

**Anecdotes and Afterthoughts: Literature as a Teacher's Curriculum**

BY

EDWARD PODSIADLIK III  
B.A., Saint Xavier University, 1990  
M.A., Purdue University, 1995  
M.A., St. Xavier University, 2004

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

William H. Schubert, Chair and Advisor, Curriculum and Instruction  
William Ayers, Curriculum and Instruction  
Ward Weldon, Educational Policy Studies  
Isabel Nunez, Concordia University  
Peter Hilton, St. Xavier University

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Edward A. Podsiadlik, my father, for instilling in me values of commitment, personal faith, and perseverance that continue to resonate within my thoughts and actions. Although he passed away in 1985, he continues to share in my life's journey as both companion and inspiration.

I thank Mildred Podsiadlik, my mother, for her unfailing trust and support in me throughout my life's endeavors. Her innate inner strength continues to both astound and inspire me.

I thank my brothers for being a presence in my life that always challenges me to be true to myself.

I acknowledge the colleagues and friends who have been an integral part of my work as a teacher. I am appreciative of Joyce Allen, Patricia Doherty, and Verna Goren for their beneficial advice and friendship. I am grateful for Delbert Nelson, David Plesic, and Ralph Goren for their encouragement, advice, and genuine interest in my ideas about teaching and learning.

I am grateful to my Ph.D. advisor, William H. Schubert, who encouraged and supported my journeys into literature as curriculum. Without his guidance and mentorship, the completion of this dissertation may never have happened. I am appreciative of my dissertation committee members, William Ayers, Peter Hilton, Isabel Nunez, and Ward Weldon, for their thought-provoking feedback and meaningful scholarly recommendations.

The quoted material used throughout this dissertation has been kept to a minimum rather than offered to anthologize. I used portions of diverse literature and selected quotes to illustrate points and to enhance personal reflection. Use here will not infringe on or effect the market for the original or for subsequent permissions sought from the copyright holder.

Finally, I thank my students. Our journeys together have been – and continue to be – both challenging and inspiring. It is an honor and a privilege to be a teacher. I hope that I have positively impacted and enriched the lives of my students half as much as they have influenced mine.

EP

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
I. PROLOGUE .....	1
A. Review of Literature .....	8
B. Phenomena of Inquiry .....	13
C. Methods.....	14
II. CHARACTER AS DOPPLEGANGER .....	16
<i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> , Stephen Crane	
A. Finding the path to the threshold of transformation.....	16
B. Passing through the threshold of illumination .....	33
C. Transitioning from personal epiphany to classroom practice .....	39
D. Topics for reflection.....	46
III. CHARACTER AS CONSCIENCE .....	49
<i>Les Miserables</i> , Victor Hugo	
A. Expelling the shadow and entering the light .....	51
B. Encountering oxymoron.....	59
C. Enduring conflicts of conscience .....	69
D. Topics for reflection .....	78
IV. CHARACTER AS NEMESIS).....	81
<i>American Idiot</i> (Billie Joe Armstrong)	
A. The road to the <i>Boulevard of Broken Dreams</i> .....	83
B. On the streets of shame .....	91
C. Wake me up <i>When September Ends</i> .....	102
D. Topics for reflection.....	110
V. DISCOURSE ONE .....	112
VI. DIALOGUE AS MEANING-MAKING .....	128
<i>Absolum, Absolum!</i> (William Faulkner)	
<i>Light in August</i> (William Faulkner)	
<i>The Sound and the Fury</i> (William Faulkner)	
A. Verisimilitude over verifiability.....	130
B. The dream-work of language .....	140
C. When a word is worth a thousand pictures .....	152
D. Topics for reflection.....	165
VII. DIALOGUE AS IRONY .....	169
<i>Seinfeld</i> scripts	
A. Relating one's fiction as reality .....	170
B. Discourse that makes the unreal real.....	181
C. When having nothing is the same as having everything .....	187
D. Topics for reflection.....	197

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
VIII. DIALOGUE AS A VEIL.....	201
<i>Frankenstein</i> (Mary Shelley)	
A. A veil of form and function.....	203
B. A veil of power .....	212
C. A veil of ethics .....	221
D. Topics for reflection.....	228
IX. DISCOURSE TWO .....	231
X. JOURNEY AS METAPHOR .....	247
<i>Odyssey</i> (Homer)	
A. Journey of inspiration.....	248
B. Journey of transformation .....	260
C. Journey of transcendence .....	271
D. Topics for reflection.....	278
XI. NIGHT AS METAPHOR.....	282
<i>Night</i> (Elie Wiesel)	
A. Undiscovered self.....	285
B. Metaphorical crucifixion.....	294
C. Descent into underworld .....	305
D. Topics for reflection.....	314
XII. DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AS METAPHOR.....	318
<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> (W.E.B. Du Bois)	
A. Identity and integrity discovered.....	320
B. Self-respect realized .....	329
C. Inner life acknowledged.....	338
D. Topics for reflection.....	349
XIII. DISCOURSE THREE.....	353
XIV. EPILOGUE.....	369
A. Personal hopes and future possibilities.....	369
B. Chapters One – Three: Character as doppelganger, conscience, and nemesis.....	370
C. Chapters Four – Six: Dialogue as meaning-making, irony, and veil .....	371
D. Chapters Seven – Nine: Metaphors of journey, night, and double- Consciousness .....	372
E. Directions for further inquiry .....	373
CITED LITERATURE .....	376
VITA .....	389

## SUMMARY

This qualitative study is a journey away from the *outer world* of teaching and into the *inner world* of spiritual, emotional, and oftentimes deeply personal realities, conflicts, and contradictions that lie beneath it. Integrating my life as an educator with excerpts from literature creates a variety of reflective entrypoints through which I explore the authentic intrinsic landscape that lies beneath the surface of my teacher identity. It is a landscape embedded with a plethora of aspirations, fears, and conflicts wherein the clash between ideals and realities simmers. Exploring the complexities and personal nature of educational practice in this way helps me to ascertain the intangible values, truths, and struggles that inspire, nourish, sustain, and sometimes threaten the intangible heart of my life as an educator.

Integral to this exploration are works of literature that I have used as an urban public school teacher in the middle school classroom. As my students are interacting with the text, I too am simultaneously engaged at cognitive, emotional, and autobiographical levels. Excerpts from these texts facilitate a reflective and aesthetic journey into the interior landscapes of my *self* as educator. By delving beneath my exterior ‘teacher mask,’ a collage of images, anecdotes, reflections, aspirations, and fears is exposed that sheds light on the inner consciousness that underlies my teaching. Integrating literature as it is taught in the classroom with how the same text is simultaneously resonating within me stirs up waves of struggles, contradictions, and conflicts. Many of the moral, pedagogical, and personal challenges and contradictions that inform and define who I am as an educator become illuminated.

## **SUMMARY (continued)**

Beneath quantitative data, bureaucratic demands, and Cartesian dualities resides the personal, emotional, psychological, and moral landscape of my identity. This is the space that both informs and defines the heart and soul of who I am as an educator. Here I confront underlying demands, dilemmas, and contradictions as I explore the ethical, spiritual, and intrinsic dimensions of my work as an educator. These aesthetic pathways of imagination, experience, and creativity are critical to the sort of introspection capable of inspiring personal and professional epiphanies. Hopefully reading this portrayal of literature, which has been a source of educational insight and imagination for me, will be of use to other educators as they reflect on their own teaching.

## I. PROLOGUE

What informs our identities as teachers? What defines us as educators? What interior realities, fears, and aspirations lie beneath our extrinsic concerns of quantitative assessments and bureaucratic demands? How can the spirit of our intrinsic identity as teachers be accessed when it is so often buried beneath the immediate physical, mental, and emotional demands of our profession? Where is the elusive talisman that can help us educators transcend the finite and measureable external landscape of teaching and learning? How can we educators move past the deterministic landscape and return to the intrinsic realities that inspire, nourish, sustain, and sometimes threaten the intangible heart of our lives as educators?

For me, these questions capture the tension I experience as a teacher somehow intrinsically trapped between reality and possibility. This qualitative study explores a journey away from the *outer world* of teaching and into the *inner world* of spiritual, emotional, and oftentimes deeply personal realities that lie beneath it. It is a journey into the landscape of a teacher's heart and mind wherein the clash between ideals and realities simmers and where primal ambiguities and conflicts converge. The purpose of this excursion is to deepen our understanding of the intricate complexities and highly personal nature of educational practice. The intention of this study, therefore, is not to ascertain linear knowledge, but to explore the underlying values, truths, and struggles that characterize the inner consciousness that underlies one's teaching. This exploration is not intended to categorize that which defines us as educators. Instead, it endeavors to unmask and meander through the realities that are buried beneath the externally-imposed constraints placed upon us. In this way, the journey intends to transcend single

dimensional perceptions of teaching and learning by constructing and reconstructing the multiple realities that constitute the immeasurable possibilities of our curriculum and instruction.

The journey I propose embodies both reflective and imaginative inquiry. Maxine Greene (1965) strongly advocated using these modes of exploration in the field of curriculum and instruction as a means to experience what she called the “existential innerness which escapes all formulas and sermons and cannot be realized by any public Dream” (p. 162). Building on her theory, the work of George Willis and William H. Schubert (1991) relied upon the arts as a source of reflective inquiry into the understanding of curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, Eliot Eisner’s (2002) work further legitimized the relationship between the intellectual and the aesthetic. Using literature as an aesthetic tool for reflective practice is critical to the journey I am proposing.

I have selected nine works of literature to facilitate this reflective and aesthetic journey into the interior landscapes of an educator. Each of the works selected is one that I have used as an urban public school teacher in the middle school classroom. One of my primary classroom goals is for students to understand that they are invited (and encouraged) to meander through the worlds which the authors have created. Through classroom discussions and projects, students are challenged to consider the layers of philosophical and moral meanings embedded in the texts and to ascertain the potential relevance to their own lives. As their teacher, I am simultaneously engaged in introspection as I reflect on the same books that my students are reflecting on.

As I am teaching literature, I continue learning from it as well. As my students



interact with the text, so too am I engaged on cognitive, emotional, and autobiographical levels. The notion of using autobiography as a mode of curriculum theorizing has been supported by Madeleine Grumet (1978) as a means to “provide connective tissue between inner and outer experience” (p. 301) and by William Pinar (1978) as a research strategy that “can serve to disclose more deeply one’s psychic and intellectual investment in educational institutions” (p. 323). By applying research strategies that are a composite of reflective and imaginary inquiry, literary analysis, and autobiographical experience, this study aims to paint a ‘portraiture’ of the metacognitive methods, processes and conflicts that embed the intrinsic nature of my *self* as educator (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997)

This exploration, born out of my twenty years’ experience as a middle school literature teacher, attempts to delve beneath my exterior ‘teacher mask’ by exposing a collage of images, anecdotes, reflections, aspirations, and fears that lies underneath. Each chapter of this study focuses on a separate piece of literature and uses extended excerpts as springboards for reflection and imagination. Autobiographical tangents tinged with relevant literary analyses are used to transcend external forms and functions into the multi-dimensional landscape that underlies my teaching and learning.

In their support of curriculum theorizing that relies on art, education, and autobiography, Willis and Schubert (1991) have noted that the outcome of such research is often “challenge, risk, and change” (p. 11). Similarly, a primary focus of this study is to illuminate some of the moral, pedagogical, and personal challenges and contradictions I struggle with as an educator on an intrinsic level. Integrating literature as it is taught in the classroom with how the same text is simultaneously resonating within

my mind and heart stirs up waves of struggles, contradictions, and conflicts. John Dewey (1943) wrote that the convergence of art with personal experience has the potential to evoke emotional ‘irritation’ and ‘transformation’ through which “the attitudes of the self are informed with meaning” allowing the self to “become aware of itself” (p. 487). What does this convergence look like? What could we learn from it? In what ways could journeying into these realms of intrinsic ‘irritation and transformation’ enlighten us as educators and contribute to the scholarship of curriculum and instruction? These questions support the focus of this current study.

The first three chapters channel Henry Fleming, Jean Val Jean, and St. Jimmy, protagonists of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), *Les Misérables* (1862), and *American Idiot* (2004) respectively. My reflections of teaching these novels mingle with my personal musings of the texts and their characters. When combined with autobiographical afterthoughts and aesthetic wonderings, an intrinsically personal, emotional, and psychological landscape emerges. The imaginative parallel between the fictional protagonists and myself as educator brings to life what Jerome Bruner (2004) called the ‘landscape of consciousness’ (p. 698). What Bruner called ‘autobiography as psychic geography’ (p. 703) emerges as a re-working of an inner reality which I propose defines and informs my identity as educator. In this way, these chapters aim to fulfill Greene’s (1995) ambition of utilizing the meaning-making capacity of the arts as a means “for perspective, for perceiving alternative ways of transcending and of being in the world, for refusing the automatism that overwhelms choice” (p. 142).

The second triad of chapters relies specifically on literary dialogue. The goal of these chapters is to further use autobiography and imaginative literature, as Janet Miller

(1998) proposed, “to disrupt rather than to reinforce static versions of our “selves” and our work as educators” (p. 151). Excerpts of dialogue taken from three William Faulkner novels I’ve used in the classroom are used to explore the capacity of words to define, shape, or destroy our beliefs and values on both real and surreal levels. To transcend the literal use of language into the intangible realm of contradiction and incongruity, sequences of dialogue from diverse *Seinfeld* scripts are examined. Finally, dialogue excerpts from Mary Shelley’s (1818) *Frankenstein* are used as examples of how the surface meaning of words often strongly conflicts with internal intentions or attitudes. Thus, literary dialogue is used to facilitate a journey from the real to the surreal, from the literal to the contradictory and incongruous, and from a surface view to an intrinsic vision. In this way, I hope to frame a landscape reflective of the kinds of interior realities, fears, aspirations, and conflicts that lie within my heart, mind, and soul.

The final set of chapters focuses on metaphors used throughout three texts that have been an integral piece of my middle school curriculum – for the students I teach and for my *self* as well. While my students are interacting with the conflicts, challenges and monsters that Odysseus faces in Homer’s *Odyssey*, as their teacher I am simultaneously facing my own professional and personal fears and obstacles. As my students and I read Elie Wiesel’s (1960) *Night*, his metaphorical words, symbols, gestures, and thoughts resonate deeply – albeit differently for my students than for myself. How I experience the memoir on a *personal* level cannot be entirely separated from how I present it to my students on a *professional* level. Similarly, as my students struggle with the political, economic, and moral injustices described by W.E.B. DuBois (1903) in *The Souls of Black Folk*, as an educator I too am challenged to make some sense of incidents wherein

integrity is attacked and intrinsic values are undermined based upon externals including race, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

In this way, the externally driven pedagogical aspects of teaching and learning are attached to the intrinsic realities, conflicts, aspirations, and values inherent within myself as teacher. The unique process of reflection and introspection utilized throughout this qualitative inquiry is designed to craft an understanding of how and why lessons are designed and delivered in particular ways. This course of reflection models the use of aesthetic and autobiographical means in a way that merges my professional act of teaching with my personal identity as an educator. My aim is for a better understanding of the complexity of curriculum and instruction to emerge.

My hope is that this journey will inspire other educators to further reflect upon the intrinsic realities of what it means to be a teacher. As a resource for pre-service teachers or as a reflective exercise for veteran teachers, this qualitative journey would benefit other educators by providing them a new pathway through which to better understand their own innate and intrinsic identities as teachers. To this end, each chapter concludes with a list of topics and questions that readers are encouraged to reflect upon individually and/or collectively. These pages for reflection are modeled after the “Recommendations for Reflection” that Schubert (1986) employed in *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility*. The purposes of these questions are to further connect the chapter contents to the personal and professional lives of the reader and to encourage further personal introspection within autobiographical, aesthetic, and imaginative pathways.

Each set of three chapters is followed by an imaginative discourse. The first two dialogues are among three literary characters from the preceding chapters and myself.

The third discourse utilizes the voices of three authors *reading* pertinent passages from their respective works of literature. Together, we further discuss issues and conflicts that arose within the chapters. The dialogue of the speakers is genuine in that it is taken directly from its original sources. The authentic words of the literature are re-imagined within the context of a conversation about the intrinsic realities, fears, and aspirations of myself as educator. This imaginative discourse as an additional mode of inquiry is inspired by Virginia Woolf's (1929) *A Room of One's Own*: "Yet it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top" (p. 31). The daydream-like nature of these discourses evokes Schubert's (2009a) use of what he called a 'dreamland portal':

Daydreams are not mere excursions of fancy; they are the seeds of revolutionary ideas and the courage to live such ideas. Daydreams are the license to strive for social justice - profound stimuli to the human spirit....Thus I advocate for daydreaming to be recognized as a viable epistemological base, at least sometimes. (p. 6)

It is this spirit of daydreams and imagination that extends the possibilities of this qualitative journey far beyond the limitations of space and time. Similarly, the journey explores my identity as a teacher unbound from deterministic restrictions of science. In this way, I am freed to examine my *self* as the living embodiment of past lives, experiences and challenges as well as a harbinger of immeasurable future possibilities. A goal of this study (however quixotic) is to use literature, autobiography, and imagination to capture a glimpse of this intrinsic identity that is at once past, present, and future.

### A. Review of Literature

It is ironic that most reviews of literature in journal articles and other academic works do not actually contain *literature* in the literary sense of classic novels, poetry, and drama. This qualitative journey, on the other hand, is based primarily on pieces of literature in the most traditional sense. In fact, each chapter in this study is in itself a ‘review of literature.’ For example, three chapters are devoted to 19<sup>th</sup> Century French, British, and American literature (*Les Miserables* (1862); *Frankenstein* (1818); and *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) respectfully). The importance of using words, characters, images, and dialogue from literature to reflect on and to better ascertain a sense of one’s identity, purpose, struggles, and accomplishments has been endorsed by an eclectic group of educators, authors, and literary theorists alike (Tolstoy, 1898; Woolf 1929; Greene, 1965; Iser, 1976; Eco, 2002; Ayers, 2004). Wolfgang Iser (1976) specifically describes this phenomenon:

The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (p. 1222)

Other chapters in this study focus more closely on literature that relies upon biographical introspection as a means to explore personal issues and conflicts (*The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); *Night* (1960); and *American Idiot* (2004)). Madeline Grumet (1978) attributed the value of autobiographical writing to its potential “impact upon [one’s] present assumptions and intentions” (p. 295). Again, a diverse group of educators,

authors, and literary theorists have supported the use of autobiographical reflection as a means for individuals to gain relevant insights (Dewey, 1916; Eliot, 1921; Shaw, 1947; Jung, 1951; Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Miller, 2005).

The remaining three chapters of this study focus on literature that relies heavily on the writer's imaginative, almost surreal, portrayal of events, emotions, and conflicts (*The Odyssey*; *Light in August* (1929); *Absolum, Absolum!* (1932); *The Sound and the Fury*. (1936); and *Seinfeld* scripts, 1992-1998). John Dewey (1934) proposed that "all *conscious* experience has of necessity some degree of imaginative quality" (p. 276). Through literary constructions (including stream of consciousness, anthropomorphism, and an animated suspension of disbelief) these authors use imaginative devices to procure a more intrinsic view of reality. An eclectic group of educators, authors, and literary theorists have acknowledged the role that imagination can play in terms of better understanding the complex issues and challenges people face (Horace, 18BCE; W. James, 1920; Eco, 1972; Bettelheim, 1976; Campbell, 1991).

More lean, however, is curriculum scholarship that integrates an educator's life experiences with the literature he or she is currently teaching. In Willis and Schubert's (1991) *Reflections from the Heart of Educational Inquiry*, educators reflect on literary and artistic resources that have contributed to their understanding of teaching and learning. Similarly, in Rick Ayers and Amy Crawford's (2004) *Great Books for High School Kids*, educators describe and reflect upon personal and collective classroom experiences that have been created or enhanced through the specific literature used. Bruner (2004) in *Life as Narrative* demonstrates how pieces of literature can become 'experimental autobiography' (p. 709) to the extent in which others can use the

‘structuring experience’ (p. 708) of the text as a tool to ‘interpret and reinterpret’ their own lives, values, and choices.

Interpreting and reinterpreting one’s perspectives and life experiences in order to better understand the intrinsic nature of teaching and learning demands a caliber of reflection and introspection that transcends linear and deterministic boundaries of thought and possibility. Curriculum scholarship that integrates reflective inquiry, literary analysis, autobiographical experience, *and* imagination is slim. Schubert’s (2009a) *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians* relies upon his conversations with Utopians via daydream. The ensuing text is a collage of literary reflection, personal life experiences, and a variety of perspectives and possibilities brought to life via a myriad of voices:

I fully support the active engagement of academics in inventing possibilities, and I suggest that we must continuously expand this to include mobilization of all in a diversity of efforts to cultivate individual and collective experience of many yet unknown configurations. It requires the best of a quixotic vision. (p. 9)

Henry Adams (1906) in *The Education of Henry Adams* created a work of academic scholarship that weaved together national and personal history with nuances of irony, satire, humor, and literary allusion, while masquerading as an autobiography. He integrated ideas, metaphors, characterizations from a range of literary voices including Tacitus, Sophocles, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexandre Dumas, William Shakespeare, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. This use of literature to deepen one’s understanding of education has been supported by Eisner (2002) in *The Arts and the Creation of the Mind*:



Aesthetic qualities are not restricted to the arts; their presence depends upon how we choose to experience the world...artistic activity is a form of inquiry that depends on qualitative forms of intelligence. (pp. 44-45)

Thus inspired to experience and to better understand my world as an educator through the aesthetics of literature, I also embedded my study with a variety of literature, most of which I also shared with my students through instruction. In this way, genres ranging from children's literature (*Pinocchio* (1883); D'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (1962); *Oh, the Places You'll Go* (1990)) to Ancient literature (*The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *Marcus Aurelius' Meditations*), to Shakespeare dramas (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*), to historical documents and comic books (*The Declaration of Independence* (1776); *The Death of Superman* (1993)) have enriched the tapestry of my qualitative study.

The educational and philosophical scholarship Kieran Egan (2008) proposed in *The Future of Education* was also informed by literary sources and imagination. Egan postulated Ancient Greek educators visiting our 21<sup>st</sup> Century schools and assessing our contemporary educational policies. He then imagined 21<sup>st</sup> Century educators traveling to future schools through the year 2060. His mechanism of travel defied the constraints of space and time in order to investigate teaching and learning without being encumbered with deterministic limitations. Along the way, he alluded to the works of Plato, John Locke, Jonathan Swift, Gustave Flaubert, and others to help him better understand the timeless and intrinsic realities of curriculum and instruction.

Thus, I am inspired by the writing of educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) who in *Releasing the Imagination* advocated that we educators regard ourselves as

“questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing realities with those around us” (p. 130). I am simultaneously intrigued with the possibilities of scholarship that integrates the thinking of Greene with the ideas embedded in author Virginia Woolf’s (1928) novel *Orlando*:

Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after. Thus, the most ordinary movement in the world, such as sitting down at a table and pulling the inkstand towards one, may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting, like the underlinen of a family of fourteen on a line in a gale of wind. Instead of being a single, downright, bluff piece of work of which no man need feel ashamed, our commonest deeds are set about with a fluttering and flickering of wings, a rising and falling of lights. (pp. 78-79)

Furthermore, I am committed to synthesizing these two qualitative styles with the kind of research orientation described by Norman Holland (1975) in his article *The Question: Who Reads What How?* He described his investigative style as:

A literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of specks of carbon black on dried wood pulp. When these marks become words, when those words become images or metaphors or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty. He gives them life out of his own desires....He mingles his unconscious loves and fears and adaptations with the words and images he synthesizes at a conscious level. (p. 1239)

My goal is to synthesize elements of literary criticism, educational philosophy, literature, and autobiography to facilitate a journey that transcends the finite and measureable external landscape of teaching and learning. By infusing imagination into this inquiry, I hope to explore the intrinsic realities that inspire, nourish, sustain, and sometimes threaten and challenge the intangible heart of my life as educator.

## B. **Phenomena of inquiry**

In this study, I endeavored to portray:

- 1: how literature has informed and challenged my understanding of teaching and learning on an intrinsic level;
- 2: how aesthetic immersion into works of literature helps me transcend linear boundaries in order to inspire a deeper understanding of my identity as a teacher;
- 3: insights, questions, challenges, and conflicts that are revealed when my personal and professional experiences are immersed in literature and imagination.

## C. **Methods**

An interplay of five qualitative methods is used throughout this study. My intention is not to segregate these methods, but to merge them in a unique synthesis that blends the potential insights they have to offer into a unique tapestry that strives to increase our understanding of teaching and learning from an intrinsic perspective. In the tradition of the philosophical essay (Whitehead, 1929; Dewey, 1943; Eisner, 1969; Schon, 1983; Greene, 1988), each chapter in this study is, as William H. Schubert (1991) explained “a kind of meta-analysis or research synthesis that uses the informed and insightful scholar (rather than a set of statistical rules) as the instrument for synthesis and illumination” (p. 64).

My experiences as an urban public school teacher are the basis of my narrative inquiry. In the tradition of narrative educational studies (Jackson, 1968; Wigginton, 1985; Bullough, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; He, 2003; Ayers, 2010), authentic classroom experiences are critical to each chapter of this study. Autobiographical details coupled with reflective exploration and pondering are intended to increase the introspective nature of the essays.

These philosophical and narrative inquiries are viewed through an aesthetic lens. The literature that I used in the classroom with my students is simultaneously the literature that is informing and enlightening my own identity as a teacher. Aesthetic response and criticism as a mode of inquiry has been supported by curriculum scholars (Eisner, 1967; Kelly, 1975; Willis & Schubert, 1991; Greene, 1995). By focusing on specific pieces of literature while at the same time employing philosophical and narrative modes of inquiry, this study strives to illuminate a unique perspective of teaching and learning that is at once personal and professional. In this way, the study aims to create the ‘portraiture’ of an educator from the inside out (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Elizabeth Vallance (1991) expounded on the use of aesthetic inquiry to transcend external thinking into more intrinsic ways of knowing:

Aesthetic inquiry offers a perspective on curriculum research that traditional research methods assiduously avoid. In every case it offers a perspective that at best complements the perceptions of the situation gleaned from other sources....[and] assists educators in seeing more clearly what they are dealing with – seeing what they may really be reacting to and why. (p. 169)

Thus, this study endeavors to journey between external and internal levels of

experience using a phenomenological inquiry approach. Scholars who have supported this phenomenological vision include Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1971; Pinar and Grumet, 1976; van Manen, 1978-79 and Willis, 1978. The outer world of the classroom is my narrative starting point. The aesthetic inquiry facilitated by the literary experience is intended to mediate the emotional, cognitive, and imaginative connections between the outer curricular experience and the inner personal meanings that lie more deeply in the educator's consciousness. By using a synthesis of these modes of inquiry, the goal of this study is to achieve a portrait of teaching and learning in the spirit of intrinsic illumination, as described by Willis and Allen (1978):

We live within an external environment that we are experiencing immediately, but we also live within an inward world in which we constitute meaning by ultimately experiencing experience....The objects, processes, and structures of the external world may or may not be regarded as fixed, but all phenomenological methods attempt to take seriously the individual's own particular perceptions of them and his own process of moving from the surface level of experiencing to the deep level of experiencing experience. (pp. 34-35)

As David Smith (1991) described it, hermeneutic inquiry is about "creating meaning, not simply reporting on it" (p. 201). As the phenomenological inquiry leads the reader and me more deeply into the intrinsic landscape of an educator's heart, mind, and conscience, the limitations inherent in our finite system of language become barriers to expression. This study attempts to overcome these restrictions by turning to the infinite possibilities offered when imagination is used as a tool for further inquiry.

## **II. Character as Doppelganger** *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane

Henry Fleming is my doppelganger. He is a young man determined to live by his personal values and ideals as he confronts a variety of life's conflicts and challenges. Like Henry, as an educator I have always tried not only to uphold my personal values and ideals, but to infuse them into my instructional work. Although to some the fact that Henry Fleming is from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century might disqualify him as my doppelganger, I adhere to a broader definition of the concept as characterized by James Hillman (1996):

Your alter ego, your shadow, another you, another likeness, who sometimes seems to be close by your side and is your other self. When you talk to yourself, scold yourself, stop yourself up, perhaps you are addressing your doppelganger, not out there like a twin in another city but within your own room. (p. 180)

On this topic my thoughts are also influenced by Virginia Woolf (1929) as she remarks that only within your own room can you “illuminate your own soul with its profundities and its shallows, and its vanities and its generousities” (p. 90) as it is “in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top” (p. 31). Whether I'm exploring *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) with a class of eighth graders or reading it alone, I always feel that author Stephen Crane is holding up a mirror to me – as an educator, as an individual person, and as a piece of a larger humanity. In this way, the text functions less as a mirror that focuses on external features and more as a magical looking-glass capable of transporting me as well as my students into alternate realms of existence, self-awareness, and, if we're lucky, illumination.

### **A. Finding the path to the threshold of transformation**

When Henry skedaddles after a frightened squirrel into the depths of a forest,

he enters into the deepest realms of nature that metaphorically represent the innermost terrain of his human nature, the very essence of his being. If my students and I are on a journey for life answers or enlightenment, there are more meaningful answers to be found on this intrinsic path than any external resource such as curriculum guides or test prep books could possibly offer. To this end, I am indebted to educator Leo Buscaglia (1982) who inspired me with his reflections on teaching:

Go into a library and gather up all the holy books and sit down and read them for commonalities. How marvelous! There are so many commonalities! Jesus said, “If you want to find life you’ve got to look inside you. Buddha said it. The Hebraic Holy Books say it. The Koran, The Gita. The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Tao – they all remind you of this. Trips outside of you are worthless. They are what lead off into the forest where you are going to be lost. If you want answers for you, the answers are inside, not outside. (p. 70)

As a middle school reading and writing teacher for over twenty years, I have come to understand that external knowledge and facts are only of value insofar as they are capable of fueling the growth and development of our inner consciousness and spirit. By taking this journey with Henry - *as Henry* - my students and I reconstruct a sense of who we are as individuals, as teacher and students, and as members of the larger community of humanity. As the mind, identity, and spirit of Henry are transformed throughout the text, Crane’s words, images, and metaphors linguistically weave together pieces of imagination and reality with the potential to transform the consciousness of the reader as well. It is these transformations of mind, spirit, and consciousness that inspire illuminations and epiphanies.

Crane's images of nature serve as a metaphorical Greek chorus and establish a dynamic pattern of consciousness that progresses as such:

- from metaphysical **support** ("he [the youth] lay down in the grass. The blades pressed tenderly against his cheeks" p. 16);
- to **anger** ("the branches, pushing against him, threatened to throw him over upon it [a corpse]" p. 46);
- to **fear** ("the youth stared at the land in front of him. Its foliage now seemed to veil powers and horrors" p. 99);
- to **concern** ("Yellow flames leaped toward it [the troops] from many direction. The forest made a tremendous objection" p. 100);
- to **grief** ("There was much blood upon the grass blades" p. 122);
- to **condemnation** ("As he marched along the little branch-hung roadway among his prattling companions a vision of cruelty brooded over him. It clung near him always and darkened his views of his deeds" p. 126).

