Abstract

This study aims to contribute to scholarship on ethics and teaching with particular relevance for teacher education. The point of departure for the research is the problem of theorizing both teaching and ethics in universal terms, an approach that I suggest fails to capture the particular character of these concepts, their relationship to each other, and to explain how people learn to teach ethically. Following Aristotle’s writing on *phronesis* or ethical judgment, Martha Nussbaum’s concept of ‘discernment’ suggests that people gain the capacity for phronesis by learning to discern the ethically-salient features of particular situations, and this involves the priority of particular perceptions over universals, emotions as judgments of value, and a kind of insight that is gained through an interplay between particulars and universals in the exercise of phronesis. The questions guiding the research were: how do teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how does this discernment help teacher candidates to construct their practices in more ethically-responsive ways?

The methodological approach for the study drew on Nussbaum’s merging of ethical inquiry and literary criticism, and data was gathered through a series of life history interviews, classroom video-recordings with subsequent interviews with the participants, and a research journal. The main themes from the study were that learning to teach ethically involves seeing particulars, responding to particulars, and seeing new particulars, and these themes inform three issues in teacher education: (1) the kind of experience that teacher candidates gain while on practicum is a kind of practical knowledge that orients them to future experience in particular ways; (2) seeing and responding to particulars relies on an openness to surprise, ambiguity, and experience itself as a way of becoming discerning while on practicum; and, (3) wise practical
reasoning is informed by human emotions because they enable teacher candidates to see and to respond to practical situations in ethical and educationally-valuable ways that our cognitive intellect alone cannot. The study concludes that teacher education should focus on the cultivation of educational discernment as the capacity to see and to judge and to act ethically in classrooms.
Preface

This study examines the Aristotelian-inspired concept of discernment in the context of the teaching practicum in teacher education. The fieldwork for the study was conducted at public schools in British Columbia, Canada, and the analysis of the data was grounded in literary criticism. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the University of British Columbia, Office of Research Services on February 23, 2010 under the project title *Discerning Practice*. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board certificate number is H09-01791.
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This work could not have been realized without the support of many friends, family, and colleagues, some of whom I cannot thank here by using their real names, and so I will begin with them first. I am greatly indebted to the three teacher candidates who participated in this study by inviting me into their classrooms and sharing their reflections on teaching and their practicum experiences with me. Without their generosity, this study would not have been possible, and I want to extend my gratitude to them for their help and my sincere best wishes for the future. I am also grateful to the teachers, faculty, staff, and administrators at the schools, schools districts, and teacher education program who supported this project and to the students and parents at the schools where this study took place for their invaluable assistance.

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Dedication

With love always for Carmen, James, and Alison
Chapter 1: Introduction

Mr. Merrick was sitting in a deep armchair, his attitude of complete ease harmonizing with the tranquil room, though his eyes, as he looked up from the review he was reading, were irate. “The modern recrudescence of mysticism is truly disheartening, Felicia,” he said. “Have you read this article?”

Felicia, on her way to the tea-table, glanced at the title he held out, and nodded.

“How long will the human race, like an ostrich, hide its head from truth and, in the darkness, find revelation?”

“Why shouldn’t they make themselves comfortable in any way they can?” Felicia asked, measuring her tea into the teapot.

“Comfort at the cost of truth is a despicable immorality.”

“Well—what is truth? How is the poor ostrich to find it out? Besides, papa, you are comfortable, and the truths you believe in aren’t.”

Anne Douglas Sedgwick (1904/2013) Paths of Judgement

I believe Felicia Merrick and her father’s exchange in Sedgwick’s novel captures a similar contrast in points-of-view in teacher education today. Like Felicia’s father, some people remain skeptical about any view of human life, education, teaching, and teacher education that might seek truth in what he calls “the modern recrudescence of mysticism”. The phrase is an interesting one, suggesting the revival of some obscure or confused belief that had been proven quite wrong a long time ago, and he connects this notion to an ostrich who finds revelation in darkness and a comfort he describes as “a despicable morality”. Indeed, Mr. Merrick seems to know precisely what truth is, and he seems, moreover, to understand it in plainly ethical terms. Felicia, on the other hand, seems less sure about what truth is. For her, it seems to do with a comfort of some kind, and she asks, while measuring her tea, how a poor ostrich might “find it out” in a novel set in rural England just after the turn of the twentieth century.

The study that follows here took place in British Columbia, Canada, about a turn of a century later, and it follows Felicia Merrick’s lead. It is a study of how people learn to teach
ethically, and it draws on an ancient concept of wisdom that was first articulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle as *phronesis* or ethical judgment a very long time ago. Over the past few decades, Aristotle’s phronesis has come to feature prominently in the study of teaching (e.g., Bondi, Carr & Clark, 2011; Carr, 2000; Dunne, 1997; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012a), and I shall argue that its revival is by no means a mystical idea, but rather a very practical one that offers an alternative to a far more despicable morality that has taken hold of education over the past century or so. Readers in Mr. Merrick’s camp may wish to forgo this study altogether, and to them I shall bid farewell now. For those who wish to stay, let us brew a pot of tea, and I will begin with an introduction to the study that follows here.

The Problem and Background

The basic problem that led this project is a very old one, and it concerns a tension between the concepts of ‘universals’ and ‘particulars’ in human life. The philosophers of ancient Greece were among the first to recognize these two concepts, and they did not always agree on the nature of these terms, their place in human life, or their relationship to each other. One of the most famous disagreements on this topic was between Plato and his student Aristotle and captured beautifully in Raphael’s fresco *The School of Athens*. The two philosophers stand at the centre of the fresco: Plato is depicted as old and grey, holding his *Timaeus* in one hand as he points upwards to the heavens, while Aristotle, younger and standing slightly ahead of his mentor, holds his *Nicomachean Ethics* and gestures outwards towards the viewer. These two philosophers held very different views about where we should look for answers to our questions about human life and about living a properly human life; for Plato, truth was to be found in the cosmos above, but Aristotle held that we can only find answers to these kinds of questions in the
'rough ground' (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009) of our mortal lives here on Earth. Aristotle’s philosophy was a radical departure among the philosophers of his day because he emphasized the particularity of human life, of human living, and of human truth, and his practical philosophy has had a tremendous influence on such contemporary thinkers as Hannah Arendt, Richard Bernstein, Joseph Dunne, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Martha Nussbaum.

Although the concepts of ‘universals’ and ‘particulars’ have a long history in philosophy, they have received very little attention in the literature on teaching and teacher education until fairly recently. This is quite surprising when we consider that teaching has always involved universals and particulars: universals can include any number of abstract or general beliefs and concepts: the purpose of education, the notion of ‘good’ teaching, various theories of curriculum, teaching and learning, subject-matter knowledge, instructional techniques, lesson planning and assessment strategies, and classroom rules are a few examples. And, because classroom teaching invariably takes place in very concrete educational contexts, it has always involved particulars: a particular person teaching a particular lesson to a particular group of students made up of particular people on a particular day and in a particular classroom and school, and it seems self-evident that universals are fundamentally different from particulars, in teaching as in other areas of our lives, and that this difference can lead to some very practical predicaments for us all.

I can offer a brief example here in my own work as an English language teacher. I started out teaching English to children and adolescents at private language schools in Spain for a few years as a Canadian living abroad in the 1990s and, after returning to Canada, I taught English to
adults in a community-based program for new immigrants in East Vancouver for a few more years. During the past decade or so, I have been teaching courses in a department of English as a Second Language at a small, rural university in British Columbia, where I teach courses that are broadly grouped under the umbrella of ‘English for academic purposes’, and most of my students are either visiting Canada from abroad or landed immigrants who are preparing for undergraduate studies conducted in the language of English. One of the courses I teach is a writing and grammar course, which focusses on writing a series of short, academic-style essays that follow fairly conventional guidelines in terms of essay and paragraph development, thesis statements, and topic sentences, and the course carries a fairly heavy emphasis on things like formal register and accuracy with regards to grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation.

Not too long ago, I was teaching a grammar lesson in this course on avoiding dangling, misplaced, and squinting modifiers to a group of about twenty-five people, when a student named Libo walked casually into our classroom half an hour late for the third time in two weeks. Libo was wearing sunglasses, plugged into his iPhone, and carrying an extra-large coffee in his hand; taking a seat at the back of the room with his friends, he made a brief show of his phone screen to them, paused his device, removed his ear-buds, took a sip of coffee, and then sat back in his chair without removing his books from his backpack. Giving him this moment while the class looked on, I paused, wondering if his books were really in his backpack at all, and I made a mental note to speak with him after class again. At Week 4 in the course, Libo had already missed two classes and, as this was his third late arrival, he was due, as per Department policy, to receive an academic warning. Libo’s name had also come up in recent department emails and at meetings, not only because of his unexplained absences and lateness, but because of his bluntly
‘cooler-than-thou’ attitude, which was clearly grating on many of my colleagues’ nerves. My own sense, however, was that Libo was really struggling with adjusting to life in Canada; like quite a few of our international students, I suspected he had likely been sent here to study by his parents, and I knew that this was his first semester abroad, which can be a difficult time for anyone.

Meanwhile, I glanced briefly at Kulveer, a local student who was sitting by the classroom window with her books, dictionary, and pencils all neatly organized at her desk and anxiously waiting for me to continue with the lesson. Kulveer had immigrated here with her family, who operated a raspberry farm just down the street from the university’s main campus, and she had grown up picking and selling berries at the family farm’s roadside berry stand. She had attended high school here, and she did not wish to continue in the family business: Kulveer wanted to be a nurse, and she was planning to take the university’s nursing program next semester. Her writing and grammar were quite good, but she had never used a word processor before she started the course, and she had double-spaced her first essay by hitting ‘enter’ on her keyboard at the end of each line of text as she was typing it. Reading her essay, I had remembered doing the very same thing many years ago, and I made another note to check with her on this for the next essay for the course at the break as Libo settled in and I carried on with the lesson.

I think most teachers are familiar with these kinds of events. Teaching obviously involves all kinds of universals—abstract subject-matter knowledge, instructional techniques, and various theories of learning and teaching—but the problem is that they never really manage to capture real-life, every-day classroom situations like these in which teaching inevitably transpires. And, as most teachers know, teachers need to do something in these kinds of situations, and since their
actions involve other people, teaching involves ‘ethics’, a term that Richard Paul and Linda Elder (2006) describe as a “a set of concepts and principles that guide us in determining what behavior helps or harms sentient creatures” (p. 2006). But what concepts and principles should guide teachers in determining what behavior helps or harms their students? And what should they do when Libo walks into the classroom late for the third time in two weeks and as Kulveer sits waiting for you to carry on with a grammar lesson? Until very recently, educational theorists have tended to answer these questions in universal terms, an approach that one hand, seems to ignore the particular character of both teaching and ethics, but which also fails to address a really important question for teacher education: how do people learn to teach ethically?

A View from Science

Quite unfortunately, the prevailing model of teacher education ignores this question altogether. During the past hundred years or so, teaching has been largely constructed as a kind of ‘applied’ science, a view that is grounded in the assumption that the main purpose of education and of teaching is the acquisition of ‘scientific’ or universal forms of knowledge by students. In her book An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research, Ellen Lagemann (2000) examines the history of this development in the United States, and she makes some interesting observations. One is the historically-low status of education, which she claims is due, in part, to its long association with “woman’s work” (p. 3) but also to its designation as an ‘applied’ field, which tends to hold less prestige in universities than the so-called ‘pure’, or ‘experimental’ sciences. Lagemann writes that a key theme in the history of modern education was an effort to raise its professional status by making it more ‘scientific’, that is, by developing a model of education and teaching that mirrored the experimental sciences, and she shows how
various individuals, institutions, and historical circumstances all contributed to an emerging ‘science’ of education and a body of professional literature that constructed education, educational research, and teaching in largely scientific terms. And, as Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kim Fries (2005) observe, this is a view of teaching that endures in many areas of society, education, and government today, where “It is now written into federal law that scientific evidence ought to be the grounding for educational practice, policy, and resource allocation” (p. 102).

Why is this view of teaching a problem? As Joseph Dunne (1997) explains, the problem is twofold. On one hand, science is, by definition, an enterprise that aims at generating knowledge in the form of testable predictions and explanations about the universe; from a scientific perspective, teaching and learning are thus no longer seen as activities that transpire between people, but rather exclusively concerned with certain forms of universal propositional knowledge:

- teaching is no longer seen as embedded in particular contexts or within cultural, linguistic, religious, or political traditions which may be at work in all kinds of tacit and nuanced ways in teachers and pupils as persons. Or, rather, it is suggested that everything essential in teaching can be disembedded from such contexts and traditions, as well as from the urgencies and contingencies of the classroom, and made transparent in a neutral model which, by isolating in precise terms the goals of the activity, provided teachers with straightforward criteria for evaluating success. (Dunne, 1997, p. 5)

Second, the universal character of science is grounded in a claim to value-neutrality, thereby eliding the ethical dimensions of teaching and learning altogether. Put another way, how
a teacher should respond to a student showing up late for class or to another impatiently waiting for a lesson to continue is of no concern whatsoever, so long as their scores on their essays and grammar quizzes are both in a passing range and, of course, valid and reliable. Indeed, from the vantage point of science, a teacher could respond to Libo or to Kulveer in any way at all—and the problem with this is that it completely sidesteps the crucially-important question of why we educate in the first place, and it prevents us from asking if there might be ends, beyond the acquisition of abstract, universal knowledge about dangling, misplaced, and squinting modifiers of equal, or perhaps even greater, value in education and in teaching.

An important consequence of the scientific model of teaching is that it views teacher education in similarly scientific terms, that is, as focussed on the acquisition of abstract knowledge about teaching, which can then be ‘applied’ in classrooms in observable and measureable ways. Of course, few people would deny the potential value of gaining knowledge about subject-matter and teaching, building a repertoire of teaching techniques, and developing skills in lesson planning and assessment, but the problem with an exclusive focus on these aspects of teaching is that it similarly ignores the ethical dimensions of education, schooling, and teaching, and it leaves teacher candidates ill-prepared to deal with the contextually-embedded and inevitably ethical realities of classroom teaching.

A View from Professional Ethics

Alongside the dominant literature on teaching as an applied science is a rich and growing literature on professional ethics in teaching¹. As reviews by Hugh Sackett (1992), Fritz Oser

¹ I use the phrase ‘professional ethics in teaching’ in its broadest sense here to introduce some of the educational literature that links the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘teaching’; as David Carr (2000) and David Coulter
(1994), David Hansen (2001), and Elizabeth Campbell (2008) indicate, this is an expansive area of scholarship, and my purpose in this section is not to provide a comprehensive review of this work, but rather an overview of three major and overlapping perspectives on the relationship between ethics and teaching and how these views conceptualize how people learn to teach ethically: as reflective of moral or character education, as reflective of professional ethical standards, and as reflective of teaching as an ethical practice.

**As reflective of moral or character education.**

One view on the relationship between ethics and teaching can be found in the area of ‘moral’ or ‘character’ education. As Campbell (2003) observes, this is a large body of literature which includes a range of perspectives, but what they share is a focus on “what teachers as ethical exemplars model in the course of their daily practice and what moral lessons they teach directly either through the formal curriculum or the informed dynamics of classroom and school life” (p. 47). In other words, moral or character education is concerned with the teaching of moral or character traits, virtues, or dispositions such as compassion, honesty, and trustworthiness as the focal point of education and teaching, and it spans religious and secular orientations (Lapsley & Narváez, 2006; Nucci & Narváez, 2008). Although there is a clear emphasis on the ethical dimensions of education, schooling and teaching across this literature, there is a concern that it tends to emphasize a moral or character-based curriculum over the actual practice of moral or character education. In his chapter in the *Handbook of Research on Curriculum* entitled “The Moral Aspects of the Curriculum”, for example, Hugh Sackett writes that

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and Liz Orne (2010) point out, the link between these terms and the concept of ‘professionalism’ is complicated and problematic, but this is not my focus here.
Surprisingly we do not know what teachers now do by way of moral education in their classrooms. . . . We do not know the ways in which teachers generally confront such basic issues as racial prejudice and sexism or what their curriculum strategies look like. We do not know the extent to which teachers are more or less influenced by their religious persuasions when they teach, nor the precise extent to which state mandates or local community values inhibit moral teaching. Nor do we know to what extent teachers feel their integrity is compromised by a conflict between their world view in moral terms and the practices of the schools in which they work. (Sockett, 1992, p. 562)

Sockett’s comments here point to a key issue on the relationship between ethics and teaching from the vantage point of moral or character education. Although moral or character traits, virtues, or dispositions are all well and good in an abstract sense, they are also exercised in very complex situations and ways, and the question of how teachers do this in classrooms is not addressed in this literature.

What does this area of scholarship say about how people learn to teach ethically? As mentioned, much of this literature focusses on the curricular aspects of moral or character education, but it also tends to focus on curriculum in the preparation of moral or character educators (Jones, Ryan, & Bohlin, 1998) with an emphasis on learning strategies in teacher education as the primary approach for teaching moral or character dispositions to students. Thomas Lickona (1991, 1998), for example, outlines an ‘approach’ to character education that centres on a set of ‘classroom strategies’: acting as a caregiver, model, and mentor, creating a moral community, practicing moral discipline, creating a democratic classroom environment, teaching character through the curriculum, using cooperative learning, developing the conscience
of craft, encouraging moral refection, and teaching conflict resolution. In one sense, there is no discussion here on such issues as how prospective teachers learn how to use these strategies ethically in classrooms or, indeed, the ethical significance of a strategies-based approach to moral or character education, but the overarching curricular approach here also bears a striking resemblance to the scientific model of teacher learning.

As reflective of professional ethical standards.

A second view on the relationship between ethics and teaching is the union of these terms in the form of professional ethical standards, policies, or ‘codes’ that are generated by organizations such as teachers’ associations and unions, governmental departments, accreditation bodies, and other institutions. The literature relating to the desirability and potential usefulness of these varies, from being generally supportive in principle to highly critical, with a shared concern that the ethical realities of teaching are far too complex to be summarized in any single document (Beckner, 2004; Bradley, 1998; Campbell, 2000, 2001; Carr, 2000; Coulter & Orne, 2010; Freeman, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sockett, 1990; Strike & Ternasky, 1993). As David Coulter and his colleagues point out, professional standards in teaching clearly reflect ethical concerns; teachers are expected to “value and care for all children [and] act as ethical educational leaders” (Coulter et al., 2007. p. 6), but simply knowing about these ethical dispositions, responsibilities, and roles “is not enough: teachers have to act” (p. 6).

How do professional standards conceptualize how people learn to teach ethically? Well, in one sense, they are created for existing members of the teaching profession—rather than pre-service teachers—and they make no mention at all of the relationship between ethical teaching and learning. One impact of standards, however, has been the development and inclusion of
‘professional ethics’ courses in many teacher education programs, but there is a concern that such courses tend to form a very small part of a curriculum that is generally weighted towards the development of subject-matter knowledge, technical skills, and educational theory (Carr, 2000; Campbell, 2003, 2008).

Another impact of professional ethical standards in teaching has been the development of standards for teacher candidates as they complete their university-based courses and begin their school-based teaching practicum placements. In the teacher education program at the University of British Columbia, Canada, for example, there is a document entitled “Bachelor of Education Practicum Guidelines”, which includes a section called “Professional Conduct”, and part of the section reads:

*Expectations*

During practicum, teacher candidates are expected to:

- follow the BC Teacher Federation’s Code of Ethics in their relations with principals, teachers, faculty advisors, fellow teacher candidates, students and their parents/guardians,
- respect the dignity of children and their right to confidentiality,
- respect boundaries between teachers and students in all interactions, including social media,
- be good role models for students regarding the use of language, attire, attitudes toward study and learning, respect for others, fair decision-making, and collegiality,
- speak professionally about colleagues and members of the profession,
- observe all legal aspects in the BC School Act, and guidelines included in the BCTF
Members’ Guide regarding treatment of pupils and school property, and school arrival
and leaving time,

- observe normal social courtesies befitting guests in a school,
- anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be abused
  or neglected has a legal duty under the Child, Family and Community Service Act to
  report the matter

(UBC Teacher Education Office, 2013, p. 4)

Professional ethical standards for teachers and for teacher candidates clearly link ethics
and teaching, and they underscore ethics as a defining feature of good teaching and teacher
professionalism. However, their broad framing of ethics as codes or ‘rules’ does not capture the
contextually-embedded nature of teaching and ethics, and they offer little guidance to teachers or
prospective teachers to grapple with particular ethical dilemmas in classrooms.

As reflective of teaching as an ethical practice.

Thirdly, the concepts of ethics and teaching have been linked as a way of conceptualizing
teaching as an ethical practice. As mentioned earlier, there is inevitable overlap between the
three major perspectives I discuss in this section, and much variety within them, and this is
especially true in this third perspective. For example, some scholars frame their discussions on
teaching as an ethical practice within an orientation to principles, right, and duties (Strike, 1990,
1995, 1999). Some write from the perspective of socio-moral theories (Nucci, 2001; Watson,
2003). Some draw on John Dewey’s philosophy (Garrison, 1997; Hansen, 1998, 2001), while
others explore feminist scholars’ work in the area of ethic of care and caring (Noddings, 1984,
2002). Some recall the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and his theory of moral development (Oser,
1994; Rest & Narváez, 1994), some explore more critical views on the moral purposes of schooling (Beyer, 1991, 1997; Slattery & Rapp, 2003), and some write from the perspective of ‘applied’ or ‘practical’ ethics (Campbell, 2003; Nash, 1996; Strike & Ternasky, 1993). Finally, there is a growing literature on teaching as an ethical practice that draws Aristotle’s ethical philosophy (Bondi, Carr, Clark, & Clegg, 2011; Carr, 2000; Dunne, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1990; 2001; Higgins, 2011; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012; Sockett, 1990; 1993).

Despite this conceptual variety, there are a few common threads that run through this literature. One is the notion that ethics underlies and permeates just about every aspect of education, schooling, and teaching (Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen, 1993). In addition, most of these educators do not see ethics in teaching as limited to extreme kinds of plainly unethical and illegal activities that are often stated in professional ethical standards or codes of conduct; rather, scholars in this area tend to focus on the ‘everyday ethics’ of classroom teaching, teachers’ actions, and the ethical dimensions of these everyday actions (Rossman & Rallis, 2010). Finally, there is a general consensus among scholars in this area that ethics in teaching is not limited to teachers’ ‘professional’ conduct; rather, teachers’ ethical actions in classrooms are understood as interwoven with their personal histories and lives as ethical human beings (van Manen, 1991).

How does a view of teaching as an ethical practice conceptualize how people learn to teach ethically? The different philosophical approaches mentioned above naturally suggest different approaches to answering this question, but Roseanna Bourke and John O’Neil (2008) provide a helpful summary of some of various perspectives and threads across this strand of the literature on this question:
(a) learning to be ethical is not about the application of abstract rules or “cookbook” approaches, but gaining experience of solving practical ethical problems rationally; (b) ethical problems are by their nature complex with more than one possible solution, requiring a systematic approach by the teacher to frame and consider a dilemma; (c) in addition to the principles and commitment embodied in a Code, teachers must come to know their own personal moral character, their beliefs and values as a teacher, and their assumptions about the world; and (d) the specialized language and processes of ethical reasoning are not typically part of a teacher’s day to day language and thinking. (Bourke & O’Neil, 2008, pp. 110-111)

I believe this brief summary helps to introduce some of the many features of learning to teach as an ethical practice, some of their inherent tensions, and some very difficult questions. What is the difference between learning to teach ethically and learning to be ethical? If ethical teaching practice is not about the application of abstract rules or ‘cookbook’ approaches, then what is it? How do teachers gain experience of solving practical ethical problems, and what kind of rationality does this involve? If ethical problems are by their nature complex with more than one possible solution, then how can a single, ‘systematic’ approach help in framing and considering a dilemma? How do beginning teachers come to know their own personal moral character, their beliefs and values as a teacher, and their assumptions about the world and how, if at all, might they realize this kind of ‘knowing’ in the context of teacher education? And, if the specialized language and processes of ethical reasoning are not typically part of a teacher’s day to day language and thinking, does this difference hinder their ability to properly deal with ethical dilemmas; if not, what does this say about the specialized language of ethical reasoning?
Given the complexity of the concepts and questions mentioned above, it might be helpful if we returned here to the conversation that began this chapter and Felicia Merrick’s question to her father: “Well—what is truth? How is the poor ostrich to find it out?” On one hand, it seems unlikely that a view of teaching as an applied science can offer any insights on the relationship between ethics, teaching, and learning to teach ethically; on the other, there is a rich and growing literature that recognizes the central place of ethics in teaching, but the concept of ethics in this literature tends be presented in universal terms and with little attention to the particularity of both teaching and ethics or to the central question of how people learn to teach ethically.

An Aristotelian Perspective on the Problem

In this section, I suggest that a solution to this problem was sketched out by Aristotle and his original concept of phronesis or ethical judgment over 2,000 years ago. I begin with an introduction to his concept of phronesis and how some of his ideas on this topic have been taken up in the educational literature on teaching. I then turn to his concept of discernment as a central feature of phronesis and Martha Nussbaum’s claim that people gain the capacity for ethical judgment by learning to discern the ethically-salient features of particular situations. Nussbaum’s writing on discernment suggests that people come to grasp phronesis by learning to discern the ethically-salient features of classrooms, and this involves the priority of particular perceptions over universal rules, principles, and categories, emotions as judgments of value, and a kind of learning or growth that comes about through an interplay between particulars and universals in concrete situations.
Aristotle on Phronesis

Along with Plato and Socrates, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was one of the most prominent thinkers of ancient Greece, and his original concept of phronesis appears most frequently in his writing on ethics and especially in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work that was originally written on separate scrolls and is understood to be based on notes from his lectures at the Lyceum and dedicated to his son Nicomachus (Anagnostopoulos, 2009; Barnes, 1995). Many English translations of *Nicomachean Ethics* have been published, and the modern text is typically divided into ten separate sections or ‘books’ that, together, constitute the complete work. In Book 6, Aristotle distinguishes between what he calls ‘intellectual’ virtues (aretai dianoētikai) or “modes of thought or states of mind by which truth is reached” (in Aristotle, trans. 2004, p. 147) and these intellectual virtues are five: episteme (‘science or scientific knowledge’), techne (‘art or technical skill’), phronesis (‘prudence or practical wisdom’), nous (‘intelligence or intuition’), and sophia ([theoretical] ‘wisdom’) (Aristotle, trans. 2004). In the other ‘books’ of his text, Aristotle writes about what he calls the ‘ethical’ or ‘character virtues’ (aretai ēthikai), such as courage, temperance, patience, and truthfulness, and he links the single intellectual virtue of phronesis to the various ethical or character virtues.

Aristotle describes phronesis as the unique intellectual virtue by which human beings realize ethical or character virtues—worthy human qualities that distinguish us from plants, animals, and gods—and it is this ‘activity of the soul in accordance with virtue’ that enables us to flourish, prosper, or live well: “It is concerned with acts that are just and admirable and good for man” (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1143b22-23). Whether translated as ‘prudence, practical wisdom, or [practical] common sense’ (Aristotle, trans. 2004), or simply ‘wisdom’ (Aristotle, trans. 2002),
Aristotle writes that “We may grasp the nature of prudence if we consider what sort of people we call prudent” (1140a25-26). He calls this sort of person a *phronimos*, a person with the exemplary human capacity “to feel or act towards the right person to the right extent at the right time for the right reasons in the right way” (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1109a26-29); in other words, a person of practical wisdom and ethical judgment.

The Texture of Judgment in Teaching

Aristotle’s phronesis has become a topic of increasing interest in the study of teaching over the past few decades. In her 1999 review of the literature in this area, Jana Noel observed that the original Greek term had been translated as ‘practical reasoning’, ‘practical wisdom’, ‘moral discernment’, ‘moral insight’, and ‘prudence’, and she wrote that “Each of these translations points to different important facets of the original Aristotelian concept” (p. 273). In the years since Noel’s review, her observation seems to hold true today, where more recent writing on phronesis has examined its different features by combining adjectives such as ‘educational’ ‘ethical’, ‘professional’, or ‘practical’ with nouns such as ‘deliberation’, ‘knowledge’, ‘judgment’, ‘practice’, ‘reason’, and ‘wisdom’ in a variety of ways.

Although scholars have interpreted phronesis in many different ways, much recent writing focusses on linking its various features as a form of judgment in teaching. David Coulter and John Wiens (2002), for example, describe phronesis in teaching as “an amalgam of knowledge, virtue, and reason that enables people to decide what they should do” (p. 16), and Joseph Dunne captures its many interrelated features well when he writes of:

its irreducibly experiential nature, its non-confinement to generalized propositional knowledge, its entanglement (beyond mere knowledge) with character, its need to
embrace the particulars of relevant action-situations within its grasp of universals, and its ability to engage in the kind of deliberative process that can yield concrete, context sensitive judgements. (Dunne, 2005a, pp. 375-376)

Aristotle’s discussion of the intellectual virtues offers one point of departure for thinking about phronesis as educational judgment, in part because of its distinctiveness from episteme, techne, and sophia and their counterparts in teaching. He begins by locating these virtues within the realms of theory and practice; to the first, he assigns episteme and sophia and to the second, techne and phronesis, and he asserts that each of these virtues has corresponding forms of knowledge, rationality, and activity. Within the realm of theory, we find scientific knowledge and theoretical wisdom, which typically involve analytic rationality and activity as abstract, context-independent thought. In teaching, episteme could include propositional subject-matter knowledge, while sophia could include theories of teaching and learning. Within the realm of practice, we find techne and phronesis; while techne aims at the achievement of technical ends through technical reasoning and the activity of poiesis, ‘making or production’ (Aristotle, trans. 2004), phronesis involves practical reasoning with reference to what is good and what is bad in particular situations, and phronesis is exercised as praxis, or ‘action, conduct’ (Aristotle, trans. 2004). In teaching, techne includes the kind of reasoning and activity that we see in the use of instructional techniques, whereas phronesis centres on reasoning about what is good and what is bad in particular educational situations, making judgments about what to do, and taking action as part of these ethical deliberations.

As several educators have pointed out, one of Aristotle’s real contributions to teacher education is that he offers a very different view on the conventionally-held nature of educational
‘theory’ and ‘practice’ in teaching and the relationship of these two entities to each other. For Aristotle, the intellectual virtues belong to qualitatively different realms of human life, and each of these virtues has its own corresponding forms of knowledge, rationality, and activity, and so it is quite impossible to simply ‘put’ abstract, theory or knowledge from one virtue ‘into’ the practice of another (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Saugstad, 2002). And while phronesis clearly involves ‘universal’ knowledge about what is good and what is bad, he asserts that, with phronesis, knowledge is not enough, and this is because it is concerned with acts that are just and admirable and good for man; but these are acts that are characteristic of the good man, and knowing about them does not make us more capable of doing them. (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1143b23-25, emphasis in original)

Beyond knowledge, good judgment in teaching involves practical reasoning, and it differs from technical reasoning in several aspects. In the first place, phronesis is concerned with human well-being, and so its end is not to produce an object or to perform skillfully, but to realize some ethically-worthwhile ‘good’. This is a crucial point that also links ethics and teaching practice. As Wilfred Carr (1987) explains, “a definitive feature of an educational practice is that it is an ethical activity undertaken in pursuit of educationally worthwhile ends” (pp. 165-166, emphasis in original); in other words, teachers have a responsibility to deliberate upon the ends of education, schooling, and teaching and the desirability of these ends, and this is very different from the means-to-end reasoning that is so characteristic of the scientific model of teaching (Carr, 2000; Dunne, 1997; Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002; Smith, 1999/2005).

This is a key theme across the recent literature linking phronesis and teaching. Increasingly, education has come to focus exclusively on the pursuit of scientific truth and the
development of scientific forms of knowledge in classrooms, where learning and teaching have been reduced to little more than mechanized processes that are only deemed to be of value when they are manifest as measurable changes in our behaviors and cognitions. As a form of educational judgment, phronesis centres on the recognizing the ethical significance of this development and on focussing instead on what Maxine Greene (1973) calls the “the pursuit of the worthwhile” (p. 220), that is, of recovering education, schooling, and teaching as importantly human endeavours that aim at helping people to live better lives. Anne Phelan captures this alternative beautifully when she writes that

Practical wisdom…recognizes that thinking is not simply a cognitive act of an individual, but a dance between the life of a child and the love of an elder, a conversation between what is and what could be, an openness to passionate sorrow and surprise, a play between understanding and perception. As such, practical wisdom provides a more likely account of living in good faith with oneself and with others. (Phelan, 2001, p. 41)

Judgement and Perception

Throughout his ethical writing, Aristotle uses images of ‘eyes’ and ‘seeing’ to capture the central place of aisthesis or perception in phronesis. Various translated as “perception, sense perception” (in Aristotle, trans. 2011, p. 317), “moral perception” (Blum, 1994; Garrison, 1997), or “practical perception” (Reeve, 2013), this feature of phronesis involves ‘seeing’ the various items that make up a practical situation, and this perceptiveness plays a key role in a wise person’s ability to reason, to judge, and to act well. As Jim Garrison (1997) explains:

Moral perception is the capacity to comprehend particular contexts and the uniqueness of persons. It is especially important when we need to grasp mutable, indeterminate, and
vague situations in which rules and clear criteria for their application are difficult to determine. It also allows us to see not just who our students are here and now, but to see into the future and imagine their best possibilities. Moral perception allows us to see the unique needs, desires, and interests hidden in the words and deeds of our students. Thus moral perception is an indispensable part of practical rationality. (Garrison, 1997, p. 170)

For Aristotle, aisthesis is an element of judgment that is closely tied to character, reasoning, and action, but he also suggests that it involves an important link between phronesis and learning, and this is because “it is from particular instances that generals are established. So these particulars need to be perceived” (Aristotle, trans., 2004, 1143b43-44). In other words, Aristotle suggests here that we not only rely on ethical perception to make good judgments, but that we become wise, in part, by perceiving particulars, since this is how universals become refined and clarified to us through experience.

