

## Exploring Ethical Tensions on the Path to Becoming a Teacher

By M. Shaun Murphy, Eliza Pinnegar, & Stefinee Pinnegar

### Introduction

Eliza's student teaching narrative reads:

Jeff is a difficult child in the day care class where I am an assistant teacher. He is socially immature for his age and irritating—this means he always tells the joke at the wrong time, wants to talk when it's time to be quiet, begins the work just as they finish, hangs out by the bus all afternoon, and then runs away just when it's time to get on and go. In our class, the other teachers have devised a token economy system where the school tradition is to award tickets for good behavior and remove them for bad. I have talked to them about how this doesn't work but the other teachers still use this system. As a result, I always look for ways to subtly inflate the number of tickets kids who cause trouble have to work with. Jeff was a student who seldom had points to do anything. But I had been subtly working with him getting him to work with me. I would use key words to prompt him to do what he needed to and when he would follow those words, I would give him extra token economy points. Jeff was willing to do this, because we were planning projects he wanted to do. Although he wasn't perfect, I had worked with him until he had earned

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1000 points. Last week, I walked into class just as Karen (the head teacher) was starting a craft project. Jeff was off by himself and I noticed that he was crying. Both of these things were unusual for him and so I went over and talked to him about why he was so sad. He told me that Karen had taken all of his points. Now, I totally understood why Karen was frustrated and why she had taken his points. But as Jeff talked he told me he wanted to do the project we were doing that day as a present for his mother. I didn't feel I could just over-ride Karen and so I sat down with Jeff. We talked about all his options for recovering enough tickets to be able to make the gift and then we practiced what he might do in this negotiation. (reconstructed field note, June 5, 2009)

This narrative from Eliza's experience as a preservice teacher drew our attention to the ways she negotiated the relationships in this daycare class where she worked as a teacher assistant during her preservice education. We had been working with Eliza during this year in her program in order to understand more fully the ethical nature of preservice teaching work. An ethical stance is central in the writing by Eliza, not only in her work alongside Jeff, but also with Karen. It would be simple to dismiss Karen as out of relationship with Jeff and lend him our sympathies, but Eliza endeavours to stay in relationship with both of them, negotiating the tensions required to sustain relationships on the narrow ridge of knowing another (Buber, 2002).

While we were interested in Eliza's skill in defusing challenging situations with both children and teachers we were more interested in the ethical tensions embedded in the story—tensions that confront most pre-service teachers—tensions of negotiating safe spaces for children, tensions of negotiating professional relationships, tensions of being fair, and others. This narrative inquiry emerged from wonders about ethical and moral obligations in teacher education and through Eliza's desire as a pre-service teacher to understand her own development more deeply. We wondered about moral authority as teachers in both grade schools and teacher education programs and what might this attention to moral authority, and its relation to ethics, mean for our practices. This inquiry takes up these wonders as we examine our own narratives alongside Eliza's.

### **The Research Participants**

Eliza is being educated in teacher education at a small college in a medium sized community in the Western United States. The program has been in place for a few years but is the first four-year program at a school moving to four-year college status. In this program, from their admittance into the program, students spend one full-day a week working as an assistant to teachers in the public schools. This inquiry occurred as Eliza began the program. Eliza brings a unique perspective to teacher education, because she has been working in day care since she was 16 and has spent almost four years working as a teacher during the summer in a day care program. Eliza is also not a student in either Stefinee or Shaun's teacher education programs. Because Eliza was not a student in our programs, she was

able to frankly discuss and be a part of the research process. We made a conscious choice not to work with students in our own programs. Part of this has to do with the ethics required to work with one's own students. Another aspect of this inquiry was Eliza's enthusiasm for the topic and willingness to participate. Because of this work with Eliza we are now interested in pursuing this with other participants and future research will include students from our own teacher education programs.

Shaun is a beginning mathematics teacher educator in an elementary teacher education program in Western Canada. We conducted this inquiry during his first year as a faculty member. Stefinee has been a faculty member in teacher education for over 15 years. She works at a large private faith-based institution and her primary responsibilities include directing an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement program for both pre-service and in-service teachers as well as teaching adolescent development to secondary education majors.

