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WE NEED A NEW IDEA: THE NEED FOR STUDENT AUTONOMY BECAUSE

THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY

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SARAH WORDEN
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WE NEED A NEW IDEA: THE NEED FOR STUDENT AUTONOMY BECAUSE
THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY

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BY

_____
Dr. Neil Houser, Chair

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Dr. Stacy Reeder

_____
Mr. Jeremy Lindberg

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"'Then you shall judge yourself,' the king answered. 'That is the most difficult thing of all. It is much more difficult to judge oneself that to judge others. If you succeed in judging yourself rightly, then you are indeed a man of true wisdom.'" *Le Petit Prince*

Just as it can take a village to raise a child, it takes a community to complete a thesis. I would first like to thank my committee for shuffling through multiple rewrites and providing their insight for revisions. Thank you Dr. Neil Houser, Dr. Stacy Reeder, and Prof. Jeremy Lindberg. I also have to thank my husband for dealing with piles of books and papers, tripping over the laptop cords, and very late nights. I love you!!

To Mom and Dad, thank you, thank you, thank you.

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Chapter 1: An Introduction

One of my favorite books is Kate Chopin's, *The Awakening*. When asked why, I explain that I connect with a character that makes a choice for what direction she wants her life to take. I appreciate the need for freedom to make personal decisions for one's life. Several times, when I have shared that information, I have then been asked if I am all right, or if I need to talk. Many times, I have found that people focus on the suicide at the end of the book, rather than the burst of independence that came right before. I connected with the desire for finding control in my life and yearning for freedom to act as I wished, but I was not tempted to follow her direction after finding it. Other teenagers, however, have recreated her tragic path.

As I will be discussing possible experiences in high school, I want to open this paper by sharing my personal story. In both the ballet studio and academic classroom, I have spent time in the front of the room and the back of the room. I have been the teacher and the student, and often both roles at the same time. From both viewpoints, I observe that best intentions to protect can backfire when attempts to show care and concern are absorbed as controlling and limiting.

I graduated high school as what many would consider a success. I was in the top fifteen percent of my class, took honors and advanced placement classes, and was highly involved in choir. In addition to my school involvement, I was a senior company member for a pre-professional ballet company and performed principal roles. Despite my achievements and successes, I was generally unhappy at school. For me and many of my friends, high school felt constrictive and controlling, as if we never had the opportunity to consider alternatives for what to think, or how to live.

The pressures also felt contradictory. My high school claimed to praise academic achievements, yet I overheard administrators criticize high-achievers. They explained how mediocre students would be more successful in college and less likely to "blow out." Their comments furthered confused me as to the purpose of my time at school. Which one was I supposed to be? Was I supposed to work my hardest in school, or sit back and try not to work too hard? The school culture seemed to tell us that we would be successful if we followed their plan. I never understood their plan. The consequences to such a structure proved graver for some students than my insecurities and self-doubt were for me. Strict paradigms for expected behavior gave little room for self-exploration. At first, I thought that I struggled to "fit in" with my peers; however, I also learned that some teachers did not appreciate my questions. In so many ways and under so many social syllables that I never received to memorize, I was deemed inferior.

Students who shared experiences similar to mine also risked missing practice at exploring who they were, who they wanted to become, or why they made the decisions they did. Control fell like a heavy blanket from real "grown-ups." Some students may have agreed with the structure; however, I, and many of my peers, felt left out of the mold that "good" and "successful" students should fit. My school created limits and controls that made adapting to new situations feel nearly impossible. We heard teachers who routinely spoke about "creative thinking" yet, in practice, generally discouraged independent thought. When life failed to go as originally planned, for many students' the first reaction was to fall apart rather than consider an alternative route.

While I endured dominant external pressures to direct thought and behavior in my school, some students suffered far worse consequences than lack of self-confidence and questioning of self-worth. Differences felt suspect and strangeness feared. I further questioned the pressures of society that seemed to make the rules when after a tragedy in Colorado,[1] rather than practicing acceptance and welcoming to the slightly "weird" students, my friends and I were judged, questioned, and isolated even more. I heard news reports blame the music I listened to and the movies I watched as a catalyst for the tragedy. I was friends with students who wore black trench coats and liked the same bands as the shooters at Columbine. My new boyfriend and I tried to steal moments of affection in the hallways; however, because I displayed band names on my backpack associated with the two teenaged shooters, we were suspect. We felt that the teachers missed the point; happy students do not shoot other students. I eventually considered myself lucky that the massacre at Columbine occurred just weeks before we graduated; we did not suffer the suspicious gazes for long.

Today, as I work through a graduate education program and prepare for a career in teaching, these are some of the thoughts I revisit while reflecting on my development and observing my students. While high school memories exist for me more as ghosts from an earlier age, I considered it important to evaluate honestly my experiences as I move into a position to be on the other side of possibly initiating similar memories for a new generation of high school students. What type of teacher will I choose to be? I learned to navigate my challenges as a student through trial and error; however, it was not without painful consequences. These days I observe junior high and high school

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[1] http://history1900s.about.com/od/famouscrimesscandals/a/columbine.htm; http://davecullen.com/columbine.htm

students and repeatedly recognize familiar frustrations. I want to be the teacher that reaches for the students on the outskirts; I want to be the teacher lonely students feel they can trust.

The dominant external structures I endured, and continue to witness in some students, can fall closely to what Constance Kamii (1993) defined as "heteronomy," which involves "being governed by others" (p. 41). She explained how adult regulation of behaviors could result in a child having "no opportunity to construct internal rules by which to govern himself" (p. 41). Kamii's ideas brought me to believe that the pressures from heteronomy and conformity may prevent teenagers from developing their full potential as individuals to survive and thrive by adapting to life's challenges. In this thesis, I will argue that it is important to encourage empowered adaptability through developing autonomy in school. I believe that emphasizing the importance of unique individual experiences through life and education would help more teenagers survive high school and beyond.

During my three years in the education program, amongst the variety of approaches I experienced for bringing the best of ourselves to our classrooms and students, I felt that something was missing from the conversations. Despite the multitude of class discussions about ways to support and protect students, not one education class I attended examined Columbine, or the subsequent school shootings at Virginia Tech College or the elementary school in Newtown. Class discussions approached the topics of school violence and bullying in reference to race, religion, and sexual orientation. On one occasion, I tried to tie a discussion about Latino students being told to hang out with the presumed "right" (i.e., white) students, with my

experiences of being judged in high school for being friends with "goths." The instructor told me that my experience did not count because it was not about race. Discrimination comes in many forms, and I believe that every isolated child should be our focus for care and concern.

My preparation for becoming a teacher has thus far told me that there is more that can be done to help students feel included and individually empowered. One education class spoke about the importance of "people-first" language and classifying students by their names rather than their race or abilities. I felt encouraged that students may be protected from experiences similar to mine. Another course emphasized the importance of creating a classroom community, even, from my perspective, at the expense of individual personalities. Many educators focus on specific areas of personal concern in their classrooms. I felt that I had found my area for improvement in education.

Surviving high school is more than graduating; it includes maneuvering the personal, academic, and social twists that threaten to pull many teenagers into destructive tendencies.[2] The overly structured "plans" many high schools present for students can limit their options for what kind of lives they may want to lead and reduce students' abilities to alter course if needed. If one purpose of secondary education is to prepare students to become participatory citizens of a democratic society, should not education give them the tools to become adaptive and autonomous adults? I believe

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[2] http://www.cbsnews.com/news/teen-boredom-destructive-behavior/;
http://www.teendrugabuse.us/statistics-on-teenage-drug-use/;
http://www.webmd.com/parenting/features/coping-school-stress; http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/12/02/246599742/school-stress-takes-a-toll-on-health-teens-and-parents-say.

students deserve more than academic content. They deserve to achieve more than a diploma at the end of the twelfth grade.

I decided to become a teacher because of my deep love of education and art and my concern and care for teenagers. As a ballet dancer and teacher, I routinely see similar patterns of troubling experiences in the eyes and posture of my students. I hear the dressing room conversations and catch whispers during class. I witness the pain of defeat and heavy weight of fatigue. I struggle with finding the balance of wanting to make my students' paths easier, yet knowing that they will need to be even stronger for life's challenges yet awaiting.

Autonomy, as I use the term, is the opposite of heteronomy. For me, autonomy means an internal understanding and guiding of the thought processes and actions, including what morals and values to abide by, why we came to those perspectives, acting on our perspectives, and accepting the responsibility for the consequences that may follow. Autonomy is not acting without recourse. Nor is it acting purely out of self-interest. If I am "autonomous" I think, I evaluate, I act as my own person, and I accept the responsibility in questioning the world and learning to live with the answers**.**

I consider autonomy as a means to surviving and thriving. When I say that I want students to survive, I mean that in addition to the literal definition of "surviving," I want high school students to leave school confident in their abilities to adapt to the complications and unexpected surprises in life along their personally evaluated best possible terms. They deserve to feel empowered to adapt to new and unexpected scenarios. When I say that I want teenagers to thrive, I mean that I believe they deserve to experience personal gratification in their achievements. Graduating high school is an

achievement for many students. However, I care about students not only surviving through grades nine through twelve, but also thriving with confidence and self-direction.