**Becoming Wise: A Circle between Phronesis and Experience**

Aristotle does not provide a comprehensive account of how people acquire phronesis, but he does suggest an important relationship between phronesis and experience, and he says two things about this. The first is that we acquire phronesis from prior experience; in part, this includes the gradual development of good character and habits in children by parents and teachers (Broadie, 1991; Burnyeat, 1980; Sherman, 1989), but he writes that we become good, more than anything, by performing virtuous acts, which gives us experience in dealing with particulars: “the reason is that practical wisdom is of the particular, which becomes graspable through experience” (Aristotle, trans., 2004, 1142a15). Moreover, he asserts that this kind of prior experience involves performing virtuous acts in a certain kind of way:
For the acquisition of virtues, on the other hand, knowledge has little or no force; but the other requirements are not of little but of supreme importance, granted that it is from the repeated performance of just and temperate acts that we acquire virtues. Acts, to be sure, are called just and temperate when they are such as a just and temperate man would do; but what makes the agent just or temperate is not merely the fact that he does such things, but the fact that he does them in the way that just and temperate men do. It is therefore right to say that a man becomes just by the performance of the just, and temperate by the performance of temperate acts; nor is there the smallest likelihood that any man’s becoming good not by doing them. (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1105b3-13)

This leads to a second feature of the relationship between phronesis and experience, in that phronesis arises from prior experience, but it also returns into experience through its exercise. Dunne (1997) writes of this circular, dynamic relationship as more than simply ‘learning by doing’; rather, “the insights it achieves are turned back into experience, which is in this way reconstructed or enriched. And the more experience is reconstructed in this way, the more sensitive and insightful phronesis becomes—or, rather, the more experiencer becomes a phronimos” (p. 293). In other words, people do not become wise by simply ‘learning’ about phronesis so much as ‘grasping’ it through its exercise in practical situations and over the course of a lifetime, and this centres on the gradual cultivation of our perceptive abilities to see the significance of a situation and to judge and to act well.

**Echoes of Phronesis, Experience, and Perception in Teacher Education**

Many of the themes mentioned above have been explored in different ways in the teacher education literature, and some bear a strong kinship to their conceptualization by Aristotle and
his educational interpreters. Donald Schön’s (1983, 1987, 1991) writing on ‘knowing-in-action’, for example, has been very influential in conceptualizing the knowledge that teachers hold and use in classrooms as tacit, situated, and practical. D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly have written extensively on teachers’ ‘personal practical knowledge’ as a “moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life’s educational situations” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p. 59), and Peter Grimmett and Allan MacKinnon (1992) write of a ‘craft knowledge’ in teaching that “represents teachers' judgment in apprehending the events of practice from their own perspectives as students of teaching and learning” (p. 387). Rather than viewing teachers’ knowledge as a kind of episteme, these and other educators present a view of knowledge in teaching that is at once ethical, affective, intersubjective, embodied in persons, and cultivated over time through experience of concrete situations.

A related theme here is the concept of experience and its relationship to learning in teaching. For Schön, knowing-in-action is bound up with ‘reflection-in-action’, “which is not dependent on the categories of established theory or technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case” (Schön, 1983, p. 68). As Deborah Britzman (2003) observes, this is a view that challenges a discourse of experience as a simple, linear process or “map…to order and valorize perception and guarantee essential truths” (p. 30) because it focusses instead on teachers’ understandings of what happens when they act in concrete situations:

[it] places experience somewhere between the poles of discourse and desire, and, so, experience as lived rather than as picked up or acquired. Something different from mere circumstance, yet also containing the circumstantial, the conditions not of our own making, yet still requiring something of a response, experience in education as a
foundational discourse, one that will go on to structure the values we bestow onto theory and practice, reading and doing, thinking and acting, knowing and ignoring. (Britzman, 2003, p. 13)

As mentioned, these educators do not write from an Aristotelian perspective, but their work shares an emphasis on the situated, practical, and ethical nature of knowledge, experience, and learning. However, the concept of perception and its relationship to experiential learning in particular contexts is largely missing across this work, and this seems an important omission. As Eija Hanhimäki and Kirsi Tirri (2009) point out, beginning teachers often find themselves in situations that demand ethically-sensitive teaching, and this involves perception:

To respond to a situation in a moral way, a teacher must be able to perceive and interpret events in ways that lead to ethical action. The teacher must be sensitive to situational cues and must be able to visualize various alternative actions in response to that situation.

(Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009, p. 108)

Robert Sternberg (2013) also emphasizes the central place of perception in a teacher’s ability to respond to a situation “in a moral way”, and he adds that there are various elements that make up ethical sensitivity and perceptiveness: one needs to recognize that there is a problem worth responding to…to view the ethical situation as sufficiently important to be worthy of attention…[and] to perceive the ethical situation as personally relevant to him or her (p. 47, emphasis in original ). And, as Sternberg observes, teachers also need to act, and this is sometimes difficult to do because: “Sometimes, people know the rule, but they can’t see how to apply it to particular situation” (p. 47).
This is where a return to Aristotle’s discussion on the relationship between phronesis, experience, and perception is worthwhile, because perception here begins to operate not only as a way that teachers merely ‘see’ situations, but also as a way of “making sense of their experiences and to re-imagine that experience in order to improve it” (Russell, Martin, O’Connor, Bullock, & Dillon, 2013, p. 32). Russell et al. conclude that this perceptive ‘sense-making’ will tend to foster the development of phronesis, which “may well be a necessary base from which candidates can come to understand the traditional scientific content of teacher education programs, thereby moving away from the traditional theory-into-practice perspective” (pp. 32-33). In this way, phronesis, experience, and perception work together to improve teaching by helping teacher candidates to become more sensitive to the ethical dimensions of teaching and better able to respond to ethically-sensitive situations in their future teaching practices.

**Grasping Phronesis: Linking Experience and Discernment**

Aristotle makes a subtle distinction between the concepts of perception (aisthesis) and *krisis*, a term that is closely related to perception. In his essay “Deliberation and Practical Reason”, David Wiggins (1980) uses the term ‘situation appreciation’ to stress that ethical perception, beyond merely ‘seeing’ the items of a situation, involves a recognition of the ethical saliency of these items, and this is a feature of phronesis in teaching that is explored in similar terms in a series of papers by Shirley Pendlebury (1990, 1993). Aristotelian philosopher Paul Schuchman (1980) translates krisis as a kind of “moral discrimination”, in which a wise person examines the various particulars of a situation and determines the fitting response to it, while Martha Nussbaum (1990, 2001a) writes of krisis as ‘discernment’, and reference to her extensive writing on this topic can be found in some of the literature linking phronesis, teaching, and
I shall only briefly introduce Nussbaum’s concept of discernment here because I provide a more detailed discussion of her work in Chapter 2 of this study. For now, I want to focus on how her concept of discernment contributes to our discussion of phronesis in teaching so far and to Aristotle’s links between phronesis, perception and experience. Nussbaum summarizes her concept of discernment as:

the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one’s particular situation. The Aristotelian conception argues that this ability lies at the core of what practical wisdom is, and that it is not only a tool toward achieving the correct action or statement, but an ethically-valuable activity in its own right. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 37)

For Aristotle and Nussbaum, discernment is not an isolated quality of phronesis, but rather closely connected with practical perception, reasoning, judgment, and action and in a very non-linear way; this is to say that one does not first perceive a situation, reason about it, judge, and then act; these activities, are closely interwoven together in particular situations and in the fabric of a person’s life. Nussbaum elaborates on this feature of phronesis through her two-way readings of Aristotle’s ethical philosophy and ancient and contemporary literature, and she explores some its key elements in her books *The Fragility of Goodness* (Nussbaum, 2001a) and *Love’s Knowledge* (Nussbaum, 1990).
One feature of discernment, she writes, is the priority of particular perceptions over universal rules, categories and principles. For Aristotle and for Nussbaum, universals certainly have a place in life, but they can never fully capture the fine detail and nuances of particular situations. As Nussbaum (2001a) explains, discernment “is, centrally, the ability to recognize, acknowledge, respond to, pick out certain salient features of a complex situation” (p. 305), and this includes attending to the new and unanticipated features of a situation, the contextual-embeddedness of these features, and the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships.

Second, Nussbaum underscores the central place of emotions in Aristotelian discernment. Rather than free-floating ‘passions’ that might impede or even undermine good judgment, she asserts that human emotions are an important element of phronesis because they enable us to see features of a situation that our cognitive intellect alone cannot. Emotions themselves, she writes, are discriminating modes of perception, “responsive to the workings to deliberation and essential to its completion” (Nussbaum, 1990, p.41); in other words, they enable us to see the ethical saliency of particulars in an importantly human way.

Finally, Nussbaum links Aristotle’s circle between phronesis and experience when she writes of a kind of learning or growth that comes through discernment. She writes of “the interplay of the general and the particular in Aristotelian choice” (Nussbaum 1990, p. 94), a “two-way illumination between particular and universal” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 306), and “a loving conversation between rules and correct responses, general conceptions and unique cases, in which the general articulates the particular and is in turn further articulated by it” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 95), and she explores this educative quality of discernment in her studies of Greek tragedy and twentieth-century literature.
Purpose and Research Questions

Nussbaum’s writing offers some important contributions to the study of phronesis in teaching. As Joseph Dunne and Shirley Pendlebury (2002) observe, “Practical reasoning about a particular set of circumstances begins with our perception of the ethically salient features of those circumstances. An appropriate and discerning reaction to circumstances is itself part of a wise or virtuous response. (p. 206). Following Aristotle, Nussbaum focusses on the central place of discernment in phronesis, and she elaborates upon its related features—the priority of particular perceptions over universal rules, principles, and categories, emotions as judgments of value, and a kind of learning or growth that comes about through an interplay between particulars and universals in concrete situations—and her elaboration of these features helps to clarify this central element of phronesis in ethical teaching.

However, I believe Nussbaum’s concept of discernment also offers a set of resources to explore the important question of how people learn to teach ethically. Of course, Nussbaum does not write about teaching or any other areas of practitioner education, and she does not present her concept of discernment as a model of moral or ethical development. Nevertheless, her work clearly shows that people are always becoming wise through the exercise of phronesis and, more specifically, through the discernment of particulars that phronesis involves in very concrete situations, and she offers a set of conceptual resources for thinking about how people learn to teach ethically that goes far beyond an applied-science model of teacher learning and much of literature on professional ethics in teaching.

The purpose of this study was to engage Nussbaum’s concept of discernment to examine how learning to teach ethically involves learning to discern the ethically-salient features of classrooms.
while on practicum. Although the teaching practicum is often constructed as a place where
teacher candidates simply ‘practice’ what they have learned, it has also been acknowledged as a
place where experience can contribute to different kinds of learning as teacher candidates move
from their university-based courses to real-life classrooms (Mattsson, Eilertsen, & Rorrison,
2011; Schulz, 2005). Nussbaum suggests that the teaching practicum, and the exposure to
particulars it provides, offers a potentially rich context to explore how beginning teachers learn
to teach ethically, and the questions guiding this study were:

(1) How do teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on
practicum, and

(2) How does this discernment help teacher candidates to construct their practices in more
ethically-responsive ways?

**Overview and Organization of the Study**

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 2, I focus on Nussbaum’s concept
of discernment as the guiding conceptual framework for the study. Following an introduction to
her writing on Aristotle’s phronesis, I present and discuss a set of conditions in which she
grounds her concept of discernment and how the conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and
particularity help to capture teaching. I then provide a more detailed account of the three features
of discernment I have briefly introduced in this chapter—the priority of particular perceptions,
emotions as judgements of value, and the interplay between particulars and universals—and I
discuss these features as important qualities of ethical teaching and of learning to teach ethically.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the methodological framework for the study. I begin with a
discussion of how Nussbaum’s merging of ethical inquiry and literary criticism provided a
conceptual approach to researching discernment in teaching and how this approach led to the research design and the gathering of data through life history interviews, video-recorded lessons with subsequent interviews with the participants, and a research journal. I then describe the participant recruitment and fieldwork, the resources I engaged to interpret the data, and the selection, presentation, and writing of the teaching episodes that feature in the three thematic chapters that follow.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the theme of seeing the particular. This chapter explores how discernment involves making sense of contingency in the classroom by staying grounded in a human world that is characteristically caught up in complex and uncertain relationships, emotions, and identities. By acknowledging the conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity and by seeing and responding to practical situations in feeling as well as in thought, beginning teachers become more adept at dealing with the contingencies of classroom teaching and better able to make wise judgments and to cultivate more ethically-informed relationships with their students.

In Chapter 5, I explore the theme of responding to the particular. This chapter focusses on how discernment involves a yielding responsiveness to particular situations and people, where seeing and responding are mutually-constitutive activities that involve opening oneself to the value and special wonder of the particular and feeling the appropriate emotions about what one chooses. In yielding responsively to particular situations and persons, beginning teachers come to appreciate the educational and ethical significance of openness, flexibility, and resourcefulness in teaching over the scientific ideals of control and universality.
In Chapter 6, I examine the theme of *seeing new particulars*. This chapter explores how seeing and responding to particulars lead to seeing new aspects of education, schooling, and teaching that beginning teachers may have missed before. In this way, discernment also involves practical insight which, like seeing and responding, involves our emotions, identities, and relationships with others, but also re-creating educational ideals in more ethically and educationally-sound ways with others.

In Chapter 7, I present the conclusions of the study and some recommendations. The first part of this chapter draws on the themes from the previous three chapters to inform three issues that prevail in teacher education. I conclude that (1) the kind of experience that teacher candidates gain while on practicum is a kind of practical knowledge that orients them to future experience in particular ways; that (2) seeing and responding to particulars relies on an openness to surprise, ambiguity, and experience itself as a way of becoming discerning while on practicum; and that (3) wise practical reasoning is informed by human emotions because they enable teacher candidates to see and to respond to practical situations in ethical and educationally-valuable ways that our cognitive intellect alone cannot. I then provide some recommendations for the cultivation of discernment in teacher education and an acknowledgment of the limitations of the study and some suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Conceptualizing Discernment

You did put your finger on it a few minutes ago. It’s general, but it avails itself of particular occasions. That’s what it’s doing to me now. I’m always considering something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment. The obsession of the other thing is the terror. I’m considering at present for instance something else than you.

She listened with charming earnestness. ‘Oh, you oughtn’t to do that!’

‘It’s what I admit. Make it then impossible.’

She continued to think. ‘Is it really an “order” from you?—that I shall take the job? Will you give yourself up?’

Poor Strether heaved his sigh. ‘If only I could! But that’s the deuce of it—that I never can. No—I can’t.’

She wasn’t, however, discouraged. ‘But you want to at least?’

‘Oh, unspeakably!’

‘Ah then, if you’ll try!’

Henry James, The Ambassadors

The theme of struggle from a cramped, almost starved emotional life towards a more generous and gracious existence plays throughout James’ (1903/2008) novel about Lewis Lambert Strether, a middle-aged man from Woollett, Massachusetts who travels to Paris to retrieve his wealthy fiancée’s son from the clutches of a presumably wicked woman. Along the way, he meets Maria Gostrey, an expatriate who becomes Strether’s guide as he reflects on his journey and comes to embrace the value of a fuller, more richly-lived life. For Martha Nussbaum, literature offers a rich window for exploring Aristotle’s phronesis in the lives of others and in our own with other people because it shows us, in both its form and its content, “that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 304).
James and Nussbaum share a view of human life that recognizes the importance of caring about “the thing of the moment” and confronting its “significant surprises”, and this is a view that leads Nussbaum to develop her concept of ‘discernment’ as a key ingredient in phronesis. In this chapter, I present a more detailed account of her concept of discernment as the guiding conceptual framework for this study. Following an introduction to her writing in this area, I present and discuss a set of conditions in which she grounds her concept of discernment and how these conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity help to capture teaching. I then focus on a set of related features that she elaborates upon in her account of discernment that offer some useful resources for conceptualizing discernment in teaching. I conclude with a summary of the chapter and a few closing remarks.

**Martha Nussbaum on Discernment**

Martha Craven Nussbaum is a contemporary American philosopher with a range of interests and a distinguished record of scholarly activities in many areas, including ancient philosophy, law, and ethics. Among her many publications on Aristotle’s phronesis are her book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, first published in 1986 and then in an updated edition in 2001 and *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, published in 1990. Nussbaum’s writing is rich and multi-layered and she does not develop her ideas in linear fashion; rather, she explores different aspects of Aristotle’s phronesis through her two-ways reading of ancient and contemporary philosophy and literature, touching on different topics at different times and sometimes returning to the same topics in light of new examples, and she often develops and connects her ideas under the umbrella of ‘discernment’, which she summarizes as:
the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one’s particular situation. The Aristotelian conception argues that this ability lies at the core of what practical wisdom is, and that it is not only a tool toward achieving the correct action or statement, but an ethically-valuable activity in its own right. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 37)

Nussbaum’s merging of philosophy and literature makes for interesting reading. She shows, first and foremost, how these two literary forms can operate together to offer insights into Aristotle’s phronesis which separately, they cannot, and she achieves this through her exemplary scholarly rigor and superb writing. In reading her essays and books, one is also struck by how she reveals the kind of thinker that Aristotle was. A prolific writer on a vast range of topics, Aristotle has been described as a “polymath” (Barnes, in Aristotle, 2004, p. xii) and, with regards to his writing on ethics, a “cautious middle-of-the-roader in most profiles contrasting him and Plato” (Dunne, 1997, p.103). Nussbaum, however, reads Aristotle as a “living teacher” (Roochnik, 1988, p. 309), whose sense of the fragility of human life, of human goodness and human beauty, are rich in philosophical and practical significance for our modern times. For Nussbaum (2001a), Aristotle is an exquisitely sensitive observer and protector of appearances, “a professional human being” (p. 261) who can “show us the way back to the ordinary and…make it an object of interest and pleasure” (p. 260), and she quotes Aristotle’s lost work On the Good, where he is said to have written: “You must remember that you are a human being; not only in living well, but in doing philosophy” (p. 263).

Nussbaum’s writing has been hugely influential in contemporary studies of Aristotle’s ethics, and her award-winning work has received some attention in educational philosophy linking phronesis to teaching and teacher education. And while she elaborates on different
aspects of discernment at different points in her writing, she also grounds her discussion in a set of conditions that she asserts are fundamental to living a human life on Earth.

**The Conditions of a Human Life**

Nussbaum does not provide a set of conditions of living a human life at any one single point in her essays or books. Like many of her ideas, she alludes to them at different times and at places in her writing, and I present them here as tentative themes that I have arrived at from my readings of her work. These are: uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity.

**Uncertainty.**

In *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum (2001a) reads Aristotle alongside the tragic plays of the Greek poets Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, who she asserts were important ethical philosophers because they reveal, through both their form and their content, “the worldly contingencies of a specifically human life” (p. 340). This is a life that the Poets understood as very different from the life of an eternal, divine being because it is often subject to the sometimes unfortunate influence of luck— for the Poets, tragedy is certainly sad, but it also asks us to reflect on how we should live with the fact that there are some things in our human lives that are simply beyond our control and the uncertainty that seems to come along with this.

Nussbaum (2001a) explores this condition in her study of Euripides’ tragedy *The Trojan Women* as Hecuba reflects on the death of her grandchild Hector at the hands of Greek soldiers. Nussbaum observes that, in one sense, Hecuba’s very situation shows us how luck and tragedy

2 Following Nussbaum, I translate the original Greek word *tuche* as ‘luck’ here. Nussbaum (2001a) suggests that “Its basic meaning is ‘what just happens’; it is the element of human existence that humans do not control.” (p. 89)
are uniquely human events because they are simply not a part of the life of an eternal being. In another sense, though, Hecuba’s speech is significant because she not reflect on the situation before her as a divine being would—instead of mourning Hector’s death from the cool, detached perspective of an eternal god, her deliberations strike us as distinctively human as she looks upon Hector’s young, mangled and bloody body, his crushed head, his broken wrists, and his silent mouth that once spoke to her:

you are dead, and all else was false, when you would lean across
my bed, and say: ‘Mother, when you die I will cut
my long hair in your memory, and at your grave
bring companies of boys my age, to sing farewell,’
It did not happen; now I a homeless, childless, old
woman must bury your poor corpse, which is so young.
Alas, for all the tenderness, my nursing care,
and all your slumbers gone. What shall the poet say,
what words will he inscribe upon your monument? (in Nussbaum, 2001a, p.313)

Nussbaum suggests there is ethical significance in Hecuba’s deliberations, since it would strike most of us as simply inhuman for a person to mourn the death of a child in an abstract, scientific way: “we would find it exceedingly strange if she recognized the death of her grandson with a cold intellectual eye; we would have a hard time treating her as one of us” (p. 315). In this way, Hecuba reveals herself as person of wisdom in an uncertain, human world because, as Nussbaum puts it, she
inhabits the human world and does not attempt to rise above it...She herself speaks from
the center of human life, making no attempt at all to distance herself from her merely
human values and attachments...In fact, it is one of her major purposes to point out that
the point of view of the needless god does not bring with it sufficient concern for very
important human things. (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 314)

Hecuba’s speech also reveals uncertainty as manifest in highly concrete situations and
ways, and part of what contributes to the wisdom of her deliberations is that they focus on the
context-relative details of the situation at hand—her love for Hector, her love for Troy, her
attachment to religious duties and her duties to her family. And while her uncertainties in this
situation clearly involve her conceptions of proper courage and reasonableness, as well as her
views about what should count as a good life for a human being, her deliberations also focus on
what choices are available to her in this situation. One of the distinguishing features of Hecuba’s
situation is that she is a slave, and so it might seem that she has little room for choice. As
Nussbaum points out, however, “proper response in speech, passion and circumscribed action,
can be just as virtuous as a big heroic deed. Narrowing the scope for movement does not always
remove the opportunity for excellent perception” (p. 314), and what Hecuba chooses is “to
mourn for Hector; to order the child’s fitting burial, despite the neglect of these human matters
by the gods” (p. 314).

I believe most teachers are familiar with this condition. Most of us have little control over
the communities and schools and classrooms where we teach or students who join us each
semester or school year. Different schools and communities are likely to have unique histories
and traditions, and our students can come from any number of socioeconomic, cultural,
linguistic, religious, gender, sexual-orientation, intellectual, and emotional backgrounds and orientations. Together, factors such as these can lead to uncertainties about how to meet diverse and individual student needs, wants, and desires, but also how to do this in the complex ‘grouped context’ of a particular classroom, school, and community (Labaree, 2000; Lortie, 1975).

Second, knowledge and practice are not static in teaching: educational content can change with new research findings and shifting social, institutional, and curricular trends and emphases, as can a teacher’s understandings of subject-matter knowledge and teaching over time (Britzman, 2007; Floden & Clark, 1988). Other uncertainties are inevitable: the many roles that teachers maintain as educators, how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others (e.g., students, colleagues, parents, and supervisors), the effects of their teaching (not only in terms of student learning), and the assessment of their students’ learning and their teaching (Floden & Clark, 1988; Jackson, 1968; Labaree, 2000; Lortie, 1975). In this way, uncertainty arises as teachers make judgments about teaching every day, but it also seems to characterize teaching over the course of a person’s life and career in education.

Although teaching has been described in various ‘uncertain’ terms, Nussbaum’s readings of Aristotle and Greek tragedy focus on the concreteness of this condition and the ethical significance of a person’s response to it. For Aristotle and for Nussbaum, the practical world is mutable and indeterminate, and these features seem to characterize the world of teaching, too. Classrooms are mutable, that is, lacking in fixity, because they involve details which can never be fully captured in a general description and which change over time—and, sometimes, from moment to moment—and they are indeterminate because the kinds of choices that might be available to a teacher a one particular educational context and situation may not be available to a
teacher in a different context and situation (Pendlebury, 1990). Anne Phelan (2001) writes that there is ethical relevance in how teachers live with this uncertainty and how they act upon it in classrooms; rather than trying to deal with this condition by way of a detached form of ‘critical’ thinking, she draws our attention to the importance of “think[ing] well in the presence of others and amidst the difficulty of life” (p. 43). In teaching, as in other areas of our lives, “[t]he life of a divine being might be ever so admirable, but the study of this life, insofar as it lies beyond our capabilities, is not pertinent to the practical aims of ethics” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 293).

Vulnerability.

A second theme across Nussbaum’s writing is the vulnerability of a human life. At times, she focusses on this condition in terms of how our human bodies and appetites—unlike those of eternal beings—depend on external resources and other persons. Part of what makes us human, Nussbaum (2001a) maintains, is our need for food, drink, and sexual activity, needs that “lead us and bind us to the world of perishable objects and, in this way, to the risk of loss and the danger of conflict” (p. 7); what this means, she asserts, is that we simply “do not yet know in what way the specifically needy and risky elements of our ‘human condition’ are going to shape or constitute the virtues that make up our eudaimonia” (p. 341, emphasis in original). And whereas in her book The Fragility of Goodness Nussbaum explores vulnerability in examples from Greek tragedy, her examples in Love’s Knowledge are drawn from twentieth-century literature and the novels of Samuel Beckett (1906-1889), Marcel Proust (1871-1922), and especially Henry James (1843-1916), whose later novels she describes as rich in philosophical significance.

In her study of Henry James’ 1904 novel The Golden Bowl, for example, Nussbaum (1990) examines how vulnerability underlies the life and deliberations of Maggie Verver, the
daughter of a wealthy American industrialist and widower who travels to Europe with her father. Maggie’s father has plans for her to marry the Italian aristocrat Prince Amerigo, and while she is not adverse to this possibility, complications arise when Maggie learns that her best friend, Charlotte Slant, has been involved in a relationship with Amerigo and then when she learns that Charlotte and her father plan to marry as well. During their time together in London, Maggie and her father begin spending much of their time together, leaving Prince Amerigo and Charlotte together on their own. Throughout the novel, James explores the perspectives of the four main characters, but Nussbaum’s focus is on the character of Maggie and her deliberations on these two marriages, their mates’ attractions to each other, and the shifting, overlapping relationships between these people as the story unfolds.

Nussbaum focusses mostly on Maggie’s deliberations in the second half of the novel, and she makes some interesting observations. One is that Maggie’s reflections reveal particular kinds of love for her father, her fiancé, and her best friend, and her relationships with these people are bound up with each other. As James puts it, “her thought...had more than one face” (p. 86), and this is because all of these people are important to Maggie. For this reason, her reflections involve plural and incommensurable attachments, values, and commitments that therefore leave her vulnerable, open to conflict, and to the real possibility of losing her father, her fiancé Amerigo, or her best friend, Charlotte. For Nussbaum, what distinguishes Maggie’s deliberations as those of a practically-wise person is her willingness to acknowledge the vulnerability of her world and its manifest in the specific deliberative circumstances in which her story takes place, and this is a view that she contrasts with Maggie’s deliberations in the first half of The Golden Bowl.
Earlier in the novel, Maggie is continually showing “her determination not to acknowledge conflicting obligation, not to waver from ‘that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended’” (p. 89). She approaches “other people as if they were sculptures or paintings, situations as if they were all episodes of contemplation of one’s collections of such objects. The objects do not act or move; they lack the power to behave in unpredictable and alarming ways; the whole moral scene has about it a shade of cool contemplative control” (p. 91). Nussbaum points out that the basic problem with Maggie’s approach in the first half of the novel is that it ignores the complexity and vulnerability that we so plainly see in her situation and how any course of action she chooses will involve difficult and concrete choices and trade-offs: should she be concerned about Charlotte’s earlier romance with her fiancé Amerigo? About the fact that they are spending so much time together again while she spends time with her father in London? About Charlotte’s impending marriage to her father? Questions such as these permeate Maggie’s, as well as our own, deliberations about what she should do, and this is why, on Nussbaum’s account, the problem with abstracting these complexities and then ranking them in terms of greater or lesser ‘importance’ is that we lose “its moral richness, and the deliberation would seem bizarrely irrational” (p. 91). Far more than a weakness, Nussbaum argues for an acknowledgement of vulnerability as a vital key to realizing the human good, and she interprets Maggie’s recognition of this condition over the course of The Golden Bowl as “a way of growing up morally, of reasoning like a mature woman rather than a fearful child” (p. 90).

What does vulnerability look like in teaching? Geert Kelchtermans (1996) writes that vulnerability has both cognitive and emotional dimensions, and it is manifest in teaching in many
different ways. In one sense, teachers are vulnerable to shifting social, historical, political, and institutional factors, and the lack of control that teachers may have over these kinds of factors are not only a matter of feeling ignored or depreciated; rather, “The vulnerability also lies in experiencing the loss of something professionally valuable” (p. 307). Teachers are also vulnerable to certain individuals and relationships of power in schools, such as supervisors and parents, and teachers experience vulnerability when they feel judgments about their professional competence rely too heavily on the more visible aspects of their work, that is, without recognizing the full demands and responsibilities that teachers actually have. Kelchtermans also suggests that teachers, especially beginning teachers, seem to describe vulnerability in terms of helplessness when, despite their best efforts, they feel they are unable to help their students. Kelchtermans and his colleagues add that vulnerability in teaching involves more than cognitions and emotions because it is bound up in teachers’ identities and their understandings about education and about teaching and learning: Vulnerability, they write, “is the fundamental condition a teacher ‘finds’ his or herself in” (Kelchtermans, Ballet, & Piot, 2009, p. 217).

Nussbaum’s study of Maggie Verver suggests that vulnerability is similarly bound up in our emotions and identities, but she emphasizes the ethical relevance of this condition and how it is also caught up in our relationships with other people. Just as we might contrast the certainty of a Greek god to the uncertainty we find in Hecuba’s speech, we might contrast Maggie’s vulnerability to a fictional Superwoman; although the image of a caped, invulnerable ‘super’-teacher might seem a little overdrawn, it is actually not too far from the calculating, self-assured, and all-powerful image that we find in much of the scientific literature on teaching. Like Maggie Verver, however, teachers have needs for food, drink and other human activities that lead us and
bind us to ‘the world of perishable objects’ and in this same way, to the very real ‘risk of loss and the danger of conflict’ in our lives and in classrooms and in our relationships with other people.

**Particularity.**

A third condition that Nussbaum emphasizes is the particularity or historical/contextual-embeddedness of a human life, and this is a condition that is revealed, in part, in her studies of Hecuba in *Trojan Women* and of Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* mentioned above. Both examples also illustrate how abstract, universal concepts such as ‘mourning’ and ‘love’ take on highly particular shapes and forms in human life, and this is a condition that she explores in her 1990 study of Lewis Lambert Strether, the protagonist in Henry James’ 1903 novel *The Ambassadors*.

Strether is a middle-aged magazine editor from the small American town of Woollett, Massachusetts, sent by his widowed fiancé-employer Mrs. Newsome to Paris to retrieve her son Chadwick from his love affair with the older Marie de Vionnet and to return him to the United States to take over the family business. Over the course of *The Ambassadors*, Strether reflects on his mission as Mrs. Newsome’s representative, and he comes to realize, as he travels and meets others, that his life has entrenched him in a boring routine, and he takes to warning everyone he meets along the way that they may have similar regrets if they do not live life to the fullest. At the end of the novel, Strether and Chadwick return home to Woollett, and while Chadwick seems unaffected by his experiences in Europe, Strether’s outlook on his life has changed completely.

A central theme in James’ novel is Strether’s deliberations and his ultimate re-consideration of what constitutes a worthwhile life. Prior to arriving in France via England,
Strether seemed content with his life in Woollett, but his journey to Europe leads him to realize that, despite his social status and pending marriage to his powerful and influential fiancé, his life has been almost devoid of worthwhile experiences and meaningful relationships. While in Europe, Strether is impressed by the excitement and openmindedness of Parisian culture, but he does not merely replace his provincial, American perspective with a more cosmopolitan, ‘European’ outlook. With guidance from the wise Maria Gostrey, Strether comes to embrace the value of a full, richly-lived life, one that not only refutes a stagnant, unlived one, but that distrusts preconceived definitions and rules and that relies on wise observation and good judgment.

