The Journey of an Urban Educator: Growing the Soul with Hope, Love, and Liberation

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To the universe I am thankful for the breaths I am given and for all of the experiences of life I can partake in. Life is a love supreme.

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The purpose of the study is to better understand the complexity in learning and meaning making. By investigating how the attributes of hope, love, and liberation are intertwined in the practices of educators and activists, this research documents my quest to rethink how to prepare educators to teach in urban schools. The research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What can we learn about preparing teachers for urban spaces from the experiences of urban educators and activists? How would they describe their processes of learning? What do they value as sacred knowledge? What are their expectations of students and how do they 'teach'? 2. How do we redefine the profession of teaching urban students? How do we compare the wisdom of experienced educators and activists to the expected outcomes of today's public school system? How can we design teacher education programs to inspire creative, innovative, and transformative intellectualism in prospective teachers? And how can the practice of teaching change the world as we know it?

In order to address the inquiry, this study was designed by qualitative research methods in which the stories of educators and activists were gathered and used to enhance my understanding of experiences as an urban educator. I chose to speak to educators and activists age 18 and over who identify their work with social justice, liberation, and transformation. Candidates were diverse in age, race, gender, religion, and profession. I conducted 8 interviews with

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educators and activists and interviews lasted between 1-3 hours. The project

aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of why and how our

processes of self-reflection in our personal growth may inform a new model for

schools for love.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Salvation Story

From a young age I was told that I was a gift from God on loan to my parents. I suppose it's why they were never too overbearing or protective and supported my evolution without too much restraint. We attended church on the weekly, always begrudgingly, and always armed with an arsenal of excuses as to why I should be allowed to stay home. I hated going to church. I didn't really appreciate my peers, I couldn't understand why it was so boring, and it felt like an unnecessary routine that should be eliminated from my schedule.

My time in college was spent in church. It was ironic to me that somehow the tables flipped. I became a church lady. I went to church on Sundays, which was about (3 hrs), but I also went to a weekly Bible study (3 hrs). Through the years my church involvement escalated to the point where I was also attending a weekly meeting for small group leaders (4 hrs), Thursday night prayer meetings (2 hrs), early morning prayer meetings at 6:30 am (1 hr), Friday night large group (3 hrs), Wednesday night prayer meetings from 10pm-3am (5hrs) and meeting with small group members (2 hrs) and my co-leaders for our Bible study group (2 hrs). I spent about a part-time job's worth of time doing church-I was insane. All the time I spent in church through college was when most people were going to parties, getting wasted, and being reckless. I think I was trying to recover from a broken heart and I found a safe place in church.

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When I did time in church, I experienced some unexplainable moments that made me feel undeniably connected to a larger power, force, energy, whatever you want to call it.   However, simultaneously I had some horrible experiences which left a very negative impression on me for a long time. Since I've been released from college and my time in church, I feel like I've been roaming the world in a self-contained rehab center. I loved and still love reading the Bible. I still feel a deeply spiritual connection to something not of this world and I still pray that I may live my life with love and faith in my convictions. Studying the Bible was a quest for wisdom and offered insight to how I should live my life. I became a true believer in a God who was kind, loving, and faithful and I fell in love with this feeling of infinite love, compassion, and understanding. I am still in love today but I needed to come to terms with the negative feelings I attached to my faith, which I didn't realize was really attached to religion.

Church made me into a feminist and into an analytical, critical, stubborn, outspoken intellectual.   I still believe in a God that is ultimately good and infinitely loving and I do think that Jesus was super fly. He was a badass no doubt. But I have a ridiculous disdain for narrow and anti-intellectual ways of thinking. Mainly because I fell into that quagmire of shame and embarrassment. In the 2000 presidential election I voted for Bush. It still makes me want to vomit. I voted for Bush because all the other Christians were voting for Bush because of his Christian-ness. I actually believed that since he said he was a Christian he would root his decisions in love and justice. Horse shit. That was the ultimate

disappointment.   And then when 9/11 happened, I remember attending a prayer meeting and all I did was weep, like crazy uncontrollable sobbing because I somehow felt this unbelievable pain realizing that the world was fucked up beyond my understanding. It was this shock in my own stupidity and tiny perspective of the world that disgusted me because I knew that the God I believed in would not stand for the atrocities we commit in our ignorance.

Church also revealed to me man's great capacity and potential for absolute idiocy.   During Bible studies, it was not rare for me to speak passionately about different matters but it became rare after I was constantly met with the responses of my male peers, which was some version of, "whoa! Calm down, calm down." I felt sad and silenced because they saw me as a woman speaking beyond the limitations they placed on me.   I received comments that I was going to be a bad wife and mother by a pastor because I was headstrong. I took that comment very personally and it was one of the reasons why I left the church. I felt that unspoken judgment from the majority of the men at our church because it always seemed that they were seeking out the quiet, meek, subservient woman. I always felt like they took the Bible literally when it talks about husbands being like God and wives the worshiping church without thinking about why people worship God and not just claim the status based on gender. I was not impressed by any of these men. Somehow they all were incredibly disappointing specimens of human beings and I blame it on their inability to really think about the contradictions in their lives. Nevertheless,

they taught me my greatest lesson in gender roles and displayed behaviors that legitimize feminism in the 21st century.

   After many years of feeling silenced and blind I was very angry. I came to a breaking point after my first year of teaching, which was incredibly difficult, heart wrenching, and overwhelmed and exhausted me. After spending 5 years saturated in church culture and community something in me snapped and I needed to take a breath. I wasn't trying to renounce my faith or become a prodigal child wandering the streets on drugs looking for prostitutes, but I needed a minute to recharge. I was wiped out. I finished one of the hardest years of my life. I taught a self-contained special education class that had me in tears every single day, not to mention I was serving in church as a Bible study leader which meant I was attending formal meetings six times a week, not to mention lunches, dinners, coffees, and hang outs with members from my Bible study. It took a toll on me and I felt like I had nothing to give anymore. I never meant to completely disconnect myself from my spiritual experiences but the reactions from church leaders and people who I respected and looked up to hurt me and triggered a flight response. I told my pastor that I would not be attending the 'servants retreat' as it was called for the leaders retreat and that I would not be serving in the church that year. I was met with, 'what's going on? What happened to you over the summer?' with a tone that assumed I had somehow slipped up and fell away from my faith. What was not inferred or felt through his response was a genuine concern for me as a person. I was hurt

beyond my control. I was bombarded with phone calls from other leaders and pastors pressuring me to go to the retreat, asking me why I wasn't going, telling me I was going to be a leader, how they were disappointed, how I should fight being lazy, and inquiring about who in my life was going to keep me accountable from completely losing faith. During that time, it was that inquiry process and line of questioning that made me lose my faith in the church. I seemed to have come full circle again and started right back at the beginning-hating church.

For a long time I compartmentalized the majority of the people I knew from church in the category of 'idiot' and dismissed them from my list of people I would care to acknowledge in the world. However, my self-contained personal rehab is forcing me to deal with the fact that my inability to heal, forgive, and acknowledge my own imperfections puts me on a self-constructed pedestal made of sand. I'm still trying to be a person who is committed to living a life that mirrors loving kindness. I still want to be a person who is kind, compassionate, forgiving, generous, loving and faithful to my life path and in order to do that I need to work on getting rid of negative energy. I am still in the process of recognizing and rectifying my shortcomings.

I was told that I was put on this earth to do good work and I believe that. I'm committed to discovering, trying, failing, and repeating the process over and over until the world that I know is a little better. There have always been problems and there always will be problems, but it doesn't mean that they have

to be the same problems for the same people. I want to imagine another world and I think my ability to imagine and dream something different is based on faith.

I returned to Chicago after spending 6 years in church and a year later found myself in the office of Bill Ayers talking about a PhD program in education. Funny how the universe works. Fast forward another 6 years and I here I am at the end of the program attempting to identify myself for the academy and having similar feelings of questioning who I am and trying to figure out how I got here. I am an intellectual nomad. I like to wander through the mind fields of others and I spend a lot of time wandering in my own thoughts. I am insatiably curious about the world, how people construct reality, how we choose the principles that guide our lives, why we give into specific thought patterns, and how we come to understand the purpose of our existence.

This process of transformation has not been easy for me. It's always been deeply personal, highly conscious, reflective, disheartening, humbling, and terrifying. To question who we are and to be ready for answers that we don't want to hear or acknowledge is not easy. Especially when the answers tell us that we aren't as important as we think we are, that remind us we are but one syllable in the epic story of our universe, and that point us back toward the basic bare bones truth- I am only human; I am not perfect nor will I ever be. But that's my life lesson that I am forced to constantly wrestle with. I wrestle with my humanity so I can better understand myself in this crazy place we call reality. At

the end of these exhausting bouts I feel at peace when I can see the beauty again in the struggle, appreciate the confusion, discontent, frustration, and turmoil, and fully embrace that life is a series of ass-kickings that help me remember that my life isn't about control, it's about being.

Life isn't just about knowing. As a teacher, scholar, academic, functional citizen/inhabitant of the earth, etc. we do have a responsibility to what we do and do not know. Over the last five years I have become someone that is consumed with knowing. I feel that I am being judged again for what I know and how I am going to use it. Someone is going to pay me one day for what goes on inside this skull of mine and the irony of it all overwhelms me. Because what I am really obsessed with is the unknown. The unknown is terrifically brilliant in all that isn't yet and I don't want to predict it. I just want to be apart of it.

I think the universe teaches me over and over again to love my humanity in all its contradictory natures and to embrace the process of becoming. I don't know why any of us are put on this earth but I think I am here to explore love, hope, and transformation. So here I am at the end of another chapter of experiences ready to begin a new one, optimistically fearful of what lies ahead, knowing that this experience has changed and prepared me for my next phase, and thankful for each breath that allows me to enjoy this crazy time and place. And at the end of the day this journey has been between me and the universe.

This dissertation is a testimony of my personal quest to rethink how educators are prepared to teach in urban schools. The research seeks to

answer the following questions: 1. What can we learn about preparing teachers for urban spaces from the experiences of urban educators and activists? How would they describe their processes of learning? What do they value as sacred knowledge? What are their expectations of students and how do they 'teach'? 2. How do we redefine the profession of teaching urban students? How do we compare the wisdom of experienced educators and activists to the expected outcomes of today's public school system? How can we design teacher education programs to inspire creative, innovative, and transformative intellectualism in prospective teachers? And how can the practice of teaching change the world as we know it?

The research questions are a result of my experiences in contradictory spaces of schools where examples of teaching range from nurturing and encouraging the bright minds of the future to be free, innovative, and creative to breaking the spirits, brainwashing, and programming robots to follow orders and obey. The project is an exploration into the wisdom of experience and sets out to figure out a way in which we may be able to envision a world where being human is more important than being human capital and education serves the happiness of the children and not the interest of the state. The final work seeks to provide a philosophy and framework for preparing urban teachers based on the principles of community, justice, integrity, and love.

B. Why I became a teacher

Cougar Elementary School is situated in West Rogers Park about four city blocks away from the house I grew up in. It was the stomping grounds of neighborhood families and a place that brought people together. The neighborhood kids congregated at school during the day and dispersed in packs after the bell rang, each pack rumbling and tumbling with laughter and wild conversation, slowly dissipating as each member drifted to their home. Cougar facilitated friendships, brought families from different walks of life together, provided a place of belonging, and an education that I was proud of.

My memories of elementary school are mainly associated with success. My teachers provided academic opportunities that allowed me to flourish creatively and intellectually and I was a very confident student. An extraordinary team of teachers from 6th-8th grade facilitated my academic success. They were armed with infinite patience for pre-teen energy and the chaos that came with it. With a vehement intolerance for mediocrity, they challenged our class to exceed our visions for ourselves by providing unique learning experiences, which instilled a vigorous appetite for knowledge.

I have vague memories of sitting at a desk since the space in which our education took place was used more as a workroom. There were three grade levels shoved into one room to listen for general information and direction for the day. Our curriculum was research and project based and we dispersed between two classrooms to work in groups to construct a plan for a new city, find solutions for ocean pollution, or to build a prototype for a new monster out

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of milk gallons, boxes, construction paper, and paint. We were encouraged to think, imagine, create, explore, and we were rewarded for it- not just through academic success, but with candy. Our teachers had no problem giving a bunch of crazy middle school kids candy and we loved it. We would work in groups, eat candy, laugh hysterically and create projects that would take us all the way to National History Day in D.C. for our research and to the international competition for Future Problem Solving.

The classrooms and hallways of Cougar School contained some of my fondest childhood memories. All of those memories emerged out of the antics of my friends who were a motley crew brought down different paths to the doors of Cougar from Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the southern states of America. The diversity of my circle of friends seemed never ending and it was a beautiful circle of camaraderie, quarrels, friendship, teamwork, and love. I mention these particular friendships to highlight a small piece of the diversity that traversed the hallways of Cougar. These friendships constructed days of endless laughter and memories so brilliantly wild and beautiful that made the word 'nostalgia' seem like a description for a passing moment at the post office.

The friends I made and the learning experiences I had were major influences on why I wanted to become a teacher. To my understanding, school was a place that let me drift into unexplored areas of thought, discovering and roaming through new terrains in my head. School was my portal to an

expansive universe where limitations did not exist. As my imagination illuminated a world that could be, the possibilities were overwhelming and renewed my excitement for life. I wanted to be a teacher that would take students on a similar mind-space exploration. I understood the importance of building the capacity of imagination. In my self-discovered alternate universe of dreams, we moved progressively towards making the world a better place, and in a direction that humanity plotted and traversed together. These were my dreams as a student in the world of endless possibilities.

I set out on my journey to become a high school English teacher, hoping to equip students with an imagination that would ignite the audacity and courage to hope and dream towards a better reality. I was 18 years old. Fourteen years passed and I had to remind myself why I began the journey. It feels I am a long way gone from that young idealistic student, full of optimism and hope. Trudging through the field of education led me to unexpected pitfalls and obstacles.

C. My first classroom experience

I began my teaching career as a full-time emergency substitute for a self-contained special education class where I worked with 12 students with mild to moderate disabilities, 4 instructional aides, and 7 student teachers. I was not trained as a special education teacher but naively took the job because I thought it would build character and I was up for the challenge. I was also hired

at two selective enrollment Chicago Public High Schools for positions I was qualified and certified for, yet I felt the universe was calling me to that classroom. Since my knowledge of curriculum was limited, I spent most of my time and energy advocating for the rights, services, and resources that my students were entitled to. Whether it was being acknowledged as human beings in the larger school community, ensuring that the physical or occupational therapist would show up, getting specialized equipment, learning tools, or programs that would help my students' instructional needs, I learned very quickly that I needed to be their voice and a very loud one. My time in the classroom was mainly spent organizing field trips to practice life skills, creating IEPs, student portfolios, making phone calls and attending the meetings that would ensure the resources and services for my students.

The key to surviving my first year teaching was the community of our classroom created through the relationships between my students and instructional aides. While the system, bureaucracy, and school culture wanted to make my class invisible, our team did the best we could to provide meaningful learning experiences. As an emergency substitute, I was treated like a baby-sitter but I felt an incredible responsibility to my students to be their teacher, advocate, voice, parent, and friend.

My understanding of how students with special needs were treated by the district was heart breaking. Through the course of the year, I realized how much knowledge and skill was required to provide a quality school year for my

students. It made me nauseous to think about how inadequate I was and the damage I could have caused to their education. I needed to process what happened in that year, and I thought studying educational policy would provide me with some answers since my teacher preparation program threw me into the wilderness without a compass.

I remember sitting in the office of a wise professor, unaware of who he was, telling him my story of injustice and inequity in the school system with a genuine outpouring of shock, disbelief, and disgust. Throughout my long, rambling story his eyes looked at me with laughter yet his demeanor offered me patience. I approached him as a young teacher who just found out that the school system was not fair and his laughter let me know that my journey and struggle in the field of education was just beginning.

Graduate school helped to clear the dirt off of the lenses I was seeing through. Not once did I have a class on the history of the U.S. education system, school inequalities, neoliberalism, or globalization during my teacher preparation program. I never engaged in a discussion about No Child Left Behind or thought about policy implications to classroom practices. I was thankful I entered that program because it provided the space to dialog about why and how schools operated from a historical viewpoint and it introduced me to the lens of neoliberalism. Through this program, I critiqued how the teacher education program could unleash me into the field so ill equipped and uninformed. I wondered why my school experience as a student was so

different from my teaching experience and wanted to further understand that disconnect.

D. Philosophy vs. Reality

    The following year I found myself teaching at a Chicago Public high school experiencing the pressure of high stakes testing, seeing the workings of neoliberal policies affecting the structure of the school, and feeling like I was swimming with sandbags on my arms. The pressure to teach test prep, the afterschool hours tutoring for the ACT, and finding ways to teach 15 year olds how to read were not easy tasks against the backdrop of an unequal city. Hearing loudspeaker messages telling the students to go home straight after school because the neighbors complained about loitering, attending professional developments reminding us of our probationary status, and creating learning opportunities that were considered 'not in line with the academic program' were obstacles that sent me spiraling down into a state of despair. I found the inequalities in schools from the building infrastructure to the resources, academic programs, and school climate. It made me feel like I got jumped on Chicago's Michigan Avenue, during broad daylight while passers kept passing by. These injustices interfered with my understanding of education and I felt alone in my shock, anger, and action against it.   Racism, discrimination, and disconnected people from communities and the earth revealed that the terrains of educational environments were degenerating into

toxic swamps. I felt that my students did not receive the best education and I needed to learn how to navigate the system better to help ensure it.

I entered the PhD program hoping to find more answers of how to better prepare myself for the classroom and what I discovered through the process was the deeply political structure of schools. I faced the privileged space I grew up in as I realized I was one of the lucky Chicago Public School students who was encouraged to think creatively. The initial dream of becoming a teacher who could engage the imagination of students came from a place not everyone had access to and it was depressing to acknowledge that the system I flourished in was the same system that marginalized others. I was fortunate to attend a public elementary school with a gifted program and a selective enrollment high school, but graduate school provided a different understanding of my success as a student. I left classroom teaching to pursue knowledge that would help me be a better teacher. Instead I found the problems in teacher preparation were recurring arguments recycled through different strands of discourse sharing the same diseased root and proposed remedies and prescriptions that came and went.

I dedicated my studies to better understand how to improve the preparation of teachers for urban classrooms and the research revealed that the existing problems were similar to the problems of past generations of teachers. During critical discussions about inequalities in schools and society based on a racialized historical trajectory of discrimination and disinvestment,

I've heard students make comments such as, "if minorities are so upset, then why don't they just go back to where they came from," followed by "why are we talking about race? Race doesn't matter anymore." These conversations threw me into the twilight zone and I wonder if somehow time stood still and progress overlooked education programs.

E. One Last Shot

In my last teaching position I started the school year thinking I would be able to make teaching a career. I had a good time in my first few years of teaching and thought I could go back to the grind of the classroom and be satisfied with my life. Wrong. It is fun to think about school in a Glee kind of way. Dealing with teenage drama, angst, and self-esteem issues while singing and dancing about it, but unfortunately school is not that. The school I worked at had all the drama, angst, self-esteem problems, and a lot of non-choreographed, impromptu singing and dancing but in the context of one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city. The neighborhood had not seen any investment in over 50 years. Vacant, boarded up, dilapidated buildings sit rotting along what used to be thriving streets looking out on an impeccable view of Chicago's skyline.

I don't think it's realistic anymore to think that the mission of schools should be to educate citizens to compete in the global economy. Today, the disparities between the have and have-nots illuminate the failure of the global

economy to be a just system for the majority of the population. The world's rulers understand implicitly that theirs is a system established to suit the needs of a few, not the many, and the many cannot ever be permitted to question and alter corporate rule (McChesney, 1998). The result of our inability to resist that, which oppresses us, allows the corporate take over of every facet of social life. The process of being dissatisfied with injustice is difficult because it means that we prepare ourselves for suffering and it is more comfortable to adjust to the familiar than risk it for the unknown.

Corporate communities work incessantly to see that important issues are never debated and spend a fortune bankrolling a public relations apparatus to convince Americans that the status quo is the best of all possible worlds. The possibility for social change for the better will be when the corporate communities of wealthy elitists abandon their control over the media, stop buying elections, and when they are comfortable establishing a genuinely participatory democracy because they no longer fear the power of the many (McChesney, 1998). As we wait for that day to come, the struggle for social change has begun. The current neoliberal order has generated massive political and economic crises across the world, where societies are in turmoil and the quality of life is fragile. Noam Chomsky says, "If you act like there is no possibility to change for the better, you guarantee that there will be no change for the better. The choice is ours, the choice is yours" (1999). Revolutions can

only lead to a democratic and humane resolution through how we, the people, organize, respond, and act.

F. My Experience of the Status Quo

The way the world operates now does not make sense. The vast disparities are inhumane and yet we allow ourselves to stay asleep. We must awaken a generation of people to move forward beyond our current structures and systems of living and free the minds that have been enslaved by miseducation. Are we too trusting of those in power to make the right and just decisions for the people? Or has the system created a legion of drones to comply and service the machine? Steve Biko said in a speech (1971), "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." And he is right. The system is set up to limit the imaginations of people from revolting and constructs a power structure to keep specific people from getting ahead or limiting the number of the ones who can. Those who have the power have a common way of thinking that perpetuates the system. It is a system based on the selfish desires and needs of a few, who have been corrupted by the spoils of the earth, and have an insatiable lust for consumption. Consumerism is killing our humanity. Overconsumption has cannibalized public services. At the expense of human life, our capitalistic society has profited off of the labor, energy, and livelihood of the people.

Why do we teach children to measure their self-worth based on their ability to score well on tests, get into college, obtain a degree and get 'good' jobs? We live in a society where the value of a human life is captured through the measurements of a very limited knowledge set. Intellect is solely defined through the subjects of math, science, reading, and history and compartmentalizes the wealth of knowledge we each develop through our human experiences. One of the many problems with the education system of today is that schools infect children by miseducating them into believing their self-worth is determined by the product they become. As the adults in the building, teachers must remember that more than performing a job; we are shaping the minds of the future. History is often taught in a chronological sequence of time by highlighting events, moments, and individuals. Often times it fails to show the evolution of thought and paradigm shifts in seemingly static times. The greatest injustice produced by schools of education is the containment of that evolution. The value placed on test scores has not just corrupted the future but reduced teachers to the role of an SS officer carrying out the duties of those seated in power all the while taking part in the genocide of our own humanity.

Schools should be spaces to help kids love learning. Unfortunately, school can feel more like being locked up for 7 hours a day slowly losing your autonomy, creativity, intelligence, and sanity.   I think we must make the distinction between teaching and robot technician. I thought teaching meant

that I would create an environment where kids felt comfortable and excited to explore new concepts and ideas. Instead teaching, in many ways, has become an act of violence. Paulo Freire said, "Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects" (1970, p. 85). There is a system of surveillance and compliance through scripted curriculums and measured outcomes. It's hard to be in environments that make you feel like your main objective in working with kids is to prepare them to be another brick in the wall. It's a terrible expectation and standard for teaching and it operates through school policy and culture. It's even more heartbreaking to see how programmed teachers and students have become. They are robots, performing robot tasks, and don't question or fight back and comply, just like robots. But even in the movies, the robots have their moments for robot rebellion where they fight the humans and try to take over the world.

Urban schools are incredibly complicated spaces. They are not easy to navigate. If you can see beneath the surface of what takes place on a daily basis, it can be a mind blowing, paralyzing experience. Urban school systems are set in conditions that systematically segregate, divide, and select those who have the right to reach their fullest human potential. It is the conditions of this system that have allowed violence to breed in disinvested, poverty stricken communities, and it is the structure that allows it to continue.

Challenging the status quo will lead to engaging in a process of wrestling with knowledge that is disruptive, discomforting, and problematizing (Kumashiro, 2004). Naturally, it is not in the best interest of the soul to be broken, to enter into a state of crisis, to feel discomfort, displaced, or threatened but learning should not be a process that repeats and affirms what we think we know- it should be a disarming process that allows us to escape the uncritical complacency of repetition. Entering into states of crisis in our knowledge can help us challenge the status quo, challenge oppression, and push the boundaries that make us apathetic and impotent and strengthen our audacity to fight for something greater- happiness.

When we think about re-invisioning an education that will better our communities and our society we must be realistic about what is actually happening in the lives of our students now because band-aid solutions will never heal deep wounds. Neighborhoods that experience violence, drug addiction, homelessness, and poverty are dealing with a lot of issues that schools are not equipped to address. Current policies do not address the needs of the students but cater to the needs and interest of the state. What the numbers of wealth inequality fail to reveal is the human experience of generational poverty, the impacts on families living in disinvested communities, and the damage to the children of disenfranchised people. My dissertation work is an attempt to connect the research on preparing teachers for urban schools, my experience

as an urban student and teacher, and the ideas of educators and activists to rethink how we understand and practice education.

My experiences as a student and a teacher brought me to a very simple conclusion: we can do better. I use the term 'we' as an all-encompassing, terribly generalizing term because the current social, political, economic, and environmental moment points towards an evolution in our humanity. When some serious and honorable people devote themselves, with courage and conviction, to a struggle for ideals that one knows to be just and deeply important, the struggle develops the potential for a mass movement of the oppressed and exploited. The impulse to contribute to it may intensify, growing both from moral pressure and the desire for self-fulfillment in a decent and humane society (Chomsky, 1994). Change is possible, but it requires the most advanced intellectual and technical achievements within the movement. It is time to gather the knowledge, creativity, and skill of people from all walks of life to build a vision for society that we can all work towards together.

G. The Road is made by Walking

The following chapters of the dissertation document my journey as a teacher and express the process of my reflections on life experience. I record my successes and failures inside and outside the classroom, engage in a lot of conversations with myself and with others about life philosophy, and inquire about people's visions and dreams for themselves and the world around them.

Chapter two is a review of the literature, which applies to teacher education in three ways: 1. Neoliberalism provides a context to understand the ideologies and policies of school reform in Chicago and the impacts on teaching 2. Applying understandings of social justice education and teaching for social justice to think about how injustices have been addressed 3. Analyzing the racial component of urban schools through the lens of Critical Race Theory and multicultural education to challenge the preparation of urban teachers. Engaging these areas within the conversation of preparing urban schoolteachers, I hope to create a highly complex and nuanced framework for developing objectives, analyzing current policies and practices, and identifying areas for improvement.

Chapter three will explain the rationale for the methods of 'talk story' and quest narrative writing used for collecting data, coding, analysis, and the final write up. By documenting conversations and the lessons learned through lived experience and human interactions, the final product is a story about teaching and navigating the spaces of urban schools.

Chapter four will be written in the first person and largely storytelling, interwoven with autobiographical and biographical accounts from my participants. The journey of learning is the emphasis of the chapter and walks the reader through particular moments of teaching and learning experiences while offering moments of reflection to consider my own experiences and allow myself the opportunity to respond to certain moments. These sections are

called "The Reflex" and create parenthetical breaks from the actual conversation in which I insert my thoughts and reflections. I encourage the reader to offer and insert their moments of reflection and response to any of the stories and experiences and hope that those notes would be a conversational piece at the dissertation defense.

Chapter five is the solution I found at the end of the quest. It is the result of years of pondering what purposes and functions of urban schools fulfill and it is a manifestation of dreams for something different. The treasure is found in a truth that was buried in self-doubt and misunderstandings of humanity. It is a truth I must never forget- we can change the world through love. The idealism that I started out with was lost along the way but it returned to me and it manifested into a proposal for a new way of preparing teachers in Chicago founded on the practice of love. The final chapter is the philosophy of the school and the beginning of a new journey.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Introduction

The work of urban teacher education is unlike the work of teachers in small rural or suburban communities and calls for research that pays particular attention to urban issues. The term 'urban' is embedded with socioeconomic and racial connotations. Used in media reports to describe a neighborhood or group of residents as 'urban' it is common that those being described are people of color who live in impoverished communities (Noguera, 2003). The association between the term urban and the people and places composed of poor, racialized minorities is tied to the demographic and economic transformations that occurred in cities throughout the United States during the past 50 years (Clark, 1998; Wilson, 1978, 1987 cited in Noguera, 2003).

Characteristics of urban school systems include: serving large, highly-diverse populations (Rogers, 1968, cited in Noguera, 2003); having a centralized decision-making bureaucracy politically isolated from communities (McLaughlin & Hopfengardner, 1998; Mirel, 1993; Krei, 1998; Wong & Lee, 1998 cited in Noguera, 2003); chronic patterns of underfunding that influence decisions about teaching and learning; serving high concentrations of cultural and linguistic minorities in conflict with the dominant cultural model (Ogbu, 1995; Seller & Weis, 1998 cited in Noguera, 2003); and dependence on a unitary, seemingly objective definition of "intelligence" and standardized measures of learning to classify students (Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991; Holdzkom, 1999; Sheldon &

Bidlle, 1998 cited in Noguera, 2003). In response to these characteristics, the preparation of urban teachers must be seen as part of the intricate web of urban space.

The following bodies of literature are applied to teacher education to serve the following purposes: (1) Neoliberal ideologies are discussed to understand the political and economic rationales for the current predicament of schools in Chicago; (2) Critical urban theory is used to ground the unique spatial dynamics and social organization of urban cities; (3) The literature on social justice education highlights how injustices in education have been addressed; (4) An analysis of urban schools as racialized spaces is provided through the lens of Critical Race Theory; (5) Multicultural teacher education literature is used to challenge the preparation of urban school teachers. The work of urban educators is highly complex and nuanced and these bodies of literature build a broader framework for understanding the current predicament of 'failing' Chicago schools and 'bad' teachers. This chapter engages these bodies of literature to lay the foundation for my research in the preparation of urban teachers, which proposes alternative philosophies, epistemologies, and practices to the field.

B. Neoliberalism

David Harvey describes neoliberalism as an ideology that takes the view that individual liberty and freedom are the high point of civilization. Pauline Lipman describes it as:

> [A] particular, historically-generated state strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism and provide new opportunities for capital accumulation (Jones & Ward, 2002). Put simply, neoliberalism is an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the pubic sphere. Neoliberals champion privatization of social goods and withdrawal of government from provision for social welfare on the premise that competitive markets are more effective and efficient (2011, p. 22-23).

Neoliberalism also proposes that individual liberty and freedom can best be protected and achieved through deregulation, preserving private property rights, and the institutions of the free market (Harvey, 2005). The policies and processes of private interests control as many aspects of social life as possible in order to maximize personal profit. Neoliberal policies and initiatives operate through free market capitalism to encourage private enterprise and consumer choice. Personal responsibility, entrepreneurial initiative and consumer choice are characteristics of neoliberalism, and promotes government participation only when in support of initiatives for capital gain. Examples of these policies and initiatives permeate through Chicago's transformation from a post-industrial to a global city. As a result, dismantling unions, privatizing education, and eliminating social welfare programs are rationalized because they threaten the workings of the free market and corporate domination of society.

1. Economic Restructuring

Changes in economic structures are bound by political and social changes in a society (Underhill, 2006). The 1970's spawned a movement to reinvent capitalism and restructure the global economy. Changes in the global political economy show that governments have a tendency to adopt policies meant to 'liberalize' their domestic structures since the mid 1970's (Gill, 2006). Four elements of this transformation were to: 1. Decrease the cost of production, 2. Create unrestricted mobility for capital, 3. Develop new technology, and 4. Reorganize institutional arrangements (Gill, 2006). In order to meet these four goals and revitalize the economy, decreased tariffs and opening trade boundaries were necessary elements for this transformation to take place. By eliminating boundaries through trade agreements, capital was able to flow more freely, but also resulted in job loss and income redistribution. Deregulation would ensure capital mobility and allow business to find resources and human capital to decrease the cost of production but this also exploited the labor of the developing world (Gill, 2006). The development of new technology would create opportunity for new capital, increase competition and create highways for capital to flow.

From 1967 to 1990, Chicago manufacturing jobs declined from 546,500 (nearly 41% of all local jobs) to 216,190 (18% of total jobs) while non-manufacturing jobs went from 797,867 (59%) in 1967, to 983,580 (82%) in 1990

(Betancur & Gills 2000, p. 27 cited in Lipman, 2011). Manufacturing workers were left with lower wage service and non-union manufacturing work (including day labor, part-time, and sweatshop work). In 1998, 76% of the jobs with the most growth in Illinois paid less than a livable wage, and 51% of these jobs paid below half a livable wage (National Priorities Project, 1998 cited in Lipman, 2011). Some workers were able to find new labor positions, but others were forced into alternative economies and unemployment. On the other end of the spectrum high-paid knowledge based jobs and business and professional services increased. US Dept. of Labor data (1986-1999) on the 50 largest U.S. cities confirmed a lopsided labor structure with growth in high and low-paid jobs and a decline in the share of mid-skilled middle-income administrative and skilled production labor (Skinner, 2004 cited in Lipman, 2011).

Saskia Sassen (1994, p.3) states, "The notion of a global economy has become deeply entrenched in political and media circles all around the world." Its images of instantaneous communication and interactions through capital and social relationships around the globe create a dominant narrative to frame the status quo. However, Sassen argues, "Missing from this abstract model are the actual material processes, activities, and infrastructures crucial to the implementation of globalization," (1994, p. 4). Overlooking the spatial dimensions of economic globalization distorted the roles that major cities play. Sassen argues, "an analysis of place, rather than national indicators, produces a highly variable mosaic of results" (1994, p.4). When space is overlooked, the

intricacies of the infrastructure pivotal in understanding a city's capacity for global economic expansion are reduced to a generic formula. Looking at the new global and regional hierarchies of cities, certain groups of people are falling on the outskirts of the periphery not only in less developed nations, but in some of the most advanced economies.

Economic globalization led to eviction, exemplified in former manufacturing and port cities abandoned by the corporations who have gone transnational and the immigration of workers from country to country and city to city (Sassen, 1994). For instance, North Lawndale, a west side Chicago neighborhood once was a thriving industrial center of the city. From 1950-1960, the community's population of white inhabitants decreased from approximately 87,000 to under 11,000 while the population of African Americans increased to approximately 125,000 by the mid-1960's (Lawndale Christian Health Center, 2011). The demographic shifts in North Lawndale coincided with the economic shift, which reinforced strains on the community.

The process of deindustrialization, began during the 1950's and peaked during the 1970's and 1980's and had devastating impacts on the community's industrial economy. To adapt to the new global economy, the United States shifted from a manufacturing economy (based on the production of goods) to a service economy (based on the provision of services). The community of North Lawndale, whose economic strength depended on industry, was nearly decimated by this economic transformation. Sears was the symbol of the

industrial foundation of the community and began its shut-down in 1974 and completely closed by 1987 (Lawndale Christian Health Center, 2011). Most other major manufacturers in the area (i.e. Zenith and Sunbeam, Western Electric, and International Harvester) also closed (Steans Family Foundation, 2011).

As manufacturing facilities shut their doors, the community suffered from a massive job loss. Statistics indicate that "between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s, the neighborhood lost roughly 80% of its manufacturing jobs" (Chicago Architecture Foundation, 2011). Deindustrialization accelerated the departure of commercial business as well. By 1970, over 75% of the community's businesses had been closed (Lawndale Christian Health Center, 2011). With economic restructuring, the quality of jobs available to residents changed, and diminished the community's resource base. The living-wage manufacturing jobs that were formerly the backbone of the community had ensured that social and financial capital remained within the community; through the economic transformation, these jobs were replaced by low-wage service jobs that were often located outside of the community (Lane, Ryan, Wilson, & Yeftich, 2007).

Huge decreases in the quantity and quality of jobs available in North Lawndale produced large increases in unemployment, poverty, and other social ills. Resources, both social and financial were filtered out of the community at a time when the need for resources was greatest. Legitimate avenues for upward mobility within North Lawndale decreased, the stress on the

community's resources and residents increased, and problems such as drug use, homelessness, low education rates, housing dilapidation, and land vacancy proliferated (Lane, Ryan, Wilson, & Yeftich, 2007).

This analysis of space is applicable to the impacts of global economic shifts on education. According to Lipman (2011) disinvestment in Chicago's African American and Latino working class communities and schools created the basis for gentrification and displacement of community residents and dispossession of their schools. The conditions for neoliberal urban restructuring were created by post-World War II racial segregation and deindustrialization which led to White flight, disinvestment in urban communities and urban decline (Lipman, 2011). This created the material and ideological conditions for the privatization of education and expanding education markets through the charter school movement based on choice and market competition.

2. Neoliberal Education Tactics- Chicago Style

Policy is an expression of values arising out of specific interests and relations of power (Ball, 1994). Educational policy in the last few decades reflects changes in the global economy. This current era of reform is supported by educational initiatives first inspired by the 1983 document entitled *A Nation at Risk*, which held schools responsible for creating a competitive workforce through innovation and rigor and placed more emphasis on high stakes testing. This document called for major school reform. In 2001, the rhetoric repeated

itself in *No Child Left Behind*. Education for economic competition fulfills one of the many purposes of the education system but the popularity of these policy initiatives is framed by rhetoric of equality achieved through accountability, higher standards, sanctions, and incentives.

NCLB established a sorting machine to identify and label "failing" public schools which legitimized turning them over to the market. NCLB's sanctions provided incentives for districts to expand charter schools because the school district avoided sanctions for failing to meet annual NCLB benchmarks by selling the schools over to the private sector (Lipman, 2011). By providing "options" in choosing a school, the idea that charter schools would be a better alternative to open-enrollment neighborhood public schools. Chicago was a prime example of this in the last decade (Lipman, 2004).

Mayoral control and appointed CEOs of the public school system pushed the closing of "failing" public schools and transferred them into the hands of corporate entities while promoting school choice in the charter school models. Incentive based pay for teachers based on student test scores, circumventing the power of the teachers unions, and implementing top-down accountability measures, were all part of a larger national agenda based off of the Chicago testing grounds. These market-based policies alongside mayoral-controlled school districts went nationwide by sparking a competition for the $4.35 billion in federal stimulus dollars for education (Duncan, 2009a; U.S. Department of Education, 2009b cited in Lipman, 2011). These reforms aligned with larger plans

to transform Chicago from an industrial city to an entrepreneurial post-welfare city (Lipman, 2011).

