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"LIFE IS JUST MY SHOW"  
FLOW, OPTIMAL EXPERIENCE AND THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF A  
NATURAL STUDENT TEACHER

by  
Mary Grace Jondrow

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
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As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Mary Grace Jondrow entitled "Life is Just My Show" Flow, Optimal Experience and the Unique Characteristics of a Natural Student Teacher

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Walter Doyle

10-31-01  
Date

Kevin D. Vinson

10/31/01  
Date

Rosy Alexander Koff

10/31/01  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Walter Doyle  
Dissertation Director Walter Doyle

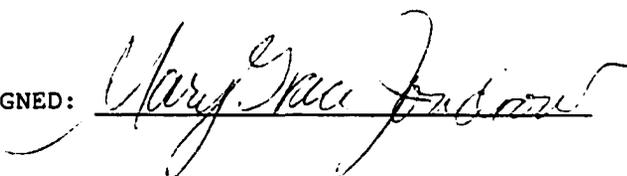
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Grace Johnson", written over a horizontal line.

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this research was on student teachers who are anomalies, in particular those who appear to begin their practicum in a state of affirmation, able effectively to negotiate many of the roles of "teacher" and appear to have few classroom problems. In this report these student teachers are referred to as "Naturals." This investigation sought to explore variation and examine the sources of difference focusing on both the context and the individual.

A Natural student teacher was identified, and, utilizing qualitative methodology, observational and interview data were used to create a case to describe this student teacher's experience and unique characteristics.

The case of Wendy as a student teacher demonstrated that her practicum semester was characterized by: an ongoing state of enjoyment, flourishing relationships with her cooperating teacher and students, and a focus on a productive learning environment. Using Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) theory of optimal experience and flow, the unique characteristics of Wendy's student teaching are found to be both individual and contextual in source.

## CHAPTER I. THE QUESTION

## Introduction

From the beginning of my work in teacher education, I have been struck by the differences in teachers. When I say this I am not referring to the quality of teachers, but rather the differences in the individual people who are teachers. I have been fascinated by individuality; who each of us is when we choose to become teachers, how we experience our growth into teachers and who we become as professionals.

Early in my doctoral work I investigated differences in curricular stance of two experienced art teachers, seeking to understand why some teachers utilize curricular philosophies introduced in their preservice education, and others did not. Then I turned my attention to preservice students and investigated differences in beliefs and self-perceptions, seeking to understand how that influenced their approach to learning to teach. Each of these questions centered on why some individuals make certain choices or experience a situation one way, while others

find a different path. The inquiry reported here was an extension of that interest.

Early in my career in teacher education I noticed a striking difference in the experiences of student teachers. In a group of ten student teachers I was supervising, nine appeared to have a "normal" experience complete with struggles with classroom management, confusion, and self-doubt. The tenth student teacher proceeded through the experience with ease; her classroom was orderly and organized, students responsive, lessons well planned and meaningful. She was happy and relaxed and "just loved the kids." They in turn clearly loved her. At the time I wondered why her experience appeared to be so different. She was placed in a "tough" middle school with an equally "tough" cooperating teacher. Her academic performance up to that point had been quite unremarkable. She was young and inexperienced. Her cooperating teacher appreciated her accomplishment and provided many opportunities and increased responsibility. She on the other hand was just having fun.

In subsequent years of supervising student teachers, I have worked infrequently with others like her. I made it my purpose to speak to principals, administrators, cooperating

teachers, and other teacher educators and they too have had students to fit this profile, but very few. It was clear from their comments however that these were the people they wanted to be hiring. It appeared to be their perception that "naturals" needed less "work" to get up and running as teachers. As anecdotal as this was, I believed teacher research should be asking why and how these students were different.

#### Statement of the Problem

The focus of this research was on student teachers who, like the student discussed earlier, are anomalies, in particular those who appeared to begin their practicum in a state of affirmation, able to effectively negotiate many of the roles of "teacher" and appeared to have few challenges from their students. In this document, these student teachers are referred to as Naturals.

This inquiry aimed to enlighten our understanding of Naturals and the unique characteristics of their practicum experience. Based on the understanding that the experience of Naturals represents a variation in the normal experience of student teaching, this investigation sought to explore

the basis for this variation. The question at the heart of this research was: How could this variation in the experience of student teaching be explained? Was this student teacher's practicum semester a more productive learning experience, or simply qualitatively better? Where did the source of difference reside: within the individual, the context, or both?

#### Significance of the Study

Student teaching is the capstone of most initial teacher preparation programs. Generally student teachers follow a predictable flow of development during the course of their practicum and in the subsequent early years of their teaching careers. Theories abound that explain these stages for student teachers (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Kagan, 1992; Piland & Anglin, 1993; Valli, 1992; Veenman, 1984). Though teacher development theories use different terminology, most trace a predictable progression of growth.

Student teachers generally begin their experience in a state of fear and uncertainty. They are forced to address painful concerns about compliance and classroom management.

Gradually they achieve a level of autonomy, may be less likely to seek prescriptive solutions to classroom issues and more likely to generate their own ideas. Hopefully before the end of their practicum, they are able to turn their attention to student learning and engage in self-affirmation, knowing that they are in control of content, connecting with their students and respected by their supervising teacher (Piland & Anglin, 1993).

In addition to the research directed toward teacher development, there is substantial documentation of the student teaching experience. In a critical analysis of studies on learning to teach, Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998) noted that in these studies "we found them [student teachers] struggling for control, we heard words of frustration, anger, and bewilderment" (p. 159). Student teachers report these feelings at a time when they feel the judgment of them is the harshest, essentially reflected in their ability to get a job (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). The student teaching semester is characterized by most as "stressful."

To date the research on student teaching has done an excellent job of rendering "normal" experiences of student teachers. In delineating the experiences of student

teachers, findings focus on commonalities as opposed to individual differences. However, the trend toward a more constructivist notion of teacher education, where a student "constructs" meaning based on life experiences and beliefs (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996), suggests that individuality, in particular an individual's perspectives have assumed more importance. Attending to variation in an individual's experience of student teaching, this inquiry was an extension of the constructivist tradition.

#### Need for the Study

To date there has been a wealth of research on the normal experience of learning to teach. This work has proven to enlighten and explain many problems in acquiring the complex skills of teaching. However, little attention has been paid to variation in the experience of student teaching. It appears that when a student teacher has an experience that is particularly positive or productive it is assumed to be a fluke or the result of some sort of talent. However, because little is known about Naturals, it is also possible that this unique experience was due to other factors; differences in context, differences in the

role or characteristics of the cooperating teacher, or characteristics of the student teacher either innate or learned. A finding suggesting any of the above scenarios would provide a new perspective on the experience of student teaching. With this possibility in mind, the experiences of Naturals need to be better described and understood.

#### Organization

This report begins by providing a formative framework of this investigation into the differences in teachers. This portion, Chapter 2 serves as a cumulative review of related "learning-to-teach" literature. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research methodology utilized in the case development. Chapter 4 presents a case study, a simple rendering illuminating the experiences of a particular student teacher, Wendy. In Chapter 5 this case is analyzed and discussed relative to extant findings that may explain this phenomenon. And finally, implications for teacher preservice are discussed.

## CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This inquiry aimed to shed light on the variation in the experience of student teaching, in particular to better understand the experience of a Natural. Review of the literature on student teaching sought any findings that might help one understand the experience of a Natural. This section will address current knowledge of the student teaching experience and will serve as a platform from which the characteristics of the Natural can be studied.

### The Student Teaching Experience

Field experience is seen in contemporary teacher education as a critical experience in learning to teach. Reform efforts place increasing emphasis on the earlier and longer exposure to "real" classrooms for preservice students (McIntyre, et al., 1996). Field experiences take different forms in the course of teacher education. Of interest in this inquiry is student teaching. Student teaching may be

one or more semesters and is typically the culmination of a teacher preparation program. It serves to allow the student to gain progressive experience in various aspects of teaching while ultimately taking on more responsibility as a teacher.

Currently, the general trend is for universities and colleges to carry out formal coursework of teacher education, while student teaching and other field experiences take place in neighboring school districts with little, if any, formal association with the university (McIntyre, et al., 1996). This arrangement has contributed to a variety of problems and limitations in the student teaching experience. Griffin's (1989) study of student teaching found that "student teaching programs were only minimally related to the university preservice programs of instruction" (p. 362), there was no unifying set of objectives between the two institutions, and student teachers themselves had difficulty identifying the source of expectations and evaluation. This disconnect appears to be the result of an underlying belief in the field that exposure to classrooms and students, any exposure, provides a basis for learning to teach.

Zeichner (1980) further questions the value of field experiences noting that in addition to concerns that the practicum coercively assimilates student teachers to the norms of schools and fosters rigid conservative teaching practices, they are often "miseducative." More often than not, student teachers learn more custodial and utilitarian teaching perspectives in contrast to the more humanistic perspectives typified by the goals of most districts and universities.

#### The Role of the Cooperating Teacher

During the practicum student teachers are typically placed with one cooperating teacher in a single classroom (McIntyre, et al., 1996). Though they have a limited relationship to the university program, this arrangement places significant importance on the role of the cooperating teacher. In the leadership role for the student teaching semester, the cooperating teacher sets the tone and nature of relationships during the practicum (Griffin, 1989). A common attitude voiced by cooperating teachers is that they are doing the work not done by teacher education programs: teaching how to teach rather than about theory

(McIntyre, et al., 1996). In the absence of defined roles, cooperating teachers often based their role on their own experience as a student teacher and on their own acquired expertise as a teacher (Koerner, 1992).

Griffin's (1989) work delineates the massive influence a cooperating teacher has on the practicum experience. Cooperating teachers have more exposure to the student teacher than their university counterpart, the university supervisor. They hold the dominant leadership role in the practicum experience while maintaining primary concern for the experiences of their own pupils. Griffin found that cooperating teachers dominated conferences and other discussions during student teaching. In that dominant role they tended to maintain focus on situation-specific management issues and suggestions for classroom practices. Griffin found that about half of the cooperating teachers in his study felt the "student teacher needs to learn my way of conducting instruction" (p. 357).

The role of the cooperating teacher takes a toll on the beliefs the student teachers hold about the experience. Koerner (1992) describes cooperating teachers as the "ambivalent participants" of student teaching. Her findings reflect the complexity of introducing another adult in a

student role into an existing classroom. She identifies several major areas of concern. First, she found that cooperating teachers felt that having a student teacher in the classroom placed instruction at risk. In spite of the general benefit of having a student teacher invigorate a classroom with energy and new ideas, the behaviors of inexperienced student teachers raise concerns for cooperating teachers over the quality of instruction being given. One reason noted by cooperating teachers was that student teachers were preoccupied with themselves and the difficulty of their own learning experience rather than the learning experience of the pupils. In addition the needs of the student teacher can interfere with the cooperating teacher's own attention to planning and instruction. Whether or not a teacher is willing to serve as a cooperating teacher, it is understood that the teacher has made commitments to parents, students, and the administration to provide a quality experience for his or her students. The cooperating teacher will be held accountable for student learning, with or without a student teacher (Sarason, 1996). Cooperating teachers often saw the role of the student teacher to enhance what the cooperating teacher was doing in his or her classroom. Once the student

teacher began to utilize the cooperating teacher's management and instructional methodology the cooperating teacher viewed the student teacher as successful. If the cooperating teacher perceived that the presence of the student teacher was negatively affecting instruction, anxiety and tension developed in the relationship between the two (Koerner, 1992).

Another source of concern for cooperating teachers is the displacement they feel in their own classrooms. Up until the entry of the student teacher, the cooperating teacher's role with the students was that of primary adult in the school context. The presence of a student teacher alters that relationship. The alteration can take several forms. When the student teacher is unpopular or has classroom problems, the cooperating teacher finds his or herself in an uncomfortably popular position as the preferred teacher. A very likeable student teacher can leave the cooperating teacher feeling that the affections of students have been alienated. Worse yet, a lenient student teacher can put the cooperating teacher in the position of being the "bad guy" while maintaining the normal rules in existence in the classroom.

Cooperating teachers also reported feeling their carefully considered ideas had been displaced when student teachers proposed instructional innovation. As experienced teachers, cooperating teachers recognize the value of routine in making a classroom run smoothly. In the years they have been working as teachers they have refined their own way of running their classrooms to suit their own methods. Student teachers often disrupt this routine by not recognizing or valuing it. Or they may simply not yet have the experience to support it. In any case, this disruption of routine slows the pace on instruction and has the potential of disrupting the progress of the pupils. Whether a student teacher proposed innovation or not, one byproduct of having a student teacher in the classroom was disruption of routine. As the responsible adult for this particular classroom cooperating teachers sometimes feared and resented problems presented by student teachers, sometimes feeling criticized or threatened.

In Keorner's (1992) study, cooperating teachers also reported feeling that their privacy had been invaded with the presence of a student teacher. Teachers are accustomed to the isolation of working alone in a classroom full of children. They reported feeling pressure having the student

teacher watching them and possibly judging them. The student teachers arrived with "university" ideas that appeared in conflict with the "real life" of a classroom. Cooperating teachers perceived that the student teachers tended to be more focused on the contrast between the two than on their own need to learn.

The experience of cooperating teachers reported here might simply be symptomatic of the ill-defined relationship between universities and districts, or possibly the nature of breaking the isolation of the classroom teacher by introducing an adult learner (the student teacher) into the classroom. It is clear, however, that the response of the cooperating teacher to the responsibilities of having a student teacher could potentially influence the quality of the practicum experience.

#### Problems of Student Teachers

To date there has been a wealth of research on the "normal" experience of student teaching. "Normal" is generally defined in terms of problems. Some scholars view these problems in terms of their progression or development (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Piland & Anglin, 1993) with general

similarities running through a number of theories. Student teachers approach the beginning of their practicum with a huge amount of anticipation. This anticipation takes the form of mixed feelings; excitement over the beginning of their professional lives and anxiety and self-doubt about their own ability to perform (Pilland, 1993). Much of their anxiety centers on the unknown and confusing questions that arise from the start. This confusion and tension often stimulates novices to appropriate classroom solutions from their cooperating teachers. This imitation generates inappropriate and unexamined actions that not only may be in conflict with what the student teacher has learned in their formal training, but also since this action has likely been misapplied, it simply doesn't work (Valli, 1992). According to Pilland (1993), student teachers move forward from the "fear and uncertainty" stage once they have become familiar with their environment. Marked by acquiring some answers to their burning questions, student teachers move into Pilland's "socialization" stage. At this time their greatest need is to be respected and accepted by the students. It is critical that the student teacher have opportunities to prove his or her worth interacting with

the students and planning lessons. Positive feedback from supervisors and students is very important.

Pilland's third stage - autonomy - is marked by student teacher desire to take control of the classroom and the cooperating teacher allowing that action. Trust and confidence expressed by the cooperating teacher at this time is particularly important. The student teacher exercises a full range of a teacher's professional responsibilities making decisions about lesson content and classroom management.