As a high school student, an observer, and now as a preservice teacher, I have passed signs on school walls encouraging students to "make good decisions," but who decides what constitutes a good decision. The student? The teachers? I want teenagers to feel confident in the art of decision-making and be able to minimize unwelcomed, unguided, last minute, shifts in their plans. I care about students not only adapting, when necessary, but also being able to consider alternative options before coming to conclusions.

I chose to frame this exploration of possibilities for autonomy and adaptability around ideas of knowledge, morality, and experience, with the goal of preparing myself and others to consider ways to help students experience critical consciousness. This paper utilizes the works of educational theorists such as Constance Kamii, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire to explore ways in which adaptability through autonomy might help more students both survive and thrive.

Constance Kamii informs much of my understanding about autonomy in children. Kamii furthered Jean Piaget's research in early-childhood psychological development by exploring and comparing issues of autonomy and dependence. She interpreted Piaget's views of autonomy as meaning, "the *ability* to take relevant factors into account and make decisions for oneself about right and wrong in the moral realm, and about truth and untruth in the intellectual realm, independently of reward and punishment" (Kamii, 1993, p. xiii). Kamii discussed the ability of young children to

shape individual morality, which encourages autonomous thought and actions. She

argued that the "morality of heteronomy is characterized by obedience and conformity

to external rules and…[that t]he morality of autonomy…is characterized by personal

conviction about values and rules that are constructed by oneself" (p. 41). Autonomy,

in reference to Kamii's ideas about early childhood education, is not just self-directed

decision-making by students, but also self-directed morality in understanding how they

make sense of the world and their own place in it.

Reading John Dewey offered me many opportunities to reconsider the directions

education takes with students. Dewey was a twentieth-century philosopher who

examined human experience and focused greatly on the purpose of education. He is

generally credited with prompting views of progressive education that melded together,

teacher-centered, student-centered, and subject-centered education. Among other

things, Dewey (1938/1997) wrote about the importance of "continuity of experience,"

which descibed the importance of building connections from one experience or decision

to another, both in life and education.

I agree with Dewey (1916) that knowledge combines internal and external

aspects of oneself and one's life. Dewey asserted that if "the living, experiencing being

is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then

knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective"

(cited in Menand, 1997, p. 210). In order for students to receive the most benefit from

their exposure to the world they live in, they deserve the most cohesive understanding

about knowledge and to participate according to their personal wishes. While some of

Dewey's books were published a hundred or more years ago, many of his concerns of

how society, schools, and teachers approached education are relevant today. Dewey's beliefs about how knowledge and experience influence personal growth contribute to my exploration of how schools can benefit student survival by encouraging autonomy.

Paulo Friere was a twentieth-century human rights advocate for emancipatory pedagogy. He spoke out against the marginalizing of people, historically poor in South America, silenced by an oppressive patriarchy. He advocated for critical consciousness, where people realize both the degree of their oppression, and the need for non-violent release from oppression for themselves and their oppressors. Freire's (1970) theories of how education can overcome oppression also informed my thinking about the importance of autonomy and adaptability for students to survive. Critical consciousness includes continual awareness of who we are, where we are, and what we want to achieve. In this project, I invoke his theories and beliefs because I feel that one passage to emancipation is through one's mind. Freire also explored the importance of liberating oneself in order to name the world: "The young perceive that their right to say their own word has been stolen from them, and that few things are more important than the struggle to win it back" (Freire, in the foreword by Shaull, 1970/2012, p. 34). How can we, as people and educators, help students discover their words about the world? Discovering the power to name the world for ourselves is one beginning to living autonomously.

Another author referenced through this work will be Daniel Quinn. I appreciated his idea that although part of humanity started down a wrong path with the

development of totalitarian agriculture thousands of years ago,[3] there is still hope for redemption through changed minds.[4] He explained that there are laws of nature from which humanity is not exempted. Quinn (1997/1998) suggested that the predominate conflict in modern society is that it exists under the influence of "mother culture," a system that has created conditions "tantamount to cultural collapse. For ten thousand years you've believed that you have the one right way for people to live. But for the last three decades or so, that belief has become more and more untenable with every passing year" (p. 127). Quinn presented evidence that the path much of humanity is on is not working. I tie his idea that there is no one right way to live to my hope for the development of greater autonomy for individual students. Just as there is no one right way for humanity to live, there is also no one right way for students to live either.

One of Quinn's ideas is that programs will not save the world. Rather, what is needed is a new vision. According to Quinn: "If the world is saved, it will be saved by people with changed minds, people with a new vision. It will not be saved by people with old minds and new programs. It will not be saved by people with the old vision but a new program" (1996/1997, p. 48). I use his advocacy for a new vision for saving the world in my desires to help more students survive. My vision for more students to survive involves the development of greater individual understandings and applications of autonomy.

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[3] "Totalitarian agriculture is based on the premise that *all the food in the world belongs to us*, and there is no limit to whatever we may take for ourselves and deny to all others" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 260).

[4] "We don't have to change HUMANKIND in order to survive. We only have to change a single culture" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 255).

This is not an exhaustive list of authors who discuss the ideas of autonomy, the purposes of education, or ways to help teenagers survive. In all instances, these are authors I met during my studies for this degree. I reference their works as a beginning to this explorative thesis on the importance of developing greater autonomy in high school students. I argue that to continue on our present path risks detriment to current and future students.

In this chapter, I have explored some serious problems I believe persist. The next chapter discusses some factors in schools and society that can prevent students from surviving and/or thriving in high school. One problem involves an often unintended failure to care for people as unique individuals, which can then leak into schools failing to encourage students to create critical understandings of self-worth and identity. A tragic result of this failure is that some teenagers literally do not survive,[5] through their hands or the hands of others. Many more students potentially fail to survive with intent and confidence of their lives. In the third chapter, I examine possible origins for why these failures still occur, including factors such as pre-existing structures reinforcing pressures to conform, desires for external validation and control over others, and the persistence of black and white binary thinking. In the fourth chapter I discuss what might be done to help students survive school and beyond by exploring the theories of Kamii, Dewey, Freire, and others. In the final chapter, I bring together the criticisms described, as well as the theories for improvement discussed, emphasizing factors that would support adaptability and autonomy in order to help more high school students survive and thrive.

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[5] https://www.ncjrs.gov/yviolence/statistics.html.

After the massacre at Columbine High School, understandably frightened teachers and school administrators watched the students much more carefully, in case any more of us were like "them." I heard claims from teachers, administrators, and news reports that something was wrong with *those* students. Though many adults probably rationalized their protective methods as for the students' safety, from a student perspective, we felt that already existing controls tightened unnecessarily. There may have been teachers and administrators fighting for us, though we did not feel their well-meaning intentions at the time.

While the two young shooters suffered from depression and isolation, these were not, isolated, one-time tragedies. Sometimes smaller, more personal acts of violence go unnoticed. A young girl changes her hairstyle; a young man starts working out and taking supplements to "bulk up"; straight "A" students give up their studies when not accepted by their first choice universities. Many teenagers try multiple paths to explore the world and search for their place within it. Unfortunately, not every choice is based on self-respect and personal understanding. I believe there are still problems with the ideas underlying the structures of education when some schools attempt to make every student fit in to imagined parameters of sameness.

Chapter 2: What Is Happening?

It can happen that circumstances may shatter a culture's vision of its place in the scheme of things…When this happens (and it's happened many times), things fall apart in this culture. Order and purpose are replaced by chaos and bewilderment. People lose the will to live, become listless, become violent, become suicidal, and take to drink, drugs, and crime. (Quinn. 1996/1997, p. 277)

While humanity experiences an innate desire to survive, there exist multiple obstacles to work past in order to achieve that goal. High school is no different; some students survive and thrive, and others do not. Education has too often twisted into schooling, which stifles experiences rather than freeing minds. The failure of students to survive or thrive autonomously in school can result in themselves, and possibly other people, not surviving inside and outside of schools. Teenagers, hurting and scared, turn to irrational reacting instead of critically examined decision-making.

Students endure a variety of challenges to creating a personally meaningful identity or sense of self. As if academics were not enough of a challenge for many students, teenagers also attempt to balance studying and school-related projects with extra-curricular activities, personal interests, part-time jobs, and family responsibilities. The time spent outside of schools may be more important to the students than their academic work toward discovering self-worth and self-identity.

