

A Teacher's Story:
Inquiry into the
Personal Meaning of Being a Teacher

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is, for the most part, my rendering of an interpretation of the personal meaning of being a teacher implicit in the professional practices of my co-researcher in this enterprise and of myself.

Initially, a text was created in our conversations, in my observation of my co-researcher at his work, and in my reflection on my own practice. I then interpreted that text and created this text, this thesis, for the edification of my co-participant and myself and, hopefully, for any others who might read it.

Hopefully as well, it is a text which shows how and who we are in our lives with children, and an affirmation of what we aim for and what we aspire to reach.

Such a text requires mimetic reading in that the reader needs to make him or herself open to the consideration of the nature and the possibilities of his or her pedagogy, the way of being.

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... i

Table of contents ii

Acknowledgement..... iv

Introduction 1

 Statement of purpose..... 1

 Overview 2

 Phenomenological research 3

Prologue..... 5

 Turning to the phenomenon: Orienting to the question 5

Some assumptions:

 About knowledge..... 12

 About teaching 13

 About awareness/unawareness and personal responsibility 13

 About the role of the researcher 14

 About possible implications of the study..... 14

Some other studies with a similar orientation to educational research..... 16

Research methodology 17

Ethical considerations..... 20

A Teacher's Story 21

Epilogue

 Purpose re-considered 44

 Phenomenological research re-considered..... 45

 Re-consideration of method 46

 Ethical re-considerations 48

 Interpretive writing 49

Implications re-considered.....	50
Understanding and interpretation.....	52
Autobiography.....	55
Spring on the Prairie.....	56
Reorientation.....	60
Notes.....	62
Reference.....	65
Bibliography.....	71
Appendix.....	77

Acknowledgement

To Robert Blank, Bob of the story, I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude. He embodies the will to transcend and belies the mistaken truism so common in education that only those who are made uncomfortable by others, who are skillfully led, will be willing to seek change. Thank you.

To Antoinette Oberg, I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude. She embodies what it is to teach, to create the space for the growth of another and, I expect, the space for personal growth. Thank you.

To Ron Tinney, I wish to express my gratitude for the support he has offered me during this project and throughout the time I have known him. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of purpose

I undertook this study with the broad purpose of attempting to facilitate a teacher's understanding of his own professional knowledge, "that amalgam of understandings, conceptions, beliefs, and aims which form the bases of the teacher's practical knowledge" (Oberg, 1986). I believed that those teachers who understand best the nature of their professional knowledge would be most likely to make pedagogical decisions which would best enhance the learning situation for the children in their care.

Initially, it was in my mind that I would develop a model of supervision for achieving my goal, ie. facilitating the understanding of professional knowledge. I conjectured that this model would be emancipatory in that it would liberate teachers from the bonds of unawareness and its justification lay in its corollary, improved practice.

I still look back on such a broad purpose as having merit (improved teaching practice is always a worthwhile goal), but the participation in the study with my co-participant has somewhat re-oriented me (shifted my perception) such that I look now on my original treatment of it as somewhat instrumentalist, that is, as "action instrumental toward achieving a chosen end on the basis of rational calculation of the best means" (Fay, 1987, p. 86). I now look on the notion of a model as in the tradition of instrumentalism, as rational calculation of the best means toward achieving a chosen (even if desirable) end. Further, I see it as having the effect of treating people as objects.

Slowly (at times imperceptibly, at other times in flashes of insight), over the period of the research (the research including the observation of my co-participant's practice, conversation with him, immersion in the transcripts of the conversations and recollection of the observations, reflection on my own life-events and thoughts, and interpretive writing of all of the preceding), I moved from this instrumentalist standpoint to another where the idea

of models is inappropriate. This new standpoint has an affinity for the position Fay posits wherein he contrasts instrumentalist conception of theory and practice with what he calls the educative conception of theory and practice which concentrates on social scientific theory, “a means by which people can achieve a much clearer picture of who they are, and of what the real meaning of their social practice is, as a first step in becoming different sorts of people with different sorts of social arrangements...The purpose of scientific theory is to engender self-knowledge and so to liberate people from the oppressiveness of their social arrangements” (Fay, 1987, p. 89).

However, my new standpoint is more in keeping with an awareness, however dim, where I must “meet each person, each situation, and every subject in its own way” (Kaufman, 1970, p. 16). From this standpoint, the relationship with another human being can never be a means to an end, but rather the relationship is the end in itself.

This inquiry, in part, is the story of this journey from instrumentalist conception to existentialist realization, with glances backward at the road travelled, reflection on the present path, and speculation about the future course.

The purpose now becomes one of understanding rather than explaining, of realizing rather than using. With this purpose, there can be no thought of being an uninvolved facilitator. Instead, I am a committed participant in the dialogue seeking understanding, a fellow in the “conversation of mankind” (Oakeshott, 1959).

Overview of the study

Briefly, this study involved my observation of the professional activity of one teacher and conversation with him pertinent to his practice. Subsequently, I withdrew from his venue to write an interpretive account of his professional life and then returned to present this account to him and to converse further as to his perception of the “fit” of my account.

Put this way, this overview presents a very austere view of something which is much richer, much deeper. I hope the sections of interpretive writing will clarify what I want to say.

By way of explaining why I have used narrative as a method of interpretation, let me quote from van Manen, “Anecdotal narrative as story form is an effective way of dealing with certain kinds of knowledge. ‘Narrative, to narrate,’ derives from the Latin *gnoscere*, *noscere* ‘to know.’ To narrate is to tell something in narrative or story form. The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something particular while really addressing the general or the universal. And, vice versa, at the hand of anecdote, fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience. And so one can say that the anecdote shares a fundamental epistemological or methodological feature with phenomenological Human Science which also operates in the tension between particularity and universality” (in press).

I have written a prologue which will represent me as I approached the inquiry. The prejudices I held, the assumptions present then will be apparent. What I write will reflect my orientation to the study - my thoughts about teaching and about research about teaching.

I have also outlined the manner of the research itself; that is, the mechanics of the process.

I have written a narrative section with the intention of capturing the nature of my co-researcher's struggle in the process of being and becoming a teacher and what that means for him.

Finally, I have written an epilogue looking back at the inquiry. After the research, my prejudices were altered, my assumptions different. Thus, I was qualitatively different after the study and I have attempted to write of that difference.

This thesis is story. It is Bob's story of his struggle to hold to his ideal of what

teaching is, to clarify his understanding of his ideal, and to live out that ideal in his practice. It is also my story. It is my story of who I was when I met Bob, reflections on my life as I had lived it, my deepening understanding of all that is involved in being in dialogical relation with another person, and it is my story of who I have become in that process.

Phenomenological research

The research I have done differs from most research in this field in that it does not seek to generate sets of principles or rules of teaching, to prove or disprove a point, or to advance any particular argument. It is, instead, phenomenological and the end of phenomenological research in education is “critical educational competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogical situations on the basis of carefully edified thoughtfulness” (van Manen, 1984b, p. 36).

I could know at the outset that I was not interested in Bob's classroom curriculum as someone might be who could be looking for a way to organize it into discrete categories and get it between the covers of a manual or curriculum guide for distribution. I could know that I was interested in knowing what being a teacher meant to Bob and what it meant to me. And I could read what others wrote of phenomenological research in education and recognize it as the research attractive to me. I could cite van Manen that “to do a phenomenological study of any topic, therefore, it is not enough to simply recall experiences others or I may have had with respect to a particular phenomenon. Instead I must recall the experience in such a way that the essential aspects, the meaning structure of this experience as lived through, are brought back, as it were, and in such a way that we recognize this description as *a possible human experience*, which means as *a possible interpretation* of that experience. This then is the task of phenomenological research and writing: *to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience.*

In order to make a beginning, the phenomenologist must ask, what human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?...Reduced to its elemental methodological structure, phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among four procedural activities: (a.) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (b.) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (c.) reflecting on the essential; (d.) describing the phenomenon through the act of writing and re-writing” (van Manen, 1984b, p. 38). I could read this but I had no way of knowing what I really understood of such research and what it meant to do it. Only the actual doing of phenomenological research could point to the knowledge of being a phenomenological researcher.

PROLOGUE

This is my attempt to capture myself as I approached the inquiry.

Turning to the phenomenon: Orienting to the question

“The essence of the question, said Gadamer (1975), is the opening up, and keeping open, of possibilities. But we can only do this if we can keep ourselves open in such a way that in this abiding concern of our questioning we find ourselves deeply interested (*inter-esse*, to be or stand in the midst of something) in that which makes the question possible in the first place. To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the centre of our being. Even minor phenomenological research projects require that we not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we “live” this question or, better, that we “become” this question. Is this not the meaning of research: to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put to question begins to reveal something of its essential nature?” (van Manen, 1984b, p. 45).

What impelled my research question? What was my research question? And, once enunciated, what was there about the framework of that question (my life) that moved me to ask that question? And so, as I approached my study with my original question in mind; that is, how would I go about facilitating Bob's understanding of his own professional knowledge. I also had to consider that, if I were to facilitate, would I not have to consider first myself as facilitator? Not only would it be necessary to consider what I would do as facilitator, but also it would be necessary to think about what would authorize me to be facilitator.

My personal orientation to the study is in my life as I have lived it, including all that I experienced and reflected upon. I look back now on specific things I did, as I considered this study, to orient myself to it. I had a strong interest in the work of Alfred Adler (1938) and I thought of experiences I had had in learning of the work of counselors following the teaching of Adler and his follower, Rudolf Dreikurs (1.) and of my own efforts to utilize these teachings in my own previous practice. This led to reading (in some cases, re-reading) the writings of Adler and Dreikurs and their adherents, especially Adler's later work on *gemeinschaftgefühl*, translated unsatisfactorily by Adler himself as social interest. I followed my interest in *gemeinschaftgefühl*, re-reading Adlerian writings which I had previously known, then continued through to read the majority of Adler's translated works in books and journals. I came to look upon Adler's notion of *gemeinschaftgefühl* as the total community of humanity in which each human being is, at once, in union with other people, other species, the planet and the universe. I found this notion then in the works of Buber (1947, 1949, 1968), Camus (1956), P. Palmer (1983), and Novak (1971), and I came to look upon it as the essence of being human and something which has occupied people throughout humanity's history.

However, I became dissatisfied with Adler's attempts to render this fundamental feature

of humanness into an evolutionary developmental process and reduce it to something to be approached cognitively. The nature of this dissatisfaction was unclear to me but I knew it had something to do with my idea that many of Adler's followers had reduced their work to a technology and were unaware of the importance of relationship in their practices. I had also noted others of Adler's followers who spoke of the mechanics of their practices but embodied a quality of relationship with their clients or students that was quite apart from any technique and which I speculated had more to do with their success than the technique they espoused.

Inside this broad orientation to the whole, I oriented myself to teaching through reading and re-reading the writings of van Manen, Aoki, Denton (1974), and Vandenberg (1971). All of these people, I think, would say that at the foundation of teaching lies the being of the teacher. (2) I think they would agree with Buber that "it is not teaching that educates, but the educator" (Cohen, 1983, p. 50). I also agree.

Later, in tracing the sources cited by van Manen, Aoki, and other phenomenological educators, I began to learn of phenomenology and hermeneutics, this path taking me to Heidegger (1962), Gadamer (1975) and Ricoeur (1973), among others. I will say more later about what I took from their writings about understanding and interpretation of human experience.

I had often speculated that a characteristic of the lives of most people was a progressive, insidious narrowing to a vanishing point. That is, a child entered the world with all the possibilities of an infinite universe before him. But, very quickly, the traditions, the historicity and prejudices of his or her social group reduced those possibilities to the much smaller, finite number inherent in that social grouping. Family, school, associates, further reinforced this narrowing. With aging, the narrowing progressed to a point where further existence could seem pointless.

