

VOLUME 23 • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2010

# ENCOUNTER

*Education for Meaning and Social Justice*





# ENCOUNTER

EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1 SPRING 2010

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# Planktonic Awareness and Transformative Learning Communities

Paul Freedman

**How the recognition and identification of plankton became an opportunity for one class to become a genuine learning community.**

As a holistic educator I look on the educational mission in four planes, or perhaps four concentric rings as depicted by Mike Seymour (Seymour 2004, ii). First, the holistic teacher works towards developing an understanding of self within each learner. Second, he/she strives to elicit and develop within the learners a connection to other people, moving towards tolerance, acceptance, understanding, empathy, and care. The third connection is to nature, nurturing each learner's capacity for reverence and respect for the natural world, a sense of place and belonging within it, and an ecological sense of existing within living systems. The final connection is to spirit or nurturing a capacity to see connections with the cosmos, and the sense of being part of something bigger and mysterious, again with a sense of reverence and wonder.

In striving towards these four lofty and often elusive goals, I have come to understand the critical nature of the learning community. Inner work and contemplative practices, often the cornerstones of holistic education (e.g., Miller 2007), hold an important place in my classroom, for sure, but it is through a process of looking *outward* and entering community that learners can step outside of themselves and begin to make these four critical connections to self, other, nature, and spirit. It is in community that we clarify, crystalize, and articulate our own perceptions, beliefs, and understandings so that others can see them through our eyes. It is in community that we are asked again and again to try to grasp and hold another's point of view or divergent belief. It is through dialogue within community that we can begin to reciprocally and consensually build shared understanding and co-create "truth."



PAUL FREEDMAN is the founder and head of the Salmonberry School in Eastsound, WA, where he also teaches first through the fourth grade. His main interests are in holistic education and its application to the elementary school. Paul can be contacted at [dancingmonkey@rockisland.com](mailto:dancingmonkey@rockisland.com).

So what do we mean by community? A learning community is much more than a collection of individual learners. A true learning community requires time and patience to develop. It requires a slow and deep building of trust, and a resulting gesture of embrace. Community is the living, breathing container that provides the context for meaningful encounters and experiences. It challenges each learner, as it simultaneously holds them in unconditional acceptance. It holds space for learners to acknowledge their own self-doubt and develop and express their emerging understandings. Through open dialogue and shared reflection in this safe and trusting environment, the community nurtures the unique learning processes of each individual. It allows for and encourages both the need for risk-taking and a feeling of complete safety, and it creates opportunities for transformative growth.

The term *transformative* here refers to the learner recognizing a faulty worldview and a realizing a new way of seeing or organizing one's world. As Edmund O'Sullivan (2003, 326) has written,

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

A transformative community then, is one that facilitates and maximizes the possibility that such individual or collective transformations might occur.

Parker Palmer (1998) refers to such a community as a "Community of Truth." According to this powerful model, the community engages together as it gathers around a living subject, forming relationships both between subject and learner and between various learners within the community. This collective and committed focus on this living subject, what Palmer calls a "Great Thing" (1998, 99-108) coalesces

the community. This is a vision that guides my pedagogy. Realizing the transformative learning community, or the "community of truth," provides the vehicle by which I can reach the four-fold goals of holistic education: connections to self, other, nature, and spirit.

My classroom is comprised of sixteen 6- to 9-year-olds and two adults. Some would argue that it is an untenable ideal to reach for transformation as a goal of education for children at this developmentally young level. Some would say that these early elementary years are a time only for absorbing information handed down from the instructor and building skills through repetition and practice. However, I believe that even these young children are capable of much more, and this belief is occasionally confirmed. In the story that follows, not only did we do the heady work of engaging in a transformative learning community, we did so in a developmentally appropriate, fun, kid-friendly environment — and it was amazingly simple.

Through an extended place-based education project, our class had spent time over several years developing a connection to a particular intertidal marine environment near the school. We had already learned about many of the flora and fauna there, and it was time to try to see more, to look deeper than the obvious biological community existing on the surface, deeper than the crabs, and sea stars, mussels, and eel grass. We were drawn to explore the question of what sustains the lives of these large easily visible creatures? Where do they fit within the intertidal ecosystem? Our scientist-in-residence designed a simple activity. She suggested the possibility that the salt water continually washing over the intertidal zone was a rich soup of nutrients, including millions of tiny living planktonic creatures that feed the larger organisms. She brought in a sample of water from "our" bay, and some low-power microscopes. She taught the sixteen young scientists how to prepare a sample, focus the microscope, and adjust the light. She introduced them to some pictures of zooplankton that they might encounter. That's it. Then she turned 'em loose.

Excitement was high. The lesson was unscripted and open-ended. The exploration was real and authentic as were the tools and processes. The group

was heterogeneously mixed and well-formed due to a lot of shared time and a careful nurturing of respect and trust. In short, everything was in place to realize the elusive vision of the transformative learning community.

But it didn't happen. Kids formed themselves into small groups around each microscope. They fiddled with knobs and adjusted lights, but saw nothing. There were the physical frustrations of looking through the eye-pieces, focusing the lenses, and moving the sample dishes. Then there emerged the social and emotional frustrations as kids bumped tables, took turns that were "too long," and became impatient with one another and the failure of the experiment. The group became increasingly convinced that the plankton were not there at all, or if they were they were impossible to see. After fifteen minutes some were ready to give up. Others kept at it, and then, quite unexpectedly, it happened.

"Hey, Emma, I think something's wiggling there."

"Where?"

"There. Down in the corner, look!"

"Anne, Anne, check this out, I think something's moving in our dish!"

"Can you focus in on it?"

"Wait. Yes!! Look, look!"

"What is it?"

"I think it's a bryozoa! Yeah, it is! Look!"

That was it. The goal was achieved. A note taken on the observation form. Mission accomplished. Next activity? Not a chance.

What happened next was incredible. One child asked the successful observer-team what it had looked like when they first saw their zooplankton. The successful ones told the others what they had seen, then offered their services and took a look in some of the other microscopes. Now that they knew what to look for, their vision markedly improved. As they found a wiggle in another dish, they pointed it out to several other kids. And as you might guess, in a palpable upwelling of excitement, one after another group found zooplankton moving through their samples.

With more time spent getting acculturated to the size, scale, movement, and pace of the tiny zooplank-

ton, the kids gradually came to planktonic awareness, or perhaps became open enough to allow it to come to them. There was definitely some sense of

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***A learning community is much more than a collection of individual learners. A true learning community requires a slow and deep building of trust, and a resulting gesture of embrace. It challenges each learner, as it simultaneously holds them in unconditional acceptance.***

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reciprocity with the subject, as in, "Look, look, it's a rotifer — and it's waving at me. Look!" The kids tuned into the initial signs of life, and they attuned their visual sense to what the subject asked of them. Slowly they came to be able to distinguish between species. They even recognized and commented on differences between individuals, and of course started naming some of their new microscopic friends, "That's the same one I saw before. I'm sure it is. It's head thing leans to the left, like this. I'm going to name it Rotey."

I felt genuinely privileged to witness this process. It was as if a dense fog was lifting to reveal a previously unseen and unknown world. The details slowly came into focus, with ever increasing sharpness. Like particles settling out in a murky glass of water until all seemed crystal clear. Most striking to me was how the process of discovery was so joyful. Kids were bubbling with excitement, literally dancing in between turns at the microscope. Shrieking with pleasure at new observations, spontaneously chanting multi-syllabic Latin names of microscopic aquatic organisms. Genuinely supporting one another's emerging awareness. It was incredibly powerful, an almost tangible collective breakthrough.

But was this transformative learning? How was their learning that microorganisms exist where they

had been thought absent, any different from correcting a simple, more one-dimensional flawed notion such as  $7 \times 6 = 43$ ? The difference was in the dialogue, and the extent to which the ripples reverberated out well beyond the "lesson." The shared experience and the new worldview it prompted, seemed to take hold in the children's lives. I took notes furiously. Below are excerpts from several different dialogues over the next two days.

"Man, that was so cool. We are surrounded by 'em!"

"Yeah, that's cool. I couldn't even see 'em at all at first. Like, I thought they were not even there at all — but they were *everywhere*. I wonder how much other stuff is all around us and we don't even notice."

"Yeah, but *they* must think they're surrounded by us."

"I guess they do."

"No, they can't even see us. They don't even know we're here."

"Yeah, you're right ... but we didn't know about them either. If *we* learned to see *them*, maybe *they* could learn to see *us*."

"I'm really good at tuning into stuff — just like focusing the microscope thingy. Sometimes I can just, *zoing*, focus right in on something."

"Emma was so nice. She really helped me. I know she'll always help me if I need help. That's what friends do."

"It was like everyone was helping."

"What if we all really knew about and cared about each other. I mean, I probably step on a million zillion plankton every day and I don't even know it."

"No you don't, plankton only live in the water."

"Salt water."

"Like my eyes. I bet they're swimming in my eyes right now!"

"That's creepy."

"No, it is so cool! Anne, do I have plankton in my eyeballs?"

For a long time after this experience, the kids would return to this discussion in different ways. As

they walked through the yard, I saw kids stop and get down in the grass, parting individual blades to "see who's down there." A ritual developed, every time we finished washing hands before eating, each child would apologize to the microorganisms that had just been washed away. The kids' previous anthropocentric worldview was challenged, and they began to experience and organize the world through a new lens, albeit in a very playful developmentally appropriate way.

How an educator might create a transformative learning community and increase the likelihood, frequency, and depth of experiences like these is an important question for another essay. At this time what I am suggesting is that even young children are quite capable of transformation and building transformative community. It is a worthy and powerful goal that adds a critical sense of meaning and purpose to the educational mission. I believe the presence of community in this case was critical to the success and depth of experience, which this class enjoyed. Sustaining this sense of community is difficult but continues to serve as the holy grail of my quest as a teacher.

I believe that it is through transformative learning communities that we realize our holistic ideals. These children in this class, by coming into community with one another as well as the zooplankton they encountered (their "great thing") discovered themselves. They discovered a deep connection with and reverence for nature. And they discovered a sense of something bigger than themselves, a sense of spirit and purpose.

This is a holistic learning community in action.

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# Hannah's Question

Alan A. Block

**When teachers are the *only* ones who ask questions in class, both student and teacher learning are impoverished.**



ALAN BLOCK is finishing his fourth decade as a teacher, and though he has learned not a few things over the years, he still has a few questions. He has published six books, most recently *Ethics and Teaching* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), along with a large body of essays on issues of contemporary importance.

"Dr. Block, can I ask you a question?" she said.

I had just left a class that I felt had been an utter failure. We had been discussing John Updike's *The Centaur*, a novel I have loved over the years, that I had decided would be an appropriate text for a Foundations of Education class for first and second year students who were interested in becoming teachers. During the semester I had made a point to emphasize how difficult the teaching profession was, and how very hard it was to be a teacher. Besides studying the perspectives on education of several influential American educators (John Dewey, Franklin Bobbitt, Jane Addams, Robert Hutchins, etc.), I had offered several case studies of student teachers who had struggled in the classroom to become teachers. One of the two chose to leave the profession after a particularly difficult and unrewarding student-teaching experience. I had recently given students an article I had published in *The Journal of Teacher Education*, entitled "Why Should I Be a Teacher?" which portrays the difficulties confronted by classroom teachers. I had suggested in the essay that teachers must be brave *because* the work is so hard and the rewards so intangible, so rare, and so uncertain.

*The Centaur* is the story of a teacher, George Caldwell, who struggles with the demands of the profession because he is such a good teacher. Like his mythological counterpart, Chiron, Caldwell tries to bring the children out of darkness, but in 20th century Olinger, Pennsylvania, this darkness seems pervasive and unending. "Knowledge is a sickening thing," Caldwell responds to poor Judith Lengel, who almost in tears says, "I get so sort of sick and dizzy just trying to keep it all straight." Caldwell's father had been a minister, but on his deathbed had asked, "Will I be eternally forgotten?" This doubt spoken by a man of faith plagues the son; it calls into

question the very solidity of the world. When Al Hummel comments "These are bad days," Caldwell responds, "It's no Golden Age, that's for sure."

I had given students sufficient time to read the book and asked them to keep a reading journal, though regretfully I didn't tell them how to go about doing it. I also gave my students a study guide which I asked them to fill out and bring to class. During the semester I had regularly engaged students in discussion about the assigned essays and book chapters, exploring issues such as the philosophy, history, and politics of education. I expected that by this late in the semester, everyone would be ready *and prepared* to engage in some intellectual discussion of *The Centaur*.

I was wrong. I was confronted by deep wells of silence. All I could hear in that classroom were the echoes of my own voice as I called down into the dark cavernous abyss. I felt not unlike the student teachers described in the two book chapters I had assigned: confused, lost, frustrated, and upset. But I had been teaching for 39 years! I felt angry and discouraged. I consciously reviewed my Bloom's taxonomy, tried to adjust the nature of my questions to his categories, searching for some way to stimulate conversation. Still, silence reigned. I said aloud (foolishly, because I knew no response would be forthcoming), "What is wrong with my questions? Why won't you respond? What questions would you prefer?" In the silence my students stared beyond me.

As I walked toward my office after class, I felt that this had been useless class, and that the time and the book had accomplished nothing. And then Hannah snuck up behind me and said tentatively, "Dr. Block, can I ask you a question?" Hannah was a student in the class from which I had just fled. "Sure," I responded, ("Please," I thought, "give me some insight into what I had done wrong in that class. Please help me be a better teacher!") Hugging her books to her chest she asked, "Have you ever read *The Sun Also Rises*?"

Not exactly what I expected and certainly not what I wanted, but at least it was a question! I said, "Yes, I've read the book several times. Why do you ask, Hannah?" She looked ahead, waited a second or three, and then asked, "What's the point?"

Now, this *was* an interesting question, and I realized that I could interpret it in at least one of two

ways. First, Hannah could be asking what was the point of reading the book at all! This approach called into question the very nature of the life I had chosen, but I was not prepared to engage in *that* discussion at this time and place. Its philosophical implications were so enormous that I feared venturing at all into this terrain. I wasn't ready to explain my life in front of the Student Union Building. Instead, I asked Hannah for further clarification. "What do you mean, Hannah, 'what is the point?'" "Well, she said, "What is the point of the book?"

Ah, I considered, I know where I am. Hannah wanted to know what was the meaning of the book; what was the book's theme? I have been here before. And if I could give my response to her in say, a single sentence or brief paragraph, I think she would have been very appreciative. After all, *points* are those places to which we head; arriving at some point justifies the effort, or at least, completes it. Without the point, many believe that the effort is meaningless. Unsure of the point of *The Sun Also Rises*, Hannah was wondering if she had wasted her time reading the book. "Why did you read that book?" she might be asked. "I don't know," she might respond. "It was a waste of time, actually. I don't know what the point of it was." On the one hand, if Hannah didn't get the point, then there was either something wrong with her or with the book; her question to me whether the book had a point led her away from her own potential failings.

I know that Hannah's is a pedagogical problem: Hannah learned to read *that* way — *to get the point* — in school. She learned this in part because her *teachers* had asked all of the questions, praising students for correct answers and voicing disapproval for wrong ones. Standardized and multiple-choice tests are forever asking what is the main idea in a selection. Students are constantly asked to uncover the *hidden* meaning of texts. Reading is seldom considered an activity that should be engaged in for its own sake. Students are rarely taught how to *make meaning* of the texts they are assigned to read. They are not taught how to interrogate the texts they are assigned. Rather, reading is done in order to "get the point" so that some question posed by someone else might be correctly answered. The question students most ask in school is "Will this be on the test?"



Hannah's question suggested a limited repertoire of questions. She was asking the only question that she had been taught to be legitimate: What is the point? And this is a pedagogical problem: we have organized education so that students only give answers; they don't ask questions.

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***Reading is seldom considered an activity that should be engaged in for its own sake. Students are rarely taught how to make meaning of the texts they are assigned to read. They are not taught how to interrogate the texts they are assigned.***

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But I think that this is really far more than a pedagogical problem. Hannah's question raises a social issue of some consequence. It suggests that she has learned that she should be focused on *ends*, not on *means*. This is a paradox because if we mean to create lifelong learners, a statement enshrined in *every* mission statement of *every* educational institution of which I am aware, then Hannah should be learning about means and not ends. "What is the point?" is a question about ends, not about means. I thought back to Phaedrus, in Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, who says that the top of the mountain defines the sides, but it is on the sides that life grows. Hannah's question concerned the point — the peak — and was blind to the sides.

I said, "Hannah, perhaps the book doesn't have a point." I tried to make a joke: "If books had points, then they would hurt people." Hannah didn't laugh. I continued, "But perhaps you might ask a different question." "Like what?" she asked. "Well, what kind of world does the book portray? Would you want to live in the world of *The Sun Also Rises*?" "No," she said. "Well, why not?" "Well, all they do is drink, and screw around, and criticize each other?" "Why do they do these things?" Her face wrinkled a bit, "I don't know."

This is a standard student response. I tell them that it is not true that they don't know but that either they don't trust what they do know, or that they do not realize that what is running through their minds is what knowing is all about. A question is the beginning of knowledge. "What do you think?" I asked Hannah. And for a few precious minutes, as we walked down the block on one of the first days of a too-brief Spring, Hannah and I talked about Hemingway's novel. I think Hannah may have learned a few things about *The Sun Also Rises* and maybe even about asking questions. And I learned that the failure of the class hadn't been all my fault, and I learned a bit about a new set of questions I might ask the next time I teach *The Centaur*.

What is my point here? Our students seek answers; even worse, they seek *the* answer, but they haven't the foggiest idea how to ask the questions. And why should they when almost all of their worth as students has depended on bubbling in answers to questions on standardized tests. Much of the time they are asked for answers to questions they have not asked. I suspect they do not know even that they ought to ask questions. In schools, at least, the question is merely the route to an answer, and if they do not have a ready answer, then they revert to silence and await the next question. Or if the answer is too ready, then they do not want to expend much energy to give it. They have not yet been taught to ask another question or to turn an answer into a question.

There is a story about a man who spends all of his wealth to purchase a chest filled with answers. When he opens the chest he discovers pieces of paper and on each one is a sentence: "Eat breakfast," "Marry him," "If you must," "Seventy-six." "Now," the man excitedly cries, "I have the answer to all things!" But what good are the answers without the right questions? Our students don't know how to ask questions because they have been taught to seek only the answers.

But the inability to ask meaningful questions is not unique to schools. Rather, I think that it has much wider social implications. We have created a society that is not interested in questions. We have come to expect and to value only the answer; we have placed all of our faith in the answer and none in the ques-

tion. The question leads us out into the unknown; the answer draws us back into the familiar.

The question implies a sense of mystery. There is a dangerous excitement in the question. Our society has lost its ability to appreciate the delight of the mystery, magic, and enchantment implicit in the question. Questions open the world, and answers close it down. Questions inspire movement, but answers render further movement unnecessary. Questions are the enemies of falseness, but the answer falsely promises fulfillment.

We are told that when the genome project is complete we will know everything there is to know about the human being. All questions about human behavior will finally be answered. But I do not believe this at all: Will the map of my genes tell me now why I have fallen in love with one and not another, and what I should do about it? Will it tell me why today I want oatmeal and not eggs for breakfast? How will knowing my genetic map improve my sense of humor or compassion?

The question acknowledges that there is more to know, and the answer puts an end to curiosity. The question opens the world to speculation, and the answer closes it to wonder. There is nothing beyond the answer, but by the question the world is open to possibility.

As a society we must restore the sense of mystery and enchantment to life so that our first thought is of the question and not the answer. There is nothing wrong with answers as long as they do not silence the question. The genome project itself was begun by a question, but its beauty seems despoiled by its promise of the finitude of the answer. What good is the answer without the right question? Why would I want to end all of the mystery and remove all enchantment from the world?

Hannah's question, "What is the point?" is a start and I hope my responses to her were the beginning of a whole new line of questions. We may have opened the world on our walk from a class that I thought had closed it.

# Creating a School With Soul

Richard Njus

**“We need to ask ourselves why we became educators. What do we want for our students? Do we want them to be efficient test takers or do we want them to be filled with the wonder of learning?”**

When parents send their children off to kindergarten they hope that they will be safe, instilled with the joy of learning and a sense of wonder, made to smile and laugh each day, fueled with a desire to explore the world, and that their creativity will be sparked. Although each child comes to school with different needs, the reality is that we continue to put all learners in the same box for learning as if all students are the same. We are told to judge all students by the same standards or testing procedures, which restricts the learner and impedes learning for a large proportion of our students. We grade our students' and schools' success by the score of a test given once each year and by our rating on government-mandated guidelines.