We negotiated a relationship in which we, as teacher educators interested in the ethical development of teachers, would respond to Eliza's stories and questions about her development using that lens. Then we used her stories and questions as a way to tell about and explore our stories and experiences of living in ethical relationship as teachers and teacher educators in order to relive and re-tell our experiences with public school students and pre-service teachers. An account of the research process and methods we employed in inquiring into ethics in the development of teachers and teacher educators stories is found later in this article after we have represented our process of telling and retelling a critical tool in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Using Narrative Inquiry: Structuring Our Research**

The article explores our, two teacher educators' and a pre-service teacher's, understanding of the ethical dilemmas, obligations, and plotlines that emerged in the experiences of a pre-service teacher as she began to develop her identity as a teacher. The inquiry, based in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), used the analysis of narratives from a preservice teacher candidate, Eliza, and responses to them by teacher educators, Stefinee and Shaun, to explore the intertwining issues of identity and ethics. These responses take the form of further narrative on the part of the teacher researchers and responses attending to the blogs Eliza posted. Clandinin and Murphy (2009), when writing about the centrality of relationship in narrative inquiry, commented, "ontological commitment to the relational locates ethical relationships at the heart of narrative inquiry. The ethical stance of narrative inquirers is best characterized by a relational ethics" (p. 600).

This inquiry increased our understanding of the plotlines of ethical relationships as teachers and teacher educators form their identity, or stories to live by, a narrative term conceptualized by Connelly and Clandinin (1999) to "refer to identity, [which] is given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and

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context” (p. 4) and provided new insights in conceptualizing teacher and teacher educators’ ethical obligations to all students.

We created and participated in a yearlong blog where we could share narratives of experience. These blog entries, often initiated by Eliza, and responded to by Stefinee and Shaun, provided field texts and opportunities for telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as we considered the tensions the entries brought forward and our responses to them. In a recursive movement, our initial living of the stories and telling in the public space of the blog allowed us a way to capture the experience and provided opportunities for the subsequent retellings. The possibilities for reliving arise out of our research work with the ideas of the texts as we consider reliving this understanding in our practices of teacher education and our ongoing work in teacher education research.

Dewey’s (1997) criteria of experience highlights the roles of situation and continuity on present and future experiences for us in relation to our personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), which “allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing people. Personal practical knowledge is understood in relation to a teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher’s practice” (p. 25). The present day space of the blog enabled recall and memory to live alongside current experience.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) further attend to the influence of Dewey in narrative inquiry by noting, “experience is what is studied in narrative inquiry and we argued for a Deweyan view of experience. This shared commitment to the study of experience is central to narrative inquiry” (p. 69). Clandinin and Rosiek argued that “experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry—narrative or otherwise—proceeds” (p. 38). Furthermore, they stated:

From a conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous, narrative researchers arrive at a conception of how reality can be known. Following Dewey, the narrative inquirer takes the sphere of immediate human experiences as the first and most fundamental reality we have . . . and focuses on the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of a pragmatic ontology of experience can manifest in narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience but also in the lived immediacy of that experience. . . . Following from this ontology, the narrative inquirer arrives at a conception of knowledge . . . of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives. (p. 44)

As researchers using a narrative inquiry method to examine ourselves in relation to our teacher education practices we consciously moved inward and outward as we brought forward narratives of experience. We used the narrative commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) to unpack these narratives in relation to our current practice and the narratives Eliza posted on the blog. The narrative commonplaces highlight the ways these narratives are bound and can be unbound as we take them apart in relation to

present day experience and our desire to consider the ethical and moral in our teacher education practice.

We analyzed the stories identifying key themes, ethical tensions, and ethical obligations. We then returned to the blog entries and identified the key events from the blog that would allow us to present the themes that emerged. Next, we reconsidered the stories adding details from those experiences that would more clearly reveal the tensions we uncovered in the analysis. We then plotted the stories considering their relationship to each other and the ways in which laying stories alongside each other allowed us to re-live and re-tell our experiences in ways that captured the lived character of the themes of ethical tension and obligation we uncovered in our analysis (Boje, 2007). Boje helped us understand how placing stories in tension with each other opens new spaces for meaning making. Just as in conversation, narratives have the possibility to interrupt dialogue in order to illuminate or refute ideas being presented. In addition, in representing the stories, we used a tool from Bal's (1997) exploration of narrative theory in literary criticism to invite readers into certain narratives and uncover the tensions present by separating the roles of actor, narrator, and character in the plotlines.

