when called upon to make moral decisions, we are always projecting an understanding. The task for us as teachers resides in making moral decisions, in doing the right thing in a particular situation. As Gadamer noted, "we are always already in a situation of having to act" (p. 317) and possess understanding that guides our actions and "ideas of right and wrong, of decency, courage, dignity, loyalty" (p. 317). Thus co-venturing with students requires making moral judgments attuned to what the concrete situation demands from us. Moral knowledge requires self-deliberation and recognition that our understandings are contingent. Co-venturing with students carries an ethical weight not knowable in advance of the arrival of students. Moral knowledge ought to be susceptible to interruption—*Erfahrung* "contains a kind of experience in itself . . . the fundamental form of experience compared with which all other experience represent an alienation, not to say a denaturing" (p. 322).

Gadamer (2004) noted the importance of reflection in revealing self-knowledge, and suggested that "the virtue of thoughtful reflection stands sympathetic understanding" (p. 322). A teacher's journeying with students requires a letting go and a letting be with a sympathetic understanding of students' becoming—not as abandonment, but rather as an ethical attunement to students' quests, to their experiences in the world. A teacher's judgment calls for a sympathetic understanding and a thoughtful response, which "transposes himself fully into the concrete situation of the person who has to act" (p. 323). Furthermore, a pedagogical attunement seeks what is right and to unite teacher and students together in commonality.

For social studies teachers, engaging in a pedagogical relationship with the core themes of citizenship and identity is "not about knowledge in general but . . . seeking what is right" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 323). A pedagogical attunement requires that we as teachers nurture a sensitivity and thoughtfulness to particular contexts, since "an insightful person is prepared to consider the particular situation of the other person, and hence he is also most inclined to be forbearing or to forgive . . . it is clear that this is not technical knowledge" (p. 323). As teachers venturing with students as they journey, we are called to engage moral knowledge that discerns what the particular situation calls for—what is required in the concrete situation. However, as Gadamer noted, determining what is right in a concrete situation is "no simple application" of a rule. Dunne (1993) offered that while working with students "there is always a need for a situated reflection for which no indemnity can be provided by a method or technique with an independent security outside this interaction itself" (p. 117). Working alongside students and responding to them requires an attunement that is not derived solely from method or

technique. As students put forth their understandings of a world, we are called on to respond.

Perhaps when students investigate notions of citizenship and identity, the cultivation of moral knowledge will assist them in acting responsibly and understanding their emerging identities, both contingent and on the way. Thus teachers and students nurture an orientation to others and to the world—a comportment of openness where understanding may enact a more ethical life. An insightful person who is responsive to the demands of the particular does not merely stand apart from the other person, "but rather he thinks along the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 323).

Similarly, Aoki's (2005) pedagogical thoughtfulness and watchfulness calls for a teacher's attunement that encourages students to embrace their own existential journey. He suggested that "students can truly learn to stand, what it is to be in one's becoming" through a pedagogy that "knows deeply what it is to shepherd the mystery that is life" (p. 395). Furthermore, Aoki pointed to the importance of openness and called on teachers to keep firmly attuned to the otherness of the other so as to invite the arrival of the not yet, in his observation that "we need to think in a way we have never thought before" (p. 212).

Aoki (2005) discussed the relation between teachers and students as a belonging together, a dialectical relationship with the hopes of acquiring more profound insights and a multilayered understanding of life, as he articulated that "we come face to face with the primal mystery of Being" (p. 68). Aoki's oeuvre pointed to a pedagogical response to a calling that embraces an existential quest to provide possibilities for "a deeper

awareness of who one is, and of a fuller understanding of the conditions shaping one's being" (p. 35). He noted the risk and suffering that accompanies life's ventures as he portrayed life's original difficulty in the telling of "Kisagotami's Story," a story that described a mother's suffering following the death of her young child. To address her suffering, she sought the advice of Buddha. Buddha sent Kisagotami to each neighbor in her village to search for a family where death had not been experienced. Returning to Buddha she understood the meaning of his words.

Aoki's (2005) telling of "Kisagotami's Story" pointed to the vulnerability and the impermanence of our lives as well as to a familiar condition of suffering that ensues after the loss of life. However, impermanence and suffering are not universal—there is no single story, no universal story of suffering, but rather an understanding of suffering occurs in the context of consciously articulated stories. As Kisagotami engaged in conversation with her neighbors, she lingered in the pain and suffering of their experiences and as similarities and likenesses emerged their narratives began to intertwine. Aoki (2005) elucidated that although "suffering is always uniquely embedded in a story in which I am the seeming narrator, it is never mine alone but always ours" (p. 410). Similarly, Gadamer (2004) noted that understanding does not reside solely in the subject but rather in the world—in and through intersections—through conversations with otherness we have opportunities to expand our horizons of understanding.

Aoki (2005) strived to point to the tension that resides in the space in between, a dialectic relationship where teachers and students may critically co-venture; the space in the middle allows multiplicities to grow. One of the guiding themes of Aoki's pedagogy is his pointing to "a human being interested in his [or her] own and others' becoming"

(p. 120). Similarly, Levinas recognized the individual: "Apart from myself there is also someone Other, but—if I fail to make the effort to notice or to show a desire to meet—we shall pass each other by indifferently, coldly and without feeling, blandly and heartlessly" (as cited in Kapuscinski, 2008, p. 35).

Perhaps through deliberative inquiry, as teachers and students we may engage with alterity and dwell in the tension between familiarity and strangeness to reveal our hidden assumptions and intentions. Furthermore, perhaps the voice of the other may provide a catalyst for humility as we come to recognize our finitude and the need for the voice of the other to reveal a world that we could not have understood on our own. Perhaps belonging together points to the pedagogical attunement that reveals the importance of a letting be and a letting go as students venture into the topics with a requisite tentativeness that is ethically sensitive to the multifariousness of being, and to future possibilities that embrace a radical openness.

Chapter 4: Teaching—Experiencing Encounters

> To teach as an art would require us to study [the understandings] we bring to the world we know, to build our pedagogies not only around our feelings for what we know but also around our knowledge of why and how we have come to feel the way we do about what we teach. Then, perhaps, teaching the text may lead us to devise new forms for knowing that will not compel our students to recite the history, and future of our desire. (Grumet, 1988, p. 128)

> If man always encounters the good in the form of the particular practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to determine what the concrete situation asks of him. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 311)

Throughout *Truth and Method* Gadamer (2004) noted that understanding is "never a subjective relation to a given object but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood" (p. xxxi). In considering this idea within the context of education, as a teacher I am drawn to my own situatedness and belonging as my pedagogical and curriculum understandings reflect a historical moment. In this chapter, I journey with fellow interlocutors to understand differently and to come to an agreement about the lifeworld of teaching that illuminates other possibilities. To encounter the voice of the other requires that I cultivate a pedagogic attunement—a willingness and capacity to hear. Hearing the voice of the other often initiates a sense of humility that occasions an opportunity to garner a more fulsome understanding of others, the curriculum topics, and myself.

As Gadamer (2004) suggested, a comportment of openness is a receptivity that embraces the Thou and encourages it to speak; "what is so understood is not the Thou but the truth of what the Thou says to us. I mean specifically the truth that becomes visible to me only through the Thou, and only by my letting myself be told something by it" (p. xxxv).

At the heart of my interests as an educator are both the event and the meaning of encounter with the lifeworlds of teaching, with students and other teachers. Such encounters reveal the possibilities and demands for ethical encounters with others and with curriculum topics including the "what" of teaching. The stories included in this chapter show that encounters are intersections where possibilities exist to understand differently, offering a generative space to explore possibilities not yet known. It is my contention—and experience—that social studies teachers, because of the topics we are required to teach, may experience the invitation to journey with an unfinished map promising future possibilities, a journey with others that acknowledges the vulnerabilities and contingencies of living a teacher's life.

Through four autobiographical encounters, I will illustrate the notion of teaching experience that includes and requires an inner and outer journey where we as teachers confront our understandings of the lifeworld of teaching. Encounters with students, the curriculum topics, and fellow teachers illustrate a profoundly relational engagement central to the experience of teaching. Encounters with the unfamiliar may offer insights such as a heightened awareness of our own conditionedness and finitude. Indeed, such encounters may unveil that the narratives we embrace have become sedimented and commonplace; they may no longer be suited to new and emerging contexts. Encounters may expose the questionability of our own presuppositions and intentions as educators. Moreover, as Grumet (1988) wrote, journeying with others "may lead us to devise new forms for knowing that will not compel our students to recite the history, and future of our desire" (p. 128).

Encountering otherness presents a challenge for teachers as we are called upon to cultivate a capacity to let something new present itself in all of its otherness. Becoming experienced encourages engagements that are made possible by forms of pedagogical practice that speak to the complexity of experience. There are no definitive methods that, when applied, will absolve us from the necessity of enacting judgments that honour the particularity of the students in our midst. "To be able to hear and obey someone does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 355). Rather, to nurture a capacity for receptivity and responsiveness requires teachers to make thoughtful decisions with a sensitivity to a particular student within a particular context. Given that we have come to an agreement regarding a topic, what does a particular situation call for? What is our responsibility as teachers? How might our encounter with the voice of the other contribute to the furthering of an event?

Journeying as an Encounter

> Experience, despite its often being understood in subjective terms alone, comes only with an encounter with otherness in which the self no longer remains the same. (Jay, 2005, p. 356)
>
> It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 298)
>
> Since we are socially situated creatures, we are profoundly vulnerable to the ways in which we are perceived and characterized by others. (Markell, 2003, p. 2)

As mentioned in earlier chapters, in considering Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a form of inquiry, I am drawn to his theory of *Erfahrung* that explicitly accentuates the notion of *fahren*—a venturing out. *Erfahrung* connotes that through one's ventures one comes to understand differently. For social studies teachers, *Erfahrung* may

contribute to our understanding of curriculum inquiry as it centers on the notion of lived experience—teachers and students' experiences of the lifeworld. I wonder how this particular emphasis may provoke educators to embark on a wondrous existential journey where we have the opportunity to become more fully attuned to self, to others, and to life's mysteries. This journey may at times present more than we can withstand as we encounter the complexities of the world.