Not many years ago, I saw my own life in this same sort of way. However, it was impossible not to notice that there were some who did not fit this pattern. Despite aging, their vitality was undiminished; infinite possibilities seemed to exist before them. They would truly live until they died. It was also impossible not to be attracted to them; the strength they held was manifest in all their being. All of these people were, in some way, teachers. And it occurred to me that they, in some way I didn't understand, were what teachers should be, people who can show others how to live all the days of their lives, to keep the infinite universe before them.

This notion that teaching is more than a technical act or set of competencies developed slowly in me over many years, going back, I think, to my earliest experiences as a teacher. I had noted those teachers who are artistic teachers (3), who achieve outstanding results with beginning readers, who “turn around” delinquent youths, who inspire young people to go far beyond what they would ever expect of themselves, who do this with children and young people from all economic groups, and of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Very often, these teachers are called upon by others or feel compelled to share with other educators what they think they know. They often write books, explaining their method(s) and often excite others to attempt these methods, usually with modest success, more often with total failure. My belief had come to be that their method, their reason for success, lay within themselves and not within their technique. This, I think, is a not unusual sort of inference and I think many people have come to it, considering the “common knowledge” noted previously that teachers are born, not made. Very often, but not always, I have noted that these artistic teachers, these “born teachers,” had some distinguishing characteristic which placed them outside of the mainstream. One might have known the experience of early life on an Indian reservation and been raised in the knowledge of her people's defeat in a cruel war and expulsion from their ancestral land, another had lived life

with a body deformed by a congenital bone condition. Some others, while having no outwardly observable characteristics which might place them outside the mainstream, seemed to hold a sense of injustice, that things were not as they should be. This sense of injustice is not to be confused with the daily indignation of most people which is accompanied by a kind of resignation to the “way things are”. Instead, it is more a sense that there is something wrong in a fundamental way with the way we live amongst each other. Rather than resignation to this as a fact there is a desire to know what is the nature of this wrong and, through knowing, to change it.

Reflection on other experiences reinforced the view that teachers create their way of being. At one time during my classroom life, I invited a group of colleagues to meet to learn about the principles of teaching contained in S.T.E.T. (Systematic Training for Effective Teaching), a program based somewhat on the ideas of Alfred Adler and, moreso, Rudolf Dreikurs. At first, I was unfamiliar with the program's materials and curriculum and, very often, our discussions left the theoretical and went directly to the events of our classrooms and we sometimes spoke openly of our lives there, of our beliefs, and what we should do with children, and of what was valuable and worthwhile. Later, after I gained more familiarity with the program and as I attended more workshops sponsored by Adlerian associations and the group of colleagues deferred more to my expertise, we spoke more of the theory contained in the program and less of our own practices. The vitality of our meetings waned and we gradually ceased to have anything to talk about. We had considered our selves more authentically in the absence of external theory.

We had, perhaps quite fortuitously (certainly without any particular plan), made our lives with children problematic and engaged in pedagogic theorizing (van Manen, 1982b). Later, we conformed to what we thought we should do; that is, we turned to theory to inform our practice to learn the techniques of dealing with children. (I recall now that one

teacher in the group spoke of extending her 'repertoire' of techniques for coping with difficult children). I would now characterize our first activity as a form of pedagogic thoughtfulness (considering our lives as teachers and how we are with children) from which can flow skill or pedagogic tact (doing what is right with a child). Our latter activity definitely was considering theoretic knowledge which can advance technical competence and the "difference between technique and skill is that technical competence is derived from theoretic knowledge, whereas skill is derived from the practice of living" (van Manen, 1984a, p. 1).

As much as it seems to have been common knowledge that the essence of what a teacher is, is significant in what a teacher does, educational researchers have all but ignored this knowledge and have concerned themselves almost exclusively with teaching as a way of doing.

In my life in the classroom, I didn't know what to do about this anomaly, or even how to make sense of it. Like many others, I was susceptible to attempts to emulate these artistic teachers, to be like them, to learn to do what they did. Such a life is a series of jumping on bandwagons (even if there are few others on the same wagon), disappointment, and subsequent loss of faith which leaves one even more susceptible to looking for the next Messiah. And I was often at odds with "superiors" who were in the midst of another, different "movement", listening to the voices of researchers telling them of the latest knowledge, extolling the benefits of 'effective teaching', 'effective schools', bringing 'instructional theory into practice', 'teaching to objectives', rendering oneself 'accountable'.

It follows that, if what a teacher does flows from what a teacher is, then consideration of the being who is the teacher, is an activity foundational to all of teaching.

So, the object of research which I chose is likely a logical culmination of my thoughts,

considerations, frustrations, disappointments through over twenty years of being a teacher. I have already noted my initial, poorly developed idea of teaching as something more than a way of presenting information or of utilizing skills. Had my thoughts remained at that level, the research I have done would never have occurred to me.

However, in 1986 I began my current program at the University of Victoria, the Masters' program in Curriculum Studies, which emphasizes a teacher's coming to a defensible position as to one's professionalism, that is, students in the program are asked to examine critically the assumptions they hold, to look critically at their professional knowledge. For many, doing so can be, at once, terrifying and liberating; it was no less so for me. To examine ideas is a familiar and comfortable thing; to examine self is neither familiar nor comfortable.

Perhaps the study began here.

Recall that this prologue is my present attempt to explicate my standpoint in the initial period of the study, before I began to converse with Bob and to interpret the meaning of his practice. I will now present some assumptions I held at that time. Some come from writing I did then; others are based in recollection.

“The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, the problem is that our ‘common-sense’ pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have ever come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question...If we simply try to ignore what we already ‘know’ we may find that the presuppositions creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories in order then to simply not try to forget them again but rather to turn this knowledge against itself, as it

were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing nature” (van Manen, 1984b, p. 46).

Some assumptions.....

.....About knowledge

The social knowledge that a person holds at any moment can be viewed as having been constructed by that person out of the interpretations he or she has made of events, persons, and circumstances of his or her environment. The sets of attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that the person holds, consciously or at a level below awareness, have been personally constructed and he or she organizes his or her life and acts as if these were truths (Vaihinger, 1924; Schutz, 1962; Adler, 1938; Kelly, 1955; Hillman, 1983) . This can be considered an optimistic view in that what has been personally constructed can also be personally re-constructed. However, this reconstruction would require that an individual come to a state of awareness or insight about the purpose of his or her behavior and how it is guided by the sets of beliefs he or she has built and holds at a particular moment. Along with this view of knowledge as being personally constructed in a social and historical context is the idea that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions because he or she has created the beliefs underlying them. Rather than seeing human beings as organisms driven by all manners of events and things beyond their control or as a victim of the actions of others or circumstances in which he may be, they can be seen as active creators with power to transform or transcend those events, circumstances, or actions of their environment. Such a view of the nature of meaning as created by each human being implies that each is responsible for the interpretations he or she has made. Some, such as Sartre, view this as placing man alone in the world, as facing all of the questions of existence in total isolation (Cohen, 1983). I do not think this is so. I would, rather, agree with those who consider humans as responsible for their own actions in the context of community. (4)

.....About teaching

Teaching is an act which can be and has been characterized in a number of ways. Most often, it has been treated as a technical means to most efficiently deliver a service to a clientele; sometimes it is considered the act of transmitting a culture. Rarely is it considered an intersubjective meeting of a student and teacher wherein both enter creatively into the learning process. While there is a certain validity for the former characterizations, the one considered most suited here would be that of teaching as a creative act. As with the artist, who is oriented toward a vision of what is beautiful and good for humankind to see, hear, and experience, the teacher is oriented toward the pedagogic good of his students. Teachers and artists require courage in that both make decisions and perform acts to achieve ends which cannot be predicted; both must make decisions as the process unfolds and accept responsibility for those decisions.

.....About awareness, unawareness, and personal responsibility

As conceptualized here, a teacher is one who has responded to the call of pedagogy (van Manen, 1982b). The one who has done this may lack awareness of the implications of this responding and it is well known that some people seem to be “born teachers” in that they intuitively seem to make pedagogically good decisions. Conversely, others who have trained to be teachers sometimes lack what the “born teachers” intuitively know and they do not make pedagogically good decisions. If we accept that some are “born teachers” and that others can only become technically competent, we accept a very pessimistic view. However, if we view teachers as being the creators of the constructs underlying their professional knowledge and believe that becoming aware of this knowledge is very possible, then we can be much more optimistic. Awareness of professional knowledge could then be an initial step in a teacher's coming to see to what extent his knowledge is “private” or at a level of unawareness and to what extent it is not. A teacher then would be

empowered, that is, placed in a position to affirm his knowledge or to alter it. The teacher, then, would be a professional person whose professionalism comes from accepting responsibility for the pedagogical decisions he makes.

.....About the role of the researcher

The role of the researcher here is not to explain, nor is it only to understand; rather, it is to facilitate the understanding of the participant. Such understanding would be considered to be empowering the participant in that it could bring him to a state of awareness of the purpose of his pedagogical decision and then put him in a position of control of those decisions and responsibility for them. Beyond this, I was uncertain about my role as researcher. I anticipated that the role would unfold in the doing of the research. I wasn't always as confident that clarity would accompany the activity as this writing might suggest. I can say that I did have the idea that I would be the more active participant, that it would be my function to focus the conversation. Then, it would be my role to write my findings, to present them to Bob for his inspection and his affirmation or denial of the correctness of what I had taken from our talk. This was in keeping with my idea of myself as an instrument, a tool of the research.

.....About possible implications of the study

This project holds greatest significance in a personal, situated sense. That is, it is most significant for the classroom teacher who participated in it and for myself as researcher. As we sought to understand the teacher's practice, we both came to greater understanding of our professional lives.

For education generally I see significance in two areas. One is the general area of improvement of practice; the other is specific application in supervision, especially a form of clinical supervision.

I will address myself first to the significance of supervision. Smyth (1984a, 1984b,

1984c, 1985, 1986) and Sergiovanni (1976, 1985) have called for a form of clinical supervision which would involve a collegial, egalitarian relationship between supervisor and teacher, both seeking understanding of the teacher's practice such that the teacher would come to view his practice as something to be considered problematic and viewed critically. I would postulate that what is proposed here could serve as the platform for the kind of emancipatory orientation that Smyth and Sergiovanni say should be the focus of supervision. Another who writes in this view is Diamond (1982) who states, "It may be that a central role for in-service teacher educators is to let themselves be used by teachers so that the teachers can then learn to validate themselves and thus form their own pedagogical relationships and theories. The over-riding challenge for teacher educators is to help teachers to see themselves as self-directing and self-determining, as professionally competent and as capable of trying alternative pedagogies" (p. 168).

Finally, the motivation of my study in the field of education should be the improvement of the learning situation for children. In that light, I would concur with this statement by Yonemura (1982), "Because professionals are engaged in work which influences the lives of others in significant ways, their professional development ought to be an essential component of their work lives. Part of this development involves an increasing awareness of the values and beliefs that underpin their practice and the congruence of these with those they espouse...recent studies concerning teacher thinking agree that the behavior and thinking of teachers are steered by a set of beliefs which are often unconscious. Those beliefs, unconscious as some of them may be, help form the behavioral world of the classroom " (p. 239).

Some other studies

The research orientation which I have taken fits most closely with what Aoki has termed situational-interpretive, wherein the researcher "cannot stand aloof as an

observer...but must enter into inter-subjective dialogue with the people in the research situation” (Aoki, 1985 p. 16). Some who have conducted research in this tradition have been van Manen (1973), Werner (1977), Rothe (1979), Favaro (1982), Peterat (1983), Everett-Turner (1983), Harrison (1984), Fahlman (1984), Carson (1984), Bopp (1985), Van Damme (1985), Hultgren (1982). Carson (1986) described his own research and that of Peterat, Favaro and Smith as “informed by an explicit intention to move away from positivistic forms of research in order to forge new understandings and to develop new platforms for practical action. This intention is marked by an awareness that positivistic research is inadequate to the task of an educational practice which demands both performance excellence as well as an orientation to the “good” --what has been called ‘practical philosophy’ (Gadamer, 1981, p. 98) or ‘pedagogical theorizing’ (van Manen, 1982b). Thus a conventional notion of method is also called into question as these researchers have attempted to come to an understanding of what forms the basis of both curriculum research and teaching....Each of these studies is guided by an understanding that establishing a conversational relationship is a hermeneutic endeavor. Such a view is rooted in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which considers interpretive acts in their widest possible sense as the ontological task of understanding the nature of human being-in-the-world.... Hermeneutic interpretation begins not with direct research into the problem, but with an uncovering of the question to which the problem statement is an answer. This process is inherently conversational in that the participants in the conversation seek to deepen their understanding of the topic of conversation itself” (p. 74).

