

**TEACHING LIKE A MOUNTAIN:  
TOWARD A POETIC PEDAGOGY OF PRESENCE IN THE MIDST OF  
EXPOSURE**

by

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Drawing on my climb of Mount Rainier to frame my inquiry, I meander through the circuitous and strenuous terrain of my personal history in education to clarify my identification with transformative learning and my constantly evolving pedagogical temperament. I start with the premise that each student is *thrown* into an elusive world of inherited stories and expectations. I presume that she embodies her own rhythms of change and metamorphosis, her own specific ways of expanding and contracting in response to what she is engaging and learning, and that this shapes and is shaped by where she comes from and her consciousness of the world in which she dwells (Abram, 2009, p. 19). Reflecting my presumption, I take my reader on a journey through a series of movements wherein I discover the cognitive topology of my inquiry into *exposure* and *presence*.

Grounding this interpretive study philosophically in Somerville's (2007, 2008) *postmodern emergence*, I employ Krall's (1988) *personal history* research heuristic to guide my poetic exploration of *thrownness* (Heidegger, 1962) in education. Writing against the backdrop of "the mountain," I uncover and highlight significant moments with *exposure* and *presence* to explicate how I have negotiated complicated relationships with teachers, students, and my *thrown* self, and navigated various theoretical and concrete pathways that have presented themselves as provocative and heartening guides along the way.

As my reader will discover, I believe that if we seek to avail ourselves of and transcend the inherited stories and expectations we have learned to live out in the classroom, then we are compelled to consider that our venture will require of us a great deal of curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity. With this in mind, I have become convinced while traversing the landscape of my educational past that an important aspect of my role as a teacher is to expose and be present to students in a way that supports and honors their specific ways of responding to what they are engaging and learning, and awakens them to possibilities not yet discovered regarding their *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*.

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*“Daddy, I think I want to climb a mountain,” I announced from atop an apple tree in the orchard. “Well,” he responded from below, “just remember, mountains are a little bit bigger than the trees you’re used to climbing.”*

## **PREFACE: A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO MY INQUIRY**

*I am about to backpack into a tireless wilderness. Physically and psychologically tired before beginning, I am filled with ambivalence. The divide at 12,000 feet and the decent into the drainage on the other side are our goal; we have planned long for this journey. But now with the moment at hand I dread the days ahead, the beginning, the climb, the struggle, the unknown. I feel the weight of inertia, the resistance to change, the longing for the status quo. I wonder why I am doing this.... A feeling, deep down begins to emerge. A quick breath. A rush of excitement bubbles up.... I pick up my pack and head out. (Krall, 1979, p. 1)*

In June, 1992 I enjoyed the opportunity to climb and summit Mount Rainier in the state of Washington with Lou Whittaker. Lou is a veteran mountain climber, “a guide of proved nerve and endurance” (Muir, 1997, p. 107), notable in climbing circles for leading the first ascent of an American mountaineering team up the North Col of Mt. Everest in 1984, and as one of the co-founders of Rainier Mountaineering Incorporated (RMI), the leading guide service on Mount Rainier (Whittaker, n.d., ¶1). He’s a tall man with an auspicious character. As he looms above the heads of his climbing apprentices he exudes an intoxicating and conciliatory demeanor. People want to be around this man, and he is gracious in his acceptance of their esteem. As a leader he is unassuming and courteous. He obviously wants for his climbers to ascend and summit the mountain he refers to as his “second home.” He respects those who have ventured to

Rainier by the simple show of his steadfast presence and generous affirmation. And, as he is careful not to impose stultifying expectations or responsibilities upon those who tremble with anticipation or outright fear, ultimately, Lou respects and knows “the mountain.” “It’s a delightful and dreadful place,” he cautions the evening before our climb. “The mountain will eat you up if you aren’t ready for the journey you’re about to take.”

Throughout our excursion together on Mount Rainier Lou remained gentle and forthright, stable and benevolent. We had a mountain to climb, and unreliable conditions through which to navigate our journey. There were some who would struggle more than others; a few who simply would not be able to complete the trek at all. And still, Lou personified an unaffected calm, supporting each climber in their respective abilities, and maintaining a firm and gentle grasp on the mission at hand. He nurtured and rallied for those of us who struggled and seemed capable, while supporting those who struggled and simply couldn’t continue. It seemed that he wanted all of us to succeed, and he recognized that success would mean many different things for each of us.

For my part, I remember feeling terrified and elated the night before our journey commenced. And, that tension would linger until our return from the summit to the base of the mountain seven days later. My personal ascent of Mount Rainier was an awe-inspiring experience; an opportunity to meet head on my fears and trepidations about being “enough”: strong enough, tenacious enough, focused and brave enough to reflect on, transcend and utilize what was painful and hard; and, brave and humble enough to know when I needed to stop and reconsider the task I was taking on. It was an opportunity to *be-and-become-whole-on-the-mountain; being* in my multidimensionality just where I was, and further *becoming* myself at that

place. As well, it was an opportunity, not known at the time, to witness first hand a teacher's enaction of *presence* and benevolence in the midst of my own and others' *exposure*.

Eighteen years have passed since I donned crampons and glacier glasses with Lou Whittaker. My mountain climbing boots have long since been discarded, unable to support another rubber sole replacement. And, my ice axe has morphed into a dull and tenuous instrument of decoration rather than exploration. My mental memories of my week on "the mountain" have softened, no longer as sharp as I attempt to recall intricate details about the climb and the people in my brigade.

My sentient memories however, are crystal clear. Peering at the topographic map I have hanging slightly askew from the center of my workspace, I am reminded of balancing atop my own personal crevasse between anxiety and ecstasy the morning we were to begin our trek; tears streaming down my face while I struggled to convince myself that indeed I was capable enough to climb to the top of Mount Rainier. My palms tingle as I remember the sweat they excreted when a teammate slipped during the second leg of our early morning ascent. My head shakes when I recall the humiliation I felt while trying to ice climb for the first time, and the exposure I felt on the last leg of our summit attempt. My heart races when I recollect my first sighting of "the top" and how that glimpse evoked a potent surge of adrenalin enabling me to continue to trudge through snow and ice to summit the highest mountain in the continental United States. And, my whole body calms when I remember the enormous sense of relief and satisfaction I felt when I knelt at the base of the mountain, whispering gently to my mother so many miles away, "I did it, Mom. I climbed that mountain."

Today, my work no longer takes me on expeditions to places where a backpack and warm sleeping bag are essential for survival. Instead, my pack is filled with books, pens, mini cruzers



and lesson plans. I am climbing different mountains these days, exploring routes toward the twin summits of a long-desired educational apex and my pedagogical *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*. My journey now, though one steeped in intellectual curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity, resembles the long approaches of my earlier glacial travel. Like the tension I felt on the mountain, I continue to be moved by the terror and elation I experience as a teacher, hoping that I, like Lou, can locate ways to be gentle and forthright, present and benevolent, firm and nurturing with myself and the students who pass through the doors of my classrooms, often not aware of the kinds of exposure they will experience within the boundaries of our classroom paradise. It is awe-inspiring work at times, providing opportunities for me to meet head on my fears and trepidations about being “enough” in the classroom: strong enough, tenacious enough, focused and brave enough to reflect on, transcend and utilize what is painful and hard; brave and humble enough to know when I need to stop and reconsider the task I am taking on. And, it is humbling work requiring of me a disposition that signifies to the people with whom I am working, that “I am here,” “I will not leave you,” and, “I want to understand what you have to say.”

As well, it is work that constantly presents me with opportunities for *being* in my multidimensionality just where I am, and further *becoming* myself at that place. Remembering and honoring the tension thus reminds me that my progress toward *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* is and will continue to be conditional, deliberate and incremental, and that the triumphs and tribulations, joys and lamentations that arise are elements possibly unforeseen, and ultimately fortifying of my pedagogical temperament nonetheless.

Charting the course of my inquiry and leaving a trace of the knowledge I have thus far gained, is not a path easily tracked. The focus of my inquiry has changed, moving about like a

chipmunk scampering around my backyard. As I have tried to appear organized and thoughtful throughout the process of preparing for and setting out on this journey, I have often been waylaid and sidetracked, following interests and ideas with a vigor and enthusiasm that have often left me feeling ambivalent, unsure, exhausted, resistant and exposed. I have scouted numerous pathways for my exploration, wondering what cardinal points and bearings to follow. And, I have felt tired, even paralyzed, under the weight of a familiar inertia: the possibility that what I present will not be good enough, and my fear of climbing a different sort of mountain, one that I have imagined ascending for a very long time.

Richard Rhodes (1995) affirms in *How to Write*,

If you want to write, you can. Fear stops most people from writing, not lack of talent, whatever that is. Who am I? What right have I to speak? Who will listen to me if I do? You're a human being, with a unique story to tell, and you have every right. If you speak with passion, many of us will listen. We need stories to live, all of us. We live by story. Yours enlarges the circle. (p. 1)

Nancy Slonim Aronie (1998) concurs, "Writing comes from the deepest interior of your psyche, where bravery dwells. It comes from your truth" (p. 164). Still, like the character of Anna Wulf in Doris Lessing's (1962) *The Golden Notebook*, "[I am] afraid of writing what [I] think about life, because [I] might find [myself] in an exposed position, [I] might expose [myself], [I] might be alone" (p. 38). Still, I *am* doing this. I *am* here.

So...*who am I?* I am Julia Gates Brooks. *What right have I to speak?* I have every right, for I live, and I have had life experiences, some of them profound, others less significant perhaps on the excursion I aim to chart here. *Who will listen to me?* I imagine many who are interested in the various topics and questions I raise here about teaching and specifically teacher

education. Though truly there are no guarantees that anyone beyond my dissertation committee will find interest in reading my work. And even in their case, their attention is conditional; they agreed to be interested when I requested that they serve on my committee. Admittedly, I don't believe that any of them agreed out of a sense of academic duty or pitiful obligation. If I believed that then I could not continue.

Of course, they will judge; you, my reader will have shrewd opinions about my stories; you, my reader, will wonder, and rightly so, how I am making the connections I am making, drawing meaning from those connections, and, weaving the tapestry, or enlarging the circle of my life and its relevance to my profession. And you, my reader will draw conclusions, some of which I will have the opportunity to consider alongside you, while others will remain silent, and perhaps hidden from my view. In this way, we are walking this path together, for as Maxine Greene (1995) believes,

Writer and reader are responsible for the universe brought into being through the act of reading. The [manuscript] becomes a kind of gift, largely because it is addressed to human freedom—the capacity to move beyond what is, to create identity in the light of what might be. (p. 77)

Ultimately, you will decide if I have done enough, if my work is good enough to give you pause. I am exposing myself here, feeling alone in my offering of my experiences and insights, laying bare the identity I have thus far created, and am continuing to develop. This is my wilderness, and though I have spent many a night wondering why I am doing this, I am nevertheless excited to share what has bubbled up, what has emerged from my climb, my struggle and my uncovering of what is unknown.

Retrospectively, I believe my journey is one I might liken to *being-and-becoming-whole-in-the-dissertation*; a poetic, personal and transformative journey, tracing the roots of my desires to understand, know and transcend where I have been on my educational expedition thus far, to the place I currently inhabit: a place wherein I am free to feel, explore and imagine, alongside my “discursive colleagues” who have eloquently written about similar adventures, and my peers, advisors and mentors who have been generous and forthright in their support, feedback and presence. My project here is not a linear exposition or syllogism, chunked together in a fashion that is immediately clear and progressive. Rather, my project has manifested as a mosaic, a poetic discussion that does not necessarily provide my reader with any definite conclusions, but perhaps elicits a more coherent, and not necessarily complete, understanding of everything I am trying to convey.

I have planned and prepared long for this excursion, and I am ready to go. Sweaty palms and heart racing, I take “a quick breath...pick up my pack and move ahead” (Krall, 1979, p. 1). *I have read enough, I have written enough, I am enough.* Perhaps Dr. Seuss (1990) said it best, “Your mountain is waiting. So, get on your way!” (p. 44).

## 1.0 MOVEMENT I, BASECAMP: A TECHNICAL INTRODUCTION TO MY JOURNEY

*Mountains are big. Very big. But they are also great. Very great. They have dignity and other aspects of greatness. They are solid, stable, unmoving. A Sanskrit word for them is a-ga, that which does not to go. But curiously enough, there are lots of movements in them. Thus a ridge is sometimes ascending, there is a strong upward movement, perhaps broken with spires, towers, but resuming the upward trend, toward the sky and even toward heaven. The ridge or contour does not only have movement up and up, but may point upward, may invite elevation. When we are climbing a mountain, it may witness our behavior with a somewhat remote or mild benevolence. The mountain never fights against us and it will hold back avalanches as long as it can, but sometimes human stupidity and hubris and a lack of intimate feeling for the environment result in human catastrophes. (Naess, 1979, p. 13)*

For as long as I can remember I have revered the natural world. As I recall childhood mornings peering from my bedroom window at deer scampering through freshly fallen snow, afternoons spent climbing trees in the woods behind my home and evenings with my mother watching baby owls learning to fly, I am reminded of a sacred and enchanting relationship that I once took for granted between myself and all things more-than-human (Abram, 1996). As a child, nature, animals, anything that existed in the world beyond the brick walls of my home both intrigued

and called to me, “Come out and play.” I was mesmerized watching squirrels pull peanuts from the contours of the tree bark my brother and I packed in the mornings before breakfast. The chirps of birds searching for morsels during my walks to school enlivened my appreciation for nature’s symphony. And, the hours I spent trudging through sinking stone, navigating routes around abrupt overhangs in a strip mine close to my family’s retreat in northern Pennsylvania, are among some of the most vivid reminders I have of the emergence of an adventurous, enchanting and awakened spirit within me--what Rachel Carson (1956) dubbed “a sense of wonder,” Edith Cobb (1977) recognized as “the first poetic spirit of our life” (p. 24), and Arne Naess (1988) recognized as “the ecological self” (p. 22). It was a life-force if you will, a primordial connection with and faith in the world in which I dwelled that I longed to integrate into every facet of my life.

As I progressed in my education, that spirit, though still present for me while meandering in the natural world, was often stifled in school. As a young student, for example, my love of and passion for adventure in the outdoors was often met with disdain by teachers, and dismissed as “something to do at recess.” The tools of my explorations were things to “share at show-and-tell.” Early on my educational journey I learned to compartmentalize my interests, temper my passions and discern which parts of myself were appropriate to reveal in particular settings. My *being-and-becoming-whole* was arrested. I was hurried, like so many other students in public schools, through imposed processes and procedures intended to educate me. Ultimately, I came to feel that I was never quite enough: smart enough, capable enough, attentive enough, patient enough, or focused enough to *be* or *become* the “good student” that so many of my teachers expected me to be.

There were times and opportunities, of course, for me to engage those parts of myself that yearned to experience something more in my education, times and opportunities during which I was permitted to integrate my passion for and connections with the Earth, for example, in my formal work as a student. I kept personal journals and wrote poetry, some of which was published in my high school's literary journal, and one, "The Distance is Too Far," published in a larger book of poetry (Brooks, in Campbell, 1986, p. 285). In these places I recorded feelings and thoughts, ideas and questions, yearnings that emerged for me in response to classroom topics and material, as well as events happening in my life outside of school. Often I revisited and reflected on specific memories, periods and incidents that I may not have recorded in the moment but that seemed to esoterically emerge from the darkness of many a solitudinous moment. Thus, I did locate venues through which to chronicle my musings, and I did enjoy the support and encouragement of a few teachers and other allies to continue drawing connections between what was taking place in school, and what was internally and externally important to me. Still, the lesson to compartmentalize my thoughts and emotions, my passions and yearnings, was a powerful one.

Today, as I recall my early professional life as an teacher, I believed, as explicated by Noreen Garman (2005), and perhaps instigated and confirmed by some of my earlier experiences, that the modernist concept of education was the only true form for educating the young: that through adherence to the "right" techniques and inclusion of the "right" components of structure and evaluation in the curriculum (i.e. knowledge, syllabus, academic materials, rules, norms), I could "make" students become more learned and productive; I could lead them to the discovery of certain universal truths about the world and their place in it. I came to believe that I could "cause [the student] to learn subject matter," often irrelevant to their worlds outside of our

classroom, by providing an “adequate curriculum” which I would then manage and evaluate (p. 2).

In retrospect, and as a result of experience, self-reflection and collegial discussions, I suspect that by placing priority on my students’ rational and technical engagement with classroom material, for example, I have perhaps contributed to the covering over of many of the potentialities for their *being-and-becoming-whole*, perhaps reinforcing the message that they are not enough if they do not see that learning my lessons the way that I have presented them is imperative to their academic success. In “Max, Just Max” you’ll read about a young man who pushed many a defensive button for me. Interpreting his behavior in my classroom as arrogant and even loathsome at times, I spent much of our first semester together looking for opportunities to put him in his place. Later I did eventually realize the roots of my own behavior, but only after inflicting a fair amount of contempt upon him.

Reflecting on my own struggles to *be-and-become-whole* throughout my educational journey, and, again, in conversation with others, I have come to realize that by adhering to the notion that students are open vessels to be “domesticated” (Freire, 1970/1993) and filled with knowledge, rational beings needing to be socialized to intellectually grapple with learning in a specific way, I have repeated the same messages of some of my earlier teachers, interrupting, I surmise, many of my students’ self-reflective abilities as interested and motivated learners; compartmentalizing their cognitive and emotional capacities; stifling their poetic spirits; and, diminishing the possibilities for transformation in the context of our class. I have tried to dictate a specific route up the metaphoric mountains of our educational expeditions only to in some cases—like the one I experienced with Max—devastate, or at least, suppress many a student’s potential for ascension, apprehension, self-realization and *being-and-becoming-whole*. In this



way I imagine that I have perpetrated what Freire (1998) refers to as a *posture in disdain* (p. 51), placing priority on *my* way of teaching at the expense of students' motivations, desires and propensities for learning.

Gretchen Givens Generett (2009), in clarifying the influence of bell hooks' narrative approach to "engaged pedagogy" on her life as a student at Spelman College and as a teacher educator, proposes in line with how she interprets hooks' work, "that educational transformation cannot take place until [teacher educators] first understand the impact of their own ways of knowing and being educated about their value system, beliefs, and desires for education" (p. 86). She goes on to suggest that "Teacher educators have to be able to critically answer the question, 'Why do I believe this and what outcome am I trying to produce?'" (p. 88). In my current work with students I have tried to learn from and remedy some of my earlier missteps as a teacher, sometimes conforming to what others have suggested, and other times scouting out different pathways on my own. As I have written in "Bearing the Weight: Discomfort as a Necessary Condition for 'Less Violent' and More Equitable Dialogic Learning" (Brooks, forthcoming), there are dynamics at play in the classroom that have the potential to represent some of the richest and most daunting opportunities for exploring and bringing about major change in education, society and the self.

For example, as you will read, while attempting to foster students' dialogic and critical engagement with a justice-oriented curriculum in the Social Foundations of Education, I was confronted by a student claiming that I was being disingenuous in my desire to create "participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge" (hooks, 1994, p, 15) for everyone in our class. According to this student, by allowing for dissenting voices in the classroom, I was ultimately providing a forum for people to offend and denigrate one another. Referring

specifically to a class discussion about Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer/Asexual (GLBTQA) issues in education, this student confided in a reflective essay that she personally felt “bombarded,” “shut down,” and “exposed” after she had shared her religious viewpoints on the issues at hand. I certainly remembered the conversation, and recollected that there was some tension in the room, as there usually is during conversations about social and ecological issues. My experience of that class, however, was that those tensions had been addressed, that we as a class had ended that particular session both acknowledging and rectifying any lingering questions or concerns. To my surprise, however, and admittedly feeling stunned, confused and even defensive, this student made it apparent to me that though I *thought* the class had engaged both the topic and the discomfort in the room in a manner that was respectful and caring, at least one student emerged from that room with “brittle, crumpled wings” (Kazantzakis, 1953, ¶1).

Though I have become increasingly more comfortable with the various and often times unexpected dynamics that emerge with each class, and have come to trust that if acknowledged and addressed these dynamics have the potential to initiate opportunities for personal and social change, I walk with that earlier tension from my days on “the mountain,” feeling terrified and elated by and for the obstacles and vistas I anticipate experiencing and seeing, and those also unforeseen on the excursion I am inviting students to take with me. I know that I am entering the room with skills, ideas, questions, an autobiography of my own, and an intellectual agenda for engaging learning and nurturing the *being-and-becoming-whole* of each of us. I know also that ultimately I want and am constantly working to do things differently for and with my students. And, I do not know at the outset of the semester how all of that will evolve and make sense: how we will traverse the contested terrain of our project together, ascend the walls that present themselves as barriers, and open ourselves up to reflecting on the individual and collective

stories that dominate and might ultimately liberate our steps both inside and outside of our classroom. I am therefore challenged, as I imagine Lou Whittaker was in his early days of mountaineering, to discern between the moments that call for nurturance of and a rallying for our struggle, and those that must wait for another day.

## 1.1 SCOUTING THE TOPOGRAPHY

### 1.1.1 Initiating Presumptions

Parker Palmer (1998) suggests that “A learning space must have features that help students deal with the dangers of an educational expedition: places to rest, places to find nourishment, even places to seek shelter when one feels overexposed” (p. 75). In the following pages I traverse the precipitous terrain of my own *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* in an effort to understand the metamorphosis and influence of my identification with transformative education on a poetic pedagogy grounded in *presence* amidst students’ and teacher’s experience of *exposure*. As well, and perhaps more precisely, I consider the development and enaction of my pedagogical temperament whilst trekking alongside students on our collective educational expedition. I start with the premise that each student embodies her own rhythms of change and metamorphosis, her own specific ways of expanding and contracting in response to what she is engaging and learning, and this shapes and is shaped by her personal history, where she comes from and her consciousness of the world in which she dwells (Abram, 2009, p. 19). Drawing on Heidegger’s (1962) notions of *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness* and *authenticity*—concepts I will explore in much more depth below—I presume that students, like myself, are *thrown* into and exist in a

particular world. I presume as well, that they are generally aware of their existence in that world, though perhaps not fully aware of the possibilities available to them in that world beyond what various social agents have offered to them or what they have inherited from the past. And, I presume that when we are confronted with the reality of our existence in the world, when our compliance with prescribed roles and expectations, for example, is revealed as *inauthentic*, not of our own making, and perhaps not the only way to live, we feel *exposed*, opened up and raw. For Heidegger this is the manifestation of our *anxiety*, our unsettling response to the ambiguity of our existence and the ambivalent relationship we cautiously contain with the possibilities we have been led to believe we embody (pp. 228-235).

In light of my presumptions, I believe that a significant aspect of my role as a teacher is to expose our *thrownness* in the world in a way that might open doors and awaken students to possibilities that they had never before considered, perhaps because they have had no reason to consider anything, again, beyond what various social agents in the world alongside them have made available to them. As well, I believe I am responsible for supporting students' responses to their *thrownness*, whatever those responses might be or look like, honoring the intellectual, emotional, visceral and spiritual spaces from which they emerge and in which they dwell. In this sense I am imagining my pedagogical disposition as grounded in *presence*, and focused on creating and maintaining conditions in the classroom wherein students and teachers might consider deep personal, political, ideological and social change as a result of particular "educating encounters" (Vandenberg, 1971, pp. 138-142), "pedagogical moments" (van Manen, 1991, p. 40) or "teachable moments" (Cain, Cummings & Stanchfield, 2005); and wherein they might rest, find nourishment and shelter when they feel overexposed.

Certainly, I am not setting out *to* transform students, disparaging what they have internalized from various authority figures, fighting against what they are doing or choosing, imposing a particular protocol, or espousing a specific agenda for enacting change. Our students are not entities unto themselves, isolated victims in a world of drudgery and perpetration, uncertain of how to be or live. They are not people living in the wrong seeking to live in the right. Instead, they are curious, courageous and living with dilemmas that are neither easy nor always desirable to resolve. I am also not seeking to portray myself as value-free or neutral. Though I reject the temptation to represent myself as an ardent expert, I do have opinions, ideas, questions, expectations and a point of view about education. I do come to the classroom with my own story. And, though I am willing to hold back avalanches for as long as I am able, I do understand that sometimes catastrophes will happen (Naess, 1979, p. 13); sometimes people will feel unheard, confused, riled and perhaps, angry; and sometimes they will continue to make the same kinds of decisions and choices I may have initially hoped they would change.

I am embarking then *with* my students on a journey at the end of which I imagine they and I will consider our lives and contributions to the world differently, perhaps in line with what we each want for ourselves rather than what others have prescribed for us. In this way, I am envisioning our project in the classroom as one wherein we are working to engage our intersubjectivity, weaving what Nick Crossley (1996) refers to as the “fabric of our social becoming” (p. 173) wherein we are held together in an “identifiable group” (p. 173). “This world and the multiple relationships therein are always in a process of becoming something and are never static,” Crossley suggests (p. 173). He expounds,

My point is that intersubjectivity is the key to understanding human life in both its personal and its societal forms. It is that in virtue of which our societies are possible and

we are who we are. Moreover, it is irreducible and *sui generis*, a generative principle of our identities, our agency and of the societies in which we live. And, it is something which we cannot step out of. (p. 173)

Thus, this journey I am asking my students to take with me, and my role and responsibility on it, is about fostering *movement*, both backward and forward, toward and beyond spires and towers, perhaps “towards the sky, and even toward heaven” (p. 13). It is about movement of individuals within a distinct group. And, it is reliant, I believe, on a particular way of *being-and-becoming* in the classroom that honors where students are and challenges them to consider different ways of knowing about and interacting with their worlds without denigrating or obliterating their sense of self, community and place in that world.

### **1.1.2 Intentions for My Inquiry**

On this dissertation journey, I have recorded, examined, discovered and articulated what it means to me to identify as a transformative teacher, specifically regarding my pedagogical temperament in an atmosphere of exposure. In particular I have sought to uncover some of the themes that currently contribute to my emerging pedagogy for teaching like a mountain; illuminate some of the problematics of a transformative approach to learning; and clarify some of the implications that my constantly evolving pedagogy might have for teacher education instructors and students. In this effort I have organized my inquiry, like I have imagined my journeys with students, around Naess’ (1979) notion of “movements.” Like mountains, there is movement in this manuscript, sometimes ascending toward various ideological apices, other times descending into valleys full of questions and uncertainty. Like *climbing* mountains, writing this dissertation has been an exploration of process and progress, movements upward and down, trends advancing

and retreating. Thus, I have chosen to identify my chapters as *movements* to signify both the fluidity of my project, and my momentum through the contours of this dissertation landscape.

Grounding this interpretive study philosophically in *postmodern emergence* (Somerville, 2007, 2008), I have employed Florence R. Krall's (1988a) *personal history* research heuristic, undertaking an "archaeology of my-self" as learner and teacher (Kesson, 1999, p. 93) to uncover various events from my educational autobiography, specifically regarding my experience of *exposure*, and explicate, against the backdrop of "the mountain," how I am continuing to *be-and-become-whole-in-education*; how I have been motivated and supported to negotiate what has at times been rather circuitous and strenuous terrain; how I have experienced exposure as a student and a teacher, and grappled with what is enough both within and outside of myself; how I have experienced transformation in my learning life; and how I have navigated various theoretical and concrete pathways that have presented themselves as provocative and heartening guides along the way.

With Krall's heuristic as my methodological map, I have additionally drawn on various forms of "poetic inquiry" (Brady, 2004, 2005; Heidegger, 1959, 1975; Montuori, 2008; Pillow, 2003; Richardson, 1997; Rolling, 2004; St. Pierre, 2000; Somerville, 2007, 2008; Stewart, 2005) and personal essay writing (Logsdon, 2000; Piantanida, 2006, 2010; Schubert, 1991) to structure and illustrate some of the deeper contours of my study. Krall premises her *personal history* approach on the proposition that "thoughtful recovery of one's educational experiences can be an effective method for identifying and understanding broad curricular and pedagogical issues" (p. 467). And, William Schubert (1991) explains, "For the essayist, writing is a special way of thinking. It is a method of inquiry, one that allows the reader to follow along the often convoluted journey that leads to greater illumination" (p. 69). "The essay," he goes on to

describe, “a fluid and less formal form, retains the vitality of lived experience by creating a method of inquiry within its presentation” (p. 69). Thus, writing personal essays and weaving these significant personal passages, drawn primarily from journal entries and memory, with others’ personal narratives, poetry, and scholarly work, I have envisioned and crafted a *poetic dialogue* emerging between myself, my experiences, and my discursive colleagues; a generative, if not sometimes convoluted, exchange from which I have gained greater insight and further developed my pedagogical worldview.

This is *my* story. I am not attempting to accurately portray how other actors involved here may have experienced me, or interpreted the events that I share. And, I am cognizant that even though I am claiming *my* story here, writing through *my* recollections of *my* experiences, I may not be expressing an precise portrayal of what actually took place. In this sense, there is a *fictive* element to my work here, a conjuring and creating of powerful portrayals of experiences as I have imagined, remembered and made sense of them. Certainly, as Peter Clements (1999) suggests, “memories can be fraught with difficulty” (p. 22). And still, their legitimacy can be found in their potential to inform how one might consider and reconsider the changing nature of one’s values, beliefs and desires over time; “the varying personal baggage [one might bring] to tasks over time” and one’s “architecture of self” (p. 23). This fictive element is different from fiction in that what I portray here is a version of what actually happened. I have not “made up” the characters or events about which I write, though admittedly I have changed many of the names of the people involved, modified some of the circumstances under which I experienced these actors, and certainly attach to my memories of these events in the present particular meanings and insights to which I did not have access in the past.



Additionally, I have relied on what Krall (1979) describes as emerging “living metaphors” to frame and give voice to the sentient components of my inquiry:

Metaphors. Living, not literary. What are they? Encounters. Encounters with nature, purely sentient and personal in their conception. Vivid, intense, clear, they grow and go on living in my heart and mind, tapes, replayed over and over telling me more and more about my Earth niche. Tools of pedagogy? Perhaps. Sometimes. But shared with students with great care and humility only when a common ground is sensed. Parcels of existential reality they carry a deeper meaning transferable as it is remembered. (p. 4)

As my reader has already observed, I have positioned “the mountain” front and center as the most potent and significant “living metaphor” from my personal history, drawing on my experiences with it to illustrate and highlight the ontological significance of my *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*. Influenced by Aldo Leopold’s (1966) *Sand County Almanac*, and specifically his essay, “Thinking Like a Mountain” (pp. 137-141), as well as John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming and Arne Naess’ (1988) book of the same name, “the mountain” signifies beauty and grace, agony and insight. The mountain and my experiences with it represent my penultimate struggle to prove, albeit to myself, that I have and can continue to survive and thrive in the midst of my experiences of *exposure* and draw on them for further insight into my whole and authentic self. This is my movement both backward and forward, toward and beyond spires and towers, perhaps “towards the sky, and even toward heaven” (Naess, 1979, p. 13).

Finally, in the process of writing, and in the service of shaping my poetic pedagogy, I have recorded specific events from “the mountain” in the form of “interludes” throughout to both prefigure and help me configure a “dialectical link” (Crotty, 2003, p. 106) between the felt world and the intellectual world (Oliver, 1999, p. 24), between my lived experiences on the mountain,

and the theoretical insights I have garnered as both have catalyzed and sustained my desire to understand the influence of my own *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* on my pedagogical temperament, and ultimately, my construction of a pedagogy for teaching like a mountain.

### **1.1.3 Research Dilemma**

Adrienne Rich (1979) mused “It’s exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful”(p. 35). In my early years of scampering about outside, I felt connected, integrally linked with the Earth and all things more-than-human (Abram, 1996). I was enchanted (Moore, 1996) and transformed by the relationships I both witnessed and enjoyed in and with the natural world, touched sensually and intellectually by what I was observing, imagining and becoming in relation to the world around me. As an adult, ascending even further in my studies as a student and my work as a college instructor, I have enjoyed a re-connection with the Earth, witnessing and being re-enchanted and transformed by the “living metaphors” (Krall, 1979) that my immersion in the natural world continues to generate for me, both personally and professionally.

In light of these emerging metaphors, these parcels of my existential reality, and reflecting my deep commitment to and concern for the plight of the Earth, I have become increasingly troubled about the plight of teacher education students surviving in a system that for all intents and purposes continues to perpetrate their disconnection with the planet; diminishes their sentient ways of knowing; exploits their cognitive capacities; delegitimizes their imaginative navigation of and through the world; and arrests their potential for *being-and-becoming-whole* and thus, thriving authentically in their respective communities. In this atmosphere, responding to my earlier observations in the context of transformative education, I

have wondered what role I am currently playing in this system, and what my responsibility is to investigating and remedying my concern.

Furthermore, I have grappled with what it means to teach with dignity on this planet of which I am an integral part at a time when many students seem more concerned with where they are going (i.e. obtaining a degree and a job) than they are with recognizing the ontological significance of where they reside and how they are connected to others right now. And, I have asked: how do I encourage my students to see and feel their connection to themselves, others and the planet in a way that might awaken them to possibilities for community thus far unconsidered? And, how do I convey the imperative I sense for addressing and alleviating my students' and the planet's difficulties, as well as my own vulnerability as a teacher, without scaring or alienating them?

As I have written about before (Brooks, 2009, 2008, 2007; Brooks & Hulse, 2006; Brown, Brooks & Gunzenhauser, 2008), I have been troubled by the general lack of attention to emotion and discomfort in the justice oriented undergraduate Foundations of Education and graduate Education and Society curriculums. More specifically, I have been concerned that the *critical* approach to these curriculums has neglected to attend to the needs, desires, vulnerabilities, exposure, and emotional health of teachers and students addressing inequality and oppression in education. As such, I have sought to illuminate “the potential role that discomfort might play as students and instructors individually and collectively risk questioning the authority of various norms and narratives in education, venturing into what is often unknown, uncomfortable, and potentially violent territory in the classroom” (Brooks, 2008, p. 4).

In other words, as I have experienced and recognize the importance of the critical project in teacher education classes for revealing inequity and oppression in education and society, and

engaging students' consideration of activism to remedy the social blights imposed upon human beings and the planet, for example, I have wondered if we in education have unwittingly neglected portions of students' stories, their autobiographical journeys through, in and with the world, diverting a process that was begun long before they came into our classrooms. I have wondered as well if in our neglect we have ultimately contributed to covering over students' ability to feel, care, take responsibility for and identify with themselves and others, both human and more-than-human, with whom they are intimately connected and dependent. With these curiosities in mind, I have sought to uncover and consider, alongside students and colleagues, first, how to recognize and honor these powerful experiences of discomfort in the classroom, and second how to create, integrate and manage a pedagogical disposition that compels us to pursue our academic agendas with more authenticity, humility and reverence for our respective processes of *being-and-becoming-whole*.

Peter Renner (2001) considers that "Teachers everywhere go about their work every day, making the best of what they have in order to teach" (¶3). He continues, suggesting that "Most toil in relative isolation, unable to share their stories and benefit from others' wisdom" (¶3). And, he concludes citing Parker Palmer, that "Much of their teaching expertise arises from lived experience, their private storehouse of 'identity and integrity'" (¶3). Where I believe deeply in and am committed to revealing, investigating and resolving social and ecological injustice, specifically in education, I am curious about the most appropriate and satisfying tack to take toward elucidating and engaging these conflicts.

I want for my students, like I imagine Lou Whittaker wanted for his climbers on Mount Rainier, to leave my classes feeling supported, heard, seen, motivated, successful, and transformed in some way by our classroom endeavors. However, the route to demystifying what

we have learned to take for granted about the world, our dwelling within it, and our emotional, visceral and spiritual responses to considering those lessons differently is circuitous and unclear. There is no clear pinnacle to reach. Unlike summiting Mount Rainier alongside Lou, I can't see the intellectual, emotional, visceral and spiritual apex of my work with students, I can't verify that indeed our work together has initiated an intersubjective experience from which my students do feel supported, heard, seen, motivated, successful and transformed. And, though I may *want* my students to walk away from our time together having enjoyed certain intellectual, emotional, visceral and spiritual encounters with me, I do realize that what *I want* and how my students actually engage and understand the material we are exploring, as well as the conditions for that engagement in the classroom, are often fraught with contestation. Thus, charting a course toward our summit is both troubling and opaque.

Additionally, as I can't foresee a clear protocol or pathway, nor do I expect that there should be one, I, alongside other critical and transformative teachers, can't ultimately know what that vista will look like or how it will be represented by and for students. So, in addition to my earlier speculations, I wonder: who am I to decide and how do I decide what is whole in me and others? And, how might my ideas and insights about wholeness be particularly useful to augmenting my pedagogical temperament, my understanding of *being-and-becoming-whole*, and my construction of a pedagogy for teaching like a mountain?

#### **1.1.4 Research Questions and Sub-questions**

Nicholas Burbules (2004) supposes

Despite our tendency to view learning and growth as an ever-climbing upward journey, I think a truer perspective is cyclical: that education is often about returning again and

again to certain existential and intellectual problems, sometimes in new ways or with particular insights, but not with a sense of ever solving them or making them go away.

(pp. 8-9)

As I continue my process of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, remembering and reconsidering many of my earlier experiences as a student, growing increasingly cognizant of my naiveté and fears as a beginning instructor, and cultivating insights from reflecting on my earlier assumptions about teaching and learning, I wonder how those earlier assumptions and fears might be playing out in my current pedagogical practice. I have enjoyed a great deal of intellectual validation for what I have struggled to manifest and understand about human beings and education: that students are not empty vessels to be filled by nebulous others; that teachers are not the sole possessors of truth about the world; and, that given the opportunity to explore their own unique gifts and interests in the context and pursuit of mutual erudition, students and teachers can wholly and authentically flourish and *be-and-become-whole*. Still, I remain curious about and driven to better understand my own journey and its influence on my temptations, passions, questions and general disposition in my teaching.

It is specifically in the context of continuing to hone my own approach to learning, clarifying my pedagogical temperament, and progress, albeit incrementally, toward composing a pedagogy for teaching like a mountain that I have been led to a series of questions and sub-questions which I have sought to explore and clarify here in order to continue following the current bearing of my pedagogical endeavors:

- 1) How does the idea of transformation fit into my personal and professional scheme regarding knowledge and *being-and-becoming-whole* in my pedagogical practices?
  - a. What do I mean by transformation?

