

**Book Review**

# Provoking Conversations on Inquiry in Teacher Education

Darren E. Lund, E. Lisa Panayotidis, Hans Smits, and Jo Towers  
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Lund and his colleagues have published a rather unusual book. It is unusual in a number of ways, starting with the point that much of its contents have been presented and published previously over a 10-year period (2003 to 2012). There are four main sections of the book, and the first three appeared as previous conference presentations and later as journal articles. This is not hidden by the authors—indeed, very little seems hidden in this volume even when the possibility exists that what is written may reflect negatively on the writers—but they have indulged in the luxury of revisiting and revising their earlier work in light of later experience and deeper perspective. This is, in short, a kind of post-mortem examination of a teacher training program that no longer runs. The result is an in-depth examination of the ontology of a teacher training program and the struggles, personal and professional, encountered by some of the faculty members who created it.

This book challenges the reader throughout and asks more questions than it answers to provoke readers' responses to the problems of educating teachers in a higher education setting. It challenges the reader in two senses. First, it challenges the reader to keep up with and understand the philosophical explanation of their ideas, the basis of these ideas, and the rationale for choosing them. At times the small volume becomes quite a dense read. Second, and more to the point of the authors' intentions, it challenges the reader to examine his or her own practice and goals in teaching by posing the provocations as points of departure for self-reflection. There are several threads running throughout the book and one of these is to prod the reader into becoming more self-aware of her or his own teaching practices, the intellectual rationale for one's approach to teaching, and what the effects of those practices might be on the students being taught.

The book is divided into four broad areas, and as mentioned earlier, each of the first three sections had been published before in slightly different form. The first area is about curriculum (published in 2003), the second is that of *narratives* (published in 2006), and the third is about *embodying inquiry* (published in 2008). The final section is about the faculty's *responsibility to history* and discusses the authors' reactions to the closure of their program, their feelings about their experiment of training prospective teachers much differently from other teacher preparation programs, and reflections on the long term impact of their practices upon themselves, the profession, and the students who participated in this program. Each chapter has a respondent, who, with one exception, comes from outside the immediate teaching staff of the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, where the Master

of Teaching program ran. The authors deliberately rejected the “overwhelming technical rationality embedded in current institutional practices” (p. 5) of teacher training. Instead, they followed a training program that they felt concentrated on the people, actions, and experiences involved in teaching rather than the techniques found in textbooks. Their main concentration focused upon the question *who is the teacher?* rather than *what does the teacher know and what can she (he) do in a classroom?* It is with a thorough rejection of so-called conventional teaching approaches that they embarked on this journey seeking a new and different way of training teachers.

Throughout the early chapters, the authors delve into a few key concepts that informed their philosophy of teaching and became the basis of their curriculum. The first of these is what they call “practical judgement [sic]” (p. xviii), in other words, judgment in context or “discernment” (p. xix). They cite Coulter and Wiens (2002), Ricoeur (1992), and Wall (2003), who have called it “a particular kind of knowledge—knowledge oriented to action—and specifically, ethical action, oriented to the good” (p. xviii). This arises from the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, which they describe as “fundamentally about living and acting ethically,” while realizing that many of the things that we do each day “are not *phronetic*” (p. 29). In a statement that appears to capture the paradox of their approach, they quote from Flyvbjerg (2001), “More than anything else, *phronesis* requires *experience*” (p. 57, italics in original). The authors do not discredit fully the pedagogic techniques and subject knowledge typically expected of teachers, but they wanted to instill in their students the understanding that these techniques and textbook knowledge are incomplete without “the recognition that such knowledge and skills are incomplete without attending thoughtfully to the particular qualities of life in classrooms, schools, and community or workplace sites” (p. xviii). They strove to develop in their students a “sensitivity to contexts and living examples of teaching and learning” (p. xviii). That is, the authors sought to develop knowledge oriented to action, which they believe prepares prospective teachers better for their real lives as teachers in schools than abstract training in teaching techniques.

We may accept their argument that there is strong justification for this orientation, because not all teachers will learn equally well or quickly from their own experiences and not all teachers will experience the same things during their careers. Their desire to instill these ideas in their students suggests that they felt that teachers are more effective when they have some years of experience than they are immediately after graduation from a(ny) teacher training program. But this leaves them and us with a puzzling dilemma, both philosophically and pedagogically: how, if at all, can experience be taught?

