BECOMING A TEACHER DOES NOT COME THAT EASILY:

ARISTOTLE, CONFUCIUS AND EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

One of my earliest memories was peering through my mother’s classroom window to watch her teach mathematics to middle school students. My mother inspired me to become a teacher and I believed that I had succeeded when I was appointed as a teacher and subsequently won district and national awards in China for teaching excellence. However, I found my “successes” unfulfilling: I felt more and more like a commander training her students for the battlefield of examinations where some would succeed and many would fall. I wondered why my mother had thrived while I floundered. My search for answers took me from Beijing to Vancouver for graduate study and the realization that I was actually searching for my practical identity, that is, an identity “under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking” (Korsgaard, 1992, p. 83) with associated ideals, roles and excellences (Lear, 2006).

Searching for a practical identity is fundamentally a normative quest for ethical integrity; unfortunately the language currently available to describe teaching emphasizes teachers’ accountability for improving student test scores and assumes that higher scores indicate better preparation of the young for future jobs—the primary purpose of schooling. My search for a suitable ethical framework to understand what it meant to be a teacher quickly led to two of the most influential approaches in human history: Aristotle’s and Confucius’. I use their ideas about how to cultivate human virtue to create a dialogic interpretation of teaching that includes concern for educational purpose (eudaimonia and dao), teacher excellence and teacher-student relationships (phronesis, philia and ren) and teaching skill (techne and liuyi), continually testing
my interpretations against my own experiences as student/teacher/daughter of a teacher/mother of a student.

Despite my efforts, however, my thesis remains haunted by the sense of a whole without completeness, a conception of the good without closure and an aspiration without achievement—an aporia that, following Kierkegaard (1854) and Lear (2011), I now understand as the inevitable irony of any quest for ethical closure.
Lay Summary

My mother inspired me to become a teacher and I believed that I had succeeded when I was appointed and subsequently won district and national awards in China for teaching excellence. I found my “successes” in preparing students for examinations—increasingly understood as the primary purpose of teaching—deeply unfulfilling, however. My search for a suitable ethical framework to understand what it means to be an educator led me to Confucius’ and Aristotle’s ideas about how to cultivate human virtue. Here I explore their ideas about educational purpose, ethical judgment, teacher-student relationships and teaching skill, continually testing my interpretations against my own experiences as student/teacher/daughter of a teacher/mother of a student. Despite my efforts, my thesis remains haunted by the sense of a whole without completeness and aspiration without achievement—a result that I now understand as the inevitable irony of any quest for ethical closure.
Preface

This dissertation is original intellectual work by Ying Ma.

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Chapter 1: Among the Teachers, Is There a Teacher?

The way to re-enchant the world . . . is to stick to the concrete (Richard Rorty, 1985, p. 173).

I was born into a big family in Beijing, China in the early 1980s. I am the only child of my parents because of China’s “one child policy,” yet I grew up in an extended family that included my grandparents, my parents, my uncle and aunt, my cousin and myself who all lived together in a Beijing courtyard house.

My mother was a mathematics teacher in a middle school. She worked very diligently: she often returned home with piles of student work and laboured on her lesson plans for the next day after I went to bed and then dragged her exhausted body to school the following day. I also remember standing on my toes and peeking into a small window to watch her teaching while waiting for her to give me a bicycle ride home after school: Her face was lit with joy as she moved around her classroom in constant motion helping each of her students. From then on, I believed that teaching was not an easy job, but it certainly was a mysterious one. I was not sure whether teaching injected energy into my mother (my mother looked so animated in her classroom) or consumed her energy (she often seemed very tired after teaching). I found myself fascinated by this difficult and mysterious occupation. Indeed, my curiosity about the profession my mother committed herself to for thirty-eight years led to my following her into teaching myself.

I had been successful in schools as a hardworking student: My elementary school grades allowed me to enter a good secondary school where, with the support of my teachers, I diligently prepared for the Gaokao and scored so well that I was admitted to a prestigious university in
Beijing. Upon graduation, my childhood dream of teaching directed me to obtain a teaching certificate and finally became a secondary school English teacher. I found success in my new career and was recognized as an “excellent teacher” for three consecutive years in our district and even won first place in the national competition for teaching competency in 2008.

Gradually, however, my successes failed to provide satisfaction as I began to detect my own vanity in my awards. Indeed, I felt more and more like a commander who trained her students for the battlefield of examinations where some would triumph and many would fall. I suffered in exercising this kind of leadership: I experienced the victory of mastering teaching skills and theories, but my satisfaction would disappear when I encountered the casualties—many of my students. I was further confused about the contrast between my struggles and my mother’s experience of learning to teach in the 1970s without the benefit of any teacher education program. I wondered how she was able to thrive as a teacher while I floundered. I began to ask myself what should be important to me as a teacher and could not find any good answers. After seven years of teaching I could not explain what constituted good teaching to myself and so decided to go to Canada in 2011 to search for answers in a developed Western country with a renowned reputation for modern curriculum, educational technology and effective schooling systems. Becoming a student again at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver 8000 kilometers away from my home country provided me with the time and space to reflect on my previous teaching, my mother’s teaching stories, my son’s experiences in Vancouver elementary schools and my own experiences as a student.

The current frameworks and discourses about what counts as good teaching seem severely impoverished. Schooling in both China and Canada is increasingly focused on
mandating teachers’ accountability for improving student scores on standardized tests of knowledge—either on the Gaokao in China or on provincial examinations in British Columbia—with the presumption that better scores indicate better preparation of the young for future jobs—the primary purpose of schooling. With overwhelming pressure from standardization and accountability that distorts the educational aims of teaching and teacher education (Clark & Phelan, 2017), teacher success is often determined by test results on, for example, the international PISA tests (The Programme for International Student Assessment), SATs (National Curriculum Assessment) in England, SAT (Standardized College Admissions Test) in the United States, NAPLAN (National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy) in Australia, provincial examinations in Canada, the Gaokao (College Entrance Examination) in China. In many ways, teaching has become an instrumental occupation where practitioners labour to achieve limited predetermined goals through “effective” practices (Lewis, 2015). Teachers, “trapped by test requirements, community surveillance, and the fear of accountability” (Greene, 2009, p. 1), have jobs that often seem comparable to factory workers, technicians, bureaucrats (Pinar, 2004) or knowledge depositors (Freire, 1970). In consequence, Greene (1973) worries that teachers “behave like clerks, subjects of a remote authority that issues orders, supervises and asks little more than conformity to custom, to the prevailing ‘law.’ They are powerless and they accede” (p. 5). In effect, teachers are expected to follow, reproduce and deliver prescribed knowledge and skills to their students without regard for what is worthwhile learning for whom, when or how.

The inadequacy of the dominant available frameworks to help me understand what counts as good teaching led me back to my own experience with good—and not so good—teaching and the embodiment of that experience in stories. Stories can be powerful structures. More than
simple chronologies of events, stories lay claim to significance and meaning: To tell a story is to organize and create an end for a series of events. Indeed, cultural and social schemes select, assemble and argue for certain stories that instantiate certain ideals—or violations of these ideals. Stories organize concrete particulars in light of existing generals and help us understand our lives in light of those ideals. In the intersections between the particulars and the generals, stories enable us to make meaning. MacIntyre (1981) encourages a narrative conception of human identity in the pursuit of purposes and ends; he explains that stories are narratives of significance that we use to make sense of our lives. Indeed, he contends that human beings are storytelling agents and that we live our lives as narrative quests. Carr and Harrison (2015) go on to suggest that: “It seems that stories provide knowledge and insight of highest human importance—because, without them, we cannot as human agents understand ourselves” (p. 49).

Important for my purposes, stories not only help us to make sense of our lives in light of the existing generals, but they also indirectly point to a remainder or excess in our stories that the available schemes neglect. Teachers tell stories that claim significance for their practices—some stories are consistent with the managerial regime, while some critique it and suggest alternate meanings. Yet there is always something more to a story, particulars that remain outside the generals. Unsettling stories of teachers may help us find meanings we missed and claim new significance. Britzman (2003) aptly captures the importance of the little stories in teaching as pointing to “where the materials for theory were made from autobiography, memory, and a renewed consideration of the educational archive” (p. 17). These stories are not just fragments of life. Excesses (i.e., what exceeds the explicable of the current frameworks) in the stories may gesture towards renewed generals or ideals. With the shifting of the frameworks, particulars in the stories that were previously hidden or missing can be excavated to reveal new significance, a
practice that resembles Kuhn’s (1962) description of scientific revolutions; something is always left unsaid in an explanation and a shift in generals or “paradigms” can allow us to tell the story otherwise.

As a young teacher, I often felt pressured to accomplish the prescribed teaching goals: I was concerned about how to help my students gain better marks more efficiently and I worried that their learning outcomes would not reach the required standards so I pushed myself to meet demands for accountability. Although I made great efforts, I still felt myself falling short of becoming a good teacher; I sensed that there was something wrong in my teaching even when I succeeded in helping my students get better grades. Indeed, I was confused and intuited that something was missing when I went through the teacher training program and wondered about my mother’s experience of becoming a teacher thirty years ago. Current cultural schemes for schooling and teaching are unable to account for what was meaningful or important in either my mother’s or my own stories of learning to teach. Ultimately, my teaching practices did not seem to make sense to me anymore. I recognized the vanity of my “success” as a teacher after helping students to gain better marks, engaging them in class to teach more effectively, training numeracy and literacy skills. I asked myself what all of these tests, marks, and methods have to do with good teaching. In response, I returned to the learning to teach and teaching stories of my mother, my teachers, my son and myself to search for significance.

I believe managerial frameworks fail to capture what is important about teaching for me; indeed I understand teaching as being more than a particular occupation or a profession and attending to the moreness or excesses in my teaching stories can help deepen my understanding of what counts as good teaching and what makes a good life of teaching. Here I hope to adapt Kierkegaard’s ideas in his journal on December 3th, 1854 when he wrote: “To become a human
does not come that easily” (p. 278). I suggest that becoming a teacher does not come that easily—a sense of uncertainty and inadequacy, a search for sensitivity and openness, are integral to becoming a teacher. Heidegger, more than half a century ago, claimed that teaching is more difficult than learning because teachers must learn “to let learn” (Heidegger, 1968, p. 15). He explains:

The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn . . . [To become a teacher] still is an exalted matter. (1968, p. 15)

Heidegger has an unconventional view of learning. To let learn, for Heidegger, is not the same as helping students master subject knowledge or obtain information, which he describes as “merely the procurement of useful information” (1968, p. 15). Learning requires “being sensitive to situations; finding one’s place within them; letting understanding disclose to effect a response that makes sense of its intimations” (Riley, 2011, p. 802). Indeed, teaching (as well as learning in the Heideggerian sense) always demands openness, sensitivity and responsiveness to particular situations—all values that inform my quest.

Excavating Kierkegaardian irony, Lear (2011) draws on Korsgaard (1992)’s notion of practical identity and suggests becoming a human could be an arduous task and ironic experience. A practical identity, for Lear (2006, 2011), is a role or amalgam of roles built on defensible ideals and excellences. I hope to commit to a process of re-constituting and deepening the practical identity of a teacher, that is, a conception of teaching “under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking” (Korsgaard, 1992, p.83). This is not a new quest. Socrates asked 2400 years ago: “Among the politicians, is there a single politician?” (Gorgias, 513e–521e), a question that
can be understood as a genuine question and not a tautology: Socrates seems to be distinguishing how “politician” is understood in the first and second parts of his sentence, a relationship that Lear (2011) characterizes as ironic. While the customary definition of irony is “the expression of one’s meaning by using languages that usually signifies the opposite,” (Oxford English Dictionary), Lear describes Socratic irony as one of tension and not simple opposition: He explains that Socrates’ answer to his own question is that no one in the entire cohort of those who put themselves forward as a politician is qualified, “for none of them have genuinely been concerned with making the citizens better” (Lear, 2011, p. 22). The first use of “politician” captures a claim to an established social role; the second use points to that role’s telos. Lear explains:

The possibility of irony arises when a gap opens between pretense as it is made possible in a social practice and an aspiration or ideal which . . . seems to transcend the life and social practice in which that pretense is made. The pretense seems at once to capture and miss the aspiration. (2011, p. 11)

Lear’s work on irony is inspired by Kierkegaard (1841) who analogously asks: “Among all Christians, is there a Christian?” a query that aims at challenging the customary understandings of being Christian. The first part of the sentence “Among all Christians . . . ” points to a social pretense, that is, how Christians usually put themselves forward as being a Christian “firmly ensconced within Christendom” (Lear, 2011, p. 14) while the second part of the sentence “Is there a Christian?” asks us to think about the aspects of being a true Christian that are missed in the usual interpretations of being a Christian.

Inspired by these ironic questions, I also hope to ask an unusual but fundamental question: “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” “Among the teachers” expresses what is
prescribed and permitted within the managerial discourses about teaching; “Is there a teacher?” invokes the aspirations and ideals that might transcend the available social pretense or how teachers normally put themselves forward as “a teacher.” I bring myself to “an abyss [that] opens between our previous understanding and our dawning sense of an ideal to which we take ourselves already to be committed” (Lear, 2011, p. 15). I hope to disrupt the ordinary understanding of the practical identity of a teacher that is often determined within the available “scientific data and industrial processes” (Curlin, 2016, p. 72) and seek to go beyond it.

Among the Crow, Is There a Crow?

To guide my search I use Lear’s Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation (2006) which describes how Plenty Coups, the last great chief of the Crow, attempted to lead the Crow out of the abyss of the devastation of their way of life at the end of the 19th century. The book begins: “After this, nothing happened” (Lear, 2006, p. 2). Plenty Coups explained: “When the buffalo went away, the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again” (p. 3). Medicine woman Pretty Shield added: “I am trying to live a life that I do not understand” (p. 56 & p. 61) and Two Leggings elaborated: “Nothing happened after that. We just lived. There were no more war parties, no capturing of horses from the Piegan and the Sioux, no buffalo to hunt. There is nothing more to tell” (p. 56). The radically altered circumstances—the disappearance of the buffalo, being confined to a reservation, and the ban on the warfare among tribes—rendered the traditional ideal Crow life impossible. Lear’s response is not anthropological research; instead, he explains:

I am not primarily concerned with what actually happened to the Crow tribe or to any other group. I am concerned rather with the field of possibilities in which all human endeavours gain meaning. This is basically an ethical enquiry into how one should live in
relation to a peculiar human possibility. (p. 7)

Lear (2006) admits that his interpretation of the Crow experience is “bleak” (p. 50) and he doesn’t pretend to say what happened to the Crow, or claim to know what Plenty Coups meant by his utterance. He aims instead “to work out in a radical but plausible way what it would be for [Plenty Coups] to have been saying something true” (p. 50) and explains that cultural devastation “is a possibility that marks us as human” (p. 9). Lear wants to know: “How ought we to live with it?” (p. 9)—can there still be hope in the face of the collapse of a culture? I read Plenty Coups’s story through Lear’s questions and concerns. Primarily, his approach to philosophical inquiry will inform my own search for significance and meaning in teaching.

“Nothing happened” (Lear, 2006, p. 2) for the Crow in the absence of an available conceptual world through which events could be organized or shaped in stories; Lear explains, “The issue is that the Crow have lost the concepts with which they would construct a narrative” (p. 32). Lear draws upon Marshall Sahlins when he suggests: “An event becomes such as it is interpreted. Only as it is appropriated in and through a cultural scheme does it acquire historical significance” (p. 9). If the scheme is absent or stops being viable, nothing meaningful or significant can happen. After their culture collapsed, Plenty Coups, Pretty Shield and Two Leggings continue to exist, but there was no possibility of organizing their actions consistent with an authentic Crow life. Lear explains: “Every event in Crow life—even cooking a meal—gained its significance within the larger framework of Crow meaning” (p. 40). Meals could be cooked, but they could no longer be counted as “cooking-of-a-meal-so-that-those-who-ate-it-would-be-healthy-to-hunt-and-fight” (p. 40) when hunting and fighting became impossible. With a ban on intertribal warfare and the disappearance of buffalo, the Crow no longer had the resources necessary to construct a good Crow life.
Lear suggests that practical identities, that is, descriptions “under which you find your life to be worth living” (Korsgaard, 1992, p. 83) depend on the availability of an overarching cultural ideal to provide a comprehensive framework for establishing social roles and cultivating the standards of excellences consistent with those roles (Lear, 2006, pp. 42–46). Given that the Crow “had no larger framework of significance into which (events) could fit” (p. 41), few sustainable social roles remained and the excellences associated with those roles had lost viability. They were therefore left with few, if any, viable practical identities. Lear asks, “Among the warriors, is there a warrior?” (p. 44) when responsibilities of a warrior were indeterminate; he asks, “Among the chiefs, is there a chief?” (p. 45) when it became unclear what a chief was supposed to do; he asks, “Among the squaws, is there a squaw?” (p. 46) when the basic patterns of upbringing were threatened. Finally he asks “Among the Crow, is there a Crow?” (p. 46) when the roles and excellences necessary for an authentically Crow life became unachievable. For Lear the practical identity of a Crow subject involves “constituting oneself as a certain sort of person—namely, one who embodies the ideals” (p. 42) by fulfilling the requisite roles in an exemplary manner. In sum, forming a practical identity is not selecting a certain social role; rather, it requires “a steadfast commitment stretching over much of one’s life to organize one’s life in relation to ideals” (p. 43).

Plenty Coups demonstrates the rare achievement of forming and re-forming a practical identity in the face of cultural devastation. In childhood, he aspired to becoming a great Crow chief and applied himself to acquiring the excellences to make his dreams come true. In early manhood, for example, he became a great hunter and warrior by mastering and exercising the requisite virtues and skills, including tracking game and demonstrating physical courage on the battlefield. Later, when the Crow culture had been taken away and it became unclear what a chief
was supposed to do, Plenty Coups struggled to define the renewed ideals of a Crow chief with its associated roles and excellences. Plenty Coups searched for and shaped himself around the practical identity of a Crow chief in different circumstances, which is “a never-ending task” (p. 43).

Much of Radical Hope examines Plenty Coups’s leadership of the Crow in pursuit of a new, yet still authentic, Crow life. Cultural demise prompted the Crow to draw wisdom from their original warrior life in order to create ideals consistent with a good and worthwhile Crow life in changed circumstances. In contrast to Sitting Bull and his Sioux followers’ wish-fulfilling way of preserving traditional way of life, Plenty Coups engaged with the new reality and provided the requisite political-ethical-epistemological-educational leadership to generate a new cultural ideal consistent with remaining Crow, allowing for new roles, new excellences and hence the possibility of new practical identities. I hope to uncover a pattern in Lear’s interpretation of Plenty Coups’s actions and adapt it for my inquiry into educational teaching. On my reading, Plenty Coups’s search for meaning involved four activities:

1. He aimed at re-searching for good and worthwhile lives for the Crow by first thinning the virtues or the standards of excellences associated with Crow ideals.
2. He exercised the virtue of chickadee to find the anomalies, contradictions and connections—the excesses in the stories—to discover new relevant particulars.
3. He used the faculty of imagination, characteristic of enigmatic dreams and poetry, to generate possibilities for new social roles and excellences that were consistent with Crow ideals.
4. He created a middle ground between cultural ideals, between past and present, to reshape and thicken the new excellences and social roles to suggest new practical
identities congruent with a good and worthwhile Crow life in changed circumstances.

**Thinning the Virtues**

Following Aristotle, Lear argues that in exercising his leadership, Plenty Coups aimed at re-searching for good and worthwhile lives again for the Crow by thinning the Crow virtues or excellences associated with traditional social roles and practical identities in light of new circumstances. Lear (2006) suggests that there is “a certain plasticity deeply embedded in a culture’s thick conception of courage” (p. 65) and in the normal course of events, a courageous Crow warrior would draw upon his tradition and culture to determine what he could do in order to continue to tell his Crow story. Courage was an equivalent term for bravery in battles—typically associated with the acts of counting coups. Counting coups could be regarded as manifestation of courage in intertribal warfare: One hits one’s enemy with a coup-stick before harming him and forces the recognition of boundaries from the enemy. It strikes the “mean between the defect of wishfully thinking that one has boundaries when one is unwilling or unable to defend them and the excess of slaughtering one’s enemies so quickly that one does not obtain from them recognition of anything” (p. 18).

With the abrupt transition to the reservation life, Crow stories about courage were disrupted and lost significance—the thick understanding of courage became impossible. Stories became fragmented—a Crow warrior would no longer tell an original Crow story in the absence of a viable cultural scheme; however, the possibility of no longer understanding could also contribute to the thinning of Crow virtues in order to re-understand them. According to Misgeld and Jardine (1989): “I must live with the practical possibility of becoming speechless; to understand, I must live with the possibility of no longer understanding” (p. 268). Plenty Coups
played the “doubting game” (Elbow, 1973) in the thinning process: He asked: “What is wrong?” “What is missing?” “What is not enough?” generating new possibilities.

In contrast, Sitting Bull, the last chief of the Sioux Nation, chose to hold on to the thick concept of courage as defined within the warrior ideal. Both Plenty Coups and Sitting Bull saw ghosts of the buffalo. For Plenty Coups the vision signified that the buffalo were going away forever, while for Sitting Bull and his Sioux followers, the dream meant that the buffalo were coming back. In consequence, Sitting Bull insisted that the Ghost Dance would continue: “Participants would dance into a frenzy and continue until they dropped of exhaustion; they wore ghost shirts that would protect them from bullets; they abandoned all other activities in order to bring about this cataclysm” (Lear, 2006, p. 149). Rather than holding on to the thick version of courage like Sitting Bull, Plenty Coups was able to thin out the concept of courage for its renewal. Being human inevitably involves risk, so courage as the capacity to “live well with the risks that inevitably attend human existence” (p. 121) remained an essential human virtue, but it “had to undergo a transformation. In particular, there had to be a thinning out of what had been a thick concept. Plenty Coups had to come to understand courage in terms that transcended counting coups” (p. 108): He had to draw on his own inner resources to “broaden his understanding of what courage might be . . . [in order to] face circumstances courageously that the older thick conception never envisaged” (p. 65).

**Following the Chickadee**

Plenty Coups was told in a dream that to survive he must follow the example of the chickadee; a bird that learned from others, but exactly what he needed to learn was left unclear. The chickadee was a good listener: “Nothing escapes his ears, which he has sharpened by constant use” (Lear, 2006, p. 80) and through listening, Plenty Coups was able to find the
anomalies, contradictions and connections—excesses in the Crow stories—and uncover significance. Plenty Coups also had a dream of listening to a man-person who provided a vision of a new world, radically different from the one Plenty Coups was used to. The man-person seemed to be “one of Plenty Coups’s internalized others” (p. 89). Lear elaborates:

This was a creature in Plenty Coups’s imaginative world who commanded authority for him and who gave him advice. It was a voice and vision he respected. And the Man taught openness to and acceptance of the destruction of young Plenty Coups’s familiar world. (p. 89–90)

Plenty Coups was able to recognize and appreciate the genuine wisdom of others. He listened to and learned from others “in the right way—even in radically different circumstances . . . [hoping] something good will come of it” (p. 82).

**Imagining New Possibilities**

The Crow drew upon their own inner resources—and especially the faculty of imagination characteristic of dreams and poetry—to expand their original understanding of roles, excellences and practical identities consistent with a flourishing Crow life. They were able to tell stories in light of a good life that the older conception of a good Crow life never envisaged.

*Crow dreams.* Dreams, for the Crow, were rich in meaning and could reveal what was hidden from the ordinary conscious life; at the same time, dreams remained enigmatic because they conveyed messages from the spiritual world that were not fully intelligible. Dreams were used to “struggle with the intelligibility of events that lay at the horizon of their ability to understand” (Lear, 2006, p. 68), extending reality and anticipating a future they did not yet know how to think about: “For the Crow, the visions one had in a dream could provide access to the order of the world beyond anything available to ordinary conscious understanding” (p. 66).
As a youth, Plenty Coups had a dream that predicted the end of a way of life:

If their way of life was coming to an end, if a huge storm was coming, the dream itself gave them reason to think that there was much about what was going to happen that they did not yet understand. (Lear, 2006, p. 75)

Because of uncertainty about what was going to happen, Lear suggests, Plenty Coups’s dream was a manifestation of anxiety characteristic of “enigmatic unclarity” (p. 76) and “would be an appropriate response of people who were sensitive to the idea that they were living at the horizons of their world” (p. 76). I believe the “dream vision” both connected the Crow with their narrative past and afforded them the imaginative opportunity to search for possible alternatives to redefine their cultural scheme in a dramatically changing context. Dreams offered the Crow a particular form of hopefulness. The dream “didn’t predict any particular event, but the change of the world order” (p. 69) and gave the tribe “imaginative tools with which to endure a conceptual onslaught” (p. 79). Through his dream and his fidelity to it, Plenty Coups was able to “transform the destruction of a telos to a teleological suspension of the ethical” (p. 146), bearing witness to the end of a traditional way of life and allowing him to conceive a Crow telos.

Crow poetry. Planting a coup stick may seem to have lost its intelligibility when the warrior life disappeared, but that did not mean that nothing could ever count as counting coups again. Lear embraces the role of a new Crow poet, “one who could take up the Crow past and—rather than use it for nostalgia and ersatz mimesis—project it into vibrant new ways for the Crow to live and to be” (Lear, 2006, p. 51). Lear explains: “The possibility for such a poet is precisely the possibility for the creation of a new field of possibilities” (p. 51). When Plenty Coups buried his coup-stick at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, he did not disavow Crow traditions, but he aimed to “clear the ground for a rebirth” (p. 51). Crow poets try to create or re-
invent, not to destroy their traditions—rather than entombing the past, Plenty Coups reactivated
the past, brought it to the present and illuminated a future. As a poet, Plenty Coups was able to
take a valued traditional and spiritual icon and put it to new use to confront new challenges; he
offered the Crow a way of going forward by drawing upon the past “in vibrant ways” (p. 154).

**Thickening the Virtues**

To make virtues thick again is not simply borrowing the thick concepts of another
culture; otherwise, one might experience “a radical discontinuity with one’s past” and
“experience a rip in the fabric of one’s self” (Lear, 2006, p. 65). For the Crow, thickening
involved “drawing upon their own traditions in novel ways in the face of novel challenges” (p.
65–66). When Plenty Coups encouraged Crow youth to go to white men’s schools, he idealized
neither the white man nor his own tribe. He intended that the young should learn not just the
white people’s successful skills and values, but also their failures and prejudices. Plenty Coups
suggested: “With all his powers, the white man is not wise. He is smart but not wise” (p. 139)
and he was no easier on his own tribe: “You who once were brave have turned into pigs . . . Stop
mourning the old days, they are gone with the buffalo . . . clean out your dirty lodges and go to
work!” (p. 139–140).

Thickening the virtues involves moving from an “excluded middle” to finding a middle
ground that would allow for reconceiving Crow virtues and roles and integrating them into new
practical identities congruent with new conceptions of a flourishing Crow life. Prior to being
confined in the reservation in the 1880s, the Crow had an understanding of what counted as
flourishing life that was largely defined by successes in hunting and war. In battle, for example,
everyone in the tribe knew that “either our warriors will be able to plant their coup-sticks or they
will fail” (Lear, 2006, p. 25). Lear calls this “the law of excluded middle” (p. 25). For the Crow,
all the possibilities were exhausted in the success or failure in war; however, when the Crow were moved to the reservation, they ran out of living possibilities defined by their nomadic way of life. Their “gamble with necessity” (p. 26)—that one would continue to be able to judge success or failure in their familiar terms—was under pressure and the law of excluded middle became problematic. Beginning with their initial encounter with white people, the Crow tried to find a middle ground: For example, the Crow adopted Larocque, a French-Canadian trader, who brought them axes and knives, into the tribe. To recover the middle ground, Lear quotes Richard White (1999):

> The middle ground is the place in between: in between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the non-state world of villages. . . . On the middle ground diverse peoples adjust their differences through what amounts to a process of creative, and often expedient, misunderstandings . . . [and] from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices—the shared meanings and practices of the middle ground. (p. x)

While Plenty Coups chose to thicken Crow virtues in a search for a middle ground, Sitting Bull chose resistance to hold onto original Sioux virtues (Lear, 2006, p. 105–106); he insisted that Sioux leaders would never cooperate with the American government, an effort that he characterized as surrendering and sacrificing loyalty to their original life. Sitting Bull “used a dream-vision to short-circuit reality rather than to engage with it” (p. 150) by, for example, refusing to admit the buffalo had disappeared: He fuelled the Ghost Dance in a wishful way to “avoid the real life demands that confront one in the everyday” (p. 152). His approach led to disaster. In contrast, Plenty Coups had the moral and political courage to acknowledge the destruction of the original ways of living a good Crow life and led his tribe toward a new middle
ground, that is, he was able to redefine some of the traditional warrior ideals in a radically new context, an effort perhaps best exemplified by laying down his coup-stick and his headdress at the dedication ceremony for the unknown soldier. Plenty Coups explained:

For the Indians of America I call upon the Great Spirit of the Red men with gesture and tribal tongue: That the dead should not have died in vain; That war might end; That peace be purchased by the blood of Red Men and White. (p. 153)

The Crow stopped performing their Sun Dance in 1875 and when it was re-introduced in 1941, they had to learn the steps of the Shoshone version and the dance was then organized around heartfelt requests, including, for example, that a young girl survive a heart operation (p. 152). Crow courage had shifted from exhibiting bravery in battle to protecting the fruits of peace and Crow rituals had changed from praying for revenge to praying for the recovery of a sick child.

Plenty Coups responded to his times by facing the loss of meaning in a cultural catastrophe. He suspended the original thick Crow understandings of courage by acknowledging the impossible act of planting coup-stick again, but still found room to act courageously in radically different circumstances. With the transformation of virtue of courage—beginning with a thick notion of courage, thinning it out and then thickening its meanings in a new context—Plenty Coups was able to live a good Crow life with integrity.

**Among the Teachers, is there a Teacher?**

In *Radical Hope*, Lear describes how the Crow were not able to tell meaningful stories consistent with any worthwhile practical identity when there was no viable cultural framework available to the Crow in the late 19th century. My project is certainly less consequential, but it does involve the connection between stories and meaningful practical identity. In my project, the current managerial and instrumental frameworks that inform understandings of what counts as
good teaching and learning to teach well do not provide me with a meaningful account of good
teaching, prompting my quest for a defensible practical identity as teacher. While the problem
for Plenty Coups is the mismatch between the warrior way of life and the circumstances of being
confined into the reservation, my problem is a mismatch between my teaching and learning to
teach stories and the available frameworks to understand good teaching.

My teaching stories seem disconnected, random and intelligible as if “nothing happened”
(Lear, 2006, p. 2), that is, nothing significant or meaningful happened. However disparate and
random my stories might seem, there remains an unsettling moreness in my small stories
claiming renewed significance. Refusing to “overcome” my confusions and get back to work
with improved efficiency or dismiss my mother’s learning to teach experiences as failures or
negative examples, I allow myself to be addressed by them and called towards discovering
alternative frameworks to make sense of my small and seemingly mundane stories. I accumulate
stories that point to meaning and attempt to adapt Lear’s approach to attend to the anomalies,
contradictions and connections in my stories. I aim to discover and address the excesses in my
stories, that is, the particular and alternate events in teaching that point to significance for me.
Lear describes how Plenty Coups seeks to construct a viable Crow way of life—and the requisite
practical identities for that life—by creating dialogue between the traditional Crow and the 19th
century Western ethical-political framework in the United States. Following Lear’s lead, I aim to
attend to the excesses of my stories and construct a more robust practical identity of an
educational teacher by creating a dialogue between the current dominant managerial
framework—evident from both my readings and my experiences—and reimagined resources
drawn from ancient Eastern and Western wisdom traditions.
My research starts from little stories, and brings them into dialogue with ancient voices—Aristotelian and Confucian traditions with their respective concerns about human virtues, the social roles promoted by those virtues, and the ideals about what counts as good and worthwhile human lives the virtues and roles promote. In order to do so, I have read *Radical Hope* methodologically and hope to take up the challenge in light of Plenty Coups’s approach as described by Lear: I allow myself to be able to appreciate the moments of not understanding and not having answers, and attend to small events and the unsettling stories and prepare to be addressed by the excesses and tensions, dwelling with the difficulties and imagining new possibilities about a future beyond my immediate grasp. I allow myself, like Plenty Coups, to stand on the edge of an abyss between past and present, between self and others, between East and West, and embrace a future life in teaching not yet known. My question is “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” What I hope to explore is a richer conception of educational teaching and practical identity that embodies renewed ideals, excellences and roles. I hope to explore stories that do not have much (if any) meaning within the existing dominant cultural framework, attend to the excesses in these stories and bring them into dialogue with Aristotle and Confucius. I hope to re-understand the ideals, excellences and roles of teaching consistent with renewed practical identity of educational teacher.

In light of Plenty Coups’s analysis of what happened to the Crow culture, I sense there is a similar difficulty in establishing a vibrant culture in the field of education today in three respects:

- Identifying cultural ideals for education that include ethical dimensions;
- Identifying excellences or virtues of the teacher associated with those ideals;
- Identifying some of the roles of teachers that are consistent with the ideals and
excellences and show how they might contribute to forming a practical identity of teacher.

There are certainly still social roles for the teacher; however the roles, excellences and ideals of teachers as defined within the managerial discourses seem to “fall woefully short” (Curlin, 2016, p. 74) of a defensible conception of education. Understanding education as largely an economic transaction conceives teachers as trainers who deliver predetermined knowledge and skillsets to their student-workers in order to upgrade them to become valuable human resources. In consequence, teachers are expected to exercise competencies such as effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and productivity, all consistent with preparing their workers for the next steps of schooling (measured by standardized tests) and then the workplace.

In contrast, my teaching and learning to teach stories prompted me to ask questions about good teaching that point to different roles and excellences more congruent with ancient Western and Eastern wisdom traditions. Aristotle and Confucius provide enriched conceptual resources to understand and reveal new significance of teaching. Educational ideals such as eudaimonia (happiness) and dao (道, the way) aim to foster certain kinds of people and not simply generate skilled and flexible human resources. Phronesis (practical wisdom), philia (friendship), techne (being skilled, artful), ren (仁, humaneness) and liuyi (六艺, the Six Arts) are very different excellences from the virtues of effectiveness, efficiency and accountability so valued by current frameworks. Instead of conceiving of teachers as managers, technician or bureaucrats, I explore roles such as teacher-guide, teacher-friend and teacher-artist, each offering possibilities for linking educational ideals, excellences and roles into a practical identity of teacher. Consistent with my search for a renewed practical identity, I follow Plenty Coups’ strategies:

1. I aim to thin both the goals and excellences defined within the managerial discourses
to make them more receptive to alternate languages. I also thin the original understandings of Aristotelian and Confucian ideals and virtues to prepare for their re-appropriations in today’s context.