### **The Teacher Educator Narratives**

The first narrative recalls an experience from Shaun's childhood that he uses in his preservice classes to draw attention to the tensions experienced by children in classrooms and subsequent wonders about the tensions this poses for teachers. This narrative supports us in unpacking ethical considerations and tensions that shape our practice in teacher education.

This is then followed by three moments of narrative interruptions. These narrative interruptions are an intentional strategy whereby we unsettle the meaning making trajectory of the initial reading of text. The narratives used here were taken from the field texts that we generated in our research blog as we sought to understand our ethical practices with preservice teachers.

### **Narrative One**

Shaun retells:

It is the 1974-75 school year and I am a grade six boy in Mrs. T's room. In our classroom are two sisters. I do not know how they ended up in the same grade because they are not twins. Noreen and Alene are Aboriginal girls who live somewhere in town, exactly where I cannot say, somewhere I do not know. They are not girls any of us at school have much to do with. In class they are mostly silent, they talk with no one but each other, and when they do, they talk quietly. They are the girls who if you accidentally touched them you can then touch someone else and pass on their germs, passing the germs on means you are then germ free yourself. This happened with other girls sometimes, but always with Alene and

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Noreen. They are girls without friends except each other. I am not one of the most popular kids, but I definitely have friends. I talk freely to everyone—just a farm kid with no particular allegiance to any group.

On the winter day of this story my brothers and I are late for school, again. It is a cold winter day in northern Alberta. We pile into the blue station wagon for our father to drive us to school from our farm in the country. As we get close to the school, there are Noreen and Alene walking. My father slows down to pick them up. He knows them from his work as a social worker in town and this also means they know him.

“What are you doing, Dad?” I ask.

“Stopping to pick them up.”

We are close enough to the school that they would not have much further to walk, but far enough that a car ride would still make a difference, plus it was cold. “They are almost there,” I reply.

They are almost there, why bother stopping, the car is full with the six of us, we were already late, all reasons to keep driving, all reasons I could have said out loud, except none of them were the real one. I don’t want to be seen arriving at school with them.

My father looks at me and frowns a little, “It is cold Shaun, and we are stopping to pick them up.” And so we do. The car pulls up beside them and my father calls for them to get in. Shyly they do, giggling and smiling, and my father pulls away from the curb and drives the rest of the short distance to the school. Already I am strategizing –“How can I get into class without anyone knowing we have given them a lift?” “How can I get in without being seen to arrive with them?”

I run from the car. (reconstructed field text from blog entry, September, 21, 2007)

Here Shaun’s memory ends. He recalls no social backlash from giving the girls a ride. In fact he recalls nothing else of the day. He does not know what became of Noreen and Alene. In fact he recalls very little of them other than this story.

Shaun’s recollection stops at the moment he got out of the car. He does not know if these girls moved back to the reserve, or if, when they were finally able to, they left this place that made no space for them. Yet, some 30 years later, now in the role of teacher educator concerned about educating teachers to create inclusive classrooms and schools, Shaun finds himself still riding in that car and stopping to give a lift to those two Aboriginal girls, still troubling over that boy. Shaun is still shamed to recall his response, still seeing those two girls in the cold from the slowing car window, in other words the tensions of that morning still ride with Shaun today.

### **Considering Shaun’s Story**

#### ***Narrative Tension and Moral Authority***

Bal (1997) suggested that one path into narrative interpretation is a consideration of the distribution of the roles of narrator, actor and character, since all can reside in the narrator alone. In this story, the separation of these roles creates the tension we experience as we read it. The actor is the father who stopped to pick up

two cold Aboriginal girls. The narrator is the older Shaun, not the grade-six boy (the character in the story) and it is told from that perspective which he shares with the actor. In the data collection process, it emerged in response to Eliza's stories about her own experiences in trying to meet the needs of all students.