By high school, some teenagers will have experienced dramatic and unsettling changes in their lives through family, school, and possibly even career choices. At sixteen and seventeen, some teenagers may learn that their dreams of becoming a professional athlete, musician, soldier, or dancer, will never materialize. Then what do they have to work for, dream for, or live for? Scores on a test? Cloistering students into stifled paths for excellence in particular academic subjects restricts their ability to

adapt to mysterious challenges. Limiting opportunities for discovering self-worth may result in students turning away from education as an opportunity for growth and guidance.

Students endure a multitude of external influences both inside the classroom, and in society. While often well meaning, these influences can restrict the production of autonomy in thought and action, and limit their adaptability in life. Heteronomy experienced in schools and society can lead to at least three significant problems. Two of these problems, lack of a sense of self-worth through value and self-satisfaction, and lack of a sense of self-identity, lead to the third: some students neither surviving nor thriving. While external pressures for conformity do not begin in schools, they do cycle back and forth between schools and society through shared ideas of patriarchal dominance (Freire, 1970; Quinn, 1997).

I believe that these problems originate from prevalent and long established societal structures that ask people to forgo discovery of identity and self-worth.[6] Dewey (1939) discussed societal attacks on individualism through both "private and public collectivism" (cited in Menand, 1997, p. 267). He described the pull between two collective forces that pushed people into one camp of thinking or the other, but both meant giving away a part, if not all of an individual's identity. In my opinion, the lack of encouragement for critically conscious self-examination of self-worth fails to prepare students for the stress and pressures of life during and after high school.

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[6] Quinn writes, "…but a lifestyle that works has always eluded you. And the more people you have, the more manifest, widespread, and painful this failure becomes. You're having a hard time building enough prisons to hold all your criminals. The nuclear family is staggering into oblivion. The incidence of drug addiction, suicide, mental illness, divorce, child abuse, rape and serial murder continues to climb." (1997/1998, p. 120)

Society, through honoring conformity and obedience over autonomous individuality, can fail to promote critical self-awareness, and our dominant culture generally lacks an understanding of autonomy and the responsibility that follows with it (Quinn, 1996, 1997). If I am unable to make decisions for myself, then I should not be held accountable for the consequences. It must be someone's fault, but always someone else's. The status quo, Quinn's (1997/1998) idea of a "mother culture," accepted a class of conquering rulers that controlled all the food, and a class of submissive receivers. To tie this idea back to autonomy for students, in many cases students receive orders and influence from external rather than internal direction. I argue that the students are then the ignored others, and that there are consequences when teenagers do not feel that they fit in. When society prizes order over individuals, the different may become isolated, angry, and possibly destructive.

Freire summarized the consequence of dominant external influences, which he termed social paternalism, as a "situation in which critical awareness and reason were practically impossible" (Freire, in the foreword by Shaull, 1970/2012, p. 30). By overzealously dictating students' lives, society and schools may limit children's abilities to comprehend their decisions and learn to navigate their lives toward their desired direction. Teenagers then miss opportunities to create conscious notions of personal identity and self-worth.

Similar to developing and implementing school and classroom rules, cultures created laws and, "[w]riting enabled them to define in exact, fixed terms the behaviors they wanted the state to regulate, punish, and suppress" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 265). What happens when a student, or any single individual, feels differently than the

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majority? Among other things, we risk losing the creative potential of an individual when we punish and suppress differences.

Social desires for communities to "get along" peacefully, without disagreements or oddities, can restrain the development of autonomy. When societies itemize and condone certain behaviors, while making others illegal, portions of the populace, in this case specifically youths, can begin to feel that they are the problem. Values become expectations, which then become rules and regulations.

Too often, both societies and schools overrun individually created senses of identity. Students sometimes receive identifiers to tell them that they are different and risk being ostracized. Schools often mirror the greater society in what is valued and promoted and what is banned or suppressed (Quinn 1997/1998). I believe we must wake up to the realization that the path we are on is not working. We must not continue to ignore the truth: "there is no one right way to live" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 318). Quinn (1996, 1997) described the worldwide catastrophe awaiting humanity if the dominant structure does not recognize the error of its thinking. Drug use, pregnancy, violence, and suicide are not new dangers for high school students. We have already witnessed the possible disasters brought upon our students by a loss of personal identity and missing the fulfillment of self-worth.

Lack of self-worth and identity can lead students to feel that they are not in control or responsible for the directions of their lives. Desires for building "school communities" may become overzealous and undermine autonomy. Teenagers face a multitude of influence from peers and adults, and many voices conflict from the opposing sides. How can we prepare students to maneuver a dynamic world if they

have not been encouraged by schools and society to explore the aspects of their character that make them unique? Current curriculum often fails to fully prepare teenagers to successfully approach and navigate present and future changes in their lives in order to learn who they are and who they want to become. Lacking a sense of identity, students can be unprepared and unsupported with critical self-knowledge they need to navigate their formative years successfully.

When educational leaders require students to fit a certain mold so school days are predictable and organized, schools may withhold autonomous power from students by attempting to control for any possible exemption to the rule. This pressure restricts a student's capacity to construct their world. Dewey (1945) discussed the relationship between an organism (a person or student) and its surroundings: "The only power the organism possesses to control its own future depends upon the way its present responses modify changes which are taking place in its medium" (cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 69). Teenagers need space and practice to create personal adaptations, and potential alternatives, to what the present environment requires. At many levels, prevalent concerns direct how things look rather than how people feel. Productivity rather than individual achievement becomes the focus. Even in my ballet classes, most schools have dress codes. I find myself policing students' personal expressions through their accessory choices only so that I do not get an email from the school director about the importance of following policies and procedures.

When teachers value calm productive classrooms over student autonomy, they often create an expectation for students to memorize the rules rather than examining personal beliefs of fairness and justice. According to Kamii, this kind of external

regulation gives the student "no opportunity to construct internal rules by which to govern himself" (1993, p. 41). Free will and governing oneself are corner-stone ideas to autonomy and adapting to a dynamic world. As such, I believe they are closely tied to the goal of helping more students survive.

Despite more than a century of pedagogical discussions of what curriculums or policies may or may not be best for students, many schools continue to struggle with low academic achievement, personal and group violence, and student feelings of isolation and frustration.[7] After more than a century of educational debate, experimentation, study, and policymaking in public schools, many students, missing a developed concept of self-worth, continue to choose to drop out of high school, or worse, take to violent and dangerous methods to inflict harm on themselves or others. As some school curriculums grow more and more packed with information, some students walk away less and less prepared to navigate a world they have not been prepared to examine or the role they may wish to play.

If students are not encouraged to learn and grow from the surrounding stimuli, they risk stalling personal and academic development. Too often, current educational practices ignore the importance of autonomy, fostering what Dewey (1938) described as "mis-educative" experiences. A "mis-educative [experience] has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experiences…it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness" (Dewey, 1938/1997, pp. 25-26). In the midst of mis-educative experiences, students do not have access to beneficial understandings of the world nor how they may fit into their surroundings. Schools and society, by imposing strict

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[7] As Kamii observed, "…schools are not working well. Low test scores, physical violence, alcohol and drug abuse, alienation, and vandalism are only some of the problems plaguing U. S. schools today" (1984, p. 410).

external influences, demonstrate a preference for rule followers, not creators. Without a sense of personal identity and self-worth, too often students may move through life based on mechanical habit, allowing others to make decisions for them, and sometimes towards dangerous, or at least unsatisfactory, decisions.

Mis-education increases the risks of teenagers losing, if they had ever gained, an idea of who they are and why they are important. Mis-educative experiences in the world decrease the chances of students feeling either responsible for outcomes of their feelings and actions, or in control to navigate towards more desirable consequences. Students may then struggle with applying healthy and productive decision-making practices in directing their education and personal futures. As Dewey observed, "[m]echanical uniformity of studies and methods creates a kind of uniform immobility… while behind this enforced uniformity individual tendencies operate in irregular and more or less forbidden ways (1938/1997, p. 62). I interpret his meaning of irregular tendencies as those that are unplanned and poorly thought-out. The "forbidden ways" Dewey identified may also lead to dangerous and or destructive tendencies for students. This leads me to believe that static obedience to heteronomy can result in erratic and catastrophic consequences.

I feel that general education fails to promote a strong sense of self-identity when it claims to encourage "critical thinking" yet does not emphasize internal understanding from students for why he or she chose a particular answer or direction of action. Quinn shared how we can discover "how far short real schooling falls from the ideal of 'young minds being awakened'" (1997/1998, p. 131). I believe that one of the missing pieces to "young minds being awakened" to an awareness of consciousness and perspectives

on the world is when education ignores the necessity for students to direct their individual lives. The pressures from too many external influences can result in the situation that when offered an opportunity to examine how or why they concluded a decision, too many adolescent students could falter or avoid examining their decision-making process.