Research methodology

The technique I employed in engaging my fellow teacher in critiquing his practice was as follows: I observed his classroom practice and I conversed with him about his practice. The purpose of observation was not investigation; rather, it provided him and me with

common references - matter for conversation. In this, there was no question of my coming to study him .

Conversation, while perhaps not traditionally a research tool, was certainly most appropriate for this study. I chose conversation rather than the more traditional interview for a number of reasons. Implicit in interviewing is the idea of someone investigating someone else. One example could be the medical interview in which the physician secures information for purposes of arriving at a diagnosis and delivering a prescription to a patient. This analogy comes to mind as its parallel is so frequently found in education when someone in a supervising capacity interviews a teacher for the similar purpose of diagnosis, prescription and remediation. More implicit in conversation is the idea of equals coming to an understanding of a situation and the deeper meanings involved. As opposed to interviewing, with its degrees of rigidity of question and response, conversation has a flow. All parties have an equal part in it; in fact, all have a responsibility to play that part. This is not to say that there is no point to the conversation. Conversation without a point is chatter. There is an unspoken agreement by the parties to maintain a focus in conversation. As such, participants in conversation are not passive; rather, they are actively involved in constructing the events of the conversation. And while they have a purpose, what eventuates is not predictable (Gadamer, 1975).

Mishler (1986) has argued for a similar form of research interview in which the researcher and the participant engage in a joint construction of meaning and in which the interview empowers the participant by enhancing his understanding of his own life. The research interview as conceptualized by Mishler is very similar to the conversation as previously described here and in the writings of Carson. My interest in this study lay not in formulating broad generalizations leading to predictions about human behavior but rather, in one person's coming to understand his own professional knowledge.

Therefore, it was obligatory that an ideographic study be carried out and that lapses into nomothetic research methodology be guarded against .

Other methods have been used by those seeking to facilitate the understanding of personally constructed knowledge. These have included repertory grids, fixed-role sketches (Kelly, 1955; Diamond, 1982) and early recollections (Dreikurs, 1953), among others. These methods could possibly have proved very useful. However, they were not chosen for a number of reasons. Among those reasons were the following: such methods could seem somewhat esoteric to teachers; such methods require rather extensive training in their use; they generally are not as efficient as is conversation and often, their purpose is to serve as vehicles to promote conversation and are employed when participants are reluctant to engage in conversation. Further, all contain an element of instrumentality, a “means- end” approach and carry the risk of lapsing into the nomothetic .

Not generally stated in the literature but alluded to by Oberg (1986, 1987) is the tentative nature of engaging another in the search for ground. Without this tentativeness, the orientation of equals seeking understanding can be lost as it is a fragile thing at best. Given our tradition of experts delivering services to clients having deficiencies, there is a constant risk of lapsing into it. Further, the tentativeness maintains the researcher's openness, his vulnerability to the experience of the other.

Data collection consisted of the recording of conversations and the writing of field notes during observation periods. Subsequent to conversation, transcripts were typed.

This research, then, was conducted in an interactive manner involving me as researcher working collaboratively with one participant seeking an understanding of his professional knowledge. The manner of interaction, as stated, was conversational. I met Bob over a period of 14 months. In our first meeting, we explored the possibility of engaging collaboratively in an inquiry into his practice and established a mutuality of interest. We

maintained contact over the period in which I wrote a proposal for the project and then obtained approvals to carry it out . We began the inquiry in October, 1987, having five conversations between then and May, 1988, each conversation lasting one to one and one-half hours. Four of the conversations were taped; one was not due to intrusive background noise where it took place. In addition, I observed several times in Bob's classroom and, on one occasion, accompanied him on a visit to a public school classroom. I took field notes during two of these observations.

In the analysis of data, I reflected on my orientation to the study as initially conceptualized and, with that in awareness, I attempted to be open to the themes emergent in the data. Thematic analysis is generally a combination of line - by - line analysis and highlighting. Themes emerge and are gathered around themselves. It is then the researcher's task to transform these themes into language which is discernible to readers and which the participant recognizes as an authentic rendering of his experience. In this study, it was expected that themes would emerge about the central interest of the participant's experience of the world of the classroom. This, in fact, turned out to be only the beginning of the interpretation of what came about in the inquiry.

Quite obviously, what I initially conceptualized for this inquiry was to place myself in the situation of one other teacher and to function as a facilitator of his understanding. Perhaps I should have considered more thoughtfully what I had written earlier, that is, Gadamer's statement that what eventuates in conversation is not predictable. But I must also know that I am not now as I was when I wrote that.

Ethical considerations

Before obtaining formal permission from the University of Victoria Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects to conduct this research, it was necessary to assure

them that there would be no basis for a lawsuit, that is, that Bob would not be defamed. As this is a single case study and Bob's workplace is unique and easily identified, this could only be done by granting him authority to restrict what was written and asking him to sign a waiver allowing me to publish writings arising from our engagement. He readily signed the waivers. For my part, I thought that whatever lay behind his practice must obviously be good. I had seen him in his classroom before the time of the inquiry and we had had informal talks. I liked his classroom; I felt good being there. It seemed that neither of us could envision any problems of ethics. And what problems could there possibly be?

A TEACHER'S STORY

The universe, at its most basic level, is not only matter, energy, and information. The universe is story. Each creature is a story. Each human being enters this world and awakens to a simple truth: must find my own story within this great epic of being.- Brian Swimme (1987).

Every action has in it an implicit story of the world. -Michael Novak (1971).

Bob is a teacher. What does that mean? We have heard many voices tell us what it is to be a teacher. Recently, some have told us that teaching is possessing competencies and carrying out specified acts toward predetermined ends and that the measure of a teacher lies in how well that is done (Hunter, 1968). Others have told us that teaching is assuming a role and that the measure of a teacher lies with how well he or she carries out the obligations implicit in the role (Buchmann, 1985). These voices have loudly assured us that, if we faithfully follow their dogma, all will be well and we will be spared the agony that so often accompanies the uncertain nature of teaching. There have been other voices, but they have often been difficult to hear over the din of the others. What they have told us might appear at first to not be so comforting and, in fact, they have rarely told us directly what teaching is. Often, they have called upon us to consider ourselves and who, indeed, we are. Such a view implies that to be a teacher is to live a life and to struggle to find the personal meaning of being a teacher.

Bob is a teacher. His professional life has been the struggle to find the personal meaning of being a teacher, to know the foundation upon which his practice has been built. This is his story.

Bob has been a teacher since the late 1960's. For most of that time, he has been outside or on the edge of the public school system. Although he began in public school classrooms, dissatisfaction there led to transfers to other classrooms until, five years after

he had begun, he ceased full-time employment as a teacher. His reason for leaving was unrelated to any question of competence. Then, as now, Bob was considered to be a successful teacher. He received favorable reports from supervisors. However, he considered what was evaluated to be the surface features of his teaching - student busyness, test results, bulletin board displays, and so on. While he didn't deem these things to be trivial, they were not the source of his practice; that is, they were not what was foundational to his ideal of what education truly is, of what a teacher truly is. While, in those early days of his professional life, he was not able to articulate the nature of his ideal, he did know that the school system as he experienced it was oriented to something different than he was. Over many months, at various times, he told me, "The difficulty I had was that I wasn't a disciplinarian because that didn't fit into my model of how I wanted kids to learn. It seemed like I was compromising. You know, if I was going to be a drill sergeant, then it wouldn't allow me to pursue education the way I wanted I wanted education to be explorative and I wanted to turn kids on So I became frustrated because I saw that to operate in the system you had to be part drill sergeant to make it tolerable so that you wouldn't burn out ...and also the children aren't set up for it (his model of teaching). The system does not encourage what I was doing I got to the point, it's taking too much out of me, and, and, what's the point of learning your phonics if these kids are so rigid they can't get beyond that So that really frustrated me. I burned out pretty quickly".

So, five years after beginning his career, Bob ceased teaching in the mainstream of the regular school system but he really never left education. He worked intermittently as a substitute teacher until he saw a way to return to the classroom on a different footing. With a LIP (1) grant, he developed a program for the Drug and Alcohol Commission and took it into classrooms, leading discussions and initiating other activities where high school

students could be engaged in discussing alcohol and other drug usage in the context of their lives. This activity was closer to his ideal of education because, as he explained it, "...you're giving people an opportunity to learn different skills ... (adopt) different perspectives ... the power is within the individual and what you do is help them to tap it, clarify their own possibilities." When the LIP grant ended, Bob returned to university and obtained a Masters degree in counseling psychology, later becoming a member of the British Columbia Association of Psychologists. Shortly after this, he entered the employ of a school district as a teacher of a hospital/homebound program for children who cannot attend regular school classrooms yet are still considered to be clients of the school system. Then, five years ago, an opportunity arose for Bob to return to being a classroom teacher, this time in a classroom with a difference, the classroom in the pediatric ward of Garden City General Hospital. This is where he worked during the time this study was done and where his story took a new and important turn.

Freedom to Respond

In his hospital classroom and throughout the ward, he met an array of children each day. The T and A's (tonsils and adenoids in this context), or the concussed bike rider held overnight for observation he might see only once or twice. Others with medical conditions readily diagnosed but not so readily mediated - the traumatized skull with brain damage or the cancer victim enduring painful therapy - he would meet repeatedly throughout their long-term hospital stay. Similarly, with children who presented medical conditions that stumped the physicians, children for whom diagnosis was elusive and whose conditions were resistant to a variety of tentatively applied treatments he would work with over extended periods of time.

Bob was sensitive to all of these children, responding with equal attention to both long-term and short-term occupants of his classroom, and with equal care for both those

whose recovery was only a matter of time and those who would suffer a lifetime of discomfort and uncertainty. To children whose medical conditions demanded a long stay in hospital, Bob gave lessons much like those seen in any classroom, explaining concepts, directing work sessions, helping correct errors so that whenever they did or even if they did not leave the hospital they would be able to fit in with their peers. He also found time to chat amiably with the boy who had struck his head in the midst of a two car collision, even though the child would likely be discharged within 24 hours. Bob asked about his interests and invited him to come to the classroom or perhaps to have some of the classroom materials brought to him, not so much to further his learning as to distract him from his pain and to relieve some of his feelings of loneliness, however temporary.

Bob was free to respond to each child on this ward in whatever way he judged to be right for that child. His classroom was self-contained and self-sufficient. Although located in an institution with clearly defined hierarchical structures, the classroom had no medical function and so it fell outside the traditional hospital structure and was influenced very little by it, except for having to accommodate the schedules required by children's medical treatment regimens. Nor was this classroom a functional part of the public school system. Although Bob answered to the local school district, he had been visited only sporadically by supervisors from the district, who came to affirm his existence rather than to monitor or to evaluate his work. There was no mandated curriculum for Bob's classroom. As in some other special settings, there was too diverse a range of needs among the children for a mandated curriculum to be feasible. Bob had *carte blanche* to design programs for the children he served, and he reveled in this freedom. Moreover, he used it to good effect.

By all accounts, which were informal but numerous, he was good at his job and his program was dramatically successful. The hospital administrators, the nurses, the children's parents all told him that they liked what he did and what happened in his

classroom. Bob himself knew that his practice was good. But one person who feels himself to be alone can lose perspective and doubt his own judgement. Could he be sure that his foundation was solid if others failed to recognize it ?