In 1995 the governing arrangements of the Chicago Public Schools centralized authority to the top of the system and shifted power into the hands of the mayor (Wong & Sunderman, 2001). As Pauline Lipman states, "Chicago is more than a rich example. It is incubator, test case, and model for the neoliberal urban education agenda" (2011, p. 38). During a Republican-controlled legislature, with support from Richard M. Daley, the business community and the Governor of Illinois, the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act gave the mayor control over the school board and instituted a corporate management model in CPS. This centralized authority, eliminated the school board nominating commission and gave the mayor the power to appoint a five-member school board and choose a chief executive officer (CEO), who would be in charge of the system. This reform focused on academic achievement and accountability and gave the CEO, the board, and school principals the authority to enforce higher academic standards by any means necessary while allowing those in power to operate without accountability and transparency.

Chicago's first appointed CEO was Paul Vallas who formerly served as the budget director for Mayor Daley. Serving from 1995-2001, Vallas was praised for extending alternative, magnet, and charter schools and balancing the budget for a school district that Secretary of Education William Bennett (1985-88)

considered the worst school district in America. However, Arne Duncan who served an eight-year term as CEO from 2001-2009, left the greatest impact on Chicago's schools by expanding education markets and injecting market principles into the public school system. Shortly after the inauguration at a gathering of urban mayors and superintendents, the newly appointed secretary would challenge mayors to take greater responsibility for improving public education (Wong, 2011). During other public speaking engagements, Duncan encouraged urban school leaders to look at Chicago as an example in allowing outsider organizations to manage the lowest performing schools.

Chicago's 1995 reform policies took on a particular look that established and normalized labeling, sorting, and classifying schools. Renaissance 2010 was proposed in 2003 as a part of Chicago Metropolis 2020, sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago to enhance Chicago's productivity as a global city. The financial support for this initiative comes from private donations for the purpose of "ending the monopoly of public education" (Lipman & Haines, 2007). The free market ideas of neoliberalism call for the deregulation of public services to open it up to market competition. This competition, in theory, should produce better results because of the principles of demand and consumption. However, Ren2010 functioned under the rhetoric of closing down failing schools to reconstruct schools that work but it served as an example of the creative destruction and privatization of public schools. In theory, this initiative aims at serving those who live in impoverished neighborhoods by creating better

opportunities, yet school closings have displaced children all over the city and transitioned them into schools did not necessarily perform better (Lipman & Haines, 2007).

For instance, studies show that charter schools are more segregated by race and poverty than public schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010 cited in Lipman, 2011) and in the aggregate, 17% charter school students perform better than public schools while 37% perform significantly worse and 46% show no significant difference (Center for Research on Education Outcomes [CREDO], 2009 cited in Lipman, 2011). The goal of Ren2010 was rooted in the sentiment of a civic responsibility to the people of the city improve their lives. Neoliberal initiatives like Ren2010 were damaging because they created a false idea of opportunity yet continued to perpetuate social inequality and injustice against people of color (Lipman & Haines, 2007).

African American students compose the majority of Chicago Public Schools enrollment and historically have had lowest test scores, were more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to be retained under CPS accountability policies, and of the 147 elementary schools put on probation from 1996 to 2001, 75% were African American (Lipman & Haines, 2007). Low-income African American sections of Chicago are intertwined with the lack of jobs, lack of decent affordable housing, decayed physical infrastructure, and a history of racial segregation and disinvestment in communities of color (Anyon, 2005). Standardized test results make the argument for closing neighborhood schools

and at the same time, a racialized discourse of failure, probation, and lack of effort constructs African American and Latino schools and communities as deficient (Lipman & Haines, 2007).

Charter schools became the primary vehicle to open education up to the market and weaken teachers' unions (Lipman, 2011). Between 2000-2008 the U.S. Department of Education awarded $1.8 billion in start-up funds for charter schools and over $320 million for charter school facilities (Lipman, 2011). In the 1998-1999 school year, 21 states reported one or more charter schools in comparison to 2008, where now over 4,300 charter schools run in 40 states (Lipman, 2011). The charter school movement is related to the historical disinvestment in communities of color (Anyon, 1980, 2005; Irvine, 1991; Kozol, 1992; Woodson, 1933/1990 cited in Lipman, 2011). Chicago's charter schools are concentrated on the predominantly African American West and South sides.

3. Teaching in a Neoliberal System

The paradigm of school reform is directed at changing regulations and rules under which schools operate so that the neoliberal agenda of privatization and expanding education markets can flourish. Pauline Lipman poignantly follows the trickle down effect of neoliberalism and its impact on teaching:

> On the assumption that the private sector is more efficient and productive than the public sector, neoliberal policy promotes education markets and privatization. Privately operated but publicly funded charter schools, private school vouchers, and privatized education services have opened

up a whole new arena for capital accumulation (Burch 2009; Saltman, 2007). School administration is geared to management techniques designed to meet production targets such as test scores. Teaching and learning are driven by performance indicators such as benchmark scores, narrowing the curriculum and producing a new regulatory culture of "performativity and fabrication" (Ball, 2004). Teacher unions are also under attack. The result is a "global assault on teaching, teachers, and their unions" (Compton & Weiner, 2008) and on public education (2011, p. 32-33).

Bree Picower (2012) says that "the current so-called 'education reformers' are clearing the path for full-blown privatization of public education using the 'bad teacher' as their rallying cry (p.1). Geared towards high stakes testing and measurable standards, teaching reverts back to archaic methods of treating the student as a depository and teacher as the depositor. Teaching becomes a task geared towards meeting annual yearly performance goals and many times defaults to teaching directly towards the tests that measure performance. Teachers must then "fill" students with the contents of his/her narration of knowledge and content becomes detached from reality and disconnected from the totality of what could be liberating (Freire, 1970). The teacher becomes a narrator of knowledge, which leads students to rote memorization and mechanical recordings of these narratives. Increased test scores and the praise awarded to teachers who are able to show improvement exemplifies this banking system of compliance and control.

Centralized accountability and education markets have produced deep changes in teachers' work (Apple, 2006; Gewirtz et al., 2009; Hursh, 2007 cited in Lipman, 2011) including increased regulation and surveillance, narrowed

curricula, and performance-based pay. It is a shift from teacher professionalism and intellectually, socially, and emotionally complex notions of learning and teaching to a neoliberal emphases on instrumental efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and measurable performance (Clarke & Newman, 1997 cited in Lipman, 2011). The effects of this shift change what is measured, and thus taught, as teaching is driven by the idea that the only things worth teaching are those that are measured or easily tested.

Neoliberal accountability shifted the responsibility for educational improvement from the state to the teachers and schools but narrowed the scope of improvement by instituting technocratic measures which gave them less control over goals, curriculum, and pedagogy which stripped them of their professional judgments. Sanctions placed on schools on academic probation, saturated the school in test preparation culture including regular test practice, formulaic instruction, emphasis on tested skills, and test preparation curriculums. Due to these sanctions, teaching has been undermined as a profession of human development and has changed "what it means to be a teacher" (Ball, 2003, p. 217). High stakes accountability is exhausting teachers with increased stress, demoralization, and exit from the profession (Valli & Buese, 2007 cited in Lipman 2011). Mandates for technical and drill and kill teaching ultimately pushed out teachers who exemplified independent professional judgment. Some left teaching altogether while others looked for work in neighboring

districts and charter schools where they hoped to find opportunities that allowed them to practice their profession with dignity.

Furthering the attack on teachers, a recent piece of propaganda sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and written for the Center for American Progress entitled "A Stronger Accountability Model for Teacher Education" (2010) threatens the free spaces for thinking to take place in universities. In this report, the argument for a redesigned accountability system was situated in what the author (Crowe, 2010) identified as the two main problems in teacher education: program quality and state oversight. The paper criticizes and blames states for not holding teacher education programs accountable, snapping the mug shots of educational institutions for irresponsibly and haphazardly preparing deficient teachers who have failed the schools and students. An accountability system based on neoliberal principles calling for empirically based, measurable indicators dependent on a few outcomes, is a symbol for the technocratic, positivistic reform agenda. The one-size-fits-all model proposed for teacher education supports the "teaching the same content to all students" position upheld by those who have resources to place them at an advantage in the public sphere (Gay, 2005).

Supporting this position are individuals holding governmental offices, philanthropic organizations, and business officials. These individuals and organizations influence the production of common sense by using their position and power to create reports and documentaries like *Waiting for Superman* and

make it difficult for counter arguments to be heard with similar political effects. Those advocating for social justice, multicultural, and anti-oppressive agendas in education are marginalized by the private and corporate control over information and the media which influences the public perception of reform, making it all the more difficult to engage in work that speaks against neoliberal movements.

Counter to the attack on teacher education, current research does not support an increase in teacher effectiveness based on standardized tests (Gay, 2005) nor can it prove individuals, who score low on tests or do not pass, fail to become good teachers (Gitomer & Latham, 1999). Teachers may be held accountable for their content knowledge or pedagogical skill, but the research does not prove those are the two determining characteristics in being a successful instructor. Ingersoll asks why there is a need to continuously prove that teaching is a highly complex craft that requires ability and advanced training in order to do well (2001). To assert that increased accountability through standardized testing will improve how teachers are prepared undermines the complex nature of teacher's work.

While the Gates Foundation report raises the important question of how to improve teacher education programs, it limits the capacity for growth in areas that cannot be measured through a standardized test. Understanding content or pedagogy are only a few tools necessary to creating successful learning experiences. The list of possible attributes and characteristics is endless yet

neoliberal reform agendas simplify the work of teachers by limiting the scope of improving urban teacher education.

5. Neoliberal Damage Control

The naturalization of neoliberal globalization has created an epidemic of people suffering from what Jason Hackworth calls the TINA syndrome, an acronym for "there is no alternative" (2007). The difficulty in refuting neoliberalism and falling victim to the TINA syndrome is a result of a dialectical treatment of global economic processes. Hackworth states, "Neoliberalism gets transformed from a political movement into something that is natural, democratically chosen, or completely predictable" (2007, p. 200). Neoliberal capitalism is often framed as natural, inevitable, or tending toward some higher-order equilibrium (Marcuse & van Kempen, 2000). The media, controlled by corporations, share the same ideological commitments of the core capitalist elite who also control most of the economy and the state. Thus, ideas are produced for consumption and alignment with the dominant ideology of the ruling class. A system of conformity creates a narrow spectrum of opinion expressed and a narrow interpretation of current history, which will conform to that of the state propaganda system (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Neoliberalism becomes hegemonic in its ability to become common sense, which seems to debilitate the envisioning of alternatives. Again, Hackworth points out that, "Neoliberalism is hegemonic not because it "won" in

a democratic, intellectual, or moral sense. It "won" because its powerful institutions and individual proponents organized enough people and interests to believe that there is no alternative; as with all hegemonic orders, its "victor" is always incomplete, contestable, and in flux" (2007, p. 201). Richard Peet and Elaine Hartwick (1999) claim economic theory in isolation cannot explain socio-political outcomes and must be critiqued before they become universalized. Peet and Hartwick's critique states that economics relies on simplistic assumptions that are taken as given for all times. He states, "Economics develops in an intellectual vacuum of high mathematics and unrealistic models, isolates itself from fundamental critiques, and reaches precarious conclusions which, while they affect everyone, are conspicuously lacking in democratic input." The mathematical and scientific aspects of economics treat it as a fixed system, giving it the illusion that there are given truths and do not allow the interference of multiple realities. However, the narratives created through economics are incomplete because they leave out the experiences of the marginalized and those that live on the periphery. When these dominant narratives are looked at closely, there are numerous contradictions and problems that unveil its mask of perfection and those details can slowly but surely deconstruct our unrealistic perception of a static world.

Students must develop a critical consciousness, which would help position them as transformers of the world they come to understand. The more completely they accept their passive roles as receptacles, the more they adapt

to that fragmented, compartmentalized view of reality (Freire, 1970). In order for the goals of neoliberal policies to be achieved we must first liberate ourselves and then our students from this banking method we have defaulted to. Education for liberation is rooted in praxis. Freire defines praxis as "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79, 1970). If teachers are truly committed to education, then liberation from mechanical banking methods must be dismissed and alternative ways of addressing policy mandates must be rethought.

Under the current paradigm of education, students are indoctrinated to understand knowledge through a narrow lens of neoliberal ideology. This paradigm must shift in order to build a solid foundation for students to "make sense" of the new and rethink the old regime. Knowledge is rarely imparted as newly constructed but we need to allow the individual to develop their power to critically perceive their positionality in the world in which they find themselves. This process will be a reinvention of the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, always in a state of transformation. Their actions will then be a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. It affirms individuals in the process of becoming, not dependent upon a fixed reality, feeling trapped without alternatives. Education can be a process of empowering and building the capacity of individuals to transform their realities. One suggestion to shift the paradigm of teaching and learning in an era of neoliberalism is to engage critical urban theory to begin visioning a new way of being in urban space.

C. Critical Urban Theory

The unique spatial dynamics of cities and the political, economic, and social construct of space impacts community development and the schools that serve them. Critical urban theory is useful to look at the unique spatial dynamics and social organization of urban cities and the current predicament of schools in Chicago. Developed through the work of Stephen Gill (2006) and David Harvey (2005), neoliberal ideology permeates political, economic, and social spheres and can be witnessed through the policies that promote the primacy of the market, fluidity of capital and labor, and individualism (Lipman & Haines, 2007).

Critical urban theory emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and malleable character of urban space (Brenner, 2009). Cities are spaces that are systematically constructed and reconstructed as an outcome of historically specific relations of social power. Critical urban theory insists that another, more democratic, socially just and sustainable form of urbanization is possible, even if such possibilities are currently being suppressed through dominant institutional arrangements, practices and ideologies (Brenner, 2009). It involves the critique of ideology and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities.

Critical urban theory insists on the need for abstract, theoretical arguments regarding the nature of urban processes under capitalism. This

approach asks individuals to think outside of the limitations and frameworks of how we understand our agency within the operations of the system and expand our understanding of our relationships to each other and to the state. By focusing on the abstract, it can help people envision a different world outside of its current structure.

If the purpose of reform is to promote change, then the existing formulas that reproduce the status quo must not be recognized as viable options. As an alternative, critical urban theory is concerned with excavating possibilities for alternative, radically emancipatory forms for urban conditions that are latent, yet systemically suppressed, within contemporary cities and gives hope to finding radical alternative solutions.

Critical urban theory continually reinvents the city in relation to the unevenly evolving political-economic geographies of the process. On a larger scale, as during previous phases of capitalist development, the geographies of urbanization are profoundly uneven—but their parameters are no longer confined to any single type of settlement space. Cities, city regions, metropolitan regions, etc. are not bounded in one site and are becoming:

> A generalized, planetary condition in and through which the accumulation of capital, the regulation of political-economic life, the reproduction of everyday social relations and the contestation of the earth and humanity's possible futures are simultaneously organized and fought out (Brenner, 2009).

Thus, critical urban theory today requires a sustained engagement with contemporary worldwide patterns of capitalist urbanization and their far-

reaching consequences for social, political, economic and human/nature relations. This theory helps to connect Chicago to other urban spaces around the world.

David Harvey's work establishes a critical framework to support the work in education to create alternatives to the status quo. Harvey (2008) claims that the right to the city is:

> Far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (p.2).

Despite top-down policy decisions that change teaching into a technocratic process of validating the lifeless knowledge on standardized tests, change can still come about because life is not stagnant.

D. Social Justice Education

The term "social justice education" can be considered an "umbrella term" (Spalding, et al., 2010; Agarwal, et al., 2010, North 2008 cited in Picower, 2012) because of the myriad of approaches to issues of equity, access, power, and oppression. The work of social justice educators and scholars addresses inequities in education and offers an alternative to high stakes testing models which fail to address the role that poverty, resource distribution, and institutionalized racism play in educational success (Picower, 2012). The

following section describes four social justice education approaches: 1. Redistribution of resources; 2. Recognition of differences; 3. Building awareness and consciousness raising; 4. Teaching towards social justice.

1. Redistribution

The dominant distribution paradigm "defines social justice as the morally proper distribution of social benefits and burdens among society's members" which Iris Marion Young (p. 16, 1990) critiques as a common notion of social justice in the United States. Distribution addresses issues of employment and income but also social resources such as rights and self-respect. The distribution of social primary goods, includes material goods but also such goods as self-respect, access to employment, educational and decision-making opportunities, and the pursuit of happiness (Brighouse, cited in North 2006). Distribution is defined by John Rawls in two principles. Rawls' (2001) first principle of justice declares each person the same, constant right to a "fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties." The second principle of justice, states that social and economic inequalities are justified only when positions of power are "open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" and when they are "to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society" (Rawls, 2001). The first principle guarantees the conditions necessary for individuals to freely pursue "happiness" while the second principle restricts the level of inequality possible in society (Brighouse, cited in North 2008).

North (p. 1187, 2008) states, "given the deep-rooted history of social inequality in the United States, some individuals and groups require more resources than others to become productive, participating citizens in our democratic society. Children with physical and cognitive disabilities may also require more than their 'fair share' of resources." Institutions such as the public schools system should ensure that all children are "provided an education that fosters their autonomy, which in turn contributes to their participation as equal citizens in the public sphere and facilitates a capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good" (p. 1187, Reich in North, 2008).

The distribution paradigm addresses social goods, such as self-respect, which can be earned as a commodity and something to be earned and possessed. However, according to Young (1990), when social goods are perceived as a commodity for possession and exchange, a vision of the citizen as consumer prevails that denies the complex ways in which individual identities and capacities are the products of social processes and relations. Young argues to expand the distributive paradigm to include social processes and relationships and frames her own theory around the elimination of oppression, the institutional constraint on self-development, self-determination, and domination (1990). North (2008) also extends the paradigm by arguing that acknowledging the inequalities of conditions and attaining an 'equality of outcome' through compensatory reform efforts, will not transform the hierarchies of power, wealth, and privileges associated with identity attributes

embedded in the dominant culture.   These limitations in the distribution framework lead to exploration of privilege in the dominant culture.

2. Recognition

Fraser (p. 109, 2000) argues that the recognition tradition emphasizes "an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also separate from it." Social recognition is a necessary component for coming into being and that the principles of affection and care are necessary for individuals to understand themselves as individuals with their own needs.   An individual requires recognition by another to flourish as a human being.   In this framework, social justice must address the marginalization, silencing, and erasing of knowledge from historically oppressed groups thus challenging dominant narratives.   This is a misrecognition common in the U.S. educational system (King, 2004).   Not only are the experiences of these groups left out of the dominant curriculum but "the values, perspectives and life worlds of dominant groups permeate cultural and institutional norms" (Lynch & Baker, p. 143, 2005), and make it difficult for individuals to gain recognition and challenge those norms.

Those who do not participate in an irrelevant system then slip through the cracks and the meritocratic ideology in which the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality continues to hide the ways in which "the value, perspectives and life worlds of dominant groups permeates cultural and

institutional norms" (Lynch & Baker, p. 143, 2005). This also serves to legitimize public policies, discourses, and daily behaviors that marginalize, exclude, and/or silence academically unsuccessful individuals and the social groups with which they identify or are assigned (North, 2008). Left unchallenged, oppressed group members having "their lives interpreted through the lens of the dominant" (Lynch & Baker, p. 143, 2005) creates a common sense that reinforces the disrespect toward, and punitive measures for individuals who are not playing the game (North, 2008).

This misrecognition often hinders the development of individuals who appreciate their own values, intelligence, and potential as political actors, which Anyon (2005) argued is critical for the creation of broad-based social movements that have the power to transform prevailing U.S. economic, social, and educational policies. Hindering the development of individuals violates the right to be fully human and warps human evolution into perverted notions of our potential and capacity. Addressing recognition injustices does not require eliminating difference, as suggested in the redistributive model, but instead revalues them or deconstructs normative ideas of being (Young, 1990).

3. Building Awareness and Raising Consciousness

The work of Paulo Freire is very influential in social justice spheres in education and to the work of many educational scholars. Freire's (1970) notion of "conscientizacao" argues that educators should aim for two goals: (1)

teaching students how to critically examine oppressor/oppressed relationships (2) translating this critique into transformative political action (Giroux, 1997).

Scholars (e.g., Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2000; Ayers, 2004; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Torres, 1998; Westheimer & Kahne, 2002) emphasize action in social justice education and not just consuming static knowledge. However, there is a debate between scholars on knowledge and action. Banks (1995) argued that teaching students about the various historical, political, social, and economic viewpoints of the knowers and the known influence the production of knowledge and (Ladson-Billings, 2004), can lead to action. He seeks a restructuring of curricula that enables students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of various ethnic and cultural groups and in turn to use this knowledge to make decisions on important personal, social, and civic problems and take actions to solve them.

Jean Anyon (2005) emphasizes action and the need for "personal and social processes that assist people in producing public contention." Although she acknowledges that the development of critical consciousness provides a crucial base for understanding, Anyon insists that raising awareness through information, readings, and discussion does not by itself induce them to participate in transgressive politics. She believes that to activate people to create or join a social movement, it is important to actually involve them in protest activity of some kind.

Knowledge and action should not be a mutually exclusive relationship but

often times these concepts are divorced from one another in educational theories. In their study of democratic education programs, Westheimer and Kahne (2002) illustrated how knowledge and action often become separated in the playing out of these educational theories. Westheimer and Kahne's (2002) attention to the unintentional separation of action from knowledge relates to Anyon's (2005) concern about the limited role of critical consciousness in large-scale movements for social change.

The role of the social justice educator challenges the individuals to question, theorize, and expand knowledge and action for social justice in order to critically examine "our good intentions, practices, and policies to ensure that they do more good than harm to ourselves, others, and the surrounding environment" (p. 1201 North, 2008). Teaching is a labor of love: "exhausting, painful, and not always rewarding in the short term" (North, p. 1201, 2008). But, as activist and socialist Helen Keller once said, "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved" (Keller, cited in North 2008).

4. Teaching Towards Social Justice

Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2009) explains, "teaching for social justice is an activity with political dimensions in which all educators are responsible for challenging inequities in the social order and working with others to establish a

more just society" (p. 352). Educators must recognize the highly political educational context that masquerades as neutral (Kumashiro, 2008; hooks, 1994; Zeichner, 1993 cited in Picower, 2012). Educators themselves must have a political analysis of how inequality, oppression, and power operate as a starting place for social justice teaching. In the practice of teaching for social justice, David Lee Carlson (2007) approaches it as instigating a "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2007), or a collaborative and "dialogical investigation and consultation with others" (Pinar, 2007). Instead of focusing on defining the term, he suggests that teaching for social justice should be a "project" or a lived practice that becomes operational in specific locations, in specific groups, with specific individuals.

Bree Picower lays out the work of social justice educators by providing three levels of engagement: 1. Teachers should recognize and provide a political analysis of injustice and how oppression is operated and maintained on multiple levels; 2. Teachers should be willing to integrate this analysis into academic teaching in the classrooms and have the ability to do so; 3. Teachers should have the mindsets and skill sets to expand their social justice work outside the classroom as activists, with students and on their own, to combat multiple forms of oppression (2012). She explains the role of the social justice teacher, is to contribute to the broader political project of identifying and eliminating oppression (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010) to work toward a more democratic society (Lipman, 2004; Freire, 1970). Social justice educators are

aware of social inequality and see themselves as responsible for playing a role in diminishing disparities within schools and the larger society (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2009; Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe, 2005; Schey & Uppstrom, 2009 cited in Picower, 2012). Teachers must connect the concerns of students and their communities to the larger constructs of oppression in the form of racism, classism, gender subjugation, homophobia, ageism, and ableism (Katsarou, *et al.*, 2010).

Picower argues that because social justice educators are concerned with changing broader systems of oppression, they must be willing to work both inside and outside of their classrooms for social change (2012). The work inside the classroom involves developing caring and respectful student relationships as well as implementing culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy that prepares students to create change. Picower argues that teachers must also take action to challenge oppressive systems that create educational and society inequality and that to be "fully realized social justice educators, teachers must be equally concerned with these dual goals if they hope to both educate their students and create actual change" (p. 4)

Social justice educators challenge inequality through particular approaches that include 1. The relationships they develop with students, 2. The democratic classrooms they create, and 3. The specific ways in which they are then able to teach students to analyze and challenge oppression (Picower, 2012). Social justice educators understand that developing caring relationships

(Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999) with students based on a critical understanding of who students are and where they come from can lead to greater student academic success and leadership development (Cammarota & Romero, 2008 cited in Picower, 2012). Social justice teachers take the time to get to know students' life circumstances (Tan, 2008, cited in Picower, 2012) and the broader forces that challenge the learning process. Social justice teachers develop respect for individual differences. Teachers who care about the challenges students face in an unjust society uphold their students to high standards (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ayers, 2008) and feel the responsibility to address issues in solidarity with their students and co-construct knowledge and social action (Camangian, 2010; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Social justice educators use students' cultures to support academic success and to develop socio-cultural consciousness (Lipman, 2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Camangian, 2010). These teachers also draw on the gifts and talents that students bring to school (Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Picower states that building relationships based on trust lays the foundation for democratic classroom environments (2012). Democratic classrooms diminish the traditional hierarchies between teachers and students and offers opportunities to co-create classroom environments where everyone feels the responsibility to engage and contribute (hooks, 1994). Democratic classrooms provide the setting in which educators engage students in developing analyses of oppression in a manner that is culturally relevant and

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action oriented (Picower, 2012). Teachers must have deep content knowledge to help young people develop the academic literacy skills they need to navigate professional and civic life.   Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) explain:

> If these students are going to wear the mantle of the struggle for social and educational justice, if they are going to produce knowledge that forces us to look at our worlds differently, and if they are going to motivate people to act as collectives for social change, they will need to be able to read, write, and speak at high levels (p. 129).

Academic skills are a mandatory component of social justice and critical pedagogy. Hackman also describes three kinds of content mastery that social justice educators must possess: factual information, historical contextualization, and macro-to-micro content analysis.

Content mastery across multiple disciplines is the foundation teachers use to teach the main theme of social justice education, which concentrates on systems of oppression, power, and privilege, and the processes that perpetuate inequality (Hackman, 2011; Picower, 2011).   By bringing to the surface the knowledge and history of people who have been marginalized and oppressed (McLaren, 2003; King, 2008), students are better able to understand how current conditions have been shaped by struggles for power, the root causes of inequality and how they are perpetuated.   Social justice education also emphasizes teaching about social movements and the processes of liberating change (Hackman, 2005; Leistyna, 2008 in Picower, 2012) so that students have the opportunity to understand that change is possible, and that ordinary people

working in coalition have had powerful results. The ultimate goal of social justice education within the domain of the classroom is to allow students to apply their academic knowledge and skills to work toward changing social inequality and opporessive institutions in order to "transcend and transform the struggles they experience in their everyday lives" (Camangian, 2008, p. 298). The goal is for students to move away from passivism and to become activists with the power to create change (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009).

Picower argues that fully realized social justice educators have a responsibility to move beyond the classroom and engage in broader struggles against injustice (2012). Without enacting their own teacher activism, these teachers aren't creating social change. A teacher activist criticizes those who are social justice teachers in theory-who believe in the central tenets of critical pedagogy but who are not active in social movements (Picower, 2012). A teacher activist/organizer is a fully realized social justice educator only when they begin walking the walk that they are promoting in their classrooms. By expanding their actions beyond teaching about social issues to taking social action to transform injustice, social justice educators become teacher activists working to effect change rather than only teach about it.

As a teacher activist, the role requires teachers to be "struggling alongside their students against oppressive conditions, both inside their classrooms and beyond the confines of the school in which they teach. True social justice projects cannot be curricular activities, but include the broader

school-wide and local community" (Picower, 2012, p.9). Lastly, Picower argues that teacher activists have two important understandings about change: 1. Isolated teachers acting alone cannot put sufficient pressure on systems to create change and 2. The process of how change is brought about is equally important to the product, therefore change best happens in a democratic way, in which parents, students, and community members have a voice in the outcome.

When Picower talks about being a "fully realized" social justice teacher, it seems as if being a social justice teacher is a title to be attained, similarly to a merit badge instead of understanding that because the nature of injustice is constantly shifting with the times, context, and people so will the work. Especially in an era in which not much has changed despite the countless marches, protests, occupations, strikes, and arrests. Especially when you live in a city that has done nothing to eliminate or at a minimum decrease the number of shootings and deaths; where property is valued over life; where the number of school closings only increases despite the warnings of community members who see the tribal wars of street gangs and who know that school closings will force kids to walk into war zones; I suppose I can call myself a 'fully realized' social justice teacher, but in these conditions, what is it worth?

Maxine Greene pays particular attention to human rights for all in her contributions to social justice education. She is an advocate for teachers to raise the consciousness to conditions of oppression and guide students towards

ways of eradicating injustice and disparity in society. This act of teaching

becomes activism. She says:

> To teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise. It is to find models in literature and in history of the indignant ones who have taken the side of the victims of pestilences, whatever their names or places of origin. It is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds (Greene, p. XLV, 1998).

The social justice educator is a position that requires not only depth of

knowledge and skill in content and instruction but heart, will, passion, and an

unharnessed determination.

Antonia Darder critiques capitalism, globalization, and the modes of

exploitation but she also contemplates the conscious critical teacher as a

revolutionary, not merely a reformist. Much like social justice educators, critical

praxis of teachers should be reflected in the classroom by facilitating discussions

around important social issues related to race, class, gender, economics, and

power. The teacher should help the students to feel liberated, while liberating

him or herself too. Revolutionary praxis is the alliance between theory and

practice in which teachers base their pedagogy to allow the unveiling of social

contradictions that betray their visions of economic and political justice, human

rights, and liberation. The nature of such a practice comprises an act of love.

Teaching is love. Pedagogy is love- love for the world and people; without love,

the process of dialogue- could not exist and could not help the oppressed find

liberation (Darder, 2002). Love gives teachers faith and strength to carry on and

reinvent their praxis, and helps students be integral human beings by "problematizing" their reality. Love also allows teachers to act in the classroom with passion and reason, and to engage students in collective work. Darder's message is that a teacher who cares is a teacher who loves (2002).

As a result of neoliberal agendas of marketing schools and curriculums, teachers and students are reduced to assembly line workers and products. Social justice educators have a responsibility to understand the context in which they work in order to challenge the dominant structures that marginalize, silence, and oppress students. In the process of fighting for the rights of the students, educators also regain their humanity by fighting against the system that polices, controls, and dominates the ways in which we teach and learn. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." Unless teachers are intentional in the struggle for social justice, progress towards the goal will not be met. It is therefore imperative to critique and constantly rethink and remake the process of how we prepare teachers for the work ahead.

E. Teacher Education and Critical Race Theory

Systematic racism remains a treacherous obstacle and as teachers are prepared to teach in urban spaces, it is crucial to engage in conversations that expose ways of thinking that can limit the capacity of teachers to fully engage

students in the development of their own capacity and potential. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) to understand the social context of education and the preparation of teachers, I critique the whitening of the teaching profession and white normativity and the detrimental impacts on children of color. There are several ways to prepare teachers to work towards social justice in education but there are also barriers to the work. Ken Zeichner's claim that "we cannot rely on university-generated knowledge alone for school improvement" (2009, p. 112) and understanding the process of reflecting on one's own experience can contribute to help prospective teachers process their initial training, develop the disposition and skill to study their teaching that will help them become better at teaching over time.

As a response to the growing diversity in the U.S. and the cross cultural interactions between students and teachers, I look at the work of multicultural education scholars who discuss the importance of preparing teachers to become knowledgeable of cultural diversity (Banks & Banks 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dilworth, 1992). Lastly, the literature on Multicultural Education addresses ways to teach towards embracing diversity but it means putting prospective teachers through the process of understanding their own biases and preconceived understandings of cultural difference.

Due to the large demographic of students of color and the disproportionate number of white teachers, critical race theory becomes an integral part of the analytical framework for urban teacher education programs.

Many new teachers working in urban school districts do not have the cultural sensitivity to work in cross cultural communities and therefore it is critical to discuss the underpinnings of racism in American society and how it prevails today. Critical race theory challenges the invisibility of White privilege and is important to the work of preparing urban teachers because it forces people to grapple with the inconvenient truth of racism and inequality.

Critical race theory (CRT) was born out of the discontent of legal scholars of color but became it's own entity. Critical legal studies challenged traditional legal scholarship that focused on doctrinal and policy analysis (Gordon, 1990) and challenged the idea that "the civil rights struggle represents a long, steady march toward social transformation" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1334). Critical legal scholars critiqued mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of U.S. society as a meritocracy, but they failed to include racism in their critique (Ladson-Billings, 2010).

Critical race theory emerged in the mid-1970s, as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, that the advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, even rolled back (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). With the understanding that new theories and strategies were needed to combat the subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground, early writers such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado answered the call (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In a book of key CRT writings (Crenshaw et al., 1995), it is pointed out that there is no "canonical set of doctrines or

methodologies to which [CRT scholars] all subscribe" (p. xiii). But scholars are unified by two common interests: understanding how a "regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" (p. xiii) and changing the bond that exists between law and racial power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In the pursuit of these interests legal scholars, such as Patricia Williams and Derrick Bell, were among the early critical race theorists whose ideas reached the general public. Derrick Bell, professor of law at New York University, is considered the movement's intellectual father figure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The late Alan Freeman, who taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo law school, wrote a number of foundational articles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams are major figures, as well (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theory draws upon several traditions, including liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, critical legal studies, cultural nationalism, and pragmatism, to provide a more complete analysis of "raced" people (Tate, 1997). While CRT has many components one of the major goals of CRT is the elimination of racial oppression in the larger goal of eliminating all forms of oppression (Matsuda *et al.*, 1993). By exposing claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as camouflage for the self-interest of powerful entities, (Tate, 1997) CRT challenges the normative operations of

society. Critical race theory insists on a historical examination of the law and recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color in the analysis of the law and society (Tate, 1997). Critical race theory uses storytelling to "analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms hat make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). According to Barnes (199O), "Critical race theorists ... integrate their experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as 'other' with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony" (pp. 1864-1865). Delgado and Stefancic also explain that the voice-of-color thesis puts forth the idea that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate matters that Whites are unlikely to know (2001).

CRT also proposes that race is socially constructed by social thought and relations. Race is not objective, inherent or a fixed identity and does not correspond to biological or genetic realities. Race is a category that society invented and manipulates at its convenience. While people with common origins may display similar physical traits, they have nothing to do with the higher order traits such as personality, intelligence, or morality. Critical race theory tries to understand social situations but also tries to change it by setting out not only to discern how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) incorporated CRT in education as a challenge to traditional multicultural paradigms. They argued that race continues to be salient in American society, that the nation was premised on property rights rather than human rights, and that the intersection of race and property could serve as a powerful analytical tool for explaining social and educational inequities. Tate (1997) identified CRT as a form of oppositional scholarship that challenges the universality of white experience and judgment as the authoritative standard that also measures, directs, controls, and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation, and behavior. Critical race theory makes space for new perspectives on how we understand the racialized spaces of schools, the different notions of school failure and student success, and the racialized and feminized profession of teaching.

Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic in U.S. society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically (Tate, 1997). Derrick Bell (1992) claims that racism is a permanent fixture of American life and the work of those fighting for justice must expose racism in its various forms. Critical race theory asserts that racism is a normal, inherent feature of American society "endemic and deeply ingrained in American life" and asserts that race is the key organizing category for inequality because White supremacy penetrates throughout American society (Ladson-billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 1999; Stovall, 2006; Woodson, 2006). White ideology dominates and penetrates through American culture and is reproduced and normalized through schools to

sustain the status quo.

Whiteness is operationalized in a variety of ways. One way to see how it is masked from everyday consciousness is through an individual's inability to acknowledge his or her privilege or their membership to a specific group. Participants are often unaware that they have a racial identity, and thus deny their place in the racial hierarchy through the use of power erasure (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1997). Whiteness remains masked from everyday consciousness, allowing Whites to be blind not only to their own privileges but also to their group membership. Large-scale reform does not speak about race and therefore conversations around the topic may not take place or become popular through the implementation of the policy. Therefore, when reforms in teacher education are being handed down from federal to state, to district, and then schools, they are ineffective. The recognition of racial hierarchies and privilege must be acknowledge and engaged in teacher education. Lawrence (1987) asserts that racism operates on an unconscious level because it is so embedded in the American psyche:

> Americans share a common historical and cultural heritage, in which racism has played and still plays a dominant role. Because of this shared experience, we also inevitably share many ideas, attitudes, and beliefs that attach significance to an individual's race and induce negative feelings and opinions about nonwhites. To the extent that this cultural belief system has influenced all of us, we are all racists. At the same time, most of us are unaware of our racism. We do not recognize the ways in which our cultural experience has influenced our beliefs about race or the occasions on which those beliefs affect our actions. In other words, a large part of the behavior that produces racial discrimination is influenced by unconscious racial motivation (p. 322).

Lawrence's theory encompasses the premise that racial thought and action evolve from a common American history and cultural heritage that leads to an unconscious privileging of White identity (1987). This is especially important to how researchers approach the topic of improving teacher education programs. Schools, from elementary into institutions of higher learning, play a major role in creating a common history and cultural heritage and CRT exposes whose knowledge is privileged. Racism is present but not even recognizable because it becomes naturalized and normalized.

Lawrence (1987) argued that discrimination exists even when it is not consciously intended. Even in spaces where anti-oppressive and multicultural courses take place, the very structure of the teacher education programs may be inherently biased towards White beneficiaries. Some scholars write about White privilege as if people are passively handed advantages in an 'invisible knapsack' (McIntosh, 1990) while other scholars challenge that notion and argue Whites actively oppress people of color throughout the world (Picower, 2009). Bush (2004) argues that Whiteness "reveals the ways in which Whites benefit from a variety of institutional and social arrangements that often appear (to Whites) to have nothing to do with race." This seemingly 'race-neutral' or 'color-blind' stance aligns with ideologies of merit that mask the historical oppression of people of color (Lynn 1999; Stovall 2006). Using CRT to see the invisible privileges of race is a tool for lifting the veil off a colorblind society and asks that we re-think how we prepare people to see the world and teach to that

reality.