Students who see the world differently may then feel that they must live in the shadows and against the current. Dewey (1938/1997) discussed how the disconnect between individual students and over-all curriculum standards contributed to ineffective teaching: "The principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of material to needs and capacities of individuals may cause an experience to be non-educative quite as much as failure of the individual to adapt himself to the material" (p. 47). When children do not learn, the break in the flow of knowledge is not necessarily their fault. Traditional educational practices then risk abandoning children and teenagers to either conform to the written and unwritten expectations perpetuated in schools, or falter on their own and reap unknown consequences.

Making decisions requires practice, otherwise, in lacking a sense of identity, "[w]e get used to the chains we wear, and we miss them when removed" (Dewey, 1902 cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 481). Possible results may include that the students either avoid making decisions as long as possible, or default to regimented practices. In either situation, students may not feel supported in feeling that they have control or responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions. Extraneous limitations that bypass students creating a meaningful sense of identity and personal self-worth may hinder their ability to adapt to new situations.

Some students might even resist helpful guidance from adults inside and outside schools. Once convinced of a lack of self-worth, students' reactionary choices could become self-destructive. According to Kamii, "children's interest in learning is adversely affected by such feelings as insecurity, frustration, anger, and fear" (1993, p. 45). These learning and emotional blocks may result in students giving up on their dreams and ambitions, or even in life.

Lack of self-worth and self-identity could also lead to some teenagers, students, and people in general to feel not valued. As a result, they may grasp for any possible idea to feel that they belong and matter. Quinn (1996) observed that much of humanity experiences a need to be saved, and many others are willing to show them how to be saved. In this situation, the leader, or idea, reached for may not be the best option for survival. Too often, young and impressionable people do not reach for the best options, just the closest and easiest: "One vision is sweeping us toward catastrophe…I'm trying to show you another vision, healthy for us and healthy for the world" (Quinn, 1996/1997, pp. 148-149). Lack of autonomy from neglected opportunities to develop self-worth or personal concepts of individual identity can negatively influence high school student's survivability. When students internalize the beliefs of others without question, they may miss the opportunities to discover personal strengths deep within.

Some students may then reach a point of revolt against pre-conditioned acquiescence to sources of outside authority. For example, Kamii (1993) described that as frustrations build, students "exercise the last freedom left for them—the freedom not to learn" (p. 44). When this occurs, whether in small actions of deviance, or large, it can then be too late for students to determine beneficial options for their actions:

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When external control is rejected, the problem becomes that of finding the factors of control that are inherent within experience. When external authority is rejected, it does not follow that all authority should be rejected, but rather that there is need to search for a more effective source of authority (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 21).

If the years spent in school do not contribute to bringing students closer to autonomy in life, teenagers may miss the opportunities to learn how to adapt. The great danger of youth rejecting external control comes when a child or teenager has no personally relevant base of morality in which to turn: "In revolt, the individual is opposing conforming. Nonconformity does not necessarily make an individual morally autonomous" (Kamii, 1984, p. 411). When students push away external controls, which are the only controls they know, they risk destructive choices if they have not learned how to direct themselves toward individually productive, "educative" experiences.

Chapter 3: Why These Things Happen

'…what's wrong with you that you can't get with this wonderful program?' Perhaps you understand for the first time now that my role here is to bring you this tremendous news, that *there's nothing wrong here with YOU*. You are not what's wrong. And I think there was an element of this understanding in your sobs: 'My God, it isn't *me*! (Quinn, 1997/1998, p. 204)

The previous chapter elaborated on some of the problems caused by too many external influences in school and society that lead to high school students not living autonomously, losing their ability to adapt to the world, and possibly not surviving. Many schools expect students to memorize content and become "good" citizens but offer few if any opportunities to explore themselves and develop full autonomy. As a student, external expectations for how a "good student" acts, and what a "successful student should do" clouded both my ability to make clear personal decisions for the person I wanted to become and the understanding of how I wanted to get there. I do not believe that I understood the concept of autonomy, much less the importance, until well after high school. I did not recognize the power I had to control the possible directions for my life until recently. Undone by overwhelming external forces, some students may suffer the ultimate price by losing their life.

This section will explore some of the examples of why external forces creating limiting factors have become so prevalent. Existing structures and beliefs about the world have framed a top-down mode of heteronomy. Both Quinn (1996, 1997) and Freire (1970) warn against too little questioning of cultural status quos. Some structures for external influences exist with the best intentions to guide students intelligently and honorably through dynamic development years. Other structures inundate students by desires for validation. This need for external validation can lead into a desire for

controlling others. An element flowing though both the social and educational

structures is an over-arching belief in finite, either/or, binary thought that does not give

space for a third or even fourth option.

Teachers, administrators, families, and friends give well-meaning advice, or

restrictions, for how students could think, act, and live. In general, many instances form

from a perceived need to help guide another. Dewey (1938/1997) explained the value

of learning from another's life: "The mature person...has no right to withhold from the

young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own

experience has given him" (p. 38). The potential benefit from a mentor-mentee

relationship requires that the mentor has not only a level of experiences similar to the

students, but also that they have explored the meaning behind those experiences. After

all, sharing lived experiences is not the same as dictating specified behaviors or values.

Unfortunately, guidance and teaching can morph into what Freire (1970/2012)

summarized as "paternalism" with the occurrence of "[p]edagogy 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

maintained and embodies oppression" (p. 54). Though community and cultural leaders,

teachers and administrators, and adults in general may approach education as the

oppourtunity to impart meaningful knowledge to teenagers, too often the process

ignores the needs and desires of individual students. The best intentions of sharing

knowledge instead then produces "ignorance and lethargy" (Freire, in the foreword by

Shaull, 1970/2012, p. 30). In teenagers, we witness apathy to education or self-surivial

that potentially leads to dangerous consequences for individuals and potentially their communities.

Pressured by curricular demands, many of the education processes adults enact ignore the autonomous development of critical consciousness students need in order to examine their minds. Education should be an opportunity for students to explore their own minds and individual intellects:

> there can be no moral autonomy without intellectual autonomy, and vice versa. If the young child is constantly given moral rules ready made and is not allowed to question the adult, his experiences do not provide him sufficient opportunities to develop an attitude of critically evaluating what the adult tells him. (Kamii, 1993, p. 42)

While having opinions and sharing experiences can be helpful in some situations, in my experience too often the noise becomes a hectic crowding in students' heads. Suggestions can vary from those that were similar to my experiences in school of what to wear and who to befriend to more oppressive and dogmatic beliefs involving culture and spirituality and how to believe and act.

Many people have opinions in telling students how they should think and how they should live. Freire (1970) referenced one approach for this as "false generosity." Even after allowing for intentionally beneficial advice, guidance often edges toward control. Advice that originated from a desire to guide others helpfully toward beneficial outcomes may morph into desires for agreement and obedience. Quinn (1997/1998) writes that "[a]s you move out into the world, you'll find that the intellectually insecure often bolster their confidence by maintaining subjects in solid, impermeable categories of good and evil" (p. 221). Ideas that support mother culture or the cultural status quo

are generally considered "good," while ideas that question the dominant culture fall into the "bad" category.

While schools advertise accepting individuality and display words such as *personalized instruction*, emphasis in binary either-or thinking potentially leaves out a large portion of options for viewing the world[8]. If one answer is correct, the other must be wrong. For one person, or group, to be in power, another must be controlled. Years spent in school could be the opportunity to encourage students to question their world, and what role they chose to play rather than to absorb dictations from a false mount.

As an example of overly intrusive external influences in schools, Dewey (1938) summarized the development of theories for the classroom as divided by answers given to learn and answers personally created. He described the dichotomy of "the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 17). Too often, class time emphasis falls heavily on the "formation from without." What is taught inside the school becomes sacred and beyond questioning. Students' personal thoughts and opinions on the matter, "formation from within," may become pushed aside and neglected. Believing that they simplify for the student's benefit by removing complexity, education becomes about knowing the difference between someone else's right and wrong instead of holistic understanding that incorporates an individual with their perceptions about the world.

An emphasis on binary black or white options limits learning opportunities for both teachers and students. Kamii (1993) described a difficulty students experience when they meet a concept that runs counter to how they individually believe: "Rather

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[8] https://thinkingcoral.wordpress.com/2010/03/23/life-may-not-be-binary/.

than trying to figure things out for himself, the child may then become preoccupied with reading the teacher's face in order to say 'the' right thing the adult wants to hear" (p. 36). Children, teenagers, and teachers may then miss the opportunity to explore a thought process different to their and, perhaps, to consider critically how they view the world. Restricting how students shape and consider their decisions may then also limit students' abilities to adapt to varying scenarios of success and challenges in life.

