

# *Pedagogy: A Teacher's Practice*

*Andrew Foran, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada*  
*Email: aforan@stfx.ca*

*Dan Robinson, St. Francis Xavier University, Canada*  
*Email: drobinson@stfx.ca*

*Margareth Eilifsen, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway*  
*Email: Margareth.Eilifsen@hvl.no*

*Elizabeth Munro, St. Francis University, Canada*  
*Email: emunroe@stfx.ca*

*Tess Thurber, St. Francis University, Canada*  
*Email: TThurber@GOV.NU.CA*

## **Abstract**

Neoliberal assaults upon public education have been grounded upon the supposition that schools are failing to prepare students to respond to local and global economic needs and realities. The result has left the relational between pupils and teachers as a taken-for-granted practice. Lived experiences often can show and capture the unexpressed in taken for granted moments. This discussion presents teaching as relational moments, shared between beginning teachers and pupils. We employ a phenomenological sensitivity as we unravel the anecdotal evidence to bring into language a “lived through” dimension of human relations. As teacher educators, we ask: what is experienced when relationality is the focus for beginning teachers? The importance of this question is due to the prevalence of neoliberal forces that now guide, and to large extent, control what it means to teach in schools across Canada. In an effort to understand this emerging view of teaching, we explore what four preservice teachers from Nova Scotia experienced in becoming teachers, as they completed their final Field Experience in Bergen, Norway. We share these anecdotal representations to help teachers see how the relational informs identity in becoming a teacher and allows teacher educators to deconstruct the “taken-for-granted-ness” of teaching stuck in the rational-technical model.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, teacher education, international, field experience, neoliberalism

## Introduction

I got into teaching because I know I can make a difference. But now, I dread planning and teaching because it's just teaching to the test. (Kylie, middle school Science teacher)

I agree we need the curriculum guides; they serve a purpose. But really it comes down to choice. Leave me alone in deciding what is best for the students. I do not need to be told how to reach each child, to spark their curiosity. What I need is space to choose. (Kevin, secondary Math teacher)

Why can't school be like our outside lessons, no pressure, a fun place to be, the kids want to be here, I want to be here, and the things we do make a difference. (Jill, Primary elementary teacher)

It's simple, we are so caught up in what we think is important; we lose sight of the fact that [children] just want to belong to something. (Emily, secondary Social Studies teacher)

When considering the opening comments from Bachelor of Education (BEd) students, preservice teachers from St. Francis Xavier University (StFXU), Nova Scotia, Canada, one cannot help but be challenged when attempting to answer the following question: What does it mean to become a teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The very nature of this question asks all involved in education to take into account the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideas and their impact on teaching practices. As teacher educators, we ask: what is experienced when relationality is the focus for beginning teachers? Phenomenologically and pedagogically, this question has increasing importance in light of alarming reports of Canadian teachers frustrated with the profession due to the growing burden of common neoliberal practice including administration and documentation, increased emphasis on testing and evaluation, and profession-wide inspection (Clark & Antonelli, 2009; Karsenti & Collin, 2013). In an effort to understand this emerging view of teaching, our discussion explores what preservice teachers from Nova Scotia experienced in becoming teachers, as they completed their final Field Experience, a practicum requirement, in Bergen, Norway.

Being immersed in an education system that contrasts significantly with that of Nova Scotia, in the area of pedagogical priority, these beginning teachers were led to reflect deeply on their teaching practices. In particular, they began to examine pedagogy, a practice based in intersubjectivity (van Manen, 2014, 2015), as a profound reason to teach. Pedagogy refers to the relational qualities between a teacher and children, as they grow and mature (Foran & Saevi, 2012; Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008; Saevi, 2011; van Manen, 1991, 2015). In this discussion, we share encounters experienced by our preservice teachers that can challenge neoliberal aims now entrenched in teacher preparation.

## **A Beginning Teacher's Practice**

We agree that the element of relationality is often forgotten or ignored in educational discourse and practice in Canada. By exploring the everyday work of Kylie, Kevin, Emily, and Jill, as a “lived through” dimension of human relations (intersubjectivity) in becoming a teacher, we easily can detect levels of dissatisfaction, frustration, or even disenchantment with school. The following teaching reflections are based on their Nova Scotian classroom experiences, shared with us in conversations prior to teaching in Norway. According to Kylie, she recalls her first Field Experiences as restrictive:

As soon as the lesson returns to the books the pain sets in, like an ache! They hate it as much as I do, but there is no choice. The text has been decided and provincial exams are always in front of us and we all know it; I teach to the test and it's only once in-awhile when I will step outside literally or into the lab to do something interesting and hands-on with the students—outside the typical lesson. These brief moments are what keep me wanting to teach.

Despite her frustration, Kylie clings to some level of optimism. She did encounter moments where she could just be with the students, guiding them without institutional pressure of testing.

This curricular control and the dominance of adhering to the lesson plan (a staple in all teacher education programs) is also captured by Kevin:

If I am to help these students become people, the approach has to be unique, not prescribed and predetermined. I want time to explore what's working for each of my students; you know we come into our own in our own time; this cannot be forced and the curriculum plans from our Province [government Department of Education] have a naïve expectation that the students will become this person because they followed the plan.