Using Bal's (1997) analytic tool allows us to consider the tensions in the narrative that naturally exist between the character, narrator, and actor roles. That separation allows questions to bubble to the surface and invites not simply reconsideration of the narrative but retellings as well and highlights the tension resident in the story. In addition to creating tension, the separation invites a space in which we join Shaun in observing his behavior and in echoing his father's interpretation and it places us back into classrooms of our own childhoods. Like Shaun, most of us, as teacher educators, carry stories like these, usually hidden from others, stories when we acted toward others in ways we are still ashamed to recall. But such stories guide us in the ethical actions and obligations we assume in our lives as teachers and teacher educators. These stories usually present us lived plotlines contrary to those we wished we had enacted. In observing ourselves as characters or actors in such plotlines, we feel sorrow and regret for how we lived in that moment. As teacher educators we sense Eliza's tensions as she tried to understand why teachers, including herself, act in less than ideal ways and we resolve to educate teachers to create classrooms where they and their students can live out ethical relationships.

### **Ethical Relationships**

Margalit (2004) argued that moral relationships are those we have with humanity in general and that ethical relationships are those that emerge in close intimate relationships with family and friends. Teacher/student relationships should be ethical relationships. Margalit argued further that the parent/child relationship is the prototypical ethical relationship. Love is the constitutive element and is the obligation of the parent in the parent/child relationship and the teacher in the teacher/student one.

Moral relationships, unlike ethical ones, are thin and driven by definitions of what is good or right, Margalit (2004) suggested, "we need morality not so much to counter evil as to counter indifference" (p. 33). Attention to ethical relationships can carry us further in our work with teachers than attention to principles of morality because ethical relationships reside within the thickness of close personal experiences with people we care deeply about in plotlines we value (Appiah, 2006) and ask that we consistently respond in love within those relationships. Ethical relationships also carry us across difficult experiences. In order to have ethical relationships with our students we need to have thick relationships with them. University constraints, such as the large class size, fragmentation of teacher education curriculum, and the typical sixteen-week length of the semester, often act against our ability to create thick relationships. Stefinee tells this story of a student:

It was a late winter day in Tucson—my favourite time of the year. I sat at my desk

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facing the west wall. I always prefer natural light and so the office lights were off but the late afternoon sunlight flowed in through the southern window illuminating the room. I was intently reading a research article when I heard the noise of someone plummeting into my office and depositing themselves in the chair that sat alongside my desk. The young woman immediately burst into an apology for missing class for several days, well actually over a week.

Initially, I was startled—it was office hours but I had never had a student from the 150 person Child Development class I taught visit me during office hours except at my request. While I tried to think of who I had asked to come by, I couldn't think of anyone, I simultaneously looked up expecting to recognize the person. I confronted a stranger, a blond-haired young woman of about 20. Her clothes were modest and stylish, but seemed a little low and a little tight.

She was delighted to see me and her eyes looked at me with recognition, the pleasure of friendly interaction, and the expectation of intimacy. I frantically sorted my memory. No, I couldn't place her. She was unfamiliar to me—foreign and I remember thinking—surely I would remember a young woman who looked like this, but no matter how hard my memory was working it could make no connection to any student I currently had, particularly one who looked like they could be her and who had been missing class. I actually did keep track of attendance in this large class, because it was one where students' grades kept them out of our teacher education program and the biggest reason for failed grades was poor attendance. I usually followed up when I didn't see a student for a week with phone calls or questions. I was puzzling both over the lack of recognition I felt and the quandary—I couldn't think of anyone who had missed class this week—no more than a week—two I think she just said.

As she added the details that she hadn't been sick but she had just lost it and had not been able to leave the house for several days, but finally she had talked it over with her husband and they had reached an agreement and now here she was to talk things over with her teachers. It felt like the twilight zone—my mind struggled how could I not know this beautiful young woman who so obviously knew me and liked me.

Now in a class of 150 there are often students I did not know, but she expected me to know what the details of the story she was telling me meant and she thought I would care deeply about what she was saying.

Suddenly in mid-sentence she started to laugh—"You don't know me, I'm the girl in the veil." I did know her—sort of—but I still could not connect her face with the completely robed and veiled slightly overweight student her description indexed in my memory.

We talked then about her conversion to Muslimism, her marriage, her confusion, and distress with trying to live this new faith. The unexpected distance she felt from other students once she veiled and the sense of being cut adrift. This seemed strange to her, because she felt her conversion to Muslimism and her marriage had given her more stability than she had ever had in her life. Finally, things reached a crisis and she had not been able to leave the house. She and her husband realized that she needed to take off the veil and adapt to this new religion more gradually. This had been difficult, but she felt better and now she needed to make up what she had missed. We made plans.