By using nature as a personified moral compass, Crane immediately broadens my narrative experience beyond static story-telling by blending realism (the events Henry is engaged in) with naturalism (the organic presence and responsiveness of nature). Eliminating any separation between humanity and nature provides an uncommonly unified vision of a singular *human nature*. The value of this has been specifically pointed out by Barry Sanders (2009) who warns that too great a focus on finite human matters of the here and now, without consideration of the larger and deeper nature of our inner humanity, will result in the metaphorical disappearance of the human being!

Building on Sanders' idea, if classroom teaching and learning never go beyond the



levels of external operations, tangible facts, and scripted lesson plans and dialogue, will there be a metaphorical disappearance of teachers and students? Sanders specifically cites several 19th Century authors whose works preserve the finite consciousness of our humanness as it is enveloped within the infinite consciousness of our larger humanity:

Henry James and Henry David Thoreau both use *human being* with great frequency. Twain uses *human being* in almost every one of his books and short stories. I count some sixty occurrences in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays of the word *human being*, which makes absolute sense, for that's precisely his main subject – the sentient, spiritual, and vibrant human being. (p. 242)

For me as a teacher and as a human being, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) offers such a journey. The images and ideas embedded in the text defy the absolute nature of tangible facts, and the limitations of scripted lesson plans. Instead, for me as an individual, the text serves as a meaningful meditation on the intrinsic nature of my values and core beliefs; as an educator, the text continues to forge a unique pedagogical path on which my students and I can together travel these depths as a community.

Henry's intrinsic experience (and ours) begins when he leaves the regimented path prescribed by the army commanders, and we, I suggest, leave the regimented path dictated by curriculum commanders:

The youth went again into the deep thickets. The brushed branches made a noise that drowned the sounds of cannon. He walked on, going from obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity.

At length he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine needles were a gentle brown

carpet. There was a religious half light.

Near the threshold he stopped, horror-stricken at the sight of a thing.

He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but now was faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip.

The youth gave a shriek as he confronted the thing. He was for moments turned to stone before it. He remained staring into the liquid-looking eyes. The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look. Then the youth cautiously put one hand behind him and brought it against a tree. Leaning upon this he retreated, step by step, with his face still toward the thing. He feared that if he turned his back the body might spring up and stealthily pursue him. (p. 46)

At this moment, Henry has turned away from military protocol. He has retreated from what promised to be his first opportunity to demonstrate patriotism and valor in battle with the enemy; his first chance to earn a red badge of honor and heroism. *Or has he?* He has not entered into the external forest wherein Buscaglia warned we would get lost. Instead, as Crane portrays this moment, Henry has turned away from cannon fire into a religious half light; away from deep thicket onto a gentle carpet of pine needles; and away from the battle field into the arching boughs of a chapel.

No longer a member of an *army of soldiers* carrying bundles as it heads toward the *lips of a riverbank*, he now is an omniscient observer watching an *army of ants* carrying

bundles along the *lips of a corpse*. His finite consciousness of binaries (right *or* wrong, good *or* bad, north [union] *or* south [confederate], dead *or* alive) is transformed to a new level of consciousness. As the corpse now stares at Henry, Henry's former binary reality of dead or alive (which caused him great consternation as a new military recruit) has been transformed into a reality where dead and alive exist simultaneously.

Roland Barthes (1967) asserted that when literature is used as a reflective tool, it triggers an embodied self-feeling which in turn allows for a more introspective and empathic reading and understanding. In Barthesian terms, the reader initially identifies with the role of the protagonist, then unconsciously adopts the lens of the creator (the author), and finally reconstructs an experience based on his or her own human relationships and cultural contexts. Barthes qualified this phenomenon as movement from *identity* to *adoption*.

Henry's *identity* as soldier, bathed in military protocol and patriotic dogma, now must *adopt* this heightened sense that transcends one-dimensional dogma and rules.

Initially, Henry is turned to stone: either he returns to a one-dimensional consciousness (dead *or* alive) or he adapts to this reality of two dimensions (dead *and* alive), and enters the final stage of embodiment that Barthes calls *reconstruction*. A reconstructed reality means that an episode of transformation and epiphany has occurred.

But as Henry and the corpse exchange a long look, it is Henry who shrieks and turns away; Crane emphatically tells us that Henry *retreats*. This is his second retreat. In Barthesian terms Henry has now retreated twice: first from his military (binary) identity and later from the two-dimensional reality when he refuses to adopt it. Thus, Henry's chance at what Barthes called reconstruction or epiphany is delayed.

As I read and teach this initial stage of Henry's journey, I also reflect on the extent to which I am operating out of the Barthesian level of identity, wherein my instruction serves mostly to perpetuate surface identities of myself and my students. If my instruction is geared toward noticing the answers and behaviors I have been "trained" or taught to look for (i.e. *correct* answers and *appropriate* behaviors), then, like Henry, I am blinding myself from seeing a much larger, more meaningful reality both in myself and in my students.

In this way, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) has taught me to teach by asking questions that challenge dogmas, biases, and ideologies which threaten to block or restrain paths to higher levels of consciousness and deeper depths of our humanity. As a teacher (and a person), am I, like Henry, responding to immediate external stimuli rather than using my journey as teacher to develop a deeper sense of possibility and understanding for myself and my students? Am I leading students on a path that perpetuates identities as defined by curriculum guides, political agendas, and stereotypes (economic, racial, or ethnic in nature)? Am I using texts such as *The Red Badge of Courage* to empower students to travel beyond surfaces and facades into deeper, more meaningful arenas of awareness, reflection, and thought? Am I willing to lead students, like Henry, into the "deep thickets" and into the "religious half light" of individual and community self-awareness? These questions prod me in the same way that Henry is pricked by the branches and brambles of the deep thickets.

Crane (1895) metaphorically illustrates the dangers of remaining satisfied in the realm of blindly accepting pre-established, extrinsic identities and of being apathetic toward pursuing levels of adopting new thoughts or reconstructing one's way of thinking.

Consider this passage where Henry, out of fear, returns to his prescribed identity as a soldier successfully following rules and accepting his assigned military position:

The youth thought the damp fog of early morning moved from the rush of a great body of troops. From the distance came a sudden spatter of firing.

He was bewildered. As he ran with his comrades he strenuously tried to think, but all he knew was that if he fell down those coming behind would tread upon him. All his faculties seemed to be needed to guide him over and past obstructions. He felt carried along by a mob.

The sun spread disclosing rays, and, one by one, regiments burst into view like armed men just born of the earth. The youth perceived that the time had come. He was about to be measured. For a moment he felt in the face of his great trial like a babe, and the flesh over his heart seemed very thin. He seized time to look about him calculatingly.

But he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It inclosed him. And there were iron laws of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box.

As he perceived this fact it occurred to him that he had never wished to come to the war. He had not listed of his own free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government. And now they were taking him out to be slaughtered.

The regiment slid down a bank and wallowed across a little stream. The mournful current moved slowly on, and from the water, shaded black, some white bubble eyes looked at the men.

As they climbed the hill, on the farther side artillery began to boom. Here the

youth forgot many things as he felt a sudden impulse of curiosity. He scrambled up the bank with a speed that could not be exceeded by a bloodthirsty man. (pp. 20-21)

As soon as Henry is confronted with the threat of external conflict (“a sudden spattering of fire”), he loses both his ability to think independently (“he strenuously tried to think”) and to exercise free will (“he felt carried along by a mob”). Military protocol with its unwavering rules and restrictions on movement and thought made it “impossible for him to escape” to the point that he became enclosed behind iron bars of patriotic dogma and was trapped “in a moving box” of men to an unforgiving and merciless slaughter. While he is functioning here at Barthes’ base level of (military) identity, he is furthest away from the higher levels of human existence, namely exercising free will and thought.

Consequently, regardless of the outcome of this military skirmish, Henry’s deeper humanity is spiritually and morally “dragged by the merciless government” further “out to be slaughtered.” It is not with tremendous pride that I acknowledge Henry during this episode as my doppelganger. Nevertheless, this passage forces me to consider how many times my judgment, perception, or actions have been similarly taken over by dogma of one kind or another, be it patriotic, religious, ethnic, or economic in nature.

In this sense, I can now adopt the idea that Henry and I are metaphorically in the same “moving box.” As such, Henry as an entity is no longer real *or* imaginary; he is now real *and* imaginary. He is no longer past *or* present; he is now past *and* present. For me, the restrictions of space and time have been lifted and I can now consider questions of more *intrinsic* worth: When have my independent thinking and free will been so assailed that I

succumbed to the bias of a larger external “authority”? When have I been enclosed by the rigidity of some tradition or law and simply become thoughtlessly carried away? How can I consider myself an effective educator if I am operating (knowingly or not) at this level? These are the branches and brambles of intrinsic questions that bombard my thoughts and lead me to reflect upon teaching and learning in new ways.

As teachers, to what extent are we perpetuating “iron laws of tradition”? To what extent is it impossible not to? I remember trying to guide my eighth grade social studies students to an understanding of the differences between fighting the American Civil War (1861-1865) for political reasons versus ideological reasons focused on racial equality. I was surprised when the wave of student sentiment turned strongly against President Lincoln. By raising issues of political motivation and economic gain (for the Union states), I seemed to have opened a floodgate of what my students would call “trash talk.” Was I single-handedly tarnishing my student’s perception of a great American icon? Wasn’t it terribly unpatriotic of me to ignite a conversation in which a group of fourteen year olds were maligning the ‘Great Emancipator’? Although I understood that my rationale to be well-intentioned, these questions and fears quickly ended this class session.

With this in mind, to what degree is our instruction promoting free will and independent thinking? I remember teaching John Hersey’s (1946) *Hiroshima* in the months following the 9-11 attacks on America. With the recent images of 9-11 in our minds, the details of despair and destruction that Hersey described were even more poignant:

The lot of Drs. Fuji, Kanda, and Machii right after the explosion-and, as these three

were typical, that of the majority of the physicians and surgeons of Hiroshima-with their offices and hospitals destroyed, their equipment scattered, their own bodies incapacitated in varying degrees, explained why so many citizens who were hurt went untended and why so many who might have lived died. Of a hundred and fifty doctors in the city, sixty-five were already dead and most of the rest were wounded. Of 1,280 nurses, 1,654 were dead or too badly hurt to work. In the biggest hospital, that of the Red Cross, only six doctors out of thirty were able to function, and only ten nurses out of more than two hundred. (pp. 33-34)

Was the American use of atomic weapons against the civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki an act of war or an act of retaliation? Although I have read *Hiroshima* with students for a number of years, this was the first time that this specific question emerged in my mind. As my students and I read the horrific atrocities that destroyed unsuspecting (and innocent) Japanese citizens, the question continued to burn in my mind. I wondered any of my students had a similar reaction. But I was afraid to ask. One passage at the end of Chapter Two, however, prompted my students to vocalize the kinds of questions I was asking myself:

Just before dark, Mr. Tanimoto came across a twenty-year-old girl, Mrs. Kamai, the Tanimoto's next-door neighbor. She was crouching on the ground with the body of her infant daughter in her arms. The baby had evidently been dead all day. Mrs. Kamai jumped up when she saw Mr. Tanimoto and said, "Would you try to locate my husband?"

Mr. Tanimoto knew that her husband had been inducted into the Army just the day before....Judging by the many maimed soldiers Mr. Tanimoto had seen during



the day, he surmised that the barracks had been badly damaged by whatever it was that hit Hiroshima. He knew he hadn't had a chance of finding Mrs. Kamai's husband, even if he searched, but he wanted to humor her. "I'll try," he said.

"You've got to find him," she said. "He loved our baby so much. I want him to see her once more." (pp. 54-55)

A serious boy, who always kept our class informed of what he learned from watching a variety of history documentaries on television, began to raise the questions: didn't the descriptions of chaos and mass human suffering sound like what happened at the Twin Towers in New York City? Aren't both these situations examples of a military attack on non-military territories and against non-military people? My initial reaction was a rush of excitement and pride! After all, I felt that I was truly nurturing independent thinking. My students and I were analyzing the impact that political and military decisions have on innocent men, women, children, senior citizens, babies, and medical personnel while they were in their homes, schools, hospitals, and places of worship. Connections were drawn to the atrocities of 9-11.

As we moved into Chapter Three, wherein Hersey provides even more explicit details of the aftermath of the atomic bomb, the students were now reading the text with a different lens. The parallel between Hiroshima and the 9-11 attack which had occurred only months earlier, gave the text immediacy and a relevance. As I look back, I now realize that each anecdote we read was bringing us closer to verbalizing another very potent critical question:

Thousands of people had no one to help them. Miss Sasaki was one of them.

Abandoned and helpless, under the crude lean-to on the courtyard of the tin

factory, beside the woman who had lost a breast and the man whose face was scarcely a face anymore, she suffered awfully that night from the pain in her broken leg. She did not sleep at all; neither did she converse with her sleepless companions. (p. 64)

My excitement and pride in watching students critically examine a text in light of current events were soon deflated. A student asked that if the 9-11 attack was regarded as a terrorist event, doesn't it follow that the American use of atomic weapons in World War II against Japan also qualifies as a 'terrorist attack? I should have been proud when my students then began making these sorts of intellectual connections between events past and present. I should have been proud when they began critically reflecting on the ethical implications of current military policies and practices. I should have been proud when they were challenging contemporary political rhetoric. But I wasn't. I was frightened.

And it got worse. The student with the passion for history documentaries then asked whether it was true that while the citizens of Hiroshima were suffering from nuclear fallout, the Americans were *celebrating* with victory parades. His friend shared that he saw rallies on television that showed people from foreign countries celebrating 9-11. At this point I feared that the tone of the discussion was replacing one set of "mob-like mentality" with another. I feared that I was nurturing a perspective that was insensitive to the national grieving that was prevalent after 9-11. I feared I was facilitating a discussion that was disrespectful to the victims of 9-11 and their families. I feared that when students would repeat some of the classroom comments out of the context of the lesson they would be misconstrued as disloyal, unpatriotic, and even blasphemous. I remember

my fear was as potent as Henry's. Like Henry during his first battle skirmish, a surge of fear mingled with regret rushed through me:

He [Henry] ran like a blind man. Two or three times he fell down. Once he knocked his shoulder so heavily against a tree that he went headlong.

Since he had turned his back upon the fight his fears had been wondrously magnified....He believed himself liable to be crushed. (p. 40)

Before the class session ended, I re-directed students to Abraham Lincoln's (1863) Gettysburg Address. There would be no mention of Hiroshima or 9-11 during this class. Instead, I explained that in order to understand the complexity of these events and issues we needed to turn to *other* primary resources of historical validity. We spent the next ten minutes focusing *only* on Lincoln's inspirational and patriotic words:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.... It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Students recorded their personal reflections to the prompt 'How does the spirit of Lincoln's words and sentiments remain alive in our nation today?' No mention of Hiroshima or 9-11. Like Henry, I had retreated. When I read their journal responses, I saw with relief that they indeed focused on issues of patriotism and liberty. One student

even ended his writing with “God bless America” and another with “I thank God for the United States.” These responses reassured me that my decision to retreat from the earlier discussion was fully justified. This reassurance paralleled the reassurance Henry received after his retreat:

After a time the sound of musketry grew faint and the cannon boomed in the distance. The sun, suddenly apparent...This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy.

He threw a pine cone at a jovial squirrel, and he ran with chattering fear. High in a treetop he stopped, and, poking his head cautiously from behind a branch, looked down with an air of trepidation.

The youth felt triumphant at this exhibition. There was the law, he said. Nature had given him a sign. The squirrel, immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado. He did not stand stolidly baring his furry belly to the missile, and die with an upward glance. On the contrary, he had fled as fast as his legs could carry him; and he was but an ordinary squirrel, too-doubtless no philosopher of the race. The youth wended, feeling that Nature was of his mind. She re-enforced his argument with proofs that lived where the sun shone. (pp. 44-45)

Crane portrayed Henry as a prisoner of a metaphorical mechanical contraption, a moving box that imprisoned him. As Henry’s doppelganger, what man-made contraptions entrap me as well? Did I lead a retreat from a critical analysis of 9-11 because my

thinking was imprisoned within a ‘moving box’ of patriotism that rebelled at thoughts or ideas which might undermine that patriotism? Wasn’t my retreat, like the squirrel’s, perfectly natural and in synch with an innate understanding of all that is right, good and just?

Henry’s confidence and pride in his decision to retreat, however, was soon shattered. Ironically, it appeared that those who surrendered to the imprisonment of the ‘moving box’ were in fact to be declared the heroes of the battle. They were heroes. Henry was not:

The youth cringed as if discovered in a crime. By heavens, they had won after all! The imbecile line had remained and become victors. He could hear them cheering. He lifted himself upon his toes and looked in the direction off the fight. A yellow fog lay wallowing on the treetops. From beneath it came the clatter of musketry. Hoarse cries told of an advance. He turned away amazed and angry. He felt that he had been wronged...He grew bitter over it. It seemed that the blind allegiance and stupidity of those little pieces had betrayed him. He had been overturned and crushed by their lack of sense in holding the position, when intelligent deliberation would have convinced them that it was impossible. He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark, had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge. He felt a great anger against his comrades. He knew it could be proved that they had been fools. (pp. 43-44)

Those in the ‘moving box’ did not need to think but only to follow orders. Thus, those awarded heroic medals, those who did not surrender the battlefield, were actually the ones who *surrendered* the part of their humanity responsible for thinking, feeling, and

reflecting. What quantifiable, numeric data designates the “progress” of our students? To what extent do these positivistic data-driven target goals lessen the more intangible elements of our humanity?

Consider the regimented march of the ‘moving box.’ When Henry is marching, is he moving forward or going nowhere? Yes. He *is* moving forward *and* he *is* going nowhere. In this sense, like Henry, I often choose to retreat in the sense that I do not want to move my students *quantitatively*, if that means leaving them stranded *qualitatively*. Sometimes the only expression of free will left lies in the act of *retreating* from these mechanisms or systemic regulations that constrain our spirit and deny our consciousness as “sentient, spiritual, and vibrant human beings.”

William Barrett (1987) proposed that if free will succumbs to the will of political, economic, mechanical, or other externally imposed systems, human consciousness itself is at stake. He frames his argument around the notion that if we are not aware of these “mechanical moving boxes” which trap our spirit and attempt to control our freedom, we are in danger of losing the very freedoms that define our humanity:

Mechanics was a central part of the new physics; until mechanics was firmly established, physics could not get under way. But the science of mechanics was no sooner founded than a widespread ideology of mechanism followed in its wake.

Man is a machine, so the lament goes. The molecules in nature blindly run according to the inalterable mechanical laws of nature; and as our molecules go, so do we. The human mind is a passive and helpless pawn pushed around. (p. xv)

Without this self-consciousness, human beings don’t even know if their actions are constrained or not; their freedom and free will would become an illusion.

It is at this point that Henry and I stand at the threshold of epiphany (Barthes' point of reconstruction). The question is no longer whether Henry's experiences being stared at by a dead man and being trapped as a prisoner in a mechanical moving box are real or imaginary (identity level), nor whether these experiences are somehow both real and imaginary (adoption level). Instead, Henry's consciousness (and ours) begins to be transformed when there is an understanding that what has been perceived by our senses as real is actually only the veil of reality masking a greater truth.

#### **B. Passing through the threshold of illumination**

Initially, Henry longs to participate in battles, sieges, and conflicts that are "distinctly Homeric"; he desires to witness a noble "Greeklike struggle"; and he is determined to prove himself a man within episodes of glory which are steeped in "large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds." These are the ideas and ideals society has taught Henry in regards to what it means to be a man decorated with innumerable secular honors and prestige. Henry has been schooled in the stories and images of 'heroic and praiseworthy men' from Achilles to Odysseus to King Arthur to General Washington, who have proven through their military valor to be 'great heroic men.'

While participating in graphic episodes of warfare, however, Henry notices a "singular absence of heroic poses" and is shocked to see soldiers who face oncoming enemies standing "as men tied to stakes." My students and I have often commented at this point that the more the men are engaged in battle, the more they *lose* their humanity while becoming "strange and ugly fiends jiggling heavy in the smoke;" who actually "resembled animals tossed for a death struggle into a dark pit." It is at this very point that Crane sardonically remarks "they were become men." Likewise, when battles resume,

the soldiers are described as having a “wolf-like temper”; running like “madmen”; and fighting like “tortured savages.” Again, it is at this point that Crane slyly observes “And they were men.”

The military training, patriotic fervor, and blind allegiance to his generals that would lead Henry to achieve his ambitions of becoming a great hero and to earn the highest medal of esteem and respect that men can bestow (the red badge of courage), are also the very components that would usurp his humanity and his free will. Crane describes a battlefield whereupon military heroes become successful only when they are transformed into beasts; in order to accomplish the ‘heroic’ deeds of great men like Achilles, the soldiers have to ironically give up their humanity. Crane sardonically proclaims that they are ‘men’ at the very moment that they are actually losing their humanity. Thus, those honored as the “greatest men” (i.e. war heroes) are those who have successfully sacrificed their own humanity to become non-thinking animals and war machines, even madmen.

In this way, the very red badges and medals of courage bestowed for honor, glory, and justice, themselves become veils masking behaviors of cruelty, maliciousness, and greed. In this case, what appears real is only a veil but this time the reality underneath is not the dream; it is the nightmare. When Crane portrays Henry ‘heroically’ engaging in battle, he lifts the veil of heroism and valor, and shows us the nightmare that lies beneath it: profound clamor, splitting crashes, armies positioned upon each other madly, houndlike leaps, screaming and yelling like maniacs, men bandied like toys, dirtied faces with glowing eyes and grotesque exclamations. Using these images, Crane takes and established and commonly shared societal/cultural understanding of patriotism, bravery,



valor, and heroism and contaminates it with bleak, animalistic, and mechanical images.

Henry's awareness of this marks an intuitive epiphany, an illumination. Henry has transcended the cultural veil of 'hero' and has glimpsed the interior human essence that lies beneath the externally imposed military badges honoring "manly heroism." Again, I can see in Henry my spiritual doppelganger. As I read texts such as *Red Badge of Courage* with my students or on my own, I can closely identify with this intuitive epiphany. After all, I ask myself, what lies beneath the veil of a "Teacher of the Year" selected on the merit of quantitative gains in assessment scores? What is gained and what is sacrificed in order to achieve a *Golden Apple* award of public recognition (perhaps an instructor's equivalent of the soldier's *red* badge of courage)?

Reflecting on Henry's observations and realizations as well as the development of his deepening consciousness provides my students and I a pathway through which we are enabled to further reflect upon what actually informs the meaning of our lives. Are our lives based solely upon the reality of dogma or fact-based information and data? Do we ferret out our reality based upon what lies beneath the concrete, quantitative data? These questions are not skills-driven or specifically designed as part of a sequence of test preparation drills. In crossing the threshold of illumination with Henry my doppelganger, however, these questions and the discussions they ignite serve to nurture intrinsic reflections that nourish our souls instead of our brains; and serve not as test-preparation, but as life-preparation.

In this way, I have become more aware of classroom teaching experiences that I feel are more in harmony with the ideals of the Lama Surya Das (2007) as he models the soul-searching nature of educational questioning:

a wisdom practice that leads directly to discovering for ourselves the wisdom, conviction, and inner certainty that lead to greater knowledge and understanding of the deepest issues and mysteries of life. (p. 5)

Only when my students and I began to regard Henry as a metaphor did we begin to explore the intrinsic depths of Henry in all his glorious irony, oxymoron, and contradiction. ‘Henry as metaphor’ provides a rich image to use as if Henry were an object about which to think, to ponder, and to discuss. Our reflections and discussions of the text transport us into the realm of ideas concerning the purpose and meaning of life. The metaphor’s role is not as an end in itself but acts as an agent serving the distinctive cognitive role of creating new meaning. Although the metaphorical Henry does not reveal a truth, he does serve to trigger more profound levels of reflection and thinking.

Does growing up mean adhering blindly to the values and beliefs that we have been taught to believe since childhood? How can we be respectful to family, religious, or national traditions while still explore our own independent thinking? Can we achieve success in a capitalistic society while remaining true to deeper, spiritual values? *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) has caused me to reflect on these sorts of questions and to use them for classroom projects and dialogue. Whether it’s through informal student script-writing and performance; planned, formal debates; or candid discussions of related current events, my reflections on Crane’s novel have filled the questions I ask my students with a sense of the extraordinary.

Throughout the text, Henry’s dreams of glory vacillate from “Greek-like struggles” to crimson blotches; from killing machines to “puppets under a magician’s hand” ; and from “dragons coming with invincible strides” to “men tied at stakes.” This aesthetic

blending of real and imaginative images constitutes a collection of symbols that transcend the restrictions of space and time in order to create a textual tapestry rich in extrinsic and intrinsic conflict and transformation. Similarly, the dynamic nature of Henry's character reveals a human being just as much in conflict with his external enemies as with his internal ones; a human being interacting within both a physical and a psychological landscape.

As Henry is suffering his internal civil war between the veiled reality of what he has been taught versus the perceived reality of what he is actually experiencing, Crane describes him in various stages of being and becoming "a mental outcast"; a "bloodthirsty man"; a "fine fellow"; a "proverbial chicken"; a wise man ; a criminal; a "slang phrase"; a "war devil"; a "knight"; "mule driver"; a "madman"; and "a man." It is specifically this internal commotion that encapsulates such critical existential questions as the Surya Das (2007) identifies including:

Who am I?...Who among us can say they really know themselves, without illusions, beyond the face in the mirror, their name-rank-and-serial-number role in the world, their personas, defense mechanisms, and self-deceptions? Do we distinguish between when we are being authentic and inauthentic? Do we know what we really feel about things, what our true values and priorities are, what lies below the surface of consciousness, and what makes us tick? (p. 55)

Henry's journey into nature is really a trek into Henry's "human nature" which actually is an expedition into our human nature. As a human being and as a teacher, who am I? When have I, like my doppelganger, crossed the metaphorical line from proverbial chicken to wise man? From slang phrase to fine fellow? From knight to devil? If my

instruction is going to be authentic and meaningful, I must, like Henry, illuminate the truths that lie beneath my self-deceptions and my public persona:

For a time the youth was obliged to reflect in a puzzled and uncertain way. His mind was undergoing a subtle change. It took moments for it to cast off its battleful ways and resume its accustomed course of thought. Gradually his brain emerged from the clogged clouds, and at last he was enabled to more closely comprehend himself and circumstance. (p. 125)

Just as it took atrocities of physical violence to obliterate Henry's Cartesian thinking (he is *either* a hero *or* a coward, and is *either* war *or* religion honorable), it took atrocities of ethical violence to obliterate my Cartesian thinking (instruction as *either* successful *or* unsuccessful, and *either* substantial achievement *or* stagnant non-progress). The 'ethical violence' I am referring to consisted of a series of events, policies, and procedures that relied upon racial profiling, financial impropriety, ethnic elitism, and political patronage that were expected to continue to flourish under my leadership as a principal. The boundaries of right and wrong, legal and illegal, and separate versus equal were destroyed and I was left, like Henry, comprehending my role as educator and my very self through "clogged clouds."

An internal civil war raged between the veiled reality of what I had been taught were acceptable moral and ethical guidelines of educational leadership and practice versus the political and economic and racist realities of what I actually faced. The clouds of battle thinned when I stepped away from asking what results I was expected as an educator to "produce" versus asking what values and ideas are worth implementing and pursuing. Instead of asking quantitative questions regarding how my effectiveness as an educator

would be measured, I began asking *where* my daily pursuits as an educator were taking me...and my students.

### C. **Transitioning from personal epiphany to classroom practice**

Reaching this epiphany not only affected me personally, but professionally as well. At the moment of Henry's illuminations, Crane tells us "whatever he [Henry] had learned of himself was of no avail. He was an unknown quantity." Like Henry, despite my college diplomas and state education certifications I too am an unknown quantity. In this way, I am an explorer discovering truths and illuminations along with my students. Thus, I "suddenly became a modest person" as I become a student of my students!

Teaching the text no longer meant *delivering* lectures, rote vocabulary lists, and test-tips. Instead, my students and I now were now embarking on a journey through the text in search of *discovering* great ideas, ideals, and values. This leap from *delivery* to *discovery* meant my students and I could now use the text as a tool to shape, transform, and challenge each other to see things in new ways. Willaim Ayers (2004) called this a transformation into the "humanistic concept of teaching: the voyage is under way, and we are pilgrims, not tourists" (p. 2).

As *tourists*, students line up and are herded wherever the "expert guide" leads them. The herd becomes a quiet receptacle of the shepherd's "expert wisdom." As a part of the herd, Henry came to understand that he and his fellow soldiers were being treated no better than 'lunkheads, mule drivers, and jackasses'. When being expected to follow orders without any independent critical thinking, Henry comments that "it makes a man feel like a damn' kitten in a bag." But what happens when the tourist questions the motives and expertise of his guide? When Henry begins questioning where and why the

soldiers were being herded, he realized that the lieutenant himself was a lunkhead mule driver who was blindly following the orders of *his* superior (and equally lunkheaded) officer.

The more Henry blindly follows orders, the more likely he is to achieve a red badge of courage, high military honors, medals, and stripes. However, to achieve these “honors”, he must forgo his humanity and enter the battlefield as a criminal; a “slang phrase”; a “war devil”; and a “madman.” Does this mean that the greatest of “heroes,” those with the greatest number of medals and ribbons, are the greatest lunkheads, mule drivers, and jackasses? And is the person who chooses to retreat, who elects to hold on to his humanity, free will, and critical thinking and who is thereby is considered a disgrace, really the “better human being” because he had the bravery and courage to think for himself and to resist becoming a war devil and a madman?

In this way, Henry and I “had now climbed a peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing.” By lifting the external veils of military medals and stripes, Henry realizes that true wisdom, courage, bravery, and heroism come from within. Regardless of rank, power, or prestige, we are all pilgrims searching for wisdom and courage. Similarly, if we lift the host of external honors and designations, state certificates, university degrees, and summative assessments, we see that the teacher, like the students, is just another of the many pilgrims searching for wisdom and courage. I can now see myself now as a very wee thing. Whether I am standing in front of the classroom or not, my students and I are all pilgrims; we are all wee little things.

Clifford Mayes (2005) regards this revelation of modesty as crucial to true spiritual teaching. Like Henry and his fellows, if my students and I are truly pilgrims on a journey,

where are we headed? Mayes proposes a foundation to such spiritual pedagogy in this way:

Thus it is imperative that the spiritual teacher enter into a relationship with the student in an ever deeper moral encounter. The subject under analysis in the classroom is the curricular scaffolding for this ethical process – a process that *illuminates* subject matter but ultimately *transcends* it as the teacher and student, through dialogical encounter, approach the light of the divine. In this sense, education is a form of prayer. (p. 50)

The more Henry's veiled understanding of the world becomes illuminated, the more his surroundings become filled with "a religious half light" and "the trees began softly to sing a hymn of twilight." Similarly, I discovered that the more teaching and learning can transcend external forces that are politically, economically, and socially imposed, the more a classroom is endowed with a similar intrinsic religious half light and a hymn of twilight.