Although the journey involves an inquiry into our lived experiences, according to Gadamer (2004), we do not set out with a pre-existent inwardness, as an all-knowing subject. Rather, he suggested that a reflexive inwardness emerges from our engagement in the world and our interactions with others. Indeed, our relations with otherness constitute the true locus of hermeneutics since otherness reveals possibilities that are not yet known to us. As we venture with others we may become more attuned to our own inner historicity. To venture with others and encounter their voices calls for a comportment of openness, a profound attunement to listen, to hear, and to allow the other to speak. This is no solo venture. Engaging in conversation offers a dialectic relationship that allows us to reflect on our own understandings and the possibility of coming to an agreement regarding a topic. Coming to an agreement offers insights into our own being and becoming and into the topics of inquiry.

The voices of fellow travellers are integral to the journey as they provide the necessary and creative tension that allows an encounter with otherness to spawn new understandings. How might an encounter with the unfamiliarity of the other compel us, as teachers, to scrutinize our own forms, to travel beyond our current understandings of life, and to render a more expansive view both of the students entrusted to our care and of the

curriculum topics? How might our fellowship with others reveal our own limited horizons? How might the recognition of our finitude evoke the humility that reveals the precariousness and contingency of living a teacher's life? As a result of our journey as social studies teachers, what attachments to the world may we abandon, which ones might we alter, and which ones might we clasp more firmly? How might Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung* assist in cultivating a pedagogical attunement? How might an encounter with the voice of the other be a moment that initiates a process of mediation rather than an end in itself? These are some of the questions I ponder in my autobiographical explorations in this chapter.

Encountering Students

The bell sounds to end class. I now have to make my way from one class to the next by navigating overcrowded hallways. As I approach the bottleneck created by the convergence of three hallways, bodies are pressed up against one another and backpacks thrash about, striking those who fail to pay attention. I am struck by the familiarity of the experience. Throughout my travels from one end of the school to the other, I recognize the faces of students from classes previously taught, football players I am currently coaching, my colleagues, and the faces of graduating students from yesteryear mounted on the walls. As Markell (2003) observed, "life is given texture by countless acts of recognition" (p. 1).

Finally reaching my destination just seconds before class is scheduled to start, I move about the room, re-organizing desks, chairs, and the video equipment in preparation for the day's lesson. As I make my way to the doorway to greet incoming students, I am flooded with reminders from my 'to do' list. I must remind Stephen that he is to go to the

test center during the lunch hour to write a make-up test, ask Carolyn about the outcome of her volleyball game last night, make extra room for Ahmed as he makes his way on crutches, and remind Madison of her appointment at the resource center for assistance with her reading. I am also reminded of the marking that sits restlessly on my desk when Aziza asks, "Do you have our essays marked yet?"

In my life as a teacher, the notion of recognition pervades many of the day's activities. From moving about the crowded hallways and interacting with students in the classroom to coaching sports and adhering to the policies and procedures that govern the school day, I am constantly projecting understandings of the lifeworld of teaching. I am struck by Gadamer's (2004) insight as he suggested that "the way we experience one another, the way we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world, constitute a truly hermeneutic universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened" (p. xxiii). As a social studies teacher, I am drawn to his suggestion that the ways we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world are not behind insurmountable barriers. Instead, our experiences provide opportunities to understand differently, to be opened to possibilities not yet known; it is through our relations with others that we are opened.

Gadamer observed that as we move through the world we are always already projecting understandings. He contended that prejudices are necessary as they assist us in navigating the lifeworld. His philosophical hermeneutics attempted to reclaim the importance of prejudices from the Enlightenment, which he suggested was fundamentally prejudiced against prejudices. Although prejudices often have pejorative connotations, Gadamer suggested that there are legitimate prejudices. In fact, prejudices, or our

prejudgments, are essential as we interact with students and the curriculum we are entrusted to teach. We are called to make ethical judgments regarding students like Stephen, Carolyn, Ahmed, and Madison.

It is important that we examine the prejudices that dwell within us. In order for us to examine their legitimacy, Gadamer (2004) suggested, they need to be provoked. It is important to put our prejudices at risk, to make them vulnerable, as "[i]t is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us" (p. 272). We do not seek to determine their legitimacy by using the methodological procedures of modern science.

A central focus of *Truth and Method* is to rescue the theory of *Erfahrung* from the epistemological schematization of the methodological procedures of British empiricism. *Erfahrung* is influenced by the epistemological emphasis of the natural sciences. Scientists use the theory of induction to accumulate experiences and articulate an abstraction that represents a general concept for the accumulated experiences. Once they establish a generalization, there is no longer a need to refer back to the accumulated experiences. According to Gadamer, by employing an objective approach through the application of methods, natural scientists are concerned to guarantee that experiences are predictable and repeatable by anyone. He suggested that a commitment to the procedural methods of science does not take into account the inner historicity of experience. Thus, to become experienced is a procedure that standardizes experience. To objectify experience "strips experience of its historical element, its historicity, its dynamic character of unfolding and undergoing" (Risser, 1997, p. 86).

Within a social studies context, the procedural method of modern science influences us to present the complex topics of democracy, justice, race, and freedom as

abstract concepts. Thus, the topics of democracy and justice are, as Risser suggested, stripped of their historical elements when they are treated as fixed and stable concepts. The concepts often lose their dynamic character because they seemingly no longer require an encounter with the lifeworld—they are viewed no longer as an inheritance, no longer as possessing a past, a present or a future, but rather are simply an abstract idea to be learned 'about.' I have often heard students comment, "it is what it is." This approach severs the topics from ancestral voices, from the lifeworld of teachers and students, which often forecloses on future possibilities. Topics such as democracy are rendered ahistorical, devoid of contestations, devoid of the multiplicity of voices and of the interdependence and relational character that inspirits them with possibilities and embraces their living character. Often the lived experiences of teachers and students are neglected, as knowledge is oriented towards what can be confirmed. Insights, comments, and queries from students that exceed the defined objectives of the day's lesson are often silenced; students' voices that venture beyond the predefined territory may just slip away. Students' lived experiences often interrupted the delivery of the planned lesson as they point to the multifariousness of the topic—its contingency and vulnerability. I recall saying to students: "Hold that thought, we are not there yet. We will cover that content in the next chapter."

Encountering the Whatness of Teaching

As a social studies teacher I recall asking myself, *what* am I going to teach today? It was often the *'whatness'* of teaching that colonized my attention. In particular, while preparing to teach the concept of democracy to a Grade 12 class, I sought first to explicate its characteristics through a definition and then apply the definition to a variety

of case studies that would illuminate the democratic processes in countries such as Canada, the United States, and Sweden. I often followed a single textbook that provided an overall definition of democracy and described its component parts, political parties, citizenship participation, accountability of government, minority rights, provisions for change, opposition, and guarantee of rights, to name a few. I now hear a student's comment that "all social studies seems to be is about is the memorization of names, dates, and events" as a form of resistance. In treating democracy like a fixed object to be defined and implemented, I often neglected to connect the topic of democracy to the core themes of citizenship and identity.

Perhaps in treating democracy as a fixed and stable entity, I inadvertently severed the study of democracy from the world, from the students' lived experiences, and from self-as-knower-of-the-world. Gadamer (2007) wrote that neglecting one's lived experiences resulted in alienation—an alienation that "takes place when we have withdrawn ourselves, and are no longer open to the immediate claim of that which grasps us" (p. 79). I now wonder if my teaching *about* democracy often denied an opportunity for teachers and students to honour and to inquire into their experiences of the lifeworld. As a social studies educator, I want to further explore how democracy lives in our lives and the lives of others and to imagine its future possibilities. Thus, democracy is not merely an abstract concept to be inculcated, but is a living concept with possibilities yet to be discovered.

Similarly, as a mentor teacher and as a curriculum specialist working alongside teachers, I found that their pedagogical concerns often resembled my own, as they, too, were preoccupied with the *'whatness'* of teaching. Perhaps this partially explains the

challenges of engaging in discussions regarding inquiry. A common explanation offered by teachers was that once we have taught the concepts, once students have acquired the basics, once the foundation has been laid, students would possess the knowledge to engage in inquiry. Such a focus often turned us towards teaching *about* the curriculum topics and away from a profoundly relational space where we could critically co-venture with students in a way that honoured students' lived experiences in the world and acknowledged that they already had understandings of the topics.

While walking back after a break from my exam supervision—the end-of-semester ritual where students gather en mass in the gymnasium to write their final examinations—I noticed a seemingly distraught student sprinting down the hallway towards the gym. Looking at my watch, I realized that the one-hour cut off for students to enter the gym was approaching. I stopped him within meters of the entrance to ask him if he needed a minute to catch his breath and compose himself. In an attempt to put him at ease, I asked how he was doing. His frenetic response matched his outward display of panic: "I have been up all night studying and I don't know a fucking thing about sovereignty." As I reflect on his response, I wonder if his experience in social studies was often directed towards abstract concepts such as sovereignty that foreclosed upon opportunities to address its livedness and his understandings of what it might mean to be a sovereign being and to belong to a sovereign nation.

In contrast to the epistemological schematization of the human sciences, Gadamer (2004) articulated *Erfahrung* as a process of travelling with interlocutors, of listening to the voice of others. Becoming experienced is essentially negative as one's expectations are continually thwarted, one's anticipations continually interrupted. Being and becoming

experienced has a dialectical structure as one engages with others to reveal new horizons and new possibilities. An encounter with another, Gadamer suggested, is the hermeneutic work. This encounter is predicated upon the polarity of familiarity and strangeness to represent "the true locus of hermeneutics" (p. 295).