2. I exercise the virtue of the chickadee and examine the small things (particulars) in significant events/stories to find the anomalies, contradictions and connections in my stories (the excess).

3. I use my philosophic imagination to generate new possibilities for the current taken-for-granted understandings of ideals, excellences and social roles of teaching.

4. I attempt to create a new middle ground between cultures (Chinese and Canadian), between past (Confucian and Aristotelian) and present, in order to integrate new ideals, new excellences and possible new roles for teachers into a renewed practical identity of teacher.

**Thinning the Virtues—Challenging Available Frameworks**

Teachers are expected to practice and embody certain ideals and excellences consistent with their responsibilities. Ideals within the managerial discourses must be consistent with measuring goodness or success by elevated test scores initially and ultimately by the preparation and placement of suitable human resources for the job market. Within this discourse, the thick content of the excellences or human virtues associated with such ideals must be described in managerial terms. Within such a regime, a thick understanding of a teacher’s love for her students could be the teacher’s giving extra tutoring to her students in order to help them succeed on their examinations; a thick understanding of a teacher’s wisdom could be the teacher’s mastery of the subject knowledge, teaching skills and classroom management; a thick understanding of a teacher’s perseverance could be the teacher still teaching even when she is
sick because she is afraid that her class’ academic performance would fall behind schedule; a thick understanding of a teacher’s justice could be the teacher’s punishing her students when they do anything against the school/workplace rules; a thick understanding of a teacher’s pride could be measured by the test results of her students.

My research aims to suspend and thin the current thick ideals and virtues of successful teaching in order to make room for alternate excellences to emerge. Thinning the current excellences and ideals requires more than just adopting and applying thick concepts from other frameworks (in my study Aristotelian and Confucian traditions). The validity of the current thick excellences and ideals may be challenged, suspended, questioned and thereby thinned when we ask the fundamental questions of why we teach and—with the assistance of my own small teaching stories—inquire whether something meaningful is missing, distorted or wrong. Likewise, in my re-appropriation of Aristotelian and Confucian concepts, I hope to begin with their “thick” notions of human excellences within their respective traditions and then thin these concepts by capturing their key elements, abstracting their meanings, asking fundamental questions and testing the answers for significance against my own experiences. Indeed, my aim is not to “answer” my question for all teachers, but to create a richer dialogue about the practical identity of educational teacher.

*Following the Chickadee—Looking for the Excesses of Meaning in the Stories*

I hope to attend to the “little things” in my stories and bring them into conversation with alternate cultural schemes to address the question: “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” I am ready to be addressed or “educated” (Warnke, 2012, p. 89) by my stories and approach the stories “from the perspective of individual vantage points, individual backgrounds, and individual locations in the world” (Greene, 1978, p. 61). The stories grounding my research are
not research data to analyze and generalize, but little events with texture and particularity that may point to significance and that might lead to a better understanding of the excellences and ideals involved in being a teacher. In following the chickadee, I hope to see anew by paying close attention to the particulars. I understand the chickadee’s openness to the particulars grounds my search and pursuit of the practical identity of an educational teacher. The raised eyebrow and lifted voice of my teacher Mr. Wang, the awkward feelings I experienced when I got the trophy in the national teaching contest, the gentle smile on Mr. Zhao’s face when he gave my mother a book wrapper to cover the forbidden books, all claim my attention and suggest something more and something significant. Indeed, I understand education is not a grand theory for us to create and then apply, but a never-ending quest for people to reflect upon their own lives in relationship with other people in order to live well. In listening to my stories attentively, I am provided with opportunities to retell them and generate new meanings.

**Imagining New Possibilities**

In my stories, I follow Plenty Coups’s practice of using enigmatic dreams, poetry to envision something meaningful in the future that I do not yet understand and testing the connections between particulars in stories and generals from cultural frameworks. Such a process demands that we reflect upon our own lives in relationship with one another, when “human beings [participate] in a shared reality” (Greene, 1978, p. 55). I use alternate languages to (re)tell the teaching and learning to teach stories of my mother and myself with the hope of finding significance missing from the current managerial frameworks. In the spirit of a Crow poet, I try to notice something new, something more in the stories that demand attention and hope to transform the social pretense of a teacher. I search for renewed excellences and teaching roles in the process of renewal and re-creation through dialogue with Aristotle and Confucius. Listening
to their ancient voices, I aim to reimagine the roles of the teachers today and (re)construct deeper and more adequate practical identities for teaching. I aim to re-approach and re-search the stories of my mother, my teachers, my son and myself looking for new significance with the intention of weaving my understanding together with resources reclaimed from ancient Eastern and Western ethical-political traditions to form a new practical identity for myself as teacher—just as Plenty Coups had to revise the original framework of a Crow life to reconstitute himself a Crow chief. Moreover, I hope to challenge the managerial and instrumental frameworks so dominant in teaching and teacher education today by attending to the excesses in my stories, but also use my stories to talk back to Aristotle and Confucius.

**Thickening the Virtues—Searching for New Roles of a Teacher**

I aim to dwell in the middle ground between Eastern and Western traditions and between past and present. Though embedded in different social and cultural backgrounds and even unknown to each other, Aristotelian and Confucian traditions enjoy common ground for comparative conceptual explorations. For example, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* and Confucius’ *dao* both are concerned with human *teloi* and what would count as good and worthwhile human lives. Though they have distinctive notions of human virtues, they share ideas about how to cultivate human excellences. Traditions, following Plenty Coups’s approach, can “interact, have conversations,” which are “multidimensional and will yield all kinds of possibilities” (Lin, 2009, p. 152). I hope to bring these frameworks into conversation with one another, taking care not to synthesize or oversimplify them. More importantly, I intend to bring these traditions nearer to education. I hope not only to create a middle ground between ancient wisdom traditions, but also test them against my teaching stories. In sum, I hope to bring my teaching and learning to teach stories and the wisdom traditions into “mutual illumination” (Yu, 1998, p. 323) in order to
thicken the excellences and roles necessary for a practical identity of teacher.

The people in my teaching and learning to teach stories live in different historical moments, come from different cultural backgrounds and have different life experiences; in consequence, they have very different understandings of good and worthwhile lives and educational teaching. My parents grew up in China in the 1960s during the great proletarian Cultural Revolution and experienced a highly authoritarian political regime. Born in the 1980s, I grew up in a society going through rapid economic development and marketization. My first son, born in 2008 in China, moved to Canada when he was two years old, and my second son, eight years younger than his brother, will grow up in a more democratic and pluralist society. As a teacher, I experienced difficult moments in my encounters with my students when I taught in China; as a daughter, I observe my mother as a teacher; as a student, I have conversations with my teachers and witness their practices in both China and Canada; and as a mother, I am being questioned and challenged by my elder son who is being schooled in Canada. Little unsettling teaching stories rooted in diverse historical, political and cultural backgrounds from very different wisdom traditions can help me thicken the virtues and ideals consistent with the practical identity of teacher. I hope my attempts at creating hermeneutic dialogues can help me link the particulars in my stories with the generals of virtue ethics in order to create new—and perhaps better—notions of educational teaching. As Hughes (2001) suggests:

The fulfilled life is a life in which one pursues the noble and fine and lives according to the virtues in itself says nothing about what such a life consists in. One has to go on to fill in the details in terms of courage and honesty and temperance. (p. 175)

Of course, I don’t aim to exhaust the possible meanings in my stories or provide any immediate or perfect solutions to the difficulties, but with radical hope, I hope that my
explorations will extend and deepen a dialogue about teaching. Ultimately my concerns are normative: What is education? What is an educational teacher? I am reminded of Lear’s utterance “ultimately, [my project] is concerned with ought rather than is” (2006, p. 9).

A “Kaleidoscope” of Forthcoming Chapters

My thesis follows Lear’s (2006) lead: He describes how “Plenty Coups laid down an enduring collective ideal for the tribe as it faced new challenges. He drew upon ancient tribal beliefs and put them to new use” (p. 139). On my understanding, Plenty Coups set out, more than laid down, a process of an ongoing dialogue about the collective ideal of being Crow. To better understand what counts as a good teacher, I begin a process of challenging the teacher’s roles currently defined with managerial languages by practicing the virtues of the chickadee, that is, listening carefully (p. 80) and attending to “little things” (p. 81) with imagination, re-searching for their significance through dialogue with Aristotle and Confucius.

My inquiry attends to the teaching and learning to teach stories of my mother and myself; I treat the stories not as empirical data to be collected and analyzed, but as a reservoir of claims to significance in teaching. Reinterpreting, reshaping and challenging the teaching stories are guided and illuminated by the ideals of teaching embedded in my stories. The disruption and extension of the ordinary practical identity of a teacher are not isolated or detached processes; rather, my efforts are rooted in the stories and need to attend to the stories to “facilitate the attachment to the more robust version of the ideal” (Lear, 2011, p. 38). In the chapters that follow I hope to capture something more, something significant about teaching that the current cultural scheme misses. I attend to the often un-noticed, small and ephemeral moments that disturb the routine practical identity of teacher as portrayed by managerial discourses. Such moments render the customary understanding of the practical identity of teaching vulnerable and unstable and
make room for possible transformation. The following is a sketch of forthcoming chapters that all grapple with my central question: “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” while recognizing, as Wiens (2013) writes, to reach a commonly acceptable definition of education or educational teaching is a worthy, yet an impossible and never-ending public endeavour.

Below I outline the purpose of forthcoming chapters and indicate how each contributes to or moves my overall inquiry forward. I am aware that my materials—the stories, the memories, the texts, the wisdom traditions—may not provide a strong logical line: They deal with recursive and complimentary themes; however, I don’t believe this is a structural weakness. Rather, this structure reflects my dialogic intent and is “at best a dialogue between one’s intentions and the material one works with, and thus a process in which both have a voice and both have a role to play” (Biesta, 2013, p. xi). It is more of a “kaleidoscope” rather than a “linear” argument (Biesta, 2013, p. xi). I believe the particular experiences and encounters involving my mother, my teachers, my students, my son and myself invite us to dwell with the stories, imagine new possibilities in them and open a gap between what is prescribed within the managerial cultural scheme and a more genuine aspiration that transcends the current social pretense of a teacher.

**Hamburgers and Hotdogs: Schooling and Educating**

Despite the etymological emphases on education as a process of helping people learn what they need to learn in order to lead good and worthwhile lives, education is often understood as solely an epistemological matter involving the acquisition, production and delivery of knowledge, ignoring ethical aspects, including understandings of worthwhile lives, and what kinds of learning might contribute to such lives. While schooling and educating are often used as synonymous terms, they need to be distinguished from each other.

Schools require new language to reconnect facts with values in order to be more
educational: To discuss not only what is correct and efficient, but also what is good and desirable; to be concerned about not only how to achieve goals, but also think about what purposes are worthwhile to pursue; to consider not only instrumental knowledge, but to consider what might make us more fully human. The appropriation of moral languages can challenge the prevalent instrumental and economic discourses of schooling and provide fresh insights. My understanding of education as including both axiological and epistemological concerns leads to my choice of a virtue ethics approach to education and the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues in both students and teachers.

In the Shadow of the Water Bucket: Eudaimonia and Dao

The starting point for us today is the same as it was for the ancient Greeks: “Education is about learning to live the good life, to live life better, taking into account all others” (Wiens, 2013, p. 23). Aristotelian habituation and eudaimonia (happiness) and Confucian hua (transformation) and dao (the way) can help us to reflect upon the fundamental questions of education that teachers rarely have time to notice: The questions of educational purpose—why do we teach? I explore two student-teacher stories—one featuring me as an elementary school student with my teacher in the 1990s and the other, me as a teacher with my student a decade later—and attempt to understand the renewed ideals of an educational teacher and in particular, to address the perennial tension between conformity and freedom. I believe for both Aristotle and Confucius, a good human life, a life of eudaimonia or a life of dao, is embedded in cultivating and practicing human virtues. According to Aristotle, people need their “partners” (Nicomachean Ethics, 1177a31) to be habituated properly, learn about and practice virtues informed by practical reason, while for Confucius, a life of dao aims at a virtuous end rooted in human relationships through hua. Eudaimonia and dao jointly orient us toward pursuing the
virtuous ends of education. In this pursuit, however, I am mindful of their very different understandings of freedom and explore some of the tensions between conformity and freedom so central to deciding educational ends.

**Feeling the Pebbles: Phronesis, Philia and Ren**

I describe my mother’s efforts to learn to teach in a middle school in China during the Cultural Revolution. The lenses of Aristotelian *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and Confucian *ren* (humaneness) help me understand my mother’s stories in a new light: Her teaching stories with her student Ling and her teacher Mr. Zhao not only recover the largely forgotten voices of teachers from that period, but also reveal new insights about educational teaching. In this chapter, I hope to investigate educational teaching as “feeling the pebbles.” Educational teachers are constantly negotiating the links between the particular and the general to make ethical judgments—to attend to and discern the unique particulars—the particular people, the particular contexts in light of the guiding generals of *eudaimonia* and *dao*. I then hope to enrich and complicate *phronesis* with *philia*, together with *ren*, to understand better about educational relationships and their significance in educational teaching.

**Interrogating the Tricks: Techne and Liuyi**

I tell my learning to teach stories of participating in the National Basic Teaching Skills Contest against the background of teacher education in China and Canada. I re-approach the stories through Aristotle’s *techne* (being skilled, artful) and Confucius’ *liuyi* (the Six Arts) and interrogate the “how-to”s of teaching and education particularly through Joseph Dunne’s (1993) reworking and thickened notion of *phronetic techne* and *liuyi*. I sense there is a need to renegotiate and refine the space of *techne* and transform a craft understanding of *techne* to an aesthetic and artistic understanding. Indeed, both Aristotle and Confucius contend that skilful
activities contribute to cultivating moral virtues, to which Agamben (1995, 1999a, 1999b, 2013) may present a radical challenge.

**Becoming a Teacher Does Not Come That Easily**

In my concluding chapter I assess my progress towards creating a more satisfactory practical identity for myself, that is, whether I have indeed brought my teaching stories into dialogue with the ancient wisdom traditions to point to new ideals, excellences and roles consistent with a coherent and integrated understanding of what it means to be an educational teacher. In Chapter Three, I explore the possibilities of helping people pursue the ideals of *eudaimonia* and *dao* instead of concentrating on helping my students improve their test scores on standardized tests. In the following two chapters, I focus on the benefits of developing the excellences of *phronesis, philia, techne, ren* and *liuyi* instead of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity. In this chapter, I begin by imagining the possible roles that an educational teacher might subsequently fulfill: As a teacher-guide to a life of *eudaimonia* and *dao*; as a teacher-friend embodying and expressing *phronesis, philia*, and *ren*; and as a teacher-artist with *phronetic techne* and a mastery of *liuyi*. Despite my efforts, however, my search remains haunted by the sense of a whole without completeness, a conception of the good without closure and aspiration without achievement: I have discovered no integrated practical identity of teacher that accounts for all the excesses in my stories and my appropriations of Aristotelian and Confucian resources account for only parts of my understanding of educational teaching.

Lear’s (2011) conception of ironic experience, however, explains my dissatisfaction and helps me understand that educational teaching must remain an aspiration rather than an achievement, that is, a teacher’s practical identity is a never-ending quest to transform and transcend the social pretenses of teaching. Greene (1988) makes my point succinctly: “It is a
matter of affirming human beings as ‘subjects of decisions’ rather than objects, of involving men and women in the striving toward their own ‘completion’—a striving that can never end” (p. 8). Becoming a teacher requires one to always “reach out to create an opening” (Greene, 1988, p.11), a quest that does not come that easily.
Chapter 2: Hamburgers and Hotdogs—Schooling and Educating

If by keeping the old warm one can provide understanding of the new, one is fit to be a teacher (*Analects*, 2.11).

On the journey to Northfield, the North Star is the means you use to establish the correct direction for your travel (Fenstermacher, 2000, para. 7).

As I began to write this chapter, my calendar turned to June 7th, 2016, the day of the Gaokao in China. I can imagine my hometown Beijing and other parts of China entering annual emergency mode—almost ten million young people are preparing to fight one of the most important battles of their lives: The Gaokao—the College Entrance Examination in China. Two days, nine hours and four exams determine the future of each student. In preparation for the “sacred” time of the Gaokao, students often spend their weekends in cram schools, sacrifice their sleep and study from six a.m. to midnight each day; parents nourish them with vitamin supplements; roadside stands are prohibited; policemen block roads near the exam locations to ensure a quiet environment for the students. The whole country seems to seethe with enthusiasm for the Gaokao. I can still remember what I was told by my high school teachers and what I used to tell my own students: One more mark would allow you to overcome thousands of other students in the battle of the Gaokao. Better marks guarantee entrance to a more prestigious program in a distinguished university, a higher paid job, and therefore a more promising future life.

As a teacher, I was proud to see my students study diligently for the Gaokao and cheered them on. Moreover, I was deeply moved by the earnest and hopeful looks of their parents when
they waited outside the school gates for their children to come out of the examination in triumph. At the same time, other stories troubled me: One parent killed all the frogs in a nearby pond because he was worried that the sound of the frogs could disturb his daughter’s concentration; a mother held back the news of the death of her husband from their son to prevent emotional distress before the Gaokao that might affect his marks; a teacher postponed her cancer treatment in order to be sure that her students did not fall behind in their studies; a student jumped out of the window of a twenty-story apartment building on the second day of the exam because he could not bear the pressure to face the exam results; some students put up slogans like “There is a road ahead of the Gaokao, but not behind it. If you withdraw from it, there is only a dead-end.”

I knew long ago that something was not right. Enthusiasm and anxiety about the Gaokao seemed to generate serious problems, yet few people seemed concerned. Indeed, the status of the Gaokao was unassailable. The examinations were so taken for granted in schools that I could not envision any alternative, a predicament clearly captured by Maxine Greene (1973): “The teacher is prevented from considering his assumptions and actual, everyday events if he insists on copying by means of slogans, abstractions, mere names” (p. 81). For me the purpose of schooling seemed clear: To prepare people to win the battle of the Gaokao—the embodiment of past, present and future educational attainment. Only later did I begin to challenge the equivalence of education and schooling—a disentanglement prompted partly by my son teaching me to question my own assumptions.

The Importance of Education

One day, my son Marvin came back from his grade two class in a Vancouver elementary school and shared with me the school project he had been doing with his teacher Linda and his
classmates. He told me that Linda asked the class to come up with five things they deemed most important in life. The class generated a long list of “most important” things in life and finally the class voted for the top five. Marvin was excited to share with me that the most important things in life his class chose: air, water, food, family and education. Out of curiosity, I asked Marvin why they believed education was one of the most important five things in life. Marvin replied without hesitation: “Of course. Education is so important. Otherwise, you won’t even know one plus one equals two. Even worse, you might not know what plus means . . . You don’t recognize things so that you couldn’t even make a choice between hamburgers and hotdogs!” I couldn’t help bursting into laughter upon his metaphor of making a choice between hamburgers and hotdogs. After a good laugh together, I knew from his eyes that he was apparently expecting an encouraging compliment or at least some comments from me. But at that moment, I was short of words.

Marvin’s innocent comment about the importance of education was stuck in my mind. Schooling generally seems to presume a selection of predetermined knowledge and skills to acquire, digest, master, remember and apply—assumptions as normal as the availability of hamburgers and hotdogs on hot lunch days. People can choose between hamburgers and hotdogs, but seldom question their availability or legitimacy. Similarly, students learn what they are supposed to learn and even question what they are supposed to question in prescribed ways. I am very familiar with schooling; indeed, I have spent most of my life in schools. Before I was six my mother would pick me up from daycare and take me back to the school while she worked and asked me to wait in her office until she finished; for the next sixteen years I studied in elementary school, middle school, high school and a renowned university in China before graduating; I then became a middle school teacher in Beijing for seven years before leaving
China to study in Canada. I can still accurately recount the daily routine of schools in which I worked for seven years; picture the classroom settings and the arrangement of the furniture, remember the piles of exercise books lying on my desk and the excitement of my students when they got good marks on examinations. While these images capture the daily life of schools, I am not sure whether all, some, or any of these images are educational. A sense of something missing in my successful teaching continues to remind me that the structure of schooling does not always promote education. Often, schools, rather than being an adequate and appropriate means to reach educational ends, neglect their educational purposes, or worse, thwart education.

In English, schooling and education are often synonyms. When we search authoritative dictionaries to find the meaning of education, we encounter definitions such as “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), “the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). It seems obvious to us that students need to be schooled/educated properly so as to get a promising job in the future. Education, however, also includes an often-neglected normative dimension: Education is an activity whereby some, or all, citizens of a particular society get their bearings and learn to live with one another. Education always reflects a society’s views of what is excellent, worthy, necessary. The reflections are not cast in concrete, like so many foundation stones, rather they are ongoing, refracted and reshaped as definitions, meanings and purposes change. (Elshtain, 1993, p. 82)

Wiens and Coulter (2008) explain that “schools are . . . institutions intended to further education, but conflating schooling and education risks confusing means and ends” (p. 11) and Phillips adds: “Education needs to be distinguished from schooling . . . [f]or not everything, and perhaps
very little, that occurs in the process of schooling constitutes education” (2015, pp. 74–5). It seems that schools, rather than always provide the means to reach educational ends, can sometimes promote education—and sometimes discourage it. Indeed, understanding schools as businesses maximizing certain benefits or a factories producing standardized outcomes can lead to the miseducation of students (Pinar, 2004). What then do I understand by education? For what purposes? How is schooling different from educating?

The Latin root of education, *educare* (to lead out), aims at bringing out the good in children and emphasizes the adult’s responsibility to guide children from the “private world of the family into the public adult world” (Coulter & Wiens, 2008, p. 11). *Educare* includes ethical as well as epistemological concerns since education aims at nurturing the good in children, requiring a determination of just what will count as “good” and accepting the responsibility to guide children towards the good. Correspondingly, the word “education” in Chinese contains two characters: *jiao* and *yu* (教育). According to *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (a dictionary to explain the origins of Chinese words published in Han Dynasty), *jiao* and *yu* are verbs like *educare*: *Jiao* (教) involves the teacher’s display and imparting of knowledge while students imitate and learn; while *yu* (育) is the nurturing of people in order to contribute to their flourishing in relationships with others. Both *jiao* and *yu* involve normative considerations: *Jiao* (教) is not only about imparting and transmitting information, but also contemplating what counts as worthwhile knowledge; while *yu* (育) requires the cultivation of the good within students. Accordingly, all aspects of teaching that aim to be educational need to be guided by the dynamic relationship between *jiao* (教) and *yu* (育), nurturing the students intellectually and morally, cultivating virtues in students and helping them to lead a good life in conjunction with others.
However, schools in both China and Canada are increasingly focused on mandating teachers’ accountability for improving student scores on standardized tests—either on the Gaokao in China or on provincial examinations in Canada—with the presumption that better scores indicate the acquisition of the required knowledge to prepare the young for future jobs, that is, better “education.” Education as schooling is understood as the means to secure better-paid work in competitive job markets, and letters and numbers on report cards become measures of progress towards that ultimate goal. In consequence, schools focus on imparting skills more effectively without attending to the ethical dimensions of education. Such an approach to schooling institutionalizes a very limited understanding of education that—in contrast and broadly speaking—is centrally about “the means whereby some, or all, citizens of a particular society get their bearings and learn to live with one another” (Elshtain, 1993, p. 82). Coulter (2001) explains:

Conceptions of goodness in teaching, for example, are often not confronted in public dialogue, but are unproblematically assumed in discussions about effective teaching or are settled by bureaucratic fiat or by politically bargained job descriptions. (p. 4)

Disturbed by questions prompted by stories about the Gaokao, puzzled about the vanity of success in my teaching, prompted by my son’s impression of schools, I aim to explore the possible resources to help me reimagine education in schools.

**A Moral Quest**

My unease with contemporary schooling is certainly shared: From different intellectual traditions, scholarly works have criticized and challenged the reduced and mechanized interpretation of education so prevalent in contemporary schooling. In many ways, teaching in schools has been degraded to the effective implementation of instrumental techniques to meet
limited and predetermined goals. Biesta (2013), for example, argues that learning has supplanted education in schools and Lewis (2015) subsequently explains that an exclusive focus on learning allows teaching to be reduced to “a practice that is managed, systematized, and regulated by a series of quantifiable measurements related to student learning outcomes” (p. 165). Biesta’s and Lewis’s worry that schooling often perverts education is not a new concern, however; indeed, the problem is as old as the invention of schools and we can find efforts to rescue education from schooling in many different intellectual traditions. Rousseau (1762/1979), for example, charges the French schools of the 18th century with turning out to be asses loaded with books and argued that students needed to be active learners rather than being passive recipients of knowledge. At the turn of 20th century, John Dewey attacks the transmission of ready-made knowledge as the goal of education: He (1897) highlights the moral dimensions of education and argues for a conception of education as a mode of social life to establish proper relationships with others. Later, in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), Paulo Freire describes the banking concept of education that underlies much of current schooling and points out that the “banking” discourse conceives students as containers or receptacles to be filled by the teacher: “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Friere, 1970, p. 53). My own experience of schooling mirrors the banking notion of education: As a teacher, I was supposed to master and impart prescribed knowledge and skills to my students understood as clients, without much interest in interrogating what was worthwhile to teach and what ways were desirable.

Not surprisingly, if we look at the criticisms of the institutionalization of education in schooling in various intellectual traditions we find that they share a common critique of the employment of managerial and industrial languages and the reduction of the teacher’s role to
delivering and depositing ready-made subject knowledge in their students/clients/customers. Despite the origin of education as a process of cultivating the good in people, contemporary schooling is largely understood as an epistemological concern, neglecting the ethical. Fifty years ago, Greene (1978) observed that in schools “facts have been easily separated off from values; decisions have been made on grounds independent of moral propriety” (p. 60). This continuing neglect of the ethical is especially ironic since teaching is a profession that is doubly ethical: All teaching involves complex relationships with (often very vulnerable) other people and teaching in schools includes the responsibility to help the young to become ethical people themselves. Any interaction teachers have with students (including the moments they do not think they are teaching) has moral import. Fenstermacher (1990) explains that

   Nearly everything that a teacher does while in contact with students carries moral weight. Every response to a question, every assignment handed out, every discussion on issues, every resolution of a dispute, every grade given to a student, carries with it the moral judgment of the teacher. (p. 134)

   Education therefore encompasses all aspects of the human condition including epistemological, ethical and political dimensions: Education is not only about producing and mobilizing knowledge to serve instrumental ends, but also about understanding what is valuable knowledge, what counts as a flourishing human life and how we might live alongside other people and interact with them. To examine current schooling assumptions and re-imagine education, I need moral languages that help me challenge the prevalent instrumentally and economically oriented discourses of schooling, and search for and create more educational spaces in schools. As Coulter (2001) suggests, “discussions of what is worthwhile—and educational—in any human society will involve moral discourses” (p. 4). Phelan (2015) also
recognizes the importance of exploring teacher education and teaching through ethical vocabularies from the humanities when the dehumanizing impact of performativity, standardization and accountability is so dominant in schooling systems around the world. New languages are needed to join facts and values: To discuss not merely what is correct and efficient, but also what is a good and desirable; to be concerned not merely about how to achieve predetermined goals, but also think about which purposes are worthwhile to pursue; to think about what could make us more fully human rather than promote only the instrumental and predetermined goals. With renewed languages, I hope to challenge the prevalent instrumental and economically oriented discourses of schooling and to create new insights to re-imagine education and create educational spaces in schools.

**Virtue Ethics and Other Ethical Frameworks**

I understand that any effort to understand education must include both normative and empirical considerations: We need to determine both what we ought to do and how human beings actually learn to understand and act. Hence, a more comprehensive approach to education is needed to integrate epistemological and axiological concerns, that is, attend to both “is” and “ought” questions. Arguing for the importance of a caring approach in education, Noddings (2010a) explains, “I do not go to naturalistic extremes and argue that things should be as they are, but I do argue that any normative ethic that ignores ‘how things are’ is unlikely to be taken seriously” (p. 11). Unfortunately, at many times, the “ought” question or what we should do is often taken for granted and rarely raised in educational research. Egan (2004), for instance, observes that the recommendations for classroom practices implied by empirical research usually advance definitions of the concept under investigation, leaving the normative question
unexamined. The normative relationship between teaching and educating is the focus of my investigation.

The axiological dimension of education leads to my choice of a virtue ethics approach and subsequent interest in the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues in both students and teachers. Virtue ethics is concerned with conceptions of a good or flourishing human life and can provide the moral language that education needs: A virtue ethics of educational teaching asks questions not only about how and what we teach, but also why we teach, what might be counted as goodness in teaching and what might contribute to living a worthwhile human life. All of these questions are challenging, but essential questions for teachers. I choose to argue for the language of virtue ethics rather than other approaches to ethics such as utilitarianism and deontology because I believe the axiological dimensions of education and educational teaching can be best approached through virtue ethics. Put simply, a virtue ethics of teaching is concerned with what is worthwhile to experience, excellent to achieve, and admirable to become (Campbell, 2013) and can provide insights into the fundamental educational questions concerning why we educate or what constitutes desirable educational processes.

A brief review of the three dominant approaches to Western ethics can provide justification for my choice of virtue ethics and outline the normative and conceptual considerations involved in each approach. Western scholars often divide ethics into three distinct frameworks: Utilitarianism often represented by Bentham and Mill; deontology inspired by the thought of Immanuel Kant; and virtue ethics as represented by Aristotle. Virtue ethics, in brief, is an approach to ethics that emphasizes the virtues in contrast to an approach that emphasizes consequences of actions (utilitarianism), or one that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) (Hursthouse, 1999). For most of the 20th century, utilitarianism and deontology dominated
discussions of ethics until the 1960’s and 1970’s when Anscombe (1958), MacIntyre (1981), Nussbaum (1990, 2001), Slote (1992), Dunne (1993) and others helped revive and reconceive Aristotle’s works. We are well advised to bear in mind that the categories are merely labels intended to describe and characterize these three traditions and inevitably involve the interpreters’ own lenses. My brief explanations are not aimed at cataloguing them, but describing them for better understanding. While it is impossible to do this exercise comprehensively, I hope to signal the difficulties that each approach confronts in teaching and teacher education and I hope to explain not only how virtue ethics suits my needs, but also explicate why no approach, including virtue ethics, is entirely successful.

Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism reasons that “we are all governed by the feelings of pain and pleasure . . . and the utilitarian philosophy recognizes this fact [we all like pleasure and dislike pain] and makes it the basis of moral and political life” (Sandel, 2009, p. 34). Sandel (2009) succinctly captures the challenges for an utilitarian approach to ethics: “The most glaring weakness of utilitarianism . . . is that it fails to respect individual rights” (p. 37) and goes on to doubt whether it is possible to “translate all moral goods into a single currency of value without losing something in the translation” (p. 41). Weighing the social costs and benefits, we would promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of students and teachers without paying too much attention to whether the policy or practice in schools would harm a few if it could benefit the many. Following Bentham—who suggests removing beggars from the street because they reduce the pleasures of the general public—a utilitarian approach to education might, for example, recommend that teachers give up on students who disturb other students’ learning and thereby maximize learning outcomes for the majority. Generally speaking, a utilitarian approach lacks respect for individual rights and is concerned with maximizing pleasures or benefits for the
most people. Following a utilitarian approach to educational matters, we would be interested in
the calculation of costs and benefits. Some practices consistent with a cost/benefit analysis
include: the allocation of additional funding to “successful” schools and the reduction of funding
to “failing” schools; the development of charter schools allowing customers to choose the best
schooling product; the creation and implementation of zero tolerance policies to push or
“encourage” some student/clients to leave school—approaches that largely depend on the
capacity to measure teachers and students against a uniform “educational” scale provided by
examinations.

Kant’s approach to ethics, in contrast, begins with his concern for individual autonomy
and argues that to act freely is not to choose the best means to a given end, but to choose ends for
their own sake. Kant (1959) contends that we should never treat humanity, whether in our own
person or in the person of any other, as a means to an end, but always as an end in itself. Kant
rejects the idea of maximizing welfare in a consequentialist view or promoting virtue as the goal
in virtue ethics and instead ties morality to human freedom as expressed in the categorical
imperative which suggests acting only on a maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it
should become a universal law (Kant, 1959). Moral law is therefore not based on any particular
interests, purposes, or ends, but on the principle of allowing other people to pursue their own
ends. Sandel (2009) summarizes: “To act autonomously is to act according to a law I give
myself—not according to the dictates of nature or social convention” (p. 109). Given Kantian
duty is centrally about respecting the autonomy of others, this understanding of ethics becomes
especially important for the education of children: Kant is concerned to both protect the
autonomy of students and to develop their capacity to exercise their own freedom. Instead of
focusing on achieving heterogeneous goals for the students—e.g., improving their test scores,
preparing them for future jobs, or helping them gain more certificates or degrees—teachers’
ultimate responsibility is to help children become autonomous adults themselves. In sum,
deontological ethics seems like a more defensible educational approach than consequentialism
because of its fundamental concern for individual human worth and dignity; however,
deontological ethics has its own challenges. Sandel (2009), for example, worries that different
people reason differently and could come up with very different interpretations of the moral
laws: “How can Kant be sure that different people won’t reason differently, and arrive at various
moral laws” (p. 126). This is a criticism that has been addressed by a number of Kantian scholars
recently. Korsgaard (1985) responds by arguing that the categorical imperative should not be
understood as a positive law to direct moral action, but a negative injunction that cautions us to
avoid creating laws that unnecessarily limit the autonomy of others.

I find both consequential and deontological ethics lack sufficient explanation for moral
motivation, that is, why we should act well. Drawing on Katja Maria Vogt’s Desiring the Good,
Baggini (May, 2018) observes that deontological ethics might lead to mindless rigidity while
consequential ethics is focused on maximizing happiness of the most people to the detriment of
minorities. He writes: “Deontologists try to disown the compliant citizen of the Third Reich,
while consequentialists are trying to distance themselves from the instrumental horrors of
Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Baggini, May 2018, para. 15). Deveterre (2002) adds that neither
utilitarian nor deontological approaches have: “a good explanation of why we ought to follow the
principles they propose” (p. 3) and explains:

Modern moral philosophy is thus arguably in a state of disarray and distress. It retains the
language of obligation arising from moral laws, principles, and rules but rejects the
religious underpinnings that once provided both the sources of the moral law and the motive for observing it. (p. 3)

In contrast to Kantian deontology and Bentham’s consequentialism, Deveterre proposes a return to virtue ethics, a process largely initiated by Anscombe’s (1958) recovery of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Revivalists of Aristotelian traditions argue that the cultivation and practice of certain dispositions or virtues are conducive to ethical action, human well-being and flourishing (MacIntyre, 1981; Dunne, 1993; Nussbaum, 1995, 2001; Hursthouse, 1999; Annas, 2011). Aristotle contends that that there are two sorts of virtues, intellectual and moral, and explains that *eudaimonia* (happiness) depends on the acquisition and exercise of both intellectual and moral virtues. Aristotle identifies five intellectual virtues: *nous* (knowing the correct first principles or intuitive reason), *techne* (being skilled, artful), *episteme* (possessing systematic or scientific knowledge), *sophia* (being theoretically wise) and *phronesis* (being practically wise or acting well). None of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues has precise equivalents in English, although some (unfortunately) seem to have modern English counterparts. Aristotle’s moral virtues seem more familiar and include qualities such as courage, temperance, friendship, honour and justice. Intellectual virtues and moral virtues interact with one another, that is, they are interwoven and infiltrate one another in the flourishing person.