Pilland's final stage, affirmation, indicates emerging competence. This is accomplished as student teachers are able to recognize they have grown professionally, many questions have answers, and he or she has established a working rapport with students. The student teacher is managing a reasonably productive classroom. The stage of affirmation places the student teacher ready to assume responsibilities for his or her own classroom, and is prepared to embark on being a beginning teacher.

Student teacher development theory provided a basis for comparison of the Natural's practicum experience. Do Natural's follow the expected progression of development or do they experience growth differently?

Developmental theory notes that student teachers have a number of uncertainties and questions. Many problems arise for student teachers in the solutions to these questions. Student teachers come to the practicum with a strong desire to succeed and to do it quickly. They hold their cooperating teacher in particular respect as the individual who teaches them the most (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Griffin, 1989). Seeking immediate solutions to their classroom concerns, student teachers are prone to imitating the actions of their cooperating teachers. Like their responses to their early experiences with school, this imitation is unexamined and lacks a depth of understanding of the philosophical and theoretical basis for the expert teacher's actions (Valli, 1992). Unfortunately, this can lead to some serious missteps.

Though student teachers have a basis for understanding classroom actions from their formal education on teaching, they are prone to miss the connections to what they have learned, often failing to use what knowledge they do have once they are in the classroom (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Compounding this issue is the isolation of student teachers from their university instructors and peers (Valli, 1992). Whatever

the emphasis of their initial teacher preparation, once immersed in their practicum, the student teacher experiences pressure to conform to the norms of their host school whether or not those norms are consistent with the content of their formal education (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

### Expert Teachers and Novice Teachers

One question implied in this inquiry is if Naturals somehow "know" more than other novices. In other words, are there some behaviors present in Naturals that would fall on the expert end of the continuum rather than the novice end?

Expertise has been studied in a variety of disciplines, including teaching. Much of this work has roots in the area of artificial intelligence and seeks to delineate specialized knowledge that develops over time and distinguishes one who is highly competent in knowledge application from those who are more naïve in their knowledge use (Glaser & Chi, 1988). The findings of this work illustrate the importance of accumulated domain specific knowledge. This knowledge base is key in all areas of expertise, including teaching. It enables the expert to

perceive relationships within the knowledge base that simply are not visible to the novice. "Clusters" or "chunks" of concepts enable experts to accurately and quickly evaluate problems; they are able to remember details and connect problems or events to theory. In problem-solving episodes, experts have been shown to take their time analyzing the problem, asking more questions, and identifying constraints, thereby providing greater definition and clearer solutions. Novices react with haste, plugging away on the superficial aspects of the problem at hand and are generally unaware of their misinterpretations (Glaser & Chi, 1988).

The literature on expertise in teaching is consistent with the findings on expertise in general and serves to delineate behaviors associated with successful teaching (Berliner, 1992). Like other experts, expert teachers are masters of their own domain. They develop expertise based on the context in which they teach and must adapt the use of their knowledge when their context changes (e.g. a master elementary music teacher may find themselves less of an expert teaching a high school music class). In teaching, the context is more complex than many studied in the expert research in other fields. Expert teachers will be the

first to assert that knowledge of their students is as important (maybe more so) than their formal knowledge of teaching. Thus each new class of students introduces another opportunity to develop, another needed expansion of their expertise. Expert teachers use their understanding of patterns in the tasks of teaching to create routines. The use and establishment of routine represents a breakthrough for beginning teachers and enables them to move their focus onto the instructional aspects of teaching and give their students important cues on how to act (Berliner, 1992). As Chi et al. (1988) asserted, experts use their knowledge base to cluster the information they must use in a given context. For expert teachers this clustering includes a use of social cues or knowledge of their students in different contexts for use in solving instructional problems. This takes the form of continuous reflection or problem solving. Expert teachers accumulate new information, revising interpretations and devising new solutions.

Novice teachers, without the benefit of acquired understanding of the contexts and routines of schools suffer from varying degrees of confusion and frustration when they begin teaching. Their view of teaching from the pupil's point of view has not revealed the complex

planning, management and execution present in an expert teacher's practice. Instead they need to serve their time, developing their professional knowledge and understanding through service. Through experience they develop the ability to interpret the actions of students and learn to respond appropriately.

#### The Influence of Beliefs on the Individual

With roots in anthropology and other social sciences, beliefs have been seen as the elemental property that defines an individual's way of understanding situations and guiding personal action. Beliefs are "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 1996, p. 103). According to Richardson, the provenance of beliefs held by teachers can be attributed to three general sources: beliefs as a result of personal experience, beliefs as a result of schooling and instruction, and beliefs as a result of experience with formal knowledge. This combination of influences on the beliefs of student teachers explains both general tendencies among preservice

students as well as their own individualized approaches to the task of learning to teach.

### Beliefs of Preservice Students

As one looks at Naturals one could ask if the literature on beliefs of preservice students might explain their unique experiences. Preservice students come to their teacher education with extensive experiences as students themselves and a vast variety of life experiences that influence their view of the world. This combination of influences contributes to how the individual understands and makes meaning of what is being taught in their formal training. Constructivist theory employs this notion and explains that individuals construct or create their own knowledge base in a way that "makes sense" relative to their own personal experience. Put in terms of learning to teach, the preservice student's life experiences temper their understanding or attitude toward acceptance of much of what they learn in preservice coursework. The influences of apprenticeship as a student serves as a foundation for student teachers' beliefs about the profession of teaching and to a great degree depicts what teaching "looks like" to them (Lortie, 1975).

These years on the other side of the teacher's desk have rendered images of teaching in every person's memories, whether they plan to teach or not. Unfortunately, these renderings are based on an obstructed or student-sided view of teaching. Consequently, they do not represent a realistic view of the less public aspects of the job. Understandings may be more mythical, and sometimes romanticized, representing an unexamined accumulation of life experiences as a student (Valli, 1992). Such ideas about teaching, based on the personal history of the student, serve as the basis of "lay theories" about good teaching and best practices (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). Holt-Reynolds has found that such understandings are powerful and interfere with the student's receptiveness to new ideas presented in their preservice coursework.

As sentimental and unrealistic as the preservice students' view of teaching is, those who choose to go into teaching tend to have a high sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability as teachers. Given their impressions of the teachers they have had, they feel they align well with observed attributes and expect to perform well in the classroom (Book & Freeman, 1986; Weinstein, 1988; Weinstein, 1989).

Beliefs also have been found to influence the level of engagement students demonstrate in their initial teacher preparation course work. Preservice students have been found to hold the student teaching experience as the most critical educational element of their teacher preparation and in turn had less faith in the educational value of their other coursework (Valli, 1992; Book, Byers, & Freeman, 1983). Preservice students were so confident in their perspectives that when they confronted information from their preservice instructors that did not align with their beliefs, their response was to question the beliefs of the instructor, rather than their own (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). This confidence in their own construction of the job of teaching has been found to limit the impact of formal coursework. Preservice teachers are anxious to "get in the trenches" and teach. They believe that "on-the-job-training" is the best way to learn to teach. (Richardson-Koehler, 1988) Though the beliefs literature reveals critical influences on student teachers in general, it offers little to explain the different experiences of Naturals. In fact, the beliefs literature suggests possibilities that could counter "Naturalness". Reliance on childhood experiences and a distortion of their own

abilities in the classroom would likely increase the stress and anxiety of the practicum.

In a more holistic view of the individuality of teachers, the literature on personal narrative in learning to teach enables greater focus on vast complexities of personal history as a shaping force in the ideologies and actions of teachers (Carter & Doyle, 1996). Related to the literature on beliefs, personal narrative or life story research delves deeper into the individual's unique accumulated experiences as the critical substance of perspective later in life. In this sense, one's personal narrative is not unlike one's own DNA in that it defines our own inclinations and potential in terms of who one is and how that unique being sees the world.

Life story is at the root of identity as a teacher. Life experiences within family, schools, and culture come together to define one's perspective about teaching and how the individual lives within this perspective. It is the basis upon which preservice students' envision their future role and relationship with students. This storied image mediates all aspects of initial teacher preparation, but also sheds some light on the different experiences of student teachers. According to Britzman (1992), the

strength and fit of a student teacher's identity either helps or hinders the ability to adapt and solve classroom issues.

### Conclusion

The literature on student teaching as a whole does the best job of demonstrating that the normal experiences of student teachers are problematic. Disconnects between university programs and schools leave practicum experiences unstructured and ambiguous. The seat of power, the cooperating teacher sometimes brings his or her own agenda to the student teaching experience that can be in conflict with the student teacher's formal training. Conflicting roles of classroom teacher and teacher educator may create urgency for as little disruption of normal classroom routine as possible, limiting discussion to issues of custodial pupil control.

The student teachers' own perspectives and beliefs further complicate the practicum semester. Influenced by their own experiences as pupils, students tend to envision teaching in a simplistic way, sometimes reverting to classroom solutions witnessed as children. The role of

individual beliefs and life experiences introduces infinite variation on the perspectives of student teachers. Eager to enact their own perspectives on teaching, student teachers tend to be anxious to assume responsibility and may misinterpret appropriate responses.

This body of literature provided a framework for consideration of the unique characteristics of Natural student teachers from the perspective of the context and the individual. The next section discusses methodology, in particular how this study was designed to explore a Natural's experience in relation to the generalized experiences of student teachers.

## CHAPTER III. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The goal of this inquiry was to examine the practicum experience of a Natural student teacher. To understand this experience required a multi-dimensional view exposing the ecology of this complex learning experience and the individual within it. The researcher needed to gain access to the classroom experience of the Natural and gain insight into the student's own interpretations and understandings of student teaching.

#### Creating the Distinction - Natural

A concern prior to starting this investigation was the acceptability of the distinction "Natural" since such a distinction does not appear to exist in the literature on learning to teach. In other words, did others in the field of teacher education recognize the phenomenon "Natural"? Though that question on its own could have made an interesting research topic, it was not the core of the question being investigated. To answer this concern the

researcher conducted an informal "check" of the idea in conversations with others in the field. Over a period of six months, the researcher actively sought the impressions of a variety of individuals who had worked with student teachers. Ultimately, the researcher queried nearly 100 individuals. It was through these conversations with principals, teachers, superintendents, and teacher educators that the term "Natural" emerged to describe this subset of student teachers. In the vernacular of schools exceptional teachers, novice or expert, are referred to as "naturals." In speaking with these professionals, I found that most had a memorable story to tell about a Natural they have worked with in the past. Many also had theories they felt might explain the phenomenon. One professor believed that Naturals were those who had parents who had been teachers. Others felt they were "people" people, while others speculated Naturals were more likely to be non-traditional or second-career students. Of all the educators spoken to, only one person wasn't sure the phenomenon existed. Therefore, a primary assumption of this study is that there are student teachers that somehow experience their practicum semester in a way that is qualitatively different, more positive. The question is how and why.

## Methodology

Qualitative methodology utilizing a case study design provided a basis for an in-depth study of the individual and their particular experience. Qualitative methodology was seen as the most appropriate methodology suited to this question because it is characterized by:

1. The use of a natural setting as a source of data and the use of the researcher as the key instrument of data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).
2. Use of a variety of data sources to provide for painterly depiction and descriptive analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this inquiry observational and interview data were utilized.
3. Research focuses on process as opposed to outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In the case of student teaching, the majority of student teachers successfully complete the practicum semester, whether they are Naturals or not. Of interest here were the qualitative characteristics of the experience for the Natural.

4. The use of inductive analysis. This research sought an understanding of a very complex experience. The inquiry began with a general question. What are the characteristics of this experience? Data were collected, trends identified, concepts extracted, and ultimately conclusions emerged. The conclusions of this inquiry were "grounded" in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
5. The "meaning" of the participant experience is central. The perspectives of the participants illuminate unseen dynamics in a given context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this case it was hoped that understanding the perspectives of the Natural would illuminate the various factors that contribute to this experience.

Though qualitative or naturalistic inquiry may be used to investigate a complex context or culture, this inquiry is an in-depth focus that is bounded by the experiences of one student teacher, an individual identified by her cooperating teacher as a Natural. A case study of her student teaching experience was analyzed to provide as clear a rendering of the phenomenon "Natural" as possible.

The definition of "case study" is plastic and lacks consensus. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) case study may be defined as a piece describing "a slice of life" or could be an intensive, exhaustive examination of an issue or event over time. According to Merriam (1998), "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved (p.19)."

"The case study focuses on holistic description and explanation" (Merriam, 1998, p.29). In the context of this study, Merriam's definition of case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (1998, p. 34) was used.

Donmoyer (1990) goes further to describe the strengths of case studies emphasizing three characteristics. First, case studies allow the reader access to a situation that would otherwise be outside their view. Second the case study allows clear vision from the researcher's perspective, essentially allowing the reader to envision the situation with a view that is unique to the researcher. And finally, because of the vicarious and interpretive nature of cases, what the reader is able to learn from the study is more accessible than having witnessed the phenomenon in the field.

## The Design

Drawing from the theoretical distinctions developed in Chapter Two, data for this study were needed to examine: the Natural as the person, the Natural as the student teacher, and the Natural in the context of student teaching. Both observational data of the student teacher during her classroom experience and interview data aimed at an examination of her individual beliefs and inclinations were used.

### Selection of the Student Teacher

Deliberate attention was given to the selection of the student teacher for this study to avoid over-reliance on the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon. To address this concern, another teacher educator who had no previous contact with the research, initially identified the student teacher as a Natural. Through observation, the investigator confirmed that she too agreed that this individual was a Natural. Participation of the student teacher and cooperating teacher was secured.

The student teacher in this study was a woman in her mid-twenties. At the time of the data collection she was

student teaching in a high school in an upscale area in a city in the southwestern United States. Her disciplinary specialty was music education with an emphasis on vocal performance. In this document she will be referred to using the pseudonym Wendy.

### Capturing the Student Teacher in the Natural Setting

Since the question pertained to understanding an authentic educational experience, field data were collected through observation of the student teacher in her host classroom and while fulfilling other related duties. Observational data were collected four times over the course of five weeks. Data were collected in the form of field notes, including selective verbatim transcription of student teacher and student comments. The goals of this portion of data collection were to first confirm that the student teacher appeared to be a Natural, then to develop an image of the student teacher in her teacher role. What was her manner? How did she handle the various aspects of teaching? The role of the researcher was that of an observer. Observation was conducted openly with no participation on the part of the observer.

In naturalistic inquiry observation is considered to have two distinct characteristics. First, observation takes place in the natural setting as opposed to some setting artificially created to suit a particular purpose. Second, observation represents a first-hand experience with the setting on the part of the observer. Because the observer is the instrument of data collection in this sense, data collected is fresh, without interpretation of another party (Merriam, 1998).