Splitting subjects into black or white might help students retain information, but does the practice ultimately help students survive a complicated and dynamic world? Freire (1970/2012) warned that limiting what and how a student gains understanding about the world "hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (p. 55). The missing attachment to responsibility can also further distance students from feeling in control or autonomous and may induce more irrational and dangerous behaviors. If teenagers are not feeling in control, they may look to others for more direction, without considering the consequences.

In my opinion, some pedagogy theorists, or educational bureaucrats, push to prove the importance and applicability of their personal theories over the potential needs of individual students when they impose external controls rather than promoting individually meaningful development. Instead of encouraging tying together what one has observed in the world with what one has been taught, "the separation of 'mind' from direct occupation with things throws emphasis on *things* at the expense of *relations* or connections" (Dewey, 1916 cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 498). Education then shifts to validation through how much students know about isolated facts rather than how cohesive a picture of the world they see themselves living in.

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One rationalization for an overzealous desire to direct behavior evolves from a need to validate one's thoughts and actions. In both schools and society, some leaders may view their followers, or students, as ignorant. In Freire's words, "by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence" (1970/2012, p. 72). The cycle begins with an itch of insecurity, and returns by creating uncertainty for others. The insistence falls close to a belief that says, "I am right because you believe that I am right and I need you to believe that I am right in order for me to feel that I am right." A leader's, or teacher's, search for validation in what they believe or teach may in turn limit what students experience. Reproducing one's thoughts and encouraging others to follow examples gives validation to actions whether or not they are correct and productive for all.

Teachers seeking validation for what and how they teach may become blinded to the needs of students who view the world differently. Even one-hundred years ago, Dewey (1916) described the trials of teachers forced to reduce education to tests and grades to measure their effectiveness of their profession and their students. Often in schools, teachers must emphasis one correct answer, at the expense of critically examined options. Too often, schools seek validation for their procedures, requiring students to change and submit to a pre-established expectation. Freire (1970) explained how the dominant structures felt threatened when the prevailing, and patriarchal truth was questioned. Opportunities for learning should first make sure that every individual feels valued and honored for their contributions, rather than obsessing over what answers the teachers want to hear.

Binary thought divides more than intellectual categories. The process of continually seeing options as only either/or may also create a perceived division between individuals and their surrounding communities. Desires for validation too often leads to the assumption that the individual must sacrifice autonomy for the greater good of society. Freire (1970/2012) discussed how a dominant class established a status quo and retained control through "strongly possessive consciousness—possessive of the world and of men and women" (p. 58). The established order in both school and society required willing commitments to order over autonomy to maintain their promise for calm achievements. While autonomy emphasizes the power of individuals, it does not promote isolation. It can, however, disrupt patriarchal controls and create questioning curiosity to limitations founded in binary thought.

Educational structures often have required teachers to maintain strict control. Dewey (1938/1997) presented one explanation for this emphasis:

> a reason why the order which existed was so much a matter of sheer obedience to the will of an adult was because the situation almost forced it upon the teacher. The school was not a group or community held together by participation in common activities… [but] by the direct intervention of the teacher, who… '*kept* order.' (p. 55)

The fallacy of a learning community continued under domination rather than cooperation. Similar relationships occur culturally outside of schools when leaders demand "kept order" at the expense of exploration and individual meaning. The trickle down from social expectations may then lead to education bureaucracies directing teachers to exchange their passions for students for dedication to order and the curriculum. Education becomes control when the emphasis is on giving the "right" answer rather than critically examining a problem.

Society and school curriculums claim to honor the national tradition of democratic freedoms, yet too often ignore autonomy for students.[9] Many educational structures have left behind Dewey's belief that the importance of the quality of experience for individuals deserve consideration before "methods of repression and coercion or force" (1938/1997, p. 34). Controlled schooling, rather than autonomous education, often results in students reciting empty facts. Emphasis on test scores and quotas for graduation rates contributed to a stereotypical background of students passively receiving information from teachers: "We did the memorizing mostly because we were obedient conformists in a system that reinforced our heteronomy" (Kamii, 1984, p. 413). Students passively taking in facts from teachers without autonomously integrating the information to their own experiences and understandings, risk passively passing through life as well.

In my experiences, many traditional education classrooms have ignored, or worse, inhibited knowledge of oneself and the understanding of one's person needed in order to lead a self-directed life. Desires for control emphasize externally created morality instead of permitting students to engage in development in conjunction with individual interests and values (Dewey, 1938). The traditional structures of classrooms have generally promoted external control. As Dewey (1938/1997) observed, "[s]ince the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience" (p. 18). A culture of high stakes standardized testing, and end-of-the-year exams, can make educators feel pressured to ensure that their students know the

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[9]http://sde.ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/documents/files/Social%20Studies%20OK%20Academic%20Standards.rev815pdf.pdf.

"correct" answers for standardized tests, and perhaps glance over whether or not the students feel in control of their thought processes. How can educators expect students to draw conclusions about the world and their place within it if they have not had the opportunity to explore themselves?

Insistence for control can discourage students from seeking new experiences or expanding their understanding about themselves and the world. For example, Dewey (1916) reminded us of these dangers when "what is distinctively individual in a young person is brushed aside, or regarded as a source of mischief or anarchy…Consequently, there are induced lack of interest in the novel, aversion to progress, and dread of the uncertain and the unknown" (cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 492). In educating students about the world, schools too often bypass encouraging students to explore their minds. In viewing the world in cases of either "right" or "wrong," education limits student potential.

Quinn explained how, in classrooms, regime replaced discovery, because although "[t]eachers for the most part would be delighted to awaken young minds… the system within which they must work fundamentally frustrates that desire by insisting that all minds must be opened in the same order, using the same tools, and at the same pace, on a certain schedule" (1997/1998, p. 131). Teenagers endure limitations schools and society created in consequence for regularity, order, and certainty. Exploration faded and predictability became the goal. Promoting order and obedience may then risk stifling individual students' adaptability to a dynamic world. It does not have to be a question of either/or, rather welcoming along both sides. Overcoming others' desires for control and validation does not mean segregating from society, but rather a holistic

understanding of identity and self-worth contributing to autonomy and adaptability in life.

Validation and control both stem from a shared belief of binary thinking that something either is or is not "right."[10] The combination of best intentions, binary thinking, and desires for control and validation has resulted in the current reality in which, "the logic of the child is hampered and mortified" (Dewey, 1902 cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 480). Students, as children or teenagers, may lose the ability to think for themselves and on their own. Many school curriculums, either willingly or not, have promoted isolated and disconnected visits to information. Dewey explained how the "disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits…Under such circumstances, is it idle to talk of self-control" (1938/1997, p. 26). Suffering under others' desires for validation and control in a realm ruled by binary thinking, some students choose whatever easy option seems viable, not necessarily that which is the best for their survival.

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[10] http://thearchdruidreport.blogspot.com/2011/10/trouble-with-binary-thinking.html

Chapter 4: What Can Be Done

[W]hat people believe to be true is just what they think it is good to believe to be true…understanding the world in that way will put the child into a better relation with it, will enable him or her to cope with it more satisfactorily-even if this means recognizing how unsatisfactory, from a child's point of view (or anyone's), the world can be. (Menand, 1997, p. xii-xiii)

The goal of this chapter is to address what can be done to help solve the problem that some students do not survive high school. Chapters two and three addressed that too many external influences exist in dominant social structures and why binary either/or thinking works towards validating controlling others. This top-down control can trickle into schools and possibly restrict teenagers from fully developing concepts of identity and self-worth. At some point adults, society, or both have willing or unwillingly created parameters wherein a participant loses the option to agree or disagree. Students may then miss the opportunity for autonomy and adaptability in order to institute personally relevant changes. This has led to one prevailing heteronomous dictation that creates catastrophic conditions for society and the world (Freire, 1970; Quinn, 1996, 1997).

As stated earlier, autonomy, for the purposes of this paper, infuses ideas of morality, knowledge, experience, and critical consciousness. I believe that it would benefit students to experience what I will call "autonomous adaptability." What I mean by autonomous adaptability is gaining power and control for the direction of one's life. An old proverb states that we cannot control what happens to us, but we can control how we react to it. I do not imply that autonomous adaptability would give a student complete and permanent control of his or her life. Rather, knowledge and understanding, our personal synthesis, of how we create our thoughts and opinions on a

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topic, environment, or action can give us power over how we choose to react. I believe that that is *true* autonomy.

One way to promote autonomous adaptability is through self-governing. Kamii (1984) described the success of autonomy as, "the extent that a child becomes able to govern himself or herself, that child is governed less by other people" (p. 411). When people have the opportunity to govern themselves, to monitor and conclude their choices of actions, they build personally meaningful intellectual support for their decision-making. Self-governing of this nature could be one path for more students surviving and thriving in school and in life.