Kevin sees that teaching is more than lesson delivery. What is foundational in his words is the desire to help these students grow beyond Biesta's (2010; 2012a) notion of qualification and governmental control of curriculum through lesson plans and testing measures. Kevin sees a uniqueness in each student in his class, but the constraints of curricular coverage made this difficult for him to navigate early in his career.

The complexity of teaching also confounds Emily because she sees the value of having students belong. However, her experiences as a preservice teacher have led her to wonder if she will continue teaching:

If you spend any length of time inside a school you soon realize how stifling it is; it cripples the humanity, sucks the spirit out of you. If teachers could be allowed some autonomy to create a space that reflects who we are, school would be a better place—this wouldn't be the entire fix, but a huge start. I am not sure I want to continue with this [career choice].

Emily's experience is based on an ideal that calls for a more relational experience. A careful reading of her words reveals relationality has been absent in her teaching experience.

Jill has a similar desire to be afforded more freedom to explore the world with children:

I know teaching should be based on what my students want to learn. It can be that simple, let the teachers work it out and ditch the curriculum docs. The problem I face is I cannot create the kind of space I want to be in for these students. Children are meant to be natural explorers and this is just not possible within the four walls: water tables and sand tables do not cut it when they are sitting all day long. Children need to be able to roam and touch their worlds.

Jill is calling for autonomy that is not often possible in schools due to curricular and instructional regulation. And Jill is clear: "I cannot bring a child's senses alive inside, when we are outdoors it's possible. Don't get me wrong, I have no issue coming indoors for a lesson, but I should be allowed to decide this for my class." As teacher educators, these accounts reveal a profound need to bring back a relational focus, allowing preservice teachers to reclaim teaching that would be pedagogical versus regulatory.

Many in education might interpret these remarks to be alluding to the consequences and pervasiveness of neoliberal influences that have become entrenched in Nova Scotian schools. These comments may reveal that there has been an erosion of a deeper and more complex understanding in the area of pedagogical practice. The current educative stance in Nova Scotia, over two decades, evolved to focus preservice teachers on the uniformity of government-controlled curriculum (Glaze, 2018; Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education, 2017, 2018; Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, 1994; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2007a, 2007b, 2011, 2012; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016a, 2016b), centralized educational policy, and reporting testing scores as performance data at all grade levels, and that unfortunately trumps the inherent value of teacher-student relationships that attract many adults to education (Biesta, 2011, 2012b). Many Canadian teachers can testify how the nature of their professional duties have changed dramatically in these 20 years due to increased: bureaucratic control; professional accountability; and governmental demand for student performance under the guise of universal standards, but with political intentions of control.

## **Neoliberalism's Influence on (Teacher) Education**

The rise of neoliberalism in the West brought with it disconcerting consequences upon both public education and teacher education. Indeed, as Baltodano (2012) observed, "neoliberalism has taken away the joy of learning, [and] the creativity of teaching" (p. 489). Neoliberalism's assaults upon public education have been grounded upon the supposition that schools are failing to prepare students (in Canada, including Nova Scotia) to respond to local and global economic needs and realities. Such a perspective, particularly as it is embraced by a vocal citizenry who decry that public education is broken, has led to increased hierarchical control related to public school accreditation and standardization (Giroux, 2010). Nonetheless, public institutions in neoliberal times have embraced

corporate-based ideologies related to, for example, competition, market maximization, and individualism.

Relatedly, given teacher education's impact upon classroom teachers, schools of education have also been impacted by neoliberalism in adverse ways. These neoliberal influences have been shaped by both the teacher education institutions themselves, and also by the governing bodies that accredit them. For example, teacher education programs (like virtually all other university programs) have been impacted by cost-saving measures (Aronowitz, 2004; McLaren, 2005). At the same time, priorities for teacher education programs have necessarily had to mirror those of their universities (where, for example, generating revenue through applied research has been encouraged) (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

The neoliberal shift in Canada changed the focus of what is done (or possible) within many teacher education programs. Thus, the public institutions that accredit teachers and provide teacher education programs are increasingly focused on the "accountability and accreditation agendas of neo-liberalism" (Bloomfield, 2009, p. 28). These intrusions into the teacher education sphere often result in teacher educators focusing upon and offering technocratic teaching idea(s) rather than transformative ones, and for the purposes of this discussion, the relational in becoming a teacher.

## Pathways of Instruction

In response to government directives to meet accountability measures and teacher effectiveness in the teaching profession, teacher education programs in Nova Scotia have moved to preparing teachers in managerial tasks, claiming *pathways of instruction* (Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education, 2017; 2018). These governmental policies have caused a drift from teaching as a relational experience between adults and children to that of a learning manager practicing learning theories, presenting knowledge as a commodity for students, and mediating behavior and disciplinary classroom management. We have observed teachers becoming technicians, utilizing the latest diagnostic tools in performative testing practices via standardized exams, while proclaiming subject matter specializations coupled with outcome-aligned assessment strategies that claim accurate measures in student growth. At StFXU, we are seeing an entrenchment of neoliberal practices in the last decade, and our colleagues from Western Norway University (WNU), have now begun to witness a slower neoliberal transformation impacting their teacher preparation practices. Collectively, we view neoliberal reforms as a simplistic view of teaching and learning that not only overlooks the complexities involved in the everyday teacher-student interaction, but also restricts teachers' opportunities to participate in educational decision-making that preserves the uniqueness of each child. As a result of neoliberalism's infiltration into teacher education at StFXU, we believe this has eroded the relational focus, which has become disturbingly absent and taken-for-granted in teacher education in Nova Scotia.