As Nussbaum points out, one of the ways that James explores these opposing views is by contrasting the characters of Strether and his fiancé, Mrs. Newsome, who never actually travels to Paris in the novel. Despite her physical absence, however, the omniscient Mrs. Newsome exerts a powerful influence on just about everyone in the novel from Woollett. At times, she appears as a dignified, “deep devoted sensitive noble’ (in Nussbaum, 1990, p. 178), a kind of exalted matriarch whose aim, Mrs. Newsome claims, is to rescue her son from the clutches of the Parisian seductress, Marie de Vionnet. At others, what we notice about Mrs. Newsome is her coldness and her distance, “her moralism, her preoccupation with questions of moral right and wrong, with criticism of offense, with judgment upon vice” (p. 176). In both senses, ‘the lady of Woollett’ also embodies the very small town and traditions that Strether carries with him on his journey to Paris, and she provides a constant, contrasting view to his reflections and shifting perspectives on his role as Mrs. Newsome’s emissary.
Strether’s deliberations are thus caught between his distant life in Woollett and the concrete, everyday moments that make up his experience in Paris, where Mrs. Newsome’s ‘all cold thought’ never really captures the surprise and ambiguity of the people and places he finds all around him there. For Strether, what emerges is a renewed sense of life that involves a kind of ‘letting go’ of his obedience to Mrs. Newsome and her embodiment of a life that is guided by antecedently-established general rules. As Nussbaum observes, this “is somehow key to all the rest: that a willingness to surrender invulnerability, to take up a posture of agency that is porous and susceptible of influence, is of the highest importance in getting and accurate perception of particular things in the world” (p. 180). This new sense of life, Nussbaum adds, “feels perplexed, difficult, unsafe… [but it] also seems to Strether—and to us—to be richer, fuller of enjoyment, fuller too of what is worth calling knowledge of the world” (p. 181).

What does particularity look like in teaching? I would ask the reader to pause for a moment here and reflect on his or her own experiences in education. It seems almost impossible to separate education, teaching, and learning from the particular times, places and people that make up our own human lives, and Nussbaum asserts there is ethical significance in this particularity. This is why, she writes, that certain forms of literature are especially well-suited to capturing this condition of human life. What emerges from her studies of Hecuba, Maggie Verver, Lewis Lambert Strether and others is a view of human life that is “situated between beast and god” (Nussbaum 2001a, p. 21), and she argues for the fragility of living a life in a properly human way in conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity. She asserts that it is precisely in these kinds of conditions where phronesis arises and that our ability to make wise judgments in these kinds of situations ‘rests with’ or is ‘in’ our capacity for discernment.
The Fabric of Discernment in Teaching

Throughout his ethical writing, Aristotle uses images of ‘eyes’ and ‘seeing’ to capture the crucial role of aisthesis or ‘perception’ in phronesis because this is what enables us to recognize the salient features of an ethical situation and to deliberate and to judge and to act well in particular ethical situations. Nussbaum uses similar images throughout in her writing on phronesis and in her elaboration of discernment. In this section of the chapter, I present three qualities of Nussbaum’s account of discernment—the priority of particular perceptions, emotions as judgments of value, and an illumination between particulars and universals—and some examples of what these qualities might look like in wise teaching practice.

The Priority of Particular Perceptions

On Aristotle’s account, universal rules, principles and categories certainly have a place in ethical life, but where they fall short is their very universal nature, which can never fully capture the fine details and nuances that make up a concrete situation. This is why he insists that “these particulars need to be perceived” (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1143b5-6), and Nussbaum similarly emphasizes the priority of particular perceptions over universals in the exercise of practical wisdom. She describes this quality of discernment as a “fine–tuned concreteness in ethical attention and judgment” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 38, emphasis in original) that focuses on the new and unanticipated features of a situation, the contextual-embeddedness of the relevant features, and the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships.

The new and unanticipated features of a situation.

For Aristotle and for Nussbaum, a practically-wise person recognizes that human life and practical situations are difficult to predict in advance, and this means that she attends to the new
and unexpected features of a situation. They both provide examples of this quality of
discernment in the lives of wise doctors and navigators, who often encounter new and
unexpected circumstances and events in their practices, such as a patient with an unanticipated
combination of symptoms or a ship that is suddenly caught in a storm of shifting intensity and
direction. In situations such as these, medical or navigational texts are of limited usefulness
because they can only provide guidance for what has been seen before. As Nussbaum (2001a)
puts it, a doctor who based her diagnosis and treatment on a medical text alone would be a poor
doctor and a pilot who steered his ship by a pre-determined rule in a storm would be “quite
simply, incompetent at his task” (p. 303), and this is why practical wisdom “uses rules only as
summaries and guides; it must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at
improvisation” (p. 305).

**The contextual-embeddedness of the relevant features.**

A practically-wise person also recognizes the contextual-embeddedness of the items in a
situation. As Nussbaum (1990) points out, to see any single feature of a situation appropriately, it
is usually necessary “to see its connectedness to many other features of its complex and concrete
context” (p. 38). In diagnosing a patient, for example, a wise doctor does not focus on a single
symptom, but rather she considers various factors and how they operate in unison, and her care is
guided by a concern for the overall well-being of her patient. In a similar way, a pilot must
consider a myriad of factors when navigating a ship, and this also includes a concern for the
well-being of his crew and passengers. In situations such as these, good doctors and navigators
do not rely on specialized, declarative or procedural forms of knowledge alone because they
need to make judgments in particular contexts which “do not fall under any art or professional
tradition...[and so] the agents are compelled at every step to think out for themselves what the circumstances demand” (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1104a8-10).

**The ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships.**

Perhaps more than any other Aristotelian scholar, Nussbaum emphasizes that concrete situations and judgments involve particular persons and relationships, and so a practically-wise person will also attend to the ethical relevance of these persons and relationships. A doctor, for example, may find that her patient is both pregnant and with cancer, and so her counsel and discussion of treatment options will also be guided by a concern for any number of complex ethical issues that involve her own values and her relationship with the patient, her values, and those of other people that may be involved in the situation. Likewise, our navigator may have to choose from several possible courses to steer his ship clear of a storm, but his judgments will also be guided by his relationships with his captain and crew. Is it a transport or passenger vessel? Are there children on board? Is the captain a stubborn or insecure leader who will over-ride the navigator’s wise judgment to show his leadership before a doubtful crew? Or, has the crew just mutinied? As Nussbaum (1990) points out, our relationships with others is a crucial feature of the ethical scene “and, here again, general formulations frequently prove too crude” (p. 38).

**The priority of particular perceptions in teaching.**

What does this element of discernment look like in teaching? Well, a wise teacher of Grade 8 of mathematics might prepare a lesson on how to perform a certain mathematical equation; in the classroom, however, she might discover that her students already know how to perform it, and so she would change her plan, perhaps by expanding upon the equation or by
teaching something else. Or, she might discover that the technique she had planned to use to teach the equation has left some students confused, and so she would try another technique or combination of techniques that would work better. Alternatively, she might overhear, along with the rest of the group, a sexist remark from one student directed at another; although the remark may have nothing to do with mathematics, it would strike her as wrong, and so she would do something about it. Depending on the situation, the people involved, and the nature of the remark, she might choose to do any number of things: she might address the comment in a brief manner in front of the group, and then discuss it with the two students privately after the lesson, or she might even plan to discuss the issue with the group at some later point in time.

In other words, discerning teachers certainly prepare their lessons, but so, too, are they prepared to make subtle changes or to shift course all together. In addition to an openness to surprise and a willingness to improvise, a discerning teacher will recognize how the contextual embeddedness and “interweaving of the various items in the scene shades their moral meaning” (Nussbaum 1990, p. 91). And it would strike most of us as incompetent if our mathematics teacher were to teach an equation to a group of students if they already knew it, to continue using a particular technique that does not help her students to learn, or to ignore an incident of sexism in the classroom as a responsible educator of young people.

**Emotions as Judgments of Value**

A second theme across Nussbaum’s writing on discernment is the central place of emotions in practical reasoning and the exercise of wise judgment. As she points out, Plato, Kant, and the Utilitarians regarded the emotions, or ‘passions’ as they were frequently termed, as characteristically irrational and thus directly opposed to the kind of cool, detached rationality that
they felt should guide sound reasoning. Aristotle, however, held that the problem with this position is that emotions are an important part of who we are as human beings “for this sort of being-without-feeling is not human” (in Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 309) and so without them, something very important is missing in our deliberations about ethical matters.

Like Aristotle, Nussbaum (1990) describes emotions as “composites of belief and feeling” (p.78). This is to say, for example, that in experiencing anger, we experience a feeling that we have been wronged, but this feeling is closely tied to a set of beliefs that we hold about the world and about a particular incident and its circumstances, such as the damage done, its severity, and the intent of another person to willingly cause the damage. These beliefs, along with the feeling of anger, can also change if they are found to be false. If we discover, for example, that an imagined slight did not really take place, then our beliefs about the incident and the people involved are likely to shift, and our anger may give way to other feelings and other related sets of beliefs. In a similar way, emotions such as fear, pity, compassion, and love involve both feelings and beliefs, and they operate in tandem as “intelligent parts of our ethical agency, responsive to the workings of deliberation and essential to its completion” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 41).

In *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Nussbaum (2001b) describes emotions as ‘thoughts’ or ‘cognitions’^3^, and she links emotions and ethical perception. Rather than viewing anger, fear, hope, grief, or love as thoughtless, free-floating passions, she suggests they are suffused with intelligence and discernment and their perceptive ‘aboutness’ involves

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^3^ By ‘cognitive’, Nussbaum (2001b) says she means “nothing more than ‘concerned with receiving and processing information.’… [this is not] to imply the presence of elaborate calculation, of computation, or even of reflexive self-awareness.” (p. 23)
several qualities. One is that they function as both discriminating and distinctive modes of perception, that is, different emotions will perceive an object in different ways, “we actually identify and individuate emotions” (p. 28). Second, these distinct ways of seeing are bound up in how “one sees oneself or what one loves” (p. 28); that is, they include perceptions of ourselves and what we think, believe, and feel are important in our lives:

They insist on the real importance of their object, but they also embody the person’s own commitment to the object as a part of her scheme of ends…they have to do with me and my own, my plans and goals, what is important in my own conception (or more inchoate sense) of what it is for me to live well. (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 33)

A third quality of the emotions, then, is that they operate to guide practical reasoning and judgment in a way that is very different from a strict reliance on our cognitive intellect alone. Of course, Nussbaum (1990) is not suggesting that wise people simply follow their feelings whimsically in deliberating about ethical matters, but rather that the intellect will want to consult the emotions to get information about the true nature of the situation: “[w]ithout them, its approach to a new situation would be blind and obtuse…[t]heir responses are part of what knowing, that is truly recognizing or acknowledging, consist in” (p. 79, emphasis in original).

Nussbaum provides an example in which a person deliberates upon helping a friend: to do so without emotion—that is, through strictly intellectual motive, perception, and response—would be to fail to see what friendship is and why it is important in human life: “This person doesn’t really or doesn’t fully, see what has happened, doesn’t recognize it in a full-blooded way or take it in…because the emotional part of cognition is missing” (p. 79). In proposing what she calls a “cognitive-evaluative’ view” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 23) of emotions, Nussbaum stresses
that they are not to be understood as mere tools or instruments for perceiving or judging; rather, she insist that emotions occupy a central place in our human lives, providing us with important insights about living a properly human life that the intellect alone cannot.

In one sense, Nussbaum’s proposal suggests a dynamic link between teacher’s cognitions, beliefs, and feelings. Several decades ago, a series of influential articles appeared on the topic of teachers’ beliefs, and while this work showed that teachers hold beliefs about many things, its focus was largely on the development of belief ‘typologies’ drawn from cognitive psychology (Nespor, 2012) and with no consideration of how teachers’ beliefs might be connected to their emotions. As Jim Garrison (1997) points out, teachers’ cognitions are not separate from their feelings; knowing, for example, that a violent, disruptive child is abused at home affects not only how we feel about the child, but also how we cognitively respond to the child’s behaviour, and emotions can also alter our beliefs (p. 172).

Nussbaum’s work in this area also points to the relationship between emotions and identity in teaching. Although the emotional dimensions of teaching have been acknowledged in the educational literature for several decades (Denzin, 1984; Hargreaves, 1998, 2001), recent writing in this area suggests a strong relationship between teachers’ emotions and their personal and professional identities (Zembylas, 2003; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009)—an idea that seems to echo Nussbaum’s claim that emotions are bound up in how ‘one sees oneself or what one loves’—yet the connection between emotions, identity, and ethical perception in teaching has received little attention.
Emotions as judgments of value in teaching.

What does this feature of discernment look like in wise teaching practice? Well, a Grade 6 English teacher might find himself teaching a student with visual impairment called Stargardt’s Disease, a hereditary, incurable form of juvenile macular degeneration that affects person’s central retina and cannot be corrected by conventional eye glasses. In the context of a classroom, this condition might limit the student’s ability to read texts below a 10-point font size and to see her teacher’s writing on the classroom whiteboard. Instead of seeing this person and situation from a strictly cognitive, intellectual perspective—that is, how this particular student might best be ‘supported’ through any number of assistive devices, services, or materials—a discerning teacher would see this person and situation, first and foremost, with compassion. This is to say that, in inviting her to sit closer to the board, writing on the board using larger print and avoiding cursive writing, and providing her with supplementary printed handouts, this kind of teacher is not merely ‘supporting’ a ‘disabled’ or ‘special needs’ student, but rather seeing this young person as a human being first, and seeing and responding to her as wise and good person would. And in seeing and responding to her “in feeling as well as in thought” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 89), this teacher might very well come to hold a different set of beliefs about ‘visually-impaired students’, teaching ‘special needs’ students, and perhaps even come understand the notion of a ‘disability’ in a different way.

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4 Nussbaum (2001b) describes ‘compassion’ as “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s suffering” (p. 301), and she distinguishes between this word and the related terms ‘sympathy’ and ‘empathy’: compassion, she writes, “has a closer connection to concern and subsequent action.” (p. 302)
Illuminations between Particulars and Universals

Aristotle writes that we become wise, in part, by performing virtuous acts because this gives us experience with particulars: “the reason is that practical wisdom is of the particular, which becomes graspable through experience” (Aristotle, trans., Ross, 1908 in Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 305, 1142a15). Nussbaum similarly emphasizes that we become wise through the exercise of phronesis, but she focusses on how this involves what she calls “the interplay of the general and the particular in Aristotelian choice” (Nussbaum 1990, p. 94), a “two-way illumination between particular and universal” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 306), and “a loving conversation between rules and correct responses, general conceptions and unique cases, in which the general articulates the particular and is in turn further articulated by it” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 95). Nussbaum’s metaphorical ‘illumination’ clearly refers to more of a gradual ‘embellishment’ to particulars and universals rather than a blinding ‘enlightenment’, and she writes that these kinds of illuminations can take different shapes, forms, and degrees.

In one sense, it can involve illuminations between particulars across space and time because experience provides us with an increasingly fine-tuned awareness to new situations and particulars. Nussbaum (2001a) asks, “What does experience contribute if what practical wisdom must see is the idiosyncratic and the new? (p. 306). One contribution, she writes, is that we become more adept at recognizing, acknowledging, and responding to particulars, because our experience “yields an ability to understand and grasp the salient features, the practical meaning, of the concrete particulars” (p. 305). In other words, “This continuous basis, internalized and embodied in the agent’s system of desires, goes a long way to explaining what that person can and will see in a new situation” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 306).
Second is that our experience with particulars can illuminate our understandings of the universals we hold. Sometimes, a person’s discernment of particulars can add to or inform “what her conception of the good life has been all along, showing her more about its constituent values” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 316). So, for example, a good person will have general sense of what things like courage, temperance, truthfulness, and patience and why they are important, but our understanding of these universals become further refined to us through their exercise over a lifetime. At other times, though, our experience with particulars can also lead to more pronounced revisions. While universals such as courage, temperance, truthfulness, and patience can be refined or embellished, they are “not immune to revision even at the highest level; this revision may come from the perceptions embodied in a new experience” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 306). In all of these various shapes, forms, and degrees, Nussbaum (2001a) maintains that our ‘two-way’ discernment of particulars and universals is continually evolving over the course of our lives; “they are partners in commitment and share between them the honors given the flexibility and responsiveness of the good judge” (p. 306).

**Illuminations between particulars and universals in teaching.**

What does this aspect of discernment look like in teaching? Phelan (2001) describes this feature as “the play of the particular and the general” (p. 50). During a discussion about the classical origins of ‘beauty’ with a group of Grade 5 students, a boy named Steven approached her and explained how it had felt to fly a falcon with his father the previous Saturday. Steven described how it felt to hold the falcon and on his arm and to feel its release as the bird took off. With his arm extended and raised to chest-level, he softly uttered, “It was beautiful!” In one sense, the story illustrates how the general concept of ‘beauty’ became enriched by Steven’s
discernment of the particulars of his experience, but it also shows how a discerning teacher’s understanding of this same concept became similarly enriched as this new particular was added to the classroom. Phelan suggests that this aspect of discernment involves an educative “back and forth movement between particular experiences and general conceptual understanding” (Phelan, 2005a, p. 67) and is crucial in the cultivation of practical wisdom in teacher education.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Nussbaum’s concept of discernment offers a rich, contemporary reading of Aristotle’s phronesis, and she makes some important contributions to his ethical theory. One is that, whereas Aristotle limits his phronesis to the privileged men of the ancient Greek polis, Nussbaum shows that the capacity for practical wisdom is available to people from many walks of life: an ancient Greek grandmother, a twenty-something year old woman visiting London with her father, fiancé, and best friend, and a middle-aged magazine editor from Woollett, Massachusetts on a mission to rescue a young man living a decadent, cosmopolitan life in Paris. In this way, Nussbaum goes beyond her mentor because she shows that the capacity for practical wisdom is available to all of us in our lives and in our deliberations about ethical matters, in classrooms and elsewhere.

I believe another important contribution of Nussbaum’s work is that she is able to elaborate upon the various features of phronesis and their connectedness to each other without losing sight of the crucially ethical texture of phronesis, and this is a quality of her work that is very rare in the philosophical literature on practical wisdom. Rather than seeing phronesis as the mere possession of ethical knowledge, she focuses on the priority of particular perceptions, the central place of emotions in seeing, judging, and acting well, and a kind of learning or growth that comes about with discernment through illuminations between particulars and universals.
And while she reveals and elaborates upon these features of phronesis in her studies of Hecuba, Maggie Verver, and Lewis Lambert Strether, what emerges is a kind of phronesis that is always caught up in the specificity of human lives, in relationships and attachments that always put it at risk, and a kind of wisdom and judgment that is characterized by flexibility, improvisation, and a “refined perception of the contingencies of a particular situation” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 318).

Perhaps one of Nussbaum’s greatest achievements, then, is that she shows us the kind of person a phronimos is. Throughout Aristotle’s writing, he appears only briefly as the fully-virtuous person and criterion for good ethical choice; in Nussbaum’s work, however, he—or she—appears in flesh and blood in very different situations and times, but also at different temporal points on the long path to wisdom. For Nussbaum, a wise person is ultimately a very human being, living in conditions of sometimes maddening uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity, but also in a way that inspires us to hope in our efforts to live well and to confront tragedy in our own lives with others. In this way, Hecuba, Maggie, and Strether remind us all that the aim of ethics is not theoretical but practical, and that the Good Life must be one that a human being can live:

It must be a life that we, as we deliberate, can chose for ourselves as a life that is really for us, a life in which there will be enough of what makes us the beings we are for us to be said to survive in such a life. (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 293, italics in original)

For all of these reasons, Nussbaum’s concept of discernment makes some valuable contributions to the study of phronesis in teaching and teacher education. Just as Aristotle’s image of the fully-virtuous phronimos begins to give way here to a person who is always in the process of becoming wise, so the image of the practically-wise teacher begins to shift from one
of timeless, phronetic ‘excellence’ to a person who is similarly always becoming wiser and more adept at making good judgements through her discerning experience in classrooms and elsewhere in her life with others. In teacher education, an important question is what this might look like as teacher candidates move from their university studies to teaching in real-life schools and classrooms, and Nussbaum’s concept of discernment provides a rich lens to examine the emergent texture of discernment in the ‘rough ground’ of teacher education. Finally, Nussbaum (2001a) underscores Aristotle’s claim that a theoretical account of phronesis can only go so far; it is only a sketch that needs to be filled in by stories of experience and so “it would be in the spirit of his argument to turn for further illumination to complex examples, either from life or from literary texts” (pp. 312-313).
Chapter 3: Researching Discernment in the Teaching Practicum

And what if it is love that one is trying to understand, that strange, unmanageable phenomenon or form of human life, source at once of illumination and confusion, agony and beauty? Love, in its many varieties, and their tangled relations to the good human life, to aspiration to general social concern? What parts of oneself, what method, what writing, should one choose then?

Martha Nussbaum (1990), *Love’s Knowledge* (p. 4)

This chapter present the methodological framework for the study. In reading the scholarly literature on phronesis, I found there is a real lack of field-based research on this topic and only a few general guidelines for carrying out this kind of work. As a result, the approach I present in this chapter was informed by writers and researchers in several scholarly and literary disciplines. Although these writers do not always ask the same questions or share the same assumptions, I believe they agree on some important ideas, and they provided resources that, together, helped me to frame this study and to design an approach to researching discernment in the context of the teaching practicum.

**Researching Discernment in a Literary and Reflective Perspective**

Part of the story of this research is that it was delayed for about a year due to some unexpected events in my family life. You see, shortly after being advanced to candidacy in my doctoral program, my wife was diagnosed with cancer, and I had to step away from this project to care for her and our two young children while I continued to work at the university I mentioned in the previous chapters. It was also during this time that our daughter was diagnosed with Stargardt’s Disease, a sudden and incurable form of juvenile macular degeneration that left her legally blind at the age of nine. This was a difficult year for all of us and, fortunately, these
developments turned out as best they could: my wife survived and our daughter’s vision loss has stabilized, and these are people who are carrying on with our life together in ways that inspire me every day.

During this time, I did not abandon this project altogether, and I continued to read with a focus on developing a research methodology for the study. Throughout my readings on phronesis, I had not come across much field-based research, and I found only a few broad guidelines that I felt were appropriate for the study and very little in terms of concrete resources for researching discernment in the context of the teaching practicum. For this reason, I began reading in other areas of philosophy, the social sciences, and education in search of a ‘method’ that I finally developed by drawing on different researchers and writers, many of whom I had never read before. Somehow, my memories of my first readings of much of the literature I discuss in this chapter have become indelibly interwoven with the year I stepped away from this research and now braided with images of chemotherapy treatment sessions and visits to child ophthalmologists and clinical vision tests and fears of death and loss and blindness and wondering if I would ever finish this project, and if that would even really matter at all.

One of the things I realized during this time is that the conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity in life and in teaching that I mentioned in the last chapter are also very useful concepts for framing the conditions in which educational research seems to takes place, and I hadn’t come across these conditions in my graduate school readings or my reviews of the research literature. It occurred to me that this omission is unfortunate because it seems to neglect the fact that research on human beings is inevitably carried by other human beings, all of whom are likely to be grappling with life and its inevitable complications in all kinds of
particular shapes and forms. Moreover, I have little doubt that there are research stories with events far more tragic than the ones I have mentioned briefly here; my point is that this vulnerability would seem to be as much a part of *any* research on human life as the development of a defensible methodological framework, a conceptually-sound research design, and a clearly-articulated account of fieldwork, and it became important to me to try to bring this sense of human life to the study as I sought answers to my research questions: how do teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how does this discernment help teacher candidates to construct their practices in more ethically-responsive ways?

**Grounding the Research: Purpose and Background**

Since the purpose of the research was to understand how *teacher candidates* begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how this discernment helps *them* to construct their practices in more ethically-responsive ways, it seemed appropriate to take a broadly qualitative approach to the study. Although the nature of qualitative inquiry has been described in many different ways, its distinctiveness from quantitative inquiry is well documented in the research literature. As John Creswell (2009) explains, “The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from the participants” (p. 176) and this means, as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2003) explain, that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 5).

Before my wife and daughter got sick, I had come across two possible approaches to researching discernment in the context of the teaching practicum. I found one in Bent Flyvbjerg’s (2001) book *Making Social Science Matter*, where he develops a kind of case study
methodology that draws on phronesis and which he describes as “phronetic social science” (p. 5). Flyvbjerg makes an especially convincing argument, following Aristotle, for the use of concrete examples in the study of human learning; however, there were a few features of his approach that I felt made it ill-suited to my study. One is that he focusses on linking phronesis to case study research—rather than linking a case study methodology to the study of phronesis—and I had not yet decided that a case study methodology, phronetic or otherwise, would be appropriate for a study of discernment in the teaching practicum. Second, Flyvbjerg frequently describes phronesis as a form of ‘context-dependent knowledge’ which he contrasts with ‘context-independent’ knowledge, but his emphasis on the former tends to ignore the latter: “in the study of human affairs, there exists only context-dependent knowledge, which thus presently rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction” (p 71). It seemed to me that this view contradicts Aristotle’s account of phronesis as a capacity that involves much more than ‘knowledge’ and, importantly, his link between particulars and universals in phronesis. This led to another concern, since Aristotle directly connects this link to experience and learning, that is, to grasping phronesis in concrete situations, whereas Flyvbjerg draws on the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) model of learning and its various cognitive and temporal levels. Finally, Flyvbjerg says very little about the collection of specific case study data or its interpretation; although he claims to focus his analyses on ‘narratives of value and power’, I felt he never really addresses the ethical dimensions of his methodology which, from an Aristotelian perspective, is what would seem to matter most in this kind of work

I had found a second approach briefly mentioned in Joseph Dunne and Shirley Pendlebury’s (2002) book chapter “Practical Reason”, where they suggest that a merging of
narrative inquiry and hermeneutics could provide an appropriate methodological frame for the study of phronesis in teaching. They explain that an approach of this kind will embrace a variety of narrative modes and be strongly hermeneutical in character. In other words, they will tell stories about particular projects or episodes in the history of an individual teacher or school…that can bring out the nuances of plot and character, the dense meshings of insights and oversights, of convergent or contrary purposes, motivations and interests, of anticipated or unanticipated responses from students and other relevant agents, all conspiring to bring about relative success or failure. If these studies, with their deep embeddedness in a particular milieu, renounce the generalizing ambitions of wider-gauge research, they are not on that account condemned to a narcissism of the particular. To the contrary, when they are well done, they possess what might be called an epiphanic power: they disclose an exemplary significance…This is close to the power of all literary art, which, as Aristotle suggests, can instruct and move us precisely because, in its depiction of individual cases and characters, it reveals—without necessarily stating or explaining—universal themes. (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002, pp. 203-204)

Dunne and Pendlebury’s chapter led me several months of reading on the topic of philosophical hermeneutics, which was mostly focused on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900-2002) 1960/1975 book *Truth and Method*, along with a few philosophical and historical studies of his work (e.g., Bernstein, 1983; Grondin, 1994; Schmidt, 2006) and some of the research literature linking Gadamer’s hermeneutics and the study of teaching (e.g., Jardine, 2006; Moules, 2002; Smith, 1991). Sometimes, I read this literature as my wife slept in a hospital bed or at home
following her chemotherapy treatments and, at other times, between driving our daughter to and from a local dance studio in the evenings after school as she was learning to dance again with the loss of her central vision.

I found Gadamer’s hermeneutics offers a wealth of resources for the study of how people make sense of the world. Building on earlier work by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and his mentor Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Gadamer did not see hermeneutics as a mere ‘method’ for the study of texts, but rather as a metaphor for all human understanding which is manifest whenever we attempt to make sense of some ‘thing’, a way of ‘being-in-the-world’ that is ‘always, already’ rooted in our historically-inherited consciousness and traditions and bound up in our experiences and language. For Gadamer, human understanding and truth are not fixed or static because they are embedded in particular histories, cultures and human lives, and so they are always ‘coming-into-being’ because what the ‘objects’ of our inquiry say to us are always different in light of our changing horizons and the questions that we learn to ask. His ‘methodology’, if one may call it as such, is for a reader to engage in a dialogue with himself and the text, and his discussion includes various interpretive resources: the principles of openness and dialogue, the experience of address and the engagement of bias, an attentiveness to language, and the metaphorical ‘hermeneutic circle’, in which a person comes to an understanding of the single parts of a text with reference to the whole.

I found all these resources helpful in different ways. They all pointed to the importance of locating the study—and any understandings that might be gained from it—within a particular context and temporal period, but also within the lives of the teacher candidates I hoped would
participate in the study, as well as my own life. I also felt that Flyvbjerg’s emphasis on the use of concrete examples resonated with Aristotle and Nussbaum’s work, but also with Dunne and Pendlebury’s notion of stories about teaching and the use of examples in hermeneutic research on teaching. Gadamer also offered some important philosophical and interpretive resources for this kind of an approach, and his work seemed to suggest a crucially ethical relation to one’s self and to knowledge.

Up until this time, my readings of Nussbaum had focussed on her conceptual elaboration of discernment, but after reading the literature mentioned above I returned to her work a few months later, and it occurred to me that her writing also yields some possibilities for the study of discernment in teaching through her unique merging of ethical inquiry and literary criticism.

**Linking Ethical Inquiry and Literary Criticism**

Nussbaum does not present a ‘method’ for the study of discernment. She begins instead by suggesting that there is what she calls “an organic connection” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 4) between ethics and literature and that this important connection is often missing in much ethical philosophy. As she points out in *The Fragility of Goodness*, the link between ethics and literature has been acknowledged since ancient times because its contextual richness makes it especially well-suited to the study of ethical matters. In *Love’s Knowledge*, she recognizes some twentieth-century literary theorists such as Wayne Clayson Booth (1921–2005), Frank Raymond Leavis (1895–1978), and Lionel Mordecai Trilling (1905–1975), but she demonstrates her unique place in this dialogue, acknowledging that these “major thinkers with whom I link my proposal…seem to have been perfectly able to speak of the ethical content of literature and the
ethical expressiveness of literary forms without bringing moral philosophy into the picture" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 190).

For Nussbaum, a basic flaw in much ethical philosophy from Plato to modern times is its typically abstract form and content, and this is an approach that she suggests is problematic for at least two reasons. One is that it tends to frame human life and living in universal terms, and so it has very little to do with the particularity of human lives and of ethical matters. The second problem is that this abstract approach offers little guidance to people for actually dealing with ethical situations in their day-to-day lives. As she puts it:

Philosophy has often seen itself as a way of transcending the merely human, of giving the human being a new and more godlike set of activities and attachments. The alterative I explore sees it as a way of being human and speaking humanly. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 53)

This marks a subtle but important departure from her mentor Aristotle. Although she clearly follows Aristotle’s view that ethics “is not just theoretical understanding but also practice” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 139), her transition from ‘transcending the merely human’ to ‘a way of being human and speaking humanly’ focusses on recovering the practical essence of ethics, a field that has become rife with abstract theory and, consequently, of little use to understanding how people actually act ethically in their lives or how the study of ethics might be of practical relevance for people. It occurred to me that this observation and concerns might also apply to much of the educational literature linking phronesis and teaching, which seems to be similarly framed in abstract philosophical terms. As Nussbaum suggests, there is nothing wrong with this approach; indeed, it is well-suited to elucidating and expanding upon abstract concepts,
but it contradicts the distinctively practical nature of phronesis, and it never seems to capture how teachers actually exercise judgment or make sense of it in concrete educational situations.

Nussbaum asserts this is why ethics needs literature. Literature, she writes, directly contributes to the exploration of human life and to the cultivation of human emotions, imagination, perception, and good judgment in ways that conventional philosophical texts cannot. Through both its form and its content, literature provides us with very concrete views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world’s surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty—which cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder—but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. Nor perhaps, either, in the expositional structure conventional to philosophy, which sets out to establish something and then does, without surprise, without incident—but only in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises, that our task, as agents, is to live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing. If these views are serious candidates for truth, views that the search for truth ought to be considered along its way, then it seems that this language and these forms ought be included within philosophy. (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 3-4)

This link between ethics and literature leads Nussbaum to a unique approach to the study of discernment that merges ethical inquiry and literary criticism. Like Aristotle, she focusses on concrete examples of phronesis, but whereas his examples are very brief, her examples from
literature yield far more detailed illustrations and conceptual elaborations, and she shows how literature, and especially novels, presents us with precisely the kinds of complex, contextually-embedded situations in which discernment takes on concrete shape and form. Nussbaum’s approach is also quite eclectic; in *The Fragility of Goodness*, she focusses on examples from Greek tragedy, whereas in *Love’s Knowledge*, she reads twentieth-century novels. Nevertheless, her studies share a few key qualities. Like Aristotle, she is always looking for concrete examples of phronesis which, in turn, provide insights for further philosophical elaboration of its various features. In *The Fragility of Goodness* these situations are typically tragic, whereas in *Love’s Knowledge* they tend to focus on moments of surprise or unexpected happenings, but these focal episodes are always read with reference to the concrete situation at hand and connected to the larger context of characters’ lives in the play or novel.