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When she left my office, I was puzzled and dismayed wondering why I hadn't been able to see her and why I hadn't noticed how disconnected she felt from the other students since we did group work assignments in class and students usually knew and interacted well with each other. I was left wondering about the assumptions I had made and enacted in relationship to her. From her interaction with me it seemed to be that she had felt that I had seen her, she had felt that I had known her, but what had I known and how exactly had my assumptions about language and culture interrupted that.

Of course, I took comfort that she felt seen and accepted by me—but I was sad that I hadn't really seen beyond the veil. (reconstructed field text January 16, 2008).

Stefinee stands here in the narrator role but also as a character in the story. In this case the “marginalized” student is the actor. The story still has a valence of ambivalence and dissatisfaction located at exactly that space between acting and being that is critical in teacher education during a time of increased accountability when we agonize over the fact we do not just want our teacher candidates and classroom teachers to act in kind, accepting supportive ways—we want them to be kind, loving, and supportive as human beings. While from the response of the young woman, Stefinee had fulfilled her role as a kind, loving, and accepting teacher, we can tell from the plotline that she was located in just that space between acting and being—Stefinee felt that she was not that person who was kind loving and accepting because she did not recognize that young woman. How could Stefinee claim to know and accept her when she did not see her beneath the veil? The idea of the veil is interesting in this narrative. The student was veiled both literally and figuratively. Our attention is drawn to this as we consider what it means to know students in a layered manner and be willing to live alongside them when they reveal themselves to us. This highlights moments when the moral shifts to the ethical and how relationship is essential in this shift.

Like Shaun's story there is an underlying yearning—an awkward moment that we can never quite fix, unalterable and trapped in our memory of that moment. While this story is not as sharp-edged as Shaun's, or similar stories to Shaun's that Stefinee could share from her own experience, it continues to shape the interactions she has with students and deepens her desire to know each teacher candidate as the human they are behind the actions and interactions shared in the classroom.

We know as teachers that we have to both *see* and *be seen by* students. In their seeing, they decide whether to trust us, learn from us, and be guided by us. In our seeing, we have opportunity to identify potential and enable growth and we need to see beneath the veil in order to do this. While we may create ethical relationships with pre-service teachers while they are in our classrooms, as teacher educators we are more interested that the ethical issues we raise and the methods for supporting students' learning and creating culturally sensitive pedagogy (Nieto, 2005) that we teach pre-service teachers about will travel with them into their classrooms and permeate their interactions with their students. In other words, we hope that the

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ethical relationships we create will lead our teacher candidates to grant us moral authority over the decisions they make in their teaching (Pinnegar, 2005). We hope our voice will continue to guide teacher candidates in positive action as teachers in the same way that Shaun's story lives with him and guides him in the moment-to-moment decisions he makes.

#### **Moral Authority as Teacher Educators**

One of the ways that narratives gain power is when we lay them alongside each other so that the interruptions enrich and open their meaning. In his teaching, Shaun talks about this as interrupting teacher candidates' narratives to offer new ways to be and think. This leads us to lay alongside Shaun's story as a child and Stefnee's story as a teacher educator, three narratives from Eliza from her experience as a teacher candidate. We consider Eliza's narratives as interruptions because they provide us with an opportunity to interrupt the sense making we held in relation to the narratives we told. The interruptions then enable possible retelling and opportunities for reliving.

Pinnegar (2005) argued that in order for teacher educators to have moral authority teacher candidates must view them as people who are trustworthy and deserving of respect, who can therefore, call forth ethical behavior. Eliza tells a story of disliking her special populations' teacher and feeling confused and uncertain about what is being taught, she ends her commentary with this haunting question:

How am I going to be able to address the needs of my [special population] students without having bad feelings toward my training in that area? (Field text from blog, October 30, 2007)

She questions how she is going to be able to address the needs of her at-risk students because she dislikes her course focused on teaching special populations and her experiences in learning about how to work with such students.