We need to ask ourselves why we became educators. What do we want for our students? Do we want them to be efficient test takers or do we want them to be filled with the wonder of learning? I believe that most teachers want the same for our students that a parent wants for their children: an education for the whole child where each child is provided the tools to reach his or her full potential. As educators, we have to say, “No! I am not accountable to the people who mandate the high risk test; I am accountable to the kids.” In short, we need to create schools with soul.

A school with soul is one where staff members work from the heart and keep the whole child at the center of the educational program. It is a school that educates minds and touches hearts. As Mary Pipher (1996, 87) puts it,

Children need to believe that the world is an interesting and safe place. The relationship between children and their teachers isn't incidental, but rather is the central component of their learning. Human development occurs within the context of real relationships. We learn from whom we love.



RICHARD L. NJUS has been an elementary principal for 30 years. He has worked with the U.S./China Center at Michigan State University on numerous projects, including the creation of a school in Beijing. He is the author of *Touching Hearts, Educating Minds*.



In my 35 years experience in education, 30 of them as an elementary principal, I have found that the culture for learning that we create in a school and the connections teachers make with students are critical for the success of a school and its teachers.

What makes a school with soul different from other schools is illustrated in an email one of my staff received from the parent of a former student:

The level of care and support from John's [name changed] teachers in his [current] school is nowhere near what you and other Deerfield teachers have. I am amazed that in the same school district, the gap can be this significant.

Of the four schools where I was the principal, two were new schools. The two de novo experiences are almost a case study in what is most important in the creation of an educational environment where students thrive academically, socially, physically, and spiritually. Most of my comments in this article relate to the last school I opened, Deerfield, a magnet school in Novi, MI, north of Detroit in 2000. Deerfield illustrates what a community can do when head and heart work in tandem.

Deerfield was the culmination of two years of preparation by a district cadre of administrators, teachers, parents, and an outside facilitator. Our intent was to take the strategies from research on best practices in teaching and learning and develop a school that met the learning styles, interests, and needs of all children. The cadre wanted to create a school that truly prepared students to take their places as whole persons in our global society.

Their mandate was to review research, primarily the Carnegie Foundation's Basic School program, visit successful schools, and create a program for Deerfield. The school program and design were very unique. Deerfield's program is built on a continuous progress model in a multi-age setting. Continuous progress looks at teaching and learning as a seamless progression at the student's own learning rate and pace — not the traditional standardized curriculum for all students at each grade level. Our school is designed in four K–4 multi-age houses with 120 students in each house. The educational program was based on the four themes of the Basic School: School as Community, Curriculum with Co-

herence, Climate for Learning, and Commitment to Character.

Yes, the design of the building and program make our school unique, but the real difference in the school is the culture that staff in partnership with parents created. The reason for "John's" mother's amazement in the significant difference in schools in the same school district was the underlying care and love that staff surrounded each student with in their learning experience at Deerfield.

### Creating a Soulful Culture

How does one create a school culture with such richness? First, one has to look at education and the role of educators differently. When we went to college we were taught that if we filled our stu-

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*We must always remember  
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dents' minds with knowledge and skills they would be successful. Education was a simple matter: Open mind, insert information. We need to rethink that understanding of education. The root meaning of the word *education* is not to fill up the students with information, but draw out something that the student already holds within. Education should be discovery. Children are born with the gift of discovery and wonder, but in traditional, government-mandated, test-driven education we insist so much on performing up to someone else's expectations that children soon lose their sense of wonder. In contrast, in a school with soul one tries to help students reach deep into their souls and reclaim the joy of learning.

We must always remember that we are not just educating minds, we are also touching the heart, the source of will, emotion, thoughts, and affection. The heart is the center of the whole person — intellect and body. It is the center of passion and love. We must help students better understand

themselves. The avenue to learning is from the heart to the head.

The culture of the school is the key factor in a school with soul. In my book, *Touching Hearts, Educating Minds* (Njus 2009, 99), I defined culture as “the living core that runs through an organization; those values and beliefs that don’t change.” The emotional connection of teachers with students is one of the core values of a school with soul. Parker Palmer (2007, 248) said, “What we teach will never take unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students’ lives, with our students’ inward teacher.”

A teacher creates the climate in the classroom. One of the most important decisions for one’s child each year is who his or her teacher will be. The teacher sets the tone for learning: Will it be a joyous place? Will it be a challenge to excel without causing frustration? Will one’s child be instilled with an excitement for the joy of learning? Will one’s child have the freedom to express themselves and reach full potential? We must hire teachers who realize the importance of their vocation, who love kids. If teachers truly love their students, they would do everything in their power to make sure that they learn and grow.

Student success should be judged not by test scores and grades, but by their success in life. Education is all about building a life — mind, body, and soul. Teachers who think this way connect in a rich way with their students and have a major impact on their lives. Therapist and author Chris Crutcher (2001) said

In all the years I worked fulltime as a therapist, I don’t remember a kid over the age of nine or ten who didn’t have a teacher in his life who had saved him.

Teachers who connect with their students help create a school with soul. They save kids and help them realize their fullest potential.

### **Creating a School with Soul**

So how does one create a school with soul? A soul culture has to be built on attitude and trust. It is a process. It takes three years to create a culture and six years to realize flow. Deerfield started with the development of a mission statement and a commit-

ment to the joy of learning. To create a soulful culture, staff members need to spend time together. When staff were assigned to Deerfield six months before it opened, we began to meet to talk about the school, to create teams, and begin the process of training and developing our program. We met at least once a month. One of the most heart warming and effective things we did to help us get to know each other and bring us together was having each staff member share his or her story. Most people do not have the opportunity to share their stories. Teaching is often an isolating career. We had teachers who had teamed for ten or more years together learn new things about each other. We laughed and cried together.

The summer before our school opened the school district arranged for us to spend three weeks together to prepare for the opening. We did a lot of program training and curriculum and staff development. We created personal profiles to help staff better understand themselves and each other. They also helped us realize how we need each other, that our combined talents make us better. We defined how we would work together and our decision-making process. Through the years we have begun holding our meetings in a Circle of Trust. We sit in a circle with nothing between us but open space, which helps create an opportunity for everyone to share, for everyone to be heard, and for us to reach the best decisions possible.

This concept of the Circle of Trust extends beyond staff training into the very fabric of the classroom and school. The eight guiding principles of the Circle are the very core of how students and staff relate to each in the school.

- *Come with the whole self.* This means being fully present. How many times do we talk to someone and they seem to be somewhere else? It means looking, listening, and being attentive.
- *Presume and extend welcome.* Help others feel they are valued members of the group. Give affirmation.
- *The Way: Listen, not invasions; Opportunity, not demand.* It is an invitation to take part in the conversation, not an invasion of the person’s

space or a demand that one take part. No one has to speak. You are offered the right to speak, but you may simply pass.

- *Listen with the "soft eyes" of compassion not judgment.* Soft eyes are thinking the best of the speaker. Von Goethe (n.d.) put it this way: "Treat a man as he appears to be, and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be."
- *Deep confidentiality.* What is said in the group stays in the group, which gives participants confidence that they can speak their truth freely. One cannot ever talk about what is said in the group unless the person who spoke brings it up.
- *When things get difficult, turn to wonder.* We do not always have the answers. We sometimes have to live in the question.
- *No fixing! No saving!* It is not our responsibility to set people straight. We are to help everyone pull what they want and need to learn from deep inside their core. It lets one realize their own need to change and learn from within. Change is much more effective when we change because we see the need rather than being forced by someone else.
- *Assume best intent.* Everyone sees life through a different lense, from different perspectives. It is accepting our differences as something positive rather than negative, and valuing the views of others.

When the staff embraces these simple rules for working together, when they model it, and when it is integrated into the classroom and becomes an attribute of the school culture, the school is well on its way to genuine soulfulness. The eight principles result in an openness to learn that increases engagement in learning. Staff and students become better listeners, and adults and students both feel freer to express themselves. Many more ideas and different perspectives arise from the discussions and the sense of accomplishment is almost palpable.

Our program was developed around a strong emphasis on character and high expectations for students.

Monthly assemblies are held to develop our school culture and the attributes of character. We emphasize the celebration of diversity and understanding of our cultural differences by integrating them in our daily instruction. Every year we hold an international festival with all our families to celebrate the diverse cultures represented in our school. We center our program and discipline on our school pledge, *Deerfield Explorers are caring responsible community members who respect themselves, others, and their environment.* We also engage our students in quality service learning activities.

Through the years we have enhanced our program with student-led conferences, student-created character assemblies and a buddy system between older and younger students. We also established programs to help students better understand themselves, such as personal profiles, the study of multiple intelligences, and the adoption of the Making Meaning program, which emphasizes comprehension, diversity, and character.

To create a school with soul, leadership is extremely important. The leader sets the tone for the school and waves the flag of the vision. Think of the greatest leaders in history. Why did people follow them? Passion. I remember that when I met with 60 teachers who were considering applying to open the new school, they wanted to know more about who I was than what the school was going to be. They wanted to feel comfortable that I would support them in the risky undertaking of opening a new school.

All the passion and effort has paid off for Deerfield school. We have great test scores; we have the highest state and federal ratings that schools can receive; we have extremely high parent approval; and, most of all, we have students who are excelling not only in academics but also in their personal growth. A parent whose children had been out of our school for a few years told me that he can identify the teenage children in his neighborhood who attended our school by how they are performing in school and by the character they display in the community.

Can the Deerfield experience be replicated anywhere? Without a doubt. There are pockets of soulful schools around the country and world. We don't have to think about changing the whole system; we just have to work to change our little piece of the sys-



tem. Twenty years ago some graffiti on a piece of the Berlin Wall was said to have read: "Many small people, who in many small places do many small things, can alter the face of the world." If we all do our part, we can change our schools. Our challenge is to dedicate ourselves to creating soulful schools that truly touch hearts and educate minds.

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# Is There Room for Spirituality in Canadian Legal Education And Practice?

Andrea Chisholm

**Spiritually based ideas continue to edge their way into the legal education consciousness.**



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The subject of spirituality is rarely considered or discussed by Canadian law students and lawyers in connection with their legal education or practice. Traditionally, those in the legal environment have been taught either implicitly or explicitly that this subject matter has nothing to do with effective, objective, or good lawyering, or possibly may even interfere with it. Humanistic legal scholar Marjorie Silver refers to this longstanding unease between spirituality and legal learning and work as the “deep ambivalence ... about the appropriate boundary between the personal and the public” that lawyers and other professionals generally share in Western societies (Silver 2007, xxxiv). Most lawyers seem to feel that their spirituality, personal religion or belief system, or lack thereof, is strictly a personal matter. But is it? And should it be?

Recent studies reveal law schools and the legal profession in Canada and other Western countries are immersed in a growing identity and moral crisis. Critics currently describe law school as a place with “little room for emotion, imagination and morality” (Hess 2002, 79) and lament that learning to think like a lawyer means “abandoning [one’s] ideals, ethical values and sense of self” (Hess 2002, 79). In recent years it has become increasingly difficult for law students and lawyers to derive a sense of meaning and service in their work. There is a deepening sense of spiritual poverty and despair in the profession. The sterile law school experience contributes to shaping lawyers who lose their way:

Here’s what ... many practicing lawyers know, but deny: the practice of law ... breaks all but

the highest spirits. The profession can no longer lay claim to being a calling: it has become a soul destroying business (Scott 2007, 44).

The current Western legal pedagogical and professional structure reflects a learning and working environment in which many law students and lawyers are experiencing an ever widening division between their original vocational goals and the reality of their chosen work. Many lawyers feel that their role has become "reduced to the caricature of the hired gun whose responsibility it is to do whatever the client wants without regard to the lawyer's own values and morals" (Allegretti 1996, 3). This hired gun or Rambo mentality is taught and instilled from the beginning of law school. The result of this widespread sense of ongoing personal versus work conflict is to create within many in the profession what Allegretti describes as a type of "moral schizophrenia" (1996, 18).

Law schools have also been increasingly criticized for placing too much emphasis on "the acquisition of knowledge and the development of reasoning skills" to the detriment of character development and the cultivation of qualities such as "fidelity, honesty, loyalty, and confidentiality" (Allegretti 1996, 32). They are too often viewed as "an instrument for wealth acquisition" rather than a vehicle for transformation, leadership development, and self-realization (Zajonc 2006, 1750). In the current era of neo-liberalism, globalization, and corporatization, Canadian law schools and firms have come under new fiscal and competitive pressures that have resulted in a shift from upholding law schools and other forms of higher education as public institutions serving the interests of justice and society to institutions adhering more to a corporate agenda and the needs of the global market (Arthurs 2001; Hornosty 2004). The result is that legal institutions are increasingly teaching students to serve morally neutral business interests, or what has been called "a great nothing ... the [status quo] hierarchy with no heart or centre to it" (Gabel 2004, 159). In this educational environment, the ideal of law as a calling with sacred or spiritual characteristics and origins is rejected and forgotten.

### **Is There Room for Spirituality in Law?**

Increasingly, it is being suggested that a more spiritual, morally based approach in education and work

will help students and lawyers become happier and healthier and experience a more meaningful professional law school experience and professional life. Given the current loss of meaning and direction in the profession and its institutions, it may be time to reflect on the possibility of welcoming new dimensions into the traditional legal story.

Is there room for spirituality in law in Canada? This paper examines whether law students and lawyers would be better served if more meaningful links were cultivated between spiritual ideas and practices and Canadian legal education and practice. Ways of learning and teaching spiritual practice are discussed with a view to shedding light on their existence and their potential for enhancing the law student and practice experience on many levels.

### **What Is Meant by Spirituality?**

Spirituality has been described and defined differently by thinkers across a variety of disciplines (Hall 2005). For example, European psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl (1985) believed that spirituality is connected to man's search for meaning, a search and journey that is intrinsic to being human and a central path to true happiness. Law professor David Hall describes spirituality as involving "the intentional decision to search for a deeper meaning in life and to actualize in one's life the highest values that can be humanly obtained" (Hall 2005, 7). Hall proposes that, while spiritual values and beliefs may be rooted in religious traditions, they can just as validly spring from other human experience. From this perspective, even atheist and agnostic lawyers can be spiritual if they are searching for what Hall describes as the "sacred" aspects of life and if their thoughts, words, and actions reflect the highest ideals of the profession and life. Pang widens the definition by adding that the spiritual is "a personal dimension that is in us whether or not we give it nourishment, attention or value" (2007, 495).

A small but growing group of humanistic and spiritually oriented legal scholars and practitioners are calling for a richer marriage between spirituality and legal education and practice (see Silver 2007). They argue that personal values and professional practices must be integrally related; that such integration is essential for practicing law as a healing



profession; and furthermore, that the absence of such integration “contributes to a kind of moral disconnect that threatens lawyers’ psychological and emotional well being” (Silver 2007, xxxiv). It is difficult to sustain interest and commitment to a course of study or work when one cannot find meaning in it aside from its material or temporal potential.

### Lawyers, Law Schools, and Brokenness

Timothy Floyd’s research in the area of spirituality and law reveals that the major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, are all centrally concerned with restoring relationships and loving and serving others. Above all, they are concerned with what Floyd (2007, 474) calls “healing brokenness.” In Floyd’s view, this brokenness is pervasive. It is profoundly evident at all levels of human existence: in divorced, dysfunctional, and abusive families, divided communities, the failure of formal institutions, the loss of meaningful traditions; in material excess, addiction, abduction, and other criminal aberrations; in the breakdown of the environment, escalating natural disasters, the destruction and extinction of entire ways of life; and in disputes from the personal to the global level. Law students themselves are often “broken” by the time they leave law school, even as they are taught that they will be expected to solve much of the “brokenness” around them once they leave the school environment. In their future professional work, they may act within the current system on behalf of individuals and organizations, often by instituting legal claims and responding to fallout arising from broken relationships, contracts, promises, lives. Therefore, it is critical that they are helped to reach this position of responsibility in a state that is as humanly whole as possible.

Floyd (2007, 474) points to spirituality as the way out of this brokenness: “Religious faith and spirituality embody the belief that brokenness is not the way the world is meant to be.” He and education reformer Parker Palmer (1998) emphasize the idea of a “hidden wholeness” in humanity espoused by Catholic spiritual writer Thomas Merton. Bringing spirituality into education, work, and life allows individuals to embrace and connect to each other and to everything living. Floyd observes that the word “religion”

comes from the Latin word *religare*, which means “to bind together”; and that a compelling and fundamental human desire is to bind together to heal ourselves and to make what is broken whole (Floyd 2007, 475). Legal participants need to draw on these dual spiritual impulses of healing brokenness and restoring wholeness when interacting with each other and others in legal study and practice. The traditional uses of intimidation, competitive tactics, and rule/rights-oriented justice often do not offer meaningful resolution. At this point in history, such traditions appear to be making the legal community feel ever more disconnected from their study and work and more personally broken.

As Floyd and others observe, law students and lawyers have to work among so much conflict. Presently, due to the nature of their educations and the structure of the Western legal system, many lawyers have been conditioned to exacerbate the situation by distancing clients and parties further via lawsuits and other aggressive claims. Metaphorical wars are constantly being fought. Learning to work this way and in this system begins in the highly competitive and adversarial atmosphere of law school (Floyd 2007; Kennedy 2004).

With a change in perspective things could be different. Precisely because they work in the midst of so much conflict, lawyers are presented with the power and opportunity to bring about healing, reconciliation, and resolution in many situations and for many people and organizations on a regular basis. To realize this goal, potential lawyers would benefit by being taught in law school the central importance of becoming self-aware and open to the possibility of helping, healing, and reconciling conflict in less harmful ways. Floyd talks about the need for lawyers to listen more closely to clients and colleagues at the outset to each given fact situation or story that presents itself to them. Law students need to be taught that careful listening and attention is “a central ethical issue” (Floyd 2007, 480) which lies at the heart of ideal professional behavior and interaction of those in helping professions such as law.

In legal education, the idea of carefully listening to clients in order to meaningfully discover their stories and concerns can get lost in the black letter teaching of doctrine, rules, procedures, and standard ways of

thinking and acting in the highly rational world of law. Students quickly learn that fighting to enforce rules and rights is key in the existing legal milieu. They are given little time to question or reflect on the deeper meaning or rightness of what they are learning and doing. This lack of reflection carries over into legal practice, where the answer to the question "What is truly going on with my client?" can be eclipsed by costly and excessive tactical maneuvering, time-consuming litigation steps, and linguistic and evidentiary obfuscation. In the interests of time and other constraints, lawyers can feel pressured to behave in a reductionist manner and fail to listen meaningfully to the client or opposing side, or omit to ask key questions or pursue deeper or more helpful insights.

### **Law is More Than a Game**

Much of legal education and practice tends to view law and its workings as a game rather than a human story. Sports metaphors abound in the legal arena. Emotions and restorative or care-oriented approaches are not encouraged. Words such as opponent, fight, rights, rules, win and lose are often heard in the legal arena; while words like story, journey, feeling, reflecting, reconciling, healing and restoring are rarely, if ever, used in typical legal scenarios. Each case become objectified as one of many competing cases. Yet one can become most effective as an advocate when one knows as much as possible about not only the law and rules of the game, but also about one's particular client and his/her situation. The needs, feelings, thoughts, and desires of the client often become lost, and the "winning" of a case can be hollow. The simple act of listening closely with no agenda and posing careful, thoughtful, personalized questions to a client can in itself bring about some healing and resolution (Floyd 2007; Hess 2002).

### **Law Schools Underutilize the Power of Their Own Myths and Narratives**

Law is full of rich story, but law schools use little personal or professional narrative or storytelling to give meaning to the law school experience. William Bennett (2001) has observed that the current pedagogical approach in legal education tends to discount or dismiss the nature and power of narrative

and its ability to reinforce moral paradigms. His research in this area reveals how "the instinct for [their] own narrative" is challenged by law students' "educational fiat or training" (Bennett 2001, 24). Yet personal and group narrative has long been recognized as being primary to the human journey and psyche, (Bennett 2001; Campbell 1988; 2008) and Bennett reminds legal educators that it gives voice to many lessons and insights that would otherwise be excluded from traditional, scientific legal analysis. Moreover, he cautions that individuals cannot dismiss and replace their own moral stories about who they are without serious consequences to their personhood, since emotions, desires, hopes, values, ideals, the hidden and the unconscious, all are expressed through narrative (Bennett 2001). In law school curricula, "the devaluation of professional mythology has been systematic and largely intentional because the indefinite character of mythology and the narrative method is conceived as an impediment to the scientific methodology of the law" (Bennett 2001, 78). A student's evolving understanding of who he/she is can be harmed or negated within the context of the rule-oriented law school environment lacking in personal narrative. The end result is loss to the student's ultimate capacity for meaningful professional and moral growth.