The second major concept is that of the “project of teacher education” (p. 100), which represents a central question throughout the book. What the authors mean by the word *project* adapts meaning from both the noun and verb forms of the word: their *project* is to transcend normal teacher education by helping their students understand their place in the future world in which they are teachers themselves, thereby allowing them to *project* themselves and Aristotle’s *phronesis* into the indefinite future. Defining this leads to a discussion of Lear’s *Radical Hope* (2006) and of their own concerns about the futures of their students. As Lear wrote, “for what may we hope?” (p. 103). Adapting this, the authors approach one or more of the following questions in multiple ways in the course of writing this book: *Where are we going? Is this desirable? What is to be done?* Their occasionally fraught answers to these fundamental questions betray how deeply they have cut against the grain of conventional teacher education programs. They courageously question the very purpose of what they are doing, not because

they feel that preparing teachers to teach is itself questionable, but because they have begun to appreciate the complex and long-reaching ramifications of their *project of teacher education*.

Their third major concept is that of *inquiry*, which features in the title of the book and can be felt on nearly every page. What they mean here is *thinking* in an organized and philosophical way. This naturally includes ways of thinking that include criticism, memory, learning, and reflection. It is on the one hand so integral to the program they were part of that it almost goes unnoticed. *Inquiry* was a pervasive part of the woodwork of the edifice they had constructed. On the other hand, it is a mercurial concept because at any given point it is difficult to know who is doing the inquiring, and what benefits arise from it. The authors have clearly done a great deal of it and according to the fourth section (*Responsibility to History*), they tell us that their former students are more successful at *doing* and *living* inquiry than they appear to be at *articulating* it. This, too, is maybe a little troubling, and perhaps it is very tempting to suggest that through *further inquiry* the program's former students would be able to articulate this more easily.

There are some issues in the book that warrant more critical comment as well. First, non-Canadian readers would find a brief explanation of some of the national or provincial teacher education regulations and context very helpful in understanding how (and perhaps why) the authors felt such a radical turn away from the conventional teacher training methodology was necessary or desirable. It would also help the reader better understand the constraints, and therefore the freedoms, under which their program was conceived and built. Further, it is difficult to gauge the popularity of this approach among students, as student numbers on the program are seldom mentioned, and the size of their student cohorts are never measured against other student cohorts in other universities. Second, the book is somewhat myopic, though this is understandable given their mission of eulogizing the program rather than comparing it more objectively with other teaching training degree courses elsewhere in Canada. They seem so focused on exploring, explaining, and to some extent, justifying their own actions that little serious examination of traditional programs takes place, except to write them off as overly rationalist and technical. A more overt comparison could have highlighted the reason(s) they felt compelled to redesign the curriculum in the way that they did.

Third, it is not fully clear who benefitted from all of these activities. The reader is left wondering whether the chief beneficiaries were the teachers who they trained (who could *do it* better than they could articulate it), the children in local schools receiving their tuition from the teachers trained in this new way and (allegedly) benefitting from the more developed *practical wisdom* of their teachers, or the professors themselves who wanted to experiment with a new way of doing things and carry out their pedagogical research in the process. Did the authors ever wonder whether they were harming their students' career chances by exposing them to such innovative professional preparation methods? This could be important because at job interviews the students' inability to verbalize their techniques clearly to other professional educators might cost them employment opportunities over the long term. There is, at times, a price to pay for not being able to *talk the talk* in the way that an employment panel expects or demands.

In sum, it appears that this whole experience was one group's attempt to answer the eternal student question: why do we need to know this? In responding, they problematized nearly all the elements of that question: *why*, *we*, *need*, *know*, and *this*. They turned each of those ideas on its head and devised a new teacher education degree, the Master of Teaching. The *why* was answered with a new ontology and a desire to create the *whole teacher* with the *capacity for discernment*. They expanded the concept of *we* to include all of the stakeholders in youth

education, teachers, pupils, and themselves. The *need* they saw was based on rejecting the narrow rationalist technical basis of teacher training and instilling “a sense of ethical purpose . . . central to the work of teaching” (p. xix). They questioned the value of *knowing* in a conventional sense and concentrated on combining the *what* and the *how* of teaching into a *who*. Teaching for them became about *being* rather than *knowing*. The *this* they were teaching was no longer solely pedagogical technique and legal responsibility, but they transformed this into experience, growth, maturity, and self-awareness. In other words, they attempted to create *phronetic* teachers in a classroom.

Despite these criticisms, the authors achieved their mission with this book. It would be a difficult task for a responsible teacher at any level to read it carefully and not put it down occasionally to reflect upon one’s own teaching. It forces one to scratch one’s head in wonder at the ambitious nature of their goals and begin to consider how to change current teaching practices in any field in order to steer students closer to the self-fulfillment promised by *phronesis*.

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