For example, I would begin by asking questions of myself and of my students regarding Henry's pursuit of military glory; then I would ask about Henry's struggle to maintain his morality/code of ethics; and finally I would synthesize these issues and begin to question how a military code of ethics and a religious code of ethics might co-exist without hypocrisy or compromise. This third level of questioning, inspired by Henry's struggles, is the level that most stripped away external layers of thinking and brought the flow of ideas to a more intrinsic place. As students and I would grope for the right words to express ourselves, it was as if the dialogue became a hymn and the light of knowledge became a twilight of wisdom.

This phenomenon has been described by scholar L. Thomas Hopkins (1954) as a step toward self-realization. The intrinsic half-light I experience through classroom dialogue and reflection based on *The Red Badge of Courage* illuminates a path toward deeper meanings and clearer insights. Instead of discussion that anticipates specific answers and responses, these discussions take the dialogue in new directions. Like Henry, the students and I embark on a journey of self-questioning and self-discovery. In doing so, we become free to explore the personal and community values that underlie our actions and our personal selves.

These classroom experiences demonstrate how *imagination* illuminates our essence, our consciousness, and our deepest levels of being. When stripped of political, economic, and social limitations, ideas and concepts serve as linguistic and metaphoric signs with infinite qualitative possibilities and meaning. My students and I experienced what George Willis and Anthony J. Allen (1978) identified as a phenomenological attempt to move from a surface level of experiencing to the deep level of experiencing experience. For Henry, the hymn of twilight is the sound of tranquility and truth emanating from within himself without the interference of external noise. For my students and myself, this hymn of twilight is the sound of our inner voices or our inner conscience as we attempt to ascertain what values and beliefs most resonate with who we are, not with who we are told we are or are expected to be. Peter Smagorinsky (2001) described the act of reading in a similar way:

Just as the mind extends beyond the confines of the skin, textual signs extend beyond the cover of a book. During a reading transaction, reader and text conjoin in an experimental space. This space provides the arena in which cultural



mediation takes place, including the act known as reading. I view this space not as a sealed area connecting two discrete entities but as a dynamic, permeable zone.

(p 141)

Examining Crane's text in this way allows for more introspective and empathic reading and understanding. In Barthesian terms, the reader initially identifies with the role of the protagonist (identity); then unconsciously adopts the lens of the creator, the author (adoption); and finally reconstructs an experience based on his or her own human relationships and cultural contexts. In this way, Barthes' *reconstruction* stage is achieved. The former data-driven, competitive veil of reality has been reconstructed into a prayerful reality. This reality which lives in the interactions between teacher and student is what Mayes means by "soulful teaching":

Through the mirror of the subject matter, the teacher helps students see into their own hearts and thus find freedom from the psychological, social, and spiritual forces that have heretofore enslaved them. Is it any wonder that we look back on our favorite teachers with undying love? They have directed us from the starting-point of subject matter into the depths of our own hearts, where the eternal lives.

(p. 59)

The character of Henry serves as a guide by which my students and I can search for what Hillman (1996) calls our invisible selves. Alongside Henry, we search beneath our various disguises to ferret out a deeper truth. Beneath our various masks which may include the mask of citizen, student, teacher, child, and athlete, lie the values and morals that truly define us:

And so it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath his

soul changed. He came from hot plough-shares to prospects of clover prosperity, and it was as if hot plowshares were not. Scars faded as flowers. (p. 127)

When considering the sentence “Scars faded as flowers” my students and I embark on a transcendent voyage of thought and discovery. We explore scars and flowers not as mere qualities but as *possibilities*; not as general laws but as reasonable *arguments*; and not as symbols but as *pieces of our consciousness* (individual and collective). Embedded in this brief four-word sentence is the larger spiritual motif of death and resurrection in the classroom and in the educator himself. With the use of timeless pedagogical tools of oxymoron (death springing from life), sacred mythologies (from Aztec to Greco-Roman to Christian), and the metaphorical heroic journey, this passage embodies the challenges we face as teachers and as human beings.

Henry has shown me a new meaning for William Shakespeare’s line: “He jests at scars that never felt the wound” (*Romeo and Juliet*). Our scars are that which define us on an external level. But it is the wound, the very source of the scar, which needs to be explored in order to free our spirit and mind from the prison of the scar. These are the challenges Henry faces as he engages in battle; these are the challenges we encounter as we engage in life. *The Red Badge of Courage* inspires me to reflect on the realities of my self that lie beneath external scars or masks. Each time my students and I read this novel, we don’t examine Henry, we examine ourselves. After each unit, we are not the same. In this way, I suspect, the teaching experience becomes transformative.

When Henry is bombarded with the hype and hysteria generated during the Civil War era and is in his pursuit of an externally imposed emblem of glory and honor (military rank and medals), he is transformed into a metaphorical beast on the battle field. He

surrenders to an externally imposed tale of heroism that ultimately de-humanizes him. Because he sacrifices his intrinsic sense of self, his humanity is metaphorically crucified.

Although this transformative notion of crucifixion and rebirth is seldom included in teaching manuals, I have come to see its significance. I have been influenced by John Gray (2003) who writes about living according to the spirit of Dionysus which enables humans to experience cycles of cruelty and survival; and by Joseph Campbell (1991) who expounds on the motif of life as life and life as death, two aspects of the same phenomenon of becoming. This thinking opens the door to a new set of educational standards and curricula: to crucify prejudice and resurrect understanding; to crucify dogma and resurrect free will; and to crucify allegiances and resurrect free thought and logic. These are the educational standards that Henry's journey inspires me to consider.

In order to achieve the highest external honors bestowed upon "heroes," Henry must set aside his natural human tendencies of reflection and contemplation in order to act according to a base, thoughtless, and bestial spirit. He must metaphorically crucify his old self (a self that relied on dogma, state-sanctioned patriotism, and an externally imposed rank), in order to be resurrected into his true worth as an individual thinking human being.

He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past. He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war. He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks – an existence of soft and eternal peace. (pp. 127-8)

Similarly, Crane's text inspires me to more closely ponder what happens

when the intrinsic reality of the teacher and learner is crucified as a sacrifice to the externally “standards” imposed from outside our humanity instead of being generated from within it? Ever since becoming familiar with the writing of Barrett (1987), I have been intrigued with his argument that the human mind and self are disappearing items, that there is a gaping hole at the center of our being where personal ethics and individual free will are being usurped by technology and bureaucracy. The Civil War Henry is fighting is not North (Union) versus the South (Confederacy). It is submissive Henry versus free-thinking Henry. Each time I read the novel alone or with a group of students, the same internal battle is waged.

Like Henry, I have learned to battle passivity in learning and to engage in the stalwart quest for a deeper truth that is found not within the curriculum or in the state standards, but in ourselves. This is a spiritual battle I engage in each day as an educator, and as a person.

#### **D: Topics for reflection**

1: As an educator, where do you stand in terms of infusing your personal values and ideals into your instruction? Reflect on times when the school’s curriculum and your own values were at odds. As a professional, how can these dilemmas be addressed?

2: Rate these statements first as a human being, then as an educator. External knowledge is of value in that it:

A: helps assess student progress and teacher performance

B: helps categorize students into ability groups and projected job and/college tracks

C: helps in the development of personal and community values

How might educational systems develop greater harmony between these pedagogical

perspectives?

3: Characterize the social, political, and economic situations and attitudes that surround your educational environment. To what extent is the educational system operating primarily out of the Barthesian level of identity, wherein reading and reflecting serve primarily to perpetuate surface identities that we have been taught to accept?

Which areas of the curriculum allow educators to challenge such prevailing ideologies and prejudices? What risks and what benefits can be incurred from instruction that challenges externally imposed identities and expectations?

4: Relate an experience that you've had in which a teaching episode (either inside or outside of a formal school) led participants on a path that imposed identities and beliefs as defined by curriculum guides, political agendas, or stereotypes (economic, racial, ethnic in nature)? Imagine ways in which that experience could be re-written in order to empower the participants to travel beyond externally imposed identities and into deeper, more meaningful arenas of awareness, reflection, and thought.

5: Try to recall experiences (as a teacher and as a student) in which you, like Henry Fleming, were in the "deep thickets" of deeper personal reflection and awareness. To what extent do you feel these events characterize meaningful educational experiences?

6: As a human being and a teacher, what moments of personal and professional transformation or epiphany have you experienced? What were the circumstances and the outcomes? How have these (or how might these) kinds of experiences affect you as a person and as a teacher?

7: As an instructor, to what extent are you perpetuating what Henry Fleming called the "iron laws of tradition and law"? What are some of the significant teaching moments

you've had that promoted free will or a mob-like mentality? In what ways have these experiences influenced your role as educator?

8: Do you think it would be possible to re-focus curricula away from extrinsically quantitative, fact-based information and toward a more intrinsically personal, and qualitative perspective? What would be gained? What would be lost?

9: How much of our lives as teachers and individuals revolves around societal values imposed externally and how much revolves around the values and character of our own individual beings? From which 'reality' (the externally imposed one or the internally derived one) does our reality find its sustenance?

10: Brainstorm additional ways texts such as *The Red Badge of Courage* be used as semiotic vehicles to analyze and to construct a sense of who we are as individuals and as a community.

11: Metaphorically speaking, what lies beneath the veil of a 'Teacher of the Year' whose students have scored the highest test scores in the district? What is gained and what is sacrificed in order to achieve a Golden Apple of public recognition (perhaps an instructor's equivalent of the soldier's red badge of courage)?

12: As a teacher (and a person), how much time is spent responding to immediate external stimuli and expectations rather than using one's journey as teacher to develop a deeper sense of possibility and understanding of one's self and one's students?

## II. CHARACTER AS CONSCIENCE

*Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo

If Henry Fleming (*The Red Badge of Courage*) is my doppelganger, then Jean Val Jean (*Les Miserables*) is my conscience. By conscience, I am referring to Val Jean's capacity to illuminate the depths of my spiritual/ethical core as an individual human being and as a teacher. Henry's journey revealed an outer and an inner reality that were often "at war" with each other. Although Henry's epiphany was in seeing the harmonious juxtaposition of seeming opposites, Henry stops short of actually embracing this reality. By stopping here, Henry remains my doppelganger, a *shadow* of my larger and deeper human self. Consequently, Henry finds himself going from "obscurity into promises of a greater obscurity" and his revelations lead him to the "peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing." William Barrett (1986) identifies this problem as the death of the human soul:

The starry heavens open before me the vista of a cosmos that broadens out into the unbounded expanse of world beyond world, system beyond system. In confrontation with that immensity, my own personal significance is diminished. Facing this universe, I am but an infinitesimal speck of matter that must in the end give back to the universe those bits of matter I have borrowed for a while. On the other hand, if I turn inward to the sense of the moral law that grips my conscience, my dignity as a human person appears exalted. As a spiritual being, I seem no longer to be merely a tiny speck of matter in an indifferent universe. The moral law that commands me inwardly seems to open upon a fuller destiny than that. (p. 90)

Although at the time I could not explain why, as a twenty-year old undergraduate student, I was intrigued with Barrett's ideas of personal significance versus specks of

matter; conscience and dignity versus an indifferent universe; and moral law and spiritual beings versus the unbounded expanse of an impersonal cosmos. Randomly spotting a copy of Barrett's text in a used bookstore some fifteen years later, I purchased and re-read the text only to find that Barrett's ideas continued to challenge me in an immediate and profound way. As I again reflected upon Barrett's thoughts, I came to more clearly ascertain Barrett's insistence on the existence of *two sets of reality*: the outer (the starry heavens above me) and the inner (the moral law within me); as well as the natural (scientific and quantitative) and the moral (spiritual and soulful). Henry never ascends to this revelation; he remains a shadow (a wee thing of great obscurity) thereby not achieving depth of conscience or soul.

By contrast, Val Jean not only struggles with the *call of duty* (as Henry endeavored to do), but also responds to the *call of conscience*. As an archetypal character, Val Jean traverses that precarious road of conscience which Henry became aware of but did not travel. In doing so, Val Jean attempts to bridge the gaps between what is factual and what is moral; between scientific rationalism and spiritual consciousness; and between natural laws and human conscience. He transcends the question '*what do I do*' and instead asks the question '*what ought I do*'. As a teacher and a human being, I am again reminded of Barrett's (1986) concluding question:

Scripture warns us, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" We can provide a secular version of this warning as follows: What shall it profit a whole civilization, or culture, if it gains knowledge and power over the material world, but loses any adequate idea of the conscious mind, the human self, at the center of all that power? (p. 166)



It is in this way I feel that Victor Hugo's (1862) *Les Miserables* is a story of education. It has deepened my reflections on what it means to be a teacher. Throughout his transcendent journey, Jean Val Jean demonstrates how a re-vitalized human conscience can humanize one's life's work, add dignity to one's life's choices, and protect us from a physical universe that threatens to usurp the soul of our personhood. It is this human conscience that liberates us from being merely the shadow of a person, from being the specter of a teacher, and from being merely a wee obscurity.

A. **Expelling the shadow and entering the light**

Although Val Jean is a literary creation, he is (for me) through the genius of Hugo's imagination, a personification of the possibilities of living (and teaching) with integrity, humanity, and conscience. Early in the novel, Val Jean asks himself - asks *all of us* - to consider the following:

Beware darkness in the atmosphere, darkness in the deeds, darkness in voices all bound in monstrosly grey mist of rain, night, hunger, vice, lying, injustice, of the miserable. Let us have compassion. Who are we? Are we ourselves? Who am I who speak to you? Who are you who listen to me? (p. 831)

If we are educators, then *who* and what are we really? Are we rules and laws personified? Or are we compassion and conscience embodied? Are we teaching from a place of shadows or from a field of light? Are we leading our students and each other into shade or into light? These questions delve to the heart and soul of teaching. If they are neglected and remain in the shadows, Val Jean warns us that there is a price to pay:

Have no fears of robbers or murderers. Such dangers are without, and are but petty. We should fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices the real murderers.

The great dangers are within us. What matters is what threatens our heads or our purses? Let us think only of what threatens our souls. (pp. 24-5)

In this way, Val Jean suggests a profoundly meaningful avenue in which to engage in the kind of spiritual introspection scholar Clifford Mayes (2005) calls for:

We need to attend to spirituality much more than we presently do in our study and practice of teaching. We particularly need to attend to it in our “reflectivity” as teachers. By this term I mean introspection about why one has chosen to teach, how one teaches, and what one hopes to accomplish as a teacher...By these means, a teacher may engage in deep introspection about herself as a teacher in order to explore why she decides to teach, the conscious and subconscious images and experiences that influence her idea of “good practice,” and goals for herself and her students. The primary purpose of teacher reflectivity is to nurture and refine those images and impulses, transform them, or even expunge them in favor of more professionally and personally satisfying ones. (p. 2)

Which teachers in our lives (both in and out of the school building) have come to us from places of darkness? Which have led us into places of darkness? How have these teachers contributed to the educator (or individual) we have become or aspire to be? What educators in our lives have threatened, robbed, or even murdered a piece of our selves, our souls? For me, the responses to these questions transcend space and time as I am immediately transported to my eleven-year-old self lost in a monstrosly grey mist of perceived personal injustice and humiliation emanating from the voice of the Little League baseball coach/teacher who operated from the philosophy that ridicule and embarrassment would transform me into a more successful player. The coach/teacher

rained down a storm of negativity upon my impressionable self-esteem and my sensitive soul.

How does this conscious memory, as well any related subconscious feelings or thoughts, influence the spirit of my daily interaction with students? Val Jean reminds us that the true danger of a misguided education is not a lower intelligence quotient (IQ). It's a diminishing of our soul; a lessening of that which makes us truly human. Prior to this illuminous revelation, Hugo explains "Val Jean, to one who had examined him in that shadow, would not have seemed a living man."

Hugo goes on to describe the moment of Val Jean's awakening from these shadowlands:

His brain was in one of those violent and yet frightfully calm conditions where reverie is so profound that it swallows up reality. We no longer see the objects that are before us, but we see as if outside of ourselves, the forms that we have in our minds. He beheld himself then so to speak face to face and at a great distance a sort of light which dawned upon his conscience. At one moment he was but a shadow. The bishop filled the whole soul of this wretched man with a magnificent radiance. The light grew brighter and brighter in his mind – an extraordinary light at once transporting and terrible; He beheld his life and it seemed to him horrible; his soul frightful. (p. 96)

No teacher preparation course or text that I have seen has clearly identified the incredible moments of transformation described here: the moment when a teacher realizes that he has been so caught up in the *role* of teaching that he or she did not truly see or understand the humanity of the students before him; and the moment when the *role of teacher* would become more real than the act of teaching and learning. While Val Jean

was living under the shadow of spiritual and material poverty, his only thoughts were for his own individual well-being and survival. But once the character of the Bishop bestows upon Val Jean acts of charity and forgiveness, the illumination of the selfless actions themselves pierces the shadow Val Jean had been mired in. For the first time in his life, Val Jean is aware that a soul without a conscience is a soul that is frightful. In response, Val Jean weeps:

The first time he wept in nineteen years. While he wept the light grew brighter and brighter in his mind – an extraordinary light; a light at once transporting and terrible. He beheld his life and it seemed to him horrible; his soul seemed to him frightful. There was, however, a softened light upon that life and upon that soul. It seemed to him that he was looking upon Satan by the light of Paradise. (p. 27)

Val Jean reminds me that as a teacher, if instruction becomes mired in shadow, then no charity, forgiveness, or conscience will penetrate any words, actions, hearts, or minds. Without these qualities, my interaction with students (and all others) becomes rote, mechanical, and lifeless. If we are teaching in shadow, then is our instruction rote, mechanical, and lifeless as well? And if our teaching is rote, mechanical, and lifeless, *where* are we leading our students? Where are we leading *each other*? These are the kinds of questions that Val Jean inspires me to consider as a teacher and an individual.

What teachers (again in the broadest sense) taught us from fields of light or lead us into similar places of illumination? Hugo portrays his Bishop character as teacher. When the Bishop treats Val Jean – an escaped parolee who has stolen again - with mercy and kindness, it is the *lessons* of forgiveness and charity that pierce the shadows of injustice and inequality which had previously plagued Val Jean. What teachers, like Hugo's

Bishop, have taught us lessons capable of penetrating what Hugo calls the “darkness in the atmosphere, darkness in the deeds, darkness in voices”?

My response to these questions again transcends space and time as I am immediately transported to my fourteen-year-old self sitting in my high school Latin classroom. Although I recall little of the declensions and classical rhetoric, the more valuable lessons I learned and retained were the ones that penetrated my fragile adolescence with the wellsprings of self-confidence and self-worth. Through discussions, journaling, and projects, my Latin teacher, like the Bishop, challenged me to understand and to embrace my strengths and weaknesses in order to pierce the shadows of self-doubt and low self-worth. The lessons of humility, patience, and charity illuminated and continue to illuminate my life’s path.

Where in our daily curriculum does this spirit of humility, patience, and charity reside? Adhering to the terms that Mayes has laid out, if the baseball coach images and impulses are the ones I need to expunge from my pedagogical methods and interactions, then it is the conscious and subconscious images of my Latin experience that I need to nurture in order to transform my teaching into a practice which is intrinsically, professionally, and personally satisfying in terms of what I truly hope to accomplish as a teacher.

The act of differentiating between the teaching and learning that emanates from or leads to paths of lightness from those of shadow is an act of epiphany. Val Jean embodies this moment of epiphany when he realizes that “the true division of humanity is this: the luminous and the dark. To diminish the number of the dark, to increase the number of the luminous, behold the aim” (p. 831). He then enters an emotional and

intellectual landscape wherein “the angel of light and the angel of darkness are to wrestle on the bridge of the abyss” (p. 210); this place was “the safest and the most dangerous” (p. 102). Hugo describes this surreal moment as a time when “his destiny and his conscience were suddenly covered with shadow” (p. 210); when Val Jean is “hesitating between two realms – the doomed/the saved; to cleave a skull or kiss the hand” (p. 20).

For Val Jean, the epiphany is followed by a choice: to follow the *call of duty* or the *call of conscience*. To adhere to the course of ‘*what should I do*’ or of ‘*what ought I do*.’ Val Jean carefully considers the stark decision he is called to make:

This man who passed through every distress who was still bleeding from the lacerations of his destiny, who had been almost evil and who had become almost holy and who could at any moment be led back from the obscurity of his virtue to the broad light of public shame. (p. 177)

Throughout the novel, Val Jean is portrayed as an intrinsically ethical man who commits externally illegal actions (for internally moral purposes). He robs a store (to feed his sister’s starving children). He deliberately breaks the terms of his parole and assumes a false identity (in order to secure his freedom so as to continue doing good deeds for society as an honest factory owner and a fair and compassionate mayor). He breaks his parole a second time and assaults a police officer (to rescue a dying woman and to keep a promise to take care of her orphaned daughter). The list of Val Jean’s intrinsically ethical deeds (which ironically could only be accomplished by breaking external laws) is extensive. Since society judges him by his external actions alone, Val Jean is labeled a criminal. While his good deeds remain hidden, the shadow of justice hangs over him, brandishing him an outlaw and a degenerate.

Despite the conflict between his public identity and his private values (or perhaps because of it), Val Jean is more than a hero to me. He is a super hero. Val Jean is a combination of Batman (perceived by Gotham City as a criminal vigilante despite his commitment against crime); Superman (hiding an alternate identity and a mysterious past); and Green Lantern (whose rage forces him to do bad things for good reasons). W. Irwin (2011) pointed out that when viewed as modern mythology, comic book superheroes challenge us to think deeply and to be inspired:

Superheroes are complex characters and have become the mythology of our time.

Like the gods [of ancient mythology], superheroes tend to have basic origin stories and character traits, which set the stage for a limitless number and variety of tales....our flawed heroes can act as moral exemplars. (p. 11)

One of the most engaging projects I present to my students is the creation of their own superhero. In pairs, students devise their hero's identity, history, powers, and weaknesses. Next, they plan and create a life-sized portraiture of the hero. Embedded in this sequence of lessons is a set of narratives, essays, and journal entries that ask students to contrast their hero's outer actions with their inner motives; to analyze how the hero's values serve as their strengths *and* their weaknesses; and to elaborate on how their hero might be perceived by a variety of on-lookers (past, present, and future). The lesson is eventually repeated in terms of creating their own villain.

Some students chose to create variations of the characters we've examined in class. One outstanding student project specifically utilized the theme of a misunderstood Val Jean. The student created an animated version of Val Jean as a villain (VJ) pursued by a high tech version of a superhero Javert (JV). She explained in her accompanying essay

that while technology had replaced the heart of hero Javert, Val Jean was regarded as a renegade rebel defying technological progress over human reasoning while threatening the uniformity of society. The student explained that she was using her characters to try to point out how easily people accept false truths at face value. Her superhero VJ, like Hugo's Val Jean, adhered to what Ayn Rand (1957) called a morality of sacrifice:

If the motive of your action is your welfare, don't do it; if the motive is the welfare of others, then anything goes....to love a man for his virtues is paltry and human...to love him for his flaws is divine. (p. 1030)

At the height of his desperation, Val Jean steals silver candlesticks from the Bishop, the only person who ever showed him any mercy or compassion. Rather than allow the police to arrest Val Jean, the Bishop adheres to a 'morality of sacrifice,' proclaims that the incident was a misunderstanding, and offers Val Jean the silver, forgiveness and his freedom:

Jean Val Jean felt like a man who is just about to faint. The bishop approached him, and said, in a low voice:

“Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.”

Jean Val Jean, who had no recollection of this promise, stood confounded. The bishop had laid much stress upon these words as he uttered them. He continued, solemnly:

“Jean Val Jean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God. (p. 90)



At this point, Val Jean became a changed man from the inside out: “He was another man; it was more than a transformation – it was a transfiguration; happy to feel his conscience” (p. 51). To the outer world, however, he remained a hunted galley slave, a criminal under the eyes of society and its external justice system:

The galleys make the galley slave. Receive this in kindness, if you will. Before the galleys I was a poor peasant, unintelligent, a species of idiot; the galley changed me. I was stupid. I became wicked. I was a log, I became a firebrand; Later I was saved by indulgence and kindness as I had been lost by severity. (p. 65)

Because of the Bishop’s unbiased act of forgiveness and faith, Val Jean is no longer a mere galley slave: “I am a galley slave who obeys his conscience” (p. 260). To what extent are we educators metaphorical galley slaves to what we know we need to do in terms of the external regulations, restrictions, and obligations society imposes? More importantly, to what extent, if any, are we galley slaves *with a conscience*?

Furthermore, to what extent are we teaching our students as if they were galley “slaves-in-training”? Are we teaching students what they need to be citizens who abide exclusively to societal regulations, restrictions, and obligations or are we empowering them with the tools they need to function positively in society without compromising their conscience? Again, by raising these questions and reflecting on them, Val Jean has been and continues to be for me a powerful resource for reflection.

## **B. Encountering oxymoron**

While Val Jean is covered in the shadows of merciless public law and the prejudices against the criminal status attributed to him by government officials, the light of his inner self goes unnoticed by most people. Of the Bishop who penetrated that shadow, Hugo

remarks: “No man is a good historian of the open, visible life of the nation if he is not at the same time historian of the deeper and hidden life” (p. 830). By the same token, I ponder this revised statement: No person is a good *teacher* of the open, visible life of the nation if he is not at the same time *teacher* of the deeper and hidden life.

Our inner selves do not exist *instead* of the external world, but simultaneously with it. Nevertheless, in a society filled with multitudes of people, laws and restrictions are imposed externally to maintain a level of order and stability. Political and economic systems are theoretically devised and implemented ostensibly for the same purposes. Agents of state, government, media, energy-use, even religion operate at this bureaucratic, corporate level. William H. Schubert (2009a) describes our economically-driven acquisitive society that prizes ‘having’ over ‘being’:

I contend that all Earthlings (including radicals who propose redistribution of wealth and public ownership) would be greatly frustrated, to say the least, if the consequences of corporate ingenuity and organization were suddenly turned off: electricity, gas, transportation, lodging, communication, food, shelter, clothing, and much more, Heavens, a fit is thrown by radicals and conservatives alike, when the computer or television ceases to work for a few minutes, and when communication, air conditioning, or entertainment is interrupted. (p. 119)

Without these external systems of operation, even the network and funding for public education would cease to exist. Without this, my students and I would have no consistent means or space to gather. Thus, Val Jean embodies this co-existence of opposites: to operate and thrive in the external demands of the “open. Visible public life” while simultaneously attending to the “deeper and hidden life” of then conscience. Val Jean

shows us that this is the “safest and the most dangerous” space to be. He accepts and embraces the mysteries of life’s oxymoron as “he becomes a beggar who gives alms” (p. 86); and “he was so happy that his conscience at last began to be troubled” (p. 172).

Val Jean must violate what is legally right in order to do what is morally appropriate; must lie in order to be truthful; and must destroy himself so that others can live more fully. As Val Jean personifies these contradictions within this crucifixion motif, he is embodying a worldview that transcends categorizing and classifying. Instead, he offers a glimpse of all the richness, mystery, contradiction, and possibility that lie within imagination and conscience.

In this way, students and I explore other riddles that embed our reality with oxymoron, such as when we examine William Shakespeare’s (1597) *Romeo and Juliet*. In trying to explain the heartbreak of love denied, Romeo can only capture the reality of his internal torment by using ‘unreal’ contradictions. Thus, the reality of his intrinsic spirit is revealed through the unreality of the words and images he uses:

Here’s much to do with hate, but more with love.

Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate,

O anything of nothing first create;

O heavy lightness, serious vanity,

Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,

Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Still waking sleep, that is not what it is!

This love feel I, that feel no love in this (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene 2, lines 172 – 179).

I muse: Do we perceive in our carefully crafted curriculum maps the ‘misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms’? Are our discipline procedures motivated by ‘brawling love’ and ‘loving hate’? When is ability-level segregation of students nurturing a ‘cold fire’ and episodes of ‘sick health’? These oxymorons free reflections from the restrictions of ‘either/or’ thinking.

In describing the complex political, social, moral, and economic zeitgeist of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century London, Charles Dickens (1859) relies on oxymoron:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. (*A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 7).

In what ways is the era of *No Child Left Behind* both ‘the best of times and the worst of times’? How does the increased use of technology in the classroom bring us to both ‘have everything before us’ and ‘nothing before us’? Is the era of data-driven instruction and accountability both a ‘spring of hope’ and a ‘winter of despair’? The perspective of considering a *simultaneous* best *and* worst, an *inclusive* Winter *and* Spring, and a *totality* of everything *and* nothing inspired me to actually invite Jean Val Jean into my classroom via Herbert Kretzmer’s (1985) lyrics for the Broadway production libretto.

When Val Jean is reprieved by the Bishop, the motif of a simultaneous death and birth emerges:

My life was a war that could never be won. They gave me a number and murdered

Val Jean. ...I feel my shame inside me like a knife. He told me I had a soul. How does he know? What spirit comes to move my life? Is there another way to go?

I am reaching but I fall/ and the night is closing in/

And I stare into the void/to the whirlpool of my sin.

I'll escape now from the world; from the world of Jean Val Jean.

Jean Val Jean is nothing now. Another story must begin. (Kretzmer, p. 6)

It is this moment of death that ironically triggers the possibility of new birth; Hugo described its impact on Val Jean as the “good wound; o kind hurt” (p. 183). At the moment Val Jean is blessed with an awareness of his soul, he is simultaneously tortured with an awareness of his sins. Hugo portrayed this moment as a collision of “the same harm and the same blessing” (p. 179). At this glorious moment in which he is reborn with a new identity, Val Jean nevertheless “felt a deep and indefinable anguish in his heart” (p. 177).

In this way, Val Jean has opened up my classroom discussions in ways I had never previously thought possible. What in our lives is or has been a ‘good wound’ or a ‘kind hurt’? Is it possible for new personal or public identities to emerge and thrive? When the Bishop remarks that Val Jean has a soul, what is he really saying? Is there really more to us than our physical actions and words alone can reveal? These questions and others like them have inspired discussion and reflection through dialogue, writing, art, and music. My middle school students, being at the adolescent stage of their lives and facing challenges in terms of their own identities and life choices, seem to relate to these ideas with an introspection that always astounds me.

Barry Sanders (2009) regards this openness to perceive the simultaneous existence of

opposites, such as darkness and light, to be an avenue by which to glimpse our inner reality:

Who I am in the full blaze of the sun, in the clearest light of day, leaves a faint trace, which you can discover in my shadow. As the sun sets – as I grow older – I reveal more and more of myself. I am substantial and insubstantial at one and the same time. I move through the world as both positive and negative. One of the most forceful ambiguities of the period is one that sees in the absence the possibility of a most powerful presence. (p. 310)

Following this thinking, when the metaphorical sun shines upon our public work as teachers, must there also exist some underlying shadows? What reality is exposed within the shadow of our classroom work? What attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, or emotions are the shadows of our teaching casting upon our students? As a hunted criminal, Val Jean is forced to move within the shadows of night and under the covers of disguise. The darkness, however, also serves to protect Val Jean against the falsehoods and misunderstandings that misjudge and condemn him.