Not only do law students stand to lose their individual narratives in law school, but the profession as a whole has largely lost its original "tribal mythology" of law as a just and noble endeavor and a statesmanlike, service-oriented profession with a purpose and meaning greater than its collective members. The lawyer as a champion of just causes has generally become a lost ideal. Bennett connects this loss to Carl Jung and his ideas on the origin and meaning of myths by pointing to Jung's view of myths as original revelations of the preconscious psyche (Bennett 2001, 53). Ideally, law students and lawyers view the study and practice of law as a personal and vocational journey to which they have been called, along with fellow members of the legal "tribe." Lawyer myths reveal to the legal professional tribe and its members what Bennett (2001, 52) describes as the "great mysteries of the law and the transcendent power of the profession." Bennett (2001, 53) quotes Jung's assertion that a tribe's mythology is ulti-

mately "its living religion," whose loss is always "a moral catastrophe."

Understanding these ancient and sacred links is a critical precondition to achieving success in revitalizing the spiritual and moral state of legal education and the profession. One spiritually oriented goal of law schools could be to re-establish and authenticate their mythological power by rebuilding, re-activating, and adapting their moral and narrative function, thereby restoring and enhancing both teaching and learning potential (Bennett 2001, 22). Law students would benefit from the celebration and cultivation of their own personal narratives within the framework of their professional legal aspirations, and from increased exposure to uplifting stories and experiences of ideal lawyer/leaders, and positive traditions of the profession. Such exposure would provide inspiration for students to resurrect old ideals and create their own new stories to reinvigorate the profession as a calling and work to restore its altruistic identity.

In the new millennium, it is important to not only resurrect but also renew and adapt the traditional law narrative. Currently, it remains imprisoned to a large extent in the Western masculine archetype reflecting Eurocentric, white male-oriented ideals of rational judgment and competitive, adversarial thinking. Bennett and others have argued that the linear reasoning and oppositional decision-making so highly valued in the legal education paradigm tend to develop a lack of balance in lawyers as people (Allegretti 1996; Bennett 2001; Gilligan 1982). In law, traditionally, the more "feminine" voice, which "roots itself in context and human experience and which makes true justice possible" (Bennett 2001, 99) has been repressed and excluded from professional development. This lack of balance in lawyers has contributed to the current personal, pedagogical, and spiritual crisis experienced and/or witnessed by many in the law schools and profession.

### **Re-Imagining Law as a Helping Profession**

In the helping professions such as social work, psychological counseling, medicine, and the religious ministries, the habits of listening, awareness, mindfulness, and/or meditation are central to the work while also allowing for the ongoing spiritual

development of the listener/counselor (Floyd 2007). Law is also a helping profession. As such, its students, members and institutions could benefit powerfully by studying the therapeutic approaches to client communication and problem resolution used in other helping professions. In learning and developing more meaningful listening and communicating habits, students, professors, lawyers, and the public could collectively experience law in a more healing and effective way. If, as Pang (2007) asserts, the spiritual is an inherent part of all human beings whether we acknowledge or value it or not, why not acknowledge and value it in the legal environment?

The legal profession can start by incorporating into its educational pedagogy ways to treat its own students humanely, in part by teaching them to view themselves not as fighters but as advocates and agents of healing and reconciliation. Professors could ask themselves: What am I doing? What is going on in my class? With my students? How can I be more emotionally and spiritually aware and present in my work; and teach my students to do the same? Those involved in legal education could create more room in the classroom for their students to explore the status quo and ask questions such as: What does being a law student/lawyer mean to me? Why do I want to be one? What do I expect to think/feel/act like in my study/work as a law student/lawyer? Does this law school provide a humanistic and healthy learning and teaching environment? How can I contribute to that ideal? How do I understand the terms "human," "emotional," and "spiritual"? How can I be a student and lawyer who thinks, acts, and feels with all of my cognitive, emotional, and spiritual intelligence capacities? How can I bring wholeness and humanity to my studies, work, and life? The discussion of spirituality and law, listening, healing, and making whole infrequently occurs in law schools and organizations in Canada. Opportunities for reflection or deep discussion about what legal education and lawyering should mean and be are eclipsed by more immediately compelling discussions of critical legal analysis, practical applications of doctrine, and other strategic or temporal matters. Rather than giving life to the sacred and spiritual in their students, law schools and organizations usually stifle it.



### **Integrating Spirituality and Legal Education/Practice**

Perhaps the most challenging part of envisioning teaching and practicing law as a spiritual experience is the absence of clear theoretical or practical frameworks to assist law teachers and practitioners in moving beyond the traditional law school approach of transmitting, measuring, testing, competing, winning, and losing. Some ideas and strategies for incorporating a more therapeutic or spiritual framework into the broader legal education pedagogy and practice have been recently suggested by various spiritually minded legal reformers.

#### **Comprehensive Law**

One of the more recognized terms currently gaining visibility in the growing Western humanistic law movement is Comprehensive Law, a term coined by Susan Daicoff, as a way to describe an interconnected set of humanizing, holistic approaches to the study and practice of law. Professor Daicoff chose this term because it covers a wide-ranging emerging group of theories and practices favoring the relational, care oriented legal resolution of matters (Daicoff 1999; 2004). The Comprehensive Law movement is made up of what Daicoff characterizes as "vectors" or branches of therapeutic and humanistic teaching and practice approaches espoused by various humanistic education advocates. Daicoff names approximately ten vectors, including preventive law, procedural justice, therapeutic jurisprudence, therapeutically oriented preventive law, transformative mediation, restorative justice, holistic justice/lawyering, collaborative law, creative problem solving, and the problem-solving court movement. In addition, she points out newly emerging vectors including law and spirituality, mindfulness meditation in law, and humanizing legal education (Daicoff 2000; 2004).

While they all differ somewhat, the vectors are described by Daicoff as sharing in common two main goals: (a) the desire to optimize human well-being and add harmony to the ongoing relationships between people, in communities, and in the world; and (b) caring about and making room for considerations beyond the strict legal rights of the parties involved, such as personal needs, resources, and goals (Daicoff 2004). These extra-legal factors are considered when

choosing strategies and planning outcomes mutually agreed upon by lawyers and clients.

The vectors described by Daicoff are different from and more sophisticated than the approaches and practices traditionally taught in law schools. They consider the immediate case at hand not in isolation, but as part of the many complex, dynamic facets that typically characterize a client's personal and professional concerns and relationships. Rabaut describes the Daicoff vectors as being rooted in "heart stuff": qualities such as "collaboration, healing, restoration, peace-building and human connection." Rabaut points to Comprehensive Law qualities as having always been considered by the legal profession to be less valuable in determining legal outcomes, in that they are not intellectually based or typical "head stuff." (cited in Stahura 2003, 26). Comprehensive Law, however, does not advocate a blanket rejection of teaching the head stuff or intellectual aspects such as doctrinal knowledge and analytical skills; it continues to recognize such knowledge and skills as a fundamental part of a comprehensive legal education and practice. The focus of the movement and its proponents is to call for more recognition of the human relational aspects of practicing law, beginning in the law schools.

#### **The Comprehensive Law Movement Helps to Develop Ethic of Care Lawyering**

Promoting human well-being and considering factors other than strict legal rights fits the instincts and character of individuals who possess what has been described as "a feeling preference or an ethic of care" (Daicoff 2004, 192). It has been proposed that an ethic of care-oriented perspective is central to enlightened moral reasoning and decision-making (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 2005). The Comprehensive Law movement is attractive in the sense that it calls for caring and ethical decision-making in the legal education and practice context. Many of the vectors or branches of Comprehensive Law, such as creative problem solving or preventive lawyering, optimize human well-being by preserving or improving human relationships. Students and lawyers with a feeling preference or an ethic of care approach to problem resolution "inherently value human relationships and interpersonal harmony"

in their study and work environment; and would benefit from more exposure to Comprehensive law ideas and practices (Daicoff 2004, 192). This type of educational and practice approach also encourages and allows students and lawyers to more easily bring their own personal moral values into learning, teaching, and work-related situations. Having a core moral base in turn improves student, professor, and lawyer mental and spiritual health (Daicoff 2004; Vogel 2001).

The growing popularity and use of Comprehensive Law ideas in Western legal education and practice reflects an encouraging shift in terms of perspective: More legal processes are becoming preventative and therapeutic rather than adversarial and punitive. They are slowly becoming guided and propelled by a desire for what lawyer Patrick Wiggins describes as "a desire for wholeness" rather than "a fear of loss" (cited in Stahura 2003, 29). Canadian law schools and their participants would benefit greatly by widely embracing and centralizing the ideas of this movement in their pedagogy.

### **Specific Spiritually Oriented Teaching Strategies and Courses**

David Hall (2005, 196) has written that "if [society] wants law students to be less stressed, depressed and conflicted, then legal education must teach to the hearts and souls of its students and not just to their minds." Law schools are places where many students discover law but lose a part of themselves in the process. Hall suggests that legal institutions, and law teachers, and senior lawyer/mentors as individuals can adopt specific administrative and individual strategies to prevent this spiritual crisis from happening. The following are examples of such strategies.

#### **Institutions**

Law schools leaders can show that they understand the value inherent in a more spiritual pedagogical approach by adopting broad institutional initiatives such as: (a) articulating a more open, holistic, inviting vision of lawyering in a compelling way in a general address to each incoming set of students; (b) communicating to the student body that the law school sees the law as a serious moral and

spiritual calling and inviting students to dynamically reflect on why they are at law school and providing ongoing opportunities to do so; (c) inviting students and instructors to investigate, discuss and analyze ethical dilemmas throughout the curriculum involving issues such as racial, cultural, or economic class conflicts and to look for deeper spiritual and moral issues within typical legal problems; and (d) providing for mandatory courses/course sessions wherein students are asked to identify conflicts between their own values and those of the profession and asking how they plan to resolve such conflicts (Hall 2005).

#### **Individuals**

A teacher's ability to know his or her students and subject well depends heavily on self-knowledge. Good teaching "cannot be reduced to technique" but emanates from the personal identity and integrity of the teacher (Palmer 1998, 10). Teaching with the mind, heart, and spirit together is education at its best (Hess 2002; Palmer 1998). All three elements need to be interwoven holistically into pedagogical and professional discourse. Such an approach would be a radical departure from the norm for most traditionally educated law instructors. Law teachers can more effectively connect to their students by bringing their own unique experiences, perspectives, talents and strengths into dialogue and practice in the classroom. For example, if a teacher has literary or artistic ability and knowledge, he or she could teach a subject through the use of visual or performing art and the messages and work of literature or artists. While perhaps not immediately apparent to some law teachers, the subject of law, with its foundation rooted in story and human drama, particularly lends itself to such an aesthetic pedagogical approach. In diversifying and deepening their individual teaching approaches, law teachers can more richly honor their own personal diversity as well as that of their students. The general ideal aim would be to create environments in the law school and workplace where participants feel free to employ the methods and techniques that allow them to openly reveal themselves and encourage their students and peers to do the same (Hall 2005; Palmer 1998).

### **The Hale and Dorr Course: A Working Example of a Spiritually Based Law Course**

The Hale and Dorr course is an innovative course that focuses on values, spiritual growth, professional fulfillment and leadership in the study and practice of law. It was developed primarily by David Hall and Professor Jane Scarborough at Northeastern University School of Law in conjunction with the Boston law firm of Hale and Dorr (Hall 2005). In the course, students and lawyers together are asked to list the values that are important to them. They then use the values to develop a personal mission statement for the profession. The point of the statement is to encourage students to reflect on and clarify their values; to see which values conflict with those of the profession; and to keep the statement to use as a personal compass to accompany them on their continuing journey in the profession (Hall 2005, 218). These statements are then compiled into a broader class mission statement. A common theme in the individual mission statements is the theme of law serving some noble purpose in society: Typically reflected in the overall perspective of students as well, is the concept of law as a calling to public service, which evokes in participants "a spiritual notion of their work" (Hall 2005, 215).

Another assignment requires each student to write a letter to themselves about how they see themselves as lawyers and what they hope to be in the future. These sealed letters are later mailed to the students, unopened, five years later, after they graduate. In this small way, the course succeeds in "institutionalizing [an] act of self-reflection and self-renewal" (Hall 2005, 219). Over time, those who have taken part in the course tend to experience the clarification and development of their values. The course has been positively received by all participants, for whom it has made a difference in their education and work. It provides a workable example of ways available for use by law schools and firms to work together to embed more spiritual, value-based thinking into law school curriculum and practice; an example to which Canadian law schools and firms can look for inspiration and practical guidance.

### **The Reflective Lawyer Course, Suffolk University Law School: Reflection in Practice**

The Reflective Lawyer course was created by Clinical Law Professor Cheryl Connor at Suffolk University Law School in Boston. The course is linked to required clinical practice experiences undertaken by the students. Its goal is to assist law students in transforming their consciousness and understanding of the legal education environment and professional worlds; and in reflectively creating their own roles in those environments (Gabel 2002). Professor Connor's class borrows from the Indigenous tradition and convenes in a "sacred circle," wherein students are encouraged to explore their states of mind and emotion in relation to law school and their clinical placements. The course content explores Eastern and Western teachings about the nature of suffering and injustice, and students are engaged in meditation, contemplation, and prayer (Gabel 2002). Students are able to discuss issues, problems, and experiences connected to their clinical practice that may have affected or upset them in some way. They are required to keep weekly journals expressing their highest desires and aspirations in connection with their legal and wider lives. In many ways, the course is a radical departure from the typical law school experience. Connor has noted that student response to the course has been positive and enthusiastic; many welcome the opportunity to take part in something different even though it involves risk on their part. The Reflective Lawyer course demonstrates that integrating spiritual practices and law succeeds well when methods such as Connor's are used. In the Canadian context, if offered as part of the clinical or working experience, such practices would allow space for the development of intuitive, emotional, and spiritual legal voices along with practical skills.

### **Developing Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) in Law School Students**

Professor Danah Zohar and Dr. Ian Marshall have studied spiritual intelligence (SQ) and suggest that it lies at the heart of human innovation and creative leadership (Zohar & Marshall 2000). They further suggest that SQ be developed and even assessed by way of what is essentially an exercise in reflection. To

that end they have devised in their research a series of questions representing possible spiritual paths or journeys. Some questions suggested by Zohar & Marshall (2000) for reflection within these paths are:

- What is your present moral code? How do you follow it?
- Consider an example of personal behavior that moves you. What are its pros and cons? Are there examples of rebels or rogues with whom you identify? What can you learn about yourself from that?
- Is justice important to you? For everyone, or just a few groups with whom you can identify?
- Have you ever felt that you could lay down your life for certain people or causes?
- Are you willing to defend what you value, even if it has no chance of being accepted by others?
- Have you ever experienced something holy, sacred, or as an intelligent source of energy larger than yourself?
- If you were to die tonight, would you feel that your life has been worthwhile?

Some of these questions for assessing spiritual intelligence appear to be particularly relevant for law students/lawyers. Studies show that upon originally entering law school, many young lawyers are idealistic and view their future in law as not simply a job or profession but a calling to serve the interests of justice and the public, particularly those who have no voice or whose voice is compromised in some way. By the end of law school, many lose this perspective and come to think the opposite: They have learned to remove emotion, passion, and spiritual ideals from legal considerations (Allegretti 1996; Bennett 2001; Daicoff 2004). Upon graduation, many students, especially those carrying heavy debt, consider their original views to be naïve, simplistic, unattainable, idealistic, impractical, and/or unprofitable. They limit their work opportunities to those that will offer the greatest chance to make the most income. Incorporating some type of ongoing spiritual assessment or reflection into the law school curriculum and law

firm practice would help to reverse this trend. It would communicate to students and lawyers that the powers that be value the importance of spiritual intelligence and reflection in those whom they are teaching and leading. Making such discourse central to law school pedagogy and professional practice would reinforce to lawyers the idea that law is the calling many originally thought it was: a calling to which one must bring all of one's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and moral resources.

### **Do Humanistic Approaches Leave Room For the Traditional Approaches?**

Advocating and implementing the caring, humanistic methods and practices espoused in Comprehensive law and spiritually oriented lawyering does not entail a complete rejection of traditional status quo approaches. While humanistic law approaches generally provide wider dimensions, more customized solutions, and richer processes for teaching the resolution of human conflicts and legal problems, they are usually presented and suggested as a complement to, rather than replacement of traditional adversarial legal approaches, which are recognized as having continuing intrinsic value (Allegretti 1996; Daicoff 1999; 2004; Rhode, 2000). Traditional adversarial law approaches remain necessary in situations of conflict involving individuals, groups, or corporations that refuse to negotiate or collaborate, or cannot come to resolution owing to profound differences in position (Daicoff 2004). The traditional approach remains the best — and sometimes only — hope of upholding and setting legal precedents at common law for some individual rights, as well as vital public values: “Certain fundamental rights ... and laws remain only a dream unless enforced by the courts” (Allegretti 1996, 83).

In the context of judicial influence on U.S. education, Allegretti uses the example of the groundbreaking U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to show that “no one can deny the pivotal role that lawyers and courts have played in defending and extending the rights of minorities” (Allegretti 1996, 83). In the *Brown* case, the Court established enduring recognition of the critical importance of equality of educational opportunity in a



democratic society when it held that “education is the most important function of ... governments [and] ... education is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms” (Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483). Judicial decisions of this nature authoritatively reinforce important social values, and their broad public impact can give new momentum to movements and groups that struggle for democratic ideals such as equality in education and other areas of society (Wise 1968).

There is a generally held belief that the adversarial system not only “protects core public values” but also reinforces and substantiates the ideals of individual dignity, autonomy, accountability and participation that mark democratic, humanitarian societies (Allegretti 1996; Rhode 2006; Spaulding 2008). Such ideals are perhaps even more compelling in criminal matters, where defense lawyers are viewed as “the quintessential symbol of the lawyer as advocate” (Menkel-Meadow 2005, 96). In criminal adversarial proceedings, defense lawyers act as the voice of the accused in ensuring that the principles of the presumption of innocence, the legal requirement to establish proof beyond a reasonable doubt to convict, the right of an accused to remain silent, and the right of appeal are upheld as powerful legal safeguards afforded to the accused (Cooper 2004; Datt 2009).

In addition to relying on publicly promulgated safeguards, members of the public requiring legal presentation may prefer the adversarial system and settings based on “pragmatic grounds”: They may simply feel more comfortable with the formality and inherent societal acceptance and transparency of the process:

Adversary system values permeate our culture and are so deeply embedded as to constitute a dominant conceptual and discursive frame.... There are deep layers of reliance and desire bound up in the imagination of adversary advocacy ... [as it is one of our] fundamental institutional commitments ... even a pragmatic justification of the adversary system ... carries enough weight to enjoy a relatively strong presumption of validity. (Spaulding 2008, 1407-8)

Currently, while both traditional and newer legal theoretical and procedural approaches have strong

proponents and detractors, no single legal theory or practice approach is “uniformly superior” to any other (Rhode 2000, 133; see also Daicoff 2004). In some cases, adversarial and more spiritually oriented approaches can be intertwined, or even practiced side by side. Proponents of new methods do emphasize that more caring and therapeutic resolution alternatives “should not be second class compared to traditional law” (Daicoff 2004, 193). Proponents of Comprehensive Law hope that the ideas and practices favored by this movement will gain a central place in future legal education and practice. The caring relational approach is considered to be especially helpful in situations where a legal matter involves parties who will continue to be involved in some sort of ongoing personal or working relationship with each other after the matter at hand is resolved (for example, family law cases involving ongoing custody issues) or where there is significant disparity in terms of litigation resources, such that it may affect the outcome (Daicoff 2004; Rhode 2006). Currently more women, minorities and mature students are entering Western law schools, and it is these nontraditional students in particular who are seen as likely to be drawn to learning and practicing law in these relational, humanistic ways (Daicoff 2004; Gilligan 1982; Guinier et al. 1997).

Given all the above considerations, care would have to be taken not to present the ideas and practices espoused by the Comprehensive law movement to law students as inferior to or less valuable than traditional adversarial law approaches:

The perception that such law is “touchy-feely” — what soft hearts do because they just cannot cut it in litigation or what one does if one flunks out of litigation or fails at traditional law — is enormously detrimental to the success of this movement. (Daicoff 2004, 193)

Ideas and practices of the movement could perhaps best be presented as a mainstream alternative equal in value to the more traditional ways of learning and practicing law. The ideal approach would be to teach all law students in both traditional and Comprehensive Law methods, ideals, philosophies, and practices so that they can utilize and offer any or all of these approaches in their work. In this way, legal

institutions will provide present and future members with a wider variety of tools with which to involve and assist clients in owning, resolving, and even preventing legal conflicts.