A Disarming Grace

During the time I spent in Bob's classroom , I verified these judgements of the others for myself and in the process came to appreciate Bob's response-ability even more. As I watched Bob on the ward, I was struck by the graceful care and attention he gave each child - a nod, a touch, a glance, a greeting, a question, in the classroom, at a child's bedside, in the corridor. He moved quickly so as not to neglect anyone, but his pace was not hurried. He knew intuitively what each child needed and he gave himself enthusiastically and freely, often seemingly unaware of the significance of his acts.

One particular day, I observed just before noon hour in Bob's busy classroom. Children played at the computers (Spellicopter was popular, and Cross Country Canada had taken a girl on a motor trip from Newfoundland to British Columbia) and some sat at the table in the center of the room working at materials sent from their home schools. Susan was concentrating on creating a scene on the computer. The task she had set herself was nearly finished and soon she would be able to give the print instruction to cause Garfield, Odie, John and their friends to appear in hard copy on the chattering printer.

Susan had Downs Syndrome, but that was not why she was in the hospital. Her diabetic condition had worsened and the medical people were having some difficulty finding the appropriate regimen of insulin treatment. She would be hospitalized until the proper treatment plan was found and her condition stabilized. To monitor her condition and as part of their training, two student nurses accompanied Susan wherever she went. I had seen Susan earlier as she met Bob in the corridor and exchanged exuberant greetings with him.

Now one of the young student nurses looked at her watch and motioned to the other seated by Susan. Lunch was to be served soon and Susan had to have blood samples drawn before eating. However, Susan wasn't ready to return to her room, not with Garfield still in the computer. The young nurses-to-be were perplexed. Susan had to come now; she could come back later. Was there to be a confrontation, an embarrassing scene?

While this small scenario was unfolding, Bob was in the opposite corner of the room working with a boy at another activity. Finished there, he turned and moved toward the scene of agitation. In moments, Garfield was appearing out of the printer and gently, quietly, Susan was preparing to leave for her room. Picture in hand, she left happily. Bob was moving away to another part of the room, apparently unaware of the major role he had played in the small drama which had just ended.

An Uneasy Success

The ease and beauty of this event, typical in Bob's practice, made it difficult to understand the feelings of persistent discontent that had plagued him for much of his professional career. Bob expressed some of the same frustration now. In an early conversation, I suggested that, even though he might not like everything about the structure of the system operative in the hospital - the hierarchical system of command, the sexist power structure where most doctors are male and most nurses are female, etc. - his focus was not on changing these things but, rather, was concentrated on providing the best quality service to children in his care. This did not sit well with Bob and, after further conversation, he corrected me, "...the thing is that, yes, I do want to change the system. On a broader level, I am not satisfied One of the goals I have, long term goals, is to change this system because this system doesn't work properly ". Yet my observations of his current practice as well as Bob's descriptions of his earlier teaching did not reveal the source of this frustration. On the contrary, in both the 'regular' classroom and in the

hospital classroom, Bob had had the freedom to follow his pedagogical conscience and to do all of those things (grouping for instruction when appropriate, at other times individualizing and arranging for tutors, organizing resources and activities in a myriad of ways) which many teachers find frustratingly impossible. Bob had clearly not suffered the fate of the frustrated teachers seen so frequently in the system, the keen edge of their early enthusiasm eroded until they have been smoothed and rounded or, covered with layers of cynicism built up as protection against the acid sting of disappointment. Bob caused me to forget these others. His vitality and love of his role permeated the classroom and created a heady atmosphere which drew me into it. Yet Bob himself seemed oblivious of what for many would have been a source of great satisfaction. Instead, he spoke of his “disappointment.”

Beyond Success: A Quality of Care

No one questioned the success of Bob's practice. Its foundations seemed secure. Bob had established credibility: he had masters level academic credentials, extensive experience in his field, and a demonstrably successful program. His position was also secure. He could rule supreme inside his classroom fiefdom, answering for all practical purposes to no one but his students and himself. He used this freedom to respond sensitively to children. When these facts were held up to Bob, however, he downplayed them, calling this the “narrow view” of his practice, and complaining that it did not satisfy him. I, like the others - the supervisors, the nurses, the parents - had failed to look beneath the surface, to discern what is foundational to Bob's practice. Here was the long-sought clue to the source of Bob's disappointment. He was committed to a greater good than is represented in this “narrow view” of his teaching, a view of teaching and being a teacher which goes far beyond the “narrow view”, something which in this hospital setting he had come to call “quality care”.

As Bob explained it, “quality care” meant focusing on children as whole beings, rather than just on their medical conditions. Children's medical symptoms are simply their tickets to admit them to special forms of care, not the source of their identities. Children with medical conditions are more than sets of symptoms and their would-be care givers must see them as individuals rather than as examples of particular categories of illnesses. Bob contrasted this focus to the focus of most hospital staff, physicians included. He said, “We tend to forget the patient. We do it so often that it is frightening”.

Bob felt the provision of quality care as he envisioned it would require a wholesale change in the organization and approach of all hospital staff, particularly the physicians, who were at the top of the hospital hierarchy and therefore had the most invested in the status quo. As I came to understand later, Bob's aim was not so much to change the hospital's organization, as to change the way people related to each other within the organization. He aimed for relationships which were not determined by an organizational chart, but by a shared commitment to the quality of care he believed in so strongly. The kinds of relationships he envisioned required a dramatic change in the way hospital workers understood their practice. Lacking a clear articulation of this aim by Bob, I struggled to grasp the practical meaning of “quality care” and the relationships it embodied. My attention was drawn to Bob's talk about the pediatric health care team. Was this the key to understanding the nature of Bob's frustration, the foundation of his practice ?

Quality Care: A Team Effort ?

There had arisen on the ward in the last two years a pediatric health care team comprised of a handful of individuals: Bob as teacher, a social worker, a child life worker, and a head nurse. The team members shared Bob's commitment to "quality care" and had evolved a unique modus operandi consistent with this commitment. In the team, roles often became blurred, lines of authority were erased, credibility was based on performance

rather than on years of study or job descriptions, and professional egotism was given short shrift. Team members did not forget these things, nor were they naive about their significance in the larger context. Rather, their focus was elsewhere. They assembled not to address a problem or an issue (on which they could unleash all the power and authority of their collective expertise), but to serve a child. Each aimed to do what was right for the child rather than what was correct according to established protocol.

I mined Bob's talk about the team (for it was difficult to see the team in operation apart from the individuals who comprised it) for clues that might help me understand the way it worked, particularly how team members related to patients, to each other, and to the rest of the hospital staff, and how they handled the questions about accountability that inevitably arise with any alternative to bureaucratic organization.

Though the team itself was an identifiable entity, its internal and external boundaries were fluid. Each member did what was called for by the situation rather than what was assigned by his/her role description. They oriented to an individual child rather than to their roles. They drew on all available resources in the name of the child.

The team was willingly accountable for its decisions. Its accountability was both joint and individual. Decisions that were made consensually, as many were, were answered for jointly. If one team member were questioned, any could answer. This is different from saying that the team had to answer for the decisions of its members, a typical arrangement that encourages covering up rather than admitting the shortcomings of one's peers and risking a consequent decline in the prestige of the whole group.

Bob did not know how to sell the idea of the pediatric health care team to the hospital staff and administration. He knew that he had a better chance of convincing these people of the value of "quality care" as part of a hospital-based team with a medical function than he did as a single, non-medical, educational practitioner. Bob was tempted to try to describe

the team in the kind of technical language which held currency with the physicians, but this would have misrepresented its fundamental nature. As Bob knew subconsciously, the essence of the team had more to do with who each member was and what they aimed for than with what techniques they used. Over the time of our conversations he had told me, "... you have to demonstrate it and from there people will pick it up ... you model it and then you get them excited ... what I'm afraid of is people want recipes... like a cookbook... they say, give me the proper techniques and then I can just go ahead and do it and I don't have to change.... Everybody wants a formula. Everybody's so insecure that they can't live with that tension."

Bob was frustrated by his inability to say explicitly what the team was about, not only because it prevented him from convincing the physicians of the value of the team's approach to quality care, but also and perhaps more importantly because it created a feeling of uncertainty about the team's foundations and its durability. Bob said, "My suspicion, the thing I'm going to be horrified to find out, is that the only reason we have this team is because of the people ... I know that in any organization it's the people who make it. But I would like to be able to work out some guiding principles that at least work for us." And later, he said, "What we have to do is get a realistic perception of who, in fact, we are."

Bob's feelings of vulnerability were exaggerated by his lack of knowledge about the team's beginnings. Attempting to pinpoint the origin of the team, Bob noted, "And then somehow...the different personalities came together...it just happened. And the problem with that of course is that it's so fragile." If the team's coming together were serendipitous, a happy conjunction of people with diverse competencies but compatible orientations, then its dissolution could be equally precipitous. If one member left, the team could disappear, or it could mutate into something different, retaining its present appearance but not its essential nature. Would an understanding of the essential nature, of

the foundations of the team prevent its being swallowed up by the prevailing technical orientation of the rest of the hospital staff? And would it get at the source of his disappointment, his frustration? And would such understanding help Bob to secure the foundations of his practice?

The Search for Foundation

To learn more, I accompanied Bob to a regular school classroom, where he and some of his co-workers from the pediatric ward had gone on a REACH (2) visit to follow up on a child who had returned home after brief hospitalization for diabetes. My intention was to see the team in action. Instead, I began to learn more of the hidden standards by which Bob measured his life with children.

Just after I entered the classroom, the school bell signalled the beginning of another afternoon's classes. Bob and the others were already there. Children streamed into the room and went about readying themselves, hanging up jackets, picking up books from shelves, seating themselves in rows of desks facing a green chalkboard at one end of the long room. They looked at the strangers in the room with only mild curiosity. I wondered if they often had adult visitors in their classroom. A few minutes later, the teacher entered, arranged seating for the visitors, and proceeded to explain briefly to the class the reason for the visitors' being there.

When the teacher relinquished the floor, Linda, a child-life worker, introduced herself and the others to the children: Cathy, a nurse, and Bob, a teacher. She asked the children what they knew about diabetes, if they knew anyone who had diabetes. They responded. One had a little brother who was diabetic, another an uncle, another didn't know anyone who was diabetic but had a friend who had asthma. They wanted to talk about needles and inhalers. Gently re-directing the discussion, Linda explained that she and the others were there because David was in this classroom and he had diabetes. David himself was not in

evidence. No little boy squirmed in embarrassment. No heads turned to stare.

Linda turned the discussion over to Cathy, to tell the children what diabetes was. She drew a funny little figure on the board to represent a person, laughing at her own drawing. The children laughed along with her. She pulled a pancreas out of the little figure and some beta cells and blood vessels and talked about what it meant medically to have diabetes, using mostly kid language. In the midst of this explanation, she began to refer specifically to David. As she explained the effect of extra sugar being dumped into the blood stream, she told the children that one thing David would notice was an urge to pee. A few children giggled at this un-adult language in a classroom, but the giggles quickly subsided and children were drawn into a conversation about what it was like to be a child and to have diabetes. They talked about the time David asked for help on the playground, the needle he had poked into one of them because the other boy was curious to know what it felt like. They talked about brothers, uncles, and friends who had diabetes. Cathy listened to all these stories.

Margaret, the classroom teacher, appeared by this time to be somewhat agitated. Frowns crossed her face and she changed position frequently. At last, able to restrain her teacher self no longer, she came forward and asked the children some questions about diabetes, referring to a recent lesson that had concerned a similar topic. The children gave good answers. Emboldened, she turned to those at the front of the room and asked them to tell about the history of diabetes, its discovery and treatment. She asked if the team had any visual materials to show the children.