Without being able to rely on external comforts and pleasures, Val Jean turns inward for spiritual sustenance. He discovers that in solitude and in shadows there exists a presence of truth, wisdom, and justice that is unblemished by secular greed, jealousy, and ambition. I believe that his cry for spiritual transformation has strong pedagogical implications:

We must reform and transform. Certain faculties of man are directed towards the Unknown: thought, meditation, prayer. The Unknown is an ocean. What is conscience? It is the compass of the Unknown. Thought, meditation, prayer, these

are the great, mysterious pointings of the needle. Let us respect them. Whither tend these majestic irradiations of the soul? Into the shadow, that is, towards the light.

The grandeur of democracy is that it denies nothing and renounces nothing of humanity. Close by the rights of Man, side by side with them, at least, are the rights of the Soul. (p. 437)

I hear Val Jean crying out for education that reforms and transforms; teaching and learning that respect thought, meditation, prayer, and conscience; and a curriculum grounded in democracy, humanity, and the ‘irradiations of the soul.’ What would happen if we used Val Jean’s ‘compass of the unknown’ as a metaphorical gauge of our teaching? Would the ‘mysterious pointings of the needle’ be directing us (and our students) further outside of our selves or further toward our selves? To what extent does our teaching explore the external landscape of society’s laws, prejudices, and *conflicts as well as* the internal landscape of thought, meditation, and prayer?

Val Jean’s outcry is more than mere words. He is often called to put his notions of faith to the test. For example, he faces a moral crisis when his new identity as a successful factory owner and mayor is put in jeopardy. As an entrepreneur, he is able to offer work to many unskilled people and as mayor he holds a leadership position with which to further help others. Nevertheless, when the dogged police inspector Javert arrests someone he believes to be the escaped convict Val Jean, the real Val Jean faces a test of conscience. He examines his options through thought, meditation, and prayer:

If I speak, I am condemned. If I stay silent I am damned!

I am the master of hundreds of workers; they all look to me.

Can I abandon them? How will they live if I am not free?

If I speak, I am condemned. If I stay silent I am damned!

Who am I? Can I condemn this man to slavery?

Pretend I do not see his agony? This innocent who bears my face,  
who goes to justice in my place. Who am I? Can I conceal myself forevermore?

Pretend I'm not the man I was before?

And must my name until I die be no more than an alibi? Must I lie?

How can I ever face my fellow-man? How can I ever face myself again?

(Kretzmer, 1985, p. 9)

In this scenario, honesty to the law would end his good works that benefit so many. Dishonesty would allow his good works as factory owner and mayor, which benefit many people, to continue. His conscience is torn between following the laws of the land set by the government versus a higher law set by a Divine Providence:

My soul belongs to God, I know I made that bargain long ago

He gave me hope when hope was gone. He gave me strength to journey on.

Who am I? (Kretzmer, p. 9)

By presenting this dilemma in terms of a debate exercise, my students have the opportunity to argue both the legal and metaphysical considerations of Val Jean's choices. The line between legal and moral grounds becomes more cumbersome as the debates progress. Raising this sort of situation as a premise for debate challenges my students in that they need to examine more thoughtfully areas of law and conscience that are far from the familiarly proverbial "black and white" world of law and order that they are accustomed to.



In this forum I am also challenged in terms of having to facilitate a discussion in which the perimeters of the true meanings of “right or wrong” are being tested. I am asking my students and myself to critique situations in which there is no “right *or* wrong” – only right *and* wrong. Like Val Jean, we are forced to consider moments and situations of conflict when it is “right” to do the “wrong” thing or it would be “wrong” to do the “right” thing.

This is why Hugo calls the conscience the ‘compass of the unknown.’ He ascertains that this compass of the unknown is the soul. Whereas measuring right and wrong according to the brain is an exercise of intellect and law (a positivistic compass, if you will), measuring according to the soul is an application of heart and spirit (a metaphysical compass). John Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI 2005) contrasts these two modes of thinking in educational terms:

Scientists tell us that the dinosaurs died out because they developed in the wrong direction; a lot of armor plating and not much brain; a lot of muscles and not much understanding. Are not we, too, developing in the wrong direction: a lot of technology, but not much soul? A thick armor plating of material know-how, but a heart that has become empty. (pp. 92-93)

If we preparing students to meet overwhelmingly positivistic goals which give expected appearances of success (such as high test scores and numeric grade point averages), then who is preparing them for the unexpected conflicts that lie beneath those externally imposed surfaces and achievements? What happens when circumstances of oxymoron pierce this extrinsic lining as when a person is forced to compromise his ethical values so as to keep his job in order to feed his family; or when someone needs to

commit a crime in order to prevent what he perceives to be a larger crime? These are the ethical challenges that constantly plague Val Jean:

Life as a long trial; an unintelligible preparation for the unknown destiny.

Meantime, love, suffer, hope, and contemplate. Woe to him who shall have loved bodies, forms, appearances only. Death will take all from him. Try to love souls and you shall find them again. All lineaments traced upon the surface of the nation have their dark but distinct parallels in the bottom and all the convolutions of the bottom produce upheavals at the surface. (p. 787)

Is not teaching also the preparation for an unknown destiny? Do we see or perceive anything beyond the outer shells of students in our classrooms each day? Do we sense or intimate the souls that lie beneath the surface? Do we teach only the body and form of our disciplines? Do we share merely the chronology of history, the formulae of mathematics, and the procedures of science? Or do we share the curiosities of the historian? The creativity of the mathematician? And the passion of the scientist?

Behind the discipline of the scientist is his passion. Beyond the precision of the historian is his imagination. Similarly, Val Jean insists that: God is behind all things, but all things hide God. Things are black, creatures are opaque. To love a being is to render her transparent (p. 785).

If we are “covering” as much of the curriculum as we can, then what are we leaving transparent? Does the imagination and passion that drive us as teachers - as people – remain opaque mysteries to our students, hidden beneath the outer shell of our teacher persona? Beyond sharing information and standardized curricular goals, is there no transparency in our teacher persona to reveal glimpses of the values, ideas, and thoughts

that define us as human beings?

Val Jean's existence is the opposite of this; he is the rare example of a character whose earthly identity remains concealed while his inner soul becomes more transparent. The more his external identity is hidden (from the police, from his friends, from his family) the more his internal persona is revealed. He remarks near the end of his life that:

Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees...the future belongs more to the heart than to the mind. To love is the only thing which can occupy and fill up eternity...love partakes of the soul itself. (p. 785)

If "the future belongs more to the heart than to the mind," then where in our teaching do we address both the heart *and* the mind? Is it even possible to achieve such an oxymoron as an 'intellect of the heart' or of a 'prayerful effort of the mind'? Of these questions, Pope John Paul II (2005) in his *Sign of Contradiction* wrote:

Prayer is indispensable for persevering in pursuit of the good, indispensable for overcoming the trials life brings to man owing to his weakness. Prayer is strength for the weak and weakness for the strong. (p. 49)

Thus, I am again drawn back to my earlier musings regarding what role (if any) conscience (i.e. thought, meditation, and prayer) plays in my role as teacher.

### **C. Enduring conflicts of conscience**

Val Jean embodies this sphere of conscience and space of light, composed of thought, meditation, and prayer. Despite this, or rather because of this, Val Jean is continually tormented with emotionally sordid, and heart-wrenchingly painful, emotional, and spiritual conflicts. Hugo (1862) remarked:

But he who says light does not necessarily say joy. There is suffering in the light.  
In excess it burns. Flame is hostile to the wing. To burn and yet to fly, this is the  
miracle of genius (p. 831).

These images of wings, flames, suffering, and genius have a distinct dream-like  
quality. Is it possible that within this realm of conscience, the dream and the reality are  
interchangeable? Fantine, a significant character in Val Jean's journey, clearly expresses  
this state of being in the prayerful Broadway libretto *Les Miserables* (1985):

I dreamed a dream in time gone by; when hope was high  
And life worth living. I dreamed that love would never die.  
I dreamed that God would be forgiving. Then I was young and unafraid.  
And dreams were made and used and wasted. There was no ransom to be paid.  
No song unsung. No wine untasted.  
But the tigers come at night with their voices soft as thunder.  
As they tear your hope apart as they turn your dream to shame.  
But there are dreams that cannot be.  
And there are storms we cannot weather. I had a dream my life would be  
so different from this hell I'm living. So different now from what it seemed.  
Now life has killed the dream I dreamed. (Kretzmer, p. 8)

Fantine's prayer is solely to preserve the life of her child. This unselfish wish for  
another's well-being, for the salvation of another's soul, is accomplished only at the  
destruction of her own being. As she becomes effectively prayerful and thoughtful  
intrinsically, it is her physical body that is prostituted and ultimately destroyed. For  
Fantine, saving her daughter's life (and soul) is accomplished only by selling her own

body, her own life. The flames of her conscience were hostile to the wings of her body. She suffered in the light of her prayers.

Sharing this poem with my students means identifying and examining the tigers in our lives. It involves exploring our dreams and pondering the price we may or may not be willing to pay in order to make them reality. It means dissecting the ‘happily ever after’ theorem and bravely trying to unravel what values, ideas, or persons (if any) we would be willing to be sacrificed for. These conversations demand a level of emotional risk, candor, integrity, and mutual respect well beyond what I had ever imagined. As an elementary teacher, discussing *Fantine* and *Val Jean* in this way is much more demanding than discussing narrative plot lines or drawing character webs.

Why bother taking these risks? Why not take the “safer” course of asking the textbook-driven questions instead of delving into the often murky areas of personal values and beliefs? My response, paraphrasing the earlier passage from Hugo, is to acknowledge that the light of truth “does not necessarily say joy” and that with emotional and spiritual growth comes a genuine “suffering in the light.” In this way, my students and I become metaphorical ‘*les misérables*’ – those who burn and yet fly.

*Val Jean* sacrifices his duty to the public law by refusing to turn himself in as an escaped parolee, and he risks his own external safety and well-being by agreeing to care for *Fantine*’s orphaned daughter, *Cossette*, in secret. Hugo (1862) tells us:

His highest duty was not toward himself; following the example of all who have been wise, holy, and just; but if his name was uttered would his new soul vanish? He was getting a wider and wider view of his position; only one object remained: to save not his body but his soul. (p. 52)

The more Val Jean follows his conscience, the greater his conflict with the law, with the police, and with those from whom he is forced to hide or to confront in order to carry out Fantine's dying prayer. The more Val Jean operates in the prayerful service of others, the more his individuality seems to disappear. Only by denying his earthly 'labels' (name, address, profession, and earthly fame and wealth) can he serve others. To answer his call of conscience, he had to be willing to give up more and more of his very self.

In this way, Val Jean shows me that being a (hopefully) more effective teacher is not really about me at all. It is about the students whose thoughts, feelings, and ideas are being aroused and challenged. Perhaps the more I assume the role of teacher, the less of the individual and personal 'me' exists. Teaching for extrinsic purposes involves financial rewards, citations of excellence from school boards, gifts from students at holiday times, and a gold watch at retirement. Teaching for intrinsic purposes, however, is not about what is received, but is about the values, ideas, and thoughts we are giving away. Perhaps this is what Hugo means by achieving a 'wider and wider view' of one's position as well as saving not one's body, but one's soul.

The pedagogical implications of Hugo's novel also cry out for social justice. As an urban educator, I have seen the effects of poverty, hunger, and physical abuse on an individual's ability to learn. I have also been witness to systemic abuses and biases that ignore or are complacent to these conditions. When Val Jean decries the conditions of the neglected poor in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France, his words resonate in my 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears:

Make thought a whirlwind! This multitude can be sublimated. Let us learn to avail ourselves of this vast combustion of principles and virtues, which sparkles, crackles, and thrills at certain periods. These bare feet, these naked arms, these

ragged, these shades of ignorance, these depths of abjectness, these abysses of gloom may be employed in the conquest of the ideal. Look through the medium of the people and you shall discern the truth. This lowly sand which you trample beneath your feet, if you cast it into the furnace, and let it melt and seethe, shall become resplendent crystal, and by means of such as it a Galileo and a Newton shall discover stars. (p. 503)

Will assessment preparation ‘make thought a whirlwind’ as Val Jean suggests? Will racial, ethnic, gender, social, political or economic disparities continue to propagate what he calls ‘shades of ignorance, depths of abjectness, and abysses of gloom’? Nevertheless, this cry for justice is just as revolutionary and incendiary as it was during the French Revolution. When platitudes and ideals become real world choices, people get threatened and frightened. Even Val Jean’s efforts at charity were forever threatened by Javert, the personification of middle/upper class society and mores.

Living his life according to the edicts of his conscience (an unwritten spiritual course) pushes Val Jean into whirlwinds of conflict against Police Commissioner Javert. Javert lived his life according to the edicts of man-made written rules and restrictions. His concept of justice was based exclusively on scientific, legalistic, and positivistic evidence. Larger humanitarian concerns, moral responsibility, ethical deliberation, or spiritual authority bore no part in Javert’s single-minded pursuit of a one-dimensional justice. Whereas Javert sees a crime, Val Jean discerns the “abysses of gloom”; while Javert sees criminals, Val Jean discerns people who are ‘victims of ignorance and abjectness’; while Javert sees only the overt sins, Val Jean discerns covert suffering of ‘the bare feet and naked arms.’

The orderly array of stars shining down upon the earth is the symbol Hugo uses to link these two characters. For Javert, the stars are a scientific phenomena representing the linear and unquestionable system of justice devised by human lawmakers. Issues of justice are exclusively right *or* wrong. By contrast, Val Jean perceives the stars as a miraculously heavenly phenomena representing a realm of spiritual justice that resides well above and beyond the narrow limits human thinking. Truth is not an external calculation found in a physical action. It is an intrinsic force that encapsulates both right *and* wrong. It is accessed not through legal textbooks, but through meditation and prayer. For Javert the stars provided light; for Val Jean they provided illumination.

Javert saw Fantine only as an immoral woman who committed crimes of prostitution. For Val Jean, however, these extrinsic crimes of the flesh became transparent as he perceives that underlying these external actions lies the quietly intrinsic desperation of a defeated mother sacrificing her entire earthly vessel in a noble crusade to provide for her daughter. Both Javert and Val Jean are right. And they are both wrong. They are at once heroes *and* villains. Trying to do what each believes is ‘right’ puts Javert and Val Jean in direct conflict with each other. The conflicts are messy, cruel, and confusing. They are full of hurt, anguish, and pain.

The more Val Jean acts according to his conscience, the more Javert pursues him according to his municipal handbook. In the end, after Val Jean shows mercy and compassion to Javert, his arch-rival, it is this very act of forgiveness and reconciliation that penetrates to the heart of Javert’s conscience. But even this only fuels the intensity of his conflict. Javert’s meditation expresses his desperate struggle:

Who is this man? What sort of devil is he? To have me caught in a trap



And choose to let me go free? It was his hour at last/ to put a seal on my fate

Wipe out the past and wash me clean off the slate.

All it would take was a flick of his knife.

Vengeance was his and he gave me back my life! (Kretzmer, p. 19)

Javert has arrived at what Sam Harris (2010) called the moral landscape: “a space of real and potential outcomes whose peaks correspond to the heights of potential well-being and whose valleys represent the deepest possible suffering” (p. 7). Javert’s epiphany is that facts and protocols do not always adhere to one’s values. The wisdom shatters his well-ordered, neatly packaged view of the world:

Damned if I’ll live in the debt of a thief

Damned if I’ll yield at the end of the chase.

I am the Law and the Law is not mocked.

I’ll spit his pity right back in his face.

There is nothing on earth that we share.

It is either Val Jean or Javert. (Kretzmer, p. 19)

Is it really possible for a well-intended person to act solely on facts (and objective laws) without acknowledging the values that sustain and nourish the actual human being behind the act? Is it really possible for a person to break factual laws in order to strive for and to preserve larger intrinsic values and morals? For Javert, these questions prove fatal:

And now I must begin to doubt? Who never doubted all these years?

My heart is stone and still it trembles. The world I have known is lost in shadow.

Is he from heaven or from hell? And does he know that granting me my life today-

This man has killed me even so.

I am reaching - but I fall. And the stars are black and cold.

As I stare into the void of a world that cannot hold.

I'll escape now from that world - from the world of Jean Val Jean.

There is nowhere I can turn.

There is no way to go on. (Kretzmer, 1985, p. 19)

The impact of this illumination proves too much for Javert. A conscience (i.e. a soul) can be a dangerous thing. It takes tremendous strength, stamina, fortitude, and courage to live in a world that bears such contradictory challenges. When the legal 'wrong' is the moral 'right' (as when Val Jean steals bread out of desperation to feed his sister's family); and when the legal 'right' is the moral 'wrong' (as when arresting Val Jean for breaking his parole would prevent Val Jean from being free to redeem Fantine's life and to save Fantine's daughter from misery), the sincere and stalwart agent of the police cannot reconcile the intrinsic moral rectitude of an action with his one-dimensional definition of law enforcement. The intensity of the conflict, without the spiritual tools of thought, prayer, meditation, proves fatal to Javert.

We need to revisit Hugo's earlier wisdom:

Certain faculties of man are directed towards the Unknown: thought, meditation, prayer. The Unknown is an ocean. What is conscience? It is the compass of the Unknown. Thought, meditation, prayer, these are the great, mysterious pointings of the needle. Let us respect them. Whither tend these majestic irradiations of the soul? Into the shadow, that is, towards the light. The grandeur of democracy is that it denies nothing and renounces nothing of humanity. Close by the rights of Man, side by side with them, at least, are the rights of the Soul. (p. 437)

Javert's mechanical compass of the stars cannot guide him as a spiritual 'compass of the unknown.' He cannot reconcile 'the rights of man' with the 'rights of the Soul.' Even Thomas Jefferson's (1776) *Declaration of Independence* calls for a democracy with a conscience that acknowledges a respect for the individual "to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them" and that "among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." To me, Val Jean personifies the life of the human spirit, the liberty of the soul, and the true intrinsic happiness that comes from operating in a moral landscape.

In this way, Val Jean has led me to an epiphany: my role as teacher is not about me – it is about the values and spirit I embody and share as a teacher. At this pivotal point I am forced to ask the following questions: Does my instruction nurture in my students meaningful (albeit esoteric) components necessary for sustaining a life, liberty, and intrinsically worthwhile pursuit of intrinsic happiness of their own? Is the instruction as I impart it in harmony with the values and morals I truly value as a person?

Ascertaining meaningful questions to ask myself is a critical step in my education as a teacher. The more important task, however, is the actual search for answers. Val Jean and Javert explored this moral territory by embracing moments of crisis and confrontation that called for making choices and taking action. After all, Javert is more than Val Jean's rival; he is his nemesis, relentlessly challenging and threatening the very core of Val Jean's conscience. At the same time I am both invigorated and frightened at the idea that it is these moments of conflict and challenge which are most likely to be the very ones with the potential to ultimately define or destroy my integrity as a person – and as a person.

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: What is your orientation to teaching? Can you recall moments when you were teaching as if from a place of shadow? Can you recall moments when you were teaching as if from a field of light?

2: Which teachers in your life (both in and out of the school building) have come from places of darkness or may have led you into places of darkness? How have these teachers contributed to the educator (or individual) we have become or hope to be? What educators in your life have threatened, robbed, or even murdered a piece of your self, your soul? What teachers (again in the broadest sense) taught from fields of light or led you into those places? How has that experience contributed to the educator you have become or hope to be?

3: Focus on your own school or educational situation. Where in the daily curriculum does a spirit of humility, patience, and charity reside? How might curriculum or learning experiences embrace such areas?

4: Val Jean pronounces: “I am a galley slave who obeys his conscience” (260). To what extent are we educators actually galley slaves to what we know we need to do in terms of the external regulations, restrictions, and obligations society imposes? To what extent, if any, are we galley slaves with a conscience? To what extent are we teaching our students as if they were galley “slaves-in-training”? Are we teaching students what they need to be citizens who abide exclusively to societal regulations, restrictions, and obligations or are we empowering them with the tools they need to function positively in society without losing a conscience?

5: Reflect on your thinking about what personal qualities define an effective teacher.

Assess the following statement: No person is a good teacher of the open, visible life of the nation if he is not at the same time teacher of the deeper and hidden life.

6: What would need to be done for educational practice to both operate and thrive in the external demands of the “open, visible public life” as well as while simultaneously attending to the “deeper and hidden life” of the conscience?

7: In what ways are the discipline procedures in your school environment motivated by both ‘brawling love’ and ‘loving hate’? When is ability-level segregation of students nurturing a ‘cold fire’ and episodes of ‘sick health’?

8: Make a list of ways in which *No Child Left Behind* policies represent both ‘the best of times and the worst of times’? Generate a second list identifying how the increased use of technology in the classroom bring us to both ‘have everything before us’ and ‘nothing before us’? Create a third list of ways that data-driven instruction and accountability both a ‘spring of hope’ and a ‘winter of despair’?

9: What reality is exposed within the shadow of your classroom work? What attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, or emotions lie in the shadows of your teaching?

10: Using this ‘compass of the unknown,’ as a metaphorical gauge of your teaching, where do the ‘mysterious pointings of the needle’ fall? Try to identify moments when you feel that your teaching has approached ‘grandeur of democracy’? Then, assess the extent to which you feel your teaching meets Hugo’s call to ‘reform and transform’?

11: If, as Hugo proposes, the ‘compass of the unknown’ is the soul, then what roles do ‘thought, meditation, prayer’ play in your instruction?

12: What role does technology and the accumulation of information play in our teaching? If we are preparing students to meet surface goals which give the expected

appearances of success (like high test scores), then how are we preparing them for the unexpected realities that lie beneath those artificial surfaces?

13: If we are “covering” as much of the curriculum as we can, then what are we leaving transparent? If “the future belongs more to the heart than to the mind,” then where in our teaching do we address these both? Does “love of the soul” have any part in our teaching?

14: What moments of conflict and challenge in your educational past (and/or present) are the very ones that reflect or define or destroy your integrity as a teacher – and as a person?

### **III. CHARACTER AS NEMESIS**

*American Idiot* (Billie Joe Armstrong)

Teaching is not about me; it is about the values and spirit I embody and share as a teacher. I arrived at this critical realization via the course of thought and reflection forged by Henry Fleming, Jean Val Jean, Inspector Javert, and Fantine. Ann Jauregui (2007) offered this intrinsic notion of what defines an epiphany:

An epiphany is the conscious recognition that the mind's edge has dissolved and a discovery is in the making. You see something about the world you had not seen before, and, with the help of fairies or gingko leaves, you see something about yourself. (p. 145)

As it was for Val Jean and Javert, I believe that these moments of “discovery” occur for me at moments when my values and integrity as an educator are most put to the test via conflict or confrontation with an external force that directly challenges or threatens them. For me, the fairies and gingko leaves Jauregui refers to appear in the form of monsters. Joseph Campbell (1991) characterizes these monsters that transcend ethics and didactics:

By a monster I mean some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct. For example, Vishnu at the end of the world appears as a monster. There he is, destroying the universe, first with fire and then with a torrential flood that drowns out the fire and everything else. Nothing is left but ash. The whole universe with all its life and lives has been utterly wiped out. That's God in the role of destroyer. Such experiences go past ethical or aesthetic judgments. Ethics is wiped out. (pp. 278 – 279)

This metaphorical monster, which wears a variety of different masks, appears

intermittingly to challenge the integrity of my work and my values as a teacher. Engaging in these conflicts has been and continues to be a true test of my mettle as an educator, and as a person. Whichever mask the monster chooses to don, underneath it lies my nemesis. Dale Correy Dibbley (1993) traces the term ‘nemesis’ back to its Ancient Greek roots as meaning an unconquerable foe or stumbling block. She asserted the following:

The Greek verb *nemein* means “to distribute or deal out.” Nemesis dealt out retribution or punishment, putting back into their place those whose arrogance and pride caused them to defy the gods or otherwise incur their displeasure. (p. 144)

Depending on the time and place, my nemesis has worn masks of political, economic, social, and moral countenance, striking out, as monsters will, when they believe their pride, power, profit, or image has been threatened. Underneath these masks, lies the heart of my nemesis. To better understand its nature, I again turn to literature. Campbell (1991) proposes that the only way to understand these monsters is through poetry:

Poetry is the language that has to be penetrated. Poetry involves a precise choice of words that will have implications and suggestions that go past the words themselves. Then you experience the radiance, the epiphany. The epiphany is the showing through of the essence. (p. 283)

I found the metaphorical representation of my nemesis lurking in lyric poetry from the libretto of *American Idiot* (2004). Lyricist Billie Joe Armstrong’s character St. Jimmy, who appears in both the Greenday *American Idiot* punk rock recording as well as its 2010 Broadway incarnation, embodies the spirit and voice of my nemesis. Facing him, in whichever form he chooses to take, simultaneously invigorates and frightens me. Nevertheless, it is these moments of conflict and challenge that are most likely to be the



very ones with the potential to ultimately define or destroy my integrity as a person – and as a teacher.

A. **The road to the *Boulevard of Broken Dreams***

As a middle school literature and writing teacher at an urban low-income community public school in Chicago, my instruction was purposely filled with themes of personal choice, free will, ‘Golden rule’ morality, and a strong work ethic. The majority of students was first generation American and Spanish was their primary language. Planning - and even dreaming - of their future personal and career goals and opportunities was encouraged through my instruction. The explicit understanding was that with hard work, good intentions, and strong drive their dreams were attainable.

Reading and listening to a recording of Armstrong’s (2004) libretto to *American Idiot*, I was introduced to his character St. Jimmy. What I did not suspect at the time was that this would be the first of several confrontations with my nemesis. I did not at the time even take seriously the foreboding nature of his greeting:

My name is Jimmy and you better not wear it out  
 Suicide commando that your momma talked about  
 King of the 40 thieves and I’m here to represent  
 the needle in the vein of the establishment;  
 I’m the patron saint of the denial  
 With an angel face and a taste for suicidal. (p. 15)

At the time I would never have suspected that my altruistic intentions could ever be misconstrued. In retrospect, I can hear in St. Jimmy’s words some of the concerns that would soon plague me. By insisting that my students dream big and rely on the merits of

their good intentions, could I really be acting as a sort of ‘suicide commando’ setting them up for certain disappointment and failure? Was I teaching at the altar of ‘the patron saint of the denial’ when I was adamant about the positive prospects of material and career success for students who at 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade spoke little to poor English, came from extremely low income homes, and barely tested at grade level in reading or math? As I spoke of the ‘Golden Rule’ merits of “treating others the way you would to be treated” while many of the students fought daily for survival on gang-infested streets, was I overtly wearing ‘an angel face’ while covertly nurturing ‘a taste for suicidal’?

With these thoughts still silently brewing somewhere in my subconscious, I continued nevertheless to be enthralled by the words of Armstrong’s *American Idiot*. Perhaps it was the contagious musical accompaniment of drums and electric guitar that continued to lure my attention like a sort of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pied Piper. Regardless of the reason, while I continued my teaching endeavors, St. Jimmy’s words pounded away at the foundations of my intentions:

Don’t want to be an American Idiot.

Don’t want a nation under the new media.

Information age of hysteria calling out to Idiot America.

Welcome to a new kind of tension all across the alienation

Where everything isn’t meant to be O.K.

Television dreams of tomorrow

We’re not the ones meant to follow

For that’s enough to argue.

Maybe I’m the faggot America. I’m not a part of the redneck agenda

Now everybody, do the propaganda!

And sing along at the age of paranoia. (p. 10)

Was my encouraging my students to trust in personal choice, free will, and good intentions in reality asking them to ‘do the propaganda and sing along with the age of paranoia’? Was the vision I was trying to nourish, that hard work and a strong drive would help dreams come true, merely fabricating ‘television dreams of tomorrow’ that the student demographic I was teaching were in fact ‘not the ones meant to follow’? Was it possible that for some members of society, ‘everything isn’t meant to be O.K.’? John Gray’s (2002) philosophical treatise *Straw Dogs* seemed to parallel the taunts of St. Jimmy:

The ideal of the chosen life does not square with how we live. We are not authors of our lives; we are not even part-authors of the events that mark us most deeply.

Nearly everything that is most important in our lives is unchosen....Personal autonomy is the work of our imagination, not the way we live. (pp. 109-110)

I refused to believe that I was teaching a group of ‘american idiots’ for whom the American dream was propaganda and a fabrication ‘of the redneck agenda.’ Nevertheless, small telltale signs began to stir up conflict in my thinking. For example, prior to standardized testing, administrative directives were given that would exclude almost 40% of my students from the exam by giving them an ambiguous ‘bi-lingual’ label. Another approximate 15% of my students were given a special education ‘code.’ Based on these classifications, half of my students would be removed from standard (i.e. grade level) reading and math instruction. They would be removed to a separate classroom and receive instruction from the day-to-day substitute teacher on duty. After

all, why should our resources and talent be used on students who cannot achieve, won't produce high test results, and aren't statistically college-bound anyway?

As these directives were given, I can see now that it was St. Jimmy, my nemesis, lurking underneath my administrator's countenance. At the time, however, I adhered to these policies, assuring myself that they in no way conflicted with my ambitions for my students to achieve the American dream through hard work and perseverance. I had no problem in submitting to the judgment and discretion of the veteran administrator. Was I surrendering to what Eliezer J. Sternberg (2010) called the "revolution of the brain over conscience" (p. 111)? Sternberg's writing forced me to consider the role of the brain versus the role of the heart:

It will have to be concluded that our deepest moral convictions are not actually "ours" at all. They belong to the brain, to neurons, to chemical compounds – to the vast chain of causes tracing back to the beginning of time. The implications of such a worldview for the workings of society could be tremendous. If deterministic chemical exchanges in the brain are the sole cause of our behavior, then we cannot justly be held responsible for immoral actions – the inclination to do what's ethically wrong cannot possibly be overcome by the moral agent. The source of human evil is the brain. (p. 119)

Ostensibly, the themes of personal choice, free will, 'Golden rule' morality, and a strong work ethic remained in my conscience; but my decision-making brain was independently supporting a larger agenda that was actually segregating these students from resources, grade level instruction, and college-track preparation. In the guise of "meeting the needs of a special population," I was handing St. Jimmy a victory. Even

now, I can hear him serenading my actions:

City of the dead, at the end of another lost highway.

Signs misleading to nowhere; City of the damned;

Lost children with dirty faces today; no one really seems to care.

I don't care if you don't

I don't care if you don't

I don't care if you don't care. (p. 11)

Building on this dichotomy between brain and conscience, it was if my brain's decisions were operating separately from those of my conscience. My conscience cared but my brain did not. Sternberg's (2010) writing continued to taunt me:

It is our conscious will, inspired by our experiences and emotions, our contemplation and deliberation, that directs the engine of mechanics to guide us through life. This seemingly natural understanding of the person is threatened by the rising tendency to represent the human being as a programmed machine, of which all thoughts and actions are merely outputs, results of the deterministic interactions occurring within. (p. 118)

If this were true, then is it possible that *I* was becoming the 'american idiot'? Was I doomed as some passive victim to what St. Jimmy calls the 'new kind of tension' created by the 'information age of hysteria' and sustained 'under the new media' and infiltrating 'all across the alienation'? These questions, still unspoken at the time, were nevertheless rising up somewhere in my subconscious.