Teacher educators should question how to best prepare preservice teachers to take their place alongside children. However, preparing preservice teachers in Nova Scotia has been reduced to what it means to be a professional and accountable by meeting imposed *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards'* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016a; 2016b) teaching expectations: assessment tools, outcomes-based

education, instructional strategies, classroom management, student behavior, educational law, school board policies, inclusion models, and diagnostics for special education. These topics are important, but limited, in preparing teachers for classroom responsibilities. In Norway, a relational pedagogical practice is still part of their teacher preparation programs. Complicating our work in Nova Scotia is the strong hold neoliberalism now has in teacher education and for Norway, this is arguably still subtle, but becoming a dominant and pervasiveness force shaping preservice teachers and teachers.

## Field Experience

In response to growing interest in global education, the last decade StFXU has seen an increase in international Field Experience placements. In many BEd programs in Canada, preservice teachers must successfully complete assigned field experiences where they engage in *practice teaching*. In our School of Education, there are four Field Experiences, over two years, that are a prerequisite for teacher certification in Nova Scotia (Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education, 2017; 2018). While we value the quality of our program courses, there is no denying that the Field Experience for our preservice teachers ranks high. This comes as no surprise due to the fact they are able to spend their time teaching young people and children. As Biesta (2011; 2012b) states: doing what they were looking forward to doing as they entered into the profession in the first place.

International placements provide us opportunities to challenge the intended outcomes of our BEd program by drawing attention to critical markers of teachers' competencies that signal a beginning teacher's professional readiness for teaching. International Field Experiences can contrast and illuminate best practices based on differences and similarities (see Foran & Robinson, 2017; Robinson & Bell, 2014; Robinson & Foran, 2017). This understanding is based on our observations, and internal program evaluations from over 10 years of leading Field Experiences, including international placements. By including an international Field Experience in the fourth and final practicum, we think this can help our preservice teachers contextualize the academic elements of their coursework and past Field Experiences.

## Why Norway?

We believe the fourth Field Experience is an opportunity to challenge taken-for-granted elements in becoming a teacher. In collaboration with WNU, we determined the Norwegian school system revealed many potential sites to host our preservice teachers from kindergarten (all-daily instruction is conducted outdoors), elementary-middle grades (a city school), up to grade 9 (two suburban schools on the city outskirts). In selecting schools within Bergen, Norway, we were confident these placements would challenge our preservice teachers in their beginning practice. The difference in language, Norwegian to English, did not prove to be a deterrent; rather this was viewed by many teachers and students in Norway as an opportunity for them to improve their English-speaking skills. In Norway, students start learning English at school when they are in second grade. The critical feature of the Norwegian school system that we found essential, and in contrast to teaching in Nova Scotia, was the multiple year model: students staying with the same classroom teacher for two years (or more) and the team teaching approach, two teachers

assigned to a class to support children. Therefore, the Norwegian school system was pedagogically appealing, and quite different from classrooms in Nova Scotia, for their model is based on teachers knowing and being able to better relate to children.

The Bergen schools demonstrated there was still a distinct pedagogical priority among inserviced teachers—educators that would serve as mentors for our preservice teachers—despite the shifting educational landscape toward neoliberal policies. In short, these teachers still value the relational as the foundation in practice. Thus, pedagogy was first and foremost, for many Norwegian teachers a relational pedagogy where teachers focused on the pupils as they grow and mature (see Foran & Saevi, 2012; Saevi, 2011; van Manen, 1991; 2015). This model was quite different to the instructional environment in Canada and would serve our preservice teachers who had, to this point, learned about teaching immersed in a rational-technical approach: subject-specific knowledge, literacy, numeracy, social justice, reflective practice, assessment and inclusion strategies, and constructivist-collaborative learning theory, as it applies to lesson planning and integrated units of study. As a part of the application process to participate in the Norway placement, we conducted a number of conversations with our preservice teachers about their prior Field Experiences. This revealed a dominant theme: relational qualities seemed to be lacking in the first three Field Experiences due to the focus on “technocratic teaching” where teaching standards were constantly evaluated and reported as a measure of progress. During the Norwegian placement, relationality clearly was a distinct sought-after element for these preservice teachers. When trying to describe how this difference was experienced, and what this looked like in practice, words would fail them. They would grasp for explanation, but what they observed from their Norwegian mentoring classroom teacher would often exemplify as they were becoming teachers.

## Relational Pedagogy

Our hope was that Norwegian placements would foster an aspect of pedagogical practice different from what was experienced in the preservice teachers’ three prior Field Experiences in Nova Scotia. We wanted our preservice teachers to experience relationality not as taken-for-granted in teacher education as is often the case in that many BEd programs in Canada. Van Manen (1991) states pedagogy is about teachers genuinely seeing children and leading them in the world, in a caring, sensitive manner (p. 37). This is not some romantic notion, rather a moral and thoughtful child orientation on growth as they are becoming a person. This would require preservice teachers that were *fully there* for the child, not a mere technical conveyor of knowledge and instruction, as called for by neoliberals. Norway offered relational teaching concerned with pupil growth, as young people are guided into becoming who they are, and not becoming, as a person (see Foran & Robinson, 2017; Mollenhauer, 2014).