An encounter reveals a double experience. An experience with the multifariousness of an idea, concept, or the 'other' comes to be understood differently as does the history of effects—one's own inner historicity. Gadamer (2004) suggested that the tension between familiarity and strangeness becomes a way of confronting ourselves. Being with others provides opportunities to produce meaning by performing that meaning in the encounter with the other. Engaging in dialogue with the other results in a reversal of consciousness that points to one's own inner historicity. "This is the reversal that consciousness undergoes when it recognizes itself in what is alien and different" (p. 349*)*. *Erfahrung* thus results in self-knowledge and our recognition of human finitude.

Erfahrung is no romantic notion of journeying; it is replete with risk and suffering. According to Gadamer (2004),

> To undergo an experience *[Erfahrung]* with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, overwhelms us and transforms us. When we talk of undergoing an experience, we mean specifically the experience is not of our making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens. (p. 228)

Experience as an encounter reveals the vulnerability and the finitude of one's understanding and belonging.

Journeying with others requires us to cultivate a comportment of openness and ethical friendship. As teachers and students we must be ready to encounter otherness

when we embrace the special autonomy of the voice of the other and its generative possibilities. "[T]o reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 379). The existential possibilities of hearing the voice of the other offer an invitation to embrace the other, to think with the other, and to come back to oneself as another. I am drawn to curriculum scholar Hongyu Wang, who described the notion of journeying as a venturing with others. She pointed to the in-between as a space of possibility as she wrote that it is "one's capacity to acknowledge alterity lovingly that initiates an educative process" (as cited in Pinar, 2011, p. 106). Moreover, Wang noted that an encounter with a stranger "calls one out of oneself, when the stranger inside oneself emerges, enabling one to move away from home toward a destination not yet known" (p. 107). Perhaps an encounter with strangeness offers opportunities for us as social studies teachers to garner a more fulsome understanding and to be opened to new possibilities.

Being and becoming experienced does not culminate in a teleological endpoint, where one comes to understand fully. Rather, an experienced person acquires an openness to new experiences. Gadamer (2004) wrote that "[t]he truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only through experiences but is also open to new experiences" (p. 350). Furthermore, "the person who acts in history continually experiences the fact that nothing returns . . . to have insight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited" (p. 351). In particular, teachers, through encounters with alterity, may reveal that we belong to history, to the furthering of an

event, and we "must be aware of the fact that [our] own understanding and interpretation are not constructions based on principles, but the furthering of an event that goes far back. Hence [we] will not be able to use [our] concepts unquestioningly" (p. xxiii).

Encountering the Otherness of the Other

Several years ago while I was working as a mentor teacher in a grade eleven social studies classroom, my partner teacher and I were preparing to open a discussion regarding the curricular topic of nationalism and its connection to the core themes of citizenship and identity. We asked the students what nationalism meant to them. The students' responses revealed the diversity and complexities of the lifeworld in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, India, Pakistan and the United States.

Many students observed that nationalism often contributed to civil, national, and international disputes and that these disputes often escalated to conflict and declarations of war. Others commented on the extreme suffering that many people endured as a result of war. Some students remarked on the outpouring of the national pride when Canada's men's and women's teams won the gold medal in hockey at the Vancouver Olympics. It was Adar's response that brought me to halt. The concept of nationalism reminded him that he was a "citizen of nowhere." He was born to parents of Kurdish-Iraqi descent and although his family referred to Iraq as home, they often felt like aliens, like strangers. He explained that throughout history, the Kurdish people have suffered the ravages of war and have lived under oppression inflicted by various domestic and imperial rulers. Years ago, Adar and his family escaped to a refugee camp and later were granted permanent resident status as immigrants to Canada. Adar commented that he was non-Iraqi and non-

Canadian due to the fact that neither country had granted his family citizenship; therefore, he remarked, "how would it be possible for me to have a sense of nationalism?"

I worked in a high school with a large proportion of immigrant students, many of whom were enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. During a conversation with Aafia, a grade 10 student and recent immigrant from Pakistan, I asked her how she was enjoying her new school. After a long pause she responded, "not very well." Aafia mentioned that although she spoke four languages, she was embarrassed to speak in class because she was self-conscious of her strong Pakistani accent. My conversation with Aafia reminded me of the fragility of our identity and the difficulties associated with living outside predominant customs and conventions. Regardless of being able to speak four languages, Aafia regretted being recognized as other. She concluded our conversation by commenting, "I just want to fit in."

During a class discussion on the responsibilities associated with freedom, Sana, a Muslim student, shared that she had chosen to wear a hijab. She went on to explain that she was taking responsibility for how she was perceived by her female and male peers. Sana remarked that she felt a sense of freedom as a part of her identity was less influenced by how she looked. In particular, she felt she was able to insulate herself from the gaze of her classmates. Her comments proved to be a substantial interruption to many of her classmates, who had not considered that wearing a hijab might be an assertion of one's freedom. Several students indicated that they had underestimated the extent to which their own identity was influenced by their physical characteristics. They recognized that others, both within and beyond the school community, often influenced what was considered attractive.

As I reflect on the stories conveyed by Adar, Aafia, and Sana, I am reminded that the young come to us with understandings of the lifeworld they have experienced. In many cases their experiences offer strangeness, contributing insights into the topics of inquiry that are unfamiliar to me and many of their classmates. In these moments of strangeness I am reminded that I often feel constrained by my limited knowledge and understanding of a world that my students have experienced that includes civil wars, families separated by violence, and life in the harsh conditions of refugee camps. Although the Program of Studies acknowledges that our identities are shaped by several factors that include race, gender, and socio-economic conditions, it is often through dialogue that the factors that influence our identity no longer remain abstractions, no longer exist as objects to be talked about, but rather emerge from encounters in the world. Ideas of gender and race do not live as mere universal constructs but are cultivated and enacted in a world with others. As students shared their stories, I was reminded of the vulnerability and frailty of living a life.

As a teacher I am called upon to respond ethically and to be present to my students' tellings, and I felt the precariousness of my position. How might I invite the class to explore that which none of us knows? It was Adar's comment, "I am a citizen of nowhere," that awakened many of us from our taken-for-grantedness. His observations provoked us to re-think our understandings of citizenship and identity. Aafia's struggles with her strong Pakistani accent were, in part, a stark reminder that language is not merely something to be learned about, but rather, as George Herbert Mead observed, "[a] person learns a new language and, as we say, gets a new soul . . . [she] becomes in that sense a different individual. You cannot convey a language as a pure abstraction; you

inevitably, in some degree, convey the life that lies behind it" (Aoki, 2005, p. 240). Indeed, how might speaking four languages offer perspectives of a world and shape an understanding of one's identity?

Sana's story opened an evocative space and provided a catalyst for us to return to some of our presuppositions about freedom and responsibility. Her comments summoned many of us to journey with the contradictions of our own stories about freedom and reminded us that any time we encounter an articulation of an identity, that articulation is an answer to a question that could have been answered differently. Engaging others in conversation emphasizes the interdependence of our lives as we gain access to the world in which we all live.

The above stories also point to the complexities involved in teaching the core concepts of citizenship and identity. Although the Program of Studies assumes a fiction of sameness, since the core concepts remain constant throughout the province, teachers are confronted with many challenges as students' stories reveal a diversity of experiences. Many students struggle to find the right words to describe their experiences. I am drawn to the work of Aoki, who pointed to the complexity and the generative possibilities that dwell in the tension in the between space—the gaps that exist between and among teachers, students, and the curriculum topics. How might teachers and students cultivate an attunement to hear the voice of others? Aoki suggested, "it is the difference that really matters," but the task for teachers is "not so much the elimination of differences, but, more so, the attunement of the quality of the tensionality of differences that makes a difference" (Aoki, 2005, p. 61). Through discussion we can bring into the open our differences and evoke questions such as: How should we live together?

Reflecting on the tensionality of differences that makes a difference, I am drawn to my own identity and my own prejudices that I bring into the classroom. I am reminded of the vulnerability of those constructions. The above stories reminded me of my own situatedness, my own belonging to a particular historical moment. It was my encounter with the voices of others that exposed me to my own prejudices. Gadamer (2004) suggested that we are always already imbued with ways of seeing, hearing and being in the world, and that we require provocation from another to understand differently. He observed that "understanding begins when something addresses us" (p. 298). The above anecdotes also reveal that regardless of what we plan as teachers, regardless of how much we prepare, regardless of defined objectives, salient moments of interruption happen. As Gadamer noted, it is "not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (p. xxvi). Perhaps it is these moments that exceed our planning that prompt us to ask: What is it to be a teacher? How should I respond? Furthermore, my responsiveness as a teacher to the particularity of the stories presented by Adar, Aafia, and Sana revealed that there are no easy answers that define the best way to respond.