### Spiritual Law Schools and Profession: The Ideal

Spiritually based ideas continue to edge their way into the legal education consciousness, as evidenced by the growing spiritual education movement based primarily in the U.S. but far less evident in Canada. While many aspects of the traditional adversarial system of justice remain valuable and integral to legal pedagogy and practice, the inclusion of a spiritual dimension in legal pedagogy is key to bringing law students and lawyers out of their present identity crisis and moving them toward meaningful change. Without developing a soul, the schools and the profession will continue to lose worthy students and lawyers.

This paper explores some emerging spiritual and holistic learning and teaching ideas from different philosophies, movements, and learning disciplines that appear to hold significant promise for enlightening and humanizing Canadian legal education and practice. Some of these ideas and strategies are now being successfully applied in current law school pedagogy and curriculum, particularly in the U.S. They are also flowing into professional practice. The ideas and practices discussed in this paper could be used to create a more caring and value-oriented legal environment in Canada. Such strategies, if embraced and applied meaningfully by committed participants in the legal community, have the potential to make legal education and practice more widely therapeutic, cognitively sophisticated, emotionally intelligent, and morally and spiritually meaningful.

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# Columbine and the Jefferson County Open School

## Reflections on Posner's *Lives of Passion, School of Hope*

Chris Mercogliano

**Berserk expressions of rage like the Columbine shootings are a byproduct of anonymity, disconnection, and denial — none of which were evident at the Open School.**

It was one of the most bizarre days in a life that has seen its share of the unexpected. I sat proofreading a magazine article in the Jefferson County Open School, having reached the suburban Denver alternative at around 10:00 a.m. with eight 7th and 8th grade students and another teacher from the Albany Free School. We were en route to the annual conference of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools, which was being held that year in the mountains about an hour's drive to the north. The publicly funded Open School, which serves about 550 pre-K–12 students and utilizes a non-graded, self-paced, and self-directed curriculum, is a fellow NCACS member and had generously agreed to let us spend the day and night there before we headed up to the conference early the following morning.

While the kids were in the gymnasium burning off the pent-up energy from 2½ days of confinement on the train, I had sought refuge in the quiet of the library. It didn't take long to notice something was amiss. The staff person that picked us up at the Amtrak station, as well as the principal and several teachers upon our arrival at the school, had all been quite warm and friendly. But now, even though there appeared to be an unusually high volume of traffic in and out of the room, I suddenly seemed invisible.

Puzzled, I looked up from my work long enough to realize that the librarian and a growing number of other adults were staring up at a small television screen mounted in a corner of her office behind the circulation desk. One by one the small, hushed



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crowd dispersed hurriedly past me, each face creased with alarm.

After everyone else had cleared out, the librarian came over to me and calmly introduced herself. She apologized for not having done so sooner, and then she uttered those fateful words, "*But we have a situation here.*" Apparently there was a shooting rampage underway at nearby Columbine High School, located only five miles down the same busy avenue. News reports were still sketchy, but it was known that a number of students had been shot and the shooters were still at large. Equally stunned, I thanked her for letting me in on what was going on, put away my papers, and rushed back to the gym to find my kids still happily bouncing around on a thick stack of tumbling mats. They had been too noisy to hear the wail of sirens and whump-whumping of news and police helicopters that were now plainly audible outside.

Thus I was presented with a surreal lens through which to view the very different kind of school that is the subject of Rick Posner's recently released *Lives of Passion, School of Hope* (2009). Like this reflection, Posner's book is a story within a story, or in Posner's case, several stories. The author's primary mission is to give the reader a straightforward, up-close look at a school that operates according to a model bearing little resemblance to the standardized and standards-driven approach of the overwhelming majority of public schools in the U.S. Along the way he also describes the school's highly interesting evolution as staff, students, and parents continued to improvise and experiment after the school opened, and then he shares the personal stories of numerous former students — as well as of his own conversion from skeptical school bus driver and conventional Jefferson County high school teacher to committed and valued member of the Open School staff.

Finally, and probably most significantly, Posner, armed with a detailed follow-up survey completed by nearly half of the 865 graduates who attended the school between 1976 and 2002, provides an authoritative response to the most frequently asked question about unconventional schools: "It all sounds so wonderful — no tests or grades; kids following their own interests at their own rate and having a voice in school affairs — but what happens after they leave?"

In other words, does this liberal, touchy-feely approach to education really work?

Perhaps, therefore, it is fitting to cut straight to the answer, which is a resounding and unequivocal "yes," and then backtrack to Posner's explanation of the Open School model and why it works so well. According to the survey, 91% of the respondents attended college, in many instances prestigious ones, and together they achieved an average GPA of 3.44. 85% successfully completed their degrees, compared with a national average of only 19% of American ninth graders, and 25% went on to earn graduate degrees. And as an interesting aside, 20% are now pursuing careers in education, meaning that the school is sowing seeds of change in a system that desperately needs new vision.

More importantly to this reader, Posner takes us beneath the kind of raw statistical data that reflects today's hyperemphasis on material success. With personal anecdotes collected from interviews he conducted in conjunction with the survey, he shows us why so many alumni reported feeling much better prepared for college than their conventionally educated peers. Quoting Anne, class of 1990:

I noticed a dramatic contrast between myself and other freshman students in the dorm. This was the first taste of freedom for so many students, and they seemed to literally not know what to do with themselves. This was no novelty for me; and although I was *far* from being any sort of goody two shoes, I was ready to get to work, not just to party as much as possible. Many of my peers felt later that their freshman year had been wasted; I had no regrets.

Observing others struggling with the independence and responsibility necessary to enjoy a smooth transition into college life was a common refrain in the interviews. Numerous alumni also emphasized that, because they already possessed an ingrained sense of ownership of their education, they had no trouble with the lack of academic supervision in college. Setting good goals and choosing good courses, managing time well, and knowing when and how to seek help were second nature to them because they already had years of practice directing their own learning. Moreover, college for them wasn't a matter

of playing the grade game and taking the path of least resistance to your degree. It was about pursuing your interests and passions for their own sake.

Which brings us to the model itself, and why nearly 90% of the responding alumni rated their Open School experience as a positive influence in their continuing education and their adult lives beyond. The centerpiece of the model, according to Posner, is the staff/student advisory system. Every student meets weekly with an advisor, whose role is to provide support with social and emotional issues as much as with academic ones. The fact that every single student in the building has a significant, trusting relationship with at least one adult cannot be overstressed. Combined with the staff mantra — “mentor first, teach second” — it means in no uncertain terms that the model fully recognizes the reality of Joseph Chilton Pearce’s classic one-line dictum, “The head will follow the heart every time.”

Together with their advisors, students construct their own individual Mutually Agreed-upon Plan (MAP), which consists of a set of learning goals and strategies, a schedule of classes and projects, and the various means by which their accomplishments will be evaluated — with self-evaluation a major component. Students are free to shape their plan around their own interests, and experiential learning is encouraged at every turn. Trips, internships and apprenticeships, and service and other out-of-school projects are all staples of a typical Open School day.

Advisors also meet regularly in a group setting with all of their advisees, as well as in smaller triads to insure that every student develops a facility for forming meaningful ties to others. It should be noted here that every adult participant in daily school life — administrators, teachers and assistants, interns, parent volunteers, secretaries, janitors — is considered an important member of the staff. Add to this the school’s democratic governing structure, in which students have an equal say regarding the philosophy, curriculum, and everyday operation of the school and are also proportionally represented on staff and administration hiring committees, and it is clear that the Open School model places an exponentially greater emphasis on community than the conventional model.

What I appreciate most about *Lives of Passion, School of Hope* is that with a minimum of the lingo and rhetoric found in most alternative education writings, the author beautifully articulates all of the core elements that must be present in order for a school truly to be a place where all of its students flourish. Just as Joe Pearce claims, when children are well-nurtured and bonded to others; when they are trusted to act responsibly; when their feelings and opinions are respected; when the growth of self-knowledge is encouraged; and when they are set free to seek out their own meaningful challenges and to learn from their own experience, their development into intelligent, sociable, and mature persons is all but assured.

This basic truth was everywhere in evidence for the rest of the fateful, tragic day of my visit. I was immediately impressed by the fact that the school refused to wall itself off from the horrific events at Columbine by tightening into a business-as-usual state. In fact, I observed quite the opposite. As news about the massacre spread among the students and staff, many of whom had friends, colleagues, and former students who attended Columbine, I saw impromptu discussions about the crisis breaking out in every room into which I poked my head. By 2:00 p.m. a large group of high school-age students were conducting a highly emotional meeting to brainstorm and organize ways for the Open School to offer support to the students and staff at Columbine. The sense of connectedness and purpose was palpable.

Later that evening, as I tried to digest the grisly details of what the world now knew was a well-planned massacre carried out by two deeply alienated Columbine students, I found myself saying to my co-chaperone Sandy that this kind of disaster would never occur at a place like the Open School. No, I reflected, berserk expressions of rage such as this are a byproduct of anonymity, disconnection, and denial — none of which were evident at the Open School.

It’s not as though, as Posner is careful to point out in the book, the Open School doesn’t admit students who are quite lost or angry when they first enroll. In fact, the school sees plenty of them because the reason many students seek out the Open School is that they didn’t fit in or couldn’t keep up in conventional

schools. But then the school immediately begins to work its magic, which is perhaps summed up best by Jean from the class of 1979:

I remember my first day of school. I saw an overweight, weird-looking kid on the playground and expected the taunting and name calling to begin. It never did, and I saw that this kid was accepted, even welcomed at this school. I knew I was in a very different place.

Meanwhile, a decade has passed since Columbine. The ensuing war on school violence, with all of its heightened security and lockdown drills, has not prevented deeply disturbed students elsewhere from committing mass murder against their peers. Like at Virginia Tech two years ago, where more than twice as many were killed, the back story is always one of exclusion and isolation — and no one noticing and responding to a young person's pain before he is driven to the ultimate act of desperation.

Thus the terribly important timing of Posner's book. It is a must-read for anyone concerned with the current state of public education in this country; not only because it contains an effective remedy for school shootings, but also because it addresses all of the failings of a conventional school model that only continues to drift farther away from helping children develop the knowledge, skills, and maturity needed to lead happy, successful, and engaged adult lives.

The Jefferson County Open School, we must keep in mind, is not just some small, private alternative for a few fortunate kids. It is a full-scale public school — and not a charter school either, which means it is not taking away resources from the rest of the system. Above all, it has withstood the test of time. For nearly forty years the Open School has been turning out graduates that are successful by anyone's measure, and furthermore, thanks to Posner, this remarkable success has now been thoroughly documented.

Or is it really so remarkable that an educational model which both nurtures each child's uniqueness and also functions as a deeply interconnected community is a model that works?

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# The Organic Infrastructure of Transformative Education

Clifford Mayes

**If we are to touch people in intellectually, emotionally, and ethically enriching ways, we must understand that there is a physical substratum to almost every human experience.**

We are embodied. Each of us is an incarnation of an eternally unique spirit that has taken on a specific form of flesh, bone, and blood. From conception to death, who we are is unavoidably involved with the fact that we are physical creatures. However high our thoughts and aspirations may rise, however “spiritual” we may believe ourselves to be or hope we may become, we cannot ignore (or at least we *should* not ignore) the fundamental fact that we are organic creatures who are moving through the world by means of our senses. Any view of education that claims some sort of validity but that does not recognize and honor this reality is necessarily incomplete and must, in one way or another, crash into and be shattered by the intractable fact of the student’s physicality.

In my own faith tradition, it is believed that one’s soul is an imperishable union of the physical and the spiritual. There is nothing spiritual that does not have some corporeal component, and nothing corporeal is not without a spiritual aspect. If this is true, then overlooking them is disastrous because doing so deprives spirit of a physical component and trivializes physicality by stripping it of spiritual significance. Education which does not attend to the student as an organic being — with organic needs, problems, and potentials — is existentially incomplete and pedagogically lacking.

The union of the physical and the spiritual is not a new idea. At the dawn of the Western tradition, Plato’s vision of schooling in *The Republic* had all students taking part in varied and vibrant physical activities, which, beginning in the student’s earliest school years, would serve the developing individual throughout his life. Seventeen centuries later, the Moravian educator and scientist Jan Comenius also



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insisted on the importance of the physical dimensions of education, leading to a multi-sensory pedagogy. "The sense of hearing should always be conjoined with that of sight, and the tongue should be trained in combination with the hand" (Brody & Palmer 1965, 102).

One hundred fifty years after Comenius, the Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi insisted that a child learned best where there was sensory engagement with objects, and the result was what he called "object lessons." What was learned in these object lessons would form the organic foundation for subsequent cognitive and emotional growth in later years. At about the same time, Friedrich Froebel, father of the Kindergarten movement, was also approaching education from a broadly integrative point of view that fully honored the student as an organic creation. He pictured the cosmos as a series of nested realities, each intricately interwoven with the others enclosing it. What this holistic cosmology entailed pedagogically was the idea that the student would not only learn *about* all the spheres of his existence but that, whenever possible, he would learn *in* them, too. There was no such thing as a lesson that was only about the physical realm, for the physical realm was shot through with metaphysical import; and even the most abstract ideas or theories might have physical implications and consequences that needed to be acknowledged, and sometimes even experienced, in order to be fully appreciated.

This awareness of the organic realm in educating the student was a key feature of the more liberal, child-centered Progressive pedagogies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in the American Kindergarten movement of Francis W. Parker. Kindergarten, of course, is a time in the child's life when special emphasis is placed on the student's rapidly developing body. Many liberal Progressive pedagogues, however, also insisted on the need to attend to the physical dimension of education for adolescents and adults. Chief among them was John Dewey.

The map is not a substitute for personal experience.... The logically formulated material of a science or branch of learning ... is no substitute for the having of individual experiences. The mathematical formula for a falling body does not take the place of personal contact and imme-

diate individual experience with the falling thing. (Dewey as quoted in Willis et al. 1995, 126)

Simply giving the student "logically formulated material" to read and lectures to listen to would, Dewey believed, always be an inferior way of teaching if it was not accompanied by real tasks for students to do, individually and together, that engaged the emotions and body as well as the mind.

In my *Seven Curricular Landscapes* (2003), I related a personal experience that has made this point real to me in a special way years ago. I never did particularly well in science in elementary or secondary school, but one of my most memorable lessons was a 6th grade demonstration of the speed of sound. Our teacher had been talking about how the speed of sound was much slower than the speed of light. Here was another boring and irrelevant fact for me to remember, and one which was not only uninteresting but downright counterintuitive! How could light be faster than sound? When you turned on the TV, didn't the picture and the sound reach you at the same time? He took the class to the baseball field. With a track-and-field starting gun, he stood at home plate. We all stood in center field. He had given one of the girls in the class a stopwatch and told her to start the watch when she saw the plume of smoke come out of the barrel of the gun and stop it when she actually heard the shot.

I'll never forget seeing the plume of smoke issue from the muzzle but not hearing the loud rap of the gun until a heartbeat later. A whole world of teaching happened in that brief second between heartbeats. Light *was* faster than sound! I knew it because I had *experienced* it — with my ears, eyes, and even nose because of the acrid smell of the smoke. When we later calculated the speed of sound by using the data we had collected on the baseball field, it was simply logical confirmation of what was already physically and psychologically real for me. To *see* and *hear* the speed of sound lagging behind the speed of light had allowed me to internalize that fact and thus to make it my own as something real, proximate, and subjectively potent. For me then, and even today, the idea of "the speed of sound" is invested with the hues of that Fall afternoon in Arizona desert, with the smell of the browning grass of my el-

elementary school's baseball field, with the sight of the curling and ascending smoke, and, moreover, by an aura of sensory immediacy that a mere concept could never have.

Perhaps the heyday of interest in the physical/organic nature of the learner in American public education was in the 1960s and 1970s, when principled concern for and deep care of the organic realm of existence was a central feature of the counter-cultural movement of the time. Ecological awareness, more openness about sexuality, the exploration of alternative forms of medicine, greater care paid to nutrition, the practice of spiritually oriented physical disciplines such as Tai Chi and yoga, the rise of bodywork such as Rolfing and Hakomi therapy — all these all typified an increasing awareness of the body. The ethos of the time was permeated with the notion that we ignored the organic nature of our individual and collective lives at our personal, political, and planetary peril. Educational theory and practice during this period reflected this sentiment as is evident in the titles of such as "Education and the Body" (in Schultz 1976) and *A Curriculum for Feeling and Being* (Hendricks & Fadiman 1976).

Perhaps now more than ever, education should pay particular attention to the student's senses, which have been rightly called "a neglected dimension of education." In a world in which children's experiences are ever more relentlessly mediated by the latest in technological inventions,

the senses, and therefore perceptions and experiences, are disrupted and will continue to be disrupted by the stimulated world of technology, science, and economic pursuits. (Sardello & Sanders 1999, 226-227)

Not only children but all of us increasingly need "to become trained in the art of living in our senses" (Sardello & Sanders 1999, 226-227).

Education has traditionally handled this domain in physical education classes. However, with the increasing focus on higher scores on standardized tests, our youth are being allowed less and less time on the playground, in the gymnasium, or on the track, football, or soccer field; and many are being given virtually no time or opportunity — either at school or home — to simply wander around in na-

ture and learn the many incalculably rich lessons that such free-and-easy rambling offers. Indeed, even recreation for the postmodern youth largely revolves around a soul-paralyzing array of technological games. What Gardner has identified as two of the eight crucial intelligences — naturalistic and kinesthetic — at best get short shrift at best in most current educational programs.

Although it has reached a terrible zenith in the 21st century, the program to corporatize education and turn teachers and students into cogs in "the military-industrial-educational complex" (Cremin 1988, 375) has been building since at least the closing decades of the 19th and the early years of the 20th centuries as education has come more and more to mirror and service the voracious needs of the metastasizing corporate state (See Spring 2006; Tyack 1974). Historical and sociological scholarship have offered many theories to make sense out of this trend toward what the 19th century sociologist Max Weber (1946) called the technical rationalization of societies since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the nation-state in 19th century Europe.

However, I believe that there is a cause even deeper than politics or economics for this neglect of the senses in education. It has to do with our psychodynamic depths, and it involves the gendered nature of our experience, which oscillates — both within and between individuals — between the twin poles of the archetypally masculine and archetypally feminine principles. The psychological theories of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1963) clarify this point.

### Archetypes

According to Jung, an archetype is a basic structural element of the human psyche, one that is more ancient and that lies much deeper than one's merely personal subconscious. An archetype is a fundamental lens at the very core of our psychospiritual being, through which we experience and interpret the world. And since there are many lenses through which we view the world, there are, by definition, many archetypes that filter our experience in these primary, and even primal, ways. Simply because we are human beings, we are born with these structures in our psychospiritual makeup and they largely de-

termine how we see and understand the world. Although archetypes manifest themselves in different visible forms in different historical periods and cultures, the archetypes themselves are fundamentally the same in all times and places, for all individuals and groups. It is impossible to say how many archetypes there are. They may not even be “countable” since they are often very fluid, merging into and emerging from each other in an unconscious “energetic” ballet of ongoing psychospiritual metamorphoses at our deepest depths.

Whether the archetypal structure of the human psyche is fixed or fluid, some archetypes are very common. An example is the archetypal hero's journey. All cultures have stories of heroes and heroines, deserts and forests of travail that the hero or heroine must pass through, ogres and dragons and devils that they must face, wise old men and women who help them on their way, mysterious dwellings where they stay in the course of their journeys as well as castles that are either resplendent or menacing, kings and queens, priests and priestesses, tricksters and helpers, and, in short, all the other characters and places and objects that make up the mythic realm of our existence where some of our most enchanting or horrifying stories are told, and where the keys to the mystery of our existence reside. These examples of archetypes are predispositions that we all have (undoubtedly from birth but perhaps maturing over the course of one's lifetime) to make sense out of what it means to be a human being.

Since this primary realm of our psychological and spiritual nature lies deeper than the forgotten or repressed elements of our personal subconscious, Jung called it the *collective unconscious* — *collective* because it belongs to all of us, inheres in all of us; and *unconscious* because it exists at much deeper levels than the merely individual subconscious. One's personal subconscious might be pictured as that part of the “boat” of our existence that floats under the surface of the ocean, our conscious ego being the boat itself that we purposefully and practically guide through daily social reality. But the collective unconscious is the eternal ocean itself that surrounds us, and its currents, waves, eddies are the indeterminate number of fluid and ultimately inscrutable archetypes that *are* the infrastructure of our psychospiritual dynamics.

### The Great Father and the Great Mother

Two of the most powerful archetypes are the Great Father and the Great Mother — or the eternally masculine and feminine principles.

