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The Privileges Chart in a Behaviour Class: Seeing the Power and Complexity of Dominant Traditions and Unconcealing Trust as Basic to Pedagogical Relationships

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Abstract

Through an anecdote, this interpretive work suggests that a chart on student privileges in a class for students with behavioural challenges led to an understanding of dominant traditions at play and the power such traditions can hold over educators. These complexly intertwined traditions included the efficiency movement, the norm, and market capitalism's emphasis on personal rights. These traditions set the conditions for an abused and exclusive notion of privileges for particular students. This led the teacher and me to question of who decides student rights and for whom do such rights apply. We were then able to talk about how the teacher came to understand his students through pedagogical relationships built on trust rather than a singular belief in the rights of each student. This paper also attempts to show the above understandings involved an investigative labouring to dialogue with the topic and that such effort is worth-while because we were able to return to or recover some 'basics' within pedagogical relationships.

Keywords

behaviour, discourse, interpretation, pedagogy, rights, special education, tradition, trust,

*All things are full of labour; man cannot utter
 it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
 nor the ear filled with hearing.*

Ecclesiastes 1: 8 (King James Version)

The Anecdote

Jakob was hurting others regularly. He was a grade 6 student in a designated classroom for students with severe social and emotional disabilities. The school had asked me to come in to help strategize because they felt his behaviours were too severe even for a setting designed to assist such children. Soon after receiving the request for support, I met with the

principal, assistant principal, resource teacher, and classroom teacher at the school.

I arrived early, purposively. Classrooms provide their own artifacts of a culture or evidence of how life might be for students who inhabit them, I believe. Before everyone was present for the meeting, I walked out of the resource teacher's office and headed down the hallway...

The students are not here at this time as I

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enter the room. It feels large for a class of eight students. Several small windows allow just enough light in so the classroom lights can remain off. There is a large carpet, a comfortable reading chair, about ten separated student desks facing a cobra-like head of a SmartBoard projector and screen at the front of the room.

There are bulletin boards on the walls of the classroom. I walk clockwise through the room, scanning the environment quickly. A large light green poster board sits on the fourth wall of my scan. It looks like a chart. I get closer to read the large dark text of the title:

'Loss of Privileges'

Oh no. I read more...

- 1) The privilege to eat lunch with peers will be lost for misbehavior.*
- 2) The privilege to have recess will be lost for misbehavior.*

I am stuck. I feel despair and anger together. There is more on the list. This is enough though. I am captured as I have been captured so many times these past few years. It is not the first time I have seen similar kinds of ominous and universal warnings framed as special favors or advantages for special children.

In this moment of being pulled up short and disappointed, a flood of thoughts arise. The privileges chart says to me that children in this room have behaviours which are to be pre-empted against with stern warnings of what may come. Because of their exceptional status, they alone are 'privileged' for what would be in other cases with other students everyday occurrences like eating lunch with others. I see a structure that drips of ex-

clusionary relations within a school community. I do not know how to reconcile the general term 'misbehaviour' with the specific 'privileges' of eating lunch with others or going out for recess. I wonder how we justify treating the difference labeled as 'behavioural challenge or disability' so universally and unjustly different than the rest of the students in the school? Also, I want to know if eating together and playing outside are considered privileges in any official educational documentation in the province. I don't know how pedagogical relationships can develop between students and teachers when threats like those of the chart are disconnected from the particular lives of complex children and their everyday occurrences.

I struggle to hold a calm face. I want to tell the teacher this chart acts as a warning that most likely exacerbates the challenges this classroom is supposed to be positively supporting. Over the past few years, charts like this have evoked an overall guiding question in my work in schools: Is this what we ought to do about students identified as having severe social and emotional disabilities? I contain the emotional response of the immediate experience. I know it is a moment to be captured in writing. I need to wrestle with it, attempt to articulate it, take the time to reflect on it, open it up and expose it for myself and for others. I immediately decide I will do this.

The Nod - Part 1: An Opening

Several days later I met with the school team again. I remember my mind was full of many of the thoughts above racing about trying to come forth clearly. At the same time, I tried to be tactful and to apply the right words at the right time in the right way. I had been thinking about positions I have been reading within

the field of Disability Studies in Education (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2010; Ralston & Ho, 2010; Skrtic, 1995; Thomas & Loxley, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2011) and how this field arose in response to the negative pathology of traditional Special Education that often focuses mainly on the person of disability exclusively.