Aristotelian virtue ethics provides a better account of the sources of ethical action: The exercise of virtue—and not the acquisition of wealth or social recognition—leads to a flourishing human life (*eudaimonia*). For Aristotle, “the purpose of politics is not to set up a framework of rights that is neutral among ends. It is to form good citizens and to cultivate good character” (Sandel, 2009, p. 193). One must practice the requisite virtues at the right time in the right way to flourish: Living virtuously realizes what is unique to human nature—our *telos*—and allows us to
thrive (NE, 1144a1–10) and a virtue ethics approach therefore attempts to explain what will count as a good human life. Devettere (2002) summarizes: “Virtue ethics is about desire and not duty, about what we want to do and not what we ought to do, about personal happiness and not the greatest happiness of all” (p. 21). In consequence, virtue ethics, which is primarily concerned about what the worthwhile lives for human beings and ways to promote them, speaks uniquely to education’s aim to help people learn whatever will assist them to lead good and worthwhile lives.

As I continue to wonder about the significance embedded in my small stories, I raise questions about applying and universalizing Aristotle’s philosophy into a Chinese context and hope to challenge the parochial concerns of Eurocentric discourses in approaching educational practices. Virtue ethics with its distinct emphasis on intellectual and moral virtues as well as its rootedness in the particulars reminds me of my own cultural heritage, Confucianism, and the influence of Confucianism on my upbringing in China. Jiyuan Yu (2007) points out that The New Confucian Manifesto was published in the same year as Anscombe’s Modern Moral Philosophy making 1958 a turning point in both revivals. Confucianism and Aristotelianism share parallel concerns for cultivating human virtues and leading good and worthwhile lives in conjunction with others.

Confucius, born into the Spring and Autumn period (551–479 BC), was an educator, philosopher, politician and the founder of Confucianism, which was subsequently developed into a school of philosophy by his followers in the Han Dynasty. Confucius was believed to be the author of the five classic texts (Classic of Poetry, Book of Documents, Book of Rites, Classic of Changes, Spring and Autumn Annals). Together with the Four Books (The Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean, Analects, Mencius) that were selected and edited by Zhu Xi, one of Confucius’ followers in the Song Dynasty, the five classic works are considered as illustrations
of the key belief systems of Confucianism. His ideas about dao (道, the way), ren (仁, humaneness), li (礼, ritual), zhi (智 wisdom) and xi (信, trust) have profoundly influenced Chinese traditions and beliefs over the last 2500 years. Mencius, a key figure in Confucianism, describes the five dimensions of Confucian education: “To nourish everything like the drops of the rain; to cultivate virtues; to grow into the good timber; to respond to questions and to promote the wonder of future generations” (2013, Chapter “Jin Xin Shang”, p. 359).

Confucian virtues are interrelated and complimentary; Chen (2013) explains: “all the ethical virtues [of Confucianism] must be integrated so as to develop their accumulated functions” (p. 21). Confucianism is well known for its emphasis on virtues such as filial piety, a communal conception of the good and a conception of the self that is more relational than individualistic (Ivanhoe, 2013). As Hua Zhang (2008) observes, Confucianism can be interpreted from various perspectives, with emphases on virtue cultivation, on harmony in human relationships and on education:

As a life philosophy, Confucianism is a continuous learning process in which a person persists in raising his life vision by self-cultivation. As a social ideology, Confucianism advocates a harmony-based social arrangement that upholds a system of rites and music. As a way of life, Confucianism permeates everyday life and forms a whole package of social customs and norms that emphasizes family relationships, filial piety, morality, and education. (p. 336)

**Incompatibility and Comparability of Aristotelian and Confucian Virtue Ethics**

Aristotelian and Confucian wisdom traditions are often interpreted as representatives of virtue ethics (Yu, 2007); ironically, both Aristotle and Confucius lived in a period of great social conflict and both focused on understanding how human lives could be brought into some kind of
balance for ultimate human flourishing. In the face of deteriorating morality as the result of constant warfare and political turnover, both sought social reconstruction by reviving and reconceiving what counts as human virtue. Instead of confronting fierce social conflicts with arrows and spears, the two philosophers chose the gentlest ways to address the harshest warfare: To search for the glimmering lights in human nature and to embrace, cultivate and combine them.

Despite shared concerns with virtue, I am, however, cautious about placing the Confucian tradition under the umbrella term of virtue ethics, a concept that originated in Western scholarship. MacIntyre (1991), for example, warns about the incommensurability of Confucian and Aristotelian virtues and suggests: “We are discovering that each system [Confucian and Aristotelian moral systems] has its own standard and measures of interpretation, explanation, and justification internal to itself” (p. 109). Angle and Slote (2013) also remind us of the asymmetry between the two traditions: “Virtue ethics is stripped of its Western origin and becomes putatively universal, while Confucianism remains a kind of local knowledge” (p. 10) and “viewing Confucianism as ‘philosophy’—and viewing Confucian ethics as ‘virtue ethics’—can seem to privilege a historically contingent Western way of categorizing the world” (p. 3). It is not hard to understand this problem when we realize that the very concept of “philosophy” is derived from ancient Greek discourse and the expression “Chinese philosophy” only first appeared in the early 20th century (Hu, 1919; Feng, 1947/2013).

Being aware of the possible incompatibility and asymmetry between the Western and Eastern terminology of virtues, I do not intend to subsume Confucianism under virtue ethics in its strict sense as stemming from ancient Greek philosophy. Rather, I use the term virtue ethics in a much looser sense, implying a general approach to ethics that shares an interest in human
virtues in order to promote a good life, in spite of different understandings of what constitutes virtue and different ideas of a good life. Ivanhoe (2013) explains:

Virtue ethics is a class of ethical theories that share a common emphasis on virtues as central features of their account. Different species of virtue ethics disagree not only about what the proper list of virtues is, but also about the nature of the virtues, how they relate to one another, and how they do or do not fit or hang together to define a good life. (pp. 28–29)

I acknowledge the differences and even disagreements between Aristotelian and Confucian traditions about what counts as virtues, what might promote virtues, how they are related to one another and how the virtues contribute to good and worthwhile lives. Chen (2013) adds: “Though Confucian ethics inherited from earlier tradition [having] the concern with virtuous conduct, it can at the very least be said to have transcended a narrowly specified form of virtue ethics” (p. 23).

I therefore attempt an interpretation and comparison of two ethical traditions, one from the West and one from the East. Following Bernstein (1983), different ethical traditions may indeed be incompatible and incommensurable, but they can still be compared. Aristotelian and Confucian traditions, though embedded in different social and cultural backgrounds and unknown to each other in that era, enjoy common ground for comparative conceptual explorations. Indeed, in contemporary scholarship we can see emergent comparative studies of these two traditions in the works of Jiyuan Yu (1998), May Sim (2001, 2007), Kupperman (2009), Bryan Van Norden (2007, 2013), and among others. Sim (2001), for example, observes that both Confucius and Aristotle emphasize the role of virtue and explains that for both philosophers the good life is about the kind of person one should become and the happy life is a
life of exemplary virtue. Van Norden suggests they share an interest in particulars: “Aristotle is a paradigmatic example of a particularistic. In Chinese tradition . . . the Ruists [Confucianists] are comparatively particularistic” (2007, p. 36). Kupperman observes that in both Aristotle’s and Confucius’ virtue ethics, “there is great attention to a longitudinal view of virtues, with emphasis both on how people can come to be virtuous and on the rewards of a life that centers on being virtuous” (2009, p. 251).

I understand the caution that “viewing Confucianism as ‘philosophy’—and viewing Confucian ethics as ‘virtue ethics’—can seem to privilege a historically contingent Western way of categorizing the world” (Angle & Slote, 2013, p. 3); nevertheless, when the traditions share certain categories, even if they are not exactly complementary, they may contribute “an important bridge to mutual understanding” (Sim, 2007, p. 62). I am mindful of Lin Anwu’s advice of “not mining Chinese tradition in Western ways” (2009, p. 152), but by drawing on these two philosophical traditions, I hope to understand education and educational teaching better. My efforts are partly inspired by Arendt’s (1968) reference to Shakespeare’s “pearl diving” (p. 51) as descending to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light, but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths, and carry them to the surface for examination. I hope that my study of these two ancient traditions might have “a redemptive relation to the past and a constructive bearing on the present” based on my belief that “the saved fragments from the past, albeit incomplete, contain a ‘truth content.’ Through pearl diving, the pearls are torn from their original context and brought into a new perspective that brings forth new insights” (De Valk, 2010, p. 40).
The Limitations of Virtue Ethics

The choice of virtue ethics as the framework for my study seems to imply a particular understanding of what constitutes education. Considering this, my study not only includes both Eastern and Western traditions to broaden my approach to virtue ethics, but also challenges a common criticism of virtue ethics as focusing only on individuals. I do not pay as much attention to defining particular virtues and ways to foster them in individual people as virtue ethics usually demands; instead, I follow a more communal conception of the good and adopt the Confucian notion of the self that is more relational than individualistic (Ivanhoe, 2013). I contend that people’s virtues are imbedded in relationships with others (including the self as an other) and what counts as virtues is being constantly negotiated, reconsidered and redefined in a diverse society in relationship with other people.

However, it is hard to dispute one of the most glaring limitations of Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics: Both assume that a flourishing of human life can be attained by men only, denying women the possibility of a full human life. Constrained by his times, Aristotle regarded slavery as natural on the grounds that slaves’ souls lacked the capacity for rational deliberations; he believed that the same was true of women. In Politics, Aristotle defines men’s rule over women in terms of natural hierarchy: "The relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled" (Politics, 1245b12). Confucius, in a similar tone, writes: “Of all people, women and little men are the most difficult to educate. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve towards them, they are discontented” (Analects, 17.25). Clearly we have in many ways moved beyond Aristotle’s and Confucius’ thoughts on the inferiority of women, yet I believe there remains much in their thinking that is valuable for my current concerns. I am aware of Aristotle’s and Confucius’
attitudes on the inferiority of women to men; however, I will not regard it as a problem in my explorations. Rather, I hope my examination of Aristotle and Confucius’ ideas to explore women’s—my own and my mother’s—experiences of teaching might challenge their problematic conceptions of women. In my investigation, I will extend Aristotelian and Confucian notions of men to include all human beings and hope to challenge their “patriarchal power structures” (Jacobs, 1998, p. 82). Nonetheless, I believe both Aristotelian and Confucian ethical approaches, with their emphases on human teleology in relatively homogenous communities, makes them especially vulnerable to charges of parochialism, misogyny and elitism. More importantly, their singular notions of what it means to be a human being can promote certain ways of life while diminishing other possibilities. At a first glance, for Aristotle and Confucius, it is important that one is expected to stay with certain people and become a person of a certain kind. I wonder how Aristotle and Confucius might (or might not) address the tension between the need to learn to live with very different others and to exercise one’s freedom. Indeed, I wonder what counts as freedom for Aristotle and Confucius? Being critical of their constrained understanding of human beings and their homogenous interpretations of a human telos, I still hope to recover valuable insights, while going beyond what they offer in an attempt to transcend a singular notion of a good human life.
Chapter 3: In the Shadow of a Water Bucket: Eudaimonia and Dao

This makes the educational way the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way, and so we might say, the weak way, as the outcome of this process can neither be guaranteed nor secured (Biesta, 2013, p. 3).

The purpose of education, as many have seen it, is to open the way, as the young become empowered with the skills they need and the sensitivities they require in order to be human—to create themselves and to survive (Greene, 1978, p. 85).

I soon realized that I was not my grade-six teacher’s favourite student. I knew it from Mr. Wang’s knitted eyebrows when I challenged him about homework (of which there was always too much); I knew it from his disapproving looks when I talked with a friend in his class; I knew it from his frustrated looks when I asked him to clarify or explain what he taught in class.

One day it was my turn to clean the classroom after school. I hoped to finish my chores quickly and fly home to have a play date with a friend. I swept the floor as fast as possible, rushed to fill the bucket with water, put the bucket of water down and got ready to go home (Water was refilled for tomorrow’s use of dampening the cloth to wipe the blackboard). I noticed Mr. Wang walking towards me. “Why did you put the bucket of water in the center of the doorway?” he asked me with round eyes behind his thick glasses. “Did I?” I replied on my way towards the doorway. However, Mr. Wang stopped me and continued: “I was watching you as you cleaned the classroom. You were doing it so impatiently. Didn’t you know I was watching?” “Yes. I knew,” I replied without hesitation—a reply that made Mr. Wang’s round eyes even
"You always defy me, don’t you?" he uttered it with a serious tone. "No. I don’t," raising my voice as well, a challenge that made his eyes glare with distrust and anger. He began to list all the “evidence” that showed my ongoing defiance. He closed his eyes, raised his head and said resolutely: “You are not going home until you admit that you put the bucket of water in the center of the doorway deliberately!” “No, I didn’t do it on purpose,” I replied instantly, but in a lower voice. Silence filled the classroom for several minutes, which felt like years. He lowered his voice and finally said: “Now, are you ready to admit?” Tears began to roll down my cheeks. I looked at his blurry figure, gritted my teeth and said: “Ok. Yes, I did it on purpose and I won’t do it again.” I saw his relieved look and he continued: “You need to listen. . . . You should be more well behaved so that you can study well. . . . Why do you always challenge me?” He talked and talked, but I didn’t hear anything and escaped from the classroom as soon as he finished.

A decade after graduating from elementary school, I became a middle school teacher myself. The water bucket incident had been forgotten until in a hot and humid summer afternoon when I was having a reading class with my students. I saw Bo, fidgeting on his chair at the back of the classroom, chatting and giggling with another student. I walked towards them, knocked at his desk to remind him to sit well and not to talk and continued with my class. One or two minutes later, I found him stretching his neck over to his neighbour and starting to talk again. With knitted brows, I asked him to stand up and repeat what I had just said. He used a ridiculous tone to imitate what I had just said and then made a funny face. Feeling offended and upset, I lowered my voice and said, “You are trying to challenge me, aren’t you?” and asked him to leave the classroom to think about his disobedience. As he walked out of the classroom, I noticed the whole class watching me in deadly silence. My mind drifted to imagine a little girl—myself from ten years ago—sitting among my students and watching me. She looked upset at what just
happened and asked: “Why do you ask your student not to challenge you? Aren’t you just like Mr. Wang?”

As a child, I didn’t understand why Mr. Wang was so harsh with me or why he demanded that I admit that I put the water bucket in the center of the classroom doorway on purpose and as a teacher, I was embarrassed by my realization that I treated students who challenged my authority in the same way that Mr. Wang did. Clearly, I had not escaped the shadow of the water bucket in the intervening ten years. My classroom management strategies included raising my voice, using serious tones and unsympathetic manners to discipline my students, constantly telling them to “behave well”—to sit quietly in their seats, listen to and follow my instructions carefully. I discovered that I had become more and more like Mr. Wang—my least favourite teacher. I began to ask whether there was something wrong, something missing from Mr. Wang’s teaching and my own: What did we both promote and prevent? Another ten years later, with the assistance of two ancient thinkers, I am beginning to understand what was missing. Aristotle and Confucius, with their shared concern about the telos of human beings—“Why does a teacher teach?”—have both given my “bucket” a hard push, toppled it over and let the water spill out.

Conformity and Freedom

Teachers often demand conformity from their students, to become what the school and the larger society expect them to become to secure successful economic futures. To be successful, or even to just survive in schools, teachers often “face a good deal of pressure to conform the children they teach to the needs of the economy” (Brighouse, 2008, p. 71). To better “subject the child to the desires of society” (Biesta, 2013, p. 3), schools apply homogeneous
standards, often in the forms of testing, to measure and sort students. Sometimes schools seem to be reduced to “huge testing services and solemn officials and entrepreneurs setting up test-coaching companies” (Egan, 2001, p. 937), while the students are expected to be docile and obedient. The schooling discourse is focused largely on limited epistemological concerns while the ethical-political dimensions of education—pursuing and living good and worthwhile lives alongside others—are largely missing or tacit. Ironically, we often habituate children in ways that promote obedience and docility while claiming to want them to become independent and critical future citizens.

Competing and contradictory educational purposes have certainly not gone unnoticed in the academic literature. Egan (1996), for example, elaborates upon three educational purposes that conflict with one another: socializing or initiating the young to an existing society; providing children with the requisite knowledge and understanding to develop a rational and privileged view of reality, and developing each child’s unique talents and capacities. Biesta (2013) also outlines multidimensional educational aims that are in tension with one another, proposing three domains: “qualification, socialization, and subjectification” (Biesta, 2013, p. 128). Qualification aims to qualify people for certain activities by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions; socialization aims at introducing the newcomers into particular traditions and cultures; subjectification focuses on how we can exist “outside’ of such orders” (Biesta, 2013, p. 129) and asks the fundamental questions about human freedom. Both Egan (1996) and Biesta (2013) seem to grapple with the tension between the collective and the individual, conformity and freedom in their respective conceptions of educational domains.

Contemporary schools generally focus on qualifying young people with the competencies needed to socialize them into current society. As Biesta (2013) writes, “Schooling is more and
more being constructed as the effective production of pre-defined 'learning outcomes’” (pp. 1–2). Indeed, qualification and socialization seem to have become “the only thing[s] that matter in school education” (Biesta, 2013, p. 128). What is less noticeable is the protection of the freedom of the young to bring something new to the world. Subjectification embraces uniqueness and irreplaceability, values the involvement and commitment of each particular people—that is, human freedom. Schooling institutionalizes certain notions of education and—by necessity and often taken for granted—increased degrees of conformity to a collective with decreased scope for individual freedom and ethical action. Forty-five years ago, Maxine Greene (1973) wrote: “A teacher’s responsibilities becomes more and more complex; and [she] is required every day to reinterpret, to make [her] own sense of modern life” (p. 291). I aim to reopen the conversation about modern schooling with its single-minded concern with the epistemological by returning to the writings of Aristotle and Confucius in order to grapple with the ethical dimensions of education and attend to the tension between conformity and freedom.

**Unfortunate Icarus and Beautiful Butterflies**

I am reminded of the Greek myth of Icarus and Daedalus. When Daedalus called frantically to his son Icarus high above him wearing two great waxwings: “You are flying too high! Come down! Come down!” his son Icarus wouldn’t listen and continued to fly as high as he wanted. Icarus’s wings began to soften, wax melted and feathers fell off. Finally, he plunged into the sea, disappearing in the waves. The tragic end of the son continues to remind us of the importance of obedience to parents and teachers: Aeschylus implies that success is wedded to compliance and safety. From my experiences as both student and teacher, I believe the lessons of this ancient Greek story are deeply embedded into today’s schools. Good students are supposed to obey their teachers and parents so that they will acquire the requisite knowledge to do well on
examinations and then become successful adults; good teachers control their classes well to ensure that the students learn what they are expected to learn. Not following teachers’ or parents’ instructions can be dangerous for students; after all, Icarus tragically ends up in the waves!

Mr. Wang’s knitted eyebrows and harsh looks signalled his students that they were supposed to follow his instructions (e.g., do their homework) and obey the school rules (e.g., keep quiet and do not talk freely in class). Except for those moments when I raised my voice or adopted an unsympathetic manner to “get things under control,” I was a teacher generous with my compliments to the students who did well in exams and generally patient with students who challenged me about the homework. For a long time, I was content with my classroom management techniques that helped me to tame my students so that they would be “well-behaved”—that is, until that stuffy summer afternoon when I suddenly realized that I shared an understanding of teaching with Mr. Wang. We both demanded unthinking obedience and conformity from our students to meet what the school expects of them (and us), often in the name of protecting them from becoming “unfortunate” victims like Icarus.

Aristotle and Confucius also argue for habituating or ritualizing people into certain dispositions in order to become particular kinds of people. Aristotle, however, thinks of teachers more like farmers than carpenters. Fenstermacher (2000) explains: “The child will grow to an adult without the teacher. But with worthy teachers constructively engaged with their students, more children will become fine adults than would occur otherwise” (p. 5). Confucius stresses the importance of ritual in fostering virtue: “Whether people could perform rituals well makes people different” (Analects, 17.2). Both Aristotle and Confucius aim at fostering virtuous adults. For Aristotle, good adults are those citizens of the polis who can reason well in order to act ethically; for Confucius, good adults observe established rituals and cultivate traditional virtues
in order to transform themselves and fit their station in the larger society. Indeed, a certain degree of conformity is important to both Aristotle and Confucius; neither, however, would endorse the unthinking conformity to prescribed rules that is too often reproduced in current schooling.

**Aristotle’s Habituation and Practical Reason**

Aristotle proposes three requirements for the development of full human virtue: *phusis*, *ethos* and *logos* (Politics, VII, 12). He explains that *phusis* is natural virtue, that is, the traits and dispositions that we are born with and suggests that this “natural element clearly does not depend on us, but belongs by divine causes of some kind to the truly fortunate” (NE, 1179b22–23).

*Ethos* is usually referred to as habit or habituation (Rowe & Broadie, 2002; Yu, 2007), that is, induction into a particular human community. *Logos* is understood as the capacity of reasoning wisely to inform and guide ethical action.

Aristotle stresses the importance of habituation and points out: “It does not make a small difference whether people are habituated to behave in one way or in another way from childhood on, but a very great one; or rather, it makes all the difference in the world” (NE, 1103b24–26).

However, as Kristjansson (2007) explains, it is “unfortunate how little Aristotle has to say about the nature of his all-important early moral habituation process” (p. 33). Aristotle generally believes that living alongside good people, that is, those who are much like Aristotle himself, can provide good habituation and promote good character. Aristotle explicitly grounds the fostering of moral virtue in habituation:

> Excellence being of two sorts, then, the one intellectual and the other of character, excellence in character results from habituation—which is in fact the source of the name...
it has acquired [ethike], the word for “character-trait” [ēthos] being a slight variation of that for ‘habituation’ [ēthos]. (NE, 1103a15–18)

Aristotelian habituation is therefore linguistically and conceptually related to the development of moral virtues by seeing and doing actions of certain quality many times, a process that relies on “dealing with” and learning from other human beings. For Aristotle, our actions reflect our moral norms. The messages we convey through what we do (e.g. knitted eyebrows) and how we talk to our students (e.g. “You always defy me, don’t you?”) habituate our students to act in certain ways. He explains:

    It is through acting as we do in our dealings with human beings that some of us become just and others unjust, and . . . through becoming habituated to fearing or being confident, that some of us become courageous and some of us cowardly. (NE, 1103b15–18)

For Aristotle, virtuous action also depends on the development and exercise of practical reason: Good habituation may encourage us to act in certain ways, but acting well also involves discerning the situation, giving good explanations and reflecting carefully on the context. We must consider, for example, whether our deeds are appropriate in a particular situation involving individual people at a specific time and place for the appropriate purposes. Aristotle is not especially interested in the induction of people into dominant social norms. Habituation must not lead to unthinking conformity; for Aristotle, ethical action requires the use of practical reason to discern particulars, to reflect on particulars and imagine possible suitable courses of action that take those people, that time and that place into consideration. Lear (1988) observes: “Habits, in Aristotle’s view, do not merely instil a disposition to engage in certain types of behaviour: they instil a sensitivity as to how to act in various circumstances” (p. 166). Aristotle’s habituation is therefore distinct from Egan’s socialization or Biesta’s qualification, both of which focus on
fitting people into the existing society. In sum, Aristotle aims to confront and negotiate the tension between conformity and freedom by combining good habituation with the capacity to reason practically, both of which contribute to the possibility of acting well (i.e., practical wisdom or *phronesis*).

I need to note that Aristotle does not consistently champion what we understand as individual freedom. In both *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, he advocates significant restrictions on human freedom, including freedom of speech (*NE*, 1136b3–23), freedom of exchange (*Politics*, 1270a18), and reproductive freedom (*Politics*, 1335a4–b26). Moreover, given his notorious claims about natural slavery and the inferiority of women, Aristotle does not seem to be anyone’s idea of an advocate for individual autonomy. Nonetheless, as Walsh (1997) explains, “it is possible to glean Aristotle’s notion of freedom” (p. 495). To be free, for Aristotle, is to be free from a master, that is, not a slave. Aristotle explains that the right of a freeman is “to be ruled by none, if possible, or, if this is impossible, to rule and be ruled in turn” (*Politics*, 1317b10–16). For Aristotle, freedom depends on the possibility of exercising practical reason, that is, of apprehending suitable ends, discerning what is at play in various situations, providing clear explanations, and choosing appropriate means to achieve context-sensitive ends. Good habituation must be combined with the exercise of practical reason—and the skilful exercise of practical reason depends on proper habituation. Sherman (1999) argues for reflective and critical habituation: “I shall argue that the general conception of habituation as reflective and critical coheres with Aristotle’s view of experience as training practical reason through trial and error as well as inquiry” (p. 233). In sum, Aristotle hopes to properly habituate the young so that they can discern ethnically sensitive situations and then use their practical reason to make good judgments about how to act.
I suspect that Aristotle might severely criticize our usual approach to habituating children and promoting ethical action in schools. We seem to expect that young people who undergo years of coercive habituation characterized by repetition and compliance will subsequently develop into autonomous and responsible citizens. Yu (2007) explains: “[M]ost of the ethical training process, habit and reason . . . are developed together in a mutually reinforcing way” (p. 99). The discourse of first attending to good habituation and then attempting to develop reasoning capacity (Burnyeat, 1980) separates two processes that Aristotle argues are enmeshed and depend on one another. Aristotle would argue that Mr. Wang’s approach to habituation segregates habit and reason: He wanted his students to obey him—not to think for themselves or reason together. He seldom questioned his own actions in class and his judgments often confirmed his prejudices: When I tried to deny Mr. Wang’s accusation and provided an explanation for my actions, Mr. Wang didn’t bother to listen to my reasons for why I put the water bucket in the classroom doorway. He took my denial as the confirmation of his judgment that I was not a “well-behaved” student who was supposed to follow instructions and comply with school rules. His prejudices were only reinforced.

Following Aristotle, teaching children to be polite and respectful, for example, would involve more than pointing to the class or school rules and outlining the penalties for infractions. It would require both engaging them in ongoing conversations to reason and explain why we should be polite and respectful towards others; what being polite and being respectful look like in particular contexts; how we might promote certain patterns of ethical behaviours, such as turn taking, polite listening to and consideration of other perspectives, without oversimplifying or dismissing them. Both teachers and students would need to ask questions, to discern, to give explanations, to challenge and to reflect together.
Confucius’ Hua

The language of conformity and obedience does not seem as alien in Confucius’ writing as it does in Aristotle’s. Confucius has particular ideas about socializing people through appropriate rituals and seems to suggest that people with lower social status need to obey those on higher levels. For example, when the Duke Ching of Chi asked Master Kung about government, the master replied, “Let the emperor be a emperor, the minister a minister, the father a father and the son a son” (Analects, 12.11). Confucius indeed wants students to follow their teachers, but has a fundamentally different end in mind than Mr. Wang’s or my own demands for student obedience and conformity: Confucius wants his students to pursue only virtuous ends, to cultivate themselves, so that they may become moral persons. For example, he compliments Yanhui, his favourite disciple, by saying, “Yanhui has a great love of moral learning. He never vented his wrath upon the innocent nor let others suffer for his faults” (Analects, 6.3) and “Yanhui could commit himself to ren for three months and others could only do it for one or two days or one or two months” (Analects, 6.7). Moreover, Confucius does not simply advocate absolute conformity of ministers to emperors, sons to fathers or students to teachers; instead, he emphasizes the mutual responsibility and respect both parties must contribute to relationships. Confucius suggests: “An emperor employs his minister according to the rules of propriety; ministers serve their emperor with faithfulness” (Analects, 3.16). Both sides in relationships, teachers and student, emperors and ministers, can cultivate themselves in their interactions. In Li Ji, we read about the expectations of junzi (exemplary people): “Cultivate oneself [修身, xiushen]; bring order to the family; govern the country; bring peace to all” (2013, Chapter “Da Xue”, p. 1523). Xiushen or self-cultivation could be understood as primary and fundamental pursuit of a Confucian ideal, which involves rectifying [修, xiu], transforming [化,
hua] and nurturing [养, yang] the self (Huang, 2018). Hua is one of the important functions and processes of xiushen for Confucius. I believe hua might allow us to have a glimpse of the Confucian idea of freedom.

We can detect at least three camps interpreting Confucius’ notion of freedom. Some scholars believe that there is no concept of freedom in Confucian tradition. Hansen (1972) suggests:

Confucianism has no doctrine of freedom. . . . I do not imply that there is a gaping hole in Confucian moral philosophy. In fact, I hope to show that the absence of such a doctrine is quite consistent with the overall moral system described by Confucius. (p. 170)

Other scholars believe that the Confucian tradition has an implicit notion of freedom, but it is not explicitly regarded as one of the worthy values. Wu (2006), for example, suggests the ideal of freedom was not regarded as a positive and worthy value in Confucian society because it might jeopardize social order. Finally, there is a group of scholars who believe that freedom is actually foundational in Confucian thought, explaining that his notion of hua is “a kind of freedom that is accomplished as the result of effectively transforming the self along with various domains of relationality” (Tao, 2011, p. 465–466). Xunzi (around third century BC), one of the prominent ancient Confucian philosophers, suggests that one could “transform [hua] one’s natural dispositions and become virtuous” (Xing E Chapter). Mencius also says: “The masses transform themselves in the wonderful and subtle presence of junzi or the moral exemplar” (2013, Chapter “Jin Xin Shang”, p. 349). A person could be transformed or transform himself in the presence of the other “creatively” (Huang, 2018). Hua might therefore be regarded as a kind of “transformative freedom” (p. 466) that emphasizes exercising moral creativity and agency and aims at transforming oneself into a moral being and the world into an orderly cosmos.
Confucius’ notion of *hua* (化) or transformation emphasizes creating and transforming oneself as a result of encounters with morally exemplary people, rather than being regulated by law or conforming to authority. *Hua* is not directional or prescriptive in terms of particular values; rather, it is spontaneous transformation in the presence of the other. *Junzi* do not make the masses learn, but because of their presence, the masses transform (*hua*) themselves without identifying fixed ends. I believe *hua* seems to encourage a space of creativity and freedom for moral transformation.

It seems to me that practicing rituals could be an important avenue toward *hua*. The master suggests, “At the age of seventy, I could act in whatever way I wish without stepping over appropriate boundaries” (*Analects*, 2.4) and adds, “I set my heart on *dao* [the way], base myself on *de* [virtue], lean upon *ren* [humaneness], swim in *yi* [rituals]” (*Analects*, 7.6).

Confucius explains that freedom is to “act in whatever way” or “swim” freely—within the boundaries of appropriateness. Built upon familial bonds and social heritage, Confucius’ *li* (ritual) seems to provide sources for determining appropriateness. I realize that *li* is often criticized for contributing to maintaining the mechanisms of the slave state and for preventing social mobility; however, at the same time, *li*, despite its concern with regulation and standardization, can also allow transforming space—the space of *hua*—for people to re-create meanings for their lives. For Confucius, *li* seems to attend to the tension between conformity and freedom in subtle ways: *Li* delimits boundaries, while structuring opportunities to “swim” or “act in whatever way” within those limits. Chen (2013) explains:

> Because the rites function as the controlling factor to establish internal constraint within a society with comprehensive standardization, established criteria are needed to guide
behaviour in a specific manner. Therefore, people can easily actualize the concepts in their everyday practices. (p. 18)

*Li* helps establish a structured space for people to interact with self and others where people can cultivate and transform themselves (*hua*) into good people. While observing *li* seems inconsistent with the notion of freedom, the interpersonal and creative space *li* structures can contribute to Confucius’ notion of freedom—to transform oneself with moral imagination and creativity (I will elaborate it more in Chapter Five). Zhang (2008) asserts that “Confucius’ doctrine of moral inquiry is that of moral creativity, which provides the transcendental ground for Confucians to understand the universe and their roles within it” (p. 337). He continues to explain that “The way of the universe is organic, nuanced, and unpredictable—in a word, creative. Hence Confucius conjoins morality and creativity: morality is creative, and creativity is moral” (p. 337). Halls and Ames (1987) and Sim (2007) also notice that the Confucian self is not only defined by roles, but it is morally creative about what it means to be virtuous. Hall and Ames (1987) contend that creativity is required in ritual practices as well as in music and painting. Sim (2007) suggests: “Mere role playing is not sufficient for Confucius . . . [one is] capable of adding creativity to the tradition” (p. 161). These comments all attend to the involvement and creativity of the unique human being in the meaning making process: One adds to, re-creates, imagines and transforms meaning. *Li*, in its structured space for freedom, does not imply just doing whatever you want to do or choosing whatever you want. Confucian freedom is structured by ethical concerns of what is good or bad, re-created by one’s own involvement in rituals and differs from other conceptions of freedom that focus on individual freedom of choice. Confucius’ freedom, in contrast, pays more attention to and cares more about other people. Confucius aims to “hit the mean” or achieve a dynamic balance between becoming part of the
existing world with other people and exercising our individual agency creatively and imaginatively.

Confucius, in different ways from Aristotle, constantly negotiates the tension between conformity (in rituals) and freedom (in moral creativity and transformation). Confucius demonstrates the place of freedom in his dialogues with his disciples. In the famous chapter in the *Analects* which records Confucius’ dialogue with Zi Lu, Zeng Dian, Ran You and Gong Sunchi, Confucius suggests: “I am just a few years older than you. And there is nothing extraordinary about me” (*Analects*, 11.25). After Zi Lu, Zeng Dian and Gong Sunchi share their dreams for the future, Zeng Dian asks whether he could share something different and Confucius encourages him to speak. In Confucius’ dialogues with his students, he does not insist that his students conform to his instructions or expectations, but arouses their curiosity to ask questions for themselves, to share their different perspectives in order to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad; he provides a dialogic and creative space for his students to transform themselves. When Confucius is challenged by his students, he not only shows his respect and humility in his taking the advice of his students, but he also expresses his delight at the questions (*Analects*, 6.2, 7.3, 11.3, 19.8, 19.21). Both teachers and students are involved in the process of hua—being transformed and transforming oneself.