Students, like all people, build comprehension of themselves and their surroundings through personally meaningful interactions. Kamii (1993) suggested that especially in the minds of children, "[s]ituations are never entirely new, and we understand them by assimilating what we observe to the totality of knowledge that we bring to each situation" (p. 28). Knowing oneself and knowing about the world is a process of connecting pieces together, not living by isolated facts or rules.

One way to guide teenagers towards autonomous adaptability begins by introducing students to the possible connections available between various experiences. Dewey (1916) recognized the importance of supporting connecting experiences. He explained how "knowledge furnishes the means of understanding or giving meaning to what is still going on and what is to be done" (cited in Menand, 1997, p. 214). This understanding and applicability of knowledge by late adolescent students, within their personally dynamic environments, would give them tools not only for understanding

their minds, but also how their lives had contributed to where they are, and eventually where they want to be.

Another way to support developing autonomous adaptability for students is through granting students the space to experience weaving personal interactions with the environment. Freire shared that "[p]rovided with the proper tools… the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradiction in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it" (Freire, in the foreword by Shaull, 1970/2012, p. 32). Freire compared and contrasted the notions of subjectivity and objectivity and how the constant cycle between the two[11] can bring about critical consciousness through critical reflection, as an awareness of problems and acting to solve them (1970/2012). One additional suggestion to deal critically with reality is the empowerment provided through autonomous adaptability. Students could be better supported to survive when they are empowered with the tools to create outcomes instead of suffering them.

In general, people cannot always control what happens in life, but can control how to react. Students would benefit from a deeper understanding of oneself and what it means to be "self" in order to help guide the decision making process away from reaction. Years spent in school could be an opportunity for students to explore their environment and mind with curiosity and confidence built through guided practice.

The process of building autonomy begins early in education. Kamii (1993) challenged educators to consider that "moral and intellectual autonomy should be the aim of education" (p. xiii). Even at a young age, students can connect causes to

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[11] Freire explained: "On the contrary, one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized" (1970/2012, p. 50).

consequences, and begin to consider both what outcome they desire and how to get there. Kamii further reflected that for children to build a personally relevant concept of self, "they have to be active, independent, alert, and curious, have initiative and confidence in their ability to figure things out for themselves, and speak their minds with conviction" (1993, p. 28). Education should be a time for bringing new information together with older stimuli.

Another way to promote autonomous adaptability might be to promote students making decisions based on connections they draw between various kinds of experiences. In order to accomplish a goal of empowering students to accept and maneuver by their own accord, Kamii (1993) discussed how adapting included understanding our knowledge about what is happening, and making a decision using the information. Her ideas implied that giving children the space to explore and create connections between what they know, what they live, what they see, and what they want to make, can lead to meaningfully piece their lives together, when ideas relate and connect to previous conclusions (1993). This personal network, built through individual experiences, prepares students not only to live autonomously, but also to maneuver a dynamic life of challenges. Education becomes an opportunity, not of teachers making the connections for them, but showing how thought, action, and reflection tie together.

Practice and guidance during school could be an opportunity to introduce the control and responsibility required to think, act, and respond autonomously and in the best way for the individual student. Autonomously acquired knowledge and morality is a reflection of how students see the world. Before fully understanding what they are,

"children acquire moral values by constructing them from within, through interactions with their environment…taking relevant factors into account in determining the best course of action for all concerned" (Kamii, 1984, p. 411-412). Morality then should not be created solely from external influences or directives. Internally created morality, built from personally constructed situations, would be longer lasting, more applicable, and more meaningful.

Both Kamii and Dewey used the example of children playing a group game according to particular rules (Kamii, 1993; Dewey, 1938). The interaction begins spontaneously and with an agreed upon basis for actions. If children choose to leave, they may, and if they wish to suggest alterations to the rules, they may, since:

> control of individual actions is effected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are co-operative or interacting parts…those who take part do not feel that they are bossed by an individual person or are being subjected to the will of some outside superior person. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 53)

When given space to choose, children can agree to cooperate with others, and without coercion. Autonomy of thought and action does not mean students close off concern and respect for others. Rather it presents an opportunity for absorbing the multitude of factors that create feelings of personal success.

Giving children space to consider their decisions is another way to encourage autonomous adaptability. Kamii explained how "[c]hildren can develop intellectual autonomy only when all ideas, including wrong ones, are respected. Children can develop moral autonomy only when their ideas are given serious consideration in the process of making decisions" (Kamii, 1984, p. 414). While the process should begin at an early age, it is not too late to begin in high school. Once the process of self-directed

thought and action takes hold, students can accept responsibility for their actions and contemplate alternatives if they wish for a different outcome. Students could also learn how positive consequences might be recreated at another time.

Giving children the power to decide and choose ties to Dewey's theories about how knowledge, environment, and experience contribute to positive and constructive habits of critically considered experiences. One way to build experiences that are beneficial to surviving could be through critically examined habits. Dewey (1916) defined habit as "an ability to use natural conditions as means to ends. It is an active control of the environment through controls of the organs of action" (cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 488). Dewey also described the role habit plays in building a continuity of experience for development and growth in every experience by creating both emotional and intellectual attitudes (1938). Habit is not a passive taking in of information and reacting, but continuous contemplation of whether and how to act. Morality, built autonomously, contributes to beneficially developed decisions for thoughts and actions.

Education directed toward autonomy gives an opportunity to encourage students to make unique and individual connections across school and life. Regarding a continuity of organizing thoughts and actions, Dewey (1916) explained that: "[w]hat makes it continuous, consecutive, or concentrated is that each earlier act prepares the way for later acts" (cited in Menand, 1997, p. 209). The years spent in school could be the opportunity to deepen an understanding of decisions, actions, and consequences. Students learn about themselves and their environment simultaneously. Teachers should then give room for students to participate in their individual development by

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letting them control how they make connections between themselves, their environment, and the consequences of actions, both self-directed and receiving.

Autonomous adaptability could also lead to smoother decision making. Dewey (1938) described the constant construction from one experience to another. He states that "every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end" (1938/1997, p. 37). Positive experiences can help lead to more positive experiences, and negative experiences may lead to more negative experiences. However, students need room to make and absorb the meaning of what occurred. Education could support student autonomy and adaptability as every action has a reaction or consequence in both school and life.

Autonomy gives room for students to ponder experiences and environments in their own ways and to categorize their understandings into whether they are beneficial for them or not. When schools overly regulate students' lives and try to pre-determine their opinions and values, they restrict the opportunity for students to discover how to direct themselves to desired outcomes (Dewey, 1938). Knowledgeable decision-making requires building and comparing experiences. Children deserve the space to personally approach challenges since, "[k]nowing and doing are indivisible aspects of the same process, which is the business of adaptation" (Menand, 1997, xxiii). Education could become a time to create a "habit" of knowledgeable decision-making and self-direction.

Autonomous adaptability is one approach to creating room for students to manipulate stimuli into personal relevance. Dewey (1938/1997) warned of the

consequence of failing to build connections through knowledge and habits: "A divided world, a world whose parts and aspects do not hang together, is at once a sign and a cause of a divided personality. When the splitting-up reaches a certain point we call the person insane" (p. 44). For many teenagers in such situations, we tend to describe them as difficult, oppositional defiant, immature, and use other convenient labels that avoid assuming responsibility for the consequences of a constrictive culture. Dewey (1938) continued by suggesting that a more positive cohesive personality would be one that ties experiences together within the environment.

Environment and continuity contribute towards building connections and discovering the relationships from one lived experience to another. For students, learning the similarities within the world make it manageable (Dewey, 1938/1997). Knowledge leads to autonomy, and familiarity leads to adaptability. All too often we see the result of forcing students, or any person, to lived divided, yet not often enough do schools avoid the disaster of creating division within students.

Education supporting autonomy encourages students to challenge, question, and critique. Rather than encouraging students to accept the world as dictated by elders, schools could offer the beginning for students to realize how much they can shape the world into their design. From the perspective of Freire, students could discover that "[t]his *world* to which he relates is not a static and closed order, a *given* reality which man must accept and to which he must adjust; rather, it is a problem to be worked on and solved" (Freire, 1970/2012, in the foreword by Shaull, p. 32). Knowledge gained through autonomously created morality and adaptive and contemplated habits would bring students into greater control of their world rather than the other way around.

In revisiting Freire's concept of "naming the world" (1970/2012), instead of classifying students into levels and labels, education could be the beginning of the search to create names with personal importance that empower students to take control of their lives. Utilizing the skills gained through developing autonomy in morality and habits can lead to students "learning to perceive and take action" (p. 35). Autonomously directed decision-making ties individual thought processes to personally created outcomes. Teenagers need the opportunity to shape their ideal world within their minds in order then to develop a critical picture of how to shape the world they live in. For many students, the first access to shaping their personally named world begins in the classroom.