1. *Whiteness and White Normativity*

The works of scholars examining the role of race in teacher education highlight the importance in understanding the social context of education in urban spaces. Their work enables the reader to acknowledge the history deeply rooted in racial inequities and provides a space for understanding how history runs through the foundation of school systems and permeates ideologies that affect classroom practice. Marilyn Cochran-Smith argues that we need to move beyond the individual (student, teacher, and teacher educator) as our focus to examine institutional characteristics, such as descriptions of how teacher education is "raced" and how race intersects with class (2000). One reason for studying race in education is due to the demographic differences between the teaching task force and students in urban public schools and takes us beyond the individual towards examining systematic issues. The dominant enrollments in many of these schools are students of color and come from poverty yet teachers are mostly White and come from middle class or affluent backgrounds.

The landscape of teacher education does not span a diverse population. The work of Bree Picower (2011) reveals startling statistics on the racial composition of teachers in the US – 90% of the K-12 teaching force is White (National Collaborative on Diversity of the Teaching Force 2004) and almost half

of the schools in the US do not have a single teacher of color on staff (Irvine, 2003). The future does not foresee much change with 80% to 93% of all current teacher education students are White females (Cochran-Smith, 2004), and they are being instructed by a teacher education profession that is itself 88% White (Ladson-Billings, 2001). One of the major issues in urban teacher education programs is that they are typically designed to prepare middle-class, European American candidates to teach middle-class, European American students in mainstream schools (Dilworth, 1992). Haberman (1996) contends that colleges and universities have generally presumed that nonurban schools and White, monolingual children are the norm. This assumption allows programs to prepare pre-service teachers for a context in which diversity goes unacknowledged leaving questionable implications for new teachers in urban public schools.

Predominantly White teacher education programs did "business as usual" in which course requirements paid no specific attention to the social context of urban schooling (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Davis, 1995; Grant & Koskela, 1986; Parker & Hood, 1995; Weiner, 1990, 2002 cited in Picower 2011). While students showed receptivity toward learning about diversity, the programs themselves provided disjointed multicultural content. Studies found that during student teaching, preservice teachers in primarily White schools had lost any interest in multicultural education to demands of their cooperating teachers while those in urban schools felt unprepared and had great difficulty. The studies reveal how the study of race in education was not prioritized and simultaneously showed

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how problematic the impacts can be on students of color.

When teacher education programs are examined it is common to find a handful of courses that specifically target the social context of urban schools. Gloria Ladson–Billings (1999) found that "most [teacher education] programs were satisfied with adding 'multicultural content' rather than changing the philosophy and structure of the teacher education programs" (p. 221). The core of teacher education programs, the nature and focus of the programs, and the interests, and emphases on certain issues over others are policy matters that White faculty and administrators often control (Milner, 2008). Critical race theory is unique in that it pushes the argument against the add-on historical, political, social, and economic challenges of various ethnic groups into disjointed and isolated curricula by critiques the very structure of the program and the curriculum (Milner, 2008). The nature of the curriculum content is important and rejects what Banks (1998) called the additive approach in which: "[racial and] cultural content, concepts, and themes are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purposes and characteristics" (p. 30). With only one or two courses that focus on race and racism, it is no wonder that many teacher education students find deficiencies in their ability to teach students of color and changes in the dispositions of teachers remain ignorant.

Jane Agee's (2004) study on teacher identity explained, "The teacher education texts used in the course made recommendations for using diverse texts or teaching diverse students based on the assumption that preservice

teachers are White" which reveals the normativity of Whiteness in teacher education. While research shows an overwhelming presence of Whiteness in the profession, students of color still remain marginalized in these spaces (Sleeter, 2001). Alienating pre-service teachers of color through focused attention on the needs and interests of the White students in their coursework illuminates an aspect of the social context of urban schools that reveals race is an imperative issue. Critical Race Theory draws attention to issues of race that would not be addressed in a society of White normativity.

Critical Race Theory shows how teacher education programs are disjointed, and how the few teacher educators who try to prepare teachers to contest institutionalized racism might be overshadowed by teacher educators who may acknowledge the role race and racism plays in education but refuse to restructure the ivory tower. Those professors may not be unconcerned people, but a focus on race is irrelevant and inconsequential to them because they may not live a reality that makes race important or of interest to them (Milner, 2009). People of color may have an interest in race because of their lived and perceived realities. CRT can also make one aware of how diversifying higher education is beneficial to the field of teacher education.

As a result, CRT helps to highlight the importance for all teacher educators who work with preservice teachers, to consider the ways in which they may participate in and promote White privilege. Especially in urban public schools that serve students of color of low-income communities, examinations of racist

ideologies should be incorporated throughout the curriculum. Critical race theory creates a framework for engaging in that type of work but is limited by the particular ways in which the social construction of race, class, gender, sexuality, values, and ideas are located in unique spaces.

F. Multicultural Teacher Education

The need for multicultural teacher education runs parallel to the growing diversity in the U.S. demographic but the movement towards standardizing education imposes a dilemma in how to best prepare teachers to serve the needs of all students (Gay, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2001) maintained:

> Teachers in urban classrooms not only [will encounter] . . . multiracial or multiethnic [students] but they [students] are also likely to be diverse along linguistic, religious, ability, and economic lines . . .. Today teachers walk into urban classrooms with children who represent an incredible range of diversity. Not only are [there] students of different races and ethnicities, but there are students whose parents are incarcerated or drug-addicted, whose parents have never held a steady job, whose parents are themselves children (at least chronologically), and who are bounced from one foster home to the next. And there are children who have no homes or parents.

The growing diversity should be an indication of how urban teacher education should diversify methods, course work, staff, and teacher candidates but the demographics remain stagnant. Obidah and Howard (2005) argue that more than ever is there a need for great teachers who can effectively serve diverse student populations. Studies show that the majority of prospective teachers who enter certification programs have little knowledge about diverse groups in the United States (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Goodwin, 1997; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997).

Given the diversification of urban schools, teacher education programs should address the cultural deficiencies of teacher candidates if they are to effectively serve these populations and schools.

James Banks states the major goal of multicultural education is to reform the schools and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality (2004). Multicultural education scholars are persistent in their arguments that teachers should become knowledgeable of cultural diversity and develop pedagogical skills to combat racism and promote social justice (Banks & Banks 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dilworth, 1992; Irvine, 2003). They argue that because race and culture count in significant ways in the teaching-learning process, they should play a central role in the professional preparation and performance assessment of teachers. The deeply ingrained ideas about race and culture that each individual brings to the classroom affect how we understand the different learning processes and construction of knowledge.

To symbolize and synthesize with emphasis the need for building the capacity of pre-service teachers to contextualize their educational and teaching experiences, Irvine (2003) suggests that pre-service teachers in urban, culturally diverse schools should be provided with the opportunity for professional growth that focuses on learning and experimenting with culturally relevant, sensitive, and contextualized instructional strategies. In order to make these accommodations, there needs to be a shift in both pedagogical and

political power from the dominance of the White American perspective and experience to the inclusion of experiences, viewpoints, and participation of multiple ethnic groups in educational decision-making (Banks & Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 1995). Teacher education programs should be restructured to meet the needs of those who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised. Lacking the space for inquiry for multicultural teacher preparation will continue the oppression of those on the periphery struggling to be recognized in their humanity.

The progress of teacher education programs throughout the United States, according to several recent research and scholarship reviews (Banks & Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 2001; Trent et al., 2008) are similar in that they reveal that more programs are including some cultural diversity in their curricula as integrated content and stand-alone multicultural education courses. However, Gay reports (2010) while the peak of the resistance curve to including cultural diversity in teacher education has flattened considerably, the ways in which it has been addressed are not as successful as they need to be and continue to be Eurocentric even in the attempt to shift the focus:

> Generally, they involve moving students ideologically from claims of color blindness to cultural consciousness; pedagogically from awareness of cultural differences to culturally responsive educational actions; morally from tolerance to advocacy of ethnic and cultural diversity; and politically from individual shame, guilt, and blame about historical atrocities and continuing oppressions to institutional- and systemic-based critical race, cultural, and ethnic analyses and activism. The most troublesome aspects of diversity—those that are race related—are often remarginalized or sanitized to make them more palatable to mainstream European American students (p. 149).

The central focus of these programs is Eurocentric and requires alternative visions for how to do this work. Ethnically and racially diverse students, families, and communities are demanding the right to be recognized, respected, and educated for who they are, instead of having to conform to Eurocentric norms as a condition for receiving high-quality educational opportunities (Gay, 2010). What this shows is an inadequate attempt at restructuring teacher education.

Villegas and Lucas (2002), Irvine (2003), and Ladson-Billings (2001) offer alternative ways to conceptualize, design, and implement multicultural teacher education programs that deal simultaneously with separate and integrated approaches to learning about ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity. Teacher educators should not avoid the unpleasant conversations because the feeling of unwillingness manifests in insufficient critiques and limited transformation towards social justice. Picower argues that critical education should be required and integrated across the curriculum (2011). Courses on critical multicultural education need to be a mandatory part of the teacher education course work so students can be introduced to the field while having a place to critically examine their assumptions and biases before they enter a classroom.

Another way of making teacher education programs less homogenous is through diversifying the population. A highly politicized issue is overcoming the underrepresentation of students of color in teacher education programs. Many reformers agree that more racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is needed in the

teaching profession and that its presence has positive effects on the school performance of both minority and mainstream students (Irvine, 2003; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).   Research shows students of color bring richer experiences and perspectives to multicultural teaching than most White students who make up the majority.   Students of color bring a richer multicultural knowledge base to teacher education and are generally more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum (Sleeter, 2001).   These students are also more critical of superficial treatments of diversity and their voices are important to the conversation.   There are multiple ways to think about improving teacher education but I am most interested in processes that will help individuals think through the hard issues and not shy away from the realities we often don't want to acknowledge.

For prospective teachers to become "conscientious professionals" who continuously scrutinize their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning and tune in carefully to the ways their assumptions are created and guided by practice (Schubert & Ayers, 1992), opportunities for both self-reflection and instruction about historical oppression and current educational inequities should be required throughout preparation programs (Picower, 2011).   These practices can help uncover the hegemonic understandings concerning race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. and be an opportunity to challenge these ideas through multiple dimensions of problem solving/posing.

G. Conclusion

The landscape of this literature is not pretty but it helped me understand the vital need to better prepare urban teachers. Preparing teachers for the challenges of urban spaces is not an easy task. My contribution to the work of preparing urban teachers is incorporating and prioritizing human values in a time when almost every aspect of life can be bought and sold as a commodity-even our most intimate personal relationships. In building a foundation of hope, faith, love, and liberation I want to remind others that it is our right as humans to create the world we want to live in and we need teachers to help prepare our youth with the skills and tools they need to build our future.

The goal of education should aim to liberate and advocate for the participation of individuals to transform their realities. The traditional models of teacher education that reinforce a lifetime of racial inequalities must be destroyed if we truly care about the future. In the process of renegotiating our perception of the world and critically and creatively proposing new ways of preparing teachers, it may be possible to see education as a manifestation of our process of regaining our humanity. Knowledge emerges through invention and re-invention, the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970). By investing in new ways of operating within and outside of societal structures, may we find new knowledge that will help us build that world together.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. The Motive

I am perplexed by the world and find it difficult to make sense of the current state of education. I left teaching because I hated who I became as a teacher. I didn't want to be angry, negative, or complain all the time. I was upset that the students were developmentally behind in reading and writing and wondered what went on during K-8. I hated that this was a reality that I was not prepared to deal with. I was angry at myself for not knowing how to make it better. I complained about my students and their lack of effort. I became toxic. My conversations were filled with complaints about everything school related and I associated with colleagues who were just as frustrated. We reproduced a culture of misery amongst each other and yet it was somewhat comforting to release that negativity somewhere. During the semester of teaching a cohort of teachers and listening to them complain week after week about not being respected, bad parenting, lazy students, testing, and being too scared to do anything to make changes, I asked them how they conceptualized hope in their work. One of the students responded very quickly: retirement.

Wrestling with my own negativity for the past few years, slumped into an Eeyore phase of life, that comment brought back the little black rain cloud. In that moment the only response I could give was to jokingly but not so jokingly suggest therapy because people shouldn't live their lives in misery. When I

asked them to think about how they could make changes, many of them were stuck. They couldn't think outside of what they had accepted to be their lot in life. They would continue to function within the constructs of school environments that made them feel like puppets; they were willing to resign their autonomy to prescribed curriculums; they gave into the fear of their school culture that made them impotent. I could understand the frustration, anger, and depression because the conditions of schools are bleak but I refuse to allow the experiences within schools to diminish the ability to hope, dream, and try.

Kenneth B. Clark (1974) argues that the intellectual must seek the truth, but this quest must be guided by values. James Banks acknowledges the role of both mind and heart in research and uses the "heart" as a metaphor for values, which are the beliefs, commitments, and principles to which social scientists have strong attachments and commitments. I would add that my engagement with this work and the development of the research process not only engages the mind and heart, but also the spirit, which plays an essential role. I use the term 'spirit' to describe the driving force that sustains the beliefs, principles, and commitments that Banks talks about. My research process is an intellectual, ethical, and spiritual quest. I want to emphasize the spiritual quest as an essential element in our humanity because it represents the need to engage love, passion, and vision for the work we do.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the study is to better understand the complexity in learning and meaning making. By investigating how the attributes of hope, love, and liberation are intertwined in the practices of educators and activists, this research documents my quest to rethink how to prepare educators to teach in urban schools. The research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What can we learn about preparing teachers for urban spaces from the experiences of urban educators and activists? How would they describe their processes of learning? What do they value as sacred knowledge? What are their expectations of students and how do they 'teach'? 2. How do we redefine the profession of teaching urban students? How do we compare the wisdom of experienced educators and activists to the expected outcomes of today's public school system? How can we design teacher education programs to inspire creative, innovative, and transformative intellectualism in prospective teachers? And how can the practice of teaching change the world as we know it?

The research questions are a result of my experiences in contradictory spaces of schools. Examples of teaching ranged from nurturing the bright minds of the future to be free, innovative, and creative to programming robots to follow orders through standardized curriculums and tests. The project is an exploration into the wisdom of experience and a quest to seek out the moral values that are being destroyed by market values and commodified realities. Humanistic values stress nonmarket values. Cornel West says:

In our own time it is becoming extremely difficult for non-market values to gain a foothold. Parenting is a non-market activity; so much sacrifice and service go into it without any assurance that the providers will get anything back. Mercy, justice: they are non-market. Care, service: non-market. Solidarity, fidelity: non-market. Sweetness and kindness and gentleness. All non-market. Tragically, non market values are relatively scarce . . . (p.11, 1999).

So then, the research sets out to figure out a way in which we may be able to envision a world where being human is more important than being human capital.

For this research study, I chose to speak to educators and activists age 18 and over who identify their work with social justice, liberation, and transformation. Candidates were diverse in age, race, gender, religion, and profession. Eligibility was pre-determined for the research project. During January and February of 2011 I recruited educators and activists who were interested in my research topic through emails or personal interaction. Interviews were conducted and completed by May of 2012 with no follow up interviews necessary. I conducted 8 interviews with educators and activists and interviews lasted between 1-3 hours. The interview participants consisted of 2 White females, 2 Asian females, 1 White male, 1 Asian male, and 2 Latino males. The conversations I had with my research participants were audio recorded and then transcribed. After multiple readings of each conversation I looked for common themes that emerged through the experiences of the participants. Interviews required an audio recording but participants were given the option to speak off the record in which case the audio recorder was turned off. However,

this scenario did not occur during the interview process. The names of the participants and identifiers have been changed to provide anonymity.

The conversations revolved around the following topics and questions were proposed to get at the following: becoming, knowing, teaching, learning, and building. Each section of chapter 4 is dedicated to a single participant with the exception of the first section. The section includes the stories of two of my former teachers who co-taught together and a former classmate who currently co-teaches with one of them. I thought it was appropriate to group these conversations in the same section because they all shared experiences at a particular school.

My research project seeks to offer a different platform to the debate on teacher education reform and an alternative paradigm towards education for liberation. Paolo Freire advocated for 'conscientization,' a radical pedagogy that focused on 'praxis', which consists of reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (1970). In response to the current political and ideological framing of teachers, my research sets out to provide a new framework for teacher education based on the praxis and life history lessons of those who do not fit into the mainstream. Using my autobiography as an example alongside the life histories of the participants, the project aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of why and how our processes of self-reflection in our personal growth may inform a new transformative pedagogy.

C. The Design: Talking Story and Quest Narratives

The method I used in co-constructing ideas about education and the preparation of teachers is similar to what the people of Hawaii would call 'talk story.' To enhance their understanding of what community violence meant to a multiethnic school community in rural Hawaii and obtain people's perspectives of how to deal with and prevent violence-related behaviors among children, Affonso, Shibuya, & Frueh (2007) used focus group methodology via Hawaiian island-style of "talk-story" to elicit contextual data on the experiences, meanings, and perceptions of youth violence. They also used qualitative narrative analyses to analyze the data. In the islands, 'talk story' is an informal chat or conversation where people take time to share ideas, opinions, stories, and memories (Affonso, Shibuya, & Frueh, 2007). My research process began with informal conversations that have shaped my thoughts about what type of work I wanted to engage. These conversations were ongoing chats with former colleagues, Chicago Public School teachers and activists, and my former teachers. The interviews I conducted were informal in the way the dialogue was structured, but formal because the objectives of the interviews were clear. From the interview data I looked for 'generative themes' that would help describe the complex ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges of the current situation in teacher education (Freire, 1970). The term "generative themes" highlights that the thematic complexes are full of hope and possibility. These are

the issues that are consciously or unconsciously important to people's understanding of self and society.

The goal of 'talking story' was not to come up with a single, simple narrative. My intention was to explore the meaning of experience told through the orchestrated stories of the participants to critically think about the purpose of education and the direction we should move towards. Elbaz-Luwisch argued that "telling our stories is indeed a matter of survival: only by telling and listening, storying and restorying can we begin the process of constructing a common world" (p.145, 2001). Constructing a common world in which common people talked about education and life in terms of liberatory and collective practices was why I chose to 'talk story' with my participants.

In fiction, the quest is a story that revolves around an adventure, and more specifically, a journey. The tradition of the quest is an ancient narrative tradition. Some examples are Homer's *the Odyssey*, *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, and *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coehlo. Arthur Frank wrote *The Wounded Storyteller* which is a collective portrait of a "remission society," whose members live with some form of illness or disability. He shows that people tell stories to make sense of their suffering and in turning their diseases into stories, they find healing. Drawing on the work of authors such as Oliver Sacks, Anatole Broyard, Norman Cousins, and Audre Lorde, as well as people he met during the years he spent among different illness groups, Frank shows that these stories are more

than accounts of personal suffering- storytelling was a method of healing. Quest stories tell of searching for an alternative way of being (Frank, 1995).

After hearing a call to begin a journey and leave home, the protagonist usually walks a road of trials towards a goal to seek out a treasure. Along the way, the world appears immense and boundless, in which the protagonist stumbles through obstacles and challenges that must be completed in order for the quest to be completed. Other characters appear throughout the journey to accompany the protagonist to provide aid and divulge necessary knowledge that will help in completing the quest. At the completion of the quest, the attainment of the sought out treasure may require the person to be more than she/he has been and the purpose is becoming one who has risen to the occasion (Frank, 1995).

This research method is similar to the literary narrative quest. My teaching experiences are my quest/adventure/journey to find a better way to prepare urban educators and I use self-reflection as a process to understand the constant evolution of teachers. I incorporate interviews with eight educators and activists who provided assistance, taught me lessons, and helped me in completing my quest. Through our conversations around personal evolution, teaching and learning, knowledge, and preparing for the future, I was able to reconceptualize how educators are prepared to teach in urban schools. Learning from the wisdom of experience, I use the stories of my research participants to challenge what we value in education and how those values are

enacted. Incorporating quotes from philosophers, writers, scientists, and other sages to enhance the themes that arose from the interviews, I wanted to show that these themes are important to the development of humanity across race, class, and generations. I also embed my reflections of the interviews in the final write up of chapter 4 to show how these conversations were layered onto my own knowledge sets and challenged me to question and probe my own ideas of teaching, learning, knowing, and building.

Narrative writing was the most natural way in which this research could be told. Narratives help to do what C. Wright Mills refers to as linking 'personal troubles' to 'public issues' (1959, p. 248). My entrance into the academy was not with the intent of becoming a professor or a researcher- I entered in search of knowledge. What I came to find through this journey was an understanding of knowledge as a form of communication and connection, a search for harmony in a community (Hill-Collins, 1990).

The process of learning through my graduate studies naturally included other people along the way as I needed to talk about and make sense of the new pieces of information I was gathering. What unfolded were conversations that pushed my way of thinking and helped me understand the convergence of what I was learning with what I experienced. This process was most similar to narrative inquiry in that it explores multiple layers and is a collaborative construction that involved different participants and their constructions. Without

the sharing of life experience and the exchange of ideas would this journey or this research be possible.

I used my coursework to help me gather a better understanding of capitalism, neoliberalism, and the privatization of the public sector. Using my understanding of these concepts I tell my story through the lens in which these larger system constructs impact teaching and learning in Chicago. Listening to other people's experiences in life and how they've come to understand and process those experiences helped fill broaden and fill in the gaps to the limitations in which I experienced the world.

C. Wright Mills said, "[M]any personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history-making. . . Human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of the individual life (1959, p. 226). This narrative is about the process of connecting personal struggles to the broader issues in education. When I began this journey, I felt my problems as an educator belonged only to me. Along the way I came across others who shared my pain, frustration, grief, and confusion and I realized these problems were of significance to the progress of humanity.

Through the research process, the experiences of educators and activists share how dehumanizing teaching and schooling can be while simultaneously offering glimpses of hope and suggestions for moving forward. It partially illustrates the situation that Paulo Freire talks about: "Any situation in which some

individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence" (1970, p. 85). The experiences of those embedded in Chicago school systems reveal that the standardization of knowledge, the constraints of following common curriculum, and the abuse of testing and evaluations have turned teaching into an act of violence. I do not believe that teaching is thought about or enacted in the same way I experienced it and as Kerl (2002) explained, "We cannot necessarily know what is true or even real outside our own understanding of it, our own world view, our own meanings that are embedded in who we are" (p. 138). My journey is my interpretative dance of my teaching experience and my research participants helped me see outside of my own understanding of teaching and learning.

The construction of this journey is the hard part because I must make decisions about what information, anecdotes, experiences, and exchanges do and do not make contributions. Knowing how to write a clear story while being true to my natural state of random connectivity is a difficult endeavor but as Flyvbjerg said, "Good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradiction of real life" (2006, p. 237). Narrative inquiry, through rich examples of the complexities of real life and an emphasis on the mundane, simplistic everyday actions of everyday people may call into question dominant narratives that do not match the experience of life as lived.

My story and my participants are a disturbance to the dominant narrative of teaching and learning because our stories reflect human values and our

philosophies are rooted in love. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001, p. 4) argue that some forms of research aim to exclude noise, yet 'the excluded noise may be a highly significant part of the story.' I understand the noise in the conversations with my participants to be a part of the method of storytelling including the anecdotes, banter, inside jokes, and the silences. Writing into these moments can help develop a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behavior is not simply about rule-governed acts (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I wanted to highlight these glimpses of being human because these stories can help us see that our lives do not have to be co-opted by our relationship to the state.

A significant and important feature of narrative research is that it provides a platform for those whose lives and histories go unheard, unseen undocumented- ordinary, marginalized and silenced lives (Riessman, 2008). H. Richard Milner IV says, "We know that teachers do more than go into a classroom and robotically teach a set of information or materials. Rather, what happens to teachers in their daily lives and experiences (in the supermarket or in a car dealership, for instance) often show up in the curriculum and their teaching." Learning often appears through what happens to us in our daily lives. It takes place in lived experience, during trial and error, in adventures, in love and heartache, and in moments as mundane as sipping tea while looking out the window. The importance of these narratives is to offer an alternative way of reading the world and emphasizing the value in the unique experiences

of how people learn. I see narratives as the best method to explore these moments but there are limitations and problems in their construction.

Susan Chase cautions, we need to be wary of the "extraordinary self-conscious fascination with story telling," (2005, p. 212). This is a creation of what Berlant (2008) calls 'intimate publics' in which story telling links to political processes that work at the level of sensation and emotion (Wood & Skeggs, 2008). However, the narratives I write serve a function of imposing order on otherwise random and disconnected events and experiences. They are embedded within discourse and give shape to experience versus creating a spectacle out of people's lives.

In educational contexts, Ecclestone (2004; 2007) argues that such practices diminish individuals and provide the state with new opportunities for surveillance and control. She describes storytelling as a therapeutic turn where people are encouraged to tell their personal stories and explore their emotions in public. There is an element of therapy to this writing process and I believe emotions are part of the learning process. To feel is part of being human and the emotional responses to experience can be used as a tool for understanding personal growth. Most importantly, I believe that emotions can raise awareness to the self and make us question why and how we respond to life. Many of my emotions have forced me to embark on this journey of what H. Richard Milner IV says, "distinguish the world we live in from the one we want."

D. Madness to the Method: Conceptual Framework

As I thought about the research process, the design of this project was inspired by the arts. Through literature, music, and visual arts I was able to think differently about constructing ideas and communicating them. While music and the visual arts offer helpful metaphors, I will be primarily using the quest narrative form in the final production of this work.

1. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined by an effort to highlight the meanings people make, the actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why. Qualitative research is committed to participants using their own words to make sense of their lives and it places an importance on context and process. Doing qualitative research involves a healthy skepticism about whether 'to see is to know,' and instead calls upon us to look at people (including ourselves as investigators), places, and events through multiple and critical lenses. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p. 27):

> Qualitative research assumes that subjectivity and values are part of human interaction and therefore cannot be eliminated or controlled. It requires that researchers acknowledge their own subjectivity and values, and reflect on them in a systematic and disciplined way. Qualitative researchers believe that their own subjective experience can be a source of knowledge about the phenomenon they are studying.

The inquiry approach to this research project derives out of personal wrestling with ideas and making sense of experiences which coincides with qualitative research in its attempt to understand the how individuals make meaning out of

the situations they experience and how that shapes a unique perspective on learning and growth.

C. Wright Mills says that social scientists must learn to use life experience in intellectual work, continually examining and interpreting it (p.139). An 'experience' is looked at how the past affects the present and how it can define your capacity for future experiences. Using interviews as a method of inviting a story, this research project will be a process of learning through the experiences of others and using my understanding of my own experiences to think about how to contribute to the profession of preparing urban teachers. Mills also says that "as a social scientist, you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflection, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman" (p. 139). Through each step of this intellectual endeavor, I not only want to keep track of how I understand experience, but how stories decide to be told by those who experience them.

2. Participant Sampling

The people I chose to interview were educators and activists who along my journey sparked a curiosity in me through 'talking story' and I decided to have larger conversations with them based on our prior interactions. I thought about how to arrange this collection of stories at the end of the interviews and it made me think about house music. Chicago house music was born out of an

old Chicago night club called The Warehouse where Frankie Knuckles, referred to as the Godfather of House, spun old disco classics, synthesized and pop beats, in a high energy amalgamation of recycled soul. The location of The Warehouse is a Chicago landmark on Jefferson in between Monroe and Van Buren and was honorarily named Frankie Knuckles Way. House incorporates the sampling of different portions of a sound recording and reuses it as an instrument or sound in a new piece. In the construction of this research I feel like the DJ and the stories I sample are meant to elevate the soul.

House music has this ability to enter into the body, transform energy and elevate the spirit. Through beats, rhythms, and sampled lyrics, house music is a reinvention of what already is and escalates the listener to a heightened level of being. House music is a feeling and unless someone has experienced it, there is no way of really knowing it. Not everyone that listens to house music 'gets' it. House music is a shared experience with people who connect on a very raw plane of existence. It almost feels like being on drugs- overtaken by the feelings of elation, lost in a trance of beats, notes, words, and sounds that enter the body, losing physical inhibitions in a kinesthetic response. The way I connect to the stories of my research participants is similar to how I connect to house music only I did not feel like I was on drugs during my research process. I can feel the stories of the research participants because they share the experiences of life. Those moments of shared humanity are the sacred moments that allow us to feel for a brief moment, that we can exist on this earth in a very different way.

While conversing with and listening to the participants' ideas, experiences, and perceptions of the world, my own knowledge sets were challenged, stretched, altered, and reinvented. These conversations helped me think about what teaching and learning meant in the development of other individuals as I thought about my own. During the course of the interview my participants helped me think about the possibilities of what could be. Each individual had a unique sense making experience in navigating the world that added complexity and dimension to how I understood what it means to know, learn, teach, and dream.

While conducting interviews for this dissertation, I approached the conversations with the intent of emphasizing the multiple knowledges, stories, memories, and perspectives from the participants. This design involved developing a final piece that incorporated multiple voices to narrate the story of teaching and learning in Chicago. It aligns with the CRT proponents that emphasize aesthetic and emotional dimensions to stories that spark the imagination and inspire empathy to allow others to imagine the role of an urban school teacher, and to see the world through their eyes (Duncan, 2005).

3. Collecting and Organizing Data: Murals and Portraiture

Emerging from the canvas of urban public schools is a mural depicting layers of interaction between actors, institutions, processes, ideas, emotions, actions, dreams, all within the context of a space that represents a multitude of

realities. This research is a convergent space that tells the story of a multitude of interactions that fostered human growth and development, life philosophies of teaching and learning, and hopes and aspirations for the future. The process of mural making was most similar to how I understood the research process.

When I was in Mexico City, I stood in front of "Man at the Crossroads" painted in 1934 by Diego Rivera, an immensely brilliant mural. The detail in which he painted, the complexity he created, the colors, life and vibrancy of the work in its totality were captivating. What I witnessed were layers of a conversation that engaged and drew me in. As I think back on that moment I cannot muster up an all encompassing, simple explanation for what I saw but I think of gathering and presenting data in the same way. People are diverse in their nature, actions, hopes, dreams, values, and trajectories. Politics, policy, economics, social constructs, culture, family, the media and pop-culture can be influences that are experienced, internalized, interpreted, and enacted and converge in ways that build character and identity.

Murals provide a representation of a community's histories and hopes. Community murals provide an opportunity for people to publicly celebrate those things that they consider to be truly important. The communal art project enables the participants to feel the community's strength and warmth, while acknowledging its gaps and its paradoxes. Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft, authors of *Toward a People's Art*, believe that building community involves people's coming together to find common values and to develop a sense of

solidarity. Murals can strengthen community by redefining and reformulating common values.   They maintain that this calls for the revaluation of a history and heritage previously ignored or suppressed.

In collecting data for my dissertation, I engaged in a similar process in which my participants and I entered into conversations defining, redefining, and reformulating common values in education.   In an epoch of neoliberal globalization, there is a need to be intentional about living out values, to expose the injustices, give voice to the oppressed, and strengthen the global communities.   Mexican muralists, José Clemente Orozco, declared: "The highest, most logical, purest and most powerful type of painting is mural painting . . .. It is for the people. It is for everybody" (cited in Cockroft et al., 1977). I wanted my research to be filled with conversations that incorporate the people and is for everybody to engage in.

Community murals are controversial by nature "for in a world of injustice, exploitation, war, and alienation, a formulation of values implies a criticism of that world and the projection of a possible alternative world. Community art becomes a form of symbolic social action and implies further social action" (Cockroft et. Al, 1977, p. 73). The mural is a symbol of the commitment to working out problems, of bridging the gap between the reality and the ideal and represents the collective consciousness of evolving possibility. The research expands the dialogue of hope and proposes visions for the future of schools and education.

In the final write up of my quest, I incorporate Sara Lawrence Light-foot's work on portraiture to illuminate the complex dimensions of goodness in research. Portraiture directs its gaze toward goodness rather than pathology so I kept each interview intact so that the reader could gather a better understanding of the values of each participant (1997). Educational research and writing, especially, tends to focus on what is broken in the school system instead of what is working or what could be. While critique is necessary for the work I hope to engage, the "relentless scrutiny of failure" (p. 8-9) can also lead to cynicism and fatalistic responses. Portraiture turns its attention toward what is good in a person or place and opens windows of hope and possibility. Lawrence-Lightfoot says, "the researcher who asks first 'what is good here?' is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure" (1997, p. 9). Along the research journey, I was intentional about looking for moments of goodness and focusing on possibilities.

4. Constructing the Quest Story- A lesson from my mother

The way I 'talk story' is embedded in my genetic composition. I am very similar to my family members and I learned to think that the details and process of storytelling is critical to the objective of the story. Some of our conversations have gone like this:

Me: How was your day today? Were you busy?
FM: Well, in the morning I took dad . . .
Me: to the mall? What happened to the car, is it still broken?
FM: No, actually it's fixed.

Me: Oh, good! How did you fix it?
FM: Well, when I tried to start his car the other day I somehow hit the panic mode and it triggered something and I couldn't start it. So when your dad tried to start the car it just kept shutting off and he did it like four or five times. So then I called the Jeep dealer and they said we could tow it over there but they didn't know how long it would take to fix it and they had a line out the door and they don't seem to have their act together since the last time it took over a week to get the car back and I think only one guy works on all the cars, so I said forget it. Then I called Northtown and Chris wasn't in and the other guy was too busy to look at it and he does mainly body work but he said he could look at but I thought why waste time if he doesn't know how to fix it. And then Chris wasn't coming back until Wednesday so they didn't know when they could get to it . . . (all of this information was already shared with me the day before)
Me: So how did it get fixed? Get to the point.
FM: Anyhow I told him that we tried to start the car and it kept shutting off and the guy said that we probably shouldn't do that and it was really bad for the car, but oh well.
Me: And? How did the car get fixed?!!!!!
FM: So then I called again and he said to try unlocking the door to the car and waiting a minute to start the engine and so we did that and the car started.
Me: Why do you do that? Why do you take forever to get to the punch line?!
FM: What? (genuinely perplexed) You asked me how we fixed it.

My family members tell stories in absolute detail. So much detail that I often find myself asking her to just get to the point and skip all the information that doesn't pertain to what I'm asking. Her process of getting to the answer involves every step it took in order to get there, whether that was solicited or not, they feel the need to expound upon them in order to give you the full picture of the event in order to drive home the answer. In this process, I grow impatient and want to know what the point is and move on but they are more systematic, finding the details of the process just as important, if not more than the actual answer.

Current research in education suggests the creation of standardized evaluation systems that will somehow ensure better teachers and students, but

the process is not an automated system of inputs and outputs that can be measured according to a technocratic vision for improvement. My family member's detailed description of fixing the car reminds me that the outcome was not easy. The process was full of roadblocks, annoying phone calls, unsatisfying answers, inefficient systems, lack of manpower, and inconvenient timelines. It reminds me that the outcomes we seek are not always as simple as we want them to be.

In the data analysis, I did not expect the stories to provide simple answers and I didn't know whether these stories would intersect at any crossroads. However, several themes arose from the data analysis which include: Everyone is important and deserves to be happy; Everyone is different but connected; Everyone is imperfect but evolving; Everyone is talented but limited; Everyone can create and transform. The data sometimes offered moments that may have seemed disconnected from education but I liked the offbeat way in which life lessons formed through random experiences of life. I treated each story as an opportunity to dig beneath the surface to get at the roots of what makes us human.

My research methodology seeks to dive into the wreckage of the process of education that helps individuals make sense of the world they live in. Using personal narratives I wanted to understand the process of the educational journey in and out of schools and reflect on it in order to draw attention to the process that we often want to skip and just get straight to the point. The current

reform agendas for education propose quick fixes and simple solutions, but as a student of education I have come to understand that those agendas are too narrow in scope and will continue to mend a system that is broken instead of focusing on innovation and the possibilities of investing in the unknown.

The focus of this research is to embrace the chaos, highlight it and tell the stories of those who were willing to take the unpaved road to a destination we create collectively, in solidarity, and with hope. The research documents that journey of faith to envision a new structure for education that frees the capacity of individuals to be fully engaged creatively, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually in the process of becoming people who can alter reality.

IV. QUEST NARRATIVES

A. Introduction

The following sections in this chapter are stories from educators and activists who share their experiences of teaching and learning and offer their perspectives on reading the world. Each conversation begins with an introduction to my relationship with the person I am speaking with and I provide a rationale as to why I wanted to engage this person in a deeper conversation. The conversations are then broken up into the following sections: 1. Becoming; 2. Knowing; 3. Teaching and Learning; 4. Building a Future. Thich Nhat Hanh said: "In English we say 'we are' but it's proper to say 'we are becoming' because things are becoming." These conversations are testimonies of becoming and the process of how we define knowledge through reflecting on our learning experiences, identifying good teaching, and envisioning a future where we honor each other and consider our experiences sacred to our humanity.

As the conversations progressed so did the evolution of my thinking and that can be seen in the sections entitled "The Reflex." I wanted to reflect upon the ways in which my own values affected the data and the picture of the social reality I was creating, so "The Reflex" section is a post-interview moment of reflexivity (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994). Reflexivity is the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject (Goodall, 2000).

Acknowledging the self in one's interpretations enhances the capacity to be reflexive, to keep track of one's influence on a setting, to bracket one's biases, and to monitor one's emotional responses. Hatch argues that these are the capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on (2002). The Reflex moments are in bold to differentiate time and space in the conversations. Those moments were also times that I could converse with the data in a way that did not derail the focus of my initial conversations yet serves as an example to the dialectical nature of knowledge production. Slightly comical, but every time I came across the word reflexivity I would think of Duran Duran who had a song entitled "The Reflex" in 1984 and according to them:

> The reflex is an only child he's waiting in the park
> The reflex is in charge of finding treasure in the dark
> And watching over lucky clover isn't that bizarre
> Every little thing the reflex does
> Leaves you answered with a question mark

I also happen to be an only child, searching for treasure in the dark and possibly leaving you answered with a question mark. Part of the process of writing this chapter is to inspire the reader to ask more questions into the experiences, ideas, and stories. As we continue to question, we continue to develop different ways of seeing the world and we can create ways of traversing the earth in a harmonious connection to one another.

Having these discussions and the time to reflect on different ways of teaching and learning, school experiences, definitions of knowledge, and our

visions for the future, I was able to arrive at a point in my journey where I feel less confused.   I'm more comfortable with the contradictions because life is incredibly complex- our individual knowledge is limited but our collective knowledge is infinite, our society is lost but we can help people find their way. The following conversations helped me find my way back to hope, love, and faith. It was an honor to have the opportunity to 'talk story' with the people who helped guide me out of my despair and led me to see the light in their lives. I had forgotten that life is about happiness because my experiences in schools seemed to obliterate hope. Listening to their stories, sharing experiences and ideas, and dreaming together reminded me that we could transform our world. The treasure I found at the end of this quest was something that I had all along: the gift of life, learning, and knowledge and being equipped to shape my own destiny.