A concern in utilizing observational data was the impact that the presence of the observer could have on the behavior of the student teacher and others present. The "observer effect" suggests that the act of observing has consequences and may influence the responses of all participants in the natural setting (Bogdan, 1992). This is of particular concern in working with student teachers who are often disquieted by being observed. Conscious effort was made to be unobtrusive in the classroom environment during observational fieldwork. The student teacher and observer briefly discussed protocol for observation prior to the first data collection event. In an effort to avoid distracting actions, observational sessions were characterized by constant scribing of field notes.

### Capturing Meaning

At the core of this study was the story of the student teacher herself. To expose the beliefs and perceptions of the Natural, interview methodology was used. Though observational data presents an image of the Natural as a teacher, it does not illuminate the underlying sources of action. Since one cannot observe all behaviors, feelings and interpretations of the observed, one must ask questions to get at unseen information (Merriam, 1998).

Interviews utilized a semi-structured format and were designed to gain access to the Natural as a person, the Natural as a student teacher, and the Natural's interpretation of the student teaching experience. Atkinson's (1998) life story interview served as the basis for questions aimed at capturing the Natural's life history. The purpose was to seek important life themes, disruptions, and challenges, particularly ones that may have reoccurred. According to Atkinson, reoccurring themes enlighten developmental paths, influences, and relationships. Life stories allow the investigator to explore meaning that is influential in life's paths. One may gain insight into continuity, purpose, and commitments

of the participant. Questioning strands that probed the Natural's life story focused on her personal history as a child and a pupil. The importance of music in her life was a theme that emerged and was developed further during the interviews.

Figure 3.1 Example Interview Questions: Life Story

How would you describe your parents?

What do you remember most about your schooling K-12?

When did your interest in music start?

What kind of aspirations have you had for your music?

Did your parents encourage you to go into teaching?

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Richardson's (1994a; 1994b) work on teacher beliefs demonstrates connection between an individual teacher's beliefs and that teacher's perceptions and actions in the classroom. This research provided direction for another strand of questioning that more directly addressed the Natural's perceptions about pupils, her role as a teacher, and her attitudes about her teacher preservice and student

teaching. The protocols for student teacher interviews are in Appendix A.

Figure 3.2 Example Interview Questions: Beliefs

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What do you feel was the most important coursework you had to prepare you for student teaching?

Did you feel prepared for student teaching?

What did you expect student teaching to be like?

What personal attribute do you have that you felt would be helpful in teaching?

What do you think the needs are of the group of students you are teaching?

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The Influence of the Cooperating Teacher

The influence the cooperating teacher has on the student teaching experience is substantial (Griffin, 1989). Because in general cooperating teachers serve the key leadership role in student teaching, essentially controlling student teacher access to the classroom, an understanding of the actions and perceptions of the cooperating teacher was also necessary. Data were collected from the cooperating teacher in the form of interviews. Questioning again utilized a semi-structured format and

followed an abbreviated life history interview, beliefs format, a discussion of his philosophy about his role as

Figure 3.3 Example Interview Questions: Cooperating Teacher

What was your student teaching experience like?

What do you think are the most important things Wendy can get out of the student teaching experience?

What do you think accounts for the differences between good and not-so-good student teachers?

What do you think accounted for Wendy's success during student teaching?

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cooperating teacher and his responses to the experience of the student teacher. The cooperating teacher is referred to in this document with the pseudonym "Mr. Baum." The protocols for cooperating teacher interviews are in Appendix B.

Triangulation

As noted in the previous paragraphs, this study was designed to provide three distinct views of the Natural; as a person, as a student teacher and in the context of

student teaching. Consistent with the goals of case study research, this study served to provide a rich view of the student teacher and her experience. The intent was to allow the reader an unobstructed view of the Natural, one that served to provide a more credible basis for investigation and analysis. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the greatest challenges of naturalistic inquiry is assuring the findings are trustworthy and worthy of attention. To address this concern this research utilized a triangulated design. Triangulation is associated with both validity and reliability of qualitative studies, and involves the utilization of multiple sources, investigators, or investigative methods to assure a less biased view of the subject (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). In this case, though data collection was limited by the narrow scope of the inquiry, data were collected utilizing a variety of investigative tools. Observational data were collected both formally and informally in a variety of settings, with primary emphasis being on the classroom of the student teacher. Interview data were collected from both of the primary participants in the student teaching experience, the student teacher and the cooperating teacher.

### Member Check

Another accepted method for assuring increasing trustworthiness of an inquiry is to perform what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as a "member check." A member check allows the respondent an opportunity to read a case or field data as a confirmation that the researcher has captured the experience recorded in an accurate way. In this case, the member check was performed by providing a copy of the case without interpretation for Wendy to read. She was invited to comment on or correct any portion she felt was not an accurate representation of her experience. Her comments were incorporated into the case presented in the next chapter.

### Investigator's Position

The investigator in this study was a doctoral student at the University of Arizona, in the Department of Teaching and Teacher Education. In her fourteen years of working in teacher education, she has supervised over 100 student teachers, the majority of whom were training to become art teachers. As a result of this extensive exposure to student teachers, it is the position of this researcher that the

phenomenon of Natural occurs regularly but not in the majority of student teaching cases. Between her work in art and in teacher education, she has over ten years of college teaching experience.

### Analysis Procedure

Formal and informal observational data were collected over the course of five weeks during Wendy's student teaching. Interview data were collected from both Wendy and her cooperating teacher, Mr. Baum, at scheduled interviews during the same weeks. During the interview process, some themes began to emerge. Some questions were added to allow more in-depth investigation of unexpected ideas. The investigator transcribed all data either the same day or the day following data collection.

Transcriptions were read for emergent themes. Recurrent themes received a concept code to be used in identifying comments or actions that were ideologically associated. For example in this study the code "PSN" was used to identify comments or actions that were associated with the Natural's perception of student needs. This category would be a sub-set of the larger category of beliefs. Once all transcripts were coded, excerpts were

grouped by code. So, for instance, all comments and actions that speak to the Natural's perception of student needs are grouped together. The groupings were then reviewed and analyzed for the dominant ideas. Using the grouped subsets and prioritization of ideas, comments and observations were used as the basis for the case presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV. CASE STUDY OF WENDY - A NATURAL

### Introduction

The case depicted in this section is a reporting of data gathered on the student teaching of Wendy, a student teacher considered by her cooperating teacher to be a Natural. It has been intentionally written with minimal interpretation to give the reader the opportunity to view the depiction in a more realistic way without the vision of the researcher dominating the experience. Analysis follows in Chapter Five.

### A Description of the Practicum Semester

At the institution Wendy attends, preservice students serve one semester (16 weeks) of student teaching to complete their certification. Though students may gain their certification in a post-baccalaureate program, the majority seeks certification as part of their undergraduate coursework. Students are placed in local schools based on their disciplinary specialty and career goals. Students are

matched with one teacher, the cooperating teacher with whom they work for the entire semester. The University representative, the student teaching supervisor, is a faculty member (academic faculty), clinical (a master teacher) faculty member, adjunct faculty member, or graduate student. The supervisor is responsible for documenting the progress of the student teacher and certifying the pass/fail grade at the end of the semester. While the cooperating teacher works with the student all day, each day of the semester, the university supervisor visits for an observation about every two weeks (eight times) during student teaching. The supervisors also runs weekly or biweekly seminars for student teachers they are supervising. The supervisor, to meet the immediate needs of the particular group of student teachers, customizes the seminars.

At this institution, the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the university is fairly unstructured. There is no training or certification to serve as a cooperating teacher and pay is minimal. However, in some disciplinary specialties such as art and music, departments have taken great care to develop productive working relationships with cooperating teachers, which has

resulted in the possibility of deliberately selected placements for student teachers.

Each cooperating teacher and student teacher are provided with guidelines to follow during the practicum. The guidelines suggest a flow to the semester, outlining a phase-in schedule where the student takes on increased responsibility. The university supervisor confers with the cooperating teacher to help guide the progression and feedback provided.

"Life is Just My Show"

Case Study of Wendy - a Natural

*It is almost seven in the evening and we are sitting in the Auditorium at the high school. The concert was set to begin in a few minutes. Parents hurried to find seats before the lights went down and music began. In the balcony are the students, sitting in clusters based on the color of their dress. Each group was wearing their performance outfits provided by the school. Suddenly the crowd of students erupts into whoops and cheers. Parents turn. Standing before the section of student performers is Wendy Hook, the student teacher. She is dressed in a floor-length black gown. She looks polished and ready. She raises her hand and the group quiets. Behind her is a muscular young man. He is blushing and looks embarrassed by the attention. She tells me later she learned a lot that night, most importantly not to take a date to your concert while student teaching. "He never called again!" She laughed.*

*This was my first exposure to Wendy. Up until that point I had been unaware that my daughter even had a student teacher for any of her classes. This was unusual. My children, aware of my interest in the experiences of student teachers, had always supplied me with stories, both successes and failures, of their student teachers. This student teacher had gone without mention. Until my daughter noted that Ms. Hook was like those student teachers I was studying, the Naturals. We discussed her experiences in Ms. Hook's class. How did she handle misbehaving kids? No kids misbehaved. Everyone loved her. We worked hard the entire hour.*

*I contacted the cooperating teacher for his impressions of her performance. Was she a Natural? He felt she was in the way she related to the students, her ability to move through a class period keeping it productive and positive and in her ability to respond to classroom demands. He agreed to participate in my study if Wendy was willing. The next day I contacted her to see if we could meet. Wendy had no hesitation about participating; in fact, she suggests it might be "fun." The first time I observe Wendy, my intention is to confirm that she fits my own definition of a Natural. She does. The following case is a profile of Wendy and her student teaching experience.*

### Wendy's Educational Provenance

Wendy described her school life as being marked with change. Her family moved several times between Canada and the United States during her school years. She sees this as having presented both opportunities and complications for her school life. When asked what really stands out when she thinks back to school she answered:

I remember having a lot of friends. That was one of the big things for me about school, not so much what I was learning, but that I could make friends. Like I looked forward with each year, getting a new class and making new friends. I really liked that. I moved around a lot during that period. . . . I constantly had new friends.

But, her family's moves also presented real problems for her educationally. The most difficult transition for her was moving to a Canadian high school. She noted that her interest in music had developed young and that the Canadian high school she was attending didn't have a music program. Her work in music occurred on her own time.

I wasn't really a great student. That basically came at the University level. . . . In high school I just couldn't settle down. Canadian high schools are very, very different from American schools. I had been trained in American school system and going there, I was over my head immediately. And by the time I was in grade twelve, I had learned a lot in the schools up

there, but I was completely blown away by the differences. . . . School was always secondary to what was going on outside. I had a lot of stuff going on outside of school and I had a really difficult time focusing until my first year of college, I had a major problem.

I still have my ripped up jeans that I used to wear in high school. And all the other girls were looking for those funny little things. And I was a really funny girl even then and so life was just my show. And I kind of got off on really shocking those little girls. It was an odd couple of years at that [laughter].

Even early in her education, school was not the favorite part of Wendy's childhood.

I hated it. Well I guess not kindergarten, but round in there. I could read when I was very young. Before I went to school. . . . I remember . . . up until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade I was told, I hadn't learned to read right. And that I was never going to learn to read right. . . and then I would have to read these dumb books about Dick and Jane. I kept going to my mother, "Why do Dick and Jane have to say everything like three times? Like: Run Spot run, Run, Run, Run. Why is everything like this, why, why, why?" [Laughter]  
I was mortified. And I was really loosing interest.

I had a couple of good [music] teachers. I can remember that I had a lot of not good teachers, one in particular who was abusive actually. . . . I pretty much remember feeling I would wake up most mornings and dread having to go to school. Until eighth grade I absolutely hated it.

The aspects of her childhood and school experience that were most positive in addition to her friendships, revolved around music.

I don't remember there being a time when I didn't know I was going to be a musician. . . . The question was what sort of musician was it going to be? Did I want to be a singer? I had my records of Oliver and Anne memorized by the time I was about 8. I've just always been a vocalist. I have just always been singing. . . . It's just one of those things, there's not a decision made, it's just part of you.

When asked about influential teachers, once again music was the key.

I really, really liked my 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade band teacher, by the name of Cheryl Canter. I was really, really into Cheryl Canter. That was in the states and Mr. Bright. He was my choir teacher in 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I just loved him SO much. He was just a great, great person. They were my first experience of being a musician. I had always wanted to do these things before and Mr. Bright gave me chances to sing. He always gave me the big solos . . . it was wonderful. I was really interested in what he was doing and he saw that I was really interested and the same thing with the band lady. . . . so they both would give me harder things to do. And they would really try to nurture that . . . I had never had a teacher take that much interest in what I was doing before. I came out of that feeling that I really was talented. . . . I still think of those 6<sup>th</sup> grade musicals. And I still know my lines. [Laughter]

Wendy's decision to go into teaching was again driven by her interest in music.

I would just like to perform professionally. That's just what I've always wanted to do. Everything else has just fallen into [place for] me following that one goal. God! [laughter] I would just love to take off and go to New York. . . . I would just love to take off and go to New York and audition for a bunch of

things . . . well, I just couldn't do that. What would I do? What would I eat?

[My parents] were really happy [I decided to teach]. They were both really happy. My Dad was a professor for a long time. And he had always said to me . . . you should [teach]. Don't go directly into performing, because you'll need something to fall back on. They were really happy to see me do that. And actually they are the reason I'm getting the education degree. To placate them, I did the education route [laughter]. Because there was something that I was interested in doing, to be able to study music and not have to . . . everyday wonder what are you going to do?

#### Preservice Program

Wendy's impressions about her teacher preparation program were consistent with the research on preservice students' beliefs about the value of experiential learning. At the time of her student teaching, Wendy was in her last semester of her undergraduate education. Her first two years had been at a two-year institution in the Southwest. She describes her certification program.

It's a dual major. The requirements from the music school are so hard. And the requirements from the education department . . . were not at all what I was expecting . . . I've learned a lot of things . . . but I find a lot of it is just theoretical debate. Until you're actually doing it I don't think it actually sinks in as much. Teaching a lab class where everybody . . . pretends to be ninth graders, it just isn't the same as teaching ninth graders.

The music education program, I really love it. I have a really great advisor. And he's somebody who's been

with me from the first year on. [He was also her student teaching supervisor.]

[My music education coursework was helpful] because it was practical. I have to be doing something [to learn it]. . . . If I'm just talking about something, I will forget it unless I [really do it]. It's dangerous for people [going] into the schools . . . because you fly over the net and then you crash and you burn . . . everyone laughs at you. But the lessons I learned in [the field] are so much more valuable than being told "the first day of class you state your rules, day one." Having not stated my rules day one, I know what the results are. So I now know for the rest of my life, day one, the first day you're in there, state the rules.

When asked about previous teaching experience, Wendy explained that her experiences were through the Music Education program. She was not as positive about these experiences as her student teaching. Both were in different schools than her student teaching.