- i. What are some of the problematics of a transformative approach to education?
  - b. What do I mean by *being-and-becoming-whole*?
  - c. What role does authenticity play in a transformative approach to education?
    - i. What do I mean by authenticity? From whom am I drawing?
    - ii. What is the relationship between authenticity and wholeness?
- 2) What is it that is relevant from my own *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* that I am most called to disclose in my teaching?
  - a. Why am I turning to my-self and my educational autobiography to understand and conceptualize a pedagogy that addresses the *being-and-becoming-whole* of myself and the students with whom I work?
  - b. How do/have my experiences with “the mountain” enable(d) me to cope more effectively with the problems of humankind in education?
    - i. How does postmodern emergence aid me in my explication of these experiences?
    - ii. How are poetic representations useful in my conceptualization and enaction of a particular pedagogical temperament?
- 3) As I am inextricably connected to my students and the world in which we dwell together, how do I enact my pedagogical temperament in relation to them?
  - a. How do I stand for something in a way that is transformative for others?
    - i. What assumptions do I have about learning, and how do these assumptions inform my pedagogical temperament with regards to *exposure, posturing in disdain* and *presence*?

- 4) What are the implications of these insights for a pedagogy of teaching like a mountain?



## ***INTERLUDE: STARTING OUT***

### *Meeting Lou*

“We’re pulling out promptly at 8 a.m.,” Lou said with an emphatic grin. “Make sure that you all get as good a night’s sleep as you can. Tomorrow is a BIG day!” I had arrived in Seattle two days before our climb of Mount Rainier. Along with nineteen other employees of outdoor recreation clothing and equipment stores from various towns and cities in the United States, I had come to attend JanSport’s annual “Mt. Rainier Dealer Seminar.”

Eight months prior, while working as a retail associate in a recreational clothing and equipment store in Madison, Wisconsin, I was invited by my employer to attend a talk about mountaineering by Skip Yowell, one of the co-owners of JanSport, and Lou Whittaker, a renowned mountaineer, and an individual whose climbing life I had admired from afar. “Lou Whittaker is coming here?” I screamed. “And, you’re inviting me to meet him?” I was beside myself with joy.

Following their talk, while Skip worked the crowd, talking up his product, and trying to convince people to sign up for his seminar, Lou remained gracious and humble. Surrounded by hordes of admirers and aspiring climbers, he seemed to hold himself in a way that exuded confidence and grace. As many of us showered him with accolades, he remained curious and gentle, looking each of us in the eye, and modestly responding with a handshake and a simple “thank you.” I was mesmerized, and I was hooked. *I’m going to climb that mountain with Lou.*

Fast forward eight months, and I am standing beside Lou Whittaker in the middle of the JanSport factory floor, listening to assorted employees talk about what a great company JanSport was to work for. This was the corporate-sponsored part of the “seminar” we were attending; the part of our trip wherein we were given all of the technical information about the products we were trying to sell in our respective “stores back home.” I must have been daydreaming, as I didn’t even realize that Lou had put his arm around my shoulder until he whispered into my ear, “This part isn’t so interesting, is it, Madison-girl?” To which I blushed, and quietly responded, “Well...not really.”

### *The Night Before*

The night before our climbing journey was to commence we were all treated to a kick-off party and tour of Puget Sound aboard Skip Yowell’s yacht. It was a surreal experience for me, hanging out with some of my mountaineering heroes, people whose climbing careers I had followed for years, and whose names appeared on the clothing and equipment I was selling back home. Still, it was Lou whose presence held my attention. Now in his element, he was much more playful than I had seen him before. With a Rainier beer in his hand, and climbing protégés Ed Viesturs and Peter Whittaker (also his son) flanking him on either side, Lou told jokes, sang songs, and shared stories, both humorous and harrowing, about his many years on Mount Rainier. And again, as I had been on that cool, autumn night in Madison eight months before, I sat captivated, excited and maybe even a little terrified about the journey I would be taking with Lou during the next seven days.

Later, as I swaggered back to my room following an evening of drinking and socializing with my new-found climbing companions, I couldn’t stop thinking about how cool this adventure was going to be. Sure, I was scared, and certainly a little worried about the fact that I had never

been ice-climbing in my life. But this chance, this dream I had imagined for so long, this opportunity...well, it was a once-in-a-lifetime gig. How could I not be ecstatic about that?

When I got to my room, I did what I imagine every other individual in my group was doing: I made some phone calls. First I called my mother, checking in one last time for her warm and supportive words; then I called my dad, trusting that I would receive the same from him. To both I confirmed that we would be returning from the mountain by Friday, and that I would call each of them to let them know that we were “down.” Next I unpacked, counted and repacked all of the equipment and clothing I was told to bring from home; brushed my teeth, put on my pajamas, set the alarm clock for 7:00 p.m. sharp, and settled into the last warm nest I would enjoy for the next seven days.

### *The Day Of*

*Head under my blanket...dark red window curtains closed...the phone is ringing...it's still dark...the phone is ringing...I'm so sleepy...the phone is ringing...THE PHONE IS RINGING? ANSWER IT!!*

“The bus needs to leave NOW! Are you coming?” shouted Todd in a frantic voice on the other end of the line. “What happened to you? Where are you?”

Stunned after seeing that my alarm clock was flashing 8:03 a.m., I responded abruptly, “I’ll be there in 3 minutes.”

Scurrying around the room, all I could think about was “don’t forget your toothbrush,” as if bad breath in that moment even mattered! *What did happen? I thought I set the alarm!*

I did get it all together in three minutes; rushed to the guest services counter, where it took another ten minutes for the clerk to check me out; and then, sprinted across the parking lot

with my heavy, heavy duffel bag in tow. *I made it*, I thought to myself while bending over in my own frenetic pant. *Now I've got to get on this bus.*

After my bag was secured in the compartment below, I trepidaciously boarded the bus to a sea of faces staring at me as if I had just committed a profound sacrilege. Heart racing, head down, with sweat and tears beginning to stream down my face, I walked past six of my peers to find a seat next to Todd. Once I sat, all I could seem to muster was a forced smile and a whisper—"I'm sorry. I guess I set the clock for 'p.m.'" And, for the next two hours, keeping my head down and avoiding eye contact with everyone else on the bus, I wondered to myself over and over again, *what the hell have I gotten myself into?*

#### *Off to Paradise*

The bus ride to Paradise Guide House, the visitor's center for Rainier National Park, (replaced and renamed in 2009 as the "Henry M. Jackson Visitor Center at Paradise" for the late Washington Congressman, Henry M. Jackson), behind which we would physically and psychically transform ourselves into mountaineers, was quiet and still. *Twelve people, on a bus, saying virtually nothing to one another for two hours* (Personal journal, June, 1991). For me, that trip simply served to intensify my awareness and feelings of terror and elation, feelings that would surface at pivotal points on the mountain, to both shake and sustain my confidence. As we approached, and eventually pulled into the parking lot, I was experiencing heart palpitations and sweaty palms; my head was beginning to ache, and tears were again welling in my eyes. *Seriously, how am I going to do this?*

#### *Softball Tryouts*

Such anxiety was not unfamiliar to me. Though I was always physically active, there were numerous times in my younger years when I signed up to do something new only to feel

paralyzed by a fear of not being good enough. I'm recalling the summer I announced that I wanted to play softball. I was nine years old, enthralled by a speech the recreation specialist at our local park had given at our elementary school, and driven by the enthusiasm of many of my friends. I *really* wanted to play softball; that is until the actual day of try-outs.

We entered the Washington Park, and as my mom weaved the car through the swimming pool area, and past the big pavilion where I had attended Brownie Day Camp several years earlier, the butterflies in my stomach began to quiver in chaos; my throat went dry, and tears began to stream down my face. "I don't want to go, Mom," I exclaimed from the back seat. "I don't want to play after all." With a quick retort my mother declared, "You've been waiting a whole month for this. You're NOT backing out now!" I, however, continued to protest. When we reached the playing field I could see that there were dozens of other girls throwing balls and swinging bats. With tears continuing to flow and a building desire to flee from the car I quietly wondered, *How am I going to do this? What if I'm not good enough?*

I was a fairly slight young girl, a "beanpole" according to my Grandparents. I was also fast and strong. I loved to run, and kickball was *my* game at school. I was always the first girl chosen on the coed teams that were picked in gym classes. And, I was one of the only girls allowed to play with the boys regularly during recess. I wasn't particularly competitive. I just loved to play and run and have fun. I was also, however, very shy. Starting around the age of five I balked at attending birthday parties for kids I did not know. And, even when walking up the sidewalk to the house of a playmate with whom I was familiar, I was known to turn on a dime and bolt back to the car, locking the car door before my mother even realized that I wasn't standing beside her when the host of the party opened the door.

So, my anxiety that morning at the Washington Park softball fields shouldn't have been a surprise to my mother. And, in fact, as I recently invited her to recall that day, "Oh, I knew you were going to run," she explained coyly. "That's why I held your hand so tightly when we were actually walking to the field." True to form, I did try to bolt. And, my mother, holding onto my hand as if we had been super-glued to one another, continued to pull me toward the field. I wasn't wailing, or resisting her outright, though the butterflies in my stomach were now causing quite a stir. I was feeling sick, my head was throbbing from all of the crying I had done in the car, and I was keenly aware that my face stung and that my eyes were most likely swollen and beet red.

Once we reached the sideline of the playing field, I relented and relaxed into an at-ease position next to my mom, watching the other girls throw balls with one another. I did *want* to play, but I was scared. And, as evidenced by my constant recoiling from social situations like birthday parties, my fear often led me to run away. In this situation, however, my mother would have none of that. As we stood watching the girls playing on the field, mom made a series of observations: "Wow, your friend Lynne looks like she's having a lot of fun?" "Gosh, Julie, you've been so looking forward to this. I hate to see you miss out." Then, before I knew it, before I could respond or resist, I felt the warm palm of my mother's hand on my back. I couldn't even think, let alone protest, before she PUSHED ME onto the field.

### *Paradise Found*

Historically, when I have felt like running away from a social situation or challenging event, concerned about my ability to participate, I have relied on the gentle nudges and strength of my mother and father, or a significant friend, to convince me that indeed I was good enough to go forth. On this trip, however, this climb I was about to attempt, I was completely alone. There

was no sideline from which to mull over my options, and no door to protect me from the invasion of a well-intentioned advocate. Though there were twelve of us on this expedition, I had only met the other climbers two days before. And, given that I had overslept earlier in the morning, delaying our departure for the mountain by thirty minutes, I didn't feel particularly willing or able to lean on any of them. I would have to nudge myself to begin.

Hours later, after learning about, examining and packing the gear that would serve as our trusted tools for comfort and survival during the next seven days, our group continued to radiate an air of quietude as we each moved independently toward tying up loose ends, on the laces of our boots or on the telephone to families back home. My own consternation had begun to relax as I moved, albeit cautiously, into my own preparatory rhythm, cataloguing everything I had packed, and resigning myself to the fact of my situation: *I had chosen to take this trip; I knew before leaving Madison that I would be out here alone; and I had met some wonderful people in the past forty-eight hours. This isn't going to be so bad.*

For his part, Lou was steadfast and responsive, attending to people with a calm and warm sensitivity that seemed to assuage our fears and concerns. He was not available to individuals, however, in the sense that he didn't perform personal therapy, or attend to each verbal inquiry with intimate and immediate consideration. Rather, he remained present and empathic in the midst of the chaos, treating the tremors of our fret with respect and understanding. Lou did not placate and he did not denigrate. He did not seek to admonish us or diminish the importance and legitimacy of our fears with superficial incentives. Rather he remained *with* us, solid, forthright, compassionate, and accepting of our individual experiences as they unfolded in both displeasure and delight.

Lou's presence was particularly confirming for me. While tying my bootlaces for the third time—the first two were “practice ties”—I felt a kind of heat on my back, like someone was watching me from behind. Finishing my laces, and wiping the tears from my eyes, I scanned the room. Eventually our eyes met, and I was instantly reminded of my mother's gentle nudges to “get out on the field.” Though my fear remained, for a moment I felt like I was enough, like Lou saw me, understood my trepidation, and was with me on this journey. In that moment I no longer felt so alone. *I can do this.*



## 2.0 MOVEMENT II, MY DISCURSIVE ROPE-TEAM: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

*The things we want are transformative, and we don't know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration—how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else? (Solnit, 2005, p. 5)*

Mountain climbers generally ascend mountains in groups of three to four people who are clipped into a single climbing rope by figure eight loops and carabiners. They move in these “rope teams” so that if one climber falls, the other members of the team will be able to immediately respond by throwing themselves to the ground, thrusting their ice axes and crampons into the snow, and holding tightly until everything and everyone stops moving. In this movement I introduce my discursive rope-team, an assemblage of interdisciplinary scholars and writings on whom I have relied and figuratively drawn to support and nudge me through the sometimes unsettling genesis of my conceptualization of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*. Separating this section into three parts, I begin the first by grounding my theoretical ideas in Martin Heidegger’s (1962) inquiry into *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness*, and *authenticity*. I then consider the development of my understanding of these ideas in the context of education, specifically guiding my reader across what has sometimes felt like a theoretical crevasse,

bridging others' ideas with what I have borrowed from Heidegger, and illustrating how they have both endorsed and enhanced my own theoretical inclinations.

In the second section, I track the work of various scholars of critical theory and transformative learning whose work has resonated with my own critical and transformative tendencies, and highlight some of the key elements of their respective works as they have been particularly influential to my own ideas regarding transformative learning. In this section as well, I place particular emphasis on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/1993) and *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), relying on Freire to lay out the various cairns marking my theoretical pathway across the border between Heidegger's ideas and my own emerging transformative temperament in education.

Finally, in the third section I reveal important themes that emerged from my personal stories later exposed in movement four. In this section, I meander through the murky terrain of *being-and-becoming-in-the-classroom*, drawing on Carl Rogers' (1961, 1980) conceptualizations of *being* and *becoming* to help me to clear the trail between where I have been and where I am headed, and to elucidate significant elements that I have found to be particularly stifling and enhancing of my pedagogy for teaching like a mountain.

## **2.1 HEIDEGGER IN MY HEAD**

I am not an expert in Heideggerian philosophy, but rather an interested participant in the interpretation and application of his ideas for education, as perplexing as they might be. In this way, I am following the path that Heidegger himself intended for those interested in his ideas. “[He] did not want his books to be made the source of any kind of exact scholarship in the usual

sense,” suggests Dolores LaChapelle (1978, p. 86). Rather, “he intended them to be a way to lead each person to investigate and to experience on his own the same questioning which inspired Heidegger’s quest for Being” (p. 86). Thus, Heidegger’s ideas are starting points for me, initial bearings for theoretically orienting my inquiry.

I have been moved by Heidegger’s ideas at various stations on my educational trek, grappling with his language and the sometimes circuitous nature of his thinking. However, such grappling seems appropriate for my project here since Heidegger invites his readership to be perplexed regarding his work with “the question of the meaning of Being” (1953, p. xix). Kenneth Maly (2008) has written,

Heidegger often made distinctions between philosophy as scholarly research and philosophy as *engaged thinking*. Thinking that is underway, thinking that encounters things and the world, thinking that is about doing or *accomplishing*. Rather than taking texts of philosophy into scholarship—denoting, objectifying, comparing to other texts for the sake of scholarly research, developing “theories”—Heidegger wanted to engage in a thinking that is always underway, that takes in what the world and the natural have to offer to it, and that sees itself as a *praxis* of tending and actively responding to how things self-show. (p. 32)

For Heidegger (1981/2000) “Human existence is ‘poetic.’” (p. 60.) “‘To dwell poetically’ means to stand in the presence of the gods and to be struck by the essential nearness of things” (p. 60). He goes on to muse that “Existence is ‘poetic’ in its ground—which means, at the same time, as founded (grounded), it is not something earned, but is rather a gift” (p. 60). In his earlier thinking about poetry, thought, language and Being, Heidegger (1971) mused in his own poetry,

*But poetry that thinks is in truth*

*the topology of Being.*

*This topology tells Being the*

*whereabouts of its actual presence. (p. 12)*

And so, I consider the topology of my own Being, inquiring into how the terrain of my own existence has changed over time, and influenced my current location and vocation.

### **2.1.1 Being-in-the-World**

In *being-in-the-world* I recognize the provisional nature of my existence as both student and teacher with all of the opportunities, potentialities and barriers that surface and constitute how I encounter and interact with myself and others in the context of education. I am a human—*Dasein*, according to Heidegger (1962)—that understands the kind of being that I am, and that the kind of being that I am is distinct from all other beings surrounding me.

Dasein is an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understandingly towards that Being. In saying this, we are calling attention to the formal concept of existence. Dasein exists. Furthermore, Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am. (p. 78)

*Dasein* for Heidegger is disclosed as the human kind of being that is aware of its existence in the world alongside others. *Dasein* is worldly, of the world, and aware of the world. Ontologically speaking, I am both aware of my existence (“I know I’m here”) and I am aware of what it means to be a human (“I am mortal”). This is what, according to Heidegger, makes me different from other *beings-in-the-world*. I am not a “corporeal thing [like a glass of water], an entity which is present-at-hand” (p. 79). Rather my awareness of my existence signifies that my existence is at issue for me: things matter to me and concern me; I want to know about these things; I can ask

questions; I can conjure ideas. And, I can talk about these things, for they are mine; mine to experience, and mine to know (Large, 2008, p. 35). For Heidegger, my awareness and knowing constitute me as unique among other *beings-in-the-world*, for Heidegger assumes that other *beings-in-the-world* do not embody or represent the same kind of potential for self-awareness as the human kind of being.

As the human kind of Being, in the world alongside others, my “*fundamental ontology*” (Heidegger, 1953/1996, p. 11), the reality of my existence, “must be sought in the *existential analysis of Dasein*” (p. 11). For Heidegger, there are three *priorities* that define my existence, and thus make me unique in the world alongside other beings: (1) my humanness, (2) that I am full of wonder, and (3) that a full understanding of the meaning of the human kind of Being, the very being to be interrogated, is being (p. 11). For Heidegger, recognition of these priorities essentially sets the stage for Being’s inquiry into the *isness* of other kinds of beings in the world. Such an inquiry must go through Dasein.

Heidegger’s conceptualization of *being-in-the-world* validates my project here as I read him suggesting that I can know no other being in the world alongside me *before* I know my own Being-in-the-world. I am a human being, not a thing; I exist in relationship to myself first, and am at issue with myself first. I exist, I am existence; I embody a myriad of possibilities, I am my own possibilities (p. 10). For Heidegger, the project of coming to know being, of *being-in-the-world*, is a matter of inquiry into one’s relationship with one’s self and one’s existence. This is the essence of Heidegger’s delineation between *authentic* being-in-the-world and *inauthentic* being-in-the-world, into which I will go into more detail below.

In the context of education, “The fact that I perceive myself to be in the world, with the world, with others” writes Paulo Freire (1998), “brings with it a sense of ‘being-with’

constitutive of who I am that makes my relationship to the world essential to who I am” (p. 55). In other words, I don’t merely exist in the world looking for ways to accommodate myself to the world outside of myself. Instead I belong in and with the world; I am part of the world struggling to influence it and myself in ways that will help it and me to continue moving forward.

With regards to students, Ronald Barnett (2007) posits, “The being of the student is the way the student is in the world” (p. 27). Students, like myself, are social beings, standing in relationship with the world around them. They are “there,” Barnett suggests, “in a particular place, being part of that place, at least, to the extent that [they feel themselves] to be part of that place” (p. 28). But they, again, like me, are not static beings, empty vessels waiting to be filled, directed to do what they *should* be doing. “World and human being” according to Freire “do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction” (1973/1990, p. 32). Thus, students are active in the world, with me, with others, and with themselves, though admittedly, their activity may initially have been motivated by the directives of others who have perhaps seen them as naïve, inexperienced and even irresponsible pupils.

### **2.1.2 Thrownness**

In Chapter IV of *Being and Time* (1962) Heidegger discusses the “who” of Dasein “in its everydayness” (p. 148), and more specifically, who Dasein is in relation to her world, and “the They” (p. 150) alongside whom Dasein exists within the world. For Heidegger, we are essentially *thrown* into the world alongside others. *Thrownness* is the basis of our existence in the world, though our existence is not objective like the glass of water to which I refer above.

Rather, we exist in the world, at a particular time, and in a particular place, in relation to and dependent upon others. As Heidegger explains,

As thrown, Dasein has indeed been delivered over to itself and to its potentiality-for-Being, *but as Being-in-the-world*. As thrown, it has been submitted to a “world,” and exists factually with Others. Proximally and for the most part the Self is lost in the “they.” It understands itself in terms of the possibilities of existence which “circulate” in the “average” public way of interpreting Dasein today. (p. 435)

In other words, we are *thrown* into our world with a distinct social, cultural, and political history (our facticity), plodding along with the internalized expectations and tenets that others have defined for us and which we continue to perpetrate. We are *thrown* into a world constituted in terms of our environment, wherein the language we understand, our perceptions of ourselves and others, our behaviors and the possibilities we believe exist for us were created and then given to us in advance of our singular existence by others who came before us and who have already grappled with what it means to participate in the world such that this knowledge is both invisible to us and generally considered “common sense” (Large, 2008, p. 125). “Though the shape of my existence is an issue for me, and so presents itself as something that is responsive to my choices and decisions,” suggests David Cerbone (2008), “that *this* existence is *my* existence to deal with was not something I ever chose or decided” (p. 61). As we didn’t choose our parents, the historical epoch of which we are a part, or the cultural arena in which we dwell, we have learned to perpetrate, without question, the norms and beliefs handed down to us by those who came before us. We have apprehended and internalized what others have deemed plausible, important and legitimate, and thus we exist in our world *undifferentiated*, rarely if ever questioning the meaning of our own lives, or recognizing our thrownness.

In *thrownness* Heidegger (1962) does not mean, however, that we are set-up in the world without having any influence in or over the lives we choose to live; that our lives have been predetermined with no possibility for changing direction; that we are doomed to exist passively and unaware. Instead, Heidegger acknowledges that we have the choice to engage our agency and change the course of our journey, or at the very least, to remain on our current path, albeit as informed and active. Though we may have had no control over how we arrived, we can, if alternatives are made available to us and we choose to, take responsibility for how and where we might proceed. Though, because we are social beings (or rather, *public*), realizing and enacting this possibility can feel threatening, manifesting as anxiety in the midst of what might seem ambiguous and even overwhelming.

*Anxiety* for Heidegger is Dasein's "realization that anything they might possibly do has already been defined for them in advance by 'the They'" (Lemay & Pitts, 1994, p. 57). Eventually, we turn to realizing our nothingness, our complicity as cogs in the cultural machine and the absurdity of our pre-defined lives. Our anxiety thus appears when we face up to the possibility of this nothingness and absurdity. And we are left with two choices: to refuse to recognize our situation and deny our anxiety, or to face up to the possibility of our nothingness, realizing that we are finite beings in a finite world, and take responsibility for our choices and decisions, even if they are and have been determined and defined by others. Stopping to consider our journey thus far, mulling over the ideas and beliefs we have inherited or been taught to trust, and most certainly imagining ourselves as "nothingness," can be both risky and dangerous. For what if we are wrong? Or, what if others disagree with us? What if those about whom we care discourage, denigrate or deny us as a result of our contemplation?



### 2.1.2.1 Publicness

In his discussion of *publicness*, the ontological structure of social reality that distances us from one another, and disburdens us of the weight of our being-in-the-world-alongside-others (pp. 126-159), Heidegger explicates the influence that others exert upon us in our *thrownness*. As we are social beings, we are thus *public*. We not only interact with other human beings in the world for the purpose of enjoying a good conversation, learning about a particular academic discipline, or to secure food and shelter, for example. We rely on others to help us to define who we are and how to be in the world, to help us figure out what *should* be important, and how we might be most productive. And, given that we dwell within, or were *thrown* into, a particular historical epoch and cultural arena, we come to believe that we are ultimately beholden to the edicts and expectations of that epoch and arena; that we are subordinated to those edicts and expectations alongside the various others with whom we dwell. In our *publicness*, as we have internalized and accepted the norms, rules, beliefs, edicts and expectations lain before us, we are motivated to “cover over,” or dismiss, significant questions about our existence. We defer to others, for example, questions about what it means to be human, what it means to be finite, and what possibilities we embody as finite beings in the world because others, “the They,” have already prescribed for us what it means to be, how to understand and deal with our mortality, and what the possibilities are for us to participate in the world.

Furthermore, through our use of and participation in *idle chatter*—how discourse is engaged and perpetrated in *publicness*, or more crudely put, the noise that “the They” employs to keep us incurious and our life ambiguous--we contribute to the exchange of information about life and death, for example, supplied by “the They,” by making the information givers the “real” authorities. Thus, *idle chatter* helps us to remain practical in our everyday lives; it allows us to

be with others as others are with us--“average,” according to Heidegger (1962), in our everydayness:

In this averageness with which [the They] prescribes what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noisily suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force. This care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the “leveling down” of all possibilities of Being. (p. 165)

*Publicness* thus disburdens us of the weight of our existence and finitude. When we ask the question “what does it mean to be?” and attempt to confront the meaning of our mortality, our *thrownness* into “the They,” our *publicness* through our participation in *idle chatter*, covers over *our* answers with *their* answers: “to be like everybody else” and “everyone dies sooner or later,” for example.

In education as the teacher and student exist in the world, enjoying a particular grasp on the world as unique human beings, each is embarking on a specific journey, a “course of study with its challenges, time sequences, situations” (Barnett, 2007, p. 27), and I would add, limitations. As the traditional Western public educational system is set up, the student learns and eventually comes to embody particular roles, expectations, norms, and beliefs about what it means to be a *student*. And, as Michael Bonnett (2002) suggests,

In everydayness, awareness of such things is for the most part tranquilized by slipping into a frame of mind that Heidegger terms the ‘they-self’—the inauthentic understanding of the anonymous ‘they’ whose ‘gossip’ or ‘hearsay’ silently covers over every call of

individual conscience and every truth, substituting what is said in easy public talk for what things mean in terms of each individual's sense of their own unique existence. (p. 231)

The student "is embedded in all of this," as Barnett (2007) goes on to explain, "but this student is not to be read off these educational moments" (p. 27). Rather, "She brings her own wherewithal to bear on all of that" (p. 27). Teachers, as well, are not immune to the social constructions, or idle chatter, of what it means to be a *teacher*, though like the student, the teacher learns and also comes to embody possibilities for being different in her respective role.

Now, though Heidegger espoused the deep belief that Dasein is essentially *thrown* into the world alongside others, he did not believe that Dasein was forever stuck in the mire of *publicness*. Students and teachers are not doomed to remain swamped in the morass of contingencies, ambiguities and dilemmas that currently characterize their respective positions and existence. Instead, as Dasein, we can choose to apprehend opportunities and possibilities that "the They," or the "they-self," may not have considered, been presented with, or more likely, prefers we ignore.

### **2.1.3 Authenticity**

In light of these opportunities and possibilities, Heidegger (1962) proposes,

Dasein *is* its possibility, and it "has" this possibility, but not just as a property, as something present-at-hand would. And because Dasein is essentially its own possibility, it *can* in its very Being, "choose" itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only seem to do so. But only insofar as it is essentially something which can be

*authentic*—that is, something of its own—can it have lost itself and not yet won itself.  
(p. 68)

I take Heidegger's suggestion here to mean that as we move toward recognizing the being that we are, different from the being that we have been socialized to present to the world by others, we apprehend a choice from the possibilities available to us: to become what it is that we are, or to remain compliant with the kind of being that others (i.e. "the They") have conceived and come to expect us to be in relation to the rest of the world. In other words, either we wake up to potentials that exist within us and move forward in a way that allows us to flourish in our own unique ways, or we continue to move through the world being, albeit conforming to, what others expect us to be without consideration of alternatives or what we want for ourselves.

"The *authentic self*" for Heidegger is "the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way" (p. 167). He goes on to explain that

If Dasein discovers the world in its own way and brings it close, if it discloses to itself its own authentic Being, then the discovery of the "world" and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (p. 167)

Bonnett (2002), drawing on Heidegger's "authentic self," suggests that "personal authenticity" is significant for education in two ways: first, "it provides a view of personhood, and therefore, in a liberal tradition, a view of what must be respected and developed in the treatment of young people during their education" (p. 230); second, "it offers a perspective on the nature of personally significant learning and the conditions that are necessary for it to occur" (p. 230). As Dasein is *thrown* into the world, and personifies particular ways of being and acting in the world—both socially prescribed and embodied—Dasein's catching sight of her own unique

*authentic existence* and the possibilities that lie within, is not an easy maneuver. It, according to Bonnett, “is not ‘primal’ in the sense that it is a natural state, or that it can be assumed present” (p. 232). Rather, as he goes on to explain, “Personal authenticity is an *achievement*. We have to extricate ourselves from the frame of mind that constitutes the ‘they-self’ and which proximally and for the most part conditions our perceptions” (p. 232). Barnett (2007) similarly affirms that “authenticity is not easily or lightly achieved: it calls for hard work, yes, but also for courage, for the capacity to stand alone, independently of those surrounding voices and texts” (p. 43). Simply put, being and becoming authentic is not merely about pulling one’s self up by one’s bootstraps.

I am reminded here of James Park’s (1983) “authentic existence,” wherein human beings seek to “recreate ourselves according to our own design” (p. 3). For Park

We are born without instructions, without ready-made purposes for being. As we awake into full human awareness, we find ourselves cast into the blind, purposeless whirl of existence; and out of this chaos we must either create ourselves or allow ourselves to be shaped by the cultural forces around us. We must either choose or be chosen for. (p. 3)

Here, Park is clearly referring to our *thrownness* in the world, and offers a keen insight into why we might recognize and contend with it: for the purpose of *being* and *becoming* what it is that we are meant to be.

Now, it’s important to me to clarify that I do not read Barnett (2007), Bonnett (2002), Heidegger (1962) or Park (1983) as suggesting that there is a particular destiny that we all simply need to discover for ourselves, and that we simply need to buckle down, grasp our inner most courage and convictions, and leap forward into an abyss. I do not read these theorists as suggesting a pre-determined blueprint or pathway for individuals, or that being and becoming authentic means that the individual has “arrived.” I also do not believe that they are claiming an

essential self, a true self that need only to be uncovered and revealed. I do believe, however, that there is something—perhaps, an inner voice, a gut feeling—that we tend to drown out in the service of focusing on and listening to what others expect and want for us. That inner voice or gut feeling, I surmise, represents the muttering of our potential and perhaps more authentic self; the whispers of our own unique possibilities; potentials and possibilities that only we can ultimately determine for ourselves. This process of uncovering that gut feeling and amplifying that inner voice is thus not about *discovering* an essential self that has simply been lying dormant waiting to be found. It is not about revealing something static and definite within us. Rather, it is a dynamic and pliable process, I believe, of exploring, experimenting with and determining the unique possibilities that are available to us, and which we might decide are most in line with what we want for ourselves in relation to the rest of the world.

Admittedly, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* are extremes on a larger ontological continuum. “As modes of Being,” Heidegger (1962) writes, “*authenticity* and *inauthenticity* are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness” (p. 68). He goes on to qualify these expressions of Being by affirming that “the inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify any ‘less’ Being or any ‘lower’ degree of Being” (p. 68). I own my existence. And, I can choose how to take up my existence, opting to “be who I am or just live my life without choosing at all” (Large, 2008, p. 38). Either way, I will continue to exist. However, once I know that there are other possibilities available to me, once I am made aware that there are alternatives to the way I have been thinking about and living my life, I surmise that it is indeed hard to simply continue traipsing about in the same ways that I was before I became aware of my options. Thus, there’s a kind of liminality to my experience and my existence. In other words, though I am now aware of new possibilities for myself, existing within the margins

between who I was and who I might become, (1) I may still choose to exist in the ways that have been prescribed for me, (2) I may remain in my current location or vocation, and (3) whatever I choose to do, and however I choose to be, I may be confronted with risks and dire consequences that I could not have anticipated.

## **2.2 ON THE EMERGENCE OF MY TRANSFORMATIVE TEMPERAMENT**

Freire (1998) proposed in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, “For us, to learn is to construct, to reconstruct, to observe with a view to changing—none of which can be done without being open to risk, to the adventure of the spirit” (p. 67). Numerous scholars have grappled with claiming risk and bringing about change in the spirit of justice-oriented education as a vibrant frame for teaching undergraduate college students, most expounding on Freire’s (1970/1993) provocative first book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Boler, 1999; Bowers, 2003; Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Cranton, 2006b; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Dirkx, 2000; Generett & Hicks, 2004; Giroux, 2001, 2005; Gruenewald, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Gunzenhauser & Gerstl-Pepin, 2006; Hicks, Berger & Generett, 2005; hooks, 1989, 1994, 2003, 2009; Illeris, 2004, 2007; Martusewicz, 2001; McLaren, 2007; Moore, 2005; O’Sullivan, 1999; O’Sullivan, Morrell & O’Connor, 2002; O’Sullivan & Taylor, 2004; Palmer, 1993, 1998; Shor, 1996). And, it is from many of them that I have drawn to craft and clarify how I have come to appreciate transformative education as the most promising avenue for being present to students’ experiences of exposure and the manifestation of my pedagogy for teaching like a mountain.

### 2.2.1 From Critical to Transformative Teacher

To begin, let me organize the writers above, beginning with those theorists who identify specifically with the *critical* perspective in education, and then turn to those whose work broadens the critical perspective and speaks more directly to a *transformative* approach, whether explicitly identified by them or assumed by me. Each of the above authors nods to Freire's (1970/1993) work as the grounding text from which critical theory and later the transformative perspective spring. Henry Giroux (2001, 2005), bell hooks (1994, 2003, 2009), Peter McLaren (2007) and Ira Shor (1996) are some of the most prominent scholars specifically engaging and modeling critical inquiry in education as the approach of choice for addressing the intentions and responsibilities of the justice oriented teacher. Identifying the critical perspective as one ultimately aimed at revealing, investigating and rectifying the power dynamics embedded within social institutions like education, the critical teacher, according to these writers, works to initiate and instill an interest in and commitment to bringing about social change as a result of this examination. Each of these authors offers "insights from the field," being cautious not to impose an explicit protocol or recipe for how a teacher might approach the task of education, and insinuating an agenda that delves deeply into socially constructed beliefs, norms and practices that serve to compartmentalize and oppress.

hooks (1994, 2009) and Shor (1996) are particularly intriguing for me as each exposes some of the hidden pitfalls to fostering a critical investigation in their respective undergraduate and community college classrooms, snags they were initially unable to anticipate. Under the guise of "sharing power" with his students, for example, Shor (1996) poignantly shows that "sharing power" is not to be likened with "handing it over," an assumption made by some of his students, and a challenge to which he felt ill-prepared to respond while remaining true to his



philosophical beliefs about democracy and justice. He exposes the pitfalls of his intention to foster a more democratic approach in the classroom, one wherein his students share power for co-creating a syllabus and establishing the norms and rules that the class will follow regarding evaluation and participation. Shor, however, is loathe to reflect on his own short-comings and gleanings. This seems somewhat endemic to the critical perspective in general. There seems to be a tendency to look outward, addressing what one sees as oppressive in the world, and exploring ways to bring about emancipation for others, with little attention to one's complicity in that oppression, for example, or considering that one cannot actually deliver emancipation over to another human being.

hooks (1994) as well bravely reveals and explores insights regarding her desire to share power with students. However, what is different in hooks' work is her explicit recognition of the power of self-reflexivity. Specifically, hooks transcends the temptation to think of emancipation as something to be delivered over to the oppressed. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks acknowledges what she brings in the form of her personal and intellectual biography and her expectations for students' work in the classroom, and she owns that though she is determined to help her students survey and consider where they come from and how they are in the world as a result of certain socialized norms and beliefs, she does not seek to deliver emancipation to them for she knows that emancipation is not hers to give. Instead, hooks seeks to co-create, maintain, and re-negotiate with her students the necessary conditions in the classroom wherein all might explore together how one might liberate one's self and take those conditions elsewhere to support the realization of emancipation alongside others.

Proposing her *engaged pedagogy* in the context of education as "the practice of freedom that anyone can learn" (p. 13), hooks suggests

That the learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred: who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

In other words, we teachers serve best those with whom we work when we acknowledge the unfolding potential that emerges for our students from our investigations and interactions. hooks goes on to acknowledge that such an engaged pedagogy is “more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy” (p. 15), requiring a recognition of well-being and self-actualization on the part of the teacher “if we are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15). “That empowerment cannot happen,” hooks implores, “if we [teachers] refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (p. 21). She continues to reflect that “Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive” (p. 21). In this light, hooks offers a nice segue, for me, into a more explicit explication of the transformative perspective in education.

Expanding on hooks, Gretchen Generett and Mark Hicks (2004), Michael Gunzenhauser and Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin (2006), Mark Hicks, Jennifer Garvey Berger and Gretchen Givens Generett (2005), Parker Palmer (1993, 1998), and Rosalie Romano (2000) address respectively issues of self-actualization, hope, teacher responsiveness, authenticity, engaged pedagogy, reciprocity, community building in the classroom and, student empowerment, all strands that have contributed to the tapestry of my understanding of Heidegger’s notions regarding *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness* and *authenticity* in the context of education. These authors and readings

in particular thus bear the most fruitful considerations for the generativity of my pedagogical temperament and identification with transformative learning.

Generett and Hicks (2004) and Hicks, Berger and Generett (2005) explore the promises and pitfalls of transformative education, specifically with regard to “audacious hope-in-action” and the job of teaching from a transformative perspective that celebrates actively engaging social change. In sum, acknowledging what is for them a moral imperative, these authors engage a transformative approach specifically in light of addressing race and racism in education and society with their teacher education students. As Generett and Hicks (2004) present,

We contend that teachers not only need to exercise their intellectual muscles to promote powerful teaching and learning in their classroom, they must also engage in the intentional creation (and recreation) of a learning context that empowers marginalized ideas, groups, and individuals. (p. 192)

They go on to propose that “the teacher faced with creating the world as it could be, it seems, must take a hopeful stance to counter the power of the oppressor” (p. 195). In fact, they fervently argue for a stance that is “*audaciously* hopeful,” borrowing the phrase from critical theorist and philosopher Cornel West, a stance grounded by “the ability to take action when there is little evidence that doing so will produce a positive outcome” (p. 192).

Generett and Hicks also acknowledge that “Teaching transformatively requires the ability to envision the world as it might be otherwise” (p. 195). Advocating for students’ and teachers’ engagement of self-reflexivity and action, Generett and Hicks envision their anti-oppressive and transformative curriculum as one wherein students and teachers explore and reveal power dynamics and oppression as they exist within and outside of education; consider the autobiographical and normalizing influence of and alternatives to these dynamics and

oppression, again, within and outside of the classroom; and simultaneously construct plans for how they might contribute to resolving those power dynamics and assuage oppression to the end of transforming the educational system from one that is unbalanced and uncertain to one that is supportive and “capable of opening new avenues for both themselves and their [future] students” (p. 201).