If Confucius could give Mr. Wang and myself some suggestions, he might speak against the kind of conformity and obedience we demanded of our students and suggest that teachers and students should pursue human virtues together and transform themselves in each other’s presence. Understanding Confucius, Mr. Wang would be able to notice things that he missed before: He could see the shimmering lights of virtues and ignite them rather than putting them out with knitted eyebrows or harsh looks; he might see the courage revealed by a student who
stood up in the whole class to challenge the homework, or the spirit of justice growing in a student who pointed out a teacher’s mistake. Mr. Wang would really see the particular student and respond to her rather than regarding her as something that needing to be corrected. Mr. Wang, together with his students, would ask questions about right and wrong, good and bad, discern the situations, challenge what was taken for granted and share their thoughts. Although neither Mr. Wang nor his students are the moral exemplars Confucius valorizes, I believe Mr. Wang and his students can jointly transform themselves into more moral beings.

The pathways to virtue are not for both teachers and students to follow, but for them to create, re-create and co-create. Within the structures and discourses of schooling today, teachers and students still have a degree of freedom to re-interpret how they can live together. Teachers might set up welcoming and open structures in classrooms to provide each person the opportunities to make a unique appearance in the world of the classroom. If I could re-live that class on that stuffy summer afternoon, I would talk with Bo after class and ask him about how he felt and what he thought; I would question myself why I became so annoyed by Bo’s manners; I would challenge my prejudice against Bo and reflect why I picked on him rather than his neighbour with whom Bo was talking; I would listen more carefully to him, imagining how I could respond to him better, how I could become a better person and help him to become a better person in each other’s presence.

I am reminded of the Chinese legend from the Eastern Jin Dynasty of Zhu Yingta and Liang Shangbo and their transformation into butterflies. At that time women were discouraged from going to school, but Zhu persuaded her father to allow her to attend classes disguised as a man. Emancipation has its limits, however, and Zhu’s father subsequently arranged for her to be married to a wealthy merchant despite her deep love for Liang—who subsequently died of a
broken heart. On the day of her wedding, however, Zhu refused to be married and instead threw herself into the grave to join her true love Liang. Unlike Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, however, the story is not a tragedy: Zhu’s and Liang’s spirits were transformed into two beautiful butterflies that flew away together. The legend has a distinctly Confucian character: Zhu did not directly challenge societal expectations, but neither did she comply unthinkingly and absolutely, as evidenced by her creative and courageous acts of convincing her father to allow her to go to school disguised as a man, and jumping into the grave on her wedding day. Zhu learned to live in the space between conformity and freedom: She did not die tragically like Icarus, Romeo or Juliet, but created new possibilities for being.

**Reimagining Educational Ideals—*Eudaimonia* and *Dao***

Education is a space filled with tensions—between the ideals of conformity and freedom, collective and individual goods, public and private interests—which teachers and students negotiate daily. Normative questions about what constitutes educational ideals and purposes are rarely engaged or examined explicitly in schools however. Here I hope to challenge the unexamined schooling agendas and inquire now about what counted as living well in Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* and Confucius’ *dao*. Pursuing *eudaimonia* or *dao* is not about procedural routinization or the installation of pre-programed matrices, but about the search for and the creation of meaning in human life. Both *eudaimonia* and *dao* are dynamic and need to be interpreted in each unique human life. As Yu (2007) summarizes,

> for both ethics of Confucius and Aristotle, the central question is about what a good life is. . . . Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* is about what is a good human life, and Confucius theory of *dao* is about which way a human life should take. (pp. 24–25)
Eudaimonia, which has various translations such as “happiness,” the “chief good” or the “good” in modern English, can inform us about the desirable ends of teaching and about what ideal(s) a teacher should uphold. Aristotle’s eudaimonia is a choice-worthy activity by itself rather than for any other end, that is an end in itself. Aristotle describes eudaimonia as the ultimate end of human beings that is achieved by the acquisition and exercise of important excellences or virtues. I believe that for Aristotle, a life of eudaimonia is embedded in practicing virtue and people need “partners” (NE, 1177a31–33) to learn about and practice virtues.

Dao, which appears about one hundred times in Confucian Analects, is of great importance in understanding Confucius’ thinking. Dao literally means the way or the path and Confucius’ fundamental attempt is to “wake people up and bring them back to the correct path” (Yu, 2007, p. 27). Dao is closely related to human life and the essence of dao lies in the pursuit of human virtue; I understand dao as a verb rather than a static and absolute principle (Hall & Ames, 1987) and involves the ongoing pursuit of how we could live in changeable and unpredictable circumstances. Dao offers us another avenue to understand the dynamics and richness involved in the pursuit of educational ends; like Aristotle’s eudaimonia, dao aims at virtuous ends and is rooted in human beings and their co-creative relationships or “partnerships.”

The Ideal of Eudaimonia

Aristotle is fundamentally concerned with the why question. Lear (1988) explains that “we do not understand something, Aristotle says, until we have grasped the why of it” (p. 26). Eudaimonia is Aristotle’s major conceptual resource to respond to the ultimate why question—for what purposes do we live? He divides eudaimonia into three categories: primary eudaimonia, secondary eudaimonia and external goods. Primary eudaimonia is “the expression of something divine, something superior to and so different from the merely human” (Reeve, 1992, p. 156; see
also 1177b26–31) the pursuit of which could be understood as study. Study, as the activity of *sophia*, is concerned with abstract and theoretical understanding and is regarded as superior to the concerns of practical life. For Aristotle’s teacher, Plato, the only route to *eudaimonia* is a life of study and those who practice such a life are lovers (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*). Aristotle echoes his mentor in valuing *sophia*, but worries that ultimate understanding of the world is beyond human capacity and that we need to make the best life possible within our capabilities:

The pursuit of *sophia* can contribute to leading a good life, but attaining *sophia* “will be divine as compared to a human life” (*NE*, 1177b30–32). Aristotle lists three goods as necessary to leading a good human life: external goods, goods related to the body and goods related to the soul. Goods related to the soul are goods “in most proper sense and good to the highest degree” (*NE*, 1098b16), while “external goods and goods of the body are things that the virtuous person uses to change the world or himself for the better, and that the vicious one uses to change himself or the world for the worse” (Reeve, 1992, p. 161): Indeed, “it is impossible, or not easy, to perform fine actions if one is without resources” (*NE*, 1099a33–34).

I focus on secondary *eudaimonia* involving the use of our human capacities to make the best mortal life. Aristotle claims that “we suppose *eudaimonia* is the end of things human” (*NE*, 1176a32) and he claims repeatedly that *eudaimonia* is a kind of activity in accordance with *arête* [excellence or virtue] on the basis that doing what is fine is worthwhile in and of itself (*NE*, 1176b7–10, 1177a10–11, 1177a17–19). Aristotle believes that secondary *eudaimonia* involves making the best human life possible:

[I]n so far as he is a human being, and shares his life with others, he chooses to do the deeds that accord with virtues, and so he will need such things for the purposes of living a human life. (*NE*, 1178b5–7)
For Aristotle, pursuing *eudaimonia* accords with the nature of human beings and lies in the realization of one’s virtues. Lear (1988) explains:

The genuine pursuit of happiness and the virtuous life are, for Aristotle, one and the same. The happy life is, for Aristotle, one in which man deeply fulfills his nature. And this realization of man’s nature is the virtuous life. (p. 156)

For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is the distinctively human *telos* and explains that one pursues *eudaimonia* by practicing the requisite intellectual and moral virtues and I believe *eudaimonia* can help teachers reimagine and renew their educational ideals. *Eudaimonia* demands that teachers like Mr. Wang and myself think carefully about why we teach. Mr. Wang and I both demanded students’ unreflective compliance with the norms of schooling and Chinese society. We made great efforts in channelling the students through a system of evaluation and training, in effect producing “human resources” to cater for the nation’s economic needs. *Eudaimonia*, in contrast, redirects us towards a virtuous end, a human end. As Lear (1988) observes, “there is something definite and worthwhile that it is to be human being” (p. 155). Getting higher marks is not an end in itself because it serves as a means for another end such as going to a good university. In contrast, leading a *eudaimonic* life reveals the intrinsic significance of being or becoming a human being and the activity of *eudaimonia* is embedded in understanding and cultivating virtues in relationships with other people. It differs from activities that are desirable for other ends, such as schooling for the purpose of economic gain or societal advancement.

Reeve (1992) explains that Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* is characterized by several features including that it must be choice-worthy activity by itself (not for any *para* end) and that it must be an activity expressing virtue. *Eudaimonic* life sheds light on educational ideals that are fundamentally about human beings leading good and worthwhile lives.
To lead a life of eudaimonia, we need to cultivate and practice human virtues, make good judgments in particular encounters in the effort to lead a worthwhile human life. As teachers, we interact with our students on daily basis. Mr. Wang and I were faced with students who challenged our homework, corrected our mistakes, talked freely in our classrooms, made funny faces, and put a water bucket in the center of the classroom doorway. If Mr. Wang and I had been trying to cultivate human virtues in ourselves and our students, we would not have perceived a student complaint as a signal to show that the students were not working hard enough; or understood a student who pointed out our mistakes as defying our authority; or considered a student talking as disturbing the smooth functioning of our class; or drawn the conclusion that the “water bucket in the middle of the classroom doorway” signalled a declaration of war. Our judgments were grounded in unreflective conformity agendas rather than promoting eudaimonia. Reconsidering my encounter with Bo, the student who talked freely and made a funny face, I should have been able to think more about the student’s own circumstances as well as question my own judgments from the perspective of how I could contribute to his leading a eudaimonic life: He might have had a very active nature; he might have wanted to draw the attention of teachers; he might have demonstrated courage in challenging of the authority of his teacher. I should have been more interested in listening to him patiently and giving him more trust and freedom to grow.

Virtuous people, according to Aristotle, are always in relationship with others. Greene (1978) reminds us: “One has to be with others actively, reflectively . . . in a space one knows is a shared space, and one has to care” (p. 153). Indeed, we can never be completely free and independent, nor is such isolation desirable in the eyes of Aristotle. Aristotle explains: “The just person will need people to be objects of, and partners in, his just actions, and similarly with the
moderate, the courageous, and each of the other types” (*NE*, 1177a31–33). Merely noticing the just or courageous acts of students is not enough to further cultivate virtue. We need to realize that justice, courage or kindness and many other virtues are embedded in relationships. Hence, it was not a wise choice for Mr. Wang and myself to establish a high and thick wall of authority around us by saying, “You always defy me, don’t you?”, “You are trying to challenge me, aren’t you?” In doing so, we were isolating ourselves from our students and losing the opportunity to build relationships with them to help them lead an *eudaimonic* life.

In the teleological pursuit of virtues, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* does not obviate the need to reason. Rather, a life of *eudaimonia* must include reason to interpret, discern, explain and reflect upon what counts as virtuous human lives in context. The core of *eudaimonia* is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtues complicated by “the operation of human reason” (Broadie, 2002, p. 80)—to obtain happiness in its complexity and tension. Aristotle’s understanding of freedom tempered by practical reason contributes to a fuller understanding of habituation as well as *eudaimonia*; indeed, there is a strong sense of creativity and freedom, derived from the capacity to reason about particulars in Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*:

Aristotle would find fault with the democrats for failing to recognize that freedom is not just the ability to move oneself towards whatever end one happens to desire, but the ability to order one's life towards the end apprehended by right reason. (Walsh, 1997, p. 501)

Johnson (2002) echoes Walsh: “for Aristotle, a free man is not merely any man who lives in a free society. A free man possesses certain traits of character that allow him to govern himself responsibly and attain happiness” (p. 36). Long (1996) further speculates on the tension between conformity and freedom and explains that conformity is not necessarily antithetical to freedom;
rather conformity to a certain degree can encourage and foster freedom and help one grow into an autonomous moral person. Aristotle himself adopts a modest notion of freedom. Miller (1995) writes that for Aristotle:

Liberty is an external good necessary for virtuous activity but which can be possessed in excess. . . . [T]he aim of the individual should not be unlimited liberty but moral perfection, which is achieved through conformity to the constitution. (p. 787)

For Aristotle, reasoning frees us from our own ignorance, folly, and irrationality and for our own self-actualization. Sometimes students do not possess sufficient capacities to reason well; in consequence, students need guidance from teachers who have students’ eudaimonic interest in mind.

The pursuit of eudaimonia is not an isolated individual choice, nor is it mechanical conformity to principles and rules. We direct ourselves, in relationship with others, informed by reason, towards a life of eudaimonia. In this pursuit, we dwell in the tension between solitude and relationality, conformity and freedom. When teachers help the young pursue eudaimonia, they cannot measure students’ success using a qualification or socialization scale; instead, they, together with their students, need to reason about their experiences and inquire into the question of what constitutes desirable and good lives.

The Ideal of Dao

Regaining the Aristotelian language of eudaimonia helps me to grapple with the questions of why we teach and what renewed ideals teachers might uphold. I realize that Mr. Wang’s and my demands for students’ unthinking obedience and conformity fall short of the eudaimonia ideal. I now wonder what insights Confucius’ dao might provide us to deepen and extend insight about the perennial tension between conformity and freedom. Confucius often
describes dao as a legacy from three preceding generations—the Hsia dynasty (2205–1766 B.C.), the Shang dynasty (1766–1122 B.C.) and the Chou dynasty (1122–221 B.C.)—writing: “The dao of King Wen and King Wu has not fallen to the ground—it exists in people” (Analects, 19.22). Confucius understands that pursuing dao is his life task: “I set my heart on dao” (Analects, 7.6). On the one hand, he seems to claim a mandate from heaven that commands dao: “It is the heaven that reveals and set up the virtue for me” (Analects, 7.23), but on the other hand, Confucius’ dao is anchored in human life: The Doctrine of the Mean records that “Dao starts from the particular man or woman” (Zisi, 2013, XII, p. 186) and “Dao is not far from human beings” (Zisi, 2013, XIII, p. 187).

In the interpretative texts, we can find a range of interpretations of dao. Waley (1971) understands dao as “one infallible method of rule” (p. 30), while for Fingarette (1972) dao is the absolute and transcendent moral principle which every human being should follow through “painstaking and properly directed effort” and “good training by his teachers” (p. 21); it is only then “to that extent he will walk straight upon the Way [dao]” (Fingarette, 1972, p. 21). In my view, dao both follows the heavenly orders and is rooted in human life: Dao requires people’s participation to interpret human virtues in light of a heavenly mandate. Fingarette’s interpretation of dao risks stagnating dao by making it an impersonal principle and depriving human beings of their agency in its pursuit. According to his interpretation, educating for dao would involve controlling and shaping the young to tread the path properly and this “cutting, filing, chiselling and polishing of the individual” (Analects, 1.15) could be done well or poorly; there seems to be little room for the young to choose, negotiate or create. In line with Hall and Ames’ (1987) interpretation, however, I view dao as a verb rather than a static and absolute principle; in other words, it is a constant pursuit of virtue in changeable and unpredictable circumstances.
Hall and Ames (1987) acknowledge the creativity and involvement of individuals in pursuing dao, implying that dao is not simply implanted through training, but rather (re)created and embodied in every unique individual. They write: “Dao lives in the people, is carried forward by them, and is to be learned from them. And individuals receive and embody dao in unique and qualitatively different ways” (p. 228). Human beings are therefore active agents who pursue dao by interpreting, broadening and adding to dao: “It is the human being who is able to extend the dao, not the dao that is able to extend the human being” (Analects, 15.29). One can express one’s freedom in the pursuit of dao; however, the subjectivity and creativity required to interpret and internalize human virtues are often in tension with pressures to conform to prescribed social roles and rituals. This tension, for Confucius, can open a space for people to interrogate and co-create their lives “rather than letting considerations of wealth, power and fame dictate the moral agent’s actions” (Tao, 2011, p. 474). Moral agents, in their pursuit of dao or in their self-transformation (hua), are not merely followers of the prescribed path(s); rather, their individuality is involved in improvising and creating the process. To emphasize, Confucius’ dao is fundamentally connected with his notion of freedom, the freedom to (re)create, to interpret, to “do whatever”—within parameters.

Confucius would suggest dao is a crucial source of guidance for teachers. His idea of dao is not merely an abstract concept, but embedded in the richness and creativity of human life. Confucius advocates a dialogic dao that involves a re-interpreting and re-creating process in particular circumstances with other people. Understanding the need for active and creative human participation in pursuing Confucius dao, for example, would mean that Mr. Wang and I would not simply determine what counts as dao and then design and implement lesson plans with virtue templates. Instead, we would need to realize that we not only have to teach our
students about their cultural heritage and historical traditions in order to learn about what our predecessors understood about human virtues and *dao*, but also to connect with them, talk with them and re-interpret *dao* in distinct circumstances today. Teachers would have to create room for open conversations without being certain of direction or results. Mr. Wang and I would have to attend to the tension between conformity (following *dao*) and freedom (re-interpreting and re-creating *dao* through the efforts of both teachers and students). The involvement of students in dialogue with teachers is crucial for (re)interpreting the meaning of *dao*: *Dao* is embedded human *dao*, that is, it is not imposed as a universal rule, but is improvised, recreated and lived through each human being. Respecting *dao*, Mr. Wang would have to ask about what I thought and let me explain why I was so hurried in cleaning the classroom and in putting the water bucket in the center of the classroom doorway. He would encourage me to think about what I might do better. In the dialogic process, I might have been able to realize that I needed to be more responsible for my duty while Mr. Wang would be addressed by my explanation and his previous judgment might be questioned and suspended. We might have both come closer to *dao*.

To summarize briefly, so far I have questioned and challenged the unthinking obedience and conformity that Mr. Wang and I promoted as teachers. Aristotle seems to argue for teachers’ responsibility for habituating students properly through cultivating their capacity to reason, while Confucius emphasizes how moral transformation and moral creativity can emerge from ongoing conversations between teachers and students. Teachers are expected to provide a dialogic space, as exemplified by Confucius and his disciples, to promote students’ enthusiasm for self-transformation. Certainly, Confucius does not seem to emphasize the role of reason in cultivating virtue as much as Aristotle does. Instead, as Li (2004) observes, Confucius’ moral virtues are developed through practices of rites and music rather than through dialectical reasoning.
contrasted Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* with Confucius’ *dao* and their respective understandings of the tension between conformity and freedom to understand how they might serve as educational ideals. Both *eudaimonia* and *dao* provide teachers moral languages to think about the teleological ends that they aim to foster and to reimagine more adequate ideals of teaching—and in particular to address the tension between conformity and freedom in their practice.

**Aspiring for Genuine Alternatives**

The pursuit of a single ethical *telos* does not seem to trouble Aristotle or Confucius as much as it worries me now, having lived in two countries with very different cultural and historical heritages. Aristotle’s and Confucius’ definitions of good human life are certainly historically limited and both lack challenges from outside their respective normative frameworks. *Eudaimonia* and *dao* are both securely rooted in a historical Golden Age (the Athenian *polis* and the Western Zhou Dynasty). From Aristotle, we learn that the promotion of the good human life is the ultimate function of the *polis* (*Politics*, 1278b17–24, 1280b39, 1325a7–10). Although Aristotle admits that different communities might embrace different ideas of goodness, he explains,

> It is clear that every community aims at some good, and the community which has the most authority of all and includes all the others aims highest, that is, at the good with the most authority. This is what is called the *polis* [city-state] or political community.

(*Politics*, 1252a3–7)

Confucius, who lived in the Spring and Autumn War period—an era marked by constant warfare when *dao* had been lost—aimed to recover *dao* from the golden era of the early Zhou dynasty.

Confucius and Aristotle both endorse the reproduction of similar notions of teleological goodness and understand human freedom as severely limited by established hierarchical social
frameworks. Aristotle ends *Nicomachean Ethics* by “considering the role of social institutions in training of character, which is a necessary basis for all human happiness” (Broadie, 2002, p. 80), while Confucius prioritizes order and harmony as being essential to the highest good. Fingarette (1972) observes that discussions about genuine alternatives are missing from Confucius’ doctrines and adds, “Confucius does not elaborate the language of choice and responsibility as these are intimately intertwined with the idea of the ontologically ultimate power of the individual to select from genuine alternatives to create his own spiritual destiny” (p. 18).

Aristotle and Confucius can certainly help us to inquire into fundamental questions about why we educate and help uncover tensions among different educational purposes, especially between conformity and freedom; however, both approaches are, to some extent, still limited by the parochialism of their societies and restricted *teloi*. *Eudaimonia* and *dao* may not be sufficient or radical enough to address the needs of modern pluralist democratic societies. Ultimately, their teleological approaches reduce the scope for heterogeneity. I agree with Li (2014) who points out the limitations of anchoring freedom in a singular notion of goodness and suggests we need to re-interpret the notion of good “in a non-culturally specific way, to accommodate culturally diverse interpretations of the good” (p. 912).

In an increasingly plural and democratic world, freedom involves challenging and questioning existing frameworks—a more radical version of human freedom than one defined by a singular notion of the good. Maxine Greene (1978) spurs us to further and deepen our understanding about human freedom and considers it as essential for education; she suggests that “a crucial issue facing us is the need to find ways of educating young persons to such sensitivity and potency” to “ponder those alternatives and to play them out in their imagination” (p. 46) and educators must “create conditions where persons of all ages can come together in conversation—
to choose themselves as outraged and destructive, when they have to, as authentic, passionate, and free” (p. 71). Greene points out the importance of encouraging students to connect with one another, constantly question the world, see society as constructed and imagine and choose among real alternatives in order to be genuinely free. I sense a need to expand the taken-for-granted teleological pursuits of Aristotle and Confucius under which human freedom is unduly constrained. We need to bring the good defined within a certain scheme into dialogue with other notions of the good and worthwhile, a daunting, disturbing—and essential—educational challenge.
Chapter 4: Feeling The Pebbles: *Phronesis, Philia* and *Ren*

We encounter the good in the concrete situations which we find ourselves in

(Risser, 1997, p. 106).

*My mother became a teacher when the whole of China was undergoing a devastating ten-year Cultural Revolution. In 1971, without the benefit of a teacher education program (all universities were shut down at that time) and with her students just three years younger than she was, my mother became a teacher “for the first time.” The first years of her teaching were intimidating; she didn’t exactly know what to teach or how to teach. “It was like wading across the stream by feeling the pebbles,” she said. As a young mathematics teacher, rather than just assign a grade, she always managed to write some words after checking her students’ homework; she visited each of her students at home every term and would make the students’ family steamed buns if they were poor and did not have enough food to eat; she gently put a jacket over the shoulders of students who fell asleep in her class; she pondered over and over again on each day’s teaching.*

*My mother told me a story about a student named Ling who was born into the family of a landlord. During that time, landlords were considered the enemies of the proletariat who had natural ties with the peasant masses. Ling was discriminated against and isolated by other students. Even some teachers deliberately ignored her and Ling often lowered her head, hiding in a corner of the classroom. From some doodling on a scrap of paper that Ling had thrown away, however, my mother happened to learn that Ling was good at drawing, so my mother started a drawing club and asked Ling and some other interested classmates, to join her. Once a*
week after class they went to different places to draw. Eventually, my mother said she was able to see a smile on Ling’s face.

In 1979, after she had taught in middle school for eight years, the Cultural Revolution drew to an end and universities were reopened. She was finally admitted to a normal university in Beijing where she studied from 1979 to 1983 so that she could become a teacher “for the second time” and taught for thirty more years before retiring. She once shared with me a story about one of her university teachers, Mr. Zhao. When the Cultural Revolution had just ended, books that challenged communist ideologies were still labeled as “forbidden books,” but my mother secretly read and copied the forbidden books to share with her university classmates. One day, her teacher Mr. Zhao discovered her secret and she was frightened about the possible consequences associated with reading and sharing forbidden books. Mr. Zhao asked her to come to his office; he pulled over a chair and invited her to sit next to the desk. He didn’t talk much, but listened carefully to my mother when she finally mustered enough courage to share her passion for those books. In response, he nodded, smiled gently, handed her a book wrapper to conceal the book and then let her go. For my mother, this is a long treasured memory.

The Cultural Revolution, also known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a socio-political movement in China from 1966 until 1976. It is now referred to as ten years of great calamity. Initiated and launched by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, the Cultural Revolution was aimed at implementing “pure” Communist ideology and eradicating capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. My mother began to teach during the Cultural Revolution an era not only of reduced material circumstances, but also of political monologue and hegemony. Teachers at that time were notoriously labeled as “stinky old
9th (ranked just before the 10th ranked beggars) due to the political agenda of the Revolution when intellectuals were given minimum respect and often punished. Due to scarce resources, many teachers like my mother did not have access to formal teacher education programs. Her subsequent success, therefore, cannot be attributed to the skills she learned in any formal program, or the introduction of any advanced teaching technology, or even her mastery of subject knowledge. I wonder then what resources gradually helped my mother become at first a competent and later a respected and loved teacher. I hope that I can bring her experiences nearer and dig for hidden treasure in her stories. I am struck by my mother’s use of nuanced comments instead of grades in response to her students’ mathematics homework; her act of putting a jacket over a sleeping child in her class; her initiation of a drawing club for Ling; and her teacher Mr. Zhao’s sensitivity and responsiveness revealed in the forbidden book wrapper story. Among these stories, I have noticed that neither my mother nor Mr. Zhao followed any predetermined protocol or script—or even obeyed the rules. Their understanding of educational teaching seemed to involve helping individual people in a specific context at a particular time learn something they deemed worthwhile.

Aristotle and Confucius in different ways both emphasize the interplay between the particular and the general in *phronesis* and *ren* and elaborate on the embeddedness of cultivating human virtues in order to lead a good human life. In Chapter Three, I explored the tension between conformity and freedom in deciding educational ends. In this chapter, I hope to investigate how educational teaching involves “feeling the pebbles,” that is, paying attention to particular students, and particular other people, and helping them to lead good and worthwhile lives. For my purposes, I thin out the original thick notions of *phronesis, philia* and *ren* in Aristotle and Confucius in contemporary interpretive texts, investigating and interrogating them.
I gradually thicken them again in bringing them closer to the particulars by engaging in conversations with my mother’s stories. I hope to re-conceptualize teachers’ success from producing human resources for a homogeneous society to paying attention and responding well to particular people in their joint quest for human goodness.

Languages of competency, measurement, assessment, and accountability are ubiquitous in schools. Employing pre-determined, outcomes-based curriculum and testing regimes, contemporary schooling is geared towards standardization and cultural homogenization; teaching and teacher education are now, as Clark and Phelan (2017) make clear, “subject to the same managerial norms as those that dominate in the business sector” (p. 2). For the policy makers, popular media, Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (2005, 2010) and the World Bank, education is often characterized as solely an epistemological matter. In this industrial approach to education, students are viewed as human resources while teachers are cast as the means to attaining predetermined ends. Contemporary schooling’s focus is on the general, measured with numbers and the management of schooling is at the expense of the particular student, the particular teacher, the particular class and the particular context. As I argued in Chapter Two, education is fundamentally about helping people learn whatever will help them to live good and worthwhile lives both now and in the future and therefore must include concerns not only for worthwhile knowledge and understanding (the epistemological dimension), but for treating other people with love and respect (the ethical dimension) and living alongside very different other people in the public sphere (the political dimension). In consequence, to make schools more educational, the current epistemological focus needs to be expanded to add concerns for the ethical and political. Indeed, we should not only inquire into how to “deliver”
knowledge and skill, but promote discussion about what knowledge is worthwhile and valuable to learn for which purposes.

I am aware that philosophical attempts to address education are often abstract—missing the texture of particular people and relationships among them that my stories attempt to capture. I also understand that educational teaching attends to particular people and aims at helping them acquire and practice the requisite intellectual and moral virtues—a life of *eudaimonia* for Aristotle and a life of *dao* for Confucius. But Aristotle and Confucius do not aim at applying *eudaimonia* and *dao* to regulate people or control contexts; rather, they attend to the individual and attempt to find unique paths towards *eudaimonia* and *dao*, a journey determined, (re)interpreted and (re)created by each person. Educational teaching therefore requires discerning particulars—people and contexts—and bringing them into conversation with the guiding generals of *eudaimonia* and *dao* in order to create meaning.

I primarily draw upon my mother’s stories of learning to teach without any formal teacher preparation in a middle school in Beijing China during the Cultural Revolution almost forty years ago. I bring her stories into conversation with Aristotelian and Confucian ethics by first outlining the major virtues of both wisdom traditions as the dynamic pathways to *eudaimonia* and *dao*: *phronesis* (practical wisdom), *philia* (friendship) and *ren* (humaneness). Then I attempt to excavate Aristotle’s and Confucius’ insights in relation to my mother’s stories of teaching and learning to teach. I hope to re-understand teachers’ excellences as the capacity to teach educationally, that is, to discern and make judgments upon the relevant particulars and negotiate the links between those particulars and the appropriate generals in educational relationships.
Negotiating the Links between the Particular and the General

To teach educationally, for both Aristotle and Confucius, does not mean applying the given general rigidly to particular experience. Rather, it involves constantly attuning oneself to the particular and negotiating with the general. We (re)create, (re)negotiate, (re)construct what counts as good and worthwhile lives in attending first to the particular. Consider, for example, my mother’s initial experience of teaching without any formal preparation by navigating the stream of the classroom by “feeling the pebbles” of her particular students, particular classes, and particular contexts. Other examples include my mother’s creating a drawing club in which she and some other students learned drawing and painting with and from Ling, who was previously segregated by others because of her landlord family background, and Mr. Zhao’s refusal to conform to the policy of the “forbidden books” in the face of his student’s transgression. My mother’s and Mr. Zhao’s stories about students who were ostracized or did something against the school rules make me think about my own encounter with my student Yanglei whose behaviour was often considered a problem and one day he was in trouble once more. I remember that Yanglei stood in my office with a burning red face and a clenched fist. I put my hands on his shoulders and uttered, “Can you tell me what has happened?” He stammered: “I just . . . hit someone in the nose.” I frowned but continued to listen to him. Yanglei looked at me and said: “A boy from another class kept on making fun of my friend Zhu’s appearance and calling her names. I could not let that happen . . . I needed to teach that boy a lesson.” I was standing there wondering how I should respond to him. Indeed, rereading these concrete moments of my mother with her student Ling, with her teacher Mr. Zhao and my own encounter with Yanglei through Aristotle and Confucius helps me re-imagine what educational teaching might look like.

For Aristotle, to pursue a life of *eudaimonia, phronesis* is the “central virtue” (MacIntyre,
Aristotelian intellectual virtues are interrelated and are connected by *phronesis* to the moral virtues, which contribute to one’s leading a life of *eudaimonia*. Dunne (1999) argues that *phronesis* “is not just one virtue among others but is rather a necessary ingredient in all the others” (p. 51). For Confucius, *ren* is also understood as an “all-encompassing” virtue (Yu, 2007, p. 77) or the “summation of human virtues” (Wong, 2013, p. 75). The deepest caring and concern for humanity constitutes the core of *ren*. Confucius does not provide us with a fixed definition of *ren*; rather, it is the fluidity and indefiniteness in the practice *ren* that distinguish it. Confucius refers to *ren* as both a general and a particular virtue. *Ren* is considered as a universal: “the ultimate truthfulness and unity of the cosmos” (Chen, 2014, p. 32), while also rooted in particular people: “*Ren* [仁, humaneness] is *ren* [人, human being]. To combine *ren* and human being, one can achieve *dao*” (Mencius, 2013, Chapter “Jin Xin Xia”, p. 365).

**Phronesis: Arising from and Returning to the Particular**

Disputes about the relationship between the particular and general are not new: Plato and Aristotle debated the relationship 2400 years ago in ancient Greece. In Plato’s account of the Ideal Forms, for example, the absolute and self-sufficient theoretical Good determines how to act; in response, Aristotle contends that theoretical knowledge may indeed be “exceptional, wonderful, difficult, even superhuman but useless, because what [it] inquire[s] into are not the goods that are human” (*NE*, 1141b3–5). While Aristotle seems to agree with Plato when Aristotle labels *theoria* the primary good and *praxis* the secondary good, he also points out that *theoria* is beautiful, but useless and actually gives more weight to individual people in contingent circumstances to anchor *praxis*. Aristotle explains that excellence in *praxis*—*phronesis*—is not only concerned with universals, for “to be wise, one must also be familiar with particulars, since wisdom has to do with action, and the sphere of action is constituted by particulars” (*NE*, 1141b3–5).
1141b15–18). For Aristotle, *phronesis* is constituted from experience and “not the ability developed in geometry and mathematics” (*NE*, 1142a12–17). Aoki (2005a) explains that Aristotle “was reacting against the Sophists of his day who had reduced knowing to instrumentalism” (p. 119) and Nussbaum (2001) adds that Aristotle says two anti-Platonic things about practical deliberation: “First, that it is not and cannot be scientific; second, that the appropriate criterion of correct choice is a thoroughly human being, a person of practical wisdom” (p. 290).

Aristotle redresses and renegotiates the link between the general and the particular. He emphasizes the importance of particular people, particular circumstances, and particular experiences: “If then a man . . . knows the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure; for it is the individual that is to be cured” (*Meta I*, 1981a24).

Similarly, a teacher cannot teach educationally—make good judgments and take appropriate action to help the individual student to live well—if she fails to know the individual student for it is that person who must be helped. A teacher teaches each particular student and contributes to his good and worthwhile life; the intent is not to produce uniformity through delivering and testing content knowledge, but to guide the student in his own self-formation. In turn, a teacher grows and becomes a teacher by attending and responding to each student.

Considering the importance that Aristotle attaches to the particular, I wonder what might count as paying attention to the particular. There seems to be no easy answer. Primarily, as Dunne (1999) argues, *phronesis* is not mechanical training: There are no methods or recipes to train one’s *phronetic* eyes in discerning particulars. My mother’s story of becoming a teacher seemed to be in sharp contrast to many teachers today. She was assigned a teaching post before graduation from high school, while teachers today often go through a four-year teacher education
program in Chinese universities or one or two year post baccalaureate program in Canadian universities to prepare teachers to teach in schools. My mother could access few resources in her subject, mathematics, while teachers today can consult ready-made lesson plans, beautiful PowerPoint models or exemplary on-line teaching videos. It might seem obvious to suggest that teachers today are much better prepared than my mother was; however, if Aristotle could respond to the contrasting experiences of my mother and many teachers today, he might observe an important distinction between their experiences. Aristotle might suggest that my mother’s teaching experiences were, in unexpected ways, more educational. My mother’s lack of formal theories or standardized training enabled her to focus and reflect on her particular experiences: Her story of becoming a teacher is deeply embedded in her everyday events rather than being dependent on the application of predetermined knowledge or uniform teaching methods. Largely due to the very limited provision of pre-service as well as in-service teacher training programs in China at that time, experiences were foregrounded and distinct encounters and time spent with each particular student became the primary resources for my mother’s development as a teacher. Moreover, unlike today’s teachers who are under pressure to promote students’ academic performance, my mother was not worried about helping her students achieve better scores on standardized tests. She was more attentive to her students and helped them to become good and successful people even though she did not exactly know what that meant.