Eliza, thus, raises a question for herself as a future teacher and for us as teacher educators. She wonders if her feelings for her teacher educator and that particular course will block her ability to learn and will, ultimately, influence her interactions with and feelings about her public school students. She reveals the ethical tension between her own plotline as a college student and the future plotlines she will create with students when she is a teacher. For us, as teacher educators, it raises the question of the responsibility teacher educators hold for the teaching of the preservice teachers they educate. Goodlad (1990) argued persuasively that schools of education do not prepare teachers well for teaching and that improving the conditions of schools is the responsibility of universities and schools of education. A decade later, Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) recommendations for what teacher educators need to do to prepare teachers, continued to echo Goodlad's earlier concerns and argue that schools of education are still not meeting that challenge.

However, Eliza's question raises a counter-narrative to that of Darling-Hammond, Bransford, and Goodlad whose questions focuses on the academic performance of public school students. Eliza questions whether her feelings about a teacher educator get in the way of her ability to meet the needs of the students who most need a teacher to enable their success. As a result of our work on this project, Eliza questioned more carefully what happened in class that day that led her to wonder if her feelings for her teacher would impact her ability to be a good teacher. After reconsidering her blog in light of her course syllabus and class notes, she reconstructed this event from her teacher education classroom:

I recalled a class session late in the fall semester; I was sitting in a class that focused on meeting the needs of special populations. Our professor had given us an assignment and about 25 minutes to complete it working in groups. My group was at the back of the class. Our professors have told us that our group is an unusual cohort, because we are so eager to learn—sometimes pushing our teachers to teach us more so that we can learn to be better teachers. Like any other class, however, we like to talk about other things when there is nothing else to do.

We had completed the assignment in about seven minutes leaving a lot of time for us to just talk. My friend Amanda, who was at my table, recognizing that quiet pause at the end of group work when students look up for further direction before they turn to mere talk, looked around and saw that it wasn't just our group that had finished but all of us had.

With 20 minutes of class left and wanting the teacher to give us something else to learn, worried that everyone would soon be off-task and too distracted she raised her hand and caught the attention of our professor. She said, "We've finished the assignment. What else can we work on? My professor stood there with a puzzled look on her face for several long seconds.

Kristen, another friend of mine, raised her hand; she identified a sentence in a segment of the assigned reading and asked, "Would you explain this to us?" Instantly every head turned toward the teacher, I know I hadn't understood and I wanted to learn more about the topic. My group members seemed interested as well.

The professor just stood there and looked at us for what seemed a long time and then she said "Oh, don't worry about that. You won't need to know that until sometime next year. Just keep working on the task I assigned."

The professor went back to what she was doing. We all sat in stunned silence—we had already told her we were finished with the work she had given us. Being left to our own devices we returned to our conversations about *American Idol*, where to buy clothes, and various students' wedding plans. (reconstructed field text based on blogs, September 15, 2008)

In unpacking more clearly the source of her feelings and the classroom interactions that lead her to these feeling, Eliza uncovered the fact that her teacher educator had denied the students an opportunity for learning. Indeed, Eliza revealed that her anger at her teacher and her feelings that she might dislike working with special population students because she so disliked her teacher, has a learning as well as an ethical component. It is not beyond us to remember and imagine the

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ways we live alongside students in teacher education programmes and recognize that experiences with our students will influence the ways they live alongside the children they will work with in classrooms one day. Eliza highlights tensions she felt in response to a teacher educator and her narrative moment challenges Stefinee and Shaun to consider the ways they interact with students, the ways they ignore students' desire to learn more or learn differently. Stefinee brought forward the moment with the student in her office because she wonders what sense this student may have made of Stefinee's lack of recognition of her and provide evidence to her that she didn't need to actually know each of her students in order to meet their needs. Metaphorically, it is possible to consider all the ways that our students remain veiled to us and the ways we remain veiled to them and the ways in which this may or may not result in powerful teacher education.

Eliza's emotional response to the teacher had masked her sense of frustration about not learning what she would need to know to meet the needs of these students and about her teacher's seeming refusal to provide the knowledge she sought. Eliza realized she felt that her teacher was wilfully leaving teacher candidates unprepared to meet the needs of their students. The emotionality of Eliza's response was tied directly to her sense that the teacher educator was denying both her moral obligation to teach her teacher candidates as much as possible in the classroom time available to her and her ethical obligation to them as fellow beings.