At various points in her work, Nussbaum also provides some guidelines for her approach. In her introductory essay to *Love’s Knowledge*, she presents a series of short passages from Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, Henry James’ *The Ambassadors*, and Seneca’s *De Ira* (On Anger), and she begins with a focus on *listening* to texts and how this listening leads to questions about them:

> listening to the texts and the differences among them, listening to the shape of the sentences and the tone of the voices, let us see what questions start to arise, what questions seem as if they will lead us further toward an understanding of the ways in which content and form shape one another. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 30)

From here, she presents a set of ‘diagnostic’ questions to explore different features of texts, and these features are organized together in different ‘families’. These families of
questions ask about such textual features as voice, points of view, the parts of the personality involved, the overall shape and organization of the text, and its consistency, generality, precision, explanations, and its use of language. Yet in asking these more ‘formal’ questions, she stresses that literary criticism is not only concerned with structural analyses, but also—and very importantly—with the ‘sense of life’ that texts convey to us, as well as the sense of life our own
texts ask about them, and so we must also ask:

What does the text in a question seem to say, or show, about human life, about knowledge, about personality, about how to live? And how are these claims related to the claims made in and by the form itself? (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 35, emphasis in original)

In a later essay, she links her literary criticism back to ethical inquiry, and she explains two ways that works of literature contribute to our sense of life. One is that we begin to read ethical philosophy in new and more insightful ways:

We grasp by contrasting; we sense what something is by bounding it off against something different, If it should prove true that novels share certain ethical commitments (to particularity, to the moral relevance of surprise) just in virtue of their form, we will grasp these shared commitments better by seeing on what grounds some philosophers have denied or refused them. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 190)

Second is that literary criticism is linked back to the practical goal of ethical inquiry, which involves the goals of self-understanding and communal attunement:

These goals matter. Each of us is not only a professional, but a human being who is trying to live well; and not simply a human being, but also a citizen of some town, some
country, above all a world of human beings, in which attunement and understanding are extremely urgent matters. Now certainly we can promote these goals in indefinitely many ways, apart from our professional lives: by raising children, by engaging in some form of political action, by using our money generously, by seeing and conversing and feeling. And yet, when a person happens to have a professional activity that is or becomes relevant to major ends of human life—how exhilarating that activity is then, and how deep, I think, the obligations it then imposes. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 192)

For all of these reasons, Nussbaum argues that “philosophy must be more literary, more closely allied to stories, and more respectful of mystery and open-endedness than it frequently is” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 280), and she provides examples of her unique approach in her studies of various ancient and contemporary texts. These examples help to illustrate how this approach conceptualizes the interpretation and description of ‘reality’, textual stages of knowing, and social relations and the research act, and these issues, informed by other writers, helped to further frame the methodological approach for this study.

**Interpretation and Description of ‘Reality’**

This second, more ‘methodological’ reading of Nussbaum’s work led me back to her studies of Hecuba, Maggie Verver, and Lewis Lambert Strether that I mentioned in Chapter 2 of this study, and it was interesting to read this work again from this perspective. During my year away, I became more involved in our daughter’s competitive dance activities as my wife was going through chemotherapy treatment, and part of our daughter’s dance program was attending competitions in the spring of that year. The world of dance is one that I had never had any contact with before, and I began learning the names of different styles of dance and meeting the
other children at the school and their supervising parents, the majority of whom were girls and women. Of course, most of the parents were aware of my wife and our daughter’s diagnoses, and these became frequent topics of conversation in various parking lots and at the venues where these events took place. In addition, I found I also needed to ask the help of these people because I was understandably not allowed into the girls’ change room to help my daughter with costumes and stage make-up, which I learned is a very big part of this kind of activity. The result was that I spent many, many hours simply waiting and watching the kids dance in a pull-down seat by myself in various auditoriums around British Columbia, usually thinking about my wife at home and how our daughter was doing backstage.

It might sound a bit strange, but I sometimes thought about Hecuba, Maggie, and Strether as I sat watching several dozen dance performances that spring. At the time, I did not know what the outcome of my wife’s treatment would be, but I found I shared Hecuba’s helplessness, sorrow, and anger at the thought of losing someone so very close to me, too. Watching our daughter on the stage, I wondered what she was seeing with the blurred, bulls-eye damage to her retinas and how it was that she could still see other people in her dance groups with just her peripheral vision and perform gymnastics that I never could and which were now way past my years. Watching her perform different dances, in different costumes, I wondered: What would she look like when she reached Maggie’s age? How would she see the world? Would she ever fall in love? Would her mother still be here? Would I? And then there was Strether, poor old Strether: he was certainly the closest to me of the three characters in terms of gender and age. Nevertheless, I never found much kinship with the man from Woollett, Massachusetts; it occurred to me that I had spent a good part of my young adult life doing the very kind of ‘living’
that he seemed to have missed out on as a young man, and I really did not share his middle-aged regrets or crises, although I did cry as I watched our daughter perform her Hip Hop solo one evening.

A basic premise underlying Nussbaum’s work is that literature can show us how people interpret and describe reality. One of the things that literature teaches us, she writes, is that all texts are written from one among many possible points of view, and this is important because it reminds us that we live in a world of many different perspectives; literature—and especially novels—also includes different characters and different points of view, and this “reminds us again and again that the whole of the relevant reality is more complex yet than the text” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 88).

This is view that is echoed by quite a few literary scholars. Wolfgang Iser (1975) compares the literary genres of fiction and nonfiction and their different views of reality; whereas nonfiction tends to present reality in empirical terms, fiction focusses on the fact that people interpret and describe the world in different ways, and this is where fiction really begins to work for us: “If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition, but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite of the other—fiction is a means of telling us something about reality” (p. 7, emphasis added). As Klaus Mortensen explains, this is why fiction is far more than a mere alterative to nonfiction:

Literary fiction is not an alternative reality. But neither is literary fiction unreal in the sense of being irreal (still less a lie or deceit), nor an illusion, even if it makes use of illusionary effects. For the apparently irreal or illusionary in fiction constitutes a literary sign language that addresses, influences and guides its reader and involves knowledge
and interpretation of inner and outer realities of human life. Viewed from this perspective, literary fiction always has to do with people’s ways of relating to reality.

(Mortensen, 2002, p. 446)

Mortensen writes that there is an educative quality to our experience with literature because it is through the contextual richness of fiction, its imaginative distance, its characters, and its features of narrative, metaphor, and parable that we gain insights into other people’s lives, but also our own, and this is because “the reader can return to his own, actual reality and look at it with new eyes, or from a different perspective” (Mortensen, 2002, p. 454). Nussbaum echoes this ‘different perspective’, but she underscores the ethical significance of this phenomenon:

For novels, as a genre, direct us to attend to the concrete; they display before us a wealth of richly realized detail, presented as relevant for choice. And yet they speak to us: they ask us to imagine possible relations between the characters and/or situation, thereby perceiving those similarities and differences. In this way their structure suggests, as well, that much of moral relevance is universalizable: learning about Maggie Verver’s situation helps us to understand our own. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 95)

**Textual Stages of Knowing**

I find some interesting contrast in points of view between Nussbaum’s discussion of literature and some of the other writers I have mentioned above with regards to their discussions on the textual stages of knowing. In some ways, Flyvbjerg’s use of the Dreyfus model of learning almost seems to echo Aristotle’s discussion the different levels of moral excellence that he claims people pass through before achieving the ‘full’ virtue of the phronimos. In contrast to this more ‘developmental’ view of phronesis, however, he also writes that phronesis is grasped
through its exercise in concrete situations through experience, perception, and the illumination between particulars and universals this involves, and it is this feature of becoming wise that is the focus of Nussbaum’s work and her writing on discernment and which seems more aligned to Gadamer’s writing on hermeneutic experience and understanding.

Like Gadamer, Nussbaum’s studies of discernment do not aim at a developing a model of becoming wise, but rather they focus on the texture of particular moments of insight in the lives of particular people in particular situations. This is to say, for example, that one might make some general observations about Strether’s ‘moral development’ over the course of *The Ambassadors*, but her focus is the practical moments in the novel where we sense the concreteness of his growth as he reflects that, in speaking with Mrs. Gosprey, that he is thinking about something other than her, or as he imagines himself caught in the velvet neckband of the omniscient Mrs. Newsome. This seems to be why Nussbaum claims that some forms of literature are better able to capture this kind of knowing because of their attentiveness to fine detail, as in the work of novelists such as Henry James.

I believe this approach offers another perspective on linking the study of literature to the study of teaching. Mortensen (2002), Lars Løvlie (2002), and Løvlie and Paul Standish (2002), for example, link literature to the concept of *Bildung*, which refers to the German tradition of self-cultivation, (as related to the German for creation, image, shape), wherein philosophy and education are linked in a manner that refers to a process of both personal and cultural maturation, but the term is also connected to the literary tradition of *Bildungsroman*, a genre of fiction that that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood, or what we might call ‘coming-of-age’ stories. However, Mortensen shows in his study of
William Wordsworth’s 1802 poem *To the Cuckoo*, that Bildung certainly takes place over the course of our lives, but its real intrigue lies in its perceptive and reflective nature: “it corresponds to abstract thought, but it distinguishes itself from this form of thinking by being ‘concrete thought’, i.e., by concerning itself with actual, possible, and even impossible human acts and passions in an imaginative, illuminating way” (p. 446).

**Research Design**

As I considered a research design for the study, I discovered what I felt was a striking similarity between Nussbaum’s studies of discernment and bell hook’s discussion of ‘quilt-making’. hooks describes quilt-making as a kind of story-telling, whereby personal stories, like pieces of fabric, are woven together in the tradition of quilting; in this way, the stories blend together, overlapping and forming a composite new creation. hooks (1990) writes that quilts, like novels, are constructed vignettes of human life, where the author includes or leaves out certain parts, either intentionally or because she does not have access to them, and it is through the weaving of these pieces together that quilting “can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past” (p. 40) and which “serves to illuminate and inform the present” (p. 147). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe quilt-making as a form of qualitative research whereby researchers gather various types of data and engage in various interpretive practices; these are then pieced together, and “The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience…[in which]…many different things are going on at the same time—different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision” (p. 7).
Nussbaum does not write of quilt-making in her approach to researching discernment, but the various chapters of her books have a very quilt-like texture because she presents separate studies of different people in different contexts, and these studies also work beautifully together. In this way, hook’s notion of quilt-making seemed to offer an appropriate, flexible, and potentially-fruitful approach to exploring discernment in teaching by focussing on particular classroom teaching episodes in the lives of teachers, and presenting these episodes as separate pieces of a kind of fabric, one from each participant in the study.

Gathering Data

I planned to gather data for the study in context of the school-based teaching practicum because of the exposure to classroom particulars that it provides to beginning teachers as they move from their university-based courses to actual teaching practice. It thus seemed important to locate this phase of the study data within very particular educational setting and temporal window and, in most Canadian pre-service, undergraduate teacher education programs, the practicum typically takes place in public schools, with a duration of twelve to fourteen weeks. In addition, I wanted to gather data to capture how teacher candidates begin to make sense of their teaching in this educational context, and this sense-making could only be understood with reference to the participants’ lives and the universals they bring with them to the practicum about human life, education, schooling and teaching. In seeking to answer my research questions and to explore the contextual-embeddedness of any answers I might find, I decided to limit the study

\[5\] I acknowledge the word ‘data’ as potentially problematic in the context of qualitative research. As Max van Manen (1990) points out, qualitative researchers gather different kinds of data than quantitative researchers and for reasons which are not always quantifiable; nevertheless, the word is still widely used in qualitative research, and I use it here in this same qualified sense.
to three teacher candidates, and I planned to gather different types of data during their practicum placements: data drawn from life-history interviews, video-recorded lessons with subsequent ‘post’-teaching interviews, and a personal research journal.

**Life History Interviews**

It seemed to me that life history interviews would provide a useful source of data for the study. As Aristotle and Nussbaum relatedly emphasize, phronesis and discernment are always exercised within the context of a person’s life, and there seemed to be several layers to this feature of discernment in this study. In one sense, the question of how teachers discern the particulars of classroom teaching is bound up in a teachers’ personal history and life, but the practicum itself could also be understood as a kind of story within a story, so it made sense to try to get a picture of these stories as part of the study of discernment in particular situations. From an Aristotelian perspective, it also seemed that life history interview might also reveal the kinds of universals that teacher candidates bring with them to the practicum and provide a point of reference for how these might be illuminated through experience with the particular.

Life history and life writing research include a great range of approaches and techniques that share an emphasis on life story, whether in the form of oral history, personal narrative, autobiography, or biography, as a source for the study of the meanings that people give to their lives. Among the many approaches to conducting life history research in the methodological literature, I found Irving Seidman’s (2006) interview model especially interesting because it involves a series of interviews that take place before, during, and after a participant’s experience and that operate together to elicit a participant’s life history, the details of a contemporary experience, and the meaning that the participant gives to this experience. This approach seemed
well-suited to the study because of the situated and temporal nature of the practicum and the stories-within-stories quality of the research mentioned above, and I planned to collect a series of interviews with each of the participants before, during, and after their practicum placements.

However, I decided to adapt Seidman’s three-interview model to this study. Although I felt that the first and third interviews of the series could provide important information with regards to the meaning the participants might give to their experiences before and after their placements, I felt that a second interview seemed very limited in its ability to capture the ‘details of contemporary experience’ over the course of a twelve to fourteen week period and the crucially-important particulars that were a key focus of the study. As a result, I chose to replace the second interview from Seidman’s model with a series of classroom video recordings with ‘post’-teaching interviews (which I describe in the next section) and to describe the remaining two life history interviews from Seidman’s model as the ‘pre’ and ‘post’-practicum interviews for the study. Following Seidman, I planned to meet with each participant approximately one week before and after his or her practicum for these two interviews. Each interview would be approximately 45 minutes in length, audio-recorded for later transcription, and I would provide the participants with interview schedules before our meetings.

During the first, ‘pre’-practicum interviews, my focus would be to try to get a sense of who the participants were as people and aspiring teachers. Using an open-ended questions, I planned to ask them reflect on their lives up until the time they became teacher candidates. These first interviews would help to provide what Nussbaum calls a ‘a sense of life’ as the participants began their placements, as well as ‘universals’ about teaching that could be explored in more
detail in the subsequent interviews that were planned for the study. Some of the questions I planned to ask during this first interview were:

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to be a practicum student in this particular teacher education program? How would you describe your educational background? Your prior experience(s) as a teacher?

- How would you describe your experience in this particular teacher education program so far? Is there anything that you have learned in the program that you have found particularly important, useful and/or interesting as you begin your teaching practicum?

- How do you think your personal background and experiences have influenced your ideas and beliefs about teaching? What is teaching? What is good teaching? Can you give me an example of this?

- Looking forward, what are you hoping to explore in your practicum?

- Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think might be important to help get a sense of your personal background, your prior experiences, and your ideas and beliefs about teaching as you begin your practicum?

During the ‘post’-practicum interviews, I planned to ask the participants to reflect on the meaning of their teaching practicum and to share, perhaps with reference to topics that had come up over the course of the research and previous interviews, any insights about teaching that they had gained from their experience. During this interview, some of the questions I planned to ask were:
• Looking back, how would you characterize your overall experience as a practicum student teacher?

• Which aspects of this experience do you think have been most helpful to you as a teacher and why?

• What would you say stands out for you at this point and what have you learned so far from this experience?

• Was there anything important that you learned that you didn’t expect to learn? Anything in particular that surprised you?

• In our first interview, we talked about your ideas and beliefs about teaching before you began your practicum, and you mentioned the importance of ______. Now that you have completed your practicum, where are you at now with this topic, and why do you think this might be? Can you give me an example from your practicum to illustrate this?

• Looking forward, what are you taking with you from your practicum experience so far to your future practice as a teacher?

• In our first interview, we talked about good teaching, and you mentioned _____. Now that you have completed your practicum, where are you at now with this topic, and why do you think this might be?

• Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think might be important to help get a sense of the meaning that you give to your experience as a practicum student teacher?
Video-Recorded Lessons with ‘Post’-Teaching Interviews

The use of video seemed to offer some exciting possibilities for capturing the contextual richness of teaching and to provide a useful source of data to explore how teacher candidates discern the particulars of classrooms. Sometimes described as ‘video-stimulated recall’, this technique involves the gathering of interview data as participants view a video-recording of themselves engaged in a practice while reflecting on their thoughts, emotions, and actions at the time it occurred (Calderhead, 1981; Gass & Mackey, 2000; Lyle, 2003; Pirie, 1996; Towers, 2007). Rather than a single interview of this kind, however, I felt the study would benefit from several of these kinds of interviews because this would provide multiple sources of data and, I hoped, some different perspective on discernment over the course of the participants’ placements between the pre’ and ‘post’-practicum interviews mentioned above.

I planned for three of these interviews with each of the participants, conducted approximately at the beginning, middle, and end of their placements at the schools. Each session would involve a recording of a 30-minute lesson taught by the teacher candidates, and I planned to use a small digital video-recorder placed at the back of the classrooms. The ‘post’-teaching interviews would be conducted immediately after each lesson in a private room at the school, where we would view and discuss the recordings as they replayed on a laptop computer. Before watching the video, I planned to ask the participants to describe the context of the lesson and their thoughts before teaching it. As we watched the video, I would ask them to describe what it was like for them to teach the lesson and to comment on their thoughts, feelings, and actions while they were teaching. After watching the video, I would ask them to reflect on the lesson with reference to the lesson’s details and how these might be related to topics from our previous interviews. The
interviews would involve open-ended questions and be approximately 60 minutes in length. The participants would be provided with interview schedules before our meetings, and the interviews would be audio-recorded for later transcription. During these interviews, some of the questions I planned to ask were:

Pre-viewing (approx. 15 minutes)
- What can you tell me about the context of this particular lesson?
- What were your thoughts about the lesson before you actually taught it?
- Were there any surprises for you as you were teaching the lesson?

Okay, let’s watch a video of the lesson…

Viewing (approx. 30 minutes)
- As we are watching the video, I’d like you to describe what it was like for you as you were teaching the lesson. Please feel free to pause the video if there was anything in particular that you’d like to talk more about before we continue.
- Is this what you meant by ____? Can you tell me about that?
- Is that what you meant by surprise? Why did you respond like that?
- Who is that? Can you tell me anything about him/her?
- What do you think he/she would say about that?
- What did that feel like?
Post-viewing (approx. 15 minutes)

Now that we’ve watched the video, I’d like to focus on your overall thoughts about how the lesson went:

• Overall, how do you think the lesson went?

• What stands out for you about this particular lesson and can you connect this to anything we have talked about earlier or in a previous interview?

• How do you think you might bring any of this to any future lessons you might teach?

• Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think might be important to help get a sense of what it was like for you to teach this particular lesson, what this lesson might mean for you as a teacher?

Research Journal

I also planned to keep a research journal during the data-gathering phase of the study. This seemed like a valuable resource for taking informal ‘field notes’ of different types and at different times during what I expected to be a busy time. Although I planned to avoid taking notes during the interviews, I planned to do afterwards, and keeping a journal seemed a useful strategy to reflect on our conversations and to connect, explore, and record ideas in the field.

Participant Recruitment and Fieldwork

I began to solicit participants for the study just after my wife completed her chemotherapy treatment, towards the end of 2009. I met with the Director of the Teacher Education Office at the university where I was studying to discuss my research project and to ask if I could try to recruit teacher candidates in the university’s Bachelor of Education program. She
agreed to help with the project and recommended that I try to recruit participants in the elementary teacher education program, who were scheduled to complete their final, thirteen-week practicum placements in the spring of 2010. At her suggestion, I then contacted four local school boards to inform them of my project, and I was granted permission to conduct the research at elementary schools in these districts.

I recruited participants from January to April of 2010. With the approval of the program’s Director, I contacted the practicum university advisors by email to explain my project and, with their permission, I emailed an invitation to participate in the research (see Appendix A for the Call for Participants) to approximately 80 teacher candidates in the program. I had hoped to recruit three teacher candidates to participate in the study and, as things turned, exactly three participants volunteered and contacted me by email. Two of the participants had been placed in different schools in one school district, and the third at a school in another district.

Next, I contacted the principals and school advisors at the schools where the participants had been placed to explain the project and to request their permission to conduct the study during the participants’ placements. With the help of the teachers, I then contacted the students’ parents to explain the project and to ensure the anonymity of their children. The data-gathering took place as the participants completed their final 13-week practicum placements in the program during the months of March to June of 2010, and I took a one-semester leave from the work at the university for this phase of the study.

__________________________

6 During the data-gathering phase of the study, I learned that, as part of the university’s program, all of the participants had completed a two-week placement several month earlier at the same schools where their completed their final practicum placements.
Although we were all students in the university’s Faculty of Education, I had never met the teacher candidates who participated in the study before. Two women and a man volunteered, and they ranged in ages from mid-twenties to mid-thirties. All three replied to my invitation to participate by email, and this was our primary mode of communication to arrange our meetings during the data-gathering phase of the research. Our first face-to-face meetings took place during the ‘pre’-practicum interviews, and we met again for the three classroom video-recordings and ‘post’-teaching interviews and the final ‘post’-practicum interviews for the study.

Throughout the data-gathering phase of the study, I tried to stay conscious of the fact that as a teacher with more years of experience, a faculty member at a university, and a doctoral student, I may have been perceived by the participants as a person in a position of greater power in different ways and at different points in the research. I tried to be mindful of this possibility and not to perpetuate an image of myself as an expert. Of course, being aware of power differences does not negate them and working to minimize them does not necessarily equalize them, but I did my best to conduct myself in a collegial and ethical manner with them throughout the project.

I tried to be courteous and punctual in our email communications and in our meetings and to accommodate our meetings around their schedules. I also tried to mindful of my language in our conversations; I tried to bring a conversational-yet-professional tenor to my voice and body language, and I avoided using Aristotle’s Greek terms and their English translations. I provided the participants with interview schedules before our meetings, and we used them as open-ended guides for our conversations together, and I saw my primary role as a privileged listener. Sometimes, they asked me questions about my background, work, family life, education and
teaching, and I tried to answer these questions sincerely without straying too far from the topic at hand.

As the data-gathering phase of the study progressed, I came to realize how fortunate I had been to have worked with these three people. All three were courteous and considerate in all aspects of their participation in the research; in our email and face-to-face meetings, their comments were always friendly, helpful, and relevant to the research. At the schools, they made arrangements for rooms for us to meet together, and they introduced me to their school advisors and other teachers, administrators, staff, and students. During our interviews, I was often genuinely touched and surprised at how willing and with such heartfelt honesty they were to share their personal histories and reflections on their teaching, and I remain grateful to them for their invaluable help with this project.

**Interpretive Resources**

In keeping with the conceptual framework for the study and my research design, my purpose in gathering and interpreting the data was not to await a final ‘collection’ of data and to then arrive at a ‘final’ truth. Rather, my approach was ongoing and recursive throughout the data-gathering phase of the study and afterwards. This process involved many overlapping interpretive activities: meeting and talking with the participants, observing and video-recoding lessons, transcribing and reading the audio-interview transcripts, listening to audio-interviews in my car stereo while driving to and from meetings, watching classroom videos, taking notes and writing questions in my research journal, asking new questions as the research progressed, re-reading educational theory, Aristotle and Nussbaum, and reading novels and other forms of literature.
The selection of teaching episodes that would provide the textual ‘quilt’ of the study took place after the data-gathering phase of the project. I transcribed the first, ‘pre’-practicum interviews immediately afterwards and began reading them and looking for tentative topics that might point to universal ideas about teaching, and I kept track of these in my research journal throughout the study. In particular, I was interested in topics related to Aristotle’s intellectual virtues of episteme, teche, and sophia, but also universals related to phronesis in the form of ethical or character virtues and emotions. For example, during our first ‘pre’-practicum interview, one of the participants mentioned a keen interest in trying out some of the teaching techniques (a kind of teche) she had learned about in her program, someone else mentioned an interest in ‘multiple intelligences’ and ‘critical thinking’ (a kind of sophia), while someone else mentioned the importance of ‘caring’ for students (a virtue of character or an expression of love). My initial readings of these transcripts provided three or four tentative universal topics for each participant that I returned to and discussed with them in our later meetings and in our final ‘post’-practicum interviews for the study.

The three video-enhanced ‘post’-teaching interviews provided the descriptive details and particulars for the study. Several studies report that using video can aid reflection on teaching and learning because it provides a visual point-of-reference that can activate teachers’ cognitions, emotions, and motivations in an authentic and relevant way (Kleinknecht & Schneider, 2013; Sherin, 2004; Sherin & van Es, 2005). During these interviews, I asked open ended questions as the participants viewed and commented on the lessons. Interestingly, all three of the participants remarked on how much they enjoyed watching themselves teach throughout the study, and I found these interviews were very successful and providing detail-rich reflections
on classroom teaching and which I interpreted, in part, with reference to the universals mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2 and by connecting these particulars to the universal topics from the ‘pre’-practicum interviews.

During the final, ‘post’-practicum interviews, I asked the participants to reflect on their teaching practicum experience and the topics that had come up over the course of our previous interviews and any insights about teaching that they had gained from their practicum experience. These final interviews helped to further clarify the participants’ views on the topics that had emerged over the course of the project.

As mentioned, my interpretation of the data continued throughout the data-collection phase of the study and involved multiple sources of data. Nussbaum’s emphasis on the principle of listening was helpful through the interviews, the transcription of audio-data, and the textual analyses of the transcripts, as were her families of ‘diagnostic’ questions, but also what these particular texts “seem[ed] to say, or show, about human life, about knowledge, about personality, about how to live” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 35).

Selection, Presentation, and Writing of Teaching Episodes

The selection of teaching episodes took place once all of the data had been gathered. Beginning with the universal topics from the ‘pre’ and ‘post’-practicum interviews, I went back to the participants’ comments on the three video-recorded lessons with ‘post’-teaching interviews, looking for particular moments in their reflections on their classroom teaching that seemed to capture some of the different features of discernment that I presented in Chapter 2: the priority of particular perceptions over universals, emotions as judgments of value, and an interplay between particulars and universals. From the three video-recorded lessons and
interviews I conducted with each participant, I selected one brief, focal teaching episode that seemed to illustrate how the teacher candidate was beginning to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how this discernment seemed to help him or her construct his or her practices in more ethically-responsive ways.

This was a challenging task. In one sense, it seems important to note that none of the lessons I discussed with the participants included examples of extreme unethical or illegal activities; rather, the participants were engaged in the more everyday aspects of classroom teaching in all of the lessons we discussed. In another sense, there was little doubt that all of the classroom video-recordings we discussed were rife with subtle and sometimes overt examples of ethical judgments and actions—a way of looking at a student or a change in tone of voice, for example—and each 30-minute lesson could have provided multiple teaching episodes. Another issue, though, was that the participants did not always comment on these actions, and I felt I could only prompt them to do so up to a certain point in our interviews without compromising my own integrity as a researcher.

Another feature of these interviews was related to the temporal nature of the practicum and the sequence of the three video-recorded lessons and interviews with each participant within this time frame. As mentioned, these were conducted at roughly the beginning, middle, and end of their placements; although the purpose of the research was not to examine discernment from a ‘developmental’ perspective, it was very clear that the teacher candidates were gaining cumulative experience with classroom teaching during their placements. They made increasing reference, for example, to their earlier lessons in subsequent interviews and the fact that they
were getting to know their students as the study progressed, and it seemed important to try to include this quality of their comments in the study.

As a result, I decided to choose one episode from each teacher candidate to create the quilt of the study, but to select one episode from a different one of the three video-recorded lessons I discussed with them. Since all of the lessons contained multiples episodes that might serve as a focal one for the quilt—and since I planned to include comments and examples from other episodes and the ‘pre’ and ‘post’-practicum interviews as well—this helped to narrow the selection process, and I chose one episode from one of the three lessons in the order in which the participants had volunteered. In other words, the first episode was chosen from the first participant’s lesson and so on, and these would provide the three textual fabrics of the research quilt.

In considering how to organize and present the teaching episodes that are the focus of the three thematic chapters in the study, I became drawn to some of the structural conventions of Greek tragedy. Of course, not all of the plays by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles follow the same structure, but Greek tragedy usually begins with a prologue (from pro and logos, ‘preliminary speech’), in which one or more characters introduce the drama and explains the background to the story. The prologue is followed by the parodos, in which the story unfolds through three or more epeisodia (episodes), and the episodes are interspersed with stasima, or choral interludes explaining or commenting on the situation developing in the play, and the tragedy ends with the exodus or conclusion.

I thought this approach would be an appropriate and useful approach to writing the thematic chapters of the study. Each one begins with an introduction to the participant and some
of the topics from our first, ‘pre’-practicum interview. The introduction is followed by a focal teaching episode, transcribed from the video-recording and presented as a play with lines spoken by the characters in the scene and few stage notes. In the remainder of the chapter, I present the teacher candidate’s comments on the episode from our ‘post’-teaching interview afterwards, and these are interwoven with his or her comments from other interviews and interpretive commentaries. Each chapter concludes with a few closing remarks in response to the episode and the questions that were guiding the research.

**About What Follows**

In the following three chapters, I present the three teacher candidates who participated in this study, and each chapter focusses on their reflections on a particular teaching episode from their teaching practicum placements in the spring on 2010. To protect their identities, their names have been changed to pseudonyms: Dana Coupland, Adam Lau, and Lauren Gibson. In Chapter 4, Dana comments on part of French language lesson that she taught to a group of Grade 7 students. In Chapter 5, Adam reflects on part of a science lesson that he taught to a combined group of Grade 6 and 7 students. In Chapter 6, Lauren comments on part of a language arts lesson that she taught to a combined group of Grade 2 and 3 students. The three chapters are presented around the overlapping themes of seeing particulars, responding to particulars, and seeing new particulars, and they focus on how these particular teacher candidates seemed to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how this discernment seemed to help them to construct their practices in more ethically-responsive ways.
Chapter 4: Seeing Particulars

As I said, I always enjoyed teaching the children at the school in Japan, and I felt comfortable and I just enjoyed everything. But I wanted younger children on a regular basis that I got to have a full relationship with, versus children that would come in for forty minutes and then leave, and then another group would come in and leave. So I thought the public system would be what I wanted. And then teaching at the school here in Canada was different. That was a junior high, that was all day with the same group of kids, so I enjoyed the relationships that I made every day with them, and then they came back the next day. So I thought that was just a whole different type of teaching, which I really enjoyed.

I’m looking forward to trying the different techniques I’ve learned in my program. I’m going to try the ‘think, pair, share’ technique, where the students work on their own first, then with a partner, and then in a group, or even ‘think, pair, square’, where there are two groups of partners, and then they share as a foursome. I’m going to try a jigsaw activity during Week One, when they become experts in a certain area, and then they come back and teach it to the rest of their group. And I want to try doing literature circles, which at first scared me because I didn’t know if I could trust thirty children to discuss books in small groups, but I’m going to try that technique one day as well. I know it’s going to be a challenge, but I’m looking forward to it. I’m ready for literature circles!

Dana Coupland, ‘Pre’-practicum Interview

Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out, and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to do.

Henry James, The Golden Bowl

This chapter explores how discernment enables teachers to make sense of contingency in the classroom. Although uncertainty has been acknowledged as a fundamental condition of teaching, Nussbaum (2001a) emphasizes the ethical significance of how we respond to this condition, and she writes of “a good person’s refined perception of the contingencies of a particular situation” (p. 318), a way of ‘seeing’ complex and uncertain situations that she suggests is bound up in how “one sees oneself and what one loves” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 28). In this first thematic chapter of the study, I explore this feature of discernment in teaching as Dana
Coupland reflected on part of a French language lesson that she taught towards the beginning or her practicum.

**Introducing Dana**

I first met Dana Coupland in a room I had reserved for us at the university’s Education building where she was completing a program in elementary French language teacher education. During this first meeting, I learned that Dana was twenty-five years old and that she had grown up in an English-speaking, middle-class family and learned French while attending public French immersion schools in a large city on the Canadian west coast. After completing an undergraduate degree program in psychology, Dana accepted a job offer to teach English at a private language school in Japan, and it was during the year and a half that she spent there that she began thinking about becoming an elementary French language teacher upon her return to Canada.

Dana said that she had come at this idea in what she called “a strange way”. Before leaving for Japan, she had thought that teaching overseas seemed like a good opportunity to travel and to gain some experience in education before pursuing her interest in becoming a school counsellor back home. As a teacher of English and a learner of Japanese in Japan, however, she began to recall her enthusiasm for learning French and her success at learning another language when she was growing up, and she found that she really enjoyed teaching English, too. She said that at some point, she realized that she would never become a fluent speaker of Japanese unless she “lived there forever” but also that her French was very good, “So the Japanese actually pushed me in a way to French because I was already, um, I knew I had the skills there that I had grown up with, and so I thought that maybe I could teach it.”
One of the topics from our first meeting was the value that Dana seemed to give to what she called “making relationships” with her students. Although she taught both children and adults at the school in Japan, she said that what she enjoyed most was teaching younger learners, but it was difficult to make relationships with the children at the private school because she only saw them for a few hours each week. So whereas her experience with learning Japanese and teaching English seemed connected to her interest in becoming a French language teacher, her experience with teaching younger students in Japan seemed connected to her interest in becoming an elementary public school teacher upon her return to Canada.