Pedagogical relationships are based on the ability of teachers to “enter into the world of a child” (van Manen, 2002, p. 3) with thoughtfulness and tact. Van Manen (2002) explains this *intention* as the “ability to actively distinguish what is appropriate from what is less appropriate for children or young people” (p. 8). The challenge for any educator is to cultivate their pedagogical thoughtfulness: “Tactful educators have developed a caring attentiveness to the unique: the uniqueness of children, the uniqueness of every situation, and the uniqueness of individual lives” (van Manen, 2002, p. 8). The Norwegian school

settings created opportunities for our preservice teachers to open their practice, cultivating the relational, that would become central to their teaching.

## **Pre-reflective Lived Experience**

We invited all 12 preservice teachers who went to Norway to participate in a collaborative study (StFXU and WNU) as approved by StFXU Research Ethics Board. All 12 are currently employed in schools in Nova Scotia, across Canada, and globally. Four preservice teachers agreed to participate and share anecdotes that show relational possibilities from their Norwegian Field Experience. These preservice teachers were a mix of elementary and secondary teachers, specializing in Language Arts, Math, Science, Physical Education, and Social Studies. In effort to capture the pedagogical dimension these preservice teachers experienced in Norway, we conducted interviews after the completion of the fourth Field Experience. We kept the conversation open and fluid, allowing questions to guide the phenomenological interview. Our intention was to remain focused on pedagogical accounts, isolating a pre-reflective moment of becoming a teacher. When the relational element was shared in conversation, that clearly could serve as an anecdote, we explored this dimension in effort to show their account of what they experienced as distinct and significant when compared to their prior teaching experiences in Nova Scotia. The use of anecdotes is to achieve reader recognition—the phenomenological showing (see van Manen, 1997). We believe our responsibility is to reveal what is recognizable, as evoked by each anecdote: capture the unexpressed (Eilifsen, 2011).

## **The Anecdote**

Anecdotes not only provide an intimate link to past moments, but also, with hermeneutical reflection, provide those elements needed to inform pedagogical practices as part of teacher education. Our intent is to make connections with a “practical pedagogic orientation to children in their concrete lives” (van Manen, 1988, p. 411) and view the pre-reflective in becoming a teacher. We employed the anecdote as method allowing us to suspend re-awakening, and describe the lived experience. The pre-reflective moment that captures the wonder of the relational significance for our preservice teachers with children removes the semantics of a neoliberal debate in education; more significantly, we wish to “emulate the unreflective life of consciousness” (van Manen, 1997, p. 185). Showing the lived experience, the uniqueness of the pedagogical, allows for a more open investigation that remains true to the phenomena of becoming a teacher. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through” (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). These anecdotes can serve as potential lessons for beginning teachers and teacher educators.

In presenting anecdotes as lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 1997, 2014), we reject the specialized language (Galvin & Todres, 2007) often infused in education, and turn instead to the questioning and exploration of the mutual humanistic circumstances in becoming a teacher in a Norwegian school setting. To guide our understanding, we will draw on phenomenology as practice (van Manen, 2014), lived experiences, and hermeneutically analyze the data through a neoliberal lens specifically linking to pedagogical practices. These anecdotal representations can help teachers see how the



relational informs teacher identity and allows teacher educators to deconstruct the “taken-for-granted-ness” of teaching stuck in the rational-technical model. We employ a phenomenological sensitivity as we unravel the anecdotal evidence to bring into language the relational as a “lived through” dimension of human relations (intersubjectivity) (see van Manen, 2014). The overall aim is to contribute to the understanding of what it means to become a contemporary teacher, revealing the relational qualities in spending time with young people to counter the current technical drive in teacher education.

## **Pedagogical Practice**

The connections these preservice teachers made in their international experience to a more pedagogical practice can help inform teacher education on the relational significance implied in the use of the term *pedagogy*. For our preservice teachers, we discovered a consistent and dominant theme of student (pupils)-teacher (preservice teacher) relationships as foundational in their growth in becoming teachers. The Norwegian Field Experience allowed our preservice teachers to experience opportunities of pedagogical practice that countered the technical focus in Nova Scotia. The lived experiences shared by these preservice teachers are examples that would be in opposition to neoliberalism, where there is a tendency to limit the relational possibility in education settings by shutting down self-exploration in favor of hyper-technical-ized teaching.

The crafting of anecdotes provides the “phenomenological now” and guards against “abstract theoretical thought” (see van Manen, 1997, p. 119) that dominates neoliberal practices in school. Van Manen (1997) explains that this methodological device is crucial “to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (p. 116). The purpose of the anecdote is to open up the researcher to the lifeworld of teachers leading children as a suspended moment of preservice teachers “here and now” (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962) as they were becoming teachers. The uniqueness of each story, shared by Kylie, Kevin, Jill, and Emily, becomes a part of the thematic structure of relationality as pedagogy. The lived experience descriptions shared by reveal a relational sensitivity. Van Manen (1991) would refer to this sensitivity as pedagogical tact, and a teacher’s action and reflection on these encounters as pedagogical thoughtfulness. Their accounts show phenomenological insights, illuminated by hermeneutic interpretation, that offer a richer possibility in becoming a teacher for our BEd program.