Disability Studies provides a counterbalance to the deficit-based understanding of disability that permeates education. It is an interdisciplinary field in which disability is studied as a marker of identity—like race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Disability is viewed primarily through a social lens, as a series of historical, cultural, and social responses to human difference... Disability studies focuses on social relationships among people and the interpretation of human difference. (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. xi) Recently, I have attempted to be more mindful of the pathological focus dominating Special Education in Alberta. Disability Studies and hermeneutics have provided me with different ways of approaching my work with educators and students.

In this second school meeting, we were once again discussing Jakob and how we could best support him in the school. An opportunity arose for me to share my thoughts on the privileges chart.

“Because I care about this new relationship with you and the work we do, I want to tell you about something I saw in the classroom that really bothered me.”

“Shoot away. We want you to tell us what you see here.”

“I’m not a fan of talk about privileges. I think it’s important to talk to students about their rights and the responsibilities that come with having those rights. If I

were a parent of a child in the behaviour class, I would want to know why my child has privileges that probably the rest of the students in the school have as rights. What is it about my child that gives you reason to treat him as without certain given rights all the time?”

To my surprise, heads nodded in approval immediately. It was as if I had hit on an idea they felt was just. A new space had been created for us to explore, discuss, and perhaps to come to an understanding. I believed I could now begin to ask the teacher what was at play with the posting of this privileges chart.

Later, I realized my thoughts about rights needed critical reflection too. Privileges (from the Latin meaning ‘individual law’) are defined as special rights, favours, advantages, or exemptions to particular individuals or groups (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2012). Hence, privileges are part of the rights discourse. In evoking student rights, I initially did not realize their connectedness to privileges. Our Western exaltation of rights as individual and inalienable can lead to an isolating subjectivism. One is able to hold whatever opinion or position they like without the ability of anyone else being able to offer arguments for or against others opinions (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2006). This can have pernicious consequences; as a parent I could argue my child must have lunch and recess with others regardless of her actions. Certainly, there would be times where it is unwise and unhelpful for some students to be with their peers. Evoking children’s inalienable rights could be a barrier to considering what is best for her and the community of students she lives within. This was not what I wanted the school team to believe was my position on the privileges chart.

The rights discourse can lead to a distorted and self-enclosed subjectivity devoid of

any ability to make truth claims (Jardine et al., 2006). This self-enclosed state of individuals perpetuates an idea of freedom not capable of being accountable to others. David Smith (2011) wrote of the gradual morphing of medieval Christendom's seven deadly sins into "...the easier virtues of contemporary capitalism (self-righteous rage against another in the name of personal rights..." (p.154). Therefore, it is virtuous to act in defense of one's rights even if it acts to push the defender further from his or her community. Likewise, in the excess framing of the individual's rights wise judgment on behalf of a community can be sacrificed. A personal or individual reign of rights is the measure of freedom. Smith argued this same glorification of rights works at cultural and national levels. In the United States, this collective belief in inalienable individual rights has created a government that believes it can tell the world how to be free. Professional authority also gets lost in the realm of opinion and rights (Smith, p. 157). Given this understanding of rights, I could more justly ask if the use of privileges in this classroom was best for this community of identified 'behaviour kids.' Further labouring was needed.

Within the school board's regulation 6001 on *Student Discipline* (CBE, 2008), principals can remove privileges from students on a short-term basis. However, mention is not made anywhere of examples of privileges nor is it defined in the first section of the document where terms are defined. I could not find any mention of similar privileges in the School Act. In Alberta Education's current three-part document titled *Supporting Positive Behaviour in Alberta's Schools* (2008), references to privileges are almost universally meant as extra or additional benefits used to proactively create positive relations between students and schools. Some examples of privileges are given in these documents which do evince the 'extra special' nature of the rights

given: "activities or privileges such as playing a game, sitting in a special place in the class, drawing, writing, colouring, going to recess or gym early, having extra computer time" (p. 62) and "Tokens may be 'cashed-in' for 'back-up' reinforcers such as food, objects, activities or special privileges" (p. 65).

Then I found this: "A formal contract can be used to require a student to either demonstrate positive behaviour or face a negative consequence such as the loss of privileges (e.g., participating in lunchroom programs or extracurricular activities)" (p. 55). Intertwined discourses of economic, legal, and behavioural traditions confronts us immediately through 'formal contracts' and token systems that can be 'cashed-in.' We can see through this current and official Alberta Education document that the privileges chart did not come to exist ex nihilo. A historically present and guiding mega discourse exemplifies this use of privileges thereby giving authority to their continued use. Important questions were now howling at me. How did participating in lunchroom activities like eating lunch with others or going outside for recess become privileges? Is it the case that we live in an educational system where doing something different at lunch than eating alone at a desk in a room is a privilege? What systems of student control and efficiency were at work here? What vestiges of an earlier mode of schooling children still runs deep in our modern system?