Gunzenhauser and Gerstl-Pepin (2006), writing with graduate students in education in mind, offer a compelling, “post-paradigmatic” framework for “engaging students dialogically” in a climate of epistemological and theoretical diversity (p. 324). Challenging what is often made trivial by those who dispute Freire’s (1970/1993) conception of the “banking” method of teaching and drawing specifically from hooks’ (1994) “engaged pedagogy,” Gunzenhauser and Gerstl-Pepin (2006) redress the student-teacher relationship as one wherein teachers engage students toward the end of realizing their own unique life projects, and wherein the teacher and students explore a “dialogue that respects the fundamental right and need of students to name their worlds, to become more complete, and to be agents of their own praxis” (p. 324):

We differentiate epistemological diversity from theoretical diversity and identify the specific ways in which both forms of diversity affect learning about research. This shifting context calls for revisiting the goals of graduate education and revising the teaching of educational research. We envision an alternative (influenced by Ellsworth, 1989, 1997; Florence, 1998; Freire, 1970/1990; hooks, 1994; Noddings, 1984) in which graduate students, valued as knowing subjects, enrich their investigations of educational problems and questions with epistemologies and theoretical perspectives that inform their “life-projects.” (p. 321)

As well, Gunzenhauser and Gerstl-Pepin offer for my own personal project an eloquent study that utilizes the tenets of a postcritical theory for transformative pedagogy, inviting the transformative teacher to consider and transcend the obstacles “that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (citing hooks, 1994, p. 325), and into the terrain of self-reflexivity and constitution. “Difference and conflict,” they offer “are a part of dialogical engagement” (p. 325). They go on to own that in light of these differences and conflicts, which they are careful not to ignore, “our task is to develop a dialogic and caring disposition toward students, partly by acknowledging students’ social and cultural realities,” as well as their “different epistemological and theoretical assumptions” (p. 325).

Parker Palmer (1998) and Rosalie Romano (2000) contribute to my overall conceptualization of responsibility, community building and reciprocity in the contexts of authenticity and a pedagogy of love. As I have written elsewhere, “Romano suggests that things like *trust* and *compassion* are necessary requisites for dialogic relationships, and emerge not by direct training and instruction, but ‘through our actions, behaviors, and attitudes expressed in the day to day living together’ (p. 57)” (Brooks, 2006, p. 11). As a transformative teacher I enjoy a position in the lives of my students that might model what I expect, what I am striving for and how I seek to change the world. Romano’s (2000) work is particularly illuminating of the importance of this work for students’ growth and humanity, and how powerful I am as a teacher in my “actions, behaviors and attitudes” with students. For many teachers I imagine that this realization can be rather daunting, especially for those who do not choose to acknowledge or take responsibility for the effect they have on their students, and for those who resist seeing students as they are in their multidimensionality.

Palmer (1993, 1998, 2004) takes a different albeit equally illuminating tack on the teacher's responsibility by chronicling his exploration of the courage it takes to be in the classroom alongside students in a way that is genuine, hopeful and life-changing. "If I want to teach well in the face of my students' fears," Palmer (1998) observes, "I need to see clearly and steadily the fear that is in their hearts" (p. 45). He goes on to suggest that certainly as teachers we have our own fears to face, and that working alongside students in an atmosphere that seeks to unearth individuals' socialized assumptions about the world and their place within it can be daunting and burdensome. "One of the blessings of teaching," Palmer muses, "is the chance it gives us for continuing encounters with the young, but whatever eventually blesses us may at first feel like a curse" (p. 50).

Still, in spite of the burdens of teaching, Palmer later confirms in *A Hidden Wholeness* (2004), "A teacher who shares his or her identity with students is more effective than the one who lobbs factoids at them from behind a wall" (p. 17). And, he is clear that the kind of "identity" about which he is talking is a "whole" one, grounded in integrity and complexity: "an integrity that comes with being what you are" (p. 3) and "a complex integration that spans the contradictions between inner and outer reality that supports both personal integrity and the common good" (p. 21). For me, Palmer's words point to an identity that honors all of one's self: the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and visceral components of the *whole* person.

George Dennison (1965/1999) wrote in *The Lives of Children*,

The experience of learning is an experience of wholeness. The child feels the unity of his own powers and the continuum of persons. His parents, his friends, his teachers, and the vague human shapes of his future form his world for him, and he feels the adequacy and

reality of his powers within this world. Anything short of this wholeness is not true learning. (p. 44)

Taking Dennison and Palmer together then, the experience of learning is an experience of integrity that comes with being what and who you are, completely, and wholly.

Finally, like Palmer, hooks (1994) emphasizes the well-being and self-actualization of the teacher in the service of teaching “in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15). She laments the existence of a particular kind of fear in teachers that assumes that attention to the self, in all of its parts and glory, somehow interferes with the teaching process. And she notes, “Not surprisingly, professors who are not concerned with inner well-being are the most threatened by the demand on the part of students for liberatory education, for pedagogical processes” that according to hooks “will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization” (p. 17).

### 2.3 FREIRE’S UNFINISHEDNESS

Like the authors I cite above, I too have been moved by Paulo Freire’s (1970/1993, 1998) ideas regarding justice in education. For me, however, Freire is compelling not only because of the questions and ideas he poses regarding equity, oppression and the humanization of education, but because he theorizes at a conceptual depth that helps me to clarify the link I am making between Heidegger’s conceptions of *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness*, and *authenticity* and transformative education. As he notes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “I hold that my own unity and identity, in regard to others and to the world, constitutes my essential and irrepeatable way of experiencing myself as a cultural, historical, and unfinished being in the world, simultaneously conscious of my unfinishedness” (1998, p. 51). He goes on to confirm, “Women and men are capable of

being educated only to the extent that they are capable of recognizing themselves as unfinished. Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (p. 58). In these lines I read Freire as reflecting Heidegger’s ideas specifically regarding *being-in-the-world* and *thrownness*. Students and teachers alike are *thrown* into the classroom “unfinished” in many respects, Beings-in-the-world with particular biographies seeking in some way to unconceal their potentials. For Freire, education is the arena in which students and teachers might have their unfinishedness revealed, their potentials uncovered, and the possibilities for personal and collective change explored and pursued.

With regards to *authenticity*, “When we live our lives with the authenticity demanded by the practice of teaching that is also learning and learning that is also teaching,” Freire suggests, “we are participating in a total experience that is simultaneously directive, political, ideological, gnostic, pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical” (pp. 31-32). “In this experience,” he concludes, “the beautiful, the decent, and the serious form a circle with hands joined” (p. 32). In truth, though Freire uses the word “authentic” throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973/1990) and *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), and I suspect his other works in between, he does not explicitly define what he means by his use of the word. However, I believe that he does delineate various components of *authenticity* present in his *dialogue* as profound love, humility, faith, horizontal relationship, mutual trust, hope, and critical thinking (1973/1990, pp. 70-73), and made evident by a show on the part of the teacher of epistemological curiosity, care, mutual respect, generosity, presence, passion, listening, methodological rigor and serious intellectual discipline (1998, pp. 30-34, 37-44, 58, 110).



### 2.3.1 Freire's Dialogue

For Freire (1970/1993) there is no hope for authentic engagement between all participants in the classroom, in fact, no hope for “true education” (pp. 73-74), without dialogue about and reflection on who we are, where we come from, where we are going and what we want in the world. In dialogue with others we come to know the world, not only through our own eyes and ideas, but through the experiences, questions, anxieties and notions of others; through their words. “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 77). But, as suggested above, Freire's dialogue has conditions. For it is not only the expression of one's word that is important, but its potential for moving one and one's listener, as well as contributing to the transformation of the world that makes it *authentic*, and makes genuine dialogue possible. As Freire insists, again, echoing Heidegger (1962),

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. (1970/1993, p. 68)

Authenticity is not limited, however, to simply being sincere, willing to dialogue, in touch with our ontological knowing, or making ourselves available mentally and emotionally to the possibilities of others' experiences. It includes and is possibly best personified by our attention to certain internalized values, as I have identified above. However, it additionally involves recognizing how we utilize those values in our relations with others, acknowledging as Patricia Cranton and Ellen Carusetta (2004) suggest, the contexts of our being with others as

“taking stances on issues and norms” that exist within those contexts, and “engaging in critical reflection on each of these components” (p. 288). In the mode of being authentic we are who we are; considerate of where we come from and what we embody; aware of the demands or expectations of others; and discerning of their power and influence regarding how we constitute ourselves and how we are constituted by others. We are aware of and grappling with our own *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*. Thus, as teachers, when we are *authentic* in our relationships we are genuinely committed to and with those with whom we share our journey, whether ideological, political, or personal. Our behavior and interjections of interpretation are minimal and deliberate. We are quiet and attentive, though not passive, and we support an open space for our students to allow their own authentic voices to emerge. In our authentic stance we have no rigid agenda for interacting, rather we rely on our awareness and self-reflective capacities, seeing our self as a disciplined and intentional tool with which to “assist rather than promote the process of self-determination and development” in those with whom we interact (Baldwin, 1987, p. 42).

Drawing then on my original premise--that each student embodies her own rhythms of change and metamorphosis, her own specific ways of expanding and contracting in response to what she is engaging and learning, and this shapes and is shaped by her personal history, where she comes from and her consciousness of the world in which she dwells—there are three significant components that undergird my pedagogical temperament in light of *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness* and *authenticity*: my assumptions that (1) my students are aware of their existence in the classroom, though they may not be aware of all of the possibilities available to them for engaging and/or interacting within it; (2) students, like myself, are *thrown* into our classroom arena with an internalized sense of who they are as students; and, (3) my job and my intention within the bounds of the classroom is to co-create and maintain the conditions wherein

my students might confront their *thrownness* and ponder their *unfinishedness* to the end of realizing their *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*.

I am the one then nudging my students “onto the field,” advocating for their participation when they would prefer to remain protected behind a locked door to other possibilities. As I recognize their trepidation as a manifestation of one possibility for them, I want for them to know that I see them, that I am open to and willing to try to understand them, and that I will support them should they choose to reconsider exposing themselves, risking their taken-for-granted knowing about and place in the world.

#### 2.4 BEING-AND-BECOMING-WHOLE: CARL ROGERS

“Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” notes Freire (1970/1993, p. 65, emphasis added). Later, in *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), Freire confirms “It is in our becoming that we constitute our being so. Because the condition of becoming is the condition of being” (pp. 38-39). As I have assembled above the major contributors to my theoretical notions of *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness*, and *authenticity*, I turn now to Carl Rogers (1961, 1980) in humanistic psychology to (1) ground my conceptualizations of *becoming-whole*, and (2) help me to hone in more tightly on *exposure* and *anxiety* as they provide the keystones for my transformative pedagogical temperament.

Søren Kierkegaard (2004) wrote, “Becoming oneself is a movement one makes just where one is. Becoming is a movement from some place, but becoming oneself is a movement at that place” (p. 66). Here Kierkegaard affirms the shifting nature of being-in-the-world (p. 66)

and becoming-in-the-world. I am not always *only* being *or* becoming. I am constantly *both*. As I exist in the world alongside others, I am never standing solidly in one place without *becoming* something different, someone different. Expanding on Kierkegaard, Rogers (1961, 1980) helps me to tease out *how* I can be both at the same time: *being-and-becoming-whole* while *in-education*. My reader will recall my earlier reflection on compartmentalization; my feeling that at an early age on my educational journey I learned to separate the different parts of myself, to “temper my passions and discern which parts of me were appropriate to reveal in particular settings.” As Heidegger (1962) offers a theoretical lens through which to view and ponder the multidimensionality of my being in the world, and Freire (1970/1993, 1998) distills Heidegger’s ideas for transformative education, Rogers (1980) offers me a measure of practical application upon which I can focus more explicitly on the experience of *exposure* and *anxiety* that emerges in the face of seeing my and my students’ multidimensionality and enacting my wholeness in relation to them in the classroom.

Rogers once remarked in his essay, “Can Learning Encompass Both Ideas and Feelings?”

I deplore the manner in which, from early years, the child’s education splits him or her: the *mind* can come to school, and the body is permitted, peripherally, to tag along, but the feelings and emotions can live freely and expressively only outside of school. (p. 263)

Rogers went on to write, “There should be a place for learning by the *whole* person, with feelings and ideas merged” (p. 264). It seems that when we split or compartmentalize the individual, we arrest their potential for *being* and *becoming* uniquely themselves; we stifle some of the possibilities that they may avail *for* themselves when different parts of themselves are revealed to them and in sync.

In his existential poem, René Daumal (1959) offers an ardent insight into becoming that, for me, nods to Heidegger's *being-in-the-world*, *thrownness* and *authenticity*, and signifies both Kierkegaard's (2000) and Rogers's (1980) sentiments, perhaps bearing witness to the confluence of Daumal's own being and becoming awake:

*This is how I sum up for myself what I wish to convey to those who work with me here:*

*I am dead because I lack desire;*

*I lack desire because I think I possess;*

*I think I possess because I do not try to give;*

*In trying to give, you see that you have nothing;*

*Seeing that you have nothing, you try to give of yourself;*

*Trying to give of yourself, you see that you are nothing;*

*Seeing that you are nothing, you desire to become;*

*In desiring to become, you begin to live. (p. 102)*

As well, Daumal's poem connects for me Heidegger's (1962) notion of *anxiety* with Rogers' (1961) take on *becoming*. "Trying to give of yourself, you see that you are nothing" and "you desire to become" (Daumal 1959, p. 102). In these lines, Daumal portends Heidegger's (1962) possibilities once we have acknowledged our nothingness and absurdity in the world, and presages the process for becoming more authentic that Rogers (1961) lays out when he implores us to ask, "Who am I, *really*? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior? How can I become myself?" (p. 108).

In *On Becoming a Person* (1961) Rogers posits that as a result of being socialized (or, conditioned) by a particular culture human beings initially become what their culture needs and wants for them to be. They surrender, like Heidegger (1962) suggests in his discussions of

*thrownness* and *publicness*, under great pressure to belong, to the desires and expectations of the agents of a larger mechanism (Heidegger's "the They") with a particular agenda in place (Rogers, 1961, p. 108). As a psychotherapist and teacher Rogers proposes that in order to help individuals to uncover and see the "unique combination of difficulties" (p. 108) they embody in the world, it is his job to "create an atmosphere of freedom in which [the individual] can move in his thinking and feeling and being, in any direction he desires" (p. 109) to the end of revealing, understanding and shedding "the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles, with which he has faced life" (p. 109). For Rogers, this "getting behind the mask" is the starting point for helping those with whom he works to come to know their "real selves," as opposed to the self they have learned from others to represent, or the self they believe others expect them to be (p. 109).

Admittedly, as Rogers acknowledges,

This exploration becomes even more disturbing when [individuals] find themselves involved in removing the false faces which they had not known were false faces. They begin to engage in the frightening task of exploring the turbulent and sometimes violent feelings within themselves. To remove a mask which you had thought was part of your real self can be a deeply disturbing experience, yet when there is freedom to think and feel and be, the individual moves toward such a goal. (p. 110)

He continues suggesting that as the individual takes up the project of removing the "false faces,"

Deeply and vividly [she] experiences the various elements of [herself] which have been hidden within. Thus to an increasing degree [she] becomes [herself]—not a façade of conformity to others, not a cynical denial of all feeling, not a front of intellectual rationality, but a living, breathing, feeling, fluctuating process—in short, [she] becomes a person. (p. 114)

I am troubled by Rogers' implication that there is an essential "real self" to be realized by the individual, or an endpoint that the individual will eventually reach in their becoming, namely "a person," with nothing to follow. Still, again, like Heidegger (1962), Rogers (1961) provides a starting point for me. In terms of considering my notions and enactment of my own authenticity, for example, the false faces I presume I continue to wear, and the masks that I presume my students wear in the absence of knowing anything different, I do consider Rogers' notion of *becoming* as significant to conceptualizing both the effects of transformative pedagogies on students, and my pedagogical temperament as a response to these effects.

For example, as students are engaged in the process of uncovering, investigating, reclaiming and enacting new ways of being in the world, Rogers' ideas have led me to consider how they may be realizing the "false faces" they have been socialized to wear for the first time, and thus how vulnerable and exposed they might feel when coming into contact with parts of themselves that may both make them feel more congruent with something more authentic within themselves, and yet propel them into a state of anxiety about what that means for them outside of our classroom. In addition, as you will read about in "Straight to Hell," Rogers helps me to make sense of and learn from a particularly disturbing experience of my own wherein I both endured and exacted my own "turbulent and violent feelings" upon a student, "deeply and vividly" experiencing elements of myself, false faces perhaps, that had been "hidden within." As I have both witnessed and felt, such exposure can be both daunting and dangerous, and potentially damaging when uncovered in front of others who are not able to understand and support this process. In response then I believe it is my job to co-create a holding environment (Kegan, 1982; Grabinski, 2005) of sorts, wherein students might practice realizing their

experiences, considering where they come from, reconsidering the value of their lessons and beliefs, and feel supported in their respective decision-making processes to move forward.

Ultimately, Rogers gets at the muck and messiness, the sweat and adrenalin, “the confusing, disorienting, and painful” (Rich, 1979, p. 35) pieces of our *being-in-the-world* that burst forth when we set out to uncover and reveal ourselves, when we engage in “awakening consciousness” (p. 35). He also addresses the dynamic and tentative nature of *becoming*, stressing the realization of self in process, “as a stream of becoming, not a finished product” (Rogers, 1961, p. 122). Becoming then for Rogers, like Kierkegaard (2004) and Daumal (1959) imply (and as I am coming to learn about teaching like a mountain), “means that a person is a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity; a flowing river of change, not a block of solid material; a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits” (1961, p. 122).

## **2.4.1 Two Ways of Being-and-Becoming-in-the-Classroom**

### **2.4.1.1 Posturing in Disdain**

“No matter how much someone may irritate me,” Freire (1998) proposes, “I have no right to puff myself up with my own self-importance so as to declare that person to be absolutely incompetent, assuming a *posture of disdain* from my own position of false superiority” (p. 51, emphasis added). Expanding on Freire’s coin of the phrase in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, in *posturing in disdain* I am referring to a stance of arrogance and control, condescension and impatience; the presumption on the part of teachers that “we have sole ownership of wisdom or technique because we have advanced degrees” (Bach, 1997, p. 340); and, the positioning of one’s perspective (the teacher’s) as more legitimate than another (students’). The academy has



long been viewed as “the ivory white tower” where “Academicians were a bunch of [educated] idiots” obfuscating and proselytizing, and “Academic writing was obtuse and difficult to understand” (p. 339), “using inaccessible language and/or academic jargon” (hooks, 2003, p. xii) to prioritize the abstraction of ideas over practical implications and actual practice. Certainly, as an actor on the academic stage, I find these characterizations troubling at best and absolutely enraging at worst. Still, I am curious about the effect that such assumptions have on teachers and students, and more specifically, the influence that some of my past teachers, taking such a stance, has had on my development as a student and teacher. As well, I have been curious about the stance I have taken myself in classroom situations wherein my naïve assumptions about learning reflected the “false superiority” that Freire (1998) identifies, and perhaps a “false front” or mask that Rogers (1961) claims I may have adopted in order to face my anxiety about my teaching life.

In her provocative presidential address on academic posturing to the Western States Communication Association, Betsy Wackernagel Bach (1997) suggests

We need to constantly remind ourselves of the impact our messages leave on others and think seriously about the impressions we form. Quite simply, the impression we leave upon our students, and we always leave one for better or worse, is the only lasting currency of education. That impression is formed less by reminding our students of how intellectually honest we are and how hard we work, than by having our students regularly observe us working hard and being honest. (p. 351)

In other words, our actions in the classroom speak louder than the words we espouse. Our students are watching us. If I *say* that I am interested in them, that I believe in a dialogic project, and that I am committed to justice in the classroom, I better make sure that I am indeed enacting those ideals. “No one can be in the world, with the world, and with others, and maintain a

posture of neutrality,” Freire (1998, p. 73) proposes. I cannot simply promote particular ideas in the classroom and then stand on the sidelines idly watching and evaluating how those ideals are being played out by my students. For as Freire goes on to recommend,

I cannot be in the world decontextualized, simply observing life. Yes, I can take up my position and settle myself, but only so as to become aware of my insertion into a context of decision, choice, and intervention. There are inconsistent questions that we all have to ask and that make it clear to us that it is not possible to study simply for the sake of studying. As if we could study in a way that really had nothing to do with that distant, strange world out there. (p. 73)

I, like my students, am a participant in the classroom, driven and influenced by where I have been and who I believe I am. If I am compelled to propose and expect my students to enact a particular pedagogy, than I am also compelled to live by that pedagogy.

In my estimation, a *posture of disdain* may be a stance that is safe for the individual seeking to distance themselves from knowing themselves, or perhaps from being known by others. It leaves an impression however, a pretense in fact, that seemingly permits teachers to avoid showing students that, as Applebaum (1995) suggests, they are indeed human beings just as their students “[with] faults, weaknesses, desires, and ambitions” (p. 448).

Certainly, there are times when self-disclosure behooves discretion. And, I am in no way suggesting that teachers put themselves out there with students at all times, or that observation is never appropriate. I do believe that teachers can be open and generous, however, without denigrating students; that teachers can attend to their whole selves, sometimes at the expense of a student’s needs, and perhaps even in spite of a student’s troubling behavior, whilst remaining respectful and honest. And I do believe that sometimes standing back and witnessing what is

happening can reveal a necessary perspective. We are human after all, with needs, desires, frustrations, strengths and growth edges. To cover over those parts of ourselves in an attempt to shield us from discomfort or anxiety so that we might avoid showing our students that we feel and experience the world just like they do perpetrates, in my estimation, our complicity in our own and our students' continued *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*. And, limits all of our potential for *being-and-becoming-whole*, and perhaps more authentic, in education.

#### **2.4.1.2 Presence**

I ground my understanding of *presence* in Freire's (1998) ideas regarding *being* as *presence*:

Our being in the world is far more than just "being." It is a "presence," a "presence" that is relational to the world and to others. A "presence" that, in recognizing another presence as "not I," recognizes its own self. A "presence" that can reflect upon itself, that knows itself as presence, that can intervene, can transform, can speak of what it does, but that can also take stock of, compare, evaluate, give value to, decide, break with, and dream. (p. 26)

Later, Freire muses,

I like being human because I perceive that the construction of my presence in the world, which is a construction involving others and is subject to genetic factors that I have inherited and to socio-cultural and historical factors, is nonetheless a presence whose construction has much to do with myself. (p. 54)

Here Freire acknowledges his *thrownness* in the world, his being with others who have shaped and influenced him. I read Freire as heralding who he has become, both celebrating and seeking to challenge those dynamic parts of himself that he is continuing to uncover and know.

Peter Senge and his colleagues (2005) similarly write

The key to deeper levels of learning is that the larger living wholes of which we are an active part are not inherently static. Like all living systems, they both conserve features essential to their existence and seek to evolve. When we become more aware of the dynamic whole, we also become aware of what is emerging. (p. 12)

They go on to suggest that becoming more aware of the dynamic whole of which we are a part, and what is emerging within and outside of that dynamic whole, rests on the capacity to enact *presence*, which they collectively define as

being fully conscious and aware in the present moment; deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense; letting go of old identities and the need to control; and, making choices to serve the revolution of life, [all] leading to a state of "letting come," of consciously participating in a larger field for change. (pp. 13-14)

In other words, *presence* on the part of the teacher suggests that they are able to make room for freedom from interruption and intervention in the classroom; willing to co-create alongside students a space that is free of intrusive needs to enforce, reassure, cover over, and thus stifle the honest elements of students' struggles toward the emergence of their stories, interests, growth and engagement in the classroom; and, emancipated from rigid interpretations, meanings, theories, conclusions, and images about how things *should* go, or what we *should* be doing (Shainberg, 1983, p. 163).

Krall (1988a) proposes that "Healthy adult relationships grow out of reciprocity and mutualism, not from territoriality and exploitation" (p. 474). Thus, when I am present in the classroom I am unconcerned with "what comes next" or clarifying topics, unless my students seek that clarification. I am interested in student's ideas and questions in a facilitative way

wherein I decline to offer my own thoughts and ideas as static fact, and instead work to guide a dynamic inquiry (i.e. helping them to develop questions) whereby students might then strive to find *their* answers for themselves. To offer my interpretations as “fact,” for example, would simply be covering over my students’ curiosities and would stifle any personal change or growth that might come about by their own desire to learn. As well, I am compassionate, witnessing students’ behavior and ideas with benevolence, perhaps like Lou did with me when he whispered into my ear, “This part isn’t so interesting, is it, Madison-girl?” Finally, I am “solid, stable, unmoving” (Naess, 1979, p. 13), enacting Freire’s (1970/1993; 1998) authentic stance, and impressing upon my students that “I am here, I am not going anywhere, and I want to hear what you have to say.”

On the other hand, I am not value-free or neutral. As I have written above, though I do not view or portray myself as an expert, I do come to the classroom with my own story, my own biography. And so, one of my challenges is to constantly be aware of how I might offer my perspectives, talk about my story, and support and encourage students to dig more deeply into their own in a way that might enhance the larger story we are composing together in the classroom. In this way, again, I am refusing to fight against my students, willing to hold back avalanches for as long as I am able, and sympathetic to the possibility that sometimes “catastrophes will happen.”

In addition, I am not suggesting a laissez-faire approach to teaching. And, I am certainly not proposing that we allow students to “fall off the edges.” Students stumble; we all stumble. We also come to the classroom with various experiences, significant events from our lives and lessons that might provide some necessary guidance. Some of us have had experiences that have helped us to anticipate particular obstacles along the trail, while others of us have learned how to

propose options without expectation. A teacher employing a pedagogy that attends to *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, that realizes and honors the *thrownness* of both themselves and their students in the world, that engages *presence* to the end of supporting their students' respective journeys toward *being-and-becoming-whole*, also recognizes the delicate balance between supporting the student where she is and fostering learning and growth, between being compassionate toward the student paralyzed by fear, and naming and challenging certain behaviors that might keep the student stuck.

### *INTERLUDE: FOOD FOR THOUGHT*

For our first day we hiked nearly 4.5 miles and 3,000 vertical feet, from Paradise (5,400') to Camp Muir (10,060'). It was a spectacular climb as we traveled through the alpine region and onto the Muir Snowfield, named after John Muir who climbed the peak in 1888. The terrain, though steep, didn't require technical climbing gear, though we were each using walking sticks and wearing gaiters to keep our feet and ankles dry. The weather, though chilly, was steady and calm, and the sun was particularly bright. Everyone seemed to be settling into a kind of rhythm, talking amongst one another, and even laughing about my alarm clock debacle.

As our brigade continued forward, scrambling around outcroppings of rock above the tree line, and playing in the snow that was becoming much deeper with every step, one of our peers, Adam, began to stumble. Within seconds he'd lost his footing and was beginning to slide down the snowfield. Lou, who was bringing up the rear of our group, moved quickly to catch our friend before he reached the rocks. Stepping in front of Adam, with his back turned and his legs spread wide so that Adam's body would slide through them, Lou grabbed the collar of Adam's jacket and jerked him upright as if he were lifting a rag doll. For Adam's part, the jolt had clearly startled him, though surprisingly after a few seconds of trying to stand on his own, again, he couldn't quite seem to get his footing. He continued to wobble, and in an effort, I imagine, to insure that Adam didn't fall and slide again, Lou held onto his jacket until someone could lay down a sleeping bag.

After a few questions, Lou concluded that Adam hadn't eaten breakfast, or the snack provided us at Paradise. "I just wasn't hungry," Adam admitted. "I was too nervous!" Within seconds, Ed, one of the other guides, dropped his pack and pulled out a Snickers bar from his pocket. "Here, eat this" he told Adam with compassion and generosity. "Eat this, and let's just sit here for a few minutes." Eventually we were all sitting down, on the snow, snacking on various candy bars that the guides had handed out before we started to climb. Though I felt no animosity toward Adam, I couldn't stop wondering if others felt like *he* was slowing us down. *He had chosen not to eat before we began.* As if he had heard what I was wondering, Adam tentatively asked, "We're not going to make it to base camp on time are we?" "Well, what would be *on time*?" Lou rhetorically replied. Others seemed equally unconcerned with whether we would reach the top "on time." Instead, everyone remained seated, silently and patiently waiting for Adam to rest. No one admonished him for not eating earlier; no one suggested that he was letting us down. Instead everyone simply sat, quiet, comforting and generous.



### 3.0 MOVEMENT III, MAP AND COMPASS: CHARTING THE COURSE OF MY METHODOLOGY

*As the narrator from the film Eve's Bayou reflects, "Memory is the selection of images, some elusive, others printed indelibly on the brain. Each image is like a thread, each thread woven together to make a tapestry of intricate texture. And the texture tells a story, and the story is our past." (Lemmons, 1998)*

Reflecting on the efficacy of her *personal history* approach to educational research, Florence Krall (1988a) muses,

The life journey toward understanding is like a hike along a trail that encircles a mountain. At each turn a new vista is unveiled. We know that view reveals a little of what the mountain is. Should we persist to the very summit, we are assured, even there, and by our very experience of this pinnacle, that this too is not *the* mountain. It, like understanding, is not something that can be conquered in one grand assault. Each step of the journey unveils in bits and pieces an authentic approximation of what the mountain really is but can never be known to us absolutely. Our attitude on this journey is one of openness to what lies before us at each step, for each moment contains the consistency and truth of the whole. (p. 478)

By now, my reader certainly sees why Krall's cogitation resonates for me, and perhaps, why her *personal history* heuristic is more than an apt metaphor for the course I am exploring. It's a mucky place to be, on this pathway of self-reflection, tracking a past for the sake of illuminating a present. Those vistas to which Krall refers, and I alluded earlier, are unanticipated, unknown, and exhilarating at best. At worst, they are terrifying for again they are unanticipated and unknown. "The landscapes," writes Rebecca Solnit (2000), "gestate the stories, and the stories bring us back to the sites of [our] history" (p. 4). Most importantly then, these vistas and the landscapes upon which I trek are glimpses into my history, my stories as they are constantly evolving in my memory, colorful threads weaving the tapestry of who I am both *being* and *becoming* in relation to my self, others and the world that surrounds me.

### **3.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1.1 Postmodern Emergence**

With compass in hand, I lay out here the bearing for my venture into these landscapes, my inquiry into my stories. Grounded by interpretivism, I have sought on this journey to read and write texts that inform and reflect my *personal history* through a methodology of *postmodern emergence* (Somerville, 2007, 2008). Somerville characterizes *postmodern emergence* as wonder, playful, resilient, becoming, generating, undoing, creative, and unfolding. It is a methodology that "moves from deconstruction to creation and unconditional representation" (2007, p. 240), emphasizing "the irrational, messy and embodied process of becoming-other-to-one's-self in research" (2008, p. 209).

Somerville's methodology of *postmodern emergence* surfaced as Somerville was struggling with her own "crisis of representation" as a researcher "working with Aboriginal co-participants and my own fractured embodiment in the landscapes of research" (p. 226). Desiring to engage her research, and the people with whom she was working, in a way that honored her own and their creativity and place-based sensibilities, Somerville sought to locate a methodology that acknowledged and facilitated "the emergence of alternative voices and new knowledges" (p. 228).

For my purposes here, *postmodern emergence* positions the coming to know one's experience in the world front and center. It focuses on apprehending the quality of wonder, the aha experience that can emerge from reflection, wherein one seeks to know the unknown (p. 228), and, generativity, wherein one seeks to more clearly represent their wonder and aha in a way that leads to the creation of new knowledges about what one knows and can now articulate in the process of research (p. 235).

In this way, applying David Griffin's (1990) framework for differentiating between different postmodernisms, *postmodern emergence* can be characterized as *reconstructive*, accentuating the interconnectedness between *being* human and *becoming-other* to one's self. Standing in sharp contrast to *deconstructive postmodernism*, *reconstructive postmodernism* (and thus *postmodern emergence*) intentionally proposes a new way of seeing and being with one's self, "recasting self-other relationships" (Somerville, 2008, p. 214), and examining "the ways in which the undoing of the self-constituted relationally in the research act is a necessary condition for the generation of new knowledge" (p. 216). More precisely, as Chad Barnett (2008) summarizes, *postmodern emergence*

is a response to the limitations of empiricist research paradigms that promise precision and control. [Somerville's] methodology of postmodern emergence seeks to facilitate the emergence of alternative voices and new knowledges. Somerville extends the idea of identity as a process of merely becoming into an ontological experience of emergence as becoming "other." (p. 205)

Thus, like *reconstructive postmodernism* (Griffin, 1990), *postmodern emergence* (Somerville, 2007, 2008) seeks to change "the essential gestalt" (Spretnak, 1997, p. 72) of the individual's universe, rethinking, reclaiming, re-centering and revising various modernist metanarratives regarding ontology, epistemology, and the process of representation that inform the individual's relationship and way of being with the self-as-other. Somerville's (2007, 2008) *postmodern emergence* then presents the most satisfying tack for me to take toward creating my mosaic.

In a similar vein, and particularly apt regarding my use of the mountain, the phenomenologist David Abram (1996) affirms, "My life and the world's life are deeply intertwined" (p. 33). In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram suggests that the life-world, the environment, is inextricably connected to our being-in-the-world, however we define or are aware of that world in the moment of our attention to and with it. "This cycling of human back into the larger world" (p. 16), Abram proposes, "ensures that the other forms of experience that we encounter—whether ants, or willow trees, or clouds—are never absolutely alien to ourselves" (p. 16). He additionally affirms, "Despite the obvious differences in shape, and ability, and style of being, they remain at least distantly familiar, even familial" (p. 16). In other words, we are in-the-world and with-the-world; we *are* the world in which we dwell. Thus, we are Nature and Nature is we.

Finally, I find Alfonso Montuori's (2008) understanding of "creative inquiry" particularly complimentary to Somerville's (2007, 2008) *postmodern emergence*, and my own undertaking here, "where [educational research] is seen as a joyful process of inquiry, where the person is engaged in a collaborative process of self-creation and self-understanding, as well as creating an understanding of the world" (p. 11). I have already laid out my key theoretical collaborators, articulating what I have drawn from my discursive rope team on this journey. There are certainly others to whom I owe a great deal of credit and gratitude regarding the fruits of my creative inquiry here, the creation of my mosaic, not the least of which are the students and teachers with whom I have co-created particular stories, with whom I experienced profound educating encounters, and whose contributions signify some of the foothills I have already trekked and explored.

In retrospect, I acknowledge and honor the joy I feel putting our shared stories down on paper; the gratitude I express for others' participation in these stories; and, the privilege I own as I present them here. Still, I want to remind my reader that these are *my* stories, ultimately *my* interpretations of *my* memories of shared encounters. As I acknowledge the presence of others in these stories, and am grateful for others' as they have contributed to these encounters, I will not be so arrogant as to claim any generalized or definitive meaning of them for all involved.

### **3.1.2 Dialectical Links**

As Krall (1988a) affirms "that each view reveals a little of what the mountain is" (p. 478), Abram (1996), Griffin (1990), Montuori (2008) and Somerville (2007, 2008) confirm my interconnectedness with what the mountain is as *I* see and experience it in conjunction with how others might see and experience it; how it is emerging and being reconstituted in the context of

my pedagogical temperament. I can't see the whole mountain before me, and I trust that there is more that exists beyond what I see and experience. Further, I see that the natural and academic worlds in which I participate, and the individuals that inhabit these worlds alongside me, are not necessarily purely independent beings, disconnected from one another or from me. Rather, we are interconnected and reliant on one another. We do not exist in isolation. Thus, I cannot wholly and authentically know who I am and who I am *being-and-becoming* separate from either the natural world or the academic arena, as both inform who I am and who I am *being-and-becoming* within each. I cannot wholly and authentically know myself as *being-and-becoming-whole* as a teacher separate from those who have taught me, or with whom I am continuing to *be-and-become-whole-in-education*. And, I cannot wholly and authentically know who I am *being-and-becoming* in relation to both arenas and the people who make up the communities within each without attending to my *whole* self: my mental, physical, spiritual, visceral, and emotional being. Thus, in my effort to re-cover and re-constitute my own whole and authentic self as a teacher, I acknowledge that I have been searching for solid places, rock shelves perhaps, upon which I might construct a bridge that traverses the crevasse between the poetic and the philosophical, the personal and the academic, the rational and the eloquent, the sensible and intelligible.

Willi Unsoeld (1963) once queried

Why not stay out there in the wilderness the rest of your days...? Because that's not where [people] are...The final test for me of the legitimacy of the experience is "How well does your experience of the sacred in nature enable you to cope more effectively with the problems of [humankind] when you come back to the city? (§ 2)

My experiences with and connection to the earth inform my temperament in the classroom, supporting albeit metaphorically perhaps, the interconnectedness I am seeking to encourage and honor, individually and collectively, in myself and my students. Thus, my stories from “the mountain” serve as the backdrop against which my musings about *exposure*, *posturing* and *presence*, for example, “back in the city,” make sense to me. In other words, I am relying on movements from “the mountain” and the meaning I have conjured from them to inform how I am continuing to grapple with Unsoeld’s (1963) questions in the context of teaching and learning.

Michael Crotty (2003) offers a particularly compelling and relevant insight to my intentions, illustrating and accentuating the confluence of the experiential and the personal:

The world of meaning into which we are born is a world of trees as much as it is a world of kinship, law, finance, or nationalism. Understanding of trees is not something we come to individually “in the course of our practical life”. ...we are taught about trees. We learn that trees are trees and we learn what trees should mean to us. In infancy and childhood we learn the meaning of trees from the culture in which we are reared. Trees are given a name for us and, along with the name, all kinds of understandings and associations. They are a source of livelihood if the setting of our childhood is a logging town. They constitute a focal point of lively aesthetic pleasure if we grow up within an artist’s colony. They are the subject of deep reverence, fear perhaps, if we come to adulthood in an animist community. They may have very little meaning at all if we come from a slum neighborhood in which there are no trees. (pp. 56-57)

Or, as I am reminded of my earlier educational experience—a ripple of a deep resonating effect: trees may simply be things to enjoy at recess because trees are “out there” and education happens “in here.”

Additionally, in light of illuminating the power of *intentionality*, enhancing the meanings, understandings and possibilities that individuals derive from their experience in the world, Crotty proposes,

Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. An object is always an object *for* someone. The object, in other words, cannot be adequately described apart from the subject, nor can the subject be adequately described apart from the object. From a more existentialist viewpoint, intentionality bespeaks the relationship between us as human beings and our world. We are beings-in-the-world. Because of this, we cannot be described apart from our world, just as our world—always a human world—cannot be described apart from us. (p. 79)

Hence, challenging and reclaiming the lesson of my earlier educational experience: trees are integral to education, and education is integral to understanding and knowing trees. Both are “in here” and “out there.”