The Great Father is concerned with measurement, analysis, systematicity, and their practical manifestations in the forms of various tools and technologies, both concrete and abstract. The Great Mother, on the other hand, is concerned with intuition, art, natural processes, interrelatedness, and their practical realization as acts of nurturance and deep organic creativity. As the child-bearer and the one who, every month, experiences the biological reality of creative flow, the Great Mother is sensitively attuned to physical reality as something to be tended to, loved, and helped to unfold into full-bodied life. It is no coincidence that we speak of Mother Earth, for the earth, in her fecundity, *is* feminine. It is also no coincidence that etymologically the words “mother” and “matter” stem from the same hypothesized root word, *ma-ter*, in prehistoric Indo-European.

The neglect of the physical dimensions of education is, I believe, the result of dishonoring the archetype of the Great Mother, casting her to the margins of our psyches and societies, especially in highly industrialized cultures. This alienation of the Great Mother is a core cause, I believe, of the fact that teachers and students are growing increasingly bored, anxious, aimless, and depressed in classrooms. Where the focus is almost exclusively on the archetypally masculine with its devotion to analytical processes and its insistence upon quantitatively measurable results, the Great Father is exercising excessive sway at the expense of the Great Mother. In other words, we suffer in the highly industrialized nations from a radical and pathological imbalance of the male and female principles, which, in everything from naturopathic medicine to ancient Chinese philosophy, is seen as the cause of illness and evil. This is one of the great promises of multiculturalism in education, for indigenous, First World cultures are often more in touch with the Great Mother than the so-called “advanced” nations.

With our growing obsession on higher standardized test scores in the service of corporate profitability, decreasing attention is being given to the archetypally feminine purposes and goals of education. Instead of

being a space where teachers can help students deal with and help resolve basic physical and emotional issues at an organically healthy and developmentally appropriate pace, the classroom is becoming a patriarchal prison. Students are increasingly forced to gain information and master cognitive tasks as quickly as possible. The consequences of this preoccupation with high scores on norm-referenced tests are grim, resulting in what some public health officials are calling "the new morbidity" among children.

In the United States ... the number of children with a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD) ... combined with hyperactivity is growing rapidly. The drug Ritalin is often being prescribed for such children. Statistics vary but range from 1 million to 1.5 million children in the United States now receiving Ritalin.... Whereas some children genuinely need help because of constitutional problems in the nervous system, many others appear to need help primarily because they cannot accommodate to current educational practices. (Almon 1999, 254)

The excessive use of Ritalin, Concerta, and later-generation drugs that are designed to tighten cognitive focus and diminish the need for physical activity in young people is symptomatic of a pathology that ultimately is not in the children but in the system itself. Where the categorical demands of the Great Father are not humanized by the tender nurturance of the Great Mother, we respond by drugging children into submission. This is nothing less than socially sanctioned child abuse — and a serious ethical problem.

Clearly, any pedagogy that aims at completeness, balance, and health must honor the student (and teacher) as embodied beings. If their needs and potentials are not recognized or fostered at this level, then, as in any system, the part that is neglected will either atrophy and die and spread its post-mortem toxicity throughout the entire system, or will find a way to make its needs known by undermining the functioning of the other parts of the entire system. In holistic theory, not to attend to some part of the total system is to breed a "local pathology" in that system which will ultimately pollute or pillage the rest of the system.

I have discovered in my career as a psychotherapist how crucial physicality is in an individual's deep transformation. And what, after all, is education at its best than profound change into ever more humane and skillful forms of seeing, being, and acting in and on the world? Education is not therapy, but it inevitably has either healthy or unhealthy psychological consequences for the student. It is possible to talk through and around an issue with a client in therapy from every possible angle until there is simply nothing left to say or analyze. Still, the person may not change, or may not change enough. Why is this?

Often it is because there is a physical component to the underlying problem that keeps on debilitating the person in spite of the fact that he has a firm cognitive grasp on the problem. A searing tightness around the heart, a sickly feeling of dread in the limbs, shortness of breath, dizziness, or dull waves of weariness — all of these sensations, and many more, may continue to distress and debilitate the individual in spite of the fact (and sometimes precisely *because* of the fact) that he has an exhaustive intellectual understanding of what is going on with him but he has not addressed the problem at an organic level through various forms of body work.

One of the most damaging and damning aspects of the current obsession with testing and technology in American education is that it conditions a student to live almost exclusively in a mental world divorced from any other aspect of the student's being. As the student receives the message — test after test, class after class, year after year — that all that really matters is scoring well on a standardized test and winning institutional praise and (later) financial rewards for doing so, that person becomes increasingly divorced from his body. The result of such alienation from one's organic nature is usually some form of neurosis, and sometimes even psychosis. The danger of "de-organicized" education, in other words, is that it works to neuroticize the individual, who must then be "treated" by drugs brought to us by the same corporate structure that creates the problem in the first place.

As in therapy, so also in education. If we are to touch people in intellectually, emotionally, and ethically enriching ways, we must understand that there is a physical substratum to almost every human ex-



perience. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any human experience that is not intertwined with — and even enabled by — the fact that the person who is having the experience is an embodied being.

Moreover, if education is to be liberating for a student, and not simply a means of perpetuating vicious or vapid social practices and arrangements, it must resist the program of our governing corporate power structure to make us cogs in the machine. With its increasingly powerful tools and techniques of standardization, surveillance, and consumerism, the corporate state and transnational corporate capitalism are more and more erasing the individual, depriving him of his own unique, even idiosyncratic, experiences. It accomplishes this by deluging the individual with words, images, and constructs that define the nature and delimit the horizons of how he sees, interprets, and values his world.

As in Orwell's prophetic novel, *1984*, these terms and constructs are largely provided by the corporate elites, slickly packaged by the media, and subtly instilled in the individual by the various institutions in which he is obliged to perform. By dangling before the consumer ever more seductive media that, as their name implies, "mediate" the individual's experiences through so many layers of electronic "filters," *immediate* and deeply personal experiences are becoming an endangered species. More and more, *to have* an experience — one that is uniquely one's own — is, in itself, a revolutionary act. And since, as the branch of philosophy called phenomenology (which is the study of the nature of experience) shows, one's experiences are inseparable from one's senses, education that helps a student engage healthily and authentically with his senses will be liberating, while education that does not do so will tend to create a student who is not only ill but also unfree. "What if," as the sociologist Brian Fay (1987, 146) asks, "oppression leaves its traces not just in people's minds, but in their muscles and skeletons as well?" If this is true, then attending to the sensory domain is not only good pedagogy; it is politically and ethically imperative.

It is largely this nurturance of the student as a delicate and beautiful physical organism that distinguishes such alternative schools as the Waldorf schools from traditional education. Even in dealing with such abstractions as numbers, the Waldorf edu-

cator takes an organic and psychologically rich approach to introducing children to the world of math.

First graders live in a world of imaginative pictures; they have a natural feeling for the archetypes implicit in the world of numbers.... The number one, for instance, represents more than a digit. It can be thought of as the largest number, for it contains all other numbers within it. The number two, in contrast, denotes duality, contrast, opposites. The children in first grade might encounter some of these dualities in stories which contrast a bright, sunny day and dark, gloomy night, or a mighty king and the queen who rules with him. With the number three comes a dynamic quality, with four a quality of stability and form. There are four seasons, four directions, four elements.... A student who has gone through this process will never again consider a number simply as an abstraction or merely as a mark upon a page. (Trostli 1991, 343-344)

Knitting, dancing, painting, modeling clay, and caring for animals on the school farm also make knowledge tangible in ways that rarely happen at traditional schools. Such activities should also be a feature of public classrooms.

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# The Zero Sum Game of Denigrating Students

Peter Kaufman

**Teaching and learning are relational processes and it is nearly impossible to be in a constructive relationship, especially an educational one, when there are feelings of disrespect and disdain.**

*"It's depressing teaching some of these students, they are just so ignorant."*

*"I've come to the realization that students today don't want to learn."*

*"I'm tired of these students always wanting to cut corners and find the easy way out."*

*"I feel like it's a waste of my time trying to reach these students. They just can't think critically."*

Sound familiar? These quotes are just a sampling of the denigrating remarks I often hear colleagues make about students. Sometimes I hear these comments in conversations, other times they are mentioned directly to me, and increasingly I hear them at faculty gatherings, both on my campus and at academic conferences. They are usually expressed when someone is discussing a specific classroom experience, an interaction with a student, or a general observation about higher education.

When colleagues express such scornful sentiments I find myself progressing through a series of emotions that range from surprise to embarrassment to aggravation. At first, I am taken aback that an instructor would express such disdain for students. Then I feel somewhat uneasy, much like I do when I am in the presence of someone telling an offensive joke. But rather quickly my amazement and confusion turn to frustration as I ponder how such an attitude bankrupts the educational process. I would think that after hearing these comments so regularly I would be less affected by them; however, just the opposite is true. With each passing remark I become increasingly bothered and annoyed and I fear a widening schism between teachers and learners.

Although some may view these comments as relatively benign and innocuous — as just blowing off steam — I tend to disagree. My own sense is that



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these disparaging remarks contribute to a culture of negativity, foster an anti-student climate, and produce a pseudo-Pygmalion effect whereby our negative perceptions of students become the tainted reality that affect our social interactions. Even if students do not hear our remarks and do not internalize our projections of them, the ways in which we perceive the educational reality may still affect the end results. Sociologists sometimes refer to this as the Thomas Theorem: If people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. In this essay I take these comments seriously and I consider the consequences that may transpire when instructors express them. I focus on three processes: reinforcement of the student-teacher contradiction, exoneration of the teacher, and blaming the victim. These are certainly not the only damaging effects of such verbal denigrations but I limit my focus to these themes because they resonate with my personal and professional life.

A few important caveats before I begin. It should be clear at the outset that my purpose is not to stifle these feelings of anger and resentment. I recognize that teaching is not easy. As instructors, it is important that we acknowledge how we feel and that we have the space to express ourselves. I am also not trying to cast stones from my glass-enclosed house. I realize that all teachers, including me, have entertained such thoughts or have uttered such remarks at one point in their careers. My tone and purpose, then, are not meant to be personally accusatory but rather analytically forceful. My goal is to encourage us to be more mindful of what these remarks suggest and especially of how they may impact our educational practice. If teaching and learning are anything, they are relational processes and it is nearly impossible to be in a constructive relationship, especially an educational one, when there are feelings of disrespect and disdain.

### The Student-Teacher Contradiction

In his classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) highlights one of the main obstacles to a humanistic education: the teacher-student contradiction. This dichotomous teaching arrangement is reflective of a traditional classroom in which the teacher *teaches* and the students are *taught*. The teacher knows everything and the students know

nothing; the teacher is the subject and the students are mere objects. This model privileges the teacher as the all-knowing authority figure and reduces students to ignorant, subservient dolts. Freire refers to this model as the banking system of education because teachers view students as empty vessels that need to be filled with the teacher's extensive knowledge. In the banking approach to education the students do not have any say in the subject matter, the methods of assessment, or the mode of instruction. Why should they? After all, they are presumed to have no knowledge of the course content — isn't that why they are in school — so their role in the educational process is to be a receptacle of the teacher's expertise.

Within the discourse of denigrating students there is an unexpressed assumption, even endorsement, of the teacher-student contradiction. When we criticize students' intelligence, question their motivation, and doubt their level of competence, we are implying that they are unworthy objects of our talents and proficiencies. We know what they need to learn, how they need to learn it, and why it is important to them. We are so informed and so enlightened that any student who does not enthusiastically and energetically welcome all of our knowledge must be utterly hopeless. In short, we are subjects and they are mere objects. And for the students who fail to follow our instructions, refuse to do exactly as we say, or ask stupid questions, they are, quite frankly, helpless and really do not deserve to be in college in the first place. Of course, the great irony is that teachers who maintain the teacher-student contradiction in their daily pedagogical practice are setting students (and themselves) up for failure. When we do not welcome students into a dialogue with us, when we do not ask them what they want to learn, how they best learn, and why the material is or is not relevant to their lives, should we really be surprised when they act out, withdraw, and resist our lessons? Isn't it a bit disingenuous for instructors to criticize students for not wanting to learn if we have not invited them into the learning process in the first place?

One of the hidden problems with the teacher-student contraction and the denunciation of students is that both teachers and students are similarly oppressed, limited, and dehumanized. Freire (1998) ad-



dressed this topic at the end of his career in *Pedagogy of Freedom*. In this book he makes a final plea to teachers to reclaim their own epistemological curiosity as a means to re-humanize themselves. According to Freire, we can achieve this re-humanization by questioning, criticizing, and condemning the very haughtiness that produces our verbal denigrations of students: "As a teacher, I cannot help the students to overcome their ignorance if I am not engaged permanently in trying to overcome my own" (1998, 89). Only by entering the educational context with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others will we be able to comprehend the world in unimaginable ways. But if we are so dogmatic in our insistence that students have nothing to contribute, we deny them as well as ourselves the opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom.

Every semester I invite students to join me on a day hiking trip in mountains that are located near my college. For the past ten years I have been taking students on a trail that includes a moderately strenuous climb up a steep rock scramble. Since many of the students are novice hikers, and in fact some have never even stepped foot in the "woods," the rock scramble always presents some challenges. It is common to hear expressions of fear, trepidation, awe, and uncertainty during our ascent. Inevitably, there are always some students who need to be coached and cajoled up the mountain, but rarely am I the one who does the coaxing. Instead, other students always end up taking the lead in guiding their peers, allaying their fears, ensuring their safety, and leading them up to the top of the climb. Although I certainly make my presence known by pointing out particularly tricky spots or offering suggestions about foot and hand placement, the students ultimately serve as guides for one another. And these roles are not in any way predetermined; rather, they arise spontaneously as students interact and problem solve their way up the trail.

When I think about the learning that occurs on the hiking trip, it is clear that although I provide the logistical support for the experience (set the date, get the permit, choose the trail, provide transportation, etc.), most of the educational dividends come from the interactions between the participants. The reason for this is not because my knowledge of the physical terrain is very limited; rather, it is because on this trip

everyone is both a teacher and a learner. Some students who join us on the hike enlighten the rest of us with their geological or biological understanding of the outdoors while other students share their considerable knowledge about climbing rocks and ascending much higher mountains. Other students have keen interpersonal intelligence and subsequently are instrumental in establishing a great group rapport. Even for those students who are novices, they readily teach (or remind) the rest of us about what it is like experiencing the outdoors for the first time.

Now imagine how this hiking trip might transpire within the traditional framework of the student-teacher contradiction. What names might I call those students who express some apprehensions about making it to top of the mountain? Wimps? Babies? Scaredy-cats? What about students who are completely unaware of the various dangers on the trail such as poison ivy and tick-infested grasses? Are they stupid, dumb, and ignorant? And what of the urban-dwelling students who never had the privilege or the means to traverse in such environs? Shall I dismiss them as unprepared and not belonging on this trip?

While some instructors have no qualms about belittling students' performance in the classroom, I find it less likely that anyone would verbally denigrate these novice hikers. But is there really a difference between the two? Although students may have more experience in their student role than in a hiker role, they probably have little to no experience dealing with such things as a particular instructor's teaching style, the subject matter, the books being read, the assignments and exercises they are asked to complete, and the other students with whom they are taking the class. Much like the hiking trip, each and every class is new terrain for students and faculty to navigate.

A few years ago I was sitting in a faculty meeting and a colleague said

I am the teacher; I am the intellectual; I am the expert. The students are not there to educate other students, that's my role. I am the educator and they are the students.

I do not recall the context in which this comment was made, but I do remember how forcefully it was ut-

tered. This comment was also made just a few weeks after that semester's hiking trip. That particular hike was especially unnerving for me because there were a couple of students who really had quite a bit of difficulty getting up the rock scramble. I remember thinking that if the other students had not helped the two unsure hikers make it to the top, our group would have been in a potentially precarious position because once you begin ascending it is more difficult and quite dangerous to turn back and head down. This same thing happens periodically in the classroom. Most professors have probably experienced being at a loss for examples, have found themselves unable to recall a specific word, or have realized they need help explaining a concept in alternative terms. In all of these situations it is usually students who come to our rescue and keep us moving forward on the path of learning. But such assistance can only occur if we suspend, if just for the moment, our affinity for the teacher-student contradiction. Clinging to the notion that we are the only authorities in the room will do nothing but stall our progress and breed the rigid attitude that my colleague articulated so clearly.

### Exoneration of the Teacher

A second negative pedagogical outcome of denigrating students is that such verbal denunciations render teachers blameless in the face of educational problems. Implicit in these dismissive putdowns of students is the notion that *they*, not us, are the cause of our suffering. If only students were motivated, engaged, dedicated, responsible, capable, and smarter, then our efforts would be rewarded. It is especially surprising to hear such rants about the ineptitude of students when they are uttered by colleagues who fashion themselves to be reflexive, student-centered, and even radical pedagogues. I could understand, but not condone, such comments coming from colleagues who do not place a high premium on their educational practices. But I am perplexed when I hear these denigrations coming from those who appear, at least ostensibly, to be interested in and committed to the processes of progressive teaching and learning. Stephen Brookfield (1995) points out that being a critically reflective teacher requires that we examine the assumptions that underlie our work. Clearly, one of the biggest assumptions among col-

lege faculty seems to be that when it comes to poor student performance, we professors are absolved of any wrongdoing.

There is a Tibetan teaching called *lojong* that has been popularized by Buddhist practitioners such as Chogyam Trungpa (1993), Pema Chodron (1994), and Allan Wallace (1992). *Lojong* refers to "mind training" and the practice involves meditating on the fifty-nine slogans (or proverbs) that comprise the seven points of mind training. The *lojong* teachings arise out of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, the middle path, and seek to foster compassion among sentient beings. Those who practice these 59 slogans do so in an effort to cultivate loving-kindness and an awakened heart. I often find myself referring back to the 59 slogans, especially when I reflect on my role as a teacher. In particular, there is one slogan that I come back to repeatedly that I think is especially relevant to the notion of the blameless teacher.

Point three of the seven points of mind training is about transforming bad circumstances into the path of enlightenment. This third point contains slogans eleven through sixteen but it is slogan twelve, "Drive all blames into one," that sticks out in my mind. As Chogyam Trungpa suggests, "this slogan applies whenever we complain about anything" (2003, 43). By driving all blames into one, into ourselves, we move away from the practice of finding fault with others and instead we look introspectively to uncover the ways in which we are part of the problem. It is easy to cast blame onto others; indeed, in such an individualistic culture as ours we do it all the time. Our inclination to blame, criticize, and find fault with others is by no means unique to the classroom experience; however, for teachers to blame students for being ignorant, uninterested, and disengaged seems a bit ironic. After all, if students are not succeeding academically or falling short of *our* expectations for them, then it seems that we need to examine our own culpability in these failings.

By heaping blame on students, criticizing their efforts, and questioning their intelligence we exonerate ourselves from any wrongdoing. If students are ignorant, it is not because our teaching methods are ineffective. If they are disengaged, it is not because we are boring. If they are uninterested, it is not because we fail to make the material relevant to their

lives. And if they are cheaters, it is not because we buy into a system that emphasizes achieving grades rather than promoting knowledge. By blaming students instead of ourselves, we can continue feeling self-assured and self-righteous. More importantly, by failing to own our role in the students' shortcomings, we free ourselves from having to alter—much less transform—our longstanding and cherished pedagogical strategies. In effect, we lose *our* agency. Rethinking our curriculum, reexamining our pedagogical practices, incorporating techniques that reflect a variety of learning modalities, or even just asking students to explain their resistance or confusion to the material, are either dismissed as unnecessary or not worth the effort. This sort of argument brings us perilously close to a self-fulfilling prophecy of complacency and fatalism that I have already heard too often: "Look, if the students don't want to learn, then I'm not going to break my back to try and get them motivated." "Why should I bother going the extra mile if the students are not willing to take a few steps?"

The *lojong* slogan of "drive all blames into one" is not meant to be interpreted as some veiled form of masochism. The point here is not to accept full and total responsibility for everything that occurs in the classroom—certainly, some accountability rests with learners too—but this precept encourages us to reflect on the social situation and consider how we are major players in the construction of this reality. Any problems that students are experiencing must be recognized as *our* problems too, because we are co-creators of the educational process. We cannot even talk about students, much less denounce them, without recognizing that their status as students implicitly suggests our status as teachers. Similarly, the roles they fill as students—i.e., good student, awful student, motivated student, disinterested student—imply, at least to some extent, our role as teachers. It bears reminding that there is an inherent symbiosis between students and teachers, not just in terms of their respective identities but also their behaviors, their values, and, yes, their successes and failures. When we play the blame game we are pretending that this symbiosis does not exist. We are assuming, incorrectly, that students can exist apart from their relationship with teachers and, conversely, that

teachers can exist apart from students. By accusing students of not wanting to learn or of being stupid, teachers are implicitly implicating themselves of similar offenses. Criticizing students for having an antipathy toward learning suggests our own antipathy toward teaching because learning and teaching are reciprocal acts.