Generally, when rights for others are privileges to some we most often think of those who have lost those rights through a violation of the law, like criminals. It would be more natural to find a privileges chart in a jail where inmates have been found guilty of violating laws and therefore have had their rights suspended. For them, privileges are most often earned for more law-like behaviours while in jail. Similarly, this classroom artifact appears to work prior to the violation of the law

by placing these particular students into an assumed prior status of guilt that has been given special dispensation via privilege to engage in what most would see as everyday healthy situations for and among children. In other words, the behaviour students' behaviours will not be tolerated in the least. There has been an acceleration of control over these students in anticipation of the law-breaking behaviours the students will get into, assumably.

In the context of the education document referenced above, the formal contract was meant to be used when students presented with challenging behaviours. Hence, it does not seem mere conjecture to state that students with behavioural issues can be given status akin to prisoners who are guilty with special privileges to be removed at the first violation of the school laws. If the status and chart or formal contract could only prevent such anticipated extremes all would be well; after all, who would want to lose the specially earned status--a status assigned by a pathological discourse of abnormality--of no longer being able to eat with peers or play outside at recess? A colleague in Special Education consulting would often tell others how he had 'earned' over fifty such 'formal contracts' in his years at school, all of them working to push him away from school rather than inspire or motivate to keep him in our formal places of learning. The contract and privileges chart speak of a power attempting to control students not understand or converse with them. What is communicated to only these kinds of labeled and constituted students with such tools in a hyper focused seemingly positively appointed way is that if you misbehave we will be quick to take you away from your peers. I suggest the very conditions of play and socializing that some 'behaviour children' need most is the very thing we hold above them waiting to be removed. Such threatening signs can stranglehold hope for those used to

living in schools and homes in often-hopeless ways. This artifact presents without goodwill towards those particular children.

The privileges chart demands of us to ask - - rights and privileges written by whom and for whom? When set out into the educational world, the enactors of such regulations, best practices, and strategies must be interrogated. The rights discourse can be very powerfully held as an exclusion making or community dividing tool and this requires our vigilance. Back at the second meeting, the teacher excitedly replied, "*Yes! I think so too. We had someone from the school board here last year telling us this was the way to do things so I was following that. But I completely agree with you.*" It looked as though when he said that a tremendous emotional release occurred. More of the play of this teacher's life in the classroom was coming forth. I felt an urgency to meet with him so we could explore how and why he followed the advice to post the privileges chart. In that moment of his emotional release, it also appeared as if he had an immediate recognition of the importance of what was said. This was a moment of having caught or re-captured an insight or knowledge or perhaps even wisdom held ready to burst forth like those delicately exciting and intensely memorable moments that happen between students and teachers in their acts of learning together:

The rest of the children in the class caught Alex's excitement. A space had opened and questions rushed in. Just how many ways were there to make five? What if you were not limited to ones and twos? We were in, and the glances between us told the tale. As Daniel (Grade 4) once said about a similar moment in the classroom, "I can always tell we've hit something because you two [Sharon and Pat] look at each other in that way. (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2008, p. 124)

We looked at each other that way in the meeting. In our nod of excitement, an understanding was brought to the surface again. Surprisingly, this surfacing seemed so easily come by. As I laboured over this phenomenon, I began to wonder if perhaps this timely catch of what was thrown happened because life in the classroom for Jakob and his peers was not well. Life in the classroom was not working out as the teacher and the school administrative team had hoped. I was reminded of Heidegger's (1962) notion of the everydayness of things, like his example of the hammer - "we do not ask what a hammer is for rather, we demand in certain moments to have the hammer. The hammer's function is already understood, taken for granted, effective" (pp. 109 - 115). As Wrathall (2011) noted of Heidegger's work on the concealing and revealing nature of truth, "...the style of being that allows things to show up as having an essence is most invisible when it is most effective, for example, we are captivated by things - we are wholly absorbed in our dealing with them. That renders us unable to make ourselves aware of the understanding of being that is shaping our experience of the world" (p. 33).

When the hammer breaks, one begins to notice the hammer and that which is hammered differently. Intentionality arises to discover more or differently in order to work with that which was being hammered. The privilege chart as 'hammer' had broken. With the school team, there was a greater intentionality and openness to seeing possibilities or to seeing anew. Maybe this openness had nothing to do with the privileges chart. Maybe it was enough to have a strategist with them giving them advice for their time of crisis. For the school team, there was ripeness for possibility and renewal as a result of being pulled up short by the severity of the behaviours Jakob displayed, I suggest. The nod came about for us easily.