My first semester, it was my first teaching experience [laughter] and I had to teach the boys' sectional of a choir for a guy who had just started working at the high school [laughter]. He just gave me all these boys. They were all these little studs [laughter]. I had to videotape every session [laughter] and every time I turned my back the whole group did like this (hip thrust motion). They would try to grab my chest. Oh, it was horrible. I had to teach them a Little Mermaid melody. I finally just got into them. They were going to respect me by the end of the semester, and eventually they did come around. They did come around a lot [laughter]. It all ended up being ok [laughter].

I went to another school that was not the greatest place to be. It was over the summer. I worked with a group of foster children. That was just heart breaking . . . everyday.

Wendy describes the anticipation of her student teaching as negative. Unlike many student teachers, she was not anticipating student teaching with excitement or with high expectations.

I expected it to be grueling and hard and not to enjoy myself. I was really not looking forward to doing it. I thought day after day of rehearsal. There was nothing really that was going to be any fun. I was going to be stuck in this little dungeon room. It's not the way it's been except every morning at 6:15 when I wake up and as I'm driving here. That may sound bad, but I was pretty sure it was going to be awful.

[It has not been awful] right from day one on. At the beginning I was nervous, but once I told them all I was nervous everything seemed to be OK. I'd be playing something and mess up and would say, "I'm sorry, I'm just really nervous because high school kids are just really intimidating."

### The Beginning of Student Teaching

Wendy's cooperating teacher had never worked with a student teacher before. He had begun his teaching career in the seventies and had left teaching to run a business. He returned to teaching in the late eighties when he moved to the Southwest. His music program is considered excellent and the source of pride within his district. During our

interview Mr. Baum reflected on what he most wanted Wendy to experience while working with him.

I think she would want to gain some experience in the craft or art . . . of choir conducting. . . . She has had to deal with some of the students in here - she has done very well. You want to give them an opportunity to do not only the obvious, but I guess get involved with some of the things behind the scenes. I have shown her some of the things it takes to have a music department. To really get things accomplished. Because it doesn't all happen in the classroom.

Being a choral director is . . . a different type of job than being classroom teacher in that you're also running this production. It's the performance aspect of it [that] gets a little bit different.

She observed for two weeks. Sometimes that can get to be an awfully long time. Then after a couple of weeks she started to do parts of the period. And then eventually, in the last two, three weeks, she has taken over the entire class. And that's with the beginning girls group. So that's really how I did it, she observed first, and got to do an occasional song, and now she has full responsibility.

Wendy responded to the phase-in with some frustration. She describes that stage of her student teaching as being among the most stressful. Though she had pronounced career goals to be a performer, her sense of self as a teacher contributed to her frustrations early in the semester.

[I was] very slowly phased in, which I got really frustrated with. It's torture to sit in somebody else's classroom when you are a teacher. It is just absolute torture . . . especially if you are a musician too. So I just got really frustrated with it

eventually and basically told him [laughter] I was really frustrated. He said "OK" and started giving me sectionals. . . . it actually worked out great and by the time I actually assumed responsibility for a class . . . the girls were used to seeing me. They weren't just coming in off the street and finding a strange person in front of their class one day. He set me up, he established me as being the student teacher. . . . That was great. . . . The first concert I had one piece with a couple of groups that I had to prepare on my own and then conduct at the concert. . . . All those kids staring at me!

The dual role of teacher/musician is also an important part of her weekly seminar with other student teachers from the University. Students in the music education program are accustomed to critique of the personal musical performance. Discussions in the seminar are an extension of this tradition.

Every Wednesday we meet at the University for about two hours and we discuss. For a couple of weeks we just went around the room for the whole two hours . . . "this is what's happening to me, this is hard, what's your idea?" We actually watch each other's videotapes of teaching for ten or fifteen minutes to see what we're doing in rehearsal. "I think maybe you could have taken time out of what you're doing here and addressed the fact that they are missing that beat there." It's better to have another set of ears listening to what it is that you're doing. It's better to have eight other musicians at my level sitting there going "oh yeah, you could put some attention to that!". . . I think there is a very different thing between teaching and rehearsing. And it's a very, very different feel.

Both Wendy and Mr. Baum comment on this placement being a good match. In the interviews, they both note that they have very different ways of dealing with classroom issues, but both work. Mr. Baum comments on his satisfaction with the experience.

We've gotten along really well. I've known that from the first moment I met her. She came and introduced herself and told me a little bit about herself. I knew . . . We must have talked for an hour and a half, just getting to know each other. . . sharing our ideas. That aspect of the relationship has really been very good from the very beginning.

Oh! It's been very satisfying in terms . . . that you get to make an opportunity for someone to come and do work with the students you've worked with, to see that things can continue to progress. And she has done very, very well.

When asked about the difference in their styles of teaching Mr. Baum replied:

. . . I'm a bit more structured than she is. But then, she's new at it. She may find that in the future she'll become more structured too. She may evolve to structure. I'm quite comfortable with her doing her thing, you might say, in the classroom.

In fact, Mr. Baum expresses a particular openness to sharing his students with a student teacher.

I don't feel like those are my babies [laughter]. Well, quite frankly . . . I'm not one of these teachers who feels these are *my* kids. Those are not your kids, they are students that you teach. That

really bothers me. It really irritates me when teachers feel that way.

Wendy's first impressions of Mr. Baum were a source of concern for her. She admitted to wondering "How am I going to get along with this guy? Could he be any more like my father [laughter, laughter]?" As the semester progressed she noted that her impressions of him changed. "He is funny and he's a lot of fun to be around . . . when kids see that they really like it."

Wendy in particular appreciated Mr. Baum's level of feedback.

He said, "You obviously have a really good way, they seem to really like you, and your teaching seems to work really well with them." We've never had conversations about "What do you think about what I'm doing?" We have never had any discussion in depth about what I'm doing. My adviser comes in from the University five times during the semester. Whenever I get a little mark that's a little low, Mr. Baum looks at it and says "Oh no, that's not a big deal". . . . So, he kind of defends me. And he'll look at what I was graded well on and then I can see he's trying it in his class too. So, we kind of share back and forth.

#### Impressions About Student Teaching Experience

Wendy's level of enjoyment of student teaching has been quite high. She expressed pleasure in the experience in a variety of contexts.

I love it [student teaching]. Yeah, it's been really satisfying. It's given me an idea of what I would have to come up with . . . the day to day. To know exactly what goes on. The scheduling, the preparation for concerts and putting together a tour and fundraising. Thinking up music for each of the things. And be able to figure out when you could get on the stage to practice.

When asked about the best part of student teaching, she focused on her students.

The kids [are the best part]. Getting them to do well in a high school situation. They are just SO much fun at this age! They are thinking and figuring everything out. . . . [It's] a neat period of life to be in.

Also, it's been really nice to have been here getting to run my own rehearsals. I'm a control freak. Not only getting to run a classroom, when I say OK this is what it's going to be like - they have to listen to me. But also being able to say OK this is what the music is going to sound like, IS incredible. Conducting my first concert where I actually prepared everything on my own, that was great. I was absolutely thrilled with that for days. They made me cry. I've never been so happy, I've never been so nervous either. . . .

About the day of the concert:

I was shaking. I kept thinking don't wear a shiny skirt because they can see you shake in a shiny skirt. I thought I was going to die the whole night, it was just awful. I'm just so nervous and I looked at them and they are just all so nervous. I thought "Wow, one of us is going to have to not be nervous. . . . It might just be me because I didn't have to wear that awful dress [laughter]".

Mr. Baum commented on Wendy's energy before the first concert.

Well she was [nervous], she would come up and tell me. Yet, for the performance that night I think she conducted herself very well. As far as the day of . . . I guess everybody gets a little hyper and I kind of get hyper myself. . . . If you don't get hyper maybe it's a sign that you're not really into it.

When asked if she has any particular personal characteristics that had served her well during student teaching, Wendy explained:

I'm not afraid of anything. Well, snakes and horses, that's about it! A lot of people have a fear of people. I think that's the biggest thing and that comes from an uncomfortableness with being in front of the group. You know, what are they thinking of me right now? What if they think that I look like an idiot? OK, well I probably do look like an idiot, but that's no problem.

Wendy seems able to use this belief to her advantage by communicating confidence while poking fun at herself. While conducting a sequence she commented to the class, "I had a teacher tell me once I look like a flightless water fowl." She laughs and exaggerates her motion. She does in fact fit the description much to the amusement of her students.

I think I'm funny. . . . It's something I rely on a lot of the time. If there's a situation going on, and

I can make a person laugh, that situation isn't going to escalate to any big point. It just goes away. And then I'm young. I'm not that much older than they are. So they can see that I'm not this alien person. . . . I'm somebody who's . . . in the same age group, we are not that far apart in the life continuum.

At one point on a particularly restless day for the students, Wendy commented with a smile, "Don't make me yell. I hate my voice when I yell!" Student response was immediate and lasting.

At the first observation, Wendy was difficult to distinguish from her students. Her appearance and demeanor were casual. She wore blue jeans and a form-fitting sweater with "Abercrombie" across the front. Her hair was windblown. Unlike the evening of the concert, she wore no makeup and was wearing glasses not contact lenses. When asked if she didn't feel her age was a disadvantage, Wendy expressed that youth has its advantages and disadvantages.

No, It's not that I think that kids this age don't pay you enough respect because you're young, I think it's quite the opposite. They know that it was not that long ago that I was in high school.

In fact, I haven't matured to the point that I know what is OK and what isn't OK. Like, I have major problems with questions that come up, and I don't know if I should answer them or not. . . . the other day a couple of girls came up and basically in front of the class said "Ms. Hook have you ever smoked pot?" And I'm standing in front of a class going - How do I answer this? With my own life aside from anything, the

fact that this question had just come out. . . . Where as, no one would ever go up to Mr. Baum and ask the same question. It's not something that would happen. (Wendy went on to say that she doesn't smoke pot.)

Wendy commented that she feels that different people have characteristics that seem to work better with different aged children. Her strength she feels is working with high school students.

I think that just personality wise you fit with certain ages better. First through seventh graders, they don't like me. They don't want me around. They don't think I'm funny. I mean, I think I'm funny and they sure don't. Right, it's just a bad, bad mix. I can be excitable and I don't have to worry about constantly trying to tone myself down [with older kids].

### Stress and Student Teaching

Overall, stress has not been a particular problem for Wendy during student teaching. Though she described nervousness that coincided with the concerts and taking new responsibility during student teaching, she described her experiences with stress as being "no big challenge."

I suffer from a stress related insomnia thing anyway, an anxiety type disorder. So, I get woken up in the middle of the night with anxious ideas like "Oh my God, where's your car?" [laughter] . . . So I have to get up in the middle of the night go outside and see, yes my car is still there. Not so much anxiety related to student teaching in general. But I do notice what I have felt, it's the same as performance

stress. When sometimes I go to work with a group, I'm just the slightest bit nervous and my hands shake so bad. It's so hard to hide. The first couple of weeks were I was working with any of the group's my voice would shake. I'm this really confident person and it was just really weird for me. And so would just say, "I'm sorry but you guys are just freaking me out because you know you're just a lot bigger than I remember high-school kids being, so your scaring me right now." And they would all say, "Don't be scared". And it was fine. I do get that fear stuff and I really am not all that stressed about it, it just doesn't seem like that huge of a challenge.

Wendy also described two situations that were stressful interactions with her cooperating teacher, Mr. Baum. The first she described as being a frustrating shift in her role with the students. This occurred during a road trip in which they took three choirs on a performance tour to California. Though she describes this as stressful, she also notes that it was in part difficult because both she and Mr. Baum were stressed and that her stress was due to her desire to "run the show."

My job was to count the people on the bus. I was his assistant director, even though I taught these kids this music. My job was to count the kids on the bus, and not to say anything else. It did cause a lot of friction. Because I would get on the bus and he would say "How many people are on the bus?" And I would say "I don't know yet." And he would say, "Can't you keep track of a couple of people on the bus?" And I'm thinking, could do sound any more like my father? He was hugely stressed, until like the day we went to Disneyland. Then he was very nice. There were lots of things I would have done differently and it's really

hard to be such a controlling person . . . to want to takeover and just do my own thing. Which I think is the whole challenge of student teaching. It isn't so much working with the students but [working with] the personality that runs this program.

Wendy also describes minor issues of creative control during preparation of a piece for a concert. She describes this situation that became uncomfortable in front of the students.

One time . . . I changed something in the music. Nothing very big, in fact, he asked me to do it. I realized that by having a whole lot of voices singing this note up here was too much and overpowered everybody else. So what I did was take two of them off of that and put them down on this note. And then I took just a couple voices and stuck them up there. Well, he wasn't going to do it that way. He thought it was better to have this other girl up there, who doesn't sing in tune. So, it would have been miserably, a quartertone flat. He said, "you put them up there?" I said, "I'll tell you afterwards." This was in front of the class. I didn't want to say in front of a class that I thought this little girl, I'm sorry, but she can't sing in tune. And so we were discussing it really quietly in front of the class. . . . Well this little girl over there, the one I already told was going sing this high, high note, got really upset. And another girl stands up and basically tells him, "Maybe you don't know what you're doing and Ms. Hook does." It was really bad. . . . I talked to him when class was over and he was really OK about it. He said, "I know you didn't do anything. That was just a student going out of control. She needs to handle that. She needs to learn to not stand up and say whatever things come to her head." He handled it really well. There's been no mention of it again after that.

When asked about the most difficult part of student teaching, Wendy replied, "Keeping a distance."

You're the teacher. I see that I have to wear cardigans and a bun, if you know be mean. It's been very difficult to learn to relax and be myself. To keep up this business that you can't really be friends. . . . Which is difficult. Because I do like them and I do want to be friends with them, but I can't be hey, call me up this weekend and we'll make coffee.

Mr. Baum noted that one thing Wendy did especially well was establish a relationship with her students. His impression was that this was a key to her success.

I would say that she has geared herself more to . . . relating to what's happening with the kids outside of class. And that has been helpful to her as a means to have their attention more in class. . . . She's very sincere. She wants to get to know how the kids she works with, which is important. It isn't that you have to know everything about somebody, but it's nice to know a little bit. . . . I think she's done quite well at that. She's good at getting to know the kids. . . . I think that's been really helpful to her.

### The Needs of Students

Wendy's impressions of her role as teacher are closely aligned with her thoughts about the pupils she is teaching. Most of her concerns are about the needs of her students.

. . . this is a huge age 13 - 18. There's a massive age difference going on there and there are a lot of things happening. The need to belong is overall. It's like the driving force at any point in this time. It's like a weird need to belong to a group. . . . have

friends, and feel normal. The issue of conformity is just so big, it's very, very tough. I know my own experiences; I can only relate to what I felt [laughter].