Cathy appeared somewhat taken back by these requests, and replied that no, she did not have any prepared materials with her but, yes, she could talk about the history of diabetes and its treatment. Very quickly, she went back to 1920 to the story of Banting and Best and the discovery of insulin, early difficulties with its use, and the eventual manufacture of

artificial insulin. The way she did this was not exactly perfunctory, yet it did not have the spirit of her earlier talk. The children asked no questions, shared no stories. Cathy wound down her monologue as quickly as she dared, and directed her attention once again to David, in order to pursue the boy's story of having been poked by David's needle. Had David used a clean needle? Had he disposed of it properly? Had he used sterile technique? Although he had done all of these things, she suggested that perhaps he should not demonstrate his needle in this way. She did not show any alarm, as some might have done in a similar situation. She and David spoke easily, like two people consulting on the proper use of an approved procedure.

This issue disposed of, Cathy reopened the conversation to the rest of the children and returned to the question of what it was like to be David, and to have diabetes. Did he require special treatment? Was he a special person because of his condition? The children did not seem to think so. There was talk of his being a regular child who had to take care of a condition which would always be with him. Others might help him if he required it, but he was largely responsible for his own safety and well-being. Bob wrote on the chalkboard a few suggestions for helping David, should he require it. The session ended.

As Bob, Linda, and Cathy prepared to leave, it was evident that they were pleased. This had been Cathy's first school visit and she had been surprised to have taken such an active part. She had assumed that Bob would take the major role. She had enjoyed the experience and the others offered reinforcement and appreciation for her efforts.

The Foundations of Bob's Practice

A closer look at this seemingly unremarkable event in an entirely unremarkable classroom revealed much about the foundations of Bob's practice. At first, I was disappointed not to have seen Bob in action and I was puzzled at what I had seen. Like Cathy, I too had expected him to play a larger role, using his well-developed teaching skills

to orchestrate and conduct the school visit. Why hadn't he taken his rightful place on the stage and provided a polished presentation, with motivating questions, visual materials, and summarizing points? After all, the classroom was his specialty, his milieu. Cathy and Linda were strangers there. Yet Bob had stayed in the background most of the time, standing to one side as Cathy and Linda had talked about David's condition and conversed with the children.

Bob's apparent comfort in relinquishing the teaching role to non-teachers was in stark contrast to Margaret's discomfiture at the course events took. She had been compelled at one point to seize control of the session as if to get it on the right track. She had watched the REACH presentation to the grade five class as an inspector or superintendent might, concentrating on the organization of the lesson and the relevance of the topic to the prescribed curriculum. Bob, on the other hand, and the others along with him, had been concerned primarily with David, a little boy of perhaps ten years, who had a medical condition that was with him now and would be part of him for the rest of his life. Medically, this condition was not of great significance. (Bob likely saw more serious conditions every day of his working life.) Still, he treated David's condition, and David, with all seriousness and respect. He had come to the school not to give a polished presentation, but to help a little boy to live in his lifeworld in a better way than he had been able to do when Bob had first met him.

Bob's tactfulness with his colleagues flowed from an anticipation of the possibilities inherent in the REACH program. Bob could have gone on these forays into the classrooms of the school system without the others. While he was not a medical person, it would have been possible for him to have consulted medical staff and to have presented a program appropriate to the medical conditions of the children. However, if the educator ideally looks for possibilities of exciting others and contrives situations where they can extend

themselves, then it would be wrong to restrict those possibilities. So, when Cathy, who had never been on a REACH visit, responded to the invitation to lead the children in discussion, Bob's tactfulness allowed him to see her enthusiasm and excitement and to support it and her. Now, she too, has been re-oriented, seeing the REACH visit as a part of her practice, something to which she contributed as it, in turn, contributed to her professional growth.

This caring, this respect, this orientation to others is at the foundation of Bob's practice. It grounds his existence and nourishes everything he does as a teacher. In that grade five classroom, although I did not at first recognize it, I saw Bob acting the entire time, acting with the tact not to put himself forward. He knew that the situation was not for his promotion. He supported and encouraged his non-educator colleagues because they were doing ably what they had all come for. In his silence was speech, in his standing back was action, the tactful speech and action which flow from being oriented to the lifeworld of his fellows.

The Prospects of Quality Care

Bob's label for this pedagogical tact (3) was "quality care" and there were a number of things about the team that made quality care possible. Most important were the members' shared commitment to the idea of quality care and the evolution of modes of relating consistent with this commitment. Also important were the team's capacity to challenge various points of view from the diverse perspectives represented on the team; their concern to help each other make the best possible decisions; their willingness to forgive and compensate for another's mistake; their readiness to relieve some of the load of an overburdened member; and their ready support and encouragement of each other. The durability and longevity of the team depends on these dispositions and commitments more than on any particular organizational structures adopted. Bob was worried about the team's

survival because the team was the vehicle for providing quality care. It was not the team per se, but the quality of care it made possible that most concerned him.

Bob had striven throughout all of his professional life to treat children care-fully, and he wanted others who served children to do the same. He expected to be able to convince other hospital workers beyond the team of the importance of quality care by giving them explanations and results, and was frustrated at his apparent inability to make a convincing case in these terms. However, the essence of quality care eluded his grasp not because of the deficiencies of his explanations, but because its nature is such that it can be communicated only by demonstration. Quality care is not an approach or a set of procedures. Rather, the idea of quality care is what stands behind the actions of those who aspire to it.

Disappointment

While, within the team, Bob could work toward those goals which had eluded him in other settings, frustration persisted, even there and the prospect of systemic change began to seem more distant. Every hierarchy has ways of dealing with those who attempt to alter its patterns. As Bob told me, "You still have an administration that's really against this team... They don't really support it. They committee you to death." Further, I began to question the team as the way to understanding the foundation of Bob's practice. Could it be that Bob deluded himself somewhat in hope that the team could subvert the system and make it possible for him to be able to teach in his way and that his way would be recognized as good? I began to look more deeply into Bob's practice.

I knew that the pediatric ward staff liked the hospital classroom, but not for perhaps the right reasons. Bob contributed a great deal to the total care of children in the hospital and his knowledge of schools enhanced the pediatric ward's ability to provide post-hospital care. Further, while children were in the classroom, they did not demand staff attention

and their apprehension and fears could be temporarily forgotten while they were involved in the activity of the classroom. However, this is a limited idea of what a classroom is for, what teaching is all about. A teacher should not be judged by how well he diverts someone from the anxiety of the moment, but by how well he inspires those in his charge to take control of their own lives, to create meaning of their own existence, to face their anxieties, for these anxieties are ultimately the anxieties of all of us.

When Bob stated that he had "burned out" in the regular classroom many years ago, this statement, I believe, was somewhat inaccurate. Burn-out is the sigh which has no answer to the question, "What's the use?" (van Manen, 1986a). In contrast, Bob's professional life has always manifested the struggle to give the lie to the question. This struggle has not been without disappointment (the effort has only occasionally produced the results hoped for) or frustration (if only others, especially those in positions of authority could or would see the possibilities) but the struggle has always been worth the effort. "Burned out" teachers are more likely to have long ceased the struggle and are dutifully marking papers which will be unread by students (Cunningham, 1983), are going through the motions in their classrooms, fulfilling the obligation of the position but investing it with little of themselves for they have little left to give.

Burned out teachers no longer struggle with the questions:

What's the use of teaching children to read, to learn the phonic conventions, if reading itself is just a skill and they never see the beauty of literature or how stories help them to make meaning of their own lives?

What's the use of teaching Tom about diabetes and controlling his condition if at home he won't get regular meals or a balanced diet because his mother is out drinking most of the time?

And what's the use of being a teacher if so much of what is expected of a teacher is a

‘narrow view’ of disciplinarian, one who forces children to accept the mind-numbing chores of becoming merely competent?

And what's the use of being a teacher if children themselves become so alienated from their own experiences that they too demand that the teacher restrict himself to technical competence, to transmitting information efficiently?

And what's the use of having an idea that education holds unlimited possibilities for exciting people, for helping them to see the potential meaning of their own lives, for helping them to clarify their possibilities, if the bureaucratic mind set that pervades in the system where most of ‘schooling’ occurs accepts or perhaps even demands a limited view, a “narrow view” that sets technical competencies as its standard?

The system (and those in it) will recognize, perhaps even laud, those aspects of teaching, of classroom life, that constitute the narrow view. But, for Bob, there is little satisfaction in this. These things may be necessary (and often are) but they have not been enough and likely never will be.

A Competent Teacher

Bob cited hypothetical examples of teachers who could competently teach, who could fulfill the mandates of the curriculum and who could capably present information but noted that such teaching is the “narrow view”, the view that gives rise to the question, “what's the use?”

His hypothetical examples brought to my mind teachers I have known, teachers who have framed responses vastly different from Bob's. Marlene was one of these. I do not know what had drawn Marlene to the call of teaching. Despite her B. Ed. degree from a Western Canadian university, she had, at first, encountered difficulty in obtaining a teaching position and she worked for a time as a cocktail waitress. While the pay had been good and the tips easy to come by during those booming days of the oil rush, the work was

tedious and some of the customers had expected more than prompt service for the price of the tip. When our school expanded by another classroom in early autumn, she procured the position.

Initially, she had not been a particularly capable teacher. In fact, her daybook was disorganized, bulletin board displays were non-existent, and the classroom was often a mess. The principal had been somewhat disgruntled at her failure to accept his first quiet hints for improvement. However, with the school in the throes of a massive population explosion, the principal had more pressing problems than one less-than-satisfactory teacher. Besides, he was looking forward to a career change, an opportunity to handle his real estate investments.

In Marlene's second year of teaching, the school population began to shrink. It appeared that some teachers would have to be dismissed.

A transformation occurred. Marlene's classroom began to blossom. Bulletin boards appeared and were changed regularly. The hallway near her classroom displayed student art. Notebooks, formerly dog-eared and unkempt, began to be tidy, well-marked, and cheery comments (eg. "Good work! Excellent! You can do better!") and stars began to appear on student work. The classroom itself was tidy and clean. Her daybook was kept religiously and lesson plans were in evidence. There would be no less-than-satisfactory report for Marlene. Her position would be secure.

Marlene followed all the rules. In fact, she mastered them. If it appeared that a child might 'experience difficulty' with the second grade curriculum, she immediately enlisted the services of the learning assistant. This might or might not have helped the child with his or her difficulty but it certainly could protect against any charge that she had failed to do 'everything possible'. And yet it was apparent to the learning assistant, when Marlene and he discussed the child, that the child was not present to Marlene. Instead, he or she was an

object, a something. In fact, the discussions were not the conversation of two professionals considering the best action to follow in a child's interest. Instead, they were more analagous to the consultation an apprentice mechanic might seek with a journeyman as to the correct procedure for carrying out the repair of a defective part. And, while Marlene always cheerfully agreed to any recommendations, they were carried out in a mechanical way. Her decision to be a merely competent teacher had effectively cut her off from the possibility of understanding teaching as a profession in the way Bob knows it. "A professional is a person who is committed to an ethical set of principles, has a philosophy and an understanding who and what they are and then has the autonomy to go out and deal with the situation as an autonomous, or as autonomous as you can get, as an autonomous person in their own chosen field."

I do not know what had drawn Marlene to the call of teaching. Whether it was the desire to do something of significance with children or if it was the illusory lure of the lengthy vacation period (or some other) remained her private knowledge. Her quickly acquired cynicism would likely have prevented her revealing any sort of idealism, had it ever been present.

Marlene turned into a competent teacher, yet something was missing. The surface looked fine but there was little beneath it. Marlene was not authentically present to her students. She did not seek to create the meaning of her own life in their presence and she was not open to them as they, in turn, sought the possibilities in their lives.

An Openness To Possibility

Where, then, could the ideal be held, the ideal that to teach is to inspire, to help others to see their own possibilities and, as a teacher, to create meaning from the experiences of one's own life, to be alert to one's own possibilities?

Neither the school system which Bob has forsaken nor the hospital system of which he

is now a part encourage the development of this ideal or recognize it. However, as a hospital teacher more than as a regular classroom teacher, Bob could respond to a situation. “What I view here is a whole series of opportunities to teach. But they're little; you might call them micro-units.”