It is also important to bear in mind that most college instructors have very little, if any, training in educational pedagogy. Unlike primary and secondary school teachers who may take courses on developmentally appropriate teaching practices, social and philosophical foundations of education, and the incorporation of active learning strategies, many college instructors enter the classroom as relative neophytes who learn to teach largely by trial and error. Although these individuals may be renowned in their respective fields, their scholarly credentials do not necessarily make them competent teachers. Being an expert in Greek philosophy, 18th century British literature, or electrical engineering, does not mean that one can necessarily teach these ideas in a clear and engaging manner.

This is an important and sometimes difficult point for us to acknowledge. After all, holding a Ph.D. or some other terminal degree signifies that one has earned the highest educational credentials. Shouldn't that degree certify us as master teachers, particularly in the field of our expertise? This seems to be a prevailing attitude, or myth, that many college instructors cling to and it may well be responsible for many of their denigrating remarks toward students. The challenge for us is to recognize that our disciplinary knowledge does not automatically translate into pedagogical wisdom. If we strive to expertly teach our expertise, then we will need to turn the well-honed analytical and critical lens that we developed as scholars onto ourselves as teachers. Recognizing the myriad ways we may be to blame for students' off-putting academic behavior is one small step on this endlessly enlightening path.

### Blaming of the Victim

The corollary to exonerating the teacher is blaming the victim. Let us just assume for the moment that many students do not want to learn, that they do view themselves as consumers and not learners, and

that they are, among other things, slackers, cheaters, sycophants, and corner-cutters who are disengaged, unmotivated, lazy, and ignorant. How might we explain their attitudes, their inabilities, and their aversion to learning? Does the current generation of college students suffer collectively from some inner defect that makes them reject the college experience? Or is there something about how they were socialized as students that inhibits, obstructs, and erodes their passion for learning? And is there something about our attitudes and our pedagogies that cultivate or reinforce this seemingly negative approach to the educational process? Although it is relatively easy to malign students and blame them for their own failings, it is more difficult to uncover the underlying social processes that contribute to and perpetuate this state of affairs. As noted above, this analytical undertaking is even more discomforting if we turn the gaze onto ourselves and recognize our own role in this situation.

In his book, *The Passionate Learner*, Robert Fried (2001, 2) details a process with which many of us as teachers and learners are probably all too familiar:

Children come into the world with a desire to learn that is as natural as the desire to eat and move and be loved, [and] their hunger for knowledge, for skills, for the feeling of mastery [is] as strong as any other appetite. [But we] are less likely to see this same passion when we look at kids in school. Something happens to a child when learning is replaced by schooling. [T]oo many young people, when they enter formal schooling, feel the passionate learning of their early years begin to decline, often with permanent results.

How might we explain this loss of epistemological curiosity? What can account for the crushing of a child's spirit, what Erik Erikson famously called "the most deadly of all sins." Before we even try to understand this process we should, at the very least, acknowledge its presence. We must recognize that students are not entering higher education as educational novices; rather, they come to the college classroom as hardened veterans of the schooling process. For many of them, their educational experience has been dehumanizing, alienating, and oppressive. In

crafting our expectations of their behavior we must be cognizant of the path they took to reach us and the potentially deleterious effect this path has had on their innate love of learning.

Recently, I was listening to a colleague express frustration, even exasperation, at the fact that students were not reading the assigned material and consequently could not participate in class discussions. Because the texts were so complex and dense this instructor went through great lengths to make the material more easily digestible. Study questions were prepared, the reading load was reduced, and secondary sources of summaries and explanations were offered — all to no avail. Fed up with the situation, my colleague abruptly abandoned plans to foster a discussion-based learning environment and reverted back to a very traditional banking model of teaching in which notes were projected onto a screen to be dutifully copied down by students. Feeling stymied by the students' disinterest, their inability to comprehend the material, and their unwillingness to do the work, my colleague was resigned to "teaching to the test."

This scenario is probably one that many of us have experienced. But as irritating and bothersome as this situation is, it really begs the question of why *should* students do the work? At first, this may seem like a naïve question; however, if we sit with the question for awhile and really force ourselves to contemplate it, the answers may provide some valuable insight. Of course, we can gain greater understanding by asking students themselves why they do or do not complete assignments. More likely than not, their answers will reveal a means-end analysis that students have become experts at deciphering. If there is one thing that students have learned from all of their years of schooling it is how to manage the educational system for their own benefit. This expertise, or adaptation for educational survival, is probably even more characteristic of college students because they have navigated the system successfully enough to move from one level to the next.

When I think of the many denigrating comments that faculty make about students, the theme of student resistance to doing the assigned work is certainly near the top of the list. Whether it is falling short of reading loads, handing in late assignments,



or cutting corners illegitimately, the prevailing sentiment is that “these damn students just don’t want to make the effort to do the work.” Of course, this complaint is not just that students are not doing the work; rather, students are not doing the work because they are lazy, unmotivated, disengaged, or intellectually inferior. What I find particularly interesting about these explanations is that they are no different than the reasons that are often given for why poor people remain poor. The mainstream rhetoric that we hear from politicians, media pundits, and others, is that poverty is an individual problem that would be eliminated if poor people would just get a better attitude.

As an instructor of sociology, one of the greatest challenges I face is encouraging students to set aside these individualistic explanations and instead try to understand the structural and institutional causes of individual behavior. William Ryan (1971) popularized the phrase “blaming the victim” to highlight the tendency in society to incriminate and condemn individuals for the situations in which they find themselves. In my own discipline, C. Wright Mills (1959) similarly implored us to reject psychologisms — our inclinations to rely on individualistic explanations — and instead focus on the social conditions that bring about individual behaviors. Mills also made an important distinction between personal troubles and public issues. If something is affecting only a few people we may view this issue as a personal trouble that besets the individual. As a personal trouble we can seek personal solutions. However, when something is experienced or exhibited by many individuals then we are discussing a public issue. Public problems cannot be understood, much less be solved, by focusing exclusively on individual actions. To address them we must first be aware of their social origin before we can begin to prescribe social solutions. Apathy, disinterest, and disengagement among college students are as much public issues as persistent poverty.

The importance of distinguishing personal troubles from public issues cannot be overstated, especially in a society that overwhelmingly encourages us, erroneously, to see social problems as individual afflictions. Poverty will not be solved by blaming individuals or by expecting them as individuals to overcome a lifetime of structural disadvantages such as failing schools, dangerous and unhealthy neigh-

borhoods, diminishing economic opportunities, poor nutrition and health care, lack of reliable public transportation, and limited access to child care. Similarly, apathy, disinterest, disengagement, and even ignorance among college students cannot be adequately addressed if we do not understand the structural and institutional underpinnings that foster and perpetuate such maladaptive outcomes. The typical student in the United States faces an education based on rote memorization, a curriculum revolving around high stakes tests, and course content that has little or no connection to their everyday lives. Since students experience this educational reality day-after-day and year-after-year, is it any wonder that they have developed strategies to resist and escape such drudgery? Moreover, should we be surprised that they lack the skills, much less the desire, to engage in high order critical thinking? If we agree that students entered school with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and educational exploration, that their epistemological curiosity was boundless, then we must accept that something happened on their educational journey that sent this passion for knowledge into a deep freeze. As instructors we should not blame them for being victims of this process nor should we victimize them further; instead, we should work diligently with them to identify how this educational state of affairs came to be so that we can do everything possible to rekindle their enthusiasm for learning.

### Concluding Thoughts

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer notes that when he asks teachers to identify the biggest obstacle to good teaching the overwhelming response is “my students.” In discussing the “blame-the-student shtick” that he hears so often, Palmer (1998, 41) points out that our predilection for blaming students is “the conventional defense in any embattled profession” and that “the way we diagnose our students’ condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer.” These are important points to bear in mind not only in terms of the students’ condition but our own condition, and conditioning, as well. Just as we should understand the structural realities that have contributed to apathetic, disinterested, and unprepared students, we must also acknowledge the insti-

tutional milieu that has contributed to our own frustrations, resentments, and irritations. Work creep, micromanagement of our curriculums, larger classes, greater expectations for scholarship — all may impact how we approach our role as educators. If we are truly concerned with the processes of teaching and learning, we must be willing to consider not just who the students are as learners but also who we are as teachers. And this process of reflexivity must cover the full spectrum of our life as teachers from the institutional to the intrapersonal.

As I think may be true for many of my colleagues, I made the decision to pursue a career as a professor because I loved being a student. From kindergarten through college I relished the pursuit of knowledge. Learning new things was stimulating, discovering new realities was entrancing, and becoming more informed about the social, physical, and aesthetic world was empowering. After I graduated college I remember coming home after my first full-time job in the “real world” and thinking, “What have I gotten myself into and how do I get back to where I was?” Having such fond memories of being a student I find it particularly troublesome when I hear my colleagues lambaste them now. Granted, not all students are perfect, and I am not naïve enough to think that they all approach learning like most professors did when they were in college; however, I do believe that the process of learning is inherently infused with the potential to be stimulating, entrancing, and empowering. Since many of us in the academy are here because we love to learn, should it not be our goal to cultivate this same feeling among our students?

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# Reading to Fly

## Creative Reading as Pedagogical Equalizer

Elite Ben-Yosef

**"In the real world, we control what and how we read, and we are lead only by our interests, imaginations, and pleasure. This should also be our goal for our students."**

*"I hate reading."  
"I don't have time to read."  
"It's boring....."*

We hear such claims or assertions from our students all too often, yet we shouldn't be surprised since we are responsible for a great part of it. In my daughter's honors English class (in what is considered one of the best high schools in the U.S.), the teacher wanted to make sure the students actually read the assigned pages at home so she quizzed them, and one of the questions for *Catcher in the Rye* was "What color jacket did he wear in the bar scene?" What has this got to do with reading? What has it got to do with literature? Questions like this promote responses like those above. Forcing all students into lock-step, predetermined, teacher-controlled reading dynamics, turns many youngsters away from reading, particularly those with minds of their own and those who have difficulties reading and/or memorizing (which surely should play no part in reading activities). In addition, as Miller (2009, 3) states, there is no justification for all the money and effort we have spent systematizing the act of reading:

The only groups served by current trends to produce endless programs for teaching reading are the publishing and testing companies who make billions of dollars from their programs and tests.

All these mountains of programs and bundles of cash have made us lose sight of what we were trying to create in the first place: a child independently reading a book *with pleasure*.

Like any other reading teacher, I always struggled and juggled to engage my students with reading.



Struggling beside my son through school, I found more just possibilities in literacy studies and an ability approach to learners. I teach the concept to graduate students of education and use it in teaching developmental reading to undergraduates. For some adult examples, visit [www.LiteracyAndLife.blogspot.com](http://www.LiteracyAndLife.blogspot.com).

"Tricks" like working with high interest trade books, creating suspense through read-alouds, trying to fit the book to the reader's interests, teaching about the readers' authority vis-à-vis texts and introducing reader response theory sometimes work (Ben-Yosef 2008; Drogowski 2008; Hidi 1990; Rosenblatt 1994). Force — read it for a grade — also occasionally works, but we have to ask what our real goal is. If it is prepping for "The Tests," the dismal statistics about nationwide poor achievement on reading tests and the high percentage of students reading below their grade levels should alert us that something is wrong (not with the kids, whom we tend to blame, but *with us and our system*).

Yet, isn't school about preparing kids to function in "real life" adult society? Who tests us adults about our independent reading? To whom do we owe an explanation if we give up on the book after the first chapter? Who controls what, when, how, and why we read independently? Who holds sway over the wandering of our imaginations while reading? In the real world, we control what and how we read, and we are lead only by our interests, imaginations, and pleasure. This should also be our goal for our students.

In the past few years of teaching literacy to pre- and inservice teachers in graduate school, I grappled with this problem because I realized that many of my grad students were the same reluctant readers from middle and high school who have developed negative feelings about book reading, although they constantly read other media. They remember books they liked, even loved, from childhood, but most have a spotty reading history after that. Another recurring obstacle to assigning books to read are the many students who got stuck — when they first learned to read — on reading "correctly," focusing on pronouncing every word and never progressing to fluency. This sort of mechanical reading demands so much energy from the reader that little is left for comprehension and the reader easily becomes frustrated by the slow pace of getting through the text (Wolf 2007). It is very troubling to think that these are the role models we are sending into schools to influence the next generation to read books.

Rethinking and re-envisioning the teaching of reading in schools is imperative. What we should be doing is transmitting to our students the love and

pleasure of reading and its creative potential, its inherent power to teach us new things about ourselves and the world, to slake our curiosity, expand our minds, open our hearts, and reach out to others across time and space. Readings is a treasure trove full of wonders and powers with a built-in reward system. The reading teachers' real mission is to lead students to the treasure chest and entice them to open the cover. The rest should take care of itself.

### Reading to Fly

My idea for motivating students to read has to do with giving *them* control over their reading. It is based on brain studies that have shown that when learners feel in control of their learning, their brains go into "learning mode," as opposed to "survival mode" in which we are busy protecting ourselves from danger. When we feel safe and in control, our brains open to learning and facilitate the intake and comprehension of information (Zull 2002). *Reading to Fly* is based on the idea that when reading independently, be it for information or pleasure and anywhere in between, it doesn't matter what you read, how much you read, or what you remember from your reading. The important thing is knowing that you are in control both of the process and of the creative rewards you obtain.

The rewards are invaluable because reading has the power of taking us places: places we had never visited; places that can strengthen, challenge or change our worldview; places that can grow our minds and skills; and most importantly, places we may like coming back to for knowledge, comfort, and pleasure. It's not about what "kind" of reader we are (distracted, fast/slow, ELL student, uninterested in the topic, etc.), but where we allow reading to take us. Real reading isn't about remembering, knowing, passing tests, or achieving for others; it is about creating personal meaning, whatever that happens to be. Creative reading is a great equalizer because it allows *every* reader, regardless of individual differences, to successfully find personal meaning and creatively respond to any text.

*Reading to Fly* uses an ability approach that includes all learners and accommodates readers' interests, experiences, and strengths, combined with Rosenblatt's (1994) ideas about the readers' power



over texts, and insisting upon flights of imagination, which, as Maxine Greene (1995, 3) writes, allow us to create that which has never been before, to envision what should be and what may be, to “give credence to alternative realities,” and to realize our quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world. *Reading to Fly* introduces reading literature as a platform from which to launch the reader’s imagination into those places that interest her — wherever and whatever appeals, excites, engages. Reading is unshackled from someone else’s understandings, directions, or questioning, and it becomes a creative journey in search of personal meaning, beginning with the individual reader and open to any possibility, any direction, anywhere the reader wishes to head. And oh, the places they go!

This approach to the teaching of reading and responding to literature mimics adult “real life” reading of books for pleasure and for knowledge. As adult independent readers we can fly anywhere our mind takes us before, during, and after reading (without having to prove where we’ve been). Reading to fly (or creative reading) is also totally inclusive in terms of language, culture, and ability levels. Every reader may respond to the text as she chooses, according to her ability, interests, and motivation. There is no attempt to fit anyone into a box; performance anxiety is eliminated and engagement is heightened. The reader is fully empowered to make her own decisions and choose her own way. As Dr. Seuss (1990, 2) wrote,

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.  
You’re on your own. And you know what you  
know.  
And YOU are the guy who’ll decide where to go.

### Examples of Student *Reading to Fly* Responses

The students are given the list of ideas (see appendix) and are asked to respond to the text using one of the possibilities, or any other they come up with. They decide what they respond to (a word, an idea, an issue, a character, or the whole book). They also determine what form the response will take, the execution, and the amount of effort they want to invest. When it is time for presentation, the scope, creativity,

and imagination of the students’ work never fail to impress. They have created skits, sound tracks, travel brochures, collages, and performances of songs and dances. The following are a few examples of student responses.

*The Circuit* by Jimenez elicited a list poem:

Mexico  
Migrate  
California  
American Dream  
Work  
Labor camps  
Farms  
Crops  
No home  
Uncertainty  
Spanish-English  
Schools  
Brothers, sisters  
Family  
Lying  
Panic  
Fear  
Caught

One student responded to *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson by creating a box within which the book itself and several relevant objects were placed. She covered the outside of the box with a collage of pictures and quotes from the book protesting violence against women.



In response to reading *Missing May* by Cynthia Rylant, a student wrote a poem to May (who passed way) from her adopted daughter, Summer. (Ob is her adoptive father and Cletus, a classmate.)

### We Miss You May

Ob and I are forever changed  
Your garden seems so bare  
From day to day we journey through life  
With a dark and disconsolate stare.

I worry about Ob  
He loved you so much  
I often hear him talking to you  
About our home, the garden and such.

I remember you would always say  
"We're all meant to need each other."  
Now that you are gone I realize  
Your absence will manifest forever.

Each day hurts a little less  
Fading like a dawn that leaves little by little,  
Even Ob's beginning to smile again  
Cletus helped with that a little.

At first I was against  
Him hanging around the house  
Till I realized it helped Ob cope  
With missing you so much.

We miss you May  
We miss your smile  
So fly off to that church picnic  
In the big beautiful sky.

*Esperanza Rising* by Sharon Creech prompted a student to imagine a letter Esperanza's mother, who was dying in the hospital, would have written to her daughter:

Dear Esperanza,  
I am writing you this letter from the hospital bed while I still feel I have enough strength to write.... I want to tell you what an honor it has been to be your mother. We have been through so much in recent times and I want you to know that your willpower and perseverance have been astonishing.

As I lie here I think of your father and how much he loved you.... I remember the harvests of grapes and the fiestas. I think of Abuelita and wish she were here now to comfort you.... Most of all I think of you, my dear Esperanza. A day does not go by when I do not feel awful that you

had to give up all of your things and leave your friends to go off to work in America....

Do you remember the day we went to una tienda for Mexican candies and sweet rolls? That was one of my best memories in America with you! We had so much fun that day, no work and happy faces! I do wish you many more memories just like that here, Esperanza.

### Concluding Thoughts

When we work with creative reading responses, it doesn't matter if the student has read every page or if she liked the book. One student who was required to read *Far North*, the adventures of two boys in the Canadian wilderness, said she didn't like the book and wasn't interested in the topic. Her response, however, was creative: she chose 10 concepts or objects from the book — e.g., bush pilot, moose, The Dene — researched them and shared her findings with the class. It makes no difference if the student is rereading a book he likes or what "level" the book might be, or whether only the action parts or the dialogue were read. Real independent reading is ultimately about some form of thoughtful engagement with a text and our personal enrichment. So these responses are all excellent assessment tools because they assess real learning from an inclusive perspective, using an abilities approach: we can assess what each student was *able* to learn or take away from the text. Every student responding to the text achieves success, and by sharing the responses with the class, all of our experiences are enriched.

What I learn from my students' responses is that all have invested time and thought in their projects; that they focused on something that interested them in the text; that they chose an activity they liked doing (a text-messaging option was not on my list until one student used it in her response). These responses show involvement, compassion, interest, creativity, stretching and extending the texts, going on flights of imagination. The smiles on their faces when they presented their responses clearly showed that there is a good chance they will be less afraid of approaching a book in the future.

They all succeed (rarely have I received a poor response), and when students associate reading with a positive, pleasant, interesting experience, I know

that reading has come closer to the heart, has become slightly less boring and a little more intriguing. I feel that I have nudged them towards an independent creative reading path and that I may have set a new empowering attitude in motion. I only hope they will do the same for their own students.

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### Appendix. Multiple Ways to Respond to a Text

- Perform the text or part of it in a dramatic presentation/ reading with musical accompaniment.
- Respond to the text in several, ongoing personal/double entry journal entries.
- Write a poem from/about the text (found poem, list poem, 10 reasons why poem, etc.).
- Dramatize the text as a one-act play.
- Create one/several drawings, sketches, visual representations of the text or parts of the text (a scene, a mood, a character).
- Create a power point/storyboarding electronic presentation of the text or parts of it.
- Make a picture book about the text with lines or paragraphs from the text accompanying every illustrated page.
- Create a short video recording to complement the text.
- Write a film script for the text (or for a chapter).
- Investigate the author/poet, including other works s/he has written and how this text fits in to the author's body of work.
- "Box" the text by decorating a container appropriately and putting in it the text as well as several items that go along with it. ("My bag" is the same concept for older kids using a regular backpack where you place things associated with the text).
- Research ideas/concepts from the text on the web and share the information with the class (including why this concept intrigued you).
- Choose a scene from your book that is referenced but not elaborated on and write the scene as you imagined it took place. Be sure to include dialogue.
- Create a graphic novel/ comic book version of one of the chapters/scenes of the story.
- Stretch the text. Bring in 10 outside texts that are related to issues in the story to enhance and stretch its meaning (e.g., ads, brochures, web sites, other books, poems, songs, magazine or newspaper articles). Explain the relevance of each text.
- Write a new ending to the story or continue it to another phase (what happens to all of the characters in the sequel).
- Create a travel brochure for other readers who will be visiting the story world of the novel you read. What do they need to know about the climate, the attitudes of the people, the money, the food, etc., of the place in which they will travel? Insert photos and use your computer to make it look professional.
- Write eight to ten journal entries from the perspective of the main character. Be sure that your entries show the subtle shift in your character's thinking as they mature and grow throughout the novel.
- With another classmate, write the script of an interview between a journalist and the main character OR the main character and the author.
- Design a movie poster for the book you read. Cast the major characters with real actors and actresses. Include a scene or dialogue from the book in the layout of the poster. Remember you are trying to convince someone to see the film so your writing should

be persuasive. Attach two movie reviews with the poster.