I hear a lot of stories, the moms keep coming and telling me that their daughters are just really, really depressed. And I just want to tell them, "everyone keeps telling you this is the best time of your life . . . don't believe that because it's not. High school sucks so much." College is so much more fun. It's much more cool but until you get there, basically the best years of your life are one through five [laughter]. I think kids need more than anything that sense of belonging - of being part of something and not feeling like you're just kind of drifting, because that's very scary. That's one of the things I tried to tell these kids, I know how it feels.

Watching Wendy interact with her students, it is clear that she is interested in them as people. Before one observation of a class immediately following lunch hour, students start gathering ten minutes early. When Wendy arrives she is greeted enthusiastically and walked through the crowd of girls, greeting them by name while giving and receiving hugs. They eagerly follow her into the room, some paused to talk with her before taking their seats. Students entering late are greeted with a scowl and a friendly comment, "You are so late!" Wendy expresses that she feels the demands of a chorus class can be especially problematic for students this age. She discusses her approach to fostering a comfortable class environment for her students.

The biggest thing is that it so difficult to get a kid stand up and sing by themselves. For young adults it's just horrifying. And so it took about two months of people singing in small groups, then kind of tricking them into doing it. And when there was a criticism, doing it in such a way that they didn't feel like I was [singling them out] - because when you do that . . . Then here's my soul, and then somebody else says - that's not a very good soul. [Laughter] Well then you never, never really show it again. . . . So, I've been very careful about making sure that if I do have a criticism, it's something that you have to be very careful, that you really have to work on. Sometimes, there are just a couple voices that . . . drag the entire section. I can say, "Honey you need to back off just a little bit." But if anybody else says that, it's a very different thing. I'm not going to let my classroom turn into something where other students try to point fingers at other kids. This is a group, we're all in this group together. And I come back to this a lot. I'm just really hypersensitive about making sure that people will not get their feelings hurt by other kids.

When asked about her best students, Wendy notes that in her situation she is not only working with the most talented musicians. Her classes are made up of beginning singers. In a sense, she explains they all need to be her best students.

I don't really have like the most talented or anything. But I have kids that I really like, ones that I think are really funny. I don't really have any favorite or best students. . . . I just don't have any best, but I think that everyone just needs to achieve their best when they're here. When they're in my classroom they just have to be working to their best. There's no high, these kids are going to achieve this level and these kids in achieve that level.

Everyone's going to do the best they can and that's the only level that I want that bar to be.

### Class Routine

Wendy's class sessions can best be described as "energetic." Several times in our interviews both Wendy and her cooperating teacher, Mr. Baum, describe her as "excitable." As an observer, one sees that the combination of her energy and the flow of instruction creates a "super-charged" class environment. She somehow maintains a relaxed environment that is seriously productive. She appears to do this by maintaining a dynamic tempo or rhythm to the class routine. Her cooperating teacher describes her classes this way:

I would say it's a matter of Wendy knowing what she wants to get done any given day. And I think she has a pretty good handle on that. . . She's pretty focused on what she wants to get done here. So that when there is a need to adlib, like when the piano is locked. And she can't play the piano even if she wanted to. I don't happen to arrive back here in time. She's able to keep things rolling. I just think she's clear about what she wants to do, then you go in there and whatever obstacles you've run into, you find a way around them, to maintain your goals and your objectives. She really stays on it.

Wendy is aware of the importance of the routine she has established.

First we warm up, followed by three pieces of music. That's usually singing through the entire piece one time. Then we go back and fix problems. Depending on what they are doing, I have them standing or sitting. I use that[standing] as a signal to be ready to sing. And then when they get tired of those I move them around. I walk them to different places in the room and that really helps. So we spend about 20 minutes on each piece, based on the amount of time [available]. I don't think they know that we are going through things with such a specific routine each day.

As a testament to the rapid pace of class, Wendy's transitions are crisp. Observing one gets the sense that they must keep moving, there's too much to do and too little time. Wendy uses time as a management tool. During several observations she instructed groups of students to watch the clock and stand ready to sing in exactly 15 seconds. While they were attending to the clock, she addressed a problem with another section. At the end of the 15 seconds, all eyes were on her and the entire group was prepared to come in on the count of three. Her students appeared to have learned to follow her pace or be left behind. Even worse they might miss her next joke.

### On Classroom Management

Though Wendy felt well prepared for the demands of the classroom, she expressed some frustration with classroom management.

In classes I've taken it's [classroom management] just huge. You're led to believe that if you're just a really, really good teacher then behavior problems won't happen for you. Because if you're "with-it, with it" [reference to Kounin, 1970], there you are! I hate that so much! [laughter] That if you are an interesting person who teaches, everything is just so much fun and students will be motivated to learn because they like you. They want to learn from you. It doesn't really set you up for the fact that it's just a daily thing of really weird stuff happening all the time. And whether you are this exciting person to watch or whenever, you're still going to have weird stuff. Half the time, I'm just thinking "OK, when did we cover what to do when a girl shows you her thong underwear. We never covered that!" [laughter] When this happens you should say . . . just be "with-it" . . . she comes up to me and pulls up the side and says, "look they're leopard print!" I'm at the piano . . . [laughter] And it's now just part of our routine, because I didn't jump on it right away. I didn't know what to say, what you do. Now about once or twice a week she just comes in and shows me her underwear. And I say. "OK, thanks." [laughter, laughter] and it's just such weird stuff! I should have known, in retrospect if I had just gone, "Oh my God! What are you doing?" Maybe it never would have happened again. But, it isn't my normal response. My normal response is to laugh. So now she learned it's OK to do. I hope that when substitutes are there she doesn't do that to them. [laughter]

Wendy's use of humor and quick wit are an important part of her classroom strategy. While observing her class

the afternoon before Spring Break, Wendy demonstrated just how quickly she could produce a solution. The class had been working on the rhythm for a new piece and between their distraction over vacation and the difficulty of trying something new, the group appeared to be somewhat scattered. Right when they gained focus, Norm (the stage manager) walked in with the TV, which he delivered to the front of class. Norm is a known character around the music department. Today he is wearing Hawaiian print pants. Wendy keeps the students counting and responds to his interruption with, "No, No don't look! Keep counting; do not be distracted by the pants, do not be distracted by the pants." Her request was successful; her students were amused but remain focused. When he leaves, Wendy congratulates the students for doing a great job.

Observing Wendy it is impossible to miss that she herself is active and energetic. But, overriding that one notices that she is focused. Wendy is extremely quick to recognize drifting amongst her students and is particularly creative in her solutions. On another occasion, Wendy responded to student distraction by singing and dancing a short segment from Peter Pan. She gained student attention within seconds and immediately moved the class back to

their work. On yet another occasion, students missed her cue to begin singing. Wendy's comment, "Let's review, this [hand motion] means sing [laughter]." Student response is immediate.

Though Wendy's actions appear effortless, her comments suggest that monitoring students was an unexpected complication for her.

Classroom management is a huge struggle. I always thought that if you're in a classroom that you can see what's going on. It's kind of hard in here because it's so free form. There's one particular problem child [laughter] in the beginning group and I moved her right down in front . . . So she's right in front of me and it hasn't done anything. And I don't want to yell at her because I don't want it to become that kind of bigger stuff. She's the only one who does this. And I've asked her other teachers and they're like "Oh, she doesn't give us any trouble." And I'm, "Oh, great!" [laughter]

[With two other girls] I've tried a lot of things. Just doing things with them, focusing them on me, directly saying, "I see what you are doing and know that you are lying". I've tried everything and it just seems that I've kind of resigned myself to OK they just don't want to be here. And they still show up to class every day and still work on stuff. They are banging around on the piano, they're still being musical. I would like to have had them really get into it, and drop the attitude. I have an attitude, too. Well, it's hurtful, it hurts my feelings.

[There are] two little girls in the theory class, who don't listen to me at all. They talk to each other and I say, "please don't talk to each other." They look at me and say, "we weren't." There are four people in the room; clearly I can tell if you were. I can

surely tell you are talking. And they cheat off each other all the time. I move them away from each other and they say, "Why are we getting moved away?" I say. "Because you cheat off each other." And they say "No we don't" . . . So they've just been endless. . . . They're not interested in theory and that bothers me.

Wendy views classroom management as a matter of context. She is clear about her philosophy, but tempers it with an understanding that in different situations with different kids, one may be called upon to react differently.

You have to be in a particular classroom. . . . I cannot tell you how I'm going to control my classroom, unless I've been in that classroom and gotten to know the significant problems. I don't have that much [problems] here, so I really don't have to worry much about class control. It's coming naturally with the group. Stick another group of kids in here and it's a completely different scenario. . . . I know that I want to treat everybody with respect. That's a big issue to me and I want them to really enjoy being here. I want them to feel that they're not afraid to come over and show me their underpants. I mean that's not the best thing to do, but I want them to be comfortable enough in here to take risks.

. . . This is a group full of girls. I'm a girl. But say if it's a roomful of guys and then the female teacher. That's a very different dynamic set up, and I don't know if I can go about it the same way.

Wendy also feels that one's personal history is either an advantage or disadvantage to working within the context of a particular school's situation.

Say someone comes from a village of twenty-two people on a remote little island on the northern part of Canada, I can never go to Compton and teach there and expect to have any idea of what's going on. You can't really say well I was in high school, because that was a very, very different place. I have no frame of reference for what's going on here. And I think that's exactly right. The people that are in the sort of nostalgic feeling [about high school] don't really have a frame of reference for what's going on, because unless you go through it you don't know how to deal with it.

In one of the interviews, Wendy points to an experience during her preservice program that rang true to her and helped her define her thoughts about classroom management.

I think I told you about that great disciplinary person I worked with during the summer. He would make children responsible for their own actions. That was something that really changed things around for me. Not that you're going to listen to me because I know everything. . . . Instead . . . putting it that way, if you do this then it's going to get you in trouble. . . . Ben would never raise his voice. He would walk in the room and the children would immediately drop their voices and sit down and be calm. If there was a problem he would just say, "excuse me", and the whole room would just become quiet. And these were K-5 year old kids [children in kindergarten, five-year olds]. One of the boys hit another kid, it was something bad, and I remember seeing Ben in the corner. He had the kid up on the table saying, "Look you know you're going to get in trouble, so why would you do that? Why would you put yourself in that position, you know you're going to get in trouble? What's going on?" He helped me with that a lot, making kids responsible for their actions. Don't do the when they get in trouble you are going to come and punish them. Make them responsible; let them figure out why they did

something wrong and how they're never going to do that again. It's a great approach that works normally.

When asked about her most problematic students, Wendy focuses her attention on a student in one of her sections who does not have the background necessary to be successful in her class.

In the same class [as the two girls mentioned earlier] there's one kid who just does not get it at all. He's never had theory before and he's never played an instrument. He's trying to analyze the piece. He's trying his best . . . He draws his notes with the sticks on the wrong side. . . . But he's trying, he's actually trying. The other ones [two mentioned earlier], they're just not that interested. It's unfortunate because I want everyone to be just as passionate about music as I am. And I realize they're not [laughter]. Right, they have to just pretend to be for an hour, during the day when they're with me.

When asked if she thinks it's possible to turn some of her most problematic students into some of her best, Wendy responds:

Yes and no, I can get them to turn in a great project, and I can get them to do their homework and get to class on time and control their behavior. But I can't get them to like my class. They either like it or they don't. . . . But I'm not going to make them suddenly intrinsically motivated.

Having observed and spoken with her students, one could question her last comment. It is clear that her enthusiasm is infectious. Not only do they respond to her

as a person, but they appear to have responded to her dedication to music as well.

### Summary

One comes out of extended contact with Wendy with an understanding that she is a realist who is perfectly comfortable with herself in a variety of ways, facing a variety of challenges.

First, Wendy came to student teaching with balanced expectations about stress and nervousness. She appears to expect stress and anxiety as a normal byproduct of investment. She notes that she finds dealing with it "no huge challenge." She is accustomed to performance nervousness from her work in music. In fact, it is part of her normal world and appears to be an energy that she has learned to use to her advantage. She voices a lack of concern about what others think of her, does not have as she puts it, "a fear of people." During her student teaching Wendy was able to use her openness about being nervous to build affinity with Mr. Baum and her pupils.

Wendy's balanced attitudes about stress were enhanced by her expectations of student teaching. Rather than

entering the experience with a romanticized image of herself as a teacher, Wendy anticipated student teaching with dread and did not expect to enjoy the experience. As it turns out, she was pleasantly surprised.

Wendy is also particularly goal-oriented. In terms of curriculum, she was clear that her students needed to successfully master material because they would be "tested" by performing in a concert attended by parents, friends, teachers, and administrators. Their success would not only reflect on her and her students, it would reflect on Mr. Baum and the school as well. She knew her students would be anxious about this event. Wendy maintained focus each day on developing musical skill. In each class, students were actively engaged in refinement. As result of her focus on productive class time, Wendy maintained observant awareness of student focus and behavior. Her solutions to problems were prompt and creative.

Another goal guided Wendy's daily interaction with her students. She articulated a clear understanding and concern for the needs of students at this age. Her goal was for them to become comfortable and confident with their voices through increased skill. She was particularly alert about creating a safe environment for her students, one of mutual

respect, where they can be themselves, take risks, and not be damaged by others' comments.

Wendy's overall goal about her student teaching may have set her apart from many student teachers. Wendy's goal was to acquire a profession that would allow her to fulfill another goal; to be a performer in New York. She anticipated her practicum with dread, apparently not because she had doubts about her capabilities, but because she feared it would be drudgery or tedious. When she discovered the experience to be enjoyable, she was able to invest energy freely in enhancing her experience.

Wendy's student teaching was also characterized by positive relationships. From early in her student teaching, Wendy and Mr. Baum established a mature working relationship with strong tendencies toward mutual respect and collaboration. As a result, Wendy was able to establish and refine her own way of working with the students rather than conforming to Mr. Baum's ways.

This working relationship would not have developed had it not been for Wendy's high level of content knowledge. That knowledge coupled with her understanding of the goals and objectives of Mr. Baum's program allowed her to focus intensely on what she needed to get done on any given day.

The resulting practicum semester was a highly productive one for Wendy. She experienced significant success in establishing a working relationship with her students that was active and focused.

A final note on Wendy. Following student teaching Wendy went on an extended trip to Ireland to celebrate her graduation. While on that trip she secured an adjunct teaching position at the National University of Ireland in Galway where she is currently working as a voice teacher and music director.

## CHAPTER V. FINDINGS

### Introduction

The case describing Wendy's student teaching depicts a particularly successful practicum experience. In interviews Wendy and Mr. Baum related their satisfaction with the experience on a number of levels as well as an appreciation for each other's contributions. Observation confirms that Wendy excelled in her development as a novice teacher and maintained a highly productive class environment. She was considered by both her cooperating teacher and this investigator to be a Natural. The following three salient characteristics describe her practicum.

1. State of Enjoyment - The overall emotive tone of Wendy's student teaching experience was quite positive. She was happy and generally quite enthusiastic about her time spent student teaching. Though she did report several incidents of stress or anxiety, they were event-specific and viewed by her to be a normal part of investing effort.