A kinship then emerged, a famil(y) iar sense of having been here before in our lives. I think we recognized from our past experiences as educators that progress in a kind of technical know-how for troubled youth—that know-how evidenced in the artifact—was not attained or achieved as a form of competency or mastery or as an objective and clear method to be applied. Students often act beyond the wanting and doing (Gadamer, 1975) of our attempts to control and predict their behaviour especially when we attempt to do so through a hyper structure like the privileges chart. Perhaps we realized the chart was actually like a raised hammer ready to strike and this was the wrong way to support students. Perhaps we knew this about the chart and the timing of this anecdote finally brought it to the open and stated it when the words could be heard by all of us. I was starting to understand the latter may have been at play. This was an unconcealing of the barrier-like, and disempowering play of, traditional discourses.

Our nods of approval demanded more from me. It was not enough to let my sharing and our collective sigh act as the final word. My interpretation of the chart and the events needed to be shared with the teacher. We needed to do some work within this experience. We needed to labour interpretively to bring this forth well. Something had been noticed or nodded to; it was worthwhile to hold onto, pursue, and find ourselves more deeply immersed in it. What I needed to do was begin talking to the teacher about this nod and to explore the play of that artifact in the context of his life with those students in the classroom and school. Hence, the nod was a return to conversation, dialogue, and ongoing understanding. We had once again come back to an original difficulty. This difficulty is to suffer through complex work with children in crisis.

This whiling away (Jardine et al., 2008, p. 223) with the experience—taking the time to

reflect on it and explore it—and this recognition that there was something important, something worth-while to dwell within, connected me to the topography of the efficiency movement led by Frederick Winslow Taylor (Friesen, Jardine, & Clifford, 2009; Jardine et al., 2006, 2008; Valle & Connor, 2011). The privileges chart shared a similar tone to his important, society changing work less than 100 years ago:

Every day, year in and year out, each man should ask himself over and over again, two questions,” said Taylor in his standard lecture. “First, ‘What is the name of the man I am now working for?’ And having answered this definitely then ‘What does this man want me to do, right now?’ Not, ‘What ought I to do in the interests of the company I am working for?’ Not, ‘What are the duties of the position I am filling?’ Not, ‘What did I agree to do when I came here?’ Not, ‘What should I do for my own best interest?’ but plainly and simply, ‘What does this man want me to do?’ (Boyle, 2006, cited in Friesen et al., 2009, pp. 151-152)

Clearly the voice of the artifact in the classroom wanted the students to behave well or to put it in the way it was written, to not misbehave or to do what they were told to do without question.

This interpretive connection needed further investigation because the teacher also hinted at his discomfort with this way of controlling children. In the past 6 years, I have been in hundreds of classrooms supporting educators. I have been witness to an absorption into that which makes our work efficient, stems the flow of challenge and difficulty and ambiguity in learning. Like the privilege chart demands, prior to behaving, a student must be aware that certain behaviours will be punished. Therefore, we must make life easier for

us all by making sure students do not behave in certain ways regardless of what needs might be communicated for example rest, or food, or time away from school work. There is the curriculum to get through, the lesson to be taught, seats to be sat in, and lines to stand straight within. The chart says, ‘This is what will get them into position for learning.’ Yet the howling against such a method grows in numbers. I have seen this change over the years. Complex students like these and the crisis educators find themselves in despair at what once captivated us, concealed from us a more basic (Jardine et al., 2008) way of being with one another in learning. More and more of the teachers I meet in classrooms understand that children do not need universal laws imposed on them or reward and token systems to shape them. In Jardine’s *Back to the Basics* (2008) we are provocatively asked to:

Imagine if treated these things as “the basics” of teaching and learning: relation, ancestry, commitment, participation, interdependence, belonging, desire, conversation, memory, place, topography, tradition, inheritance, experience, identity, difference, renewal, generativity, intergenerationality, discipline, care, strengthening, attention, devotion, transformation, character. (p. xi)

As I will attempt to reveal, this teacher has imagined and lived in this kind of a basic way with his students and had to suffer through the power of these traditions held over him.

There are also many in education who are attempting to hunt down this recent howling for the marginalized and overly fragmented student population with a renewed vigor for certain knowledge, especially in Special Education (Gallagher, 1998; Kauffman & Sasso, 2006). Some argue that we need to re-impose standards of verifiable, effective and, hence objective, practices if we wish to have Special

Education students succeed in schools (Cook, Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Kauffman, Crockett, Gerber, & Landrum, 2007). They argue that if only educators could follow the proper methods we could get things right for students.