It is here that I am inspired by Gadamer's theory of *Erfahrung.* As my teaching partner and I prepared for our discussion on nationalism, we began by looking at the stated goals and objectives outlined in the Social Studies Program of Studies. We then discussed our current understandings of nationalism and decided that given the diversity of our class, we should conduct further research, specifically concentrating on the countries in the Middle East. We observed that although our planning and preparation was invaluable, the curriculum-as-planned dwelt in the tension as the students

experienced it. It was Adar's comment, "I am a citizen of nowhere," that interrupted our underlying assumptions and intentions. We had taken for granted that all students would consider themselves citizens and therefore identify with a particular nation. Gadamer (2004) observed that "experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason" (p. 351). Our encounter with Adar revealed the limits of our planning reason. We realized that the concepts of citizenship and identity are not fixed and stable, but rather possess a living character, replete with a past, and are susceptible to being understood differently in the future. Thus, citizenship and identity were not examples of content objectives possessed by us, but rather, as Gadamer suggested, an understanding that became "situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. Understanding proves to be an event" (p. 308). The generative potential that exists in conversation surfaced as the class was provoked by future possibilities that stretched beyond our current understanding of citizenship and identity. Jay (2005) observed, "it was through an encounter with otherness in which the self no longer remains the same." (p. 356)

Central to *Erfahrung* is the notion of alterity. Gadamer (2004) commented that as human beings we live in the world, always projecting an understanding, always already seeing something *as* something. Throughout my interactions, I was reminded of my own limited horizon. I was also was reminded that my understandings of the concepts of citizenship and identity had formed within a particular context. Gadamer indicated that although our forestructures are barriers to understanding differently, it is important to allow them to be put at risk, to be made vulnerable, "to explicitly examine the

legitimacy—i.e., the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within him" (p. 271). Perhaps it is through encounters with otherness that teachers and students will cultivate a more expansive understanding of self, other, and the curricular topics. This may offer an opportunity for a certain kind of experience, a readiness that embraces alterity and orients a teacher to a questioning of things. Gadamer wrote that "[d]iscourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the questions" and tells of the importance of humility in that "all questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know" (p. 359).

Encountering the Responsibility of Being a Social Studies Teacher

At times, accomplishing the specified outcomes articulated in the Program of Studies seemed like an impossibility. Outcomes specify that students will: "value the diversity, respect the dignity and support the equality of all human beings"; "thrive in their evolving identity with a legitimate sense of belonging to their communities, Canada and the world"; and "understand how social cohesion can be achieved in a pluralistic society" (Alberta Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 2). As social studies teachers, we may teach about these topics, but I continue to investigate how learning about the complexities of becoming human, including knowledge, attitudes, and skills, may influence the way in which students and teachers engage in the world.

There were many times I felt overwhelmed by the ethical weight of these topics as I attempted to understand this particular relationship. I struggled as I contemplated what was the best thing to do. How might an encounter with Robin, a Grade 10 Social Studies student I was asked to work with, reveal other ways of being in the world? How might hearing Robin's story provide a catalyst for my own existential and ontological quest? In

working with Robin, I was confronted with my own taken-for-granted assumptions, awakened to confront social norms regarding gender identity and sexual orientation. I reflected upon my experiences in teacher education that often focused on learning to teach. This focus emphasized methods and strategies, suggesting that if somehow we just got it right, if teachers were just trained properly, if we just possessed the requisite skills and techniques and followed best practices, students would thrive. Skills and techniques *are* important to the teaching profession; however, they alone do not suffice in contributing to teachers becoming experienced. When faced with a particular student, on a particular day, gathered around a particular topic, we are called upon to exercise our judgment, to make a discerned ethical pedagogical determination as to the best way to proceed. We are called to continually theorize and concretize understandings of our students, the living disciplines we are entrusted to teach and ourselves. Perhaps this critical venturing with our students presents an opportunity to encounter alterity that may result in a seeing beyond our situatedness to new possibilities.

Several years ago, while working with Robin, I was confronted with the profound complexities involved with being a social studies teacher. Although I understood the Program's stated goals for citizenship and identity and the corresponding attitudes, skills, and knowledge that I was entrusted to teach, my work with Robin thrust me into a situation that extended beyond my understanding of the goals and objectives I espoused. Specifically, I was confronted with the responsibility that teaching 'about the topics'—citizenship and identity—required more than explicating to students abstract notions such as recognition, respect, pluralism, inclusion, diversity, public good, race, and gender. I was reminded that race and gender are not merely abstract concepts but rather are

experiences lived by both teachers and students. As the Program states, students "construct meaning in the context of lived experience" (Alberta Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 5) How might we, teachers and students, live well within a democracy that accentuates the importance of the diversity of experiences and perspectives within a pluralistic society? As a social studies teacher, I questioned how it might be possible to encounter alterity with students as we interpreted the world together and how encounters may assist us in understanding differently. When engaging alterity, how do we resist foreclosing on possibilities? How might we, as social studies teachers, cultivate an attunement to the other that calls for an ethical response—a response that is not bound by techniques or procedures but rather honours the fecundity of the individual case?

I first met Robin when she was a grade ten social studies student. Her teacher considered her to be a very strong academic student, but Robin was withdrawn and unwilling to participate in many classroom activities. Although Robin attended class regularly, she had become disengaged and was reluctant to submit assignments. As a result she was failing miserably. Given that Robin was underachieving, her teacher approached her about the possibility of devising her own inquiry into the topic of identity. To support Robin's inquiry, her teacher asked me if I would assist Robin with her investigation.

At that time Robin was struggling with her gender identity and sexual orientation. Her experiences as a young female did not correspond to the social categories that frequently defined the terms of masculinity and femininity. Her lived experiences concerning her gender and sexual orientation frequently clashed with the predominant discourses of masculinity, femininity, and heteronormativity. She mentioned that

throughout the course of most school days, she seldom saw or heard others like her. The narratives that she had come to understand about herself were often silenced in school; she did not feel recognized or validated.

As Robin worked through her uncertainties and the corresponding anguish that her journey induced, she decided that she was going to come out of closet and affirm to the school community that she was gay. However, after months of further struggle she realized that she was not gay; she declared, "I am in the wrong body."

Since our initial meeting several years ago, Robin has endured many difficult and tumultuous moments as he continually strives to understand himself and his place in a world—a world that at times has been hostile as he is at variance with society's norms for gender and sexual orientation. Robin is now attending university, has transgendered, and is involved in a loving heterosexual relationship. In addition, Robin has been actively involved with the Lesbian Bisexual Gay Transgender Queer (LBGTQ) community as he speaks to high school students about his journey through high school and beyond. The following reflection by Robin describes his journey through the world:

> *For as long as I can remember, I've naturally wanted to do masculine things. When I was younger, I kept my hair short, owned baggy pants, watched wrestling, and other things like that that I just enjoyed and didn't even realize was out of the ordinary for a girl. Getting older, I started wearing (slightly) more feminine clothes because I just felt that it was expected of me, though I still got mistaken for a boy quite often. I started getting "crushes" on my guy friends who I could hang out with or go skateboarding with, but there was obviously no actual romantic connections. After realizing myself and telling other people that I was attracted to women, I forced myself to look more feminine (like wearing mascara or attempting to grow my hair out) to rebel against the "dyke"*

> *stereotype. None of that ever felt right. Thinking back on the past memories and just knowing myself as a person, I finally understood why I had been so uncomfortable with myself for my entire life. Of course I was a wreck, at first. I hated myself. I hated society for putting this giant burden on me, and only me. I thought this type of thing only happened in the movies. I felt like a circus freak. Every time I heard the words "sex-change", "transsexual", "transgendered" or anything like that I'd feel disgusting and angry. It was like realizing I was gay all over again but a hundred times worse. And, just like before, I just needed time and support to truly accept myself, and to know I'm not the only one. Once I reached that point, I could act and look as masculine as I wanted, and I didn't care who minded. It was like I was me as a little kid again, before our society's view on traditional gender roles had fucked with my head. Everything I did from then on was pure liberation. Now, I can start the transformation. It will be long, and will take all of my strength to get through, but it will be well worth it when I can finally wake up in a body that's truly mine.*
> (Robin, personal communication, May 14, 2008)

As I re-read Robin's words I am moved by the challenges that confront social studies teachers as we attempt to encounter the world with our students. Although the Program of Studies generously indicates the process of deliberative inquiry into the ambiguities inherent in the study of identity, it is beyond the scope and possibility of a planned curriculum to address the temporal complexities of the lifeworld. How students and teachers make their way in the world concerning the multiplicity of identities, self-formation within a plurality, the livedness of our experiences, and the temporality of our lives exceeds the grasp of curriculum-as-planned. The lifeworld is fraught with tension as it is often ambiguous and uncertain, presenting many challenges and places of struggle.

Nevertheless, dwelling within the tension may provide a generative site of possibilities, a future that might be understood differently. In the lifeworld of teaching, how might we guide the singularity of the individual case, as the word *educere* denotes, to lead students tactfully out into the world? Teaching the concept of identity extends beyond teaching about identity; the formation of teachers' and students' identities demands that we cultivate an attunement to our lived experiences.

A teacher's pedagogical tone and tact points to a responsible response to the students in our care that involves a letting be and a letting go as students embark on their own existential quests. As noted earlier, Aoki (2005) pointed to the space in between, where teachers and students co-dwell in the tension. He poignantly described an inquiry of identity, where "life in the classroom is not so much *in* the child, *in* the teacher, *in* the subject; life is lived *in* the spaces between and among" (p. 45). Perhaps it is *in* the between spaces where possibilities exist, where movement among multiplicities invites teachers and students like Robin to examine the assumptions underlying our understandings of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Robin revealed his private struggles with the dominant narrative that defined what it meant to be masculine or feminine and the corresponding stereotypes. He frequently framed these in pejorative language. In his case, the word "dyke" referred to an overly masculine female. Robin's private, partially concealed self did not find expression within the dominant constructions of gender and sexual orientation. Perhaps predictably, Robin attempted to conform, to be and act more feminine. Regardless of his attempts, he was still perceived to be too masculine to fit comfortably into the narrowly defined parameters of femininity and was frequently referred to as a boy. A pedagogical

thoughtfulness is called upon that does not foreclose on possibilities for Robin, and to provide opportunities for him to embark on an emancipatory journey.