2. Flourishing relationships - Wendy's student teaching was characterized by positive relationships with her cooperating teacher and students. Her cooperating teacher stated that Wendy left such a positive impression on him during their first meeting that he knew she would have a good student teaching experience. In particular he showed confidence in the caliber of Wendy's content knowledge in music and recognized her unique and successful way of working with her students. Possibly influenced by his faith in Wendy's abilities, this working relationship was enhanced by Mr. Baum's willingness to share his students and facilities.

Wendy also maintained positive and productive relationships with her students. She articulated strong beliefs about the needs of teenage students and her pupils in particular. These beliefs were enacted in the classroom on a daily basis. Classroom management issues were uncommon and limited to only a few individuals. Students were responsive to the intensity with which Wendy directed her classes.

3. Focus on a productive learning environment - Wendy orchestrated her classes to be productive and focused.

She was particularly accomplished at class monitoring and in her ability to recognize problems. She was notably improvisational and responded appropriately and quickly to distracters. Because Wendy did not have to spend much of her class time and energy focused on classroom management and discipline issues, she was free to concentrate on nuances of her students' developing skills. Her classes focused on the refinement of their musical performance. As opposed to a written exam, the final evaluation of student proficiency is the concert, a very public and potentially embarrassing forum for the students and teachers involved. Wendy demonstrated her commitment to performance through the intensity of her teaching.

### Analysis

During this study, from the inception of the concept of Natural on, inquiry has centered on defining an understanding the phenomenon of Natural. In a search for an explanation for this difference a variety of genre of research on student teaching was examined. Chapter Two discusses influences on the student teaching experience.

The following sections consider Wendy's student teaching relative to the findings known to define the experience of learning to teach.

This section begins by looking at Wendy's beliefs. As was mentioned in a previous section, beliefs are seen as important because they influence an individual's premises, understandings, and responses (Richardson, 1996). The beliefs held by student teachers influence their expectations, personal investment and day-to-day engagement.

#### Wendy's Beliefs About School

In interviews Wendy discussed both positive and negative experiences from her school years. She recalls her moves between two different school systems, American and Canadian, as problematic because she needed to adjust to the differences. At the same time she held positive feelings about these moves because it gave her opportunities to meet new friends and left her with the positive sense that she overcame a hardship.

Wendy holds the influences of her early music teachers as being important. She was privileged to be the pupil of two music teachers who focused on her special interest in

their own fields. Through their focus, Wendy earned the self-image of a talented musician, an image that has continued to influence her in her adult years.

Wendy also emphasized the importance of developing friendships during her school years. Repeated changes in school appear to have empowered Wendy as a person who seeks and enjoys pursuing and investing in new relationships and friendships. She describes the enjoyment of shocking other students with her individuality. Unlike her impressions of the teenagers she works with, Wendy appeared to be unguarded about the social consequences of her actions.

Her disappointments in school began early. She remembers feeling frustrated that as a young reader, somehow her way of reading wasn't correct. In addition to questions about the quality of some of her teachers, Wendy noted that the experiences with primary relevance to her, with the exception to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, were outside of school and related to music. Music took on a special importance for Wendy starting at a young age. By high school musical activities outside of school dominated her energies and concerns.

### Wendy's Beliefs About Her Preservice Program

Wendy's impressions of her preservice program are fairly consistent with the research on preservice students' beliefs. She voiced concerns that the general teaching courses were too detached from a "real" classroom and focused too much on theory. She found her music education course work to be challenging and relevant. She characterized her music classes as a more "practical" approach to learning to teach, which she stated she preferred. However, Wendy saw this preference as being correlated to her own preferential way of learning as opposed to a better method. Overall, Wendy noted the most valuable elements of her preservice program were when she was involved in experiential learning.

Wendy's affinity for her music education coursework may also be a reflection of her powerful self-image as a musician. She regarded her student teaching seminar as being especially helpful because of the camaraderie of eight other student teachers, musicians of her caliber, working together to help each other refine their directing and teaching skills.

### Wendy's Beliefs About Student Teaching

As Wendy reflected back on her expectations for student teaching, it became clear that she did not approach student teaching with high expectations for her own performance. She envisioned the semester as being "drudgery" and tedious. She had experienced difficult challenges during her fieldwork in her preservice program, and as a result viewed student teaching with dread.

Wendy pursued certification as an extension of her career goals. She chose teaching for practical reasons. Her desire was to support her chosen profession as a performance musician. Teaching is a means to an end.

Unlike many student teachers, Wendy did not appear to hold a romanticized impression of herself as a teacher (but possibly held a romanticized impression of herself as a musician). Her desire in teaching is an extension of her beliefs about the needs of high school students. Her aim is to teach them skills that allow them to feel accomplished and competent. Her investment of energy in student teaching was quite focused on the experience of her students.

### Wendy and the Problems of Student Teachers

Wendy's student teaching semester was remarkably free of the expected or "normal" problems of student teaching. Using Valli's (1992) construct of problems experienced by student teachers one finds that Wendy was able to bypass some. The first issue, that of imitation, suggests that student teachers suffer problems because they seek prescriptive solutions to classroom problems from their cooperating teacher. This occurs in part because student teachers lack an accumulated repertoire of strategies to resolve classroom problems. Wendy however appeared to recognize that she and Mr. Baum had very different ways of relating to students. She appeared to feel confident and comfortable in establishing her own classroom strategies.

As noted in Chapter Two, cooperating teachers have a contributing role in the problem of imitation, by directing discussion and feedback around situation specific recommendations for action that reflect their own methods. Mr. Baum's actions did not encourage imitation. He voiced significant confidence in Wendy's ability from "day one". His confidence in her knowledge base and ability to act in the classroom was represented by his minimalist approach to feedback or criticism. He went so far as to note that Wendy

is not as structured as he, but that she may "evolve" to more structure eventually. Mr. Baum was quite affirming about Wendy's way with her students. He appeared to trust her to make meaningful judgments about her actions. In his role as cooperating teacher, Mr. Baum was key to allowing Wendy the freedom to establish her own strategies in the classroom.

Valli's next problem, that of isolation was resolved by her frequent meetings with her peers in music education. Their weekly discussions and critiques appeared to leave Wendy feeling connected and supported by other student teachers. Their focus on videotapes of their teaching allowed for extensive discussion of alternative approaches and substantial feedback. This scrutiny was removed from the classroom, thereby allowing for contemplation and well-considered responses.

It is difficult to ascertain if Valli's problem of transfer influenced Wendy's student teaching or not. Such a problem is most apparent when a student teacher isn't reacting to a situation in a way that suggests the use of formal knowledge of teaching. For instance a student teacher might use homework as punishment, though she knows from her teacher education coursework that such actions

have a negative effect of pupil attitudes about school. But in Wendy's case, the notable finding is that Wendy appeared to have few classroom problems. Minor classroom management or discipline issues were resolved with ease. Her classroom management strategy appeared to be to spot student behavior issues quickly and resolve them with as little disruption of learning as possible. In fact, one particular concept from her preservice coursework, Kounin's (1970) concept of "with-it-ness" has a significant presence in Wendy's own classroom behaviors. In her interviews she discussed the challenges she faces in terms of monitoring student behaviors, in her actions she exhibits particular skill in maintaining a productive, compliant atmosphere.

In terms of Valli's final student teacher problem, technique, again it depends upon how one interprets Wendy's classroom experience. In the course of data collection, Wendy described a total of four students in all her sections that she found to be difficult. One student appeared to be inattentive and talkative. This student she moved to the front of the class for closer monitoring. Another two students were general behavior problems and appeared to challenge her on most everything she did. She described a variety of actions taken with the two students

that appear to have had little influence on their behavior. The final student she described was the student who lacked background knowledge to be successful in the theory class. Her concerns for him revolved around enabling him to gain something from the class, though he was struggling with the basic content. Relative to these problem students and in general, Wendy demonstrated abundant teaching strategies to maintain a productive classroom, a variety of management strategies to maintain student focus, respect for and enjoyment of her students consistent with her perceived needs for this age group of pupils.

#### Wendy on the Expert/Novice Continuum

On observation, Wendy appeared to be quite advanced in her way of handling the complexities of the classroom situation. She had few problems with classroom management, in part because she utilized daily routines and gave very clear indications of expected student behaviors. She was very quick to recognize student "drifting" and had a variety of creative desist interventions. As a result, Wendy's class time was focused and productive. The overall tone was positive, even on the day before Spring Break when students were distracted and more interventions were needed

than usual, Wendy maintained a significantly productive manner.

One cannot expect, however, that Wendy had the depth of teaching experience to be considered very far along on the expertise continuum. For example, if Wendy were placed in Carter's (1987) study of expert and novice teachers' interpretation of classroom images, there is little indication that she would read the classrooms with the complex understanding of an expert. She appears to be quite functional, but not unusually sophisticated in her understanding of situations.

In interviews Wendy often discussed the importance of the particular context where she was teaching. As pointed out by Mr. Baum, one could observe Wendy's deliberate efforts to come to know her students well and address their particular needs. She developed a depth of knowledge of the context in which she was teaching. Wendy is possibly advanced in her understandings about the importance of context. This could be similar to that of expert teachers.

The literature discussed above was helpful in providing lenses through which to discuss and understand Wendy's experience and has provided extensive understanding of the novice teachers' experience. However, it does not

explain the unique characteristics of the Natural. Another way of considering Wendy's case was needed. Rather than focusing on teacher education literature, I decided to consider the literature from two fields, higher education and recreation and leisure to consider investigations into quality of experience and excellence in performance. The following chapter is a report on this body of literature.

## CHAPTER VI. TOWARD A THEORY OF NATURAL IN STUDENT TEACHING

## Introduction

Wendy's student teaching experience has been described in a previous chapter. From this case certain personal characteristics emerge. First, Wendy's student teaching had positive qualitative characteristics; she experienced a variety of positive emotions and mediated emotions that could have negatively influenced her student teaching (such as stress and anxiety), she actively maintained a productive focused class environment, and experienced positive relationships with students, peers, and cooperating teacher. Though the literature on student teaching provided a foundation for considering aspects of Wendy's experience, it did not adequately explain the unique characteristics of Wendy's student teaching. This chapter discusses other sources of literature that relate more closely to the experience of a Natural. The first looks at performance issues of beginning faculty in higher education and identifies characteristics of individuals who have received full tenure most readily. "Fast Starters"

have been shown to approach their task as researchers and instructors in a particular way that allows optimal performance in several areas of their personal and professional lives. The next literature was from the field of psychology and addresses a positive state of engagement in activity known as "flow". Flow has been studied across a vast variety of circumstances and has been shown to have significant impact on the qualitative characteristics of an experience. This chapter discusses the relationship of this literature to Wendy's experience as a Natural.

#### Fast Starters

Within the Higher Education literature there is a parallel body of research focused on the experiences and development of faculty in post-secondary institutions. It includes some work focused on the attributes of faculty members who are able to teach and publish successfully during their early years of academic life. Boice (1996) has identified the characteristics of "fast starters", a subset of new faculty who are able to attain tenure (as measure of success) in their home institutions in a relatively short period on time. A salient characteristic of this subset of

faculty is their enjoyment of their work and the "balance" they maintain in their emotional investment in their profession and between their various responsibilities. Like Naturals, Fast Starters appear to others to be performing well in their professional responsibilities. They seem happy and appear not to suffer undue stress.

According to Boice (1996), higher educational settings are permeated with traditions that negatively influence the possibility of success for new faculty members. New faculty exist in a position of complex demands. They are typically assigned responsibilities for classes that are new to them. An unspoken expectation is that they will make their mark on the institution by creating unique educational experiences for their students. At the same time, they are being evaluated for the amount of research and writing they are able to accomplish. As a result Boice notes that time management becomes a struggle of conflicting urgent demands. In a quest to succeed, new faculty tend to develop "binging" behaviors to manage the demands of teaching and writing. Binging in this context refers to working marathons that demand obsessive focus and exclusive time devoted to research and writing. Teaching is an immediate concern and tends to override writing on a daily basis.

Publishing deadlines, grant deadlines and the like are postponed until large blocks of time, such as spring break, are available. The result is a new faculty who are stressed, sacrificing social life, relationships, health and leisure. The writing experience is consistently rushed and urgent. In their fervor to achieve, a pattern is developed that negatively affects resilience. These behaviors foster pressure to be creative, pressure to be imaginative, impatience to push for spontaneity, and immediacy. This ultimately subverts self-assurance. This pattern is similar to the feelings student teachers experience as they witness the gap between the demands of teaching and the level of their skill.

Resilience in this context is a fundamental characteristic for survival. Like resilience in other areas, resilience in higher education entails working through obstacles, learning from setbacks, and maintaining balance between commitments. Resilient individuals are less likely to be dominated by strong moods and fatigue, and ultimately are less likely to overreact to distractions and criticisms. Boice (1996) found that young faculty members who develop skills of resiliency are able to focus flexibly on several demands simultaneously and effectively.

Boice's research recognizes that people tend to hold unrealistic expectations for their own performance. They lay unrealistic plans and try to meet unrealistic standards and deadlines. As a result, action falls short of their own construct of perfection, they may overreact by getting stressed and overcompensate with "binging" behavior, writing or planning classes under the gun without enough time.

Boice asserts that balance and moderation in early years leads to successful induction into faculty life. A healthy pattern once established he claims will stick with the individual for their professional lives. Those who are able to maintain a sustainable effort move forward productively in key responsibilities. From his work identifying the characteristics of fast starters, Boice has created what he refers to as the "first-order principles for college teachers," a series of recommended behaviors that will enable beginning faculty to work more productively.

Boice notes that Fast Starters are efficient in their efforts. They focus on their goals equitably and designate time accordingly. They manage distractions.

The contrast between the experiences of novice faculty and Fast Starters is similar to the contrast in student teachers. The distinction of Fast Starters confirms that although learning to teach is an infinitely complex task, some behaviors allow the process to progress more quickly and successfully.

### The Theory of Flow

Another substantial body of research that connects well to the phenomenon of Natural, focuses on human enjoyment. From the area of psychology, Flow Theory investigates the various contexts in which one's action of giving focused attention creates a chain of events or experiences that ultimately leads to an absorbingly satisfying experience. A remarkably large number of studies have been done on Flow. Many focus on leisure activities, for example learning to play chess (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), rock climbing (Mitchell, 1988), and reading (Massimini & Carli, 1988). Other studies have investigated experiences of Flow in hostile or extremely adverse circumstances such as being a prisoner of war (Logan, 1988), paraplegics learning to cope (Csikszentmihalyi,

1990), and other circumstances where the participants could otherwise be viewed as victims. Yet another group of studies focus on the experience of Flow in everyday life; factory workers who find challenge and satisfaction doing tasks others would find boring (Allison & Duncan, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fave & Massimini, 1988), surgeons who must be totally focused to perform their work well (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), and working mothers balancing their responsibilities (Allison & Duncan, 1988). All of the studies of Flow demonstrate that some individuals have the ability to control thought to the extent of controlling the quality of experience, even in the most dire of circumstances.