As we talked, I learned of some examples of the micro-units. One of these involved a young woman of twenty years, afflicted with cystic fibrosis, whose condition was nearing its fatal termination. When she had a brief reprieve, she sought to do something of significance. Bob had anticipated this time and helped her to create a videotaped chronicle of this final period of her life. No prepared curriculum, no prescribed rule of action could have been of assistance to him in helping this young woman to make meaning of living with the disease which would take her life.

Another instance had to do with the REACH visits into homes and classrooms which Bob had formerly conducted from the burn unit at Queen City Hospital. The people at the burn unit had come to see REACH visits as an integral part of their work with the children in their care. They had become enthused with the dimension the visits added to their treatment of these children. Eventually the nurses took over the program although they still consulted Bob and he had maintained his association with them. He did not view this change of his status relative to the program as a loss of prestige. On the contrary, he saw it as a splendid success. People had become excited about something which he had placed into their lives and had created something meaningful of it for themselves. “That's what I enjoy the most, coming into those kinds of situations and seeing what are the possibilities and trying some of them.”

Once they had appropriated the program, the nurses had extended it to involve city firemen in identifying high risk groups in the community and had begun burn prevention programs. Bob was greatly enthused by this development. “The ideal educational input is

that if you go into a situation like that, that was not oriented in this way, you go, you work with them, you get them oriented to the point at which they don't need you They pick it up and run with it. To me that's incredibly exciting. The burn unit may be the best thing I ever did, I mean, actually doing true education. The hospital could shut down ...they could shut down this program (Bob's hospital classroom) and the burn unit would still have that aim. To me that's incredibly exciting.”

Conclusion

In his present setting, Bob has found a way to hold to those ideals, that animating idea which called him to teaching in the first place, the idea that the role of the teacher was to excite people, to inspire, to help them to clarify, to see their own possibilities, to discern the beautiful, to understand their own beings. In the regular school system with its insistence on conformity to the hidden rules of its culture, he had seen no way to be faithful to what he would not compromise. The places where he has been able to be a teacher and to maintain his goal have been the LIP program, the homebound program, and now the hospital classroom, which has been the most fruitful of all. Here, he has established a solid core, a place to dwell and a base from which to operate. While the hospital classroom has not provided the setting where he might have the opportunity for long-term relation with children (and there may be some disappointment in this), he has not compromised his ideal and he can remain ever alert to the possibilities there, the opportunity to teach the micro-units.

Being a teacher is living a professional life that is an answer to the question, “What's the use?” It is a way of being that is an affirmation that what one does has a point. The answer to the question, “What's the use?” is not framed with words, but with the living of a life, in remaining alert to the possibilities of authentic being. And so it has been for Bob . His way of being has framed an answer and that answer is obvious .

While understanding more clearly the nature of what lies behind his professional life may relieve some of Bob's feelings of frustration, there is no resolution to his story. His professional life will remain one of tension, struggling to maintain his ideal in the midst of a structure which is oriented to other, different goals.

Notes

1. LIP was an acronym standing for Local Initiatives Program, program sponsored by the Canadian government to encourage the development of social programs at a local level.

2. REACH was the term Bob had given to the program wherein he extended his practice into schools. Initially, the purpose of the program was to facilitate a child's re-entry into regular classroom life. The action followed varied with each case and Bob used his judgement to determine what was appropriate.

3. Tact, here, owes much to van Manen and might be summarized as knowing how to act in "pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness" (van Manen, 1984b, p.36).

EPILOGUE

Purpose re-considered

In the original statement of the purpose of this inquiry, I said that I aimed to facilitate a teacher's understanding of his own professional knowledge . I may have done that but that purpose now seems off the point. Looking back on the study, I believe I have been involved in something more profound, more subtle, deeper, more full of meaning. I think that both Bob, my co-participant, and I made our lives with children the object of study and as we talked about our experiences of being teachers, we engaged in “pedagogical theorizing... bringing to speech the everyday experience of living with children” (van Manen , 1982b). We constructed a situation where we could engage each other in viewing some events of our professional lives, whereby both of us could see possibilities of transcendence, of going beyond our present situation.

Doing this has given me an enhanced appreciation of the gravity of such an enterprise, the moral nature of it, the difficulty in doing it. I have experienced the exhilaration of authentic presence of another person and the frustration of trying to write about that and the disappointment at the inadequacy of writing about human events.

The process of engaging with another teacher in a manner to bring to speech or to writing the meaning of life in a classroom, what it is to teach and to be a teacher is a constant search for the space between nihilistic relativism and absolutism. This is the space in which there are no laws of teaching to be discovered, no sets of principles which will tell a teacher what to do or how to be, and yet, where that teaching is not a frivolous activity where anything goes, where the absence of absolute standards says that one person's ideas are as good as another's, that one action is as appropriate as another.

In this process, one constantly brings his experience into question and, in doing that,

brings himself into question for, in teaching, there is ultimately no way to separate the deed from the doer. And yet, in this process, there is not the sense of loss, of having no measure. In fact, in consideration of teaching life, there is a glimmer of realization of what it is to be a teacher, of the measure of pedagogy.

Phenomenological research re-considered

Previous to this study, I could read about phenomenological research and attempt to comprehend what it would be to conduct phenomenological research. I could write that I would orient myself to the study, that I would investigate experience, reflect on themes, and describe the phenomenon through the art of writing. But I could not fully appreciate these words, “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience...it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world.

Phenomenological research is the study of essences...The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language when the descriptions reawakens or shows us the lived meaning or significance of the experiences in a fuller or deeper manner.

Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness...a minding, a heeding...of what it means to live a life.

Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human...as its ultimate aim, to fulfill our human nature: to become more fully who we are.

Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity...What we must do is discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that in the words, or maybe better, in spite of the words, we find 'memories' which paradoxically we never thought or felt before” (van Manen, 1984b, p. 36).

Upon looking back, I have an enhanced appreciation of all that I previously wrote. The question that I had to orient myself to has become this: What does being a teacher mean to

Bob? How does he experience being a teacher? My turning to this question occurred not prior to the study but during and not in one insightful moment but slowly over the period of the time of conversing and analyzing and writing and re-writing. I slowly moved from investigating Bob's experience as I conceptualized it to investigating it (more closely) as he lived it. This, too, was not in any flash of insight (as understanding is sometimes conceptualized) but transpired slowly over months. And I did isolate themes from the data (the transcripts) and I did reflect on those themes. But it was only after the hours spent with them, thinking about them, having them evoke similar themes from my own experience, that I began to see some as peripheral and others as more central. Then, I began to see that they only pointed the way to development of understanding of what being a teacher means to Bob.

And, as I look at the previous drafts piled on my desk I appreciate what it means to write and re-write in the attempt to portray a phenomenon.

Re-consideration of method

After an initial period of conversing with Bob, I retired with my transcripts and tapes to the place where I write. I began to analyze; that is, I read and re-read the transcripts, listened and re-listened to the tapes. After a time (and because I was predisposed to looking for them) certain themes emerged. (Appendix) Around those themes, I was able to gather supporting statements. However, after a period of gathering more and more supporting statements around the emergent themes, it occurred to me that the themes I had generated did not reveal what I was seeking to illuminate; they did not tell me what was behind Bob's practice. So, thematic analysis proved to be only a starting point. Perhaps it was a useful exercise, perhaps even necessary, but stopping at thematic analysis would have been unsatisfying to me and, I think, given only an illusory, perhaps false, idea of

Bob's pedagogy.

The activity of pedagogical theorizing at times seems so mundane as to be hardly worth the time taken to do it. Yet, at the same time, it also seems so profound that attempting to sense the meaning implicit in it is overwhelming. For it is nothing more or less than the attempt to interpret the meaning of a human life and human lives are, at once, mundane and profound.

The artistry inherent in framing orienting questions (those kind of questions which cause someone to stop, to consider, to reflect) is something which I have come to appreciate. However, only in the attempt to do this can appreciation and a kind of comprehension grow. And this is not so much a skill, (though there is an element of technique, of course) as something which grows from immersing oneself in the subject, in coming to care about the life of another, in reflection on one's own life.

I might, in retrospect, be tempted to define what I did as method but I am troubled by that possibility. I consider Gadamer's notions of method and seeking truth, "... what definition distrusts is the capacity not only of the reader but conversation itself. Through definition a word becomes a term: rigid, predictable, and invulnerable to the twists and turns that a word receives both in dialogue and in the history of the language in general. The terminal character of terminology is appropriate to meaning that has been finally determined and about which discussion has stopped....If Gadamer does not begin (or end) with a definition of method but rather proceeds to the history of humanistic alternatives, that is in part because history itself is the alternative to method....As methodical proof calls a halt to history and obviates any further need to consult tradition as a source of knowledge, so also art, philosophy, history- tradition generally - challenge the universality and exhaustiveness of method as the exclusive means whereby knowledge worthy of being

called true is disclosed” (Weinsheimer,1985, p. 1).

In thinking of what teaching was for Bob, I found myself drawn back into my own history and, in interpreting meaning for him, I interpreted meaning at the same time for myself. From interpretation, understanding grew. If this is method, let it be called so, but there is nothing I would tell anyone else to do in their own efforts to create meaning and to understand. By this, I do not mean that there was no value in what I did. Rather, it is simply that I have found no prescribed route for someone else to follow. But the possibility does exist that another who would be researcher could read my account and see their own possibilities for their own journey to understanding.

Ethical re-considerations

There is no human activity in which ethical considerations are absent. Stating the obvious does not lessen the difficulty in making public what previously has been private.

Perhaps the following quote summarizes how I have come to feel about the ethics of the research, “If my work permits the teachers I work with to examine their own work with a seeing that is more inclusive, that surveys an ever widening surround, that is a search I would gladly join. But if my work certifies me, as an agent of the state to peer into what is hidden from public view, if it is my look that discovers and appraises, then I might as well approach the classroom with bloodhound as well as briefcase, and they ought to demand to see my warrant, before they let me in” (Grumet, 1987, p.324).

In this instance, what Bob has said and what he does belong to him and are his responsibility. What I have interpreted of what he has said and done is entirely my responsibility. In fact, in interpreting, I know, of course, that I reveal to public view my values, my biases, my assumptions. Once more, this does not lessen the ethical consideration of this sort of research.

The issue of defamation is very likely a false one. It is not particularly likely that any researcher would defame a participant in this kind of research.

Joan Didion wrote that only the very young and the very old can tell their dreams at the breakfast table. All others keep their thoughts private. But in our conversations, we both said more than we knew we said and in my writing, I tell more than I can know I tell.

We grow up, we live in inauthentic relationship. We have little familiarity with revealing our selves to ourselves or to others. But conversation does not have the formal rules of debate or even the informal rules of argument and we lose our selves in it and we reveal our selves to ourselves and to others.

Though we seek to know our selves more authentically, we fear what may eventuate for it cannot be predicted. Novelists can do the same thing; ie, write about authentic existence, but they can protest that their writing is a creation of imagination. My research is not based in imagination. I have attempted to write an interpretation of a life as I encountered it. I do mean my own life and Bob's.

Did any of my questions lead Bob to consider things which he would have left unconsidered? Did my attempts to understand him lead me to places in my own life I might have left undisturbed? The answer is probably yes. Authenticity exacts a heavy price, the stripping away of the apparent safety of self-deception. Of course, self-deception exacts its own price, the suffocation of authenticity.

There is no resolution; a dilemma remains. I can only know which course I opt for and hope to have the courage to hold to it.

Interpretive writing

Interpretive writing has a value which is inherent in itself (not as a means to an end), for in the writing and re-writing comes a kind of clarity. The writing has the effect of

creating a distance from the event (be it experience, or conversation about experience), a space where one has room to think about the meaning of the event.