My mother saw her student Ling: She noticed Ling’s lonely eyes; she noticed Ling’s doodling paper in the garbage bin; she noticed the smile on Ling’s lips. She tried to build her up when she was sinking. She felt drawn towards Ling and contributed to Ling’s living well. She did not have a predetermined agenda about how the drawing club would help Ling’s situation, yet the writing club provided the space to reconnect Ling with other students, build Ling’s
confidence in something she loved and was good at, and most of all, spend more time with Ling. These opportunities created an opening for Ling and prompted a smile on Ling’s lips. My mother’s teacher, Mr. Zhao, was also informed by a particular encounter with a student, and managed to negotiate and expand the general framework available to him. If Mr. Zhao had focused on implementing school regulations, then a student who read and distributed forbidden books would have been deemed a disobedient student in need of disciplining. If he had only concerned himself with teaching theory, he would have cared only about achieving his curricular goals and any attention to forbidden books would have been a distraction. However, seeing a student whose eyes shone when reading the forbidden books, who was touched by those books, and who copied the books in a delicate calligraphy, Mr. Zhao attuned himself to the encounter; he allowed himself to be addressed by the passions of his student; he listened attentively to her and responded to her situation rather than follow the rules. *Phronesis* is sometimes characterized as a form of ethical knowing “in an acting situation and . . . about the exigencies of this concrete situation” (Risser, 1997, p. 107). Kristjansson (2007) adds that, this kind of knowing “can be acquired only by an individual who has been initiated into a particular practice and has learned to direct his activities” (p. 166). Mr. Zhao tried to act according to his best judgement in light of what was educational for a particular student and negotiate with his own values and beliefs.

The embeddedness of my mother’s as well as Mr. Zhao’s stories reminds me of the ancient Chinese tale about Shennong, the legendary originator of Chinese herbal medicine and author of the book *Shennong Herbals*. Unlike today’s practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine who frequently study the names and properties of herbs and have little or no experience with numerous individual herbs or the formulas that are made from them, Shennong always began with particulars: He tasted each herb and experienced its unique taste, forms, smell, effects and
was therefore better able to discern and discover its properties. He was followed by generations of herb doctors who did not have fear in trying out the herbs, even experiencing the highly toxic ones, as Shennong did. By contrast, those who only study herbs by name and recite their properties and effects would not know, at a deep level, what they are prescribing or understand the basics of their taste, nature, and effect. Moreover, Shennong distinguished among different types of plants, but not, for example, among individual tea leaves. He aimed at categorization and generalization rather than discerning the individual tea leaves and still fell short of building the dialogue between the particular and the general. My mother’s and Mr. Zhao’s stories are both similar to and different from Shennong’s: My mother and Mr. Zhao, like Shennong, did not rely heavily on protocols and scripts; yet, unlike Shennong who categorized the particular rather than discern and judge among different particulars, my mother and Mr. Zhao lived with the ambiguity and resisted the temptation to categorize. People are not tealeaves.

In contemporary teacher education programs, teaching is often reduced to descriptions of what teachers should know and be able to do and teacher knowledge is disembodied from the immediacy and idiosyncrasy of situations (Phelan, 2015). As such, teacher education, framed in terms of theory-into-practice, risks hindering teachers’ capacity to develop sensitivity towards particulars, to discern among the particulars and to improvise in the face of particulars to help students to become good and to live worthwhile lives. To respond well to the “rough ground” (Dunne, 1993), Aristotle searches for the mean by carefully considering the particulars in context. For Aristotle, *phronesis* involves both the ability to employ practical reason to determine the mean between two extremes of excess and deficiency (the vices) in a particular context at a particular time *as well as* the capacity to marshal and exercise the necessary
intellectual and/or moral virtues to act appropriately on that understanding in that situation.

Aristotle says:

Excellence of character is an intermediate state; in what way it is intermediate; that it is intermediate between two bad states, one relating to excess and the other to deficiency [in that particular context]; and that it is such because it is effective at hitting upon the intermediate in affections and in actions. (1109a20–24)

To determine the mean is be committed to human virtues and it requires phronesis. Carr and Harrison (2015) clarify the connection between phronesis and moral virtue: “Aristotelian moral virtues may be glossed roughly as feelings, emotions and/or appetites ordered in accordance with some deliberative ideal of practical wisdom” (p. 43) and explain:

The key role of determining the appropriate mean in any given set of circumstances—how, as Aristotle puts it, to respond appropriately to the right persons or objects, in the right way, in the right place, at the right time and so on—is played by the master virtue of phronesis. (p. 43)

Mr. Zhao’s courage was demonstrated by his refraining from acting rashly. He didn’t support my mother’s reading the forbidden books publicly; otherwise, he would risk being expelled from the teaching team. Mr. Zhao’s courage was also embedded in his not choosing the safe road of following strictly the school rule without considering what he valued and what was good for his student. Mr. Zhao was neither acting crudely or rashly, nor cowardly or compliantly. Courage for Mr. Zhao, in that particular moment, emerged as the intermediate state between these two extremes and was manifest in the subtlety of a book wrapper. His courageous act also involved putting rashness or fear “in rational perspective so that they know when and where it is appropriate” (Carr & Harrison, 2015, p. 43). His courageous act was at a particular time (highly
controlled political environment), in a particular place (in the university), involving particular people (my mother), in a particular relationship (educational) and determined by Mr. Zhao as the mean.

*Phronesis*, it seems, is located in Schön’s “swampy lowland” (1987, p. 3), Dunne’s “rough ground” (1997) and my mother’s everyday encounters with particular people and circumstances. Rooted in the rough ground, *phronesis* is, of course, “not a type of rootless situational perception that rejects all guidance from ongoing commitments and values” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 306). Here Dunne (1999) tells us,

> I take Aristotle to be indicating . . . that experience is not a matter of exposure to ‘one damned thing after another’ but rather of particulars giving rise to, and then being perceived in the light of, universals; and of universals neither cancelling the particularity of the percepts from which they have arisen nor becoming invulnerable to modification by new percepts. (p. 61)

Aristotle does not hold a stance that is substantially anti-theory nor does he reject all theory or method wholesale. Instead, Aristotle argues against “disembedded, abstract theories” (Kristjansson, 2007, p. 159). *Phronesis* rejects enlightenment notions of scientific method and abstract theory. Lund, Panayotidis, Smits and Towers (2006) also point to the insufficiency of universal and abstract principles or technical procedures for *phronetic* practices: “from the perspective of practice as *phronesis*, its meaning and understanding cannot be encapsulated in rules, procedures and processes” (p. 2). *Phronesis* is embedded in the intertwined and mutually informing relationship between the particular and the general and constantly negotiates between them—arising from the particular and returning to the particular. *Phronesis* is not focused on applying abstract theoretical knowledge to a situation; rather, it pursues an ultimate general—
what counts as a good human life. The general, in Aristotle’s terms, is therefore a life of *eudaimonia* in accordance with human virtues. My mother does not apply the general to organize her experiences. Rather, she listens to the particulars directing her towards something valuable.

*Phronesis* is therefore a capacity that can be acquired only by a person who has been initiated into a particular experience with particular others and has learnt to direct his activities towards goods internal to that experience (Carr, 1995; Kristjansson, 2007). Referencing Carr (1995), Kristjansson (2007) stresses the point that teaching is “not the application of [a time-and-place-independent] educational theory; nor is educational theory an applied theory that draws on theories from philosophy, social sciences or other forms of knowledge” (p. 159). *Phronesis* anchors the ongoing conversations between the general and the particular and there “no divorce [of the particular and the general] is admissible” (Dunne, 1999, p. 52–53). It seems to me the particular and the general are not binary concepts. Their interplay and reciprocally informing conversations are where educational teaching is located.

In that most devastating political era, my mother, like her teacher Mr. Zhao, initiated dialogue between the particular and the general. She seemed to generate informal or tacit ideas and thoughts from ongoing interactions with her experiences that then informed ensuing encounters. Generative understandings stemming from the particulars, in turn, constitute and contribute to a flourishing human life. Teachers with *phronesis* attend to the particular student, moment, space, text and relationship and refuse to totally ascend to procedures, methods and abstract theories. Such teachers recognize that there are always excesses in the infinite particulars that can contribute to the general frame of life—that is, to leading a life of *eudaimonia*. My mother based her self-composed textbooks on her everyday teaching; she wrote comments instead of marks to respond to individual students and to reflect on her teaching. My mother
noticed Ling who suffered from discrimination from other students and she spent time with Ling, drew with her, chatted with her. My mother not only brought a streak of light to Ling’s life, but also became a teacher herself in their encounters. She committed herself to a journey of interrogating what counts as good and worthwhile lives for herself and her students. When she was finally admitted to a university, she continued to ponder, question, negotiate, challenge, and reflect on her previous experiences of teaching in the space and time provided in the university (similar to what happened to me thirty-two years later when I came to study in UBC). She used rules only as “summaries and guides; [phronesis] must itself be flexible, ready for surprise, prepared to see, resourceful at improvisation” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 305) and avoided “settling into mere routine” (Dunne, 1993, p. 292).

The general also leaves room for changes, revisions, and transformations in the unpredictable and unique particulars. Phronesis is anchored in the to-and-fro, creative process between the particular and the general, which, I believe, is a foundation for educational teaching. Nussbaum (2001) writes: “General rules are being criticized . . . both for lack of concreteness and for lack of flexibility” (p. 301). Until my mother retired, she had never had a moment of total satisfaction about her teaching. She was always thinking about her lesson plans and carefully preparing before each class, yet, ironically, she never followed her lesson plans. Using her words, “there is always something happening in every class, in every child”, and she was always “crossing the river by feeling the pebbles.” In her encounter with Ling, she did not apply the existing general “the landlord family is bad” to Ling. Rather, in their interactions, she searched with Ling for alternative generals—what counts as good for Ling’s life as well as her own. In consequence, the kinds of experiences that are conducive to the cultivation of phronesis are experiences rooted in an ongoing quest for the good and worthwhile in and for each child that, in
turn, help teachers “construct, repair, maintain, and review” (Epson, 2013, p. 231) their teaching and their roles. The result, one hopes, is the creation of a generative, yet humbling space where we might (re)discover the excellences of educational teaching.

Teaching today often reflects its procedural, analytical and managerial agendas that neglect and undermine the generative space where my mother pondered, questioned and imagined. To make better judgments and to teach more educationally, in contrast, require the teacher to attend to the particulars and explore and interpret them in the context of good human lives. The concept of teaching embedded in my mother’s stories is not a technique to master, a skill to manipulate or a theory to apply, but an ongoing conversation involving particular people in particular circumstances in light of the general which is always “vulnerable to modification” (Dunne, 1999, p. 61). Greene (1973) observes that teachers working in schools often succumb to pressures to categorize and label students as “slow learners,” “gifted,” or “underprivileged” and cautions:

Categorizing becomes damaging . . . when the teacher perceives an individual only by means of the abstract term selected for categorizing him. It becomes damaging, too, when the teacher bases his expectations on a child’s membership in a category instead of on what he has directly observed. (p. 81)

In contrast, my mother didn’t categorize the sleeping child in her class as lazy or segregate Ling as someone with hostile family background; Mr. Zhao refrained from labeling my mother as a student who broke the “forbidden book” rule; I resisted the title of a “mischievous student” attached to Yanglei. We tried to be open to the complexity in the situation and attend to the individual student in that context. To elaborate, when I tried to respond to my student Yanglei who just beat another child. I managed to render my previous beliefs loose (I suspended the
assumption that Yanglei was a mischievous child who needed to be punished and disciplined) and attuned myself to the particular context (I listened to Yanglei and learned that he hit another student because that student said something humiliating towards an innocent student) and decided what might contribute to Yanglei’s leading a good life. I raised questions about his behaviours; I wondered why he was angry and why he came to see me; I imagined that he was sympathetic towards the innocent and wanted to uphold justice; I understood it was the courage that took him to come to me and confess. Listening to and letting the student explain his action not only enabled me to make alternative interpretations of his deeds, but also to revise my previous conception of what counted as promoting good and flourishing lives for the young. Attending to the particular student allowed me to think critically about labeling a mischievous child and to go beyond my previous understanding of bullying, opening the possibility of adding to and transforming my general scheme of understanding what could make a good life of that particular child. In that moment, there was a spark of *phronesis*.

*Phronesis* negotiates the link between the particular and general, determines the mean between two extremes in a search for the good and worthwhile. Through *phronesis*, we can glimpse an educational teaching that aims at bringing out the good in people. In its back-and-forth process, as Dunne (1993) asserts, *phronesis* “does not ascend to a level of abstraction or generality that leaves experience behind. It arises from experience and returns to experience” (p. 293). *Phronesis* is therefore characterized by subtle responsiveness and flexible attunement to both the general and the particular (Phelan 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Krisjassoon, 2007; Field and Macintyre Latta, 2001; Krisjassoon, 2007). It is important to realize from the stories that *phronesis* neither exhausts itself in the general, nor merely repeats itself in particulars. Teachers aiming to practice *phronesis* initiate dialogues and linger in the tension between the particular
and the general. This improvising, creative and dialogic process helps students thrive as unique human beings and it also helps the formation, re-formation and transformation of teachers.

**Ren as the Concrete Universal**

Confucius’ *ren* also addresses the links between the particular and the general. As May Sim (2007) suggests, “neither Confucius nor Aristotle believes that knowledge of definitions and rules suffices for practical moral guidance” (p. 12). Confucius sometimes refers to *ren* as a general virtue that encompasses all other virtues and other times he uses *ren* as a particular virtue which contrasts with *zhi* (wisdom), *yong* (courage), *yi* (propriety) and emphasizes love or affection towards others (Yu, 2007; Feng, 1947/2013; Chen, 2014). The seemingly contradictory definitions of *ren* reveal that *ren* attempts to unify the concepts of the particular and the general as an embodied manifestation of the good in our lives. Mou (2005) describes *ren* as a “concrete universal” (p. 35). In comparison, Sims (2007) uses similar words to describe *phronesis*: “The *phronimos* act as a kind of concrete universal, exemplifying how the right ends are pursued in particular instances by using the right means” (p. 110).

*Xiao* (filial love) can be understood as a manifestation of *ren* that is embedded in a familial relationship. Confucius provides several meanings for *xiao* (*Analects*, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8); for example, when Fanchi asks about *xiao*, the master replies: “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rituals; when they die, bury them in accordance with the rituals; offer sacrifice to them in accordance with the rituals” (2.5); while, when Ziyou asks about filial piety, the master then says: “Nowadays filial piety merely means being able to feed one’s parents. Even dogs and horses are being fed. Without reverence, how can you tell the difference?” (2.7). As Mou (2005) explains, “the manifestation of *xiao* is endless, it is always in its concreteness. Yet it shows a universal truth [*ren*] in its concreteness” (p. 36).
Confucius also interprets ren as “gong [respect], kuan [forgiveness], xin [trust], min [sensitivity] and hui [generosity]” (Analects, 17.6) towards particular people. My mother had a glimpse of ren in Maoist societal campaign against the Confucian tradition. Mr. Zhao embodied respect in his pulling a chair and letting my mother sit at the table; exemplified forgiveness in not punishing his student for breaking the rule; showed his trust in letting my mother go without questioning her; and revealed his sensitivity in the subtlety of a book wrapper and his generosity in nodding appreciatively at my mother’s hand copied books. Ren is flexible and concrete, while it is at the same time universal, pointing towards a general scheme. The inherent tension in ren allows for ren’s creative manifestations rather than being absolute and rigid. In that sense, ren is both concrete and universal, similar to phronesis in dwelling between the particular and the general. Ren and phronesis share similar concerns about the intertwined, mutually informing and transforming relationship between the particular and the general; both help us break through the top-down application mind-set so prevalent in teaching today.

To attend to and respond wisely to particular people in particular circumstances, people with ren walk on the path of the mean, thereby achieving dao. Confucius, like Aristotle, emphasizes the importance of hitting the mean in particulars and elaborates on its relation to ren: “Junzi [the person with ren] embodies the mean, while xiaoren [the small person] acts contrary to the mean; junzi acts appropriately in each particular moment, while xiaoren indulge themselves with little understanding and care for others” (Zisi, The Mean, 2013, p. 183). The mean is the “great root from which grow all the human actions in the world” (The Mean, p. 183). Confucius’ mean exists in the particulars and concerns particular people. It requires understanding of and discernment among particulars and is like “hitting the target in archery” (The Mean, p. 188). Hitting the mean is no easy task, however. In Confucius’ terms, people
“could walk on the edge of a sharp knife, yet they may not be able to walk on the path of the mean” (*The Mean*, p. 185). The target is not out there, but has to be determined at different times, in particular places, by individual people. When Zilu asks Confucius about his understandings of the moral virtue of *qiang* (强, fortitude), Confucius responds:

Whose understanding of *qiang* you are talking about? *Qiang* in the South? Or in the North? Or your own? It could mean influencing others in gentle manners and to refraining from taking revenge on ruthless people in the South; while it could also mean to fight courageously in the battlefield in the North (*The Mean*, p. 186).

The path of the mean is not only difficult to find and walk on, but also it needs to be built and rebuilt by each person. Educational teaching, in Confucius’ terms, is about “educating people in people’s terms” (Zisi, 2013, *The Mean*, p. 187). Finding the mean in my mother’s interactions with Ling requires my mother to recognize the particular situation, with the particular person. My mother did not criticize other students or her colleagues for their treatment of Ling due to the peculiar political circumstances (or the Red Guards, those who were mainly comprised of the youths who deemed themselves as revolutionists and guards of pure communist ideology, might have treated her as a dissident). Setting up the drawing club provided a relatively safe space to generate confidence in Ling and reconnect Ling to others. My mother attempted to create and walk on the path of the mean in her interactions with Ling.

For Confucius, a teacher with *ren* needs to “master *wen* [文, classics]; conduct appropriate *xing* [行, actions]; have *zhong* [忠, loyalty] and *xin* [信, trust]” (*Analects*, 7.25). Confucius is not only interested in knowledge, but more importantly, about what knowledge is most worthwhile. For Confucius, the most worthwhile knowledge is the knowledge that is
conducive to virtue and good actions and hence contributes to a life of dao. Loyalty and trust are both virtues embedded in human relationships in the pursuit of dao. What Confucius speaks to, I believe, is the attentiveness to others without deceit or conceit: Loyalty is commitment to one’s own roles; while trust is an invitation to others and helps them flourish. My mother committed herself to “feeling the pebbles”—to being loyal and trustful in relationships with her students; Mr. Zhao acted in a similar manner when he imagined the possibility of a book wrapper for my mother. Each became more fully a teacher by attending to their respective situations by (re)-interpreting what counted as good and virtuous human action in relationship with others. Indeed, “teachers with skills and knowledge [经师] are easy to find, while teachers with virtues [人师] who help the young grow into virtuous human beings are rare to find” (Yuan, Jin Dynasty).

Ren not only manifests itself as different forms of virtue. Ren, like phronesis, also involves discernment and judgment in each particular context: Ren is not immunized from conflicting considerations of inexhaustible and unpredictable particulars. Ren involves one’s judgment about someone and something in their complex particularity. When Confucius responds to Fan Chi’s question about what is ren, Confucius suggests: “Being ren is to love people” (12.22) and the master also says: “The person with ren could love people and dislike people” (4.3). Ren is distinguished by loving people, but it is neither the blind love nor the universal love (兼爱) advocated by Mozi. Mencius criticizes Mozi: “Mozi’s universal love does not recognize fathers . . . universal love is a kind of beast love” (Mencius, 2013, Teng Wen Gong, p. 259). Ren must recognize and attend to particular people. For Confucius, it is important to love people with differentiation. In order to love people, we have to know them first; without knowing them well, there is no ren love, because ren (仁, humaneness) is about ren (人, human
Loving people certainly does not mean treating all people in identical ways (Fan, 2010). It requires specific knowledge of that person and developing a trusting relationship with that person in order to express love in the right way at the right moment, something that varies from one person to another, from one circumstance to another, at different times. Sim (2007) claims, “to do what is good for others entails that one knows what is good for others” (p. 28). The others are always particular others. To love Yanglei who just hit another child neither means I need to punish him harshly nor that I need to say gentle words to him; rather, the love for Yanglei needs to be informed by discernment in light of the particular circumstance and knowledge of the particular student: It could be wrong to hit another student in the nose; yet I need to consider that he hit the other student while trying to protect someone else. It might not be the best action he could have taken, yet I also realize that his undesirable action revealed glimmers of justice and courage.

Interestingly, the absence of any formal initial teacher education enabled my mother to prioritize the particular—students, class group and context— when she returned to formal education after eight years of teaching. Her teacher Mr. Zhao was also a keen observer and an attentive listener, responding to the particular encounter rather than trying to be a master of teaching. They both took the initiative to respond with their best understanding in the swampy low land of their teaching. My mother continued to prioritize the particular: pondering ongoing experiences and imagining what counts as good and worthwhile for Ling and her other students. Ever humbled by insights arising from her various encounters with students, her teaching was distinguished by careful thought, wise judgment and imaginative improvisation. My mother and her teacher Mr. Zhao both embodied ren as a concrete universal in their journey toward
educational teaching.

**Attending to the Particular in Educational Relationships**

Decades do not fade the connections between Mr. Zhao and my mother, nor between my mother and her students. Although my mother has lost contact with Mr. Zhao, she still keeps the book wrapper in a wooden chest as a mark of her gratitude and admiration for her teacher. Indeed, decades after leaving her class, my mother’s students continue to visit her each year during the Spring Festival (important days for family gatherings and the reunion of friends); I believe there must be something special in teacher-student relationships for them to endure so long; it is hard to imagine comparable long-term relationships between employees and managers for example. Phelan (2015) reminds us the “intrinsic goods of teaching are relational” (p. 20) and Palmer (1997) also speaks to the connectedness of teachers and students. He believes “good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives and evoke in their students, a ‘capacity for connectedness’” (Para. 10).

I recall Heidegger’s words here: “If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official” (1968, p. 15). I wonder how Aristotle and Confucius might contribute to an understanding of more authentic and educational relationships between the teacher and the student. Phronesis negotiates the particular and general links and is important in one’s own growth and cultivation in becoming a good citizen in the ancient Greek polis. Educational teaching is not only about helping oneself to grow but also about helping the young to lead a good and worthwhile life in future; phronesis, in consequence, must be embedded in and complicated by human relationships. For Aristotle, phronesis is tightly linked to philia or
friendship. While for Confucius, ren is anchored in human relationships and could certainly provide normative advice for them.

**Philia’s Contribution to Understanding Educational Relationships**

Aristotle distinguishes the best type of philia from two insufficient versions that are motivated by utility (based on some external good to be gained) or pleasure (one party finds the other pleasant). These inferior kinds of relationships are hard to sustain when one party is no longer useful or pleasant in the others’ eyes (NE, VIII. 3). The best kind of philia is anchored in mutual admiration of the other person’s character: Aristotle explains that “perfect philia is the philia of men who are good and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves” (NE, 1156b7–9). Aristotle suggests that relationships based on philia must be mutual, be mutually recognized, and involve mutual goodwill. Aristotle points out that

[For] the love of lifeless objects we do not use the word philia, for it is not mutual love, nor is there a wishing of good to the other; people say philia demands that one wish a friend good things for his sake. . . . Philia is the good will between reciprocating parties. (NE, 1155b27–34)

Relationships based on mutual admiration, that is, high regard for the qualities of the other person’s character, is the type of relationship that represents the best and most perfect kind of philia: “Perfect philia is the philia of men who are good and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves” (NE, 1156b7–9). Aristotelian philia involves choice that springs from a state of character (NE, 1157b31), while educational relationships do not usually begin with voluntariness. Also, the best form of philia is characterized by merit of equality. When there is a great interval in respect of virtue, the
possibility of *philia* ceases (VIII.7). I am aware that there may be some tension involved in a comparison between Aristotelian *philia* and educational relationships between teachers and students, often involuntary and unequal adult-child relationships. Being aware of these tensions and possible incompatibilities, I still believe that Aristotle’s *philia* can offer some insights for understanding educational relationships:

- It is founded on the mutual respect and mutual admiration.
- It promotes good character.
- It requires time and familiarity.

I discuss each feature in turn and bring each into conversation with my mother’s and my own stories.

To understand educational relationships through the best form of *philia*, we can observe the mutual respect and mutual admiration of both parties. Mutual respect does not merely imply having good manners, or being polite toward each other, but it involves consideration about “what is good for his sake” (*NE*, 1156b32). Aristotle points out that concern for the other person is more characteristic of best *philia* than being loved. He praises those who love their friends and help friends become better (*NE*, 1159a34–1159b10). This love is not coercive love, which often demands conformity and compliance; it is a love that requires mutual respect and admiration of the uniqueness of the other party. My mother showed her respect and appreciation towards Ling despite the political hostility against Ling’s family. She appreciated Ling’s beautiful drawing and established a drawing club to support her. Mr. Zhao also showed his utmost respect and care toward my mother as an individual rather than simply another student to be disciplined and controlled: He pulled out a chair for her to sit, nodded approvingly about my mother’s hand-copied poems, listened carefully to her and thought about ways to protect and support her. After
Mr. Zhao considered the circumstances, he acted in my mother’s best interest by giving her a book cover: He protected her from being punished and helped her continue to read the forbidden books. Mr. Zhao’s respect for my mother not only earned her admiration in return (Mr. Zhao might not have expected that), but also helped him grow as a teacher in his attempts to understand and attend to the needs of the particular student.

Secondly, the best form of *philia* is built upon mutual admiration and respect, and aims at cultivating good character by “bringing the best out of people” (Hughes, 2001, p. 174). Love for the other party should not be based on utility or pleasure: Aristotle contends that the love needs to be based on promoting good characters in one another and contributing to their living well. Aristotle claims that good character is enduring or permanent and can serve as the foundation for the best form of *philia* (*NE*, 1156b12–18). Of course, the best kind of *philia* does not exclude being useful or having pleasure, but bringing out the goodness of others needs to serve as the foundation. Aristotle emphasizes: “Bad men [*sic*] will have *philia* for the sake of pleasure or of utility, being in this respect like each other, but good men [*sic*] will have *philia* because of themselves—in virtue of their goodness” (*NE*, 1157b1–1157b4). Aristotle also suggests that “unequals can be friends” (*NE*, 1159b2). Adults have the responsibility to initiate the young to the existing world, encourage them to bring something new to the world, and help them to live well; however, we need to acknowledge that the direction of virtuous exchange in student and teacher relationships could still be mutual—“the child’s possession of certain morally praiseworthy qualities can enlighten the adult” (Sherman, 1989, p. 173).

Educational relationships need to be based on bringing out the goodness of particular human beings rather than being driven by external goals. Phelan (2015) hopes to recover the
importance of attending to the particular child in the context of an educational relationship despite today’s emphasis on expert knowledge:

> Armed with technical [e.g. curriculum standards] and/or disciplinary [e.g. language arts] knowledge, the would-be teacher proceeds to engage in determinative judgment, based on external criteria. Experts or expert knowledge, however, cannot answer the question of what is a good response in relation to a particular child. (p. 22)

> Sometimes, I find myself encouraging students not out of a true appreciation of their character, but for the sake of promoting my teaching goals of achieving higher marks—by stimulating them to pursue the goals more enthusiastically yet blindly. In contrast, in my mother’s relationship with her students, the external “technical and/or disciplinary” (Phelan, 2015, p. 22) criteria and goals of getting higher marks were not obvious. The lack of concern for marks as external goals opened a venue to form a more educational relationship. For my mother and her teacher Mr. Zhao, teachers are not merely those who stand behind the teaching desk delivering predetermined content knowledge, but people with warm hearts who are willing to help their students. In turn, the students’ feedback to the teachers reflects their growing respect and love towards their teachers and encourages teachers to sustain their care and love. My mother’s pursuit of something she loved regardless of potential punishment probably impressed and inspired Mr. Zhao, while Mr. Zhao’s determination to make his own judgment rather than follow the rules might, in turn, inspire her courage and persistence.

> Lastly, Aristotle admits that the best form of *philia* is infrequent because such people are rare and such relationships require time and familiarity (*NE*, 1156b24–26). *Philia* does not arise out of an immediate wish, but may develop after a period of knowing one another and the cultivation of mutual respect and trust. My mother built the relationship with her students over a
long time and the *philia* between them endures: Decades after my mother taught them, the bond between my mother and her students is still strong. As Aristotle suggests, the best *philia* demands time and familiarity to form, and when it forms, it tends to last long because “the goodness of character is an enduring thing” (*NE*, 1156b12–13). An important indication of *philia*, for example, is that “they spend their days together or delight in each other” (*NE*, 1158a8–10); teachers and students being together for extended time is crucial to forming educational relationships—a feature that has implications for some popular practices in schools such as the remote instruction and frequent rotation of teachers.

**Ren Relationships—Love, Newness and Transformation**

With its emphasis on human relations, Confucius’ conception of *ren* contributes further to unpacking educational relationships. Etymologically, *ren* (仁) consists of two parts: The left part of the word “亻” means human and the right part “二” means two. For Confucius, relationship is of paramount important in human life and *ren* involves “relationships between self and others” (Chen, 2013, p. 23). Mencius shares various examples of *ren* relationships: “Filial love between father and son; justice between emperor and ministers; respect between the elder and the younger; trust between friends” (*Mencius*, 2013, Chapter “Teng Wen Gong”, p. 259).

Hansen (2011) observes, “Confucius understands the lure of withdrawal, of getting away from the tensions and strife of public affairs. But in his view to be human is not to isolate oneself from others” (p. 23). In comparison with Aristotelian *phronesis* and *philia*, *ren* is more embodied in and dependent upon various relationships. Commenting on Confucian *ren*, Van Norden (2013) observes: “Participating in relationships [such as parents and children, between siblings, between emperors and ministers, between friends, between teachers and students] is partially constitutive
of living well. It is not clear that Aristotle fully does justice to these relationships” (p. 64). Sim (2007) adds:

Confucius seems to describe people in ways we would call more relational and processive [compared with Aristotelian substances], while Aristotle sustains this focus on the individual even when he tries to give an account of human relationship in justice and friendship. (p. 12–13)

I wonder what ren might suggest about educational relationships that generally involve interactions between the older and the younger and are fundamentally about helping the young to live good and worthwhile lives, lives of dao.

Confucius spends so much time and enjoys a very close relationship with his disciples: He relieves the financial burden of his poor student Yuanxian; visits his ill student Ran Boniu; mourns over the deaths of his students Yanyuan and Zilu. On one hand, Confucius seems to understand his relationship with his disciples as friendship: Bai Hu Tong Yi (Han Dynasty) interprets Confucius’ teacher-student relationship as just like a relationship between friends. On the other hand, his relationship with his disciples could be compared to a father and son bond, that is, like “a parallel ordering of the heaven, the earth, the parents and the teachers” (Li Ji, 2013, Chapter “Li Yun”, pp. 1288–1290) and to “serve emperors, fathers and teachers without any reservations—taking good care of them when they are alive, mourning for their death for three years after they die” (Li Ji, 2013, Tan Gong Shang, pp. 1181–1187). These comments in Li Ji resonate with Confucius’ saying “Yan Hui treats me as his father” in the Analects (11.11). I believe educational relationships for Confucius can be compared to the familial bond and friendship. Indeed, in Confucius’ eyes, relationships between family members, between friends and between teachers and students are all rooted in the love of ren. Confucius might also suggest
that ren relationships generate opportunities for students to make their appearance in the world and for teachers to welcome them into that world. Further, Confucius’ notion of junzi or an “exemplary person” who promotes social change suggests that teachers can also model the possession and exercise of the various virtues that contribute to dao. Below I elaborate on these three aspects of educational relationships based on Confucius’ ren: Loving attention to individual children; welcome to the newness the child introduces; and generator of moral guidance and social change.

Confucius would suggest that educational relationships must be grounded in ren. When Yan Hui, his favorite disciple, died, Confucius, like his father, wailed wildly: “Heaven is destroying me, Heaven is destroying me” (Analects, 11.9, 11.10), but Confucius does not mourn over Yan Hui’s death out of obligation or protocol. Ren arises spontaneously from the deep relationship between Confucius and his disciples: Ren love is relational and it feels close and intimate like the love between familial members. Yu (1998) explains: “The idea of ren as love is the expansion of the roots of filial love” (p. 332). When my mother began to teach during the Cultural Revolution she suffered greatly from the disrespect and unjustified criticism that the political hegemony directed against teachers. However, her love for her students gradually melted the hardened ice grown out of the suspicion towards teachers and rebuilt the respect and trust between her and her students: She visited her students at home; she made steamed buns for her students; she gently put a jacket on the shoulder of the sleeping student. In her encounter with Ling, my mother entered Ling’s world with loving attention while others walked away. These acts were not prescribed in any regulations; rather, they were improvised out of love when she tried to understand and care for each of her students. Her teacher Mr. Zhao also created a relational space in his classroom through ren love toward an individual particular student—my
mother. Ren is embodied in Mr. Zhao’s attentive listening, in his gentle smile, in his trustfully letting my mother go without much questioning and in his offer of the book wrapper. Ren love nourishes educational relationships and goes beyond manager-worker or trainer-trainee relationships, where teachers often try to “motivate” their students to perform well, that is, to gain higher scores. Maxine Greene (1973) worries that teachers, in their great efforts to manage and to train, too often “concentrate on the daily routines, trying to be cool and disengaged, as functional and impersonal as machines” (p. 4) and have to “postpone ‘real life’ until the hours after school” (p. 5). In contrast, the educational bond needs to be bathed in gentle rain and the dew of ren love so that it grows strong and endures. For Confucius, educational relationships involve love and care towards other human beings. Noddings (2010b) seems to have a similar view; she explains:

Care theory . . . insists that relation is ontologically basic and the caring relation morally basic. We become individuals only within relations. . . . The attributes that we exhibit as individuals are products of the relations into which we are cast. (p. 101)

Ren’s love, like Nodding’s notion of care, is rooted and manifest in human relationships; in consequence, the relationships that aim to be educational are anchored in ren.

Ren teacher-student relationships are also distinguished by support for the young to make their own appearances in the world as autonomous moral agents. Admittedly, in Confucian texts, we can find numerous ethical parameters for different social roles and relationships: When Fan Chi asks about ren, the master replies: “In private life, courteous, in public life, diligent, in relationship, loyal” (Analects, 13.19). Pang (2009) lists some of the key virtues for important social roles: “emperors with humaneness; ministers with loyalty; fathers with love and care; children with filial love; older brothers with friendliness; younger brothers with respect” (p. 38).
I realize these moral norms might have their historical limitations and might risk reproducing the power dynamics in society; however, we need also note that norms for distinct roles and relationships can also create opportunities for people to flourish in their interactions. Mou (2005) reminds us: “Morality is not to constrain people. . . . Morality is to open and realize human beings” (p. 78). The drawing club provided a creative and conversational space where Ling, other students and my mother could not only practice drawing, but also stay with each other and search for the beauty of life in their eyes as well as in their hearts. Mr. Zhao earned respect from my mother by respecting her by pulling a chair for her, by nodding to her approvingly and by listening to her attentively. The respectful relationships between my mother and Ling, Mr. Zhao and my mother go beyond good manners or etiquette: They generate more genuine and richer conversations between people and allow them to open themselves to educational possibilities.