Note to the reader:

As you are reading through each conversation, I hope that there are experiences, moments, and thoughts to connect to. I encourage you to engage with the text by highlighting the moments that resonate within. I hope we can engage the ideas that these conversations present by continuing to share our stories and engage each other into our experiences and journeys.

B. Teaching Kids how to Fly

In chapter one I discussed my elementary school experience and I wanted to know how and why we had so much fun learning during my 6-8th grade years. The following conversations happened on separate occasions but they all share an experience of being in the same classroom. I talked to the two teachers who were most influential to me in all of my K-12 education: Mrs. Foxwood and Mrs. Shepherd. They co-taught everyday in our neighborhood school in the gifted program and they believed that we could fly and they taught us how. I was curious about their philosophies of teaching and learning. I wanted to know if they have to deal with the pressures of administrators and follow rules that they thought were pointless. I wanted to know how they got into this profession and why they stayed so long. They were responsible for my inspiration for being an educator and helped me experience the joy of learning.

The last interview in this section is with Athena. We've been friends since the first grade. She was the smartest person I knew growing up and still never ceases to amaze me. We both went into the teaching profession and while my career was cut short, she's been able to hold her classroom down for the last ten years. I was curious to know about how she's developed her philosophy of teaching over the years and I wanted to compare it to my own. She was also a student of Mrs. Foxwood and Mrs. Shepherd's and she currently co-teaches with Mrs. Shepherd. I think it's amazing to be able to work beside a former teacher and to have them see you evolve too is an interesting dynamic.

1. Mrs. Foxwood.

a. On Becoming

Kay: Why did you teach in the way that you did?

Mrs. Foxwood: Because I didn't want to be bored

Kay: Can you describe that? As a former student I have a perspective of what that meant for me but what was that like?

Mrs. Foxwood: It was wonderful. I loved going to work everyday. On the way to work I would think about all the wonderful things we were going to do and of course we never did most of them because we got off on some other track but I could not stand it when you were all quiet and reading and doing nothing and I couldn't interact with you. I think teachers need to be part of the classroom, not just the giver of assignments and the dictator but make the classroom a participatory experience where kids feel they have skin in the game, like they have some control over what they're doing, what they're taught, how they're taught, and what they're allowed to do and what they're not allowed to do. I think rules are important but I think if students respect you they'll get quiet when there's a need for quiet. When I needed it quiet, I turned off the lights and you'd get quiet.

The rest of the time you could interact and experience and share ideas and I think that's what made you all what you are today. Almost all of you have gone onto very good success and I think you have to let a child fly even in the classroom. I know that's the parental job but even in the classroom let them try it while you're there to back them up and when they reach a situation when they have to do something, they're not afraid to do it. I pushed the limit on all of you and I know that at the time you thought, 'that old lady, what is she doing to us?' but if you hadn't done that I don't know if you'd be as strong as you all are. Most of you are very strong and active in society but I guess I probably planted the seed that rules need to be justified, not just for the sake of rules because somebody wants absolute order. Absolute order doesn't necessarily produce creativity. I felt the primary job of education was to teach critical thinking and give you the skills to find the information you need to implement your ideas through critical thinking and then let you do it on your own.

I think schools squash creativity. I think they squash students' innate ability by expecting them all to measure up to the same standard. What's good for one child isn't necessarily good for another. People have different ways of learning and it's up to the teacher to figure that out not just to say, 'you don't do my way and so I'll just cross you off the list and I'll deal with the kids that do it my way.' A

lot of the really bright kids don't pay attention to school. They're somewhere else in their mind even if their body is just sitting there and it's up to the teacher to hook them and get them in and learn all the skills they need. A lot of social skills take place in school too that would serve them well in society that they don't get other places. I think school should be fun. I think it should be exciting. I think you should want to get out of bed and want to go to school. Not just for the social events but for what you might learn. I don't think that can happen when you're restricted by stupid guidelines of curriculum that, yes there has to be curriculum and yes you have to teach it, but I think you should be allowed to teach it in your own way as long as the results are acceptable and I don't think we should have to do all this jumping through hoops and making plans and lessons and outlines that are duplicates of everybody else. Do your own. The teacher should have vested interest in doing her own things and teach it the way she likes to or he likes to rather than the way that someone who sits at the board that doesn't know squat likes to teach it.

The Reflex

Now, this picture of her turning off the lights seemed like we were affected by lights similar to cockroaches. She failed to mention that when she turned off the lights she was usually at the end of the rope screaming at us from the depths of her diaphragm. It was pretty scary. But she was right, at the end of the day we respected her and knew that when that happened, we were to be quiet. I think because we were engaged in what we were learning and we could explore, the freedom we experienced kept the classroom alive. We weren't given strict rules to follow and so when needed to be quiet, we knew it wasn't because we were being punished. We understood the purpose of listening and it helped us develop that space to grow as well.

Going to school was fun. We didn't want to miss a day because we knew we would be missing out on something. Our classroom dynamics were friendly, inspiring, and entertaining that we were scared to miss out on interacting with

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each other. The classroom environment that our teachers created for us truly cultivated exceptional learning experiences.

Why is it that institutions want to produce absolute order and judge people based on how well they follow the rules? Why do people accept rules that are not justifiable? How can we follow an agenda that wipes out our ability to create, explore, take risks, and question? Have we failed to remember that our humanity is not a commodity and that we can't be bought by processes that seek to destroy us while giving the false assumption of success?

Kay: How did you learn as a kid? What was your experience?

Mrs. Foxwood: I was very lucky. I had a mother that was very creative and let me be very creative. I had an exceptional kindergarten teacher that probably was planting the seeds of wanting to do differently. I had a wonderful first grade teacher. I had wonderful teachers in elementary school. Not until I got to 8th grade did I experience a teacher who put the assignment on the board and sat on her chair. The rest of them were always in there with us doing creative things all day long and I hated 8th grade because I didn't want to read the book and answer the questions. I wanted to ask questions and find where I could find the answers on my own. Eighth grade was a big disappointment for me. When I got to high school I had some wonderful teachers that let you fly and some horrible ones that wanted to squash you like a bug and I was always unhappy when I was in the bug squashing class so I thought I'm not ever going to be like that I hope.

I want kids to realize this is an environment that has electricity to it that can spark them into being all that they should be. And I think that a teacher needs to believe in her students and expect them to reach certain criteria not just say oh, well you can't do it you're a dummy sit down. Every child has something positive to offer and I think it's up to the teacher to find that and bring it out in that child and help the child when they're young find their strengths and weaknesses so they have some idea of what direction to go in life. Every kids knows what is hard for them but the teacher can cover that in an interesting way, push them to see how much further they can go even in their weaknesses but support them in their strengths and believe in them. You can be hard on kids and give them a paperback and make them redo it. You can make them do extra research but

I think they'll understand that if you're in their corner they're willing to do that. Whereas if you're doing it to make them look foolish or to put them down they'll walk away from it[1].

b. On Learning

Kay: How did you see kids learning over the years?

Mrs. Foxwood: Well kids didn't like anything that's busy work. Do they have to learn times tables? Are there specific facts that have to be learned in order to be successful, yes. But I think busy work is a huge turn off. Kids can't learn by doing busy work. There are some kids that learn visually, there are some kids that learn auditorally and you have to know the difference and how to deal with them so that you stimulate all of them. I think kids learn from each other. If you find a child that learns something really quickly they can teach it to a couple of other kids and they can teach it to other kids and when you are teaching something you probably learn it better. I often put some of you in teacher roles because I thought you would learn more and students would learn more from someone sitting next to you rather than a teacher giving you that direction.

I think you have to do it with games and projects and sending them out in the world a little bit. That's why I was so thrilled with problem solving and history fair because it puts you up against other kids so you knew what your competition was going to be when you got out in real life and the mistake they are making today is no competition. I mean if a kid takes a drink out of the fountain, 'good job, good job'- no not good job. That's an accepted fact and if you tell them good job all the time, for heaven's sake they're never going to want to do anything because they know if they sit there like a lump some fool is going to say good job, good job. I think you have to challenge kids. I think you have to set the bar really high and make them reach for it and I think you have to make them want your approval because if a kid wants your approval they'll do almost anything and they'll only do that if they know you respect them and judge them as individuals.

The Reflex

"Security is mostly a superstition life is either a daring adventure or nothing." - Helen Keller

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[1] Do we believe in children anymore? Have we short-circuited the electricity in our classrooms with hopelessness?

What is the difference between the competition Mrs. Foxwood talks about and the competition of Race to the Top policies? The rhetoric around today's schools is about competition, but it's about market competition in terms of who gets into the best school based on an unequal playing field. The competition she describes is actually what helped me thrive in grammar school. We were a neighborhood school who competed against the magnet schools in Chicago, went to statewide, national and international competitions and it did expose us to whom we would be up against later in life. And that's why I'm arrogant. Mrs. Foxwood believed in us, prepared us, challenged us, and then unleashed us into competitions, which we were able to experience success. She provided a safety net for us so that when we were heartbroken in some of our defeats, we were able to spring back up.

c. On Teaching

Kay: How did you deal with the chaos?

Mrs. Foxwood: I loved it. I loved every minute of it because I believe that sitting there quietly very seldom produces learning.

Kay: But we were crazy.

Mrs. Foxwood: Well, that's what 13 year olds are. (Laughing) You're supposed to be crazy. All of a sudden the world is opened up to you and the world is a stimulus and you don't know which to hit on first and that's a normal process of life. It's like taking 6 year olds and making them sit on a chair for 6 hours a day. Talk about something that is totally unnatural and against the forces of nature. All you have to do is look at them and know. And why did I let the boys wander around the room? Because I knew they couldn't sit. So do I make them sit and learn nothing or do I let them walk around and explore? Maybe a little bit of what's going on in the classroom gets into their head enough to get them a little

bit hooked and once they're hooked then you can lead them back to what you want them to learn.

Until you get these kids feeling like this is a wonderful place to be, I wouldn't rather be any other place than here, you lost. If their mind is on something at home or something on the street or you don't want to be there, you can't reach them. They're gone. You have to get through that wall and punch through. It takes individual conversations with kids. I think teachers are too afraid to deal with kids one on one, particularly today when parents sue you if you say gesundheit to their child. I think it would be very hard to work with children if you can't reach them as individuals and let them know you care about them and all you want for them is to learn what they are supposed to learn and fly onto the next tree.

I know everyone used to say to me, how can you stand 8th grade, you just get them where you want them and they leave. I used to say well if they couldn't leave I'd be sobbing because I didn't do a good job. My job is to get them ready for the next step and to let them know that they've had support and foundation and belief in themselves so they can go on to something else. Without that, high school is a huge challenge if they don't believe they can handle it. And I hope that most of the kids that graduated 8th grade from Clinton felt that they had developed enough that they could move on. But administration is a huge problem.

Kay: I always felt like I grew up in an anomaly. Our school wasn't considered a magnet school. Clinton was just a neighborhood elementary school. After I've gone through all these Educational Policy classes and studying the CPS I wonder how that happened. I remember getting out of high school thinking about how I hadn't learned anything since the 8th grade.

Mrs. Foxwood: I was very lucky that Beth and I teamed up. It was probably one of those forces of nature where two right people find each other. I'm very right brained and she's very left brained but a little bit right brained and it was a wonderful combination. We were able to brain storm a lot of things and agree on our goal, which was for all you kids to learn in a positive way and that doesn't happen a lot. I think team teaching should be looked at very carefully. I think it's a positive thing and all you have to do is make two rooms like we had or you could have it open and you could have a math and science person and a literature and language arts and history person and bring in or hopefully have some music and art incorporated because I think they are most important and then you have a chance of two people having the kids rather than one.

I don't think small classes make any difference except in the primary grades. I think in 1st grade put 10 kids in a room until they learn how to read and the

concept of numbers and then I don't think 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade 35 kids is not a problem. In fact it gives you more kids to do fun things with. I think we are putting all our money in the wrong places. If you have a bad teacher and you pay them more money and that's the philosophy of society today. Ok, this one isn't a good teacher we'll raise their salary and they'll want to do better- wrong. A bad teacher is a bad teacher is a bad teacher because most of them don't want to be there. They fell into this job because that's the job they got and I don't think they love it and I don't think they care about their kids and those people should be put out of education and find something to do.

Putting the activities in front of children and giving them life experiences is what's important. I think going to the opera was a fantastic experience, going to plays, even when the bus didn't come and we did a play in the courtyard of the city. That was fun and a learning experience too. I think field experiences are very important where kids learn to be giving citizens. The experiences of giving back to society is beneficial and I think schools today have a bigger job because in most situations both parents work and they don't have the time with their kids. When they do they feel like they have to make up for everything I didn't do when I was at work so they rush them here, rush them there, rush them somewhere else.

I think play is important. I would build at least 45 minutes worth of play within the school day because kids can't sit still and if you don't all you get is their bodies there and their mind is out there somewhere. It has to be fun for everybody. Everyone has to feel rewarded by the day and there has to be a plan to produce creative, critical thinking individuals that can change society because if there aren't any visionaries, we're done and I'm afraid we're done at this point. There are a few but not a lot. How do you get the major players of our society today who don't have a formal college education? That ought to scare the colleges big time as far as I'm concerned. I would not let a child of mine at this point go to college because I think they're training you all to be the three little pigs, exactly alike not even one who is a little smarter to build a brick house.

I think maybe after we graduate from high school we should have a year of service somewhere that opens your eyes up to the world and the possibilities for you. I think people go to college when they are too immature to know what it is they want to be and people around them easily influence them and they do things they wouldn't do. Three to four years later that changes their lives significantly. I think college should be a good liberal arts foundation for everyone for the first four years and then go off and major in whatever you want to go off and major in with a graduate degree, but I don't think people know enough when they first go to college to know where they want to go. So that's my philosophy of education. Most primarily we need to produce critical and creative thinkers.

Kay: I've been thinking about the lack of visionaries because I've been teaching in the teacher prep program and the kids that are coming through my class can't write. I find it extremely problematic when you can't communicate a thought in 5 pages.

Mrs. Foxwood: Do they have a thought to communicate?

Kay: Well, that's the problem. The reason why they are having problems is because they don't know how to think. They ask me what they should research and I think to myself, just read something. Start there. I don't understand this idea that you need me to create this line-by-line rubric.

Mrs. Foxwood: Because they've been spoon-fed from kindergarten on. They are just like little vessels sitting there having someone pour their spoonful of sugar in every morning and that's as far as they go. There is never this burning desire of 'oh my gosh I want to learn all I can about that.' This is how I got into this[2]. When I found out that all these artists had lived in Park Ridge and created this artist colony that lasted 75 years I was blown away. I had lived here for 30 years at that point and I never heard a word about it. Their paintings and their works are in galleries all over the world. These are just local artists here now but Ianelli was the crux of the Chicago architectural movement and no one said boo about it so I thought ok, we need to do something about that. It was like a fire in my belly- they don't have any of that at all because they've been taken to day care then pre-school then kindergartens that babied them and the teachers told them what to do, what to think, what to read, what to wear even, same thing in high school and in college they are indoctrinated into the philosophy of we are a society that can't succeed any more. We should all lay back and let the government take care of us because we don't have enough brains to take care of ourselves instead of saying you are empowered by every bit of your creation. We were made to be . . . to me this continuum of knowledge that we have has been built generation after generation after generation and yes I'm a Christian and I believe in Christ and God and I think they planned for us to little by little, gather information and become smarter and learn how to overcome the obstacles that are placed in our ways. I think that's why we're given a brain. That's why when people say science and religion don't go together I completely disagree. I think every discovery we make is an affirmation of faith.

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[2] What she got into was helping save Alfonso Ianelli's art studio in Park Ridge from being demolished and led a campaign to fundraise for its rehabilitation and turning it into a heritage center. We met there and it was like she had created another classroom, this one bigger in space and specific in history, but just as open and welcoming. Mrs. Foxwood is in her 70s, still overflowing with ideas, and still has a love of learning and a spark for teaching.

Kay: I feel like wherever you go you create your classroom.

Mrs. Foxwood: I suppose. Learning is a lifelong thing. I still have dreams that I'm in my classroom and I miss it terribly. Sure I want to brainwash those kids that they're not dependents on the government and they can do it for themselves.

Kay: Knowing that we've had generations of kids that have been stomped out, what do we do? Where do we begin? How do we fix this?

Mrs. Foxwood: You have to get them when they're little. You have to start before kindergarten if you can but I really think the best upbringing is at home with their mother before they go to kindergarten. And kindergarten has to spark their creativity. They have to learn that inside those walls that are called a school is fun and happiness and new challenges because I think kids like challenges. I think people throughout their lives like challenges and we've been trained to stay away from it, stay calm, get a massage and feel better. That would've killed me. I'd rather be given a challenge so I can punch at it and get it done. So I think that everyone would be that way.

I don't know if you've read Steve Jobs' book but he turned away from education because it was stifling his mind. That's a pretty sad thing to say. Bill Gates says the same thing and they are probably the two most successful people in innovation in my lifetime. So I think we should sit back and ask ourselves, I mean Henry Ford did the same thing, Edison did the same thing, all the people that really made a difference got out from under the thumb because the purpose of education according to this society is to make another brick for the wall. How can we make them conform to the rules of our society? How about maybe the rules of our society aren't right? So that would be one place to start looking at that and then who is to say how to turn kids on? Certainly not someone sitting at the board of education B O R E D as far as I'm concerned. Teachers have to feel confident enough to know that their administrators are behind them when they do teach kids to fly because they don't really want them to. They hated the fact that I made noise and made a mess in my classroom. They gave me a hard time everyday. Well, that's the way I teach- transfer me to another school. So I think you need support from them. I think you need to have a curriculum in the kindergarten, I mean kindergarten teachers should be the best trained of all. Not trained to do what they're supposed to by any rules but trained to teach creative thinking. Mrs. Latlin was like that although she did it in kind of a martial arts kind of way. She taught them how to fly. I thought about this when I was little, how to play the game. I'm gonna die, so I want to leave something behind at what I considered was important.

Kay: You know that this dissertation is partially your fault.

Mrs. Foxwood: Well it's true. They have to know that there are several opinions on things and how do you learn which opinion you want to accept. I mean some are based on historical fact and some are based on opinion and how does your opinion form if you don't go back and get the facts. We have a whole society of people that believe what those blabbers believe on TV instead of saying I'm going to check this out. Is it true or isn't it true? I think testing for truth is very important. Then people couldn't capture their minds. If they don't have enough sense to go back and check the facts then they're open game. People can pour whatever they want into their heads.

Kay: I think I escaped. School was kind of like jail for a while and I feel like I got to escape.

Mrs. Foxwood: Well that's what I wanted it to be. Beth and I wanted it to be an escape because we both had been smart and been squashed. Only they weren't able to squash us. We just kept rising up and getting into trouble.

Kay: The other day I was teaching my masters course and it's a small class that ranges from 23-51 and all they do is complain. They complain about the status quo, they complain about the state of their jobs, the environments they teach in are toxic and I understand the gripes but I can't handle the whining. So I tell them ok you've identified your suffering, your problem now what do you do about it? Nothing I can't do anything.

Mrs. Foxwood: No problem solving. It's a 6-step process.

Kay: So where did they learn that it ended with a problem? Life ended with you identifying the problem and then accepting it and finding ways to cope with it instead of finding ways to how you change it? And then we were talking about creativity and they were equally lame.

Mrs. Foxwood: I think they should take desks away maybe and have tables that they can go to if they needed to sit down. I mean the time we did traveling to Antarctica. Dr. Green was ready to kill me. Literally ready to kill me. And when we were all done I said we won't do that again because he was screaming and yelling and I said well we'll never do that again and he said I know you'll think of something worse. Each time it gets more complex, go to your room! And then I said ok, bye.

Kay: And then we did submersibles[3].

Mrs. Foxwood: You had the boys cooking in the back of the room. Well, the first time they didn't bring any food so they sat hungry for a week in class and the girls had all the food and they wouldn't share and it was wonderful. The next time the boys had toasters and refrigerators. They learned, you snooze you lose so they got organized. Lesson learned. I think teachers think they need to teach how to add, subtract, multiply, divide, and write a sentence. They don't look at all the other things you can teach them. Kids don't know to take a project from beginning to end. That's a really hard lesson. Mostly, a mother will step in and finish it for them because they can't stand to see it unfinished. We just let you go kerplop. Ok, you don't want to finish it fall on your face. Find out what it's like, but in a loving environment so it wasn't disastrous. I think there are life lessons to be learned in the classroom too but I think if you have teachers that are bored and unhappy they are never going to be good teachers. You have to start with them. Teach them how to be creative and maybe that will carry over in how they teach their kids. They have to be two-dimensional people too. They have to have interests outside of just earning a living by their job.

d. Building a Future

Mrs. Foxwood: The key more than anything is to set the teacher free. If you feel you have hired someone who can handle the job, leave them alone and let them do it. I don't mean don't ever walk in the classroom or don't know what's going on there but let them take the bit in their own mouths and let them run with it rather than waiting for someone to tell them what to do. They don't have enough confidence. Maybe teacher training aught to include being in a classroom with a creative teacher so that maybe you would teach them how to paint to get their minds open. If there weren't these stilted people in charge of these classes and colleges and if you had people that were creative and taught creatively to catch on that would be a big thing to look at. How do you get college professors? Are they just the ones who are the smartest or do they rise to the top academically, but don't have social skills? A lot of people I know who are professors don't have very many social skills and they don't go out in the real world. Put them in the classroom for a year and then bring them back and take their academic knowledge and meld it with classroom knowledge and come up with creative ways to teach.

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[3] During submersibles we were studying oceans, so we created a mock expedition into the ocean and turned our classroom into an under water research facility.

Colleges need to revise themselves and build a true academic community where there's exchange between professors, kids and administration and not just here's this hour that I do this and here's this hour that I do that. They never show the continuum of education and it is all interrelated. I was in a really good program in college where the teachers had us for dinner every Sunday night and we got to interact with their families and we realized that they were people. Colleges need to reorganize themselves. First of all it's become way too expensive and ridiculous for people to send their kids there because they don't get good jobs when they get out anyhow.

Kay: Any advice for future teachers?

Mrs. Foxwood: Don't become a teacher if you don't love kids and you don't want to see them grow and fly on their own. Go work at the department store or keep ledgers for someone. Don't ruin minds.

The Reflex

I take for granted that I had teachers whose philosophies were much more radical and freethinking. I thank them for helping me to develop as a free thinker and for providing opportunities to exist outside of the box. What if we were to set teachers free? Maybe they have been trapped in their ways of thinking and cannot see outside of it. What could a new teacher education program look like?

Mrs. Foxwood has known me for almost 20 years. We've kept in touch over the years and she's always been supportive of my endeavors and always offered words of encouragement and advice. I think about the roles that teachers played in my life and I am thankful that I still have a relationship with them. It helps me see that when you are truly invested in the lives of students the classroom of life continues and doesn't end outside of the school building.

2. Mrs. Shepherd

a. On Becoming

Kay: Why do you guys do this? How did you get into this?

Mrs. Shepherd: I wish I had a really good reason like, I always loved children and education was the most important thing in the world and it wasn't at all. I switched a lot of majors in college and didn't know quite what I was going to do. It was probably a good thing because I think if you set your path too early, you may find out 30 years later you're doing something that you really don't

want to do. I was probably going into my junior year and at that point I had to declare something and I was sitting there talking to my mother like, oh man I don't know what I'm going to do with my life. She said, 'well look at your sister and your sister in law. They're teachers and they have their summer off.' And I thought yeah you're right I kinda like that idea[4]. That was it. That was my decision moment. At that time I decided I was going to go into education and actually once I had the classes in it that was the first time in school where I thought things are beginning to make sense in my head. I was excited to go to my classes and I was beginning to click with it and I loved my education classes and was very happy to be getting a degree. So I got my master's immediately right after. I was already signed up before my undergrad and same deal, didn't know what I was majoring in. Talking to my mom, she said 'take anything, take math' and I said, ok and I did and so it was a real haphazard way of getting into education.   It was a right fit afterwards and I think that if I was doing it and if I was miserable it wouldn't have happened. I definitely had a lot of learning to do in between that but it was something I didn't know I had in me. I really love doing what I do and I love creating things and figuring out how to present something and I like the research involved. In undergrad in social studies, getting the historical perspective so you don't just look at one thing you look behind it and you build the story behind it and teaching is a lot of that. You just can't give the isolated thing, you have to go into it. So it was a stupid way of getting into education but as I got into the years of doing it even in my early years it just became more and more of who I was.

b. On Teaching

Kay: How many years have you been teaching now?

Mrs. Shepherd: 31

Kay: 31!

Mrs. Shepherd: (laughing) You're old too so don't even go there.

Kay: That's amazing!

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[4] Mrs. Shepherd was one of the best teachers I had and her story of getting into education because of the summer vacations changes how I think about judging teacher's who got into the profession for that reason. She was one of the most engaged, supportive, creative and challenging teachers I had.

Mrs. Shepherd: Yeah I'm retiring in 4 and if it wasn't for the fact that it's gotten so ridiculous in the way the administration is running the school system and what they're doing to teachers and the lack of respect for the profession, I'd probably do it for another 30 years. But they really make you feel worthless which is really sad. It's sad when I look at a lot of the young teachers and the talent we have and they have to face another 20-30 years of this- something needs to change. The tide needs to change for these teachers. My nephew is in Japan teaching. He's got a 2-year stint teaching there. The very first day he taught, he met the kids and the teachers and faculty and he was walking past the baseball field and the entire baseball game stopped and bowed to him. Where would you get that here? Absolutely no respect and everyday I go in there with not the attitude of 'oh, I'm being dumped on.' I love my kids, I love my classroom and still find the fun in it but it's really hard to keep on going when they want to take everything away. They want to take our pensions away, our medical away, everything we've built for all these years away from us so what's the incentive to stay for 10-15 years beyond.

Kay: What about your classroom practices? Do you feel like that's changed at all?

Mrs. Shepherd: No. With all the standards and core and common core and all the things they throw in, I don't think I've changed fundamentally because what I think what we've been doing for years has worked. Every year it changes. I swear I never teach the same thing twice and especially with Athena, we have things that we like to do, we have fun and look forward to it and we'll walk out and say ok we need something and then trigger the ideas of something fun. Things haven't changed because my classroom is always noisy. There's a lot going on, it's still a 3-ring circus, a lot of activities and a lot of challenges for the kids so that hasn't changed. I haven't bowed to testing. I certainly try to get the kids prepared the best I can but that's not my year, that's not my focus. Our goal especially in the 6th grade here is that we want them when they get to 7th and 8th grade to fly and soar. I love to hear a year, 2 years from now, 10 years from now, 30 years from now- man what you taught me then I'll carry the rest of my life. That to me is the more important thing so I probably don't change too much. Same thing overall except I don't teach the same thing all the time. I've never done that I'd be bored to tears.

Kay: What does it mean to let a kid fly? To let a kid soar.

Mrs. Shepherd: When they are ready to broach a situation they don't have to worry about everybody else and what they tell them what to do. I always hate when people tell me what to do so if a person basically can drive their own truck, that's the important thing. That kids keep creative, that they keep an excitement about life and learning. Learning is a huge thing- that they learn

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how to organize and follow through with a project. Plan things, work with people, work around people if you need to, work around the system if you need to, just keep things going. And I'm not big into organizational skills in the sense that everyone needs to be organized but you know that you need to get from A-Z and how to do it and we all have something we have to overcompensate for. I'm not artistic but I can translate something so I need to hang out with people like Athena and you *(Implying we are artistic)*. That's the kind of thing where you figure out what you need to compensate and you figure out your talents and you run with it. So that's probably what I mean by a kid being able to soar. You don't need to be number one. You find the thing that makes you special and you develop that skill.

The Reflex

"If you're young and talented, it's like you have wings."- Haruki Murakami

I can fly. I flew away from grammar school with wings. The excitement for life and learning stayed with me and I'm thankful that I was able to develop my talents in school. I felt prepared to take on the world at age 13 and while it feels like the outside world is trying to squash me, I still have the ability to steer my own ship.

Kay: What was that like teaching at Cougar?

Mrs. Shepherd: I loved Cougar. Green, he was great. I was at Gary for a long time under a really old fashioned principal. Very I am what I am what I am what I am kind of guy but he reminded me of my father in a lot of ways so I got along with him great. I used to give cards to him all the way until his death but I transferred there because Maureen got a position at Cougar. Our assistant principal left, got a different position so she was like alright time to go, so she got a job at Cougar and I followed her and got a job under Green. I liked it there because there were a lot of creative people there. There was good teaching going on. It was a great atmosphere, great neighborhood, loved the diversity, that was huge. There was a lot of stupid stuff under Green, but you got supported. Green always used to say stick together as a faculty, I'll back you. Deborah was a little goofy but you needed a good cop/bad cop that kind of thing. It was really fun working there until Lee came and I can tolerate a lot but once you start attacking my children that's when I start getting angry. You

figure, over a hundred people left when I left. I thought that they would bury me there. I really did. I thought I'd be there forever. She destroyed it and it was this one person who could destroy an entire atmosphere as an administrative leader.

Kay: What was she implementing?

Mrs. Shepherd: Tough isn't the...I can do tough, I grew up under tough. She would do things that were...she tried to do things to kind of catch you. All of a sudden she'd request a meeting and she'd say I don't trust your grade book and records and I'd come down there and say what do you want? I had everything all ready to go. I'd walk in and mind you I am an assigned teacher. She'd say 'you're not teaching today I'm putting you in this classroom.'

Kay: What?

Mrs. Shepherd: Exactly. Can you imagine? You're going to teach 4th grade today. And this is during history fair time so half the kids are going to state history fair and need my advice right now and we're working on national history fair. Random stuff like that. The screaming and yelling at people... she never screamed or yelled at me because I think she was a little afraid of me because I am a little nuts (laughs). She also new I'd bark back. Sue does the same thing. She'll pick on people who are vulnerable but because she knows I bark back. She would demoralize people, scream in front of the kids, screaming at kids, yelling at them, accusing them, just really crazy. What caught her though was the testing misappropriations and misappropriation of funds. We always thought she'd go after she killed a child but she actually got caught stealing funds and using money inappropriately. Not a very smart lady. Awful awful awful. And that was a great school. Everyone left and went to Catalpa. So we call it Cougar East.

The Reflex

I often wonder why good teachers leave and this pretty much sums it up.

After leaving my teaching positions I blamed myself for not being able to cut it,

but my situation is not rare. The conditions of schools created by school culture

can drive someone away. It's a shame to have brilliant teachers leave because

of poor management. Why do teachers need to be managed in such

unprofessional ways? Are schools run based on best practices or managerial

egos?

Kay: What's dumbfounding to me is that as a classroom teacher I only made it 4 years and then had to go to PhD rehab because I felt like what kind of system is this? This is ridiculous and it's gotten really dangerous at some schools it's a mess.

Mrs. Shepherd: It is a mess. It's a hot mess. I think there are a lot of our problems with young teachers in particular, but they may be a product of what is going on in society today. Maybe the fast access to information all the time is developing a different mindset so there is definitely a cultural divide in generations and understanding how we do things. Hard work isn't always the thing that gets you your answer anymore. It's a quick check kind of a thing. I think loss of family structure and I'm not saying we have to go back to the old days but that most kids are not being raised by a typical mom stays at home, dad goes to work, most families have both parents working and children are being watched by somebody else. Sometimes it's the school and sometimes the school spends more time than the parents ever do. All these things are making a typhoon of a mess that we aren't addressing. All we're doing is slapping it with a label and carting it aside instead of asking how do we deal with these situations? How do we move ahead? How do we keep moving with society because you can't live in a stagnant society otherwise we'd still be back with the cave men hitting that rock instead of deciding what to do with that rock.

I think as a parent of a 13 year old and thinking about what I have to do with my son and Facebook and the media and that type of thing. I won't even let him have a Facebook account because I'm thinking about his future. What may be posted about him or what he posts may haunt him when he's trying to get into graduate studies years on down the road or jeopardize his karate career or whatever else it might be. These are all things to address as a parent and maybe as a teacher they're not understanding that there are bigger worries out there too. A lot of pressure is on kids and it's insane what you have to be dealing with as a child. In a situation like this when all these kids are competing for the same position and a kid is hurting himself or has bad self esteem because we're always making them compete? What happened to being a kid? Going out and getting dirty and eating dirt once in awhile and getting a scabbed knee and learning the hard way? The problem solving skills you have in the playground when someone takes your toy away, well kids don't even play in playgrounds anymore because it's dangerous and I think all those things are factoring into it and there's got to be another way. I wish I could fix it but I can't, but it doesn't mean I shouldn't try to fix what's in front of me everyday.

c. On Learning

Kay: What does learning look like?

Mrs. Shepherd: How about sounds like?

Kay: ok

Mrs. Shepherd: It's definitely noise. A lot of questions, more often than not you don't have a final answer. Every question you have leads to more questions, which is true learning. Learning is lifelong.

Kay: What's your process like?

Mrs. Shepherd: How I process things?

Kay: How you process and then how you teach?

Mrs. Shepherd: Ok, how I process things. I'm a mover. I have to move in order to process. I drove my college roommates crazy because I used to pace up and down the apartment and they'd be like 'oh, good God sit down!' I have to move in order to understand things so I may be throwing things or walking back and forth or I have to move my arm. When I write it doesn't necessarily mean what's coming out of my head or mouth it's just movement to help me understand things. So definitely movement. Bouncing ideas off of people is huge for me. I can't do things in isolation. Multimedia- if I can put it in music or a visual. Huge on associations. More often than not the associations are ridiculous and don't make sense to most other people and most of the time will make you laugh.

Kay: What if you had to learn in a school system like this?

Mrs. Shepherd: This (referring to the school she teaches at) not so bad. I think we do a pretty good job here. I think the pressure from the outside makes you a little crazy. We spend an inordinate amount of time on some stuff that doesn't make sense to the overall picture of the kids but if I had to exist in a school system where there was a dangerous atmosphere, uncreative teachers, and people worried about making sure that we leave no one behind but forgetting we lost an entire nation behind. We're not nurturing we're just shoving things down people's throats assessing, saying here's the bar you've got to make it but we're not going to tell you how to get there or finance it. I was never raised in an environment where I didn't have the opportunity to learn. My parents are 88 years old and they're still learning stuff and they're still teaching me things so I

know they're different. I would hope that I continue to do what I do. If I don't like the way that it is I do it a different way but I can't guarantee that because I was raised in a different way. It's sad. I would hate it. If I was forced to be in this situation and didn't know anything else I'd probably hate it or be another stagnant brain in society and that's sad.

Kay: How does this transfer into your teaching?

Mrs. Shepherd: I know I try to do a lot of associations in teaching. Last year my kids made me a 'Mrs. Shepherd says' t-shirt with a list of all the things that I said: apples to apples, oranges to oranges, all the different things that come out of my mouth and a kid came back to visit yesterday and she's going into high school and she said 'you know I finally realized what apples to apples, oranges to oranges mean. It makes sense' so I thought great! So a lot of associations.

I don't think extending the school day is the solution but I wish I had more time not to deal with all the other stuff and just have a chance to do more things physically in the classroom and have the kids do more than a 45-minute lesson for math. Just as fast as they come in they're out the door. That's hard. I don't think having kids in school for 9 hours is going to make their lives more enriched. We expanded the day and we looked at the minutes and it looked like we were going to have 5 more minutes per class each day and nothing was all that different. I would like to do more projects. I think projects are key. Especially in math, you have to hit specific things in order to understand and learn the basics but when we start doing history fair and project citizen and problem solving, a lot of what we do in Language Arts is project driven. It seems to be more like I'm the consultant and the editor in chief at some point being the guidance counselor and things like that but that's my favorite type of teaching when you can reach more kids as an individual and get into a more creative process than having the standard 30 kids in front of you with a lesson and you're ready to go. You need that to a point but you can't do it all the time. Projects are the focus and especially projects I feel strongly that a lot of it needs to be done in the classroom vs. here's the project it's due in a month, here's the paper, material, turn it back into me. As a parent and as a teacher.

d. Building the Future

Kay: If there were to be a revamping, what kind of advice would you give?

Mrs. Shepherd: Anyone that wants to be an administrator in this system should do what we do everyday. If you went to a Dr.'s office and the Dr.'s office opened at 9 o'clock and you've got 30 patients in front of you, they immediately have to be addressed, immediately with 30 different concerns, and you have to solve them all in the next 10 minutes before the next 30 patients come in. What

doctor could handle that? What accountant? What lawyer could handle that? What administrative person from any other school system is going to tell us what to do and when to do it? They would lose their freaking mind. Do that for 185 days in a row? They don't. When we have principals for a day and we do this dog and pony show and show all these wonderful things, they don't understand what our job is. So until you actually spend some time in the trenches don't get up there and tell me what to do. Until you understand your student populations and the talents that your teachers have don't tell us what to do. I wish I could say this is my plan A, B, C but I don't have a plan.

For years people were trying to get me into administration. I do not want to be in administration. I always tell Ann and Beth, I do not want your job. There is nothing about that job that looks attractive to me. I don't know how those minds work. I could probably do it given the task but I'd be miserable I know that. But again, until they have an idea of what's going on in schools, stop making these decisions. You don't understand these random decisions and how they affect my 30 clients every morning. And here's what makes me nauseas about our current administration. Flight 191- an incredible child's story. We got our information from the news, media covered it throughout the nation, my brother was shocked by how many Google hits this thing had, it was like thousands and he didn't realize how big this thing was. Where was Rahm Emmanuel that day? He was on an L track talking about the lighting system he had up there. Same time this was going on. Invited but he had previous engagements. An El track for his 2 cameras on the news. We had more media coverage than he did. Where's Brizzard? He declined our offer. So we have a wonderful story about kids and they don't realize what's important. It's just sad. It's really sad.

Kay: How do you describe what you do? Yes you are a teacher, but what do you do? What is your job?