### **3.2 MAPPING THE TOPOGRAPHY**

As I have been interested then in exploring the evolution of my current pedagogical temperament from one focused solely on the cognitive discovery and analysis of social and ecological injustices, to one that embraces various sentient and poetic ways of knowing arising, mitigating and augmenting students’ and teachers processes of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, I have sought here to (1) rummage through my “storehouse of identity and integrity” (Renner, 2001, ¶3) as a student and educator, identifying from where my drive has come; (2) reveal the masks, or false faces, that I have adopted, shed and am continuing to uncover in the process of



my own *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* (Rogers, 1961); (3) clarify some of the problematics and implications that have emerged, pitfalls and potentials up to now unforeseen, regarding others' pedagogies and how they have contributed to my own; and (4) conceptualize what *exposure* and *presence* mean to me regarding my enaction of my pedagogical temperament and the formulation of my pedagogy for teaching like a mountain.

My location in academia has presented me with various options for pursuing my inquiry, various identities from which to draw. As I have enjoyed the dual roles of student and teacher, I have remained keenly aware that orienteering between them is futile less I consider them base camps along the same route. Thus, I am not a teacher separate from being a student; I am not a student separate from being a teacher. And, so it is in this light, again with a nod to Willi Unsoeld (1963), that I have progressed with fortitude toward testing the legitimacy of my earlier experiences, an inquiry into the primacy, ontological nature and pedagogical possibilities of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*.

### **3.2.1 The Importance of Story**

In "Toward a Curriculum of Mythopoetic Meaning," Kathleen Kesson (1999) asks of her teacher education students: "What significant aspects of life were left out of your education?" (p. 93). Kesson goes on to share that after posing this question to hundreds of students, "People invariably answer in no uncertain terms: the emotional, the creative, the aesthetic, the *self*" (p. 93). bell hooks (1989) similarly confirms, reflecting on writing about her own educational journey,

It had not occurred to me that bringing one's past, one's memories together in a complete narrative would allow one to view them from a different perspective, not as singular

isolated events, but as part of a continuum. Reading the completed manuscript, I felt as though I had an overview not so much of my childhood but of those experiences that were deeply imprinted on my consciousness. Significantly, that which was absent, left out, not included was also important. (p.159)

And, Joy Ritchie and David Wilson (2000) affirm that “telling our own stories—and then revisiting them to see what they mean—is a courageous and revolutionary act, far from the marginal position it occupies in the research community” (p. ix).

We don't generally talk about the influence of one's past on one's current identity and professional ramblings. In educational research in particular, though narrative methodologies have gained a lot of momentum and legitimacy in the past two decades, telling one's story, excavating one's past for the purpose of making sense of one's present, continues to trouble the academic community. I surmise that much of this is a result of a general resistance in academia to exploring the emotional components of one's experiences. And, that is certainly understandable in the larger scheme of academic performance. To allow one's self to be exposed and vulnerable opens one up to the scrutiny of others, the possibility that one will be misunderstood, misinterpreted and perhaps even rejected outright. No one enjoys being ridiculed or marginalized. And, so we protect ourselves, even if that protection cuts us off from being more engaged, and acting with greater integrity.

In a recent conference presentation, reflecting on the myriad emotions and barriers I was running into regarding this dissertation project, I wrote,

I've been feeling particularly raw—putting my stories on the page, laying *me* bare on the screen, and then trying to rationally interpret it all...well, that's been difficult. Like many who have gone before me, and those I walk beside, however, I do have much to say.

Thoughts, ideas, stories are screaming to come out. And, I, feeling uncertain about *how* they will come out, *where* I will place them, and *what* will happen to them once they've been released...well, I find myself denying them, ignoring them, trying to hold them in. I can protect them this way; I can protect myself. (Brooks, 2009, p. 4)

I concluded my paper acknowledging that there were multiple forces at play, reinforcing my reticence, the most obvious being imposed by *me*:

Contemplating my uncertainty, acknowledging my *thrownness* to the point of making myself sick sometimes, I realize that while I may try to deny what I *need* to do, what I *want* to express, and what I *know* deep within, I am missing opportunities...and, feeling more and more exposed. There's really no place to hide; I've passed the last outcropping of boulders; the tree-line is far behind me; and, the sun is high in the sky. The butterflies in my stomach are NOT settling, and I now understand what Simone de Beauvoir (1948/1976) meant when she wrote "My contemplation is an excruciation only because it is *also* a joy" (p. 12, emphasis added). (p. 5)

Historically, educational research in general has been oriented toward the acquisition of evidence, proof that what we have found is reliable and valid. We can't prove our stories. And so, we're encouraged to move on from them, leaving them behind as if they were excessive baggage on our journeys to success, relegating them to a more private space, perhaps even a therapeutic group. As well, I surmise that others' reluctance to hear our stories has something to do with a reluctance to consider their own stories, perhaps confronting their own vulnerabilities. I've heard in response to my dissertation project a few suggestions that what I was doing was "not really academic." And, some have offered, especially when I was struggling to allow my stories to unfold and *be* exposed, that I was "agonizing too much over this." In retrospect, I am

grateful for their comments for they have ultimately contributed a great deal to my reclaimed tenacity, in the middle of my inquiry, to continue moving forward.

As hooks (1989), Kesson (1999), Renner (2001), Ritchie and Wilson (2000), and perhaps, even myself (2009) note either implicitly or explicitly, the development of a professional identity is inextricable from personal identity. When personal and professional development are brought into dialogue, when teachers are given the opportunity to compose and reflect on their own stories of learning and selfhood within a supportive and challenging community, then teachers can begin to resist and revise the scripting narratives of the culture in which they dwell, and begin to compose new narratives that reflect and legitimize their identity and practice. For me, this is key to what makes personal history, narrative inquiry and storytelling absolutely necessary, for remembering my stories, seeing them through a different, more inclusive lens, affords me the opportunity to revise the outcome of their influence, or to at least avert some of the long-term effects of them as both learner and teacher. With this in mind, it seems that storytelling provides the possibility for teachers at all levels to begin then to author their own personal and pedagogical development (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 1).

Adrienne Rich (1979) muses,

In every life there are experiences, painful and at first disorienting, which by their very intensity throw a sudden floodlight on the ways we have been living, the forces that control our lives, the hypocrisies that have allowed us to collaborate with those forces, the harsh but liberating facts we have been enjoined from recognizing. Some people allow such illuminations only the brevity of a flash of sheet-lightning that throws a whole landscape into sharp relief, after which the darkness of denial closes in again. For others, these clarifications provide a motive and impulse toward a more enduring lucidity, a

search for greater honesty, and for the recognition of larger issues of which our personal suffering is a symptom, a specific example. (p. 215)

Walking [writing] alongside my discursive rope-team, with map and compass in hand, I explore and tell my stories here not as singular isolated events, but as specific components of a continuum, revisiting, and throwing a floodlight on some of the scripting narratives that have filled my storehouse of integrity as a learner and identity as a teacher. As Anna Nalick (2005) sings with passionate abandon,

*If I get it all down on paper,  
it's no longer inside of me,  
threatening the life it belongs to.  
And I feel like I'm naked in front of the crowd  
'cause these words are my diary  
screaming out loud  
and I know that you'll use them however you want to.*

In my search for “greater honesty” about how I have been exposed as a student, how I have exposed students as a teacher, and how I have been exposed as a teacher, I lay my stories bare, exposing what has been “screaming out loud.” Like Nalick, I feel naked, knowing that you, my reader, will make sense of and use these stories however you want to. In this way, I am taking perhaps some first steps into the foothills of what I imagine will ultimately be revealed as my pedagogy for teaching like a mountain, charting the course of coming “to a more enduring lucidity” about *exposure*: how is can be stifling, in the form of *posturing in disdain*, and how it can be enhancing, in the form of *presence* of students’ and teacher’s *being-and-becoming-whole* and perhaps, more authentic. Periodically, I step off of the path of my stories, veering an

“interpretive turn” here and there toward theoretical connections I am considering, and musing about more questions and ideas that have presented themselves to me.

### **3.2.2 Personal History: Dwelling within the Margins**

The lead guide for my expedition here is Florence R. Krall. In “From the Inside-Out—Personal History as Educational Research” (1988a) Krall sets out to elucidate her research heuristic for “the study of one’s personal history as a way of coming to understand the world” (p. 467). Drawing on William Pinar and Madeline Grumet’s (1976) method of *currere*, Georg Steiner’s “fourfold hermeneutic motion” (1975), and Max van Manen’s “phenomenological writing” (1984), Krall (1988a) proposes her “five movements” approach to *personal history*—venturing, remembering, comprehending, embodying and restoring (which I explain in detail below)—as a compelling method for tracking and recording one’s personal experiences and perceptions in education “as a valid beginning point” (p. 468) for educational inquiry. Owing that “Separating into steps what is an integrated flow admittedly does violence to the original intent” (p. 468) of recording and interpreting one’s personal history, Krall refuses to back away from overtly explicating her practice, declaring “I know of no way out of this dilemma” (p. 468). Instead she continues, seeking to justify “personal history as ‘good’ research, as a method that enhances and develops students’ analytic and interpretive skills and that fosters self-awareness in relation to the general human condition” (p. 468).

Ultimately, Krall expects that those who delve into the crevasse of their personal history to reconsider and reconceptualize “what it is we think we know” will “become more consciously intentional of our actions and more thoughtful and reflective of their consequences” (p. 474). For her such a project must (1) bring about deeper understanding and meaning of one’s daily life

without imposing their gleanings upon others, and (2) avoid reductionism, subsuming the complexities of social interaction and learning with simple formulas, techniques, and instrumental goals (p. 474). “The point in this approach,” for Krall, “is to clarify or to discover central questions or issues indirectly through the rendering and analysis of experience freed as much as possible from preconceptions about what is to be” (p. 469).

Krall’s approach is particularly satisfying for me as I work to remember and re-vision the fragmented elements of who I have been as a learner and as an teacher, as a being-in-education, and who I am becoming as an actor in the constantly evolving formulation of my pedagogical practices. Practically speaking, Krall’s (1988a) *personal history* approach supports my awakening to possibilities that have thus far (I presume) lain dormant: my spiritual and sentient connections with the Earth and to my vocation, for example, and how each informs my pedagogical temperament and practices; and my own “imaginative wanderings” (Riley-Taylor, 2002, p. 63) about these connections in the larger scheme of transformative education. In this way, I am searching here for understanding, embarking on a kind of “hermeneutic quest” (Macdonald, 1995, p. 173) into territory that is not necessarily rational or objective, and filled with “wonder, awe and anxiety” (p. 179).

### **3.2.2.1 Venturing**

For Krall (1988a) the introductory part of writing one’s personal history, *venturing*, entails a rendering through “thick descriptions of educational experiences” and a tentative inquiry into what emerges as significant from one’s past (p. 469). As Krall explains, “This ethnographic orientation grounds [educational researchers] in their own experiences but at the same time asks them to suspend opinion and judgment” (p. 469). In other words, with a nod to phenomenology (specifically, Merleau-Ponty, 1969, 1945 and van Manen, 1990), Krall (1988a) intends in this

initiatary phase for educational researchers to *bracket* any evaluation of the experiences that surface as they venture backward and descriptively record significant events, ideas, impressions and people that reveal themselves. Interestingly, Krall admits that bypassing evaluation of one's experiences is certainly "the most difficult part of the process" (p. 469). For those who persevere however, Krall confirms that "The decision to proceed is an act of trust in the significance of personal knowledge" (p. 469).

The results of this initial stage of my work will not necessarily be clear to my reader as this first movement is one engaged for the purpose of opening the flood gates, allowing whatever rushes through to float and flounder without explicit explanation. As I started this dissertation journey writing "thick descriptions" of various educational experiences, mining them for my initial questions and ideas, those questions and ideas have already changed, morphing beyond Krall's first movement to reframe the personal and technical introductions of my inquiry. I can no longer re-enter the *venturing* part of my excursion for I have already stepped into the foothills, seen what has been revealed as potential pathways, and begun to explore more deeply not only my interpretations of my experience, but implications and further possibilities. Thus, I present here the fruits of my broader expedition without the ability to make each step in the beginning of my trek explicitly clear.

### **3.2.2.2 Remembering, Comprehending, and Embodying**

The realization of the next three movements in Krall's heuristic lies in the educational researcher's willingness to constantly mine her experiences for further meaning and interpretation. As Krall encourages her own students to continue to search for and locate significant past experiences, she additionally challenges them to engage in the kind of probing and reflection that might help to reveal deeply embedded possibilities, adding depth and texture



to their apprehension of their existential struggle to become. In other words, Krall personifies a sort of “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 2003, 1994; Generett & Hicks, 2004; Gunzenhauser & Gerstl-Pepin, 2006) with her students’ research endeavors, supporting them to excavate and construct meaning from whatever events surface with particular vigor for them in the service of explicating their world not only as it was and is for them, but as it might be following careful and deliberate consideration and deliberation. Additionally, to the end of supporting the realization of her students own life projects, though not a passive observer, Krall (1988a) is careful to nurture and challenge her students without imposing her own interpretations on their work and memory. In this effort Krall herself *lives* the conditions of intentionality and reflection that she requests of her students. Like Lou Whittaker on “the mountain,” and Freire, (170/1993, 1998), hooks (1994), Generett and Hicks (2004), Gunzenhauser and Gerstl-Pepin (2006), and Palmer (1998, 2003, 2004) for example, in the classroom, Krall (1988a) avoids imposing stultifying expectations or responsibilities on educational researchers and portrays an unassuming and yet firm grasp of the purpose and potential of the project at hand.

Here, too, Krall challenges the oft cited predicaments of the *narrative* and *autobiographical* genres, specifically that they are entrenched in problems “related to significance and credibility” (Mertens, 2005, p. 286). For Krall (1988a), as with others aligned with varying forms of *narrative* and *autobiographical inquiry*, the significance of her approach is realized when educational researchers see that their personal knowledge *is* relevant, not simply because it exists, but because it presents them and the field with a way of knowing that others do not have (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Cook, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Karpiak, 2000, 2005; Logsdon, 2000; McDonald, 1995; Nash, 2004; Piantanida, 2006, 2010; Pinar, 1981; Pinar & Grumet, 1976;

Schubert, 1991; van Manen, 1990). For as van Manen (1990) affirms, “My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else’s are” (p. 54).

Krall’s (1988a) *personal history* approach avoids relativism and solipsism by requiring that those who engage in it seek to immerse themselves in the project of clarifying “the expression of the scholar” (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 77): “For exegesis [or, critical interpretation] to occur,” according to Krall (1988a), “the text, the descriptions of experiences, must stand against other views” (p. 472). In other words, educational researchers are not asked to engage in individual exploration for the sake of coming to know one’s self and one’s motivations in the pursuit of individual pleasure and awareness. Rather, they are utilizing this method as a way to explore, challenge and express what they have come to know as “truthlike observations” (Bruner in Eisner, 1997, p. 264), in relation to others’ experiences, ideas and questions, such that their propositions might broaden the landscape of study and understanding in the larger educational research community.

This means for me, acting as an agent of self-discovery and self-creation that I am seeking to deepen not only my understanding and existential struggle, but the understandings and the existential struggles of others interested in transformative pedagogies and *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*. To this end, I have started with my lived experiences, attempted to craft and express my personal knowledge about my experiences, and initiated a dialogue with myself, the text I have created, the texts with which I have interacted and my reader. In this effort I have uncovered and attempted to present a rich web of possibilities for understanding and expressing my conceptualizations of *exposure, posturing, presence, wholeness, authenticity and transformation*. And, I have composed new narratives about who I am becoming and how I am defining my pedagogical motivations.

### 3.2.2.3 Restoring

“Completing the final writing involves weaving analysis and interpretation into the descriptions” (Krall, 1988a, p. 473). In the final movement of her research heuristic, Krall suggests that the “final act is a fundamental act of reciprocity that lies at the heart of hermeneutics. It demands above all that the writer remain true to herself and her story” (p. 474). My final manuscript here thus represents Krall’s notion of *restoring*, bringing my experiences, in conjunction with others’ poetic musings and scholarly ideas, to the forefront, manifesting in further questions, possibilities and an exposition of my journey through the terrain of contemplation, reflection and interaction.

For Krall’s part, her book *Ecotone* (1994) is a particularly telling and eloquent exposition of the method she has proposed and ultimately lives, making her readers privy to her personal history as it is related to and revealing of the dilemmas and celebrations she confronts and enjoys in her various roles in education, the dialectical links she is making between the personal and the theoretical, the sensible and the intelligible. As well, *Ecotone* has been particularly confirming for me as Krall models the integration of her passion in, for and with natural communities to clarify and inform the various roles she plays within various academic communities. Employing as metaphor the *ecotone*, “the boundary between two natural communities where elements of both as well as transitional species intermingle in heightened richness” (front cover), Krall invites her reader to consider that place of transition, what she identifies as “the margins,” between the boundaries, where one might dwell to see, listen, feel, and consider how the various parts of one’s life intersect:

Margins . . . are not necessarily areas of isolation where we balance between two worlds, looking out or looking in, without legitimacy or equality. Although they can become

boundaries that separate—chasms that block our movement toward fulfillment and joy in living, or frontiers where we wage power battles—they may also be dwelling places that connect rather than separate (p. 4).

Thus, Krall compels me specifically to wade within the margins, transcending the space of the spectator (maybe solipsist) and engaging the location of the observer-engager (possibly informant).

### 3.3 WRITING [ESSAYS] AS POETIC DIALOGUE

#### 3.3.1 Writing

For Edith Cobb (1977), “The highest poetic endeavor has its inception in the child’s need to be what [she] wants to understand, and to express that knowledge in some outward form” (p. 50). As my experience informs who I am, in heart, mind and spirit, and how I think and feel about the world which I inhabit, as it is what defines and drives my passions and pursuits, my anxieties and curiosities, it is not always something I can define in words or even a language discernable by many others. It might be felt or sensed, emerging from my gut, in relation to the physical world that holds, molds and supports me. Thus, my engagement of and responses to *exposure* and *transformation*, for example, and my continual *being-and-becoming-whole* in the place of the academy is grounded by my experiences of an embodied and poetic way of knowing; a knowing that emerges and seeks to be expressed through writing, albeit poetically, when my palms become sweaty in response to an-other’s story or statement.

As Krall's (1988a) *personal history* heuristic provides the methodological map for my work, *writing as poetic dialogue* represents the contour lines of the route I follow on my journey here. Writing as the essential structure for my process has been crucial to helping me to explore, understand and articulate my personal history as it is relevant to and reflective of the emergence of "speculations, experiments, recognitions, engagements, and curiosity" (Stewart, 2005, p. 1027), and not to the development of uncovered truths to replace uncomfortable or inadequate protocols in transformative education. bell hooks (1989), reflecting on writing her autobiography, observes:

The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It was the longing for release that compelled the writing but concurrently it was the joy of reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual part of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present. (p. 158)

Laurel Richardson (1997) similarly affirms what I have grappled with as I have waded within the margins between what is sensible and what is intelligible, becoming an academic who is intrigued by the question, "how did I get here?", passionate about wholistic and poetic representations of her work, and deeply committed to exploring the tensions that undergird my emotional self and rational *being-and-becoming-in-education*. Writing specifically about "writing," and more specifically about "poetic representation," Richardson explains,

We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us. Academics are given the 'story line' that the 'I' should be suppressed in their writing, that they

should accept homogenization and adopt the all-knowing, all-powerful voice of the academy. (p. 2)

She goes on to reveal the story of her identity transformation from “sociologist” to “writer” laying out the map she surveyed and followed to the end of positioning what is sacred for her in both the academy and herself. Eventually, in her chapter “The Poetic Representation of Lives,” Richardson implores academics, and specifically symbolic interactionists (as she is a sociologist), to recognize that “our task is to build an interpretive framework about the production of cultural meanings and the connection of those meanings to lived experience” (p. 144).

In “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) Richardson, with Elizabeth St. Pierre, additionally suggests that “what something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them” (p. 961). Like Crotty (2003) proposes above, “Trees are given a name for us and, along with the name, all kinds of understandings and associations” (p. 57). Hence, I learned early in my educational process to compartmentalize my thoughts and my feelings because emotions didn’t belong in the classroom, for example. In addition, I was nudged, and not so gently, to dismiss the things in my personal life that enchanted me, discouraged from making connections between the academic material that excited and startled me, and the natural world that enchanted and scared me. These were separate issues and projects. And now combined, they are representative of experiences that have influenced how I have sought to be in the classroom with my own students; how I have sought to nurture and support the *being-and-becoming-whole* of those students who are interested in seeing and experiencing the world differently.

Regarding the personal essay, Maria Piantanida (2006) suggests that “transforming unwritten reflections into personal essays has become, for me, a process through which I strive to embody and enact an integrated stance of scholarly practitioner” (pp. 167-168). She continues by reflecting on William H. Schubert’s “speculative essay,” specifically his articulation of the essay as a “process of inquiry that transcends the problem of reducing human experience to an objectified commodity, a snare of all formal systems of inquiry” (p. 169). As well, she is particularly upfront about his vision of the essay being one that is “both daunting and affirming.” Like Piantanida, and, as I have already suggested above, this form of “data collection”—the recording of one’s stories, and the laying bare of them for personal analysis on one hand, and public examination on the other—is scary and exhilarating. And, again, like Piantanida, what sustains me in my own process of laying bare what I have experienced is my own “compulsion to understand myself and my experiences through the process of writing” (p. 170) to the end of supporting and inspiring others in education to do the same.

Finally, Krall (1988a, 1994), Piantanida (2006, 2010), Richardson (1997), Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), Schubert (1991), and Stewart (2005) invite me not to dismiss those early lessons to compartmentalize, but to reconsider and possibly reconfigure them, remembering and re-visioning something that might be both satisfying and useful in my current work. Understanding and accepting that “knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical local knowledges” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962), I have felt supported to write my way into *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, to nurture the continual emergence of my own voice as both student and educator. In this sense I have no longer been a prisoner, held captive by unreflected expectations and agendas. Instead, I have become a liberator, motivated to reveal how I have come to be and how I might continue to

pursue connecting students with a sense of personal meaning and agency; how I might invoke imaginal, emotional, creative and aesthetic ways of knowing; and how I might evoke a sense of authenticity and wholeness in learning and teaching.

### 3.3.2 Poetics

I turn momentarily to Heidegger (1971) to ground my attraction to *poetics* in my writing. In his essay “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger pronounces

The poet names the gods and names all things with respect to what they are. This naming does not merely come about when something already previously known is furnished with a name; rather, by speaking the essential word, the poet’s naming first nominates the beings as what they are. Thus they become known *as* beings. Poetry is the founding of being in the word. (p. 59)

The poet, for Heidegger is a generator; one who produces or brings into being the possibilities for being-in-the-world. Through language poets signify existence, of things, of humans, of the more-than-human, in a particular place and time. They call “in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed *as* that which conceals itself” (p. 225). They generate and uncover what for many may be elusive or understated.

For Heidegger (1977/1993), the ability to apprehend, reveal and organize language in poetic form resides in *poetic thinking*, thinking that “brings forth” (p. 335). “Such thinking,” Michael Bonnet (2002) observes “is fundamental to authentic human consciousness, for it is ultimately central to the notion of—and *experience* of—*truth*, without which human life becomes unintelligible” (p. 238). This *poetic thinking* Bonnet contrasts with what Heidegger



referred to as *calculative thinking*, or “that which ‘challenges forth’”; “the kind of thinking which seeks to reckon everything up in terms of its own instrumental purposes—to master, to possess, to exploit all that it encounters” (p. 233).

Dolores LaChapelle (1986), drawing on Heidegger’s *poetic thinking* explicates her sentiently-supported belief in “place” as the background against which the most profound knowledge is explored and gained (p. 24). She goes on to note that “Heidegger claims that only poetic thinking, as opposed to one-dimensional rationality” (p. 28) makes openness to one’s being and being-in-the-world possible. “Our existence is fundamentally poetic” (Heidegger, 1949, p. 283) with all parts of ourselves interconnected, perhaps like poetry. In other words, “Poetry can lead us to the place where Being reveals itself,” as Michael Crotty (2003) suggests. “It provides the ‘clearing’ where Being is illuminated” (p. 99).

For me, Crotty (2003), Heidegger (1949) and LaChapelle (1986) help me to refine, articulate, and legitimize my understanding of Polyani’s (1967) *tacit knowledge*, “the fact that we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4) about sentient ways of interpreting and coming to know the world in which I dwell; about my connection with the ants, the willow trees, the clouds and Earth community to which Abram (1996), LaChapelle (1996) refer. Ivan Brady (2005), in “Poetics for a Planet,” adds that utilizing passages and poetry, for example, that have been particularly provocative for me in the context of the natural world invites “introspective and imaginative” (p. 980) representations for and of my quest. He goes on to surmise,

[Individuals] share a quest for personal knowledge, for self-conscious information about being-in-place, and for participation that can catch us in the act of complacency about who we are, where we have been, and where we are going and thereby might change our

thinking about the meaning of life in the landscapes of our respective pasts and presents.

What they seek is, in that sense, more poetic than scientific.” (p. 981)

And, David Hansen (2004) likewise confirms that “Poetics calls attention to aspects of the natural and human world that express qualities of poetry—that is, of compressed and intensified feeling, awareness, gratitude and the like” (p. 122).

There is a deep resonance for me in poetics, then, a timbre of meaningfulness that elicits something deeper than intellectual apprehension and knowing. I not only apprehend what I witness and mull it over thoughtfully, I am moved to connect and understand it beyond words. In the context of this *meaningfulness* Hansen proposes that “This process of active response to the world, involving a deepening understanding and sensitivity, mirrors how events, actions and the conduct of others can all express intellectual, aesthetic, and moral meanings.” Thus, “A poetics highlights [the] relation between world and person: on the one hand, how the world is expressive, and, on the other hand, how persons come to ‘read’ that expressiveness” (p. 122).

My mountain signifies how my world is expressed, presenting me with a particular language and frame for extrapolating and transferring meaning. It provides the background against which my most profound knowledge is being explored and gained (LaChapelle, 1996, p. 24). What happened on the mountain didn’t stay on the mountain. As events took place, stories were developed; as I have worked to crystallize my memory of those events, new stories are continuing to be developed, with new meanings constantly emerging. Writing then, with *poetics* in mind, has opened the doorway for exploring “a whole new psychic geography” (Rich, 1979, p. 35). Locating images from my past, and playing with the organization of language to portray meanings as they have emerged in relation to those images, I have crafted here an imaginative

piece wherein I have explored and portrayed my past experiences in such a way as to elucidate my present pedagogy for teaching like a mountain.

### 3.3.3 Poetic Dialogue

James Macdonald (1995) mused about the various methods employed in poetics,

Broadly speaking, insights, images, and imaginative (or speculative) symbolizations are created as possible meaning structures. These meaning structures are, however, created as much or more by the concrete and practical experience of the participant in relation to the symbols, as they are in the coherence of the symbolic structure itself. (p. 180)

The meaning structure I have constructed here is a *poetic dialogue*, a “form of thinking-upon-the-past” (Richardson, 1974, pp. 457-458), “taking place between the poet and his ‘friends’” (p. 458). My “friends” are my discursive colleagues, upon whom I have called for theoretical clarity and intellectual enunciation; the teachers and students with whom I have worked; the musical lyrics, poetry and prose by which I have been inspired; and, “the mountain” which grounds my overall expedition into the terrain of my stories. My integration of my friend’s words, my stories, and the meaning that I am uncovering and re-covering throughout represents my dialogue. As well, there is an intertextual (Crotty, 2003) quality in my *poetic dialogue* here wherein all texts are brought together “as a matrix within which one text is transported into another” (p. 209); movement between interludes, moments which are my stories, poems, lyrics, others’ personal narratives, and my interpretation of them all. My *poetic dialogue* here is expressed as a confluence of my academic and personal knowledge, my emotional, visceral, physical and spiritual being, and my experiences of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*. It is as Cobb (1977) noted in *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* my highest poetic endeavor

thus far, to *be-and-become* what I want to understand, and to express my understanding in this outward form.

### 3.4 GOOD RESEARCH

Simply recording my stories, my experiences of these transitions, and my dwelling within the margins, are not enough however, to justify this manuscript as “good research” and construct a rationale for how my work through writing and poetics might contribute to the discourses in education with which I am identifying. To begin, writing my stories, recording events, and examining significant moments from my past in education has opened certain flood gates that have had the potential to mire me in the muck of frustration and anger, for example, reinforcing the oft cited critique of personal history and narrative as narcissistic and solipsistic. As I have opened those flood gates willingly, honoring the rush of my frustration and anger, as well as other emotions that have surfaced, I have done so acknowledging my grief and loss, for example, as providing important inroads onto the broader landscape of understanding, compassion and explication. In this effort I have engaged in *self-reflexivity*, making my process of remembering, reclaiming and re-visioning both explicit and purposeful.

#### 3.4.1 Self-Reflexivity

In her essay “Engaging bell hooks” Gretchen Generett (2009) extrapolates from hooks’ *engaged pedagogy* the imperative of understanding what motivates us to do the work that we do in teacher education, and more specifically to critically examine the outcomes we are trying to produce.

For Generett one of hook's most important messages to teacher educators is "that educational transformation cannot take place until [teacher educators] understand the impact of their own ways of knowing and being educated about their value system, beliefs, and desires for education" (in Davidson & Yancy, p. 86). Generett goes on to conclude, "Hence, self-reflexivity is essential to educational transformation" (p. 86).

Wanda S. Pillow (2003) notes that *reflexivity* is much more than simply reflecting on one's experiences and practices; it goes beyond simply recording "what I know" and "how I know it" (p. 178). *Self-reflexivity*, Pillow confirms, "requires the researcher to be critically conscious through personal accounting of how the researcher's self-location, position, and interests influence all stages of the research process" (p. 178). Thus, I consider my place within the margins, my stance on the boundary between where I have been and where I currently reside. In this way, I have taken up Robert Nash's (2004) call to compose an "extended reflection on writing, teaching, learning and living a fulfilled life as a professional and as a person" (p. 6). I have veered toward being self-revealing about my personal history in a way that nudges me to move forward, provoking perhaps others' self-examination in the academic community (p. 29). "Reflexivity then," as Pillow concludes, citing Calloway (1992), "becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness" producing "research that questions its own interpretations and is reflexive about its own knowledge production towards the goal of better, less distorted research accounts" (p. 178).

Generett (2009) and Pillow (1992) then in many respects echo what Krall (1988a) is calling for in her *personal history* research approach, an approach that seems to me to be inherently self-reflexive in both its process and intent. First, Krall suggests that her *personal history* heuristic "is value based" (p. 475), representing "the good of" something (in this case,

education), and initiating some kind of action (in this case, pedagogical construction and change). “As we attempt to take unbiased positions in an effort to come close to ‘the true,’” Krall proposes, “we must first acknowledge our own views that limit, illuminate, cloud, or distort what we see” (p. 475). In this project I have been compelled to spell out my biases about teaching and learning, exposure, transformation, and *being-and-becoming-whole*. And, I have opened myself here to considering that those biases have changed as I have plunged more deeply into the roots of my understanding from where those biases have come.

Second, Krall suggests that good research “makes us humble” (p. 475), requiring that the educational researcher become “ever more aware of our unique but limited views” (p. 475). For me this is how I have most explicitly enacted my own self-reflexivity, acknowledging that as I came to this project with certain biases and a particular agenda for honoring and expressing them, and believing that I have undertaken my project with a certain “purity of heart” (p. 475), I have enjoyed the opportunity here to engage in a sort of “critical self-consciousness” (p. 474). Calling my own ideas and biases into question in concert with sincere, well-intentioned feedback, and providing for the emergence of new twists and turns, new ideas and questions from within and outside of me, represents my co-mingling with others’ views; my rescue line out of the crevasse of solipsism.

In her third and fourth guidelines Krall advises that research “takes context into account” (p. 475), suggesting that whatever I may study does not exist within a vacuum. My inquiry is embedded within particular historical, economic, political, gendered, racialized, eco-socio-cultural epochs, or “moments” as I have identified them throughout my inquiry here. My experiences are but a few threads in a matrix of multiple interactions, iterations and ideas. I began identifying significant moments from my educational journey, spiraling through them in

dialogue with the questions and meanings that were emerging, and then ultimately returning to those significant moments with different notions and understandings. In this way I entered Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, which for Krall represents the re-constitution of my self-consciousness and self-formation. I could not know the details of my journey in advance. I could not anticipate the influence of my discursive colleagues, or the revelations that would emerge for me with each new reading of my stories. As Slattery and Rapp (2003) affirm, my process here was one that needed to unfold in its own unique and unrepeatability sequence (p. 84).

Finally, Krall's (1988a) fifth and sixth guidelines: that "good research" "sings to the world" (p. 476), speaking poetically and lyrically in an effort to inspire and enliven a reader's interest and resonance; and, "addresses an abiding and authentic concern" (p. 476), expressed uniquely, and addressing matters of consequence. In more poetic terms, Annie Dillard's (1973) disclosure of "seeing" with or without a camera in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* evokes a brilliant and potent image of the path I have attempted to walk methodologically alongside Krall (1988a) with her guidelines in mind:

Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization . . . . I have to say the words, describe what I am seeing . . . . When I see this way I analyze and pry. I hurl over logs and roll away stones; I study the bank a square foot at a time, probing and tilting my head . . . . But there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied. The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a camera I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut. When I see this second way I am above all an unscrupulous observer. (pp. 30-31)

There is profound knowledge to be gleaned and information to be shared as a result of engaging *personal history* and *writing as poetic dialogue*. What I have experienced, how I have remembered those experiences, made sense of them and offered them to others has value in the bigger picture that is education. Writing my way into and through my own *personal history* has afforded me opportunities for revisioning my *being-and-becoming-whole*, free of the shackles of a strict and rigid method, allowing me to rely if you will, “on my own silver gut.” I have meandered along the stream of my own *being-and-becoming-whole*, unscrupulously observing and tracking the awakening consciousness of myself as researcher, explorer, writer and educational philosopher.

### **3.4.2 My Subjectivity**

At the same time, writing as though I were seeing my life through the lens of “my own silver gut,” I have struggled with the unexpected and unanticipated consequences to my own sense of self. On an individual level my writing has been dismissed by some as “the ranting of a drama queen” or “too sensitive to be considered rigorous.” I have sometimes felt cast away, accused of “agonizing too much over all of this,” and have endured judgments that often times led me to second-guess my purposes and intentions for pursuing this project in the first place.

Institutionally, like Laurel Richardson (1997) (though certainly not to the extent that she endured), I have felt the power of normalizing forces attempting to corral me into more legitimate and precise enclosures for educational research, suppressing my lived experiences as relative and unsubstantial, and invalidating my passions as colorful and idealistic romps into the unimportant. And, I admit to a general uneasiness I have felt since the beginning of my doctoral program as I have grappled with trying to organize and articulate what has been both powerful



and motivating for me while I have traipsed through the territory of educational research. Those normalizing voices, both individually and institutionally, have been potent deterrents at pivotal moments, echoing authoritative voices and messages (about which you will read below) from long ago.

While I have struggled, I have been reminded of Sharon Welch's (2000) address of the Western propensity for domination and control. In contrast to what she identifies as a "pervasive ethic of control" (pp. 19-30), Welch offers her "ethic of risk" as constitutive to genuine conversation and transformation. What resonated for me while investigating my perception of my reality and knowing was Welch's acknowledgement of the need, again in the West, to rationalize and reduce "knowing" to something fundamentally true, measurable and rational. Much time has been spent by educational researchers debating the legitimacy of ways of knowing, ways of revealing, understanding and communicating knowledge. For me, this debate grew tiresome several years ago. And, in an effort to muster and fortify my energy as I continued to navigate through the escarpment of educational research, I found myself searching for a pathway into dialogue, a consilience (Wilson, 1998) of sorts, with colleagues, peers, and students that (1) investigated the purpose and intention of a "traditional" and "Western" research approach whose proponents seemed to be constantly laboring to maintain control *over* others, and (2) sought to cross over and diminish the seemingly rigid boundaries that have historically constituted legitimate and rigorous educational research and knowledge.

Reflecting on Welch (2000), as I entered into the margins between these rigid demarcations, I often wondered, what would be put at risk if educational researchers were to open the intellectual flood gates of inquiry and invite consideration of ways of being and knowing that did not seem to jive with what had been historically and traditionally taken for

granted? What would be the cost? What might be some of the rewards? And, what would be the consequences to those working to loosen the arbitrary and historical bonds that have constrained many educational researchers from broadening definitions of what is legitimate, true and real in educational research?

I have surmised that *control* is somehow linked to winning, to legitimizing and rewarding “the best” of something; to discovering concrete evidence that something is more worthy than something else; and, conquering or vanquishing whatever comes forth to stand in the way of what we assume to be “valid” and “real.” With that said, I have certainly struggled myself with needing to win, conquer, vanquish whatever I did not understand or whatever stood in the way of my feeling legitimate, or “valid.” And, I know that my struggle was, and in some ways continues to be, driven by fear.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe that all forms of narrative inquiry are fluid queries that challenge “accepted inquiry and representation assumptions.” Accordingly, they suggest that these fluid inquiries, perhaps echoing Clements’ (1999) discussion of “the fictive voice,” “necessitate ongoing reflection,” what they call “wakefulness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184). Peter Abbs (1974) similarly offers that the process specifically of autobiographical work in education is “an act of writing perched in the present, gazing backwards into the past while poised ready for flight into the future” (p. 7). My project here has been to record significant moments on my educational expedition, specifically as those moments have informed and illustrated some of my pursuits in formal and informal educational settings. As well, I have sought to wake-up to new meanings and possibilities, redefining what I have come to know as valid, real, valuable, and even enduring about my journey through both torrents of necessitating the approval of others, and the tranquility that has come with turning inward for

affirmation and self-acceptance. Finally, I have attempted to fuse these new meanings and possibilities with my and others' ideas and desires regarding teacher education.

### **3.4.3 Consequences to the Self**

There are moments on the mountain when there is no time for caution or deliberation. The adrenalin rush that comes with slamming an ice-axe into the ground when one slips just above a 50-foot crevasse is a necessary response to traversing the often slippery, erratic terrain of a mountain slope. Likewise, that surge is one that must dissipate for it is unsustainable and ultimately exhausting. In my efforts to prove myself valid, worthy and true, I have felt both energized and exhausted. And in the end, learning how to discern between moments when proof is appropriate, and others when proof is simply an excuse, have been wondrously affirming and centering.