- Make a soundtrack for the book. Choose five to eight songs that represent themes/characters/ conflicts in the story. Along with the CD or tape, include a paragraph for each song on how it relates to the story.
- Write the story from a different point of view (e.g., the stepmother in *Cinderella*, the rat in *Charlotte's Web*, the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*).
- Write a text-messaging conversation between several characters.
- Create a collage from found objects/pictures related to the text (e.g., a portrait of a character).
- "Step inside" the book and describe what happens to you in the story and how you change the plot.



# Educating for Gross National Happiness

John P. Miller

**Bhutan is serious about making Gross National Happiness the center of their educational program.**

Bhutan is small country in the Himalayas that has rejected consumerism and the unregulated development that has caused so much environmental damage and suffering around the world. I remember seeing a segment on Bhutan on "Sixty Minutes" several years ago about Gross National Happiness (GNH) being their official national goal rather than GDP. Ever since then I had been fascinated with the nation and I was overjoyed when I was invited to take part in a workshop implementing GNH in their schools.

The workshop began on December 7, 2009, and included two addresses by the Prime Minister, Lyonchhen Jimi Thinley. He is charismatic leader who impressed everyone with his intelligence, passion, and vision. In his opening address, he outlined his government's conception of GNH:

- GNH is not a "feel-good" term but something that must come "from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds."
- GNH is a "development path that judiciously balances sustainable and equitable development with environmental conservation, good governance, and the dynamism and wisdom of our profound and ancient culture."
- Bhutan has developed a "GNH index that measures key conditions of wellbeing like physical and mental health, community vitality, work-life balance, living standards, civic engagement, and the ecological integrity on which the whole human endeavor depends." Bhutan protects 72% of its forest from development which allows the country to absorb three times as much carbon as it produces.



JOHN (JACK) P. MILLER is a professor at the University of Toronto and author of more than a dozen books in the field of holistic education, including *Education and the Soul* and *Educating for Wisdom and Compassion*. His newest book, *Whole Child Education*, will be published this year by the University of Toronto Press.

The Prime Minister impressed on the audience the urgency of the situation since Bhutan is rapidly modernizing and with that comes the possibility that it will be consumed by the negative impact of globalization. We were asked to work with the Bhutanese participants to develop practical strategies that could be implemented in the schools. He also noted that workshop itself was being run on sustainable principles with food coming from local sources. He asked the local participants to walk or take public transportation to the workshop.

The next morning we began our work. There were 24 international participants coming from 16 countries and 28 Bhutanese. There were principals or representatives from several holistically orientated schools located in Nepal, Canada, the United States, Thailand, India, and Italy. Also attending were academics working in the areas of contemplative, holistic, indigenous, and environmental education. The Bhutanese participants included government officials, teacher educators, writers, monks, and students. UNICEF supported the project with funding and the participation of a representative. We sat in two concentric circles with the inner circle sitting on cushions and the outer circle seated in chairs. The workshop was led by a professional facilitator, Ivy Ang.

I found the first couple of days challenging. We discussed the vision and its implementation. Ultimately we developed a vision statement that described what a GNH-focused Bhutanese educational system might look like and proposed goals designed to insure success.

Bhutan's entire educational system will effectively cultivate GNH principles and values, including deep critical and creative thinking, ecological literacy, practice of the country's profound, ancient wisdom and culture, contemplative learning, a holistic understanding of the world, genuine care for nature and for others, competency to deal effectively with the modern world, preparation for right livelihood, and informed civic engagement.

We were impressed how quickly the government responded to our suggestions. At the end of each day the facilitator and her assistants would meet with the education minister and other officials to review the

results of the workshops and the next day we would see several of our suggestions immediately included in the proceedings. The Prime Minister was also informed of the day's work and it appears that he reviewed all the proposals that went forward. This was quite different from most governments that usually take months to respond to input.

After this initial "big picture" work, we broke out in small groups to develop suggestions for week-long workshops that are to be held for all 540 principals in Bhutan early in 2010 to discuss how they can implement GNH in the schools. Our small groups focused on critical thinking/analytical thinking; eco-literacy; community and national service; the ambience of the classroom and the school; alternative approaches to assessment; sports; non-formal education; mindfulness; and the history, science, language, and arts curricula.

One most impressive features of the workshop were the contributions of high school students. Two students were full members of the participant group and other student observers contributed in the breakout sessions. These students were articulate and not afraid to voice their concerns about the education system. One of their main concerns was the current emphasis on final exams and they recommended that as an "alternative to exams, students could be graded on class participation, completion of assignments, and independent projects."

After the workshop was over, the Prime Minister was interviewed by one of the observers, Silver Donald Cameron (2009), who writes for the *Chronicle Herald* in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In the interview the Prime Minister said

"I would like to see an educational system quite different from the conventional factory, where children are just turned out to become economic animals, thinking only for themselves," he said. "I would like to see graduates that are more human beings, with human values, [who] give importance to relationships, [who] are eco-literate, contemplative, analytical.

I would like graduates who know that success in life is a state of being when you can come home at the end of the day satisfied with what you have done, realizing that you are a happy

individual not only because you have found happiness for yourself, but because you have given happiness, in this one day's work, to your spouse, to your family, to your neighbours — and to the world at large.

On the back of the conference program was a poem by Rilke (1995, 191) that I referred to often.

Ah, not to be cut off,  
not through the slightest partition  
shut out from the law of the stars.  
The inner — what is it?  
if not intensified sky,  
hurled through with birds and deep  
with the winds of homecoming.

Gandhi (1980, 138) wrote:

A proper and all round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole. According to this theory, therefore, it would be a gross fallacy to suppose that they can be developed piecemeal or independently of one another.

Most education departments around the world focus on the intellect while committing the “gross fallacy” that the physical and spiritual faculties of the child can be ignored. As a result, we have education that disconnects or “cuts off” children from their spiritual life, the earth, and the cosmos. In contrast, Bhutan offers an inspiring holistic vision of education.

Ronald Colman of GPI Atlantic is now organizing a systematic evaluation of the Bhutan initiative. Although this project is in its infancy, I hope that countries in the industrialized world might rethink their emphasis on testing and preparing students to “compete in the global economy” and, instead, give serious consideration the holistic, sustainable model of education being developed in Bhutan. The world needs desperately needs education that fosters wholeness rather than schooling that disconnects.

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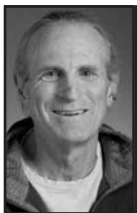
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# Animals, Social Justice, and Activism

## Maintaining Hope and Keeping Our Dreams Alive in Difficult Times

Marc Bekoff

**A veteran activist offers advice on how to stay motivated when the world does not appear to fully share your perspective.**



MARC BEKOFF is professor emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and a Scholar in Residence at the University of Denver's Institute for Human-Animal Connection and teaches for the Humane Society University. His latest book is *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint*.

We live in a troubled and wounded world that is in dire need of healing. We all should be worried and terrified by what we have done and continue to do. Humans are an arrogant lot and we have made huge and horrific global messes that need to be repaired now. The overriding sense of turmoil is apparent to anyone who takes the time to pay attention. Researchers and non-researchers alike are extremely concerned about unprecedented global losses of biodiversity and how humans suffer because of our destructive ways. We are animals and we should be proud and aware of our membership in the animal kingdom. However, our unique contribution to the wanton decimation of the planet and its many life forms is an insult to other animal beings and demeans us. We need to work for justice for all.

Humans are big-brained, invasive, and omnipresent mammals who seem to think they can do almost anything they want. Individuals in most cultures claim to love nature and other animals but then go on to wantonly abuse them in a multitude of ways. Clearly, our relationship with the rest of the world is a very confused one and our actions are often contradictory and paradoxical.

Ecosystems and webs in nature are being recklessly and routinely destroyed. Animals are dying and vanishing even as you read this essay and concerned citizens all over the world are asking, "Where have all the animals gone?" We are deep in a serious crisis out of which it will be difficult to emerge successfully. We have annihilated the planet in very undignified and shameful self-centered ways.

There can be no doubt that animal suffering continues in all corners of the world. However, there are



also good things happening and these can be used to keep us inspired and engaged when it looks like there is little or no hope. From time to time people ask me about animal activism, burnout, and other matters associated with working for animals, so I've developed some short observations that I have personally found helpful over the years. Whether you agree or disagree with some of them, I know you all agree that we must keep on working for animals and earth and peace and justice for all.

### Thoughts that Keep Me Going

*Think positively.* Don't let people get you down. I'm not a blind optimist but along with all the bad things there also are good things happening and that's what kindles and rekindles me, at least. Negativity is a time and energy drain and good people need to keep doing what they are doing for as long as they can. For me this means rekindling from time to time and taking deep breaths and enjoying whatever it is I enjoy. The bottom line is take care of yourself so you can do what you do for as long as possible.

*We are not the radicals or the "bad guys" who are trying to impede human "progress."* We are caring people and we don't have to apologize for feeling. We should be unapologetic and compassionate activists working for a better world. In fact, those who care about animals and earth should be seen as heroes who are not only fighting for animals, but also for humanity. Biodiversity is what enables human life as well as enriches it. It is imperative that all of humanity reconnects with what sustains the ability of our species to persist and that we will act as a unified collective while coexisting with other species and retaining the integrity of ecosystems. There are no quick fixes and we need to realize that when animals die, we die too.

*Be proactive.* We need to look at what's happening and prevent further abuse and not always be "putting out the fires" that have started.

*Be nice and kind to those with whom you disagree and move on.* Sometimes it's just better to let something go, so pick your battles carefully and don't waste time and energy. Don't waste time fighting people who won't change and don't let them deflect attention from the important work that needs to be done. Don't get in "pissing matches" with people who

want you to waste precious time and energy fighting them, time, and energy that needs to go into working for animals and earth and peace and justice.

*If we let those who do horrible things get us down or deflect us from the work we must do, they "win" and animals, earth, and we lose.* While this may be obvious I thought it worth repeating because it's a common ploy to get people to get into tangential discussions and arguments that take them away from the important work that must be done.

*Teach the children well.* They are the ambassadors for a more harmonious, peaceful, compassionate, and gentle world.

### Classroom Applications

It should be easy for teachers to introduce these ideas into their classrooms. Rather than dwell on the negatives — how difficult it can be to make a positive difference in a challenging world — we can empower teachers and students so that they will be able to make a difference in a world that needs a lot of help. We can teach them to be kind, considerate, passionate, and proactive and to deal with conflict in ways such that they don't waste time on people who are incorrigible. We can also teach children to confront the positions with which they disagree rather than to confront the person because fighting fire with fire doesn't get us anywhere and is a waste of time. Books by Zoe Weil (*Most Good, Least Harm* and *Above All, Be Kind*) and my *Animals Matter* and *Animals at Play* could be used in a wide variety of classrooms. We can also show how it is essential that social justice becomes the global *modus operandi* and that we should not compromise our standards because it's the easy thing to do.

In the future there likely will be fewer people who will actually be able to make a positive difference in our relationships with animals and ecosystems. Joel Cohen, head of the Laboratory of Populations at the Rockefeller University and Columbia University, offers the sobering fact that the difference in the population numbers between less developed areas of the world (the have-nots) and more developed regions of the world (the haves) will have increased from two-fold in the 1950s to about six-fold by 2050. This means that it is imperative — perhaps it is truly a moral imperative — that those who can do some-

thing good for animals and earth do it because the division between those who can and those who can't is rapidly growing and this will be even more challenging as the ratio shifts. Of course, because not all "the haves" choose to do much if anything at all, it is even more essential that those who choose to do something do it for as long as they can and not succumb to the inevitable disappointments, frustrations, and burnout that are associated with animal and environmental activism. Teachers and their students are critical resources.

We can all make more humane and compassionate choices to expand our compassion footprint, and we can all do better.

We must all try as hard as we can to keep thinking positively and proactively. Never say never, ever. Perhaps a good resolution that we can all embrace is that we will try to do better for animals — both non-human and human — and earth, and work for more peace and justice for all. We can and must keep our hopes and dreams alive.

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# Kate McReynolds And the Gift of Love

Pini Ben-Or

Kate had the gift of love — of giving and knowing how to give — infinite love.

Everyone who knew Kate immediately felt how attuned she was with people. In conversation, she had a remarkable ability to fully focus and listen to you as you are.

Kate was not just a unbelievably intuitive partner and friend, she was also a remarkable conceptualizer. Although it was easy and natural to her, Kate understood how difficult it is for most of us to recognize the great variability and diversity among people and especially among children. Kate believed and exemplified the principle that children, although constantly developing and on a life-long path of maturation, ought to be treated as *full* persons in every interaction and given the attention and respect they deserve.

What does it mean to treat everyone as a full person? When Kate interacted with others, she instantly synthesized the full complexity and nuance of their ways of thinking and feeling. It is as if she was fully aware of the wholeness and interrelatedness of their worries and concerns, of the ways anyone is tickled and stimulated, motivated and inspired. Parents and teachers and school administrators of course know that children develop and change, but how many of us have really internalized what this means, and what the implications are in terms of the diversity in

children's needs, capabilities, expectations, interests, and capacity to focus at any moment in any classroom? Kate understood this more than anyone I have ever known.

When I asked my six-year-old son a couple of weeks ago how he feels in school, he explained why he is not happy because he felt he was not being respected. The Student's Bill of Rights (available online at [educationvoters.org](http://educationvoters.org)) calls for schools to treat students with respect as partners in changing schools, and pleads with the teachers to connect with students in inspiring them.

That children should be treated as full persons by schools and teachers is implicit in our common humanity and in the responsibility we have as parents.

When you think of our "education system," treating children as full persons is both foundational and transformational. Compared to pervasive current notions, it suggests a radically different picture of what education should be — of what should be thought of as the purpose of education, of how education should be organized, of how educators should behave in the classroom, and of what the priorities of school administrators ought to be.

Kate left us an inspiring and transformational challenge: Treat every child with utmost respect. Treat every child as a full person. Enable every child to develop their unique form of creativity, to stimulate and satisfy their unique form of curiosity, and to nourish their unique forms of freedom, self-discipline, and self-confidence.

There will come a day when Kate's perspective will be as widely honored as universal suffrage, an idea once considered radical but now taken for granted.

This is Kate's gift of love.

*Editor's Note:* Kate McReynolds became the Associate Editor of Encounter in 2006. She died September 5, 2008, at the age of 52.



PINI BEN-OR came from Israel to the U.S. in 1982 to pursue graduate studies in philosophy. He and Kate were married in 1986 and had two children, Lilith and Asher. He works in risk management software and analytic solutions and maintains an unabated interest in philosophy.

# Book Reviews

## Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us

by Mike Rose

Published by The New Press (New York, 2009)

Reviewed by K.C. Nat Turner

In his latest book, *Why School?*, Mike Rose offers a timely reminder of why school matters. Using personal experience, family memories, interviews, and observational data, Rose puts the humanizing element back into the purpose of schooling as he tackles the major issues of schooling, education, and reform in the age of Obama. Rose reorients the national public debate about education through this courageous book as he stands up and argues for the need to include curiosity, reflectiveness, imagination, intellect, aesthetics, joy, civility, and understanding as central elements of our collective definition of achievement.

Rose's project is refreshing at this historic moment when the technology of large-scale assessment and record state budget deficits continue to define achievement and in turn limit what gets taught in schools. To this point, Rose challenges us to "not simply accept our public institutions as they are but be vigilantly engaged with them" (p. 156). Through numerous detailed stories of students from many diverse backgrounds, Rose illustrates how he personally has maintained this level of engagement with educational institutions from kindergarten, vocational education in high schools, community colleges, and graduate schools.

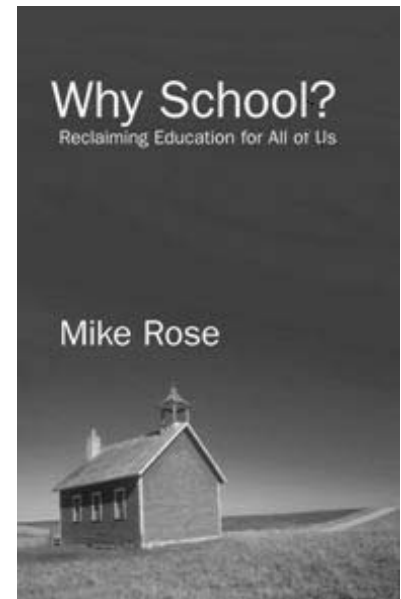
K. C. NAT TURNER is Assistant Professor of Language, Literacy and Culture in Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies at the University of Massachusetts School of Education in Amherst, MA. He has published in the *Journal of Multicultural Education and Technology* and in *The Handbook of Emergent Technologies in Social Research* (Oxford University Press). Before joining the faculty at UMass, Turner taught at schools in the U.S., Ghana, and Japan for ten years, and completed his doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

Rose paints a picture that is less bleak than what typically gets presented in current educational policy research and in the media. He shows how hope can be uncovered even in some of the everyday, unexpected moments of educational practice. In his typically vivid narrative style, Rose writes an extremely accessible book that will be informative to anyone interested in American schooling today. He reflects on what we can learn about the purposes of education from the stories of students and teachers presented in the book, highlighting instances when education goes well. Throughout the text Rose balances the role of the individual in creating opportunity with the constraints of the socioeconomic and historic contexts/he comes from. Rose reminds us that while individuals often

work hard to create opportunity ... a whole sweep of physical and social characteristics (gender and race, the markings of social class, or disability), economic policies, and social programs open up or close down opportunity. (p. 8)

Through his use of rich ethnographic detail Rose brings us in close and shows us exactly how this balancing act unfolds in the everyday lives of the students in the case studies he presents.

One of the first examples of hopeful teaching detailed by Rose is Stephanie Terry, a first-grade teacher in inner-city Baltimore, who engages her students in using the language of science during a les-





son on hermit crabs. Through Terry's artful teaching we see students beginning to feel knowledgeable as they observe closely, record, hypothesize, and report publicly on their thinking. We learn about high school students Willie, Nancy, and Peter. Willie works painstakingly on building computer tables for a district office and explains, "It has to be just right ... or it won't work" (p. 91). Nancy who is working on replacing the brakes on a car explains how precise she is about brakes because they can make a difference in saving someone's life and property. Peter goes above and beyond the call of duty when replacing a faucet on a bathroom sink, asking special permission to replace additional parts to satisfy his sense of workmanship.

These examples of students solving practical problems, redoing or repairing something to make it more appealing or functional are examples of how, when young people are given opportunities to engage in ongoing meaningful activity, they "develop and exhibit behavior and values that have personal and social benefit" (p. 96). Through their stories, skillfully drawn by Rose, he demonstrates how these values of utility, craft, curiosity, knowledge, and workmanship are perhaps as significant as facts learned because they direct students' current and future behavior.

Kevin and Anthony are students who both take advantage of special programs designed to create alternative pathways to educational achievement. Kevin is a student who came to college as a struggling writer through a special admissions program after spending most of his 16th year in a juvenile camp. Instead of the traditional remedial writing programs that focus intensely on grammar and usage through workbook exercises, Rose details a distinctive 20-week program he helped develop using a sequence of writing assignments that moved from lesser to greater difficulty. Based on current research in language and cognition that suggests students like Kevin need not go back to "linguistic square one," Rose's program took a pedagogical turn to include engagement with sophisticated intellectual material (i.e., discussions, in-class writing, and consistent feedback) which enabled Kevin to write competent papers explicating poems and comparing autobiographies. Through this example Rose illustrates how a

successful remedial program doesn't have to carve up language into little bits and build skills slowly but can set high standards, focus on inquiry, and use a variety of creative pedagogical strategies to achieve its goal.