Over the years, I have seen tools like the privileges chart cover up the deeper problems constitutive of Special Education like the glorification of mental measurement and pathological diagnosis as truths, as a discourse which venerates the normal (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Foucault, 1977, 1999; Skrtic, 1995; Thomas & Loxley, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2011). For example, I am constantly witness to teams of school psychologists spending their work time almost exclusively doing social-emotional and cognitive assessments so that school administrators can attach Alberta Special Education Coding status to students resulting in increased funding for the school and supports for the students now codified. The very system created to support students has resulted in its own army of expert mental measurers who could be directly supporting students in need but instead must spend their time churning out ‘ab-normal’ codification documents to meet the criteria for coding which in turn provides the primary funding for their employment, as well. It is a vicious cycle of production and consumption based on a notion of difference residing at two extremes of a constructed curve of population. The policy structure of Special Education in Alberta glorifies these measured, expert truths as the truth of children who are not normal (Alberta, 2010). The pathological approach reigns in Special Education. It is not that there is no truth in the psycho-educational pathology of children. The concern is with what this pathology conceals or hides in its dominance. The normal curve fragments communities into a binary of normal and abnormal. The abnormal are then further fragmented into smaller bits of diagnostic labels and categorized

streams of cognitive and social-emotional abilities. There is an ever-increasing coding structure (Winzer, 2009) ready to frame children in particular kinds of ways. In the attempt to capture freedom as everyone with their own unique and individual, right-given ways, we have created a diversity monster based on a normal curve created and defined in modern historical contexts (Danforth, 2009; Dudley-Marling & Gurn; Thomas & Loxley; Valle & Connor).

With school psychologists, the production line has been removed or cut off from supporting students directly. Echoes of the automotive line rush forth. Some workers never see the product they co-construct in its fullness, complexity, and wholeness because in their tightly defined tasks those workers can only do what they are told to do. This policy driven dominant approach within the machinery of supporting and educating the ‘special’ or ‘exceptional’ is not working as evidenced by low high school completion rates (Alberta, 2009) for severely coded students.

I returned to the school two weeks later for yet another meeting. I entered the classroom and the loss of privileges sign was nowhere to be seen. In its place, was a sign telling students which activity centers they could go to when their work was completed. There were other new ‘signs’ about the room too. These signs spoke of kindness and caring and student engagement in learning. The teacher approached as I looked closely at these new signs.

I hope you don't mind me saying this. It warms my heart to see such renewal and hope in your classroom. I'm so glad that loss of privileges sign is gone.

He smiled back and replied with enthusiasm,

I inherited that sign. I took it on because people told me to do so. Your thoughts at the last meeting reminded me that there are many things I know to be true about this work that I had forgotten or felt I had to put aside.

The Nod – Part 2: True Conversation

I sought ethics approval from the school board to interview the classroom teacher. One of my hopes with this writing was to more thoroughly clear the way so the teacher and I could interpret the experience together, to appreciate it more fully in its abundance. The event and this subsequent intentional act of research or explication through dialogue are pedagogic and thus fitting as hermeneutic.

A hermeneutic notion of understanding is centered on the dispossession of understanding from its methodical, prepared self-security. It returns inquiry in education to the original, serious, and difficult interpretive play in which we live our lives together with children; it returns inquiry to the need and possibility of true conversation. (Jardine, 1992, p. 124)

As true conversation, I wanted to explore these questions:

- 1) What does the experience say to us about what we ought to do for students we have categorized in a particular kind of way?
- 2) What gets opened up or revealed via a description of the event and a conversation with an educator from within the event?

Prior to discussing the experience with the teacher, I asked him to read the above writing. I framed the writing as anecdotal, as a piece of short narrative intended to bring forth a particular thought or point clearly (Pinar, 1995, pp. 438-439). This anecdote was in-

tended to be an act of clearing the way in order to allow us to make sense of the particular experience, as if to say, ‘We got it and here’s what we think was at play’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 204). This act of talking and writing about the experience and its complex connections is, in itself, a part of the interpretive, hermeneutic process. Coming to an understanding includes me, the teacher and this writing, and the texts I have read and bring to the conversation. In this way, there is a field of knowledge we are in and explore (Friesen et al., 2009). In this exploration, it is our ability to get into some of the thickness of the field, to dig our way around the thickets and needles, to stay together as we struggle towards an understanding, towards a mutual nod of recognition that makes this journey both worthwhile and ongoing. The chart was like a warning sign on a trailhead capable of stopping many in their tracks and turning them back to the comfort of what they had come from. For us, the sign demanded we take the risks inherent within the difficulty of this work. Jakob demanded this. Students in behaviour classes demand this. It is our responsibility to ask what is just about our work. These images of struggling in a dense and complex field to understand what we are immersed and absorbed in for the purpose of moving about well with one another is why interpretive work matters (Jardine et al., 2006).