The consequences then to my self for moving forth with this personal and poetic history have been transformative. Though I have felt defensive at times, and certainly afraid, I have enjoyed much more support for my project than opposition. And, I have come to appreciate Richardson's "truth about the consequences of poetic representation" (pp. 145-153). As a result of my work here I have become much more forthright and confident about narrative inquiry, and specifically personal history. I use the language of Krall's approach with ease and candor. And, I feel more integrated as a researcher, explorer, writer and educational philosopher. I have become much more attuned to the lived experiences of others, appreciating their subjectivity and ways of knowing. And, finally, I have learned to take pleasure in the part of my process that is perhaps colorful and idealistic. In this way I have laid bare for my reader my emergence from the cocoon of my *being-in-the-world*; my *thrownness* into the process of *being-and-becoming-*

*whole-in-education*; my wading, floating and floundering in the stream of my burgeoning consciousness and *authenticity*; all to the end of providing access for my reader to the “often convoluted journey that leads to greater illumination” (Schubert, 1991, p. 69).

### *INTERLUDE: ICE CLIMBING*

On the morning of our third day at Camp Muir, Lou informed us that we would be spending the day learning to ice climb. This would not be a skill we would necessarily need on this summit attempt however, it was an important mountaineering skill to have, “as many of you will no doubt continue climbing these wondrous places,” Lou exclaimed. The glacier we would be climbing was a one-hour trek from our camp. We’d spend the day learning the basics of ice climbing: equipment and its use; body positioning, footwork and tool positioning; and, belaying and rappelling techniques. I was feeling good about ice climbing. I had already spent several years instructing rock climbing classes. Surely, that experience would come in handy here.

When we arrived at the climbing site Lou’s assistants scurried to set up the necessary equipment we’d need to ascend the 75-foot icefall while Lou explained the mechanics of our charge. As he showed us various techniques for “throwing the pick” (swinging the ice axe above one’s head, burying the slightly curved, toothed point head of the ice axe into the ice wall) and “front pointing” (a technique wherein the climber kicks her legs so as to engage the front points of her crampons with the ice) I stood mesmerized. The icefall in front of me was beautiful. Shimmering in the sun, this frozen cascade allured me, called me to “play.” I had always been a physically capable person, enthusiastic about undertaking different physical challenges. And, again, I was already familiar with much of the language and gear we would be using. Still, I was scared; nervous about completing the task that lay before me. Though I’d been climbing rocks

for years, I had never climbed an icefall. *What if I couldn't do it? What if I wasn't strong enough to get to the top?*

After reviewing techniques and protocols, Lou asked that we separate into three groups, and organize ourselves around the three “stations” that had been set up. “Once you complete one station you can move on to another one if you like,” he exclaimed. There was no pre-set arrangement for who would climb and when. People climbed as they wanted, “tying in” when the urge moved them. I wasn’t the first to volunteer, choosing instead to watch from the sidelines a bit, and make my move when I felt comfortable. The trouble was that “comfortable” feeling never seemed to come. Instead, though the icefall didn’t intimidate me, the individuals seemingly scrambling up the wall with little-to-no-effort scared the beans out of me. *Here we go; softball tryouts all over again!* As I’d started the day feeling confident and enthusiastic, my confidence and enthusiasm waned with every step of my peers. They seemed to know exactly what they were doing. And, what they were doing did not look at all like the rock climbing I was used to teaching.

When I finally did tie in, Jeremy, the individual who would be belaying me, leaned over and whispered, “Finally. I was wondering when you’d take the plunge.” At the time I didn’t take his comment as anything but a friendly observation. He’d been fairly supportive of the other climbers throughout the morning, though in retrospect he did seem to be a little more pushy with the women ahead of me. “C’mon, just go for it!” he’d say with an air of exasperation in his voice. “What are you waiting for?” *I can do this...I think. Just take one step.*

Now, one similarity between rock climbing and ice climbing, especially in the case of “top-roping,” is that most climbers are “tied into” a belay system and intend to reach the top. Technically speaking, “belaying” refers to a method of safety where friction is exerted by one

individual (the belayer) using a belay device like a “figure –eight” or “sticht plate” on a climbing rope. Standing on the ground, the belayer controls the safety rope of the individual climber such that in the event that the climber chooses to descend, or falls off of the rock face or icefall, the belayer is “in the position to bring the person to the ground in a controlled, gradual descent” (Webster, 1994, p. 62). The belayer cannot pull the climber up, as many might assume. Instead, they are present to make sure that the climber remains safe. Beyond the mechanics however, there is a “contract” of sorts between the belayer and the climber; a pact expressed through the phrases “on belay” (asked by the climber) and “belay on” (confirmed by the belayer) that signifies to the climber that they can trust their belayer to keep them safe not only physically, but emotionally as well; that he/she will be patient, attentive, present and compassionate to the needs of the climber, and that in the event that the climber slips or wishes to descend, the belayer “has their back.”

As I continued to watch the others power their way to the top, I soon came to realize that my familiarity with and finesse in rock climbing was not necessarily going to be a bonus for me on the icefall. Instead of *stepping up* and relying on my toe position and legs to climb, in fact, I would need to thrust my toes (“front pointing”) into the ice and then throw two ice axes above my head (“throw a pick”). After these moves, I could *pull myself up* the wall. But this was much harder than it originally looked. For one thing I was becoming painfully aware of how hard it was to “throw a pick” into the ice. *This thing is heavy!* And, it was awkward hanging off of the icefall trying to muster the momentum to lift, pull back and then pitch that axe into the ice. The other major challenge for me was kicking my toes into the ice so that the tip of my crampons penetrated the ice deeply enough to support my weight. If my crampons didn’t stick I was virtually left hanging.

I hadn't climbed ten feet before I felt exhausted. My thoughts vacillated between giving up and simply taking a rest. When in the belay position as an instructor I had often supported my own students to simply take a rest. "Stop for a moment and look around," I'd say to them. "Take a deep breath and look for your next hold." I'd enjoyed many affirmations for my patience with students. As some of them had chosen to continue climbing after "taking a rest," others had chosen to "fall back" and descend. And so, I took a breath, relaxed a bit in my harness, and looked for my next move.

Then came his bellows from below: "What are you waiting for? Keep going!" I heard him shout, though initially his words weren't particularly clear. Instead he sounded like the teacher in a *Peanuts* film: "mwa-wa-wa-wa, mwa-wa-wa-mwa!" Evidently, according to some of the other climbers on the ground, his taunts quickly became more incensed, until I finally heard him with a clarity that makes me shudder to this day: "What the hell is your problem. You don't know how to do this. Just c'mon down!" At that, feeling sick to my stomach and diminished, I pulled out my ice axes, loosened the toe points of my crampons from the wall, and fell back into the tension of his belay.



#### 4.0 MOVEMENT IV, OUT OF THE CITY, INTO THE FOOTHILLS

*To reach the summit, one must proceed from encampment to encampment. But before setting out for the next refuge, one must prepare those coming after to occupy the place one is leaving. Only after having prepared them can one go on up.*

*(Daumal, 1959, p. 101)*

Susan Griffin (1978) once reflected, “I have known her all my life, yet she reveals stories to me, and these stories are revelations and I am transformed” ( p. 219). Like “the mountain” I have known my educational journey for years, yet with each recounting of a particular memory, each rewriting of a particular story, more is revealed to me about the development of my pedagogical temperament, and I am transformed. Maxine Greene (1995) imagines that “to break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, we ourselves have to experience breaks with what has been established in our own lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again” (p. 109). For Greene telling one’s story, “reaching into the ambivalence of my own choosing,” signifies this break, represents one’s willingness to remember, mull over and perhaps reclaim what one has learned to take for granted, and presents one with opportunities to “reach beyond where we are” (p. 110). In the context of coming to know what it is that moves me in teaching, Greene inspires me to ask: how much can I really know about who I am as a teacher, how much can I really have access to regarding the potential I embody, without looking back?

I am at a crossroads: remembering and reconsidering moments from my educational journey; reclaiming my experiences with exposure; revitalizing my integrity as a student; and, reflecting on uncovered possibilities for my disposition as a teacher. I am challenged, of course, by what has already emerged, my feelings of anger, shame and diminishment for example, that once determined how I responded to feeling exposed in my learning process, how I have exposed some of my own students, and how I have been exposed as a teacher. It's not easy to confront my memories, for example, of those whose actions covered over some of the possibilities I was attempting to imagine for myself. Or, to acknowledge and own some of my own actions that may have covered over possibilities my students were attempting to imagine for themselves. Even harder of course, is the self-imposed expectation that I display compassion for their and my acts, curiosity for their and my lessons, and courage uncovering various possibilities for my own pedagogical practices that they could not offer, and I could not see at the time. I feel ready, however; ready to take that break, honor what has happened with a compassionate eye, and consider what is now possible. In this way I am ready to "surmount the boundaries in which all customary views are confined" (Heidegger, 1968, p. 13) regarding pain imposed by powerful others, and into "a more open territory" (p. 13) regarding understanding for what I could not consider on my own. I am ready to explore "the hidden emotion" that Marjorie Logsdon (2000) suggests "makes the image [that I remember] powerful and also leads me to re-enact in the present what I 'see' from my past" (p. 27).

In this section of my manuscript I meander more deeply into some of the contours of my biography as a learner and teacher, proceeding from encampment to encampment, to uncover and expose deeper meanings as they have emerged from specific experiences. Carl Rogers (1980) once mused "I tend to learn the most from small, intense experiences which illuminate for

me different aspects of what I am doing” (p. 207). Thus, I organize these experiences, these moments on my educational expedition, around the notion of *exposure*, expressing what I have come to learn about myself as a student and teacher feeling exposed and a teacher exposing others; elucidating the repressive and liberating nature of exposure in relation to *posturing in disdain* and *presence*; and, articulating how I am coming to understand my particular pedagogical disposition in the context of *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*.

#### 4.1 MOMENT I: EXPOSED AS A LEARNER

In the years since my excursion on Mount Rainier, I have never again tried to ice climb, perhaps allowing what happened on the mountain to taint my enthusiasm. My becoming an ice climber, and the potential for honing any ice climbing abilities I may have embodied many years ago, was certainly averted in a particularly violent way. Jeremy’s irritation and impatience with me, his assault on my character and vulnerability, covered over whatever enthusiasm and self-confidence I may have gleaned from taking on a task that was both unfamiliar and frightening. As I initially intended to trek to the top of Mount Rainier out of a desire to “play on the mountain,” understanding that such a feat was one that would present me with certain physical and mental risks, the consequences that I endured on that icefall were in fact unfathomable.

While I have ruminated on my experience, searching for meaning in what I continue to remember as both incredible and humiliating, I am reminded of Parker Palmer. In *The Courage to Teach*, for example, Palmer (1998) surmises that teachers who refuse or are unable to see students as whole persons, with intellectual capacities *and* emotional vulnerabilities, may be due to an inability or refusal to see their own vulnerabilities, dismissing their own *whole* selves (p.

47). “Teaching always takes place at the crossroads of the personal and the public,” Palmer proposes, “and if I want to teach well, I must learn to stand where these opposites intersect” (p. 63). When I open myself up in the public space of the classroom, for example, and share my experiences, fears, questions, and even my emotional rantings, I understand that my experiences may be negated or neglected by others. I assume that students, peers and colleagues might possibly interpret my personal exposure in ways that do not fit for me, and in fact, might hurt my credibility, integrity and good intentions in the classroom. Like I have realized about my experience on the icefall, exposing one’s self, expressing what we think is our whole being in the classroom, putting ourselves out there in mind, body and spirit when others might misinterpret, negate, be offended by or even dismiss what we have offered of ourselves, is a risky and potentially dangerous undertaking. Though daunting, however, it seems that for Palmer (2004) taking such a risk, enacting courage in the face of what might feel dangerous, lies at the core of uncovering and exposing elements of our “hidden wholeness” (p. 21).

John Dirkx (2006) and Katherine Frego (2006), in the language of authenticity, extend Palmer’s notions regarding wholeness for me, suggesting that “although authenticity makes one vulnerable in the classroom, its impact on learning and on enjoyment of the teaching and learning process justifies the risk” (Frego, 2006, p. 41). Thus for me, the risk of being misinterpreted or misunderstood, of taking another misstep in my pedagogical approach, is ultimately worth it given the possibilities that exist for transformation and *being-and-becoming-whole*, for myself and perhaps for those with whom I am working. Of course, that’s easy to write. Like Palmer (2004), Dirkx (2006) and Frego (2006) imply, *writing* that I believe that exposing parts of myself in the classroom for the overall and collective good, and revitalizing my own and perhaps, my students’ integrity is certainly noble. Still, though I realize the difficulty

for myself, and certainly for others with whom I have worked, this “pedagogy of vulnerability” is not happening or at least being discussed on a grand scale among teachers and students, and I am left to wonder about what it is that is getting in the way of enacting the courage it takes to take such a risk.

Returning to Palmer (1998), and certainly echoing Welch (2000), a possible barrier to discussing and taking these risks has something to do with fear “driven by our Western commitment to thinking in polarities” (p. 61). We live in a culture that separates and compartmentalizes, placing the teacher for example, in the position of “expert,” the one “who knows,” the one with “all of the answers.” The student then, is “only a novice,” the one who “does not know” and clearly must be shown. In a certain light there’s nothing wrong with acknowledging that there are times wherein one person, a teacher, is the one with a particular kind of knowledge. Jeremy had been ice climbing for years before I entered his life. He was my teacher, and, as I assumed, an expert at his craft. I was a novice, without the necessary skills to initially succeed at climbing an icefall.

Jeremy was also the person belaying me, the one who was supposed to have my back. In the situation I explain above, however, Jeremy positioned himself as superior to me, a teacher perhaps with a rigid and instrumentally-driven conceptualization of his job. As superior and task-oriented he exhibited a *posture of disdain* for what I did not know. Evidenced by his remarks, and the tenor of his exasperation, I was clearly a failure at learning what he was not-really-trying to teach me. And, as a result, he metaphorically left me hanging, psychically abandoning me, and leaving me no choice but to submit to his rebuke. My only option, or so I believed, was to descend. He was my safety line, and he had figuratively let go of me when he yelled, “What the hell is your problem? You don’t know how to do this. Just c’mon down!” I

no longer felt safe in his belay, though I still had to depend on him to lower me *safely—at least physically*--to the ground.

Jeremy held a particular position of power, one that may have been defined by his understanding that his job was to teach me the mechanics of climbing an icefall. However, in my mind, regardless of how he understood the context of his vocation, he wielded his power in a particularly manipulative and exploitive way, putting me at further risk, and forcing me to surrender, albeit reluctantly, my own power. There were no words of comfort, no suggestions that I rest and rethink my strategy. In fact, there was really no teaching of the mechanics that he may have understood as underpinning the purpose of his task. Instead, he decided in *my* moment of discomfort, *my* risky and dangerous undertaking, *my* exposure, that I was incapable of moving forward.

Interestingly, as I shared above, I never tried to ice climb again. And, today, I wonder about what other experiences might have lent to and reinforced my feeling diminished and incapacitated in the face of Jeremy's acrimony. Something influenced my ability to resist him; something hampered both my capacity and my willingness to continue climbing in spite of his hostility. Though I'll never be able to confirm my assumptions, I imagine that something was happening for Jeremy on that day, influencing his intentions and his interactions with me, and providing him justification for his ridicule and impatience. Still, though Jeremy may have been motivated by a pre-defined understanding of his charge, I wonder if it can really be so easy to rationalize his behavior by suggesting that he had a job to do. Does any teacher, whether in formal or informal learning situations, ever have the right to diminish and humiliate a student?

Certainly, Jeremy was not the first teacher I had experienced who in my estimation personified a *posture of disdain*. And, it is because of earlier encounters, I imagine, that I

experienced the situation with Jeremy in the way that I did. In what follows I chronicle a few significant moments that perhaps contributed to my earlier submission as a learner, and also to my passion to understand the influence of looking back on the development of my current pedagogical temperament as a teacher. In “Learning to Hate Poetry” and “Informal Logic” I lay out instances wherein I experienced my teachers as personifying a *posture of disdain*, positioning themselves as superior to me, and expressing condescension toward me in a way that left me hanging with insecurity. In “Lolly” and “At Least You Look Attentive” I lay out moments wherein I experienced my teachers as *present*, available and interested, generous and challenging. Each of these instances are examples of my being and feeling exposed as a student, although as I hope becomes clear, exposure can either be stifling of a student’s progress or enhancing of their learning. Like Jeremy, I will never know what motivated the teachers to whom I refer below to act in the ways that they did with me. I can recall however, what has motivated *me*; what behaviors *I* have both replicated, albeit unreflectively, and sought to change. In this way, I am recalling those images that “form the subconscious assumptions on which [my] practice is based” (Johnston, 1992, p. 125) such that they might help me to reconsider my own *posturing of disdain* and substantiate my *presence* with my own students.

#### **4.1.1 Exposure as Stifling**

##### **4.1.1.1 Learning to Hate Poetry**

Over the years, I have shared with my students and peers my learned derision for poetry. My contempt for it has certainly softened, but the memory of my first taste of revulsion, a result of feeling humiliated in a way that crushed a part of me many years ago, continues to haunt me in incredible and interesting ways. As a seventh grader, I was directed by my Language Arts

teacher, Mrs. Reiser, to choose a poem, memorize it, be prepared to recite it in front of the rest of the class, and “speak to its meaning and significance.” Initially, this was an exciting assignment for me, for I knew exactly what poem I would share.

Sitting on his lap on the porch overlooking the Chinese chestnut tree he had planted after my birth, my grandpa often read to me stories and poems about “all things in nature.” “When you can’t be in the trees,” he would say, “always remember that you can be with the trees in a poem.” Though usually during my visits to his home I was outside climbing that Chestnut tree, we made it a practice to lounge in his favorite chair on the porch when it was raining, or simply too hot to be playing in the sun. So, when Mrs. Reiser invited my seventh grade class to memorize, recite and examine our favorite poems, I *knew* that I would share “Trees,” by Joyce Kilmer (1914).

I spent the whole week before my assigned presentation day memorizing and reciting Kilmer’s poem in front of the deep burgundy refrigerator in our kitchen. The unusually clear reflection from the refrigerator on particularly sunny days was stunning. I could see my whole body in front of that appliance, and practice how I wanted others to see me during my recitation. In addition to practicing my posture and stance, I talked with my grandfather about what the poem meant to him and what he thought it meant for us during those rainy days on his back porch. And, I shared with him that the poem made me feel “connected, like I know that the tree is my friend, grandpa.”

On my breaks from practicing in the kitchen, or interviewing my grandpa, I spent hours in the local library, sifting through information about Kilmer and his poem, deliberately choosing facts and ideas that would compliment my own interpretation of the poem. For example, I found and was fascinated by Kilmer’s writing of “Trees” as a tribute to his mother-in-law, Ada Foster



Murray Alden (1935), a poet in her own right. My memorizing of “Trees” for my class represented a tribute of sorts to my grandfather. And, so I also practiced making such connections between how I was experiencing the poem and some of the poem’s historical significance.

On the morning of my presentation I arose exhilarated and eager. Running down the stairs, dressed in my favorite jeans and sweat jacket, I practiced one more time in front of that big burgundy refrigerator, devoured my breakfast, ran like the wind to catch my bus to school, and counted the minutes through the first four periods of the day before bouncing into Language Arts. I was so wound up. I couldn’t wait to share my poem.

Class began, as usual, with Mrs. Reiser taking roll and confirming that we were each sitting in the seats she had assigned to us at the beginning of the school year. While she peered at each and every student through her big round glasses, sizing up our comportment and making notes in her attendance book, my knees shook with enthusiasm. I simply couldn’t sit still; I was so excited about this assignment.

Finally, after confirming that we were all where we were supposed to be, Mrs. Reiser called on me: “Julie, let’s hear your poem first.” My heart was beating so fast; and, my palms were sweating so much so that wiping them on my jeans left a dark, wet smudge. I don’t remember that I was particularly nervous. Instead I remember that I was thrilled.

“I think that...”

“Speak up, Julie.”

“Ahem.... I think that...”

“Julie, speak up!”

“I thought I was.”

“No need to talk back. Just speak up.”

*Talk back? Who’s talking back. Shut up and let me talk.*

“Julie, we don’t have all day.”

“I THINK THAT I SHALL NEVER SEE....”

Finally, I finished reciting my poem; whisking through it, in fact, so as to make sure that Mrs. Reiser wouldn’t have time to interrupt me again. After I finished, I took a deep breath and waited for her to ask for my thoughts. Days before, after Tommy and Brady finished reciting their poems, Mrs. Reiser made a point of asking each of them to “share your thoughts.” And so, I waited...for what felt like an eternity. Finally, she raised her brow and said with some irritation, “Well, go ahead. Tell us what the poem means.” Now, remember, I had spent the better part of the week leading up to this recitation interviewing my grandpa, talking about what the poem meant to him, me and us, and researching the historical significance of the poem. And, I had practiced numerous times in front of that big burgundy refrigerator in our kitchen answering this very question.

“Well, I think it means...”

“No. We don’t want to know what *you* think it means, Julie,” Mrs. Reiser snapped. “Tell us what the poem means.”

I was stupefied. “What do you mean?” I asked.

“Exactly what I said. Didn’t you do the assignment?” Mrs. Reiser barked.

“Yes...yes, I did, but I thought...”

“You thought what?”

With tears streaming down my face at this point I whispered, “I thought I was telling you what the poem meant.”

“Well then, tell us.”

Breathing in deeply, trying to catch my breath and wiping the tears from my cheek I responded, “I said, the poem means...well, my grandpa...”

“Your grandpa. Did he tell you what to say?”

I don’t think I need to go any further here in explaining why I spent the better part of my middle and high school years loathing poetry. For clearly, at the ripe old age of thirteen I simply “couldn’t get it,” as Mrs. Reiser would constantly remind me. “Poetry is clearly beyond you, Julie.”

#### **4.1.1.2 Informal Logic**

Feeling belittled and called out as a failure at thirteen years old, it’s no wonder that later in my learning life I would be sensitive to others’ validations of my inferiority. For example, in my second semester as a college sophomore, I would experience Dr. McFaden, a self-professed “doddering old man.” His haughty introduction of himself on the first day of the spring semester certainly left many of us wondering if we would measure up to his expectations, or perhaps, his lack of them. “I have two Ph.D.s, and I’ve become rather cranky about teaching in this place,” he declared. “I’m not really interested in learning anything from you. In fact, what could I learn from you?” (Personal journal, Spring, 1987). As if that encouraging diatribe weren’t enough to send us all running out the door, he ended his harangue throwing down a conjectural gauntlet, “whatever you get out of this class, it’ll be your skin left on the floor!” (Personal journal, Spring, 1987). I had been interested in philosophy since high school, studying albeit superficially, Hegel and Kierkegaard, and dabbling in metaphysics with my advanced placement History teacher. I was interested then in taking philosophy courses in college, hoping to broaden my understanding of the field. I was told by my academic advisor, however, that *Informal Logic* was a prerequisite

course, and that I would need to get at least a “B” in it if I had any hope of continuing in the Philosophy Department. So, following McFaden’s first class, though I was seriously considering dropping it and running for the hills, I decided to stay and endure whatever philosophical rancor McFaden would be dishing out.

In addition to reading assignments and discussions, Dr. McFaden required that we produce three-to-five page reflective summaries of our readings and discussions at the end of every week. For McFaden this meant “every Friday by noon.” Our class met on Mondays and Wednesdays, and so turning in a paper to him by Friday afternoon seemed pretty fair, at least initially. Later I would come to realize that in fact he was structuring not only my in-class work, but the rest of the week for me. McFaden was impressively diligent about reading and returning our first papers to us by Monday morning of the second week. Many of us wondered how he could accomplish this feat, lightheartedly surmising that he probably had nothing else to do with his time except dawdle about his empty old house. Sure, this was probably harsh banter on our parts; we were young and not particularly coy college students. Still, our repartee was undeserving of the penciled wrath that eventually emerged from McFaden’s quill.

During the third week of class we had been discussing “conclusions/claims and premises/warrants.” As I reflected in my second paper on what I had technically learned throughout the week, I tried to integrate information I had gathered from a history and religion course taken the semester before to illustrate how I was making sense of the material. Specifically, I wrote about “the Vietnam experience” as I had come to understand it through reading Ronald Glasser’s (1980) book, *365 Days*, and Wallace Terry’s (1985), *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History*. I laid out my claims starting with “Vietnam was a quagmire of unscrupulous degree” and launched into how “Vietnam represented a premature

transition” from boyhood to adulthood for many of the soldiers on the front line (Brooks, 1987, p. 1).

It’s noteworthy to acknowledge that Dr. McFaden’s comments on my first reflective summary were long and dense. To my three page, type-written synopsis he attached two-and-a-half, single-spaced, type-written pages worth of comments on everything from spelling, grammatical errors, word choices and sentence structure, to observations regarding how I was setting up my arguments. Though overwhelming in the amount of content, the tone of his comments was relatively benign. And so, I read them, considered them (albeit momentarily), and moved on, feeling ambivalent about his observations. For his second rendering of my work, Dr. McFaden launched an assault. This time his comments--three, single-spaced, type-written pages attached to my five page summary—ranged from “your writing is repetitious and wordy; also incredibly obvious. You’ve given me nothing original. Perhaps you are nothing original,” to “you’ve presented me with a childish tantrum here”; “this is a singularly vacuous piece of writing”; “empty of thought resembling someone who spent her whole life watching TV merely reacting to visual scenes of wartime devastation: ‘Ugh! Oh gross! Yuck!’” And then, his final blow, “Why are you even in this class? Philosophy is for the smart!”

My skin was all over the floor after reading his censure. He had pored away at one of the most vulnerable layers of my being, maligning me with a vicious tongue. I was clearly, according to him, not smart enough to continue in his class, let alone take other classes in the Philosophy Department. I would be lucky if I made it out of his class intellectually and emotionally intact. So as to spare myself further agony and the very real possibility of losing all semblance of interest in my education in general, as well as protect my tremulous self-esteem, I sprinted to the registrar’s office, intent on dropping McFaden’s course as quickly as I could. In

my two years at college I hadn't come close to dropping a class, so the protocol for doing so was unfamiliar. "You'll need to get the instructor's signature" said the woman behind the desk. "Once you have his signature, return this form and we'll make sure to erase the class from your transcript." *WHAT?! I have to go back to that...man?!*

"I'm not surprised to see you here" were the first words out of his mouth as I knocked on his open door. "What can I do for you?" I chose not to walk into his office, quite possibly for fear of being completely devoured. Instead I produced the form and muttered, "I need your signature, sir." Turning toward me in his swivel chair, he reached for the piece of paper dangling from my hand and mumbled "Well, philosophy isn't for everyone." *Indeed, it is not for me. I am evidently not "smart."* With that he signed his name and almost throwing the paper at me, said, "Good luck at staying in school."

#### **4.1.1.3 Reflections on Postures of Disdain**

With each recall of these experiences, I am reminded of a time in my early life wherein I felt integrated; wherein my whole self seemed completely invested in engaging an assignment with integrity and enthusiasm. As evidenced by knowing "exactly what poem I would share" in Mrs. Reiser's class, I was motivated by an emotional attachment, an inspiring relationship with a grandfather who loved poetry, who loved me, and who I wanted to share with my class. In addition, when I remember spending the whole week "before my assigned presentation day memorizing and reciting Kilmer's poem," and my attempt to "integrate information I had gathered from a history and religion course...to illustrate how I was making sense of the material" for Dr. McFaden, I am reminded of Montouri's (2008) "The Joy of Inquiry" wherein he suggests that what is most often left out of the picture of real inquiry is a process that is "deeply passionate, exciting and creative" (p. 17).

*Thrown* into their classrooms with expectations and plans for helping students to achieve, Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden, in my estimation, personified similar stances of disdain and superiority over me. For different reasons and as a result of inherited and perhaps unreflective assumptions about how students learn and produce, they made decisions about me and my abilities based on very little information. Again, *thrown* into the classroom, an atmosphere in which they had dwelled for many years before encountering me, they enacted their facticity, their distinct social, cultural, and political history as teachers, and carried out particular internalized and I would suggest, *unfinished* expectations and tenets about education that others had defined for them prior to our interactions.

I don't suppose that Mrs. Reiser or Dr. McFaden intended to destroy me. I don't believe that they set out with malicious intent to demean me in those moments, though Dr. McFaden's feedback is hard to interpret as anything but malevolent. Instead, it occurs to me in light of Palmer's (1998) earlier proposition that they were unable to connect with my vulnerability perhaps because they were never invited to consider their own. Perhaps, they believed, like I assume Jeremy did, that their jobs, as traditionally defined, were to impart something specific, to impose a particular (and, perhaps rigid) agenda grounded in specific ways of knowing and obtaining knowledge in the service of filling my empty vessel of a brain. "Knowledge is [seen as] a gift," Freire (1970/1993) suggests in his critique of the banking system of education, "bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 53). In this light, perhaps Dr. McFaden, for example, was simply enacting his avuncularity, believing himself to be helpful and generous in his comments to me. Though again, his demeanor was hardly friendly or good-humored. In any case, and in line with modernist notions about the student-teacher relationship, I would have been responsible for

receiving what Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden bestowed on me as the “unknowing” student, the naïve pupil come to be educated under their tutelage. If I didn’t receive it correctly or perhaps even resisted it, then I was the irresponsible one, the naïve pupil who perhaps couldn’t appreciate the gifts I was being offered.

Certainly, to some extent, there’s something noble about their approach. Similar to my unfamiliarity with ice climbing, I had never experienced poetry or philosophy in any particularly formal or comprehensive way. They had. They had studied and learned the foundations, rules and codes of their trade, or so I assumed and trusted given their positions at the front of the class. They *knew* their subjects, and perhaps in the end they believed themselves to be experts, embodying all that they needed to know in order to educate me and my peers in the subjects for which we were gathered. If indeed they believed themselves to be “experts” in both the content and process of educating me, if they believed that they existed on a plane above me, then, of course, they would present themselves as superior to me. And, they would most likely be irritated by my seeming inability to cognitively understand, integrate and articulate what they were attempting to impart in the way that they believed was most efficient and appropriate. If I was not intellectually “getting it” then there must have been something deficient in me.

Again, I can’t confirm, or really even surmise how and why these particular teachers took the tack that they did with me and my learning, except to propose that they, like me, were *thrown* into their own educational experiences without the benefit of reflection, and perhaps trained by authoritarian, rationally-oriented, domesticating others to absorb without question particular lessons and specific ways of knowing as superior and more legitimate. In this light, I can at the very least acknowledge the process of dehumanization that my teachers in their *throwness* must



have experienced in order to be able to replicate it with such vigor and clarity. And, there is much for me to reflect on and learn from their *posture of disdain* with me.

For Heidegger (1962) realizing our *thrownness* into a world not of our own making, and our *inauthentic* existence in relation to that world, can lead us to feel *exposed*, opened up and raw. For Heidegger this is the manifestation of our *anxiety*, our unsettling response to the ambiguity of our existence and the ambivalent relationship we cautiously contain with the possibilities we have been led to believe we embody (pp. 228-235). We have numerous options for either denying or tending to our anxiety and these possibilities, *disclosing* them through our openness to or clearing of them as we imagine they exist for and in us. For this to happen, for Dasein—again, Heidegger’s term for *human being*—to reveal these ontological entities for and to itself, Dasein must reflect back upon itself, being curious about its own being and possibilities, encountering, experiencing or getting to know them as particular ontological entities which may appear in many different ways (Collins & Selina, 1998, pp. 116-117).

In the context of education, Freire (1998) suggests that “to know that to teach is not merely to transfer knowledge is a demanding and difficult discipline, at times a burden that we have to carry with others, for others, and for ourselves” (pp. 50-51). He goes on to confirm that “It is difficult because it demands constant vigilance over ourselves so as to avoid being simplistic, facile, and coherent” (p. 50). And so, we must be self-reflective, but not only to the end of simply looking back upon where we have been. There is an active component to both Heidegger’s and Freire’s reflections; a conscious apprehension of insight, and enaction of lessons understood.

Heidegger (1962) and Freire (1998) give me pause, for as I want to remain compassionate to the “constant vigilance” of teaching, disclosing to myself the possibilities that

have up to now been covered over, and learning from those who held their genius over me-- leading me to feel minimized and belittled--there were other teachers in my life who offered me presence and benevolence, who exposed my inexperience and naiveté with generosity and humility. These teachers seemed to be self-reflective, familiar with their desires, fears and vulnerability, and willing to “intervene, transform, speak about their choices and intentions, take stock of, compare, evaluate, give value to, decide, break with, and dream” (p. 26) about what they were experiencing alongside me. They seemed to contend with their *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*, carrying their burdens with grace and modesty, sharing at times their own hardships with the academic projects they were required to convey in the classroom, and what they deemed to be their greater commitments to the holistic growth of their students. From these teachers I felt heard, challenged and understood. Alongside these teachers I was a co-creator of a shared reality that was not confined to rational-cognitive consideration and obedient engagement. With these teachers I felt enhanced.

#### **4.1.2 Exposure as Enhancing**

##### **4.1.2.1 Lolly**

By the time I’d entered tenth grade Honors English with Mrs. Lolly Mortensen I’d internalized my earlier lessons about poetry and interpretation with great success. No longer was I even tempted to consider what *I* thought about the poems I was being asked to read in my classes. Instead, I relied on other, more important and scholarly interpreters of poetry, for they clearly embodied the *right* answers to any questions my meager psyche might conjure.

Though I learned those lessons well, Mrs. Mortensen was none too impressed with my academic passivity. “Julie, you’ve got to think for yourself,” she would implore on my papers.

“Though you certainly know how to locate the ideas of others, I’m more interested in *your* ideas,” she’d write. “I want to read what *you* have to say about these works.” Always, when I initially read her comments, I’d roll my eyes and think, “Geez, who knows what these people really want.” Later, in the hallway after class I would wish out loud to my friends that Mrs. Mortensen would “just get off my back.” However, in the privacy of my journal at home, I appreciated her comments, even if I wasn’t sure that I could do what she was asking.

When our first quarter grades came out I received a “D” from Mrs. Mortensen. I’d *never* received anything below a “B+” in school, so getting a “D” was devastating. In addition, report cards came home in the mail, so there was no opportunity to apprehend my grades before my mother saw them. This coupled with the fact that I had no idea that I would even need to get to them before my Mom only fueled my devastation in the end.

“Julie, what is this?” my mother screamed. I was upstairs in my room when she opened the envelope, so her scream was appropriate. Though her rebuke when I finally made my way downstairs was something else. “Your brother gets these grades, NOT YOU!” she demanded. Fortunately, my brother wasn’t in the house when she denigrated his academic aptitude. “It’s not like it counts for anything, Mom,” I said with an air of disinterest. “I can do better for the semester grade.” “Well, of course you’ll do better for your semester grade,” she said with confidence. “But that does NOT diminish the significance of *this* grade.”

The next day at school, after what turned out to be a long night of talking through whatever my mother felt was getting in the way of my doing well in Honors English class, and with my proverbial tail between my legs, I walked into class trying to avoid any and all contact with Mrs. Mortensen. And, as class began with her usual “Let’s begin, my favorite little ducks!” I assumed that my mission had been accomplished. However, unlike she had ever done before,

Mrs. Mortensen ended class *early*. “I can trust you honor students to leave my class and go about your afternoon business with integrity, right?” she queried before releasing us. While others nodded in compliance and scurried to the door, Mrs. Mortensen cleared her throat and peering at me through her frameless oblong spectacles firmly announced, “Julie, you’ll stay.”

After inviting me to sit down in the chair next to her desk, she didn’t mince words, and I could tell that what she was saying to me was genuine.

“You asked me to take this class, remember?” she inquired.

I nodded.

“You said that you were bored in your Phase 4 English class, and that you had heard that Honors English would be a challenge. Do you recall that, Julie?”

Again, I nodded.

“Well, has it been challenging?”

“Oh, yeah!” I confirmed. “It’s been challenging.”

“Well, then why do you think you got a ‘D’ on your report card?”

“Well...” I hesitated. “I suppose...” I stammered. “I suppose...it’s because...”

She interjected, “It’s because you’re not really here, Julie.” And, she continued, “I’ve asked you repeatedly to show me what *you* think, to talk about *your* ideas. And, repeatedly you’ve avoided my suggestions.” Leaning inward, touching my knee with her forefinger, and then waving her hand above the desk, she said softly, “I don’t believe that you *can’t* do what I’m asking. I think you’re afraid of something.”

Indeed I was afraid, though at the time I couldn’t identify the object of my fear. What I could confirm, however, was that she seemed to “get me.” Maybe I was also moved by her willingness to meet with me, to confront what was happening between us. She held expectations

that I was not meeting. And, she was more than clear with me that she believed I *could* meet them, for she was not willing to temper them for my sake.

The rest of the year is a blur, except for the fact that I received a “C” on my semester grade sheet. And later, for my final, year-end grade, Mrs. Mortensen gave me an “A.” I can also recall her salute to me (yes, she actually did salute students in the hallways) for my publication of a short piece of prose about an apple orchard, “Nature’s Majesty,” in my high school’s literary journal, *The Shade*.

*Lolly Mortensen “got me.”*

#### **4.1.2.2 At Least You Look Attentive**

“Carolyn Schmitz, Carolyn Schmitz. You **MUST** take a class with Carolyn Schmitz!” It was my junior year in college, and I was hanging around with a whole new group of people: “self-professed tree-hugging, women-loving, gay-celebrating, anarchists,” as my friend Steve would later describe us. Carolyn Schmitz was a Women’s Studies professor at the college, and someone whom everyone in my new group adored. So, in keeping with what I imagined they all expected of me, I registered for Introduction to Women’s Studies, and planned to fall just as hard for “Carolyn”--the name she would ask to be called--as my peers clearly had.

On the first day of class, Carolyn announced that we would be keeping “journals,” reflecting on what we were reading and talking about, and “really anything else that comes up for you as a result of this class.” To many of my peers’ sighs of agony, I was quite excited about this assignment, for I had been keeping diaries and journals since childhood. Our first prompt would be to answer the question, “What do I expect to gain from this course?” *We’re off! And, I think I can see why so many of my friends like this woman!*

Throughout the semester we covered topics ranging from the historical roots of patriarchy to motherhood to advertising and gender issues in education, reading such authors as Betty Freidan, Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Alice Walker and Susan Brownmiller. I was enamored with both the content of the class and my instructor. And, I wrote voraciously about what I was pondering and learning about these ideas and writers. In class however, I was reticent to open my mouth, perhaps for fear of someone else's rebuke. Often in my journals Carolyn would write "I wish that you would bring this up in class" or "This is a great point that others might benefit from hearing." They were prods, I knew, and yet they weren't enough to push me onto the field of in-class inquiry. I was not about to risk exposing myself and my ideas. That is until Carolyn started talking about midterm grades, and her definition of "class participation."