The invitation to add newness in ren relationships is at the heart of educational possibility. Teachers can only see and attend to a particular child when they genuinely welcome the newness the young can bring to the world. Confucius suggests: “The disciples’ pursuit of ren is not necessarily slower than the teacher’s” (Analects, 15.36) and Han Yu in Tang Dynasty also writes about “how the disciples are not necessarily behind the teachers; while the teachers are not necessarily wiser than the disciples” (Shi Shuo). In a conversation with his disciples about their future aspirations, Confucius does not dismiss anyone; instead, he humbly expresses his own view of the importance of rituals and music (Analects, 11.26). Ren relationships do not aim to regulate and force people to conform to rules, but to attend to their uniqueness and bring about their newness. In my mother’s story, Mr. Zhao did not predict what good (or bad) the forbidden books could do to her. The lack of explanation, prediction, and certainty in Mr. Zhao’s interactions with my mother not only revealed Mr. Zhao’s humility, but his openness to a future
yet unknown to him and his students. Mr. Zhao both protected the particular student and encouraged her to make her own appearance in the world in the pursuit of what was good and worthwhile. I believe he created “a civic square and room of one’s own” (Pinar, 2004, p. 38) that included my mother. In the inhospitable political circumstances of the Cultural Revolution, his gentle smile not only eased my mother’s anxiety, but also resisted social suppression; his book wrapper not only protected my mother from being punished by the school, but also conveyed a supporting and encouraging message to his student to follow her own path.

I believe that Mr. Zhao is a junzi (君⼦)—Confucius’ term for an exemplary person. Junzi appears more that one hundred times in the Analects and is historically translated as gentleman (Waley, 1983; Lau, 1979), superior man (Legge, 1981) or noble man (Fingarette, 1972). Junzi, for Confucius, is an exemplary person with ren who models what it means to pursue dao. Teachers who are junzi both model moral action for their students and act as social agents who initiate the young into a world that they both join and transform.

Junzi is not a hereditary social or political title. For Confucius, junzi is closely related to one’s virtues. Confucius expresses several times the difference between junzi and xiaoren in the Analects. The master suggests that junzi is concerned with virtuous action, while xiaoren is concerned about their own wellbeing; junzi thinks about justice; while xiaoren thinks about profits; junzi is calm and at ease; xiaoren is fretful and ill at ease (2.14, 4.11, 4.16, 7.37). For Confucius, human beings are moral agents who contribute to collective well-being; instrumental skills and knowledge are always secondary to human virtues. Junzi for Confucius is a paradigmatic person with comprehensive and interdependent moral virtues. Mr. Zhao, for example, showed his respect and trust towards my mother in his gentle smile and attentive listening; his compassion was revealed by providing a book wrapper to signal his support; his
sense of justice in reflecting about what constitutes the good for each particular student. What needs to be noted is that, for Confucius, *junzi* is not solely interested in cultivating his own virtues—the ultimate end of virtue cultivation for *junzi* lies beyond selfish gain. Hall and Ames (1987) contend that Confucius re-appropriates the political designation (*junzi* as denotation of noble birth and rank) and redefines it through the correlative relationship between personal cultivation and social responsibility. In *Mencius*, we could see the descriptions about the social responsibility of *junzi*. Mencius says: “If poor and discouraged, *Junzi* could still attend to their virtues; if valued, they should contribute to the whole society” (*Mencius*, 2013, Chapter “Jin Xin Shang”, p. 348). *Junzi* “won’t be bewildered in a disordered society” (*Mencius*, 2013, Chapter “Jin Xin Xia”, p. 363). Cultivating virtues is the pathway of becoming *junzi* and pursuing *dao*—and *junzi*’s *dao* lies in promoting societal and cosmic harmony (Tan, 2016). *Junzi* is therefore expected to not only cultivate his own virtues but also get involved and assert his moral agency in social and political transformation. *Junzi* is ultimately “anxious about the Way” (*Analects*, 15.32) and in consequence, pursues social transformation.

Indeed, the pursuit of *dao* must be an ongoing journey: A virtuous life is never attained. Confucius, for example, might encourage my mother and Mr. Zhao to take more radical action to change the circumstances of his students and the surrounding society rather than being content with opening a drawing club or passing along a book wrapper. My mother created a space of drawing for Ling, which might connect her with others and build up her confidence. Mr. Zhao showed his compassion towards his student and supported her in an implicit way; however, these actions were not enough to bring radical social change. My mother and Mr. Zhao both fell short of being social agents who could “bring order” to others and to society. Confucius might encourage my mother to give students more guidance to help them become more wide-awake
and make their own judgments about societal norms. He might encourage Mr. Zhao to fight against the regulation in a bolder way: to write to the principal about reviewing the forbidden books rule; to encourage other teachers and students to protest the forbidden books rule; to launch a public campaign to support reading the books. Junzi has a responsibility to bring order and justice to other people and to the larger society—even at the cost of his own interest.

Confucius’ own choices exemplified his acceptance of this responsibility: With a gentle smile, Confucius once satirically compared himself to “a dog that has no home” (Shi Ji, The Biography of Confucius) because he was expelled from many various vassal states because his political opinions were not compliant with those in power. Nonetheless, he refused to cater to the demands of the rulers, but committed himself to ren and pursued dao relentlessly, despite all the hardships he had to endure. In sum, Confucius focuses not only on the cultivation of the self, but the contribution to others and the world. For Confucius, “life becomes artful to the degree that it is responsive to other people, to one’s own potential to grow, and to the good he identifies in nature and the cosmos” (Hansen, 2011, p. 24).

In brief, Aristotle’s phronesis is complicated by his notion of philia and relates to Confucius’ ren. They jointly provide us alternate conceptual resources to make better judgments in teaching. Phronesis emphasizes the negotiation between the particular and the general, while for ren, there is no dichotomy since ren is a “concrete universal.” Philia adds to the discussions about phronesis by anchoring it in human relationships and provides normative insight into educational relationships. Philia, in its best form, emphasizes mutual respect, mutual admiration and the cultivation of virtue in one another. Ren anchors educational relationships in ren love, which is spontaneous rather than procedural and provides the rich soil for the young to cultivate their virtues, to make their unique appearance and bring something new—something yet to be
known—into the world. In my mother’s stories with Ling and with Mr. Zhao, we can glimpse what teaching in educational relationship might be look like: The teacher discerns the context, responds to the individual student, judges and acts out of her best understanding to help the student lead a good life both in the present and in the future. To emphasize, teachers are encouraged by Aristotle and Confucius to negotiate the links between the particular and the general in educational relationships, to connect to the particular student to understand, create, deepen and pursue a life of eudaimonia or dao.
Chapter 5: Interrogating the Tricks: *Techne* and *Liuyi*

Set your heart upon *dao* [the way]; rely upon *de* [virtues]; follow *ren* [humaneness]; swim in *yi* [the Six Arts] (*Analects*, 7.6).

At a recent academic conference in Canada, I was recognized by a former teacher from Beijing who had resigned from her teaching position and just begun to study in a graduate school in Canada (like myself seven years ago). She told me that—much to my surprise—I had become a celebrity teacher since leaving China several years ago—a model for others to emulate in our district. She reminded me about my victory in the National Basic Teaching Skills Contest and explained that she had also participated in the annual event years later and learned a lot from me; I remember being thrilled with my achievement back then, but now I am not so sure.

Standing on the grand performance stage, I blinked my eyes in the glare from the magnesium lights. It was not easy to get to this round; in the previous two stages—the computer skills and teaching theories tests—many of my colleagues were knocked out of the competition. Computer skills measured the teacher’s proficiency in using computers to teach their subjects, including making PowerPoint presentations and using software such as Word and Excel. In the next round, teachers were expected to memorize teaching theories and educational psychology from two designated textbooks to prepare for a written test. I felt my eyes sore in the dazzling light because I didn’t get much sleep the previous night, but I still wore a big smile and tried hard to keep eye contact with the evaluators who were sitting in the audience. As a middle school teacher in Beijing, I was participating in the final round of nationwide National Basic Teaching
Skills Contest as part of the in-service teacher education program for elementary and secondary school teachers in 2008. The last round of questioning focused on “talking about your lesson plan.” Participants were given one day to prepare a lesson based on the designated topic chosen randomly from the textbook and the following day we were given thirty minutes to talk about our lesson plan to teaching experts, including senior teachers, research staff from different district educational centers, and university professors. I remember one judge asked me after my presentation “Why did you use task-based learning as your approach?” I answered confidently: “The task could provide the students a real world scenario and help them master the language points more easily.” They continued to challenge me with questions such as how to carry out my lesson plan, how to engage the students, the best ways to measure students’ learning outcomes. I all answered each fluently.

Although it was not easy for me to come up with innovative lesson plans and provide eloquent answers to impress the distinguished judges, I was not unfamiliar with such situations. After graduation from university, I went through a teacher-training program to obtain a certificate to teach. One of the most popular courses in the program was microteaching where we were expected to teach a fifteen-minute lesson based on a section in a textbook to our classmates who played the roles of students, followed by a 15-minute “student-teacher” interaction. Teacher educators would then make comments and evaluate our microteaching practice. Everything was recorded so that we could review our own teaching.

Finally, I won the competition and was awarded a golden “Excellent Teacher” trophy by one of the distinguished guests and afterward my school principal cheerfully congratulated me: “I told you, you could master the tricks!”
Being congratulated by my principal for “mastering the tricks” was not a surprise; successful teaching in China (and in Canada) is increasingly understood as technical expertise, that is, the mastery of strategies and teaching methods consistent with what “works” in the classroom, that is, the teacher behaviours that have been “proven” to improve student learning as measured by standardized achievement examinations. I was enthusiastic about the skills training I had received in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Yet, as a young teacher, I often had conflicting feelings. On one hand, I was tempted by the glorious trophy and shining magnesium lights to master the tricks: The first prize made me more confident in my teaching skills and competency. On the other hand, I found the magnesium lights very dim in my classroom: My perfect lesson plans didn’t regularly work as anticipated and my enhanced teaching techniques and skills could not be applied to all situations or help all of my students. Something seemed to be missing from the teaching skills and competency competition to explain why I felt confused, worried and uncertain on so many occasions in the classroom. There were many moments when the glory of gold trophy faded and the magnesium lights flickered, shedding a ghostly light on my teaching. Was it because my skills were still inadequate? Did it mean I needed to drill my skills more diligently, sharpening them like knives to cut through objects? I began to suspect the truthfulness of my principal’s exhortation: What, indeed, are the tricks of teaching? Could I master them? How? Why should I master them? What do the tricks promote and prevent? My everyday teaching encounters encouraged me to take a closer look and ask what might be missing from my bag of “tricks”.

In this chapter, I continue to challenge the understanding of teaching as primarily a concern of technique or a skill within the prevalent discourses. In particular, I hope to interrogate the enthusiastic pursuit of empirical data, statistics, matrices and methods in teaching and teacher
education—the “how-to”s. I draw on Aristotle’s *techne* and Confucius’ *liuyi* and their modern interpretations to challenge the overwhelming trend of instrumental rationality and technical thinking in teaching and seek to recover the moral, aesthetic and artistic nature of teaching.

**Technical Concerns and Teacher Education**

Understanding good teaching as largely the exercise of technical competence is not a new phenomenon; indeed, it has its genesis in the first efforts to formally prepare teachers to work in schools. Early in the 19th century, public school systems began to expand dramatically—especially in Europe. Previously, teachers taught privately or in academies in which only the privileged or the rich could get access to formal teaching. Normal schools were then established in mid-19th-century in Europe, America, Asia and other places around the world as institutions to train teachers in response to the rapid expansion of public schooling. The term "normal" is derived from France's *École Normale Supérieure* of the 1790s and implies the goal of these institutions to promote and apply certain norms in schools for curriculum and pedagogy in order to produce a qualified, and uniform work force for the new public schools. Most normal schools then became teacher-training colleges, teachers' colleges or normal universities. The explosion of mass public schooling in the 20th century contributed to establishing faculties of education in research intensive universities, offering advanced degree programs to prepare and certify teachers.

Ever since the first normal school was established in The Nanyang Public School in Shanghai in 1896, teacher education in China has been afloat on a turbulent sea, desperately in search of a seaworthy vessel. Historically, a heavy reliance on foreign models of preparation—from the Japanese training model in the late nineteenth century and American pragmatism in the 1920s to the widespread adoption of a rigid and oppressive Soviet model in the 1950s—has
characterized teacher education in China (Lu, 2008). Not until the 1980s did teacher education begin a search for a specifically Chinese model. Too often, however, home-grown teacher education in China embraces instrumental approaches to teaching and the practice of teaching is reduced to generalized descriptions of what teachers should know and be able to do. In *The Teacher Education Curriculum Standard* (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2011) in China, we read about recursive themes on training or developing teachers who can “master the knowledge of student psychological developmental stages and learning to deal with common behavioural and mental problems” (2.2.6) and “improve language skills, communication and collaboration skills and be able to use modern educational technologies” (2.2.7). Using model teaching strategies, teachers educators are expected to produce teachers with more advanced technology and improved skills. Chinese President Xi Jinping in his national speech (May, 2016) pointed out that technology is of paramount importance to in China and called upon educational institutions to emphasize the development of science and technology without reservation.

The pursuit of mastering teaching through technical improvement is not exclusively a Chinese effort; we can detect the same yearning for improving teaching though the advancement of technology in Canada. Canadian conceptions of teacher education have also been influenced variously during the twentieth century. In the 1950s–1980s teacher education was conceived in terms of training (emphasis on teachers’ behaviours), while the 1980s–2000s witnessed a shift to teacher education as a “learning” problem (emphasis on teachers’ cognitive understanding); more recently, from the late 1990s to the present, teacher education has been understood as a policy problem focused on achieving standardized outcomes (Cochran-Smith and Fries, 2005; Grimmett, 2009). We can observe enthusiastic promotion of and uncritical emphases on
technical concerns and solutions in teaching and teacher education today. Indeed, teacher education reflects the tendency of modernity to technicize most activities. Grant reminds us that as we push towards the goals we project and anticipate, the demands for more technology become even more urgent (Grant, 1969). Pinar (2013) adds that “technology [has] become not just one optional mode d'être, but the only way of life on earth” (p. 3) and warns us of the catastrophes to come if we remain on the course of technologizing everything. The approach to technology that Grant (1969) and Pinar (2013) criticize assumes an instrumental and technical understanding of teaching and I worry, together with them, not only about the societal zest for technology as a panacea for education, but also about the predominant technical view of teaching that underlies this pursuit.

Technical concerns in teaching are often manifest in indiscriminate advocacy of technology and enthusiastic adoption of technical approaches to teaching: In “professional development” sessions we hear about the need for improving teachers’ competencies, for more advanced technology in classrooms and for the adoption of the latest teaching methods and/or techniques. Such approaches share agendas about monitoring, controlling, securing and eliminating risks. Of course, it is neither likely nor desirable to eliminate the influence of advanced technology—it is the way that we understand and approach technology that matters. Taken-for-granted technical mindsets need to be examined and understood more carefully. What I hope to challenge is an exclusively goal-oriented, results-driven, means-ends technical approach to good teaching. As Misgeld and Jardine (1989) lament, “the relationships and transition between child and adult are slowly becoming understandable as little more than a technical problem requiring a technical solution” (p. 261). Indeed, we are too often concerned
about “what works” (Biesta, 2007, p. 1) instead of what is “educationally desirable” (Biesta, 2013, p. 129). Hence, I aim to examine the “how-to”s of teaching.

My central concern in this chapter is to understand, challenge, and re-imagine the forms of technical thinking in teaching and teacher education and to search for other ways to think about the practice of teaching. I tell my learning to teach stories against the background of teacher education in China and Canada and use Aristotle’s techne and Confucius’ liuyi to interrogate the “how-to”s of teaching with the hope that understanding techne and liuyi might help us (re)think what is at stake and imagine better—more educational—alternatives.

**Aristotle’s Techne**

In the opening chapter of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that techne is one of five intellectual virtues that also include phronesis, sophia, nous and episteme. Techne and phronesis are virtues that are concerned with creating objects and acting in the world; nous, episteme and sophia are virtues concerned with understanding the physical world beginning from first principles or primary concepts (nous), to systematic knowledge (episteme) and then building to theoretical wisdom (sophia). In modernity, techne is now commonly interpreted as skill or technique in making and depends on ends-means thinking, that is, techne is “oriented toward practical instrumental rationality governed by a conscious goal. The original concept appears today in terms such as technique, technical, and technology” (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012, p. 2). In sum, techne seems to be “a deliberate application of human intelligence to some part of the world, yielding some control over [fate]” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 95)—allowing humans to transform aspects of the physical world to provide a degree of stability in an unstable environment. Nussbaum details four features of techne that feature prominently in teacher education currently: universality, teachability, precision, and concern for explanation (2001, p.
—“all bear upon the goal of mastering contingency” (p. 96).

**Universality.** The similarity of the relevant objects is an assumption of *techne*. Aristotle explains: “A *techne* comes into being when from many notions gained by experience a universal judgment about a group of similar things arises” (*Metaphysics*, 981a5–7). In my story, when I designed my lesson plan to illustrate my technical mastery, I was aware that the panel would judge my performance without reference to any students, avoiding any consideration of particularity and unpredictability that would be introduced by including actual children.

**Teachability.** Aristotle contends that “the universality of *techne* yields the possibility of teaching” (*Metaphysics*, 981b7–8). Nussbaum goes on to explain “*techne* can be communicated in advance of the experience” (p. 96). In the microteaching class, for example, teacher educators teach prospective teachers the skills, techniques and technologies of effective teaching without regard for individual students and contend that simulated practice of teaching is a legitimate approximation of teaching in real classrooms (Lu, 2008). This makes me rethink about my unhesitant and fluent answer to the judges: “To provide the students a real world scenario and help them master the language points more easily.” Can we imitate, design, control and thus provide a “real world” scenario? Is it still real when it has, for example, the agenda of mastering the language points more easily? I believe the agendas of microteaching class as well as my confident answers to the judges both failed to recognize the ambiguity, uncertainty and unpredictability in teaching.

**Precision.** Nussbaum (2001) explains: “*Techne* brings precision where before there was fuzziness and vagueness” (p. 96). The result-driven approach to teaching can be linked to the precision of *techne*: Teachers require the tools of measurement and standards in order to know whether their teaching is “successful.”
**Explanation.** *Techne* involves procedural explanation, that is, it “asks and answers ‘why’ questions about its procedures . . . A doctor who has learned the medical *techne* . . . [must be able] to explain precisely why and how the treatment works” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 96). In my story, the step-by-step procedures of microteaching are judged by criteria such as logical analysis, deductive thinking and content coherence—not the education of children.

Overall, *techne* demands “a systematization and unification of practice that will yield accounts and some sort of orderly grasp” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 97). In important ways, modern schooling can be considered as an organization based on *techne* in which the teachers and students are measured against uniform standards, procedures are refined and regulated and skills are transmitted. My story seems to highlight the impact of this interpretation. Standing on the stage under the dazzling magnesium light, talking about my lesson plan, answering questions from the judges in the skills competition, or sitting in the microteaching class, I could imagine myself “mastering the tricks” of teaching. I felt secret pleasure when I saw the nodding heads of the expert judges at the competition or heard the compliments of the teacher educators.

Acquiring the skills, techniques and technologies provided a sense of mastery and triumph over the uncertainties, messiness and unpredictability of teaching. Yet, after I developed my teaching *techne*—my ability to master the universal principles, deliver the appropriate teaching strategies precisely and design the requisite step-by-step procedures flawlessly—why did I still feel something was missing? Why did I regularly feel challenged and discouraged in my daily encounters? Why couldn’t I apply my newly learned teaching expertise with my students so that they would all learn what I intended for them to learn when I wanted them to learn it? Why couldn’t I respond to my students as smoothly and effectively as I did to the judges? What rendered my teaching *techne* ordinary and caused it to lose its glory? My everyday
teaching encounters reminded me that the tricks did not always—or even regularly—work and my frustration pushed me to review my assumptions about techne more closely.

**The Interplay Between Techne and Phronesis**

Aristotle’s *techne* is largely defined by its similarities and differences from *phronesis*. They both begin by attending to experiences in a contingent world and share concerns about matters that are mutable. Within the sphere of what can be changed there are “both things that belong within the realm of production and things that belong within that of action; but production is a different thing from action” (*NE*, 1140a1–3). In general, *techne* involves acting on the world (i.e., making, producing), while *phronesis* focuses on acting well in the world, that is, human conduct (hence its concern for the ethical). In teaching, *techne* is focused on applying teaching techniques and skills to produce the predetermined outcome, while *phronesis* is concerned with the action itself in the indeterminable and particular circumstances and inquires about the good embedded in the action. Contemporary interpretative texts can been found to further support the view that *techne* and *phronesis* belong to different spheres, bear different characteristics, and are inimical to each other (Gadamer, 1989; Hughes, 2001; Nussbaum, 2001; Yu, 2007).

*Phronesis* and *techne*, for example, involve different relationships between means and ends. Dunne (1993) suggests that *techne* involves making or fabrication which aims to bring about a product or outcome that is separable from its initial state (means are employed to create discrete ends), while *phronesis* “is activity which may leave no separately identifiable outcome behind it and whose end, therefore, is realized in the very doing of the activity itself” (p. 244) (i.e., means and ends are inextricably enmeshed). In teaching, applying teaching skills and techniques is an example of *techne*, while responding well to a particular student, in a particular
class, at that time, in that place, in light of what is good and worthwhile is *phronesis*.

It seems, then, that very different forms of expertise are required for *techne* and *phronesis*. In the analysis of Aristotelian *phronesis* and *techne*, Dunne (1993) observes that for Aristotle,

*Techne* provides the kind of knowledge possessed by an expert in one of the specialized crafts, a person who understands the principles underlying the production of an object or state of affairs. . . . *Phronesis*, on the other hand, characterizes a person who knows how to live well. It is acquired and deployed not in the making of any product separate from oneself but rather in one’s actions with one’s fellows. (p. 244)

*Techne* requires teachers to enhance their teaching skills and master the strategies to promote their effectiveness, while *phronetic* teachers are always attuned to their experiences with their students, inquire about what counts as good lives for them and decide on the appropriate actions in conversation with the students.

Finally, the ultimate impact of *techne* and *phronesis* is different. Nussbaum (2001) suggests that the triumph of *techne* is the elimination of the very contingencies of human experience on which *phronesis* relies. Bruner (1996), for example, describes impact of “the decontextualized, disambiguated, totally lookuppable” (p. 7) knowledge of *techne* on practice. He explains that “the rules common to all information systems do not cover the messy, ambiguous, and context-sensitive processes of meaning making” (Bruner, 1996, p. 5). In teaching, teachers with *techne* attempt to conquer the uncertainties and ambiguities by using more developed technologies and more refined techniques, while *phronetic* teachers not only tolerate the indeterminable and malleable encounters, but also try to find what counts as the good in them.
In philosophical literature, we find many works (MacIntyre, 1981; Hughes, 2001; Nussbaum, 2001; Phelan, 2005a, 2005b) attempting to revive Aristotelian phronesis as a situated intellectual virtue embedded in experience as a remedy for the technical approaches associated with modern techne. I believe, however, that a further examination of the architectonic nature of Aristotelian virtues—especially the interplay between techne and phronesis—may help expand the constrained understanding of techne. Techne, as one of the intellectual virtues concerned with practical matters, might be promoted alongside phronesis, rather than separately. While phronesis is considered an intellectual virtue, it is unique in that it functions by selecting and activating the appropriate intellectual (e.g., episteme, sophia, nous, techne) and moral (e.g., courage, moderation, justice) virtues for ethical action in contingent circumstances and is therefore described as an architectonic or executive virtue (NE, 1141b23), that is, composed from other virtues.

Not satisfied with the classic articulation of the distinctions between the practical virtues of techne and phronesis, Dunne (1993) attempts to recover the experiential ground for techne to connect the two concepts more closely. He points out the missing part of Aristotle’s notion of techne is its link to experience: “Aristotle allowed techne to become anchored in universals in such a way that it could apparently become disconnected from the experience from which it had originated” (Dunne, 1993, p. 293). Dunne (1993) tries to break away from the conventional understanding of techne and proposes that techne cannot be completely aloof from experience: Techne should not be understood as a calculation of the means to predetermined ends; rather techne is a process of interacting with the materials and adjusting the means and ends in dynamic interaction. I prefer to use Dunne’s (1993) words here: “The alternative concept fabrication itself is seen to be a process where involvement and fluidity . . . are ineliminable” (p. 355) and
phronesis “is the notion through which [Aristotle] allows into knowledge, as well as into the
proper ordering of human affairs, the greatest degree of flexibility, openness, and improvisation”
(p. 245). Dunne seems to make a claim for, as I understand it, a phronetic techne to highlight the
interdependence between these two ways of knowing. Indeed, Nussbaum (2001) also observes:

Techne is closely associated with practical judgment or wisdom with forethought,
planning, and prediction. . . . The person who lives by techne does not come to each new
experience without foresight or resource. He possesses some sort of systematic grasp,
some way of ordering the subject matter, that will take him to the new situation well
prepared, removed from blind dependence on what happens. (p. 95)

The interplay between techne and phronesis, that is, phronetic techne renders the fore-
thought, planning, and prediction of techne less stubborn, less confident, and more receptive to
particular circumstances, more sensitive and responsive to particular people, more concerned
with the human good rather than the promotion of instrumental external goals, and more willing
to question and be questioned in the interactive process. A reconceptualization of techne in
combination with phronesis can re-attune techne, bringing the aloof, detached and proud techne
back to the rough ground of the particulars, Phronetic techne observes, adjusts, and responds to
the dynamic and creative processes, that is, the “messy, ambiguous, and context sensitive
processes of meaning making” (Bruner, 1996, p. 5). Embedded in phronetic techne is a strong
sense of undergoing experiences as “appreciative,” “perceiving,” and “enjoying” (Dewey,
1934/2005, p. 49), in addition to the process of producing. Phronetic techne can help us
challenge the binary conception of technical thinking and ethical action by proposing a more
dynamic interaction between process and end, between maker and the material.
Phronetic techne in teaching thickens the notion of techne and implies that it should not only be about obtaining predetermined outcomes, but generating dynamic, imaginative and creative interplay between the makers (e.g. the teachers) and the materials (e.g. the students, the subject matter, the planned curriculum). The fabrication process of phronetic techne is embedded in understanding the particular context, attending to the materials on hand in order to bring out their potential for the good. Such a thickened notion of techne emphasizes not only accomplishing the task, but also attends to the interactive process embedded in simultaneously undergoing and creating in the pursuit of the good.

Ironically, phronetic techne reminds me of how Aristotle understands the relationship between techne and the moral virtues:

Whereas we acquire the excellences through having first engaged in the activities, as is also the case with the various sorts of expert knowledge [techne], for the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them. For example people become builders by building, and cithara-players by playing the cithara; so too, then, we become just by doing just things, moderate by doing moderate things, and courageous by doing courageous things. (NE, 1103a31–1103b2)

Aristotle believes certain technai can promote moral virtues: He contends that training in music, poetry and dance, for example, promote virtues of character. In Politics, he explains: “Rhythm and melody provide keen likenesses of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance and of all the opposites of these and of all the other states of character” (1340a15–28). Phronetic techne, in a more explicit way, can orient techne to moral ends—not only to produce or craft something pre-planned, but to engage with the process in a dynamic and responsive way—
questioning the legitimacy of the instrumental ends, attending to the appropriateness of action in terms of time, place, person, and reason.

If I could reimagine the National Teaching Skills Contest as an exercise of *phronetic techne*, I would suggest that the content and format of contest—the teachers as contesters talk about the design and procedures of their lesson plan under the evaluation of the expert judges—are fundamentally problematic. The Skills Contest as a form of in-service teacher training emphasizes the isolated character of *techne* by suppressing the emergence of *phronesis* in response to a particular context (e.g., the students were missing); by demanding clear and rigid procedures (e.g., step one . . . step two . . . and finally . . .); and by enforcing theory-to-practice approaches (e.g., my application of “task-based learning theory” in my lesson plan). What *phronesis* arises from—the messiness and uncertainties in teaching—is precisely what the Teaching Skills Contest seemed determined to conquer. If we take the dialogic relationship between *techne* and *phronesis* seriously, we would, however, begin by challenging the underlying assumption of the Teaching Skills Contest that *techne* is segregated from *phronesis*. Such an approach ignores the in-betweenness that joins *techne* and *phronesis* in Dunne’s reworking. *Phronetic techne* should not be about uniform production, but about dynamic interplay among the teachers, the students and the subject matter. The fabrication process of *techne* is more than just achieving a distinct and predetermined outcome; rather it must include attending to the students, knowing them intimately and bringing out the good in them. Keen observation and sensitive response to the student, the subject matter or the planned curriculum as materials are integral to the teacher’s *phronetic techne*. In the Teaching Skills Contest and the microteaching classes, however, students are absent; indeed, even if students were physically present, teachers focused on implementing their *techne* would still try to follow their lesson
plans, implement the new skills and achieve their pre-planned teaching goals. They want to be successful—often at the price of being good. A renewed understanding of *phronetic techne* would suggest to teachers, student teachers and teacher educators that lesson plans can be disrupted by the dynamics of student responses; that skills should be tools that depend on unique student in the particular context; and that the teaching goals can always be renegotiated in the interplay between teachers and students.

Following Dunne (1993), I understand the goodness of *techne* lies in its dialogic relationship with *phronesis*. I aim to recover the links between Aristotelian *techne* understood as artistic making and *phronesis* as the capacity to discern and respond to the particulars in light of the human good. *Phronetic techne* helps reconceptualise teaching as an artistic endeavour whose process attends carefully to the texture of the particular material, and bring out its goodness in the making and shaping process. Teachers with *phronetic techne* would not just tolerate the inevitable shortcomings of skills and techniques to achieve their goals, but would regard these “failures” as opportunities for them to be addressed by the particulars and raise better questions. I have come to the realization that my confusions and frustrations about my reliance on teaching method can actually be a door to open my understanding of *techne* to a connected and dialogic *phronetic techne*.

**Confucius’ *Liuyi***

Unlike Aristotle, Confucius has no general theory of making. He is interested, however, in how various artistic activities might promote virtue. Van Norden (2013) observes, that Confucius pays even more attention than Aristotle to artistic activities: “The classic Aristotelians have failed to fully appreciate engaging in skilful activities, artistic creation and appreciation, being in loving relationships with other humans and freely creating one’s own life” (2013, p. 60).
Here I investigate what insights *liuyi* (the Six Arts) can provide for understanding my stories better; for example, I wonder why Confucius puts so much emphasis on the artistic activities? What similarities and differences does Confucius’ notion of artistic activities have in comparison with skills promoted in the Teaching Skills Contest and the microteaching classes? How can I understand teaching skills better through a Confucian approach to artistic activities?

Over more than two thousand years of Confucian history, we can observe a consistent attention to *liuyi* or the Six Arts. They are considered as the main teaching contents in Confucianism and the teaching of *liuyi* was originally institutionalized in the Han Dynasty. *Liuyi* has at least two major interpretations. In *The Rites of Zhou. Baoshi* (周礼.保氏), *liuyi* refer to the fundamental artistic activities that people should master, including rituals (*li*, 礼), music (*yue*, 乐), archery (*she*, 射), charioteering (*yu*, 御), calligraphy (*shu*, 书) and numeracy (*shu*, 数). In another interpretation of *liuyi*, Ma Yifu (1996) lists six classic texts that are part of the Confucian canon: *Classic of Poetry* (诗经), *Book of Documents* (尚书), *Li Ji or Book of Rites* (礼记), *Book of Music* (乐经), *Classic of Changes* (易经) and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (春秋). We can detect distinct understandings and interpretations of *liuyi*, yet they are still closely associated with one another: They seem to have overlapping concerns about similar topics, such as music, rituals and an orientation towards human virtues.

I contend that each *liuyi*, in both interpretations, is not merely about the training and mastery of particular techniques or skills, but focused on the cultivation of the virtues consistent with the art of living a good life. Confucius himself was educated in *liuyi* as a young man and among his three thousand disciples he suggests that there are only 72 disciples who are good at *liuyi*. The Master says: “draw inspiration from the poems; steady our course with the ritual; find
your fulfillment in music” (*Analects*, 8.8). *Li Ji* also records, “to learn about rituals and music is a pathway to virtue” (2013, Chapter “Yue Ji”, p. 1377).

**Li (*礼*, rituals).** In the *Analects*, the scope of *li* (rituals) ranges “from norms of ceremonial behaviour to detailed regulations governing various social and political behaviours” (Yu, 2007, p. 97). Confucius links *li* to the ontological *ren* (Chen, 2014). Through this connection, he suggests that *ren* determines the criteria of what counts as good *li*. Confucius says: “If a man has no *ren*, what can he have to do with *li*?” (*Analects*, 3.3). Or rather, whether *li* is a manifestation of the ontological *ren* can help us discern good *li* from bad *li*. Shun (2002) explains: “*Ren* and *li* . . . make one a means to the other” (pp. 56–57), that is, those who possess *ren* observe *li* as a means to express the emotion and character that comprise *ren*, while for those who do not have *ren*, *li* provides a means of cultivating *ren*. Fan (2010) echoes Shun’s interpretation of *li* in relation to *ren*: “Confucius was to reconstruct the Chinese *li* in terms of the fundamental human virtue of *ren* that he teased out through his reflection on human nature” (p. 15–16). Shun (2002)’s reading of Confucius suggests that “participation in *li* practices has a feedback effect on a person, and makes the person more susceptible to having emotional dispositions and attitudes of the ideal kind” (p. 57). Chen (2013) also summarizes: “The rites are the supplement, pattern of guidance, and parameter for various forms of virtuous conduct: being respectful, careful, courageous, and forthright” (p. 18).

**Yue (*乐*, music).** Having learned about the intimate relationship between *li* and *ren*, I wonder whether *yue* (music) as another component of Confucius’ *liuyi* is also related to virtue cultivation. According to the legend, Confucius had three teachers: He learned rituals from Lao Dan; music from Chang Hong; and how to play the seven stringed instruments from Shi Xiang Zi. In *Li Ji*, we could find explanations about how music arises from and nourishes the human
The harmony among different sounds constitutes music. . . . To practice rituals and music is the pathway to virtues. Rituals order and cultivate one’s characters while music could bring everything into harmony and is most close to the heart of ren. (2013, pp. 1376–1379)

The association between music and virtue cultivation is widely explored in contemporary interpretative texts. Li (2004) points out that music helps people form their character; Qi (2004) adds that music resides in human virtues and music should follow the path to moral harmony. Playing music for Confucius is not merely about mastery of musical knowledge or skills; rather, it is, like li, about the expression and the cultivation of human virtue.