As I read Robin's description of his journey through high school, I am drawn to the anguish he felt: "Of course I was a wreck . . . I hated myself. I hated society for putting this giant burden on me. I felt like a circus freak. Every time I heard the words 'sex change', 'transsexual', 'transgendered' . . . I'd feel disgusting and angry" (Robin, personal communication, May 14, 2008)

The words of Miller (2005) are helpful as she pointed to the subjective labor involved in self-understanding and the importance of "working difference" to engage and to respond "to the fluidity and malleability of identities and difference, of refusing fixed and static categories of sameness and permanent otherness" (p. xx). It is in these spaces where I wonder how we as social studies teachers may generously embrace and thoughtfully respond to the call from the lifeworld of our students that does not foreclose on future possibilities.

Responding to this calling exceeds the implementation of objective standards. In my interactions with Robin, I was distressed over determining what was humanly good, what was humanly possible: What is the good that should guide my actions? In our lives as teachers we strive to live among students and are called to act, to respond ethically, and to cultivate a moral knowledge: "For moral knowledge . . . is clearly not objective knowledge—i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 312).

Meeting Robin influenced my understanding of identity, particularly regarding gender and sexual orientation. Moreover, his journey introduced a world of which I was largely unaware and to which it was beyond my knowledge to respond adequately. Meeting Robin emphasized that teaching—the act of responding to our students—is not known in advance of their arrival. Perhaps Robin's story brings into the open the many possibilities of living a life and invites us to consider: How shall we live together? Perhaps Robin's story offers, as Aoki (2005) suggested regarding curriculum, to orient teachers to human/world relationships, "for it permits probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons (teachers and students) to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations" (p. 95). Similarly, as Gadamer (2007) observed regarding our encounters with the alien, they provide opportunities for the "lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world" (p. 87).

My lack of understanding provoked me to engage further educational literature regarding Queer Theory by curriculum scholars Deborah Britzman (2006), William Pinar (1998), and Janet Miller (2005). Their insightful scholarship has exposed me to the multiplicities, diversities, and possibilities that reside in the lifeworld; each of us has a gender identity and a sexual orientation, although our understanding is always on the way. As teachers, how might we continually be attuned to the lifeworld of our students so as to cultivate a generous and generative space for inquiry into understanding of others and ourselves? How might an attunement to alterity provide a space for the not yet? How might we cultivate a particular kind of experience that encourages students and ourselves to venture into the world?

Within the context of teaching, moral knowledge is concerned with possibilities of transformation presented by natality—possibilities to understand the world in new ways. As social studies teachers, to be attuned to the lives of our students involves coming to know them as "active being[s] [that] are concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different" (Aoki, 2005, p. 312). How might we respond ethically to the particularity of the lived-experiences of the students in our care? How might we, in the words of Greene (1988), who expressed her commitment to human freedom, nurture a capacity "to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise?" (p. 3). How might we cultivate a comportment of openness to the otherness of the other?

Although possibilities existed to surpass the often narrow confines of gender identity and sexual orientation, Robin's journey to find his place was fraught with difficulties and he was often met with intolerance. Although the Program of Studies recognizes the diverse and pluralistic nature of Canadian society, as teachers and students navigate the complex terrain when working through differences, they are often hostile toward one another's alterity. Determining what is possible involves uncertainty and risk.

I am reminded of the words of Hongyu Wang, who suggested, "the relation between self and stranger is a central theme of education" and emphasized the importance of a teacher's capacity "to acknowledge alterity lovingly that initiates an educative process" (as cited in Pinar, 2011, p. 106). Furthermore, Wang suggested, "it is one's own alterity that one encounters in the presence of the stranger" (p. 107). Indeed, it was Robin's alterity that revealed the otherness within me. He reminded me "we are always situated within traditions . . . [they are] always part of us" (Gadamer, 2004,

p. 283). I was moved by Robin's courage as he attempted to understand himself within an environment that often refused to recognize his way of being in the world.

Meeting Robin exposed me to my own belongingness to a particular historical moment and his otherness returned me to the original difficulty of living a life. I was reminded of the plight that confronts us all as we make meaning of our lives and the lives of others. Robin was a catalyst for me to embark on an existential journey into the narratives that were significant in shaping how my understandings of masculinity and femininity influenced my identity, being, and becoming. As Gadamer (2004) suggested, "[l]ong before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (p. 278).

Given our situatedness—our belonging to tradition—Gadamer (2004) observed that to understand anew, it is important that

> we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (p. 269)

Throughout much of my childhood and into adulthood I participated in combative sports, predominantly hockey and football, that espoused particular understandings of masculinity and femininity. Physical and aggressive play was the ethos that engulfed these sports. On many occasions, I questioned my desire and willingness to participate in the violence that my coaches often encouraged. Frequently the willingness to fight came to epitomize what it meant to be tough and masculine. In most other aspects of my life, the spirit of fighting was counter to what was deemed appropriate behavior. Like Robin, I

felt susceptible and acquiesced to the norm, allowing my private rendering to succumb to the predominant narrative. I wondered, given the prevalence of such an ethos: What is possible? How does one continue to 'play' within such a narrative? How does aspiring to such norms of masculinity thwart one's authenticity? As I witnessed Robin's journey to understand his gender and sexual orientation, I re-awakened to the possibility that particular narratives that held me in their sway could be understood anew. Moreover, I understood that there are no formal criteria for determining how to respond to Robin's inquiries about living "in the wrong body." My experiences with Robin point to the need to cultivate "the sort of character that includes a delicate readiness of apprehension and a habitual flexibility of response informed by an orientation to the true and the truly good" (Gadamer, 1981, p. xxviii).

Gadamer (2004) contended that although we come to understand ourselves through the history of effects, these understandings do not limit our ability to understand differently. Rather, to be situated in tradition provides the possibility to further our understanding, since "the way we experience historical traditions, the way we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world, constitute a truly hermeneutic universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened" (p. xxiii). Coming into contact with alterity may provide an opportunity for us to bring our previous understandings into question and come to understand the topic differently. Gadamer suggested that "[i]t is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (p. 296). Perhaps as teachers, it is this possibility to understand our students and ourselves differently that invites a more expansive horizon and assists in governing our future actions in the world. Perhaps the

interpretative structure of philosophical hermeneutics of human living provides the condition of possibility.

Butler (2009) reflected that frames do not capture all possibilities as they are suspect to the limitation that something goes beyond their borders and exposes their porosity. She wrote of "the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things" (p. 9). Perhaps a commitment to deliberative inquiry into the topics of citizenship and identity may reveal that these concepts are captured within particular frames. Although they may be shaped and understood within the effects of history, through investigation we might understand them differently.

Robin concluded his reflection with a sense of liberation: "I just needed time and support to truly accept myself, and to know I'm not the only one. Once I reached that point, I could act and look as masculine as I wanted, and I didn't care who minded . . . Everything I did from then on was pure liberation. Now, I can start the transformation" (Robin, personal communication, May 14, 2008). Perhaps Dwayne Huebner's (2008) *Lure of the Transcendent* captured the spirit of the possibilities of education by suggesting that education ought to be about the possibility to transform and transcend one's present form of life: "Everybody experiences, and continues to have the possibility of experiencing the transcending of present forms of life, of finding that life is more than known or lived . . . . Education is only possible because the human being is a being that can transcend itself" (p. 345). Similarly, Miller (2005) reminded us that there are gaps and fissures within the curriculum-as-plan, where the lived experiences of teachers and students may point to possibilities of excess—possibilities that do not "look into the

mirror of self-reflection and see a reinscription of her already familiar, identifiable self. She finds herself not mirrored—but in difference" (p. xi).

Encounters as Existential Moments in Becoming Experienced as a Teacher

My work with Robin has continued to sit with me as I find myself more attuned and sensitive to the complexities of responding to the alterity of the other. I acknowledge the impossibility of being sufficiently prepared for the complexities involved in an encounter with students. And I ask myself: What is the force of an encounter? Perhaps as I gather with students to discuss the concepts of citizenship and identity and seek to further understand my students, the world and myself, I may nurture an orientation to journey with others and embrace an occasion to garner new understanding that may foster further receptivity. As students and teachers venture into their lived experiences, there are no definitive methodological procedures that can reduce the risk inherent with this venture.

Encounters with students call for an ethical response that acknowledges the particularity of the student and aims towards the good. Gadamer (2004) recalled Aristotle in his observation "that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics. Indeed, to demand this kind of exactitude would be inappropriate" (p. 311). There are no definitive procedures that offer certainty, as it is not possible to outrun the possibilities of misunderstanding. Teachers are nevertheless called to respond to new encounters.

To encourage students and teachers to bring forth their lived experiences as a means to embark on an existential journey involves the risk that our understanding of ourselves, the other, and the world are vulnerable to understanding anew. We risk a shattering and a suffering often beyond consciousness, since as Caputo (1993) suggested,

"[t]o suffer a disaster is to lose one's star (dis-astrum), to be cut loose from one's . . . guiding light" (p. 6). Losing one's guiding light by recognizing the limits of consciousness as we experience the alien involves a dialectical space with the alien that may lead to "the overcoming and surpassing of the subjective spirit, of the individual consciousness, in the direction of a common consciousness" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 33). My interactions with Robin revealed the limitations of my guiding reason.

Erfahrung offers the notion of a journey that embraces an encounter with the lifeworld as provocation to understand differently and to become an experienced teacher. Gadamer (2004) suggested that becoming experienced is essentially negative—the thwarting of an expectation—as he wrote, "[o]nly through negative instances do we acquire new experiences . . . every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation" (p. 350). Throughout my interactions with Robin, I was continuously thrown into the unfamiliar, never quite sure how to respond to his alterity in a way that would invite him to continue his quest. My knowledge and understanding of the Program of Studies seemed insufficient. I wondered how I might cultivate a more profound pedagogical thoughtfulness to embark on a personal and communal venturing that seeks to understand the goodness of humans and the deeper ontological realms of meanings. As Aoki (2005) described, an educated person is one who

> understands that one's ways of knowing, thinking, and doing flow from who one is . . . an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto oneself, but is a being-in-relation-with-others, hence is, at core, an ethical being . . . . Moreover, a truly educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude . . . acknowledging the grace by which educator and educated are allowed to dwell in the present that embraces past experiences but is open to possibilities yet to be. Thus, to be educated is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call to walk with others in life's ventures. (p. 365)

Gadamer (2004) described *Erfahrung* as a process that we undergo as we journey in solitude and in solidarity. In fact, the process is essentially negative, since "[i]t cannot be described simply as the unbroken generation of typical universals. Rather, this generation takes place as false generalizations are continually refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical is shown not to be so" (p. 347). As I continue to grapple with my own understanding of gender and sexual orientation, there are no longer stable and permanent constructions, but rather understanding myself and the other is always on the way.