The next initiative sent out from administration was for teachers to report on any hints they may have "picked up" in terms of student residency. Of course, students performing

at or above grade level were assumed not to be included in this directive – especially good readers and speakers with a competent command of the English language. My homeroom students, however, primarily children of Hispanic immigrants, were clearly at risk of being removed from the school (especially since standardized assessments were scheduled soon).

Again, the dichotomy: my brain adhered to the administrative policy while my conscience prepared students for the February assembly: a choral performance of *Do You Hear the People Sing* from the Herbert Kretzmer (1985) libretto for the stage musical *Les Miserables*. The lyrics spoke what my brain betrayed:

Do you hear the people sing? Singing the songs of angry men?

It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!

When the beating of your heart echoed the beating of the drums

There is a life about to start when tomorrow comes!

Will you join in our crusade? Who will be strong and stand with me?

Beyond the barricade is there a world you long to see?

Then join in the fight that will give you the right to be free. (p. 13)

In the spirit of the downtrodden poor of Nineteenth Century France, these words were meant as an empowering battle-cry against social injustice and inequality. In retrospect, I could hear St. Jimmy simultaneously singing a counter melody:

Everyone is so full of shit; born and raised by hypocrites;

Hearts recycled but never saved from the cradle to the grave.

We are the kids of war and peace from Anaheim to the Middle East;

We are the stories and disciples of Jimmy of Suburbia.

Land of make-believe and it don't believe in me.

Land of make-believe and I don't believe.

And I don't care! I don't care! I don't care! I don't care! I don't care! (p. 10)

Larger issues of discontent among the staff (of which I was unaware) were brewing as well. The question on everyone's minds and some people's lips was 'are you on the administrator's *side* or not?' In other words, do you support major administration's policies or not? Apparently the staff members I worked most closely with were not on the administrator's *side*, but close friends of the administrator were doing their best to 'recruit' me. Even being seen conversing with either *side* would be perceived as supporting it. I was caught between either trying to be everyone's friend or isolating myself. Most of the time, isolation won. Being caught between Scylla and Charybdis never seemed so real.

Individuals were eventually called into the administrator's office, myself included, to sort matters out. The solution presented to me was that I could no longer sit metaphorically on the fence. Sooner or later, I was informed, I simply would have to choose *a side*. I silently retreated to my classroom determined to simply 'do my job' as quietly, docilely, and unobtrusively as possible. Again, the provocative thoughts recorded in Gray's *Straw Dogs* (2002) would capture my state of mind and conscience as I grappled with this ugly situation:

The ideal of the chosen life does not square with how we live. We are not authors of our lives; we are not even part-authors of the events that mark us most deeply. Nearly everything that is most important in our lives is unchosen. The time and place we are born, our parents, the first language we speak – these are chance, not

choice. It is the casual drift of things that shapes our most fateful relationships. The life of each of us is a chapter of accidents. Personal autonomy is the work of our imagination, not the way we live. (p. 110)

My nemesis led me to what he calls the ‘boulevard of broken dreams’ - exactly where he wanted me - almost as if I had somehow conceded to him the authorship of my life:

I walk a lonely road the only one that I have ever known.

Don't know where it goes but it's home to me and I walk alone.

I walk this empty street on the boulevard of broken dreams

Where the city sleeps and I'm the only one and I walk alone.

My shadow's the only one that walks beside me.

My shallow heart's the only thing that's beating.

Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me

'til then I walk alone.

I'm walkin' down the line that divides me somewhere in my mind

on the borderline of the edge and where I walk alone.

Read between the lines of what's alright and what's fucked up

And everything's alright. Check my vital signs to know I'm still alive

and I walk alone. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 7)

As a teacher and as a person I felt broken, ineffectual, and alone. How could I be an asset to my students when I felt as if my spirit were shattered? I felt disconnected my peers and powerless in my situation of a self-imposed exile (albeit safe from the missiles and barbs of staff antagonism, accusations, and animosity). What became of my values and integrity as an educator – as a person? Was this retreat from the nemesis



monster St. Jimmy an abdication of my very autonomy as a teacher – and as a person? Had I become, like my students, a victim of the times and a helpless pawn of the larger political scheme?

**B. Onto the streets of shame**

Although this first major confrontation with my nemesis left me emotionally bruised and morally shaken, the fires of my commitment to a teaching career built upon a foundation of integrity and conscience eventually were re-kindled. In the following years, I was able to nurture meaningful professional relationships with a small group of peers who, like me, were interested not in choosing sides, but in nurturing a common ground wherein the intrinsic value and integrity of what we represented as teachers and as people could flourish.

I also returned to the university and sought to open the doors to other educators and thinkers for guidance, support, and inspiration. Unlike my earlier degrees in Elementary Education and English Literature wherein I mostly adhered to a generic program of study designed rather uniformly by the campus directors, this time I carefully sought out courses, instructors, and texts that I felt would best fortify me in my intrinsic growth and development as a teacher – and as a person.

During my studies in an English Language Learners (ELL) Masters program, I became acquainted with Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1992) that openly addressed issues of systemic educational inequality based on race, economic status, and political privilege. In my Educational Administration graduate coursework, my thinking was impacted by William Ayers' *Teaching Toward Freedom* (2004) that bravely asked

‘what is teaching *for*?’ He argues for education that is inherently democratic, liberating, and transformative. These educators spoke candidly to many of the issues facing the low income, Hispanic students I was teaching. Their affirmation of the humanity in all our students was for me a beacon of rescue for my spirit which had been polluted with the poisonous words of St. Jimmy and the negative milieu that had infiltrated my teaching situation.

This beacon of hope grew stronger and brighter when I read Ralph Ellison’s (1947) *Invisible Man* during my Reading Specialist Graduate studies. When Ellison’s invisible man first finds the courage to vocalize his cry for justice and equality, he proclaims thus:

I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*. Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human. I feel strong, I feel able to get things done! I feel that I can see sharp and clear and far down the dim corridor of history and in it I can hear the footsteps of a military fraternity! No wait, let me confess...I feel the urge to affirm my feelings...I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I have come home. (346)

Like this character, the more I emotionally stepped away from the noise and emotional commotion of the confusion, negativity and anger that had festered in the climate of my school (thank you, very much, my metaphorical nemesis Mr. St. Jimmy), the more I was able to return to the reality of the values I held dear; that is, teaching with compassion and integrity. I began emerging from my own personal “long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey” down the lonely road of the ‘boulevard of broken dreams.’ Virginia Woolf (1929) described this ‘homecoming’ phenomenon with a set of images

and metaphors that captures the spirit of my journey:

What is meant by “reality”? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech. (p. 110)

The noise of my nemesis’s taunts and rants were eventually washed aside by torrents of silence generated by my contemplative reading, thinking, and reflecting. The silent world of thought, purpose, and reflection washed out St. Jimmy’s noise and again became the reality out of which my teaching was nourished. Similarly, Clifford Mayes (2005) expounded on the notion that it is the opposition in our lives as teachers that spurs progression:

It is not enough for the teacher merely to maintain his vision. A static vision is a dead one. What is necessary in order for him to grow in his critique of and resistance to the dominant socioeconomic order is constant spiritual growth. Paradoxically, the very criticism that threatens the teacher in the anti-intellectual environment of American culture can also spur him on in this evolutionary process...In reflectively sharpening his sense of calling on the whetstone of criticism, the teacher learns important social and ethical lessons that clarify his prophetic voice. (pp. 25-26)

After fifteen years of classroom teaching, I accepted a position as an Area Reading Coach with which I would be working with teams of teachers and administrators sharing strategies and resources to strengthen their elementary school literacy programs. By

working closely with twenty elementary schools in predominantly Hispanic Chicago neighborhoods, I had the opportunity to engage educators in conversations and professional development that focused on addressing some of the ‘savage inequalities’ Kozol wrote about; utilized resources and strategies rooted in the values of equity and democracy such as Ayers described; and relied on reflection and introspection of individual and collective teaching practices that evoked the spirit of Ellison and Woolf.

A year later, I accepted an Assistant Principal position wherein I could work closely with a specific school community rather than spreading myself (sometimes thinly) over the large geographic area of twenty schools. My vision and commitment as a classroom teacher evolved into my work as an educational administrator. Being able to give voice to issues of educational equity and to implement policies and programs rooted in the inherent integrity of those involved was invigorating to my spirit. Unknown to me at the time, however, was that St. Jimmy was lurking nearby and preparing to deliver the severest blow yet to my spirit and my integrity.

Like Icarus, on dreams of hopefulness I flew too close to the sun – and was about to be severely burned. I accepted a Principal position. Once at the post, I began to realize that the smiling, supportive faces of staff, parents, and school council were, in fact, masks covering my nemesis. Like the Hydra monster, this time my single nemesis erupted into a multi-headed beast with remarkable regenerative abilities allowing it to grow stronger with each battle it fought. Instead of being face to face with my nemesis St. Jimmy, I found myself face to face with a *multitude* of St. Jimmys. As I maneuvered through his labyrinth of deception and lies, his lyric-taunts continued to challenge, threaten, and destroy. Interpolated below are the words of St. Jimmy (from *American Idiot* (2004), and

its epilogue, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Breakdown* (2009)) aligned with my journey:

Do you know what you're fighting for?

When it's not worth dying for? (Armstrong, 2009, p. 19)

Within five months as Principal, I uncovered a pristine Montessori program that in reality serviced a primarily white population. While the Montessori students were taught with small class sizes, a teacher and an aide, additional stipends of hundreds of dollars to spend on class materials, and other perks including a full schedule of field trips, the non-Montessori classrooms, with primarily minority students, were left under-funded and overcrowded with outdated resources and limited supplies.

Does it take your breath away?

And you feel yourself suffocating? (Armstrong, 2009, p. 19)

I discovered a school budget that was controlled by a small group of teachers and parents who had access codes for spending. Financial allocation was traditionally dictated by this small group of (non-minority) individuals.

Does the pain weigh out the pride?

And you look for a place to hide?

Did someone break your heart inside? (Armstrong, 2009, p. 19)

I quickly realized that all school programs and activities were planned and organized by this small group who had keys to the building (with the security passcodes) so that they had access to the school at any day or time for just about any activity they chose—most of which were not made known to me.

Your faith walks on broken glass....

Did you stand too close to the fire

Like a liar looking for forgiveness from a stone? (Armstrong, 2009, p. 19)

The scene in which I found myself enmeshed felt like a nightmare right out of Kozol's text. Nevertheless, I endeavored to set things right. After all, as long as I was acting in the name of what was legally correct and morally just, what could go wrong? In retrospect, I can hear in St. Jimmy's voice the manipulative echoes of Shakespeare's (1603) great nemesis, Iago:

Cassio's [Podsiadlik's] a proper man: let me see now;

To get his place, and to plume up my will

In double knavery. How? How? Let's see....

The Moor is of a free and open nature

That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

And will as tenderly be led by the nose

As asses are.

I haven't. It is engendered. Hell and night

Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light. (*Othello*, I.3.390-402)

In conjunction with official Board of Education policies, I initiated budget audits which revealed that no receipts had been given for money collection during the past four years; that each of the fourteen Montessori classrooms had been 'unofficially' collecting \$800.00 per classroom each year for the past eight years; and spending reports that indicated a variety of authorization signatures which did not include the principal or assistant principal. My decisions, in the name of equity and fairness included initiating a system of receipts for all in-coming money and updating the accounts to limit the number of authorizing agents for spending. How could these obvious steps to ensure equitable

and honest money management be misconstrued?

To live and not to breathe

Is to die in tragedy.

To run, to run away. To find what I believe.

To leave behind this hurricane of fucking lies (Armstrong, 2004, p. 5)

In accordance with official safety and security protocol, I updated all school locks and security codes. A central-wide calendar of official school events, open to all students, was begun. After all, wasn't the school supposed to service all its members? What I did not ascertain at the time, however, is that my efforts were being undermined by the nemesis, St. Jimmy. Again, his toxic aura reflects that personified by Shakespeare's Iago:

The thought whereof

Doth like a poisonous animal gnaws my innards;

And nothing can or shall content my soul

Till I am evened with him...

For making him egregiously an ass,

And practicing upon his peace and quiet

Even to madness. (*Othello*, 2.1.291-306)

Nevertheless, I intended to personally oversee the Montessori lottery system to ensure equal opportunity for *all* students to participate. I reasoned that this effort to counteract the obvious segregation of students and resources would be a step forward. I regarded these actions as my professional and personal commitment toward *all* those in my school. All the while, St. Jimmy sang on:

I don't feel any shame; I won't apologize

When there ain't nowhere you can go. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 5)

While I was attending to the 90% of my school population who deserved fair treatment and an equitable educational experience, the remaining 10% became outraged. Threats from political factions, tirades from teachers and staff, and secretive internet derogatory campaigns bombarded my altruistic leadership.

I lost my faith to this

This town that don't exist...

Running away from pain when you've been victimized.

Tales from another broken home. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 5)

Board of Education and Union officials concurred that the decisions I was making were legally necessary. They agreed that if any of these issues I had become aware of were made public, I as Principal would be held accountable. Despite attempts at informing others and conversing in dialogue, I was clearly mired in a political tug-of-war. The trappings of systemic inequality, racial segregation, and political clout which Kozol and Ayers decried were rapidly running circles around me.

Do you know the enemy? Do you know the enemy?

Well, gotta know the enemy, wa-hey!

The insurgency will rise when the blood's been sacrificed

Don't be blinded by the lies in your eyes.

Silence is the enemy against your urgency

So rally up the demons of your soul. (Armstrong, 2009, p. 4)

This was my opportunity to be an educational leader with integrity, and to hold others accountable for political, ethical, and financial wrong-doing. Nevertheless, I found my



values trapped in a quicksand of corruption in which I was threatened personally and professionally.

My heart is beating from me. I'm standing all alone.

Please call me only if you are coming home.

In the streets of shame where you've lost your dreams in the rain.

There's no sign of hope. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 14)

Representatives from the Board of Education and the Administrator's Union counseled me that unless I had some real political or economic clout of my own, I should step down from the position and allow the school to run the way the community sees fit – even if that meant looking the other way when practices driven by bias and racial segregation are rampant. They advised that the abuses I was addressing were too strong for me to fight alone without destroying myself.

Here they come marching down the street like a desperation murmur of a heartbeat

Coming back from the edge of town underneath their feet.

The time has come and it's gong nowhere

Nobody ever said that life was fair now

Go-carts and guns are treasures they will bear in the summer heat.

The world is spinning around and around

Out of control again. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 17)

Should I sit quietly and allow the racial inequities and elitist segregation to continue? Should I relinquish the school's budget and instructional decision-making to the small group of politically savvy staff and parents? After all, I would still be collecting a hefty paycheck and I would still be wearing the prestigious external mask of Principal.

What the hell's your name?

What's your pleasure, what is your pain?

Do you dream too much?

Do you think what you need is a crutch?

In the crowd of pain,

St. Jimmy comes without any shame. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 14)

Shouldn't I stand strong against the bias and corruption? Shouldn't I speak out for the students and their families whom I know deserve fair and equitable educational opportunities? If I followed my conscience, I was warned that the people I would be upsetting had such strong political connections that trying to do what's right would only bring self-destruction – without remedying the situation at all.

It's not over till your underground

It's not over before it's too late.

This city's burning, it's not my burden.

It's not over before it's too late.

There is nothing left to analyze

Where will all the martyrs go

When the virus kills itself. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 12)

I found myself asking the same questions Val Jean asked himself in the Kretzmer's (1985) *Les Miserables* libretto: "If I speak, I am condemned. If I stay silent, I am damned" (p. 10). If I stay silent, I remain Principal but with a conscience severely compromised. If I speak out, I would be true to my conscience, but a professional catastrophe would likely follow.

I crossed the river; fell into the sea;  
 Where the non-believers go beyond belief.  
 Then I scratched the surface in the mouth of hell.

Running out of service in the blood I fell. (Armstrong, 2009, p. 26)

I was hired as a knowledgeable, qualified educator whose mild demeanor was perceived as docile and spineless. In this sense, I can hear St. Jimmy's words and taunts echoed by the voice of another famous nemesis, Iago, as he manipulated the conscience of Othello:

O grace! O heaven forgive me!  
 Are you a man? Have you a soul, or sense?  
 God bu'y you; take mine office. O wretched fool,  
 That liv'st to make thine honesty a vice!  
 O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world,  
 To be direct and honest is not safe...  
 I should be wise; for honesty's a fool,  
 And loses that it works for. (*Othello*, 3.3.376-385)

Once the truth was revealed that I had a strong sense of equity and fairness, and that I wasn't afraid to move toward change aligned with social justice, the clandestine audio and video-taping, internet slander, and personal attacks accelerated. Privately, a community member shared that she felt that I had lost credibility with the small yet powerful group the moment I hired a Hispanic woman as Assistant Principal.

Raise your hand now to testify. Your confession will be crucified.  
 You're a sacrificial suicide like a dog that's been sodomized...

...a fire burns today of blasphemy and suicide the sirens of decay  
will infiltrate the faith fanatics. (Armstrong, 2009, p. 11)

I stepped back. *Do you know what you're fighting for?* It seemed hopeless to fight a battle that I could not win. *When it's not worth dying for?* It seemed foolish to battle for a cause that would accomplish nothing except the demise of my career. *When you're at the end of the road. And you've lost all sense of control.* It seemed fatal to fight when I had no back-up support from my superiors, my union, legal department advisors, or from the Board of Education itself. *When it's time to live and let die. And you can't get another try. Something inside this heart has dies. You're in ruins.* (Armstrong, 2009, p. 21)

### C. **Wake Me Up When September Ends**

And so I walked away. I had seen the monster nemesis that Campbell (1991) had warned about and I found him to be every bit the destroyer of harmony, order, an ethical conduct as Campbell had described. If moments of conflict and challenge are those which define or destroy integrity, then what just happened? If teaching is about the values and spirit we embody, then had St. Jimmy pulled off the exorcism of the century? I began on a personal level to understand the despair uttered by Sherlock Holmes after he witnessed a scale of human tragedy in *The Cardboard Box* (Doyle, 1892) that was, to his mind, immeasurable and illogical:

“What is the meaning of it, Watson?” said Holmes, solemnly, as he laid down the paper. “What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever.” (Doyle, p. 561)

This tryst with my nemesis hit me with the impact of an emotional, psychological and spiritual tsunami. How could all this have happened? I found myself at the impasse

Clifford Mayes (2005) calls the valley between “the Calling and the Crucible”:

It is a serious responsibility to take on the mantle of the teacher. Aware of his weaknesses, the spiritually motivated teacher continually attempts to develop not only his understanding of his subject matter but also his moral nature, for the physician must first heal himself. (p. 26)

Returning to classroom teaching duties, I resumed my instructional work in reading and writing with middle school students at a public school. Healing the wounds to my spirit and finding a balm for the bruises to my soul seemed impossible. St. Jimmy’s voice was still taunting me with strains of despair, defeat, and desperation:

Nobody likes you  
 Everyone left you  
 They’re all out without you havin’ fun.  
 Everyone left you  
 Nobody likes you  
 They’re all out without you havin’ fun.

Where’d you go? (Armstrong, 2004, p. 16)

St. Jimmy’s anger was becoming my own. It seems fitting, then, that the first novel I selected for the eighth grade-gifted reading was Homer’s *The Iliad*. As I recited the opening lines, I instinctively felt that Homer’s words were my own; that for me at this moment, they were in fact autobiographical:

An angry man-there is my story: the bitter rancour of Achilles, prince of the house

of Peleus, which brought a thousand troubles upon the Achaian host. Many a strong soul it sent down to Hades, and left the heroes themselves a prey to dogs and carrion birds, while the will of God moved on to fulfillment. (Book I, p. 3)

The shadow of the confrontation, conflict, and retreat with my nemesis seemed to cast a pall over my words and actions. I began thinking that this must be how Ellison's (1947) invisible man must have felt when as he watched the empty promises of a college degree disappear before his eyes:

I had no doubt that I could do something, but what, and how? I had no contacts and I believed in nothing. And the obsession with my identity which I had developed at the factory hospital had retuned with a vengeance. Who was I, how had I come to be? Certainly I couldn't help being different from when I left the campus; but now a new, painful, contradictory voice had grown up within me, and between its demands for revengeful action and Mary's silent pressure I throbbed with guilt and puzzlement. I wanted peace and quiet, tranquility, but was too much aboil inside. Somewhere between the load of the emotion-freezing ice which my life had conditioned my brain to produce, a spot of black anger glowed and threw off a hot red light of such intensity that had Lord Kelvin known of its existence, he would have had to revise his measurements. A remote explosion had occurred somewhere...It was done with, finished, through. Now there was only the problem of forgetting it. If only all the contradictory voices shouting inside my head would calm down and sing a song in unison, whatever it was I wouldn't care as long as they sang without dissonance; yes, and avoided the uncertain extremes of the scale. But there was no relief. I was wild with resentment but too much under "self-

control,” that frozen virtue, that freezing vice. (p. 259)

The images Ellison describes became my reality: *contradictory voices, guilt and puzzlement, emotion-freezing ice spots of black anger, frozen virtue, and freezing vice*. In dodging St. Jimmy’s spell, I avoided becoming an american idiot, but became an invisible man instead. St. Jimmy’s serenade continued:

Summer has come and passed

The innocent can never last

Wake me up when September ends.

Here comes the rain again falling from the stars.

Drenched in my pain again

Becoming who we are.

As my memory rests but never forgets what I lost

Wake me up when September ends. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 13)

My work in the classroom adequately met state and local criteria, and succeeded in preparing students for their standardized exams. But I knew something was missing. The heart and soul of my instruction were hurt and desperately needed to heal. Woolf (1929) described such a state of being:

But what remains with me as a worse infliction than either was the poison of fear and bitterness which those days bred in me. To begin with, always to be doing work that one did not wish to do and to do it like a slave, flattering and fawning, not always necessarily perhaps, but it seemed necessary and the stakes were too great to run risks; and then the thought of that one gift which it was death to hide – a small one but dear to the possessor – perishing and with it myself, my soul – all

this became like a rust eating away the bloom of spring, destroying the tree at its heart. (pp. 37-38)

Nemesis St. Jimmy planted these seeds of poison, fear, and bitterness that were gnawing away at the heart of my instruction and poisoning the blooms of spring which would otherwise fill lessons with a sense of wonder and vitality. St. Jimmy sang on:

My name is no one, the long lost son, born on the Fourth of July.

Raised in an era of heroes and cons that left me for dead or alive...

The scars on my hands and the means to an end

is all that I have to show.

I swallowed my pride and I choked on my faith.

I've given my heart and my soul.

I've broken my fingers and lied through my teeth;

The pillar of damage control.

I've been to the edge and I've thrown the bouquet

Of flowers left over the grave. (Armstrong, 2009, p. 3)

What was making my teaching duties more difficult for me to execute was that I was teaching in the same building wherein I had formerly been Assistant Principal only seven months before. If I were here because as principal I refused to look away from the moral abuses that were taking place, then why does it feel so humiliating? If I were here because I refused to compromise my integrity, then why does it feel so degrading? If I was here because of high ethical standards, then why does it feel like wallowing in disgrace and dishonor? The apocalyptic images enmeshed in James Joyce's (1916) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* became my metaphysical reality:



His soul was fattening and congealing into a gross grease, plunging ever deeper in its dull fear into a sombre threatening dusk, while the body that was his stood, listless and dishonoured, gazing out of darkened eyes, helpless, perturbed and human for a bovine god to stare upon... The next day brought death and judgment, stirring his soul slowly from its listless despair. The faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony. (p. 105-6)

Joseph Campbell (1991) wrote that a hero's journey demands a person to face very difficult situations requiring a courage that will ultimately bring a whole new body of possibilities into one's field of experience. He argued that this hero's insight requires going beyond duality to "open to us the transcendent that informs it [experience], and at the same time forms us within it" (p. 61). This inward experience, a metaphor of returning to the source inner world, often entails seeing and understanding things that other people in the community sometimes don't want to hear. Campbell warns that these people will oftentimes destroy the "seer" out of fear. He calls this "the grace of the crucifixion" (p. 72).

Never could I have anticipated that my teaching journey would have led me to this site of crucifixion. The agonizing regret, humiliation, self-doubt, and self-loathing created for me the metaphorical hell described by Joyce (1916):

Consider finally that the torment of this infernal prison is increased by the company of the damned themselves. Evil company on earth is so noxious that even the plants, as if by instinct, withdraw from the company of whatsoever is deadly or hurtful to them. In hell, all laws are overturned: there is no thought of

family or country, of ties or relationship. The damned howl and scream at one another, their torture and rage intensified by the presence of beings tortured and raging like themselves. All sense of humanity is forgotten...they are helpless and hopeless: it is too late now for repentance. (p. 116)

In preparing for a February assembly focusing on civil rights and equality, my students researched educator Paulo Freire (2008). His ideas of “massification” (p. 120), “transformations of perception” (p. 119), “consciously critical confrontations” (p. 12) and “conscientization” (p. 131) struck a chord with my students (primarily first-generation Hispanic) who expressed that they often felt similarly marginalized, patronized, and disempowered. They suggested performing the song *Minority* (2001) which had these provocative lyrics:

I want to be the minority. I don't need your authority  
 Down with the moral majority 'cause I want to be the minority.  
 I pledge allegiance to the underworld, one nation under dog,  
 There of which I stand alone, a face in the crowd  
 Unsung, against the mold with a doubt singled out  
 The only way I know. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 11)

I too was drawn to these lyrics that denounced the de-humanization and alienation of people. By contrast, these words celebrated the minority as an agent of change. Although the majority, (i.e. privileged) might be frightened by this blatant outcry for justice, my students and I prepared for the assembly:

One light, one mind flashing in the dark  
 Blinded by silence of a thousand broken hearts

“for crying out loud” she screamed unto me

a free for all, fuck ‘em all, “you are your own sight.” (Armstrong, 2001, p. 11)

Freire’s (2008) ideas that education should lead people away from a docile acceptance of their status to an engaging state of ‘I wonder’ (p. 32); that it should promote the search for becoming more fully human (p. 129); and that it should carry out meaningful self-discovery and not mere domestication (p. 45) suddenly took on new meaning to me. For the first time in my life as a teacher, I was proud to acknowledge that I, too, spoke not only *for* the minority, but *as* the minority:

Stepped out of the line like a sheep runs from a herd.

Marching out of time to my own beat now.

I want to be the minority. I don’t need your authority.

Down with the moral majority

‘cause I want to be the minority. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 11)

As I prepared to accompany my choir of students on the piano, I realized that these lyrics were actually written by Armstrong - the lyricist of *American Idiot* - and were, in fact, an early manifestation of his St. Jimmy persona. I discovered that the very space which St. Jimmy coerced me to inhabit, was ironically an arena rooted in the desperation of dehumanized, alienated masses. It brought back to my mind the early words of St. Jimmy’s siren song:

Welcome to a new kind of tension. All across the alienation

Where everything isn’t meant to be O.K.

Television dreams of tomorrow. We’re not the ones meant to follow

For that’s enough to argue.

Maybe I'm the faggot America

I'm not a part of the redneck agenda. (Armstrong, 2004, p. 2)

Although I was far from stepping away from the hellish repercussions of my experiences battling what St. Jimmy crudely calls the *redneck agenda*, I began to realize that as a teacher I was beginning to travel what Campbell (1991) called the planes of inward experience (p. 60). I was just beginning to see only a glimpse of how this shift in consciousness would dramatically affect my teaching and learning. In this way, although my nemesis may have crucified one level of thinking and teaching, through this act of crucifixion he unwittingly opened another much more profound sphere of teaching and learning.

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: What conflicts or confrontations have been and continue to be tests of your mettle as an educator, and as a person?

2: Can you identify some of the 'monsters' you have encountered as an educator? What political, economic, social, or moral issues were at stake? How have you dealt with them?

3: Have you ever experienced conflicts between pedagogical ideology and administrative edicts? How have you dealt with them?

4: Have you ever experienced feelings of isolation or disconnectedness as a classroom teacher separated, as it were, from the larger culture of the school community? How can these experiences be dealt with in a positive fashion?

5: What kinds of organizational practices, administrative mandates or systemic biases silently (or openly) within the bureaucracy of education have frustrated you? Have you or

anyone you know been directly affected by these? In what ways can an educator separate himself from the larger systemic biases that may exist in the bureaucracy of the larger school system?

6: Can you recall occasions in which students whom you know or have known from different socio-economic levels were treated differently in school?

7: Who might be your professional nemesis? In what arenas or over what issues would you spar?

8: Reflect on your work as a teacher. Do you consider your instruction emancipatory? To what extent are we preparing students to “fit in” and “follow the rules” (as in Freire’s *massification*)? To what extent are we preparing them to find their own voice, to celebrate their uniqueness, and to seriously consider futures full of a myriad of possibilities which are not bound by economic, social, racial, or other factors?

9: Analyze your own educational history. Have there been times when you feel that you became an “invisible man” as presented by R. Ellison? Have there been times when you feel that you became an “american idiot” as described by B.J. Armstrong?

10: What is your initial response to B.J. Armstrong’s lyrics: *I walk a lonely road / the only one that I have ever known / Don’t know where it goes but it’s home to me / and I walk alone*? Try to recall moments when you might have felt a similar sense of alienation or isolation either as a student or an educator. Brainstorm forms of intervention or professional development activities that might help alleviate these kinds of moments.

## V. DISCOURSE ONE

This imaginative discourse includes three literary characters from the proceeding chapters and myself. Together, we further discuss issues and conflicts that arose within the chapters. The dialogue of the speakers is genuine in that it is taken directly from its original sources. The authentic words of the literature are re-imagined within the context of a conversation about the intrinsic realities, fears, and aspirations of myself as educator.

**Edward:** Instead of trying to improve education from the outside in, why not strengthen our teaching and learning from the *inside out*? Imagine classroom discourse that is not solely derived from external teacher guides and curriculum maps. Consider teaching and learning that is inspired by intrinsic ideals of harmony and mutual respect and inner values of equality and fairness.

These are some of the themes that embed my exploration of literature as a teacher's curriculum. In the creative spirit of W. Schubert's (2009) discourse with 426 Utopians as well as his use of 'Guest Speaker' (1987) personas, I offer this imaginative discourse with Henry Fleming, Jean Val Jean, and St. Jimmy. The dialogue of these characters is taken from their original texts verbatim. In this way, the entire discourse for me is a collage of thoughts and ideas that inspires me to delve more deeply into critical thinking about the nature and purpose of teaching and learning.

Welcome, Henry Fleming, brainchild of Stephen Crane, who brings to our discussion a youthful perspective, simultaneously naïve and insightful. Welcome, Victor Hugo's Jean Val Jean, who contributes a philosophical and metaphysical voice to our discourse. Welcome, St. Jimmy, rebellious creation of lyricist B. Armstrong, who infuses our

discourse with a sense of 21<sup>st</sup> Century angst and apathy. Together, let's consider let's consider the possibilities of teaching and learning that emanates *from the inside out*.