Mrs. Shepherd: Editor in chief? (laughs) Guidance counselor, social planner, comedic relief, and again you heard my beginning, I don't mean to change lives but I guess I'm a life changer in a good way and a bad way. I'm sure some people walk away and say thank God I'm away from her. I'm sure there are people who walk away and got one thing and years later they say ok, I'm going to sell pie for $3.14 today or having kids come back and interview you for their dissertation. I don't get off on look at all these lives I've touched. I'm so not that. I'm so clueless with my head in the wind and that kind of a thing but when you see what happened with Flight 191, it was a kids project and we stepped back and we were editor's in chief. To watch kids put together something like that, I may be a life changer but they changed my life. So kids change my life. I probably get more out of it than kids do on a day-to-day basis. That sounds kind of selfish, sorry guys but it is true.

Kay: When you think about what has helped you stay in this field for so long what is it? What has helped you?

Mrs. Shepherd: I think the fact that it's new. I actually remember when we were starting off as new teachers we had to use the same lesson plans every year and I thought how the hell do you do that? I approach this as if it's not going to be fun for me it's not fun for you. If there isn't a whole lot of spark that's when we say ok we need a live wire. When it gets to be flat lining I do something to make it fun for me and sometimes fun gives you a headache and sometimes fun becomes something really cool. Especially if you have a meeting that sucks the lifeblood out of me sometimes you have to take a deep breath, remove what just happened, and you begin a new show. Sometimes you bring it into the classroom and you kick yourself for yelling at kids when you aren't yelling at them you're yelling at something that just happened. Keeping it fun, keeping it interesting. If it's interesting for me it'll be a better day.

The Reflex

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school." – Albert Einstein

The lessons I remember from my experience with Mrs. Shepherd and Mrs. Foxwood are life lessons. They taught me how to see the excitement in learning, helped me find the courage to be creative and freethinking, challenged me so that I would always challenge myself, and passed down the values of experience, exploration, and engagement. I carry their wisdom in my teaching and learning and I became a critical thinker because they helped develop that talent in me.

3. Athena

a. On Learning

Kay: What is learning? How do you learn?

Athena: I think learning is about taking everything in from around you whether it's through books or experiences that you have and actually applying that to tasks or things that you have to accomplish. I learned by doing. I had to thrust myself into things. I couldn't just sit back and wait for somebody to give it to me. I actually had to go out and find the book or find the person that I needed to talk to. I actually had to make whatever piece I needed for a project. I did it. If I didn't do it I didn't learn anything from it. If I just sat there at a desk just reading about it that didn't do me any good.

Kay: How did you feel about having to go out and do all those things?

Athena: As a kid it was scary but I'm glad I did it because now as an adult I'm not as scared to make those moves or have to go ask somebody for something or make that phone call[5]. I'm probably a more confident person because of it.

Kay: What is creativity?

Athena: Creativity is basically thinking outside the box. Using what you have in front of you but using it in a different form or different manner that isn't necessarily conventional. Making something out of nothing.

Kay: How do you get your kids to use their imagination?

Athena: I think you have to leave things open ended. You can't restrict them so much at the beginning. I think there are certain rules and parameters that you guide them as far as, hey this is what you've got to think about, this is what I want you to imagine but I think it's important to let them explore that first before you start giving them the rules of an assignment. They have to build that imagination.

The Reflex

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[5] There is no doubt that we made some moves that were a bit scary for kids our age. We were involved with project-based learning and conducted interviews every year with people who were complete strangers to us and we had to see the interview process from beginning to end. Our projects allowed to talk to some very interesting people ranging from World War II veterans to activists to the president of the Motorola Company. It was actually very similar to the dissertation research process so I suppose we were groomed at a young age.

"I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." – Albert Einstein

Building imagination is how Athena and I worked together. We participated in all our academic competitions together for three years and we worked well together because we were able to build. One of our competitions was based on problem solving and the way the competition went down was you'd get locked in a room with your team for two hours and you'd have to come up with problems and solutions based on a scenario that you had previously researched. The dynamics of how we worked together was like mixing baking soda and hydrogen peroxide. Ideas were explosive, fiery, and alive. For two hours we lived in our imaginations and our minds collided on higher planes of thinking. Those ways of learning were organic and helped us see that anything was possible.

Kay: How do you see kids?

Athena: I see the little kid in front of me with the blue shirt or whatever they're doing. I see my next steps and what I'm going to do with them for the next day to make them feel like they can do something.

Kay: What kind of potential do you see in your students?

Athena: I always see potential but you always look at each kid individually because each one of them is going to have something different to bring to the table. You come across a lot of kids who maybe never got to explore their more artistic side in school so you see how they can build that into whatever their doing or you try and figure out how they can explore that a little bit more.

b. On Teaching

Kay: What is good teaching?

Athena: Good teaching is about giving the kids a chance to explore. I think in this day and age so much pressure is put on kids to be a certain way or to have to make a certain grade to get into a certain school and I think it's important for you to help them figure out who they are and what they want to be.

Kay: How do you do that?

Athena: Well, it's easier said than done I guess. I think teachers have to listen to their kids first of all. Teachers aren't always right. I think they have as much to teach us as we teach them. You come across kids all the time with different issues whether it's baggage from home or something else and you have to take that into account and you have to look at them all differently but there are things that factor into their learning what their experience is like at home, what support they have at home so you have to think about how you can support them within your means at the school. It's not just supporting them by giving them facts and teaching them the skills that we do need to teach but also teaching them how to figure out how to be a good person, to be a good kid, or to just be a kid, to remind them that they are just a kid. I think you have to be personal with the kids, like you actually care. They need to see the sincerity in what you're saying to them. If you don't believe it they're not going to believe it.

c. Building the Future

Kay: How would you prepare teachers today?

Athena: I think today teachers have to…you don't understand it until you're in the system, until you've experienced it. Because everything you learn and all those lessons that you had to plan for, jot everything down, those don't necessarily apply to the real world. Every minute you're adjusting because you have a classroom of thirty kids that are going to throw everything and anything at you so no matter how much you plan a lesson I think they need to realize that they have other things contending with that, whether it's the physical system that they have to teach under or whatever rules that are set up within their individual schools. I think it's different for everybody depending on where they're at. There's nothing…experience says a lot. I think for teachers coming out of school now you have to be willing to adjust and be flexible in whatever system you're thrust into because without a doubt they're going to have to change some of their own practices or what they thought were going to be their practices in college. They have to be willing to change.

Kay: For the new school system, what do you want your role to be?

Athena: I'd like to be able to teach. I hate having all these distractions and tests and too many rules are being placed. It's basically making kids just numbers in the system vs. thinking about how they're going to function or be able to function in the world later on. They're being reduced to a test score and how they're school is improving. It's so immediate instead of seeing the investment that we're making in them for later on. The way the system looks at them now, they're a test score number, an ID number that's being tracked based off of those scores, and how they do on these other assessments.

The Reflex

"We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down." – Kurt Vonnegut

What if we really allowed teachers to do what they do best? Knowing Athena and her ideas, any student would love to be in her classes. Not only is she creative, but she knows how to engage students and brings in a lot of her personality to the classroom. Often times during recess, she throws the football around with her students and wows all the boys because she's got a rifle of an arm. We nicknamed her 'the worm' in high school because her tennis serve was clocked at 91 miles an hour. She's tiny, kind of Napoleonic in her confidence, and has an energy that draws kids in. What if schools were more supportive of teachers like her? How could she continue to fly?

C. Cannibals, Vampires, and Punks

Ichiro Aoki was a former teacher at a neighborhood public school whose teaching experience was similar to mine. When we first crossed paths, my initial impression of Ichiro was that he was a pretty straight-laced kind of guy, always smiling, friendly and likeable.   As time passed, I would find that my initial impression would be pleasantly surprised by the dude behind the innocent smile. Through time I encountered the snarky, witty, critical, punk rock Ichiro, which is what makes him even more awesome. I've always respected him for his ability to connect with his students, the way he pushed critical thinking, and for bringing his gifts and talents into the classroom. As someone who wasn't from Chicago, I wanted to know what his motivation for this work was and how he's come to understand education in Chicago.

1. On Becoming

Kay: Do you just want to start talking about your background? How would you describe your youth?

Ichiro: Kind of an angry kid.

Kay: What is your first memory of anger?

Ichiro: Maybe it was like in 6th grade when I was hanging out with these kids from school and I think it was right after school so these weren't my close friends and some guy made a bunch of Jewish jokes and I'm like that's not cool man and he was like, 'what?' and he just kept saying them and he would just say that these things were true and would continue saying them and I just remember being pissed. I think what I was thinking was ok is he doing this to just piss me off or is he that ignorant that he doesn't care about how someone feels like about the shit that he's saying. I remember just getting really pissed off.

Kay: Where did your moral code come from?

Ichiro: Part of me might have been because I read a lot as a kid so the idea of finding motive was very important for me and later being an English major that's always what you're looking at is what motivates these characters and it's the first thing you think about when a book sucks, like oh, I couldn't figure out the motivation of like half these characters or one character so I think I was always looking for that in real life too. Like people have to be motivated by something.

Kay: How do you define motive?

Ichiro: I guess it's just about whatever you run on. It's interesting because earlier this week I was interviewing a teacher for my job and I always had some preconceived notions about this person because of the way I found out about her, I just thought she was part of this certain clique and she participates in a lot of activities of that clique and the interaction we had was kinda weird. I was trying to figure out what motivates her. It was a fluff piece that I was writing but I could never do a fluff piece. Even if I don't print the deeper shit that I find I still, I guess that's kind of what's going on here, I was just trying to figure out who this woman was and she gave very political answers to everything. She's a teacher she doesn't seem like she's running for office, she doesn't really roll with that clique I thought she did, but I'm trying to figure out what motivates her to do all these committees; what's her end game? I kept thinking that until now I didn't really think about, does everyone do that or do people just kind of go through life? I'm always looking for that motive.

Kay: That's interesting. That's kind of how you navigate life by thinking about people's motives.

Ichiro: And pretty much the only people that I get close to are the people that I feel that their only motive is that they are good people and I'm a good person and it's good to spend time together. If I sense there is an angle when I hang out with someone, I hate it. I think that's kind of how I see it. But with this teacher I kept trying to dig a little deeper and the tone of her answers I think she didn't know why I was interviewing her and kind of like what's his deal too.

Kay: So you operated like this as a kid, does this have anything to do with your moral compass?

Ichiro: Yeah, I think it does. Before I do something I kind of look at what my motivation is and if it feeds an unnecessary need like ego, I just drop it. I've learned not to act on ego because it gets you fucked. I think some of it was being around so many people I don't trust because I don't trust their motives.

Kay: How do you feel like that plays a role in education?

Ichiro: One thing that I get stuck on is trying to figure out people on the Ed reform side like are they there because they think they are doing good or purely because they know how much money they're making? Like how many George Bush's and how many Dick Cheney's are on the Ed reformers. I think that's basically it. Dick Cheney knew he was gaming the system, he knew people died because of his actions, he was a horrible asshole war profiteer. George Bush wanted to be liked and said things that got him liked and he rolled with this crew that got him doing some really bad shit. The guy was a clown. His second term he was a clown on TV. At first it was just Comedy Central but then it was the networks and they were just like, our president is dumb.

But yeah I always try to figure out on both sides where people are at. I think a lot of it boils down to if you can talk to a teacher about their students or anyone directly involved in the education system and the first thing they talk about is their students and not smearing someone else, then that person is in it for the right reasons.

The Reflex

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What does it mean to be a good person? Should we create a rubric?

Have people forgotten what it means to be kind, thoughtful, and caring? Or are

the majority of us operating from the ego? Ephesians 4:32 in the Bible it says

"Kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other." I've been

guilty of walking into a room with extreme caution, trying not to show all my

cards, observing who is in the room and wondering if they are trustworthy. I

don't like to operate from that position but sometimes the conditions of our world

creates experiences that seem to obliterate goodness and so we become

weary of one another. Maybe we need to hold people accountable based on a value system based on character and integrity and not on grades and tests.

Kay: As a kid you felt angry or you described yourself as angry but how else would you describe yourself?

Ichiro: I liked to get a laugh. I considered myself more of a class comedian than as a class clown. I wasn't trying to make myself look like a fool to get a laugh out of it. There was always another kid in class more than willing to do that.

Kay: Did your teachers like you?

Ichiro: (counting) My fourth grade teacher liked me. Actually all my teachers pretty much from 4th grade on liked me. They liked me but the first few years not at all.

Kay: Why?

Ichiro: I was a smart ass. I wanted to show how smart I was so a lot of them found ways to squash that. Teachers would make me feel like I was not smart in subtle ways like how they carried the class and I think that was a way to tame me but it just pissed me off. And then in 4th grade my teacher was chill, she would say ok you're good at this you're good at this, I would crack my stupid joke but I never felt the need to ever be rude to her because she was just like that was kind of funny that wasn't. So we had an agreement.

Kay: What do you mean when you said you're teachers were trying to tame you? What does that mean?

Ichiro: Just like if I was in class and I was being a big mouth, trying to show off like trying to be really smart, they would talk some shit or not call on me, ridicule answers sometimes, like looking back the answer could've been one of three answers and I just picked number 2 instead of the one she wanted so they'd cut me down for that. I think looking back on it that's what they were doing.

Kay: Do you think you were testing them?

Ichiro: Yes, definitely.

Kay: Did you think you were smarter than they were?

Ichiro: No, Ms. Stolt who was really strict and she was the 1st grade teacher, in 2nd grade she was really nice to me. She was known to be this really strict teacher but in 2nd grade she would see me in the halls and ask me how I was doing so I just thought she was a really good teacher, it was just where she was at and it wasn't personal. That's kind of the old school way of smacking the kid down for being too mouthy.

Kay: So did you deserve it?

Ichiro: I don't feel like what they were doing was affective in the goal they had which was to get me to calm down and keep my nose down and do my work but I think they did it because they cared but at the same time it didn't work on me. It was my 4th grade teacher who figured out what would work on me.

Kay: How did you do academically?

Ichiro: Fourth grade all of a sudden I was a straight A student. Then 4th-6th I was a straight A student, junior high I was a straight A student, got a bunch of awards and shit so I was placed in pretty high honors classes and my grades dropped probably by second semester of freshman year. I was extremely inconsistent though. I would get As and then Cs. I would typically do better in classes where I liked the teacher.

Kay: So it wasn't because you couldn't do the work or the work was hard for you it was more because you just didn't want to do it.

Ichiro: Math was the exception though. I had some nice math teachers. My freshman year teacher was a fucking prick and he would do the same shit like cut me down in front of the other kids. I hated that guy but the other two math teachers I had were nice guys- but it didn't work. I just don't think I think mathematically but other subjects, well no I liked all my history teachers so I did well and English I did well, math not well, science, up until junior year I was good in science but I was spotty.

2. On Knowing

Kay: What do you feel you are really good at?

Ichiro: One of the things that I think I'm good at in general is landing on my feet. I used to get really paranoid that bad things were going to happen and I was going to lose everything but I took a lot of risks these past few years and I've always landed on my feet and did a little better every year. I think generally

speaking that's something I'm good at is if something bad happens, down the road I'll figure it out.

Kay: What do you think it takes to take risks?

Ichiro: Motivation. Some people take risks for personal gain. Some people take risks out of feeling the need- a moral obligation to serve others so it just takes whatever motivates you, the highest degree of it and depending on who you are too.   Some people are just gamblers so they are always taking risks. Sometimes they work out and sometimes they don't. Some people like me, I take risks when there is a really good chance I will succeed or learn from the situation. I think especially over the last few years all of the situations win or lose I learned from all of them.

Kay: What do you feel like some of your greatest life lessons have been?

Ichiro: Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and meet lots of people but at the same time stay guarded. Allow yourself to know a lot of people but keep them at an arms length for an appropriate amount of time and then figure out how close you want to get to them.   I think that's something that has really helped me out.

Kay: What have you learned about humans through this process?

Ichiro: Humans are really complex and all very different. People's experiences kind of make them who they are.

Kay: Why do you think we need to keep people at arms length? What kind of elements of humanity are we dealing with? And I think this helps us define what we are up against.

Ichiro: People who feel like they have nothing left to lose. Sometimes you don't figure that out right away. It takes time to get them to know them a little bit and those are the people you don't want to get close to. You definitely don't want to get into a situation where you have to trust your life in their hands. Situations that can fuck you up so yeah those are definitely people you want to keep far away and then there are people that will step on anyone to get what they want. Whether it be feeling like they are part of a vanguard where they can step on other people's toes because they are part of this greater good or if there are people who just do it for instant monetary gratification. You want to keep them at arms length as well.

And for the most part, the people who are really good, they do it to help others, you trust them but you can also trust the people who are there because they

like the sense of community because that's something that motivates people too. I can trust this person maybe they don't care that much about charter schools but they really love this community of educators they are a part of so I know they're not going to screw me over based on that. I have some people like that and I'm cool with them too even if they aren't necessarily driven by a cause.

3. On Learning

"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it." — Thich Nhat Hanh

Ichiro: The system always has an effect no matter what. The last time I felt like I was not in the system was when I was in Fiji on my honeymoon. I just kind of decided I was going to drop analyzing everything for the politics, analyzing things for different power relations and stuff and when I'm on the beach, just be on the beach. I'm not thinking about how I was able to afford the plane, how I could afford the accommodations and not thinking about all the things that got me there but just being on the beach. That was awesome.

Kay: That's very Buddhist.

Ichiro: And since then I've been able to bring that into other parts of my life when things are a little crazy and kind of just listen and enjoy a song. Like all this bad shit might be going on around but I'll put on my iPod and put on a good song and that becomes my world for a while. Lately I've been getting into film editing and playing drums and I took some vocal lessons and those are situations where I could just let go of it. I need to think that I'm just going to play the drums and enjoy that. That's when I don't feel like I'm in the system. The rest of the time I'm always analyzing things, I'm always trying to categorize situations like if this person did this differently then this whole thing would work differently. Instead of just constantly analyzing the system, I feel like those are ways that I can escape.

Kay: How did you develop this way of thinking about things?

Ichiro: I did read some Zen books, some Buddhist books.

Kay: How did you learn to be calculating and analytical?

Ichiro: I think to a certain extent I was always like that with social groups just trying to figure out their dynamic and stuff like that but it wasn't until I started teaching and really understood the system and moved to the city that I realized there was some amorphous crazy shit going on and unless I figured it out it was

going to crush me. I just kind of set myself to figure it out. And one of the first things I did teaching at Sacco I was like, ok these kids are always talking about gangs, the gangs they're in, the gangs they're not in, the gangs in the neighborhood, different turf wars, and so I learned everything I could about the gang system in Chicago like the history, trying to figure out who the current leaders are and learn all the symbols and etymology of the phrases and all that.

And the kids would laugh at me because I was able to call out all their hand shakes and I think I branched out from there because when you talk about the gangs you have to talk about their connections to the main stream world and the El Rookins, before they were the Black P Stones, they were partially funded by federal grants because the leader Jeff Fort was so smart that he learned how to game the federal grant system to funnel money into his drug operation. So then I wondered how he was able to do that and I wanted to figure out how the community block grants worked and I just had more questions about it. I think that's where that came from.

Kay: When or where do you think your consciousness began to develop?

Ichiro: I always was political in a very superficial way. Like I was definitely a leftist in high school even in junior high I was reading books on socialism and anarchy and stuff like that. But at the same time I remember putting out fliers for Clinton when he was first running for president in people's mailboxes. I asked my mom who we should support and she's like we don't have any money so we are democrats.

So I said, ok who's the democrat and she's like this guy Bill Clinton so I called this number that I saw somewhere and I asked if I could help out somehow and she sent me a bunch of these papers to stuff in people's mailboxes but I didn't really connect that to the more radical texts I was reading.

Two hundred or more like 100 years ago people were socialists but now people were democrats and I wasn't really thinking too deeply about the connections or the lack of connections. It wasn't until junior or sophomore year that we went to protest this Klan rally in Rolling Meadows at the courthouse. It totally opened my eyes because there were all these people protesting. This was like 1995 because I was 16 and we did it because I knew I hated the Klan and the Klan was close enough for us to yell at so I'm like hey guys let's go fucking yell at the Klan. I didn't realize there were organized leftist groups and they were all there. They were all there and they were selling three kinds of different socialist magazines. It was totally anachronistic to me and I was like man, how do you guys exist now? I bought some magazines ordered some books and stuff but never had the desire to join because they were an anachronism.

I didn't like the fact they had a party program so to me it wasn't critical thinking. They had a platform and they all had to agree on it so some people had to go around and say they believe shit that maybe deep down they didn't and also what if you say you're a socialist and what if you evolve and in so many ways socialism is tied to your identity and I thought they could be very static for people's development. It didn't occur to me and it wasn't until later in life that I was reintroduced to these people when I started to get involved with my work.

I never hung out with leftists until recently. I'm around these people and the relationship is interesting, and it sounds arrogant but sometimes when I think about it, yeah I get what you're doing it's cool, but I don't get it. I couldn't do it. I feel kinda condescending but it's like you guys are playing renaissance fair with politics. Whatever. I grew up and I was friends with gamers. I tried it; it didn't really take so I'm just like they are just like gamers.

Kay: That's a really interesting development. So the system is kind of like a gamer's dream like if you were a political gamer. It's an interesting idea that the real world is your dungeons and dragons.

Ichiro: There is a vampire game. I was into dungeons and dragons like as a middle schooler like you start hanging out with people and in high school you get into the vampire game do you know about that? It's live action role playing where you dress up like different characters and you play the part of a vampire and there's all these political things going on and cliques that exist in this fake world. They rent banquet halls and hotels and stuff to play this fucking game and it's a bunch of kids like with slick back hair and all black and red and stuff and they'd have a conflict. Any kind of vampire you could think of was there and it was interesting because it was like geeks who realized they want to have social circles and they want to be out there so they found this way of affecting by having these different relationships. It's so interesting to watch so I knew people who were into that so I went to a few of those and it's tripped out!

Kay: Wait, you went to one of these vampire events? I want to go.

Ichiro: Yeah I haven't been to one in 15 year's minimum maybe more like 18 or 19. Yeah I went to a few of them.

Kay: Do they still exist?

Ichiro: They run deep.

Kay: I'm sure Twilight blew that shit up.

Ichiro: You know I think there might be some beef between the two camps.

Kay: Like Twilight vampire camp and old school Dracula vampires?

Ichiro: Cuz there are vampire hipsters now. They were into it before it was cool. I'm sure whoever sells the books and dress up kits or whatever, they are making a killing because you had all these kids who were into Twilight as little kids and they are probably getting into this vampire game but like a buddy of mine who is a year older than me, he was living in the Chicago suburbs, he would drive down to Atlanta once a week because he really liked the games down there, and the vampire games were better down there than they were in Chicago and he met a girl down there and they are married with two kids. They've been married for like a decade now and he found a job down there, she's in school. They have a normal life together but their entire social circle is vampire people.

Kay: So they created a whole new reality and whole new system.

Ichiro: I guess that was a big turn off for me. I think I started seeing the cliques, I saw how people were leveraging, and it was also a way for dudes to accrue more experience points to get girls to pretend that they liked them. I can't make that up. So you have these nerdy ass fat dudes or real geeky pimply kids who, and there were some cute girls there, but that was their capital in the game because they were like an attractive girl playing this game but they would have to pretend to like these dudes. It was a weird thing to see and I'm just at these games thinking, 'oh shit I'm in high school now and this is my entire day watching people do this. I'm not playing this game. I'm going to punk rock shows. You guys- peace.'

The Reflex

"It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting."-
Paulo Coehlo

"Everything you can imagine is real." – Pablo Picasso

"Without leaps of imagination or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all is a form of planning." – Gloria Steinem

**   If people can figure out a way to create a vampire reality, I think we can figure out how to make schools better in Chicago. It is an escape from reality, one that requires an understanding of a different way of operating and navigating. If people can adapt to fake vampire living, what does that say**

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about our capacity for creativity and thinking outside of the box? I found myself a little too fascinated by this vampire convention and I'm a little embarrassed to admit it but I think if I didn't have such a big ego and wasn't so judgmental I would engage in something like this. I appreciate others who can disengage reality because I find myself elsewhere a lot in my head except I'm a romantic opposed to a blood thirsty, immortal, creature of the night.

My life is romantic. I am obsessed with the sentimentality, excitement, and mystery of life and I often dream of the ideal situation for everything. I dream it, hope for it, wish it, meditate on it, and it'll probably be what ends up killing me in the end because it'll have sucked all the life energy out of me. I am in a perpetual state of scenario writing in my head, creating what if situations and choosing my own adventure as it unfolds. What if the zombie apocalypse were to really happen? Who would I assemble on my team? Now what kind of weapons and talents do they have? I would use a samurai sword. We need good strategists and flame throwers. But I digress into extremes- I live in a world of fantastical situations because I don't really like reality. I hate reality, it's awful- but I love the fact that my brain can keep me hopeful, optimistic, and excited about what doesn't exist and is not yet. I refuse to allow my perceived reality to get the best of me and to resolve into hopeless abandonment of dreams. Apathy is a mental illness that attacks the energy of the soul, silences the beating of the heart, and cripples the mind in paralysis. But it's an illness that runs rampant in our society and we all have it. Our only chance of a cure is

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faith- faith in ourselves and each other. A faith that we can create our realities and make them what we want them to be. If the vampires could do it, then so can we.

Maybe we need that type of wake up call to what we see in our everyday realities. Greedy politicians and corporate decision makers who only care about stuffing their pockets with public dollars while families suffer in poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and violence rages through the city. When will the masses decide to stop playing this game? We need our punk rock alternative and we need to peace out.

Kay: What is it about punk rock that you love? Why choose punk rock over vampire conferences?

Ichiro: The punk rock bands that I was really into in high school and stuff there was a tongue and cheekiness to it and kind of a sense of irony to it that I could relate to. They weren't that serious. A lot of the bands were like we're just outgoing dudes who own instruments, and now we're a band and you're going to come see us and we're fun. There wasn't and even though there were egos and stuff I didn't feel them. There weren't a lot of political games going on. There were like scenesters and stuff but you could totally exist outside of that stuff and have a good time with your friends and you could go and mosh or if you didn't want to you could just hang out with your friends. It was really just kind of an open place to be.

4. Building the Future (sans Cannibals)

Kay: Is there anything in terms of what you would want to see for a new generation, just be lofty, and riff on what a future could be like. What is our education system based on?

Ichiro: Currently what it's based on is really scary to me because it was like the richest people in the world have taken every resource and just monopolized it, every single resource and every industry after that and just cannibalize it, real estate, technology, just ruined them and you got public service and education which were some of the strongest unionized sectors which is the reason why

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when the bottom dropped out in every other profession teachers along with fire fighters and cops and librarians were doing ok and it's sad that now those people are like ok, we can drain these out too. These are the last two wells and we need to drain them just like we've done with oil and like we've done with everyone else. Drill baby drill and we have to take education, it's not about republicans, democrats, liberals, and conservatives, they are people who just need to continuously consume at these ridiculous rates, that's what they're doing right now with schools is that they've turned people against each other who should be working together. They've created just a mess; they've ruined people's lives.

In NY they just published the teacher ratings according to test scores and the NY Post looked at it and looked at the last teacher on there and harassed her, you know went to her family's house wanted to interview her and her students, wanted to basically make a spectacle out of her for being the worst teacher in NY city. I read this article and they were basically breaking it down and so many things were wrong. She gets kids all year round, she chooses to teach immigrant students, students who make your data drop essentially like if you have a kid who doesn't matriculate until a month before the standardized test he's not going to do well on the test especially if he doesn't speak English. So she chose to teach these kids and she's being harassed about it. It's really saddening how these people just want to suck more and take more and turning people in the media to humiliate people because everyone is a part of the system. Reporters to keep their jobs have to report shit that they don't necessarily want to. The entire system is being leveraged so these people can take more and unless we do something to really change the way people look at education and the world in a broad perspective, it's just going to be obliterated. Education is going to be obliterated and it's really sad because it's such an important institution in this country to have free public education for all kids.

Kay: What is going on with the US. Why would they obliterate that?

Ichiro: I don't get it either.

Kay: Ok, so that's status quo but what do we need to teach our kids? Think about the kind of kids that are being pumped out. I hate to say it but the ones that come through aren't very bright and I think it's because they come through a system that's testing them on things that don't matter so their intellectual capacity to think on their own has been snuffed out almost. And I think that we need to tap into our intuitions because we still have it. I think it's interesting you see things in systems, you see components to the way shit runs. How did you learn that? Is it something you are innately in tune to? How is it that we have people walking around not knowing shit and just asking for the answers all the time. I think to myself how are you going to function? What kind of education is

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going to free someone? What kind of skills do we need in an upcoming generation? What do these people need to know?

Ichiro: I think one of the most important things we need to teach kids is that the system is not this amorphous kind of element of nature. They need to figure out how the system works and at the lowest level at least having their voice heard in what they want and at the highest level actually having a lot of voice in their community.

It really has to be about changing how people see the entire world because people seriously look at teaching as just another industry and they don't get it. They think that a good teacher is just about opening up a kid's head and pouring knowledge into it really hard. Because people are generally so fucked right now that they want to quantify a value in everything because they've had a bad shake and they want to see why other people have it better and that's why educators are an easy target because we can't really quantify what we do so we need to change people's thinking on that. People need to realize and not think of teachers as nation builders but people who teach a kid how to use their own head. We are the ones that guide kids and socialize them and get them to plug into the world. That's how we can change education if people start looking at it that way. And if people start seeing the value in having an educated population and having people who question things, there's a lack of people who don't get the value in that. And it's perpetuating. If you don't think it's important to question things you're not going to have kids who question things and it's just a cycle.

Kay: The chicken or the egg? Parents or the kids where do we start?

Ichiro: I think what I've seen over the course of the school closings since I've been involved in the annual school closing campaign for like four years now. This is the first year I've seen so many parents out and it's the first year I've seen so many diverse parents saying the same shit. Like that last board meeting you had northwest side parents, parents from Beverly, parents from the southeast side, southwest side, throughout the entire city saying we don't want 7 and a half hour days, and they were very specific in exactly what they wanted to see a school day look like and they definitely knew what they didn't want the school to look like and they were all supporting each other and their teachers.

I kind of came into this system thinking that the people I knew who were from the city, if their kids didn't get into the magnet schools they went to Catholic schools like almost everyone I knew who grew up in the city at that point. CPS had such a bad reputation in my brain that I just accepted that from what the media was saying, from what my family in the suburbs were saying, because they read the media and consumed the media. I had these pre-conceived

notions about public school parents and their motivations, because you have older teachers who say stuff like, 'oh the parents think we are baby sitters and they generalize the parents.' There are so many parents out there who send their kids to the rough schools, live in rough neighborhoods but they really understand how important their teachers are to them and how important it is to have those communities for these kids.

I think there's hope. The media is never going to get it right so we're never going to feel the tide turning but it is and there are more people who feel like they have to stand up. I've seen so many teachers who are timid and conservative, but as soon as their schools get closed they are at board meetings, they're leading protests, it could just be a school in their neighborhood and they do it out of solidarity.

In the whole campaign of the school closings and in the broader picture we are losing a lot. We are constantly losing battles but a major loss is if we lose people we lose engagement because then we can't build. If we're losing people we are a bottomless cup and you know if you're bringing people in, they're active and then they leave, you're not building a movement. As long as we keep people involved I think there's a lot of hope.

Kay: What do you feel like you're role in it is going to be?

Ichiro: My role is to give people voice essentially. To have people feel like they're being listened to and also to feel like they are confident enough to stand up and speak for themselves as well. I think that's my big role and I learned a lot of that through meeting teachers who are just on the verge of really going out against their principals and fighting back and I'll say let's write it up. In a fit of anger they'll say yea I'm going to do it, I really want to put my boss on blast because he or she is doing horrible things.

I have a similar situation with the release form, I don't print anything unless they've emailed me like if it's ok to print, if something is controversial I always send them the exact quote before I publish it but even with that there is such a rollercoaster that you're on because as soon as they say ok, you send it to the printers. And then you get a call saying, 'it's not at the printer's now is it?' And you're like 'yeah, it is,' and then they start freaking out like, 'I know I agreed but now I think this is a bad idea is there anyway you can stop it?' People almost plead and say well is there anyway and every single instance I've pushed someone to put a quote in a paper they thanked me even after they've totally freaked out about it.

I think what I did was by showing them stepping up and printing it in the newsletter other people are stepping up and they are learning how to fight

back and fighting back isn't so anomalous. That's kind of how I'm finding more sources and I think that's kind of my role is just finding people who are on the verge of stepping up and pushing them to do it and amplifying their voice.

The Reflex

"Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most."- Fyodor Dostoevsky

Learning requires taking risks because outside of our comfort zones is the world of possibilities. But it takes a lot of guts to reach beyond what you think is possible. Challenging our fears is challenging the ego. When we can see a world beyond ourselves, we can dare to make the changes necessary to create a different reality. Life isn't about our personal failures or successes but the learning process that allows us to evolve and use the gifts and talents we've been given. When I hear Ichiro talk about motivation, I'm challenged by my own motivations and what I do in moments of failure and success. Are my moments about me or are they a reflection of my evolution? Am I a good person? How do others rationalize 'goodness'? Do we need to create a new code of conduct?

D. Everyone Needs to just Smoke a Joint and Eat a Meal Together

During the time I was teaching undergraduates in a teacher education program I was confronted by White privilege from students who drained my energy through their genuinely ignorant comments. I didn't believe they were bad people, but I was challenged by their miseducation and their arrogance. Matthew walked into my life at the right time. We met through a mutual friend and as I had been sharing some of my grief with education at that moment he said, "You know what? Everyone just needs to smoke a joint and eat a meal together." And I thought our conversation needed to continue in a much more detailed way. I wanted to know what that meant to him because I understood that to mean that people need to just get back to basics- chill out and do what every human being does- enjoy some food. As someone who comes from a family who likes to eat, sharing a meal is a not just enjoying food, but the company, conversation, and the good feelings of being satiated. Maybe we need to make more time to do just that.

I was curious about his school experience because he came from a northern suburb of Chicago and yet still shared similar critiques of schools and teachers. This conversation opened my eyes to allow me to see that the problems I encountered in urban schools aren't just urban issues. Dehumanizing processes of schooling take place everywhere and the problems we share as a society speak to a larger problem in our humanity, not just selected individuals.

1. On Becoming

Kay: So what was school like for you?

Matthew: I like the timelines because when I think of things it just helps with the track. It's just the way I learned how to learn. I walked into kindergarten a lot more advanced than anyone else because my mom was a teacher for 5 years and then left teaching to raise me and then decided not to go back. A handful of kids and I were more advanced than everyone else and by advanced I mean I could count to 100 and read at a first or second grade level in comparison to kids who were learning the alphabet and learning their 1s, 2s, and 3s.

I was sort of reflecting a little more after you and I talked and I think when you are accelerated, the system is not able to keep up with some people in certain ways. Everyone's mind is a little different. A lot of people have the same abilities a lot of others don't. It just seemed really cookie cutter and I remember early on having conflict with teachers because I didn't feel like I was challenged.

Getting into junior high is when people seemed like they start to get a little crazy and not do too well in school and it doesn't seem like there is enough support to try and lead kids in another direction. It felt like direction was given from a condescending standpoint. I've made the joke that older teachers have been doing the same thing for 30 years, but where's that really getting us?

Kay: Did you enjoy school?

Matthew: Not at all. I enjoyed the setting because socially I had a lot of friends. My school system was K-4th grade in one building and then 5th-8th grade was a different school but it was all the same people you went to school with before. No one was interested in anyone else. I had the same principal from k-4 and 5-6th grade because he actually came over to the middle school. He was one of the adults who was like 'ok, this kid is kind of bright but he has no discipline whatsoever.'

I can't attribute that to a lack of discipline at home because I remember being grounded and it was pretty strict. I was the child of a police officer and a teacher. Not that it was intense strictness but I remember being grounded and there were lots of rules. But my principal was the one that suggested later on in the 7th or 8th grade that I go on to some kind of a private school. That was probably the first ripple in the social aspect of school because all of a sudden I was plopped in a school full of rich kids from different neighborhoods. I was seeing the top end of what was out there and the kind of people I went to school with were ones who were going to go on as successful doctors and

lawyers, politicians, going onto the ivy league schools and that didn't work out. I think because of a lack of education from elementary and junior high I was not prepared at all for the structure that they had there. It wasn't even called a high school. It was called a prep academy and it was very difficult. It was kind of interesting for me to see that big jump and it relates to sports because a lot of these kids played football through elementary and junior high so their football teams were always the best and it's really the same with academics too.

To think that people are paying a lot of money for public education out of our tax dollars, yet what are the kids really getting for it when they are barely prepared for, in my opinion, a mediocre life? But it's preprogrammed and I think that's what you run into in the system is a lot of teachers who have settled for their own mediocrity so how could they be expected to push and push for true success? I'm not one that would be so close-minded and say there are no good teachers out there because I ran into a handful of truly marvelous teachers. But the problem with seeing good teachers is that they set the bar so high that all these other teachers look so bad because you see what the capability is. Some teachers I had I can't even remember their names and those people would be in the middle. It's probably not a terrible thing that I don't remember their names because they were just kind of floating around. I always felt like they expected a little more from me and a couple other people and I think their energy was misdirected at times. There was segregation in classrooms early on as first grade. There were a handful of us and we were given different work. There were other kids with a lot of potential but there was no support for them by the teacher. Teaching was almost aimed too much at the middle ground and I'm sure there's workshops they do every year but what kind of continuing education are they really… you know what kind of standards are they really held to and should the system maybe even be a little more selective? There are a lot of teachers out there and I guarantee that some are better than others.

The Reflex

"A ship is always safe at the shore - but that is NOT what it is built for." – Albert Einstein

What are we paying for? I think if I was given the money I could figure out

a way to run a school system and actually direct the money towards enhancing

learning opportunities. When I think of mediocrity, I think of living passively and

not really engaging in the world. Is that the road teachers teach towards? If we

look at the development of our humanity, at this stage in the game I would have to agree. There are a lot of people who have not learned to engage life and have not developed a confidence in the talents and gifts they were born with. Not a lot of teachers are teaching them how to engage their gifts and the condition of our education system is allowing certain kids to believe that they don't have any. We are allowing kids to sit in the waiting docks of classrooms and they have no clue that they have the ability to explore oceans of knowledge and experience.

Kay: Can you talk more about how you switched schools?