Gadamer contended that the negativity of experience possesses positive possibilities. I wonder how we social studies teachers might become experienced and cultivate an attunement that renders the taken-for-granted of our lives more ambiguous, contingent, and uncertain in the face of the arrival of the other? Perhaps, as Gadamer suggested, more profound understanding requires a comportment of generous openness—conviviality—that creates a space to understand the otherness of the other, with all the inherent risk and suffering that may accompany the realization of the limits of one's own understanding.

Perhaps an experienced teacher will come to understand "that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced [teacher] knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 357). Our understandings are located within a particular horizon. To understand our limited vision of the territory, "one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole, a truer proportion" (p. 304). By distancing ourselves from the familiar topic close at hand, we as teachers may gain a broader understanding of the core themes of citizenship and identity.

On many days as a teacher I was consumed by the everydayness and frenetic pace of life in school. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that there are set routines and procedures to assist in the smooth operations of classroom life. I took much assurance from the fact that my experiences with certain activities were repeatable and predictable. However, as Gadamer acknowledged, once experiences are repeated and confirmed they no longer constitute new experiences. Conventions and customs are necessary in the lifeworld since, according to Gadamer (2004), we must "acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices" (p. 278). Perhaps the journey for teachers is to maintain an eternal vigilance as we seek to determine the grounds for legitimate prejudices. Gadamer suggested that in travelling with fellow interlocutors

> [t]he consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call "being experienced," does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows it better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of many experiences he has had, and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (p. 350)

Gadamer's *Erfahrung* encourages us to see teaching as a journey that embraces the voices of fellow interlocutors. In social studies this journey invites students to be co-inquirers into the academic disciplines that elucidate particular understandings of the core topics of citizenship and identity. As we engage the voice of others we have opportunities to understand others, the world, and ourselves differently. A journey is an existential quest that reveals human finitude. A teacher's pedagogical thoughtfulness seeks to open students' worlds to possibilities not yet known; the teacher encourages students to embark on their own existential quests to become experienced.

Gadamer's (2004) theory of experience provides opportunities for teachers to cultivate a pedagogical attunement that orients them to careful listening as a way of being with students as they co-investigate the curriculum topics in general and the core themes of citizenship and identity in particular. This involves risk as we venture into a world that welcomes and embraces alterity. Gadamer noted that it is in encounters with the voice of the other where the generative possibilities reside to understand our finitude, the history of effects, and our own inner historicity. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers a form of inquiry for teachers and students that are continually attuned to the voice of others as an invitation to understand anew. An integral element of becoming experienced is Gadamer's notion of application, which honours the particularity of the situation. Application embraces an ethics that aims at the good in human life. We do not come to know the good in human life in an abstract or general way. Rather, we know it only in a concrete situation. Although teachers and students are required to make judgments to live in the world, they appreciate the limits of their knowledge and the vulnerabilities and frailties of human life. In being and becoming experienced they must be prepared to dwell in the tension between familiarity and strangeness and to recognize that "the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definite knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 350).

Chapter 5: Becoming Experienced and Living the Challenges of Being a Teacher

> Self-understanding can no longer be integrally related to a complete self-transparency in the sense of a full presence of ourselves to ourselves. Self-understanding is always on-the-way; it is a path whose completion is a clear impossibility. (Gadamer, 1981, p. 103)

> To be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future. (De Beauvoir, 1948, p. 91)

When embarking on this journey, I did not have a detailed map or a set of coordinates that demarcated the territory to ensure a safe passage; touchstones, however, were available to provide guidance, provocations for further inquiry, and, at times, refuge. This venture involved travelling in both solitude and solidarity; indeed, encounters with others were an integral aspect of this journey. Encounters with otherness, as Kapuscinski (2008) suggested, "is not a simple, automatic thing" (p. 31). Travelling with interlocutors involves cultivating a comportment of openness, receptivity, and attunement to hear the voice of others. In our daily lives as teachers, we come face-to-face with the otherness of the other, which is a profoundly complex interaction. It is here, in these moments of intersection, that we are called upon to respond, to enact judgments as we co-venture into the world, to journey alongside the young into life's mysteries.

Throughout this journey, many factors that have shaped my subjectivity as a son, father, and teacher, such as culture, language, gender, ideology, and philosophy, were brought into question. In exploring these factors, I re-entered history as a means to further understand past, present, and future possibilities, a "running of the course" where academic knowledge informed and continues to inform my lived experiences. Perhaps our existential quests as teachers will assist us in nurturing our capacities to pay attention, an attunement to hear, to see, to touch, to feel, and to respond to the young in our midst. I

am struck by the pedagogical challenges of co-venturing into the world with students as they embark on their own journeys, to pursue their own wonderments, to make meaning of their lives and the lives they want to live, and to assume responsibility for a world that is largely not of their making.

Setting out on this journey to inquire into what it might mean to be or to become an experienced teacher was initially provoked, at least in part, by restlessness—a restlessness that lay beyond my ability to clearly articulate its qualities. There were many occasions during my years as a beginning teacher that I often felt a sense of lack, of never feeling quite up to the demands of teaching. However, I was convinced that participating in an upcoming professional development day, an upcoming workshop or graduate course would assuage my angst. I believed, or at least hoped, that there was a collection of methods that would subdue the flux of a teacher's life. It is not my intent in this thesis to assert an overly deterministic subjectivity, but rather to cultivate a space that invites a living tensionality and establishes a living relation with educational and pedagogical norms. In doing so, I have shown the vulnerabilities and contingencies of these norms: the ways they are made susceptible and open to future possibilities. Thus to be and to become an experienced teacher might keep open the quest and interrupt the comment made by my principal as I attempted to find my way as a first-year teacher: "Don't worry, after five years, you will be an experienced teacher." His comment continues to churn questions about my chosen profession, because the epistemological frame often determines and decides in advance what it is to be and to become an experienced teacher.

In my time in education being an experienced teacher was frequently understood and conveyed as one who accumulated the requisite subject knowledge and the

appropriate techniques and strategies to facilitate student learning, which was often measured by standardized assessments that reflected course objectives as outlined in the Program of Studies. In addition, being experienced often accentuated the importance of 'classroom management strategies,' generally understood as a teacher's ability to motivate students towards a pre-established end while maintaining a semblance of discipline. Although subject knowledge and classroom management are central aspects of classroom teaching and point to a way of being as a teacher, the predominant focus on content and techniques often became overly deterministic—truncating or foreclosing other legitimate possibilities and understandings of what it might be to be an experienced teacher. Indeed, as we gather with students in classrooms, in community, considering ways of being with one another is paramount; however, this space is deeply relational and exceeds merely teaching about content knowledge. A challenge for social studies at this historical moment is the complex relations between teacher, students, and curriculum topics.

Furthermore, within the context of my life as a teacher, existential and ontological questions were frequently neglected. Inquiry into our subjectivities as teachers, the particular historical moments that have come to shape our lives, our ways of being in the world, were often constrained. Our presuppositions about our own being and about being teachers were often left in silence. Such an orientation silenced questions such as: How have our understandings of teaching turned out this way? Given a particular context, what is possible for us as teachers? What does it mean to be a teacher? How might we as teachers continue to inquire into the academic disciplines to inform our own understandings—understandings of lived experiences? How might we learn to dwell in

the tension between two curriculum worlds, the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived-experience?

The core concepts of citizenship and identity are complex topics; perceiving them as simply *outcomes* limits a journey that entails an existential quest, a relational space that reflects the interdependency of our understandings of others, the world, and ourselves. Being and becoming an experienced teacher calls forth a responsible responding to the students entrusted to our care; thus what seems to be demanded from us as teachers is the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement that honours the complexities involved in relation to students and to the world.

The confluence of several factors—my varied and various roles in education, my enrolment in graduate studies, and my own biographical and historical inquiries—precipitated a journey that involved travelling along both inner and outer pathways. Being a social studies educator for a number of years, my journey focused on centering curriculum inquiry on lived experience; I wondered how this particular emphasis might provoke educators to embark on a wondrous journey that entails becoming more fully attuned to self, to others, and to life's mysteries—a journey that at times may present more than we can withstand. Although these travels commenced with an autobiographic story, and brought forth memories that called for an attunement to my inner voice, this was not a solo venture. The demand to narrate my stories both unconcealed and concealed different aspects of my lived experience. Why did I include certain stories and exclude others? At times it felt like the script unfolded beyond my wanting and doing; without having extended an invitation, somehow the writing seemed to write me, like the arrival of unexpected guests.

Throughout this journey, I was supported by many fellow travellers who have assisted me and awakened my consciousness. And I have come to more fully appreciate the conditionedness and finitude of my understanding of the world, revealing the vulnerability and contingency of the narratives that had come to govern my life as a teacher. My travels with others have spawned many insights, and as Gadamer (2004) suggested, gaining new insight "always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive" (p. 350).