Schools could be a place to empower students to decide and create as they wish. There are choices for what and how to instruct. From Freire's perspective:

> There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system…*or* it becomes 'the practice of freedom,' the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, in the foreword by Shaull, 1970/2012, p. 34)

Freire's suggestion of the "practice of freedom" supports autonomy for students. Autonomous adaptability is a way to empower teenagers to face the multitude of challenges awaiting them during and beyond high school.

Autonomy begins with guidance in the practice of making personal connections between thought and action. The student who develops autonomy and learns to adapt experiences "the search for self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism" (Freire, 1970/2012, p. 36). With autonomy crafted through critical consciousness, students at points of difficulty would have experience with considering options fully before acting,

not grasping at straws out of desperation, no longer reaching blindly for guidance.

Analyzing and questioning predominate traditions and conceptions are not the same as encouraging revolt. Freire (1970/2012) referenced concern about "teenage rebellion" and tied it to his concern for honoring existence and vibrancy for life: "the current movements of rebellion…while they necessarily reflect the peculiarities of their respective settings, manifest in their essence this preoccupation with people as beings in the world and with the world-preoccupation with *what* and *how* they are 'being'" (p. 43). What is often described as "teenaged angst" and frustrations from puberty, are examples of the bubbling of resistance to the top-down influences of cultural heteronomy. Honoring individual students and the unique gifts each brings to the world through personal understanding and passions can help ensure greater student survival.

Surviving requires autonomy and the ability to adapt within the world; learning how to control personal reactions; understanding what prompts these reactions; and anticipating consequences in order to better direct outcomes toward desired ends. Students need practice at perceiving and understanding in order to "confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (Freire, 1970/2012, p. 52). When education becomes more than an acquisition of facts, students can learn to become masters of their personally named lives and worlds. Teenagers could then feel connected to their environments rather than isolated or distanced by the prevalent dominant structure. Freire addressed these connections, stating that the "[w]orld and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (p. 50). Building knowledge through experience includes the individual in their

community of people and environment, applying their personal considerations of knowledge, morality, and experience.

Critical consciousness requires focus and direction. Freire (1970/2012) states that "action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection. Reflection… is essential to action" (p. 53). Reflection is required by all, including teachers, students, and society, in order to consider autonomy at all levels. Before we can expect students to grow into democratic civic participants, we must give them space to consider what type of world they want to participate in, and what type of world they want to create.

Autonomous adaptability requires students to experience self-reflection in order to become critical, autonomous citizens of the world. Otherwise, current educational and societal expectations continue the conditions that drew criticisms from Dewey (1916), "refus[ing] to acknowledge responsibility for the future consequences which flow from present action. Reflection is the acceptance of such responsibility" (cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 501). Schools must give students the space to reflect on the present and desired future of their lives. The world begins in their minds as their perceptions of the world.

Surviving requires personal control rather than dictation from outside influences. If schools and society want teenagers to make "good choices," we need to give them the space to consider how their options to act would pan out for them. Dewey (1938/1997) discussed how inhibition and impulse related to individuals':

> reflection and judgement…For thinking is stoppage of the immediate
> manifestation of impulse until that impulse has been brought into connection
> with other possible tendencies to action so that a more comprehensive and
> coherent plan of activity is formed. (p. 64)

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We need to give students the opportunity to create and master individual reflection and judgement. Freedom in decisions and actions will not guarantee instant success; however, it may help stem disastrous reactionary impulses.

Developing and utilizing knowledge takes self-awareness awoken through autonomy and awakens critical consciousness. Students benefit not only from the freedom of truly exploring what their "self" means to them, but also taking responsibility and control of the direction of their continuing self-development. Knowledge can then take the student through exploring critical consciousness into an empowered adaptability, as, "[g]enuine knowledge… increases the meaning, the experienced significance, attaching to an experience" (Dewey, 1916, cited in Menand, 1997, p. 213). I believe educators should emphasize autonomous thinking and action instead of heavy-handed heteronomy. Tying education together with autonomy and adaptability focuses knowledge and power when students direct their lives. The process invites students, as insiders, to discover the impetus for when, how, and why they think and act. Critically conscious structured development teaches children to limit external rather than internal influences, and it increases intrinsic motivations. Self-monitoring can be more meaningful and long lasting, and it is clearly needed in schools and society.

Chapter 5: Bringing It All Together

"[I]f the world is saved, it will be saved by people with changed minds" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 94).

I could easily summarize many of my experiences, in academics, work, and art, as a search for control of my circumstances and my outcomes. While I knew I could not necessarily manipulate every outcome, I wanted to try to direct my efforts towards the most favorable consequences for myself, first, and then to others. When I work for the best from and for myself, I can then share my best with those around me. As a dancer, the most important lesson that I have learned and continue to learn is the importance of dancing for myself. Technique is integral to ballet, yet many directors and teachers have personal preferences for how they want dancers to internalize and develop their technical prowess. I, and many other dancers, often suffer bodily and personality confusion from external demands that we should do this or feel this. The resulting product then reflects someone else's artistic vision.

After my most recent experience of searching, again, for a full-time performing contract, I had the epiphany that I no longer wanted to dance for anyone else. My art and my body are for my enjoyment first, and for any audience second. The release I experienced by this decision brought clarity for why I walked into a ballet studio, because I wanted to dance. The best consequence from my decision—my technique improved. I also felt a weight lift from my teaching. If I could direct myself in my dancing, why not in my teaching? By pushing away the external influences of what ballet should look like according to whichever ego stepped into the front of the room, I benefited more from applicable corrections, and left behind what did not work. I take

the same lesson into the academic classroom. There is great power in discovering that you are worthy of deciding where and when to dance.

The challenges and difficulties explained in this paper are not absolute critiques or certain solutions. The situations I have introduced and examined are another chapter in the realm of educational discussions of how educators can best serve their students. I advocate for adaptive autonomy not to chastise the teachers I had or people who may disagree with me, but because I believe that with confidence and understanding of one's self, students will be better served for the great variety of challenges they have already encountered and those that further await them. This argument is not to say that autonomy is the only way for students to succeed, but I do believe that it can be an asset for students to survive and thrive through school and life.

This chapter ties together explanations of what has been happening in society and schools, which leads to too many students not surviving. It also suggests some practical applications for schools, teachers, and society as a whole. One purpose of this thesis is to reintroduce autonomy as more than a teaching method or classroom management practice, incorporating how knowledge and experience on the part of the students can build habits that could then be used to explore and create their individual meaning and interaction within the world.

Being a graduate student and a ballet dancer are similar experiences. In both situations, I am a student, yet I also have responsibilities to instruct and guide others. I experience standing at the front of the room giving instruction, and being at back of the room receiving instruction. Even with every teacher's best efforts to care for every child, we are not omnipotent, and even with the best of intentions it remains a challenge

to reach every student according to their particular needs. Encouraging autonomous

adaptability is not a catchall solution to attempt to shame others that may not agree with

the explanations I have given towards its importance.

As teachers, yes, we feel that we have something to give, yet it is a balancing act

on our part to not over press requiring things our way. Autonomy includes living fully

aware of oneself and the world. Adaptability is the power to make the world work for

us, even when it seems against us. Both concepts require practice, and building lessons

from one experience to the next. Dewey (1938/1997) stated, "We always live at the

time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the

full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the

future" (p. 49). I believe years spent in school should help guide students to discover

the full capacity awaiting both daily and life-long experiences through habits of critical

consciousness.

As discussed in chapter two, many external influences direct peoples' lives.

Though teenagers need a release from heteronomy, they deserve an alternative before

abandonment:

> The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control. But the mere
> removal of external control is no guarantee for the production of self-control…
> Impulses and desires that are not ordered by intelligence are under the control of
> accidental circumstances…A person whose conduct is controlled in this way has
> at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is directed by forces over
> which he has no command. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 64-65)

Rather than attempt to coerce and manipulate students into following pre-determined

lines of thought and externally created logic, the years spent in school should be an

opportunity for students to discover the power of learning what they can control in their

lives. Autonomy is not leaving students without guidance. Rather, incorporating

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critically conscious self-discovery gives students a filter of what they wish to include in their lives and how to apply learned experiences. Years spent in education could then become the basket of skills and experiences students can chose from when meeting new adventures of their own choosing; and to draw upon when encountering unexpected challenges.

Autonomy requires starting young by building confidence in students' thought processes for self-directed decision-making. The practice follows throughout school and life, with continual reflection on the outcomes of life's experiences. Approaching autonomy for students requires giving children and teenagers room to piece knowledge and experiences together like a mosaic: "The pieces can be added in any order. In the early stages, there's nothing like an image, but as pieces are added, an image begins to emerge" (Quinn, 1996/1997, p. 71). The result is personal and encourages students to see themselves and the world as the same parts of their mosaic, not anyone else's. One of the tricks here is that students need to be able to piece their images for their lives together themselves, guided but not controlled.