**Jean Val Jean:** "To diminish the number of the dark, to increase the number of the luminous, behold the aim. This is why we cry: education, knowledge! to learn to read is to kindle a fire; every syllable spelled sparkles" (p. 831).

**Edward:** Yes. Education, reading, and critical thinking - at their best - can diminish the darkness of hatred, anger, and bias while they illuminate the fires of compassion, equality, and harmony.

**St. Jimmy:** "Everyone is so full of shit! Born and raised by hypocrites. Hearts recycled but never saved; from the cradle to grave." (p. 11)

**Henry Fleming:** "Too bad! Too bad! The poor devil, it makes him feel tough!" (p. 85)

**Edward:** Excuse me, but I don't understand why the idea of education as a tool for illumination and a weapon against hatred and bias should provoke such a response.

**St. Jimmy:** "We are the kids of war and peace from Anaheim to the Middle East. We are the stories and disciples of the Jesus of Suburbia, land of make believe, and it don't believe in me and I don't care!" (p. 11)

**Jean Val Jean:** "Will the future come? It seems that we may also ask this question when we see such a terrible shadow. Sullen face-to-face of the selfish and miserable..." (p. 844)

**Edward:** But, St Jimmy, maybe you don't understand...

**Henry Fleming:** "The youth had resolved not to bulge whatever should happen." (p. 118)

**St. Jimmy:** "Don't want to be an American idiot; one nation controlled by the media. Information age of hysteria: calling out to idiot America." (p. 10)

**Jean Val Jean:** “Let us not take anything away from the human mind; suppression is evil. We must reform and transform. Certain faculties of man are directed towards the Unknown; thought, meditation, prayer. The Unknown is an ocean.” (p. 437)

**St. Jimmy:** “Welcome to a new kind of tension all across the alienation, where everything isn’t meant to be O.K.” (p. 10)

**Edward:** Jean Val Jean, I understand your call for reform and transformation, but how can we, in good conscience, give credence to this flip and overtly disrespectful rant

**St. Jimmy:** “Somebody get me out of here!” (p. 26)

**Jean Val Jean:** “On the part of the selfish, prejudices, the darkness of the education of wealth, appetite increasing through intoxication, a stupefaction of prosperity which deafens, a dread of suffering which, with some, is carried even to aversion to sufferers, an implacable satisfaction, the me so puffed up that it closes the soul.” (p. 844)

**St. Jimmy:** “Anybody get me out of here!” (p. 26)

**Edward:** Are you suggesting that St. Jimmy is uttering some sort of 21st Century existential cry? Is this some sort of spiritual rant against an ‘education of wealth’ that feeds on prejudices, selfishness, material prosperity, intoxication of physical sensations, and immediate gratification? Is the externally driven path St. Jimmy is ranting against closing out or suffocating one’s inner life, one’s intrinsic spirit, one’s soul?

**St. Jimmy:** “I don’t care if you don’t. I don’t care if you don’t. I don’t care if you don’t care!” (p. 11)

**Henry Fleming:** “He himself felt the daring spirit of a savage religion-mad.” (p. 120)

**Jean Val Jean:** “This man who had passed through every distress, who was still all bleeding from the lacerations of his destiny, who had been almost evil.” (752)



**St. Jimmy:** “I’m the son of rage and love, the Jesus of Suburbia, from the bible of none of the above on a steady diet of soda pop and Ritalin. No one ever died for my sins in hell as far as I can tell, at least the ones I got away with. But there’s nothing wrong with me. This is how I’m supposed to be. In the land of make believe that don’t believe in me.” (p. 10)

**Edward:** Who is this Jesus of Suburbia and what is this bible of none of the above?

**Jean Val Jean:** “...the miserable, covetousness, envy, hatred of seeing others enjoy, the deep yearnings of the human animals towards the gratifications, hearts full of gloom, sadness, want, fatality, ignorance impure and simple.” (p. 844)

**St. Jimmy:** “Are we, we are, the waiting unknown. This dirty town was burning down in my dreams. Lost and found, city bound in my dreams and screaming: are we, we are the waiting. Forget-me-nots and second thoughts live in isolation; heads or tails and fairy tales in my mind; are we, we are, are we, we are the waiting unknown. The rage and love, the story of my life.” (p. 14)

**Jean Val Jean:** “No man is a good historian of the open, visible, signal, and public life of the nations, if he is not, at the same time, to a certain extent, the historian of their deeper and hidden lie...all the lineaments which Providence traces upon the surface of a nation have their dark but distinct parallels, in the bottom, and all the convulsions of the bottom produce upheavals at the surface.” (p. 830)

**St. Jimmy:** “I walk a lonely road; the only one that I have ever known. Don’t know where it goes, but it’s home to me and I walk alone.” (p. 13)

**Henry Fleming:** “He felt that in this crisis his laws of life were useless. Whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail. He was an unknown quantity.” (p. 8)

**Val Jean:** “The words of the common language here appear as if wrinkled and shriveled under the red-hot iron of the executioner. Some seem still smoking.” (p. 832)

**St. Jimmy:** “I walk this empty street in the boulevard of broken dreams; where the city sleeps and I’m the only one. I walk alone.” (p. 13)

**Jean Val Jean:** “A phrase affects you like the branded shoulder of a robber suddenly laid bare. Ideas almost refuse to be expressed by these substantives condemned of justice.” (p. 832).

**St. Jimmy:** “My shadow’s the only one that walks beside me. My shallow heart’s the only thing that’s beating. Sometimes I wish someone out there will find me. ‘Til then I walk alone.” (p. 13)

**Henry Fleming:** “In the present, he declared to himself that it was only the doomed and the damned who roared with sincerity at circumstances.” (p. 83)

**Jean Val Jean:** “Its metaphor is sometimes so shameless that we feel it has worn the iron collar.” (p. 832)

**Edward:** Excuse me, gentlemen. I’m glad to see that you have connected in some way, but kindly remember that this is supposed to be a *group* discourse on the capability of education to illuminate one’s inner life. That is, unless you feel that what St. Jimmy here is calling the ‘boulevard of broken dreams’ is actually a metaphor for inner turmoil, isolation, and alienation.

**Jean Val Jean:** “Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.” (p. 785)

**Edward:** Are you saying that these cries of ‘rage and love,’ this ‘diet of soda pop and Ritalin,’ and this anger towards some kind of ‘land of make-believe’ are the murmurings of a soul crying out in despair?

**St. Jimmy:** “Does anyone care if nobody cares?” (p. 26)

**Jean Val Jean:** “There are vast numbers of unknown beings teeming with the strangest types of humanity...the herd, the multitude, the populace. Those words are quickly said. But if it be so, what matters it? What is it to me if they go barefoot? They cannot read. So much the worse. Will you abandon them for that?” (p. 785)

**St. Jimmy:** “Well nobody cares well nobody cares.” (p. 26)

**Edward:** Well, um, what I meant was...

**Henry Fleming:** “Why, what was yeh goin’ t’ say?” (p. 82)

**St. Jimmy:** “Does anyone care if nobody cares?” (p. 26)

**Jean Val Jean:** “Would you make their misfortune their curse? Cannot the light penetrate these masses? Let us return to that cry: Light! And let us persist in it! Light! Light! Who knows that these opacities will become transparent? Are not revolutions transfigurations? Proceed, philosophers, teach, enlighten, enkindle, think aloud, speak aloud, run joyously towards the broad daylight, fraternize in the public squares, announce the glad tidings, scatter plenteously your alphabets, proclaim human rights, sing your Marseillaises, sow enthusiasms broadcast, tear off green branches from the oak-trees. Make thought a whirlwind.” (p. 503)

**Edward:** Exactly! This takes us back to my original statement at the beginning of our discourse. Let’s consider teaching and learning dedicated to enlightening from the inside

out; committed to enkindling intrinsic human rights; and focused on making transparent our inner identities and values.

**St. Jimmy:** “Does anyone care if nobody cares?” (p. 26)

**Henry Fleming:** “The youth had been wriggling since the introduction of this topic. He now gave a cry of exasperation and made a furious motion with his hand. ‘Oh, don’t bother me!’ he said. He was enraged.” (p. 59)

**St. Jimmy:** “My name is St. Jimmy; I’m a son of a gun. I’m the one that’s from the way outside now; a teenage assassin executing some fun in the cult of the life of crime now.” (pp. 15-16)

**Edward:** But how can we teach from the inside out when one’s *inner* turmoil is so great? The isolation, alienation, and anger St. Jimmy expresses through his words seem too daunting.

**St. Jimmy:** “I really hate to say it, but I told you so, so shut your mouth before I shoot you down ol’ boy.” (p. 16)

**Jean Val Jean:** “This multitude must be sublimated!” (p. 503)

**Henry Fleming:** “The youth, who had been holding a bitter debate within himself and casting glances of hatred and contempt.” (p. 59)

**Edward:** I know, I know... but how can we educators inspire an intrinsic landscape of respect, equality, and fairness when dealing with such a defensive wall of despair and anger?

**Jean Val Jean:** “Let us learn to avail ourselves of this vast combustion of principles and virtues, which sparkles, cracks, and thrills at certain periods. These bare feet, these naked arms, these rags.” (p. 503)

**St. Jimmy:** “Take away the sensation inside; bittersweet migraine in my head.” (p. 16)

**Jean Val Jean:** “I have always supported the forward march of the human race towards the light, and I have sometimes resisted a progress which was without pity. I have, on occasion, protected my own adversaries.” (p. 39)

**St. Jimmy:** “It’s like a throbbing toothache of the mind and I can’t take this feeling anymore!” (p. 16)

**Henry Fleming:** “He lost sense of everything but his hate, his desire to smash into pulp the glittering smile of victory which he could feel the face of his enemies.” (p. 92)

**Edward:** But we are not his enemies. Where would such an idea come from?

**Jean Val Jean:** “Look through the medium of the people, and you shall discern the truth.” (p. 503)

**St. Jimmy:** “Drain the pressure from the swelling. This sensation’s overwhelming.” (p. 16)

**Jean Val Jean:** “These bare feet, these naked arms, these rags, these shades of ignorance, these depths of abjectness, these abysses of gloom may be employed in the conquest of the ideal.” (p. 503)

**St. Jimmy:** “Do you know the enemy? Well, gotta know the enemy, wa-hey! The insurgency will rise when the blood’s been sacrificed. Don’t be blinded by the lies in your eyes.” (p. 21)

**Edward:** An insurgency of anger and despair? No. These *should* be trampled upon!

**Jean Val Jean:** “This lowly sand which you trample beneath your feet, if you cast it into the furnace, and let it melt and seethe, shall become resplendent crystal, and by means of such as it a Galileo and a Newton shall discover stars.” (p. 503)

**Edward:** Oh, dear...

**Henry Fleming:** “He became suddenly a modest person.” (p. 88)

**St. Jimmy:** “Don’t want to be an American Idiot. Don’t want a nation under the new media. Can you hear the sound of hysteria? The subliminal mind: fuck America!” (p. 10)

**Jean Val Jean:** “What shall be done, great God! What shall be done?” (p. 198)

**St. Jimmy:** “Welcome to a new kind of tension all across the alienation where everything isn’t meant to be o.k.” (p. 10)

**Jean Val Jean:** “Darkness makes the brain grow giddy.” (p. 329)

**Edward:** No offense, Mr. Val Jean, but the challenges we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are quite complex compared to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Jean Val Jean wept long. He shed hot tears, he wept bitterly, with more sensitivity than a woman, with more terror than a child. While he wept, the light grew brighter and brighter in his mind – an extraordinary light, a light at once transporting and terrible. (p. 96)*

**St. Jimmy:** “Maybe I am the faggot America; I’m not a part of the redneck agenda.” (p. 10)

**Henry Fleming:** “He did not pass such thoughts without severe condemnation of himself. He dinned reproaches at times. He was convicted by himself of many shameful crimes against the gods.” (p. 12)

**St. Jimmy:** “Now everybody do the propaganda! And sing along with the age of paranoia.” (p. 10)

**Jean Val Jean:** “Man needs light, whoever plunges into the opposite of day feels his heart chilled. When his eye sees blackness, the mind sees trouble.” (p. 329)

**St. Jimmy:** “Don’t want to be an American idiot, one nation controlled by the media; information age of hysteria, calling out to IDIOT AMERICA.” (p. 10)

**Henry Fleming:** “Well, b’Gawd! Now this is real fightin.’” (p. 98)

**Edward:** But what can one make of these rants?

**Jean Val Jean:** “Woe, alas! to him who shall have loved bodies, forms, appearances only. Death will take all from him. Try to love souls, you shall find them again.” (p. 78)

**Henry Fleming:** “You boys shut right up! There no need ‘a wastin’ your breath in long-winded arguments about this an’ that an’ th’ other. You’ve been jawin’ like a lot ‘a old hens.” (p. 89)

**Edward:** Wait...I feel an epiphany coming on. Val Jean and I speak of education in terms of nurturing mutual respect, while St. Jimmy only hears ‘propaganda’; we envision teaching and learning as a route towards compassion, and St. Jimmy sees it as a road to ‘paranoia and hysteria’; and we imagine the learning experience as one that inspires harmony and equality, while St. Jimmy is left with the bad taste of a ‘media controlled, redneck agenda.’ Does this mean that despite the best of intentions, we educators have mistaken compassion with the *appearance* of compassion? Have we confused harmony and equality with the *veil* of harmony and equality?

**Jean Val Jean:** “God is behind all things, but all things hide God. Things are black, creatures are opaque. To love a being, is to render her transparent.” (p. 785)

**Edward:** If our teaching and learning were rendered transparent, would we find a foundation of compassion and equity? Or would the inner life, beneath the outer veil of our instruction, be bleak and barren? This concerns me greatly.

**Jean Val Jean:** “The true division of humanity is this: the luminous and the dark. To diminish the number of the dark, to increase the number of the luminous, behold the aim.” (p. 785)

**Edward:** Are you saying that education can be alternately luminous or dark depending on whether or not it is rooted in compassion and respect? That education can kindle a fire of inner strength or nurture the flames of prejudice and inequality?

**Jean Val Jean:** “This is why we cry: education...But he who says light does not necessarily say joy. There is suffering in the light; in excess it burns. Flame is hostile to the wing. To burn and yet to fly, this is the miracle of genius. When you know and when you love you shall suffer still. The day dawns in tears. The luminous weep, were it only over the dark.” (p. 831)

**Henry Fleming:** “I never saw sech gabbling jackasses.” (p. 89)

**Edward:** Hold on. Have you noticed that all of a sudden St. Jimmy has gotten quite quiet?

**Jean Val Jean:** “Noise does not waken a drunkard; silence wakens him. This peculiarity has been observed more than once.” (p. 1050)

**Henry Fleming:** “A faith in himself had secretly blossomed. There was a little flower of confidence growing within him. He was now a man of experience. He had been out among the dragons, he said, and he assured himself that they were not so hideous as he had imagined them. Also, they were inaccurate; they did not sting with precision. A stout heart always defied, and defying, escaped.” (p. 84)

**Edward:** Where do these seeds of self-confidence and faith that you speak of come from? What dragons have been torturing St. Jimmy and stirring up so much anger and



despair? Are these dragons you speak of the same monsters that Val Jean warned about? Are they the personification of prejudice, anger, selfishness, and cruelty? Has he been living within the miserable shadow-lands that Jean Val Jean spoke of?

**Henry Fleming:** “As he gazed around him the youth felt a flash of astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleaming on the trees and fields. It was surprising that nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment. The youth awakened slowly. He came gradually back to a position from which he could regard himself. For moments he had been scrutinizing his person in a dazed way as if he had never before seen himself.” (p. 36-37)

**St. Jimmy:** “And there’s nothing wrong with me.” (p. 21)

**Edward:** Remarkable. Why hadn’t I noticed this transformation? How did the youth ‘awaken’ from so much ‘devilment’?

**St. Jimmy:** This is how I’m supposed to be. (p. 21)

**Henry Fleming:** “He felt that he was a fine fellow. He saw himself even with those ideals which he had considered as far beyond him. He smiled in deep gratification.” (p. 37)

**Edward:** But how? How does one escape what Val Jean called ‘the darkness of the education of wealth’; how does one defeat what Val Jean called ‘the deep yearnings of the human animals towards the gratifications’; and how does one overcome ‘hearts full of gloom and sadness’?

**Jean Val Jean:** “Our civilization, the work of twenty centuries, is at once their monsters and their prodigy; it is worth saving. It will be saved. To relieve it, is much already; to enlighten it, is something more.” (p. 844)

**Edward:** Yes, yes...to relieve and to enlighten are critical. But where does that journey begin? Where does it lead?

**St. Jimmy:** “To live and not to breathe is to die in tragedy. To run, to run away, to find what to believe. And I leave behind this hurricane of fuckin’ lies.” (p. 12)

**Henry Fleming:** “He blanched like one who has come to the edge of a cliff at midnight and is suddenly made aware. There was a revelation. He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit.” (p. 39)

**Edward:** OK. When he throws down his gun he is metaphorically throwing off his anger and hostility. But where did this revelation come from? How is it that St. Jimmy is ‘suddenly made aware’ despite the layers of ‘dread suffering’ and ‘implacable satisfaction’ he was immersed in? I understand that he is metaphorically running away from the greed, the prejudice, and the consuming appetite of the outer world – the appetite and attitude that ‘puffed his soul closed’ - but where is he running to? Where does one ‘find what to believe’ on order to ‘leave behind this hurricane of fu\*\*\*\* lies’?

**Henry Fleming:** “His mind was undergoing a subtle change. It took moments for it to cast off its bottleful ways and resume its accustomed course of thought.” (p. 125)

**Edward:** What has the power to initiate such a ‘subtle change’ like the one you describe? What road could possibly have lead St. Jimmy back to an ‘accustomed course of thought’ after years of being guided by what Jean Val Jean called an ‘intoxicating appetite’ and a ‘stupefaction of prosperity’?

**Henry Fleming:** “Gradually his brain emerged from the clogged clouds, and at last he was enabled to more closely comprehend himself and circumstance. He understood then that the existence of shot and countershot was in the past. He had dwelt in a land of

strange, squalling upheavals and had come forth. He had been where there was red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped. His first thoughts were given to rejoicings at this fact.” (p.125)

**Jean Val Jean:** “This man who had passed through every distress, who was still all bleeding from the lacerations of his destiny, who had been almost evil.” (p. 752)

**St. Jimmy:** “Words get trapped in my mind. Sorry if I don’t take the time to feel the way I do. ‘Cause the first day you came into my life my time ticks around you. But then I hear your voice as a key to unlock all the love that’s trapped in me.” (p. 21)

**Edward:** What inspires and nourishes a transformation such as this?

**Jean Val Jean:** “What is conscience? It is the compass of the Unknown. Thought, meditation, prayer, these are the great, mysterious pointing of the needle. Let us respect them.” (p. 437)

**Edward:** With all due respect, would you please stop answering my questions with more questions?!!

**Jean Val Jean:** “Whither tend these majestic irradiations of the soul? Into the shadow, that is, towards the light. The grandeur of democracy is that it denies nothing and renounced nothing of humanity. Close by the rights of Man, side by side with them, at least, are the rights of the Soul.” (p. 437)

**Edward:** The ‘rights of the soul’ – when and where do we get a glimpse of those?

**Henry Fleming:** “After complicated journeyings with many pauses.” (p. 6)

**Edward:** I began this discourse with the idea of teaching and learning *from the inside out*. I am beginning to see that such an intrinsic voyage demands courage – the courage to

face our inner demons, our personal limitations, and sometimes to address the external challenges of trying to live in the outer world while honoring by our intrinsic ideals.

**Jean Val Jean:** “Have no fear of robbers or murderers. Such dangers are without, and are but petty. We should fear ourselves. Prejudices are the real robbers; vices the real murderers. The great dangers are within us. What matters is what threatens our heads or our purses? Let us think only of what threatens our souls.” (p. 25)

**Edward:** Are you saying that teaching *from the inside out* begins by being true to our own intrinsic ideals and values?

**Jean Val Jean:** “The ideal is terrible to see, thus lost in the depths minute, isolated, imperceptible, shining, but surrounded by all those great black menaces monstrously massed about it; yet in no more danger than a star in the jaws of the clouds.” (p. 844)

**Edward:** So even though St. Jimmy’s words were filled with the ‘great black menaces’ we call anger and despair, on some level he was ‘in no more danger than a star in the jaws of the clouds’?

**Jean Val Jean:** “He suffered in the dark; he hated in the dark; we might say that he hated in his own sight. He lived constantly in the darkness, groping blindly and as in a dream. Only, at intervals, there broke over him suddenly, a quick pallid flash which lit up his whole soul, and showed all around him, before and behind, in the glare of a hideous light, the fearful precipices and the somber perspectives of his fate.” (p. 77)

**Edward:** I began this discussion by suggesting a dream-like ideal of teaching and learning that could ‘diminish the darkness of hatred, anger, and bias’ while it would ‘illuminate the fires of compassion, equality, and harmony.’ The phenomenon you eloquently describe here alludes to both these monsters of the darkness and the glimmers

of a hopeful light. In this way, St. Jimmy represents the part of our inner humanity that is intimidated and sometimes manipulated by the darkness of the outer world. The flashes of light you describe are the moments of epiphany that penetrate the outer shell of our humanity and forge an inner path to the heart and soul of our being. I am beginning now to understand what you meant when you initially commented that ‘to diminish the number of the dark, to increase the number of the luminous... we cry: education, knowledge! to learn to read is to kindle a fire; every syllable spelled sparkles’ (p. 831). In terms of St. Jimmy, I can *now* begin to ascertain the difference between teaching from a place of fear or of condemnation and teaching from a place of compassion.

**Jean Val Jean:** “He beheld his life, and it seemed to him horrible; his soul, and it seemed to him frightful. There was, however, a softened light upon that life and upon that soul. It seemed to him that he was looking upon Satan by the light of Paradise.” (p. 96)

**Henry Fleming:** “Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways...Scars faded as flowers.” (p. 127)

**Edward:** Although I cannot thoroughly describe how, I am nevertheless beginning to understand that teaching and learning *from the inside out* is about understanding ourselves and seeing ourselves and our world by means of an inner light. St. Jimmy, like you, I don’t want to be what you call ‘an American idiot,’ either. My hope is that as a teacher and as a human being, I can help alleviate the scars of what St. Jimmy rallied against (hysteria, propaganda, paranoia, alienation, and television dreams) so that they, too, will fade as flowers. Thank you, Jean Val Jean, Henry Fleming, and St. Jimmy.

## **VI. DIALOGUE AS MEANING-MAKING**

*Absolum, Absolum!* (William Faulkner)

*Light in August* (William Faulkner)

*The Sound and the Fury* (William Faulkner)

Above all, you must illumine your own soul with its profundities and its shallows, and its vanities and its generousities, and say what your beauty means to you or your plainness, and what is your relation to the everchanging and turning world of gloves and shoes and stuff swaying up and down among the faint scents that come through chemists' bottles down arcades of dress material over a floor of pseudomarle. (Woolf, 1929, p. 90)

Virginia Woolf (1929) recognized and respected the inherent capability of language to embody our innermost values, beliefs, fears, and aspirations. In this sentence, she advises young writers that to be successful, they must understand that their words need to be the portals to their own intrinsic reality. Language has the capability to integrate one's inner being with the outer world which surrounds them. Using words to weave the fabric of one's inner life and communicating those words to others through dialogue create the opportunity for constructing new meaning, sparking new insights, and perceiving new worlds of possibility. In this way, the words we speak and write have the potential to deepen our understanding of each other on profoundly deep levels.

Similarly, can an examination of classroom-related dialogue deepen our understanding of educational practice? What questions, insights, or possibilities might arise when an educator reflects upon his or her own inner dialogue? To what extent do his or her external words embody his or her innermost values, beliefs, fears, and aspirations, as Woolf suggests?

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) wrote that embedded within the structure of an individual's internal and external discourse lies a person's history, memory, fears, and aspirations – untouched by the constraints of linear space and time. One's words, gestures, and thoughts are embodied in 'signs' that encapsulate his or her intrinsic identity. Although normally unknown to one's immediate consciousness, Deleuze and Guattari suggested that these 'signs' can be glimpsed via thoughtful introspection and reflection:

All signs, whether those I make in my actions, or remake in my inner and/or transductive (*re*)actions, are always embodied, for maker and remaker alike. In this way the meaning potentials of the mode in which a sign is made become embodied. No sign remains, as it were, simply or merely a 'mental', 'conceptual', a 'cognitive' resource. At this point, the processes named as *affect* and *cognition* coincide absolutely as one bodily effect. In this way too, *identity* is embodied and becomes more than a merely mental phenomenon, an 'attitude', maybe, that I display or perform. (p. 77)

Where in my personal and professional discourse do my memory, history, fears, and aspirations lie? What aspects of my personal affect and cognitions are embedded in this discourse? In what ways do my words, thoughts, and gestures embody my intrinsic identity as a teacher and as a person? To explore these questions, I needed an entryway of some sort into this arena wherein words, thoughts, and gestures would be freed from the boundaries of space and time. Only by becoming free from these linear limitations could I begin to ascertain the transformative reality at the roots of my discourse.

The metaphorical door to this intrinsic space was opened for me by the writings of William Faulkner. Discourse and dialogue, as Faulkner relates them, transcend space and time oftentimes utilizing a steady stream of consciousness. The style, nature, and content of Faulkner's dialogue model and inspire reflection of my own discourse. Faulkner's stylistic dialogue (both internal and external), that reveals the intrinsic identities of his characters, evokes in me a similar personal introspection of my own personal and professional discourse.

#### **A. Verisimilitude over verifiability**

To what extent does our inner and outer dialogue *reflect* our reality or *create* our reality? How much of that reality is grounded in our beliefs, values, fears, and aspirations? Consequently, is our reality rooted in the physical world around us as perceived through our external senses, or is it made manifest through the portals of our intrinsic spirit, history, and values? Although examining our discourse through a scientific lens offers the convenience of concrete verifiability, it is the verisimilitude of one's discourse that captures that intangible essence of who we are. John K. Sheriff (1989) expounded on this idea:

Language by its nature does not determine whether we see humans to be gods, puppets, prisoners, dupes, vermin, or the lords of creation. Rather, language is the medium that allow us to choose such views. Our worldviews, our theories, are purely a matter of our own choosing....we must accept the burden of freedom and the responsibility for the meaning of our world. The meaning of events conforms to our theories and beliefs; the future of the world does indeed depend on this "yes." My belief that human values and choices and language and reality are



interdependent is what makes me critical of a theory that can only treat form. (p. 141)

If our values, choices, and reality as educators and individuals are intertwined with language, as Sheriff proposed, then we need to rely on a depth of hearing and understanding that depends on more than just the verifiability of nerve impulses sending messages from the ears to the brain. We need to begin to transcend the verifiable and to explore the regions of verisimilitude out of which our own perceptions and viewpoints operate.

Many of the discourse sequences in Faulkner's novels both model for me and inspire in me such journeys into these regions of verisimilitude. The following excerpt from *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) has served me as a portal into these spaces of intrinsic spirit, history, and values. The non-linear layering of discourse that occurs throughout the passage further demonstrates the underlying interdependence of past, present, and future as well as the intrinsic burdens of meaning-making that are incumbent upon us all:

"Don't say it's just me that sounds like your old man," Shreve said. "But go on. Sutpen's children. Go on."

"Yes," Quentin said. "The two children" thinking *Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that*

*pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.*" Yes, the two children, the son and the daughter by sex and age so glib top the design that he might have culled them out of the celestial herd of seraphs and cherubim like he chose his twenty niggers out of whatever swapping there must have been when he repudiated that first wife and that child when he discovered that they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design.

(Faulkner, 1936, pp. 210-11)

Quentin, the narrator, is embarking on a personal course of meaning making via this dialogue with his friend, Shreve, as well as with a simultaneously occurring internal discourse. To Shreve, Quentin ponders the conflict between fate and free will as he explains his father Sutpen's efforts to enact his pre-meditated life design of a proposed "perfect" family line. When Quentin and his sisters do not meet the high expectations of his father's plans, they are abandoned. Sutpen's efforts to challenge fate a second time leave him equally disappointed and disillusioned. The dialogue raises questions about the futility of free will and the underhandedness of fate.

At the same time, Quentin contemplates the effects of his father's actions on Quentin's self-esteem and personal identity. He questions how far the ripples of his father's actions continue to reverberate within his own life. He ponders the extent to which his identity is intertwined with his father's. His internal discourse raises the existential question: are we ourselves? Are we vessels of those who came before us or

mirrors of those around us? Whose life design are we actually following? How much of what we perceive as free will is actually a pre-determined fate merely disguised as freedom?

I can clearly remember that Friday afternoon in late April when the classroom air-conditioning unit failed on a 90-plus degree day. I can still feel the knot in my stomach as the school administrator directed me to remain in the classroom with the students who had missing assignments or discipline infractions while the other two grade level teachers spent the afternoon at the park with the rest of the children. *What am I doing here?* I can still see the motley assortment of student faces: angry, disappointed, defiant, and smug. *Did I actually choose this profession?* I can hear the complaints, *Oh my God!* the whining, *kill me now!* the ‘under their breath’ profanity. *Am I really as miserable as they are?* I can still taste the bitterness *What have I done to deserve this?* and futility *Is this what all my education and training have brought me?* of having to fill two hours of a hot and humid Friday afternoon teaching reading to students who blatantly resent being there.

In what ways are ripples of my past reverberating in my present? How much of my discourse is actually my own, how much reverberates from my history, and how much is merely mirrored from those around me? Whose design is being enacted each day – free will’s or fate’s? Faulkner’s writing inspires me to take an introspective liberty with his text. On those days when I question the destiny (or the accident?) that led me to the classroom, I suggest that my intrinsic discourse might sound like this:

Quentin: *Yes, we are both Father.*

Edward: *Yes, we [my students and I] are both Father.*

Quentin: *Or maybe Father and I are Shreve,*

***Edward: Or maybe Father and I are my students,***

*Quentin: Maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve*

***Edward: Maybe it took Father and me to make my students***

*Quentin: or Shreve and me both to make Father*

***Edward: or my students and me to make Father***

*Quentin: or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.*

***Edward: or maybe my father to make all of us.***

How much do significant people from my history (including my father) affect the lens through which I see, interact, and reflect upon my classroom, my students, and my world? How is my classroom dialogue affected by such intrinsic influences? What does my internal discourse sound like? As I began to contemplate these kinds of questions, new vistas of reflection and introspection slowly emerge in my consciousness:

*Quentin: Yes, we are both Father.*

***Edward: Yes, we [my students and I] are both Father.***

Faulkner's writing leads me to begin to ascertain my father's voice reverberating within my own. The values, experiences, and voice of my father still resonate within me. His strong work ethic, moral fiber, and love of reading are evident in my own classroom discourse. As I speak to my students, it's as if my father is speaking to them. As my students respond with their various reactions, rebuttals, and (oftentimes) protestations, it is as if they encapsulate my father's voice, provoking me to persevere in the face of challenge.