Encountering the otherness of the other, and journeying with fellow travellers often required slowness and, at times, extended latitude and meandering; the journey's direction was not in the form of ascension, but rather circular, occasioning a return to life's beautiful difficulties. The journey invited and required difference. It offered possibilities for new understandings and new vistas, and at times required letting be and letting go of previously held ways of being in the world. It was venturing with others that occasioned humility and I continually sought a reflexive and reflective orientation towards being with others. Frequently encounters—coming face-to-face with Jeffery, with Kyle, and with Robin—unsettled my sedimented understandings of others, the world, and myself. *Erfahrung,* being and becoming experienced, is without a final destination, but rather involves radical openness to the voice of the other, to a stranger whose alterity may be a catalyst for new understanding and reminds us that life's journey, as Gadamer (1981) suggested, "is a path whose completion is a clear impossibility" (p. 103).

The notion of stranger is apt for teachers, as we lovingly embrace and encounter students, whose myriad differences are an ontological given. Similarly, the academic

disciplines included in the Program of Studies offer explanations, musings, representations, creations, provocations, and invitations to journey further into the mysteries inherent in being human. This venturing with others calls forth ancestral voices, inheritances from the past, not as voices announcing incontestable truths, but rather pointing to the multifariousness of being, to possibilities that are always *on the way*. Furthermore, temporal distance is not a bridge or a gap to be traversed, to seek original authority, but an offering, a creation of a spirit that points to understandings of the world and occasions further inquiry, further encounters as an opportunity to inquire into possibilities not yet known. Given the strangeness in our midst, how might we as teachers cultivate a pedagogical attunement that responsibly responds to the call that is teaching, a profoundly ethical commitment to our fellow travellers? How might we cultivate a wisdom that ethically informs our judgments? How might we understand the notion of practice as learning to live well with others in a deeply relational space? I am drawn to Gadamer's (2007) observation regarding his own teaching of hermeneutics. He suggested that it is primarily a practice and "in it what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts" (p. 21).

Fellow interlocutors have provided opportunities to venture into the unfamiliar, into the alien, often rendering the familiar strange. This pilgrimage involved a wide variety of experiences, traversing both inner and outer worlds. Encountering the strangeness of the other compelled me to scrutinize and travel beyond my current forms of life—rendering a more expansive and fulsome view of the territory. This journey stirred my consciousness, and at times provoked its reversal as it elicited moments to dwell upon my inner

historicity, my attachments to the world, to determine which ones I might abandon, which ones ought to be altered, and which ones I might clasp more firmly. Our journey as teachers, a co-venturing with others, calls upon us to enact judgments that aim at the good, to ennoble the particularity while seeking to dwell aright within the tension that resides between the particular and the universal with an awareness of common ends. Our decisions attempt to honour the vulnerability and contingency of living a life, and our decisions are fraught with ambiguity and frailty. Gadamer (1981) suggested the need for the cultivation of a practice what calls for "enlightened choice, just deliberation, and right subordination under common ends" (p. 76).

Co-venturing with students and the curriculum topics revealed many of my orientations to the world and offered perturbation and disorientations while occasioning the possibility for reorientation. Adventures into the world provided pathways to wonder, and to hold topics in awe. As teachers co-venture with the young, interpreting the world together; students are encouraged to embark on their own existential quest, their own becoming, to feel the ethical weight of deciding *this* not *that,* or *this* and *that*. A teacher's pedagogical wisdom to enact ethical judgments, albeit with an aporia that welcomes moments of undecidedability, opens a space for the arrival of the not yet known. Pinar (2011) reflected that a teacher's calling "is not to cram but to encourage children to explore their subjective singularity, their historical subjecthood, through subject matter" (p. 143). How might we as teachers suspend our own understandings to make room for a sense of wonderment and awe about life's mysteries? How might our erudition of the academic disciplines contribute to our capacity to invite our students to explore their subjective singularity—their historical subjecthood?

Gadamer (2004) observed that there are no definite methods that will alleviate the risk and suffering that a journey entails; however, as we embark on our own existential quest, there are a number of touchstones that may orient us as they point to a world and a freedom to act, to cultivate a judgment that is receptive, generous, and attuned to the particularity, to the vulnerability and contingency of the students' lives we come to encounter.

Accordingly, the following touchstones represent aspects of the journey of being and becoming an experienced teacher. They are not intended as prescriptions, but rather, to illuminate the profound complexities involved as we social studies teachers co-venture into the world with our students, encouraging them to embark on their own existential quests to garner an expansive view of the territory. In addition, as students engage in their own journeys', they are called upon to act, to live an ethical life, and to take responsibility for possibilities not yet known.

Touchstone 1: The Front Matter—An Invitation to Journey

> An action which wants to serve man ought to be careful not to forget him on the way; if he chooses to fulfill itself blindly, it will lose its meaning or will take on an unforeseen meaning; for the goal is not fixed once and for all; it is defined all along the road which leads to it. (De Beauvoir, 1976, p. 153)
>
> The world itself which is communicatively experienced and continuously entrusted to us as an infinitely open task to pass on. It is never the world as it was on its first day but the world as it has come down to us (Gadamer, 2007, p. 26)

The Program of Studies defines general and specific outcomes regarding the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students will have the opportunity to develop and that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed, and responsible citizens. Social studies offers a wonderful invitation to teachers to journey with students into the

existential and ontological questions inherent in living a life. In particular, the Program provides opportunities for student to inquire into self and others—a relational venture fraught with tension as we come together with students to understand others, the world, and ourselves differently. We co-venture into the topics of citizenship and identity as a means to decide in relation with others, in local, provincial, national, and international communities, and to reflect on ethical living: How might we live well in the world together? How might co-venturing with others provide a catalyst to question our current understandings of self and the world?

The Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies (2005) notes that teachers are to provide students with opportunities to transcend the given as they venture with others as a means for them to "work out differences" through dialogue and deliberation (p. 5). In addition, inquiring into the world with a diversity of voices will provide students with opportunities "to challenge their presuppositions; and to construct their own points of view" (p. 6). Thus, an inquiry into the concepts of citizenship and identity occasions students an opportunity to cultivate a sense of self and the kind of society in which they want to live as they journey with the voices of others. Moreover, as teachers we may emphasize to our students that our understandings of self, others, and our attachments to the world are tentative, as "understanding the dynamic relationships among time, continuity and change is a cornerstone of citizenship and identity" (p. 6).

TOUCHSTONE 2: BELONGINGNESS—THE POSSIBILITY THAT THINGS COULD BE

> Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 277).
>
> We are always situated within a tradition. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 283).

As teachers we always already understand the world in particular ways. As we inquire into the world with our students, how might we create opportunities for them to

question their own subjectivity as they venture with others—to create a space pregnant with possibilities?

Gadamer (2004) suggested that being in the world is more *being* than consciousness—that "long before we understand through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live" (p. 278). To "break the spell" of our understandings, to become more attuned to the voice of the other, and to understand the meaning of another requires being open to a "fluid multiplicity of possibilities" (p. 271) as a means to live well with the particularity of the young entrusted to our care. Indeed, how might we as teachers cultivate the necessary permeability to sedimented ways of knowing as a means to welcome the incoming of something other, to possibilities not yet?

Perhaps being and becoming experienced, as Gadamer (2004) expressed in his theory of experience *(Erfahrung),* is having our expectations thwarted and becoming attuned to the arrival of the unfamiliar. Thus, becoming experienced is highly interdependent, always in relation with others. There is a degree of suffering in becoming experienced, as our familiar narratives, our sense of being and belonging in the world, may no longer suffice in attempting to live an ethical life. Life, its familiarity, its taken-for-granted continuities, are susceptible to being unsettled, to being shattered, as the cellist of Sarajevo revealed. Immediately following that moment when mortars decimated the Sarajevo Opera Hall, the cellist felt as if he were inside the building, as if the bricks and glass that once bound the structure became projectiles that sliced and pounded into him, shredding him beyond recognition. The concepts of citizenship and identity reveal the notions of vulnerability and contingency, the complexity of curriculum, and the limits

of teaching content knowledge. Given the vulnerabilities and contingencies of our lives, how might we reconfigure our lives, reconsider our adhesions to the world so that we may go on living?

As social studies teachers, we are exposed to the fact that our horizons of understanding are limited and finite. Methods, schemas, and frameworks that attempt to subdue the flux will not render the world knowable in any unequivocal sense; vulnerability and contingency are facets of our factical lives that reveal that the complexities of life are not reducible to certainties. Thus, to be and to become experienced involves an existential journey where one encounters events in the lifeworld—its joys, beauties, struggles, and sufferings—and as teachers we are called to learn to dwell with life's ambiguities. As noted by Gadamer (2004), understanding as an event revealed the ever changing and shifting landscapes of possibilities. To be and to become experienced is to return life to its original difficulty, to honour that our understandings, our vision, and our belonging to the world are susceptible to being understood differently. Our belonging to history illuminates many ways of being in the world; however, these are possibilities, not necessities.

Touchstone 3: Practice—Thoughtful Pedagogy

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
> For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith?
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in waiting.
> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought.
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
>
> —T.S. Eliot, 1952, p. 8

T. S. Eliot (1952) speaks about waiting without hope, without love, and without thought, yet there is faith—but the faith and love and hope are all in the waiting. As I continue to reflect on the notion of waiting, it evokes an image of teaching, a practice of providing a void, a space—not an empty space, but rather a welcoming one, an invitation to an inner journey for our students, a journey that embraces darkness as it "shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing" (p. 8). Perhaps the stillness and the dancing provide opportunities for ideas to emerge, opportunities for reflection that may provide the sustenance for reform, to reconstitute and to remember in new ways and to welcome future possibilities.

Travelling with others requires conviviality, a comportment of openness, the cultivation of an art that seeks to understand the voice of the other and an art of questioning that requires a profound attunement to alterity. Furthermore, journeying with others summons a sensibility and sensitivity to the otherness of the other, to hear the other's claim to truth. Perhaps it is here where a productive tension may flourish, a tension where there is positive potential, generative possibilities to understand differently.