#### Attention and Psychic Entropy

The work of Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) delineates the power of attention and concentration on creating enjoyment in a vast variety of situations. In his work, Csikszentmihalyi draws a differentiation between pleasure as a passive experience and enjoyment as an experience that requires investment of psychic energy or consciousness from the participant. Csikszentmihalyi has demonstrated that the

structure of attention can enable one to become completely immersed in an experience, eliminating distracting thoughts and circumstances, thereby enhancing the quality of the participant's effort. As an example, the structure of attention determines if a student will be concentrating on the lecture being given or instead on the fight she had with her boyfriend last night.

The opposite of positive investment of psychic energy is psychic entropy. Characterized as a disruption of consciousness, psychic entropy can be caused by something comparatively small, such as worrying about running out of gas or something quite significant, a major illness, catastrophic loss, or poverty. A feature of psychic entropy is disruption of concentration that disturbs one's goal orientation. In essence, the difference between psychic entropy and Flow is the ability of the individual to overcome forces working against dedication of attention. According to Csikszentmihalyi, in the normal state of existence, attention tends to be free-floating, gravitating to the most demanding immediate concerns. Typically any potential sources of stress, even a minor one, take precedence.

Csikszentmihalyi sees the quality of one's attention as being critical. The self has the key role in interpreting conditions, rather than disruptions simply happening to a person. The way the person reacts to potentially disrupting forces will ultimately make the difference between positive and negative experiences.

The difference between psychic entropy and optimal experience or flow is the difference in the way an individual approaches the task. Optimal experiences grow out of experiences where one is goal oriented, investing attention in a way that supports goals. The result of this effort is a higher quality work situation or experience. Positive feedback from within the situation (as opposed to given by someone) helps the individual develop stronger skills and as a result feel more confident. Things work and the participants recognize their success. Optimal experience is the result of intrinsic motivation. The experience itself represents one's own choice to pursue goals. Essentially, one chooses to experience success. To experience deep enjoyment, one must have a disciplined orientation.

### Optimal Experience and the Phenomenon of Enjoyment

To understand Flow theory, one must understand the complexities of the phenomenon of enjoyment. The following eight points describe elements influencing an individual's experience of enjoyment.

1. Optimal experience occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing. An important issue in experiencing enjoyment is the relationship between

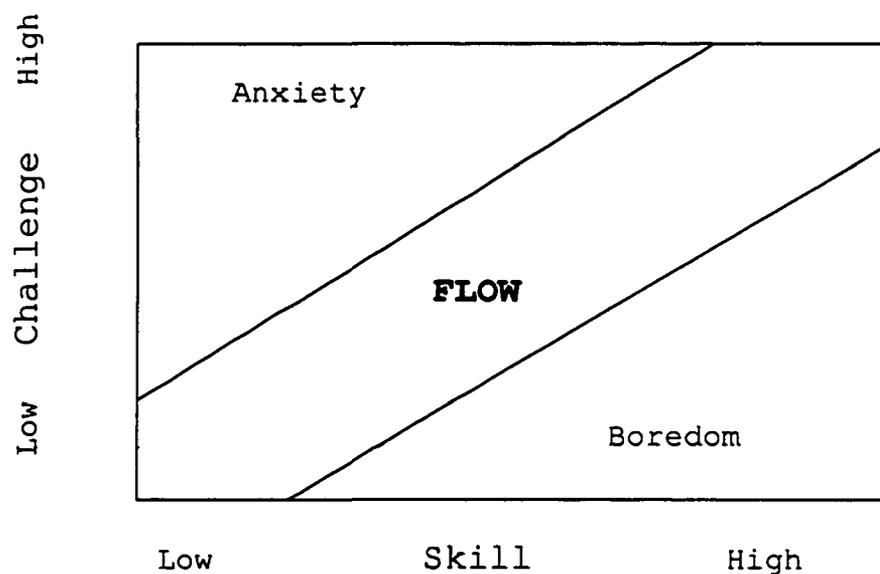


Figure 6.1 Flow in Relation to Skill and Challenge.  
(adapted from Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pg. 74)

skill and challenge. If one has too little skill for the challenges at hand, one feels anxiety. The

greater the disparity, the greater the anxiety. If on the other hand, the task requires too little skill the individual will likely feel boredom. Enjoyable tasks gradually present more challenge in consort with the increasing skill of the individual. A task ideally suited to optimal experience would present a gradual progression of challenges while the participant gradually developed greater skill.

2. To have optimal experience one must be able to concentrate. As mentioned earlier, a number of issues come between an individual task and one's ability to give concentration. Some distractions are within the control of the individual; others are outside (poverty, abuse, oppression, attention deficit disorders) and may have a strong enough influence on day-to-day experiences to interfere with the possibility of concentration. Such problems virtually eliminate the possibility of investment in enjoyment.
3. The task undertaken must have clear goals. A sense of what one is working towards provides the focus for attention in enjoyable tasks. Goals represent

the basis of feedback, a way for the individual to gauge their own performance and "own" the experience.

4. Immediate and appropriate feedback is the fuel for attention. One's ability to be sensitive to the subtle cues within one's own context or performance of a task provides incentive for greater investment of psychic energy. The most important aspect of feedback, whether from one's self or from an outside source, is the extent to which it aligns with the ultimate goals of the individual. A wide range of feedback may be seen as quite valuable provided it is relevant.
5. When one is in a state of productive attention, that attention is consuming and serves as a barrier to invasive thoughts or distractions. Even an individual who is struggling with tremendous disadvantage may find it possible to overcome negative forces, essentially shutting disruptive ones out, and giving attention to reaching their goals. In Logan's (1988) study of prisoners of war, psychic energy or attention created a powerful barrier to the negative circumstances they were

experiencing, so much so that their attention served as their salvation.

6. Enjoyable experiences allow people to feel they are able to exercise control over their actions. The quality of a situation is dependent on the quality of effort. That is not to say that the individual actually has complete control of the situation, but rather that one has the power to influence the outcome.
7. As a result of concentration self-consciousness disappears. Not unlike outside stresses, self-consciousness serves as a barrier to concentration or a distraction. Self-consciousness is seen as another form of stress and requires conscious response negatively influencing attention.
8. The result or "symptom" of investment of attention is an altered concept of time. A result may be missing an appointment or being surprised so much time has passed while being so "wrapped-up" in what one is doing.

Csikszentmihalyi describes the "autotelic personality", one that is well suited to living optimal

experiences. First, the individual must be able to focus attention. As discussed earlier, there are a variety of factors that influence attention, some too powerful to be overcome. Next the individual must be adaptive or flexible, essentially identifying the need for a varied course by responding to feedback and adapting action to goals. And finally, the individual must not be overly self-conscious. Self-consciousness is seen as a distracting force, one that disrupts concentration and attention.

Situations too can be considered "autotelic". They are characterized by being rewarding in their own right, dominated by intrinsic reward. The participant is not lost in service to external goals, but rather working deliberately, enjoying involvement, feeling in control. Situations that are inherently driven by external rewards keeps one evaluating one's performance relative to the external expectations. This focus is parallel to self-consciousness and interferes with attention.

### The Role of Motivation

Distinct differences are seen between situations driven by intrinsic motivation as opposed to extrinsic motivation (Hamilton, Haier, & Buchsbaum, 1984; Hamilton-

Holcomb, Holcomb, & Pena, 1977). Hamilton measured the level of visual concentration needed to resolve confusing visual puzzles. Subjects were asked to view images where the foreground and background were designed to be ambiguous. These images were similar to the work of artist M.C. Escher in their complexity. Hamilton's findings demonstrated that the distinction between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation appeared to impact the amount of attention needed to visually decode the images. Those individuals who were primarily extrinsically motivated need a much larger number of visual cues to decipher the image. Those who were intrinsically motivated tended to need few cues, sometimes as few as one visual cue to decipher the image. Her work demonstrated that there is a large range of variation on the number of visual cues different individuals needed to accomplish the same task. In general, those who required a large number of visual cues became dependent on external cues; their attention was turned to collection of external cues as opposed to relying on their own intellect to decipher the abstraction. In this case, external elements interfered with attention, placing limits on optimal experience and optimal performance.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), situations that contain a large number of external cues, such as work and school, often contain elements that interfere with one's opportunity for optimal experience. First, there are public elements where an outside force, perhaps a boss or a teacher, judges one's performance. Individuals within this context may become self-protective, fearing losing face. They may hold expectations for how others will perceive them, possibly devoting attention to seeking affirming cues from those around them. Responses of others rarely go as planned. This is in part because those involved generally have their own goals for the particular situation. As an example, the student teacher has the goal of enacting her particular philosophy about interacting with pupils. This student teacher may look to the cooperating teacher for feedback and support relative to that particular goal. However, the cooperating teacher likely has goals of her own. One may be to incorporate the student teacher into her classroom with as little disruption of the current classroom strategies as possible. Or perhaps her goal is to pass on her accumulated knowledge as completely as possible to her apprentice. In such a situation it is unlikely that both individuals will have satisfaction in terms of the

response of the other. The nature of their working relationship may ultimately limit the potential for enjoyment.

### The Influence of Stress

The example presented above introduces the importance of coping with stress. Depending upon an individual's response, a vast number of situations could be considered stressful. Not unlike Csikszentmihalyi's impressions about attention, it is a matter of the individual's response or interpretation of disillusionment or challenge that determines the level of stress experienced. According to Csikszentmihalyi, one's response to stress is dependent on three factors: the amount of external support available and the individual's ability to utilize it, an individual's psychological resources such as intelligence and education, and an individual's coping strategies.

In psychology a "mature" response to stress is sometimes called "transformative coping." This term describes one's ability to place stress in perspective, neutralizing painful feelings and working toward positive change. This transformation of a difficult situation to a positive one has three important elements. The first

involves a level of self-assurance, a belief that one has the power to positively influence outcome. This can take the form of humility, in adopting another's goals as beneficial or can simply be a matter of seeing oneself in harmony as opposed to opposition with one's environment. The next element is a matter of focusing attention on the world. As mentioned in the discussion of optimal experience, inward attention prevents focus on surroundings or activity. Outward focus allows sensitivity to cues that enable appropriate response and adaptation to a problematic situation. The result of the first two actions allowed the flexibility needed to discover new solutions.

### The Importance of Goals

Goals are seen as a fundamental characteristic of Flow and optimal experience because they actually define the experience and the action needed within it. A majority of optimal experiences are reported within activities that are goal directed and bounded by rules. Csikszentmihalyi refers to this relationship as the "system of action." The system of action depends on the recognition of challenges and the corresponding development of skill. It informs the individual as to the extent of successes and needed

revisions. The system of action is the basis of feedback, both external and internal, and enables development. The autotelic personality feels a sense of ownership when it comes to goals. This takes the form of commitment. An autotelic personality is able to maintain focus on goals while remaining flexible in action.

After choosing a system of action, the autotelic personality sets about the task of striving for goals by investing attention and becoming immersed in the experience. Continued attention and sensitivity to feedback fosters the development of skill. The result is enjoyment and satisfaction. It is important to understand that this response is not a result of a "laid back" personality. Being relaxed will not control chaos and other forces that control experience. Attention to goals, however, will.

#### The "Flip Side" - Anti-flow

The use of flow theory has also highlighted distractions that are a fundamental aspect of student teaching such as stress, self-consciousness, and a struggle to be reflective, which may work against one's ability to maintain focus in the classroom. Allison and Duncan (1988) identified the phenomenon of "anti-flow" in response to

research on women and work. Just as flow represents the result of a cohesive challenge/skill relationship, anti-flow is the result of the extreme discordance in the challenge/skill relationship. Characterized by boredom or anxiety, anti-flow is a counter-productive state of being and interferes with productivity as well as enjoyment.

Hill's (1993) application of flow and anti-flow to college teaching suggests that discordance in the demands of the situation and the capacity of the individual can have a cascading effect producing other undesirable elements of anti-flow such as loss of intrinsic motivation and loss of freedom or control. This brings to question whether some of the "normal" problems of the student teaching experience should be viewed as counter-productive to optimal experience.

### Analysis

The previous section presented two theoretical foundations for considering the characteristics of an individual's performance while undertaking student teaching. Boice's theory of "fast starters" emphasizes the importance of

balance between commitments and actions. Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "flow" demonstrates the importance of attention in a variety of pursuits. In the upcoming section these theoretical foundations were employed to further understand the unique characteristics of Wendy's student teaching.

#### Wendy as an Autotelic Personality

As mentioned earlier, Csikszentmihalyi defines the autotelic personality as one who is most likely to engage in an experience in such a way as to yield enjoyment. The autotelic personality has three basic characteristics. First, one must possess the ability to devote attention. The act of devoting attention may be a simple issue of disciplined focus or it may be complicated by outside forces that must be overcome. Each individual faces a variety of challenges to attention at different times in their lives. Next, the individual must be adaptive or flexible. As a result of the individual's attention given to a situation, they are able to collect cues or feedback regarding their place in that situation. The autotelic personality utilizes that information to gain greater access to the experience. Essentially they adapt their own

response to allow them to fit into the circumstance more freely. And finally, autotelic personalities lack self-consciousness. It is not that they lack confidence or self-esteem. In fact, it appears to the contrary, they are simply focused enough on the situation they are within and they are not considering issues that lay outside of it.

In observing Wendy one sees the manifestation of these characteristics in a student teacher. Wendy developed her ability to concentrate as a child through her work in music. Wendy has chosen a profession as a performance musician where learning, mastering, and refining is fundamental to the experience. She will be able to utilize this skill in a variety of contexts throughout life.

Wendy also had a way of manipulating her perception of her circumstances so as to create as few disruptive thoughts as possible. Her attitude about her age being an advantage in working with high school students is an example. During the same semester, I met another young teacher at the same school. This teacher was experiencing "power issues" with her students. The result was a working atmosphere that was unpleasant for everyone involved. This particular teacher felt that she must be "tough" (in practice this was unreasonably so) because she was young

and needed to differentiate herself from her students. Her situation was filled with anxiety and frustration, elements of "anti-flow" (Allison & Duncan, 1988).

Wendy's ability to manage stress was also critical to her as an autotelic personality. By maintaining balance, expecting some anxiety as a normal part of investment, she was able to acknowledge it as a productive element and not let it create fear. This resulting fear could have interrupted her ability to concentrate.

Wendy was able to be flexible and adaptive during her student teaching for several reasons. First, she did not hold rigid, unrealistically positive impressions of her abilities or of the situation. Because of this she was free to experience student teaching as it came rather than sizing the experience and her performance up to romanticized expectations. She expected it to be long, difficult, and tedious. Happily it was not. She was not burdened by disappointment.