Through such a journey, I hoped the way would be further cleared for us to talk about possibilities as a shared hope through a renewed understanding of what we ought to do for students in our care. I hoped for the pedagogical act described as “fielding knowledge” (Friesen et al., 2009, p. 156): within the apparently singular anecdote may lay a complex history—a field of knowledge—for us to explore. This singular case is not to be racked up as another example along a line of examples to make a statistically significant signifi-

cance. The richness explored enlivens its ties to a greater topography, a greater field.

We continued this conversation through a reading of the anecdote. Once the teacher had read the anecdote, he replied quickly:

...the privileges and loss of privileges is probably the thing that struck me most as being obviously something that I didn't want to do in the beginning and it was highly recommended...and my instinct kicked in and said well, why didn't I trust that, at least part way through last year?...I think it also harkens back to a lot of the things that were suggested to me last year when I began in this position; I think things that I don't do anymore and I wouldn't do and go against who I am as a teacher...Also when I read this I thought "Oh. What about all the good things I'm doing here?" I'm often criticized for being too soft and too sensitive and too 'bleeding heart' all the time...it's been described to me that, "You need to be a police officer in certain cases with certain kids in certain times, not all the time."

The anecdote served its initial purpose, it seemed. The teacher felt the emotional heaviness of recognizing (re-cognition) the privileges chart anew. He had been teaching in 'regular' school classrooms for several years before entering this Special Education classroom. Once there, he found that his wisdom gained through experiences had over the years was not supported. At this point, I realized more fully how his initial nod in the second meeting was a nod of recognition and release. The space was now cleared for further explanation of what was at play in that classroom for him and the students and he began to share that play in our conversation.

Also, the anecdote revealed its limitations in what it conceals as a tool. As I visited this

classroom more frequently, I realized the teacher does not live with his students in any way reflective or indicative of what the inherited artifact pointed towards. Could this have been because I was present? In conversations with several other key people close to the teacher, they all shared that he had a co-generative, community-building approach with the students in the class.

Still the inherited notion of the artifact was tied closely to the direction from 'expert' and 'experienced' others that he be like a police officer from time to time in his work with these students. What was inferred in this professional pressure? I asked him.

Unfortunately I know, I'm pretty sure it means, 'You're wrong and you need to do what I say and you have no choice' in speaking to a child...I think they are also trying to convey that the child needs to know that you are in charge, you are in control...I would take a very different approach.

I shared my burgeoning historical understanding of the dominant discourses I believed were at play. He replied:

When you talk about the artifact being 'a taken for granted tradition' I'm reminded of how I incessantly questioned everything that was suggested (from worksheets on anger management to the loss of privileges sign) at the beginning and how much time people spent trying to convince me that working with 'these kids' was different and much of what I needed to do would be counter-intuitive. Had I listened to my own intuitive wisdom I wouldn't have had any support because 'those in the know' would have shrugged helplessly, saying I didn't follow the advice given to me so why bother. My ideas of working with these kids were seen as naive and overly op-

timistic. I was so deep in self-doubt that it took a lot to resurface.

Although for some teachers the chart may be taken for granted as typical practice, this teacher felt otherwise because of his previous experiences teaching in 'regular' classrooms. Yet the chart remained posted. He shared a feeling of being unsupported if he did not use the chart and therefore pressured or imposed upon despite his learned experience. Doubt then crept in on him. Since he began teaching in this class over a year and a half ago, he has often been ill. Could the imposition of the chart as an overall approach to working with this fragmented and boxed-in population of psycho-educationally determined abnormality produce sickness in a teacher who does not wish to be this way with his students? Not only was it suggested the teacher be more powerful over the children in his care contrary to what he believed he needed to be and do with students, he felt a similar exercise of power surrounded him in his new position. For a time, the teacher felt powerless to trust his own sense of what was just and caring for students. Surfacing is an older, deeper controlling power over self and others in education. This truth came to light for us once again as if coming out of the long, deep shadow of a rational, technical age of school efficiency, the behavioural sciences, and a twisted logic within market capitalism that honours individual rights above and beyond community (Friesen et al., 2009; Jardine et al., 2010; Smith, 2011). The power of this shadow in this context is not necessarily an intentional one, bent on ruining lives and subjugating others.