While researchers and policy makers might point to the lack of teaching content as the basic issue here and the ethical and moral obligation as beside the point, Eliza's response to the situation and her concern focused on her feelings of betrayal by the teacher educator who she felt was sending her out unprepared. Her dislike of the teacher educator and her concern that her dislike would lead her to resent the special students resulted from the sense of betrayal more than from her remembering that the teacher had also not been willing to teach them about concepts that the teacher candidates felt they needed to know and understand in order to teach well. This led Eliza to dislike and resent the teacher educator. It was only as a result of doing the analysis for this paper that Eliza realized that the teacher educator had not met her obligation to teach. What this suggests is that teacher candidates' emotional responses to us as teacher educators and the content we teach is more powerful than the content we attempt to teach them.

As teacher educators, we must wonder how much responsibility can and do we have to create ethical spaces in which teacher candidates not only learn what we teach but learn what they will need to know to both create such spaces and develop similar obligations for teaching their students. There is a sense of the liminal (Heilbrun, 1999) as we consider the ethical responsibility in our work with preservice teachers. We hold that we have a moral responsibility to our teacher candidates and by extension the children they will teach, but as we come to know them over a term, our moral obligations begin to take on ethical obligations that emerge out of our relationships with them. Eliza's story highlights the tensions Stefinee and

Shaun feel as they step into the liminal space created in the tension between subject matter, pedagogy, and human relationship centred in a need for those learning to enact with vulnerable others what is being taught.

If we return to Shaun's story, we do not hold the teacher or the teacher educator completely responsible for Shaun's feelings of vulnerability in the classroom space in relationship to the two Aboriginal girls. Yet, in light of Stefinee's and Eliza's stories we cannot help but wonder what learning was denied Shaun's teacher in teacher education or teacher development programs that may have helped her to develop classroom spaces that attended to ethical tensions. We also wonder how the teacher educator might have engaged with the teacher in ways that allowed the teacher educator to be an on-going source of support who the teacher might have sought out as she worked to create such spaces. Indeed, one of our ongoing wonders is the way in which Shaun's story lives alongside his practice as a teacher educator.

Shaun did get out of that car some 30 years ago, but in some ways has chosen to step back into the space of tension associated with that car ride. He allows that the tension of that moment, or at least the tension of the memory of that moment, creates wonders about the experience of Noreen and Alene in schools. Stefinee wondered out loud at one moment about the tensions the teacher might have felt as she observed Noreen and Alene's experiences in her classroom. Shaun mentally travels back and forth between the norms of ethical relationship that existed in the family car in contrast with the norms of the classroom. Stefinee also wondered about the social tensions for Shaun the young boy who did not feel safe enough to create a more ethical space for Noreen and Alene in his classroom. We wonder what teachers do to support children who hold these tensions. Shaun knows his teacher would have had no inkling of that moment, but she must have been aware of other tensions in relation to Noreen and Alene with the other children. He also wonders what he might have missed, in terms of the ways in which the teacher may have tried to alter the classroom space for Noreen and Alene, and the successes that may have been realized.

As a mathematics teacher educator, Shaun wonders how the feelings of his teacher candidates and their ability to enact the mathematical practices he instructs them in impact their own teaching, and more significantly the children with whom they will work. The question raised is what is the responsibility in creating thick relationships with teacher candidates that both educates them in teaching and calls forth from them ethical obligations to create similar environments with their own students? Furthermore, Shaun, Eliza, and Stefinee at various places in our narratives wonder whether they can make this happen all by themselves. As Eliza expressed it:

I listen to others talk about their classes and I wonder how I will be able to create this [loving, positive] feel in my own classes or is it only the students that can create this feeling? I will of course do all I can to have my class feel safe and welcoming but to have it connect in such a way is hard. Can it be created or does it just happen? If I can, what do I do or need to do in my individual student to

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teacher interactions and in developing and guiding student to student interactions to optimize this possibility? What is the role of students? (Field text from blog, November 16, 2007)

#### **Surprise and Ethics**

The next story from Eliza that we lay alongside Shaun's narrative is about her surprise over the skill and knowledge ESL students possess:

How does perception dictate action? There are three ESL kids in my practicum class. Because they were labelled ESL, I mistakenly thought that they did not speak English or were only able to communicate on a rudimentary level. I was wrong. They have good command of social language; they understand concepts that are presented to them. The only thing they don't do well are spelling and writing. They don't seem like what I thought ESL students are. (Field text from blog, October 3 2007)