A "predetermined" and either/or regimented nature of education ignores the needs of the individual students, and ignores their individual viewpoints of the world. As the world begins in their minds as personal perceptions of stimulations and surroundings, I believe that students deserve room to become self-reflective in order to become critical, autonomous, citizens of the world. If the situations in schools do not encourage cohesion of experiences for students, they do not aid students in building either autonomy or adaptability for life:

> What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and
> history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his

own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while… if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 49)

Divided and isolated externally directed experiences do not help students survive. The lack of individually created meanings between information and consequences students receive in school instead remove feelings of responsibility or control over one's life. Also missing is exploration of the ways they make sense of the world and adapt themselves to the world and the world to them without losing empowered adaptive autonomy.

Dewey (1938/1997) reminded educators that "it is a mistake to suppose that acquisition of skills in reading and figuring will automatically constitute preparation for their right and effective use under conditions very unlike those in which they were acquired" (p. 47). Regurgetating formulas in mathematics or a timeline of dates in history does not imply that the students internalized instruction in a way that improves one's life or clarifies personal or worldy mysteries. Rote memorization and repetition of isolated facts is not building "critical thinking" for civic participation on any level. This focus on control over exploration devalues individuals' contributions. By supporting rather than overlooking individual differences, I believe education could be an opportunity for students to feel empowered by uniqueness, and teachers could learn the multitude of possible strengths offered to the world.

Traditional goals of secondary school curriculums have been to prepare for vocation or university, often ignoring the obvious gap that, many times, students are left out of the decision making process for the track or purpose of their studies. For a practical application of freedom toward autonomy, I believe education should structure

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learning so that students lead more of their curriculum decisions in both large and small areas. One approach could be a move away from the "track" system of tying subjects and course levels together. The mosaic and timeline of education would look different for each student.

Dewey (1897) insisted that "[t]o prepare [a student] for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means to train him so that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities" (cited in McDermott, 1981, p. 445). Rather than pushing students along an assembly line of standardized education, high school should be an opportunity for students to experience career options. One simple change in high schools could be to release students early to pursue vocational studies- without penalties or glances of doubt and disbelief.

The purpose of education should not be to teach a binary approach that this is the right answer or wrong answer but to awaken minds to think and live thoughtfully. In this case, "[p]edagogy becomes then the twin effort to integrate the directions of experience with the total needs of the person and to cultivate the ability of an individual to generate new potentialities in his experiencing and to make new relationships so as to foster patterns of growth" (McDermott, 1981, p. xxv). Learning should be a time to expand notions of understanding and encourage more questions. Every day can and should be a new day for our students for new connections made through new understanding.

Avoiding the debate of what particular subjects should or should not be taught in which grade and in what way, this exploration instead focused on the potential benefits of encouraging students to be truly mindful of how they think, and how they come to a

conclusion. Dewey (1938/1997) cautioned educators "[t]here must be a reason for thinking that they will function in generating an experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a particular time" (p. 46). As a student, even when I did feel a personal connection to a required reading, *The Awakening*, the class instruction tested our understanding on literary themes and how the book was considered in the historical time period. It ignored the opportunity for students to share or explore internally created meanings. Welcoming students to share personal views on the subject matter could help students feel valued by the curriculum. This gives some of the responsibility to the classroom environment to produce beneficial situations for learning for the students as individuals, rather than a mono viewed collective (Dewey, 1938).

Too often teachers have approached students, even with the best of intentions, to focus and direct their thought processes for the sake of curriculum over the individual. Schools and teachers should expand thoughts instead of constricting them. Kamii (1993) shared how "the objective is to foster an experimental attitude in a community of children and to encourage exchange of ideas and observations—not to arrive at the correct answer or even to reach a consensus" (p. 58). One useful tactic I experienced was the simple reminder to students that they do not have to agree with everything they read but that the expectation is for them to try to understand what is being said. Exposure to empathy is not the same as dictating thoughts.

The great calling for educators is not through their expert knowledge of content or pedagogical theroies. The greatness comes when a teachers is:

> able to judge what attitudes are actually conductive to continued growth and
> what are detrimental. He must, in addition, have that sympathetic

understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 39)

Teachers have the power to help students make the most of their learning experiences and environments. They also have the responsibility to select and construct educational opportunities that bring the most benefit to students in both what they contribute and what they receive, through the "powers and purposes of those taught" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 45). Knowing the students, the content, and how to bring both together, requires a constant cycle of reflection by giving and receiving information from teacher and student, child and adult. When teachers learn about their students, they also learn more about themselves. The reciprocal opportunity for growth on all sides keeps the subject and object cycle constantly evolving and deepening understandings.

Critical consciousness for all people, not only teenagers, means holistic understanding. Autonomous adaptability forms from creating thoughts, knowing what they mean, and incorporating knowledge into how one sees the world. As Quinn observed, "I wonder if awareness of the sacred is not so much a separate concept as it is an overtone of human thought itself" (1996/1997, p.131). Humanity needs to return to treating humanity as something sacred, worth saving and exploring, personally as individuals, as well as a community. I believe that it begins with individuals discovering and honoring the sacred within themselves, and that education is the primary gateway for absorbing personal and societal sacredness. As described in the introduction, I experienced a heteronomous world and continue to see it in some of the schools I have visited, and students I teach. Before insisting that students morph into a pre-arranged academic setting, could we not empower students to discover their current

shape, and what shape they want to be? Education could set students up to decide

where they want to fit and how they want to get there.

As a student and young adult, lack of opportunities to make personal

connections between my thoughts and my environment compromised my ability to

adapt to challenging situations. Living under others' desires for validation through

control weighed down and slowed my understanding of whom I was, who I wanted to

become and how I might get there. Through submission and lack of self-confidence, I

relinquished my freedom to a faceless authority I did not fully comprehend. One

purpose of increasing autonomy for student survival is introducing the power of

freedom:

> [F]reedom of outward action is a means to freedom of judgment and of power
> to carry deliberately chosen ends into execution… its complete absence prevents
> even a mature individual from having contacts which will provide him with
> new materials upon which his intelligence may exercise itself. The amount and
> the quality of this kind of free activity as a means of growth is a problem that
> must engage the thought of the educator at every stage of development.
> (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 63)

If students need space to complete their own judgements and control to bring desired

consequences to fruition, teachers are one gateway to make that process attainable.

This power also gives students the capability to adapt to ever changing

environments and possibly direct rather than react to consequential outcomes.

Dewey (1938/1997) explained the desire for freedom as a "power to frame purposes, to

judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting

upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation" (p.

64). He summarized freedom as the act of self-determination of taking in information

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and creating opinions. Freedom and power in these regards tie closely to my idea of autonomous adaptability.

As a ballet dancer and teacher, I have realized the benefits of building bridges across experiences to my performance in ballet and encourage critically conscious awareness in my students at all levels and ages. While we cannot completely control the result of the shape our bodies make, or completely ensure our perfect ideals of what we want the movement to be the first time or maybe even the thousandth time, we can discover the control of directing our approaches toward making our bodies move. There is great power in realizing that I moved my foot. I told my arm to create a shape and it followed. I initiated a thought and concluded a logical answer.

While I push my students to work harder and never settle for less than their best effort, I also discuss respect. I talk about self-respect while training by listening to your body; I talk about personal respect by loving your body as your instrument; I talk about respect for the art form by always giving your best, and respect for fellow dancers by critiquing without criticizing. While I expect my students to perform the class exercises as given and follow choreographic instructions to the best of their abilities, I also want my students to experience the moments when technique works and they feel in control of their bodies. I want them to experience autonomy in their dancing; the joy of knowing they will balance, turn, and fly.

<center>*   *   *   *   *   *   *   *   *</center>

While preparing for a career in teaching, I continually reflect on my experiences through the lens of me as a student and me as a teacher. Whenever I think back to my senior year and the last few weeks of school, the base reason for my sadness comes

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from what I see as misplaced efforts from school adults and social leaders to attempt to understand an irrational tragedy. As students, we felt just as lost and scared as the grown-ups around us, but we also felt that our concerns were forgotten when making decisions for our safety. The bands Marilyn Manson and Nine Inch Nails were not to blame, and neither was the movie, *The Matrix*. Teenaged sub-culture and angst-filled rebellion were not the causes either. All of these, however, were convenient excuses for something society did not, and often still does not, fully understand. Some people, some teenagers, do not accept the dominant status quo as the way things have to be. While I can believe that some of the blame issued was an attempt to protect children from influences many adults considered harmful, efforts to restrict student expressions can backfire in unintended ways.

Educators spend thousands in dollars and hours to try to understand students. Many people want to build a better world, but controlling the process is not the way. There is no one right way, but we have tried many wrong ones. While overcoming urges for control and validation will take more than a theoretical argument, I hope that refocusing caring best intentions towards autonomy and adaptability will help more students survive high school, and thrive in life.

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