In these long and varied travels, we have come to know something of narration sickness, and how a once enthusiastic tale of the ways of schools has become ever-increasingly, nauseatingly numbing. We have been intimately involved with hun-

dreds of teachers and students (*as I have too*) and have witnessed, first hand, an old tale, which was once full of enthusiasm, still holding sway; a tale of fragmentation, breakdown, linearity, and literalism, coupled with regimes of surveillance, management and its requisite standardization of assessment, and all the consequent sicknesses. Students have become ill, dull, disinterested in the face of this tale. Teachers, too, have become ill. And what is taken to be 'learning' has itself fallen pallid and weak, infected with a industrial assembly-line story-line that has trumped its own living ways. Perhaps even more insidious is how the (often silent) dominance of this story-line allows for the ascription of blame for such ills on the sufferers themselves. (Friesen et al., 2009, p. 149) (*Italics added*)

A pivotal leading figure in this movement was Frederick Winslow Taylor, author of *The Scientific Principles of Management* (1911). An industrialist, turned author and educational consultant for the US government, his work with industry and education on efficiency standards and practices became a cultural benchmark for what ought to be done in society (Friesen et al., 2009; Pinar, 1995; Valle & Connor, 2011). Taylor was after efficient production at the cost of intelligent, thinking workers. What mattered was the precise and timely application of very specific skills or tasks in order to keep lines of production moving well. Compliance was all that was needed.

The idea that students should be doing exactly what we ask them to do and that educators should do the same is therefore not new. It is part of a historico-cultural tradition still numbing both students and teachers. I suggest this inheritance in education often exacerbates and amplifies oppositional behaviours in many students. In a recent discussion with

junior high school staff on the topic of oppositional behaviours, I asked a simple question: “If you were told all day by most of the adults in this building what you were to do and how you were to do it, how would you feel and respond? Now imagine that as your overall, totalizing experience in schools or at work.” Staff responses more than strongly indicated this was not acceptable. In their responses to the question, some staff seemed oppositional. I pointed this out to an ironic, fading laughter. “So why then,” I continued to ask, “do we think it is OK to do this to students, especially those we know are sensitive to this kind of control and telling?” Unsaid was the answer I often run into, head-on, in schools: “Because they need to respect our authority.” So it is that we stop at such statements, equivalent in every way to phrases like, “It is what it is”, and “This is the real world here.” Here we have the taken for granted as simply the way things are. (Friesen et al., 2009)

In the face of such ominous dulling of the life and choices of students and educators, is it surprising to find behaviour classes filled with students who despise schools and teachers who no longer want to teach in them? When I met with the teacher and shared this writing, I told him I was worried about opening up a connection between his sickness and this historically situated ‘narrative sickness.’ He replied,

No. This is OK. You would be right to bring this out in the writing like you have. This is true. It is true of me and the students. Actually, thank you for this. Since we began this conversation I’ve felt much better.

When I first started I walked in here fresh and did not know what I was entering into so I sought help. I read. I stayed up many nights doing my own research thinking it through, talking it through with my sister

and friends, thinking, ‘What could this mean?’ because I’m sort of a big picture person, I need to know what’s going on, where I need to go, what it all means...I had no training so from those people who had been in this area much longer than me giving me advice. The loss of privileges chart almost seemed like a structure. It almost seemed like something I was meant to have other things flow from and that was even explained to me before many other things I believe to be important to be thinking and understanding and doing. I felt like I had been patted on the head and told, “Don’t worry dear. This is all you need to do. These kids aren’t going to make a lot progress. Don’t worry about it.” That was said to me in a meeting last year and I just felt literally crazy, I felt actually crazy. I don’t even know what, this was no longer a teaching job... and people could say as much as they wanted to, “Stop thinking about it” but I don’t think that was enough to sit back and think, “Ah well. I’ll just sit back and deal with that tomorrow.”

History tells the story of a long-standing tradition of viewing students like those in this teacher’s classroom in terms often synonymous with ‘badness’ and disrepute; vagrants, delinquents, waifs and strays, ragged urchins, guttersnipes, blackguards, reprobates, street Arabs, incorrigibles, for examples (Winzer, 2009). These were educational terms used to describe what we now label children and youth as having ‘social and emotional disabilities.’ The behavioural sciences are designed to intentionally prevent or remedy that which is out of the norm and in the subject: the abnormal or ‘dis’-abled. The privileges chart’s attempt to forewarn ‘behaviour students’ of what may come given their non-compliance is a tool of efficiency and standardization, meant for the classroom so that “...nothing happens that is not anticipated and prescribed (or

forewarned) in advance. No surprise endings.” (Friesen et al., 2009, p. 154) (italicized comments are mine). If the regular classroom cannot do this well, then the unique classroom for behaviours will stress this work and make compliance a pre-requisite for returning to the normal. Then, the hidden curriculum (Pinar, 1995) of efficiency in regular classes becomes the given curriculum which has at its aim the normalization of students for their possible re-integration to the mainstream.