Matthew: Yeah absolutely. I somehow did really good on the entrance exam and the placement exam and I always tested well. My biggest problem all through elementary and junior high school was that I didn't want to do homework. It seemed like a waste of time to me so when I got to high school, homework was a huge part of it and kids would talk about doing 2-3 hours of homework and I didn't know anything like that so after freshman year it was a combination of Cs, Ds, and Fs and I got the letter stating that I wasn't welcome back basically and whatever.

I can't say I was too upset by it going from the whole public elementary junior high setting to an all boys school, I was actually pretty happy to be going back to the public school. When I got there it was almost like such a let down. I felt like it was a continuation of 8th grade, pretty much in my second year of high school it seemed like a refresher course of 8th grade. Sophomore year was kind of a joke to me. I was happy to be back in the social swing of things and hanging out with my friends. Going back to the public school, hanging out with friends just being with them at a school, and after school I was a lot happier. Sophomore year I just glided by got most of my credits, failed a few classes and then junior year I can't really explain. First semester was ok and then I just started screwing around and ditching class. I was never an evil person; I wasn't a fighter at school. I ditched school and got a detention, ditched detention and got a Saturday, ditched Saturday and got an in school suspension and did the least amount of work in class just to kind of slide by and get most of my credits because I didn't see the value in it. I didn't feel like I was there to retain much of

the information, as I was to just kind of learn how to learn. That's pretty much what it was.

I think I already had such a high standard of what happened at the private school that even in junior year I felt like I was learning what I learned freshman year.

Then the school made this decision that they were going to send me to this off campus school which was because you've been screwing up in high school and now we're going to segregate you from everybody and since my area had two schools they had one up north and one west. They had kind of like the combined bad kid school so basically they took, probably 50-60 of the worst kids out of 3000 in terms of getting in trouble and not even necessarily doing bad in class but not going to class and stuff like that, completely segregated all of us and put us in this Mickey Mouse school that was a joke. It was towards the end of my junior year and I was pretty sharp and understood what was going on but it was really to just get you through the system. Throw a bunch of really simple stuff at you, 8-10 kids per classroom and most of the teachers there seemed like they didn't want to be there.

It was more like they needed a job, but it really seemed like an attempt to keep you out of the system and get you away from everyone else. I was in there with people who were gang bangers out of the city and people that were very mentally disturbed and it didn't seem like a setting for me. There was a handful of us who were kind of in the same boat and then the vast majority were people that really, in my opinion needed to be in a different place. I just got classified because, 'ok, he's not a good kid so he's a bad kid and let's put him in this school over here.'

Kay: Do you think the structure of the school helped anybody?

Matthew: I think it helped some that were kind of on the fence like me. Looking back on it probably the most important thing that I got out of it was my actual high school diploma. I think there were kids that tried to go there and ended up dropping out and there were kids that were in and out of there. They were very forgiving about what you could get away with. They were bound to you until you were 21 based on the laws if you are deemed special ed. I can't say I was going to school with 21 year olds because a 21 year old in that situation was already years gone.

One's that would've been in there that long had already given up when they were 17 or 18 and I watched it happen with a lot of people who were like 'what's even the point?' They'd rather stay home or go to work. It wasn't a completely irresponsible thing. Because I grew up in such a diverse area over

there some of them legitimately needed to leave school early to go work and help their families because it was mom trying to support 3-4 kids. When I looked around at the school a lot of people were from broken homes, a lot had moved there from the city, their mom, parent got them out of the city because they felt it was so terrible and they wanted to get them into the suburbs and they moved into the worst area of my little town and ended up in the worst school with the worst people.

It was the worst of the worst out of several thousand people between the two school districts. There were some of them in there that should've been kept away. They were already on a very negative track and they were very far-gone. Not that anyone doesn't have a potential to come back but some of these kids were really damaged. Maybe I should've been there maybe I shouldn't have? I don't feel like I should've been there with some of the worst of the worst but maybe they shouldn't have even been there. I think segregating them socially is a big deal and you're kind of forced to hanging out with one another and of course I found myself hanging out with people I shouldn't have been hanging out with.

You know you're going to spend a few hours a day here so let's get friendly with people and that summer you start hanging out with the "wrong crowd" people I never would've been introduced to. I always hung out with the more laid back, chill crowd and all of a sudden I'm hanging out with gang bangers and finding myself in bad neighborhoods, hanging out with bad people. It was pretty much the intro to the negative life but once I was out of there it was interesting because I completely 360'ed and I was hanging out with a completely different crowd which was basically a bunch of people I should've been hanging out with during that time.

2. On Knowing

Kay: You describe this mediocrity but what does it mean to be successful?

Matthew: I don't have the black or white, the yes or no kind of thing. It's really a spectrum and it's like a needle on a field gage. I don't think there's any way to really define it but it's going to be your own internal thing. What success is for one person isn't going to be for another and I defined it early on for myself and it's just what you want for yourself, how you want to live and having more positive feelings than negative feelings. I think once you cross that line of being positive and having positive energy and thinking a lot more positive than negative that's a success. Whether it be a combination of financial, social and emotional and even just down right spiritual. I've met a lot of unhappy people in my day and I wouldn't be one to judge them and say they're unsuccessful but if

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they're unhappy and complaining and feeling like all this negative energy is around them, obviously that's not going to be success- that's going to be the opposite. I don't know it might be an infinite answer and the needle may keep rolling around.

Kay: What life lessons helped you understand that?

Matthew: I think watching a lot of other people's mistakes and having a lot of contact with a lot of bad people and some really good people but really not having real legitimate trouble. There were a couple things here and there but I saw people around me getting arrested and I thought well I'm not going to do that. It's really just learning from your mistakes and you might as well try and learn from the mistakes of others too and jump into the fire early on. That's really it, I talk about it, I joke about it but I was always hustling in some way and not in the sense of being a criminal, but at 9-10 years old during the winter time, I was hitting the streets with the snow shovel and during the summer time I was out there with the lawn mower. I think it was more of an instinct early on.

I think success started out for me as a very materialistic thing. It was really about money, money, money. You had a little extra money and you were able to go out and buy this or buy that. It was kind of self-gratifying but it was also the fruit of hard work. I've been through more greedy days and I've been humbled but I think that's all part of growing up. Money can't buy happiness but when you're not stressed about providing for yourself- it's not just money it's a lot more primal than that because it's about being able to provide for yourself like being a great hunter. In this society now with everything being fueled by money and riches it's really an unfortunate evolution of that same idea. The husband and wife, the wife is the gatherer the husband's the hunter; the guy that has the better aim is going to have an easier time hunting. He's going to spend an hour to eat for three days rather than hunting for 3 days to eat for an hour and it's really that evolution of what was needed back in the day and what's needed now.

I've met a lot of miserable people in my day. I've had massive amounts of social contact in my day. I was in sales for 20 years and I was always talking to whoever, wherever, whenever, even on vacations and as time goes on you hear a lot of negativity and it's older people regretting what they did and spending too much time on regretting. I just never found too much worth in that. I can look back at my education and pick it apart but it's not a matter of wishing I was educated more so I could've gone on to college because hey college isn't for everybody. I may have done a different level of success. I don't know. I don't know if I would've been in a different state of mind than the state of mind that I've been in now and right now in this present time and present date I'm extremely happy and it's not about having piles of money or anything like that.

The Reflex

"The wish to acquire more is admittedly a very natural and common thing; and when men succeed in this they are always praised rather than condemned. But when they lack the ability to do so and yet want to acquire more at all costs, they deserve condemnation for their mistakes." – Niccolo Machiavelli

"The purpose of our lives is to be happy." – Dalai Lama

What if we were to construct schools around the concept of happiness? Money cannot buy happiness but it can alleviate the stress of poverty. With the imagination we can create new industries, jobs, and educate people so that they can be happy. We should address greed, excess, and waste and help people recover from their habits of overconsumption. Maybe we can all live more simply.

3. On Learning

Kay: What are some important life lessons that people just need to learn? Like in order for people to get along and treat each other fairly.

Matthew: People need to think a little bit more. Before they act and really just surround yourself by all the mistakes that other people have made so you can avoid making those mistakes yourself. Trying to figure out what you want to be when you grow up and what direction you want to go in when you're so young is going to be something overwhelming. Figuring out what makes you happy and trying out some different things, talking to as many people as you can because that's priceless. The more input you have it's either looking at their mistakes or their successes and being like I can kind of do this, or I can kind of do that and figure out what you have to do to be there and how to get to that. I think people have a tendency to come up a little too quick and it could be from a lack of training early on. It's something I joked about being an only child. We're better trouble shooters because we don't have the big sister, big brother to go to, we just sit there for an extra five minutes and figure it out. I have seen that in my own life and I just try to figure some things out a little more I get

frustrated and say ok, let's see try to figure it out a different way. Let's take a step back and kind of relax.

Kay: How do you learn best? How would you describe your learning process?

Matthew: By actually doing it and kind of finding the trickier, way, the harder way- baptism by fire if you will. It just always seems like that's the way. A little bit of trial and error, learning from other people's mistakes too. The chances of you being the first person to do something these days are slim to none so if you're going to do something why not do a little bit of research before you do something stupid. I look back at all my years and I've done some things that I probably shouldn't have done but nothing terrible. I didn't do anything stupid and it was just the logical process of consequence. What are the possibilities if this goes down? It's wise to stay out of trouble. It comes down to a lot of logic and I don't think some people's brains really comprehend that as well. It's just some radios work better than others. I don't know how to put it in another analogy and it may be from a lack of direction when they were younger or enough direction, or a broken home. I can't comment too much on that. I can say that yeah, the bad kids I went to school with most of them were from broken homes but some of them were from homes that were fine. Kind of tough but my learning process has been if I want to learn something I go out and I take some necessary steps to learn how to do it and then just keep getting better at it.

Kay: What does that mean- learning how to learn?

Matthew: Learning how to learn. When you're forced to learn things that you have absolutely no desire to learn you're really just learning how to learn. You're learning how to remember things and learning how you relate to things. I'm a numbers freak and people don't comprehend how I remember numbers but it's because I see a picture of them. Just like people describe photographic memory when I remember a phone number that I see written down, I remember what it looks like written down and what color ink. Very strange and sometimes overwhelming because it feels like it actually takes up more storage that way. It's interesting so you learn how to manipulate it and use it to your advantage and being able to see some mathematical equations and not that I'm some math genius or anything but yeah numbers fly through my mind. I remember some crazy statistics about things and people are like how do you remember that stuff? I don't know. There's a snapshot in my mind from a situation in a timeline, maybe I've seen it written down or heard it or something like that and then made my own design out of it. I think there's a lot more to human instinct than a lot of people have or ever will give credit to. It's mind blowing.

Kay: A lot of people I talk to talk about human instinct or intuition or a sixth sense or something like that. What does that mean to you?

Matthew: It's almost the initial stuff that comes on a new computer. There's a handful of things that are just on the computer when you buy it and a year from now, it's like did I download that or was that just something that was on there and I think part of being able to refer to instinct is knowing what human nature has been over the last, whatever number you want to throw at it-a few hundred years. It is a little mind-blowing but obviously we came equipped with some software. Some people are able to figure out how to use it better than others. I think when you look through the entire animal kingdom there's examples of that. Some animals just have a little more stuff going on. How do monkeys know how to crack open clams on rocks? They figured it out and then they saw their buddy doing it or whatever the case may be and that's just part of sharing things.

You have a power in one thing, I have a power in something else and maybe that's the beginning of male and female interaction. Ok, you can do this and I can do that...teamwork? Let's go a little further than that. How about the 10 people in a square mile and how about the hundred after that and it's really just sharing your own instincts that came out or developed because you saw something or were raised a little differently. Sharing it with everyone else is really just spreading the knowledge.

Kay: What do you think you'd be good at teaching?

Matthew: In the parallel universe as I've joked about before where I end up as some attorney I would probably find myself teaching law and it would probably be in an interesting sense of teaching cops how to be better cops by teaching them how to be criminals if that makes any sense.

Kay: So you would teach the criminal mind.

Matthew: I would teach the criminal mind because I think a lot of that stereotype of the criminal mind is thinking above and beyond about consequences a little bit more and planning, strategizing. Right now it's the criminal mind but...

Kay: There's a genius to the criminal mind.

Matthew: Of course there is.

Kay: But society puts it into a box of being bad but when you think about the intellectual capacity behind the criminal mind, it's well calculated.

Matthew: It's just society dubbing it the criminal mind.   Because someone commits a few crimes their mind is now the criminal mind. I think people that carry out war, strategies that they have and going all the way back to the first wars it's just strategizing, figuring out what's going to happen. It may not be a sure thing but then there's the underlings, hey we tried this a few years back it didn't work, let's try this a different way. I think it all blossoms and it's people sharing experiences of their own. I have an idea of what people are thinking about when they're doing stupid stuff and really the furthest thing from their minds is consequence.

There's a lot of mistakes that humans make over time and share. Why is it against a third of the world's religions to not eat pork? Well, because Fred 5000 years ago ate some pork and he died so guess what you guys aren't eating pork anymore and the quickest way to fall into that is, oh this book says you should not eat pork anymore, whatever. It's really the instruction manual for society. This guy caught a fish over here, he ate the yellow fish and you really can't eat the yellow fish. Things like that- cousin Fred tells uncle Bill and it goes all the way up the line whether it gets written in a book or told word of mouth. Again just back to the instinct thing. Ok, that thing was good to eat; woops it was not good to eat. Tasted good, but made me really sick. You know, trial and error. I didn't really believe you about the yellow fish. Well do you need to try it yourself? You saw him last week, maybe take a hint? Is it worth the risk? And that's the kind of person I was. I'm not going to second-guess that.

The Reflex

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" – Helen Keller

Sometimes I forget that we are not on this earth together just to annoy each other.   My mother always reminds me of how impatient I am and she scolded me a couple years ago and said: "Kay, people aren't stupid because they want to be stupid. Do you think anyone wants to be stupid?" I realized the way I see the deficiencies in others was very damaging to the way I understood human potential. I don't think anyone wants to be stupid, I know I don't want to be stupid, but I have my moments just like everyone else. Independently, we

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are limited, but together we can pool our talents and help each other out. Is

there a collective wisdom that we share that we should emphasize in schools?

Can we build learning models around developing collective intelligence instead

of thinking that as individuals we have all the answers?

4. Building the Future

Kay: Given your educational experience and your life experience how would you rethink school to be? When you think about the human capacity, how could we do schools differently?

Matthew: I think it's going to be about being more selective about who is actually qualified. I think it's got to go past just teachers passing a test and a couple interviews. You are trusting the minds, at the most impressionable part of their lives, very very early on and I don't think that most of the teachers I had were not very qualified to do that. I think it's going to start with being more strict about it and I think for a long time they've really gotten by doing the basic amount of work and not really trying to shine.

I look at even in my mom's situation- she got a full ride to college based on a teaching contract for Chicago Public Schools and when she got out she had to teach for 5 years and that was it. And I think that's an interesting carrot to be dangled. Hey we'll give you free education and you just go on and teach. It almost seems like there's not going to be enough determination and desire. I know there's teachers out there that more than anything they want to teach and share their knowledge and wisdom and I ran across a few of them.

If you look at the level of pro-athletes it's what they want to do; it's what they love. There's nothing else that they'd rather be doing. Even going beyond the education system there's got to be more of that out there if you're going to be truly successful and efficient you have to really want it and at the very least at least like it. Not just like, well ok there've been a couple teachers in my family and I might as well go to college be a teacher and then I get a pension at the end of it. I'm just going to deal with these snotty brats and punks.

There always seemed to be these older female teachers that were all the same, 'oh God get me out of here. Another 5-10 more years and I get my pension and I don't have to deal with these punks any more' and at that point in their lives, if you don't like it, just leave. You could potentially be damaging some kids. Some kids need a little more attention than others and they're not all the same. Just

because they're the same age doesn't mean they're right at the same line. Let's get started on these other ones a little sooner just to try and straighten some things out.

Kay: We are so focused on what do you want to be rather than who do you want to be and it's a travesty. It's a pipeline to the job and working world, but what does that mean now? We are preparing people to fail in a lot of ways.

Matthew: We were talking about programming them and asking them what they want to be when they grow up and the kids are like I want to be a firefighter and I want to be a doctor...it's kind of like you're setting them on tunnel vision. They don't talk about all the other things you can do. It's almost like they try and comb through and pick out the best of the best and just like they do with athletes and sports and everything like that too. You throw a basketball at 10 kids and you pick out the 2 best ones and say ok, these kids might go somewhere with it. You throw a test in front of them and the 5 out of the 30 that score the highest you say ok these are going to be the really smart ones but I think they kind of lose sight of the 5 that are on the bottom and don't do the right thing by them and it ends up really just programming them to be below average.

Kay: What kind of wisdom would you want to pass down to people?

Matthew: Learn from other people's mistakes and think twice. Think about the consequences. The earlier you think about it in your decision making process the better. It's really going to be key. There's a lot of information out there that you just need to soak up with a sponge to figure out what you're going to use and not going to use. As time goes on and you feel like there's more you need to know about you need to just pursue it. Go after it. Set yourself some goals.

I don't ever remember teachers talking about goals. I remember hearing the closest thing to goals was in gym and stuff like that. I don't know if that was the only kind of stage that should've been set on. I should be happy that Illinois has a good gym system. I think they need to use that mentality in other things to and really focusing the money on where it needs to be spent. The money is there. It's almost like to the point where you see what people spend money on. It's like the guy that owes everyone money but he's out like buying smokes and beer. You see him out at the bar and the guy owes you a hundred bucks and he's off buying shots for everyone. It's like dude, what's up? You see in the news like all the school supplies ended up in the dumpster. Really? You couldn't have just put that stuff on Ebay? There is just too much waste out there and I think harnessing resources and hiring the right people.

Some teachers deserve more recognition, and to be taken care of. They shouldn't be in their 30s stressing about student loans, living in their mom's basement or stuff like that. These are the one's truly busting their asses for our kids and those are the one's that are probably hurting the most. They are the one's who are the most passionate. The most passionate athlete no one ever knows their name just because they don't get the right outlet for whatever reason. Maybe they grew up in a different part of town or maybe they didn't go to the right high school, maybe they dropped out of high school because they had to support their family. Who knows? Whatever the reason maybe for it. The one's who don't want it don't give it to them but the one's that do, give it to them. Give them the ball and let them run with it. Let them do what they love, let them do what they are really passionate about. There are people who have this knowledge and want to share it with everybody. That's ultimately what a teacher is. You're just sharing it. Obviously there is a curriculum that has to be followed but really just making it their own and making it a personal thing.

Not sure I can blame the teachers either. Maybe it was due to the way they were taught? It's a cycle and you got to break it. In my situation dumping some of the worst kids in the same school with some of the bad kids. A line out of blow was he went in with a bachelors in marijuana and graduated with a master's in cocaine. It was almost like what the school was like. I went in there like not too bad and then there were all the terrible elements and I watched a lot of people in my situation walk into a very negative direction. I knew that it was not the direction to go in by watching other people's mistakes.

Fortunately I never had any real problems with the law or anything like that and probably my own instinct was just a little better. I had a little better aim and I was the hunter that could smell the food 100 feet away. The root of humanity is eating, surviving, reproducing and teaching the younger generations to do the same. It's going to grow and going to spread but it's going to be positive instead of negative. You grow up in an abusive household, chances are you're going to do the same. You don't know anything different and you saw that all the time, didn't know it was a terrible thing, just thought it was the life and the cycle just keeps on going. There are certain tests out there that are identical all over the country so why not follow a little uniformity but there are all these teachers who are under pressure for their kids to do good that you have all these cheating scams. You are applying pressure at the wrong side of the ziplock. You backed them into a corner and to make yourself look good you made them do some terrible things and kids are getting robbed.

I spent a lot of time thinking about how I dodged a bullet and how things could've gone in a more negative direction. There's a kid I met at this school and I've followed his criminal career basically the last 20 years. I saw some positive things come out of him and but he took a turn and a big jump in a

negative direction. I was kind of stepping along but he ran right into it and has been in and out of jail since he was 18. I watched his mug shot change over the year and it's a picture that's been burned into my brain of how things could've ended up.

I've had my struggles but nothing tremendous. Just kind of sliding along the middle of society, I think that's what we're supposed to do I guess and seeing it with people my age and younger, mid to late twenties seeing everyone struggle with student debt and how these kids were so wired to go to school, do good in school and then go onto college and once you got into college, everything's going to be perfect, congratulations you did the right thing. Now you got a solid 5 figures of student debt and you can't afford to feed yourself because that's what everyone told you to do. It's going to create a very interesting pocket of people who struggle. The scars are going to run deep from this. You're going to have people who were taken out of their houses, taken out of their neighborhoods and put into adverse situations and neighborhoods they shouldn't be in. Kids ending up in the wrong schools. It's going to be interesting, very interesting.

Life is tough. It really is and I don't think it's going to get any easier. We have to prepare these kids better. We need to look at what's worked and I don't think it takes too much. I don't think this is a job for the middle of the road; you have to be on the up and up because it's a huge responsibility and kids are just too impressionable. I don't think things have gotten better. They've gotten more complicated.

The Reflex

"We have to heal our wounded world. The chaos, despair, and senseless destruction we see today are a result of the alienation that people feel from each other and their environment." – Michael Jackson

Life is a lot more complicated and we're seeing the complications

manifest in the deaths of children across the country. The school shootings from

Littleton to Newton and the countless deaths, shootings, and incarceration of

youth in urban cities-all of these actions are signs of a toxic society. There is

much we need to recover from as a nation and moving forward is not going to

be down an easy road. We must do a better job at preparing our youth to inherit

this because unfortunately, they need to repair it.

E. Learning to Walk Together

"The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination."- Albert Einstein

Jose Haltzman and I met through organizing in Chicago and in many conversations we discussed different ways of thinking about education. I was curious as to how he came to value popular education and communal learning. Jose had different lenses for seeing the world than I did and I was curious about how he engaged his talents in his work.

1. On Becoming

Jose: Both my parents are educators but they both don't practice any more. My dad taught at the University in Guatemala and my mom taught elementary school in Guatemala. Before I went to 1st grade I had been taught to read and write by both of them so intellectually I had a different upbringing in the way I understood education. That left a lot of problematic shit both because of family life and my father being a teacher and there was a lot of pressure to succeed or to get good grades. The other process that influenced and affected me was the change in education models and education systems from Guatemala to the US. I came at the age of 11 and I was in 6th grade in Guatemala but then I had to finish 5th grade in the U.S. so I had to repeat 6th grade. It wasn't just the language but it was the way education focused on writing as well as a more classroom-based approach.

There was a lot more communal learning in the education system in the 90s in Guatemala and there was also an oral tradition component to learning. We were graded both on our written knowledge and our oral knowledge. We could present from memory as well as argue so it wasn't like you take a quiz on Friday or a midterm that counted as some of your grade, but you had to do a presentation by memory. You had to argue the same ideas that you learned which fostered a different type of intellectual development and knowledge. We would argue what we were interested in. There was some of that in the US but I think it was a lot more present in Guatemala and it was part of the everyday educational experience for me. That was very different when I came to the states.

Kay: When you talk about communal learning, what did that look like?

Jose: I'm not trying to make distinctions between the system where one is better than the other because there are a lot of problematic things in both systems but I think I experienced the support from multiple teachers a lot more when I was in Guatemala. I would get to know the other teachers because they would be interested in the work that we would be doing and we would do classroom sharing. That did happen from time to time in the states in elementary school, not so much in high school because high school in my opinion is getting you ready for that college model which is getting you ready for corporate jobs and structure. So we would know the other teachers. Sometimes teachers would visit and change classrooms and it was really a different way of education. I also think the Latino culture specifically Guatemala is a lot more communal. We get this from a lot of other cultures in Latin America and Asian and African cultures. There is a very different understanding, although there is some individualism, but I think individual learning is a lot more prevalent in western cultures especially in the US and Europe. That aspect of the learning where it was only up to me, hit me really hard when I was in the states a couple years later. My parents had the help of their friends and I would see teachers, people at the house, while I was doing my homework and it was a learning process that we would share but here it's like you do homework, you just sit in the kitchen or in the living room and you do your homework on your own and maybe you ask for help when you need it. It's in the classroom experience to ask help when you need it.

Kay: Do you have any specific things as a kid that you find particularly fascinating or interesting?

Jose: Something in general that I always thought was great was the science fair which allowed the students to develop a project on their own and be free. Obviously the scientific method is always pushed but that allowed for creativity where I went home and I get to do an art project mixed with social studies or research and science and I got to use colors and crayons. I was able to do research and I presented something that wasn't a paper, which is great because we need to encourage writing and reading but the learning process is a lot more holistic where you let kids watch a video, give them some crayons and then respond. It's that action of responding to what you see in different ways, not just responding with a paper or responding with your opinion. You can respond with an art project. You can respond with a poem. So I always liked to be given the opportunity to be creative.

It's the creative process that enabled learning to stay with me and I think the way we transfer or share knowledge has very little to do with the creative process. I know I'm emphasizing that but I've learned to use these creative processes as an artist within education whether I'm talking about social critiques, social justice or whether we are doing history, but you have all these options to

be creative with. It's been interesting to try and incorporate the arts as much as possible even though there is resistance to it.

The arts are in danger in most places around the world and there is very little focus on that especially as neoliberal agendas grow from what's happening in Chile to the privatization of education in Puerto Rico to the way charter schools are being pushed in the US. We have moved so far away from acknowledging the arts as an important part of life. Any subject matter can be approached through the arts.

2. On Learning

Kay: How do you approach learning? What does your process look like?

Jose: As an artist I'm a very incredibly visual and auditory person. I learn through hearing and visualizing concepts. I can easily read an essay or read a book but I have to sometimes go back and reflect on it. It's not a learning process where like you consume information and then you process it. I think my process has everything to do with a mixed media, multimedia kind of way where I learn and I hear and I pause and sometimes try to visualize ideas. That was hard in the early stages like high school when it was very notebook and test oriented whether it was science or social studies. I think in general there is very little creativity in the learning processes as well as teaching pedagogies. Again it's a very top down but very didactic way of teaching. So instead of sitting around a circle, we sit and listen to someone teach and we learn from someone else's opinion. I've seen how my learning process involves multiple people as well as the creative process, which is something I've always been at odds with.

There were periods of my life where I was so turned off by school. I knew it was a requirement that I had to do to get through life but I wasn't always excited about going to class and that's sad. It's mortifying when you think about the potential that one professor may have on your life. I had a sophomore English class that sucked and so did Algebra. For example my dad's a math teacher and I failed geometry not just because of the school or the teachers but the system itself offered no support. My dad flipped out. I failed geometry are you kidding me? But I couldn't go to him because he's a math teacher and I'm supposed to get all this shit? I'm supposed to be in AP calculus and I never took calculus.

It's this idea that I just hated the classroom and when I think about that and it pushes me to make the classroom fun and engaging. That's important. My job is not so much to be a friend but to engage in the learning process where students want to learn and when we want to learn we figure out other ways of

engaging. Some are fun but some aren't so fun, but at least we want to learn and that's something that I try to take away. Whether we are pushing social justice, commentary or critique in the work, I have to be able to make sure that the students want to learn because it doesn't do anything for me when youth are not interested.

The Reflex

It is incredibly sad when kids hate school and there are so many stories of people hating something that should be sacred. The way our education system is set up is damaging our relationship to knowledge. Instead of focusing on guiding kids through learning processes we're making them conform to a specific way of learning that does not resonate with their ways of understanding. Kids learn through experiences of failure but we don't want to stunt brain development in the process. Too much talent exists but goes untapped and how much of that is related to the negative and positive experiences we can create through schools?

Kay: What were your classes like?

Jose: Most of the classes that I really loved were the art classes, the music classes. So I went to music school right from the beginning of my music experience and it was a good place for me to get away from the high school system. I started music school in 6th grade and on Saturday I would spend almost all day at music school. It was intermediate music theory where we were being taught multiple and complex music analysis so not just instrumentation but context.

The teacher, Mr. Hampton and that's how it works right? We remember these teachers; we remember these experiences- it wasn't because he was cool necessarily or because he was smarter than other folks. It was because he understood bringing things that we could relate to and using that, as an educational tool was one of the ways he could teach. He brought music for us from Mexico for us to analyze- Vincente Fernandez, rancheras, Digable Planets- he brought hip-hop from France. It was pretty great but then we broke it down

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and talked about the social critique, what is he saying? Why is he saying that? And then we listened to folk music with a double meaning like with sexual innuendos and we talked about why people can't sing about their sexuality. It was like who is this teacher? We're listening to music and he's guiding our critical process in a way that opened my mind so much to social critique and the creative consciousness. It was fun, it was smart, and it was engaging.

He challenged me intellectually but he also joked with me and he believed that we all had potential. We were able to talk and he let this student go on a rant about the Simpsons for half the class and then we talked about the social aspect of the Simpsons and why it was important. The classes were mixed in ages so I was in a music theory class as a freshman with juniors and sophomores and 7th graders so if you had passed the classes previously, because you could be a high school student just learning to play the clarinet and you had to take basic music theory but you can come up with a student who's doing it since he was 5 years old and has an understanding of advanced music theory so some of these students were 8th graders and some were high school and it was that dialog hearing an older student talk about his experience and why he liked this music and listening to my friends talk about why they liked this music and being in that learning environment that's multigenerational with that youth context was really important.

And the teachers liked each other and knew each other and they would play their instruments in class. It was really a unique experience. Obviously not all classes were like that and some were didactic because of different teachers but those experiences stayed with me. And that was incredibly beneficial as a learning process for me as an educator when I looked back and hey, he brought his guitar, he brought all this stuff, we watched a video on a regular basis, but it was an art class and that type of teaching was allowed more than an English or Social Studies class.

And so experiences like that, where a teacher would invite us to a concert he was performing in and said you should come and invited us to learn outside of the classroom. Sometimes we would go, sometimes we wouldn't but learning can happen outside the classroom. It comes in different forms. It was interesting. So those are the positive experiences that I had.

The geometry class that I failed I was just like unmotivated and sick of it and the fact that I wasn't good at math, I didn't like it, and I was never able to engage with it. I cared what my dad would say to me and I cared more about that than the actual learning because I didn't care about math. I was going to be a music teacher so it was that understanding that the learning wasn't connected and that was what was damaging to my understanding of the education process. Why do we need geometry? I had to explain that to myself like why

do we need all this stuff that seems unnecessary? There was no understanding of why you take electives or why you take general courses. Why does everybody have to take certain classes? There was no understanding of how the education system or structure was created.

The Reflex

"Kids don't remember what you try to teach them. They remember what you are." –Jim Henson

When I left my last teaching position I felt like a failure because I didn't feel like I did anything for my students. There reading and writing levels were low and I wasn't able to see a lot of improvement. I measured my teaching by my students' ability to connect with the content of the class, which was measureable in their assignments. Were there amazing improvements? No, but I was proud of their work. Could anyone else look at it and say that there was a lot of room for improvement? Yes, but that's part of learning and growing. I was really hard on myself because I was striving for perfection, but being a good teacher isn't about perfection. That is a false perception. Sometimes being a good teacher can be seen through the students that come into your room after school and stay there until you leave at 5:00. Sometimes it's having kids in your classrooms that aren't technically on your roster but are there because they want to be. Being a good teacher is also just remembering that you are human just like your students are.

3. On Teaching

Kay: What is it about the arts that you find particularly important?

Jose: I was trained in classical and jazz and I still believe in teaching written music and teaching that more formalized way of music notation but I teach photography. I taught introduction to photography to youth, to adults and I have two different approaches to those. And if I were to teach music again I would definitely take cues from other disciplines. But I used to teach private lessons years ago in my early 20s. I taught trumpet, flute, and bass and I'd meet with the parents who had high hopes for the children. Some of them would say, 'oh my son or my daughter is very talented do you think they could go to music school?' They'd ask these questions and I would say to them, we don't know yet. We don't know the natural talent, some students have a natural talent or they are naturally gifted, they have natural sensibilities and some struggled but liked it and learned it and liked making music, creating. So I'd say to the parents that what's most beneficial is that they are being exposed to music, to this different way of thinking. When you learn music in a more formal way you are literally learning a new language. There's written music, there's the auditory training, the ear training exercises and there's a learning that you do whether it's somewhat formal or informal. Whether it's just by ear that you learn an instrument, you're still learning a new language to communicate. I'd say to the parents that you encourage them whether they become professional musicians or they play for an orchestra, studying musicology, it's incredibly beneficial to the creative process like learning to look at the world through a creative lens.

The emphasis I have on the arts is emphasizing us as whole people, emphasizing our learning as multidimensional, emphasizing the fact that every 6th grader is not the same. Every 12 year old is not the same that some 12 year olds learn like 14 year olds and some 6th grader would be learning things that are more advanced or less advanced. It doesn't mean their learning is stunted. It doesn't mean they are not creative or not smart. It just means they are in different stages of development and I think the more creative approach to these things allows us to see that they may be slow readers but they are critical thinkers or they're fast readers but they need more time developing their ideas. One person is more comfortable speaking in public but this person while another student is more comfortable writing you a beautiful poem or essay. When we require everyone to learn the same way we lose some of that. That's why the emphasis I have on the arts and creative process as a means to get to any critical consciousness, critical thinking. It's not like we all need to learn how to paint or play music but it's encouraging that aspect of learning music will be more beneficial to you 10 years from now. At 10 years old, you're learning how to play a musical instrument, paint; it's so good for when you are like 20 or 30.

Kay: What would a holistic education look like?

Jose: I think doing the best to have the community and parents involved in the education is a challenge. But other economic factors need to be addressed as

well. I think if a single parent can't come to the meetings then that stunts education. It doesn't necessarily mean that the parent is not involved; it could just mean that the family is trying to survive and get by. In an ideal world it would be a more horizontal process of involvement with both the students and the parents having a dialog of what's being taught. And outside the classroom learning is so important, whether it be outside in the park or a dialog with the community. And this is not just some hippie shit and I think we all learn more from the things we feel connected to, the things we feel we can identify and relate to, but we don't pay too much attention to that.

The way we hang out with people and how we connect with people is because we connect on different levels and share certain things. I think education has so much to do with that. If you're teacher pisses you off and you're teacher is a jerk you may not do all the work. You may do it but students who are able to do the work do it but students who say this is not me, I don't care they may not do the work but I think we all have experiences of teachers who've been mentors, teachers who we can say hey, this teacher is cool or my friend, but it's not about being friends but that's the challenge as an educator, how do you make this accessible and relatable? It's not just about playing hip-hop music in the classroom. It's also about being able to understand how the learning process is cyclical.

I'm trying to be very centered on the popular education methodology where that tries to address the learning process and the power between the teacher and a student. I try to be conscious of those dynamics but the educational structure puts me in a position where I have to perform for the student and the student is always looking to me for answers. It's hard to balance that when students are always coming to you for answers. When you say, 'let's figure this out together,' that sometimes can be a lot harder for all of us to process and to understand because most of us have grown up in a system where the teacher has all the answers.

We've had years of research that supports alternative forms of education to break down these structures but the creation of a modern education system is connected to creating a work force- that's not a myth. That's not a conspiracy theory. It's the harsh truth and people have been critical about this. We have people who have been creatively thinking and rethinking and I look at the Montessori models and the open school models and to a certain degree the home schooling system are all trying to dismantle all of this and saying hey there are like 50 different ways of learning that the board of education is not allowing us to use. By paying attention to the individual rather than the age or the grade and by paying attention to the community they're from, we can learn communally vs. individually. It has a much longer lasting affect on us and people might like learning and like going to school.

It's been good for me to unlearn this shit and it hasn't just been through popular education. Popular education methodology has allowed for me to criticize my own learning process as well as how I do things which has everything to do with listening to other people's experience. I've had to ask, how do you learn? And I think teachers naturally do that whether they are in a very oppressive education system. Whether you are in Cuba or in the US, teachers are always paying attention but often times these structures make it so much harder to allow the students to focus on one science project all day or stressing the importance of allowing the student to struggle on his or her own but at the same time offering the support of to the students. Instead of spending 20 minutes on a project everyday you spend 4 hours until you feel comfortable and while it's about pedagogy and methodology it's about the structure that's created which hinders teachers and stops the students from being more comfortable and creative. A lot of the reevaluation process comes from experience and paying attention to the students and paying attention to the different ways people have learned or coped with the challenges of a very static archaic education system.

The Reflex

"To be creative means to be in love with life. You can be creative only if you love life enough that you want to enhance its beauty, you want to bring a little more music to it, a little more poetry to it, a little more dance to it." –Osho

"To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself." -Soren Kierkegaard

To imagine, dream, create, and lose inhibitions is to challenge oneself to be greater than what we think we can be. It's how we move forward and progress and hold onto our humanity.

4. Building the Future

Kay: What's your philosophy of teaching photography? What do you want them to walk away with?

Jose: On the practical side, understanding how to work a digital camera. On the larger side, like the nerd in me wants to teach the basic technical stuff so that people can just enjoy taking photos. It may seem so simple but because

technologically the way cameras are created with such general presets, you turn it on it's on a setting, it's horribly balanced. So what I teach is how to work the flash, what the zoom actually does, what the settings and limitations of the camera are and once we get that out of the way now we can understand what the essence or ideology of what photography is, which is capturing moments, sharing moments, preserving history which is wonderful and something to connect with.

I think my approach is to always create a process. I say to the students you have a great natural eye for photography, a natural composition, you compose an image naturally which means you're paying attention to color, framing, to the room, you do this naturally and now you're able to reproduce it in an image- you should think about photography and encourage that creative processes of understanding that art doesn't have to be this elite unattainable thing. We can practice art in different ways.

We can engage in this creativity that we are naturally born with. Some of us interpret it differently, some of us can sing, some of us can dance, I can't dance to save my life. I've struggled dancing all the time and it's funny because rhythmically I'm a musician. So having all of us understand that it is so intrinsic in who we are, like art. I have a friend who says to me, I can't do art to save my life. I don't understand it. I think it has more to do with the way you've been taught. I had a music teacher who would say to every student she taught, what people would say to her, 'oh I can't sing' and she'd say 'it has nothing to do with ability. It has everything to do with your learning process.' Now will you be an opera singer or will you be able to sing in a church choir, those are two different things. How far do you want to go and how far do your abilities take you? We have to think about the natural range of our voice but we can learn to distinguish pitch. We can learn to distinguish tone and then reproduce it. That's what the learning process does.