"Your class participation grade is a subjective one, I know," she announced in class one day. *Subjective? What does she mean by "subjective"?* She went on to explain, "For most of you, I will consider how you have presented yourself and your ideas; how you have interacted with your peers; and how open or closed you have been to others' questions and ideas in response to your own." *Geez, she's talking about "talking" in class. I hardly ever talk. Well, I never talk. My grade is going to suck.*

I spent the weekend after that class agonizing over my grade. In the first place, I was certain that my peers who had recommended Carolyn's class had all spoken often and with enthusiasm in their own classes. And so I assumed that they had done well. *Talking of course is the most reliable measure of a good student, after all.* How would I tell them that I wasn't doing so well in a class that they all seemed to love? More importantly, however, this class and this instructor had come to mean something to me; representing something bigger than I could verbalize. I was writing about it in my journal. But, it was also in the margins next to those

kinds of comments that Carolyn would encourage me to “share your thoughts in class.” *What was she really thinking about me? And, how can I convince her that I am getting a lot of out this class, even if I am quiet most of the time?*

Finally, two days later, after sitting nervously through *Antonia: Portrait of a Woman* (Collins& Godmilow, 1974), I approached Carolyn at the end of the film to schedule an appointment. “I’d like to talk about my class participation,” I explained. To which she replied, “I have some time now. Let’s walk.” Her office was right around the corner from our class. So, I was relieved of the responsibility to carry on a conversation in the hallway about my concerns.

When we entered her office, she threw her books onto the desk sitting directly across from the door, then settled herself into the couch nestled in a nook immediately to her right. Patting the couch cushion beside her she said firmly, “Come, sit. Tell me what’s on your mind.” I stumbled, like I always had with teachers, and said fretfully, “I...I’m...I’m worried about my class participation grade.” She didn’t respond to me right away. Instead she sat there, focused and considerate, as if waiting for me to continue. When I finally added, “That’s it. I’m just worried about my grade,” she blithely responded, “What do you think about our class so far?”

For the next twenty minutes we talked about the class, what she was hoping students would gain from the experience, and what she was learning about herself. “I teach this class every year, and every year I learn more about what I need to do differently than about what’s actually going well in the class.” She didn’t make this remark mournfully. In fact, she sounded quite cheery about “the challenges I never seem to be able to anticipate from certain kinds of students.” Then she asked about what I was hoping for the class, what I imagined people getting out of it. She never asked me directly what *I* was hoping that I would get out of the class, though perhaps because I was writing about that in my journal it may have seemed redundant.

Before wrapping up, she leaned toward the edge of the couch, turned her body toward me so that we were facing one another directly, and said empathically, “Julie, I can tell you’re paying attention in class. And, yes, I would love it if you could find a way to share some of your insights with the rest of the class.” She continued by lamenting what the class might be missing “when you don’t speak up. But, your responsibility isn’t to educate the rest of the class. Your responsibility is to find your voice in this class, whatever that voice sounds like, and in whatever form that voice needs to be heard.” She affirmed my writing, and confirmed that I was indeed finding my way through Women’s Studies in my journal. She ended by standing up and saying albeit abruptly, “You’re going to be fine.”

#### **4.1.2.3 Reflecting on Presence**

When I think back upon earlier moments with Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden, I am reminded of the first half of Harry Chapin’s heart-wrenching song “Flowers are Red” (1979):

*The little boy went first day of school  
He got some crayons and started to draw  
He put colors all over the paper  
For colors was what he saw  
And the teacher said.. What you doin' young man  
I'm paintin' flowers he said  
She said... It's not the time for art young man  
And anyway flowers are green and red  
There's a time for everything young man  
And a way it should be done  
You've got to show concern for everyone else*



*For you're not the only one*

*(Chorus)*

*And she said...*

*Flowers are red young man*

*Green leaves are green*

*There's no need to see flowers any other way*

*Than the way they always have been seen*

*But the little boy said...*

*There are so many colors in the rainbow*

*So many colors in the morning sun*

*So many colors in the flower and I see every one*

*Well the teacher said, You're sassy*

*There's ways that things should be*

*And you'll paint flowers the way they are*

*So repeat after me.....*

*(Chorus)*

*The teacher put him in a corner*

*She said, It's for your own good.*

*And you won't come out 'til you get it right*

*And are responding like you should*

*Well finally he got lonely*

*Frightened thoughts filled his head*

*And he went up to the teacher*

*And this is what he said.. and he said*

*Flowers are red, green leaves are green*

*There's no need to see flowers any other way*

*Than the way they always have been seen...*

Of course, the notion that I was not getting “the ways that things should be” as either an interpreter of poetry or an informal logician, like the little boy’s artistic capabilities above, is secondary to my (and his) feeling exposed as a failure. Though one of the messages in “Learning to Hate Poetry” and “Informal Logic” seems to be “you’re not smart enough to get this,” perhaps another, more powerful message is “you’re never going to get this, so why should I help you?” These messages clearly echo Jeremy’s admonishment in “Ice Climbing,” “Just c’mon down!” and, get out of other people’s way. And all lean toward Chapin’s harrowing lyrics, “Go sit in the corner until you learn to respond like you should.”

Paulo Freire’s (1998) thoughtful description of relatedness seems particularly apt here: “Respect for the autonomy and dignity of every person is an ethical imperative and not a favor that we may or may not concede to each other” (p. 59). Freire continues, suggesting that “The teacher who...is not respectfully present in the educational experience of the student, transgresses fundamental ethical principles of the human condition” (p. 59), which he cites quite simply as decency and purity (p. 38). For reasons that again I’ll never be able to confirm, Jeremy, Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden seemingly sidelined decency and purity in the service of more rigid notions about teaching and learning. They, perhaps given the ends of their respective enterprises, drew on imposing and oppressive methods to force a particular kind of interaction between the lessons they were presenting, the expectations they held and my comprehension of both. It seems clear on one hand that their methods were lost on me as I was unable, according

to them, to grasp the imperative of their training. On the other hand, I did eventually come to see and submit to “ways that things should be” and “responding like I should” (Chapin, 1979).

Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden certainly presented me with various challenges that they defined, and expectations that determined my survival in their classes. As on the mountain, however, I was unable to anticipate the consequences of embracing them. As I had on the icefall, I imagine that I learned to engage and embrace my situation so as to insure my survival in their classes. This does not diminish my learning, however, or my understanding of things possible from their lessons. Challenges, and the risks associated with them, can be good and healthy for one’s growth into wholeness. Thus, I am not making a case for avoiding them.

Returning again to Freire (1998), sometimes it is the “simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher [that] can have [the most] profound formative effect on the life of a student” (p. 46). As I reflect on my moments with Mrs. Mortensen and Carolyn, the second half of Chapin’s (1979) song, in line with Freire’s observation, is especially provocative:

*Time went by like it always does*

*And they moved to another town*

*And the little boy went to another school*

*And this is what he found*

*The teacher there was smilin'*

*She said...Painting should be fun*

*And there are so many colors in a flower*

*So let's use every one*

*But that little boy painted flowers*

*In neat rows of green and red*

*And when the teacher asked him why  
This is what he said... and he said  
Flowers are red, green leaves are green  
There's no need to see flowers any other way  
Than the way they always have been seen.*

Mrs. Mortensen and Carolyn signified generosity and *presence* to me. And, their respective ways of being with me, of challenging and prodding me, were subtle. There were no mini-lectures, no psychodynamic interpretations of my short-comings. Instead, they were curious and compassionate, unobtrusively nudging me onto different fields of opportunity. They were reconfiguring not only my status as a student in relationship to and with them as my teachers. They were reconfiguring my relationship with my *self*.

Of course, I wasn't easily changed. Even though I had experienced Lolly Mortensen as kind and generous, as someone who sought to foster my empowering myself to be different and perhaps more responsible for my learning, I nevertheless attempted to play out earlier lessons regarding subordination four years later with Carolyn. Like the little boy in Chapin's song, change was slow to come for me.

And, Mrs. Mortensen and Carolyn had pliable expectations of me. I did not feel like a failure in their eyes, nor was I as easily moved to submit to my pre-defined lessons about how to be a good student, for example. They held high expectations and there were consequences for not meeting them. However, *I* was not ultimately diminished by them, or threatened in any particularly dangerous way. Instead, given the conditions that they laid out for our relating to one another, *I* became free to revitalize and apprehend perhaps more authentic ways of *being-in-the-world* alongside them; empowered to consider and enact possibilities for *being-and-*

*becoming* as a student in ways that were making sense to me at the time. I was not only surviving in their care, I was thriving.

Consider Carolyn's inquiry into what I was thinking about our class. Instead of putting me on the spot, pushing me to talk about *my* experiences, for example, she invited me into a conversation about the class in general, encouraging me to join her in musing about her ideas and imaginings for the class. As I entered her office, presenting her with terms for our interaction grounded in my unreflected notions about what it meant to be a student, I was inviting her to judge me based upon my perceived lack of *verbal* participation in our class. I approached her concerned about my grade, and anticipating that I would need to defend myself to her if I was going to do well in her class. Remember, I had learned and assumed that talking in class was the most reliable measure of a good student. In a manner congruent with self-reflexivity on the part of the teacher, and in my estimation, consistent with the intentions of the Women's Studies program, Carolyn suggested slowly that it was more appropriate for me to be concerned with finding my voice however my voice might be manifested and amplified. I presented Carolyn with an opportunity to enact her authority over me, and she didn't take the bait. As she metaphorically did by inviting me to sit on the couch, and structurally accomplished by insisting that I call her "Carolyn," she acknowledged and then refused the hierarchical power dyad. She realized our mutual *thrownness*, perhaps our relative *unfinishedness*, acknowledged albeit silently how my *thrownness* and *unfinishedness* might be affecting me, and actively resisted it.

Mrs. Mortensen similarly invited me into a conversation about what *I* wanted to accomplish in her class explaining with compassion both her expectations and the consequences I would have to endure if I did not follow through. Though the parameters surrounding our relationship were perhaps more in line with traditional notions concerning the teacher as

authority—she had a clear idea about my work and how I should pursue it—Mrs. Mortensen also modeled a presence with me that affirmed her interest in and commitment to me. She made herself available to me, and, confirmed that she was not leaving me behind because I had failed to embrace and perform my role as student in her eyes. Both of these teachers seemed to appreciate, and in fact encourage my abilities and creativity. They were not interested in my necessarily doing things like everyone else. Instead, like Carolyn suggested, I was supported to find *my* voice, *my* ways of knowing, *my* road into the material we were navigating together. I was no longer *thrown* into a familiar abyss, dependent on the good will of others’ insights and prescriptions for how to be, or drained by my own struggle to tread the depths of an academic millpond that stifled my *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*.

#### **4.2 MOMENT II: EXPOSING AS A TEACHER**

As I have already shared above, when I began teaching I aligned myself with the modernist concept of education without question, believing that through adherence to the “right” techniques and inclusion of the “right” components of structure and evaluation in the curriculum, I could “make” students become more learned and productive, leading them to the discovery of certain universal truths about the world and their place within it. I started my college teaching career with certain inherited notions about education and learning, for example, that students essentially represented and then presented in the classroom a conglomeration of dysfunctional ways of thinking and being. I believed and perhaps even expected, like I assume Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden believed and expected of me, that students were naïve and passive, and, that if I worked hard enough I could help them to be critical thinkers and thus, more functional and

active in the world in the world. In addition, I placed priority on students' cognitive capabilities, ignoring their emotional, physical and spiritual selves. And, I neglected to consider where they were coming from, their personal biographies and socialized notions of what it meant to them to be a student, and what it meant to them to learn.

After spending the first three semesters of my college teaching career trying desperately to "get" students to think critically about the world, I recall making the rather flip comment to my mother, "They just don't seem to appreciate the opportunity I am giving them. I'm asking them what they think, and they aren't responding to me!" My mother, bluntly retorted,

Julie, who in the hell do you think you are? Perhaps no one has ever asked them what they thought about something. Maybe they never felt like anyone ever listened to them.

And, maybe, just maybe, they have no idea *how* to think about the things you're asking of them. Was it always so easy for you to talk about what you thought in your classes?

She went on to share some of her own college experiences, times when she was invited to speak her mind by professors who had no clue about or perhaps even interest in where she came from or what she had learned about sharing her opinions: "The thing is I was trained *not* to speak my mind. So, I didn't know *how* to do it. I wasn't allowed to have opinions of my own."

She was right, of course. I *was* asking my own students to engage in a process with me that I assumed they understood. And when they didn't respond, or responded in ways that seemed purposeless and insignificant to me, I got irritated. I understand today that I was asking them to take responsibility for their thinking about and being in the world in a way that was neither clear nor familiar to them. I was not taking the time to know my students, to understand where they came from or what they had been told to believe about the world. I was not checking in with them to see if they even understood what I was asking of them and trying to accomplish

with them. And, I was expecting them to be grateful and excited about this opportunity, this freedom I was *handing them* as opposed to a process I was trying to draw out.

William Ayers (2004) writes

All students, from preschool through adult education, bring two powerful, propulsive, and expansive questions with them each day into the classroom. Although largely unstated and implicit, even unconscious, these questions are nonetheless essential. Who in the world am I, or who am I in the world? What in the world are my choices and my chances? These are simple questions on the surface, but they roil with hidden and surprising meanings, always yeasty, unpredictable, potentially volcanic. (pp. 32-33)

In my naiveté I thought I was giving students an opportunity to explore and answer these questions. I thought I was establishing a classroom wherein their ideas might ferment, foam and eventually erupt into insights and gratitude. However, looking back, I imagine that my approach was both distant and expectant. Though I may have tried to present myself as benevolent and sincere, in truth my expectations came with conditions. I expected students to *think* only, paying no attention to the knowledge or information that they may have been presenting or experiencing with or through their emotional selves, for example. Having been *thrown* into my classroom, unaware of their *throwness* into unfamiliar relationships with unfamiliar people and material, carrying their own *unfinished* personal and academic biographies, I was loathe to consider the anxiety that many of them, I now assume, may have been experiencing. As well, I was unaware of my own anxiety and my own vulnerabilities as they were made manifest by various interactions about which you'll read below. In the face of students' anxiety, I responded in a way that perhaps amplified it for many of them. In the face of my own anxiety, I reacted in a



way that protected me, shielded me from having to deal with my own discomfort at the expense of others who were sharing my space.

In the following essays I write through moments as a teacher wherein I exposed students in ways that I have come to believe were initially stifling of some of them and their potentials. Specifically, I write through my process of remembering and reflecting on these moments, threading several of them together to illustrate the tapestry of changes that have since become apparent for me in my relationships with a few significant students and my teaching. Later, upon reflection, I believe I became more present-oriented, and hopefully, enhancing of students' coming to see and apprehend possibilities that were being uncovered for and disclosed to them. But only after being confronted with my own anxieties and my own vulnerabilities.

#### **4.2.1 You Plagiarize, You're Out!**

It was a simple rule, or so I thought: "If you plagiarize, you fail this class. No second chances." I'd made it a point at the start of every semester to ask students if they knew and understood what I and the university for which I was teaching meant by "plagiarism." Trusting that my students' nods to my query were genuine and sincere, I then asked them to sign a "personal and academic integrity" contract which stated simply that they had read the university's policy regarding plagiarism, and that they understood both my and the university's consequences for plagiarizing. Not once did a student challenge me about signing the contract, nor did a student ever ask me to clarify my or the university's policy regarding academic integrity. I generally proceeded then believing that if a student was willing to sign my contract without asking any questions that they were knowingly taking responsibility for producing and turning in their own written work.

Even though I believed that I had made a concerted effort to clarify the issue of plagiarism, tying it to consequences that I trusted each student understood, and, even though not one student ever resisted signing my contract, there was at least one student every semester that tried to pass off others' work as their own. And, every semester, for at least three years, I failed those students without giving them a second chance.

I could defend myself by claiming that I was only following the rules, espouse an ethical position that plagiarism is not a victimless crime, or launch into something of a diatribe about "lessons well-learned" for students whom I decided needed to be prodded to think about and take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Still, with each of these justifications, I can't seem to shake the feeling that I stifled significantly, to my knowledge, at least one student's life because I believed in a rule about which I had never thought deeply, and in holding students accountable for breaking that rule, all in the name of institutional ethics (or, at least that's how I justified it to myself), regardless of the long-term consequences.

#### **4.2.1.1 Ling**

Her name was Ling. She was a sophomore in my Sociological Foundations class and an international student from China. She was a pleasant woman, punctual to class and diligent about engaging her work in my class. She was also relatively quiet, though always attentive to what was happening in the room. Generally speaking, Ling participated in my class with integrity and poise.

Her writing on the other hand was choppy and unclear, though at the time I was unaware of inter-cultural language issues that would have influenced her prose. With three sections of Sociological Foundations--meaning roughly eighty-five students in all--I felt overwhelmed by the idea of attending to each student's individual writing beyond offering general comments and

questions on their papers. In many cases wherein I felt that the student needed more attention than I was able to give, I suggested that they seek help from the university's reading and writing center. And in most cases, it was clear that students' heeded my suggestion. Ling however, never seemed to improve, even as my comments to her became more firm and directive. "I do not have time to go to that office" she told me once. To which I replied, "Well, it is *your* grade."

For their final papers, I assigned students to small groups of three or four, and invited them to produce a "group paper" on any sociology topic of their choice that they felt deserved more attention, or an alternative perspective to what we had explored in class. They could be creative with their format, though I did require that each group member contribute something to the final product. I also suggested that they have at least one meeting with me to discuss their ideas before their papers were due. I didn't require that they meet with me. However, perhaps I should have.

When I sat down to read Ling's group paper it was clear from the first page that something was amiss. The words and phrases used to introduce the group's topic were far more advanced than the terms and ideas we had discussed in class. This would not necessarily have been an issue, except that the writing of each of the group members throughout the semester was generally poor. They were all adept at getting across their ideas, albeit in stilted and unimaginative ways. But *these* expressions, *these* ideas, were way beyond anything they were producing on their own. After a few quick internet searches of particular words and phrases in their paper, it became apparent to me that indeed these were not their original ideas. Instead they had been lifted by three separate academic journal articles.

Generally speaking, I tended to fail students for plagiarism, especially given my experience that most of the students I "caught" tried to deny that they had done anything wrong.

“I knew you were out to get me” responded one student who had plagiarized a third of a chapter from the textbook we were using in class. “I swear I didn’t mean to copy everything” replied another student who had downloaded and printed an essay for sale. Other students copied from internet sites like Wikipedia, and as my years as a college instructor progressed I began to notice that still other students were simply turning in papers that their friends had written the semester before. I never enjoyed catching students for plagiarizing. And though with each passing year I felt incredibly concerned by the numbers of students who were cheating and then trying to blame me for stopping them in their tracks, I neglected to consider that I had any other choice but to comply with the university’s policy.

At first I met with all of the students in Ling’s group together, and presented both their paper and my concerns in a deliberate and curious manner. “What do you notice about what I’ve highlighted on your paper?” I asked. After a few minutes of rephrasing my questions and concerns, one student responded by saying, “Well, that wasn’t my part of the paper.” While another simply offered, “I’m not quite sure what you want to hear.” Ling remained silent, staring at the paper without even twitching in her seat. Eventually I spelled out what I had discovered, showing them the printed copy of the paragraphs lifted from at least three internet sources. “That wasn’t me,” demanded the first student. “I didn’t even use the internet.” The second responded similarly, and then asked, “Do you think we plagiarized?” Again, Ling remained silent.

Eventually I met with each student individually, and it was during our meeting that Ling nervously told me that she was responsible for the copied paragraphs. “Everything was so busy,” she conceded. “I had too much to do.” As I listened to her, and affirmed that I understood how busy the end of the semester can be for students, I remained unwavering about

my and the university's policy on plagiarism. "I really appreciate your honesty, Ling," I told her. Then I reminded her of the document she signed at the beginning of the semester and confirmed, "I really have no choice but to fail you."

As I reflect on how I handled the situation with Ling I can't help but wonder about what today feels like insincerity and shallow placation. Certainly, Ling never tried to convince me to give her another chance, and she was only assertive in her request that I not fail her peers. "They did not know what I wrote," she pleaded. And I, though compassionate and willing to listen to her in the moment, never entertained the possibility of compromise. Instead, I continued to rely on Ling's cognitive capacity to both understand and adhere to rules that I would later find out were most likely unfamiliar to her.

#### **4.2.1.2 Jenny**

Fast forward five years, and I am now instructing graduate students in an education class at a different university. It's one of the first classes that Jenny is taking in her graduate program. And, I am confronted with issues that I had forgotten about long ago. Jenny, who was also an international student from China, was hoping to complete her graduate studies in "record time." "I came here to study so that I could get a good education and return to my family in record time," she confidently declared on the first day of class.

Jenny was a pleasant and diligent student, attending and participating in our classes together with enthusiasm and confidence. Like her peers she was prepared for each class, and generally forthright in her questions and comments. This was a graduate class, so admittedly I had different expectations for these students. To begin with, I was a graduate student myself, and held high expectations for myself and my peers. I entered graduate school believing it to be a place wherein vigorous and rigorous work and dialogue was the norm. I also believed that

graduate classes were places wherein discussions could be heated, collegial and ripe with meaning. Finally, I expected graduate students to be even more diligent about taking responsibility for and producing their own work.

In addition to my assumptions about graduate school and students, I was very aware that the students with whom I was working in this class were more like peers to me, people whose work and ambitions were much closer to my own than the undergraduate students with whom I had been working previously. We were all in the same boat, so to speak. And, as I was diligent about pulling my own weight in my graduate classes, I expected that these students would at the very least do the same.

So, when I discovered that Jenny had plagiarized her very first paper in my class, I was livid. *Does she think I'm a fool? She's a graduate student! I'M A GRADUATE STUDENT! Graduate students just don't do this!* I could think of no reason why a graduate student would find it acceptable, or even believe it possible, to plagiarize. And, I wanted to punish her. She was on *my* turf, compromising the integrity of *my* class. And, I was initially not very willing to give her any second chances. That is until I spoke with my mentor. Whether Michael was actually feeling it or not, I saw great compassion in his eyes when I explained the situation to him. He didn't placate me, nor did he offer specific advice. Instead, he simply listened with what looked like curiosity and genuine understanding.

Eventually he did ask, "What do you want to do?" Without missing a beat I replied, "I want to throw the book at her!" I was very agitated by the whole situation, and not feeling particularly generous. "Graduate students aren't supposed to do this!" I declared, and continued claiming that plagiarism was an ethical violation, "not a victimless crime," as many of my peers believed it to be. I also launched into something of a diatribe about providing a "lesson well-

learned” for this student. “She needs to know that she can’t do this in graduate school, and that she has to take responsibility for what she’s done.” I then ended my rampage asking “Who does she think she is? Who does she think *I AM?*” And, it was upon hearing those words come out of my mouth that I stopped, sat back in my chair, and realized that there was something *personal* happening for me in this moment. I was feeling like she had committed an act *against me*; like she had done something *to me*.

After what seemed like an infinitely long few minutes of silence, Michael scanned the room, took a deep breath, and muttered aloud, “I wonder if there is something to learn here? I wonder if there is an opportunity here for you, and maybe for her?” Almost immediately I settled more deeply into my chair, feeling relieved, hopeful and less angry. His questions were spot on. There *was* something here for both of us to learn, an opportunity for both of us to do something different than perhaps we had done before.

Donald Vandenberg (1971) proposes that

Educating action can occur [...] only when the pupil understands, at least implicitly, that he requires help in the disclosure of the possibilities of the world, for only then can he project into the disclosure with his whole being and actually bring it into being for himself, and only then is he able to coexist with the teacher in the possibilities opened up.

On the other hand, educating action can occur only when the teacher understands that it is required of her to help the pupil explore the world, for only then is she able to project into the disclosure with her whole being and to coexist with the pupil therein. (p. 139)

In his discussion of “the educating encounter” Vandenberg proposes a kind of authentic reciprocity between the teacher and student wherein both concede absolute control *over* a situation, and seek to collaborate with one another in order that new possibilities for learning

might be disclosed. The student must ask for help, according to Vandenberg, and the teacher must realize her responsibility for providing that help, though Vandenberg is clear that such help must come from a place within each that is striving toward authenticity. I couldn't know ahead of time how Jenny would engage with my proposition to help her. But, I knew I needed to try. I didn't want to repeat my earlier misstep with Ling and the various other students I had failed for plagiarizing. I wanted instead to explore new possibilities for both Jenny and myself in each of our learning.

When Jenny and I did get together again, I shared my concerns about her plagiarizing. I explained the institutional consequences of passing off another's work as one's own, and talked briefly about the ethical dilemma I found myself struggling with regarding students who plagiarized. I told her that in the past I had failed students for plagiarizing, and that as I didn't intend to fail her, I was struggling with how best to resolve the situation. For her part Jenny explained that she didn't know that plagiarism was a problem. With tears streaming down her face she explained, "In my country everyone does this. It is expected that you will do this." She talked about how using others' work was viewed as a respectful act. And, she offered that she didn't mean to do anything wrong. "If you fail me I will have to leave the university and go back to my country in shame." She then pleaded with me, "Please do not fail me. I will never be able to go back to school if I fail." I reiterated to her that I was not going to fail her, and explained that "we do need to explore what is an appropriate consequence here, and figure out together how to move forward." I wanted her to know that I heard her, and that I wanted to help her. I also needed her to help me.



## 4.2.2 Max, Just Max

### 4.2.2.1 My Student from Hell

When I entered the room, I spotted him right away. *He's going to be my problem student this semester.* With his feet up on the desk in front of him, his arms crossed and his eyes peering straight through me, I could already sense *this guy has an attitude.* I'd been teaching college sociology for roughly four semesters. Not a long time, but long enough to identify a "know-it-all." Usually I taught the early morning sections of the class. But this term I decided to take an evening class, to mix things up a bit. We were holed up on the eighth floor of one of the school's oldest buildings. The lighting was terrible, the desks were old and rickety, and there was only one window, with a half-rusted air conditioning unit jammed into the center of it. It was summer, it was hot, the air conditioner was audibly assaultive, and, I was already anticipating that the term was going to feel like hell in more ways than I was already beginning to imagine.

I began the evening calling out each student's name, and requesting that they tell me if they had an alternative name that they wanted to be called in class. Most students responded by either raising their hands or offering a simple "Here!" And, many of the students whose formal names I had called out courteously corrected me. Max, however, grunted, "Max, just Max." *Well, that wasn't surprising. Of course he'd grunt.*

From that first day I disliked Max. Though he attended class regularly, he often sat in the back of the dimly lit room with his head down, playing with his pencil until I or someone else said something that he clearly didn't like. Then he would raise his head, and before I could call on him, he would arrogantly challenge whatever had been suggested by either me or another student. Often he would begin his rants with "That's pretty stupid" or, "Can we talk about the

real issue here?” He would then launch into a diatribe about “the historical truth,” as he called it, regarding our topic, ending his outbursts with statements like “If you knew your history you’d get that” or “At least that’s what a lot of intelligent people think.”

By the middle of the term, I not only didn’t like Max, I loathed him at times. And, I loathed the moments I had to spend conversing with him, often times neglecting the other students in the class to hasten the duration of his verbal outbursts. As Parker Palmer (1998) describes *his* “Student from Hell,” “I became totally obsessed with” Max, and during those moments when he would open his mouth, “everyone else in the room disappeared from my screen” (p. 43). Though, unlike Palmer, I wasn’t trying to reach him, or “awaken him from his dogmatic slumbers” (p. 43). Instead, I was trying to shut him down. I thought he was a know-it-all. And, as I had come to learn about myself in interactions with other “know-it-all” students, I often felt defensive. So, when Max would offer up his ideas about “the truth,” I would snap right back at him with a dismissive air and accuse him of espousing uninteresting tripes. “That’s all well and good, Max, but what does that have to do with what we’re discussing?” Generally, following comments like this, he would retreat, and, I would set about redirecting the class to get back on *my* track for the evening.

Then my students started turning in papers, and Max’s work, unlike his verbal tirades in class, was both impulsive and relatively incoherent. Where he could talk through an idea in class with [pretentious] clarity, his writing was chaotic and vulgar. It was hard to follow his ideas, and his grammar and spelling mistakes were beyond atrocious. *I’ve got him now. This is where I can make him pay.*

For his first paper, I simply offered comments about his grammar and spelling, and suggested that he make an appointment with a tutor at the writing center, “to help you to clarify

what it is that you're trying to get across to me." Admittedly, I didn't want to spend any time outside of class with this guy. So, helping him alone was not an option. In addition, I imagine that I was looking for ways to punish him, opportunities to "get him," short of telling him exactly how I was feeling about his attempts to demean me in the classroom. Somehow, neglecting him in this way, refusing to be available to him for help with his writing—something I enjoyed doing with other students—seemed like poetic justice in a weird and tactless way, though it wreaks of Freire's (1973/1990) "false charity" (p. 27).

He didn't heed my suggestions, and by his third paper I knew this guy was not going to pass my class if I didn't intercede. So, one evening after class I followed him into the hallway and said simply, "You know if you don't listen to me you're not going to pass. And, then you're going to have to take this class all over again." To that he turned, rolled his eyes, looked at me with exasperation and said, "Do you really think I care?" I didn't know what to say. A part of me just wanted to walk away. *Why should I care if he doesn't care?* And, yet another part of me felt sorry for him, and wanted to help.

"Listen, Max, if you really don't care about this class why show up?" I half-heartedly inquired.

"What else is there to do?" he quipped.

I decided not to engage the conversation any further. I was feeling drained by both the three-hour class we'd just finished, and his contemptuous attitude. So, without probing further, I simply informed Max that he would need to find some help with his writing if he had any hope of passing my course. At that, he walked onto the elevator, slammed the button with his elbow, and disappeared. I didn't see him again for a whole year. Which isn't to say that I didn't think about Max a great deal in the months between his dropping my class, and dropping by my office.

#### 4.2.2.2 One Year Later

“What are you doing in these parts?” I queried when he sauntered past my office the following spring. He was staring straight ahead when I saw him, clearly on a mission to get to the end of the hall. “Gotta get a signature,” he yelled back. The instructor he was hoping to find in the office beyond mine wasn’t in, so he came back to my office, and without missing a step asked “Did you ever read Baudrillard like I told you to?” Quickly I recalled our evening class and his statement to me, “You could learn a lot from me, you know.” We were taking a break from class when Max followed me into the “snack closet,” a smallish room at the end of the corridor with a candy machine jammed into its corner, and made this clever remark.

“You know, Max,” I responded with a sneer. “You’re probably right.” To which he asked, “Have you ever read Baudrillard?” I actually considered trying to lie my way through that conversation with him. *What’s he going to think if I tell him ‘no’? I’m the teacher. Of course, I’m supposed to have read whoever the hell he’s talking about.* “No, Max. I’ve never heard of the guy” I snapped at him condescendingly. At the time, a year earlier, I did not want him to see that I was feeling bitter and fraudulent. Now he was in my office bringing that up again, and I was thrust right back into feeling like an impostor!

Palmer (1998) reminds us that “The Student from Hell is not born that way but is created by conditions beyond his or her control” (p. 44) He goes on to suggest that “Students are marginalized people in our society” (p. 45). Of course, in Palmer’s case, he’s talking about the student who does not speak up in class. Max was not such a student. In fact, he was the complete opposite, speaking his mind regardless of what others might think or even want to hear. Still, Palmer’s ideas resonate. Though Max represented the “know-it-all” student for me, I was the adult in our relationship. I was the one who was supposed to be mature, on top of things,

motivated by caring and compassion to treat all of my students with dignity and respect. I was the one who should have had Max's back.

As I remember some of my own educational experiences of feeling like I had been left hanging, with Max a year earlier I was the belyer demeaning his integrity. Though I certainly did not denigrate his character outright, calling him "worthless" or suggesting that he was "incapable," I did position myself as superior to him. I did take a *posture of disdain* with him. Remember, I loathed him at times. And, interestingly, though I did not write any irreverent comments on his paper, or say them to him out loud, my belief at the time that his writing was "atrocious" certainly speaks to a derisive attitude on my part, calling up visions of Dr. McFaden in my own undergraduate years.

In response to the student from hell, Palmer asks teachers a series of questions:

Why do we have so much trouble seeing students as they really are? Why do we diagnose their condition in morbid terms that lead to deadly modes of teaching? Why do we not see the fear that is in their hearts and find ways to help them through it, rather than accusing them of being ignorant or banal? (p. 47)

He goes on to suggest that most likely we do this because perhaps "we cannot see the fear in our students until we see the fear in ourselves" (p. 47).

After enjoying a year away from Max, it would have seemed that my disdain might have softened. As I had spent many a night following our last interaction wondering what else I could have done to help him, I also consoled myself by remembering that I had reached out, I had given him a chance, and he slammed the door. In this moment, however, when he asked me about Baudrillard, my contempt for him emerged with force. Any compassion that I had conjured during the past year was instantly flung out the window. "Max, do you enjoy

antagonizing people?” I barked. “I mean, you’re a well-read guy. That’s great for you. But not all of us are interested in the same things.” I must have gone on for at least another minute, trying to justify my scorn with something that resembled an insight or a lesson for him. To his credit, Max never budged, remaining on the desk next to me, listening to me rant about his foibles with what looked like an air of interest.

After I finished my diatribe, Max simply stood up and began to walk toward the door. Without facing me directly, he nodded to his side as if to suggest that he’d heard me, and then quipped “Yea, I do that to people. I guess I thought you could take it.” *What? He thought I could take it! Did he just throw down a challenge to me? Or, did he just tell me that I’m a wimp? Take a deep breath.* As he swaggered out the door I noticed that he was heading back toward the office of my colleague, whom I knew hadn’t yet returned, and for a moment I sat back in my chair, stared at the wall in front of me and thought, *This is crazy. He’s not a bad kid. What’s wrong with me?*

Jean Baudrillard (1988) once wrote, “It is always the same: once you are liberated, you are forced to ask who you are” (p. 46). Before I even realized what words were coming out of my mouth I was shouting, “Max, come back in here when you’re finished!” He did, and I proceeded to talk to him about how I was feeling intimidated by him; how I had felt intimidated by him in our classroom. I refrained from making any suggestions about his behavior, or surmising interpretations about what motivated him, and focused solely on my experience of him. I shared that I thought I was supposed to know everything about sociology, “So, when you asked if I had read someone that was unfamiliar to me it was easier to blow you off than to admit that I hadn’t read Baudrillard.” “I was an asshole toward you, Max,” I said bluntly. “And, I’m sorry for that.”

Max gave me some insight that afternoon into his life, telling me a bit about his family and how much he was struggling to figure out his major. He talked about his love of French literature, and his desire to go to France someday. He had aspirations of creating an independent study with the professor he was trying to locate that day—a project that never came to fruition for Max because that professor refused to work with him. And, he admitted that he could be “brash sometimes.” “I just have a lot to say, and people need to hear it,” he insisted. I listened, and offered ideas only when solicited. *This kid just needs to be seen. He does have a lot to say. And, he seems genuinely concerned about others.*

Later, after Max left my office I pulled out a large yellow legal pad and began writing a letter to one of my old mentors. “I have to tell someone,” I wrote, “about this amazing kid; this horrifyingly intelligent student with whom I feel like I just experienced a break-through.” I went on to explain Max’s and my interactions, both earlier during our class, and our most recent in my office. I mused about how I had previously treated him, writing “I tried to reach out to him, I tried to offer my assistance.” And then I admitted, “But what offer did I really make to him? I didn’t want to help him, not alone anyway. And, certainly, I imagine now that he knew that.” I also wrote about what I hoped for Max, and what I was learning about myself. “He’s touched me and I want to believe that I have touched him,” I pondered. “I feel like I just released something; like a huge load has been lifted.” And, I felt liberated.

### **4.2.3 Reflections on Disdain and Presence**

Freire (1973/1990) notes that a “Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression” (p. 36). Initially,

though at the time I convinced myself otherwise, I really did not offer anything to Ling or Max beyond my own authoritarian ambition. I set myself up, as some of my own teachers had, as the expert, the knower, the one with the power to decide what would happen next for both of them. Thinking of myself as actually offering them any real choices in our initial situations is in Freire's estimation "false charity" (p. 27). I listened to them, and offered my insights, thinking that my active listening mixed with some compassion for their respective situations and choices was enough to absolve me of any responsibility beyond my own egoistic interests. Later however, I did apprehend and engage in different ways of being. Though I never knew what happened to Ling, I certainly learned something important about the power I may have wielded in her life after Jenny declared to me that failing my course would mean that she would have to return to China "in shame."

With Max I was fortunate, lucky enough to seize an opportunity to be different with him. Perhaps acknowledging that my own behavior "is ridiculous," that my animosity toward him was something much bigger and much deeper than anything he presented to me himself, I was somehow able to be present with him. I acknowledged how I had and was continuing to experience him, relaying perhaps, my own vulnerability; my susceptibility to my own defensiveness in the face of feeling intimidated and inferior. I did not sit back passively in either situation. Like my mentor Michael had done with me, I chose instead to be curious, exploring *with* Jenny and Max how they might help me to co-create whatever solution we needed to *be-and-become-whole* in relationship to one another.

Though I did not denigrate Ling's or Max's character outright, or demean them in overt ways, I certainly positioned myself as superior to them, using my power as the teacher in our relationships to control our interactions, and to impose unreflected expectations on them, all in



the name of a skewed sense of generosity. I truly did want for them to enact their own agency in our respective situations, and yet, I decided what that agency was supposed to look like. For Ling, it was all about teaching her a lesson regarding rules and regulations, regardless of the consequences that she may have endured. For Max, I simply wanted for him to shut up in my class.

On the other hand, William Eldridge (1991), the mentor to whom I wrote on that largish yellow legal pad above, reflecting on maturity, suggests

Any relationship from the past, whether reviewed positively or negatively, at least exemplified the courageous act of overcoming all or some portion of fear of rejection, and offered all or some portion of a trusting self; contained within the preliminary act of reaching out to someone else. This proactive expenditure of energy can be seen as a monumental thrust involving the explicit communication of love and caring, along with implicit articulation of the worth of another human being.” (p. 7)

Eldridge echoes something of the process of Rogers’ (1961) “getting behind the mask” in his discussion of the process of becoming wherein the individual engaging this process “begins to drop the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles with which he has faced life” (pp. 108-109). Max’s and my interaction one year later signified a loosening for me of the bindings that had been holding my beliefs about myself as a teacher, and students as learners, in place. Our discussion opened up a new and interestingly more congruent way of being for me, with Max, and (at least it was my hope at the time) with other students I had or would anticipate experiencing similarly. I had reached out, and found that he wasn’t a “know-it-all.” He was a very bright student, with very little direction; a passionate learner whose ways of interacting with people could be off-putting. He was also struggling to be seen and heard. In this sense, it seems

that Max was defending against his own anxiety and fear, putting up his own false front to protect himself from others' admonitions and disregard. And in response, I held forth my false front, strengthening perhaps my own "know-it-allness." For I was the teacher who believed that I needed to know, or at least needed to be able to convince others that I did know, all that there was to know about my charge.