It is here also that the role of the researcher takes form. Both of us as participants, engaged in the dialogical relationship and, in our conversation, created a text. However, I, as researcher, was the one who took that text (the transcripts of our conversation) and engaged in dialog with it at a further distance from the earlier text. It is, I think, in the space created by this distancing that transcendence is most possible. It was here that I came to see relationships not as a means to an end, but as the desired end in itself as foundational to teaching and being a teacher. Written in this summary fashion, it might sound as though this realization came in a flash of insight. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I dwelt in the space for many months and the realization came in the re-living of the interpretations of events of my life. Nor is this a realization which I can hold onto easily; in fact, it constantly eludes my firm grasp. Even so, this knowledge is transformative. I look to the past, live in the present, and anticipate the future in a manner fundamentally different for me.

Previous implications re-considered

Originally, I wrote that I viewed this research as having possible implications for supervision. I still hold that view but not in the same manner as before. Once more, I now have a different perspective. At first, I agreed with the stance espoused by Smyth and Diamond that a central role for in-service teacher educators is to let themselves be used by teachers.

I look upon this now as somewhat simplistic and instrumentalist, implying that supervisors are completed beings possessing understanding who will help the incomplete beings, teachers, to a more improved state. Supervisors would be the means to a better

end. I compare this to the view I now have of some events of my early teaching life. When I first began teaching, I had a notion that if I were to enter the classroom determined to not be like my own teachers, that is to be interesting, to be democratic and not autocratic, to treat students as “equals”, to be fair and just that all would be well and students' responses would be inspiring. So when the “new” social studies program with its emphasis on values clarification and de-emphasis of factual retention swept the scene, I arrogantly assumed that students would be overjoyed to participate in this glorious, revolutionary venture. I forgot my own resentment when years earlier, on the Christmas exam of my grade 12 year, Mr. Smith added a five-mark question in which we were asked to offer our opinion regarding mainland China's entry into the United Nations. I had thought it was pure hypocrisy to ask for our opinions. We had no opinions. The rules in that course were simple. You sat passively. Notes were to be made but not while Smith was talking; they were to be written at another time for homework; no questions were asked; no papers written. You listened while Smith, in his monotonic voice, reiterated portions of the text. How could he have had the effrontery to ask for an opinion on an exam? Yet, ten years later I could ask my students, after their years of quietly sitting, receiving information and mindlessly making their own notes, to accept new rules and to question their values. My own values weren't in question, but, then, I was the teacher.

Similarly, the ideas of Smyth and Diamond (and my own earlier ideas) that supervisors will go to teachers to help them change themselves now seem simplistic and instrumentalist. Conversing with another teacher and seeking understanding is a real-life activity and simplistic notions do not stand up well.

While there are no generalizations to be made, no principles to abstract, I do think that those educators who read this writing could see in it some commonalities, could feel some

resonance with their own professional lives, and could enter into a kind of reflection on the events of their own practices, could possibly even be re-oriented to view teaching less as a way of doing and more as a way of being. And, for those who already see teaching more as being than doing, they might be heartened to know that research into teaching as being is legitimate in its own right.

Today, I see implications of this inquiry in a different way. Pedagogic theorizing has within it the possibility for transcendence, for providing a space for teachers to go beyond, to get to foundations, and to be altered fundamentally. In our theorizing, Bob and I have both come to a new orientation, a new standpoint from which to view our educational lives.

Understanding and interpretation

When I entered this inquiry, the assumptions I held about understanding went unexamined; they remained hidden from my view. It was not that I had never considered understanding; rather, I assumed that my idea would have been the one shared by all, truly consensual knowledge. That way of thinking put understanding into the realm of object, a something which people possess in varying amounts.

In fact, I had thought a good deal about people I had known and whom I considered to possess understanding and I also thought about the situations where they seemed to possess understanding and where they seemed to lack it. I thought of the nurse who, though she had never been mentally ill herself, could comprehend the anguish and hopelessness of the chronically mentally ill person and communicate to that person her fellow feeling. I thought also of that same nurse's failed marriage and her disturbed relations with her children. I thought of her life situation and what might account for her ability to understand in the one context and to be so lacking in the other.

Despite these thoughts and observations, the idea of understanding which I would have

held would be as a capacity to empathize with another, to attempt to look at a situation as the other might look at it. This view implies that a certain understanding would account for a particular interpretation of a situation or event.

But, in my research, this is not what happened. Instead, there was a reflexive process of understanding and interpreting, the interpreting occurring in the attempt to bring understanding into language. At the same time, these grew in me in the awareness that I was bodily a part of this process, and that there was a disclosure to me of my own way of being.

The facile nature with which we use words such as “understand” makes them shallow, but participation in this study causes a re-consideration. How quickly I (and others) can murmur that I understand. In fact, one can never understand the experience of another. But one can strive to understand one's own experience and this striving makes one more receptive, more open, more authentically present in the lives of others. And this knowledge, that one can never understand, rather than creating a gulf amongst human beings, can be the basis for creating bridges that span gulfs, for knowing the importance of community.

At first, it seemed possible simply to talk to Bob about his professional life, to listen to him, and then to search out the emergent themes. However, when I set about to do so, what was conceived as an exercise began to become authentic and real.

In this study, Bob and I have, in some small way, come to a more aware, and thus more responsible, position regarding our lives as teachers. And, possibly, we have done this in a microcosm of community. I have come to view our engagement as being an initially tentative exploration of the attitudes, assumptions, viewpoints of the other, termed by Gadamer (1975) as one's ‘horizon’. Then, as a mutual trust, respect, and regard

developed, there was often a moment when a kind of understanding grew, a 'fusing of those horizons'.

The creation of meaning, of transcendence is a fundamental human endeavor (Frankl, 1962; Phenix, 1964; Huebner, 1984). Many do it in a way which is entirely visible to others but, for themselves, they may or may not be aware of its happening. I think of such people as sculptors, painters, performing musicians, poets, novelists. But these people are not pedagogues and they do not situate themselves in the lives of children and perhaps, then, it is not so important that they reflect on the manner of their lives. However, a pedagogue is one who cannot avoid accepting the responsibility for raising the awareness of the life as lived. And to do so is to engage in a form of pedagogical theorizing, to look closely at what it means to be in the lives of children.

For Bob, there has been, and is, the existence of the possibility of creating from our conversation and from my writing, an altered being, of going or seeing beyond his present perception of his situation, an altered way of being which is to transcend. I could not predict that this would happen. I can know only what Bob has told me, "I knew that the program was good. But I really wanted to do this, and I really wanted to get a perspective and I really wanted to get insight and I really wanted to get to kick it around and see what you see from a different point of view. ...Because I'm like a fish in the water...I don't discover the water; I'm in it...that's another thing I was looking for, the ability to reflect."

Engaging in any activity which holds possibility of transcendence is, I believe, of worth in its own right. In fact, to seek transcendence as a goal would debase the activity.

In our conversations, we have, I think, explored what it means for us to be teachers, to situate ourselves in the lives of children, and to bring that to speech. Such an undertaking is never fully satisfied, never complete, and never easy to capture and to hold. Regardless,

I have attempted to write about our undertaking and to make it comprehensible, that is, I have attempted to write of Bob's practice in an interpretive way. The events of a teacher's classroom life are mundane and ordinary; what lies behind those events, what animates the teacher's practice, can be fascinating. And it is what lies behind our teaching practices which is so often hidden from our gaze. In writing, I have come to know more of the difficulty of writing, I have clarified for myself the meanings of some events, and I offer to Bob something for him to consider. My offering is tentative and I have no conception that it is final, definitive, or complete. Rather, I see it as an invitation to consider a possibility, to extend his own interpretation of the meanings of events of his professional life.

Just as Bob has struggled with the question, "What's the use?", so I have struggled with it also. What is the use of engaging in this sort of research for, surely, I have extracted no sets of principles or formulated any generalizations from this story out of Bob's life. Nor have I attempted to do so. Again, the only authentic answer to the question is the living of a life and creating the meaning inherent in that living. I know more deeply now that in being with Bob and actively conversing with him about his professional life, his beliefs, and subsequently struggling to comprehend the meaning in all that and then to write about what I have come to understand, that I am now changed, re-oriented, seeing with different eyes from a different perspective. And I know that possibility exists for Bob, as well.

And, for my part, what eventuated was a widening and deepening of my horizon - a coming to greater understanding or personal knowing in a way that has changed me, allowed me to see in a different way, a way that lies in altered being. (5)

Autobiography

Any attempt to understand the experience of someone else will inevitably involve a

deepening of the understanding of one's own experience. Carson has said, "Interpreting the prior question which lies behind a problem statement is not totally an analytical process. There is an experience of the world which directs our attention to the question in the first place. Autobiographical reflection is, therefore, an important aspect of research in a conversational mode" (1986, p.76). In considering Bob's practice, events from my own professional life replayed themselves in my memory. Events, which, in some cases, have haunted me and which I have been able to deal with only defensively, (interpreting them for psychological self-protection with its concomitant self deceit) have been re-visited. The story which I relate now is only one of many which have replayed themselves in these past months. I relate it as an example and because it has held such personal meaning.

SPRING ON THE PRAIRIE

Spring on the prairie, it comes like a surprise.

One minute there's snow on the ground, the next there's sun in your eyes.

- Humphrey and the Dumptrucks, Gopher Suite

I really can't recall first meeting Emil. I know that he was in my physical education classes in his grade ten year. He was, I was told, a year older than most of the others not because of school failure, but because of beginning at a later age. I never questioned this, accepting it as I think I accepted or took for granted so much in those years. I suppose I assumed that accounted for his apparent maturity for he seemed different from the other students - older, quieter, more mannerly. I know that other teachers remarked as to his apparently mature demeanor and his graciousness - holding a door, a quiet greeting.

It began one day in Spring with the mud drying quickly around the new building and dust already being kicked up on the gravelled street in front. It was the kind of prairie

spring day when the things of winter have been put away - the snow shovels, basketballs and hockey sticks. But the things of summer haven't made their appearance - the lawnmowers and baseball bats. Sadie came into the staffroom. Her voice shook and her face was pale as she talked of the last period of the day with the 12A class. She said that as the class had worked at an assignment, Emil had left his desk and walked to the front of the room where he announced that he had something he wanted to say. She was startled but there was something about the look in his eyes that held back her reprimand. He proceeded to confess that he had been against the class but now wanted to be with them, that he had been evil but now wanted to do good things. Students looked away, stared silently at their books, and Sadie was frightened, something not in keeping with her well-earned reputation as the old battle-axe. The bell mercifully ended her ordeal and students hurried away. Teachers pressed her for details but she had none to give. We questioned each other but few had anything to say though a rumor quietly passed around that our administrators, Constantine and Proctor, were known to be aware of something.

The next day, I wasn't prepared when Marion came into the gymnasium to ask for help. Her face was pale and her voice was quivering as she told me of Emil. When he had begun to voice his delusions in her classroom, she had taken him to the general office to talk with him but had grown afraid. I went to the office. Whenever I had spoken with Emil before, his dark brown eyes were cast down, his voice was muted, his posture demure. That day, his eyes flashed wildly and he spoke in a frenzy. He had so much to tell. He apologized for lusting after my wife, he couldn't help himself, he was vile, his flesh was rotting away, couldn't I smell it. Now everything was going to be great, he was in love with Sharon Reed, he had millions of dollars, they would go away together.

The hall bells rang. Toward the end of their assault, Emil grew increasingly agitated

and, finally, surged to his feet and rushed out of the office. I followed and watched as he walked into Constantine's classroom and took a seat at the back of the room. As I turned to look for help, I encountered Constantine coming toward his classroom. I stopped him and told him that Emil was in the classroom and asked him to watch while I went to phone a doctor. He looked quizzically at me, but didn't speak. I felt the anger rising. When I told him that he knew what I was talking about, that he knew Emil was having a psychotic breakdown, he denied his knowledge. I repeated my instructions. He would watch Emil; I would get the doctor. I've never forgotten his words, though the memory of the rage of that moment doesn't give me the feeling of righteousness that it once did. He said simply, "But I'm giving a test."

As I spoke on the phone in the general office to the doctor, I heard a voice outside. Emil stood there, talking to the school entrance or whatever it was that his tortured mind was seeing there. He left then and I followed in my car. He ignored my offer of a ride, though I wouldn't be sure that he was even aware of my presence. The doctor's car appeared up the street and he said he would take it from there.