After returning to Canada, Dana taught English language to visiting Japanese students at a private junior high school in her hometown for three months, and her comments on this second teaching experience also seemed to underscore the importance that she gave to making relationships with her students:

As I said, I always enjoyed teaching the children at the school in Japan, and I felt comfortable and I just enjoyed everything. But I wanted younger children on a regular basis that I got to have a full relationship with, versus children that would come in for forty minutes and then leave, and then another group would come in and leave. So I thought the public system would be what I wanted.

And then teaching at the school here in Canada was different. That was a junior high, that was all day with the same group of kids, so I enjoyed the relationships that I made every day with them, and then they came back the next day. So I thought that was just a whole different type of teaching, which I really enjoyed.
A second topic from our meeting began to surface as Dana explained that, while teaching at the international high school in her hometown, she also began to research the elementary French language studies teacher education program at the university where she planned to apply. As a ‘non-native’ speaker of French, Dana was required to pass a French language proficiency test as part of her admission into the program, and she realized that she had not used the language very much since she had finished high school. Although she felt confident in French, she was worried that on the day of the test, she might not “perform as well as I could, and I wouldn’t get the level I needed to pass the test and I was worried that I might not make that French, um, level because I really wanted that specialization”. She added that this worry was also related to her future employment plans and job interviews as a ‘non-native’ speaker and teacher of French: “maybe on the day I go in for the interview, I might not perform as well as a native speaker would, and therefore I wouldn’t get the job.”

In order to prepare for the French admission test, Dana decided to move to France, where she said she “got a French job and French friends and lived fully immersed in French for nine months”. After returning to Canada, she passed the admission test and then began her teacher education program in September. And so a second topic from our first meeting was a sense of vulnerability that Dana seemed to feel about her status and identity as a ‘non-native’ speaker and aspiring teacher of French language as she set out on her practicum.

7 See Llurda (2005) for an introduction to some of the many personal and professional issues surrounding the longstanding and problematic distinction between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ language speakers in second language education.
Towards the end of our meeting, I asked Dana if she could comment on her teacher education program, and she mentioned several things. For the most part, she spoke highly of the program, her instructors, and her fellow cohort members, and she recalled that even though she began the program feeling that she already “knew a lot about teaching”, she had “learned a lot”. She added that one of the highlights was the fact that most of the people in her cohort group were, like her, ‘non-native’ speakers of French, and there was a lot of mutual support between them to practice the language:

Twenty-six of the twenty-nine of us are Anglophones, and so we have this extra personal challenge every day, and we’re all trying to improve our French. I’m always saying, “Let’s only speak in French, even on our own time outside of class, so we can practice and improve”. Sometimes it’s tiresome, but we have this in common, and it does help, and I’ve really enjoyed the cohort experience. We’re very close.

Finally, I asked Dana if there was anything that she was hoping to explore in her teaching as she set out on her practicum, and she replied that she was planning to try out some of the many teaching techniques that she had learned about in her program, many of which she referred to by name:

I’m looking forward to trying the different techniques I’ve learned in my program. I’m going to try the ‘think, pair, share’ technique, where the students work on their own first, then with a partner, and then in a group, or even ‘think, pair, square’, where there are two groups of partners, and then they share as a foursome. I’m going to try a jigsaw activity during Week One, when they become experts in a certain area, and then they come back and teach it to the rest of their group. And I want to try doing literature circles, which at
first scared me because I didn’t know if I could trust thirty children to discuss books in small groups, but I’m going to try that technique one day as well. I know it’s going to be a challenge, but I’m looking forward to it. I’m ready for literature circles!

These were some of the topics that came out of our first meeting: the value that Dana seemed to attach to making worthwhile relationships with her students, a passion for language learning and teaching that was bound up in feelings of vulnerability about her status as a ‘non-native’ speaker and aspiring teacher of French, and a long list of teaching techniques that she wanted to try out during her practicum. In the following sections of this chapter, I wish to consider how these topics from our first meeting seemed to surface and connect in part of a lesson that she taught towards the beginning of her practicum, and how her reflections on the episode seemed to illustrate how she made good sense of contingency in the classroom through her capacity for discernment in a lesson she called “Où Vas-Tu?”

**Où Vas-Tu?**

Dana was placed with a Grade 6 French language teacher and her class of approximately thirty students at a large elementary school in an affluent urban neighbourhood. Built just after the turn of the twentieth-century, the three-level, Victorian-style brick building showed its age: the wooden doors and windows revealed several layers of thick, oil paint of different colours, and the faded, grey asphalt playground was cracked and raised in some areas from the roots of mature trees that grew beyond the chained-link fence of the school ground. Outside, tall, manicured hedges grew before multi-million dollar homes, and late model, luxury cars were parked on the narrow streets that surrounded the building.
Inside, Dana’s practicum classroom was on the first floor of the building, just up a set of wooded stairs and down the hall from the school’s office. The room had a floor of worn, solid oak, a soaring high ceiling with open plumbing and electrical fixtures and an enormous, split-panel window ran across one whole wall. The other walls were lined with waist-high shelving units overflowing with textbooks, cardboard boxes, and plastic baskets filled with photocopies, coloured paper and pencils, rulers, cello-tape, and scissors. Posters and student projects of all sizes adorned the walls, some blue-tacked to the chipped slate chalkboards (one black and one green) that ran along two walls. Old-style, combination seat-desks of faded oak were arranged in single rows along the room for students, while an oversized teacher’s desk of the same wood sat on an angle in a back corner of the room, its broad surface covered with more books, papers, and stationary supplies. Several ancient, white-painted iron radiators gave a dry heat to the classroom that mixed with the smell of dust and chalk in the air.

The teaching episode that follows took place in this room during the second week of Dana’s practicum, and it was part of a series of French conversation lessons. The episode is unique in one respect because Dana was not teaching what she called her ‘regular’ group of Grade 6 students, but a group of approximately thirty ‘visiting’ Grade 7 students who studied French with Dana’s school advisor while the ‘regular’ group attended a physical education lesson in the school gymnasium. As part of her practicum, Dana taught French to several groups of ‘visiting’ students, and this was her third lesson with this group that focussed on a series of French language questions and answers on the thematic question of Où Vas-Tu? (‘Where Are You Going?’)
The lesson began just after the mid-morning recess break. The ‘visiting’ students had arrived, unpacked their knapsacks, and taken their seats in the combination seat-desks in the classroom. The group was a fairly even mix of genders, with a little over half of south Asian ethnicity; some spoke to each other with Canadian English accents, some with accents from other languages, and some in languages other than English. Quite a few of them wore expensive clothing and carried the latest models of various electronic devices in colours of bright blue, silver, and red. Dana’s school advisor was at the desk at the back of the room, and I watched and video-recorded the lesson with a video camera I had set up on a tripod in other back corner. Dana began with a review activity, in which she prompted the students to ask and answer some of the conversation questions from their previous two lesson as she helped with vocabulary and pronunciation. She then moved to the front of the classroom, where she picked up a stick of white chalk and wrote Où Vas-Tu? at the top of the green chalkboard and then turned to face the group:

Dana:  *Merci, très bien.* Okay, we’re going to get started. What’s the conversation we’ve been working on the last few classes? (indicating a student with his hand up) Yes?

Student: ‘Où vas-tu?’

Dana: Good, okay. (turning and writing the question on the left side of the board, then turning back to the class) *Une réponse?* …an answer?…*une réponse?*…(indicating another student with her hand up)…yup?

Student: ‘Je vais’…then something…

Dana: ‘Je vais’…(turning and writing the phrase on the right side of the board as an answer to the first question on the left, then turning back to the group)…yes, good. Where do you want to say? ‘Je vais’…does anybody remember?

Student: ‘Au supermarché?’
Dana: ‘*Au supermarché.*’ That’s a good one. (adding this phrase to the sentence on the right side of the board)

Dana: What’s the follow-up question we did? (indicating another student with his hand up)

Student: ‘*Quand?*’

Dana: Yes, good… (writing this below the first question on the left side of the board)

Dana: *Très bien.* ‘*Où vas-tu?*’ ‘*Je vais au supermarché.*’ ‘*Quand?*’ Une réponse? (indicating a student with her hand up)

Student: (pointing to the text on the board) You, er, you spelled it wrong. You spelled it wrong.

Dana: (pausing, somewhat flustered, turning to scan the board) ‘*Demain?*’ No, that’s…

Student: No, ‘*supermarché*’… That’s ‘superché’.

Dana: (seeing the misspelled word now) Oh, I left three letters out…(erasing and re-writing the word, now turning to face the group and blushing bright red) Sorry…thank you. *Très bien.* ‘*Où vas-tu?*’ ‘*Je vais au supermarché.*’ ‘*Quand?*’ Une réponse?

From here, the lesson continued. Dana and the group completed the dialogue on the chalkboard, and she then presented some new French vocabulary and phrases. This was followed by a conversation activity, in which pairs of students practiced some of the new language and then added their own questions and answers, as Dana circulated around the classroom and helped with vocabulary and pronunciation. Afterwards, Dana and I met to discuss the entire 40-minute lesson as we watched it replay on a laptop computer in a small room that was part of the school’s main office, but I want to focus on this first part of the lesson and her comments on it in our meeting afterwards.
Particulars and Universals in Context

Before proceeding to Dana’s comments on the episode, it might be helpful to provide a brief summary of this part of the lesson as it was unfolding in the classroom and on the computer screen in our meeting after the lesson. Simply put, she was leading the group in a review activity when she unexpectedly misspelled a word at the chalkboard, a kind of minor technical mistake or ‘typo’ that she later corrected before carrying on with the lesson. As an example of contingency in teaching, I think most readers would agree it is unlikely that anyone could have predicted such an incident and that such happenings are not uncommon in classrooms. But I think the episode also helps to show how contingency is deeply bound up in particularity, that is, in particular classrooms and times involving particular situations and people and relationships, and my focus here will be on the meanings that Dana seemed to give as this particular episode as it was taking place in the classroom. As the episode began, Dana was leading the group in a review of French language items from their previous lessons together and writing these on the chalkboard in the form of a dialogue, and as she watched this first part of the lesson, she remarked:

…I think it’s good because I’m letting them have opportunities; like here, ‘je vais’ is necessary but then they could say ‘au supermarché’, ‘to the supermarket’ or they could say ‘à la piscine’, ‘to the pool’, like other ones we have learned. So they can answer as individuals, which I find important, versus just the one answer. So throughout the whole lesson, I’m trying to let them come up with their own answers, versus what I tell them to say…
Dana’s first comments here begin to illustrate Aristotle and Nussbaum’s claim that wise people make sense of practical situations, in part, by recognizing the contextually-embedded particulars that make them up and the universal attachments, commitments, and values that they bring with them to the situation, some of which Dana mentioned here. She said, “it’s good” which seemed to refer to a set of educational principles of classroom teaching and learning, that is, of letting students “have opportunities”, “so they can answer as individuals” and “come up with their own answers, versus what I tell them to say”, and which she described as “important”. In another way, though, she also seemed to be attaching these educational—even ethical—principles to the technique that she was using to lead the class, which seemed to be a language-teaching variation on the popular ‘group brainstorming’ technique. Less clear, however, was just who she was referring to when she spoke of ‘they’, ‘them’, and ‘their’: no doubt she meant ‘students’, but she seemed to be referring to them in a more abstract, universal sense, rather than to this particular group of students. And while she never mentioned ‘brainstorming’ by name as she commented on the episode, I couldn’t help but recall the many teaching techniques that she had mentioned during our first meeting at the Education building and the interest she had mentioned in trying some of them out during her practicum.

Particulars, too, were present in her first comments on the episode. She began by mentioning some of the specific language items from their previous lessons together, and she added many, many more as the episode continued. She mentioned, for example, the fact that she was using two languages in different ways: French as both the content of the lesson and as a language for leading the group and that she was trying to use more French with expressions such as ‘Une réponse?’ She also commented on her use of English throughout the lesson, and she
chastised herself at one point for her use of the word ‘yup’, which she described as ‘slangy’ and inappropriate because she was trying to provide the students with what she called a “good model of English”. She remarked that the volume of her voice was “too loud” at times and “too quiet” others, that her movements in the classroom were sometimes “too quick” and that she was struggling with using a stick of chalk on the green slate board because she was used to a writing with a dry erase marker on a plastic whiteboard. She also mentioned that she was being observed by her school advisor, who had recommended that she should try to call on “more students in the class, rather than just the ones who put their hands up” and that she was concerned about her pacing of the technique that she was using because she wanted to have enough time for the next activity in the lesson, and so she was also “watching the clock”. Of course, I was a part of this lesson, too, as I observed and recorded it from the back of the classroom.

It occurred to me that Dana’s comments reveal classroom teaching as a good example of how practical situations involve what David Wiggins (1980) calls an ‘infinite’ number of items. In another way, though, Dana’s comments also show how the sheer number of items, as well as their contextual-embeddedness, “can make the whole context a unique particular” (Nussbaum, 1990, p.72) and this, too, seemed to be the case as this episode continued. Finally, it seemed that many of the particulars that Dana mentioned involved the *people* in this particular situation and her relationships with them, as illustrated in her next comment:

…but as I said, this isn’t my regular class and it’s only my third lesson with this group and I still don’t know everyone’s names yet. These are thirty kids, and just before that there were another thirty visiting kids so I see sixty new kids back to back, and I just don’t *know* them yet and I’m trying to learn their names as fast as possible. This is actually quite
important to me because I understand, I know, that if I know their names they’ll maybe
feel a connection to me…that Ms. Coupland cares about them…

Dana’s comment that she didn’t “know” the students in the group seemed to be an
important part of what was going on in this classroom for her. As she pointed out, this was only her
third lesson with this group of students, and she had simply not had time to “learn their names”,
and she seemed to be talking about something more than cognition or recall when she said she
didn’t “know them yet”, that it was “important” that the students “feel a connection” to her, that
“Ms. Coupland cares about them”. Moreover, her comments here seemed to echo back to our
first meeting at the Education building and her emphasis on the value of what she called ‘making
relationships’ with her students—this was, in large part, what had prompted her to want to
become an elementary French language teacher in the first place.

I want to pause here to add a few observations that I made on this part of the episode as I
watched it unfold in the classroom. For one thing, I couldn’t help but notice that there was a kind
of awkwardness in her delivery of the group brainstorming technique, a kind of stuttering tempo
that is very different from the regular, rhythmic meter of a smoothly-led brainstorming session8.
As Dana mentioned, part of this had to do with the fact that she was doing a lot of things as she
was leading the group with the technique: communicating in two languages in different ways at
the same time, monitoring her voice and her physical movements in the classroom, speaking and
listening at the same time while writing on the blackboard, choosing which students to call on,

8 Momus (2006) provides an insightful account of how the modern version of this technique
arose in post-World War II America and the prevalence of military language and images in Alex
Thinking*.
and watching the clock. But it was awkward in another way, too. Rather than calling on the students by name to provide their questions and answers, she was doing so through a gesturing motion of her hand, an up-outward movement of her chin, and a raising of her eyebrows as she asked a hesitant “Yes?” This gave a more personal awkwardness to her delivery of the technique, which seemed to cascade and escalate in this part of the lesson as the students noticed her awkwardness and as Dana, at the same time, picked up on their recognition of it.

Dana’s first comment on the episode offer a few insights into the relationship between contingency and technique in teaching. Joseph Dunne (1997) writes that one of the problems with a heavy emphasis on technical forms of practice and reasoning in teaching and in teacher education is that it inevitably fails to capture “the urgencies and contingencies of teaching” (p. 5). I believe Dana’s comments here help to illustrate how these contingencies in teaching are bound up in conditions of uncertainty, vulnerability, and particularity, involving particular people and relationships, and this seem to be the case as the episode continued.

**Vulnerability and Emotions in Teaching**

I never asked Dana how she was feeling as she was teaching the group during this part of the episode in our meeting afterwards. In retrospect, I have wondered if doing so might have given me a better sense of her emotions in this part of the lesson, but I am not convinced of this. In any case, it didn’t feel right to me to do so at the time, in part because I didn’t want to interrupt or direct her ‘running commentary’ on the video-recorded lesson, but also because I had only just met her, and the question seemed too personal as we began this first ‘post’-teaching interview for the study. I can say, however, that this changed somewhat over the next few months and that we sometimes referred back to this first lesson in our subsequent meetings.
During our final meeting for the study, that is, once Dana had completed her practicum, she actually recalled this lesson, and she used an expression that seemed to capture how she was feeling as she was leading the group in a brainstorming session at the chalkboard. She said:

One of the things I’ve learned during my practicum is that when I’m speaking in front of the class and listening and writing at the board, I’ve noticed that I can get jumbled up, and that’s been one thing the practicum has shown me.

The expression is an interesting one. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) ‘jumbled’ means “mixed up in disorder, confused, muddled up” (p. 304), from the verb ‘jumble’, “to move about in mingled disorder; to flounder in tumultuous confusion” (p. 305), and there seems to be an emotional quality to this confusion that is akin to feeling *overwhelmed*, from the Middle English *over* + *whelmen*, “to turn upside down” (Barnhart, 1988, p. 742), “to overturn, overthrow, upset…to overcome completely in mind or feeling, to overpower utterly with some emotion” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 1137).

There is a rich and growing educational literature on the emotions of teaching that shares a few themes. One is the idea that teaching is not just a technical or cognitive practice, but also an emotional one (e.g., Denzin, 1984; Hargreaves, 1998, 2001; Meyer, 2009). Second, many educators point to a strong overlap between emotions in teachers’ personal and professional lives (e.g., Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Hargreaves, 2001; Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1991, 1996; Tickle, 1991; van Manen, 1991), and they share a view of teachers’ emotions as socially constructed and historically situated, rather than simply as a personal or “psychological phenomena that is ‘located’ in the individual” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 216). Third, these and other educators stress that emotions occupy a central place in how experienced and beginning teachers
make sense of their teaching practice and of themselves (e.g., Britzman, 2003; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Zembylas, 2003), and this is a theme that I will return to in the next section of this chapter.

First, though, I want to suggest that quite a few of these themes share some overlap with Nussbaum’s writing on emotions. Nussbaum clearly locates her theory of emotions in the human conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability, and she emphasizes that these are conditions are also experienced emotionally by people, and this view is echoed by many educators in their studies of the emotions of teaching and of learning to teach (e.g., Britzman, 2003; Kelchtermans, 1996, Kelchtermans et al., 2009; Tickle, 1991). Nussbaum also asserts that there are many kinds of emotions, and they are notoriously difficult to define: in her earlier writing and following Aristotle, Nussbaum (2001a) writes of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions, and this is a distinction that many educators similarly make (e.g., Hargreaves, 1998; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Zembylas, 2003). In addition, Nussbaum (2001b) distinguishes between emotions and moods, in that emotions such as fear, anger and love are always about something; that is, they focus on specific objects or events and they are also concerned with action; in contrast, “Moods such as irritation, gloom, elation, and equanimity lack these characteristics” (p. 133), but she suggests that moods can also operate to set the stage in which specific emotions do arise, and this is a distinction that some educators also make (e.g., Bullough, 2009).

Nussbaum’s focus, however, is the role of emotions in ethical perception, deliberation, and judgement, and this is a quality of the emotions that has not received much attention in the study of teaching. Nussbaum (1990) describes emotions as “composites of belief and feeling” (p.78), in that our feelings in particular situations are closely tied to sets of beliefs that we hold about the
world; in this way, emotions function as perceptive “modes of vision” (p. 79) that enable us to see and to reason and to judge in important, human ways that our cognitive intellect alone cannot. Rather than rootless or fleeting ‘passions’, she maintains that emotions themselves function as important ‘judgements of value’ that reveal to us, and to others, how “one sees oneself and what one loves” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 28), and she develops a view of emotions as suffused with intelligence and highly discriminating abilities.

How might any of this help to understand Dana’s notion of getting ‘jumbled up’ as she was leading the group in a review of Où Vas-Tu? Well, we might ask if feeling ‘jumbled up’ in this particular educational situation was a mood or an emotion. It certainly seemed to be an experience of vulnerability brought on the sheer number of items that were being constantly added to the situation and shifting in the scene as it was unfolding in the classroom, and I think it is fair to say that Dana was feeling a little overwhelmed at all of this. I want to suggest, however, that this feeling or mood was not focussed on any specific object or event, but that this changed dramatically as the episode continued and a student suddenly announced, “You spelled it wrong”.

Up until this point, Dana seemed to be feeling jumbled up, confused, or overwhelmed, but her sense-perception of the situation seemed to change quite suddenly as this new item was added to the scene—everything just kind of stopped, a brief moment where the whole focus of the lesson suddenly shifted from a review of French language items to the group’s awareness of Dana’s sudden loss of composure as she searched the board to find and correct the misspelled word. It didn’t last more than few seconds, but it was marked by an abrupt silence in the classroom and a few glances exchanged between some of the students before Dana recovered her
composure and then carried on with the lesson. As she watched this next part of the episode, Dana said:

…so there I misspelled a word very badly. I dropped three letters off a word. Sometimes I need to work on when I’m leading the class, asking a question, and I’m speaking because I don’t focus on my writing. And that’s the second time in two days that I’ve found well, someone else has found, a mistake in my writing, and I felt so embarrassed when the kids saw me up there going ‘huh? Because as a teacher, I want them to see me as prepared, knowledgeable, capable…

This seemed to be a very different way of seeing what was going on this situation. For one thing, her earlier, more general feeling or mood of overwhelmedness became suddenly focussed on a very clear object and event, and it is hard to miss how harshly she judged herself when she said she “misspelled a word very badly”, “the second time in two days…someone has found as mistake in my writing”. We also notice how Dana’s seeing here is guided by a very specific emotion that she called ‘embarrassment’, which Michael Lewis (2000) describes as one of several ‘self-conscious’ emotions because it is bound up in broader views of one’s self and in concrete situations that involve a kind of public ‘exposure’. This seemed to be the case as Dana turned from the chalkboard to face the group, embarrassed and blushing bright red, “Because as a teacher, I want them to see me as prepared, knowledgeable, capable” and which seemed to suggest a connection between this particular emotion and an emerging sense of herself as a beginning elementary French language teacher.
Teachers’ Emotions and Identities

“Because as a teacher, I want them to see me as prepared, knowledgeable, capable”. We might read Dana’s comments here alongside Deborah Britzman’s study of Jamie Owl and Jack August. Britzman (2003) writes of the cultural myths and stereotypes that operate to shape beginning teachers’ views of knowledge and identities and to cloak the emotional nature of teaching and of becoming a teacher in “a sense that all of these thoughts and affects should remain hidden, lest the teacher appears too emotional, uncertain, or vulnerable” (p. 21). As Britzman explains, the problem with stereotypical views of teachers as ‘self-made experts’ is that learning to teach is inevitably “situated in relationship to one’s biography, present circumstances, deep commitments, affective investments, social context, and conflicting discourses about what it means to learn to become a teacher” (p. 31), rather than merely acquiring predetermined knowledge and skills and taking up pre-existing teacher identities.

For Nussbaum (2001a), the significance of Aristotle’s notion of a human soul lies in its distinctively human nature and its capacity for ethical reasoning and goodness; these are, she maintains, important qualities of our human identity, part of what makes us who we are human beings. As Nussbaum (2001a) puts it, “The image of the soul is an image of what I value in myself, what I am willing to acknowledge as part of my identity” (p. 222), and this is an image of a fragile and distinctively human identity that does not rely on technical or scientific forms of reasoning, knowledge, and activity alone to grow and to live well with others over the course of its Earthly life. Nussbaum (2001b) suggests that emotions are linked to identity because they operate as perceptive ‘judgments of value’, that is, “they have to do with me and my own, my
plans and goals, what is important in my own conception (or more inchoate sense) of what it is for me live well” (p. 33).

Understood as an amalgam of feelings and beliefs, it seems possible to say that Dana’s emotion of embarrassment was a kind of ‘self-conscious’ way of ‘seeing’ this situation as well as a set of beliefs about teachers as “prepared, knowledgeable, capable”, beliefs that she also seemed to connect to her students and to their beliefs about teaching and good teachers. After correcting the misspelling at the chalkboard, Dana turned to face the group, her voice dropping a bit as she said, “Oh, sorry…thank you”, and as she watched this final part of the episode, she said:

…it was definitely embarrassing, but the kids can forgive me. And it’s also great that they recognized it. They feel comfortable because they could’ve been wrong. I could’ve been spelling it right, too. But to put up a hand like that and to believe…even just to take the risk of correcting a teacher, that’s good. It’s something that I’m definitely working on: to be able to write and speak and listen on the board at the same time (laughs)…

Dana’s final comments here seem very different from her earlier ones. As the episode began, her remarks were focussed on a set of abstract educational principles and her judgments about these in terms of teaching ‘students’ in a more abstract sense of the word ‘they’, but this seems very different from her use of the words “the kids” and “they” in these comments on this final part of the episode. After misspelling a word at the board, she turned to a ‘self-conscious’ reflection on herself, her teaching and, to some extent, the students at the school where she had been placed, but here her comments are clearly focussed on this particular group of students, and something that Dana seemed to have learned about teaching and about herself.
Her comment “it was definitely embarrassing, but the kids can forgive me” seems to suggest that her misspelling at the chalkboard was no longer a source of excessive embarrassment, and she moves to the deep structure of the event. She sees that the children are beginning to trust her enough to risk correcting her and, in this way, the larger universal of a ‘trusting relationship’ is put into play with the particular of these particular children: we see a kind of growth here, as Dana is not thinking like a ‘student’ teacher anymore, but as a wise and good teacher would.

**Illuminations between Particular and Universal**

Throughout her writing on phronesis, Nussbaum suggest that there is a kind of learning or growth that comes about through the exercise of practical wisdom, a quality that she describes as ‘reflective’ or ‘perceptive equilibrium’ (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 168-194) and elsewhere as a “two-way illumination between particular and universal” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 306). This illumination, she writes, can take different shapes and forms: sometimes, it can inform or add to an existing universal by showing us more about its constituent values, while at others, it can bring about a shifting of a universal conception, “which is not immune to revision even at the highest level” (p. 306). And while particulars take priority over universals in discernment, “they are partners in commitment and share between them the honors given the flexibility and responsiveness of the good judge” (p. 306).

It is not surprising, perhaps, that the topics from our first meeting at the Education building were framed in universal terms: the value that Dana seemed to attach to making worthwhile relationships with her students, a passion for language learning and teaching that was bound up in feelings of vulnerability about her status as a ‘non-native’ speaker and aspiring
teacher of French, and the long list of teaching techniques that she said wanted to try out during her practicum. But it is quite surprising how these universals seemed to take on concrete shape and form in the episode here: Dana’s concern that she didn’t ‘know’ the students in this particular group of ‘visiting’ Grade 7 students, her feelings of embarrassment at misspelling a word at the chalkboard, and her technical and personal struggles with leading the group in a brainstorming activity and getting cognitively and emotionally ‘jumbled up’ while doing so.

Before considering what, if any, illuminations may have taken between the universals and particulars at play in this teaching episode, I should mention that this was the first of three lessons that I observed and discussed with Dana during her thirteen-week placement at the school. Our second meeting took place at approximately mid-point in her practicum, where we viewed and discussed a French language Social Studies lesson that was focussed on the Canadian parliament, and our third interview concerned a lesson Dana taught towards the end of her practicum that she called a ‘work period,’ in which she provided help to individual students as they completed projects in different subject areas. In addition, Dana and I met for our final interview for the study after she had completed her placement, and it was during this final meeting that I asked her if she could share any insights on her practicum experience with me.

During this last meeting, we returned to Dana’s enthusiasm about trying out some of the techniques that she had learned about in her teacher education program. She mentioned that she had tried many of them, but she stressed the importance of variety and of adapting different techniques to different contexts:
As for new teaching techniques, I’ve tried a lot. I tried some the first couple of weeks I thought some were great and others not so much. At first I never changed them, but then I started thinking that there were some things I could do to make them better and experimenting. So I’ve been adapting them and trying different things and I’m still adapting. And next year when I get my own class, I’ll probably adapt some more and you kind of have to because you never know how it’s going to work out. One thing I’ve learned here is there’s always a risk that it might fail but even if it does, it’s not the end of the world.

We also talked about the emphasis on the importance of making relationships with her students as an English language teacher in Japan and in Canada, and I asked her if she could comment on this aspect of her teaching during her practicum. She said:

Well, looking back, I think I bonded with the kids over time and I learned a lot. When I first came in here, it was always their regular classroom teacher who the kids asked for help or who they went to when they had the big questions. But over the weeks and as time progressed I think they started to see me as a real teacher, and they’ve been coming to me more. They don’t go and get a second opinion from my sponsor teacher, you know, like kids sometimes do, by working the mother off the father—they trust my questions, my judgment, and that’s been really great.

I was drawn to her notion of a ‘real’ teacher here and how Dana seemed to connect this idea to making relationships with her students and to trustworthiness and to judgment, and in many ways, I think this is part of what happened in the teaching episode here. In her final comments on the episode, she said “they recognized it” and I think they did, too, but it wasn’t a
misspelling of a word at the chalkboard, it was blushing, aspiring French language teacher that
day taking a brief detour from a brainstorming session to reveal herself as a fragile human being
to a group of thirty ‘visiting’ teen-age strangers through a small display of honesty and
trustworthiness.

Concluding Remarks

So what was this illumination? Well, it seemed to focus on a kind of revision of who a
‘real teacher’ is: someone “prepared, knowledgeable, and capable” of course, but also a real
person who sometimes gets ‘jumbled up’, makes mistakes, and feels embarrassed when she does.
In many ways, I think Dana speaks for teachers everywhere who face what I fear are increasingly
large groups of new students at the beginning of each year and semester—while it might be one
thing to say we value making relationships with our students, a very difficult and important
question is: how do we do this? Rather than dazzling displays of subject-matter knowledge or
technical expertise, it seems more likely that worthwhile relationships are cultivated over time
and through small displays of honesty and trustworthiness in highly particular and sometimes
unexpected situations and ways. And I think this opportunity to begin cultivating worthwhile
relationships with the people in this group of ‘visiting’ Grade 7 students would have been missed
if Dana had simply carried on brainstorming Où Vas-Tu?
Chapter 5: Responding to Particulars

Well, for me, good teaching is... it’s when you’ve been able to help someone learn. And if I had to explain that a little bit, it means: Are the students engaged? Will they be on task? Can they demonstrate some of these skills or knowledge that you’re trying to impart? That, for me, is an effective teacher. But I’m also after some of these other things, too, like: Do they have integrity? Are they going to conduct themselves well? Are they going to be responsible citizens at the end of the day?

These are people that you might run into one day, maybe years down the road, and they are going to remember you for something, whatever that little thing might be. Hopefully, they will thank you for it, so that kind of guides me, too—could I be that kind of teacher?

Adam Lau, ‘Pre’-practicum Interview

Besides poïësis, the activity of producing outcomes, he recognized another type of activity, praxis, which is conduct in a public space with others in which a person, without ulterior purpose and with a view to no object detachable from himself, acts in such a way as to realize the excellences that he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life.

Joseph Dunne, Back to the Rough Ground

This chapter explores Nussbaum’s account of Aristotelian praxis as a “yielding responsiveness” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 315) to the concrete situation at hand. For Nussbaum, responsiveness is closely interwoven with perception; that is, a wise person does not first perceive a situation and then respond, but rather she emphasizes that seeing and acting are mutually-constitutive activities, and this “responsive perception” (p. 291) involves a characteristic ‘yielding’ or giving way to strictly ‘scientific’ or ‘cognitive-intellectual’ forms of reasoning about practical matters. Second, Nussbaum writes that a wise person will both recognize that practical situations involve particular persons and relationships and care about these valuable things, and so responsiveness also involves opening oneself “to the value and
special wonder” (p. 317) of these important features of the particular. In this way, praxis is also responsive in the sense that it yields to human emotion, and this is important because “a truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 78). In this second thematic chapter, I explore this feature of discernment in teaching as Adam Lau reflected on part of science lesson that he taught at approximately mid-point in his practicum.

**Introducing Adam**

At thirty-six years of age, Adam Lau was the oldest teacher candidate to participate in the study, and he had been teaching for about six years before he began his elementary teacher education program. We first met at the suburban elementary school where he had been placed as he set out on his practicum, and it was during this first meeting that I learned he had immigrated to Canada from China as an infant with his family and that he had grown up bilingual in what he described as a ‘middle-class neighbourhood’. After attending public elementary and high schools, Adam completed an undergraduate degree program in psychology at the same university where he would later begin his teacher education program, and he mentioned that his decision to become an elementary school teacher had come about through a combination of overlapping events and changing interests.