As for Jenny, the beneficiary of my looking backward and surmising what may have happened to Ling, I was supported by my mentor to both rant about and reflect on what was taking place in our relationship. I, perhaps like I had with Ling and Max, interpreted Jenny's actions as being committed against me; something personal she was doing to me. Perhaps wearing what I have since come to identify as an "egoistic mask," I reacted to Jenny's plagiarism with a vigor that both stunned and paralyzed me. And, I was fortunate to have had someone who would listen to my rage; who could hold my anxiety and then reconfigure the situation in such a way as to both honor and challenge what was happening without colluding with or denigrating me. Michael's "proactive expenditure of energy," *his* presence, helped me to refocus my own energy on Jenny's worth, and ultimately on my enaction of presence to her learning with love and caring.

Whatever the case for Ling, Jenny and Max, I assume that we were all left vulnerable and exposed in ways that were initially reinforcing of old and perhaps inauthentic ways of being with people in similar positions. We were *thrown* into situations that triggered our defenses, manifesting our respective anxieties about our *unfinishedness* and the ambiguity of our existence together, as well as the possibilities that we were each determined to contain.

My experience with Max specifically offers me a particular and compelling opportunity for considering our mutual intersubjectivity in a way that has not been immediately available to

me in other moments along my educational journey. I reacted to what I identified as Max's antagonism by dismissing him, perceiving him as inferior to me. And he responded to my disdain by first throwing it all right back in my face, and then eventually walking away. Max reacted in the exact opposite manner that I had during some of my earlier educational experiences, specifically with Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden. Where he walked away, I had submitted; where he challenged me, I had remained silent and small. One might suggest that in those moments each of us employed tactics and behaviors that had become familiar to us in our *thrownness* in previous situations. Our ways of *being-in-the-world* prior to our interactions with one another had set us up to respond to each other in ways that were familiar, safe and perhaps inauthentic. However, we had also been primed in some way to apprehend alternative possibilities. Initially, we did what I presume we had always done, reacting to one another in ways that protected us from having to consider and perhaps cope with and manage our own fears, vulnerabilities and anxieties differently. We denied what one another was offering. And yet, eventually, we came together, locating new and different ways of being with one another; identifying our fears, vulnerabilities and anxieties; sharing them; and exhibiting *presence* for and with one another. Perhaps in the end, we were all liberated.

### **4.3 MOMENT III: EXPOSED AS A TEACHER**

I arrived on Mount Rainier with a fair amount of experience in outdoor adventures. I had grown up playing in and exploring the Allegheny Mountains and various waterways of northwestern and southwestern Pennsylvania. I was a participant on an Outward Bound multi-element excursion in Big Bend National Park, which included paddling the Rio Grande, backpacking

through the Chihuahuan Desert, trekking into the Chisos Mountains, and ultimately summiting Mount Emory. And, I had worked as an outdoor education instructor facilitating teenage and adult groups on both low and high ropes courses, as well as teaching them how to rock climb, orienteer, backpack, and kayak. I didn't arrive on the mountain believing that I was an expert of any sort, though I certainly did imagine that my experience would be helpful to me. Maybe I made some assumptions based on my experience about what I could expect from the people and the journey.

For example, as a rock climbing instructor I prided myself on paying attention to the whole climber. I was not a proponent of the oft cited assumption of many of my male counterparts, that rock climbing was a purely physical exercise, and about "powering one's self to the top." Instead, I believed that rock climbing was about playing with and experiencing patience and grace. It was a physical activity that posed innumerable opportunities for *being-with* one's self and one's world emotionally and spiritually. Greta Gaard (2007) asks, "Why does anyone climb?" And in response she proposes,

Many of us climb as a way of learning how to move with fear instead of becoming paralyzed by it. Risk, the tension between fear and desire, is at the crux of climbing; in order to fulfill your desire to move on the rock, you have to move through fear and let go of safety; you have to release your current holds in order to find new ones. (p. 93)

Thus, rock climbing was metaphoric for me, a literal and figurative endeavor laden with possibilities for grappling with and understanding ones struggles and potential beyond the rock.

In order for the metaphor to be useful and relevant, however, I believed that the experience had to touch climbers not only physically, but psychically as well. Certainly, I believed that I was responsible for teaching students the mechanics of climbing rocks safely.

And, I never led them to believe that such a feat was easy or without challenge. However, I did not believe that conveying the mechanics and physical demands of climbing was my only purpose. Instead, I believed that a significant part of my role as an instructor was to help those students who were open to and/or interested in exploring deeper struggles and personal potential, making broader connections between what they were experiencing on the rock, and what they might be experiencing in their lives. It wasn't a popular interpretation among my peers, but I'd found it immensely helpful with many of my students. *They* seemed to appreciate my patience with them when they were paralyzed by their fear, and yet desired to continue; *they* seemed to get that my only expectation was that they challenge themselves, whatever that meant for them, not that they power their way to the top or fail. Perhaps this is why I "took a breath, relaxed in my harness, and looked for my next move" when I felt exhausted only ten feet above the ground on the icefall. I became the student that I had so many times before sought to create as a teacher, and I assumed that my belayer had my back no matter what.

Recalling my experience with Jeremy and his bellows accusing me of not knowing how to ice climb, I have wondered about how he interpreted his charge; how he made sense of the work he was doing as a belayer of novice ice climbers. Ice climbing is not a necessary component of climbing Mount Rainier. Many people have climbed and summited that mountain without ever throwing a pick into an icefall. As well, though there are numerous climbers and mountaineers who ascend Rainier, our group of climbers was comprised of people who paid to participate in the "JanSport Mt. Rainier Dealer Seminar." Perhaps to Jeremy we were not really multidimensional human beings, but rather consumers buying a product. Perhaps as a paid employee working with paying clients, Jeremy perceived his role and the event for which we were all gathered as simply another day at work wherein his job was simply to explain the

techniques of ice climbing and belay those who could perform those techniques with the greatest ease.

As I have further reflected on that day on the icefall, it's curious to me that while waiting to climb, listening to Jeremy admonish some of the other women on our climb, I was not more keenly aware of his varied expectations for and behavior toward men and women. At the time, though I heard his rebuke, I did not experience it as particularly anxiety-provoking for or denigrating of me as a woman. Instead, I remained more focused on the other climbers, watching their grace and climbing prowess with both admiration and agitation. Gender was not necessarily an issue for me, though clearly it was one for him.

Remembering Jeremy's chides in this context has uncovered a deeply troubling intolerance of my own, and a curiosity about my inconsistent ideas regarding learning in the college classroom. In other words, as I have become more curious about Jeremy's motivations and sense of superiority, as well as the teachers to whom I refer in my stories above, I have become equally attuned to some of my own motivations and sense of superiority over students in my classrooms. I began teaching college after moving to Pennsylvania, and realizing that working seasonal positions as an outdoor education instructor in different parts of the country was no longer a desirable option. And, as I've already written, I entered the college classroom believing students to be naïve and inexperienced, empty vessels needing to be filled with universal truths by knowing others.

It's interesting to me that once I walked into a room with four walls and neatly organized desks, my ideas about teaching and learning changed significantly. Unlike I had as an outdoor education instructor, I seemed to have initially interpreted my charge in the college classroom as geared toward imparting the mechanics of learning particular subjects in particular ways. As

well, like some of my earlier teachers and perhaps Jeremy, I believed that those students who weren't able to receive and engage my lessons were somehow deficient. As a result, I have come to realize that my earlier assumptions about more formal teaching contexts certainly personified a naiveté and prejudice about teaching and learning that had the potential to be far more dangerous than any inexperience or immaturity my students may have exhibited. In addition, it seems that those earlier assumptions mirrored Jeremy's approach in what I now consider particularly harrowing ways.

Though I have resisted viewing myself as an employee with a specific task to accomplish, I have certainly struggled with discerning between the kinds of knowledge I have believed were more legitimate to grapple with and discuss in the classroom. For example, I have long struggled with issues concerning religion. Specifically, I have wrestled with moments in the classroom wherein I have felt that I or some other student was being dictated to and judged as a "sinner." Similarly, though I identify as queer, I have struggled outright with addressing GLBTQA issues in the classroom.

Chapters in my own back-story are full of judgments, grounded by particular religious views, made against me, my partner, familial allies and other community members, both known and unknown to me. Some of my own family members, people with whom I have shared a long history of closeness and understanding, have chosen to discontinue their relationships with me and those who have supported me because they believe that I am "living in sin" and "not fit to be around my kids." Quoting particular biblical verses, or simply repeating the unreflective messages of others, these individuals have chosen to construct barriers, obstacles that have ultimately inhibited my participation in their and their children's lives. I assume today that their

decisions were made as a result of some sort of fear; their prejudice, I imagine, maintained to shield them from naming or addressing that fear.

In this final section of my stories exposed, this last encampment along the route of my inquiry, I venture into the territory of my being “exposed as a teacher.” In “Straight to Hell” I explore the consequences of my own prejudice toward what I once perceived to be religious fervor against GLBTQA people. I delve into how my own vehemence in one particular situation stifled any possibility for understanding and consilience with a student whom I assumed had never been supported or compelled to consider other possibilities for living than the one she had been socialized to believe. And, I entertain some of the superficial rewards that may have been garnered by my students and myself as a result of my unreflective attempts to rescue a group (or, perhaps in actuality, myself) from further disparagement.

Later, in “The Dialogic Commons” I explore another educational moment wherein I am granted the opportunity to rectify my earlier missteps. The experience is not an extension of my story with one student. However, it does illustrate the importance of looking backward, of remembering one’s past for the purpose of reclaiming one’s integrity in the present. Our missteps as teachers are ultimately archives we will always carry forth. However, we are not eternally doomed to repeat or bear the weight of their consequences.

#### **4.3.1 Straight to Hell**

*Second year of teaching college students, first day of class...this is a new place...I hope these students are as good as the ones at SSC...Social Psychology...this should be a lot of fun.*  
*(Personal journal, 2000)*



It had been a fairly interesting semester. Students at Albert Gallatin University were bright and eager. Our class was larger than I was used to with thirty-two students. However, things seemed to be going smoothly. I felt like the students respected me, and I liked them well enough. I'd structured the physical space of our class in a circle to reflect and demonstrate the reciprocal and justice-oriented nature of the class. I wanted everyone to feel both included and invested in our academic deliberations. Initially some students were troubled that they would always feel like they had to say something in the group, however, I felt confident that the class had worked through those anxieties. Some students certainly spoke more than others. And, some of the students who were initially reticent, seemed to have found ways to participate without having to say something "in every single class."

Then came the day we were to discuss sexuality issues, and my impressions of my students, as well as what I imagined they thought of me, were turned upside down. As soon as everyone was seated and poised to begin class, Cathy started things off by stating boldly "I am a Christian, and I just don't understand why we are even talking about this issue." Immediately my defenses surfaced and I angrily snapped, "We're talking about this, Cathy, because it is the next chapter in the book, and," I emphasized loudly, "because it is an important social justice issue in our culture." Cathy tended to be one of the more outspoken students in class. She loudly voiced her opinions about what was "right" and "wrong" in just about every class, and rarely strayed from her own worldview, illustrating to me both her inability to hear others, and her tendency for proselytizing. I had struggled most of the semester to temper Cathy's outbursts, sometimes trying to challenge her ideas with curiosity, and more often turning to other students for their ideas on whatever subject we were covering. Most of the time the other students

complied with what I imagine looked like desperate attempts on my part to move the discussion along. On this day, however, at least initially, Cathy was the only student with a voice.

Following my retort, and without missing a step, Cathy pounced. Shooting straight up to the edge of her seat, and pointing her index finger directly at me, she stridently professed, “In my church we understand that people sin. And, we are told that *those* people will go directly to hell. I can’t talk about this because I don’t want to go to Hell!” I replied by asking her to clarify what she meant by “I can’t talk about this because I don’t want to go to hell.” Clearly irritated, Cathy blurted, “You clearly don’t get it. In my church we’re all told that we will be some of the few who will go to Heaven,” and then flippantly added, “unless we commit one of the ultimate sins.” Again I queried for clarification. Though I’d been subjected to what I had come to understand as certain kinds of religious dogma in my past, I was admittedly ignorant about the tenets of a religion that professed to house the few that were destined for Heaven. My queries, I believed were sincere (or, perhaps I wanted others to believe that they were), though admittedly, I was becoming unnerved.

After going around in what felt to me like circles, I asked rather innocently, or so I thought, “Cathy, I wonder if it matters to you that there are people in this room right now who might have some problems with what you are suggesting about GLBTQA people?” Perhaps I should have asked my questions in a more open-ended manner. Perhaps, I was trying to stick it to her in some way. And, being more perceptive than I gave her credit for, perhaps Cathy realized what I was doing. Still, the rancor with which she replied to me was both violent and devastating: “People who sleep with people of the same sex are devils! And, they deserve anything they get! There is *nothing* you or anybody else can say that will make me care about where they end up!” And, that’s when I *lost it!*

I don't remember many of the words that came out of my mouth, but I do clearly remember that in that moment I detested Cathy. I had no sense of who I was in that room; no connection with my role as a facilitator, a questioner, or a deliberator. Cathy had attacked, and I went on the defensive. "You know, people like you really make me sad," I sniped while trembling with agitation. I went on to chide her for being a hypocrite, pointing out that "in my world Christianity is about the practice of love and acceptance, not about spreading fear and hatred." I told her that she was being handed "a load of crap in that church of yours," and that "there is no room in this class for closed-minded, fear mongering attacks!" At that, without hesitating, Cathy bent over in her seat, shoved all of her books into her bag, stood up and warned "Anyone who sits here and takes this is going *STRAIGHT TO HELL!*"

As Cathy darted out of the room I remained seated. I didn't move. I *couldn't* move. I didn't know what to say, and in truth, I did not *want* to say anything. I was so angry, hurt, and confused. And, I was relieved that she was gone. So, when Mark spoke up only a few seconds later and pointedly asked "Shouldn't you go after her?" I felt demoralized. "Go after her?" I retorted with a gasp. "And, do what?" Now I was livid, even further paralyzed, and not quite sure what to do next.

The rest of the class sat in silence while I tried to pull myself together. Sweating and shaking, I struggled to remain in my own chair, thinking *I could just walk out myself. Who cares what anyone would think. I don't have to take this!* And then Mark tentatively spoke up again. This time with compassion in his voice he remarked, "She's really mad." "And, this isn't the first time she's lost it in a class," offered another student. Other students went on to talk about their experiences with Cathy affirming that "she is a hot head," "she seems to talk about things she knows nothing about," and "I hate sitting next to her because you never know if she's going

to turn on you.” As they spoke I could feel my body relaxing, and I felt vindicated. These students were confirming things about Cathy that I had both heard from other faculty members, and suspected given some of my own experiences with her. *Yea, she is a hot head. She’s clearly not interested in learning. She’s only here to get a degree.* More significantly however, these students, whether knowingly or not, were offering me a kind of affirmation for my own poor behavior. They were throwing me a lifeline, and, I took it.

Eventually, though with little time left in class, we did delve into discussing issues concerning sexual orientation, leaving the experience with Cathy behind us. Various students shared their ideas and experiences with close friends or family members who were gay or lesbian. And others asked questions like “how does one *become* gay?” and “how do gay and lesbian people come out to their families?” There were a number of students who said nothing, several of whom were generally talkative in other classes. They at least looked attentive in the circle. And since I was feeling pretty drained and relatively inattentive myself, I chose to believe that their silence was a result of either having nothing to say about the issue, or agreement with what had already been offered. For my part, I continued to sit in the circle with a pit in my stomach. Not because I was concerned about Cathy, or any other student. Instead, I was busy consoling myself. I’d felt like Cathy had attacked me, like she had attacked my person, and anyone I had ever known who was queer. And, though there was no reason for me to continue to feel defensive or angry—no other student was challenging the legitimacy of our dialogue, or making rigid, judgmental claims about the issue—I continued to sit in a stew.

Cathy did not return to class that day, however she did come back the following week. We never discussed what had happened. I never approached her, or tried to understand where she was coming from. She never offered an apology or explanation. And, I was quite frankly

unconcerned about how she was doing. I simply let things go, and proceeded to get through the rest of the semester without any further controversy. Certainly, her demeanor remained the same—she had a strong opinion about everything we were discussing. My reactions to her however, had become numb and apathetic. I didn't care about what she had to say, or query into additional assumptions and stereotypes she was making about other groups of minorities. Instead, I continued to rely on other students to move the topic forward or change the subject. I had clearly checked out on her, no longer interested in trying to teach her, or learn from her.

#### **4.3.1.1 Reflections on Disdain**

Freire (1998) acknowledges “As a teacher, I cannot help the students to overcome their ignorance if I am not engaged permanently in trying to overcome my own” (p. 89). He goes on to speculate that “The respect that we as teachers owe to our students will not be easy to sustain in the absence of the dignity and the respect due to us on the part of public or private...authorities” (p. 89). There is no way for me to dismiss my abhorrent behavior toward Cathy, for as Freire also suggests, “I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am” (p. 87). I was a jerk toward Cathy. Regardless of her own demeanor, I was unable to hold my own prejudice in check; unable to slow down and think about what might be motivating me or her in the moment. When she attacked, I retaliated. Where she was condemning, I was downright mean. I made our interaction personal in a particularly violent and exploitive way. I not only left Cathy hanging that day, I dropped and disconnected myself from her belay altogether. And, in the end, I imagine that we both fell.

Sharon Todd (2003) proposes in *Learning from the Other* that “social justice education has been and continues to be marked by a moral concern with those who have been ‘Othered’

and marginalized through discriminatory relations that are seen as violent, both in symbolic and material terms” (p. 1). She goes on to confer that

*Feelings* of guilt, love, and empathy, to name but a few, powerfully work their way in and through pedagogical encounters, and they do so not via conscious intent or purpose but in startling and unsettling ways that, in turn, fashion one’s engagement with the Other. Thus, one’s capacity for response is shaped by factors that often lie outside one’s control. (p. 4)

My response to Cathy certainly emerged from a place outside of my control. And, I am not convinced that the feelings I was experiencing, or that Cathy was expressing, were anything close to “guilt, love, or empathy.” They did emerge in “startling and unsettling ways,” however my motivation in that moment had nothing to do with being “pedagogical.” Instead, I was motivated by my own feelings of defensiveness, fear, and despair, disregarding, and perhaps even seeking to obliterate, Cathy’s sense of self, community and place. In response to her *thrownness*, Cathy resisted me and the material, enacting and articulating what I imagine today was great fear and anxiety. And, rather than hearing and holding her fear and anxiety, rather than nudging and supporting her to delve more deeply into her own *unfinishedness*, I allowed my fear and anxiety to surface and dominate our interaction.

Todd later contends that exacting violence is unavoidable in justice-oriented education, emphasizing that for her the focus must be

on the inevitable external force that has the power to subject, that compels us to learn and become. In this sense, education, by its very socializing function and by its mission to change how people think and relate to the world, enacts a violence that is necessary to the formation of the subject (this is, after all, what is meant by “formation”). (p. 20)

Todd also confirms that

violence is a necessary condition of subjectivity. Thus the question is not so much whether education wounds or not through its impulse to socialize, but whether it wounds excessively and how we (as teachers) might open ourselves to less violent possibilities in our pedagogical encounters. (p. 20)

I believe that I wielded particularly excessive violence upon Cathy; the kind of violence that Jeremy and some of my own family members had exerted on me; the kind of violence that Dr. McFaden had exacted; a fount of violence that was perhaps waiting to be tapped. I had spent a long time pushing away my own fears and anxieties about the dilemmas I was living regarding religion and sexuality. In this effort, I had perhaps adopted various false faces, constructing and reconstructing masks that would ultimately aid in helping me to avoid the power and intensity of what I was contending with and feeling in my own *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*. Thus, Cathy's words and behavior unleashed something quite deep for me, forcing me to come face-to-face with my own capacity for malevolence.

In this way, my experience with Cathy opened a door to an important opportunity for me. Freire (1998) writes

Recognizing that precisely because we are constantly in the process of becoming, and, therefore, are capable of observing, comparing, evaluating, choosing, deciding, intervening, breaking with, and making options, we are ethical beings, capable of transgressing our ethical grounding. However, though transgression of this grounding exists as a possibility, we can never claim transgression as a right. (p. 92)

Though perhaps an inevitable component of justice-oriented education, exacting excessive violence upon students in the name of bringing about change is irresponsible at best, and

ethically unconscionable at worst. As I had earlier walked with a false face of confidence regarding my address of justice-oriented issues in the classroom, believing that students with the kind of fear-based attitudes as Cathy had exhibited simply needed to be corrected, I became complicit in what Freire identifies as a “perverse system,” justifying the damage I inflicted as both necessary and deserving (p. 92). And yet, clearly, my motivations did not emerge from a desire to help Cathy learn something valuable about herself and the world in which we both dwelled. My motivations were spiteful, not instructive.

Reflecting on my motivations, and providing myself with an opportunity to learn from the experience now helps to relieve me of some of the burden I have carried regarding my treatment of Cathy, and other students like her. Certainly, again, I am now aware of my capacity for malevolence. And, more importantly, I am now aware that naming and honoring that capacity, as abhorrent as I might believe it to be, is a necessary part of my own subjective formation. “The subjectivity with which I dialectically relate to the world,” Freire suggests, “is not restricted to a process of only observing what happens but it also involves my intervention as a subject of what happens in the world” (pp. 72-73). He goes on to confer, “My role in the world is not simply that of someone who registers what occurs but of someone who has an input into what happens” (p. 73). Admittedly, I’d like to believe that my intentions and interventions in the classroom are always humble, noble and good. And, even if I believe that that is the case, and move forward to enact those intentions and interventions, I am constantly influenced by my own biography. Thus, if I had not encountered Cathy in the poignant and powerful way that I did, I may not have enjoyed the opportunity to be prepared for the event that took place in the dialogic commons of my Social Foundations of Education three years later.



### 4.3.2 The Dialogic Commons

Following a student panel presentation by our campus' Rainbow Alliance in which panel members addressed various issues and inequities associated with the GLBTQA community and public education, I invited my Social Foundations of Education students to write on index cards (unsigned) their initial reactions to and questions regarding the panel's presentation and the readings assigned for the day. After students recorded their thoughts and questions, I requested that they put their cards in a basket. Shuffling the cards myself, I then directed each student to take one and read aloud the thoughts and questions that were posed by their classmates. After all of the index cards were retrieved and read, I finally invited students to identify and interact with the most provocative questions or ideas raised. Without pause a few students jumped right into discussing the influence that certain religious beliefs had had on addressing GLBTQA issues in public education.

One student began "I just don't get what the big deal is. We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why can't religious people just get off of their high horse?" Another student quickly followed, "Yea, what's up with them? Why do they have such a big problem with gays and lesbians?" This student continued asking "And why are they so afraid of sex? You know that all of them are having it." I was feeling incredibly uncomfortable with the way that the conversation was going, experiencing students' comments as judgmental and evaluative. However, given that we were two-thirds of the way into the semester, I thought it best to continue to sit back and *hope* that another student would address the tenor of the comments that were being made. I had set up our classroom early in the semester to be a "dialogic commons," a place wherein students might enjoy Garman's (2007) "authentic deliberative dialogue" (p. 1), again, questioning the traditional authorities that students believed structured education in the United States. To this end, I'd spent

a great deal of time throughout the first third of the semester attending to students' understandings and experiences of dialogic interaction, discomfort and critical thinking by encouraging and supporting them, for example, to slow down and listen to one another differently during our discussions, and calling attention to particular moments when I suspected that emotional upheavals were rumbling and possibly being stifled by various dynamics playing out in our classroom.

Though I remained patient during this discussion for about ten minutes, it was clear that students were going to persist with the same evaluative and judgmental line of inquiry. So I interceded, stating plainly that I was “uncomfortable with the way this conversation seems to be going.” I observed that several members of our group were particularly quiet, and shared, “I have no illusions that the people who are not speaking agree with every sentiment that is being expressed.” I continued stating that though I didn't expect the silent students to “out” themselves and their ideas, I was concerned that we were not engaging in a particularly useful dialogue, that I suspected that there were indeed emotional rumblings taking place, and that I wondered how we might reconsider some of the comments that had already been made. “What are some of the cultural roots of these comments?” I asked. “Whose interests do they represent?” “And, how might we critically examine their influence on our development of alternative, and possibly more compassionate, stories?” Ultimately, students—at least the ones who had already been talking—seemed open to acknowledging that some of their comments were pointed and judgmental, and from my vantage point, willing to consider the history, influence and consequences of their ideas. In my estimation, our dialogue had become more critical and compassionate; our process more congruent with the tenets and guidelines of the dialogic commons we had worked so hard to establish.

Later that same week, I received a “reflection paper” from one of the students who is generally very quiet, and was particularly so during the class described above. I waited until I got home to read Veronica’s paper as I was rushing out of class when she casually handed it to me. After throwing my bags on the floor and finding a comfortable place in my home office to carefully read her thoughts, I was stunned to find that during the previous class wherein we had been discussing GLBTQA issues in public education she “felt bombarded.” Identifying specific comments that were made by other students, and conveying how “shut down” and “exposed” she felt as “a practicing Catholic woman,” Veronica was very clear about the intensity of her feelings. As she pointed to the panel that took place before this class, remembering how the three students on that panel said that they “struggle with feeling judged everyday of their lives,” Veronica commiserated writing “I sat there just as a gay person might’ve sat there if the group was bashing his sexuality.” She went on to suggest that I might be disingenuous in my support for a dialogic atmosphere,” wherein “everybody is supposed to be listened to.” And, she ended her letter stating “I felt like shit and I felt I couldn’t say anything in fear of everyone ganging up on me.”

After sitting with her letter, admittedly stunned, confused and feeling both guilty and even a bit defensive, I began to reflect on how I thought the class had gone. I noted that the tone of the first half of the class was indeed judgmental and harsh. However, I thought that we had resolved that issue. I recollected that the class (at least those who spoke) had turned itself around—admittedly, as a result of my intervention—and had engaged the rest of our dialogue with tact and a critical eye. Certainly I was distraught after reading Veronica’s reflection. I was most concerned however, with how I might respond to and honor Veronica’s experience, as well as brainstorm with her how we might address the issue with the whole class. If one student left

that class feeling “like shit,” I surmised that there were probably other students who felt similarly. And so I sent Veronica an e-mail.

*Dear Veronica:*

*I just got home and read over your reflection concerning Monday’s class. First and foremost, thank you. Thank you for your courage and willingness to write your reflection paper and share it with me. Your feedback is incredibly important to me, and I think very important and relevant to the kind of classroom atmosphere that we have been working to create. Clearly, given your thoughts, we have some further work to do; I have some further work to do.*

*With that, I feel it is very important that we address your concerns in class. Though, certainly I would NOT expect you to initiate this conversation, I do want to bring it up and share some of the things you wrote with the class, OF COURSE, without identifying you, or anyone else. I imagine that in truth, your experience mirrors that of at least one other student in the class. And even if that’s not the case, your individual discomfort and inability to feel heard certainly warrants my and our class addressing how to make sure that that does NOT happen again.*

*Your experience is one that I think many educators grapple with. Given that you were courageous enough to record your experience and share it, verifies for me that attending to your concerns as a whole class would be very important.*

*I’m wondering what you think about all of this, and how you would prefer we proceed? Can you imagine what you would like to have happen? Certainly, again, if we go forward with exploring this in class, I would NOT identify you. Rather, I would leave it up to you to decide whether or not you wanted to speak about your personal*

*experience. Also, if you would like to discuss this further with just me, I am more than happy to make time to do that.*

*Again, thank you so much for taking the time to write your reflection, and exhibiting such tremendous courage here. I am truly sorry that you didn't feel heard or supported. And, I hope that together we can address your concerns in a way that would be beneficial to all of us in the class (Personal communication, March 19, 2008).*

Veronica quickly responded to my e-mail confirming that she would indeed like to meet with me and discuss how we might proceed: "I am nervous, though. I don't want to offend anyone, but I do want to talk with you about what happened." I could feel old tugs to rescue Veronica in this situation. I didn't want her to feel nervous or worry about offending anyone. *She was offended. Why worry about how she comes across to others?* However, I also wondered if I had positioned myself in the situation in a way that stifled Veronica's self-efficacy and responsibility. As I suggested that I would like to bring this up to the class without naming her, I wondered if a more congruent approach would have been to support her to bring up the issue herself. As she felt squelched and silenced in our class, I was concerned that my taking over and addressing the situation *for* her might ultimately be just another act of squelching and silencing her.

By the time we met I had decided that I would not step in and rescue Veronica by imposing a particular protocol for addressing the issue. I wanted to support her in her discomfort, and perhaps, continue to sit with my own. And, I imagined that brainstorming with her about how *she* might broach the issue with our class held the most promise for enacting a just and deliberately dialogic response, one that honored her struggle, rather than one that saved her from feeling anything at all.

Initially, and understandably, Veronica was tentative. As we went over the incident together, sharing our different experiences, it became clear to me that Veronica shut down and retreated into herself in class after several judgmental comments had been made. She didn't remember the process that we engaged during the remainder of that class: "Hmmm, I don't remember that part." She did recall my stating that I was uncomfortable with the way the discussion had been going, and shared that she wished in retrospect that "I had followed your comment with how I was also feeling uncomfortable." "I just couldn't bring myself to say anything," she admitted. "I was so angry, and hurt, and just didn't know what to say without breaking down." She continued, "I know that I can get emotional, and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get the *right* words out to explain myself."

I affirmed and supported Veronica, reiterating how much it meant to me to hear her words now, and suggested that we consider how she might voice her concerns with her peers. Veronica was willing to raise her concerns with the class, and she remained cautious about how some of her peers might receive her. Specifically, she expressed being concerned that one particular student, Ashley, "who intimidates me" would "pounce" on her. I assured her that I would be willing to step in if I thought, or if she signaled to me, that she was feeling unheard or attacked. Again, internally, I struggled with whether or not I might be rescuing Veronica or the rest of the class from the struggle I anticipated would take place. Ultimately, however, we agreed to trust the process we were about to engage and simply "see what happens."

Eventually, after a few additional email exchanges following our meeting, Veronica had constructed a way to revisit her experiences of our earlier discussion with the larger class. Against the backdrop of our class' discussion of Daniel Quinn's (1992) book, *Ishmael* and "the ecological commons," Veronica initiated a conversation with her peers about the space in our

classroom, raising such questions as “who has the right to claim space in the dialogic commons?” and “how do we make sure that everyone has space in the classroom when some students clearly have more to say than others?” Though uncomfortable and time-consuming, the class seemed to engage Veronica’s queries in a way that felt, according to her and other students, “more authentic,” “more genuine,” and “truly educational.” For my part, I was forthright about my discomfort, admitting that I walked away from our previous class believing that we had explored and resolved the conflict. I went on to share that I was both surprised and grateful to learn that indeed I had completely missed some students’ experiences. I talked briefly about the intellectual intentions of the dialogic classroom and transformative learning, as well as the existential dilemma that I held as the instructor between describing the expectations of integral learning approaches and fostering alongside students the actual living of those expectations in the class.

#### **4.3.2.1 Reflections on Presence**

As part of an Instructional Team of facilitators for the undergraduate Social Foundations in Education classes, I had been committed to stimulating and supporting a classroom atmosphere that underscored interconnectedness between students and instructors, and surveyed liberatory change for individual learners and educational communities through the lens of a justice-oriented pedagogy. Specifically, through dialogic engagement with a critical perspective (Garman, 2007, pp. 2-4) our team imagined for students and instructors “an authentic deliberative dialogue where class members advance each other’s thinking” (p. 1), questioning the traditional authorities, both seen and assumed, that we identified as driving and defining education in the United States, and construing alternatives to “the ways things have always been done.” As I had found over the years, however, echoing the findings of the Grinnell College study (Trosset, 1998) and Ira Shor’s

(1996) dynamic appraisal of *sharing power* with his students, though such deliberative dialogues about topics like justice, democracy, power dynamics, and the negotiation of the norms and rules for behavior, production and assessment in the classroom were certainly an “important part of the learning process” (Trosset, 1998, p. 44), often these “controversial issues” and attempts at investigating and connecting “the ideological with the personal” (Shor, 1996, p. xi) engendered discomfort in students and instructors, manifesting in the forms of anger, withdrawal, denial, despair, and a general unwillingness to risk voicing one’s ideas and questions.

Admittedly, as I have already suggested, I have struggled a great deal over the years with the critical, dialogic approach to exploring issues of justice and equity in the college classroom. As an undergraduate student, reading about the critical perspective and participating in dialogic processes in my own studies, I had often felt obliged to comply with what I experienced as subtle directives from authoritative voices in the classroom because it was the “right” political perspective for engaging issues of marginalization, exploitation, and oppression, or, because it was the “required” process for participation in the classroom. In addition, I had often felt that my participation was only considered legitimate if I engaged in scholarly debates with my peers about the theoretical material we were exploring, “knowing my place” and submitting, for example, when a more vigorous and perhaps well-informed peer “beat me down.” Finally, I had felt at times that any reservations I may have had about the lack of consistency I observed between the texts I was reading, the processes I was being expected to engage, and the people I was surrounded by were disregarded. There were clear expectations from many of my professors—some made explicit, others implied—that our project in the classroom was to be driven by rational, cognitively-oriented dialogism. Voicing my “emotionally-charged” concerns about the lack of consistency between what we were preaching and what we were practicing was



not an appropriate option for participation as it perhaps diminished the intellectual project at hand. Instead, I was to “think about,” “write about,” and “talk about” the issues, not agonize over them; instructed to conjure ideas about how to activate my lessons in the larger social sphere, not challenge the structure that had been laid before me in the classroom. And, as evidenced by my story above with Cathy, and even earlier with Ling, I carried some of those same expectations into my own college classrooms.

So, when Veronica challenged my sincerity regarding the critical, dialogic structure of our classroom experience, and alluded to her religious affiliation in her challenge of me, I was forced to recall moments when others had exerted control over me in similar kinds of classrooms, and, when *I* had exacted control on some of my own students in similar kinds of classrooms. I was compelled to wonder about whether or not I was in fact being disingenuous with my students when I asked them to comply with a particular way of critiquing the world that was not necessarily congruent with the ways I was asking them to engage one another or me in the classroom.

I realize of course, that creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere wherein instructors and students might not only grapple aloud with the complexities of their intellectual effort, but acknowledge and honor the emotional dimensions of everyone’s vulnerabilities as they arise in response to the ambiguity and rationality of critical examination can be a sticky and precarious endeavor for all. As I have written before, and, certainly in light of my experience with Cathy, considering ideas that challenge one’s taken-for-granted reality, that require reconsideration of the beliefs around which one has been socialized and that seek to reveal and change power differentials in one’s self and in the world does not come easily (Brooks, 2007; Brooks & Hulse, 2006). Beatty and Brew (2004) suggest in light of the emotional upheavals

that emerge for students and instructors in contested situations, “remaining silent about one’s inner authentic emotions [includes] fear of seeming to be out of control or stupid, fear of being ridiculed, fear of inviting crossing the boundaries and losing power in relationships” (p. 338). Certainly, this fear was not only one with which both Veronica and I grappled intellectually. We had been living our fears, one of us holding them back, and the other unleashing them in less than dignified ways.

Freire (1998) reflects,

In my relations with others, those who may not have made the same political, ethical, aesthetic, or pedagogical choices as myself, I cannot begin from the standpoint that I have to conquer them at any cost, or from the fear that they might conquer me. On the contrary, the basis of our encounter ought to be respect for the differences between us and an acknowledgement of the coherence between what I say and what I do. It is this openness to the world that I construct the inner security that is indispensable for that openness. It is impossible to live this openness to the world without inner security, just as it is impossible to have that security without taking the risk of being open. (p. 120)

Given the emotional tremors that often shudder through the foundation of students’ academic integrity and instructors’ good intentions in the justice-oriented classroom, I have come to feel strongly that it is my responsibility then to apprehend these “emotional tremors” *in* the classroom by exploring what it is that we are risking, how it is that we might mitigate one another’s sense of security, and what role discomfort, perhaps manifested as anger, withdrawal, denial, despair and the unwillingness to risk voicing ones ideas and questions, might play in the story that unfolds within our shared space of uncertainty. In this way I believe I am *being-and-becoming* more congruent in and with the ideals I had earlier believed as an outdoor education instructor.

I do continue to be haunted by my experience with Cathy, and my experience with Veronica has alleviated a great deal of the pain I used to associate with my memory of my behavior. Mary Oliver (1996) is particularly affirming however of my passage through these memories, as she reminds in her poem, "Wild Geese",

*You do not have to be good.*

*You do not have to walk on your knees*

*for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.*

*You only have to let the soft animal of your body*

*love what it loves.*

*Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.*

*Meanwhile the world goes on.*

*Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain*

*are moving across the landscapes,*

*over the prairies and the deep trees,*

*the mountains and the rivers.*

*Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,*

*are heading home again.*

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,*

*the world offers itself to your imagination,*

*calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting*

*over and over announcing your place*

*in the family of things. (p. 14)*

I no longer walk with the expectation that I must continue to repent for my earlier missteps and malice. Though I do believe in the necessity of vigilance and reflection, I am human, with faults and foibles, and I embody the capacity to harm others. “As a teacher with critical acumen,” reflects Freire (1998), “I do not cease to be a responsible ‘adventurer’ disposed to accept change and difference” (p. 51). Certainly I feel despair and regret for the ways I have engaged and handled particular events in my life, and yet, “the world goes on” and I am not alone.

### ***INTERLUDE: ON THE EDGE***

*1:30 p.m. It's cold and dark. The stars in the sky are brilliant. I've never seen so many stars in the sky. We leave in half an hour. I'm nervous and scared, and I can not imagine being anywhere else on earth. My stomach is rumbling, I think because the butterflies flying around aren't yet in line with one another. They'll settle down once we begin.*

We were all to meet right outside of our hut at Camp Muir at 1:45 p.m. We'd have 15 minutes as a group to make sure our packs fit, divvy out the group supplies we'd need for our trek (i.e. water, snacks, portable camp stoves) and secure our personal gear. Our packs wouldn't be too heavy since we wouldn't be spending the night on the summit. Instead, we'd only pack the bare essentials, things we might need in the event that we weren't quite able to accomplish our feat (i.e. sleeping bags, sleeping pads, extra layers of clothing). By the time I finished packing the various sundries I would lug to the top those butterflies were still fluttering about in chaos. I was confident, however, that as soon as we took our first steps they would regroup. I convinced myself that "they'll all go away."

At two o'clock sharp we clipped into our respective rope teams. Scanning the group one last time, Lou threw his right arm into the air, thrust his ice ax forward and declared "We're on our way, baby!" With those words my butterflies simultaneously launched into rumblings in my stomach; dull waves of anxiety that I was sure would dissipate once we started moving. Oh, how wrong I was.