It was a beautiful prairie spring day, the kind of day when you hear the first meadowlark and I never saw Emil again. I was told that the doctor had followed him to his home and then had called for the town constable who took Emil into custody, that he had been placed in the lock-up, and that, the next day, he was taken to Ponoka to the provincial mental hospital. I don't recall that anyone ever talked about him the rest of that year.

I resigned from my job later that year. I offered a lot of reasons to my associates, especially Marion. I wanted to move up, I was bored, I wanted to try something else. I think I was burned out. My wife was pregnant with our first child and I had resigned with no idea what I would do next. But this was 1967 and teaching jobs were plentiful. I saw

an advertisement in the paper calling teachers to the County of Rouge River, and so I went. Despite my lack of qualifications and experience in the field, I was hired to be a counselor in a K-12 school in that county. I left there in mid-year. I had administered and scored hundreds of aptitude tests, interest inventories, achievement tests, and had entered the results in hundreds of pupil folders. I also had had one client approach me for counseling, a crazy kid named Larry who had been in more foster homes than years in his life, who had spent the previous two years in the youth detention center a few miles down the road and who laughed out maniacally during lulls in class periods and whom other students stared at as they would an extra-terrestrial.

I saw Marion during that year when Lynn went to visit her and to show her our new son and she mentioned that someone had seen Emil in Ponoka. He didn't talk much there, he was quiet, polite and sometimes he strummed on his guitar. She told me other things, too that had come to be known. Emil had been going over to Proctor's house evenings to talk with him about personal problems for several months before his breakdown. Constantine had known of this, but they had decided it would be best kept from the teachers. Emil's family life was rather lonely; he lived with his father, a quiet person who kept to himself and was not really part of things in the community. And when he was four years old, his mother had hanged herself and he had witnessed her death.

When Marion came to visit later that fall of 1968, she told us that Emil had left Ponoka and had gone to Vancouver whence a rumor had returned that he had taken his life under the wheels of a train.

If the rumor were true, I suppose Emil's story could be considered finished. I must acknowledge that I don't really know. Marion died two years later and I had no wish to return to the little town with my good friend no longer there. But I have lived these past

twenty years believing that he is dead and there is no comfort in thinking that my belief may be incorrect.

Re-orientation

I could say that the possibility exists to maintain that experience and preserve it, but, in fact, it does not. Conversation with Bob, the searching for what ever could lie behind his disappointments, have rendered that impossible. Not in any deliberate way, but in the process of the dialogue I have re-interpreted the experience and a different kind of meaning has emerged. The old feelings of guilt, of shame, of outrage, of righteousness are gone.

The event occurred; I shaped myself with my interpretation of it. Now, I have had an opportunity to re-interpret and to re-shape myself. The possibility to transcend, to go beyond, has been present. I could wish for nothing more.

During the months I met with Bob and read then re-read the transcripts of our conversations, much from my own past as student and teacher returned to me. Rarely did these recollections directly concern the subject matter, the disciplines. Most often the recollections focussed on relationship. This concern with relationship (most noted in its absence or in its relative failure to achieve community) frames the prior question for me. It encompasses the orientation I took to the inquiry and viewed from a new standpoint, it concerns me now. I can view my part in Emil's story as a failure of relationship, an absence of myself in community, but that was how I was then. I was not then as I am now. This does not imply that I reached a final state and that I now can enter fully into community. I do not believe in nirvanas or heavens or perfection. But I do think I have a more depthful understanding and I think that, should I ever meet Emil (or Larry, or Grant, or Lu, or Kirby, or Shawnee) again, I will comprehend them in a different way than before and what I would do would be more in keeping with what I believe.

“Education is opening up...in our meeting, even when we no more want to intervene than the heavens and the food, there is something powerful stirring - our saying of Thou. Here begins our secret might and its responsibility. Man exercises power even in the most involuntary: everything depends upon whether he knows what he does and places it under the law of his task. Oh, what is your love of it is not also responsibility for everything that is affected by its might! Whether we intend it or not, we always educate 'to' something; it depends upon us whether that something is what we do not will or something that we do will - will without willfulness. But this can only be done legitimately in one way, which is what we ourselves do in educating, since we live facing man as our Thou, not experiencing him but beholding him, not using but realizing” (Buber,1967, p. 100).

NOTES

1. Adler called his school of psychology, Individual Psychology. The name came not from an emphasis on the individual person but from an emphasis on each person as an integrated whole living in a community and world also indivisible.

2. Teaching, viewed ontologically, has been written of by a number of educators. Denton (1974) has said, "Teaching is a mode of being in the world and, as such, is neither describable nor analyzable with the language of things ..we cannot stop asking about that mode of being which we are. The explication of being, a task never fulfilled, remains our task, however. We dwell in a world which can never be fully worded, though it waits our wording for its disclosure. Paradoxical? Confusion? Conflicting? Of course, but no more paradoxical, confusing, or conflicting that world of intentional action, individuated and shared meanings, affectional ties, tensive relationships, in which there is always the possibility of one's saying no. And you, as a being-who-teaches, are a co-creator and co-existor of that world, a world you are now attempting to understand through wording it in an authentic way.... if we ground our description and interpretation of teaching in the existential situation, we shall have to reject the approach of scientific explanation as well as that of substantialist definition. If we seek understanding of a being-who-teaches from within the situation, the meaning of the particular will be obtained from the teacher in her world with others, not from some a priori law" (Denton, p. 102).

Cunningham argued, "Clearly, there is a need for a recognition of teachers, not as things, but as beings. Things can be described, defined, fragmented, measured, controlled. Things do not change from within. Things can perform actions, but they do not experience. Beings, on the other hand, actively describe, define, seek wholeness, elude measurement, pursue freedom. Being's change and grow and experience. Things do. Beings not only do, but are" (p. 18).

3. Eisner has written of teaching as an artistic endeavour in which the aims of the enterprise unfold in the process of the acting.

4. This is a view that holds that a search for truth is a communal venture, that the “out there” reality of objectivism and the “in here” reality of subjectivism can never reveal or illuminate, and that truth is to be sought in dialogue, in relationship. Community, in this sense, is metaphorical and is not to be reduced to a meeting of any two people but extends from there to the cosmos (Palmer, 1983). Camus has said similarly, “The writer can only appeal to others to confront and examine honestly their own experiences and perceptions...that a full and open communication among men will be established in order to nurture whatever commonness can be discovered” (Willhoite , 1986).

Buber is another for whom “existence is principally the enactment of communion. The self is transformed into an autonomous essence in the very process in which the relationship with the other person unfolds, when the self is confirmed by another person” (Cohen, 1983, p. 51).

5. Though I can only begin to comprehend the depth of the writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, I have drawn on the writings of those (especially R. Palmer and T. Carson) who have interpreted their works. From them I have taken the following ideas: that self understanding and the understanding of others come out of interpretation rather than as a necessary prerequisite for it (Ricoeur); that, according to Gadamer, true understanding has an ontological rather than an epistemological basis ... that we experience history and culture in an immediate and totaling way as these effectively form the horizon of our understanding (Carson in Aoki, Carson, and Favaro, p. 22); that interpretation is a dialectical questioning which not only interrogates the text but allows the thing said in the text to interrogate back, to call the interpreters own horizon into question and to work a fundamental transformation of one's own understanding of the subject.

This does not mean a denial of the interpreter's horizon nor does it mean making one's own horizon absolute, as is implicit in most analysis and method;; t means a creative fusion of horizons (Palmer , 1969); that Gadamer, in locating the source ontologically argues against the alienating distanciation required of a methodology of social service which seeks objective explanation. He says that conversation recognizes the mutual participation of the partners in dialogue in a commonly held world, but it does not return to the methodological demands for an external validation outside of the participants (Carson, 1983); and that, according to Heidegger, “understanding is not some faculty among others that man possesses; understanding is his fundamental mode of existing in the world. Through understanding, we are able to have sense of the way we are placed, we grasp meaning through language, and something like world can come to be the horizon in which we exist. Understanding is the medium of ontological disclosure ” (Palmer ,1969).

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APPENDIX

In the first approach to interpreting the meaning in Bob's practice, I undertook a thematic analysis of the transcripts of our conversation. What follows is a sample of some of the themes and excerpts from the transcripts grouped around those themes. Ultimately, thematic analysis proved only to be a way into the transcribed conversation and I moved away from them as I pursued the writing and re-writing.

Power

T2 "...there's a medical hierarchy here."

"...the power's basically held by men..."

T6 "...it's easy for doctors to pick off nurses and what they'll do is if a nurse starts complaining or starts questioning..."

"...that's how they control, that's how the hierarchical structure works."

T7 "...what gives us any power is our credibility. And our credibility... we have produced something of value that is recognized."

T11 "...teacher's a power; it's a powerful person"

T15 "One of the goals I have, long term goals, is to change the system, because this system doesn't work properly."

T30 "...It has to be a systemic change - change in the system actually moved to the point where they recognize this and reinforce it."

Freedom

T2 "...I have no supervisor here. See there's really no one here who can tell me what to do...I have freedom that a lot of other people don't have or that I can actually say things, and not be afraid of having my boss come down and say, gee, you'd better tone that

down.”

.....“I can say things to the higher-ups without repercussions.”

T16 “...I would like to see the doctors become accountable to the team.”

T44 “.... I've always wanted to be a teacher, you know, and then when I taught in a regular classroom I was always disappointed. I was never satisfied, because I had such high expectations and ideals I could never live up to. So that really frustrated me. I burned out pretty quickly in the regular classroom.”

T45 “...I feel I have so much freedom here because I'm not supervised here...I did a lot of this stuff anyway even when I was working in the school system.”

Orientation

T2 “...what I mean by quality of care is I mean taking the broadest possible look at children while, when they're in the hospital.”

T3“...what we try to do is have a much more holistic approach

T9...And quality means what is in the best interest for this kid...the medical is only a small slice of this.

T11 “...I'm part of the pediatric health care team,...I am concerned about how this child lives in his...”

T14 “...the answers you get depend on the questions you ask...this kid comes in with a stomach problem not yet diagnosed...what turns out is they can't find anything medically wrong with him. Well, it turns out the kid's being beaten at school. Once we find that out, once we sit down with the kid, once we let the school know, the school takes it...”

T18 “....We're here to help each other and that our bottom line is always the patient. We tend to lost sight of the patient.”

Responsibility/Accountability

T19 "...Our ultimate responsibility is to the patient and to the family. Now we're talking about children, so we're talking about the patient and the family. That's our ultimate responsibility. What can we best do to relieve the suffering of the patient and his family."

T20 "...So administratively, we're accountable to our hierarchy. But how the team works, and how the team views it, oh, what we've evolved is formally is, we're accountable to each other to provide the best quality of service we can and, ultimately, we're accountable to the patient."

T22 "...Because, you see, the patient is the final arbiter. What is good for the patient and that's the thing we always come back to. Not what's good for my department. Not what's good for me. But what's good for the patient. And, you see, as obvious as that sounds, it gets lost here. It gets lost so often it's frightening."

T29 "...But then you want more...is it really making a difference. You know, am I really turning kids on? Are they really getting interested in things and learning things that are important, or is it just keeping them busy?"

T53 "...We're looking at a multi-disciplinary pediatric health care team that deals with the child not only while they're in hospital, but also when they're discharged."

T61 "...I think that because we've all worked long enough...I think it just, a sort of dove-tailing of points of view and it just seems that all of us figured out in our hearts, in ourselves first and then with each other that, gee, this makes the most sense in order to deal with these kids, because we saw, before we did this, we saw so many gaps in so many places that we missed, that the quality of care, we weren't satisfied with it at all."

T61 "...you have to realize that the people we have...in this team are not uncomfortable with bucking systems."

T63 "...the thing that I'm going to be horrified to find out, of course, is that the only

reason we have this team is because of the people...I would like to work out some guiding principles that at least work for us.”

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