Every time I've taught photography I try to have the students walk away with an idea that this should be something they enjoy and try to encourage. The last time I taught photography I tried to encourage that same creative process but apply it to other things. Teaching the artistic method in the same way we think about science.   We teach the artistic or creative process in terms of approaching whether it be a story or how you organize a kitchen table. There's an art to some of these things so applying the creative process of photography or the arts can be applied that to the rest of our lives and that's what I want the students to walk away with.

We are creative people who can do creative things, not just traditional forms of art.   Can we look at problems in a creative way?   Can we look at our dissertation or thesis in a creative way? Can we apply some of these processes

that some of us are a lot more comfortable with to the way we organize, to the way we work in relationship to other people? It's not just painting a picture. It's not just about how we compose a photograph or how we write a song even though the song writing process is incredibly fun and incredibly creative. I still practice song writing because it allows me to relax. It allows me to think about music structure and chords in a completely different way. I don't always finish the songs I start but I like sitting down for a couple hours trying to write a song because it's fun.

Kay: What do we think we need to do for the next generation of folks that come up?

Jose: We need to walk together. I think part of what I'm stressing as I get older is intergenerational education. I'm sitting down with older folks and listening. I'm sitting down with youth and saying you can be more active. It's ok to challenge your teachers and your parents respectfully. That's something that I'm hoping to integrate a lot more as I'm thinking about the future of my education practice- multigenerational and creative art but multigenerational is something I think is important.

The Reflex

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it." -Goethe

The future is paved by walking the road together. We just need to begin it.

I like that. How can we learn multigenerationally, creatively, and responsibly? I

think these are questions we need to be asking ourselves about how we move

forward and when we do, we'll have the power of our movement, the collective

knowledge of infinite wisdom, and the magic of faith that will keep us walking

together.

F. The Magician

Mario is a magician. Not officially but he is a doctor who has been known to cure a lot of ailments through diagnosing food allergies and basically tells people to stop eating all delicious things. My understanding of food allergies was after you ate something you were allergic to your body would react in two ways either getting hives or getting swollen. However, Mario helps find allergies that do not always show themselves and his clients have raved that after following his instructions, their ailments and overall general health improved. I am still convinced he is somewhat of a magician.

After hearing about such life-changing experiences with him I wanted to know how he came to practice an alternative form of healing. His practice reminded me that there are different ways of knowing and engaging the body and it sparked my curiosity to think about how differently we could begin to engage science, food, the body, and energy. I wanted to know his story, what he experienced in the world that gave him such a unique perspective and how he arrived at where he's at.

1. On Becoming

Kay: Do you just want to start by talking about where you came from?

Mario: I came from Guatemala. I was born in Guatemala and I lived there until I was 13 years of age so I arrived here in 1988. December of 1988.

Kay: So you did a lot of your formative schooling there.

Mario: Yeah. K-6.

Kay: Did you speak English when you came here?

Mario: Not a word. Not A word. My mother actually tried to teach us because she learned English before but we refused to learn it. We thought, what are we going to use English for? So we didn't learn it. I didn't know how to say hi, nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Kay: Did you live in Chicago when you first got here?

Mario: We got here to Chicago in December of '88 and we went to a magnet school. It was a bilingual/dual language school. They taught Spanish on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays and English Tuesdays and Thursdays and you had reading, Spanish and English classes. Those were in their own language but everything else like, Social Studies and Science and Math, they were taught in that language, the language of those days. The following year it was English three days and Spanish the other two days.

Kay: How did you adjust?

Mario: To Chicago? To Culture? Everything was just a shock. Coming here, the place I grew up was hot. It was tropical- hot and humid all year round and it was the middle of winter when we came. It was cold and snowy when we arrived so that was a novelty for us. We'd never seen snow before in my life so it was nice but not speaking the language, not having your friends- that was hard. I learned the language maybe in a year, year and a half. In that school they designated a teacher to teach me and my siblings, who also attended that school, like an intensive English learning program outside of that main class. So whenever there was a class that we didn't have to go to or if it was in English and we wouldn't learn much from it then we would go to this class with this lady and just learn English very intensely.

Kay: How would you describe that experience?

Mario: It was . . . fun. I liked school, made lots of friends. Learning a language was fun. It was a new thing. I always liked to learn. Learning comes easy to me. It's always come easy to me, like in the traditional sense of learning. I would pay attention, listen to the teacher and then repeat. Do a lot of repetition. That was it. For my classes I would just pay attention and maybe review things once or twice and that was it.

Kay: What about high school?

Mario: A breeze. Cakewalk. I actually became lazier in this country because the standards of education were much lower than my country when I was

growing up. Things have changed obviously over there and the education level has decreased as well but math, I didn't really learn any new math until junior year of high school.

Kay: So you feel like you were way above?

Mario: In science and math yeah. I became lazy because I didn't have to learn anything new, do whatever. For math and science especially I would just do it and teachers would always be amazed at how much I knew but they didn't challenge me further than my knowledge. I got 100's and 90's and I really didn't have to try. It was just easy. And then the other classes like English; I focused my time on that. So I went from the ESL program from my first year of high school to the regular and then jumped into the honors program by my junior year. I was like a freak of nature. They didn't really know what to do with me. I was a good student. They liked me. Didn't cause too much trouble, so teachers loved me.

Kay: How did you know that you wanted to do what you do now? When did that come into play?

Mario: That's a long answer but basically after high school I went to college and my counselor was a racist person and just told me because I was a Latino that I wouldn't amount to anything and that I shouldn't bother applying to college. That made me want to do it more. I rose to the challenge and I applied and I knew I was good at science. I always liked science so I went into science and got my degree in biochemistry but didn't really know what I wanted to do even after I became a chemist. After graduating with my bachelor's degree as a biochemist I felt like a technician. I didn't really consider myself a biochemist. So I applied to teaching jobs and lab jobs and the first job I got- interviewed for was teaching. I enjoyed it a lot and I was teaching at an alternative high school. It was fun because we got to develop our own curriculum so I was trying to teach in different ways. Basically the way I taught Science was not the traditional way which I learned science- the teacher sitting in front of the class, just reading out of a book, or just lecturing from their own knowledge and then referencing articles, which was very boring because people would just fall asleep. If you weren't interested in the subject you just became disengaged and a lot of people were just sleeping, which is not a good way of learning. So I tried to teach in a discovery based environment by setting up experiments so that the students would be engaged and start asking questions, 'what are we doing here? What's the purpose of this?' so that's how I would introduce the topic. Obviously you do have to lecture, you do have to present the basics and they have to learn and memorize that stuff but they would be interested in the topic to begin with by presenting the experiment around that topic. So I thought that worked out really well and a lot of students loved the class.

Kay: How long did you teach for?

Mario: I taught for about a year and maybe a year and a half because I was teaching at a college right before that at St. Germaine's before that, biology and chemistry but the pay was not good enough and some of the students wanted me to wear a suit and tie and I did not want to do that so I quit that job.

Mario: So after teaching I went to work at Phillip Laboratories.

Kay: Really?

Mario: Yeah, I'm a biochemist. I became disillusioned with teaching high school even though it was outside of CPS the principal decided to go back to a traditional way of teaching because their math and reading scores were low.

Kay: When you say they went back to a traditional . . .

Mario: Just basic lecturing and drills! Basically you lecture and that's it. That's not why I went into that school to begin with and so I quit. I decided I wanted to change things up and I went to work at Phillip. It was the fastest thing I found. Very lucrative job, obviously a mega corporation, but very boring, very monotonous job and I left after a few months or like 8 months. And they loved me, they didn't want to let me go, they were throwing money at me and I said no, let me go!

I was a shoe in for Phillip Laboratories. It was easy to get in there, I knew how to operate all the state of the art machinery because that's what we learned in labs. All the professors were teaching us to become these techs so we were becoming little sheep for these companies. It wasn't until after chiropractic school that I utilized and transformed all this knowledge I acquired in science to apply it to healing, to health, to understanding the way the body works. That's chemistry, biology, physics all that combined. How did I learn to utilize all this? It was a process but it was not taught in school and I think that was a great disservice. I did learn some material through seminars and I choose to study through seminars now. I talk to colleagues and I am very picky about what I choose to do because time is of the essence. I'm not talking about time because I need to work to make money and I can't take time off, but time in general. We only have so much time on earth before we expire so I'm very picky about what I choose to learn, what I choose to read, and I enrich my knowledge base so I can help people.

Kay: Where did you go after Phillip?

Mario: So, I went to a prestigious school to do some research in a lab. I did electrical injury research. Burn and high voltage electrical injuries, like when lightning strikes or if you grab a power line that fell and you get zapped by that.

Kay: That's crazy

Mario: That is very crazy. The guy I worked for was an MD/PhD, head of the burn unit, was a plastic surgeon and suggested I go to med school blahblahblah, and I thought that sounded interesting. I tried that and I applied and took the MCATs. I didn't apply to that school I just took the MCATs and I got a decent score so he could help me get in no problem and then after a year or so he said he didn't know if it was going to work out and tensions were high between him and I. I was in charge of putting together research papers-information that the lab had collected and worked on new information and then put it together for research paper publications and I found a lot of research that he didn't want out there. It was controversial data.

Kay: To his research?

Mario: Yeah, he had a particular interest in one area and it just didn't work out. So I left there and I was looking for something to do in health care and at that time my mother was in a car accident and she ended up going to a chiropractor. That's how I found out about chiropractic. I went to look at that chiropractor, I talked to her, my friend was a receptionist for her and I got a lot of information from my friend about all the things she'd gone through with this chiropractor because she was an asthmatic and was on three different medications. I was fascinated by the results she got with alternative things to medicine. Then I went to a chiropractic school and talked to them about the program and admission was easy but staying in was tough. You learn a lot and basically a lot of that information is the same as med school. There's no prescription to take pharmacology classes, but all the anatomy, physiology, pathology is the same and then you learn all this other natural stuff. I learned acupuncture because I had a personal interest in that. I have a huge interest in nutrition so I devoted a lot of my time to that as well and yeah several years later here I am. Best decision I ever made. I love it.

The Reflex

"Even when you think you have your life all mapped out, things happen that shape your destiny in ways you might never have imagined." – Deepak Chopra

It's funny how the universe brings us into these moments where we feel

like we've landed- even if for a brief moment. When I look back at the series of

events that take us through life, the variety of experiences, the ways in which life flows seamlessly, one chapter into the next with constant endings and new beginnings, with experiences that taught us lessons and fostered personal evolution. It's amazing to think of how each experience we all have is so different based on how we perceive the world and have learned to navigate through it.

Kay: What do you like about your job?

Mario: Being a detective. I love the detective part. Because you can have someone come in with stomach pain, you have 20 different people come in with stomach pain and the stomach pain is going to be caused most likely by 20 different reasons so I love that I have to identify what your particular reason is for that. It could be caused by some emotional disturbance. It could be caused by a injury to your back at some particular level. It could be caused by a particular bug that you had, what they call food poisoning. It could be a virus; it could be you lacking certain nutrients. I like finding out. I like discovering because it's never the same thing. Sometimes it is but the repetition is very uncommon.

Kay: How would you describe where you're at?

Mario: I love it. I'm happy, I love coming to my job and helping people out. I love using nature to achieve the results to bring people back to health, to healthier lifestyles. It's very fulfilling to hear the stories of people once they've gone through their experiences here.

2. On Knowing

Kay: What is learning like to you?

Mario: I basically focus on scientific articles related to what I do, look at headings, titles, and briefs and based on that I choose what to focus my energy on. As far as the scientific literature goes I also read a lot of books related to what I do, written by people who are in the field of what I do.

Kay: Of magic?

Mario: I'm not in the field of magic. I'm in the field of energy.

Kay: (*I'm still convinced it's magic at this point even after the explanation of basing work on scientific articles*) How do you know that kind of stuff? How do you tap into it?

Mario: I don't know the way people begin generally but the way I began was through experiencing it myself, getting treatments through people that do this.

Kay: Why did you start?

Mario: I felt my knowledge was not enough so I needed something else. There was something missing to the puzzle of figuring out people's conditions, people's health status. You could be a great dietician with all the technology and blood work but you're still short of figuring out how someone is healthy or unhealthy. A lot of people would come in before I learned this set of tools that I have which I think everyone has- the ability to tap into but we just don't. I would use blood, MRIs, X-Rays and all this stuff, history, orthopedic testing and still people were like, oh I feel like I'm not getting well. I don't feel well and all the blood work said your fine and all the tests said your normal, and you shouldn't be having any problems but how do you figure out, how do you tap into that area where you're not healthy but you're not ill, you're not sick.

Kay: Kinda like the gray space.

Mario: Yeah, the gray space in between. You go to a medical doctor, most of the times if you're in that gray space they'll tell you you're ok go home and you say ok but a couple days later you're like I'm not ok, why did I leave, why didn't I ask more questions? You come back and you do the same tests and you're still ok. You're in that normal range for perhaps what should be. So that's how I felt for a while. That gray area, I'm not sick but I'm not well and I want to get better. I want to get healthier. So I started looking at these things, going to see people that do this work and started learning it. I started to get more in touch with my body, with myself, paying attention to how foods affect me, how other people's energy, how space affects me. Simple things have an affect on you. And sometimes it's so profound and we don't even know, we're not aware. So just paying attention to that and becoming more aware of that allows you to be more aware and more open to this other world, this other reality, if you will.

Kay: Was there a specific moment where you discovered that?

Mario: No, it was a process. Some people say that I'm intuitive or that I can, like you said perform magic, but it's feeling energy. I started with the muscle testing

called applied kinesiology and some people think that's out there. Then you begin to trust yourself. That was the biggest step. How do I go from being this scientist, a biochemist that had to have evidence for every little thing that was done or about to be done to almost just saying ok, this is what's happening. I can feel. I can sense this. This just is. There is no evidence, there is no proof of this, there is anecdotal evidence, people have done it before and it's a transfer of energy, a melding that kind of exists. People joke about it but no one really acknowledges that yes there is this huge transfer of energy between two people and your energy can affect theirs and theirs can affect you and it does. It always does. I went from this biochemist, this scientific method to just feeling the energy and trusting that. Once you start feeling it you can be shown how to feel it. I can show you how to feel it but then you have to practice practice practice, do it do it do it, until you can do it.

Kay: How would you give someone advice on trusting yourself? How do you trust your intuition?

Mario: You have to listen to it. You have to play it by ear. Many times you hear that " little voice" and you question should I do this or that? You have that gut feeling that you should do A instead of B but you think about it and then you do B and you get screwed up. You think to yourself I should've gone with my gut. We all have that. We all have an experience at one point or another. How do you go about listening to that? It's all a part of getting in touch with yourself. The more you listen to yourself the more attention you pay to your body, the easier it will be to get in touch with that intuitive part of yourself so that would be how I would begin.

Kay: What activities do you suggest to people?

Mario: Meditation is one of the biggest things. Anything that will get you in touch with yourself, be more aware of yourself. I think meditation can be maybe the greatest tool at that because in meditation you have to sit in a place and the goal of meditation, and there are many types of meditation but one of the goals of meditation is to blank everything out of your mind except for one thing and you can start by listening to some repetitive sound or you can listen to your respiration or your heart beat and you listen to that and that's the only thing you hear and feel and then the better you're able to do that the easier it is to listen and feel other parts of the body. It's easy to explain but it takes a lifetime to master. In order for me to do that, I had to be good with my diet. I had to meditate and then I was able to do it more accurately. My intuition was more accurate. It was right on and that made me more confident.

The Reflex

"I'm simply saying that there is a way to be sane. I'm saying that you can get rid of all this insanity created by the past in you. Just by being a simple witness of your thought processes.

It is simply sitting silently, witnessing the thoughts, passing before you. Just witnessing, not interfering not even judging, because the moment you judge you have lost the pure witness. The moment you say "this is good, this is bad," you have already jumped onto the thought process.

It takes a little time to create a gap between the witness and the mind. Once the gap is there, you are in for a great surprise, that you are not the mind, that you are the witness, a watcher.

And this process of watching is the very alchemy of real religion. Because as you become more and more deeply rooted in witnessing, thoughts start disappearing. You are, but the mind is utterly empty.

That's the moment of enlightenment. That is the moment that you become for the first time an unconditioned, sane, really free human being." - Osho

So I used to think I was crazy because most of the people I knew did not talk like this outside of my family. A lot of my family members are intuitive and often share their energy encounters at family parties and in the normal phone call updates. But I am who they are and we are very spiritual people. I don't think it's a mystical thing to sit silently with your thoughts. I often feel like I am on the brink of insanity and meditating does help balance out the crazy. There is a fine line between madness and reality that I like to tiptoe. But finding balance is transformative and essential to our ability to navigate the world more positively.

3. On Teaching and Learning

Kay: Can you teach kids to meditate?

Mario: Yeah that's how I learned to meditate as a kid. I was doing karate and as part of the style we had to meditate because learning a martial art was not

about being a bad ass and kicking butt. It was about mastering self-control and self-awareness. As a child, we would meditate before and after class.

Kay: What is the potential you see in education? If you would do anything you wanted, how would you teach kids today?

Mario: I think what I learned in school gave me about 20 percent of what I know or what I use now which is dismal. Everyone is on a different level, has different intellects, some people are musically . . . like you sing something, or you put something in a song and boom they hear it once and boom they know it where you read it to them in the classroom and they won't learn it. You can read it a hundred times and they read it a hundred times, it's not going to stick in their head, so finding ways to engage the student. I would start with that. Evaluating each student, each person, and identifying what their learning abilities are. Once you identify that you can create a curriculum that's suitable for their learning methods and for their abilities so you are engaging them a lot more right off the bat. Once their learning ability is identified then develop curriculum that will nurture that learning style. That would be the major challenge to develop a curriculum for their learning abilities, which could mean having different schools with different learning styles.

Kay: How do you learn best?

Mario: By listening, doing, by teaching you learn the best. Once you teach something you know it.

4. Building The Future

Kay: What kind of people would you like your kids to become?

Mario: Citizens of the world. The world is very ugly right now and people are very selfish for the most part. A lot of people are very selfish. I wouldn't want them to be that. I wouldn't want them to be selfish. I would want them to be confidant, to explore the world, to love, to give back to the world as much as they receive from it. Not to become locked up in some little thing that they do but to reach great things and be able to give back. To help the world, to heal it, to help the world heal. That's what I think I do with every person I touch. But making people more aware, aware of themselves, increasing people's frequencies, and as we increase people's frequencies they become more aware of the world. They become better people. The lower frequencies are the more inclined we are to do bad things, to be more selfish, to be more aggressive to people.

K: What do you mean by frequencies?

M: I'm talking about your vibrational frequency. Everything resonates at some frequency so the higher frequencies would be enlightened people like Buddha, Gandhi. When I touch people, when I treat people, when I clean up their lives their vibrational frequencies increase. I know it does. So when your frequency increases you change for the better. Most people's frequencies are on the low end. But the vibration I'm talking about is a level of awareness a consciousness so that the cleaner your diet, the more you meditate, the more in touch you are with yourself, your awareness increases.

The Reflex

"Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in the body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self transformation and for the transformation of society." – Thich Nhat Han

In a fast food, genetically modified, agribusiness nation, we've created a way of eating that is detrimental to our livelihood. Not only are we seeing the physical effects through illness and disease, but we have failed to stay in tune with our bodies. Maybe the more in touch we were with our bodies, the more in touch we would be with the gray space. What is the gray space? It's the unknown. It is a state of existence that is still fuzzy. It's knowing your best friend is about to have a baby before she does. It's walking into an old antique shop and feeling strange in different parts of the store. I'm sure there are a lot of folks who would disagree that we should teach this in schools because you can't

standardize someone's connection to another way of existing in the gray space.

But how would we operate in this world if we were more in touch with our bodies, ourselves, the exchanges of energy, and aware of how space affects us?

G. The Art of Waxing and the Gift of Gab

My oldest teacher was someone I've known since I was six years old and most of our lessons took place in the classroom of trial and error. Some experiences ended in relatively minor injuries, but all of them ended in good life lessons: just because it looks like candy, doesn't mean it's candy-it could be an eraser; even though dog jerky may smell like beef jerky, it's not; cartoon teeth come out by tying it to a door and slamming it, but human teeth don't; when someone tells you they're going to slap you, they will; chicken pox can be contracted by sharing a pickle with someone; don't trust anyone to cut your hair, etc. We grew up together, we evolved, we are embedded in each other's stories, and we share similar legacies.

Sayuri was on track to becoming a history teacher when she realized that teaching in schools would make her miserable. She's taught the trade she is trained in and still identifies as an educator although her profession is not typical. Talking to her was important to me because through our interactions and conversations, she's always helped me to see the world a little differently. Her perspectives and ways of story telling capture an essence of being human that help me broaden my perspective of the human experience and the process of our evolution.

1. On Becoming

Kay: Why don't we start talking about your development as a learner?

Sayuri: I think the word would be experiential. At first I think I was really reticent. My mom actually thought I had a hearing problem because I didn't speak right away at 2 so I think I was just an observer for a long time and then I realized there was a difference as me as an observer and me proactively acting within the environment. As a kid I was a lot in my own head and I played a lot by myself and with my family-my sister, but I was really independent when it came to learning and I was always really curious. My mom always said you are a really curious person and you're not afraid. I went into things thinking I'm going into the moment and learning.

I had neighborhood friends when I was a little kid and I would walk to their houses. I was 5 or 6 years old going to someone's house by myself so I was really independent. I realized that there were a lot of other things happening in other people's houses and it wasn't necessarily happening in mine. I was exposed to different things because I was at different people's houses but I feel that's where I learned the most outside of school. It was by being around other people and what they had to expose to me. For example, when I was a kid my friend Tamar's mom was from Wisconsin and they did all kinds of dehydrating and canning, jarring up the fruits and veggies. They had a potbelly stove where you could throw paper in the fire. The mom played piano and stuff like that. It was just really a wholesome, I guess you could say kind of environment. I think that influenced me in a ways because I realized when I went to other people's houses they did different things than I did in my own home.

In my own home I played a lot by myself so being outside of the home for me was an experience so that I could see what other people were like. So I've always been curious to see what other people are like and that influenced the way that I learn because I always put myself out there and even if I'm scared, I'll still put myself out there because I realize that that's the only way that I personally feel like I really learn. I could sit and listen to stories and lectures and I think that's interesting but for me to really understand it and experience it, it's learning through my senses, and critical thinking.

Kay: How was your school experience in terms of your learning identity in school?

Sayuri: I was scared. I didn't want to be at school I wanted to be at home. School was like this weird prison that was keeping you occupied and I don't think I did really well either because I don't remember studying as a kid. It wasn't like my parents did homework with me so it's almost like it was a holding cell during the day and I thought to myself, why do I have to keep going here? But I ended up going to Newberg, and I was bussed because it was considered a gifted magnet school and it was farther away from my neighborhood school down the street.

Kay: How did you get there? How did your parents take you out from Blaire?

Sayuri: Tamar's mom Marie was a teacher and she was taking Tamar out of Blaire and she knew about Newberg. She told my mom this is a good time to move your girls and my mom followed. That was good about my mom because she followed people's lead in education. I guess Jenny and I could've stayed at that school and it would've been downhill after that. We didn't really learn much because in first grade we always wrote the same thing over and over again like, 'Good morning today is Thursday' and that's what we had to write everyday and I hated it. I don't like repetition. I think it's boring.

Going to Newberg was a big experience because that's where I had my teacher that influenced me the most, Mr. Bradford and he was our science teacher. This teacher really influenced me. He told us that never in history had science and technology advanced so quickly and he said it was going to be a huge responsibility on our generation because it's going to influence global warming and the earth. His message to us is what Al Gore preaches now, but what he said to us as 6th graders was prophetic. It was really interesting, and scary how right on he was about it. That rings in my mind on a daily basis. That really influenced me and I also felt like maybe I felt such a fear of that advancement and not knowing what it was going to advance into that that's what influenced me now in my career and I chose something that was a craft a learned skill job because it's antiquated.

I have a degree in Black History, and then I went to beauty school and then I went to beauty school again to get a teaching certificate. I went vocational and I realize as interesting as going to college was I didn't want to go for a master's and regurgitate what other people wrote just reading and teaching it to kids because I probably would've been a high school or grammar school history teacher. I didn't want to do the same old same old. I wanted to be the person to teach the skill because I learned it and not because I was told that I learned it. I wanted to feel that sense of ownership with my education and that was something that goes back to what my dad said to my sister and myself. He said I wanted to give you something that no one can ever take away from you and that's your education. I want you to be able to survive even after your mom and I are gone. I want you to fend for yourself and I don't know how the world is going to be but I want you to be able to take care of yourself. Your husband could leave you or divorce you or your kids will grow up and leave and we too will pass but at least you can fend for yourself and that's where the vocational education has allowed me to really learn the skill and I'm able to perpetuate the service of it. That's why I feel like there is a big value in vocational education.

My influence was Booker T. Washington. He said he only read biographies, and didn't spend time reading anything else because he wanted to hear from the words of the people how they did it. My back track was I was in a program to be one of those future teachers in the CPS and I reneged on my contract because I felt that the program itself was kind of a facade. There were a lot of problems and politics involved. I just didn't feel that education was going to be organic if it was always fighting a political view of things. Learning has to be each person's experience. That's what wisdom is. Wisdom is being able to learn and look and see for yourself and being able to come up with a conclusion from your experiences. You can hear what people's perspectives are but learning for me had to be organic in that sense. I could question can I trust this? Do I understand this, how do I understand this? I'm not perfect at it but I think it's part of the self-exploration or learning. It's process and sometimes I feel like I'm really getting this and at beauty school there is no one-way. Any beauty school will tell you that there is no one way of doing something but this is the way that we are teaching you, their name, and this is how we are going to teach it to you but when you go into the beauty industry and you are behind the chair there may be some way that someone else is going to teach you.

Kay: How would you describe what you do within the beauty industry?

Sayuri: I work in the beauty industry but my skill is based on something that's been around since Phaoronic Egypt. Personal alchemy, change, beautification. I went to something that was very old to me as a tradition because I felt that the beauty industry as a vocational education was one of the ways of learning that allowed women, people of color, whatever your social or economic background is, you had a place in the beauty industry. There is a job; there is a creative outlet for you for whoever wants to come into it. It's helped people excel and I think the beauty industry allowed that to happen in more ways than white collar jobs would or traditional jobs would. You don't need a bachelor's degree or an associate's degree. You just need a high school education. People in the industry are very successful and I always found that to be so interesting since a lot of people don't live by the book. The industry doesn't live by the book but we are a part of a culture. And we actually help culture.

I work within the community. I feel like I have a pulse on what's going on. I'm a waxer so I work very intimately with people whether they're executives, entertainers, just people, mom and pops. I feel like the only way that I can describe it is that it's antiquated in something like the hair removal technique we used has been around since Phaoronic Egypt. It's been around for a very long time and I feel like this is something that is part of the beautification process that has been around since humanity existed- somehow manipulating the body.

I call it an art because I feel like my skill is an art because I had to do it over and over until I got better. That was the learning aspect of it. Especially in the area of eyebrow waxing, you are constantly in somebody's face. You are putting their best face forward so there is a huge responsibility. Even before I touch each client I do my own kind of prayer and saying that I hope I do the best that I can, I hope they remain safe because you can hurt somebody being waxed, and there is a big responsibility that comes with that type of work. And it's touching your face. How often do you allow a stranger to touch your face? Not that often.

I feel like there is an honor and a trust in the type of work I do and I feel really honored by and I also love the way I can talk to someone in a short matter of time. My job is definitely in the now because you're not going to have the same experience with everyone even though you're providing the same service. Each person is a unique experience. Another thing is that I meet everyone that pays my bills and keeps me alive, so I can't help but to honor the people I work with or the people that are coming to the salon. I really feel like it's an interesting job because other than your lovers, or husbands, wives, whoever is that intimate with you, or doctors- and then there's us that wax that have that little moment in time with you that the client surrenders themselves for a short matter of time in order for us to do our alchemy. It is a transformation that happens for that person. Sometimes they just like the relaxation. They say thank you for giving me this time to relax or thank you for giving me this time to talk about this.

I realize my work is something that has not left an imprint in time. My art is sand art. It's temporary it's in the now but hair will grow back. A landscaper and I have pretty much the same job except they are trimming one type of bush and I'm trimming another kind. It's only by living through a person's oral story that I exist as a person now. I'm not writing my own stuff down, I'm living in the now, I'm doing what I do. I live in people's stories also just like they live in my stories. I realize that through having clients that refer me to other people I understand how I am being spoken of even though I don't know what's been said. People refer others and bring them to me and then I get to take care of them. I find that really interesting because that's somebody that's coming to you because they trust you, or trust a word, a person that suggested you to them.

Referral people are really interesting because how do you know what they've said and technology for us, we follow yelp like the person who fuckin reads ticker tape. That's our financial pulse. If we get a bad review it is stuck in the cyber universe. That's why it's a heightened level of customer service and you have to be on it because it's that hot in the now. It's almost like big brother or big sister all the time because at any given moment you don't know who could say some shit about you. True or false it doesn't matter- it's out there. Thank you

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technology for invading my privacy at any given point. You don't even have to be part of the paparazzi like Madonna, you could be Joe Shmo or the hillbilly on the corner and everyone would know.

Kay: What do you like about your job?

Sayuri: To talk to random people on a daily basis for hours? (laughing) It's like a dream come true. It's true education for me too. I realize that I love to learn and I felt like this is the way I could learn all the time with random people. Not just random, because there are my clients who I see consistently so I have an ongoing rapport with them. It's interesting because I like to know what people are talking about. That's where I think I'm still nosy or curious like my mom said. Instead of me going to their houses they just come to one spot. I get to talk to the most random people about whatever I'm thinking or whatever they're thinking.

Kay: Who were you influenced by?

Sayuri: I was influenced by Jesus Christ (so thank you dad), from Buddha in bits and pieces from my mom and the Saito's, and my mom is Shinto but I have a bicultural if not tri-cultural family if you want to add the Latin side that the family brought in by living in Texas. We come from a very eclectic background and that's why we are very opinionated. We are very interesting people because we come from so many viewpoints that exist for us simultaneously. Is it a Texan thing, a republican thing, a family issue, cultural issue, social issue? That's what I think being a family is that you're always fired up. You are always alive, vivacious, and happy. But don't you want that for everybody? My family came from hard times like being Japanese and Japanese American and what that meant for our family.

My dad is great but he's like Jackie Gleason/Archie Bunker. Whenever I describe my dad to my clients I always say, imagine a little fire plug man that looks like Archie Bunker and sounds like Jackie Gleason. My dad even has the bulgy eyes that Jackie Gleason has. Very animated and high drama but he's so wise. My dad did the same job for over 30 years. He was a skilled laborer like how I view myself to be and he worked so hard for so long for me and for our family. My dad taught me about learning through the senses. My dad would always say that the way you experience the world is through your senses and your intuition.

In science people are trying to explain divinity, to explain life. Science to me is the acceptable way of trying to understand God in school. I come from a very religious background but I know the feeling of coming from a Christian family. Even though I don't have Biblical words for it I see my dad struggle. I hear him

talk about his dad and losing faith. To see my father be such an amazing role model, he is like a rock. I feel like a lot of people don't get to experience family that way.

To come from a family where my parents are still married is a big influence too. I've always felt that they would always be there for me in some way shape or form. Now the levels of good and bad are debatable but I still know they were together and had that kind of watchful eye when it comes to having strong parents, they were tenacious, steady; they were there. I have a fear of losing them because I would feel unstable without them. That's why I feel this urge to learn as much as I can because I want them to know that we are ok; that we are learning and growing and we can show that we are helpful, that we are good people. I want them to know that their job was well done- that they didn't live their life in vain because of all the work they put into us or didn't put into us. Learning comes to me on a personal level because I want them to be proud of me and I want to be proud of myself for being a functional citizen, a responsible person, a watchful eye, just a good human being that's there that can appreciate history and where we are, where we're going and maybe even add our own adventure into it at the same time.

People are living totems of what our past was like and they remember, recall, and reminisce. It's like how my dad tells stories of Texas. That's where the nature of my family is very talkative and we continue that legacy of storytelling and that's fun. That's history and that's what I loved about my history teachers are that they had so many stories and they could go on and on. I love that because I feel like you learn so much. And it's an honor for someone to tell you their story or a story of what's going on.

The Reflex

"Why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient." –Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X

"If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people." -Thich Nhat Hanh

Listening to Sayuri reminds me of my family. Telling stories is natural in my family. Our gatherings are loud and our conversations are almost competitive.

It's hard to get a word in sometimes because people are super opinionated, righteous, and don't think twice about verbally shoving a foot in your ass when you're wrong. We are very strong people with a very strong moral compass and that developed through facing adversity head on, keeping a positive attitude, and living by a code of honor even when the people surrounding you didn't.

There is a heaviness I feel when I think about how far my family has come in spite of the adversity they endured. That heaviness reminds me of the burden they carried to help our lineage continue with strength. It reminds me that we weren't and aren't weak people and we carry our strength by remembering the lives of our ancestors by telling their stories. It is an honor for me to hear other people's stories because they share their knowledge and wisdom of the world. That appreciation for others comes from the values in my family of honoring and treating people with respect and never looking down on someone because they have something they can teach you.

2. On Knowing

Kay: What do you mean by intuition?

Sayuri: That's your sixth sense.

Kay: Can you explain the sixth sense?

Sayuri: The sixth sense is your gut feeling. And you know what I learned recently that I thought was interesting? They say there is some similar tissue that's in your brain that's also in the lining of your gut and that's why they say you have a gut feeling. My dad always said, if you want to experience God, the divine, you have to always protect your senses because that's how you maneuver and go through this world and your sixth sense is your knowing. It's almost like your

surrender to God, or your divinity of trusting and knowing yourself. I went to see a spiritual leader and he said that you are born into this world with this faith, the antiquated belief but you are born into this world knowing what you are going to do. The shock of birth makes you forget what you promised you were going to do and when you feel like you are doing something wrong, that's your divinity telling you that's not what you were meant to do. But if something feels right you experience elation, which could be considered a modern transient kind of spiritual awakening when you feel good about yourself. That's when you know you are on the right path and that's experiencing spirituality on a daily basis.

Kay: When do you feel like that developed?

Sayuri: I think as a kid I developed an understanding of trusting who I am or learning about the sixth sense but I have to say I think I was always a cautious child- shy and scared. That has always been consistent about me. I learned to be outgoing but I was probably more in middle school. I only had two neighborhood friends in grammar school but I think the wonderment and awe that came from the 'oh my God there's so many other people now' and all their homes that they live in and all these other places I could visit. It was like a free for all.

Kay: What have you come to understand about the learning process?

Sayuri: I think that each person learns their own way but they are all meant to learn certain things in life, certain human things. It almost becomes about being divine, like a spiritual being in a body, knowing that we are only going to be here for a short amount of time and identifying what we want to experience in the lifetime. Some people want to experience getting married, having kids, and going back to the Socratic symposium that talks about love. People want to be loved and remembered.

I'm happy with the way things are going and there's always room for improvement when it comes to living your life but I really enjoy learning. I'm always going to be one of those people that want to learn more. I may not be the best at it but I want to have a working understanding of certain things.

Sometimes you write your own history and sometimes you have to read your own history. And that's what they call self-reflection. It's to be able to see what you've done and what you could do and what you're capable of and learn about yourself that way. And you learn about what experiences you were willing to go through to be able to turn this bus around and make it work better after you went through all these different things.

I think that's what makes everyone a valuable participant, active citizen in this democracy; everyone is on the same ride whether you know it or not. However you want to look at this moment, we're all on the same rock right now. I always think about how Darwin talks about how you're the best of your species at this point in time and space. It's like saying someone is their perfect genetic makeup at that point in time so if this is the best that I'm supposed to be then I really got to work on it.

Kay: What have you learned through experience and stories?

Sayuri: Reading autobiographies and biographies, spending time on things that help you understand what inspired or what motivated other people because then it might inspire you to do something. It might inspire the courage to try something new or different that you weren't able to do before and even to be able to have insight or foresight or contribute some newer ideas into the world. Changes are happening and that's why there can be new families, new ways of thinking, being raised by your community, church, job, all of those components guide experience. Love, faith, devotion, inspiration those are all things that can motivate and help navigate a person's journey in this life. I think education in the classroom sense should allow the person to explore and have their perspective.

I listen to stories because I know there is something that reverberates in me that I need to experience and express in this lifetime. That's what learning is. I didn't want to be a teacher that was paid to teach somebody something. I wanted to be a teacher that was able to teach them something but say to them that there is more to it than what you know right now. Your experience will take you to all these different places and all these different levels of understanding because of all the skills you are learning. You want your education to pay off in some way shape or form especially when you spend so much. You want it to have a value to it. You want it to be worth its dedication and discipline and the love hate relationship that comes sometimes with learning. With wisdom you are able to teach other people how to not have the same experiences. Some people have to learn for themselves the hard way and that's just their lot in life, but one needs to recognize each student, finding ways to have them become the best that they could be at that moment. Teachers need to recognize what each person's specialty could be and give them an opportunity.

The Reflex

"According to this law [the law of Dharma], you have a unique talent and a unique way of expressing it. There is something that you can do better than anyone else in the whole world--and for every unique talent and unique

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expression of that talent, there are also unique needs. When these needs are matched with the creative expression of your talent, that is the spark that creates affluence. Expressing your talents to fulfill needs creates unlimited wealth and abundance." — Deepak Chopra

Our experiences are partially driven by our intuition. It's deciding what we want to experience, sometimes measuring the consequences, sometimes leaping into the deep end and finding things out the hard way, and allowing yourself to have that moment because for whatever reason you needed to have that experience. Part of our intuition is being able to trust ourselves to handle whatever may come our way and to enjoy the ride in the process. Whether we our inside the four walls of a classroom or navigating city streets, our intuition is there to guide us. Can we help students develop a stronger connection with their intuition? Instead of forcing them into specific ways of thinking and knowing based on narrow curriculums and standardized tests, could we allow them to take risks and see how their gifts and talents carry them through? Could they begin to identify their own areas of need instead of being told what they are?