I was on Lou's rope team for our summit attempt. With two other climbers hooked into a single rope by carabiners and figure eights, one hand holding our rope, and the other carrying an ice axe, we ascended the Ingraham Glacier amidst fog, rain, snow, and finally, sunshine. I was feeling terrified and elated, carrying that same tension with which I had started on that first day of climbing from Paradise. I had wanted to climb another mountain since summiting Mount Emory in the Chisos range in southern Texas three years prior. I was looking for a more challenging feat. And, indeed one appeared. On this day, I was on my way to the top of a much taller, more intimidating peak, and, *darn it! I was feeling sick!*

At 6:45 a.m., at our third and final rest stop before summiting the mountain, one of the climbers on another rope team informed our group leaders that he was unable to continue. I remember feeling pretty surprised by this because up to that point Jeff seemed to be one of the stronger climbers in our group. Once I caught a glimpse of him, however, with his head bowed uncomfortably low and his right arm clutching at his left knee, I knew instantly that there was no talking him into another two hours of climbing. He was spent; exhausted and sore. For me, my own pain had worsened. By the time we'd reached our second rest stop two hours earlier the rumblings in my stomach had morphed into all out cramps, though I continued to convince myself at the time that they would pass. *Once we get to the summit I'll be able to relieve myself.* I knew what was going on, and I knew that there was only one thing I could do to relieve the pain. *But, where? And, how? Okay, well, I know how, but on a mountain? How would that work?* We were standing atop Disappointment Cleaver, an outcropping of steep rubble and cliffs overlooking Emmons Glacier at 12,300 feet. *Where in the heck was I going to go to the bathroom? And then, what would I do with it?*

Lou announced that he and the other guides would take about 10 minutes to secure Jeff in his warmer clothes and a sleeping bag. We would be leaving him there with water and snacks, and pick him up on the way back. Lou asked that the rest of us “sit tight, and keep sipping on your water. We’ll get going soon.” I knew I would not make it any further than Jeff if I didn’t relieve myself then and there. I was now feeling incredibly sick, with those waves coming and going at two-minute intervals. But I was also feeling embarrassed; seriously mortified, and afraid of what other people might think, especially Lou. I had spent the better part of the morning trudging along and talking myself out of my need to “go.” Now, as the sun was beginning to peek above the horizon all I could think about was “why didn’t I go when it was still dark?”

There’s no cover above a tree-line. There’s snow, and wind, and sometimes, if you’re lucky, a small protrusion or two of granite boulders. I was now looking down on the last protrusion of boulders I would see before reaching the top, and the spasms in my stomach were beginning to make me keel over. Top that off with my anxiety about going to the bathroom in front of others—which normally I only have to contend with in my anxiety dreams. I was in a seriously compromising position, anticipating a kind of exposure for which I had no experience or desire.

Finally, with no other options short of dropping out of the rest of the climb, I took a deep breath and stepped forward. As sweat worked its way from the crown of my head, down my left temple, and through the chin strap on my climbing helmet, I knew it was time to approach Lou. With urgency and incredible humility, I whispered into his left ear “I...I have to go to the bathroom.”

For his part Lou was empathic. With a smirk on his face—note, not a smile—he took hold of my shoulders, looked straight into my eyes, and gently turning my body to face the edge of the cliff behind us, whispered back, “Right over there; get as close as you can to the edge. And, ask a few people to stand in front of you.”



## 5.0 MOVEMENT V, BACK TO THE CITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR A PEDAGOGY OF TEACHING LIKE A MOUNTAIN

*Why not stay out there in the wilderness the rest of your days...? Because that's not where [people] are...The final test for me of the legitimacy of the experience is "How well does your experience of the sacred in nature enable you to cope more effectively with the problems of [humankind] when you come back to the city?" (Unsoeld, 1963, ¶ 2)*

There are numerous times in the life of both students and teachers when we are overcome with "that sick feeling," when we are made vulnerable and feel exposed. In these moments we are standing "on the edge," and our chore becomes one of considering what to do, how to do it, and how we will endure whatever consequences might disclose themselves to us as a result of our decision. In these moments, I often wonder, do I stand firm, persevere, and ignore my discomfort? Retreat in denial and hope that my discomfort will just go away? Or, do I let go, and embrace the opportunity to take the sharp end and move forward through the muddle of something seemingly difficult and strange? Like climbing expeditions many of my experiences in the classroom have shown me that though I may not be able to anticipate the situations and circumstances that will rock me to the core, I can surely count on the possibility that such situations and circumstances will indeed arise.

Likewise, students do not necessarily enter our classrooms anticipating situations and circumstances that will shake them to their core. Generally, it seems, in both roles we prepare for what we have already experienced and believe we have resolved. Rarely do we consider and prepare for the unforeseen, though as in my stories above, perhaps there are signs that can give us an inkling of what is to come. Still, how do we see and then read these signs? Who and what do we trust? How do we discern our choices? And, given the different roles that are played in the classroom, how do we enact those choices?

Even on the mountain there are contradictions and obstacles; places where we will slip, and insurmountable boulders. There are times when we will no longer want to press forward, when we may have to turn around, or look for another way. That doesn't mean we are finished, or incapable, however, or that our mountain peak is no longer attainable. Perhaps the mountain we are climbing is the *wrong* mountain. Or, perhaps our pace has changed.

I was *thrown* into my world, as were my students. In the beginning of my life I had no choices about who my parents or teachers would be, what norms and values my culture would dictate, the rites of passage I would enjoy in my chronological growth, or the appearance of possibilities that might be unconcealed to me regarding my life projects. And, as I have been exposed throughout my life to moments ripe with meaning, I have been awakened to the possibility that I do have choices now; that I do have the right, and, in fact, obligation to apprehend and consider my choices if I want to live wholly and authentically, and take responsibility for the course of my life.

May Sarton (1974) writes in her poem, "Now I Become Myself,"

*Now I become myself. It's taken*

*Time, many years and places,*

*I have been dissolved and shaken,  
Worn other people's faces,  
Run madly, as if Time were there,  
Terribly old, crying a warning,  
"hurry, you will be dead before -----"  
(What? Before you reach the morning?  
Or the end of the poem, is clear?  
Or love safe in the walled city?)  
Now to stand still, to be here,  
Feel my own weight and density!.....  
Now there is time and Time is young.  
O, in this single hour I live  
All of myself and do not move  
I, the pursued, who madly ran,  
Stand still, stand still, and stop the Sun! (p. 156)*

My awakening, my becoming myself, did not happen over night, and I did not come to it alone. It was not something that was announced to me at some pivotal moment on my educational journey. And, it is surely not something that I have finished cultivating. Perhaps it was a whisper, a muttering below the surface of what I *believed* I could hear, or even *should* hear. I did not wake up, or become aware of the myriad possibilities available to me, the rewards and consequences of my life experiences, false faces I have been handed, forces controlling my life, or the hypocrisies that allowed me to collaborate with those forces until someone, rather some others, amplified the whisper.

In *Matters of Interpretation*, Michael Nakkula and Sharon Ravitch (1998), interpreting Heidegger's notion of *thrownness*, explain that

active living, or engaged involvement, in the world necessitates being thrown into new situations that challenge our usual ways of knowing and experiencing. Such challenges contribute to a host of changes, from subtle to dramatic shifts in perspective or worldview to a range of feelings including accomplishment, inadequacy, pride, shame, and hope. Each of these changes, whether substantial or insubstantial, revises (or entrenches) in some way the ever-developing text of human experience that we take into subsequent encounters. (p. 3)

Maybe I was ready to hear the mutter, ready *and* supported at opportune times, and by present others, to confront the harsh but liberating facts about who I have been, who I am and who I want to become. And, in *being-and-becoming* ready, supported by many, I began to hear what others had to suggest, as well as what that voice inside of me was offering. I became able to heed the subtle nudges that suggested that there were other, possibly more authentic, ways of being, becoming, and behaving in the world beyond simply existing. Thus, “Now to stand still, to be here, Feel my own weight and density!” I continue to become myself.

On the mountain I sometimes felt exposed, afraid, terrified in fact, by circumstances over which I had little control. Reminded of Lou’s warning the night before our climb—“The mountain will eat you up if you aren’t ready for the journey you’re about to take”—I see now that there were times both on my mountaineering excursion and along my educational expedition that I could have been devoured. Certainly, the most satisfying course of action would have been to relieve myself of the mental and physical burdens with which I struggled while trying to climb the icefall or during my ascent toward the summit, for example, as soon as I became aware of my

discomfort. But something held me back; something exerted a greater control over my decision-making process than I was even aware of at the time. And, I submitted.

Perhaps I was simply not ready to confront those moments head on. Like my responses to Mrs. Reiser's condescension and Dr. McFaden's intellectual battering, I had learned and internalized only certain ways of responding to such circumstances; I wasn't in a position to consider alternatives, for they simply didn't exist. Maxine Greene (1995) recognizes "how hard it is to confront the controls, the principles of exclusion and denial that have allowed me to a certain range of utterances and prevented others" (p. 110). I like Greene have "not easily come to terms with the ways in which education...permits and forbids the expression of different people's experiences" (p. 110). And, I am still struggling with my exposure in that arena.

Today, my memories of some of my earlier experiences continue to be painful, however I no longer feel disoriented by them. Instead I find my revisiting and re-claiming of them to be illuminating of my potential, providing poignant living metaphors for interpreting some of my most rousing experiences, uncomfortable moments, and educative encounters as both a learner and a teacher. My experience of Jeremy's, Mrs. Reiser's and Dr. McFaden's *disdain* certainly presented me with opportunities, not known at the time, to reflect on and begin to understand the kind of exposure that can stifle, even paralyze, students' progression toward growth and learning. And Lou's, Mrs. Mortensen's, Carolyn's and Michael's *presence* confirmed the importance of benevolence and resolve, the imperative of compassion for the whole journey, and gentle acceptance of each individual's subjectivity and rhythms of change.

Of course, I would not have come to see and understand these experiences as so influential and stunning had I not engaged in the process of remembering, recording, reclaiming and revising my *personal history*. Like Florence Krall (1994), I have been "humbled by the

whole process of writing” (p. ix), realizing all the more that “writing is always on the margins,” revealing “second thoughts that expand into greater complexities” (p. 1). And, I am the better for apprehending the opportunity to expose and learn from some of the stories that have screamed for attention. Something inside of me must have known that there were important lessons for me to glean, messages that might clarify my journey and support my experience of being propelled into an unknown, uncomfortable, perhaps threatening, and transforming territory. I am grateful for my readiness to hear those murmurs from deep within. For as I have found, again like Krall, “Remembering past significant events, striving to describe them authentically and clearly; invoking, reflecting on, and questioning them; and inviting other voices to enter” is how I have chosen to “participate in the intellectual life” (p. 1).

At the same time, this has not been an easy expedition to endure. As I acknowledged earlier, I knew that each time I sat down to remember and record the details of significant moments from my educational journey, that you, my reader would judge me, that you would have shrewd opinions about my stories, and that you would most likely wonder about some of the choices I have made, the connections I have drawn, and the meanings I have extrapolated from them. My story about Cathy, for example, was a particularly tough one to share. In fact, it was one of the stories that had been screaming for a very long time to be revealed on the page. And, I resisted for a very long time to expose and write through it. I felt especially naked, first remembering that experience, then recording it. *What will they think of me? Surely this will be the one that will convince them that I really am a fraud.*

Eventually I did come to realize that I *needed* to write through that particular event; that even though I knew that you would do with my words whatever you wanted to, my memories and assumptions were ultimately threatening the life that they belonged to (Nalick, 2005). John

Mayer (2007) sings in his “lilting, bittersweet ballad” (Taylor, 2008, p. 48) from *The Bucket List* (Reiner, 2007):

*Have no fear for givin' in  
Have no fear for givin' over  
You better know that in the end  
It's better to say too much  
Than to never say what you need to say again.  
Even if your hands are shakin'  
And your faith is broken  
Even as the eyes are closin'  
Do it with a heart wide open  
A wide heart. (Mayer, 2007)*

And here, I have said what I needed to say, walked softly, though cautiously through my tireless wilderness (Krall, 1979, p. 1). Though I don't yet know how you will read and interpret my words here, the consequences for proceeding with this personal and poetic history have been transformative for me. Though I have felt defensive at times, and certainly afraid, with “hands shakin'” at the keyboard, I have enjoyed a great deal of support for my project here. And, “that has made all the difference” (Frost, 1916, p. 9).

Perhaps now I am ready for the next leg of my professional journey, ready to more actively engage my life and my vocation. Though admittedly I continue to walk with that earlier tension on the mountain, feeling both terrified and elated by the possibilities that lie ahead, the obstacles and vistas I anticipate experiencing and seeing, and those also unforeseen. For as Nakkula and Ravitch (1998) suggest, such “active living” will surely necessitate my being

“thrown into new situations” that will challenge my usual ways of knowing and experiencing myself, others and the world in which we dwell (p. 3). The lessons I learned about compartmentalizing the different parts of my person, for example, were powerful, and eventually, made sense to me. For when I entered the college classroom I too became a teacher who dichotomized the intellectual and the emotional, who placed priority on rigid adherence to rules and regulations, and who held stultifying expectations for many of my own students. I didn’t consider for example that Ling and so many other students who were asked to sign a “personal and academic integrity” contract in my earlier classes may have signed it simply because they didn’t know that they had any other choice. I didn’t think to invite Cathy or any of the other students involved in that horrid experience during our social psychology class to talk about and debrief what had happened. I simply let things go, never considering until now the impact of that day.

Still, remembering and honoring the tension reminds me that as I continue to walk toward my own *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, encouraging and supporting the *being-and-becoming-whole* of the individuals with whom I will continue to work, my and our progress is conditional, deliberate and incremental. I will experience triumphs and tribulations, joys and lamentations, for they will undoubtedly arise, and carry with them potent possibilities for my pedagogical disposition. Max gave me a gift: the opportunity to learn something new about him and about myself; the chance to rectify an earlier misstep; and, ultimately, the break I needed—albeit unknowingly at the time—to both be and act differently.

As I have already suggested, though I have become more comfortable with the various and often times unexpected dynamics that emerge with each class, and though I know I am entering the classroom with skills, ideas, questions, an autobiography of my own, and an



intellectual agenda for engaging learning and nurturing the *being-and-becoming-whole* of each of us, I do not know at the outset of each semester how all of that will evolve and make sense to me and my students. I cannot know ahead of time how we will traverse the contested terrain of our project together, ascend the walls that present themselves as barriers, and open ourselves up to reflecting on the individual and collective stories that dominate and might ultimately liberate our steps both inside and outside of our classroom.

So, “Why not stay out there in the wilderness the rest of your days...? Because that's not where [people] are.” (Unsoeld, 1963, ¶ 2). As I have reached the apex of my dissertation journey, I am convinced of only one thing: that teaching and learning are inherently precarious endeavors for those who seek to engage them with authenticity and wholeness. If we as students and teachers seek to change what we ultimately know is not working for ourselves and the system in which we dwell, if we seek to transcend the obstacles that present themselves, and open ourselves up to reflecting on the inherited stories we have learned to live out in the classroom, then we are compelled to consider that our venture will require of us a great deal of curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity. For Freire (1990), this means “apprehending our reality,” engaging the process in its entirety with our whole and interconnected selves; confronting the barriers, voices, anxieties and minute victories that will show themselves and attempt to deflect our labor (pp. 66-69). For me it means apprehending moments of exposure, being present to what emerges between myself and others, honoring the pain, possibilities and the exhilaration of these moments that show themselves, and fostering movement toward clarity and personal understanding.

## 5.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR FELLOW EXPLORERS

Certainly, a poetic pedagogy of presence that aims to be supportive, nurturing, safe, and authentic in the service of addressing students' and teachers' exposure, and supporting their experience of wholeness in the classroom can be daunting and burdensome. It demands a great deal of patience and time, self-understanding and self-reflexivity. As well, living consistently and congruently with our values can be bothersome. It's often so much easier to talk a good talk than to walk the walk.

There are all kinds of constraints on teachers, at all levels of the educational hierarchy: time constraints, professional development constraints, logistical constraints. And, there are personal constraints. Our work shouldn't be all that we think about and do in life. And yet, teachers work in a system that does demand that we make ourselves available to students often times at their whim. Thrown into new relationships with each new class, it thus becomes even more important then that we acknowledge that we are constantly revising, either subtly or dramatically, the texts of our prior experiences as we enter into new encounters with students (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998, p. 3). Sometimes, for example, our students ask for more than we can give; sometimes we don't realize that they are even asking for something; and, sometimes we just don't seem to care.

If we can not help a student or work with them in the time frame that they are demanding/needing, for example, perhaps we can communicate that to them; let them know what we can and cannot give up front. And, acknowledge that sometimes what we think we can offer might change. Additionally, sometimes students will commit what we might consider egregious acts, jeopardizing their work, integrity and educational careers. Certainly, as I've shared above, I do believe that there should be consequences for missteps taken, or mistakes made. However,

diminishing, denigrating or dismissing students outright serves only to arrest and cover over any healthy and sustainable learning that they might glean from the encounter. It would have been easy to admonish Adam for not eating before our climb began. And, clearly, in the moment, he realized his mistake, and our group could continue to support him nonetheless. Similarly, though my initial response to Jenny was to roil with anger, the resolution that we co-created made it possible for both of us to grow and, in fact, flourish in our respective roles and intentions.

Finally, ignoring students' concerns, and ignoring our own, only sets us up to fail and leaves both students and teachers feeling like they have been "left hanging." Sometimes we will not always be able to alleviate our students' feeling abandoned, let down, dismissed or even abused. And, in an authentic and present stance, I believe we teachers can construct networks for communicating to our students that we are available to them *and* that we have boundaries, needs and responsibilities of our own that may not seem congruent to them in the moment. Freire (1998) notes, "It's important that students perceive the teacher's struggle to be coherent" (p. 95). "And," as he continues, "it is necessary that this struggle be the subject of discussion in [and outside of] the classroom from time to time" (p. 95). Sometimes, we too will feel abandoned, let down, dismissed and even abused. It's not our students' jobs to take care of us, to reveal the false faces that we embody, and help us work through our feelings as they emerge in the classroom. However, I believe that we can let students know that we are in fact struggling, as I did with Veronica's class; that we are concerned with the course of things; and that our own "stuff" (whatever that might be) may be stifling our whole and authentic participation in the project at hand.

## 5.2 OTHER MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB

Returning to Kathleen Kesson's (1999) question, "What significant aspects of life were left out of your education?" (p. 93), I am reminded that what was missing in my own education, like so many other students, was "the emotional, the creative, the aesthetic, the *self*" (p. 93). Mrs. Reiser, Dr. McFaden and Jeremy would not be the only teachers arresting my excitement and creative approaches to learning and *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, though admittedly, their malevolent acts were certainly some of the longest lasting. Similarly, Ling, Max, Jenny, Cathy and Veronica would not be the only students with whom I would struggle to be present. Still, Kesson's question continues to evoke in me a desire to know more, to better understand how I have come to be so passionate about the various elements that frame my pedagogical practice and disposition. As her curiosity initially ignited my desire to identify the awe-inspiring and soul-squashing experiences that have influenced how and what I see as most important to my own pedagogical temperament, it continues to smolder with implications for others who are equally interested in and learning from some of their own.

As a teacher who identifies with transformative education and is deeply committed to supporting the whole student, I believe that I serve best the people with whom I work—students and colleagues alike—when I acknowledge and name the unfolding meaning and significance of all that surfaces as a result of our work together: how we are engaged by, with and in our learning in relation to what and who exists and emerges from within and outside of us. I concede and understand that learning to work together in the classroom to support and maintain a safe and inclusive environment for all can be quite challenging. With this in mind, I have been particularly interested in elucidating alongside my colleagues and students the role of exposure, discomfort and vulnerability in and between all of us when we are all invited to negotiate "the

necessary conditions” for learning that bell hooks (1994) suggests in *Teaching to Transgress* (p. 13). Specifically, in my practice, I have sought to uncover and illuminate the potential role that discomfort, for example, might play in both inhibiting and enhancing how students and teachers might individually and collectively risk exposing themselves, their ideas, questions and beliefs about various norms and narratives in education, for example, “demystifying canonical knowledges” (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 3),--like what the classroom is *supposed* to look like, and how it is *supposed* to be run--and venturing into what is often unknown, uncomfortable, perhaps threatening and potentially transforming territory in the classroom.

Teaching, for me, is a privilege, and it is a humbling and reciprocal opportunity to both inspire and learn from students’ experiences of personal empowerment, civic responsibility and professional potential. Ideally, I want for the students with whom I work to feel personally touched and professionally changed by their participation in the shared space of our classroom. And, I admit at the outset of every semester that I expect that I too will be touched and personally changed by what they bring to our discussions. Ultimately, I want for my students to realize that I take hooks’ (1994) charge “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of ...students” (p. 13) very seriously. However, I realize that what *I want* and how my students actually engage the material and those “necessary conditions” (p. 13) in the class is often fraught with contestation.

My observations in and facilitation of a college classroom have revealed to me that though my intentions may be to create and maintain a space wherein students might encounter one another, engage in challenging activities and fruitful discussions, and expose intimate or taken-for-granted details about themselves, their biographies and their dreams, the reality that emerges in that space is unpredictable and often messy. Topics like *social justice, oppression,*

*dialogue* and issues like homophobia/heterosexism, power, religion and plagiarism, for example, bring forth a myriad of responses that can ultimately stifle productive consideration and conversation. A transformative learning approach however, demands that these be revealed, addressed and mined for possible resolutions.

Thus, as I have endeavored to mine my own biography, exposing some of the most poignant moments on my educational expedition, I am curious about others' experiences. Certainly, as I have drawn from many discursive colleagues here, some of whom have written eloquent and harrowing texts about their own teaching and learning moments, I wonder about the students who are experiencing a transformative approach to education for example, for the first time. Specifically, as I will continue working with teacher education students, I want to better understand their perspectives, be privy to their stories, perhaps their experiences of exposure, in a way that might lead them and me to an even keener understanding of the socializing and normalizing influence of the still prevailing modernist approach to western education. As well, I am curious about students' and teachers' experiences of *presence*; whether it is as important to them as I believe it has been for me, for example. And, I am curious about what students and teachers think about the notion of *wholeness*: what it means to them, whether or not it is an important factor in their own learning and teaching, and how they believe attention to the whole student might stifle or enhance learning in general. Finally, I wonder if students and teachers would agree that the things most missing in education are in fact "the emotional, the creative, the aesthetic, the *self*" to which Kesson refers (1999, p. 93).

In other words, I want to know more about students like Veronica, before they enter my class, and what is happening for them afterward; how our experience, or perhaps others like it (if there are any), are influencing their pedagogies. I want to know how students like Ling, Max

and Jenny are faring after our encounters with one another, how they perceive our interactions and how those interactions reflect or challenge their ideas about learning, teaching and associated living in the world alongside others. And, I want to know if teachers like Mrs. Reiser and Dr. McFaden have any insight into the effects of their teaching approaches on students, and how they are harvesting and sowing those insights with each new crop of students and educating encounters.

### **5.3 FINAL APPROACH**

Mountains are signified by peaks and valleys. When climbing a mountain, there are ridges we ascend, “strong upward movements” we make to summit our intended peak. There are also places where we need to change direction, sometimes descending into the valley in order to continue moving forward. Certainly, there are some easier routes to follow, well-travelled trails that are comfortable and familiar. There’s nothing wrong with following these paths for a while. However, if we really desire to reach our specific and unique apex, we need to step off of the main paths, and consider, perhaps, how we got on them in the first place; why we are continuing to follow them; how we are walking upon them; the purposes they have thus far served; and, how we might make use of them differently.

Discussing and exploring how we might make different choices regarding our dispositions and intentions in the classroom is like climbing a mountain. There are ups and downs, discussions and experiences through which we will continue to move forward. And there are times wherein we will need to take a few steps back, reflecting on where we have been, and reorienting ourselves to a new direction. Perhaps one of the most important things to remember

on our trek is that though we are ascending a specific peak, seeking to live with dignity upon the planet alongside others for example, there are multiple possibilities available to us. We are never obliged to remain on a single path, walking that path in the same way that others have walked before us.

I acknowledge that “teaching like a mountain” is a somewhat elusive idea. I have intentionally not charted a specific route for conquering the mountain. Instead, I have been deliberately modest, choosing to draw your attention to some of the landmarks I have found particularly compelling along my own circuitous journey “toward the sky.” Teaching like a mountain then is an approach to *being* with students, oriented by a willingness to explore alongside them various dimensions of their being in particular moments, and “witnessing,” as Naess (1979) suggests, “their behavior with a somewhat remote or mild benevolence” (p. 13). As well, it calls on us—teachers and education allies—to recognize the delicate balance between supporting students where they are in their *being-in-the-world* and fostering learning and growth in the context of their moments of *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*; between being compassionate toward the student who is daunted by risk of *exposure*, and challenging certain behaviors that seem to be keeping students stuck, perhaps calling attention to the false faces that they present while holding back avalanches for as long as we can (p. 13). Finally, teaching like a mountain calls for the quality of *presence* on the part of the teacher, compassion for students’ experiences of emotional exposure, and a firm, genuine and gentle composure that expresses to the student “I hear you,” “I’m right here,” and “I’m not going anywhere.”

As well, while teaching like a mountain I believe that we must have compassion for ourselves, realizing that we cannot always be “solid, stable unmoving” (Naess, 1979, p. 13) for our students; that sometimes unexpected tremors will take place, and avalanches will fall in the



classroom. For this, we might recognize the delicate balance we embody as teachers between our own *being-in-the-world*, and our own *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*; between our own experiences of *exposure*, and the disclosure of the false faces we might seek to remove.

As a teacher, one of my greatest challenges lies in negotiating how to acknowledge the fears, anxieties, and even downright offensive comments of students while remaining present and guiding constructive dialogues about the issues at hand in the circuitous and strenuous terrain of the classroom. I do not support covering over, dismissing, rescuing or abstracting the ideas, questions and affect that might emerge, for I believe that it is the combination of all of these ways of being that lends to the most robust transformative possibilities for bringing about change for all of us in the classroom. Still, I do acknowledge that I have no absolute protocols nor have I found a clear and easily traversable pathway toward facilitating what is disclosed when oppression, discomfort, objectification or hatred emerges in the room short of being as honest, open and flexible as I possibly can about what comes forth for me, and what I am witnessing in and for others, as a result of these complicated, and perhaps disturbing, conversations. In this way I am refusing to fight against my students, supporting them “on the edges,” though I acknowledge that catastrophes may happen (p. 13). Perhaps this is the final test for me of the legitimacy of my experience here, back in the city: discerning between the moments that call for nurturance of and a rallying for our struggle, and those that must wait for another day.

### ***INTERLUDE: SUMMIT***

Out of nowhere it seemed, she appeared. “Ten minutes to the top!” Lou declared. *I’m almost there, on top of a world.* The sky is particularly blue this morning, and the trail ahead seems smooth and clear. All of the obstacles I had overcome in the days leading up to this moment are now a distant memory. Though I’m certainly tired, feeling various aches and pains in my legs and knees, Lou’s declaration lifts me from my weary slumber. Feeling a potent surge of adrenalin well and then release inside of me, I begin to float, moving forward with gentle abandon. I’m not even aware of the other members of my rope-team. It’s just me and the summit in this moment. *One step at a time. Keep pushing. Keep going!*

With the summit of Mount Rainier only a few yards ahead, I am moved by how hard these last steps really are. Though I am progressing, focused on where I’m going, that potent surge of adrenalin has subsided. I feel something holding me back; something is pushing against me, slowing me down. And, I continue, moving through my pain, and trouncing that force that seemingly wants me to stop. *I will make it. I will not stop here. I’ve come too far to turn back now.*

Suddenly, I’ve arrived. *We made it. I made it!* And, it is beautiful on the top. Lou invites those who choose to trek across the peak to sign the “summit book.” “You’ll need to hurry though,” he warns, “looks like there’s some weather coming in.” I decide to stay back, taking pictures with some of my climbing companions, taking in the view, and taking a pulse of

my own mental and physical stamina. *I was so tired on that last leg of this journey. Now, I feel invigorated. I'm ready for the next move.*

We have only thirty minutes on the summit, which seems like a very short time to hang out on top of the world. That storm is really brewing, and Lou is eager to get us all moving down the mountain as quickly as possible. While I wait for the other members of my rope-team to clip in, I stand in amazement. Everything seems so vibrant and alive on this mountaintop. As the snow glistens, and the clouds below us begin to form into large, puffy peaks, my senses seem to simultaneously sharpen. I can smell the storm moving in, feel the chill of the air on my nose, taste the tang of adrenalin that is beginning to surge again, and hear Cris Williamson's (1975) *Song of the Soul* in my head:

*Love of my life I am crying*

*I am not dying, I am dancing*

*Dancing along in the madness*

*There is no sadness*

*Only the song of the soul.*

I *am* ready for the next leg of my journey, a descent "back to the city," as Uncle Willi (1963, ¶2) describes. The mountain has had enough of me; it's ready for me to go down. I don't imagine that I will ever return to this place, that I will ever need to return. *I've learned so much about myself here.* With that, Lou announces, "It's time to go!" And, again, like he had when our journey began earlier in the morning, he raises his ice axe, thrusts it forward and proclaims, "We're on our way!" I feel sad, and yet there's no time to linger. And so, reluctantly, I whisper "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

## POSTSCRIPT: GETTING THE STORY RIGHT

*Now: if here while you are walking, or there when you've attained the far ridge and see the yellow plain and the river shining through it—if you notice unbidden that you are afoot on this particular mountain on this particular day in the company of these particular changing fragments of clouds,—if you pause in your daze to connect your own skull-locked and interior mumble with the skin of your senses and sense, and notice you are living,—then will you not conjure up in imagination a map or a globe and locate this mountain ridge on it, and find on one western slope that dot which represents you walking here astonished? (Dillard, 1987, p. 248)*

I didn't finish Florence Krall's (1994) book, *Ecotone: Wayfaring on the Margins* until recently. For reasons I can't seem to summon, I closed the book several years ago before reading "Equinox," the concluding chapter of Krall's text. When I did finally sit down to finish Krall's book, I was delighted to find that she had used Dillard's epitaph from *An American Childhood* (1987) to frame her final thoughts for I was considering Dillard's words to frame my own concluding ideas. Somehow, reading them in Krall's work confirmed that I should proceed as planned.

Peter Matthiessen (1998) writes, "The secret of the mountains is that the mountains simply exist, as I do myself: the mountains exist simply, which I do not. The mountains have no 'meaning,' they ARE meaning; the mountains are (p. 95). In my preface I asked "who am I?"

and, I answered with my name, “Julia Gates Brooks.” Asking this question of myself again, at the end of this project reveals that I am more than my name; that I embody meaning; that I do not exist simply. I am a daughter, partner, friend, aunt; a cyclist, rock climber, paddler, lover of books; a teacher, student, citizen, scholar. And, I am a writer.

“Go ahead,” Natalie Goldberg (1990) nudges,

be brave, say it anyway: “I am a writer.” Over time, the image in your mind and the reality will become one, if you continue to practice. After a while, you won’t even notice the discrepancy, you’ll be too involved in creating that second paragraph to notice writing and nonwriting. You will be engaged in the big journey. That is all that matters. (p. 104).

Like I had on my way to the summit, I have enjoyed moments during the writing of this manuscript wherein I stopped thinking about the voices, expectations, lamentations and drudgery that many times seemed to slow, disable, or curtail the process of my project; and wherein all that existed for me, all that I was “too involved in creating,” was about “getting the story right.” I could see it, feel it, even taste it, and in those moments I simply *was* with my narrative. I was on the mountain, and in my stories, straddling the edges of my *being-and-becoming-whole-in-the-dissertation*; feeling potent surges of adrenalin propelling me forward in gentle abandon, away from the margins and into the center.

In the tradition of the Transcendentalists, Annie Dillard, in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1978) positions the natural world as the backdrop against which she explores personal liberation, the essence of community and an innovative consciousness of the two combined. As she situates herself atop the precarious boundary between the internal and external spheres of personal consciousness, Dillard bravely examines how she has come to view herself in the world,

a world that is both old and new, magnificent and horrendous, and a world for which she feels a great deal of responsibility. “What I aim to do,” she muses,

is not so much learn the names of the shreds of creation that flourish in the valley, but to keep myself open to their meanings, which is to try to impress myself at all times with the fullest possible force of their vitality. (p. 137)

Dillard is one with the world that she witnesses outside of herself, recognizing that the world she embodies is intimately connected to what she sees. It is this connection, and her vision of it, that she seeks to illuminate for her reader.

Like Dillard, I believe that there is a larger perspective to be enjoyed, a profound knowledge to be gained, concerning the nexus between our internal and external worlds. Attentive and curious observation of our world attracts our absorption of lived experiences; it tends us toward discerning who we are as whole and authentic beings in relation to the potentialities and necessities of living synchronistically with other whole and authentic beings or “fellow creatures” who similarly “have the right to live . . . to fulfillment and . . . in harmony with the other elements of the Earth” (Krall, 1988, p. 55). We can’t help but feel our connection with what lies outside of us when we are made aware of the possibilities within us, and invited to express what emerges as a response to our discovery. Though *thrown* alone into an organized world that is initially unknown, at times uncomfortable, perhaps threatening, and potentially transforming, the emergence of our awareness of our primordial being as it is implicated in and by that world affirms that we are indeed not alone and, in fact interconnected with and dependent upon what exists behind and beyond our individualistic reach; what exists behind and beyond the walls of a childhood home or college classroom, for example, or the *idle talk* of an average

public. And, it is this connection, and my vision of it, that I have sought to illuminate for you, my reader.

Krall (1994) similarly extols recognition of the boundaries—or “edges”—upon which we might “see” the various perspectives of our plight in the world. She expounds on Dillard’s way of seeing, her perspectival consciousness, by contextualizing the divergence between social and cultural milieus as “not necessarily areas of isolation where we balance between two worlds” but again “dwelling places that connect rather than separate” (p. 4). To see with or without a camera, to teeter between the social and cultural spheres of our world, to cross boundaries between the individual and collective, or the academic and ecological, to exist on a mountaintop and back in the city, we need not perpetuate a static boundary between them as if they were binaries set up to compete outside of us. Rather, in creating and engaging our new vision of ourselves, apprehending our *thrownness* and *unfinishedness*, and recognizing our *being-and-becoming-in-the-world* alongside-others-in-the-world, we might view these seemingly contrived and competing arenas as “rich and dynamic transitional zones” (p. 4), places upon which we might sit, a center in which we might dwell. To recognize then the unboundedness of my internal and external worlds, and the potential that both have on influencing who I am *being-and-becoming* in my multidimensionality, I must feel, smell, taste, see, hear and sense what emerges for me from that very deep place inside, “where words float around on thoughts, and thought on sound and sight” (Hurston, 1937/1970, p. 43).

I have ascended several mountains on this journey, experiencing beauty, grace, agony, and insight. And, I have returned from them with tenacity and love, excitement and passion for the work I am doing. Each step on Mount Rainier represented my progression toward and immersion with something larger than myself, something I wanted to embrace and integrate, and

something which I needed a great deal of help to understand. And, each step on this dissertation journey has represented my progression toward and immersion with something larger than myself, something I have long wanted to embrace and integrate, and something which I have needed a great deal of help to understand. Both have been literal and metaphoric excursions laden with possibilities for grappling with and coming to understand some of my struggles and potential behind and beyond the mountain. And, both have continued to reveal possibilities even when I assumed that my journey was complete.

For example, while writing my dissertation I worked with the title, “Teaching Like a Mountain: A Poetic Personal History of Being-and-Becoming-Whole-in-Education.” As I approached the completion of this project, the subtitle no longer seemed to work for me. *Being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* certainly continued to represent the ontological focus of my emerging pedagogy. However, while reading my manuscript a final time I realized that my *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education* was a process I had and was continuing to experience through pedagogical *exposure* and *presence* as both a student and a teacher. Thus, the larger context of my inquiry had changed, and I released a hold onto which I had been tentatively clinging to grasp a different, more solid and sustaining hold.

When I remember my time on the mountain, my ascent to the top of *a* world, I am reminded of utter clarity and solace, aloneness and exposure. I am reminiscent of a time when I was seen, listened to, nudged and even diminished, and I am grateful that I made it. In these times of introspection, these moments of contemplation about who I am as I am continually *being-and-becoming-whole-in-education*, as I am continually striving to clarify my pedagogy for teaching like a mountain, I am similarly reminded of my teachers, appreciative of the qualities that they embodied and shared without any obvious [to me] need for recognition or affirmation.



And, I am indebted to my students, for their willingness to risk exposure—both known and unknown—in my classroom. Some of my teachers and students fortified my educational journey with encouragement for and celebration of my gifts, questions, and mistakes. Others offered platitudes, condescension, and in a few instances, outright malice. I was never vanquished outright by these teachers and students, never devoured completely, though my desire to please or change them was in itself diminishment enough for what I could and wanted to do for and with them.

When I returned from climbing Mount Rainier few of my friends and family were sympathetic to my initial silence. “What was it like?” “Were you scared?” “Did you have a good time?” were some of the questions I heard repeatedly. It’s unfair, of course, to pass judgment on them. Certainly I had experienced something that none of them could relate to, and they were eager to be supportive and curious. I, on the other hand, had little to say. I hadn’t had enough time between coming down from the mountain and flying home to consider and integrate my experience. I hadn’t yet located myself on an imaginary map or globe of the mountain peak I had reached. I still felt raw, moved by a number of my experiences, and impotent to express their meanings.

Here, I think I have finally realized “what is was like.” I understand and can now say out loud that indeed I *was* scared, and that I continue to *be* scared in situations that are unfamiliar to me. I have tried to be humble, and at times I know I have been arrogant. As well, I have come close to being devoured by moments of uncertainty, apathy, and terror; anxious about writing what I was thinking about my life for fear of finding myself exposed and alone. And, I have had a good time at certain pivotal points on my journey: writing my way through my experiences and uncovering what until now was unknown; inhabiting a place wherein I have felt free to feel,

explore, and imagine, alongside some wonderfully eloquent discursive colleagues, and equally exquisite [and present] peers, advisors and mentors; and, realizing the summit of a long-desired educational apex. I won't ever return to this place, or bear the weight of my fear and elation in quite the same way again. I am on my way. And, I believe I have gotten the story right.

Now, I have the words: *Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.*

*Kneeling at her foot, exhausted, disheveled and downright dirty, I bowed my head. With tears streaming down my face, and a smile beaming from my heart, I whispered aloud, "I did it mom. I climbed that mountain." When I finally stood and raised my brow Mount Rainier looked more awe-inspiring than she had seven days prior. I felt so much pride in that moment, not that I had conquered her, but that I had met and connected with her. She taught me much during our time together, and I am forever grateful for her message and support.*

*(Personal journal, August, 1992)*

**APPENDIX A**

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