## **Spin Cycle**

Kylie recalls a field trip with a grade 6 class into the mountains. On the surface, this may seem a typical class for a Norwegian teacher, but for a preservice teacher from a Nova Scotian teaching context, going outside was not the norm. This anecdote reveals what is possible when the institution is not the medium.

I followed my class to their outdoor lean-to, amazed with their energy, borderline enthusiasm, despite the cold-damp weather. As I was setting up for my lesson, I was listening in on student conversations, I knew everything about this moment was the perfect snapshot of my time in Norway. I closed my pack and realized this was teaching, this is what I always imagined: a class that provided students with opportunities to take on responsibility and bonding with young people. Watching a

group of students help me organize the shelter for the next activity, I smiled because I realized it took these young folks the outdoors to show me that I was a teacher; it just genuinely felt right *being* there with young people. Tone, a shy girl, looked up at me and said thanks as she was setting up the seats for the lesson. When I asked her for what she said: “Well this is special, our camp, and you are willing to share this with us and that’s important.” Right then I knew, this is teaching.

Kylie captures that beyond the lesson, and beyond the walls of the school, there was more going on between her as a teacher and her students. In a follow-up conversation with a teaching supervisor Kylie was challenged on what she experienced:

Hiking back down the mountain, I was debriefing the day with my supervisor, and I was shocked with their comments. They stated that it was a, “poor use” of outdoor learning experiences and, “taking the same classroom lesson outside is not necessarily what outdoor learning is about.” I felt crushed, cheated, and foolish. Had I been wrong to feel so positively about the in-camp experience I just had? My mind was racing: just what planning pieces make for a “correct outdoor learning” experience? What should have been done differently? My typically overanalyzing mind began to circulate these questions and reevaluate my experience in my head faster than a washer in spin cycle—I was in overdrive—I think it was panic because I must have been missing what it means to teach. Then I saw Tone looking back at me and smiling and I said no! I am not some first-year teacher doubting every word, every lesson. I know teaching can be, and should be, about smiling and enjoying time with kids indoors and out.

Kylie explains that she eventually arrived at a fundamental realization well after the fact: “this was a prime example of teaching being analyzed using our formal skills focused lens.” A central aspect to what was lived in that moment was panic, and is this not the neoliberal agenda: create uncertainty and panic? When under the gaze of supervisors, standards seemingly can guide quality instruction, as determined by curricular guides, and the correct use of time, as a normalizing feature in neoliberal agendas to control instructions at the expense of the humanistic bond—if we allow it. Kylie experiences first a pedagogical connection with her student Tone. Then her supervisor tried to challenge her on pedagogy as a practice, using theories and conceptual knowledge as the appropriate form of instruction; and by that, pedagogical practice was removed from the child and teacher (see Saevi, 2007). Kylie experiences what van Manen (2006) describes as pedagogical tact: “Tact and tactfulness, like pedagogical relation, profoundly rooted in the belief that the adult is there primarily for the child (not the other way around)” (see Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 2). Fortunately, she actively reflected on this experience of pedagogical relation, and on the way back to her school, she recalls; “I do not care about whether or not it was a ‘correct’ use of an outdoor learning environment. I care about how that day was shared between myself and young people.” Time for Kylie was not lived as a measurement to force instruction, but rather a quality that allowed her to dwell with Tone and witness this young person in her natural surroundings.

## The Bubble

Kevin also has a pivotal realization being with young people with his class that popped a “sheltered bubble.” Kevin’s impression of school is a professional-bubble world insulating children with policy, rules, curriculum, and assessment indicators—an apt summary of his Nova Scotian school experience. Kevin’s understanding of what it means to be a teacher came when he realized that Norwegian youth were taught life lessons first and curriculum second.

The Home Economics teacher gave a group of students a grocery list and the school credit card, and just sent them out on their own to the store. I stood there shocked looking back-and-forth between the teacher and the leaving group of students: I almost said: “this is wrong.” I know students are my responsibility—that was drilled into us back home and what I witnessed was not something we would ever be allowed to do at home! There was a part of me I had to silence as I watched the students leave the building. I was so close to yelling, calling them back because I did not want to be a part of this. Instead I asked my [supervising teacher]: “think they will be alright?” She gave me this puzzled look, shaking her head as she folded her arms. She stood there for a moment, and all I could do was stare at her *in silence*. When she determined I had nothing, she turned and started walking back to the classroom. And there I was standing alone in the school foyer, I came to the realization that students in Bergen do not live and learn in a bubble world.

Kevin, in a follow up conversation, concluded youth in Norway will be much better at “rolling with the punches” later in life. This independence in youth, supported by Norwegian teachers, was the piece that Kevin grappled with but he came to understand as a relational aspect in the school foyer. In Norway kindergarten (age 0-6 years) teachers have the mandate to provide experiences in effort to develop children’s autonomy and independence which teachers in later grades are expected to build on: ‘

children shall be able to participate in decision-making processes and develop shared content. The children shall be encouraged to express their views and create meaning in the world of which they are part.... Kindertgartens shall use interaction, dialogue, play and exploration to help the children develop critical thinking, ethical judgement and an ability to put up resistance and take action in order to effect change. (UDIR, 2017, p. 21)

Is this not the real aim for teachers: to allow children to become self-actualized and express their views? Yet, ironically, neoliberalism silenced Kevin in his role as a teacher as indicated in his opening remarks at the beginning of this discussion. And increasingly in Nova Scotia, this has become the intent of government: silence and quiet what a teacher knows best for children in favor of quiet compliance forcing an uneasy pedagogical slumber. For teachers, neoliberal tendencies can be oppressive; however, pedagogical release—allowing students to go out the door—was awakening in Kevin’s teaching.