While completing his psychology degree, Adam started working as a teacher’s assistant at the university’s English language institute where, after completing his undergraduate program and a certificate in teaching English as second language, he was hired as an ESL teacher and worked for six years teaching English language to international university students. During this time, Adam also worked as a chef and volunteered as an instructor in a community-based cooking
program for school-aged children, and he found that he enjoyed teaching younger learners. One day, a colleague who taught in the cooking program suggested that Adam consider becoming a public school teacher, and Adam eventually decided to follow through on this idea:

Well, the time came when I had to make a decision about whether I was going to continue with what I was doing or try something different. At the Institute, I was teaching academic English to international students, people who were nineteen and over and heading for university. And I felt increasingly, especially as I was getting older, that what appealed to me was teaching children in a public school setting. The Institute was a much smaller pond, more specialized. But with an elementary curriculum, you introduce kids to a broader range of things, from Science to Fine Arts to P.E., and I thought this tied in with what I valued about education and what I felt was important and how I felt I could contribute. So that’s sort of what my aim, my goal, was when I decided I wanted to teach in an elementary setting.

Adam’s comments here began to give way to some of the topics that came out of our first meeting together. In a sense, one of these topics was concerned with differences that Adam had observed between teaching adult-aged university students and elementary-aged school children, and he often described the notion of ‘difference’—as in the quotation above—in terms of the broader focus of an elementary curriculum and the value that he seemed to give to of this feature of elementary school teaching. At other times, however, Adam described this difference in terms of a heightened sense of responsibility that he seemed to feel as a teacher of younger learners:

With adults I felt it was more straightforward; it’s like they had already had their education and I sort of knew exactly how to help them because it was mostly focussed on their
language skills. And it’s quite different with elementary school because this *is* their education and so there’s so much more here to be responsible for. I mean, obviously, there are differences in terms of age and maturity levels, and there are behavioural issues and other things that I didn’t appreciate until I actually got here. But you also you have to be sort of *more* knowledgeable about so many *more* subjects, and they have to get through a lot of foundational material because if they don’t, they can fall through the cracks by the time they hit Grade 8.

Adam’s notion of responsibility seemed to have several layers to it. As in the quotation above, he sometimes described responsibility in terms of ‘delivering’ the provincial elementary curriculum and thereby preparing students for their course examinations and subsequent studies. At other times, though, he described his sense of responsibility in terms of cultivating certain skills and abilities. He mentioned, for example, the importance of developing his students’ ‘decision making skills’, ‘multiple intelligences’, ‘critical thinking’, and ‘persuasive strategies’. At one point in our meeting, he used the expression ‘good teaching’, and when I asked him what he meant by this, he said:

> Well, for me, good teaching is…it’s when you’ve been able to help someone learn. And if I had to explain that a little bit, it means: Are the students engaged? Will they be on task? Can they demonstrate some of these skills or knowledge that you’re trying to impart? That, for me, is an effective teacher. But I’m also after some of these other things, too, like: Do they have integrity? Are they going to conduct themselves well? Are they going to be responsible citizens at the end of the day?
These are people that you might run into one day, maybe years down the road, and they are going to remember you for something, whatever that little thing might be. Hopefully, they will thank you for it, so that kind of guides me, too—could I be that kind of teacher?

And so another layer to Adam’s notion of responsibility was cultivating what he called “these other things, too”, things that he described, beyond “skills or knowledge” in strikingly ethical terms—‘integrity’, ‘good conduct’, and ‘responsible citizenship’—and that he captured as a future encounter with a student one day and the question of whether or not this student would remember him fondly “for something, whatever that little thing might be”.

As with all of the participants in the study, Adam had already completed a shorter, two-week practicum placement at the school earlier that year, and a third topic from our meeting surfaced towards the end of our meeting, when I asked him if he could share any observations he had made about his classroom teaching so far, to which he replied:

I’ve found one of the biggest stresses for me here is the constant interruptions. I go into a class with a lesson plan I’ve crafted and typed up, and then it gets cut short because there’s a school assembly or a chess club meeting or something. And there are other things, too, like individual students going to ESL tutoring or sports club meetings or drama events and all kinds of other things. The other day, I was teaching a math lesson and there was an announcement over the intercom pulling everyone out of class for a school yearbook picture in the playground and I was, like, “Hey, I’ve still got twenty minutes of material to get through here!”
I mean, I understand the need to be prepared in teaching because you can’t do well if you’re not. But with things like that going on all the time, you can design the perfect lesson plan and have everything all ready, but you may not be able to implement it all because something is going to come up and derail the whole thing. So then it’s like, what can the expectations be? So I guess I’m kind of changing my perspective and adapting to reality here…

These were some of the topics that came out of our first meeting together: a heightened and multi-layered sense of responsibility that Adam seemed to feel as an aspiring teacher of elementary-aged students, his commitment to cultivating a range of skills and capacities beyond the ‘core’ subjects of the provincial elementary curriculum, and a sense of frustration that he seemed to feel when his carefully-planned lessons were ‘derailed’ by what he described as classroom ‘interruptions’. Over the next three months, I had the opportunity to observe and discuss three lessons that Adam taught during his practicum, and we meet for a final interview after he completed his placement at the school. During these meetings, many of the topics from our first meeting surfaced and converged at different times and in different ways, but I want to explore how his reflections on one part of a lesson he taught during his practicum seemed to illustrate Nussbaum’s account of praxis as ‘yielding responsiveness’ and that seemed to involve a kind of learning or growth as he reflected on a lesson he called “Investigating Pure and Mixed Substances”.

**Investigating Pure and Mixed Substances**

Adam completed his practicum with a combined group of approximately thirty Grade 6 and 7 students and their teacher at a modern, mid-sized suburban elementary school. Built in
1991, the building was situated on a large parcel of land that included several outdoor play areas with modern equipment and safety features and well-maintained sports fields. The school was a single-level building with a beige, concrete exterior, a few good-sized windows, and a red corrugated-metal roof, where large groups of noisy seagulls from the nearby ocean were gathered each time I visited the school to meet with Adam. The paved entranceway to the building crossed a blue-green grass front yard and was bordered by tidy flower beds and pruned shrubs. Across the street, late-model cars were parked in the wide driveways of modern, detached houses of similar colours and architectural design.

Inside the school, the classroom where Adam was placed was bright and spacious. At the front of the room, there were two large whiteboards and a pull-down roller screen for a projector that hung from the ceiling. Laminated wooden tables with steel legs were placed around the room with brown plastic chairs around them, providing seating areas for the students. Along one wall, a large window looked onto the school’s front yard and gave natural light to the room. Below the window, a room-length countertop ran along the wall, holding a large sink with hot and cold running water and a paper towel dispenser. At the back of the room sat the teacher’s desk with a laptop computer that was connected to the projector on the ceiling, and dry electric heat emanated from several large metal vents that had been placed at the base of the walls around the classroom.

The teaching episode that follows took place in this room during the sixth week of Adams’s practicum, and it was part of a series of science lessons that he taught to the group on the classification of two categories of matter—pure substances and mixtures. The focus of the lesson was a science experiment, in which groups of students were to predict and then determine
the ‘pure’ or ‘mixed’ nature of an everyday substance: ink from a classroom marker, and the
lesson began just after the mid-day lunch break. During this time, Adam had prepared the
classroom for the experiment, and there were various objects and materials—glass beakers, paper
napkins, and rulers—sitting ready for the lesson on the countertop under the classroom window.
I had set up my video camera on one side of the teacher’s desk and watched as the students
returned to the classroom.

As Grade 6 and 7 students, their ages were between 11 and 13 years, and the group was a
fairly even mix of genders and of Asian and Caucasian ethnicities. Most were dressed in clothes
of a modern style, and many carried electronic devices of various types and colours. The
predominant language of the group was English, and quite a few spoke with accents from China,
Korea, Japan, and India. A few spoke to each other in languages other than English. As they
entered the room, they put away their devices, sat down at the tables, and took out their science
books and journals. Adam was sitting on a wooden stool at the front of the classroom, and he
began the lesson with a review from their previous science lesson on the two categories of matter
mentioned above. He then rose to the classroom whiteboard and removed the cap from his black
whiteboard marker:

Adam: I have an experiment for us today and it involves a certain set of materials and I’d
like us to try working through it together. What I have here is a regular marker.
It’s black and what we’re curious about is the topic of our experiment today: is ink
a pure substance? So in your science journals, I want you to write that title and
then to list the materials that you’ll need: a beaker with about 150 millilitres of
water in it and (writing the list of supplies on the whiteboard)…

Calvin: (raising a hand) Mr. Lau, Mr. Lau?

Adam: (turning from the board) Yes, Calvin?
Calvin: How did people figure out what atoms go with what thing?

Adam: (pausing) Erm…that’s a great question, Calvin…sometimes, it’s…

Calvin: Like, how did they figure out two hydrogen, one oxygen for water? One carbon, two oxygen for carbon dioxide?

Adam: (pausing) Well, I think it involved a lot of…investigation. They first of all needed to identify what the, what the pure substances were, and then…a long time ago…they probably combined things. A lot of people, like chemists, like to combine things…

Calvin: Hmm!

Adam: (turning the group now) So, you’ll need a beaker with some water in it, a ruler, and a strip of napkin (continues writing on the board)…

Calvin: Mr. Lau?

Adam: (pausing, turning) Calvin, why don’t you come over here and talk to me? (Calvin walks over to Adam)

Calvin: Mr. Lau, I’ve done this experiment before.

Adam: You’ve done it before?

Calvin: Yeah, I did it in science class at my old school last year.

Adam: (pausing) Okay…well…then, do you want to help me demonstrate the experiment to the class?”

Calvin: (delighted) Yeah, sure!

Adam: (turning to the group) All right, so Calvin here is going to be helping with the demonstration and then making sure that everyone has got their rulers and napkins assembled properly. Let’s begin with the beaker and water…

From here, the lesson continued as Adam and Calvin demonstrated the experiment to the group together. For the remainder of the lesson, Calvin helped as the groups made predictions about the pure or mixed nature of the ink from Adam’s whiteboard marker, gathered their materials and performed their experiments, and then recorded their results in their science
journals. Afterwards, Adam and I met to discuss the entire 40-minute lesson as we watched it replay on a laptop computer in the same room at the school where we first met. In the following sections of this chapter, I focus on this part of the lesson and Adam’s comments on it, first as Calvin asked, “How did people figure out what atoms go with what thing?” and then when he announced “Mr. Lau, I’ve done this experiment before.”

**Particulars and Universals in Context**

As mentioned, this lesson took place at about mid-point in Adam’s practicum, and he had been teaching this group of combined Grade 6 and 7 students for about six weeks. The episode began as Adam, after presenting the focus of the lesson, was writing a list of materials on the whiteboard for the groups to note in their science journals in preparation for the experiment, and the episode involves a pair of exchanges between Adam and Calvin, who first asks Adam a question about molecules and then announces that he had performed this same experiment at his school the year before.

In one sense, the episode provides a few more examples of how contingency seems to underlie much of what goes on in classrooms, and it seems unlikely that anyone could have anticipated Calvin’s question and his subsequent announcement as the lesson was unfolding. In another, the episode also provides an illustration of Aristotle’s claim that practical situations—and our judgements about what to do in these kinds of situations—are constituted by contextually-embedded particulars and universals, some of which can be seen in the episode here.

Returning to the topics from our first meeting, Adam’s emphasis on planning and preparation is revealed in his careful preparation of the materials for the experiment and a lesson
plan that included a logical presentation of ideas and a variety of activities, and this seemed related to his notion of responsibility to what he had called ‘imparting knowledge’ to his younger learners, especially with regards to ‘core’ subjects and ideas in the provincial elementary curriculum—in this episode, the scientific classification of matter into ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ substances.

We might say Adam’s earlier mention of classroom ‘interruptions’ also takes on concrete shape and form here, first as Calvin ‘interrupts’ Adam’s listing activity at the whiteboard when he asks how people ‘figured out’ “what atoms go with what thing”, and we might pause here to consider what courses of action were open to Adam at this point in the episode. He might, for example, have chosen to ignore Calvin’s question and carried on with listing the items for the experiment on the whiteboard. Another option would have been to inform Calvin that his question was ‘off-topic’, or unrelated to the list of materials being written on the board or the focus of the experiment that was to follow. What Adam did, though, was to pause and to respond to Calvin’s question as best he could.

At this point in the lesson Adam hesitated, and he seemed to be re-focussing his attention and gathering his thoughts as he turned from the board and replied, “Erm…that’s a great question, Calvin…” Calvin then added to his question by asking about the molecular structure of water and carbon dioxide, to which Adam, after pausing again, replied that it required a lot of “investigation” by people “like chemists”. Somehow, Adam’s improvisational response here seemed to satisfy Calvin, who then relied with an approving “Hmmm!”, and as Adam watched this part of the episode in our meeting afterwards, he remarked:
…oh, so here’s a question I probably didn’t anticipate. This is Calvin here: he’s one of our brighter students and it’s interesting because I’ve noticed there are some students that already have notions about molecules and atoms, which is not something that we’ve actually touched on because the curriculum focusses more on the idea of particle model theory. So at some points, I do need to acknowledge that some of them do know more, but at the same time I don’t want to confuse the rest of the class. So that was definitely…sometimes when a student hand goes up, you never quite know what they’re going to say (laughs)…

Adam seems to be engaged in two very different kinds of activities and ways of thinking about what was going on in the classroom here. In Aristotelian terms, we might understand Adam’s activity of listing items on the whiteboard as a kind of poiesis, or the application of techne or pre-specified, technical ends through pre-specified and technical means: in this case, the listing of materials in preparation for an experiment. We might even say that Calvin’s question ‘interrupts’ Adam’s poiesis, and that Adam is now in a situation where he needs to make a judgement about what, if anything, he should do in this situation and which, on Aristotle’s (2004) account, involves phronesis and praxis, rather than techne and poiesis.

Adam’s comments on his response to Calvin’s questions are noteworthy as well. He acknowledges Calvin’s question as unexpected and involving a particular person, and he then moves to a general reflection about the students in this group. He acknowledges that some of them “know more” than others and that answering Calvin’s question also involves the risk of confusing some of the other students, something that Adam says he did not want to do. We notice, too, that Adam is not following a lesson plan at all here, but rather he is responding to this
new and unexpected feature of the lesson, in part, by perceiving the salient details that made up this particular classroom situation, and this seems very different from the kind of thinking and acting that goes into writing a list of science materials on a whiteboard.

**Responsive Perception**

This first part of the episode is an interesting place to explore Nussbaum’s notion of praxis as an amalgam of a wise person’s perception of and response to a concrete situation. Nussbaum (2001a) writes that these activities are not separate or sequential, but rather interwoven and mutually-constitutive: a wise person’s “discriminatory activity is not, so to speak, prior to her response; it is in and constituted by her response…the response…is her perception” (p. 315, italics in original).

In reflecting on his response to Calvin’s question “How did people figure out what atoms go with what thing?” Adam acknowledges the unanticipated nature of Calvin’s question, but his perception of this new item in the scene is interwoven with his perception of Calvin, a person he describes as “one of our brighter students” and who Adam has gotten to know, along with some of the other students, during his past six weeks with the group, and he added to his first comment on this part of the lesson in our interview afterwards:

…and probably the judgment call I made here is because I’ve gotten to know this particular student a bit. Calvin is one of our better students but he can also get bored or be disruptive if he’s not…engaged. So it’s a good thing to take his question because not taking it would be at the risk of him completely tuning out or taking a trip to the bathroom. And that’s because I’ve come to know this individual and this is sort of where he operates. He likes questions and he likes the attention he gets when he asks them…
…whether it’s good or bad, he likes to have my attention and it’s nice to talk to him. But there’s also a whole classroom of other students that deserve the attention, as well. I mean, sometimes, it’s like: do I choose to try and acknowledge the question, or should I just keep it moving along?

More than merely answering a student’s question, Adam seems to be simultaneously seeing and responding to Calvin as a person that he has come to know during his time at the school. And while his earlier comments focus on how ‘knowing’ his students involves an assessment of their subject-matter knowledge, here he focusses on who Calvin is, a person who seems to “know more” about this particular area of elementary science, but who also needs and enjoys the attention he receives from his teacher and, as Adam points out, can become disruptive or distracted without this attention.

At the same time, Adam wonders if he should respond to Calvin’s question at all, or if he should “just keep it moving along”, in part because he also feels a responsibility to the other students in the group, who are equally deserving of his attention, and he realizes that there will be trade-offs with any course of action. In other words, Adam’s perception of the situation is not separate from his response; it is in and constituted by his response to Calvin, to the other students in the classroom, and to himself.

As Adam put it, he chose ‘to take’ Calvin’s question, and he did this by pausing as he was writing on the whiteboard and by turning his attention to Calvin. We get a sense here of how Adam’s response involves a shift from one kind of educational activity to another, but we also see how this responsiveness involves yielding to a way of thinking about teaching that is not exclusively concerned with technical ends and means. Instead of seeing and responding to Calvin
as some interruptive classroom ‘variable’ that might be manipulated or otherwise brought under control, his discernment of the situation is bound up in particular persons and uncertain relationships, and he does not seem to be facing the situation before him by applying a pre-determined decision-making strategy. As Nussbaum (2001a) explains, this is very different from Plato’s ‘scientific’ account of practical deliberation as the “aspiration to universality, precision and stable control” (p. 291), and Adam’s deliberations on this part of the episode seem far more akin to “Aristotle’s more ‘yielding’ and flexible conception of responsive perception” (p. 291) in this first part of the episode and as it continued.

**Opening Oneself to the Value and Special Wonder of the Particular**

In the second part of the episode, Adam had returned to listing the materials on the whiteboard, and it is at this point in the lesson when Calvin, once again, exclaimed “Mr. Lau?” Here again there was pause in the lesson, first as Adam turned from the board and asked Calvin to come up to the front of the classroom, and then as Calvin got up from his seat and walked across the room.

There was a very personal quality to this part of the lesson. Although it was possible to overhear Calvin and Adam as they were speaking to each other, their voices became lower and everyone in the room seemed to understand that this was a private conversation between Adam and Calvin, and many of them turned their attention to their books and science journals. Calvin stood quite close to Adam as he explained that he had already performed the experiment at his school the year before, and his voice carried a kind of nervous, adolescent awkwardness, but his eyes were fixed on Adam, and you could tell that he really liked him. As in the first part of the episode, Adam seemed to be organizing his thoughts about what to do about Calvin’s
announcement, and his eyes moved a few times from Calvin to the groups of students at their tables, who also seemed to be wondering what Adam was going to do about this new development.

Here, again, it seems worth considering what choices were available to Adam at this particular point in the lesson. He could have told Calvin that he had to repeat the experiment, perhaps by explaining that it was simply part of his science course and a required assignment. Alternately, he might have given Calvin the opportunity to read or to work on another school project, perhaps in a different space somewhere in the classroom. What he did, however, was to invite Calvin to help demonstrate the experiment to the group, to which Calvin responded with wide eyes, a beaming smile, and a clearly delighted “Yeah, sure!” As he watched this part of the episode, Adam said:

…so here Calvin’s come by and let me know that he’s done this experiment before, and I’ve made the decision to let him help model it for the rest of the class. He likes to be in this place; it really works for him and I’m fine with that if I can give him that place and give guidance to the other groups. And they can sort of see what’s happening, too, so I’m trying to match it up, to see what it’s like…

Adam’s comments seem to offer a glimpse into Nussbaum’s (2001a) claim that a wise person brings “a concern for very important human things” (p. 314) to his or her deliberations about practical matters and that responsiveness in practical situations involves opening oneself “to the value and special wonder” (p. 317) of the particular. We notice, first, that Adam did not respond to Calvin here from across the classroom as he did in the first part of the episode, but rather here he asked Calvin to join him at the front of the room, where they spoke together in
lowered voices. Again, Adam’s comments suggest that his response to Calvin was not separate from his perceptions of various aspects of the situation: Calvin’s news, his plan to follow the listing activity with the experiment, and the fact that the other students were watching and wondering what Adam would do at this particular moment in the lesson.

Rather than telling Calvin that he needed to repeat the experiment or sending him off to work alone in the classroom, Adam’s deliberations are focussed on wondering what he should do in this situation, and he does this, in part, by “entering into it, wondering about what it is, attempting to do justice to it in feeling as well as thought” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 89). He sees how, for example, that Calvin “likes to be in this place”, how “it really works for him”, and he wonders how he can “give him that place and give guidance to the other groups”, who “can sort of see what’s happening, too” as Adam is “trying to match it up, to see what it’s like”.

Again, we notice that Adam is not following a lesson plan or ‘delivering’ some item from the provincial curriculum here. Quite the contrary, he is seeing and responding to a concrete educational situation in very concrete and educational ways by opening himself to the value of this concreteness and the particular people and items that make it up, and this is not a strictly cognitive-intellectual activity. As Anne Phelan (2001) observes, practical wisdom is not simply an intellectual act, and it is a teacher’s “willingness to dwell rather than draw back from and to perceive rather than simply ‘know’” (p. 47) that is the mark of wise and good teacher. Here, we are impressed with Adam’s judgement in this second part of the episode, for to have made Calvin repeat the experiment or to have sent him to a corner in the classroom would seem, somehow, less praiseworthy, and we catch a glimpse of a truly wise and good teacher candidate in action.
Feeling the Appropriate Emotions about What One Chooses

For Aristotle and for Nussbaum (1990), a wise person will not only act well, but also “feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses” (p. 78). Aristotle emphasizes this is because emotions are an important part of who we are as human beings, and so a wise person will not act out of a strictly intellectual commitment to doing so, “for this sort of being-without-feeling is not human” (in Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 41). Nussbaum (1990) provides an example of a person who decides to help a friend: to do so through intellect alone—that is, without the feelings that are a constituent part of friendship—would be to lack an important part of what friendship is and what helping a friend is, since “This person doesn’t really, or doesn’t fully see what has happened, doesn’t recognize it in a full-blooded way or take it in” (p. 79).

So what about Adam’s feelings as he was responding to Calvin in this particular teaching episode from a science lesson? I believe one answer to this question lies in Adam’s frequent reference to the frustration he felt about ‘interruptions’ to his carefully-planned lessons, a topic that emerged in our first meeting at the school and re-emerged in our subsequent classroom observations and discussions. During our first meeting, Adam gave several examples of these kinds of interruptions—sudden school assemblies, students leaving the classroom at different times and for different purposes, and unexpected announcements over the school intercom—and he spoke of the frustration he felt because “you can design the perfect lesson plan and have everything all ready, but you may not be able to implement it all because something is going to come up and derail the whole thing.”

This same topic emerged our first post-teaching interview, as we discussed a mathematics lesson Adam taught that focussed on the concepts of mean, median, and mode. Adam mentioned
that many of the students were struggling with this subject and were simply not interested in
math, and so he designed his lesson around a set of images and pictures that were related to the
then-current hockey play-off season and which he projected from his laptop computer onto the
pull-down roller screen at the front of the classroom. Towards the end of the lesson, his summary
of these mathematical concepts was cut short by a sudden and extended announcement over the
intercom reminding the students about a school event that was taking place during the lunch
break that day, and at this point, Adam mentioned the importance of a good ‘wrap up’ to a
lesson, and how this announcement had “thrown a monkey wrench into the plan”.

According to Robert Barnhart (1988), ‘to frustrate’ is ‘to thwart’ or ‘to baffle’, but
frustration also carries with it a feeling of disappointment (p. 412). In this sense, it seems
possible to interpret Adam’s frustration with an unexpected school announcement as a kind of
‘thwarting’ to his intended wrap-up to the lesson, but there was also a feeling of disappointment
and even sadness at this particular turn of events. In psychology, frustration has been described
as a ‘painful’ emotion that arises from the perceived resistance to the fulfilment of, or conflict
between, personal goals or desires, and frustration has been linked to feelings of anger and
aggressive behaviour (Miller, 1941), some traces of which seem present in Adam’s notion being
(or teaching) at the receiving end of a metaphorical “monkey wrench”.

Towards the end of his practicum, Adam and I discussed another science lesson that he
taught on the topic of acids and bases. In preparation for this lesson, Adam had gathered and
brought a variety of natural and household products to the classroom for the students to make
predictions about and then test in groups for PH levels using litmus paper. Some of the groups,
however, did not finish their experiments by the end of the lesson, and so Adam stayed with
them as they finished up, recorded their results in their science journals, and then tidied the classroom. Adam seemed to blame himself for the fact that not all of the groups had finished at the same time, and he chastised himself at one point as we discussed the lesson, saying “I felt so frustrated that I got distracted, and I ended up not sending in the attendance sheet to the office”.

Throughout these classroom observations and our discussions afterwards, it became very clear to me that Adam was a knowledgeable, highly-organized, and skillful teacher who took great care in preparing his lessons. And yet his teaching seemed somehow haunted by these recurring feelings of frustration when unexpected events simply ‘just happened’ in the classroom. In these situations, Adam’s feeling of frustration seemed painful indeed, in part because these sorts of events were beyond his control, but also in the sense that he seemed to be blaming himself for his inability to predict or control them when they did happen. Over the course of his practicum, however, I believe Adam came to see this aspect of classroom teaching in a somewhat different way, and his feelings of frustration with classroom interruptions seemed to give way to other, more helpful and appropriate emotions when dealing with unexpected events as they arose in his lessons.

Some traces of this shift can be seen, I believe, in Adam’s comments on his responses to Calvin in this second post-teaching interview for the study. In his reflections on his response to Calvin’s question “How did people figure out what atoms go with what thing?”, for example, there was a distinct absence of frustration when he commented “So that was definitely…sometimes when a student hand goes up, you never quite know what they’re going to say”, a comment that he followed, quite significantly, with a brief and good-humoured laugh that was distinctively lacking in feelings of disappointment, self-blame, or anger.
Adam’s comments on the second part of the episode are similarly lacking in feelings of frustration when he invited Calvin to help demonstrate the experiment to the groups. Rather than references to ‘derailment’ or ‘monkey wrenches’, his reflections on his choice here seemed to carry, above all, an emotional tenor of caring when he spoke of ‘giving’ Calvin “that place” and as he was “trying to match it up, to see what it’s like”. In other words, Adam’s responses to Calvin and comments on this episode seemed to show how he was, as he mentioned in our first interview at the school, “kind of changing my perspective and adapting to reality here” by letting go of his feelings of frustration and by caring about the people involved when unexpected events and situations came up in his lessons.

**Illuminations between Particular and Universal**

Throughout their writing on phronesis, Aristotle and Nussbaum emphasize a kind of learning or growth that comes about through the exercise of practical wisdom. Nussbaum (2001a) suggests that this growth, like phronesis itself, emerges in very particular shapes and ways: sometimes, it can add or inform an existing universal conception by telling us more about its constituent values, while at others it can bring about a shifting or revising of a general conception, “which is not immune to revision even at the highest level” (p. 306). So what was the illumination as Adam was leading a combined group of Grade 6 and 7 students in an investigation of ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ substances?

I have chosen to present this episode from Adam’s practicum because it seemed to capture two moments where he was beginning to see and to respond to what he had called classroom ‘interruptions’ in a way that was very different from accounts of dealing with contingency in the classroom, both in our first meeting and in some of our subsequent post-teaching interviews and
that he alluded to in our final meeting at the school. During this last meeting, I asked Adam to reflect on his practicum experience, and I asked if he could share insights that he had gained about teaching during this time. He said:

Well, I always felt that it was going to be a huge responsibility. I mean, it not like I didn’t take teaching university students seriously, but here it was like I needed to take a lot more on my plate to be a good teacher. With my adult students, I could pack a lot of teaching into whatever time I had and I could press on with things if I got held up somewhere along the way.

But spending time with this class has really helped me to learn that I was overestimating how much I could accomplish and how much information I could get through, and I’ve learned you really need to slow down sometimes and look out into the class and see what’s really going on and being able to recognize that has been really good for me as a teacher.

I asked Adam what he meant by this, and he said:

Well, I think for me one of the stresses was trying to prepare the best lessons I could and having the props ready and all the equipment laid out then finding out that lesson gets cut short because there’s a school assembly or someone is acting up or getting upset about something or something else happens. And you know, it can be really frustrating when you prepare a lesson and then it gets wiped out liked that. And you never know what it’s going to be because what might happen with one particular group of students is going to depend on a lot of things.
I mean, if I taught the same lesson to another group they’d, you know, be engaged in a totally different way and the same plan would probably show up differently. But it’s not, it wouldn’t, I guess my point is that no lessons are ever the same. And I’ve learned you never know what it’s going to be or how it’s going to play out. That’s just the way it is, and you have to live with that, and it’s not always easy.

There seemed to be a sense of this shift beginning as Adam reflected on his responses to Calvin in this second post-teaching interview from the study, a way of understanding teaching that was quite different from his earlier and heavy emphasis on what he had referred to as “the perfect lesson plan”. Rather than feeling frustrated by Calvin’s questions about how people ‘figured out what atoms go with what thing’ and his sudden announcement that he had already performed the experiment, Adam was beginning to recognize the need “to slow down sometimes and look out into the class and see what’s really going on”—in this instance, looking out and seeing a student who maybe ‘knows’ more than the others, but who also needs a little extra attention and personal recognition from time to time.

And instead of seeing and responding to this particular student as an ‘interruption’ to his clearly well-planned science lesson, Adam paused to see and to respond to Calvin, a person with particular needs for particular kinds of attention at particular times, and he saw and responded to him as a wise teacher would: by yielding to Calvin’s question over a listing activity at the whiteboard and by flexibly inviting Calvin to help demonstrate the experiment to the group. In this way, it seemed Adam’s emphasis on the ‘perfect’ lesson plan was beginning to give way a view of wise teaching that emphasizes caring, flexibility, and responsive perception over the iron-clad, and inevitably-frustrating, lesson plan.
Concluding Remarks

My reading of this teaching episode from Adam Lau’s practicum has focussed on Nussbaum’s interpretation of Aristotle’s praxis as a kind of “yielding responsiveness” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 315) to the concrete situation at hand, and I have tried to capture how Adam’s responses to Calvin seemed to illustrate some of the related qualities of this aspect of phronesis in a very particular educational context. In writing this chapter, I often returned to Adam’s description of a good teacher during our first meeting together, a person he described as someone that a student would remember fondly in a future encounter one day, “maybe years down the road” and who the student would remember for “something, whatever that little thing might be”. Of course, it is impossible to say if Adam will ever meet Calvin sometime, somewhere down the road, perhaps at the large, suburban shopping centre that is a just few blocks away from the school where this teaching episode took place, or maybe somewhere else.

But it seems to me that Calvin just might remember Adam, not for his knowledge of ‘pure’ and ‘mixed’ substances or his careful preparation of the science experiment that was the focus of the lesson that day, but rather for taking a moment to answer the question of how people ‘figured out what atoms go with what thing’ and for asking him to help demonstrate an experiment to class that day, and that maybe this, and nothing simpler, is really what it means to be what Adam had described, in so imaginatively ethical and educational terms, as that kind of wise and good teacher.
Chapter 6: Seeing New Particulars

I really wanted to be able to come in here and create that environment where the students are interested and engaged and feeling okay, but I’ve found some of the kids here have some really aggressive behavioural tendencies, and I’ve seen some really nasty incidents of racism and bullying and fighting. Other times, though, it’s little comments that are really hurtful to others, like calling people names and taking somebody’s jacket for a laugh. And I really wanted to create that responsibility in students, you know, that democratic classroom idea where the kids are going to be respectful to each other and take control of themselves, instead of me being the person always doing it.

But I’ve definitely had to tighten the reins. I’ve had to do way more classroom management than I thought I would have to, and I was feeling pretty crappy about this last week because I was spending so much time saying, “Okay, boys and girls, this is rude, you’re not listening, I need some green-light behaviour here, blah, blah, blah…” And there’s this side to it that I don’t like—it’s not something that I wanted to be doing here.

Lauren Gibson, ‘Pre’-practicum Interview

Trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one’s feelings to be engaged with that other person’s life and choices, one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed.

Martha Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge

This chapter considers how discernment enables teachers to see aspects of teaching in ways that they had previously missed through a kind of practical insight. Aristotle describes this insight as *nous*, an intellectual virtue that operates in tandem with the perceptive element of phronesis, whereby particulars or combinations of particulars appear as distinct ‘images’ of value to us in concrete situations. For Nussbaum (1990), practical insight is like perception, but “it is an ability to recognize the salient features of a complex situation” (p. 75) “in such a way as to see (or otherwise perceive it) as something, picking out its salient features (p. 77, emphasis in original). In this way, practical insight involves a kind of imagination, and while nous involves
the recognition of images, Nussbaum (2001a) asserts that “it has in itself non-intellectual components” (p. 309), and she emphasizes that “emotions typically have a connection to imagination, and to the concrete picturing of events in imagination” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 65). Nussbaum adds that imagination and practical insight involve our relationships with other people and that by “Trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one’s feelings to be engaged with that other person’s life and choices, one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 44). In this third thematic chapter of the study, I explore how this feature of discernment can lead teachers to learn to see new aspects of the world by re-creating educational ideals with their students as Lauren Gibson reflected on part of a Language Arts lesson she taught towards the end of her practicum.