Wendy was adaptive in terms of her dealings with her students. She maintained high expectations for her students' participation in her class and kept her focus on the quality of their learning and experience as students. She did not hold rigid expectations for their behavior that

were unrelated to the learning aspects of her classes. For example, when her student showed her the color of her thong underwear, probably in an attempt to shock her, Wendy treated the situation with humor, thus minimizing the impact on the class atmosphere.

#### Wendy's Student Teaching as an Autotelic Situation

Wendy's student teaching situation had a number of unique characteristics that aided Wendy's opportunity for optimal experience.

Mr. Baum, as the cooperating teacher, had vast influence on Wendy's semester. He controlled her access to his facility and students, and was in a position to set the tone and extent of her influence in his program. He reported that at their first meeting, he and Wendy invested time "getting to know" each other. They talked about their own experiences and shared ideas. From this conversation he was left with a powerful impression of Wendy's competence as a musician. He expressed that from that point forward he knew she would have a good student teaching experience. His actions were consistent with that impression. He enabled Wendy to feel in control of her student teaching experience, allowing her to "do her own thing" in his

classroom and make a decision if she needed more structure or not. Though this may appear that she had little guidance from him, this is not entirely the case.

Relative to many student teachers, Wendy had a slow and gradually progressing phase-in stage of student teaching. At Wendy's university the ultimate goal is for the student teacher to have four full weeks of responsibility for their classes. However, the normal case has the student teacher fully responsible sooner than that, often having such responsibility for eight or more weeks. In this case, however, Mr. Baum developed a phase-in schedule for Wendy that fit with the logistics of the semester he had planned prior to her arrival. The semester was designed around the concert schedule. Wendy began her semester observing for two weeks. Then she began working with sectionals, small groups of students learning a particular part of the music. She did this for several weeks. Next she was given one song per class to prepare for the first concert of the semester. This meant she was teaching one quarter to one third of three class periods for four or five weeks. She took full responsibility for the students performing those songs during that concert. In the final five weeks of her student teaching, Wendy was

given full responsibility for working with several classes. Her student teaching culminated with the "End of the Year Concert" where she again directed the student performance. After the beginning of her semester, when Wendy was anxious to start working with students, there was little uncertainty about the progression of the phase-in because the phase-in was dictated by Mr. Baum's goals and objectives for his classes. Wendy was not placed in a position of negotiating her phase-in based on her demonstration of skill. This gradual phase-in allowed Wendy to concentrate on her engagement in the process of learning during student teaching, rather than maintaining concern about getting to the next step. The greatest benefit from this arrangement was the progression of the skill/challenge ratio. As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant influences on optimal experience is the skill to challenge relationship. If one is in a position of too much challenge for his or her level of skill, he or she experiences anxiety, a condition that often inflicts student teachers. Through this phase-in schedule, Wendy was able to demonstrate her developing skills and had the luxury of time to refine them before moving on to the next level. Wendy's own tendency toward refinement (which she developed

as a musician) drove her participation as she prepared for the next phase of her assignment.

Autotelic situations provide feedback that fuels the individual's progression or growth. In Wendy's situation she had frequent exposure to peers in a safe environment for critique. Like other disciplines (e.g. art and drama) where rigorous feedback is central to the learning experience, music students have been trained to participate in critique, a frank discussion of the strengths and weakness of some aspect of performance. Her group's weekly meetings revolved around constructive discussion of videotapes of each student's teaching. This allowed her to consider her alternatives and the impressions of a variety of people.

#### The Importance of Wendy's goals

Wendy appeared to hold many goals for herself, both in life and during student teaching. The goals that she discussed had tremendous cohesion around her life goal of pursuing a career in music. She was motivated not simply to get through her student teaching, but to develop skill in teaching so she could support herself while she pursued opportunities to perform.

Her goal orientation guided her day-to-day interactions as well. Wendy's cooperating teacher commented on her clarity about goals. He noted that she is clear and knows what she wants to accomplish on any given day, "Nothing gets in her way." Her expertise as a musician helped her to understand in exact terms what levels of performance were needed from her students. She worked deliberately to achieve these objectives. The resulting class time is breathtaking and inspiring. Wendy's goals guided her through a tremendously productive semester. Her focus and clarity allowed her to actualize her own optimal learning during her practicum semester.

## CHAPTER VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

## Summary

This inquiry set out to consider a variation in the experience of student teaching, specifically to focus on the distinctive characteristics of student teachers considered to be Naturals. The questions were: How could this variation in the experience of student teaching be explained? Was this student teacher's practicum semester a more productive learning experience, or qualitatively better? Where did the source of difference reside, within the individual, the context, or both?

To gain understanding of this phenomenon qualitative methodology was used. A Natural was identified, observed, and interviewed. The cooperating teacher was also interviewed. A combination of observational and interview data was analyzed and utilized to create a case depicting the experience of Wendy during her practicum semester.

Extant research on student teaching was sought as a basis for understanding the phenomenon of a Natural. This literature provided a foundation for considering the

experience of the student teacher, Wendy, but fell short of explaining uniquely positive aspects of her experience.

Utilizing literature from outside teacher education that addresses the quality of experience and excellence in performance, alternative theoretical bases were found. Boice's theory of "fast starters" illustrated the importance of balanced goals and sustained effort in managing the complexities of faculty life in higher education. Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "flow" provided a basis for understanding the nature of enjoyable and productive experience.

When these theories were related to Wendy's work as a student teacher, features that enhanced her experience during her practicum were recognizable. Important salient characteristics were situated both in the individual and the context. It is also important to note that many of the productive features of this practicum were not only in the control of Wendy and Mr. Baum, those features were dependent on that control. The following features could characterize Wendy's student teaching:

- The student teacher had few classroom problems.

- The student teacher was particularly able to concentrate and control her response to distractions.
- The student teacher was accustomed to performance stress and effectively managed its impact.
- The student teacher maintained flexible expectations for the experience of student teaching. She recognized unexpected satisfaction in the experience and accordingly invested more attention and energy.
- The student teacher's personal goal orientation provided a clear basis for self-derived feedback.
- The university student teaching seminar provided meaningful feedback in a safe and supportive environment.
- The student teacher earned respect from her cooperating teacher based on her subject matter expertise, which allowed her to hold flexible expectations for her actions in the classroom.
- The phase-in of student teaching was appropriate to the challenge/skill relationship and fostered flow.

The case of Wendy's student teaching has provided a clear vision of the positive possibilities in the practicum experience. Wendy has demonstrated that individual characteristics can have powerful influence on the quality of experience. It also appears that important life skills such as stress management, lack of self-consciousness and the ability to invest in an experience intrinsically can carry-over positively into student teaching. Wendy's comfort with the public performance aspects of teaching is also clearly a positive factor.

As strong as Wendy's individual characteristics are, this case also delineates the importance of context. Mr. Baum held the key position as gatekeeper and was responsible for providing the opportunities Wendy ultimately optimized. His respect for her knowledge base and willingness to allow Wendy to find her own way facilitated her successful experience. Without his influence, Wendy's response would have been limited.

The University too fulfilled its role in supporting an optimal student teaching practicum. The student teaching seminar reinforced Wendy's connection to "University thinking" while providing the level of constructive

feedback she had become accustomed to and required to make meaningful progress as a teacher.

This inquiry illuminates the importance of both individual and contextual factors in the Natural's experience. One is left with the impression that there is an interconnectedness of factors where to some degree the individual's responses are dependent on context, while the contextual factors are, at least in part, dependent on the characteristics, abilities and actions of the student teacher him/herself.

#### Implications

This study enables one look at student teaching as holding the potential for being a more positive, productive learning experience.

First, it has shed light on the potential influence of the individual response in the student teaching context. We need to now ask the question: "How does this individual response influence what can be learned in the student teaching context?" As an example, teacher education programs select "good" students with impressive grade-point averages. We know, just from looking at the characteristics

of good students that their good grade averages are due to being self-regulated students who monitor their own performance. These positive behaviors as a student may instead be a hindrance in the student teaching context. Self-consciousness about their own performance may block concentration on the interactions unfolding in their classroom. The need to have the "right" prescriptive solution is not the goal in learning to teach, fluid responsive problem solving is. Value needs to be placed on creative problem solving behaviors early in teacher education and must be supported by cooperating teachers and supervisors.

We must recognize that learning in the clinical environment of a classroom is very different from other university learning experiences. We must prepare students for the complex nature of this learning experience. Students need to be trained to manage stress, self-consciousness and to flourish in a culture of critique.

Once again, the role of cooperating teachers must be evaluated. How might their interaction with the student teacher create distraction, rather than fostering concentration and optimal experience? From Griffin's work (1989) we see that cooperating teachers tend to hold two

distinct attitudes about their role in the student teaching experience. He found that cooperating teachers either felt that it was their role to pass on the specifics of their own successful practice to their student teacher, or they felt that it was their responsibility to provide an opportunity for the student teacher to devise their own solutions and develop their own unique practice. We are now able to look at this research and see that these two perspectives would create very different results in terms of fostering optimal experience.

This research also brings to question the importance of the skill/challenge ratio in the student teaching experience. The variety of problems of student teachers suggest that student teachers are eager, but prone to overstepping their own abilities. We need to re-examine the practice of moving student teachers quickly into increased responsibility in their host classrooms. Examining the semester curriculum, establishing cohesive and conservative transitions to more student teacher responsibility allows for focused refinement of successful teaching behaviors. Emphasis needs to be shifted from more "on the job training" to thoughtful and gradual development.

Finally, we need to provide meaningful faculty and peer support for student teachers. This support needs to reinforce the belief that teaching is a continuous process of personal growth and learning, rather than a finite accomplishment. More emphasis is needed on the development of supportive learning communities of student teachers for the purpose of problem solving and critique. In an effort to solidify feedback, student teaching seminars should incorporate substantial interaction during the practicum semester and serve as a forum for substantive critique and feedback within the context of a collegial student community. More microteaching, more videotaping, more critical self-evaluation is needed to prepare student teachers to make the most of the rigors of their practicum experience.

#### Questions for Further Research

This inquiry has pointed out that the practicum experience is a situation highly influenced by complex factors whose source are both the individual and contextual. Consequently, there is a need to expand our understanding student teaching and move beyond

generalizations about the experience. Future research is needed to better understand:

1. Variation in the experience of student teaching, both positive and negative. What different types of anomalies exist? Why and how are they different? What can we learn from other students who like Wendy had a very positive experience student teaching? What can be learned from students at the other end of the spectrum? How might a Natural's experience vary in different classrooms and subject matter contexts?
2. The role of the individual characteristics, tendencies and behaviors as they influence navigation of student teaching. How might certain behaviors (i.e. those of an autotelic personality), be taught to preservice students?
3. The influence of individual characteristics of the cooperating teacher on optimal experience during student teaching. Can desirable cooperating teacher behaviors be identified and most importantly, can they be taught?

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT TEACHER

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT TEACHER

Interview I:

What pseudonym would you like me to use for this paper?

Let's start at the beginning, where did you grow up?

Tell me about your family:

Siblings?

How would you describe your parents?

What do your parents do?

When did your interest in music start?

What kind of aspirations have you had for your music?

Did your parents encourage you to go into teaching?

Has anyone in your family ever been a teacher? Who?

What do you remember most about your schooling K-12?

When in school did you feel you thrived the most? Why?

Did you have a favorite teacher in grade school?

Middle school?

High school?

How did they influence you?

Tell me about your higher education experience?

Did you work for a while before seeking teacher certification?

What other activities have you been doing while in college?

Tell me about your teacher certification program?

Tell me about your grades? Ed Classes, Music ed classes

What do you feel was the most important coursework you had to prepare you for student teaching?

Tell me about your student teaching. How did you end up here?

What was it like at the beginning? When did you assume responsibility for classes?

How did that feel?

Tell me any requirements Mr. Baum put on you.

Tell me any requirements your university supervisor put on you.

Tell me about the seminars from the music department.

Have you been attending the Pro seminars? What are your impressions of them?

How satisfying has your student teaching been?

Did you feel prepared for student teaching?

What has been the best part so far?

What has been the most difficult part so far?

Before you started student teaching, did you have an impression of the type of teacher you would be?

Have you been able to be that teacher in this experience? Why or why not.

What did you expect the student teaching experience to be like?

Interview II:

Describe your feelings about your student teaching.

What attributes do you have that you felt would be helpful in teaching?

Before I contacted you to be a part of my study, what were your impressions of how well you were doing in your student teaching?

What do you think the needs are of the group of students you are teaching? Have these needs had any impact on the way you have been teaching?

Describe your best students.

Describe your most problematic students.

What do you think accounts for the differences?

Do you think its possible for you to help a problem student become one of your best?

Describe a problem you have had in your classroom. How do you handle problems?

Have you had the experience of trying to solve a problem and needing to use a variety of approaches? Tell me about it.

Would you say there are any routines in your classroom? Please describe how you use routine.

Student teachers have been known to experience a variety of stress reactions. Would you say you have had any? What? Why?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COOPERATING TEACHER

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THE COOPERATING TEACHER

Discuss Confidentiality

Background:

College

Employment

Years teaching

Preservice Education, Where?

What was your student teaching experience like?

This is your first student teacher?

What do you think are the most important things Wendy can get out of this experience?

Tell me about how you have structured her experience.

How satisfying has the experience been?

What have been the best parts of this experience?

What have been the most difficult parts of this experience?

What do you think accounts for the differences between good student teachers and not-so-good student teachers?

As you know my study is on student teachers who are Naturals. In your experience, have you known teachers who were Naturals?

What were they like?

At this point, I don't know what a Natural is exactly, but when I asked you if Wendy was a Natural, you mentioned you thought she was in several ways. Can you discuss those ways?

Now I'm going to ask you some questions that relate to some research on expert teachers. And wouldn't expect Wendy to excel in all of these areas. I need for you to answer them honestly.

There is some research that shows that expert teachers are especially good at understanding the social needs of the students and how this fits in with the teaching context. Basically reading the social situation of the classroom and designing the task so it is appropriate. How do you feel Wendy has handled this?

Expert teachers have been described as "improvisational performers" because of their skill in problem solving on the fly. How does this fit with what you have seen from Wendy?

Expert teachers are known to have a vast store of teaching strategies and principles at their disposal. How would you describe Wendy's repertoire?

We also know that expert teachers are very good at spotting visual cues that signal a need for action in the classroom. How has Wendy done in this area?

Now you understand that most student teachers aren't as comfortable with their experience as Wendy has been.

In fact many student teachers find student teaching a very stressful experience. How has Wendy's stress level been?

There is some thinking that teachers who have very strongly held beliefs about children and what they need, both in terms of discipline and learning are more successful. Do you have the sense that Wendy has a strong philosophy that guides her?

How do you feel Wendy's sense of self-efficacy has been in teaching?

What do you think has accounted for Wendy's success as a student teacher?

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