Kevin offered a post reflective thought about teaching in Norway that is hard to dismiss: “Even the relationships between the students and teachers were different. Teachers seemed to really know their students and there was a mutual quality of trust in the relationship in letting them leave the school and go grocery shopping!” Significant for Kevin is the realization of pedagogical trust: allowing students their independence and to

see youth not as rules or marks, but leaders in their own right, and this means allowing them to take over a lesson, shine, and teachers step back and allow them to buy food for the class. This level of *trust* is a basic quality of human life that is not represented in any neoliberal measure but can be present in every encounter between the child and the teacher and makes the pedagogical possible; trust is impossible to measure and count—it is shared and lived. There is no PISA-test to evaluate trust or pedagogical relations, but both trust and pedagogy give children a possibility to learn and to understand and embrace their worlds.

## Teaching from the Sidelines

Emily came to understand that pedagogy was not an academic outcome for teachers to master as an assessment tool. She learned pedagogy was an exchange based on mutual respect, not superficially based on authority as it is in Canada. Emily discovered that in Bergen, teachers were actually people in the lives of teens—not professionally distant, but personally engaged.

Teaching in Norway is about guiding youth in life and backing this with what we would call learning. It's about helping them arrive and being honest about it. I was in the school theatre with my class, acting out a scene from a novel in English. And then there was this moment I realized I was not directing/teaching. I woke up on stage, I got it: guide them, don't control it, just help them keep on the right track.

Emily realized that the act of teaching is about being open and present for youth and to *really respond*, not in an academic sense, but in a mutual-honest manner:

I was trying to help this one student to decide what part of the play would be best to cover. In our chat, we realized there was a difference of opinion as to why hers was more important—I agreed in the end. This was a real meeting in the middle. I never experienced a conversation like that with another student. I was not telling, and we were going back and forth. She heard my opinion and she shaped her position. She was comfortable in the exchange, deeply mutual as a conversation not a discussion. She affirmed her place in the conversation, not as a child but as person becoming an adult—affirming her view in the world. I got it in that second, teaching is not acting, it's living that moment with your student. This is what it means to teach along-side students. I never experienced this to the same extent in Canada, it's always a separation because of titles: teachers—students, academics—tasks, learning—marks, but it's life.

Emily's awakening allowed her to understand the term pupil, and she “had to go to Bergen to become awake to what it means to teach.” Emily understood that moment on the stage was not just guiding her student to decide a part, she was helping her become an adult taking her place in the world: “teaching is beyond academics and performance checklists that form the final evaluation: PASS | FAIL.” Many countries are a part of the PISA's global rankings, and a common phrase for teachers in neoliberal times is “teaching for the test;” no longer is this a whispering amongst teachers as it is now blatant in practice.

Neoliberalism has forced this type of relationship onto children and teachers. Emily realized there is a far more important task for teachers in educating youths in the official curriculum, subject specialization, demanded by governments for licensing purposes, is simply not enough. In short, neoliberalism does not take into account relationality that is within the power of a teacher. Emily lived a moment, outside neoliberal restrictions, beyond the neoliberal demand of credentialed-subject specialists, and realized that helping the child to become an adult and find their place in the world is our primary responsibility in allowing them to see a possible future (Foran & Saevi, 2012). However, as Emily realized, this is not valued in neoliberal agendas and for the most part ignored in favor of policy efficiency and governmental control over teachers.

## **Letting Go**

Teaching in another country is challenging for many reasons, but one challenge that was not foreseen was for the preservice teacher to find acceptance in a kindergarten class. Jill raises a relational connection that took patience and acceptance, not with child to child, nor adult to children, but with the child to the adult.

I was one teacher in charge of 10 children sitting and whittling. I was stunned watching this four-year old draw the knife across the stick! I remember looking to Elisabeth, the other teacher, waiting on her to bring out safety gloves or goggles or something, but no, the students watched her whittle the other day and now they are learning from doing.

This level of responsibility was a difficult transition for Jill—to see the children as capable and confident in the world. She continues with her account prepping the daily fire and her inability to connect to a student:

One of the boys, the top dog in the group, did not want to acknowledge me, and he shut me out from building the campfire, he waved me off, and pointed to the seats around the fire-pit. He made it clear to me that he was lighting the fire. I was in a power struggle with a five-year old. For me, fire making is something children can watch, this is an adult job. I was about to open my mouth but it was his look, so I backed off, and sat back. I turned off the teacher talk and allowed him to take over. The kids had everything stacked, the tinder and sticks were prepped, and when he was ready he stood up and looked at me. I had to decide: him or me. I reached into my pack, dug out the matches, and looked at him. And then I did it: I let go and I gave him the matches. He took the matches and he stuck the match, it blazed and he held it to the birch bark. Yes! they had fire and the kids cheered. He then gave me back the match case with this look, and the littlest smile ever, I knew I was finally accepted.