When we as teachers embark on our journey, we, too, ought to be alert to the future possibilities that the young represent. As we engage with the young, definitive methods to ensure student achievement evade our reach; there are no guardrails that we can clasp for assurance, and no pre-established rules that must govern our actions. This insight points to the importance for us as teachers to cultivate a particular form of practice, a practice that is reflective, intentional, and contextual. However, proceeding without prescribed methods does not render us aimless as we are imbued with customs, conventions, and truths that may assist in judging the new.

Although thoughtful teaching practices elude the application of definitive methodologies, pedagogical attunement may be pointed to through narration. In reflecting upon a classroom experience, a conversation where Grade 1 students were invited to share their stories regarding the human condition, I recall how their stories brushed up alongside the layered voices from other eras, other historical moments; I could hear the echoes of our ancestors, historians, philosophers, poets, theologians, and political scientists. Students and teachers shared stories about love, belonging, death, and beauty of possibilities, of a future yet to be determined and the earth's capacity to nurture and sustain diverse life forms.

While reflecting on that conversation, I am reminded by the voices of the young that the topics we are entrusted to teach possess a living character and are susceptible to being thought anew; with each iteration there exists the possibility of returning us to a familiar place but for the very first time. It is like venturing with the works of a writer, since as Ruiz (2004) observed: "Every book, every volume you see . . . has a soul. The soul of the person who wrote it. Every time a book changes hands, every time someone runs his eyes down its pages, its spirit grows and strengthens" (pp. 5-6). Like a book that changes hands and is passed from one generation to the next, given an invitation the young may reawaken the spirit and offer their own verse.

It is here where our generosity and attunement as teachers and our own intellectual erudition, our familiarity with the territories, our interdisciplinary understandings of the topic, may encourage students to venture while providing a caring place of sanctuary. It is here where a dialectical space may be opened—a to and fro motion, a movement that reveals that we are shaped and have the capacity to shape the world.

Co-venturing with students embraces a notion of practice, as Gadamer (2004) suggested, an opportunity to experience, to understand our students, the world, and us differently. Engaging in conversations may orient us to the world's abundance and reveal "the joy of knowing more than is already familiar" (p. 113). In addition, our travels, our telling and retelling of tales with others, point to the interdependency and interconnectedness of our lives together.

Touchstone 4: Embarking on a Journey—An Existential Quest

> He knows that everything could have been different, and every acting individual could have acted differently. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 203)
>
> Going forth is unteachable in the sense of prescriptions. (Buber, 1970, p. 126)

Frequently, the focus of education has been to ameliorate, to improve, to shape, and to form. Throughout my experiences in education, teachers have expressed the burdens they carry to improve the lives of the young—to make life better for students somehow through demonstrating care and compassion. As I conclude a portion of this journey, I am drawn to the possibilities of inspiriting the curriculum—of providing invitations for students to embark on their own journeys.

In addition, I now wonder how my attraction to the existential and interpretative discourses in some way releases me from the intensity of those burdens—not to give up hope, not to give up on students' capacity to improve their lives, but rather to understand the limits of my own will, my planning reason, and my desire to make things better. Maybe I am learning to resist the hubris that I know best. Perhaps Gadamer's (2004) notion of embarking on a journey was an apt idea for me to uncover at this juncture, since it introduced me to a language that helped me understand and think about the 'task' and

willingness to compose a life for oneself—the need to undergo, and to nurture a deep inner life. As Gadamer suggested regarding embarking on a journey, "the significance exists at the beginning of any [search] as well as the end: in choosing the theme to be investigated, awakening the desire to investigate, gaining a new problematic" (p. 283).

As educators—perhaps through complicated conversation that calls forth teachers as important interlocutors, as well as calls forth teachers' wisdom as we co-venture with students—living well with students calls for us to journey in solitude and in solidarity. We are called to apply the understandings garnered from our travels with an ethical commitment to self, others, and the world. Throughout this journey, I have been drawn to the notions of courage and suffering in Gadamer's work, perhaps in part due to the difficulty of releasing or reconstituting embedded ways of being in the world; and perhaps in part due to the many resistances I have experienced along the way that often questioned and dismissed certain pedagogical beliefs. Like the core themes of citizenship and identity, courage and suffering are not mere abstractions, ready made and impermeable to change; rather, courage and suffering are alive in the world, shifting and eluding certainty, denying uniformity. Indeed, to be courageous, to suffer, is experienced in context and is lived in the world.

The notion of citizenship also calls for students to act thoughtfully in local, provincial, national, and international communities, which requires a particular orientation towards a sense of responsibility and attachments that represent living well within the complexities of the lifeworld. We always already belong to traditions, always already have understandings of a world and neglect or deny our being with others. Butler (2005) suggested that "when the human is defined by will and refuses the way it is

impinged upon by the world, it ceases to be human" (p. 107). Thus, becoming experienced is the art of the possible and an awareness of our limitations and constraints.

Touchstone 5: Journeying—Self and Others

> One must pull and tear to turn into a multiplicity. (Buber, 1970, p. 59)
>
> If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? (Buber, 1970, p. 85)

The core themes of citizenship and identity and the complexity of these topics limits viewing them as merely content and pursuing them as outcomes. What seems to be demanded of us as teachers, in relation to students and the world, is an understanding of those terms and the difficult encounters between students' and teachers' experiences, and how these things are also lived in the world. Teachers may provide opportunities for students to not only learn about the curriculum content, but also to ask who we as teachers and students become because of what we know—now that we know *this* or *that,* what are we to do? Pinar's (2011) notion of educational experience illuminated in his theory of *currere* reveals the complexity of engaging with difficult topics such as citizenship and identity, which is not just one of content. Journeying, or running the course, emphasizes the world as experienced by an individual and "his or her capacity to learn from experiences, to reconstruct experience through thought and dialogue" (Alberta Social Studies Program of Studies, 2005, p. 2). However, often the predominant focus of curriculum, as suggested by Pinar (2011), is construed as the dissemination of content and "has rarely been understood to provide the forms though which the human person achieves singularity and social commitment" (p. xi). Furthermore, planned objectives

often restrict the notion of adventure as the tension is absolved in the articulation of a final destination.

One of the challenges posed by the Program of Studies is the notion of the unfinishedness of our inquiry into citizenship and identity. Our journey, as observed by Friere (1998) calls for our return, a continuous movement of exploring that "creates a capacity for learning not only to adapt to the world but especially to intervene, to re-create, and to transform it" (p. 66). I am reminded of this notion as I see my copy of *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted Aoki,* (2005) which sits on my desk: its spine is broken and front cover in tatters; there are countless sticky notes protruding from the well-worn pages that are curled up slightly at the edges, providing a welcoming gesture extended to a familiar hand. The book's apparent weariness denies the vitality that the collection has inspired. Aoki's provocations have encouraged my perpetual return; I warmly embrace the continued journey with the humble and gentle invitations elicited by his poetically penetrating writing. Indeed, returning to explore the notions of citizenship and identity have encouraged me to seek new understandings and at times "to intervene, to re-create, and to transform" previously held assumptions.

It was during my first graduate course in curriculum theory that I was introduced to the scholarship of Aoki. I was drawn to his portrayal of the lifeworld—to the wonderfully complex world inhabited by Miss O, her intentions as a teacher, and her presence as she lead her students out into the world. I was moved by his characterization of teaching as a profoundly human endeavour that encourages teachers and students to surmount their current understandings of themselves, others, and the world: "Thus, to be educated is to

be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call to walk with others in life's ventures" (Aoki, 2005 p. 365).

My encounters with Robin reminded me of a world that had become concealed, a world in the midst of children that ought to be alive with possibility—each student a living presence; each student living out a story; each story necessitating a teacher's attunement and tact, since children are led out into a world by their teachers. As Huebner (1999) suggested, "education is not only a leading out from that which I am, it is also a leading toward which I am not" (p. 361).

The difficulty of self and other was first revealed to me while reading Aoki (2005); his turn to the lifeworld shattered many of my prosaic understandings of teaching, although I could not have articulated it at the time. This unconcealing reminded me of what Meister Eckhart referred to as the "ground of the soul" (as cited in Caputo, 1987, p. 268)—a breakthrough, a breakdown where we are deprived of all the familiar comforts of home. How might it be possible to reorient our teaching, our understanding of being and becoming an experienced teacher in a way that honours and embraces living in tensionality?

As a beginning teacher I often felt a sense of relief knowing that I was scheduled to teach a course that I had previously taught, something familiar that seemingly required less planning. However, having experienced the livedness of the classroom, I now realize the folly of adhering strictly to a fixed plan that was successful with one group of students and believing that I could replicate the lesson with a different group. Regardless of how much I planned, how prepared I thought I was, it was not possible to outrun the singularity of the educational experiences that the arrival of the new demand.

Accordingly, I was struck by Kapuscinski's (2008) observation that captured the relational ethos between self and other: "There beside you is another person. Meet him. This sort of encounter is the greatest event, the most vital experience of all" (p. 34).

As I come to an endpoint in this journey, I am ever more drawn to the complex task of teaching, of co-venturing with the young. Becoming experienced, as Gadamer (2004) suggested, perhaps involves the recognition and humility that acknowledges our limits and thus "experience is experience of human finitude" (p. 351). Perhaps our finitude beckons, summons us to seek fellow travellers as an opportunity to come to further understand others, the world, and ourselves. As teachers, perhaps becoming experienced will offer new understandings that will contribute to the cultivation of a pedagogical attunement, a wisdom that spawns a responsible responding to the students entrusted to our care. Moreover, perhaps becoming experienced will encourage our journeying with others and occasion a radical openness, towards future possibilities, to possibilities not yet known. As teachers, perhaps our greatest gift to the young is inviting them to embrace their own existential quest and to become partners in a shared responsibility for humankind.

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