3. On Teaching and Learning

Sayuri: As the aesthetician you're the DJ. You're leading the program. You're guiding the customer service relationship from the moment you say hello to thank you, goodbye. A lot of the students are scared and worried that they don't know how to do certain things. I say to them, 'look, you're just learning what I'm teaching you and I'm training you to do a certain skill and I want to see a certain result.' The evolution of watching a student get it, the whole eureka, the it moment, it's so interesting because it comes in different ways for people and I realize that when a person says they don't like it, it's actually because they don't understand it. My job is to teach them how to fill in the blanks and once

you learn that process you don't have to worry about it anymore it will become second nature. It will become a part of you. I tell my students that they have a secret decoder ring and that's your education. It's our way of learning how to guide that experience. It's allowing someone that's scared an opportunity to find peace in their own self-confidence.

Each experience is so completely different even though it's the same because the action of waxing is the same. What makes this trade organic is that you don't know what the client's been doing when they come to see you. You don't know what they've been eating or exposed to, drugs they've been taking and that can also affect the experience or the way that we predict. That's the x factor. The client is the x factor for us. The process of customer service relations from hello to goodbye is a process I teach to my students and I said one of the things about this education that makes it so different is that you have to be aware of every detail at every moment, every time. From what you are doing as the actual process to the reality of being in the moment that you have to be aware of. You have to be aware of the moment. That's why it's exhausting. It's kind of like being a cop. A cop has to be aware all the time but I think it's the heightened level of safety that you have to be aware of for each client. It's that heightened awareness that I want my students to have when they are working.

I think that's what's so successful about the beauty industry is that we make them salon ready. We prepare them to be salon ready and I can pride myself on that and say that at least the student's I know I can predict what I taught them. We understand the imprints of habit but my whole thing is that it has to continue to be interesting and it can't just be a habit because it gets boring and redundant. At least in the beauty industry when an educator stops working in the industry it becomes that mundane textbook education and that's a disservice to the student. Every educator should have experience working in the chair, at the salon, or wellness center. To have that life experience is so valuable to the classroom setting and I think that's true in any kind of setting. It's interesting to have a teacher that's still learning because it shows that their ego is not bigger than themselves and they have to continue to be better and learn and strive and adapt. That is one of the things that I learned a lot from. With both vocational and traditional education I learned to never stop learning, never stop reflecting, never stop growing, and never stop asking why.

Kay: How can we improve education?

Sayuri: Education has never been fair but I think you can make it better if you let teachers become experts in what they want to be an expert in. Why don't they let teachers become experts in the areas that they really give a fuck in? The new system of the CPS should be a set of rotating teachers for a handful of schools. Teachers should become their own independent valued learner so that

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schools can hire out the best teachers that they want in order to come in. So for example, if I'm an expert in waxing they pay me to be an expert in what I do. When it comes to a CPS teacher, if they are the best in math or social studies, they should pay for that blocked time but make teachers interchangeable. If they are young and mobile and don't mind going to 5 different schools a week or make guest appearances, why not give them the freedom to teach the same shit over and over again but at different schools so different kids get more exposure to different people.

Then each would be responsible for what they're learning because they're going to use it. You want to give the responsibility to the person who loves and wants to teach a certain subject they have expertise in. Every school in Chicago better be vying for that teacher to come and teach those kids that course. Teachers can teach other teachers so they can support the person who wants to teach that subject matter too. Each school is in some way it's own island but it has the right people to guide the ship to teach on a daily basis.

You keep the learning community growing and the teacher keeps learning too. Teachers should be experts in their industry or whatever they're choosing to teach. If they love kids they should learn the subject matter so they can teach it that easily. If you took the curriculum away from me I could still teach it. That's how well I know my subject matter. There is some improvisation when it comes to teaching, but if you know the information well enough you could still teach it even with your eyes closed and you're not afraid to teach it and you're not stressed out. You build a community of other teachers to teach the same subject matter. Have it be the academy of grammar school educators, the academy of music school educators, whatever. It could almost be like the house of Chanel. It becomes it's own identity.

Kay: But there's no continuity from the day to day.

Sayuri: So what? Kids have to learn to adapt. They can have one homeroom teacher that's the same and do like 10-minute blocks in between. How's everybody doing? Have a snack, go to recess.

Kay: What about building community?

Sayuri: It is building community. It's building a global, international, Chicago wide community of teachers that understand the different dynamics of different schools because there are different communities with different needs. They become better teachers because they have to learn to adapt to each scenario. That's what makes you an expert. You're an expert if you can do a fox on a box on a rock in a house- that's why I'm an expert at waxing. I can do it in

a garage, in a cardboard box, as long as I have the skills and tools I need as a professional.

Kay: How do you teach people to traverse different communities?

Sayuri: You teach people the skill so well that they can then pay attention to the now. When I set up my station I know where everything is at. I'm prepped, all my ducks are in a row, and I know where all my stuff is at all times.

Kay: What makes a teacher exceptional?

Sayuri: A teacher can go into every moment of every classroom at any given time and reach the students for that moment in the time they are with them. It's an art. It's a being. it's a knowledge. It's a knowing. It's the moment of the it moment. When you are an expert at what you do you surrender to the moment of the spiritual, divine moment of every moment if you choose to see it that way. But if you are an expert you can enjoy every moment.

Kay: So what makes you a good teacher?

Sayuri: I love to learn and through my professional experience I learned that I am good at certain things. I was able to integrate the loves of my life whether it was learning, theatrics of meeting random people, the art of waxing or whatever I do, the art of application, but I feel like all my senses get equally stimulated at the same time in my job. I'm always excited and always aware of what's going on for the most part. I don't feel like I'm actually at work but I don't feel like I'm actually working because I love what I do.

I think everyone should have something like that and I think everyone should find what they really want to do. You just have to invest in yourself to find out what it is and what you can do, and what skill set you can contribute to society. That's where the greater good comes in. That's the gift you give life- what you're good at. You become your own entertainer and it becomes so much fun.

4. Building the Future

Kay: If you could pass on some life lessons what would those be?

Sayuri: I asked this cab driver to give me his 10 second philosophy and he said, "In my country we believe that every person is born with a certain amount of breaths and what you choose to do with your breaths is your choice but that's all you get, so use them wisely." That had a profound affect on me when I quit smoking because I realized I couldn't waste my breath on smoking. I thought

that was something I should do to prolong my life since I was a pretty heavy smoker and that helped me. But at the same time my dad has this whole wisdom behind the reason why he smokes because that's his signal for God to know where he is and I think that's kind of cute.

My dad said my education belongs to me, it's my responsibility, it's my identity, it's my confidence and who I am and who I want to be, who I will be. It's almost like education is the ever-flowing river of love and knowledge and the ocean of wisdom that I think religious people speak of. Because it's a constant living. I think it is most valuable to continuously question what's going on around you to constantly redefine yourself. Keep yourself in the now and current as possible. Learn from whoever you meet because each person has something valuable to teach you. People are arbitrary but they all have equal value to you if you learn from each person. I think the wisdom from being Japanese is the honor, the respect. My mom would always say each person is very valuable. Don't ever be afraid to clean the toilet or be embarrassed to work as hard as you do because each level is important. So if you are ever a manager or a business owner you can start to actually have sympathy or empathy for someone who is doing the work that you used to do. It becomes an honor to do those things.

Right now is an interesting time historically where there is a calling in the universe for change and whatever the change can be swayed or manipulated we actually have the responsibility to be great for the next generation of kids that are coming. We are laying down the roadmaps for kids and what they're going to be exposed to and what we consider fair, what we consider kind, what we consider the best of our generation, our country and right now we're not doing too good. We're going a little futile, a little crazy, a little backwards and hopefully we can go forwards quickly and excel into it flawlessly, effortlessly but with every revolution or rebellion you have to have the next plan of what's going to happen and even if it's in theory or hypothetical you've got to have a plan.

There has to be a conscience, a softness, empathy, and compassion to certain degrees when you are trying to understand the woes of what's happening to the American dream. It's changing and a lot of people are scared because they thought they were doing the right thing by going to school or finding jobs and working. But now we have these problems because people can't support their dreams any more. To tell someone that they can't support their dream anymore because the economy crashed and jobs don't exist and it wasn't even their fault and now they have to find a completely new skill set in order to survive- it's really scary. It makes you feel like no wonder there's so much stress and heaviness because unemployment is very burdensome. There's nothing better than having a paycheck with your name on it even if it's not a lot of money. It's nice to feel like I can afford that and that's what I feel education is supposed to do. Not just give you a paycheck but a life; a sense of liberty, the

pursuit of happiness…isn't that what every American is supposed to be allowed to have? What does that mean now? It's sad because if you believe there is a God, the people in charge of perpetuating this unequal system will be judged. Their kids are in really good schools because they can afford it. If you can afford $325,000 to pay for your kids to go to private schools why can't we implement that type of teaching in the CPS? It's a democracy we should have a system of schooling that seems to work for other rich kids, why not bring it to the every man? Doesn't every man deserve to learn what's considered covenant?

The Reflex

"And when I speak, I don't speak as a Democrat. Or a Republican. Nor an American. I speak as a victim of America's so-called democracy. You and I have never seen democracy - all we've seen is hypocrisy. When we open our eyes today and look around America, we see America not through the eyes of someone who has enjoyed the fruits of Americanism. We see America through the eyes of someone who has been the victim of Americanism. We don't see any American dream. We've experienced only the American nightmare." – Malcolm X

"I've always resented the smug statements of politicians, media commentators, corporate executives who talked of how, in America, if you worked hard you would become rich. The meaning of that was if you were poor it was because you hadn't worked hard enough. I knew this was a lie, about my father and millions of others, men and women who worked harder than anyone, harder than financiers and politicians, harder than anybody if you accept that when you work at an unpleasant job that makes it very hard work indeed."- Howard Zinn

There is an infinite amount of wisdom in the earth, in our experiences, and the experiences of those yet to come. The society in which we live in now speaks towards the lessons of our moments and we cannot allow our systems of schooling to place a value on our personal truths and our knowledge. The evolution of our humanity depends on our ability to make sense of the world we live in and to pass on the wisdom of our experiences so that the footprints we tread on this earth are not forgotten. The accounts of our ancestors, their struggles, their joy, their wisdom should be considered sacred and they should

not judged or criticized based on a corrupted ideology of an American dream.

Can we teach towards instilling sacred knowledge?

H. The Final Reflex

1. Lessons on Teaching

High stakes testing separates the "good" from the "bad" schools. After the sorting and distribution of stanine scores, retention of students, and determination of probation lists, categories of functionality and dysfunctionality, normalcy and deviance that label students, schools, neighborhoods, and their teachers are created (Lipman, 2011, p. 157). Public schools, teachers and students are publicly shamed by school districts that make their "failure" visible by putting schools on probation (Lipman, 2011). But what does this accomplish? It creates a culture of control and undermines the learning process and reverts back to what Paulo Freire considers the banking method of education (1970) in which the teacher is there to fill the empty vessel of the student. Teaching to the test is shoving information down a kid's throat, pouring sugar on the brain and slowly diminishing the ability of kids to think for themselves. This banking method undermines the idea of education for social mobility and human development and students become the products of carefully controlled educational processes to fulfill the desired outcomes based on the interest of the state.

According to Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, society should be driven by the goals of the individual for personal growth. The objectives of society and individuals do not involve making one the means to the realization of the other and it means that the state exists only because its citizens exist; society exists only because of individuals.

Makiguchi argues that the growth of the individual brings about a flourishing, fulfilling growth of the national society (1930). Not only does the banking method undermine the educational process, but it is dehumanizing to the teacher and the students who need to be prepared to inherit the future.

Freire (1970) said:

> For apart from inquiry apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry, human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (p. 72).

Education plays a big part of the process of dehumanization and the breakdown of humanity. While the students are often the victims of this cyclical model of this dehumanization, we must acknowledge that it was the teacher who was first dehumanized. Current attacks on teacher education look to ensure the process continues.

The neoliberal agenda promotes human capital development as the primary goal. Education is an investment so that the individual can become more marketable and to better compete in the labor market. Erich Fromm said,

> Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit, considering his position and the situation on the personality market. He is alienated from himself, from his fellow men and from nature. His main aim is profitable exchange of his skills, knowledge, and of himself, his "personality package" with others who are equally intent on a fair and profitable exchange. Life has no goal except the one to move, no principle except the one of fair exchange, no satisfaction except the one to consume (p. 97)

I often why students were being programmed to be below average. I realize it is

because it is easy and profitable to have a society of people whose main identity is one of a consumer, in which the energy of life is traded for the exchange of goods.   There is going to be a new wave of people who struggle one in which our humanity will have to recover from.

How do we prioritize our identities?   By vocation and then by if we are loving, nurturing, compassionate people?   I once entered a conversation with someone by asking the question, "so what do you do?" I was met with something along the lines of "I really don't like that question because I have friends who don't have jobs but they are artists, but don't make money and I wouldn't say they did nothing."   I liked that response.   Why was I asking him what he did?   Did I want to know how he made money or did I want to know how he spent his time?   I decided that I was more curious about how he spent his time and in general I am more curious about what people do with their time anyways.   I've flipped my question when meeting new people.   I ask 'how do you spend your time?' and some people think it's a weird question, but I'm never going to please everyone so whatever.   But I think it forced me to be more thoughtful of how I approach someone and about how I prioritize identifiers.   How we make money vs. how we choose to spend our time requires very different responses and results in a different dialogue.

Teaching in these times isn't a middle of the road position.   Are some teachers run of the mill, do the job and go home?   Absolutely.   Do they need to be teaching?   Probably not.   We need to select better candidates.   But it's hard

to separate the good from the bad when all teachers are getting dumped on. Why not let teachers teach? Set them free and see what they can do in their classrooms with their students. When schools are squashing creativity, squashing "bad" behavior or anyone that is out of line, teachers need to be vigilant in making sure that the rules being instituted are justified. How can we conform to rules that aren't right and why would we?

This profession isn't just about transferring knowledge, but allowing kids to develop wisdom by providing learning experiences. Freire said:

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity 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 (1970, p. 34).

Being a teacher is being able to model learning and working with students towards a common future. We need new criteria for what the world should be like and reimagine schools as spaces to prepare the children with the tools and skills they need to build the dreams of their future. As teachers, it is our job to help students along their paths to greatness.

Teaching is an art. It's a knowing. It's being in the moment. Teachers know the skills of their trade so well that they can teach anywhere. Teaching is about modeling learning. Teachers need not forget that they are human beings with other interests outside of teaching that need to be nurtured. What is it like to have a teacher that is still learning? The learning community should be constantly growing and professional developments should inspire creativity and

growth in our teachers so that there is constant evolution. Teachers should be engaged.

2. Lessons on Learning

Learning comes with experience. There is a difference between observing and actually being a part of the world. As an intellectual it's easy to be a nomad wandering about in your own head, pondering ideas, life, wondering if happenstance is really just coincidence, or if there is some cosmic magic in the air. With the internet its even easier not to engage the world in a physical way. It's easy to live life vicariously through a computerized perception, to engage with others voyeuristically, knowing, but not knowing. At the end of the day you learn by doing.

There is a collective process that allows us to learn from one another. We can learn by listening to the opinions and ideas of others. It is an honor for someone to tell you their story or to be allowed into their home. While we can learn from the mistakes of others, sometimes we need to make the mistakes ourselves in order to learn the lesson.

As an experiential learner I feel like the title of my autobiography would be *The Hard Way: A life of lessons by Kay Fujiyoshi*. Participatory experiences are not always about success. Life isn't always about success. Sometimes it's about falling on your face. In my case, I feel like I spend most of my time on my face because I need to be struck by humility over and over again. But it's the

experience of falling down and getting back up. We can land on our feet, but we need to take risks. Experience makes us who we are. Life is about taking risks, having some skin in the game, going out getting dirty once in awhile and learning the hard way.

What if we provided students these types of experiences but gave them the safety net that allowed them to see that failure isn't fatal. Failure is part of life sometimes, but it is something we experience on our terms, not because the rules and playing field were biased against us. On a personal level, if we are only here for a short time, we must ask ourselves what we want to experience on this earth while we're here? We learn through these experiences and we learn through what we were willing to go through and what the journey entailed and what it took to turn the ship around. Wisdom comes out of experience. Self-exploration and learning is allowing ourselves to have those experiences and there are always multiple avenues of learning.

Learning is also passed on by familial wisdom. People are living totem poles of our past and they help us understand our DNA and provide a compass to navigate this plane of existence. A lot of my life lessons are embedded in my relationships with my elders because they were my guides and modeled ways of understanding and being in the world. I still look to the wisdom of my mother when I have trouble figuring life out for myself. I may or may not listen, but nonetheless I seek her guidance and understanding. I honor the perspectives of those who came before me.

Learning takes place in happiness. For stance, I enjoy flowers and gardening so I learned how to arrange flowers by learning about space, texture, and color. I learned more about botany through gardening and flower arranging than I ever did in a science class because I never paid attention to the book, the worksheets, or my teacher. In my older age I realize I love science but my ACT score doesn't reflect that at all. In fact that score is probably worse than a chimpanzee. Anyhow, I'm bolder now in what I learn about because my passions, interests, and what makes me happy drives me to try something new.

Learning is lifelong and school is only an institutionalized way of experiencing it so why don't we make it enjoyable because life is short? Schools should be fun. One thing I am good at is having fun. In fact I don't do well in settings that are deplorable and I easily check out. Even in my adult years I find it extremely difficult to be serious during classes or meetings where I am not engaged. It is nothing personal towards instructors or facilitators, but I don't think we should automatically assume that people should be engaged just because you are stuck in a room together. Why am I there if I am being talked at? Couldn't we have done this over a podcast? During the last session of a graduate school course the professor was going into his final words for the semester and I got distracted and started drawing pictures. Then a fellow classmate started adding to my drawing and before I knew it I was trying to choke down these fits of laughter and was completely unsuccessful. The professor stopped in the middle of his speech and said, "are you two seriously

passing notes during my end of the semester speech?" Technically no, they were not notes they were pictures, but whatever it was we were caught. Woops. I am not proud of my actions, nor of my lack of professionalism, but sometimes fun is irresistible.

Spaces of learning should be fun. The classroom should be fun, it should be interesting. It should be enjoyable for students and teachers. Where did the excitement for learning go? Classrooms involve a lot of noise and chaos. Mrs. Foxwood and Mrs. Shepherd described it as a 3 ring circus and they loved the creative outcomes that ensued. Engaging students in a learning experience requires fun, which can be measured by smiles, laughter, and noise. Fun and interesting should be part of the learning objective and maybe other learning objectives may have different outcomes as well.

3. Moving Forward

What if we focused on creativity and asked students to be solutionaries? How can we harness creativity to inspire excitement about life and learning again? Students need to learn how to use their own heads. Every child has a talent and part of teaching is helping them develop that talent. Teachers should provide students with the opportunity to make their own decisions. Teaching is having high expectations, embracing different learning styles, collaborating with colleagues, providing life experiences, inspiring creative and

critical thinking. Education is transformative if you can teach kids how to fly. From tree to tree, teacher to teacher.

The creative learning process also allows the arts to enter. How do we engage the creative process? Creativity forces us to ask if there is a different way? Albert Einstein said that we cannot solve problems with the same mentality in which they were created so we must force ourselves to think outside of the box. Now is the time to really think about a different way of being in the world and part of being human is continuously defining and redefining ourselves so what kind of people do we want to be if we can be anything?

Learning is multidimensional. No one is the same so what is each person's specialty? What talents are we lucky enough to be surrounded by? Makiguchi never thought of children as empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge prescribed for them by adults. He believed that children arrived in the classroom already possessing experiences, knowledge and a capacity to learn. His philosophy was to guide the learning process, equipping the learner with methods of research. Education was not a piecemeal merchandizing of information but it was meant to enable the acquisition of the methods for each individual learner (1981). He believed that education would provide the keys to unlock the vault of knowledge. He didn't want to encourage students to appropriate the intellectual treasures uncovered by others, but wanted to enable students to undertake their own process of discovery and invention (1981). Education can develop our brain capacity so that we can be

independent thinkers, and we can learn to trust our own process, our own knowledge, and our gut.   If we believe that everyone is valuable, doesn't everyone deserve a chance to fully develop?

In *The Alchemist* Paulo Coehlo (1988) writes, "Intuition is the sudden immersion of the soul into the Universal flow of life, where the histories of all men are linked and where we can know everything, because everything is written." What if we approached students with an understanding that they are born with some DNA that is embedded with experience? What if we helped them get in touch with their intuition by setting aside time to blank everything out and meditate? What if we questioned how our emotions, food, others around us, and space affected us? What if we acknowledged that transfer of energy and its affect on us and others? Could we go from needing evidence and proof to believing things just are?   How can we sense or feel that something just is? Could we learn to live in our moments mindfully, embracing them for the exact moment that it is and not what it could've been or what it can be?

This journey has brought me to the following questions: what does it mean to be a good person? How many people think life is about personal gain over the whole of humanity? We only have so many breaths so how will we choose to use them? We only have so much time on earth before we expire so what does it mean to be picky about how we use our time? Have we forgotten that we are all on the same ride? As an inhabitant of this planet, I believe that we must revisit the fundamentals of humanity. I need to be reminded that we are

placed on earth to overcome obstacles placed in our paths and that every discovery we make is an affirmation of faith. I must remember that there is a lot of goodness, beauty, an joy in living during these times and that most importantly love can prevail if we make that our intention. We must move forward in the world to become great people who give back, who love, who help heal the world, rather than people who are enslaved to a job. There is hope as long as we don't give up.

Conclusion

Noah spent 40 days on an arc until God was done hitting the reset button on earth. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness with a bunch of complainers trying to escape from Egypt. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by the Satan. I spent 6 years in the wilderness of graduate school. Somehow my journey does not seem as epic. Nevertheless, this dissertation is partially an account of my process of transformation in the wilderness and a testimony of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual journey. Four years ago I embarked on an epic journey with an unknown destination. My road seemed pitch black and all I could see was what I needed to. But the road was also beautiful and full of people who walked and talked with me along the way. The journey taught me to appreciate the experience of struggle, of solitude, of wrestling with myself, and energized me with the strength and support of good

people. What I experienced along the way was love and love took shape in forms I was not accustomed to recognizing.

   After listening to the stories and experiences of educators and activists, I am compelled to believe that the best way to prepare teachers for urban spaces is to begin conversations and build foundations on love. As a romantic, fed by Disney notions of happily ever after, and after finding out the hard way that love does not exist as it does in the movies, I've come to acknowledge that the practice of love is more than words or expressions of feelings. It is a practice that requires commitment, character, and faith. I think we have to think beyond the conversation of fighting against injustice because we need to put forth a different way of living in the moment. Can we transform the world by transforming ourselves by practicing loving kindness in our daily walks of life? What could education look like if we developed strong practices of love and were intentional about loving practice?

V: A School for Love

"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive." – Dalai Lama

A. Introduction

Love is a universal concept, but how often do we discuss what it actually is, looks like, or how it is practiced? Love is found in sacred religious texts, in philosophy, literature, movies, is the inspiration for music and dance. Love can be found in familial structures, friendships, and intimacy, and gets replicated throughout time across generations, color, gender, culture, religion, and income brackets. Love is everywhere yet our world can seem so loveless at times. Erich Fromm says:

> The first thing we have to learn is that love is an art, just as living is an art; if we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art. Maybe here lies the answer to the question of why people in our culture try so rarely to learn this art, in spite of their obvious failures: in spite of the deep-seated craving for love, almost everything else is considered to be more important than love: success, prestige, money, power - almost all our energy is used for learning of how to achieve these aims, and almost none to learn the art of loving (1956, p. 5).

We live in a society in which love is marketed to us from a very young age and yet in our adult lives, how often do we find ourselves or encountering others who act out of positions of power, ego, privilege, or hatred? Could it be because we in fact have no idea what love actually means?

Love has been marketed to me since I was a young child. Disney taught me about happily ever after and I grew up thinking that when I found my prince

charming, ever after meant happiness. Once you find someone to marry, everything is all good and there are no worries. Disney is evil. Because relationships are all fun and goofy in the beginning and then as the days, weeks, and years go by, the luster wears off and your goggles come off, and you have to realize that all your little fantasies of who this person was or could be was an illusion and now you're like, who is this dude on my couch? Now what? Disney owes everyone a follow up movie that tells kids how to work out the situation when Cinderella gets fed up from doing all the laundry, cleaning, and cooking, gets a PhD and is having an identity crisis because she can't quite figure out how she ended up with dude because she was tripping on that pumpkin ride with the mice and maybe inhaled a little too much fairy dust.

Love gets marketed so hard in film, music, and biannual holidays of Valentines and Sweetest day. Love makes so much money in flowers, candy, gifts, trips, weddings, jewelry, heart shaped anything from diamond pendants to stuffed pizzas. You can shop for love online for the low price of $19.99 a month. You can invest in the possibility of love if you sign up for a membership to any of these dating services that have specific target interests- Chemistry, Match, E-Harmony, Christian singles, J-Date, etc. they are all services that can help people find love for a price. So what happens to love when our most intimate, sacred relationships can be commodified and sold to us?   Have we really learned to love or have we learned to exchange it like we do in the market? Do

we honor it more than the price that was placed on it? Has true love been sold out?

Unfortunately, I believe Erich Fromm is right. Our culture has prioritized the attainment of success, prestige, money, and power over the achievement of being loving people. But what if our society revolved around love? What if policies were written to create more loving environments? Would it not change the rules by which we engage one another? Would our government still handle conflicts with war and violence? Would corporations still pimp the earth and sell off her resources? Would schools continue to ensure our children replicated the lot of their parents? Or could we begin to reimagine the possibilities of another world? Could we begin to heal the wounds of the past with deep treatments of love? Love can open our eyes and hearts to see and feel our interconnectedness. Maybe we can begin to prioritize care, commitment, respect, and nurture our relationships before wondering how we can attain success, prosperity, and trophy partners. Love is an art and an intentional practice and in response to our current predicament in society, we should prepare teachers through schools for love.

B. Love Redefined

Love as I've learned it has mostly been relational but love is not contingent upon a relationship to a specific person. According to Fromm, it is an attitude, an ordination of character which determines how one relates to the

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world as a whole, not toward one object of love (1956). Love is more of a

decision, a promise, and a commitment. Rather than basing love on a feeling

which could come and go, love is an action that involves judgment and

decision. If love were only a feeling, there would be no real foundation for the

promise of loving someone forever (1956). In order to achieve this type of love,

Fromm suggests that one must overcome narcissism. He describes this condition

as:

> The narcissistic orientation is one in which one experiences as real only
> that which exists within oneself, while the phenomena in the outside world
> have no reality in themselves, but are experienced only from the
> viewpoint of their being useful or dangerous to one. The opposite pole to
> narcissism is objectivity; it is the faculty to see other people and things *as
> they are*, objectively, and to be able to separate this *objective* picture
> from a picture which is formed by one's desires and fears (1956, p. 109).

Love begins by acknowledging the self and the selfish desires of the heart that

can be wrapped up in the expectations, desires, and fears within our loving

relationships. This process of extracting or overcoming narcissism is a hefty goal.

Thich Nhat Hanh also talks about how there is much work to be done with the

self in order for us to be loving. He says:

> Love is the capacity to take care, to protect, to nourish. If you are not
> capable of generating that kind of energy toward yourself- if you are not
> capable of taking care of yourself, of nourishing yourself, of protecting
> yourself- it is very difficult to take care of another person. In the Buddhist
> teaching, it's clear that to love oneself is the foundation of the love of
> other people. Love is a practice. Love is truly a practice.

We must begin by looking inward and having the courage to look in the mirror

and embrace ourselves exactly as we are in all our imperfections. Love begins

by being able to love one's self by nurturing and caring for the self and then

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can we begin to care for, protect, and nurture others. We must first learn to be

honest with ourselves, find love for ourselves, and then can we share love for

others.

Love is also not contingent upon the other person being lovable. I will be

the first to admit that there are some people who I find easier to love than

others. Especially when there are people you don't get along with, rub you the

wrong way, or are just difficult, like my downstairs neighbor- I hate that guy. But

Thich Nhat Hanh says that:

> The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves "inside the skin" of the other. We "go inside" their body, feelings, and mental formations, and witness for ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their suffering. We must become one with the subject of our observation. When we are in contact with another's suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us. Compassion means, literally, "to suffer with."

So maybe the guy downstairs is a miserable person who hates his life and

existence and just wants to be left alone in what he thinks is a sound proof cave.

Maybe he's autistic and has super hearing powers and can't stand the sound of

footsteps above his head. It's hard to find compassion for him, but I try to be

nice, I try to be understanding and I haven't gone off on him like I've really

wanted to. Love is not an easy practice, but it's a practice. Something we

learn by doing even if the lessons have to be repeated over and over again.

But what could classrooms look like if we approached all our students with

this level of care? What if empathy were to take on forms in which we could

truly suffer with our students? Would we not be prompted to end the suffering of

others in a much more urgent way? Would we not do all that was humanly possible, explore all routes and options, and either find or create the solutions to end suffering? If we engaged love in an intentional practice, maybe the world could heal.

C. Teacher Preparation in the 21st Century

1. The philosophy

Schools for love do not exist because everyone assumes that we will know how to love instinctively (hooks, 2000). While there is evidence to the contrary, society largely accepts that the family is the primary school for love and those who do not experience love in familial structures are expected to experience love in romantic relationships (hooks, 2000). However, Fromm points out that love isn't something natural and it requires discipline, concentration, patience, faith, and the overcoming of narcissism. It isn't a feeling, it is a practice (1956). To develop this practice Jing Lin explains (2006):

> A school in the 21st century is envisioned to be a school for love. The school for love is built on the belief that human beings are inextricably linked by the energy of love, which gives life to all people and all existences in the universe. Love is the energy, information, matter and spirit that interlink the spirits and souls of all existences. As human beings, we are by nature kind and loving, we are part of the universe's loving energy. As love is the energy that creates the universe, love is also the energy that sustains human existence. The fact that we fall into incessant conflicts and hatred is due to a lack of understanding this essence in ourselves (xiii).

If we prepare teachers in schools for love, we can build a foundation in which we gather people who believe in the love that Lin describes and create schools

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in which children learn in love centered environments. Can we begin to imagine living in a way that transcends difference and focuses on the interconnectedness of spirits and souls based on the energy of love? Could we begin to address our conflicts and hatred if we started to acknowledge that we've been misguided to believe that we were anything but love to begin with?

2. Loving inspires Knowing

In the school for love, "knowing is loving," as Palmer (1993, cited in Lin, 2006) eloquently states:

> The goal of a knowledge arising from love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds. A knowledge born of compassion aims not at exploiting and manipulating creation but at reconciling the world to itself. The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out to love. Here, the act of knowing is the act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community, and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds. The origin of knowledge is love . . . A knowledge that springs from love will implicate us in the web of life; it will wrap the knower and the known in compassion, in a bond of awesome responsibility as well as transforming joy; it will call us to involvement, mutuality, accountability (pgs. 8-9).

Knowledge derived from love reconstructs the world as we know it and brings together the wisdom and knowledge from a collective of broken and imperfect people. Knowledge is no longer treated as something to be consumed but as an application to the conflicts and challenges of the earth. Love helps us see that the knowledge we create can be used to heal, build, and embrace rather than to compete, profit, and destroy. When we enter into spaces in which

knowledge is co-created, we practice humility in acknowledging that our own ability to understand and perceive are limited but that collectively we are rich and abundant in resources. Our ways of constructing knowledge from a loving practice can rebuild a world in which our lives and stories are woven together. By choosing to build our schools for love, we are not leaving our future to chance; rather, we are building our future for hope.

3. *The Role of Teachers*

Jin Ling sees the role of teachers as workers of the heart and the soul (2006). To do this work, teachers must develop an awareness of self and love in order to pass on the foundations of love to future generations. It is with the intention that they would be able to embrace all students with love, and to see nature and the whole universe with a loving eye (Ling, 2006). Teachers aim to work with a vision, one that will bring true changes to society and they see that human and environmental survival and prosperity are connected to their day-to-day work in the classroom.

Teachers first see life as a pursuit of love before they can develop a loving practice. Teachers are prepared to see their role in building a new world that will be peaceful and loving. The children they teach will be global citizens who will accept no other means except love and peaceful resolutions to problems, conflicts, and challenges. Teachers would be seen as peace workers and believe that love is the key to internal transformation, and internal changes will effect external changes. They teach children about the power they have if they

base their thoughts, speech, and deeds on the foundation of love because they themselves have experienced how that power can transform the world. They see the meaning of their work in expanding love, glorifying love, and sharing love with future generations. Teaching becomes sacred work.

D. Conclusion

But how do you tell kids who grow up in war zones, witness shootings, are exposed to drug addiction, prostitution, abuse, neglect, homelessness, and hopelessness who may not give a fuck about the person next to them that they are love, that others are loving, and that love is all that matters? Some of Chicago's neighborhoods are ridden with violence, gangs, corrupted by drugs and fast money, and left to rot in the toxicity created by a culture of disinvestment and disposability. How do you convince the children growing up in those neighborhoods that the energy of love can sustain us when the experiences of their realities have obliterated love? I believe love is the energy that sustains human existence but there is a love deficit and more people are removing themselves off of this earth or are taken out by someone else's anger. The hatred and conflict in the world is an incredible force and we see it working through the callous reactions to shootings and murders, the exploitation of people for profit, and the pillaging of the earth for all its resources. There is a disregard for life that permeates our society and instead of valuing our human existence and relationship to the earth, we value the reality that has been

packaged and sold to us, teaching us that our life worth can be measured by our consumption mobility. We must reimagine education and cultivate a new discourse in education, in a fundamental and grand way, on how we want to live as a human race. We must also be intentional in creating spaces for healing. Love in these times must be bold.

While this love philosophy and practice sounds kind of cultish to me, I really believe that love can change the world, if we develop intentional, disciplined practices, and why not start with schools for love. The road ahead will not be easy, but we must begin to try new things and have the faith and courage to make the world a better place. Erich Fromm says:

> To have faith requires courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment. Whoever insists on safety and security as primary conditions of life cannot have faith; whoever shuts himself off in a system of defense, where distance and possession are his means of security, makes himself a prisoner. To be loved, and to love, need courage, the courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern – and to take the jump and to stake everything on these values (p. 116).

At the end of this journey, I am more confident now that we must be willing to take risks if we want future generations to heal and build on something greater. Love requires courage and faith to leave behind all that we once knew and walk into the darkness of the unknown, but along the way we'll find ourselves, each other, and the greatness we were all destined for.

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Education

Ph.D. University of Illinois-Chicago. Educational Policy Studies- Social Foundations- Dissertation Defense: June 18, 2013

M.Ed. University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. Educational Policy Studies. 2005

B.A.   University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. English/Secondary Education. 2003

Lane Technical H.S. Class of 1999

Certification
Standard Type 09: English/Language Arts

Teaching Experience
- English Teacher. North Lawndale College Preparatory High School   August 2012-January 2013
- Courses Taught:
     o AP Literature and Composition
     o AP Language and Composition
     o Elective: Love, Revolution, Ourselves, Our Journey
- Adjunct Faculty. College of Education, Concordia University: Spring and Fall 2012
     o Action Research for Practitioners
     o Contemporary Issues in Curriculum and Practice (Spring 2012)
- Teaching Assistant. College of Education: Race, Ethnicity and Education   Spring 2011
- Teaching Assistant. College of Education: Introduction to Educational Policy   Fall 2010
- Teaching Assistant. Asian American Studies   Spring 2010

Department: Introduction to Asian American
Studies

- Teaching Assistant. Honors College: Education and   Fall 2009
Social Justice
- Teaching Assistant. College of Education: Spring 2009
Introduction to Educational Policy
- English Teacher. Lake View High School   2005-2008
- Courses taught:
    o Survey Literature
    o American Literature- team leader
    o British Literature
    o World Literature
    o Topics in Literature
- Teacher of Special Education. Jefferson Middle   2003-2004
School

Work Experience

- Chicago Grassroots Curriculum Taskforce   July 2013
- Gethsemane Garden Center   2010-present
- Sweets and Savories   2005
- UIUC Music Library   2003

Presentations

- Creating Grassroots Education: A Collaborative   Spring 2013
Forum- Teachers and Counselors Experiences and
Perspectives
- Chicago Teacher's Union- Developing grassroots   Spring 2013
curriculum
- Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education   Spring 2013
Asian Americans on the Frontlines: Teacher Activists
on the Frontlines

- National Association for Multicultural Education   Fall 2012
  Conference- Respondent to "Bad Teacher"
- Teacher Education and Social Justice Conference-   Fall 2009
  Education and Yoga: Positioning the Mind, Body,
  and Spirit in Research
- American Education Studies Association- Building   Fall 2009
  Teacher Capacity through Social Justice
  Methodology

Research Experience

- Research/Graduate Assistant for Asian American   Spring 2011-Present
  Studies Department, UIC
  - o Organized a College Day event for Asian
    American students in Chicago Public Schools.
  - o Developed a network between Chicago
    Public Schools and the Asian American
    Studies Department at UIC.
  - o Developed a tutoring network between
    Chicago Public Schools and the College of
    Education through the AANAPISI grant.
  - o Developed relationships between UIC and
    Asian American community organizations
    working with multicultural youth.
- Research Assistant for Partnership READ, UIC   Fall 2008-Spring 2009
  - o Data analysis for Standards Based Change
    professional development sessions in
    Chicago Public Schools.
  - o Assisted during principal meetings by taking
    field notes and maintaining logistical duties.
- Research Assistant for Kevin Kumashiro, UIC   2007-2008
- Research Intern for the Progressive Policy Institute,   January 2005
  Washington D.C.

Volunteer Experience

- Organizer, Chicago Freedom School   2010
  - Organized a youth delegation for the US Social Forum

- Japanese American Citizens League   2010
  - Judge for the national speech contest

- Debate Coach, Lake View High School   2005-2007

- Japanese American Service Committee- volunteer   2000-2009

- Chicago Area Problem Solving   2000-2009
  - Judge for CPS competition

- Mikva Challenge   Summer 2005
  - Worked on evaluation system for yearly academic progress

Awards

- Dissertation and Travel Support Recipient- UIC   Fall 2011
  College of Education

- Japanese Fulbright Memorial Fund Recipient   2007

Publications

Fujiyoshi, K. Ride or get rode on: Battling for the soul of public education. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*. Expected Date of Publication: September 2013