*Quentin: Or maybe Father and I are Shreve,*

***Edward: Or maybe Father and I are my students***

As my students and I discuss literature and related personal and societal issues, I have always regarded the discourse as a teaching tool in terms of exposing them to new ideas, choices, and options to guide them as they find their way through life. Following Faulkner's presentation of dialogue, however, I began listening to my own discourse in new ways. What I discovered is that a great deal of my classroom discourse is less about my students finding their way, and more about me finding mine. Furthermore, just as Quentin's dialogue is an extension of his father's, I have come to understand that this journey to better understand myself and my world is also an extension of my father's journey. In this way, my father's journey and my journey are one and the same.

*Quentin: Maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve*

***Edward: Maybe it took Father and me both to make my students***

My father's values (based in Christian morality), work ethic (rooted in dedication and hard work), and experiences (of fortitude in dealing with economic and military hardships) which have consciously and subconsciously been weaved into my being, embed my daily discourse with students through our formal and informal interactions. As the milieu of my classroom (established through my dialogue, verbal gestures, and classroom discussions) is made manifest to the students, so continues the discourse between my father and me.

Michael Bamberg (2011) proposed that a person's dialogue constitutes an "interactive engagement to construct a sense of who they are" (p. 15). One's words serve as verbal gestures in the journey of self-identity that seeks to both construct and represent identity and self. In this way, Faulkner's use of dialogue inspires me to reflect how my classroom

discourse both reflects and constructs my self-identity: an identity inseparable from the influences of my father.

*Quentin: or Shreve and me both to make Father*

***Edward: or my students and me to make Father***

Faulkner's provocative use of discourse opens my mind to the existential reality that my father's discourse lives within my discourse to further embody *my father's* vision, identity, and aspirations. In this way, the past is always present and the future is always affecting the past. Faulkner's writing and specifically his use of stream of consciousness show me how one's discourse can transcend space and time. In this way, I can listen to my classroom discourse with a new set of ears. Without being restricted by linear space and time, I am freed to reflect on my classroom discourse as part of a journey taking my students and myself on passages of self-discovery simultaneously rooted in the past, present and future.

*Quentin: or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.*

***Edward: or maybe my father to make all of us.***

As I begin to hear traces of my father's voice within my own dialogue, my father's journey of self-discovery becomes my own as well. Enmeshed in a staunch working class, industrial community, my father struggled to keep alive his love of reading classical literature. Growing up and raising a family in an urban community where life centered around the steel mill, the church, and the corner taverns made the idea of a college education unnecessary and unimportant which further stymied his intrinsic drive to travel, read extensively, and immerse himself (and his family) in the fine arts. Living in a segregated Chicago neighborhood (close to the mill, of course), created an ethnic,

racial, religious, linguistic vacuum which also stymied his spirit. In this way, my father resembled Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, trapped in a way in a world that did not meet his personal vision for it.

For over twenty years, I have taught in the same community where I was raised. My discourse with students is filled with references to topics such the Verdi *Macbeth* at the Lyric Opera, *An Iliad* presented at the Court Theatre at the University of Chicago, and the Art Institute's of Chicago's collection of Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman artifacts. As I speak these words, I am speaking a discourse that is rooted in my father's aspirations (and perhaps his father's before him). For my students, mostly low income, first generation American, and primarily Spanish-speaking, who are consequently surrounded by many similar biases against higher education and the larger cosmopolitan world of the fine arts, my discourse could well be opening up new worlds of possibility. In this way, as Faulkner observed, my father continues "to make all of us."

As Quentin's and Shreve's conversation continues, I am further intrigued with the powerful role discourse and dialogue play as living agents of meaning-making and introspection. The following excerpt demonstrates Faulkner's ability to illuminate this phenomenon:

"So he got his choice made, after all," Shreve said. "He played that trump after all so he came home and found-"

"Wait, I tell you!" Quentin said, though still he did not move nor raise his voice with its tense suffused restrained quality: "I am telling" *Am I going to have to hear it all again he thought I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never*

*listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do: - (that at least regarding which he should have needed no word nor warning even if Judith would have sent him one, sent him acknowledgement that she was beaten, who according to Mr. Compson said was not bereaved) and met him on his return, not with the fury and despair perhaps which he might have expected even though knowing as little, having learned as little, about women as Mr. Compson said he had, yet certainly with something other than icy calm with which, according to Miss Coldfield, she met him-the kiss again after almost two years, in the brow; the voices, the speeches, quiet, contained, almost impersonal: "And-?" "Yes. Henry killed him" followed by the brief tears which ceased on the instant when they began, as if the moisture consisted of a single sheet or layer thin as a cigarette paper and in the shape of a human face...and that was all. He had returned. He was home again where his problem now was haste, passing time, the need to hurry. *He was not concerned*, Mr. Compson said, *about the courage and the will, nor even about the shrewdness now. He was not for one moment concerned about his ability to start the third time. All that he was concerned about was the possibility that he might not have time sufficient to do it in, regain his lost ground in.**

(Faulkner, 1936, pp. 222-223)

In this passage that defies linear space and time, the "present" dialogue between Quentin and Shreve is overshadowed by four other discourses concurrently taking place as follows: the intrinsic Quentin to Quentin internal discourse (present); the Quentin to younger Quentin dialogue (present to past); the Thomas Sutpen (father) to Quentin (son)



discourse (past to present); and the Shreve to Sutpen dialogue (present to past). In this way, Faulkner demonstrates how it is that our inner and outer dialogue both reflect and create our reality. Even the physical arrangement and constitution of this passage demonstrates how the dialogue of Shreve's external narrative is overwhelmingly overshadowed by his intrinsic beliefs, values, fears, and aspirations.

These four discourses simmering beneath Shreve's external dialogue give us a glimpse of Quentin's intrinsic self, spirit, and history. By replacing externally realistic dialogue with an internally realistic linguistic portraiture we readers are given a glimpse of Quentin's intangible essence. The external verifiability of Quentin's words to Shreve in the present pales in comparison to the depth of understanding and insight provided by the verisimilitude of his internal discourse. Furthermore, Quentin's observation that *"apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do"* reinforces the intangible but very real impact of the intrinsic realities that embed Quentin's words upon those around him.

Similarly, our classroom discourse has the capability to integrate our inner self with the outer world by creating portals to our own intrinsic realities. In this way, our words have the potential to enable us, and those around us, to construct new meaning about our world and ourselves. Consequently, I now regard the instructional dialogue and conversation of my classroom as highly personal, almost sacred acts. As my students and I converse, we are sharing parts of each other that our conscious minds can only begin to understand. Each day we use our words to make meaning of our world, and to better understand each other, and ourselves.

Just like Sutpen, Quentin, and Shreve demonstrate in this passage, it is not

*“about the courage and the will nor even about the shrewdness now.... All that he was concerned about was the possibility that he might not have the time to do it in, regain his lost ground in.”* (Faulkner, 1936, pp. 222-223).

The more I come to understanding classroom discourse as a true meaning-making experience, the more precious regard I have for our classroom time together. After all, as Faulkner demonstrates, a mere ten minute conversation can underscore several lifetimes of intrinsic reality. A brief exchange of words can evoke, create, or even destroy entire worlds of possibilities.

### **B. The dream-work of language**

Certainly our consciousness of the physical world is communicated through dialogue. Valid concerns having to do with physical conditions, such as economic and housing issues, employment, and the safety and health of our loved ones are common. Similarly, educator dialogue is oftentimes occupied with concerns such as meeting assessment goals, addressing core curriculum standards, and completing required lesson plans. But what in our dialogue communicates our spiritual concerns? What part of our discourse as teachers is associated not with our physical journeys through life but with our inward spiritual journeys? Joseph Campbell (1991) bluntly asks: “how are you going to communicate spiritual consciousness to the children if you don’t have it yourself? How do you get that?” (p. 19).

Campbell (1991) explained that when our discourse and attentions are focused outward, all we see are problems surrounding us. If we look inward, however, we begin to see that the source of the concerns actually lies within us. In this way, Campbell calls one’s dreams “an inexhaustible source of spiritual information about yourself” (p. 47).

Embracing our dream-time, as he calls it, makes us “educators toward life” (p. 20) because it frees our dialogue from the mundane as it raises our consciousness to higher platforms. Faulkner’s novel *Light in August* (1932) models and inspires this dreamtime dialogue informed by spiritual consciousness. In the following excerpt, while Joe Christmas listens to a church choir, he no longer is consumed with physical concerns including finding a woman, a job, and a place to call home. Instead, the words and music of the choir speak to him on a spiritual level:

Listening, he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his envired blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?* he thinks. It seems to him that he can hear within the music the declaration and dedication of that which they know that on the morrow they will have to do. It seems to him that the past week has rushed like a torrent and that the week to come, which will begin tomorrow, is the abyss, and that now on the brink of cataract the stream has raised a single blended and sonorous and austere cry, not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross . ‘And they will do it gladly,’ he says, in the dark window. He feels his mouth and jaw muscles tauten with something

premonitory, something more terrible than laughing even. 'Since to pity him would be to admit self-doubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible.' (Faulkner, 1932, pp. 367-368)

Initially, the church choir speaks to Joe Christmas with words and images glorifying the divine status of all those present. Christmas's harsh response, however, that '*their religion drive(s) them to crucifixion of themselves and one another,*' cries out against what he perceives as the hypocrisy of the choir's words. Christmas equates their pleasure with their violence, their ecstasy with their fighting, and their praying with inescapable catastrophe. As much as Christmas longs to belong to a community entitled to mystic redemption built upon prayer and faith, his 'dream-time' reality is laden with apocalyptic images of the abyss, of torrents and cataracts, and of crosses and crucifixions.

Christmas bemoans the daily crucifixion of his spirit, ambition, and self-esteem. It is significant that the *Christ* in his name alludes to the world religious leader, Jesus Christ, who also suffered a public execution. In both cases, the men are victims of an external world that is motivated by greed, personal gain, misunderstanding, fear, and prejudice. These men are executed based on extrinsic qualities without consideration of their intrinsic worth. My students and I also explore this theme of crucifixion with the characters Superman and Hercules.

An apocalyptic Domsday personifying all of humanity's greed, rage, and power sets out to destroy the entire planet unless one being, Superman, submits to sacrifice his own life via crucifixion in an international arena:

The battle has devastated the better part of America, leaving a path of destruction

almost as long. Earth's mightiest heroes have already fallen under Doomsday's murderous blitzkrieg. Only one hope, one man remains..."He wants destruction and death! To stop him I [Superman] have to be every bit as ferocious and unrelenting as he is" (Jurgens, Ordway, Simonson, & Stern, 1993, *The Death of Superman*, pp. 140 and 154)!

Greek mythology hero Hercules was laid upon a burning funeral bier wearing a vest covered in deadly Hydra's blood. All the Ancient World was present to witness the public execution of this son of a god (Zeus). Although Heracles had previously been a savior to these people when he destroyed hideous monsters, public opinion fired up by fraudulent evidence and malignant gossip, has turned against him; he is now only judged by circumstantial evidence as an unfaithful husband. In this way, his good works and heroism are being crucified while the world watches.

Superman, Jesus Christ, and Heracles are each sons of gods or supernatural beings and are each willing to sacrifice their own lives (in humiliating public displays of death). More than this, they also each experience a spiritual resurrection and a victory over death. After a period of mourning, Superman's burial crypt is discovered empty (his supernatural father rescues him); Jesus Christ's tomb is barren (to sit at the right hand of this father in heaven); and Heracles' body has disappeared (taken up by his father Zeus to reign with him on Mount Olympus):

As the flames rose around him, a loud thunderclap was heard, and Heracles, by the order of Zeus, rose up to Olympus, reclining on his lion skin. The gods all welcomed Heracles and were glad to have him with them, for the Fates had predicted that Olympus would be attacked by a fearful enemy and the Olympians

could only be saved only if the strongest man ever born fought on their side

(D'aulaire & D'aulaire, 1962, *D'aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*, p. 146).

This motif of birth, life, death and resurrection has existed in storytelling throughout human history. Joseph Campbell (1991) explained that these stories fill a human need for understanding issues that are larger than our own small lives:

What human beings have in common is revealed through myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to understand death and to cope with death, and we all need help in our passages from birth to life and then to death. We need for life to signify, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are. (p. 4)

When my students and I examine these hero stories starring Superman, Heracles, Christ, and others, we are really exploring ourselves. What does it mean to face our mortality? What values or beliefs are we willing to sacrifice our lives for? What message do these stories have for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Which component of this recurring motif is missing in Faulkner's Joe Christmas story? Whereas resurrection is a significant part of these myths, Christmas makes no reference to it. I believe that this is the root of the despair and hopelessness that pervades Christmas' dialogue, and his life. To better understand, my students and I together explore what Campbell (1991) called "the mystery of the womb and tomb" (p. 270):

There is a deeper experience, too, the mystery of the womb and the tomb. When people are buried, it's for rebirth. That's the origin of the burial idea. You put someone into the womb of mother earth for rebirth. Very early images of the Goddess show her as a mother receiving the soul back again. (p. 270)

Instead of a rebirth, Christmas sees tomorrow as an abyss; instead of anticipating a prayerful rising up from the earth, Christmas predicts “a dying salute before its own plunge” (368). What has become of resurrection? Why does Christmas deny himself this critical component? Has society denied him this? Has society ‘written him out’ of this universal humanistic motif? Has society deemed him unworthy to partake in it? Has he internalized a message that he and his people are somehow not entitled to this heritage? Heracles and Superman were born, lived, and suffered. They were then somehow intrinsically worthy to be resurrected, to be reborn. What sort of de-humanized being is Christmas to have been deemed unworthy:

The boy’s body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient past of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and selfcrucifixion. (Faulkner, 1932, pp. 159-160)

Faulkner wrote that “the boy’s body might have been wood or stone,” and I am reminded of Carlo Collodi’s (1883) *Pinocchio* who was not a real boy; was something much less than a real boy. Is this how Christmas felt inside? Is he not a Superman but a Pinocchio? Is he a wooden Heracles? Is he of no more worth than the wooden cross against which he is crucified? Is he the Pinocchio creature created out of society’s fears, prejudices, and lust for power and authority? Without hope for a re-birth, Christmas’ spirit is racked with hopelessness and despair. Anger and rage simmer beneath. This is all he has known and all he has been taught. No truth or discourse can set him free from these monsters because, for Christmas, memory supersedes knowledge:

Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big

long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewnpacked compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting chimneys streaked like black tears.

(Fualkner, 1932, p. 119)

Consequently, as Christmas hears the Christian choir singing of God's justice and kindness, the words are filtered to him through his memory. The Biblical knowledge the choir member might possess and the sense of wonder or hope that their melodies might inspire are for Christmas hollow, lifeless, and meaningless. They only serve to heighten his despair.

As teachers, what is our song? What ideas, beliefs, values, thoughts, and prejudices make up the melodies of our classroom discourse? As our students filter our words through their memories, what messages are they receiving? Whose 'choir song' is being sung to us? Is this voice speaking to us with sincerity and hopefulness? Is this voice masquerading a reality laden with torrents, cataracts, crucifixions, and crosses? As I reflect upon the voices of leadership that have 'sung' to me over the years, Faulkner's writing inspires me to more closely assess the impact of their words. What of the administrator who asks his faculty to think of themselves as doctors diagnosing the ills of their students and trying to find cures? How about the leadership team that sings the praises of technology over the 'outdated' practices of teaching and learning? What of the



administrative choir that praises the glorious potential of each student while insisting on instruction segregated by student ability?

Within these various melodies, I can ascertain some of the disillusionment felt by Christmas. The underlying messages of these voices imply that many students are ‘sick’ and in need some sort of ‘cure’; that technology is a more efficient tool than the human teacher; and that equity of education and educational opportunities can be best achieved through segregation of students and resources. Like Christmas, I can perceive an apocalyptic minefield festering beneath these sorts of words and images. The nightmarish landscape beneath the positive façade includes the crucifixion of students who are deemed ‘sick’ and in need of ‘curing’; the crosses of segregation and inequality stigmatizing others; and the abyss of misconceptions, biases, and the inescapable catastrophe of educational inequality.

Christmas hears the choir speak a “declaration and dedication of that which they [the church members] know that on the morrow they will have to do.” Despite their words, or rather because of their words, he already feels the pangs of betrayal at the hands of the church members who today sing of justice and piety all the while knowing in their hearts that tomorrow they will violently and deliberately expel Christmas from their community because of his race and skin color. Christmas stoically responds “they will do it gladly.”

Metaphorically speaking, Christmas is the “doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them.” Christmas is speaking from a spiritual abyss wherein his personal worth and integrity are being torn apart against the torrents and cataracts of hatred and bias masquerading as godly piety. As Christmas hears the melodic choir singing majestically about the glory of crucifixion and the reverence of the cross, he understands

that there is no compassion or pity for him as he bemoans that “to pity him would be to admit self-doubt and to hope for and need pity themselves.” These words do not speak to Christmas’s impending physical torment, but to his on-going spiritual suffering.

Is our work as educators limited exclusively to external expectations, physical measures, and data-driven goals? If so, what is left to inspire, ignite, and sustain our personal worth and integrity-as well as that of our students? Without acknowledging and attending to the intrinsic well-being of ourselves and our students, we can never hope to attain Campbell’s goal of becoming “educators toward life” (p. 20). Our identity and integrity as educators relies on our ability to listen to the voice of what Parker Palmer (2007) called “the teacher within”:

In classical understanding, education is the attempt to “lead out” from within the self a core of wisdom that has the power to resist falsehood and live in the light of truth, not by external norms but by reasoned and reflective self-determination. The inward teacher is the living core of our lives that is addressed and evoked by any education worthy of the name. (p. 32)

Christmas comments that the church-goers’ songs and prayers serve as “a dying salute” of hypocrisy before their own fall, indicate that the church-goers themselves are included in his apocalyptic vision. Christmas hears the choir sing of glory and sadly responds that “they will do it gladly, gladly.” Could one man’s perceived glory be contingent another man’s demise? Could one man’s act of “seeming glory” actually serve as his own reciprocal crucifixion? In response to these implied queries, Christmas simply states “that’s why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible.”

To what degree have we educators become Faulkner's "doomed man in the barred cell"? Have we become, like Christmas, apathetic, detached, or emotionally numb to the metaphoric crucifixion of our own intrinsic values and selves? Palmer offers that the alternative to this sort of passive hypocrisy and mutual crucifixion lies in relying less on artificially-imposed external values and biases and returning instead to "reclaim our belief in the power of inwardness to transform our work and our lives" (p. 20).

This second sequence of dialogue from Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), however, shows how a journey into the dream-work and belief systems embedded in language can sometimes be an emotionally and morally perilous ordeal:

He cackles, suddenly, bright, loud, mad; he speaks, incredibly old, incredibly dirty.

"It was the Lord. *He* was there. Old Doc Hines give God His chance too. The Lord told old Hines what to do and old Doc Hines done it. Then the Lord said to old Doc Hines 'You watch, now. Watch My will a-working.' And old Doc Hines watched and heard the mouths of little children, of God's own fatherless and motherless, putting His words and knowledge into their mouths even when they couldn't know it since they were without sin and bitchery yet: Nigger! Nigger! in the innocent mouths of little children. 'What did I tell you?' God said to old Doc Hines. "And now I've set My will to working and now I'm gone. There aint enough sin here to keep Me busy because what do I care for the fornications of a slut, since that is a part of My purpose too' and old Doc Hines said 'How is the fornications of a slut a part of your purpose too?' and God said 'You wait and see.' (Faulkner, 1932, pp. 282-3)

Reverend Hightower's discourse attempts to explain the events of how 'God's own fatherless and motherless' Joe Christmas came to be adopted by Doc Hines. Within his dialogue, one can ascertain the defeat of a person's free will at the constricting hands of fate. Hightower's irreverent acceptance of events and prejudices as God's 'will a-working' indicates a moral value system beaten down by ignorance, violence, poverty, and hopelessness. Hightower relates that when young children call out 'Nigger! Nigger!' they are merely repeating the words and knowledge God has put in their minds.

Bias, cruelty, prejudice, and ignorance are not conscious choices but merely 'a part of My [God's] purpose.' In Hightower's storytelling, acts of human injustice and cruelty (which 'aint enough sin here to keep me [God] busy'), are reduced to God's purpose and plan imposed upon passive humanity. Such passivity and helplessness stifles personal morality. The lack of personal and societal accountability in Hightower's narrative indicates an alarming moral depravity. As he next relates the dialogue between God and Doc Hines, the role of an individual conscience is further undermined:

Do you think it is just chance so that I sent that young doctor to be the one that found my abomination laying wrapped in that blanket on that doorstep that Christmas night? Do you think it was just chance so that the Madam should have been away that night and give them young sluts the chance and call to name him Christmas in sacrilege of My son? So I am gone now, because I have set my will a-working and I can leave you here to watch it.

So old Doc Hines he watched and he waited. From God's own boiler room he Watched them children, and the devil's walking seed unbeknownst among them, polluting the earth with the working of that word on him. (Faulkner, 1932, p. 383)

Faulkner's dream-like imagery, including the 'abomination laying wrapped in the blanket,' God watching the children from his 'own boiler room,' and 'the devil's walking seed' flavors the dialogue with an apocalyptic tone. Personal conscience is reduced to a helpless acceptance of God's 'will a-working.' When Joe Christmas finally questions Doc Hines about the personal injustice and cruelty he suffers daily, Doc Hines' dialogue both reflects and reinforces the idea that because everything is part of a "divine plan," we must all accept our fate:

Because he didn't play with the other children no more now. He stayed by himself, standing still, and then old Doc Hines knew that he was listening to the hidden warning of God's doom, and old Doc Hines said 'Is it because they call you nigger?' and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said "Do you think you are a nigger because God has marked your face? And he said 'Is God a nigger too?' and old Doc Hines said 'He is the Lord God of wrathful hosts, His will be done. Not yours and not mine, because you and me are both a part of His purpose and His vengeance.' (Faulkner, 1932, p. 383)

Doc Hines' words take us on an intrinsic journey of helplessness and apathy. His words reflect Christmas' earlier thoughts as he listened to the church choir and asked '*should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?*' The journey of this dialogue is trodding on the road to Calvary. Along the way, Joe Christmas' next piece of discourse represents an attempt to salvage some self-respect for his personal identity:

And he went away and old Doc Hines watched him hearing and listening to the vengeful will of the Lord, until old Doc Hines found out how he was watching the

nigger working in the yard, following him around the yard while he worked, until at last the nigger said 'What you watching me for, boy?' and he said "How come you are a nigger?' and the nigger said "Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard? And he says 'I aint a nigger' and the nigger says 'You are worse than that. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you won't never know' and he says. You'll live and you'll die and wont never know. And he says 'God aint no nigger' and the nigger says "I reckon you ought to know what God is, because don't nobody but God know what you is.' (Faulkner, 1932, pp. 383-384)

Christmas' words embody his innermost doubts, fears, and insecurities. When his dialogue attempts to integrate his sense of inner being with the outer world which surrounds it, he is met with derision that further undermines his fragile sense of self. From his end of the dialogue, Christmas receives words in reply to his queries as if they were missiles, collapsing potential new worlds of possibility into depths of hopelessness and despair. Instead of affirming his identity with fresh insights, Christmas is labeled a 'little white bastard' doomed to never realize a meaningful identity or existence. The words incarcerate Christmas' intrinsic vitality leaving him again Faulkner's "doomed man in the barred cell" (p. 368).

### **C. When a word is worth a thousand pictures**

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then why can't a word be worth a thousand pictures? Faulkner demonstrates that for Joe Christmas, there is one word that encapsulates a world of derision, a cosmos of disrespect, and a universe of despair. The word that has been thrown at him by innocent schoolchildren as they blindly shouted 'Nigger! Nigger!' is further attached to his psyche by his caretaker Doc Hines, and

tattooed to his spirit by countless strangers. Just as easily as a word can create new worlds of possibility, it can also destroy them.

As an instructor who relies primarily on discourse and verbal interaction, these insights gleamed from Faulkner force me to examine the dialogue I deliver and facilitate more carefully. What words create, sustain, or destroy the spirit of my students? Which words have the same effect on my own mind and self? Unless we carefully examine our words, how can we as educators even begin to ascertain even a bit of their intrinsic impact on others?

In this way, it is through our personal use of dialogue, both spoken and received, that we can learn something about how we (and our students) experience the structure of the external world and how that experience constitutes the meaning that informs our lives. I hear that word—a word so toxic to my soul that I cannot even print it here—and I am immediately that same nine year old leaving the Little League baseball field. As I passed by an alleyway on my way home, an older team member whom I barely knew caught my attention and threw that word at me—it might as well have been a poison dart. Just as Joe Christmas was forever tainted by the ‘n-word,’ that f-word poisoned my spirit and my mind. Like a virus, it became embedded in an intrinsic soundtrack playing through my head. The single word launched a thousand pictures in my mind, pictures that served to undermine my self-confidence, and self-respect.

George Willis and Anthony J. Allen (1978) wrote that “through attending at the deep level of experience to our own experiencing of the world and to the experiencing of others, we can learn something about both the nature and structure of experience” (p. 39). That one word became the lens through which I experienced my self and my world.

Willis and Allen further ascribe to dialogue the power to “illuminate the dynamics of experience and how meanings are constituted” (p. 42). I can testify that a single word and a solitary experience have tainted my perceptions and understanding of experiences growing up. The word robbed me of close personal relationships, stripped me of self-respect, and crucified my sense of well-being. Genocide, segregation, and mass humiliation cost thousands of dollars; a word is free. The devastation left in its path is equally traumatic.

It is no wonder then that I am so impressed with how Faulkner artistically demonstrates the scope and depth that a single word can have on an individual. In this passage from *The sound and the fury* (1929), Shreve is letting his friend Quentin know that a letter for Quentin has arrived. Shreve speaks only thirty-four words. Quentin, on the other hand, hears over one hundred words:

“Oh, by the way, did you get a letter off the table this morning?”

“No.”

“It’s there. From Semiramis. Chauffeur brought it before ten oclock.”

“All right. I’ll get it. Wonder what she wants now.”

“Another band recital, I guess. Tumpy ta ta Gerald blah. ‘A little louder on the drum, Quentin’. God, I’m glad I’m not a gentleman.” He went on nursing a book, a little shapeless, fatly intent. *The street lamps* do you think so because one of our forefathers was a governor and three were generals and Mother’s weren’t any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man *Done in Mother’s mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned.* (Faulkner, 1929, pp. 101).



Although it may appear that Quentin is exhibiting signs of schizophrenia, he is not. What is actually happening is that Faulkner (1929) is revealing both an external and an internal discourse. Shreve's seemingly harmless words are triggering memories and emotions within Quentin's mind and spirit. Although Quentin may not even be aware of these words, they are real; they are impacting his overall psychological well-being. The intrinsic soundtrack playing in Quentin's mind is reminding him of disturbing memories that are still haunting him and affecting the way he perceives himself and his world. This demonstrates the immediate connection between words spoken in the outer world and the effect they can have on our inner life.

Similarly, I can recall almost instantaneously a transaction involving a beloved teacher at my elementary school when I was thirteen. I was always trying desperately to quietly do the right thing so that others would not have cause to hurl hurtful words at me especially that one which I refuse to dignify by directly calling out. I was terrorized by the fear of anyone seeing through my mask and discovering (however erroneously) that I was some sort of an imposter. Nevertheless, on a Tuesday morning after Science class, I found that my name was included in the list of students who were not going out to recess that day due to late assignments. When I returned to homeroom after recess break, the homeroom teacher had a delightfully clever message printed across the front chalk board. It was her custom to post humorous quips and observations. Although completely unknown to the teacher, this harmless fun was, to me, the height of ridicule and humiliation.

I can still remember the quip: *'Podsi' is in trouble. He, too, is human. We all thought he was perfect, but now we see the truth.* The quip left me vulnerable and victimized. In

this way I learned firsthand what Shakespeare meant when he wrote that in *Hamlet* (1598) that “there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so” (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 251-2) and in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) that “he jests at scars who never felt the wound” Act 2, Scene 1, line 43). I imagine running through my mind that day was an internal soundtrack similar to Quentin’s:

no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man *Done*  
*in Mother’s mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned.*

(Faulkner, 1929, pp. 101)

I presume that this teacher never even realized the harm she had done to my spirit, and my psyche. Nevertheless, the anecdote points out the power of words. It points out the responsibility we have as educators to safeguard our students. Shakespeare was right: the pen *is* mightier than the sword! Returning to Faulkner’s text, Quentin felt ill at ease during his brief exchange with Shreve and probably did not even know why. Faulkner shows us where this unease come from as he (Faulkner) give words to the intrinsic avalanche that is bombarding Quentin’s spirit:

You are confusing sin and morality women don’t do that your mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her Jason I must go away you keep the others I’ll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he’ll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others don’t love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread nonsense Jason is all right I was thinking that as soon as you feel better you and Caddy might go up to French Lick and leave Jason here with nobody but you and the darkies she will forget him all

the talk will die away *found not death at the salt licks* maybe I could find a husband for her *not death at the salt licks* The car came up and stopped. The bells were still ringing the half hour. I got on and it went on again, blotting the half hour. No: the three quarters. Then it would be ten minutes anyway. (Faulkner, 1929, p. 102)

Quentin has a moment of feeling ill at ease. The trigger of these feelings lasts but a brief, incalculable, practically unconscious, moment. To try to expose underlying truths, Faulkner takes this nano-moment and extends it with the elasticity of a rubber band. In this quantum instant, Faulkner imagines the depth of memory and emotion that is being agitated. Quentin's overwhelming sensations of helplessness, anxiety, and severe foreboding are just as real to him at this moment (whether he consciously is aware of this or not) as they were for him five, ten, or fifteen years ago. Similarly, deep down I *know* that sensations of humiliation, fear, and shame – brought on thirty-three years ago near a Little League baseball field – have paralyzed and tormented my words, actions, and thoughts ever since. In other words, a word *is* worth a thousand pictures!

As Quentin's moment continues, Faulkner takes us deeper and deeper into Quentin's intrinsic reality:

To leave Harvard *your mother's dream for sold Benjy's pasture* for what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough and now for her to have no more regard for me her own mother I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed I went down into the valley yet never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's

sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting away my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me I don't complain I loved him above them all because of it because my duty though Jason pulling at my heart all the while but I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your sins as well as mine what have you done what sins have your high and mighty people visited upon me. (Faulkner, 1929, pp. 101-103)

The discourse begins with 'real time dialogue' between Quentin and Shreve. But once Shreve mentions that a correspondence has arrived from Semiramis, Quentin's 'real time reality' transcends linear time and space revealing a myriad of intrinsically surreal word and images. At varying times in this excerpt, long past Quentin is speaking to present time Quentin; Quentin's third person persona is speaking to his first person self; each of these Quentins speaks with Quentin's mother as his young mother and also as his (same) mother as a middle-aged abandoned wife. Furthermore, joining the dialogue is Quentin's rebellious sister Caddy, his step-brother Jason, and a third person omniscient version of his friend Shreve. These nine simultaneous conversations defy space and time in a singular moment of intrinsic illumination and epiphany.