Whatever Eliza was learning in her ESL course led her to think that all ESL children would have only rudimentary skills. In this situation, she began to wonder how much her belief about the skills and abilities of these students would dictate her interactions with them. We know that teacher beliefs have been identified as a concern in the preparation of teachers. Bullough (2001) proposed ways to embrace teacher candidates' beliefs and use them as prior knowledge in preparing them to be teachers. Holt-Reynolds (1992) demonstrated the ways in which teacher candidates beliefs restricted what they were able to learn from teacher education. It is those spaces, in which beliefs bump up against reality in a way that calls beliefs into question, potentially shaping them in new ways and allowing teacher educators, when they are aware of these tensions, to help teacher candidates think differently about how they might teach and the kinds of relationships they might create with students. Shaun replied to Eliza:

Eliza, it is interesting you write this and I read it after a class I just taught. In it we talked about the ways we pathologize children with a learning disabled label. I suggested we might want to talk about learning difference as opposed to learning disabled. With this perception we might consider the ways they know in a different manner, like the way you are thinking about the children with whom you are working. I appreciate the honesty in the statement "They don't seem like what I thought ESL students are." I think it takes effort to name this kind of response and then more effort to let it mean something in our relationships with children. We need to let our understanding evolve because we are not always able to be the way we want to be right from the get go. This is about letting kids help us build our relationship with them through experience. As I sit here looking out the window, I think I also want to say, it is about moving from thinking of children as other to thinking of them as a recognizable person. (Field text from blog, October 4, 2007)

Shaun's response provides a particular plotline for teacher interaction with students, which also includes a plotline for teacher growth. From his role as teacher educator, he articulates the ways in which the living contradictions we experience in our teaching should cause us to rethink our teaching and understanding of our

students. Such reconsiderations lead us to enact different plotlines with children in our practice.

### ***Moral Authority of Teacher Candidates in Teacher Education***

After her first day of class in a new semester, Eliza wonders what obligation she has to forgive the teacher educator she dislikes. She expresses repentance for her feelings about the teacher. She wonders, if each day as she enters the teacher educator's classroom, not just this semester but across her program, does she need to begin again in her relationship with that teacher, accepting her for who she is and supporting her in living a different plotline in their relationship together.

### **Conclusions**

This inquiry articulated the compounding issues of ethical relationships that can emerge on pre-service teacher' paths to becoming teachers. It also highlights our tensions and understandings of ethics and relationship on our paths to being and becoming teacher educators. These spaces of ethical tensions were illuminated first, as we laid Eliza's narratives alongside Shaun's. Shaun's story reminded us of the need to create safe spaces for children. Stefinee's story reminds us of the tensions that programmatic constraints cause in the relational lives of preservice teachers and teacher educators. Eliza's question about her own negative feelings toward a teacher and its impact on her learning content in teacher education raises an ethical dilemma for us as teacher educators. We wonder what impact preservice teachers' relationships with us have on their ability to learn from teacher education and create ethical relationships and spaces in and beyond it. As teacher educators we desire preservice teachers to create classrooms that support ethical relationships with children. What often remains hidden to us is the impact of our ethical relationships with preservice teachers on their future classrooms.

Eliza's surprise at her ESL students' performance uncovers the ethical tension concerning whether teacher educators provide safe spaces for teacher candidates to reveal themselves. For without ethical spaces where preservice teachers feel accepted and acceptable, misunderstanding of content and experience flourish and ultimately impact the future practice of preservice teachers. Finally, the third interruption reminds us of the ethical obligations that we owe each other as teacher and teacher educators in meeting our obligations to children. It reminds teacher educators that we may often need teacher candidates to forgive us.

There are no simple answers; the answers lay in a complexity attentive to the diverse lives of children, youth, and adults. None of the authors believe in the idea of best practices, at the most we claim that teacher education is a contextual practice rooted in the temporal experience of the individual(s). Therefore, there are no suggestions about what a teacher educator should do to attend to ethical relationships or single ways of establishing themselves as having moral authority. Rather, we

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believe that by engaging in experience, those in this paper and the reader's own, and by engaging in retellings such as this one, teacher educators might shape a possibility in their own experience for reliving and developing ethical relationships with preservice teachers.

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