**She (射, archery).** During the Shang Dynasty (around 16th century BC–11 century BC) and Zhou Dynasty (around 11th century BC–256 BC), archery was a required skill for all aristocratic men. The Master says: “A junzi avoids competition. Still, if he must compete let it be at archery. There, as he bows and exchanges greetings both before the contest and over drinks afterwards, he remains a junzi, even in competition” (Analects, 3.7). By practicing archery and its related etiquette, nobles not only gained proficiency; more importantly, they cultivated their minds and learned how to behave as virtuous people.

**Yu (御, charioteering).** Confucius puts less emphasis on aristocracy than virtue-based ethics. Archery for Confucius became an activity not only of great practical importance in military and hunting events, but also as a way to cultivate one’s virtues such as courage and persistence to become a junzi or a morally exemplary person. Similarly, for Confucius, to become a charioteer is more than a skill training activity: It requires courage, sensitivity, patience
and temperance. In a familiar proverb, after Wang Ziqi taught King Zhao Xiang charioteering, the student was determined to compete with his teacher. During the race, King Zhaoxiang changed his horses many times but still lost the competition to Wang and afterwards, King Zhaoxiang blamed Wang for not passing on all his skills. Wang Ziqi replied that King Zhaoxiang should have observed his horses more carefully in order to maintain a harmonious rhythm with them. Impatience, not a lack of skill, led to the king’s defeat.

_Shu (书, calligraphy) & Shu (数, numeracy)._ Calligraphy, for Confucius, is not as much concerned about having beautiful writing as tempering one’s aggressiveness and arrogance, while arithmetic strengthens one’s mental agility and enhances one’s perseverance.

For Confucius, the cultivation of moral virtues is the ultimate purpose of artistic activities: _Li_ (ritual) is anchored on benevolence; _yue_ (music) contributes to harmony; _she_ (archery) cultivates courage; _yu_ (charioteering) facilitates keen observance and sensitivity; _shu_ (calligraphy) promotes temperance; and _shu_ (numeracy) is linked to perseverance and carefulness. Zheng and Sun (2007) suggest that _liuyi_ are correlated with one another; they argue that _liuyi_ are rooted in the core virtue of _ren_ and consider six virtues (wisdom, benevolence, sagehood, justice, the mean and harmony) as their creed (Zheng & Sun, 2007, p. 36–38). If we compare artistic activities to flowers, human virtues would be the roots and without healthy roots, the flowers could not blossom.

Drawing on these understandings, I am interested in imagining how Confucius’ _liuyi_ can be reconceived for today’s schools. Exercising a Confucian understanding of _liuyi_ in today’s teaching does not mean we need to implement his categories literally: Today’s context is significantly different from Confucian era, historically, culturally and politically; nonetheless, Confucius’ teachings of _liuyi_ can still have significant insight for teaching and teacher education.
Teachers and teacher educators should not merely implementers of policies, deliverers of abstract knowledge and masters of techniques. Skills, techniques or technology are not objective and universal tools; they are part of an interactive and artistic process in which human beings are being addressed and their natures are being refined and transformed. What teachers really need to pay attention to is whether these skills, techniques and technology can foster and develop the good. Confucius would criticize the National Teaching Skills Contest and microteaching classes because their very forms exclude the possibility of seeing real human beings exercising their skills. Confucius would suggest that skills should not be promoted independently of human beings. The contest stage needs to be removed and the magnesium lights need to be redirected from the performer-teacher back to teachers, teacher educators, students and all other participants in their pursuit of education. Teachers and teacher educators are encouraged to re-think skills, techniques and technologies through Confucian approaches and reimage their moral significance. What teachers need to bear in mind, based on Confucius, is that the skills, techniques or technology they use or promote in their students inevitably convey moral messages for their students as well as for themselves.

A teaching example might help: Some teachers prefer blind evaluation of student tests while other teachers want to see the names of their students on the papers. These opposed techniques might suggest that the teacher who prefers blind evaluation highly values fairness and equality, while the teacher who prefers to evaluate student papers based on his previous knowledge of students values the uniqueness of each child. She might mark one test paper a little higher to give the student with persistence and diligence encouragement and another paper a little lower to remind a different student to be more self-reflective and humble. For both teachers, grading papers is not simply a neutral tool, but an expression of their values and an indication of
what virtues they wish to promote in their students. In this sense, why, when and how to apply which techniques to whom, really matters.

Despite Confucius’ emphasis on virtue cultivation through liuyi, the master does not consider learning liuyi as implanting virtue templates into people. For Confucius, liuyi are artistic endeavours, bearing characteristics of imagination and creativity: The master says: “Set your heart upon dao [the way]; rely upon de [virtues]; follow ren [humaneness]; swim in yi [liuyi]” (Analects, 7.6). The famous Confucian Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty points out that “liuyi can harmonize one’s emotions [玩物适情之谓]” (Li, 2004, p.193). Li (2004) challenges Zhu’s interpretation and suggests that Zhu Xi didn’t sufficiently reveal the meaning of liuyi for Confucius; Li argues: “The mastery of liuyi would not only bring them emotional happiness or harmony but also enable people to feel like a fish swimming freely in the water” (p. 193). Liuyi for Confucius can be understood as artistic creations that not only harmonize emotions and cultivate virtues, but also stir people’s creativity. Teachers are not supposed to be technicians applying straightforward skill, but artists with passion for imagining and creating.

Having discussed briefly about li in Chapter Three, I now hope to elaborate more on the evolvement of li in Confucian traditions and understand li, the first category of liuyi, and its further contributions to conceiving teaching as imaginative endeavours, filled with emotion. Indeed, li is not only anchored in ren as its ontological foundation, but also intertwined with human emotion and historical and cultural imagination to come alive in people’s hearts.

Li is intimately related to and inseparable from emotion for Confucius and Mencius continues to emphasize the emotions’ roles in different virtues: “Compassionate feeling is at the core of ren. Shameful feeling is at the core of yi. Modest feeling is the core of li. Being able to feel right and wrong is at the core of zhi” (Mencius, 2013, Chapter “Gong Sun Chou”, p. 238–
Confucius also uses imagination to re-create what counts as appropriate rituals; for example, in responding to Lin Fang’s question of “What is the root of li?” the Master said: “Big question! In ceremonies, prefer simplicity to lavishness; in funerals, prefer grief to formality” (Analects, 3.4). The core of the ritual experience does not lie in the skills, format or procedures. Rather, its core meaning is manifest only in the moment of experiencing it with an attentive heart, full of emotion, rich in imagination. However, the institutionalization of Confucianism in the Western Han dynasty rigidified Confucius’ li, which subsequently became a tool for political and social control. In Dong Zhushu’s interpretation of li, three principles determined li: the inferiority and conformity of minister to the emperor; the son to the father; the wife to the husband (Wang, 2004). I believe these interpretations of li deviate greatly from Confucius’ or Mencius’ li: Li in the Western Han dynasty is no longer understood as lively sprouts from the inner roots of human beings, but becomes following governmental rules to ensure societal control. Rigid interpretations of Confucius’ li in the Western Han dynasty are very similar to the technical approaches promoted by the National Basic Teaching Skills Contest and the microteaching class. Neo-Confucianism as the first revival of Confucianism in China is originated in the Tang Dynasty and became prominent during the Song and Ming dynasties. There are two main branches in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism: the Cheng-Zhu branch and the Lu-Wang branch. Zhu Xi (A.D. 1130–1200), a prominent Neo-Confucian scholar in the Cheng-Zhu branch advocates for li as principle (理) rather than as ritual (礼) to guide human conduct. Zhu expresses the need for human beings to suppress and regulate their human nature to preserve and conform to the principle of li. He explains li (理) as principle requires li (礼) as ritual to control or regulate human emotions in order to realize li as principle (Li, 1986). His fundamental understanding of Confucius’ text is “to investigate the principle in the external world objectively
and gain knowledge” (2013, Chapter “Da Xue”, p. 1523). The Lu-Wang branch of Neo-Confucianism, however, stands in sharp contrast to the Cheng-Zhu branch. Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1193) had a famous debate with Zhu recorded as the “Goose Lake Meeting” in 1175, in which Lu argued against Zhu’s dependence on external principle and Lu suggested something simple and intrinsic instead—the study of xin (心, heart). In the Collected Works of Lu Jiuyuan, Lu states: “Xin is all inclusive. Approaching xin leads to tian [天, heavenly principle]. Learning is all about this” (Zhong, 1980, Chapter 35). Wang Yangming (1933/2013), another representative in Lu-Wang branch of Neo-Confucianism, adds that the li of fidelity and loyalty is embedded in the xin. These distinct understandings of li in neo-Confucian thought connect to today’s teaching approaches. Zhu Xi’s interpretation of li as principle reveals an objective and universal conceptualization of li that is close to today’s technical rationality. Following Zhu Xi’s interpretation of li, teachers are encouraged to investigate curriculum guidelines and textbooks to find generic objective and universal skills ready to be taught and tested. In the microteaching class, for example, teacher educators and student teachers zoom in on teaching fragments, isolating and then magnifying them to prepare to deliver them to students. In contrast, the Lu- Wang branch offers a more flexible conception of li that needs to be interpreted using one’s heart. I believe that the neo-Confucians Lu Jiuyuan, Wang Yangming and their followers would find the technical concerns highlighted in the teaching contest, the microteaching classes and many other occasions in teaching and teacher education are rigid and dull. On the grand stage of the Teaching Skills Contest, for instance, teachers were asked about the structure and purpose of their lesson plans and their choice of teaching techniques. One’s heart—what the person might feel, how her heart string is touched and stirred, what she really values and cares about—is pushed into a corner and neglected in the process. Ironically, these are the very concerns that are
central to the Lu-Wang branch’s interpretation of *li*: Teachers would be advised to dwell in the moment with their imaginative and sensitive heart to listen to each unique student, ponder on what they teach, hesitate about how they should respond, and reimagine the possibilities in their teaching. The Lu-Wang branch would suggest the skills promoted in the microteaching classes are not skills central to teaching because such procedures neglect the human heart, including what the students value, what they feel, how they judge, how they interpret their experience. *The New Confucian Manifesto*, for example, follows the Lu-Wang branch of neo-Confucianism in articulating a belief in the imaginative and creative heart as the key inner resource and *li* as its manifestation (Zhang, Tang, Xu, & Mou, 1958).

For Confucius, particularly in the interpretations of Lu-Wang branch and many new Confucians, teachers must be always attuned to their imaginative spirit and sensitive heart. Skills and techniques must be the expressions of the creative and imaginative heart; for example, when the students do teamwork, we might divide the groups randomly (e.g. by calling numbers), voluntarily (some students might often prefer to stay together) or purposefully (deliberately arrange some students together in a group). As teachers, we should not do this for the sake of merely using teamwork as a technique; we need to observe the dynamics in different groups and respond to them with sensitivity. We might imagine how a particular child could learn from another; we might create a chance for the students to sit besides someone that they do not usually sit together with; we might just have a quiet talk with students after class about how they feel in their group. We would not push the quiet students to speak in order to participate “more actively” in their group discussions, but imagine alternate ways for them to express themselves, like drawing or writing a story. We might even imagine that keeping quiet itself could be a form of emotional expression.
Confucius’ approach to *yue* (music), similar to *li* (especially in Lu-Wang branch’s interpretations), also highlights the importance of emotional commitment and the involvement of creativity and imagination. *Yue* is often mentioned in parallel with *li* in the Confucius’ conversation with Zai Yu. In *Li Ji* we can read Confucius’ description of music as “the spontaneous expression of human heart” and music is “the activity of human emotions” (Chapter “Yue Ji”, p. 1377). As with *li*, we can observe the emotional presence in *yue*: The words emotional pleasure (乐) and music (乐) in Chinese are the same characters. When Confucius learned music from Shi Xiang Zi, he learned about the music lines, rhythms and spirits, but then reflected deeply upon what he had learned and eventually understood how music fostered emotional harmony and human virtue, that is, “the close integration between the human and the cosmic order” (Dawson, 1981, p. 36). Hall and Ames (1987) contend that creativity is required in ritual as well as in music and liken ritual practice with playing jazz: Ritual participants, like jazz musicians, seem to employ the same lyrics, but actually no lyrics are identical because they depend on shifting emotions, understandings, and experience. Ritual and music both require full emotional, intellectual and spiritual participation to be meaningful. Although both *li* and *yue* are carefully structured architectonic activities, they require more than simple technical correctness: Heart and imagination must suffuse both *li* and *yue* for authentic expression. Confucius would suggest that the skills and techniques promoted in teaching and teacher education should be transformed from being cold instruments of teaching, to creative and emotional endeavours.

**Complicating the “How-to”s**

I detect similar concerns in Aristotle’s and Confucius’ works on the relationship between art and cultivating moral virtues. For Aristotle, training in music, like the enactment of poetry, song, and dance, promotes virtues. In *Politics*, for example, Aristotle writes: “Rhythm and
melody provide keen likenesses of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance and of all the opposites of these and of all the other states of character” (1340a15–28). For Confucius “archery, calligraphy, the martial arts, painting, swordsmanship and flower arrangement all came to be seen as activities that could be stimuli to and manifestations of virtue” (Van Norden, 2013, p. 60). Phronetic techne and liuyi both complicate the managerial approaches to teaching and help us to reflect on technical concerns and to understand the “how-to”s of teaching differently. Skills and technology can be re-understood as art forms that are embedded in particulars, carry moral messages and need to be interpreted in light of what counts as a good and worthwhile human life. To cultivate virtues, phronesis taps into techne to bring it “back to the rough ground” (Dunne, 1993) of particulars and demands that it respond to the particular context; similarly Confucius’ liuyi cannot be separated from contexts since their value depends on the particular person in that situation. The teacher-artist-maker may deviate from her plan, attune to the process, reimagine the possibilities and improvise in response to the contexts.

Creativity and imagination are crucial to Confucius’ liuyi. As I continue to ponder the story of Confucius learning music from Shi Xiang Zi, I notice the master would not be satisfied with playing the song without error; he searched for meaning in the song and when Sing Xiang Zi suggested to him to move on to practice another song he determined to find the human virtues embedded in that song. In playing a musical instrument, Confucius “swims” freely in it, imagines the links between the music and its meaning, creatively reconstructs the human virtues in the song. Liuyi shed new light on the teaching: Following Confucius, understanding skills includes not just their technical dimensions, but appreciating their artistic commitment to new possibilities for human beings. Liuyi are characterized by imagination and improvisation in the making process to bring out something good—qualities shared by phronetic techne.
Ironically, I believe that the conversation linking Confucius’ and Aristotle’s ideas about the “how-to”s of teaching might be facilitated by the works of an American thinker who lived several thousand years later: John Dewey (1859–1952 CE). I believe Dewey’s understanding of aesthetic and artistic experience can enrich the conversation. In Art as Experience (1934/2005), Dewey suggests that the aesthetic is not opposed to the practical or the intellectual—but by aesthetic he does not mean the current meaning that is largely a synonym for the artistic (e.g., artistic beauty), but perception or sensation (derived from the Greek aesthesis), consistent with human experience. Dewey’s interpretation reflects the traditions of 19th century philosophy and Kant’s first Critique. For Dewey, aesthetic experience can be understood through Aristotle’s “mean proportional,” that is, the “properties belonging to an experience that has a developing movement toward its own consummation” (1934/2005, p. 42). Activities consistent with aesthetic experience include observing, perceiving, adjusting and responding, while, in contrast, artistic activities include making or doing. Reconceiving the relationship between aesthetic and artistic as undergoing and making activities respectively helps us to connect teaching to the artistic/aesthetic relationship and provide a thicker meaning for educational teaching. The materials can disturb and challenge the teacher’s original intentions and thereby generate new directions, new ideas. Dewey describes as the aesthetic as open, dynamic and imaginative, resistant to being shrunk to become a procedural skill-set or toolbox. Dewey (1934/2005) writes:

To be truly artistic, a work must also be esthetic [aesthetic]. . . . Constant observation is necessary for the maker while he is producing. But if his perception is not also esthetic [aesthetic] in nature, it is a colorless and cold recognition of what has been done, used as a stimulus to the next step in a process that is essentially mechanical. (pp. 49–50)

Undergoing and making in artistic/aesthetic endeavours inform one another: Teachers
usually prepare an initial lesson plan; however, as they open themselves to particular and mutable circumstances and material, the plan must yield. The teacher is constantly responding to her ongoing encounters rather than straightforwardly executing a plan. She undergoes receptively and perceives imaginatively what she is doing with the materials, including the students, the teaching subjects, and the classroom setting. With receptivity and imagination consistent with aesthetic experience, the teacher can shape and reshape her judgment and take more informed action. To teach aesthetically and artistically, the teacher will be therefore be “not only gifted in powers of execution but in unusual sensitivity to the qualities of things. This sensitivity also directs [her] doings and makings” (p. 51).

Indeed, Dewey (1934/2005) helps me challenge the goal-oriented approach of most current understandings of teaching:

Between the poles of aimlessness and mechanical efficiency, there lie those courses of action in which through successive deeds there runs a sense of growing meaning conserved and accumulating toward an end that is felt as accomplishment of a process. (p. 40)

In light of Dewey’s conception of artistic/aesthetic experience, teaching is not merely the achievement of pre-determined ends. Instead, teaching requires a deep and intimate knowledge of the materials (Milliken, 2006), aesthetic awareness of the changing and evolving circumstances and a sophisticated mastery of technique in order to help the materials realize their own ends in a dialogic process. In sum, Dewey’s understanding of experience helps me challenge the craft notion of techne and transform it to become an artistic/aesthetic endeavour, fusing making and undergoing.
A Radical Challenge

Aristotle himself repeatedly emphasizes the supremacy of the act over potentiality (Lewis, 2015). Agamben (2013) observes,

In this sense the potential-act distinction in Aristotle is certainly ontological . . . nevertheless, precisely because it introduces a division into being and afterward affirms the primacy of *energia* [actualization] over *dynamis* [potential], it implicitly contains an orientation of being toward operativity. (p. 57)

Confucius seems to share this understanding: His fundamental creed includes cultivating *junzi* and acting well in the world. Understanding teaching as an artistic endeavour directed at acting virtuously, in both Aristotelian and Confucian languages, now provokes another question for me: when teaching is framed as an artistic endeavour around promoting and practicing virtues, what might it neglect in its orientation toward actualization?

I believe that Agamben’s more radical understanding of art can complicate the understanding of teaching as artistic activity by pointing out that both teachers and students can “prefer not to” (Melville, 1997, p. 10), that is, retain their impotentiality by suspending its actualization, even the actualization of virtues. Agamben (1999a) uses Aristotle’s *De Anima* to examine two kinds of potentiality denoted by Aristotle: a stronger sense to indicate how something could be done well and a weaker sense of potential, meaning simply that something might chance to happen or not to happen. To elaborate, the stronger sense of potentiality determines what children must learn in order to become the people that others expect them to become, that is, it transform a contingency to a necessity. Education, in this sense, is concerned with “deadlines—or lines that end with the death of potentiality” (Lewis, 2014, p. 277). The kind of potentiality that especially interests Agamben, however, is the capacity to bring knowledge
into actuality—or not, that is, potentiality/impotentiality. Impotentiality refers to someone who can bring his knowledge and capacity into actuality, but would prefer not to; she “suspend[s] the functioning of obedience through ‘preferring not’ to act as such and such a subject within the allotted order of things” (Lewis, 2014, p. 276).

Agamben ties art to (im)potentiality. For Agamben, the “‘aesthetic’ in ancient thought referred to sensibility in general, but it is reduced to artistic works and products in modernity (1999b). Agamben (1999b) sees an urgent need to recover more fully the meaning of the artistic and the aesthetic:

Perhaps nothing is more urgent—if we really want to engage the problem of art in our time—than a destruction of aesthetics that would, by clearing away what is usually taken for granted, allow us to bring into question the very meaning of aesthetics as the science of the work of art. (p.6)

I agree with Colebrook’s interpretation that:

[For Agamben,] art is neither the expression of an already existing subject nor the realization of an implicit humanity that must come to realization. Art is open relationality, a relation or potential to, where the infinitive is not governed by anything that already is. Art releases us from both a politics and an ontology of substance—what is—to a politics of potentiality: a future of open, unimpeded becoming. (2008, p. 112)

Agamben’s conception of art, I believe, defies the sense of actualization and dwells in the space of “would prefer not to.” Art has rhythms and patterns of its own and lets go of a sense of an ending, and more importantly, it “does not even desire one” (Agamben, 1995, p. 64).

Committed to Agamben’s notion of art, one could temporarily suspend the forces of the “economic, social, cultural, religious, or political pervading institutions that would influence,
cajole, or direct students” (Phelan, 2015, p. 31). Art is not solely about challenging existing norms: It can also involve withdrawing from them to allow distance and spaciousness.

Agamben’s conception of art challenges Aristotle’s and Confucius’ ideas about artistic activities that aim at virtue cultivation or making certain kinds of people. He encourages teachers to resist, withhold and withdraw from actualizing the potentiality of their students. Indeed, both teachers and students can say, like Bartleby in Melville’s short story, “I would prefer not to” (1997, p. 10). Bartleby’s refusal to check the accuracy of his work can be understood as an interruption of testing and examination; it is “a slow and steady withdrawal from not only the logic of examination, but also the logic of actualization” (Lewis, 2014, p. 283). Students in schools can prefer not to “maximize their potential”; teachers can decide not to win the teaching contest or do well in the microteaching class. Indeed, the teacher can decide not to aim at promoting certain virtues in herself or in her students. The suspension of actualizing one’s potential therefore should not be regarded as a deficiency, but a choice to be made. In its fundamentally open relationship with human experience, art can profane the dominant systems and suspend any necessity to actualize anyone’s potential. Agamben’s (1999b) notion of art as the challenging of the logic of actualization could therefore be a powerful critique of both Aristotle’s and Confucius’ understanding of teaching as artistic activities promoting virtues and the current dominant idea of teaching as mastering the tricks of techne.
Chapter 6: Becoming A Teacher Does Not Come That Easily

As long as we are alive and human we will have to tolerate and take risks (Lear, 2006, p. 121).

I went through the schooling system in China—from elementary school, middle school to university—watching and listening to different teachers before becoming a teacher myself in the high school where I worked for seven years. As I stepped onto my teaching podium in front of the class and began to wave my baton of white chalk, I saw myself as a commander preparing for yet another victory. Over time, however, the triumphs became more familiar and less satisfying: I was losing the magic and joy that I imagined for myself when I was a young girl standing on my toes peering into my mother’s classroom.

Currently, many teachers, like me until recently, see themselves as playing the roles of “factory workers” or “technicians” (Pinar, 2004, p. 27-30) while some of them “have been ‘promoted’ from the assembly line to the corporate office where they serve as ‘managers of student learning’” (p. 5). I have gradually come to realize that the current options available to conceive good teaching fail because they narrow the scope of educational teaching to helping people to pass tests and to prepare for the workplace (with the school as an apprentice workplace). My confusion and dissatisfaction with my own teaching after I was awarded the teaching skills trophy, my mother’s learning to teach experiences, my interactions with my teachers and my observations of my son’s schooling in Canada, have all combined to awaken my passion to (re)search teaching. In effect, my “fidelity to teaching . . . has brought my teacherly activities into question” (Lear, 2011, p. 21). The significant events in my teaching practice stories that current frameworks fail to account for are like the overflow of water in a stream:
They tumble over and crash into a stone dam and in response, the dam seems shaky and unsteady, prone to collapse; repairing and rebuilding the dam may be dangerous, but necessary. As the daughter of a teacher, a student, a teacher and mother of a student, I continue to wonder about what it means to be a teacher. I feel called by the question: “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?”

**Understanding Integrity with Aristotle and Confucius**

I understand teaching as a fundamentally ethical activity and I hope to focus on moral languages to understand teaching. Greene (1978, p. 51) reminds us “fundamental to the whole process [of teaching] may be the building up of a sense of moral directness, of oughtness.” Pring observed that: “Little has been written about education itself as essentially a moral practice” (2001, p. 102). In the past twenty years, however, more and more attention has been paid to the moral dimensions of teaching (Heilbronn, 2008; Higgins, 2011; Sockett, 2012; Sherman, 2013; Sockett, 2018). I contend that moral languages are essential in order for teachers to understand why they teach, what ends they should pursue and which means they should select. Pinar (2004) reminds us, “Teachers still face the challenge to become more than they have been conceived and conditioned to be. . . . They need to avoid the disappearance of their ideals into the maelstrom of daily classroom demands” (p. 30). I trust that recovering moral languages for teaching can help to initiate discussions about what it means to teach with integrity.

Etymologically, integrity often refers to oneness or wholeness, that is, “to be a thing, one thing, a unity, an entity, to be anything at all” (Korsgaard, 1992, p. 84), but integrity can also designate possessing and exercising good character. I am interested in the fusion of both meanings in my search for a coherent practical identity of teacher. Korsgaard (1992) explains: “We use [integrity] for someone who lives up to his own standards . . . [and] living up to [certain
ideals and excellences] is what makes him one, and so what makes him a person at all” (p. 84). To lose integrity is to lose a sense of what one stands for, to no longer to be able to think of yourself “under the description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions worth taking” (Korsgaard, 1992, p. 84). Similarly, a teacher’s integrity demands a sense of wholeness, that is, a sense of what she believes she stands for as a teacher. Aristotelian and Confucian languages can help me inquire into what constitutes good teaching, what counts as a good teacher and what ideals, excellences and roles are consistent with being a good teacher—a search outside the scope of current managerial discourses. I have committed to searching for a new practical identity of an educational teacher using reimagined resources from Aristotle and Confucius. My quest involves:

1. Thinning the ideals and virtues or the standards of excellences associated with managerial schemes as well as with Aristotle and Confucius;
2. Attending to the excesses in my stories in order to discover new and meaningful particulars;
3. Generating possibilities for new ideals, excellences and roles consistent with Aristotelian and Confucian frameworks;
4. Creating a new middle ground between cultures, between past and future, to imagine my practical identity as teacher.

To date I have questioned, challenged and hence thinned the ideals and virtues in the dominant framework, uncovered significant aspects in my teaching practice that my stories reveal and begun to thicken and reimagine important resources for understanding my teaching ideals (*eudaimonia* and *dao*), for developing and practicing the excellences of judgment consistent with educational relationships (*phronesis, philia* and *ren*) and for the art of teaching well (*phronetic*
In this chapter I suggest some possible roles for a teacher that follow from the pursuit of these ideals and the exercise of these virtues and assess how and whether these ideals, excellences and roles can help me to construct my practical identity and answer my central question, “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?”

**Forming the Practical Identity of a Teacher**

I understand that forming a practical identity as a teacher involves more than employment status; it includes understanding what counts as good or educational teaching. The teacher organizes her life and shapes her lived stories around often tacit understandings of certain ideals and excellences, that is, the practical identity of the teacher is constantly being formed, re-formed and transformed in particular encounters. Finding significant examples in my teaching experiences can point toward my inchoate practical identity and so my search for a more robust and publicly defensible practical identity as a teacher begins with my teaching stories.

I then bring Aristotle and Confucius, with their shared interests in what counts as a virtuous life, into dialogue with my stories to both understand and reimagine what a virtuous life of teaching might look like. Aristotle contends that virtuous people are those who act with *phronesis*: they nurture their natural and habituated virtue along with their practical reason to develop and exercise the requisite moral and intellectual virtues in order to act well—primarily as citizens in an ancient Greek city state. In contrast, Confucius emphasizes the cultivation of *ren*—a “concrete universal” that encompasses such moral virtues as *gong* (respect), *kuan* (forgiveness), *xin* (trust), *min* (sensitivity) and *hui* (generosity)—in order to become a virtuous familial and societal member in the Spring and Autumn period, as exemplified, however, in the Western Zhou Dynasty. Confucius aims to cultivate *junzi*, that is, “an exemplary individual who is fully immersed in social relatedness and practical life” (Peimin, 2009, p. 315).
From my exploration of teaching stories in the company of Aristotle and Confucius, I have learned about the challenges of selecting educational ideals or ends (Chapter Three); about making educational judgments in relationship with other people (Chapter Four); and about the possibility of reconceiving the relationship between skill and educational purpose in teaching (Chapter Five). In these thematic discussions, I see new possibilities for understanding some of the roles that I must fulfill consistent with my practical identity as teacher. I see possibilities of understanding the teacher as being an educational guide, an educational friend and an educational artist in contrast with the dominant current roles as commander, bureaucrat and manager.

The teacher-guide. Consistent with my teleological quest, I inquire about the end(s) of teaching in Chapter Three. Eudaimonia and dao both offer renewed ideals for teaching; Aristotle and Confucius each believe that the ultimate human ideal or telos is to live a good and worthwhile life, while disagreeing about the character of that life. Aristotle aims at fostering citizenry, people who discern, judge and act well in different contexts, while for Confucius dao fosters good societal members who live moral lives in relationship with others. Aristotle and Confucius, in different but related ways, can help us redirect the focus from external and economic goals to the life of virtue.

Aristotle and Confucius both emphasize the importance of habituation for a virtuous life. For Aristotle, phronesis provides an important corrective to natural and habituated virtue, while Confucius emphasizes the role of li in hua, that is, in performing, recreating and reimagining certain rituals, one can learn patterns of acting ethically in the world. The habituating processes for both Aristotle and Confucius require a certain degree of conformity: to search for the good as the human telos involves, of necessity, cooperation with other people.
Teachers might therefore be compared to teacher-guides who are expected to lead their student-newcomers toward *eudaimonia* and *dao*, both of which are being interpreted and re-created in each unique human life, that is, lived in the midst of and dependent on other human beings. *Eudaimonia* requires one to constantly explain, question, reflect on and challenge one’s own actions in relationship with others to reach a defensible *telos*, while *dao* is embodied, re-interpreted and re-created in each unique individual within a collective. The pursuits of *eudaimonia* and *dao* are, of necessity, dynamic and creative endeavours. Unlike the teacher-commander or teacher-bureaucrat, the teacher-guide is not someone who determines the route(s) or delimits boundaries: The teacher-guide invites the student-newcomer to join her in exploring and creating the way toward *eudaimonia* or *dao* in particular circumstances. The teacher-guide does not determine, but imagines with her students the beautiful landscapes of a good and worthwhile life and encourages students to make their appearances and add their newness to the existing world. Though more experienced than the newcomers, the teacher-guide is always intrigued by new encounters and experiences: perhaps remarking a flower blossom, noticing a snowflake, or discovering an unknown trail. In particular, the teacher-guide renders the familiar unfamiliar by asking questions, improvising in contexts, changing angles, and editing actions; she lets herself be addressed in every encounter with the student-newcomer. The teacher-guide and student-newcomer jointly explore what might constitute a good and worthwhile life now and in the future.

Of course, not every teacher is such a guide. Mr. Wang, for example, always asked his students to follow his instructions in silence and agree with his opinions; he deprived his students of any opportunity for conversation. Docile students and self-righteous teachers are often the products of such teaching. In comparison, when I asked my student Bo to leave the classroom
because he used a ridiculous tone to imitate what I had said, I noticed the whole class watching me. Their expressions prompted me to challenge myself as a teacher. The teacher-guide, according to both Aristotle and Confucius, is someone who dares to make mistakes, raise questions, and change course in the journey. MacIntyre (1998) explains: “Through a process of learning, making mistakes, correcting those mistakes and so moving towards the achievement of excellence, the individual comes to understand her or himself as in via, in the middle of a journey” (p. 140). The teacher-guide and the student-newcomer walk the road together.

Having re-imagined the teacher as guide, I see some pedagogical implications and historical circumstances that may complicate such an understanding of teaching. While teachers have often been criticized for exercising excessive control over students and changing the teacher’s role from manager to guide-helper might be seen as “liberating and progressive” (Biesta, 2017, p. 2), Biesta cautions that shifting attention from the teacher teaching to the learner learning could fail to capture the significance of teaching and the teacher. He argues:

The rise of the language and logic of learning has transformed the teacher from a “sage on the stage” to a “guide on the side”—a facilitator of learning, as the expression goes—and even, according to some, to a “peer at the rear”. . . such learning-centred depictions of education tend to provide rather unhelpful and in my view ultimately misleading accounts of what teaching is, what the work of the teacher is, and what students might gain from encounters with teaching and teachers. (Biesta, 2017, pp. 1-2)

The teacher as guide who walks alongside her students and discovers new territory with them may miss the point of educational teaching. Destinations matter. Educational teachers are not merely “guides on the side” or even “peers at the rear.” Teachers who aim to educate need to take their educational responsibilities seriously. Educational teachers, for example, aim to create
“existential possibilities through which students can encounter their freedom, can encounter the ‘call’ to exist in the world in a grown-up way, [being in the world, without being in the centre of the world], as subject” (Biesta, 2017, p. 6).

I realize that the conception of teacher as guide may run into difficulties when fundamental questions are posed. Perhaps most importantly, Aristotle and Confucius assume that a life of eudaimonia or dao is only applicable to certain people (i.e., men), excluding others (i.e., women). For Aristotle and Confucius, to guide some to become good citizens (in ancient Athens only about 15% of the population) or junzi (even fewer) often means excluding others. Most people disappear. To conceive teacher as guide towards eudaimonia or dao can be problematic because of the bias toward certain forms of a good and worthwhile life. I consistently use “her” to refer to a teacher in my thesis not only because I focus on stories of my mother or myself, but also because I hope to challenge and counter the deeply entrenched patriarchal culture of Aristotle’s and Confucius’s era (a bias that, of course, persists) and claim the sovereignty of “her” as a teacher. I also realize in more plural and democratic societies, there may be no agreed end(s) or destination(s) for education, or there may indeed be impossible destinations—that is, possibilities that are not foreseeable (Biesta, 2017). Questions arise such as: Who does the teacher guide? To where does she guide? Why there? And, following Biesta (2017), how does one guide students to an impossible destination?

The teacher-friend. To make ethical judgments (or make any judgment), one needs to perceive the concrete situation, understand and learn from particular others and negotiate some notion of the good. I explained in Chapter Four how Aristotle and Confucius emphasize the interplay between the general and the particular to make ethical judgments in relationship with others. Phronetic teachers render their previous plans flexible so that they can develop
understandings and actions congruent with appropriate educational ends for individual people at that time and in that place. People with ren, like the phronemi, determine the mean between extremes in their particular experiences. Ren, as a concrete universal instantiated in different moral virtues, encourages one to discern and make judgments in context. The discernment and judgment of ren is anchored in attending to the particular person and contributing to her living a good life in relationship with others.

Realizing the embeddedness of making ethical judgments in human relationships, I then supplement phronesis with philia to deepen educational relationships: Philia, translated as friendship, reminds us of the importance of mutual respect and regard in educational relationships. Confucian ren needs no such supplement, however and is well illustrated by the friend-like relationships between Confucius and his disciples; moreover, ren is also characterized by its welcoming of the newness and the uniqueness that the young bring into the world.