Anthony is an adult with some degree of brain damage who is enrolled in a special program at an urban community college dubbed "the people's college." Anthony had been in prison and worked as a janitor but had gone back to school to better guide his daughter and to jumpstart a second chance for himself. Although Anthony could barely read and write, he had used different forms of media available to him to educate himself and become an articulate and knowledgeable person. Anthony's story sheds light on a number of different topics that Rose addresses in the book, including the purpose of education, the many faces of intelligence, and the importance of creating new pathways to opportunity through public institutions.

What links these intergenerational examples are the diversity of the students and their motivations for studying, which range from pleasure and fear to outrage, frustration, and fun. As learners' interests and motivations are incorporated into their education, they improve their ability to collaborate, communicate, discover, and learn from information as they express themselves through multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis 2006). Rose calls on educators to work with younger and older people to create these types of educational pathways that prepare students for the adaptability and problem solving necessary for participation in future academic, civic, and social contexts.

Throughout his book Rose reiterates that he is not naïve to the fact that one major goal of American education is to prepare the young to make a living. However, Rose refuses to concede the goals of creative, artistic, and political expression. Rose goes to great lengths to demonstrate how, in addition to economic competitiveness, education in the progressive tradition of John Dewey and Horace Mann has been seen as the means to achieve greater intellectual, civic, and moral development. Rose states that there is an economic discussion of schooling to be had, but argues that current attempts to address school failure miss the mark because they are decontextualized

and should instead be located within the context of “joblessness, health-care and housing security, a diminished tax base, economic policy and the social safety net” (p. 27).

As President Barack Obama’s “Race to the Top” version of No Child Left Behind takes off, Rose’s voice is a clear warning that standardized tests alone will not be able to measure the most important ideals and goals we as a society hold for our children and our schools. As Paulo Freire (1995) reminded us about the importance of hope in the struggle to improve the world, Rose reminds us that we must not lose hope even during these trying times and he provides examples of what a truly transformative pedagogy and curriculum should include.

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## Field Notes on Democracy, Listening to Grasshoppers

by Arundhati Roy

Published by Haymarket Books (Chicago, 2009)

Reviewed by Alan Singer

In 1997, Arundhati Roy received the prestigious Booker Prize (now the Man Booker Prize) for her first, and as yet only, published novel, *The God of Small Things* (London: Flamingo). The award gave Roy a measure of international celebrity and an audience for her leftist political views. Since that time she has concentrated her efforts on activism and political commentary.

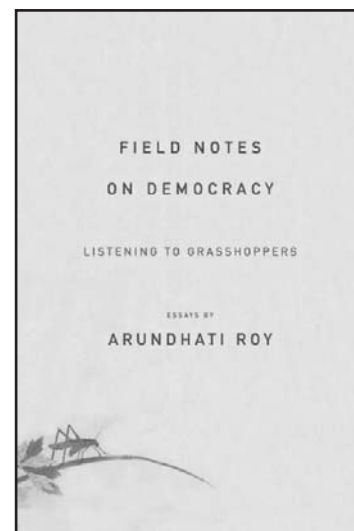
With this book Arundhati Roy enters a discussion on the nature of democracy begun by Enlightenment thinkers in 17th century Europe. Is democracy in the modern sense simply a process, voting for representatives to make decisions for the rest of us, or should it also involve a deeply held communal commitment to liberal values (liberty) and the rights of both individuals and groups? To further complicate the matter, if democracy must include a commitment to

rights, which rights should be paramount: the property rights of the wealthy or the right of the mass of humanity to live in peace, dignity, safety, and with the possibility of a better future for their children?

Common themes in the twelve essays included in this collection are Roy’s critique of globalization as fundamentally unjust and her challenge to the western liberal representative free market model of democracy, especially as it is applied in India. The essays specifically address critical moments in India during the last decade, but underlying issues, such as treatment of minorities, manipulation of electorates, alliances with the devil (George Bush and U.S. capital), and the dismissal of opponents as terrorists, concern us all. India’s Prevention of Terrorism Act passed in 2002 is a lot like the U.S. Patriot Act but even more draconian and subject to misinterpretation and abuse. Hundreds of people are assumed to be guilty and imprisoned without bail. They wait for trials in special courts that are not subject to public review or media scrutiny.

Roy goes into great detail on what will be obscure events for an American audience. But the beauty of her landscape is in the panoramic vista of contemporary India, not the details. Besides, Roy and her publisher provide readers with a very useful glossary.

Arundhati Roy does not back down from controversy in this book or, as far as I know, anywhere else. She documents the connections between rightwing “free market” forces and Hindu nationalists who have attacked the country’s Muslim minority. A recurring theme is India’s total acquiescence to capital-



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ist development projects at the expense of all other values. Roy fears that, in the name of progress, India will be transformed into a police state governed by politicians with close ties to international corporations whose interests they serve: a finance minister had previously been a lawyer for Enron, a judge who ruled on ecological issues left to go to work for Coca-Cola. This collection also includes a speech Roy gave in Turkey chastising that country's refusal to acknowledge the Armenian genocide.

Arundhati Roy is not arguing countries should no longer aspire to democracy. Rather she is concerned about what happens in a country like India where form replaces substance. She asks, "What happens once democracy has been used up? When it has been hollowed out and emptied of meaning?" (p. 3). Electoral democracy, like capitalism, is short-sighted. The process provides no long-term vision and lacks the ability to address long-term problems. Roy fears that achieving electoral democracy might mark the end, rather than the furthering, of civilization. She decries the faux democracy in India and elsewhere where elections have become television-friendly spectator sporting events with little real policy difference between the major political parties. While proudly proclaiming itself a democracy, India, always a caste-based society, has devolved into an apartheid state. The 70% of the population that lives in rural areas is overwhelmingly impoverished and completely marginalized. Meanwhile, in the urban areas a small elite lives in walled-off isolation and shares in the obscene riches of globalized capitalism.

Arundhati Roy's critique of electoral democracy has an element of the problem of "false consciousness" that has plagued left wing social movements since the start of the industrial revolution. Members of oppressed groups that the left believes should be in the vanguard of struggles for social change, act individually rather than collectively, accept the validity of the societies that oppress them, and aspire for mobility within those societies. This book would have been stronger if Roy addressed this problem directly.

Arundhati Roy's arguments, delivered with an artistic flourish, are quite sophisticated. She challenges the building of dams to support irrigation projects because they promote a shift to cash crops that denude the soil, make farmers heavily dependent on

polluting fertilizers and pesticides that they cannot afford, and change the ecological balance of the sub-continent. Roy sees free market capitalist development creating a new caste system in India of haves and have-nots, but in her variation of the Marxist dialectic, she also sees it producing the social unrest that can mean its downfall.

Unfortunately, Roy's passion and rhetorical skills can lead to exaggeration, which is always dangerous if your goal is to convince people; when they learn that you exaggerated in one area, they become suspicious of other things you have to say. The massacre of 2,000 Muslims and the gang rape of women in Gujarat in 2002, especially when it is tolerated by the police and the ruling political party, are horrific, but in a country with over 150 million Muslims, it does not rise to the level of genocide. Describing ethnic hatred in India as reminiscent of Nazi Germany in the 1930s is also too much hyperbole. In Germany, Jews made up less than 1% of the population and were much easier to scapegoat and exterminate than India's Muslim population. Roy does grapple with the perception that she is using the term "fascism" to describe India too loosely, but decides that it is an appropriate description of what is taking place.

There is also an element of conspiracy theory in the book that I find very disturbing. Roy suggests that the "incompetent" handling of the prosecution of the men accused of a 2001 attack on the Indian parliament was actually designed to mask government complicity in the attack — the mysterious second gunman on the bridge in Dallas. Roy believes this was done to justify repressive measures and to stir up anti-Islamic sentiment. Because she has no actual evidence of the conspiracy, she poses a series of leading questions that are little more than what-if statements. If Roy knows something she should have said it. But her approach in this book is just wrong. The book jacket has glowing praise from Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, and John Berger. I would feel better about the state of the left if one of them had also addressed this problem.

Arundhati Roy dedicated this book to those who have learned to divorce hope from reason. I wish that I could. I find it difficult to be hopeful when reason suggests that humanity is headed towards economic and environmental disasters on a biblical scale. I am

not convinced, although I wish I were, that the dialectal tension she counts on to bring about progressive social change — and that she argues is producing revolutionary upheaval in the Indian countryside — will actually bear fruit. The forces of global capital will be very difficult to topple. Meanwhile, I hope we have enough resources stored away from the seven fat years to survive, but as Roy knows full well, most of the world's people missed out on the benefits of those fat years.

One thing I enjoy about her writing is its conversational quality; you always feel as if she is talking directly with you, albeit with great enthusiasm, but not as if she is lecturing. However, while her writing motivates the already convinced, I am not convinced that her arguments change the minds of non-believers.

I know this is probably inappropriate in closing a book review, but Arundhati Roy is one of the few global intellectuals I would like to meet and talk with. The next time she is in New York and has a couple of hours, I would love to take her out for a cup of coffee or tea and a chat.

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## Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling

by Robert Kunzman

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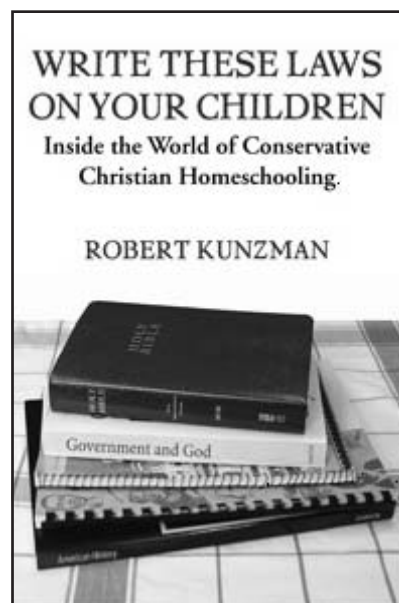
Reviewed by J. Gary Knowles

As a doctoral student researching and residing in Utah in the early 1980s, I was denied the opportunity to research homeschooling because learned professors on my supervisory committee assessed the practice as “not having sufficient importance, relevance, or merit for doctoral research.” I was enrolled in a school of schools — a university college of education — largely devoted to research about and practice in public schools. I was forced to research the phenomenon of home education independently while I completed a “more acceptable” study. How circumstances have changed regarding the place of home education in America!

I went on to explore, through parents' life histories, experiences of coming to and “doing” homeschooling. In that work, and in later research activities, I met many conservative-minded, religiously motivated parents and their families. The portraits of families that comprise most of *Write These Laws* ring true to me. I know families that have similar perspectives and views of and on the world. But I also suspect that the stories told about the activities and perspectives of the six families in this book likely represent the public face of practices

and activities that go on behind the curtain of safety and privacy of the homes Kunzman visited. (For example, what happened when he was not present? There are, after all, limits to the degree researchers can intrude upon the goodwill of families.) On the other hand, I have met few home-educating parents who were not willing to have their stories retold, even by sympathetic listeners. Kunzman appears to be a sympathetic scholar; although peppered throughout the accounts of the families are expressions of respectful, perhaps gentle, challenges to their theories, practices, creeds, and goals. This is perhaps one of the strengths of the book, although I have some reservations.

Twenty-five years after my university experience I estimate that there are well over two million school-



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age children being educated in the United States under parents' close guidance; this estimate, which is beyond what Robert Kunzman provides, is hardly insignificant or irrelevant. The exact number is unimportant, given uneven reporting policies across states and schoolboards and the continued practice of some parents to float beneath the radar. It is likely though, that parents who homeschool daily provide an exclusive venue, a stepping off point in knowledge development and growth, and a basis for citizenship and civic engagement for a sizable group of children in America. For this reason alone Kunzman's research is illuminating. He shines a light behind the curtain into the shadows of conservative, Christian home education practices and perspectives because, as he says, the majority of home-educating families in the United States (as opposed to other nations) appear to consist of this same demographic.

This, however, was not always the case over the last 70 years or so. Home education was once more situated in matters of school accessibility (or lack thereof) and progressive pedagogies and curricula. The present homeschool phenomenon rests in a set of historical events, contexts, and circumstances that I wish Kunzman had taken more time to explore and articulate for readers. It is the backdrop to the curtain.

This history has the potential to put Kunzman's stories of families in greater perspective. It would frame their actions and make stronger links to the origin of the controlling mandates of central contemporary players in this unfolding, conservative, Christian, home education drama: for example, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), numerous storefront Christian schools, small and large curricular developers and learning materials publishers to which many of these families turn for paid assistance, support, and collegiality in their educating endeavors. For instance, the conflict that began in the early 1980s between Raymond Moore, a prominent, relative early center-right/moderate home education advocate, and the then fledgling HSLDA and its leader was, perhaps, an ominous foreshadow of events and perspectives that now appear on the conservative homeschooling stage. This fact receives a passing glance in the early pages of the book and

brief mention later on. It is instructive because of the insight it affords into the present "work" of HSLDA.

Readers of *Write These Laws* are taken on a research journey as Kunzman expands his understanding of homeschooling and travels across the country interviewing parents, families, and heads of organizations committed to conservative Christian home education. In the process Kunzman derives compelling, even disturbing, insights into the movement. He interviews leaders of the Home School Legal Defense Association and its offshoot, Generation Joshua, "service providers" to home schooling, and the six families. The research accounts of these interviews and observations are laid out for readers in an immensely readable form befitting a researcher who appears genuinely interested in understanding the nuances of the educative practice. There is a natural flow to this work that parallels Kunzman's unfolding understandings. I take it, also, that the main audience for this work is home educators and the public at large although, no doubt, it will be of interest to education and sociology scholars and public school educators as well.

The audience of scholars of all stripes may find elements of this research lacking. For instance, Kunzman does not articulate his research orientation and associated methods, including information gathering, analysis, interpretation, and representation (which could have been included in an appendix so as not to disrupt the flow of the text). Although I am most interested in knowing about the arrangements and conditions under which Kunzman visited the families and gathered accounts, he is also silent about the ethical dimensions of the work, especially to what extent families may have reviewed interview transcripts and the way family participants were represented. There is also no discussion of the ethical dimensions of selecting service provider organizations and their directors for interviews and analyses, and the representations of those individuals; and, some reluctance to substantially critique practices and organizations or come to more definitive conclusions (a point about which I feel some ambiguity).

Even as I want to know more about where Kunzman stands, I know full well that, in order to continue to research in the larger home-educating community, he has to err on the side of caution, re-

straint, and fairness. After all, researchers have ethical responsibilities that are beyond those upheld by reputable journalists and they have a responsibility not to, as it were, raid and flee with the spoils. I wonder, also, what the families and the small-time service providers that were singled out think of the work. A broader discussion about these kinds of organizations may have served the purposes of the study well. To be fair, I may be a little hard on Kunzman because his writing is respectful enough so that his observations and ideas — indeed his questionings — may be considered and reconsidered, I suspect, by more thoughtful, conservative Christian homeschooling readers. Further, I sense he works hard at allowing readers to come to their own conclusions.

The goals of the study and the research questions which guided it are announced early in the opening chapter. Kunzman wants to describe what it is like to practice homeschooling from a conservative Christian viewpoint. He intends to provide a window into the worlds of educating families and four central questions guide his study. The first has to do with teaching and learning: “What kind of teaching and learning goes on at the kitchen table” (p. 9)? He wants to get a sense of the nuances of the various activities and contexts that intend to promote learning. The second is about the extent to which these parents both think for themselves and reflect their own values and beliefs while concurrently allowing (or not) their children to also think for themselves. The third has to do with Christian citizenship. He posed the questions: “How do these ... parents understand the rights and responsibilities of religiously informed citizenship?” and “How do they communicate these convictions to their children” (p. 10)? In this regard Generation Joshua’s mandate “to take back America for God,” is a rather frightening perspective, given the pluralistic and multi-racial/cultural/religious society of the new millennium. The fourth element centers on home school regulation: “[S]hould the state regulate home-schooling, and if so, to what extent” (p. 11)? These and related questions form the script of Kunzman’s quest. They are sound and timely questions about an increasingly present educative endeavor.

I found some of the best insights of the book located in “Chapter 5: Generation Joshua and the HSLDA.” Here Kunzman discusses (through recounting interviews with key people, including the founders of HSLDA Michael Farris and Mike Smith and directors of GenJ) some of the organization’s goals, practices, and public perspectives. He wonders about the implications of adversarial political and civic educational opportunities offered young people through GenJ, an organization that has mobilized hundreds of young students for conservative political purposes, to “reclaim [the country] for God.” These are the children whose families have memberships with HSLDA. He wonders about the proliferation of battleground terminology expressed through the various activities and communication channels of the organization. He wonders about the misuse and manipulation of research evidence by HSLDA and possible conflicts of interests in this regard. He wonders about the “legitimacy” of HSLDA taking up issues, such as the rights of the unborn child and gay- and same-sex marriage. He wonders about the long-term political ambitions of the leadership. He wonders about the oppressive controls by Farris on those members who challenge his authority or ideas, (such as the large number of faculty who resigned at Patrick Henry College (an arm of HSLDA where Farris is also the President) over disruptions to academic freedom. He wonders about proclamations that homeschooling is largely religious in nature. He wonders about the general adversarial framing of public school–home school debates. To be sure, the fundamental work of HSLDA (and Smith and Farris, together, as attorneys prior to the formation of the Association) was instrumental in calming the swell of sometimes frivolous litigation against parents that began in the late 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s. In that role, the Association’s legitimacy and integrity is not questioned.

Conservative Christian homeschooling is big business (contrary to the perspectives of Kunzman’s families), and HSLDA is major evidence of this fact. Parents purchase voluminous piles of redundant textbooks and public school cast-offs — not to mention all manner of media symbolic of bygone, nostalgic times when God was ever present in picture-perfect, spiritually robust, honest, hard-working, ho-

mogenous, Republican, small town America. This harkening to a glorified, imagined past, and the desire to unify church and state through God-fearing, Christian leadership in local, state and federal levels of governance, is reflected in all manner of curriculum, testing, and related services and products and organizational affiliations such as GenJ. It is a sobering reality and a wake-up call for those taking more moderate positions about the place of home education in American society.

There is much that I could criticize about the substance of this book: the findings and discussions, the stories of encounters. But Kunzman has at least cracked open the scripts of HSLDA's disinterested support for parents and their children, the actions of its subsidiaries, its leadership, and questionable educative practices. The focal points of this study allude to many of these criticisms. Of course, the directions of public education — an ideal that is yet to live up to promises — over the last 60 or so years have contributed to a flood of parental dissatisfaction with schools intended to serve all. Intimate learning environments, local curriculum, community-sensitive teachers, collegial and friendly relationships, manageable community-school relations, and the like, are just some of the qualities of public schools lost with the call to achieve economies of scale, and enforce economic rationalism, for example. These are some of the qualities home educators proclaim as not being present in contemporary schools (of course they have a litany of complaints). In parents' minds the ongoing amalgamation of school services, expansion of individual school populations, bussing, attention to "equal" distribution of resources and course offerings have contributed to the loss of quality education (and they are correct in a sense).

Robert Kunzman's account winds up with a chapter entitled "Becoming Public" and it is here that I really get a sense of what he thinks. Without arrogance he discusses the stories of engagement with parents and others in light of the research questions he posed. The first paragraph reminds readers that, for many conservative parents, "homeschooling was a spiritual battle for the soul...." His conclusions are highly compatible with those I have come to hold as a result of more than 30 years of involvement with home educators. He acknowledges the great variety

of perspectives and practices, noting that some of the very best educative contexts he has witnessed were in home or parent-directed contexts. He also notes the reverse — and rightly so. While he acknowledges the conformity evident in these settings, he recognizes that different kinds and expressions of conformity are found in public schools and the teachers and students. To be of liberal persuasion is to often disdain those who are more conservative — especially if they are Christian. Unlike the parents he does not engage in a home school versus public school debate. Like me he is also a teacher of teachers and recognizes the incredible strengths and agonizing (disheartening) weaknesses of public schools, qualities that abound in literature and debates about schools and school systems. Some, perhaps many, of these parents have come to see public schools as the emblematic enemy of their religious freedoms and assert their rights, as upheld in the highest courts of law, to guide their children's learning, believing that there is no distinction between the notion of formal schooling and that associated with attaining an education as a lifelong endeavor.

By the time I reached the end of the *Write These Laws*, I was convinced that the manner in which Kunzman engaged with the families and the community members within the conservative, Christian homeschooling movement was balanced and fair. This is a sound piece of scholarship and one to be praised for its accessibility and the windows into the families' worlds it provides. Other scholars will take these stories, and ones like them, and mold them into alternative discussions of this and other dimensions of American homeschooling. And homeschooling parents will no doubt be prompted in different ways by the reflections of families like theirs.