In Jill's assessment, she knows she is a good teacher, but it was a five-year old that taught her what counts in teaching: "He knew he was teaching me and I just had to allow him. It was the smirk and twinkle in the eye, you could just feel it. I felt accepted, he knew and I knew. Sure, I was the teacher, but I was not in charge." According to Jill, "teaching is about finding our place and being willing to share this with children." Jill is sure that teachers

meeting educational outcomes is important, but the outcome that is often bypassed is for teachers to really allow children to engage in the world. Jill has learned that teachers over compensate by “taking over,” under the guise of what we call discipline and management, instead of letting go of this time-on-task concept and allow children to organically interact with others and the world around them. One could argue that a neoliberal agenda would claim that classroom management is about developing a learning environment where a whole class can cooperate and learn from one another. Jill’s account of letting go is not what neoliberalism has in mind when it comes to instructional control. Yet, this child, and the other children are able to grow in ways, with their teachers, that are not taken into account via neoliberal learning agendas. Jill shows us a learning environment where pupils develop motivation in finding their place in the world, which is fundamental to becoming a person, and for Jill, in becoming a teacher. Jill’s moment outside the fire-pit brought her into the child’s world, and this was not in the *pathways to learning* plan book when it comes to classroom management and control. The role of manager is seeping into teacher education, but this experience shared by Jill cannot be replicated in teacher training. Most significant is that neoliberalism often fails to account for the emerging human being by confusing growth as academic outcomes. The phenomena of preservice teachers’ lived experiences in an international setting revealed pedagogical dimensions that are often absent and forgotten, or even ignored in Canadian teacher education.

## Learned Lessons

Our preservice teachers experienced pedagogical relationships that exemplified qualities both of an “immediate situated togetherness and, at the same time, a relation with lasting qualities for the young person” (Saevi & Eilifsen, 2008, p. 4) and for the teacher. This type of teaching arrangement can create an orientation that is open to the realization for preservice teachers that relationality does not exist for the sake of the adult, but comes into being for the benefit of the child. These encounters are not limited to efficiencies and academic measurements. Mollenhauer (2014) frames the paradoxes posed by academic achievement on the one hand and motivation or rather, the child’s vitality on the other. The lens to best see these encounters would be through lived experience, as positioned by van Manen (2014) to show pedagogy as another way of engagement that supersedes technical information delivery found in the neoliberal orientation.

Neoliberalism values achievement above all else and demands reliable results. When this is factored in how can teacher educators foster an attitude that is about enlivening? How is this possible if relationality may produce results that jeopardize predefined neoliberal educational outcomes? Mollenhauer (2014) expands on this conflict: “the circumstances under which people live, have lost their power to educate the young and can no longer reliably represent in a way that is helpful for their *Bildung*” (p. 46). Mollenhauer’s thinking is similar to the preservice teachers’ realization in relationality, offering an authentic experience exploring and being alongside one another in the world. The ensuing result: curriculum documents, academic scores, and classroom management become the reasons for the educative focus, but not for why we teach. These reasons are ever present, as demanding competing pressures that can force teachers to lose immediate sight of the child, but pedagogy, if constant, can counter the neoliberal drive. The result of an over-reliance on neoliberal curriculum in the broadest sense has reduced emphasis on

the daily lived experiences in which the child, and in many ways, the adult, are immersed in pedagogical moments that comprise school.

The predominant reality is one of restriction due to curricular instructional recipes that are not necessarily geared toward helping a young person become a person—*Bildung*. Mollenhauer (2014) explains that we are confronted with three fundamental questions when it comes to upbringing and education: “1) Of all the things there are to learn, which ones are truly *important*; 2) How can these be conveyed (taught in schools/out-of schools); and 3) How can children be motivated to take on the lessons as represented to them” (p. 46)? There is no denying that the relationship between adult and child in an educational context and is institutionally mediated; the adult is acting in a professional capacity and on the basis of rules, guidelines, prepared lessons, assessments, and school codes of conduct.

Despite school being highly structured in the *aim to serve students*, schools are actually structured not on the basis of how young people see or want to be seen in the world, but are regulated to reflect an adult version of the world. For teacher educators, this is a neoliberal worldview of comparative standards based on testing performance. The preservice teachers in our study realized, through their lived experience descriptions, there is an ethical responsibility that comes with being a teacher and this goes beyond the academic version government or supervisors might call school. According to Saevi (2007):

the pedagogical and the ethical are not only intertwined with each other, but they have never been separated. By seeing pedagogy primarily as methods, theories and/or conceptual knowledge, we remove pedagogical practice from the child...simultaneously causing a separation between pedagogy and ethics. (p 126)

These preservice teachers acknowledged that every educational act and relational encounter is subtended by tensions and uncertainty. The need for relationality was, and still is, required of Kylie, Emily, Kevin, and Jill as they become teachers. They presented what they experienced about teaching and embraced the ambiguities of being with children and young people. The neoliberal impulses often compete with the humanistic needs of children, and these lived experience descriptions did not celebrate the *pathways of instruction* (Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education, 2017; 2018); rather these preservice teachers affirmed the need for pedagogy as part of their becoming teachers. The Fourth Field Experience readily allowed these preservice teachers to recognize the primacy of relationality, and this was possible because teaching was removed from institutional and imposed instructional mandates. In this Norwegian teaching space, these beginning teachers were able to reclaim *pedagogy as practice* where pupils and teachers “belong.”