As for the program of studies curriculum, the teacher shared that he was told to give the students worksheets and not expect much from students. The worksheets are also artifacts pointing to the efficiency movement embedded within the program of studies and in action within our classrooms (Friesen et al., 2009; Jardine et al., 2008). The assembly line metaphor is alive here.

In the behaviour class, we could say we have a separate assembly line that is a fragment from the main line. This secondary line is intended to repair or fix that which is broken and thus fragmented so that it can be returned to the main line. After all, the stated goal of most behaviour programs is to re-integrate students back into ‘regular’ programming. This historically situated efficiency movement within schools can only return students to the main line of production and this will necessarily spit back out that which it produced in the first place unless a certain docility favouring the normal occurs.

Behaviour classes have also become places where at once we can comfortably say we educate ‘special’ students in community schools while those students are visibly divided from other students in their unique classes until such a time as they behave like those ‘normal’ students in the ‘regular’ school population. This process and conceptualization of students is deeply entrenched in the very

common educational term ‘integration’ (Winzer, 2009). This is an industrial version of schooling and it has been with us for over 100 years. Over these past few years, as I have found my way around and within the topography of Special Education in schools it seems that once students enter these unique programs and their normalizing curriculum--once they leave the main line of student learning and production--the school community often detaches itself from the students. I have been witness to repeated conversations with educators in schools who claim these students ‘belong’ to the teacher of the behaviour program and not them. Such empirical incidences demand us reconsider what it means when we say “we” and “our” students are part of school communities. Are these healthy communities for all or convenient for most?

Hints of a Resurfaced Understanding, Anew

...there’s an interplay between the student, the teacher, all the personalities and that everybody needs to approach things with curiosity...there needs to be an amount of curiosity before there’s a passing down of that understanding and knowledge ...so for me part of that year was trying to understand and so when I was trying to get a grip on it, I started to strip away all the things I knew to be wrong and I started to trust that the kids and I could figure it out. Nothing I did with the class after that...after a certain point in the year last year, ever solely came from me...we made decisions together. So for me that was a moment, that was a turning point. That came about near the end of last year. After that, I didn’t think about the privileges chart. It just hung there. (Teacher)

Despite these dominant historical traditions interwoven within Education and Special Education, above and beyond this want-

ing and doing of a structure which attempts to reproduce itself through its advocates, that which happens in the everyday interactions between these children and this teacher circumvents this very edifice. Beyond structure, power, method, and the truths of how best to ‘manage’ kids, is what the teacher describes as his ‘intuition’ for a more humane way of being together. This intuition seems to be guided by a trust in himself and the students as well as a curiosity in and for the work of educating complex youth. He has learned this over the years as a teacher. Experience in classrooms with students has helped cultivate wisdom in him. There is an awareness that no singular method, at least one centered on a notion of a dominating power over the children whose development is claimed to be challenged or special or exceptional, will do. Such attempts at framing particular kinds of students as needing “policing” or using negatively driven, universal and tactless threats under the guise of privileged status will not do given his experiences with children already had.

Together, the teacher and I uncovered features of dominating ways of seeing and being with troubled students that we agree are not just ways of being with other human beings, especially children. We engaged in important interpretive work. This work allowed us the space or clearing to begin to speak of a deeper, richer, healthier wisdom gained and cultivated through our journeys with students. This wisdom spoke of goodwill, trust, and curiosity between an educator and his students. These re-emerged ways of being are ‘basics’ (Jardine et al., 2008) worth cultivating.

Another moment of understanding arises within this: it is not that we recognized violations of students’ rights. We understood once again that being well with one another involves trust. Trust is a basic to get back to in our work with students and one another. Trust

is required and is often laboured towards in healthy pedagogical relationships. Without trust we are not able to dialogue or converse towards new understanding. With trust, we understand that we do have truthful wisdoms to share with one another. Our professional, personal, and communal authority is restored with trust. The privileges chart speaks of mistrust--a pedagogical violence--present in our thinking about students with behavioural challenges. However, we can be well when there is unity between us (Smith, 2011, p. 10). We might *labour* to get back to such basics. When we can do this in the context of an educational system striving for inclusion or for something more humane than the current codification of students and all that entails, then the question of what we ought to do for troubled students begins to be addressed justly, I propose.

After much effort on all our parts to help Jakob, he was beyond us at that time and he needed supports we could not provide. This too has been part of the suffering and understanding of our work.

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Bio

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