**Introducing Lauren**

Lauren Gibson and I first met in the library at the elementary school where she had been placed as she began her practicum. During our first meeting together, I learned that she was thirty-one years old and that she had developed an early interest in nature and a passion for environmentalism while she was growing up in a small town in the interior of British Columbia. After high school, Lauren moved to the city to pursue an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science, and it was during this time that she began working as a park interpreter for Parks Canada, a position that she held during the summer months for several years after she completed her undergraduate program. When I asked Lauren how it was that she had decided to become an elementary school teacher, she replied that a lot of her work as a parks interpreter had involved teaching school-aged children about the environment, and this was something that she felt was important and that she enjoyed:
As a parks interpreter, I really enjoyed working with the kids and seeing that as a really valuable profession. For me, that was a big part of the job; it was basically the same as being a teacher, only outside, and it was fun and something that I got a lot of pleasure out of, but also something that I feel is important and that I’m passionate about. And I think my approach to teaching is more along the lines of what I was doing as a park interpreter, you know, not just ‘working’ with kids and giving them information—it’s more about experiential learning and play-spaced learning and creating opportunities for kids to engage in ideas and activities and that sort of thing—you know, helping kids to think and not just regurgitate information, which I feel is important.

Lauren’s comments here began to yield some of the topics that came out of our first meeting together. One was how her passion for nature and her conviction as an environmentally-responsible person seemed to contribute to her views of education and teaching. As in the quotation above, Lauren often described teaching as almost synonymous with exploring and interpreting a forest or park, and she commented on the kind of environment that she hoped to cultivate in her practicum classroom:

As a park interpreter coming in here, I had some very strong opinions about how children should be talked to and what teachers should do. I had some very clear ideas on things like noise levels in the classroom and what I thought was okay and that children need to be able to move around and chat and that sort of thing, with me definitely erring on the noisier, chattier side of things. I came in thinking, “Oh, I’m going to let them be way louder and they’re going to able to do more things and I’m not going to be telling them to be quiet all
the time and I’m going to structure it in a way that’s okay and they’ll still be on task and
doing things I ask them to do.”

A second topic, however, was a sense of doubt that Lauren seemed to feel about whether or
not this kind of environment was even possible in the context of an elementary school classroom.
As with all of the participants in the study, Lauren had completed a shorted, two-week practicum
placement at the school earlier that year, and she spoke of her struggles with the ‘environmental’
realities of teaching in an elementary school context:

I mean, as an environmental educator, I feel very strongly that children need to be outside
as much as possible, and I’ve tried to incorporate that into my teaching, but it’s challenging
at times. In my park interpretive programs I only had fifteen students, whereas here I’ve
got almost thirty kids, who are a lot younger and so managing them all at the same time,
even just outside in the playground here, can be quite challenging.

And the same is true on the classroom side of things. As a parks interpreter, you have kids
for two full hours, and your job is to get them feeling comfortable in the park. So you get
their energy levels up, get them excited, you know, and then you go searching for plants or
do a bug hunt or something, and they’re excited and they’re learning about the ecosystem.
But when I do that here and get them all excited, then it’s like, “Okay, so now we’ve got
all these great ideas, now you have to go sit at your desk”, which obviously doesn’t work.
So I’m still trying to figure out how to keep the energy and the excitement there without
losing, you know, that focus and losing control of them.
This turn in our conversation gave way to a topic that Lauren alternately described in terms of ‘classroom management’ and ‘discipline’ and a sense of uneasiness that Lauren seemed to feel as she found herself caught between her own convictions as a caring, ecologically-minded teacher and an uneasy image of herself as rule-enforcing disciplinarian:

I really wanted to be able to come in here and create that environment where the students are interested and engaged and feeling okay, but I’ve found some of the kids here have some really aggressive behavioural tendencies, and I’ve seen some really nasty incidents of racisms and bullying and fighting. Other times, though, it’s little comments that are really hurtful to others, like calling people names and taking somebody’s jacket for a laugh. And I really wanted to create that responsibility in students, you know, that democratic classroom idea where the kids are going to be respectful to each other and take control of themselves instead of me being the person always doing it.

But I’ve definitely had to tighten the reins. I’ve had to do way more classroom management than I thought I would have to, and I was feeling pretty crappy about this last week because I was spending so much time saying, “Okay, boys and girls, this is rude, you’re not listening, I need some green-light behaviour here, blah, blah, blah…” And there’s this side to it that I don’t like—it’s not something that I wanted to be doing here.

These were some of the topics that came out of my first ‘pre’-practicum meeting with Lauren at the school library: a view of teaching that seemed interwoven with her passion for nature and her commitment to experiential learning, play, and exploration, her uncertainty that these same principles were even possible in an elementary school classroom, and an emerging,
almost fearful image of herself as a strict, over-controlling classroom disciplinarian. In the following sections of the chapter, I explore how these topics from our first meeting seemed to rise up and inter-mingle together as Lauren reflected on part of a lesson that she taught towards the end of her practicum and how her comments on the episode seemed to illustrate discernment in teaching as a way of re-creating an educational ideal with her students in a lesson she called “Writing Fairy Tale Endings”.

**Writing Fairy Tale Endings**

Lauren completed her practicum with a combined group of approximately thirty Grade 2 and 3 students and their teacher at a modern, mid-sized suburban elementary school. Built in 1996, the school was surrounded by large, modern condominium complexes, and the busy streets in this suburban neighbourhood were usually lined full with parked, late-model family vehicles and service vans. The school was set back from the road and constructed of pale concrete blocks, with a grey metal roof and blue trim around the windows and doors. The front entrance to the school was covered with a large, covered archway that was supported by four large cedar posts, and three wooden benches were bolted to the concrete patio under archway and just outside the school office.

Inside, the classroom where Lauren taught her classes was located at the back of the school, and it had a large window that looked onto a well-maintained sports field and towering condominium buildings beyond the school grounds. One distinguishing feature of this classroom was that it was divided into two distinct spaces: one with more conventional groupings of tables and chairs and a second with a carpeted floor area for the children to sit. This second area had its own whiteboard, and a large mural ran the full length of one wall to the ceiling above, depicting
a mediaeval castle on a hill that was populated by human and animal figures, trees, and clouds made of coloured construction paper.

The episode that follows took place in this second area of the classroom during the twelfth week of Lauren’s practicum, and it was part of series of 40-minute Language Arts lessons that she taught the group on writing fairy tales. Prior to this third lesson in the series, the students had written the beginning and middle parts of their fairy tales, and the focus of this lesson was to write the third, ‘happily-ever after’ endings to their stories.

The lesson began just after the mid-morning recess break. As the students returned to the classroom, they gathered in the carpeted area of the room and sat with their legs crossed. The group consisted of a fairly even mix of genders, and the majority of this group of six to nine year-old students were of Asian ethnicity. Lauren once remarked that there was only “one student in the class whose parents are native English speakers”; some spoke to each other in English, while others spoke in other languages. Lauren sat in a chair just in front of the whiteboard in this part of the classroom, and once the students had arrived, she began:

Lauren:  Good morning everyone. Today is a very exciting day because we are finishing writing our fairy tales and today is the ending, the happily ever after, and I thought I would give you a little bit of an idea of how my story ended and maybe it will help give you some ideas about how to end your story. So, do you remember that my hero was Normal Girl and that she had to…

Jeff:  (interrupting) Ooo-loo-loo! (some students giggle)

Student:  (to Jeff) Shhh!  (more giggling; Jeff stops)

Lauren: (pausing, noticing, then continuing)…and she had to get the wand that was across the Lava River in the cool pool of water…

Student: (some of the students have noticed that Sam has his finger in his nose)  
Eww…gross!
Lauren: (pausing, noticing, then continuing as Sam puts his hand down)…and who can tell me who helped Normal Girl out to get the wand? Allen?

Allen: The Wood Bug?

Lauren: That’s right. The Wood Bug that turned into a…

Students: (together) A unicorn!

Lauren: A flying unicorn, yes….

Jeff: Ooo-lah…haw! (more giggling from students)

Lauren: (to Jeff, putting an index finger to her lips) Jeff, excuse me…(Jeff settles down)…And so remember, the flying unicorn brought Normal Girl and the wand back to the village and the castle, flying across the course so she didn’t have to worry about the wild animals because now her bow and arrow had been eaten by the Wood Bug that turned into the unicorn. So Normal Girl gets back to the village and the Wizard is there. And he’s really mad because….

Eric: Ow! (students giggling)

Lauren: (pausing) Division Seven…Eric?

Eric: I was just trying to put my hand up, but Jeff was grabbing it!

Jeff: Was not!

Student: Was too!

Eric: See?!?

Lauren: (pausing) Jeff, can you sit up and put your hands on your lap? (Jeff does)…because the Wizard thought he’d hidden his wand in a really good place and that nobody would find it, and so everybody would be turned to stone for the rest of time…

Eric: Ow! (more giggling)

Lauren: (pausing) Eric?

Eric: Jeff poked me!

Lauren: Jeff, go sit at your desk. If you won’t listen, I’ll have to put you outside so you’re not disrupting us. (Jeff gets up and goes to sit at his desk)
Lauren: (continuing) So Normal Girl now has a very handy horse that can fly her all around the world and she spends…

Student: (Sam has his finger in his nose again, more giggling) Ewww!

Lauren: (pausing) Sam? Sa-aam…(Sam puts his hand down)

Lauren: And she spends the rest of her life travelling all over the world. And the Wizard and the people in the village lived…

Students: (together) …happily ever after!

Lauren: Happily ever after! Alright, so you guys already have your heroes, and so what I want to do now is to brainstorm a couple of ideas about how your fairy tales can end (moving to the whiteboard). And remember, every good fairy tale—I’m going to put this up on the board for you guys to look at later—will have a last sentence that says: “And they all lived happily ever after…the end”. So how could some of your stories end…Alisha?

From here, the lesson continued. Some of the students suggested endings to their stories, which Lauren jotted on the whiteboard in point form, and the group then returned to their desks in the other part of the classroom. For the remainder of the lesson, Lauren circulated among the group and helped the students as they wrote endings to their stories. Afterwards, Lauren and I met to discuss the entire 40-minute lesson as we watched it replay on a laptop computer in a small room that was down the hallway from the classroom where it took place. In the following sections of this chapter, I focus on this part of the lesson and Lauren’s comments on it in three parts: first as she noticed Jeff and Sam disrupting the group at the beginning of her fairy tale, next as she sent Jeff to his desk, and then as she spoke to Sam again towards the end of the episode.
Particulars and Universals in Context

As mentioned, this lesson was part of a series of Language Arts lessons that Lauren taught to her practicum group of combined Grade 2 and 3 students, and it took place towards the end of her practicum. The episode begins as Lauren is telling the group the happily-ever ending to her fairy tale. Shortly after beginning the lesson, one of students noticed Sam with his finger in his nose, which prompted Lauren to pause as the student exclaimed “Eww…gross!” Next, she paused again as Jeff interrupted with an “Ooo-loo-loo!” and, a few minutes later, with a similar comment. Shortly after this, Eric exclaimed that Jeff was grabbing his hand and poking him, to which Lauren responded by sending Jeff to his desk on the other side of the classroom. Upon returning to her story, one of the students noticed Sam, once again, with his finger in his nose, and Lauren responded to before continuing on with the lesson. The scene from an elementary classroom might seem like a peculiar place to explore the ways in which practical insight seems to function in tandem with discernment in teaching: I would suggest, however, that many of the elements in the scene here are not uncommon at all in Grade 2 and 3 classrooms and that it is in precisely these kinds of situations where discernment is most needed in teaching and where we might actually catch a glimpse of its exercise in action.

As I watched this lesson unfold in the classroom, I was reminded of our first interview at the school library and some of the topics from our first meeting. I couldn’t help but notice how much of the content of Lauren’s fairy tale seemed to echo her passion for nature and her commitment to environmentalism, and her story included several ecological images and characters: the ‘Lava River’ a ‘cool pool of water’, a ‘wood bug’, a unicorn, and ‘wild animals’. In our meeting afterwards, Lauren mentioned that she had chosen ‘Normal Girl’ as the hero for
her story, a name and character that seemed to resonate with her earlier emphasis on what she had called “helping kids to think and not just regurgitate information”:

…so what I’m doing here is I’m telling them my story to give them an idea of how an ending would go, and before I gave my ending, I reviewed what happened in my middle. I came up with Normal Girl as the hero because I was trying to get them away from using stories and the names of characters from popular TV shows and video games, which a lot of them were doing. I’m trying to get them away from that and to be more creative and to come up with their own stories and heroes…

The episode also includes a few examples of what Lauren had alternately referred to as ‘classroom management’ and ‘discipline’. This was a topic that came up in all of our subsequent interviews, and Lauren seemed to settle on the term ‘discipline’ to refer to a sense of rules about codes of conduct and control over individual behaviour, rather than how she was ‘managing’ the group. But whereas in our first interview she had described the notion of ‘discipline’ in fairly abstract terms, her later comments tended to focus on specific events involving particular students, especially Jeff and Sam, who also feature in this episode.

Jeff was a Grade 3 student who Lauren had mentioned several times in our earlier meetings, and she seemed to be struggling with him. Lauren had mentioned that Jeff was prone to pestering the other students in the group—sometimes by name-calling, such as the time he called another student ‘stupid’ and at others through his physical behaviour, such as poking or grabbing others—and while his behaviour was never especially aggressive, it was clearly bothersome to the other students in the group and to Lauren. In one of our earlier interviews, for example, she remarked that Jeff had taken hold of another male student’s arm, to which Lauren
had responded in a harsh, raised voice: “Jeff, let go of him! Remember what Ms. Campbell⁹ told you? Stop grabbing people!” At a different point in this same meeting, she said that Jeff was also very athletic and that he was prone to boasting about his athletic abilities and accomplishments. Earlier that morning, Jeff had announced several times that he has scored three goals in a hockey game the night before and that he had spent a good part of that morning bragging to the group about his impressive ‘hat trick’:

...so it’s like, he’s very athletic, but he’s also very cocky about it sometimes, like, “Look at me, look how great I am” and that sort of thing, which is not a trait that I value, and I don’t think it will serve him well in the future either...

Lauren also said that Jeff had a tendency to challenge his teachers, often in front of the group, and she commented on this aspect of his behavior:

...one of the things I’m challenged with, with Jeff, is that he’s just so on his own agenda all the time, and he doesn’t really put a lot of value on, sort of, following the class rules unless they’re things that he’s interested in. And he’s very defiant, like, “Why do I have to do this? It’s too easy. I know how to do this. Why do I have to follow the rules? Why do I need to read a book during silent reading?”, which is why I think I get that power struggle with him sometimes, which is frustrating for me and for him, too, right?

Lauren had also mentioned Sam several times in our previous meetings. A Grade 2 student, Sam was small for his age, and he had been identified as having an attention deficit disorder. Lauren remarked that although Sam was often quiet in class, he had also demonstrated verbal

⁹ Lauren’s practicum school advisor and the group’s regular classroom teacher
and physically-aggressive behavior towards some of the other children in the group, many of whom tended avoided him in and outside of the classroom during recess and the lunch break. At one point in one of our earlier meetings, she remarked that Sam had spat on one the students in the group during recess, and she had spoken with Sam after the incident:

…with Sam, it’s like most of students just come up to me and complain about him all the time. The other day he spit on somebody, which is awful, and I was like, “Sam, that’s disrespectful!” but he just kind of stood there and looked at me…

What I noticed about Lauren’s earlier comments about Jeff and Sam was that she seemed to be responding to them using the same ‘disciplinary’ approach and explicative language—‘Jeff, let go of him!’; ‘Stop grabbing people!’; ‘Sam, that’s disrespectful!’—and this was very different to her responses to these two students in the first part of this episode and as it continued.

**Practical Perception and Insight**

As the episode began, Lauren responded first to Jeff as he exclaimed “Ooo-loo-loo!” and then to Sam as one of students observed him and exclaimed “Ewww!” In one sense, Lauren’s responses are interesting here because they do not involve love *any* language at all. Rather than responding to these children with the explicative “Stop that!” I noticed that, upon hearing Jeff’s voice, she paused her story and looked up, but she did not stare or glare directly at him; instead, she seemed to look outwards towards the group on the carpet before settling her eyes on Jeff without aggression. Their eyes met, and it was this brief glance that seemed to settle him down. Her response to Sam was similarly subtle, and there was a kind of pausing, again, as she looked out and then rested her eyes on him without any words between them. As we watched this first part of the episode in our meeting afterwards, Lauren commented:
…so this is Jeff here pulling faces again and distracting people. And this little guy here in the yellow shirt, that’s Sam, the one with the behaviour issues we talked about before. Here he’s picking his nose again and the others think he’s disgusting because he does, poor kid. He’d been working really hard today, too, and I knew he was getting kind of overloaded and feeling a little tired…

I found a helpful resource in reading this episode in Max van Manen’s (1991) discussion of discipline in teaching. van Manen distinguishes between two very different forms of discipline, one of which is maintained through the rule of fear—“fear of failure, fear of punishment, fear of public ridicule, fear of sarcasm, fear of rejection, fear of humiliation” (van Manen, 1991, p. 200), and a second kind of discipline that is exercised as tact: when a teacher settles down a rowdy class with a simple look of the eyes, or when a teacher motivates the students’ interest with an enigmatic smile” (p. 121).

In contrast to her earlier ‘disciplinary’ approach and explicative language, Lauren’s words and her actions here seem far more tactful or discerning. She does not use harsh actions or words, but rather she settles Jeff and Sam down with her eyes, and she mentions “this little guy here in the yellow shirt”, a young person who she knew “was getting kind of overloaded and feeling a little tired” How did these more tactful or discerning responses to Jeff and Sam come about? I believe part of the answer lies in her earlier experiences with them, along with some insights she had gained about her earlier responses to these two students.
Aristotle writes of a relationship between phronesis and *nous* or practical insight\(^{10}\). While phronesis relies on practical perception (*aisthesis*) in the discernment of particulars, practical *nous*\(^{11}\) works alongside this perception to ‘see’ images in a different kind of way. Aristotle distinguishes between these two ways of seeing by way of analogy, in that a geometer might perceive the different features of a shape before recognizing it *as* a triangle (Aristotle, trans. 2004, 1142a23-30). In a similar way, Nussbaum (1990) writes that nous operates in tandem with perception and discernment as a key ingredient in phronesis; it is related to perception, but “it is an ability to recognize the salient features of a complex situation” (p. 75) “in such a way as to see (or otherwise perceive it) *as* something, picking out its salient features (p. 77, emphasis in original). Practical insight thus involves a kind of ‘imagination’, where nous functions as a way of seeing a particular—or a combination of particulars—*as* something of value or not of value. Shirley Pendlebury (1993) asserts that imagination and insight are important in teaching because “It is through imagination that we discern an item in the world *as* something to be sought or shunned (or to be sought and shunned for different reasons), *as* something that answers one or more of our practical concerns or interests” (p. 147, emphasis in original).

We might consider these features of perception and insight in light of Lauren’s comment that she knew Sam “was getting kind of overloaded and feeling a little tired”. On one hand, this involved perceiving and discerning the various particulars of the situation—Sam, the fact that he was ‘overloaded’ and ‘tired’, Jeff, Eric, and the other students in the group, the story she was telling, and many other particulars—but Lauren was also seeing the situation *as* an instance,

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\(^{10}\) Following Dunne (1997), Nussbaum (2001a), and Sherman (1989), I translate Aristotle’s nous as ‘practical insight’.

\(^{11}\) Aristotle also writes of a theoretical nous; my focus here is its practical variety.
image, or situation of a particular kind, and she illustrated this image further in her next
comments as we watched this part of the lesson:

…with Sam, I mean, I don’t know…I’ve been told he’s been diagnosed as ADD and I’m
not a doctor, but I’m not convinced. I don’t know what he’s exposed to at home, but his
writing is always full of violence and people are always dying and there’s always bombs,
and so, I don’t know, I’m trying to model something more positive, you know, like
problem solving that comes out of a more peacefull conflict resolution than war.

Most of students just complain about him all the time, but I’ve found he actually does his
work; it’s just that he prefers to do it on his own, so I’m cognizant of that; sometimes, he
can get impatient too, and he starts to cry if you don’t call on him often enough. And I’ve
had to say to him sometimes, like, “Sam I’m not always going to get to you,” but then, you
know, the next time I make a special effort to get to him, and so it’s kind of like that..

Lauren’s comments here suggest that she is not seeing Sam in this situation as a student
with an attention deficit disorder that other students “complain about”, but rather as a person
whose writing about violence is cause for concern, who also “does his work”, and who starts to
cry if you don’t call on him often enough”. In other words, she seems to be seeing “this little guy
here in the yellow shirt” as Sam, a person that she has come to know and to care about, and this
seems to have contributed to how she was also perceiving and responding to what was going on
at this particular moment of the lesson and as it continued.
Insight and Emotions

The second part of the episode involves a series exchanges between Lauren, Jeff, and Eric that played out in an almost crescendo-like fashion, first as Jeff exclaimed “Ooo-lah…haw!” again, next as Eric exclaimed “Ow!” and accused Jeff of grabbing his hand, and finally as Eric exclaimed “Ow!” again, this time accusing Jeff of poking him, and at which point Lauren said, ”Jeff, go sit at your desk. If you won’t listen, I’ll have to put you outside so you’re not disrupting us”.

As we watched Jeff walk to the other side of the classroom in the video-recording of the lesson in our meeting afterwards, Lauren said:

…so this is me doing things I really don’t like to do. Grrr…I don’t like sending Jeff to his desk but I told him to stop bugging Eric and he didn’t bloody well keep his hands to himself. Maybe I should give him a ball to squeeze or something to keep his hands busy. My school advisor did that with Sam for a while and it worked, but I don’t know if that would work with Jeff or if he’d just start throwing it…

We might read Lauren’s reflections here alongside Joseph Dunne’s (1997) account of Aristotle’s nous. Dunne links practical or ‘phronetic’ insight to experiences past and present; on one hand, her writes, nous is cultivated through it exercise over the course of our lives, and this is what gives a person what Aristotle calls ‘the eye that sees aright’, but Dunne also writes of the experiential nature of nous. In one sense, he writes that an “act of insight” involves a characteristic immediacy that suddenly strikes us when we perceive something as something, but he adds that this apprehension typically involves seeing ‘things’ in different ways:
The person who has the insight may himself or herself come to it only by displacing a previously secure and apparently adequate perception of the situation; there may be a quality of revelation or of ‘dawning’ about his or her recognition of what is really going on. (Dunne, 1997, p. 302)

Dunne’s notion of a ‘dawning’ seems to capture Lauren’s reflections on her response to Sam, but also her reflections on her responses to Jeff in this second part of the episode:

…but, you know, with Jeff, what I’m starting to realize is that maybe I was a little hard on him at the beginning; you know, at first when I saw how cocky he can be I made a point of not congratulating him when he was bragging about himself and I didn’t call on him as much because I wanted to give everybody an opportunity to get some recognition as well.

But the thing I’m coming to realize is that I need to make sure that I do give him credit when he is doing certain things because he’s quite fragile emotionally and so, you know, part of that whole ‘look at how great I am’ is that he’s really fragile on the inside so he’s puffed out on the outside to compensate, and so I’m trying acknowledge that more and to give him compliments when he does good…

Lauren’s comments here bear a remarkable similarity to her earlier comments about Sam because she has also come to see Jeff in a very different way than she did before. In contrast to her earlier descriptions of him as a boastful and confrontational student, she describes him here as “fragile…puffed out on the outside to compensate”, and her reflections here include a judgment about her past responses to him and a new concern for the well-being of this particular boy and how she sees and responds to him as this ‘new’ Jeff.
Nussbaum (2001a) writes practical insight involves recognition, but it “has in itself non-intellectual components” (p. 309), and she emphasizes that “emotions typically have a connection to imagination, and to the concrete picturing of events in imagination” (Nussbaum, 2001b, p. 65). In this way, Nussbaum suggest that Dunne’s notion of the immediacy of nous should also be understood in terms of how our emotions help us to see images as something of value. As David Carr points out, this is important in teaching because circumstances that call for caring responses are highly context-dependent and seldom (if at all) of a kind that might be subsumed under predetermined rules; what is instead called for is a kind of intuitive sympathy or empathy that is more emotionally attuned to the particularities of this or that situation. (Carr, 2011, p. 104)

In watching this part of the episode and in our meeting afterwards, it occurred to me that Lauren’s actions in the classroom and her comments on this part of the lesson did not carry the same emotional tenor of frustration and anger—towards others and herself—or the helplessness that seemed to underlie her comments about classroom discipline during our first interview at the library and in her subsequent comments about Sam and Jeff.

Although she didn’t “like” sending Jeff to his desk, she did not use harsh words or a threatening tone of voice with him, and there was no sense of anger or confrontation as she sent him to his desk for interrupting the lesson again and for bothering Eric. And rather than seeing and responding to Jeff with her earlier feelings frustration and even anger, there was another emotion here, a kind of caring or ‘intuitive sympathy or empathy’ that was combined with a resolve to carry on with the situation at hand, and she seemed to be saying that she could
exercise discerning discipline in the classroom with Jeff without seeing herself as the uneasy, fearful disciplinarian she had mentioned in our first meeting at the school library.

**Seeing Aspects of the World that One Had PreviouslyMissed**

In the final part of the episode, Lauren had returned to her story, and it was at this point that another student saw Sam with his finger in his nose again and responded to his activity with another exclamation of disgust. Lauren glanced up again, looking out into the classroom to see what was happening. Watching this part of episode in the classroom, I noticed Lauren’s eyes, once again, move slowly across the room as they came to rest on Sam, who had been looking at the student beside him before turning to face Lauren as she spoke to him. And whereas her voice with Jeff had been more assertive in tone as she sent him to his desk, her voice in addressing Sam in this part of the lesson dropped slightly in its volume, and she gently held the vowel in his name as she said: “Sam? Sa-aam…” Sam put his hand down, and Lauren carried on with the ending to her story.

As with her previous responses to the students in this episode, there was no tenor of frustration or anger in Lauren’s response to Sam and, again, she did not speak to him here as she had a few weeks earlier with “Sam, that’s disrespectful!” Instead, her voice was gentle and seemed to reflect the underlying feelings of her earlier comments about Sam as a person who she had come to know and to care for as Sam.

Nussbaum writes that the emotional texture of practical insight also involves our relationships with the people we care for, and this includes their feelings, too. In this way, she writes, the insights we gain into practical matters are also informed by other people’s lives and
feelings, which provide guidance, as well, in how we see images as things of value in our lives with other people:

bonds of close friendship or love (such as those that connect members of a family or close personal friends) are extremely important in the whole business of becoming a good perceiver. Trusting the guidance of a friend and allowing one’s feelings to be engaged with that other person’s life and choices, one learns to see aspects of the world that one had previously missed. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 44)

Nussbaum thus claims that practical insight is also guided by friendship and love, by trusting other persons we care for, and by allowing our feelings to be engaged by the lives and feelings of others and that, in this way, we come to see aspects of the world in new and important ways. I believe this episode is an interesting place to explore this feature of Aristotle’s nous in teaching and how Lauren had begun to see the educational ideal of classroom discipline—and the image of herself as a fearful disciplinarian—in a way that was quite different from her comments during our first meeting at the library.

In our later meetings, Lauren’s reflections on her lessons and her emerging relationships with Sam and Jeff included references to her feelings about these students, but she also mentioned their feelings and emotions, such as Sam’s vulnerability as an ‘outsider’ who other students avoided and complained about and Jeff’s boasting as a way of masking his fragility. A few weeks earlier, for example, Lauren and I had discussed a different lesson she had taught, and at one point in our meeting she commented on her relationship with Sam:
…and I didn’t see it at first, but what I really tried to do with Sam was to show him that I liked him. Like in the mornings, I made sure to say, “Good morning, Sam”, even if he came in late. And I know some people really discourage touching children, but if he walked past me I’d give him a gentle hand on the back sometimes, you know, just that sort of “Hey, how are you doing?” and that seemed to work for calming him down. And, you know I’m like that, too; sometimes, I just need somebody to be like, “Hey, it’s okay…”

Lauren’s comments here seem illustrate Nussbaum’s (2001b) view that in seeing an object or a person as something of value, there will typically be “connections in both directions” (p. 66). In this sense, Lauren’s comments here involve seeing and empathizing with Sam’s vulnerabilities and his need for comfort, but they also seem to echo her own vulnerabilities as a teacher and person and her need for comfort from time to time which, like Sam, can include “a gentle pat on the back sometimes”. As Nussbaum (2001b) explains, “the many details one notices about a person also enrich the love we feel, and that love becomes intertwined with perceptual habits in very many ways” (p. 66).

**Illuminations between Particular and Universal**

I have chosen to present this teaching episode from Lauren’s practicum because it seemed to capture a moment where her responses to Sam and Jeff and her reflections on the episode seemed very different from some of her earlier responses and reflections and which seemed to illustrate Nussbaum’s (2001a) account of discernment as involving a “two-way illumination between particular and universal” (p. 306).
Two weeks after we discussed this lesson, Lauren and I met for our final, ‘post’-practicum interview for the study, once again, at the school library. During this last meeting, I asked her to reflect on some of the topics that had come up over the course of the study and if she could share any insights she had gained from her practicum experience at the school with me. At one point in our meeting, we returned to the topic of classroom discipline from our earlier meetings, and Lauren remarked that she was “still working on it”:

…I’m still trying to figure out the classroom discipline thing. I think that part of my struggle at the beginning was because I had some very clear ideas about discipline and about what I thought I would be doing here—I definitely came in thinking like, *yeah*, kids need to have more freedom and that I can have, you know, sort of a conversation with the class about an idea and with little jokes or whatever, but still keep it on task and keeping it managed. But there’s so much stuff you don’t hear about in your education courses, and it’s just *so* different here from what I thought it would be like…

I asked Lauren if she could explain this a little more, and she said:

…well, things like kids coming in late and being mean to each other and stuff you don’t hear about in your education courses—one of the hardest things for me was dealing with after-recess or after-lunch break issues, like “so-and-so was pushing me” and “so-and-so did this or said that”. And because you weren’t there, you don’t see it happening, so you never know *what* happened, and then it takes over the whole day. And then, it’s like, what you’re really doing is dealing with that and trying to help the kids to deal with their problems. So then I was like, Ugh!! What do I *do*?
I asked Lauren if she could explain this a little more to me, and she said:

Well, with Sam, at first, I was like, “Who is this guy?” Like the time he spit on somebody, and I was, like, “That’s totally disrespectful! And I mean, sometimes he really bugs people but some of the students are actually quite mean to him. So even if he isn’t really bugging someone, it’s like they’ll instantly blame him and so he doesn’t get that little bit of extra space or wiggle room that you’d give to your other friends, you know, for a little bit of annoyance or misbehaviour.

Our conversation was interrupted briefly as an ice-cream truck pulled into the school parking lot just outside the library. The truck had a loudspeaker mounted to its roof, from which a musical tune was playing and attracting children and their parents who were gathered outside. We paused for a moment to watch the truck and the people outside, and I asked Lauren if she could comment on her relationship with Sam. She paused and said that Sam had prompted her “to think about kids and about teaching in a way that maybe I hadn’t thought about before”:

…he really got me thinking, “This isn’t working, and maybe it’s not my way, so maybe I could try something else, or something else like that, or maybe something that’s a little different but closer to what I was thinking”, and this really helped with the classroom discipline thing, like saying good morning and giving him a pat on the back or trying to use my voice with him in a different kind of way…

When I asked if she could give an example of this, she mentioned the Fairy Tale Endings lesson that we had discussed two weeks earlier, where she had said “Sa-aam...” instead of “Sam!” and she said:
…yeah, well I guess it was one of those moments where I like “Yeah, you know?” Where
can deal with those kinds of problems, but you’re not alienating kids and making them
feel embarrassed or like you don’t care or you don’t have time for them, because that just
doesn’t work…

She mentioned some of the other students in her combined Grade 2 and 3 group, including
Jeff and Eric, and she gave some examples from some of the other lessons we had discussed
together during her practicum. At one point in our meeting, I reminded her that during our first
meeting, she said that she had felt ‘crappy’ about disciplining students and if, three months later,
she still felt that way. She laughed and paused, and then she said:

Actually, no, because I know now that I don’t have to sound mad to deal with discipline. I
don’t have to get angry, and I’ve been working on showing how certain actions make me
feel, like trying to show that empathy with just my face and with my voice; and so instead
of getting mad at him and saying, “Sam, that’s rude!” I can show him, not with “Sam!”, but
with “Sa-aam…” And that was the hardest thing for me, I think, was creating that respect
for myself and for everybody else in the classroom without…forcing it, I guess. And it just
feels so nice to not have to do that…

So what was the illumination in this episode? Well, it seemed to me that Sam had been an
important part of Lauren’s practicum experience. In one sense, she had come to see and to care
about Sam in a different way, and this image of him as a person of value had helped her to
perceive and to respond to him in more ethically-appropriate ways, and this seemed to be the
case with Jeff, as well. In other sense, though, it seemed that this insight—along with this more
discerning way of seeing, perceiving, and responding to her students—had led her to see the
educational ideal of classroom discipline, as well as the uneasy image of herself as a strict classroom disciplinarian, in remarkably new and more educationally-sound ways.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter considers the ways in which practical insight seemed to function in tandem with discernment as Lauren Gibson reflected on a Language Arts lesson she taught to a combined group of Grade 2 and 3 students towards the end of her practicum. In this teaching episode, this perceptive ‘seeing-as’ was temporal and experiential, caught up a teacher’s character, emotions, and her relationships with her students and their feelings.