## References

- Aronowitz, S. (2000). *The knowledge factory: Dismantling the corporate university and creating true higher learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Baltodano, M. (2012). Neoliberalism and the demise of public education: The corporatization of schools of education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(4), 487–507.
- Biesta, G. (2010). What is education for? Good education in an age of measurement: ethics, politics, democracy (pp. 11–27). Boulder, C: Paradigm Publishers.

- Biesta, G. J. J. (2011). Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: A comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and Continental construction of the field. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 19(2), 175–192.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2012a). The future of teacher education. Evidence, competence or wisdom? *Research on Steiner Education*, 3(1), 8–21.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2012b). Giving teaching back to education: Responding to the disappearance of the teacher. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 6(2), 35–49.
- Bloomfield, D. (2009). Working within and against neoliberal accreditation agendas: Opportunities for professional experience. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1), 27–44.
- Clark, R., & Antonelli, F. (2009). *Results of an Ontario survey 2006-08*. Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Education.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2016). *Nova Scotia Teaching Standards*. Halifax: Nova Scotia: The Crown Printer.
- Eilifsen, M. (2011). Capture the unexpressed: Anecdote as device in hermeneutic phenomenological research. *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 11(1). Retrieved from <http://www.ipjp.org/online-issues/send/41-edition-1-may-2011/182-meilifsen-11e1>
- Foran, A., & Robinson, D. B. (2017). Mollenhauer's representation: The role of preservice teachers in the practices of upbringing. *in education*, 23(2), 3–24.
- Foran, A., & Saevi, T. (2012). Seeing pedagogically, telling phenomenologically: Addressing the profound complexity of education. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 6(2), 50–64.
- Galvin, K., & Todres, L. (2007). The creativity of 'unspecialization: A contemplative direction for integrative scholarly practice. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), 31–46.
- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Bare pedagogy and the scourge of neoliberalism: Rethinking higher education as a democratic public sphere. *The Educational Forum*, 74, 184–196.
- Glaze, A. (2018). *Raise the bar: A coherent and responsive education administrative system for Nova Scotia*. Nova Scotia, Canada: Author.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crises of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.



- Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education. (2017). *Accreditation timeline and approach*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Inter-University Committee on Teacher Education. (2018). *ICTE final draft accreditation with 11 GCOs chart*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Karsenti, T., & Collin, S. (2013). Why are new teachers leaving the profession? Results of a Canada-wide survey. *Education*, 3(3), 141–149.
- McLaren, P. (2005). *Capitalist and conquerors: A critical pedagogy against the empire*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mollenhauer, K. (2014). *Forgotten connections: On culture and upbringing*. (N. Friesen, Trans.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education. (1994). *Teacher education in Nova Scotia: An honourable past: An alternative future*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2007a). *Report recommendations of the review panel on teacher education in Nova Scotia*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2007b). *Nova Scotia public education teacher supply and demand: 2007 update report*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2011). *Bachelor of Education graduate follow-up survey report*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2012). *Nova Scotia public education teacher supply and demand: Update report*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2016a). *2016 Bachelor of Education graduate follow-up survey report*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2016b). *Nova Scotia teaching standards: Excellence in teaching and learning*. Halifax, Canada: Author.
- Robinson, D. B., & Bell, R. (2014). A Belizean education: Learning from an international field experience. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 8(1), 213–231.
- Robinson, D. B., & Foran, A. (2017). New Scotland to (old) Scotland: Lessons learned from an international internship. *Scottish Educational Review*, 49(2), 56–71.
- Saevi, T. (2007). Den pedagogiske relasjonen – en relasjon annerledes enn andre relasjoner [The pedagogical relation – a relation different from other relations]. In O.H. Kaldestad, E. Reigstad, J. Sæther, & J. Sæthre (Eds.), *Grunnverdier og*

- pedagogikk* [Basic values and education] (pp. 107–131). Bergen, Norway: Fagbokforlaget.
- Saevi, T. (2011). Lived relationality as fulcrum for pedagogical-ethical practice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 30, 455–461.
- Saevi, T., & Eilifsen, M. (2008). “Heartful” or “heartless” teachers? Or should we look for the good somewhere else? *The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 8 (Special Edition). Retrieved from <http://www.ipjp.org/online-issues/send/6-phenomenology-in-education-february-2008/278-heartful-or-heartless-teachers-or-should-we-look-for-the-good-somewhere-else-considerations-of-students-experience-of-the-pedagogical-good-by-tone-saevi-and-margareth-eilifsen>
- Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. (2004). *Academic capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state and higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- UDIR, The Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs (2011). *Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway*. Retrieved from [https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core\\_curriculum\\_english.pdf](https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/lareplan/generell-del/core_curriculum_english.pdf)
- UDIR, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2017). *Framework Plan for Kindergartens*. Retrieved from <https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/barnehage/rammeplan/framework-plan-for-kindergartens2-2017.pdf>
- van Manen, M. (1988). The relation between research and pedagogy. In W. Pinar (Ed.), *Contemporary curriculum discourses* (pp. 437–452). Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbride.
- van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (1999). The pathic of pedagogical practice. In P. Kansanen (Ed.), *Discussions on educational issues, Issue 8*, (pp. 75–97). Helsinki, Finland: University of Helsinki Press, Department of Teacher Education.
- van Manen, M. (2002). *The tone of teaching*. London, Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- van Manen, M. (2015). *Pedagogical tact*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.