Both Aristotle and Confucius understand the role of teacher as a teacher-friend to the student. For Aristotle, the teacher-friend respects the student-friend and nurtures his character while simultaneously developing her own integrity in their interactions. For Confucius, the teacher-friend cares about and trusts the student-friend, appreciates the newness that the student-friend brings into the world and—most of all—loves the student-friend. The teacher-friend and the student-friend jointly cultivate their virtues both for their benefit and the society’s.

My stories are filled with examples of teacher-friendship. The teacher-friend has patience to listen to the student-friend who just hit another student; the teacher-friend shows sympathy for the student who read a forbidden book in school and gives her a book wrapper to protect and encourage her; the teacher-friend puts a jacket over the shoulders of the student-friend who fell asleep during her class; the teacher-friend starts a drawing club for a student-friend to bring a
smile to her face. The teacher-friend always tries to make educational judgments by listening to particular others, understand them, build loving relationships with them in order to help them learn what will help them to lead good and worthwhile lives while safeguarding the uniqueness that they bring into the world.

In contrast, the teacher-manager is expected to have the expertise to always achieve the predetermined outcomes: The teacher-manager is expected to supervise the student-worker or serve the student-client by designing and implementing flawless procedures that incorporate evidence-based methods in order to achieve the target results. In contrast, the teacher-friend enjoys a close and authentic relationship with the student-friend, tries to learn about the student-friend and improvises in context to create educational possibilities. In my encounter with Yanglei, for example, I failed as a teacher-manager. I did not discipline him by making him an example in front of his peers so that they—unlike him—would follow the school rules. When I saw his burning red face, his clenched fists and his glare I was uncertain about what happened to him and didn’t know what to do. Like a teacher-friend, however, I rendered myself vulnerable and humble in front of my student-friend rather than begin to implement the required discipline policy. I was able to shed my previous prejudice against Yanglei and improvise my action: I placed my hands on his shoulders and encouraged him to share his reasons, explanations and feelings with me.

Like my mother’s “wading across the stream by feeling the pebbles,” a teacher-friend often renders herself close to and even vulnerable to the student-friend or the particular other. The teacher-friend is neither trapped with her feet in the stream nor marches boldly towards the opposite bank, but tries to feel the pebbles and adjust her steps accordingly, hand in hand with the student-friend. They listen to each other, help each other, and respect each other without
necessarily agreeing. The teacher-friend questions, reflects, moves backwards, steps forward and even takes the risks of being pulled into the water by the student-friend. Their ultimate goal may not be to march cross the river together. Instead, they may both grow stronger in each other’s company and become better human beings in their friendship and mutual support.

I also realize that a conception of a teacher’s role as friend may create important challenges. Relationships between friends generally involve equal status and equal responsibility; however, I believe teachers and students often have (and need to have) asymmetrical roles and responsibilities. Mutuality in friendships between teachers and students is often hard to attain and sustain and we should not ignore the often-unequal power dynamics between teachers and students. The teacher is often granted more power and brings more experience to the relationship. Indeed, the teacher has unique responsibilities. Conceiving the teacher as the teacher-friend as a peer of the student-friend may not only ignore the power inequality between the teacher and the student and therefore fall short of addressing it, but also neglect their asymmetrical responsibilities. The teacher not only accompanies the student as a friend, but also has responsibility to educate the student—to introduce the world to him and invite him to make his unique appearance in that world. In the process, rather than simply befriend one another, both the teacher and the student need to acknowledge and appreciate the “alterity and integrity of what and who is other” (Biesta, 2017, p. 13). The assumed familiarity and similarity in virtues between friends are to be questioned and challenged. Instead of persuading the teacher to be a friend with her student, I believe I need to call the teacher’s attention to the significance of the enigmatic student-stranger and the call from the ultimate alterity of student-the other.
The teacher-artist. Confucius and Aristotle have very different understandings of skill, as captured by Aristotle’s *techne* and Confucius’ *liuyi* described in Chapter Five. While Confucius has no universal theory of making, he is interested in how the mastery of certain artistic activities can promote the acquisition of important virtues that contribute to leading a good life. Aristotle, in contrast, explains that *techne* is a general making activity that can be generated “when from many notions gained by experience a universal judgment about a group of similar things arises” (*Metaphysics*, 981a5-7). Aristotelian *techne* with its features of universality, teachability, precision and explanation (Nussbaum, 2001) has been enormously influential in modernity largely because of its scalability: *Technai* can be applied to all making activities in which both the initial material and final results are similar and predetermined because procedures are clear and teachable and the results are measurable. Modern schooling prompted the development of the teaching *technai* that I learned in my teacher education classes and in-service sessions. “Mastering the tricks,” however, was insufficient. I felt that something was missing and kept asking myself questions such as: How I could justify my teaching decisions? Is there a perfect method for teaching? Why do the “advanced” teaching skills and techniques not always work in my class?

My search for answers led me to Nussbaum’s analysis of the modern version of *techne* and to Dunne’s (1993) critique of the current use of *techne* for teaching. Dunne’s efforts to reconnect *techne* with direct experience reveal a central problem with understanding teaching as *techne*: The “group of similar things” required for *techne* are people. Children may be similar, but certainly not as comparable as stone, clay, paint or wood. Dunne’s response is to link *techne* to *phronesis* to recognize the human—and therefore ethical—aspects of teaching. *Phronetic*
*techne* and *liuyi* therefore jointly help us transform our understanding from teaching as a making activity to teaching as an ethical-artistic endeavour to foster human virtue.

I now understand how a teacher might be compared to an educational artist by both Aristotle and Confucius, that is, an artist who inspires the good in human lives. In light of *phronetic techne* and *liuyi*, the teacher’s role as a technician might be transformed into an artist who attends to the material—but in this case, the “material” could be other human beings (and in many cases, especially vulnerable human beings). Unlike teacher-technicians who apply their skill to implement the procedure in order to attain predetermined results, teacher-artists appreciate their student-material, improvise, imagine, and create new possibilities in the pursuit of the true and good.

Such a relationship, however, is in danger of invoking images of the teacher as potter and student as clay to be moulded. The teacher-artist and student-material relationship seems to be enriching, but at the same time problematic and troubling: It does not seem to acknowledge the agency of the student-material. Students should not be only materials for teachers to work on or to shape or mould; they have autonomy and agency to make (or not to make) certain changes in their lives. Further, the underlying assumption for the teacher-artist and student-material relationship is that the teacher as artist knows about what is beautiful and good, or at least has artistic taste, while the student as material does not know or have the ability to make changes to themselves or others. I agree with Lewis’ (2015) critique of Biesta (2013): “The teacher educator issues the imperative ‘be wise!’ (p. 173). Indeed, to act wisely and tastefully and to help students to actualize their potential seem to be imperatives for both Aristotle and Confucius. Teacher-artists, I realize however, even in their most exquisite and careful carving and shaping, may still do violence to the student-material and compromise the student’s agency.
One response is perhaps to understand the educational artist as a kind of performance artist interacting with other people. I believe performing arts may suggest a different kind of relationship between the teacher and the student: Instead of considering the teacher as the artist and the student as the material, the teacher and the student might both be artists, expressing themselves in their performance without aiming to create any external “art objects.” Like playing in a jazz ensemble, teacher-artists and student-artists would be devoted to the moments of being together, respond to one another and improvise together without accomplishing any pre-determined goal. Such a relationship might still be problematic, however, by prompting new tensions between artists about autonomy, direction and responsibilities.

Finding a Middle Ground

Having faithfully followed Lear’s research strategy in *Radical Hope*, I am now in a position to attempt to find a middle ground between cultures, between past and present where I can bring the ideals, excellences and roles I have described into dialogue to generate a coherent and defensible practical identity as teacher. All of the above aims at cultivating integrity, that is, a coherent practical identity of teacher; however, teleological approaches to ethics advocated by Aristotelians and Confucians presume a degree of consensus about the good life that is inconsistent with modern pluralistic, democratic societies and their ideas about who gets to decide what is true, good, right—and educational. Confucius and Aristotle each anchor their philosophical ideal in a homogeneous schema: Confucius bases his conception of *li* on the West Zhou Dynasty and his practices on the Zhou Dynasty; Aristotle’s central intellectual virtue, *phronesis*, assumes a coherent ethical schema consistent with the ancient Athenian *polis* and in consequence fails to appreciate moments that humble and thwart its teleological pursuit.
Indeed, as Greene (1973) suggests, “no single schema or category can be sufficient for organizing the flux of reality” (p. 9). Caputo (1993) seems to offer a solution to Greene’s as well as my concerns with his notion of meta-phronesis, that is, “the ability to cope with, to judge among, competing and incommensurable schemata” (1993, p. 102). Caputo claims that meta-phronesis is a more radically conceived phronesis that “undergoes a colder, more merciless exposure to events” (1993, p. 102) and does not presume a general agreement or consensus about a telos. Meta-phronesis can push one close up “against the face of ethics” (Caputo, 1993, p 103), with the potential of transforming the singular notion of goodness in the teleological pursuit. In significant ways I now understand both my research problem and my research strategy as attempts at meta-phronesis.

Leaving my home in Beijing, China for Vancouver seven years ago helped me distance myself physically from many of my familiar frameworks. Moreover, my studies at a Canadian university and my observations of my son’s schooling experiences in his Canadian school and his Chinese weekend school disrupted my ideas of what counted as education and good teaching. Marvin’s as well as my own experiences in distinct cultural schemata challenge and push the boundaries that Aristotle and Confucius delimit. I hope to question the possibility of integrity as an accomplished whole in Aristotelian and Confucian thought while still pursuing the idea that a practical identity as an educational teacher is still feasible. In consequence, I began to wonder how teachers might develop a more defensible and comprehensive notion of education in a pluralistic and democratic society in order to construct their practical identities—a process that involves negotiating among multiple schemata, that is, Caputo’s meta-phronesis.
My son came to Canada when he was two years old. In his first day at daycare, I decided to choose an English name for him since his Chinese name, Xi Ziqian (习子骞) was very difficult for English speakers to pronounce. I chose Marvin for him because Marvin in its Chinese translation is ma wen (马文), the name carrying my family name ma (马) and also my hope for him as being well educated and refined (文). After two years of daycare he went to a kindergarten in a Vancouver public school and is now in grade 5.

I remember accompanying him to his classroom on his first day in his new school. In Chinese elementary schools the desks and chairs are arranged in rows and students are supposed to sit on their chairs with their mouths closed and hands clasped behind their backs; they are surrounded by blank walls with only a large clock hanging beside the national flag at the front. In Marvin’s classroom, however, there were mats scattered on the floor, chairs were grouped around tables; photos, drawing and various artworks lined the walls. To my surprise, I couldn’t find any exercise books to drill for numeracy and literacy; instead there were class library books that Marvin could borrow to read with huge enjoyment at the breakfast table, on the sofa, on the carpet, in the car. Moreover, sometimes Marvin would bring home different shapes of leaves or stones he collected from their outdoor learning on Wednesdays or in the forest on his way home from school. At the end of the term, rather than having a series of examinations like Chinese elementary school students, Marvin and his classmates had learning celebrations that included plays and arts and crafts exhibitions. At the end of each term, instead of receiving Marvin’s scores for each subject as I expected, I received report cards filled with encouraging words and comments.
What impressed me most was the student-led conference in the second term in his grade one class. Marvin held my hand with a cheerful face and led me to his little table in the class. He showed me his favourite journals, art works, drawings, his favourite readings and carefully introduced me to every detail in them. Suddenly, he seemed to remember something and rushed to his teacher Cathy and whispered something secretly into her ear. After Cathy’s response, he said aloud: “Yes! Thank you, Cathy!” and rushed back to me and showed me the little figures of his teachers, principal, and classmates that he had “secretly” drawn in class. The whispering in his teacher’s ear, the loud thank you and the secret portraiture of his teachers all contrasted dramatically with Marvin’s subdued and very careful manner with his Chinese teacher Mrs. Yan when I picked Marvin up at the end of the day. He was very shy when he talked with his teacher: his eyes dodging, voice lowered, he asked, “Mrs. Yan, did I get a good score this time? Is it over ninety?”

Marvin and I encountered multiple incompatible schemata in moving to Canada from China. For Marvin, creating portraits of his teachers in his Canadian school was an achievement to be shared with his teacher and mother, while it would have been seen as a sign of profound disrespect if I had done the same as a student in China. Marvin understood the distinctions: He interacted differently with Cathy and Mrs. Yan. Ironically, after Marvin returned from school each day, I often asked him: “How was your school day? Was it good?” Now, however, I realize that my inquiry raises questions about what counts as good and what it means to act well: Is drawing a portrait a sign of affection and belonging or of insolence and disrespect? Does whispering to a teacher show one’s love or presumption? What seems significant in my stories
are not only the different understandings and interpretations of similar acts under different circumstances, but also how different cultures define what is good and desirable.

When confronted with very different schemata or distinct understandings of goodness, we often attempt to reconcile them and develop a thinner, but more coherent, understanding about what counts as good. The tension between thick versions of goodness in different schemata can easily render us confused or uneasy. Nonetheless, we must still negotiate the different claims to virtue and bring them to a dialogue in our particular circumstance to understand them better.

Caputo (1993) writes: “The phronimos brings a schema to bear on events and finds a formula that is good here and now. Phronesis is a way of staying loose in a binding situation” (p. 99). Caputo points out that the narrow focus of teleological approaches to ethics depends on a “homologic schema” (1993, p. 113), that is, a logic of the same. Caputo (1993)’s notion of “meta-phronesis” (p. 102) aims for a broader, deconstructed phronesis that judges among heterogeneous accounts from different schemata. Meta-phronesis aims to be more open to dialogue among shifting paradigms. Caputo (1987) suggests that meta-phronesis is parallel to his notion of civility, uniting through conversation.

Meta-phronesis may indeed provide important ways to understand my research problem and some indication of how we might cope, but ultimately fail to address the very problem Caputo attributes to teleological ethics. Gallagher (1992) describes Caputo’s meta-phronesis as another form of phronesis that cannot escape the inevitable prejudices of the hermeneutic circle in which phronesis is also embedded: Gallagher explains:

Our past, our traditions, our practical interests always condition our situation, so that whatever temporary contract or consensus we agree to, whatever new paradigm we
invent, it will never be absolutely without precedent. The *paralogical* situation is also a hermeneutical situation. (1992, p. 302)

Judging among different schemata still must assume (at least provisionally) the validity and totality of the frameworks; however, no ethical framework (or story) can be comprehensive: surpluses always remain. My stories lead me toward the ideals, excellences and roles proposed by Aristotle and Confucius and allow me to see both their possibilities and their inadequacies. While understanding my role of teacher as an educational guide, an educational friend and an educational artist can help me understand my responsibilities more fully, I do not have definitive answers. I am confronted by challenges such as: Guiding to where? What is an educational friendship? Who is the artist and who is the material? Moreover, my challenges are not dilemmas to be resolved or problems to be solved but *aporias*, that is, questions without answers, impasses without resolution involving power, conformity, autonomy and purpose. Following Burbules (2000), I believe “*aporia*[s] can be seen, not as a barrier to knowledge, or as simply ‘clearing the ground’ for new learning, but as an integral dimension of learning [and of teaching] itself” (p. 171).

Indeed each role encompasses a set of answers to the *aporias* of educational teaching, addressing broad central questions such as: Why do we educate? Who are the people that we educating? What do we want to help these people learn? How might we help them learn? I understand that educational teaching involves accepting responsibility to help people learn the knowledge, skills and dispositions that will help them lead good and worthwhile lives in various dimensions of those lives now and in an indefinite and unpredictable future. Each educational role—guide, friend, artist—foregrounds one area of responsibility while backgrounding others. The teacher-guide stresses the responsibility of teachers to lead students towards an uncertain
future; the teacher-friend appreciates and attends to the range of talents and dispositions that each student brings into the world; and the teacher-artist helps the student-artist learn to take responsibility for shaping their own lives. Aristotle and Confucius bring new resources to understand each of those roles and address each of those central questions—without answering them. There are no answers.

When I suggested creating a new middle ground between cultures to help me construct my practical identity or when Caputo proposed dialogue among heterogeneous accounts from different schemata to judge, we both seemed to presume a degree of progress or closure is possible. Indeed, to do otherwise would be relativism. But if we cannot “answer” our questions or fulfill our roles—if there is no stable ground—what is the point of our dialogue? Perhaps better questions are: What attitudes and assumptions do we bring to this dialogue? What are our purposes? What expectations should we have for this dialogue? Greene (1973) responds that one stance is that teachers should “take a stranger’s point of view on everyday reality . . . to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. It is like returning home from a long stay in some other place” (p. 267). Indeed, dialogues that include other places, distinct people, alternative lenses, different languages may provoke new—and perhaps better—dialogues that help us “muddle again” and “muddle better” (Baggini, May 2018) about what is good and worthwhile with other people—in turn, raising crucial questions about what it means to muddle well.

An Ironic Understanding of Teaching

From the outset of my thesis, the question “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” challenges current dominant managerial conceptions of teaching and points to broader, more robust notions of educational teaching by reinterpreting resources drawn from Aristotle and
Confucius. Nonetheless, I have come to realize that my efforts are doomed to fail: Education, as I understand it, is not a telos to be gained or “achieved” and becoming an educational teacher is never accomplished. Although creating dialogue among different schemata contributes to going beyond the parochial pursuits embedded in both Aristotle’s and Confucius’ views, the conversation is founded on the same teleological thinking evident in Aristotle and Confucius. In a similar way to Aristotle and Confucius, I also presume there are epistemological-ethical-political end or ends to educational endeavours. I now have to admit that educational teaching, as an ever renewing, re-creating, transforming and transcending process, may have no telos or teloi, no answers that we could grasp, imagine or possibly agree upon: The destination(s) could be beyond both the teacher-guide and the student-newcomer’s knowledge and imagination; the student-friend may be always enigmatic and elusive for the teacher-friend; the student-material may not prefer to be shaped or carved by the teacher-artist.

Aristotelian and Confucian languages may provide us better ways to imagine the good life of a teacher in my stories, but they do not provide answers: In the seams of ongoing stories, there are always moments of teaching that demand more attention, events and episodes that exceed my reach. Indeed, whenever I believe that I have a grip on what is good and worthwhile and begin to shape my practice accordingly, something or someone intervenes to dislodge my grasp. The whole is constantly changing, transforming and is regularly disrupted or even shattered by the new. A whole without completeness, a goodness without closure, an aspiration without achievement seems to “haunt” my whole paper. Shifting or combining paradigms may dramatically improve what I can capture with my language, but important meanings stay outside my reach. Indeed, the shifting paradigms often collide with my small stories and yield more
sparks that, in turn, tell me something important about becoming a teacher rather than how to be a perfect and successful teacher. Lear, drawing on Kierkegaard, captures the *aporia* of my experience with his conception of irony. Kierkegaard explains that becoming a human being is not solely a biological phenomenon, but rather an arduous task. Using Socrates as exemplar, he writes: “Socrates doubted that one is a human being by birth; to become a human being or to learn what it means to be human does not come that easily” (1970, p. 278). As Lear (2011) interprets: “My practical identity commits me to norms that I must adhere to in the face of temptations and other incentives that might lead me astray” (p. 4). Constituting the practical identity of a teacher is thus “linked to a conception of human excellence” (Lear, 2011, p. 1). Lear draws on the tension between social pretense and genuine aspiration to argue that irony arises when a gap opens between pretense as it is made available in a social practice and an aspiration or ideal which, on the one hand, is embedded in the pretense. . . . but which, on the other hand, seems to transcend the life and the social practice in which that pretense is made. The pretense seems at once to capture and miss the aspiration. (Lear, 2011, p. 11)

The tension between different ethical frameworks or schemata and the particular events that I describe in my stories can provoke a sense of irony that challenges the social pretenses stemming from any overarching *telos*—or combination of *teloi* in meta-*phronesis*. To put it succinctly, ironic existence aspires to both accept and transcend available social pretenses that underlie practical identities allowing me to “muddle through.” Ironic understanding therefore requires a capacity to both believe and doubt, sometimes alternately and sometimes simultaneously—a very unusual concept in Western thought, despite its long history.
Aoki, for example, draws attention to the spaces in between—between cultures, between the past and the present, between self and others—for which he adopts the metaphor of lingering on the “bridge” (Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 53) as “a spirited site of being and becoming” (Aoki, 2005c, p. 420). He proposes “conjoining words like between and and are no mere joining words, a new language that might allow a transformative resonance of the words paradigms, practices, and possibilities” (Aoki, 2005b, p. 215). Moreover, Caputo’s notion of meta-phronesis challenges the single telos by exposing people to events in flux understood from different ethical perspectives. Both Aoki and Caputo still anchor their works in what is currently available—e.g., negotiating between Eastern or Western regimes; or a dialogue between Aristotle and Confucius. In light of Lear’s notion of ironic existence, however, I find that it might not be adequate for teachers to simply linger on the bridge. As Kentel and Karrow (2013) emphasize: “Being a teacher cannot be considered without the notion of becoming a teacher” (p. 25). A bridge connects two ends that are both stable and known to us, while becoming a teacher is more of an unstable and dynamic process that often attends to the jagged edges of ethics without certainty where we go next. Similarly, meta-phronesis depends on dialogue between relatively secure teleological approaches to ethics.

In contrast, I understand ironic experience as anchored on the disturbing and disrupting moments of ethical becoming and might be compared to sand painting. In sand painting, the performer constantly shapes, shatters and remakes the sand as an artistic expression; a performance varies from moment to moment. Rather than aiming at a static installation, the art is an ephemeral, fluid and dynamic performance. The beauty of sand painting lies in the making and unmaking—a constant interaction with the sand that never repeats. The performer imagines different possibilities and attends to the color and nature of the sand while shaping it. Every grain
of sand is afforded its own teleological life that is both itself and beyond itself at the same time; as soon as something is shaped, it is shattered or taken apart in the unmaking/remaking process; the shattering is simultaneously a process of forming something new from the old, transforming the previous shapes, lines, forms and orders. The process never detaches from the sand; rather, it is the constant (re)shaping, (re)creating and (re)making of the sand. With every move, the sands move towards an organic whole which is never complete and never settled, creating a unifying telos, but at the same time constantly challenging and deconstructing that telos as the performer continues to reshape them. With the moving of each grain, boundaries dissolve, the previous whole is taken apart and new shapes are (re)formed. Similarly, to live ethically with others, we need to always stand on the edge of instability that “neither dissolves into chaos, nor settles into static balance, but continues to evolve by adapting as it goes” (Butler, Storey & Robson, 2014, p. 462). Like a sand painter, I aim to capture the ironic experience of teaching and attend to the tension between forming a practical identity of educational teacher and recognizing the jagged edges of ethical becoming.

I now recognize that my pursuit of the practical identity of educational teacher is a profoundly ironic quest. As teachers, we are constantly creating our practical identities, that is, becoming teachers and—while my passion and fidelity to teaching prompts me to examine my teaching with the hope of grasping its significance—I now realize that I will never achieve complete integration or integrity. I may never close the gap between social pretense and pretense-transcending aspiration. The jagged pieces of ethical becoming may never fit together. Living ironically, however, involves courageously and relentlessly pursuing ideals while appreciating that one can never attain them. Rather than accept my own stories as directing me to an answer to my question, “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” I explore the excesses in my
stories that point to alternate ways of understanding to uncover new and better sources of significance. Rather than searching for a singular educational telos (or even combing teloi), I hope to appropriate Lear’s notion of ironic existence to continue to attend to the jagged edges of ethical becoming. Too often, moments of ironic existence happen to us, yet we often “get over them quickly and move on, remembering at best a shadow of their occurrence” (Lear, 2011, p.21). I now understand my thesis is as an attempt to attend to the shadows of ephemeral ironic experiences that arise from the gaps between my educational aspirations and pretenses in a never-ending effort to create my practical identity as educational teacher.

I began my graduate study soon after I came to Canada with my family. In the Aims of Education class, I met one of my current research committee members, David Coulter. We soon began to meet in his office or in the café (often nearer to the place where I live) regularly to discuss books, articles and life. Every time, he would greet me with a warm hug. He often asked me about how Marvin was doing at school, how my husband was doing with his work. David held regular group discussions in his house with his students where he and his wife Dianne would joyfully make us good coffee, tea and muffins and we discussed our projects. I remember once describing my worries and frustrations about when I was a teacher—not engaging my students enough in class, coping with the pressures of competitions and model classes in the pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, and struggling to increase enrolment rates of my students in top universities. He looked at me quietly, paused for a while and instead of answering my questions or acknowledging my frustrations, he asked: “What do all these have to do with educational teaching?” Ideas flew from my head and were not easy to tame: What is student engagement? Why do we need model classes? Why do we compete with other teachers?
Why does enrolment rate matter? What is a top university? I was rendered speechless and uncertain what these all have to do with education and good teaching.

These ongoing interactions with David and many other teachers at UBC continue to address me as a teacher and often remind me of the vertigo and disturbance I experienced when I was a young teacher asking myself “Why do you ask Bo not to challenge you?” or when I excelled in the Teaching Skills Contest on the stage under harsh magnesium lights. These moments of irony seemed to draw me closer to an abyss where I became uncertain about what I understood by “teaching.” The concerns for class engagement, training programs and teaching competency contests that saturated my teaching life fell woefully short. I had lost my way. When David asked: “What does all these have to do with educational teaching?” I found his question different from the “reflective questioning” of teacher education. David’s question was unlike the questions I was bombarded with in the Teaching Skills Contest that still rested safely within in the normal bubble of teaching with its taken-for-granted telos. In contrast, his questions triggered authentic ironic experiences, that is, “a peculiar species of uncanniness” (Lear, 2011, p. 16) that fundamentally disturbs and challenges our tacit aspirations. The ironic experience renders the familiar unfamiliar, while the unfamiliar is rooted in our commitment. David’s question was not anticipating a correct or standard answer; instead, his question poked a hole in one of the bubbles that comprised my conception of “teacher.” The bubble suddenly burst and I became disoriented and “lost a sense of what it means to be a teacher” (Lear, 2011, p. 18); Lear describes a similar experience and describes how “in the ironic moment, my practical knowledge is disrupted: I can no longer say in any detail what the requirements of teaching consists in: nor do I have any idea what to do next” (p.18).
This ironic uptake is spurred by my own commitment to teaching as well as David’s fundamental question. My previous understandings of teaching—couched in the languages of efficiency, management and assessment—were fundamentally disturbed not only by David’s question, but also by own commitment and faithfulness to teaching. David’s question provoked more truthful questions from myself for myself. I repeated his question and asked myself: “What do my understandings of teaching have to do with my aspirations for teaching?” “Where is the teacher and where are the students?” and most importantly, “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” The humility engendered by not knowing where to go, or for what purposes, are consistent with my understanding of ironic existence. I am again reminded of David’s observation in his Aims of Education class: “After teaching for more than forty years, I believe that the worst thing about being a teacher is that you never learn how to do it. And the best thing about teaching is that you never learn how to do it.” I understand, for David, teaching is a constant and arduous pursuit of something not yet, a restless and never-ending process of becoming. He is intrigued by it and humbled by it at the same time. When I tried to “wade across the stream by feeling the pebbles” like my mother, however, I sometimes found that the stream was too deep for me to reach any pebbles or there was no pathway to a safe beach. Similarly, making a good teaching life can never be settled or complete: It is a dynamic process where we search for alternate ways to cross streams when they are too deep and no pebbles can be found while not knowing if there is a shoreline to gain. Indeed, ironic experience entails acknowledging and coping with our ignorance in particular encounters. Nevertheless, the disruptive moment is filled with the longing and passion to inquire further about what teaching means and for what purposes.
Despite the disorientation and disturbance it triggered, David’s question did not paralyze me or lead to a breakdown: It invited me to breathe fresher air and have a more truthful and clearer look at teaching and life. Ironic existence is an expression of earnestness and commitment and consists of “a two-part movement of detachment and attachment: detachment from the social pretense in order to facilitate attachment to the more robust version of the ideal” (p. 38). Bernstein expands on Lear’s description, explaining that ironic experience:

unlike vertigo and a nervous breakdown, does not incapacitate us. Rather what is peculiar to irony is that it manifests a passion [to search] for a certain direction. . . . The search is inchoate and indeterminate. . . . It is the way to become a teacher. . . . a true or real teacher, not just someone who follows the normal conventions of the practical identity of teaching. (2016, p. 21)

Curlin (2016), a physician, suggests he must put himself forward in response to his patients even when he is unsure what he should do; he explains: “This patient called me out, stirring me with longing to become the physician I am not yet” (Curlin, 2016, p. 72). Similarly, Chinese journalist Chai Jing described her experience reporting on the disaster relief efforts during the 2003 earthquake in Xinjiang province:

If I were still sitting in the studio reporting the earthquake, disaster to me would be a piece of news to report. The accurate and timely data of the disaster relief would be what I cared about. However, seeing an old man having walked with one bare foot, a walking stick for two miles, rummaging for a shoe in our truck and finally find an old leathered shoe in the pile, put it on and walk way, I finally came to know what disaster relief meant. . . . I was finally shaken to the ground by the earthquake. (p. 45)

Chai Jing felt called to be a better journalist by her particular encounter with the old man.
In a similar way to physicians and journalists, teachers can be called to respond to particular students; we can attune ourselves in each encounter and allow ourselves to be addressed and disturbed. We may also realize how often we fall short of living up to what it means to be a teacher and long to become the teacher we are not yet, that is, we might glimpse what is good and desirable. In the café where David and I shared book notes and interpretations, in his genuine greetings, in his wonder and humility, in his fundamental questions without answers, I saw what a teacher can be and became more and more fascinated by this enigmatic and arduous task—teaching (I seem to remember again the fascination I felt when I peeked into the back window of my mother’s classroom). I believe what David ignites in me is not an enthusiastic search for answers, but a wonder about what is not yet. Greene’s words could ring the bell here:

> Human freedom, in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise . . . shows itself or comes into being when individuals come together in a particular way, when they are authentically present to one another [without masks, pretenses, badges of office], when they have a project they can mutually pursue. (1988, p. 3 & p. 16)

Laozi, the representative figure of Daoism in China, captures the significance of particular encounters in life. In Chapter 63 in *Dao De Jing*, he says, “The big things under the heaven are in the little things. The sage does not think he is doing something extraordinary, he is only doing little things to be great.” Attending to particulars and listening closely to what the moment demands of us can contribute to ironic understanding.

Aristotelian and Confucian languages can help narrow the gulf between one’s previous understandings and the ideals and excellences consistent with an authentic and robust practical identity; however, they can never eliminate the gap between our pretenses and our aspirations.
Indeed, the gap must remain open to allow for new aspirations so that “one develops a capacity for appropriately disrupting one’s own understanding of what such excellence consists in” (Lear, 2011, p. 36).

**Teaching with Radical Hope**

Only when a teacher is committed to education can she begin to uncover the inadequacies inherent in the socially defined identities of teaching. Indeed, a teacher’s loyalty to teaching is a powerful impetus to disturb her own teaching practice: My dissatisfaction with the current managerial framework as a resource to understand what might count as good teaching led me to a search for better, more comprehensive approaches to address my question, “Among the teachers is there a teacher?” My quest for better roles and excellences consistent with a rich practical identity of educational teacher, in turn, prompted me to reimagine ancient Eastern and Western ethical-political traditions for a pluralistic democratic educational context. Following Lear’s methodology in *Radical Hope*, I thinned the virtues or excellences of Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics, attended to the rich particulars in my teaching, imagined new possibilities and thickened the virtues of teaching for new contexts. *Eudaimonia* and *dao, phronesis* and *ren, techne* and *liuyi* are powerful new tools that help me understand what it might mean to be an educator. Consistent with my fledgling ironic understanding of teaching; however, I now realize I have not “answered” my research question. I find myself more attuned to and allured by something that eludes me, something I do not know yet. So I continue to try to challenge my taken-for-granted practices so that my teaching practice “fits into a good and faithful life” (Curlin, 2016, p 68) of teaching. Moreover, I remain mindful that the inevitable gap that must remain between available social pretenses and the aspirations of an educational teacher. It means that the practical identity of teacher must always be under construction and a teacher
may always fall short of something that demands more. Ironic experience focuses on this gap and calls into question the socially defined practical identity so that teachers sometimes “lose the ground under [their] feet” (Lear, 2011, p. 19).

When I was a student in primary school I was often asked for the answer to a question. Every question seemed to have a correct answer and every article seemed to have standard interpretation. Gradually, I found that there were no correct answers to many important questions. Or rather, it was more and more difficult to ask the right questions than to answer them. Heidegger (1968) explains that teachers should not “aim to establish an answer by which the question can be disposed of as quickly and conclusively as possible. On the contrary, one thing and one thing only matters with this question: to make the question problematical” (p. 159). Greene (1973) reminds us: “Everyday must be rendered problematic so that questions may be posed” (p. 11). So, rather than accept my own stories as interpreted through Aristotelian or Confucian frameworks as directing me to a clear answer to my question “Among the teachers, is there a teacher?” I continue my search for alternative sources of significance characteristic of the pursuit of the ethical life of teaching. The ensuing aporias have encouraged me to question my teaching pretenses more radically; indeed, the resulting experience of irony calls me to a halt, because it reminds me that I have not yet gotten the hang of being a [teacher]. It spurs me on, because it affirms for me, and lures me toward the possibility, that I could become the [teacher] I am not sure how to become. (Curlin, 2016, p. 68)

For me, to be a teacher is not an achievement, but an ongoing commitment to a radical questioning about what is good and desirable—what it means to be a teacher—with the radical hope of embracing something good that is not yet known and will never be. While I may not have discovered any final answers from my study of Aristotle and Confucius, I did find better
resources to continue to construct my practical identity—resources and an identity that I must continue to try to transcend. I “disrupt or defamiliarize what is taken for granted as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’” (Greene, 1988, p. 13) and do not settle on any answers. Consistent with Socratic irony, I understand that I need to both live my best understanding of educational teaching and continually challenge that identity (Lear, 2011, p. 24). This process must remain a passionate yet modest pursuit in which I am always paying attention, being struck by teaching, feeling the significance of teaching, grasping the good of teaching and longing to become more of a teacher. Laozi once wrote: “the highest level of ethics is like water” (Dao De Jing, Chapter 8). It is fluid and humble—taking different shapes, transforming itself in endless possibilities and having the courage to go downwards to every corner of the world. It never leaves the land and nourishes the land without being certain where it goes next. In enduring its ordinary and plain life, it always accumulating the energy for its unforeseeable leap over the gaps. I recall Ji Xianlin’s essay of “Some Thoughts in my Eighties” in which he says: “Today, in my eighties, I know the road in the future won’t be straighter and smoother than it in the past. But I am not afraid. I am still touched by wild lilies and wild roses in life” (1991, para.13). As a teacher, I hope to recognize the moments when I, like my mother, “wade across the stream by feeling the pebbles.” In struggling with every step, I move forward; I pause; I move back; I turn. I feel the water gently touching my feet, giggling like an innocent child while I appreciate the wild lilies and roses along the way.
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