Over the course of our meetings together, I was struck by Lauren’s early image of “the reins” as a kind of metaphor for classroom discipline seemed to evolve in our subsequent conversations. A rein, of course, is a narrow strip that is typically attached to a horse or another animal so that it might be controlled by its rider. As she began her practicum, Lauren often described these reins in terms of ‘tightening’ or ‘loosening’, an idea that seemed to work with her metaphor, but her use of these images gradually subsided and finally dissolved altogether in our later conversations.

In a way, it was almost as if she had not only ‘let go’ these reins, but that there had been a kind of ‘dismounting’ altogether, a way of re-imagining her role as a teacher, of coming to stand alongside people like Jeff and Sam and of “growing up morally, of reasoning like a mature woman rather than a fearful child” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 90).
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

The price of living in the world of the pragmatists and the skeptics is the need to acknowledge that our best-founded beliefs are still uncertain. Neither physics nor psychology can do what the rationalists hoped. Dreamers tempt us with their images, but only as poetry. When the dreams of theory no longer cloud our expectations, we are back in a world of practical hopes and fears.

Stephen Toulmin (2001), *Return to Reason*

Dana Coupland, Adam Lau, and Lauren Gibson all completed their teacher education programs in the summer of 2010, and I met with each of them for our last meetings at the schools where the episodes in the previous three chapters took place. During these last meetings, they all mentioned they were planning to apply for provincial teacher certification and for teaching posts at local schools in the fall of that same year. I did not follow up with them on these plans, but it seems quite possible they are now teaching children at public elementary schools somewhere in British Columbia. In this final chapter of the study, I discuss how some of the themes and topics in the previous three chapters further answer my research questions and what the participants help us to understand about becoming discerning in teacher education. I then provide some recommendations for the cultivation of discernment in teacher education and an acknowledgment of the limitations of the study and some suggestions for future research.

By way of introduction to this chapter, it seems appropriate to briefly revisit the problem, purpose, and research questions that began this project. The point of departure for the study was that little is known about how people learn to teach ethically: on one hand, the prevailing model of teaching as an applied science pays no attention at all to the particularity of education, schooling, teaching, and learning or their ethical dimensions and tensions. On the other, much of the literature on professional ethics tends to frame the concepts of ‘teaching’ and ‘ethics’ in
similarly universal terms, with little regard for the question of how people learn to teach ethically. The purpose of this study was to explore Nussbaum’s claim that people gain the capacity for Aristotelian phronesis or ethical judgment by learning to discern the ethically-salient features of particular situations, and the questions guiding the research were: how do teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum and how does this discernment help them to construct their practices in more ethically-responsive ways?

**Becoming a Discerning Teacher**

Inevitably, part of the answers to these questions are anticipated by the philosophers who provided the conceptual framework for this inquiry, and I think Aristotle would emphasize two features of a correct response to them. One would be that teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of teaching while on practicum in very *particular* ways, and this discernment helps them to construct their practices in *particularly*-more ethically-responsive ways that do not lend themselves to easy summary or generalization. This seemed to be the case as Dana, Adam, and Lauren reflected on the focal episodes in this study and commented on the significance of these particular moments for them as beginning elementary school teachers. I believe Aristotle would also add that teacher candidates begin to discern the particulars of classroom teaching as *a wise person* or phronimos would, and these are two concluding ideas from him that we might want to hold on to throughout this chapter.

One of Nussbaum’s real contributions to Aristotle’s phronesis is that she reminds us again and again that the phronimos is a distinctively *human* being living in a world that is characteristically uncertain, vulnerable, and particular. These are people like Hecuba and Maggie Verver and Lewis Lambert Strether—people we call persons of wisdom and good judgment
because they remain grounded in our human world; they do not aspire to a gods-eye view of human life and living and they do not rely on universals alone in dealing with ethical matters. Instead, they attend to the new and unanticipated features of the situation, the contextual embeddedness of these features, and the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships. In addition, wise people deliberate, judge, and act in feeling as well as in thought, and this because they understand that our emotions are an important part of who we are as human beings. And, wise people are always becoming wise, and this comes about through the insights they gain through the interplay between particulars and universals over the course of their lives and in concrete, particular situations. In this section, I focus on how some of the themes and topics from the previous three chapters help to further answer my research questions and what Dana, Adam, and Lauren help us to understand about learning to teach ethically and about becoming a discerning teacher.

**Becoming Experienced**

One of the main themes from this research is the concept of ‘experience’ in learning to teach ethically. From an Aristotelian perspective, ethical experience centres on the gradual cultivation of phronesis over the course of our lives and in concrete situations, and what is gained from ‘phronetic’ experience is a kind of knowledge of the way things are, a non-objectified and unobjectifiable accumulation of understanding (Nussbaum, 1990) that orients us to future experience in particular ways.

Throughout this study, the participants’ reflections on their classroom teaching were very clearly bound up in the broader contexts of their personal lives and histories, and each of them brought unique histories, desires, and anxieties with them to their practicum experiences. In
addition, their comments on specific classroom episodes revealed many layers of experience and meaning-making that seemed to jump back, forth, and across space and time, including their prior life experiences before and during their teacher education programs, their imagined futures, and different events and people that became part of their thirteen-week practicum experiences. These qualities of the study underscore the specificity of human life, experience, and meaning-making, and they also support a view of research that is wary of neat chronological categories and narrative structures in the study of teachers’ lives (Pomson, 2004).

What Dana, Adam, and Lauren’s reflections on their practicum suggest is that teacher candidates begin to learn to teach ethically through a kind of experience that transpires in very particular situations and ways, indeed: by emphasizing the value of making worthwhile relationships with new students over a technical error at the blackboard, by improvising on a lesson plan so that Calvin can help demonstrate a science experiment that he had already performed, and by learning to say Sam’s name in a way that lets him know that he is loved for being the very special person he is. In response to James Field and Margaret Latta’s (2001) important question “What constitutes becoming experienced in teaching and learning?” (p. 885), the participants in this study suggest that precisely these kinds of things do, and their comments seem to echo the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein:

This is what ‘learning’ and ‘teaching’ are like here.—What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them rightly. (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009, p. 293)
This study concludes that ‘what ones acquires’ in becoming an ethical teacher is the capacity for discernment, that is, the ability to see and to judge and to act well in very particular classroom situations, and it is a capacity that relies on a way of seeing and responding to concrete situations and people that is characterized by a “refined perception of the contingencies of a particular situation” (Nussbaum, 2001a, p. 318). What does the circular relationship between experience and discernment look like while teacher candidates are on practicum? I have provided examples in each of the three focal teaching episodes in this study, but I shall add one more here. During my last meeting with Lauren, I asked her if she could share any insights she had gained over the course of her practicum, and she told me about a student named Jason:

There was one little boy in the class, Jason, who always keeps to himself and he never really opened up to me like some of the other kids. And I mean that’s fine, you know, but he’s not one of the kids that would come up and say, “Look what interesting thing I saw in my book today”, or “Oh Ms. Gibson, guess what I did on the weekend?” He actually wouldn’t even say good morning to me in the morning sitting in the hallway before class. I would walk by and say, “Good morning” and it was like he just didn’t really care.

And then one day he wrote this great story about a wizard who finds an invisible wand, and he makes it visible by getting an eraser and erasing the ‘i’ and the ‘n’ on the word ‘invisible, which makes it visible, and I thought this was pretty cool for a Grade 2 boy and I said to him, “Jason, this is really good!” and he said to me, “Ms. Gibson, you know what? I’m so excited you’re talking to me!”
Which was something really new and so I guess it was sort of one of those moments where I was like, “Yeah, you know?”; where you really make somebody feel like you noticed them and they are important and you feel good about what you’re doing.

It seems very difficult to interpret Lauren’s comments here in terms of scientific procedures or the technical principles of efficiency and effectiveness. Instead, we see experience in the teaching practicum as bound up in beginning teachers’ relationships with their students and their emotions, and where learning to teach centres on, as Lauren put it, “mak[ing] somebody feel like you noticed them and they are important”, people who, like Jason, Jeff, Sam, Allen, and Eric were part of her experience as a beginning elementary school teacher. Lauren adds that this way of becoming experienced is not a form of detached, cognitive ‘thinking’, and this is because “you feel good about what you’re doing”, and this again seems very different from the calculating, objective logic of teaching as an applied science.

Lauren captures another quality of this experience when she describes it as “one of those moments”, something that seems at once familiar and distinct, where teacher candidates somehow ‘get it’ and things begin to make sense in a way that is not easy to put into words but which she described as “Yeah, you know?” It seems similarly difficult to describe these moments of insight in a language of ‘professional’ ethics or to place them along some abstract continuum of ‘moral development’; indeed, they bear a striking resemblance to the kind of concrete, “Yeah, you know?” moments that we find in good literature, where people “live as good characters in a good story do, caring about what happens, resourcefully confronting each new thing” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 3).
Seeing and Openness

I have presented the three thematic chapters in this study with the titles of Seeing Particulars, Responding to Particulars, and Seeing New Particulars because they seem to capture the various features discernment that run through the three focal teaching episodes, and what these themes seem to share is a reliance on the quality of openness in becoming an ethical teacher.

Throughout their reflections on their teaching, Dana, Adam, and Lauren all illustrate how classrooms are made up of a staggering variety of context-specific particulars in ever-shifting configurations. Here, seeing particulars surely involves noticing various items related to subject-matter knowledge and teaching techniques—while leading a group in a French language review at the blackboard, giving instructions to perform a science experiment, or telling a story as an example for a language arts project, for example—but it also involves a recognition of the fact that teaching and learning are activities that take place between people, and so seeing well in these kinds of situations includes noticing and attending to other important aspects of classrooms and of teaching that centre on human relationships and feelings. For Dana to have simply carried on brainstorming while facing her students, for Adam to have ignored Calvin’s questions, or for Lauren to have admonished Sam with “Sam!!” would be to ignore these valuable particulars in teaching altogether and akin to what David Pellauer (2002) describes as a kind of ‘moral blindness’.

Openness, too, features prominently across the episodes as the participants commented on their responses to various unexpected classroom events during their practicum placements. For Aristotle and for Nussbaum, the practical world is mutable and indeterminate, and this means
that it often presents us with unanticipated, complex, and context-relative situations that cannot be understood or addressed by applying pre-determined formulas. In this study, the element of surprise emerged as a central feature of classroom teaching, and it seemed very closely related to experience and the cultivation of discernment in the context of the teaching practicum. Towards the beginning of their placements, Dana, Adam, and Lauren’s comments on this aspect of classroom teaching seemed to be accompanied by feelings of anxiety and frustration, and yet their later comments revealed a growing acknowledgement of this quality of classrooms and teaching and an openness to surprise and ambiguity that seemed to enable them to deal with unexpected situations with a sensitivity, confidence, and wisdom that was missing earlier on.

I have used the phrase ‘seeing new particulars’ to capture the kind of learning or growth that comes about through an illumination between particulars and universals in the exercise of discernment, and this is another theme from the study that points to the quality of openness. Aristotle describes this feature of phronesis as a kind of practical insight, and he writes of a metaphorical triangle which ‘appears’ to us as an image of value; although this geometrical metaphor falls short of capturing the interpersonal and emotional textures of this insight, it does help to show that an ‘image’ of value can take many different—and sometimes unexpected—shapes and forms. So, just as a geometer will recognize a triangle as an image with three points and sides, a good geometer will know that there are many different kinds of triangles with varying angles and sides of different lengths, and so she is open to seeing images of a like (and valuable) kind that may, at the same time, be somewhat new and unique, and this way of seeing anew contributes to what she had seen (and valued) before.
In a similar way, Nussbaum writes that our experience with the particular can lead us to different kinds of insight, sometimes by subtly clarifying or adding to our existing universals or, sometimes through more significant revisions. This seemed to be the case as Dana, Adam, and Lauren reflected on the focal episodes in this study, and their reflections seemed to share a characteristic openness to learning, to seeing new particulars, and to thinking about education, schooling, and teaching in ways that were new to them.

What does this openness look like while teacher candidates are on practicum? I have provided some examples in each of the three focal teaching episodes in this study, but I shall add one more here from my last meeting with Adam. At one point in our conversation, we returned to the topic of lesson planning, and he told me about a lesson he had taught where he noticed one of the students in the group was having trouble with a mathematics test:

Well, I still think it’s important to plan your lessons and have your props and equipment and everything all laid out, but I’ve learned that’s really kind of one-dimensional. One day there was this poor girl in my class who spent the whole morning crying, and I found out it was because her pet bird had died the night before. I mean, it’s one thing to say that she was able to answer the questions on the test that morning, but that’s kind of missing the whole point because she was really upset.

And you don’t know these things unless you actually talk to them and find out what’s going on, and there’s so much. So then it’s like, the best laid plans\(^\text{12}\), you know? You’ve

\[^{12}\text{A remarkably apt reference, I believe, to some lines from the poem To a Mouse by the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1786): “The best-laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft agley, An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain, For promis'd joy!”(p. 140)}\]
got to know that any day *something* is going to happen, and you’ve got to be on top of these other sorts of events and things because they really *do* have an effect on what’s going on in the classroom.

Once again, Adam’s comments here reveal a very particular kind of insight that transpires in a very particular experience involving an interplay between particulars and universals. Rather than seeing this situation in terms of calculative lesson planning, we might say Adam is becoming experienced by becoming open to a particular child and her sadness, and this openness to her emotions—and to his own—help him to really see “what’s going on in the classroom” and the ethical and educational significance of seeing children as people of real value. And while this kind of insight links back to the circle between phronesis and experience in a way that echoes Gadamer’s (1975/2004) emphasis on openness as a key element in becoming experienced, it also points to a way of reasoning and of seeing new aspects of the world that relies on human emotions as a valuable source of awareness and understanding (Nussbaum, 2001b).

**Reason and Emotions**

The concept of ‘practical reasoning’ is one that runs throughout this project, and I shall offer some concluding observations on this feature of discernment as it seemed to emerge in this study. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Aristotle distinguishes very sharply between the realms of techne and phronesis and their corresponding forms of technical and practical reasoning, and this is a distinction that is echoed throughout the educational literature linking phronesis and teaching. Perhaps more than any other Aristotelian scholar, Nussbaum emphasizes the central place of emotions in practical reasoning because they enable us to see and to deliberate and to judge and to act in ways that our cognitive intellect alone cannot.
Over the course of this study, I came to observe a striking pattern as the participants commented on the video-recorded teaching episodes. During these interviews, Dana, Adam, and Lauren usually began with a reference to their lesson plans and things like subject-matter, materials, and teaching techniques, and how the lessons we were discussing fit within the previous lessons they had taught and the subsequent lessons they were planning to teach to their students. However, their comments completely shifted as they watched the video-recorded lessons unfold; rather than describing teaching in these abstract terms, their deliberations became very firmly focussed on concrete situations and people, to the point where things like subject-matter, materials, and teaching techniques seemed to be of far less concern to them.

So, instead of talking about teaching in abstract, prescriptive terms, their comments seemed to be focussed on trying to answer the practical question ‘What should I do in this situation?’, and this kind of deliberation had a very different texture from the first. Emotions featured prominently throughout Dana, Adam, and Lauren’s reflections on these episodes, and their emotions also seemed to change at different points in their reflections. As mentioned, phronesis seems to coincide—or at least appear as more noticeable—with moments of surprise, where seeing an unexpected situation can involve feelings of anxiety, fear, awkwardness, and overwhelmedness. However, these so-called ‘negative’ emotions seemed to give way to others as teacher candidates began to discern the ethical saliency of particulars by seeing and responding to situations with other, more ‘positive’ emotions such as compassion, care, and love. In these concrete moments, their seeing became relational; they began to see the children as a primary concern, and this crucially-important insight was typically accompanied by a feeling of wonder:
the emotion excited by the perception of something unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable, esp. surprise, or astonishment mingled with admiration, perplexity, or curiosity (Barber, 1998, p. 1674)

What does this kind of reasoning look like while teacher candidates are on practicum? Well, Dana, for example, did not choose to pause at the blackboard because she was feeling what she called “jumbled up”, but because she was beginning to see the situation with the eyes of a good teacher who values making worthwhile relationships with her students. Adam did not ask Calvin to help with the science experiment because he was feeling frustrated by a classroom “interruption”, but because he could see Calvin, a boy he had to care about. And, Lauren did not choose to say Sam’s name in a gentle way because she was feeling bad about an image of herself as a strict disciplinarian, but because she was seeing Sam as a child she loved. And, these emotional ‘ah-ha!’ moments of educational insight for Dana, Adam, and Lauren seemed helpful and characteristically wonder-full as they were beginning to construct their teaching practices in more ethically-responsive ways.

Towards Cultivating Discernment in Teacher Education

It seems worth asking how this project might inform the cultivation of discernment in the preparation of new teachers, and I shall sketch a few tentative answers to this question here. In a broad sense, I think the study supports claims by Aristotelian educators that the concept of phronesis can help us to understand why the pervasive view of teaching as an applied science is problematic. For Aristotle, the widely-held notion of teaching as the ‘application’ of educational theory to practice would seem very strange; episteme, techne, phronesis, and sophia are all different domains of human life, each with different purposes and corresponding forms of
reasoning and activity, and so it is simply impossible to ‘put’ a form of knowledge from one domain ‘into’ a form of practice in another. In addition, Aristotle holds that propositional knowledge, technical skills, wisdom, and abstract theory all have a place in human life and in teaching, and he emphasizes that we reason and act very differently in each of these domains; however, these are two important observations that are plainly ignored in a view of teaching as an applied science (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012b; Saugstad, 2002). At the same time, however, I shall suggest that it is important to avoid a strictly epistemological reading of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues; although Book 6 of his Nicomachean Ethics offers a rich framework for re-thinking the conventionally-held relationship between theory and practice in teaching, this discussion appears at roughly mid-point in a text that is ultimately concerned about living a flourishing human life and the central place of ethics in our lives with other people and this seems important, too, in linking phronesis to teaching and teacher education.

A central question for teacher education, then, is what it means to educate. In this study, the participants provided many examples of the intellectual virtues of episteme, techne, and sophia, and they seemed to understand subject-matter knowledge, teaching techniques, and educational theory as valuable features of teaching and teacher education. However, their comments also underscored the importance of ethics in teaching; throughout the study, they often made reference to various ethical or character virtues when they talked about good teaching and good teachers: Dana emphasized the importance of making worthwhile relationships with her students based on honesty and trustworthiness, Adam’s mention of ‘integrity’, ‘good conduct’, and ‘responsible citizenship’ could almost be a passage from the Nicomachean Ethics, and I
believe Lauren’s renewed sense of caring for her students is an educational variation on a theme that runs throughout Aristotle and Nussbaum’s ethical writing.

And while Dana, Adam, and Lauren all seemed to see these ethical or character virtues as important in teaching, it was almost as if they didn’t have a language to talk about what Adam called “these other things” or, indeed, the virtue of phronesis and where it ‘fits’ in teaching. Looking back over the interview transcripts with them, I was struck by how the participants made regular reference to various forms of episteme, techne, and sophia in teaching and how the word ‘judgment’ appears only a few times and the word ‘wisdom’ not at all. Nevertheless, Dana, Adam, and Lauren all clearly mentioned different aspects of phronesis, and they did this in some very interesting ways. Often, they described various ethical or character as broader qualities of good people and good teachers; at others, they seemed to attach various ethical or character virtues to certain teaching techniques that were loosely grouped as ‘student-centred’ (rather than ‘teacher-centred’) or to ideas that were connected to various educational theories, but they seemed to struggle with these kinds of abstract connections as they reflected on the teaching episodes in the study. And what emerged from these reflections was how making good sense of the inevitably complex interweaving of intellectual and ethical virtues in concrete, particular educational situations depends on a teacher’s capacity for discerning judgment.

How might this capacity be cultivated in teacher education? Well, the notion of ‘cultivation’ itself would seem a key concept here and very different from the enduring use of the term ‘training’ in the preparation of new teachers. Etymologically, the word ‘training’ carries a very mechanical sense of teaching and learning, in part from its meaning of to “draw out and manipulate in order to bring to a desired form” but also from the more modern notion of a ‘train’
of wagons or carriages pulled along a track by a mechanical engine (Barnhart, 1988). Another, more educative meaning of ‘training’, I think, is its reference to the growth of living branches and vines, and it might be helpful to think about the cultivation of discernment in teacher education in this more organic sense. Nussbaum, in fact, uses a similar metaphor, and she focusses on the nature of this kind of growth as concerned with what it means to be and to become a good person:

To be a good human being is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control, that can lead you to be shattered in very extreme circumstances for which you were not to blame. That says something very important about the condition of the ethical life: that it is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed; it’s based on being more like a plant than like a jewel, something rather fragile, but whose very particular beauty is inseparable from that fragility. (Nussbaum, in Moyers & Flowers, 1989, p. 448)

We might pause here to imagine what this kind of growth would look like in professional teacher education. What if, rather than a strict focus on the development of prospective teachers’ knowledge and technical skills, teacher educators aspired to cultivate some of the capacities mentioned here - a kind of openness to the world, a trust in uncertain things, and a willingness to be exposed – what, if, beyond specialized propositional knowledge and technical proficiency, we focused on nothing less than the cultivation of wisdom in the preparation of new teachers? Given the practical nature of teaching and the central place of judgment in wise teaching practice as it emerged in this study, I believe such an approach is vital to preparing new teachers, both in the
context of university-based teacher education courses and in the school-based teaching practicum.

In the context of university-based teacher education, one step towards cultivating discernment might be to provide a distinction between the concepts of ‘universals’ and ‘particulars’ in teaching. As mentioned in the introduction, the problem with constructing both teaching and ethics in exclusively universal terms is that it leaves future teachers ill-prepared to deal with what Joseph Dunne (1999) calls “the predicaments of practice” (p. 707). I believe a clearer distinction between these two important concepts and some of their related ideas and language would be well-suited to the sophia of university-based teacher education courses and very helpful to aspiring teachers. Of course, this distinction could very well include readings and discussions of Aristotelian philosophy and educational writing, but this approach could be very usefully complemented by Nussbaum’s two-way readings of philosophy and literature. As Nussbaum emphasizes throughout her work, literature provides us with a rich window to see phronesis in action and to make connections between its exercise and cultivation in others’ lives, as well as in our own, and it can contribute directly to the cultivation of emotions, imagination, and the ‘refined perception’ of concrete situations that is capacity for discernment. This is an approach that is supported in linking literary studies and teacher education (e.g., Mortensen, 2002; Vokey & Kerr, 2011) because it provides what Anne Phelan (2005a) describes as an ‘imaginative rehearsal of action’, and yet sadly, there seems to be some evidence that relatively few teacher candidates actually read for pleasure and/or intrinsic interest (Carr & Skinner, 2009, p. 150).
My suggestions for the cultivation of discernment in the context of the teaching practicum come mainly from the time I spent with Dana, Adam, and Lauren. All three described their practicum experience as an extremely busy time, involving lesson planning and preparation, teaching, classroom observations and meetings, participation in many different kinds of extracurricular activities, and practicum-related assignments. Although they acknowledged the potential value of all of these activities, they all seemed to describe the practicum as a site of sometimes overwhelming hyper-activity. Dana mentioned that she sometimes felt “frazzled” because she was teaching different groups of students one after the other and volunteering in various school programs during her placement. Adam was also volunteering in different programs, and he mentioned at one point in the study that he had some “additional stress” because he and his wife were expecting their first child that summer. And, Lauren mentioned several times that she felt a one-year teacher education program, and its brief practicum, was simply too ‘intense’ for people to really learn to teach well.

I suspect this kind of hyper busy-ness has a direct and very debilitating influence on teacher candidates’ teaching during their practicum placements. Looking back over the interview transcripts from the study, I found all three of the participants also used the expression “watching the clock” quite regularly and anxiously, and it occurred to me that in doing so, perhaps their attention was being directed away from the central issue of attending to what was actually going on in their classrooms. Dana’s feeling of overwhelmedness, Adam’s frustration with classroom ‘interruptions’, and Lauren’s struggles with the constraining ‘environmental’ realities of classroom teaching and student discipline: it seems reasonable to assume that wise reasoning about such matters—and, of course, learning and learning to teach—takes time, and Dana,
Adam, and Lauren all remarked how little time they seemed to have for this kind of reflection on their teaching and their practicum experiences.

In light of this observation, I was quite surprised and pleased to hear that Dana, Adam, and Lauren all remarked on how much they enjoyed viewing and discussing the video-recorded lessons in the study. They mentioned they were able to ‘see’ things they had not realized as they were teaching, and I think this was sometimes quite true. But I sometimes wondered if this was also simply because they had a chance to sit down for an hour, to step away from the ‘work’ of the teaching practicum and to just talk about teaching in a quiet place for a while without any assigned readings or homework. In the classroom, the cultivation of discernment seemed to involve, as Adam put it, “slow[ing] down sometimes and look[ing] out into the class and see[ing] what’s really going on”, and actually talking with other people about the judgments we make in classrooms every day seemed to really help, too.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

I acknowledge the limitations of this project. Following Aristotle and Nussbaum, my approach has been to focus on a few examples of good teaching in the context of the practicum and to explore what teacher candidates can teach us about becoming a discerning teacher. Underlying this study is the Aristotelian premise that the Good exists in the world and that it is brought into the world by people. Of course, the question may be asked whether the Good really exists at all, or if human beings are even capable of realizing ethical goodness in their interactions with other people, in classrooms or elsewhere. There are, moreover, great problems and very real evils in our educational world, but against the backdrop of teaching as an applied science and a view of ethics writ large as professional teaching standards, I believe that looking
for examples of phronesis in teaching is ultimately about trying to find some good in our existing educational practices—no matter how fragile and in need of some repair—as a key point of departure for informing and improving them, and that we can benefit from this quintessentially Aristotelian approach to ethics and teaching and learn from good teachers like Dana, Adam, and Lauren.

I believe this study points to several related areas for future research, a few of which I shall consider briefly here. One direction might focus on how the main themes from this study—seeing particulars, responding to particulars, and seeing new particulars—might be further clarified in the context of the teaching practicum with a narrower focus on the specific features of discernment. In this study, for example, Dana, Adam, and Lauren’s emotions and their relationships with their students featured prominently across all of these themes, and these are qualities of discernment that deserve more attention in the study of how beginning teachers learn to make good educational judgments and gain educational insights while on practicum.

Another area that merits attention is the concrete expression that the Aristotelian concept of ‘praxis’ takes in classrooms; in this project, ‘action’ emerged as a yielding responsiveness to the particular situation at hand, but it was characteristically expressed through the subtle use of language and non-verbal communication, and these features of discernment and of becoming discerning would seem fruitful areas for future research as well.

Next, the role of mentorship: this is a quality of phronesis and discernment that is underscored by both Aristotle and Nussbaum, but it goes largely unexamined in their work and is missing in this study. It would be worth investigating, for example, how university and school advisors might help to cultivate the capacity for discernment while teacher candidates are on
Finally, we might explore how the concept of phronesis might contribute to selecting and supporting prospective teachers in teacher education. Is phronesis a common disposition? What is its link to prior experience in teachers’ lives? Are some features of discernment more common than others? If so, how might we look for such people, support them in teacher education, and judge the goodness of discernment in the context of university-based teacher education and while teacher candidates are on practicum? These are some of the questions and suggestions for future inquiry that arose in this study and that I believe are worth exploring.

In Closing

I will conclude this project with a brief return to the conversation that I presented in the introduction to the study between Mr. Merrick and his daughter Felicia in Anne Sedgwick’s (1904/2013) novel Paths of Judgement. Despite its historical distance, I conclude that the recent interest in recovering Aristotle’s concept of phronesis in teaching is anything but a “modern recrudescence of mysticism”. Phronesis may come to us from a very different time and place, but it comes at a time when the value of living ethically with others is being elided all around us through the pervasive rise of science and scientific ways of thinking, teaching, and learning.

As educators, we should be concerned about this development, and we need to make judgments about what we should do about it and how we should act which, as Aristotle pointed out a very long time ago, is not easy and not everyone can do it. Perhaps more than anything, what the concept of discernment contributes most to this conversation is that it shows us how people can and do make good judgments and in all kinds of complex and sometimes terribly
difficult situations and that people like Dana Coupland, Adam Lau, and Lauren Gibson can inspire us as we make our own ways on the long road to wisdom.
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Appendices

Appendix A   Call for Participants

Invitation to Participate in the Teacher Research Study

Discerning Practice

To: Teacher Candidates completing Elementary and Middle Years Extended Practicum (EDUC 418 & EDUC 419) in Delta, Surrey, Richmond, and Vancouver School Districts during the University of British Columbia Spring 2010 Semester

From: Gilmour Jope, B.Ed., M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy
University of British Columbia

Date: March, 2010

Dear Teacher Candidate,

Congratulations on your progress in your teacher education program! I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia, and I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting in the area of teacher education. In this letter, I would like to briefly explain the nature of my research and what would be involved if you decide to participate in the study.

Description and Purpose of the Study

My area of interest is the teaching practicum in teacher education, and the purpose of my research is to better understand how teacher candidates make sense of the concept of ‘practice’ as they complete the practicum component of their teacher education program. I am inviting you to participate in my study because I believe that you will have valuable insights to offer on this topic as you complete your teaching practicum over the next few weeks.

Procedures

Your participation in the study would involve three main activities: (1) a series of two open-ended interviews conducted before and after the practicum that focus on your experience as a practicum student teacher; (2) a series of three short videotaped recordings of your teaching with follow-up open-ended interviews that focus on your thoughts about your lessons while viewing the videotape. All interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription and interpretation, and you will be asked to grant your consent to participate in these three activities if you choose to participate. The total time commitment to participate in the study is 4 ½ hours.

Potential Risks

There is the risk of possible discomfort to you as a participant during the audio-taped interviews and the videotaped teaching episodes, such as anxiety or embarrassment. I plan to reduce this risk to you by providing you with a copy of all interview questions prior to conducting the interviews, and to remind you that you are free to refrain from answering any questions or discussing any topics during the study that may make you feel
uncomfortable; similarly, I will remind you of your freedom to refrain from acting, speaking, or discussing any topics that may make you feel uncomfortable in any way prior to conducting the videotaped teaching episodes and follow-up interviews.

There is also the risk that your right to confidentiality may be compromised after the study is completed and submitted for publication or any other form of public disclosure. To reduce this risk, your real name will not be used, and pseudonyms will be substituted for the names of all persons, institutions and places that are mentioned in the study. All consent forms, audio and videotapes, and documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet during and after the study and all computer files will be password-protected. Data from the study will be used for research and educational purposes only.

**Potential Benefits**

The research can benefit you by providing you with an opportunity to learn more about your teaching by participating in a series of reflective activities aimed at understanding the relationship between educational theory and teaching practice. My sincere hope is that your participation in the study will help to enhance your practicum experience by providing you with an opportunity to reflect on your teaching and learning during this time in a safe and supportive environment.

**Participation and Confidentiality**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without any jeopardy whatsoever to your evaluation in your teacher education program or practicum. Only the researcher and a trusted transcriptionist will have access to the data, and all data that is collected for the study will be kept in a locked, secure location. The data will be used for research and educational purposes only. To protect your anonymity and confidentiality, your real name will not be used, and pseudonyms will be substituted for the names of all persons, institutions and places that are mentioned in the study.

**Compensation**

If you are selected to participate in the research, you will be offered a $150.00 cash gratuity, which will be presented to you upon completion of the final interview for the study, and you will be offered a copy of the completed study after the research has been completed. If you choose to withdraw from the study, this amount will be prorated and paid to you.

**Contact Information**

If you have any concerns or questions or would like any further information with respect to my study, please do not hesitate to contact me directly by email or by telephone. You may also contact my Ph.D. research supervisor Dr. Anne Phelan in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia by telephone (604-822-8855) or email (anne.phelan@ubc.ca). If you have any ethics-related concerns or questions, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the University of British Columbia Office of Research Services by telephone (604-822-8598) or by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca).

With best wishes on your teaching practicum, I look forward to hearing from you as a potential participant in the study.

Gilmour Jope