Semiramis is the single word that triggers this emotional avalanche. This allusion to the legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis is critical to understanding Quentin's innermost fears and regrets. Like the Assyrian queen, Quentin's mother (despite her pretensions) was not raised by respectable stock but by vagabonds and thieves; the queen is said to have invented the chastity belt and to have castrated young males for pleasure just as the

spirit of Quentin's mother undermines his relationships with women with echoes of her critical, controlling, and condescending nature; and just as Semiramis married her own son after the death of her husband, Quentin's mother lived separately with her son Jason for whom she shared an unhealthy attraction. These emotional trappings weigh heavily upon Quentin's psyche.

As Quentin struggles to establish his own life and identity apart from his turbulent upbringing and unstable family, in his mind he is continuously struggling with these demons from his past that continually shape his present and future. Furthermore, he is combating his guilt over the fact that he is attending Harvard only because he had access to his mentally retarded brother Benjy's money and inheritance; and with his crippling envy over his sister Caddy's spirit of adventure and independence which allowed her the fortitude to move away from the family years ago. The images of '*death at the salt licks,*' '*all poisoned,*' and 'compromised morality turned to sinfulness' each speak to the state and struggle of Quentin's soul.

Although the discourse is comprised of many speakers, it occurs with one voice. Although the pronoun 'I' alludes interchangeably to Caddy, Quentin, Mother, Benjy, Shreve, and Jason, these six entities are actually embodied in only one person: Quentin. At any given moment, Quentin's thoughts, feelings, fears, and doubts are intertwined with the many people who continually share his intrinsic journey toward selfhood and peace. Thus, although this discourse sounds unrealistic, Daniel Chandler (2002) cautioned that "language does not 'reflect' reality but rather constructs it" (p. 28).

Thus, I have come to believe that the words we educators use determine the reality (external *and* internal) of our classrooms. How we talk and think about our classrooms

directly impacts their psychological and spiritual reality. Consequently, greater attention and reflection needs to be focused on our discourse, and its potential internal impact. Just as Faulkner's dialogue demonstrates, I cannot, while teaching, separate the 'me' of the past from the 'me' of the present. At this intrinsic level, time and space are rendered meaningless. It is the experiences (and the words) that have contributed to *who I am* today that have made me especially sensitive to derogatory language, mean-spirited comments and gestures, and callous name-calling and stereotyping. It is not the external rules that set the tone in the classroom (*don't chew gum, don't be late, don't use foul language*). Instead, it is the internal zeitgeist of who I am that sets the expectations and the tone of the classroom.

What does our classroom discourse reveal about the state and struggle of our souls? I can take risks in the classroom as teacher that I am not willing to take anywhere else. In the classroom, I can speak more freely and act more at ease. Observers, even administrators, have commented that as soon as I step in to a classroom my demeanor and spirit changes. I become noticeably gregarious, unguarded, and "alive." I believe that this is because in the classroom, I can carefully use words to create a reality that does not have a tolerance for disrespect or flagrant cruelty. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) pointed out, because my classroom discourse is rooted in my history, memory, fears, and aspirations, it can project a reality unlike anywhere else.

Once my reflections evolve from an extrinsic mode to an intrinsic nature, I start to perceive my reality in terms of non-linear connections. For instance, as I dialogue with students in literature class about Hamlet's decision to avenge his father by killing his uncle, in a way I am continuing a dialogue with myself over the free will versus fate

question. As I engage my students in discussion over Macbeth's moral conscience (or lack of one), I am in a way still deliberating with my high school Latin teacher on the existence of an immortal soul.

Once the veil of linear space and time is lifted, I start to perceive a plethora of interrelated connections between my students and myself. For instance, I imagine that the aforementioned discussion of *Hamlet* (1598) could easily rest in the mind or heart of any number of my students who have had or will have in future to face a similar moral crisis. The discussion of *Macbeth* (1606) I alluded to could easily sow the seeds for future thought and reflection in the sense that Macbeth's issues of morality don't belong exclusively to Macbeth or to me, but to all members of humanity, past, present, and future.

In this way, I am challenged to think in terms that are less "black and white" and much more difficult to pin down. The Dalai Lama (1999) calls this kind of phenomenon "a picture of dependently originated reality":

We see that there is no self-interest completely unrelated to others' interests. Due to the fundamental interconnectedness which lies at the heart of reality, your interest is also my interest. From this, it becomes clear that "my" interest and "your" interest are intimately connected. In a deep sense, they converge." (p. 47)

My discourse with colleagues, administrators, and students is frequently embedded with the hope that education will make us 'better people.' Of course, there are as many different definitions of 'better people' as there are people! To some, 'better people' means people who can get jobs; to others, it means people who 'treat others the way they want to be treated.' Nevertheless, following Faulkner's prototype for discourse, our

words have the potential to unleash a deluge of surrealistic images. What images make up the surreal landscape of our being? What demons from our past shape our present and future? These questions help me reflect on the spiritual and esoteric heart of my teaching.

For me, it opens a Pandora box of hurtful experiences from the past in which I felt that people were intentionally cruel; hurts that today are still bleeding in my psyche and spirit. Thus, my dream that education can truly be a tool for social justice is enlivened through my discourse. I believe that this intrinsic energy empowers my words and my spirit to infiltrate the aura of my classroom. My discourse with students, colleagues, and parents is a rich tapestry through which I engage in meaning making. As words are exchanged, so are thoughts, ideas, fears, and dreams. Leo Buscaglia (1982) called this a process of “becoming”:

As teachers we must believe in change, must know it is possible, or we wouldn't be teaching – because education is a constant process of change. Every single time you “teach” something to someone, it is ingested, something is done with it, and a new human being emerges. I can't understand why people aren't just dying to learn, why it isn't the greatest adventure in the world – because it's the process of becoming. Every time we learn something new, we become something. (p. 41)

In this sense I have come to accept classroom discourse as sacred. When sharing words, thoughts, and images, my students and I are respectfully sharing of bits of ourselves. When viewing dialogue as Faulkner presents it, words are entities cast out as seeds of possibilities. If and when the words take root, our intrinsic journey of ‘becoming’ is touched. I am ‘alive’ when teaching unlike any other moments in my life. My day-to-day spirit and self-esteem were crucified by the cruelty of my fellow baseball



team member; the word ‘fag’ is the nail that I confess still impales me to my cross of shame and humiliation. But the classroom experience defies time and space. Together my students and I share an almost existential space that is founded on an idealized conception of integrity and respect. In this space, personal shame is no longer the reality.

This is why I regard teaching as a privilege. It is the only forum that affords me real self-esteem and personal integrity. Faulkner’s (1932) Joe Christmas never had the privilege to engage others in teaching and learning; he never fully transcended past the unwarranted shame and undeserved despair of the taunt ‘nigger’:

A sentence seems to stand full-sprung across his skull, behind his eyes: I don’t want to think this. I must not think this. I dare not think this. As he sits in the window, forward above his motionless hands, sweat begins to pour from him, springing out like blood, and pouring. Out of the instant the sandclutched wheel of thinking turns on with slow implacability of a medieval torture instrument, beneath the wrenched and broken sockets of his spirit, his life. (pp. 490-1)

I have no doubt that if not for the privilege of teaching this would be a frighteningly accurate portrayal of *me*. Christmas was never metaphorically resurrected from his personal and spiritual crucifixion. He never had the means or the opportunity to regenerate the ‘wrenched and broken sockets of his spirit, his life.’ He was trapped in the world wherein he was defined exclusively as ‘nigger.’ That single word imprisoned the thousand pictures of his life. My life as an educator holds the keys to my personal and spiritual freedom. Whereas the arena of life has de-humanized me (via that three letter f-word), the arena of the classroom liberates my true spirit of creativity, justice, and

integrity. If I can use my classroom space and time to cultivate humanity and to validate the intrinsic spirits of my students, I can could for no greater privilege, no greater life.

Despite words or experiences that can crucify one's spirit, sometimes life offers opportunities that can resurrect one's soul. Shakespeare's (1609) *Sonnet 18* speaks to this phenomenon of a life resurrected:

Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see

So long lives this and this gives life to thee. (Shakespeare, *Sonnet 18*, lines 11-14)

My vocation as teacher is that which 'gives life to' me. I have recited these words to eighth grade students, elementary principals, honorees at retirement parties, and members of the Oxford University Round Table. The poetry of these words speaks more spiritual truth to me than any scientific theorems or axioms. Food and water provide my body with nourishment, but teaching and learning nourish my soul. Faulkner (1929) portrays Quentin (*The Sound and the Fury*) as a living dead man without such nourishment:

The road curved again and became a street between shady lawns with white houses. *Caddy that blackguard can you think of Benjy and Father and do it not of me what else can I think about what else have I thought about* The boy turned from the street. He climbed a picket fence without looking back and crossed the lawn to a tree and laid the pole down and climbed into the fork of the tree and sat there, his back to the tree and the dappled sun motionless at last upon his white shirt *else have I thought about I cant even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant I didn't know what I was saying.* (p. 123)

This dialogue defies space and time while it challenges the linear notion of labeling something *either* alive *or* dead. Quentin is living in the present *and* the past; he is traveling on one road with his college friends and simultaneously traveling another one with his childhood companions. He acknowledges that although he lives, he died the year before. Metaphorically, he is alive *and* dead. In this surreal sense, I am Quentin. Outside the classroom, I am dead to any consistent lifeline of self-esteem or self-worth. Within the classroom, however, my integrity thrives on the context of mutual respect, patience, and, dare I admit it, hope.

Although the initial discourse between Quentin and his friends seems trivial and unimportant, the words and images reverberate deeply into his mind, spirit, and psyche. Hence, as the discourse shapes and re-shapes Quentin's intrinsic self, the words at this level have the capacity to resurrect feelings or aspirations that may have died inside Quentin years ago. The words also have the capability, however, to crucify future hopes and decisions.

What is the intrinsic make-up of our classroom dialogue? What parts of our discourse are of a resurrecting nature? Are the seeds of possibility, optimism, and hope being sown? What parts of our discourse is of a crucifying nature? Are the seeds of doubt, fear, and negativity being sown? Just like Faulkner's protagonist Quentin, I struggle with these questions each day. Nevertheless, despite the complex and emotionally charged nature of this sort of reflection, I feel that it allows me to more closely ascertain the humanity of my work as an educator and to better understand the more spiritual nature of role as educator.

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: What questions, insights, or possibilities might arise when an educator reflects upon

his or her own inner dialogue? To what extent do his or her external words embody his or her innermost values, beliefs, fears, and aspirations?

2: Where in your personal and professional discourse do your memory, history, fears, and aspirations lie? What aspects of your personal affect and cognition are embedded in this discourse? In what ways do your words, thoughts, and gestures embody your intrinsic identity as a teacher and as a person?

3: To what extent does our inner and outer dialogue *reflect* our reality or *create* our reality? How much of that reality is grounded in our beliefs, values, fears, and aspirations? Consequently, is our reality rooted in the physical world around us as perceived through our external senses, or is it made manifest through the portals of our intrinsic spirit, history, and values?

4: How are these kinds of meaning-making ideas and conflicts expressed through one's discourse? In what ways are the ripples of your past reverberating in your present? How much of your discourse is actually your own, how much is impacted by your history, and how much is mirrored from those around you? Which design is being enacted each day – free will's or fate's?

5: How much do significant people from your history affect the lens through which you see your classroom, your students, your world? How is your classroom dialogue affected by such intrinsic influences? What does your own simultaneously occurring internal discourse sound like?

6: What ideas, thoughts, and aspirations pepper your classroom discourse? What is this discourse “making of all of us”?

7: Can you recall moments as a teacher or as a student when a seemingly innocuous

classroom conversation became for you highly personal, almost sacred acts? In what ways is your classroom discourse helping you and your students better understand yourselves and each other?

8: Is our work as educators limited exclusively to external expectations, physical measures, and data-driven goals? If so, what is left to inspire, ignite, and sustain our personal worth and integrity – as well as that of our students?

9: What words create, sustain, or destroy the spirit of our students? Which words have the same effect on our own mind and self?

10: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/ So long lives this and this gives life to thee (Shakespeare, Sonnet 18, lines 11-14). As a teacher, what do these words mean to you? To what might Shakespeare be referring to when he remarks that ‘this gives life to thee’?

11: Does the language we use determine the reality of our classrooms? Can how we talk and think about our classrooms directly impact their psychological and spiritual realities?

12: What is the intrinsic make-up of our classroom dialogue? What parts of our discourse are of a resurrecting nature? Does it sow the seeds of possibility, optimism, and hope? What parts of our discourse is of a crucifying nature? Does it sow seeds of doubt, fear, and negativity?

13: As teachers, what is our song? What ideas, beliefs, values, thoughts, and prejudices make up the melodies of our classroom discourse? As our students filter our words through their memories, what messages are they receiving? Whose ‘choir song’ is being sung to us? Is this voice speaking to us with sincerity and hopefulness?

14: In what ways are ripples of your past reverberating in your present? How much of your discourse is actually your own, how much emanates personal from history, and how much is merely mirrored from those around you? Whose design is being enacted each day – free will's or fate's?

## VII. DIALOGUE AS IRONY

### *Seinfeld* scripts

The writers of the *Seinfeld* (1991-1998) television scripts use the dialogue of their fictional characters to create a unique universe that both mirrors and parodies reality. The four major characters are archetypes of humanity when it is stripped of the veils of false propriety and insincere civility. Their dialogue, rooted in sarcasm, irony, and satire, provides us the opportunity to reflect on our own motives, beliefs, fears, and aspirations when they are freed of any false pretensions based on values we may feel we are ‘expected’ to uphold, although deep down we do not truly adhere to. As a classroom teacher, what are the values, beliefs, and ideals you feel you are *expected* to uphold? Which of these values are determined by outside agencies such as the State Board of Education, local or national government, or community priorities? Which of these do you support as a freethinking individual?

If discourse functions as a tool for meaning making, then our classroom discourse should be creating a reality rooted in our beliefs and values. However, if the beliefs and values embedded in our educator discourse adheres to the priorities of *external* agents such as Board of Education policies and local or national government agendas, then our public discourse as educators is not aligned with our private values. The *Seinfeld* dialogue deliberately subverts this public discourse. Norah Martin (2000) wrote that although espousing an external ideology systematically helps us to become conscious of a particular view of reality, it has serious shortcomings:

What is ideology? It is the system of ideas whereby we become conscious of ourselves, our lives, our world. In short, it is the system of ideas by which we become conscious of reality...In other words, we believe that our world makes

sense, is coherent, unified and consistent. However, this is a belief in an illusion. In believing in it we are averting our gaze from the gaps, the lack of consistency and coherence..... In other words, although we know that we are dealing with a fiction, we regulate reality as though the fiction were real. Ironically, in doing this we make the fiction real. (pp. 140-1)

**A. Relating one's fiction as reality**

The *Seinfeld* character George represents the part of the human psyche that feels inadequate, insecure, and inept. Rather than coping with these feelings by acquiring skills, adhering to a set of ethics, or mustering up the necessary bravery to move forward, George's actions and words spring from his moral inadequacies and his ethical shallowness as evidenced in this script excerpt (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 84, The Fire):

**Robin's Mother:** Oh, this is just a wonderful party!

**Robin:** The burgers should be ready in a minute.

**George:** Ah, great, great. (sniffs) What's that smell? Smoke? (walks to the kitchen)

Hey, everybody, I think I smell smoke back here. (smoke boils into the doorway) FIRE! FIRE! Get out of the way!

*The kids all scream and the party goes crazy. George barrels out of the kitchen, pushing down kids, clowns, and old ladies in a mad panic to escape. He runs out the door and leaves everyone behind.*

*Cut to George sitting in the back of an ambulance with an oxygen mask on his face.*

**George** (to EMTs): It was an inferno in there! An inferno! (Eric, Robin's mother, and all kids rush at George)



**Eric the clown:** There he is! That's him! (tries to clobber George with his big shoe)

**Robin's mother:** That's the coward that left us to die!

Although his actions are selfish and cruel, George's dialogue paints a very different picture. Although his words echo the legitimate concerns raised by some members of society who are misunderstood or even victimized despite their good works or intentions, for George the discourse is a mere fiction:

**George:** I...was trying to lead the way. We needed a leader! Someone to lead the way to safety!

**Robin:** But you yelled "Get out of my way!"

**George:** Because! Because as the leader...if I die...then all hope is lost! Who would lead? The clown? Instead of castigating me, you should all be thanking me. What kind of a topsy-turvy world do we live in, where heroes are cast as villains? Brave men as cowards?

**Robin:** But I saw you push the women and children out of the way in a mad panic! I saw you knock them down! And when you ran out, you left everyone behind!

**George:** Seemingly. Seemingly, to the untrained eye, I can fully understand how you got that impression. What looked like pushing....what looked like knocking down...was a safety precaution! In a fire, you stay close to the ground, am I right? And when I ran out that door, I was not leaving anyone behind! Oh, on the contrary! I risked my life making sure that exit was clear. Any other questions?

**Fireman:** How do you live with yourself?

**George:** It's not easy. (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 84, The Fire)

George's discourse exposes the conflict between upholding altruistic values based on what 'society' considers good citizenship versus protecting one's own personal interests. Despite George's admission that it is not easy to live with himself, he perseveres with his illusionary discourse. John Gray (2003) writes that to rid ourselves of our illusions can be the greatest illusion of all:

Even the deepest contemplation only recalls us to our unreality. Seeing that the self we take ourselves to be is illusory does not mean seeing through it to something else. It is more like surrendering to a dream. To see ourselves as figments is to awake, not to eality, but to a lucid dream, a false awakening that has no end. (p. 79)

Ironically, George's very manipulation of words and the ideas they represent point out the dangers of public discourse that does not truly match the feelings and motives that lie beneath them. In this way, George's words serve an effective parody of a selfish society hiding behind a masquerade of polite words.

*The next day at the coffee shop.*

**George:** So she doesn't want to see me anymore.

**Jerry:** Did you knock her over too, or just the kids?

**George:** No, her too. And her mother.

**Jerry:** Really? Her mother?

**George:** Yeah. I may have stepped on her arm, too. I don't know.

**Jerry:** You probably couldn't see because of the smoke.

**George:** Yeah. But it was somebody's arm.

**Jerry:** So you feel that “women and children first,” in this day and age, is somewhat of an antiquated notion.

**George:** To some degree.

**Jerry:** So basically, it’s every man, woman, child and invalid for themselves.

**George:** In a manner of speaking.

**Jerry:** Well, it’s honest.

**George:** Yeah. She should be commending me for treating everyone like equals.

**Jerry:** Well, perhaps when she’s released from the burn center, she’ll see things differently.

**George:** Perhaps. (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 84, The Fire)

Every morning for the past twenty years of my teaching career, students, teachers, staff, and administration have begun the day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. How does George’s discourse hold up to these words? Although our daily classroom protocol is said to be rooted in the ideals of a “republic for which it stands,” we might reflect on how much of an authentic voice our students (and ourselves for that matter) really have. What would we see if there was a measure that held liberty on one side of the scale and classroom management (and a student discipline code) on the other? What would we discover if there was a measure holding “justice for all” on one side of the scale and adherence to public policies and mandates on the other?

To what extent do the altruistic words in statements such as the Pledge of Allegiance or a school’s vision and mission statements serve as a veil over more self-centered motives such as receiving a paycheck, maintaining job security, and achieving high assessment scores? Like George, are we educators merely hiding behind these sorts of

visionary words instead of using them as the foundation of our practice? At 9:00 I am reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with my students; but from 9:10 AM until 2:30 PM, the students are segregated by ability for instruction in all subject areas. In this way, students in the designated ‘gifted’ group are more academically challenged and are exposed to creative and higher order thinking activities and materials. If the school vision, much like the Pledge of Allegiance, promotes social liberty and justice for all, is this accelerated program that relies on ability grouping to segregate students a dangerous contradiction?

As an educator, if my words adhere to such visionary statements while my actions support the segregation, does this make me a ‘George’? School vision and mission statements are valuable tools in terms of setting high goals and striving toward ideals. George’s discourse, which ironically uses societal ideals as a shield for bad behavior, forces me, however, to consider how these educational vision statements are connected (or not connected) to the reality of the classroom.

When reflecting on this ironic disconnect between vision and reality, I am reminded of the inner city school conditions described by Jonathan Kozol (1991) that were prevalent throughout public schools in New York City, San Antonio, East St. Louis, and the far south side of Chicago. Surely these schools did not publicly promote mission statements that envisioned decrepit buildings, unsafe classrooms, and severe lack of books and supplies (pp. 26-7). I recall the conditions of public schools throughout Latin America detailed by Paulo Friere (2007). Surely these schools did not publicly envision education devoted to the ideologies of oppression and exploitation (p. 55).

Perhaps George’s satirical voice that bemoans a “topsy-turvy world” in which “heroes

are cast as villains” deserves closer examination. As I reflect again upon my brief tenure as an elementary principal, I can see myself as one of the “heroes cast as villains.”

Despite leading the school in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, I became increasingly aware of the racial segregated distribution of funds and resources that was rampant throughout the school. Ironically, because I chose to acknowledge and speak out, I was characterized by the political elite as the villain. If I had ignored the injustices, I would still be Principal. It is only because I chose to enforce the ideals of ‘liberty and justice for all’ that I was forced out of the school.

In this way, George’s fiction actually becomes my reality as I am ironically persuaded to echo George’s very words: ‘what kind of a topsy-turvy world do we live in, where heroes are cast as villains? Brave men as cowards?’ Metaphorically speaking, I was the George who saw the ‘fire of inequality’ raging. In order to extinguish its flames, I needed to metaphorically push aside the ‘clowns of bias and elitism’ as well as the ‘old guard of racial and ethnic superiority.’ In the end, however, I was the one metaphorically sent to the burn center. Maybe I’ll reflect differently on the situation once my psychological and emotional injuries heal.

In the meantime, this disconnect between the visionary words we speak as educators and the reality of what goes on in our classrooms continues to vex me. What value is there in evoking an ideology which has little to do with our individual practice or our personal beliefs and values? The *Seinfeld* character Kramer neither adheres to any ideology nor feels the need to pretend to do so. People look to ideologies to find sense and purpose in their lives – Kramer does not. For him, the process of belief is itself illusory. Kramer represents the part of humanity that does not seek an ideology to

transform the world. Instead, his life is guided by his day-to day need to live life free from hardship, inconvenience, or commitment.

Whatever fiction Kramer decides to conjure up simply becomes his reality. For Kramer a meaningful context is one without hardship, inconvenience, or commitment. Thus, he is unburdened by any compulsion to identify with reality. After Kramer returns from a baseball fantasy camp, even George points this out:

Kramer goes to a fantasy camp. His whole life is a fantasy camp. People should plunk down two-thousand dollars to live like him for a week. Do nothing, fall ass-backwards into money, mooch food off your neighbors and have sex without dating; that's a fantasy camp. (*Seinfeld*, 1993, Episode 55, The Visa)

Kramer adopts a variety of identities and contexts whenever it suits him. Consequently, his identities have included wealthy industrialist H. E. Pennypacker. Dr. Van Nostrand, specialist in cancer diagnosis; a proctologist (AKA the Assman); a severely mentally handicapped guest of honor at a Mel Torme charity ball; and Cosmo Kramer, CEO of Krameria Industries. His jobs have ranged from bagel maker to talk show host, hansom cab driver to underwear model, shopping mall Santa to rickshaw service operator, author (of a coffee table book about coffee tables) to a raincoat salesman, and from a consultant to a Miss America contestant to the manager of a vintage movie theatre. This imaginative recreation of himself on a recurring basis, reinforces Kramer as an archetype of what Soren Kierkegaard (1845) describes as a person trapped in an aesthetic stage of existence:

The intellectual gifts of the aesthete are enslaved; transparency is lacking to them ....you are constantly only in the moment, and therefore your life dissolves into

arbitrary particular occurrence, and it is impossible for you to explain it. (p. 183)

In Kierkegaard's (1845) doctrine of existence, a person can achieve a meaningful sense of reality only by passing through three spheres: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The aesthetic is marked by shallowness of purpose, lack of commitment, and empty of values or beliefs. Kramer is trapped in the aesthetic. He is in a repetitive cycle of embracing the appearances of a work ethic and a culture of ideas and beliefs and then spurning them as soon as the values inconvenience him. On a Monday morning in September, Kramer again enacts his newest imaginative reality:

**Jerry:** It's eight o'clock in the morning! What the hell is going on?

**Kramer:** Breakfast. I've got to be at Brand/Leland by nine.

**Jerry:** Why?

**Kramer:** Because I'm working there. That's why.

**Jerry** (disoriented): How long have I been asleep? What--what year is this?

**Kramer:** Jerry, I don't know if you've noticed, but lately I've been drifting aimlessly.

**Jerry** (snaps fingers): Now that you mention it.

**Kramer:** But I finally realized what's missing in my life. Structure. And at Brand/Leland, I'm getting things done. And I love the people I'm working with.

**Jerry:** How much are they paying you?

**Kramer:** Oh, no, no, no-no--I don't want any pay. I'm doing this just for me.

**Jerry:** Really. So, uh, what do you do down there all day?

**Kramer:** T.C.B. You know, taking care o' business. I gotta go.

**Jerry:** All right.

**Kramer** (leaving): I'll see you tonight, huh? (turning back, grabs his briefcase)

Forgot my briefcase.

**Jerry:** W-w-wha' you got in there?

**Kramer:** (as he leaves with it): Crackers.

MUSIC (Sheena Easton's "Morning Train (Nine to Five)") accompanies assorted shots of working-man Kramer: getting on the subway (everyone else is going the opposite direction). washing his shoes at the water cooler, eating rolls of crackers out of his briefcase, laughing it up after hours with co-workers at a TGIF-type restaurant. (*Seinfeld*, 1996, Episode 137, The Bizarro Jerry)

Kramer finds meaning in the extrinsic components of his newest self-created fiction/reality. His mantra (TCB), briefcase, black suit, subway ride, co-worker camaraderie, - and even his crackers – demonstrate his place in Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage of humanity. Like Kramer, wouldn't life as a teacher be less complicated if our briefcases were filled with crackers instead of student papers; and if our mantra (TCB) referred to being dressed, showing up, and gathering after hours on Fridays with co-workers at the neighborhood bar, instead of working on lesson plans and assessments? Nevertheless, it is Kramer's lack of commitment that ends his tenure as a corporate businessman:

**Day, interior of Brand Leland, Kramer's in Leland's office.**

**Kramer:** What did you want to see me about, Mr. Leland?

**Leland:** Kramer, I've been reviewing your work. Quite frankly, it stinks.

**Kramer:** Well, I've been having trouble at home and uh... I mean, ah, you know, I'll work harder, nights, weekends, whatever it takes.

**Leland:** No, no, I don't think that's going to do it, uh. These reports you handed in.

It's almost as if you have no business training at all...I don't know what this is



supposed be!

**Kramer:** Well, I'm uh, just--trying to get ahead.

**Leland:** Well, I'm sorry. There's just no way that we could keep you on.

**Kramer:** That's okay. I don't even really work here anyway.

**Leland:** That's what makes this so difficult. (*Seinfeld*, 1996, Episode 137, The Bizarro Jerry)

Kramer is now free to assume another identity within a new context. This continuous recreation of self, without ties to any person, place, or thing further exemplifies the futility and shallowness of Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage. Kramer's human existence therefore lacks a significant inner consciousness. Rather than reality, Kramer pursues the semblance of reality. Kierkegaard (1843) warned:

In the last analysis, what is the significance of life? Mankind is divided into two great classes: one works for a living, the other does not need to. But working in order to live cannot be the significance of life. The lives of the other class have no other significance than they consume the conditions of subsistence. And to say that the significance of life is death, seems like a contradiction. (p. 30)

To work in order to live is a despairing situation; but to live in order to work elevates a person from Kierkegaard's (1845) aesthetic stage into what he calls the ethical sphere wherein one's actions and choices consciously adhere to a sense of obligation not only to oneself, but to the larger society. Once this sense of vision, purpose, and commitment is internalized, a person enters what Kierkegaard calls the religious sphere in which one's work and inner consciousness are enacted in harmony achieving a personal and social sense of fulfillment.

As educators, which of Kierkegaard's spheres best categorize our work? Like Kramer, are we trapped in an aesthetic sphere in which we adhere to the external trappings of the job without what Kierkegaard an ethical sense of obligation to our students and to the larger society? In other words, are we working to live or living to work? Is our external educational practice in synch with our inner consciousness and values? To what extent are we operating in Kierkegaard's religious sphere? Do paychecks and medical benefits alone complete our sense of fulfillment?

Kierkegaard (1845) proposes that true freedom occurs only when a person acknowledges and accepts an ethical commitment toward a community of people. We are then free to achieve our destiny and become who we truly are meant to be. If our work fills us with a sense of despair and hopelessness, are we then metaphorically imprisoned in the aesthetic stage, whose dominant feature is inevitable despair? If our work does not truly nurture and support the well-being of those we teach, are we, like Kramer, embracing a selfish world wherein we accept no responsibility or commitment to anyone but ourselves?

At worst, are we similarly wallowing in the moral inadequacies and ethical shallowness personified by George? Perhaps when we laugh at the comical banter of George and Kramer, we are ironically laughing at satirical portraits of ourselves. Like Kramer and George, Theodor W. Adorno (1962) noted that Kierkegaard found humor in humanity's efforts to impose some sort of 'definitive' logic on that which was inherently meaningless (p. 93). For me, this serves as a sharp reminder of the dangers of getting lost in one's introspection.

## B. Discourse that makes the unreal real

How we perceive ourselves and how we would like others to perceive us is expressed through our discourse. Gray (2003) states that “the illusion of enduring selfhood arises with speech” (p. 77) and that “we are programmed to perceive identity in ourselves, when in truth there is only change. We are hardwired for the illusion of self” (p. 76). The *Seinfeld* character Elaine infuses her discourse with imagination to deliberately create illusions of reality. As she speaks about her self-created reality, she ironically believes her own fabrication. In this script excerpt, Elaine perpetrates a conversation based on the assumption that her fictionalized co-worker is real:

*Elaine's at the office, walking past Peggy's office. Peggy notices her.*

**Peggy:** Susie. Susie!

**Elaine:** Uh...Hi, Peggy. Um, look, I should have said this yesterday, but-

**Peggy:** Did you see this memo form Elaine Benes?

**Elaine:** Yeah. See that-

**Peggy** (preoccupied): You know, it's amazing Peterman hasn't fired that dolt. She practically ran the company into the ground.

**Elaine:** Well, I thought she did a pretty good job.

**Peggy:** I heard she was a disaster, Suse-

**Elaine** (testy, leans into Peggy's personal space): Look-it. It's not Suse. All right? It's Su-sie.

*Peggy feels threatened. Later that day at JERRY's apartment; ELAINE arrives.*

**Elaine:** Can you believe this woman?

**Jerry** (ironic outrage): The nerve. Talkin' about you behind your back--and right to

your face!

**Elaine:** No. "Suse!" I mean, "Susie!" "Suzanne!" "Suzanna." Fine! But there is no, way, I'm gonna be a Suse.

**Jerry:** No. No Suse. (*Seinfeld*, 1997, Episode 149, The Susie)

Umberto Eco (2002) pondered what he called the power of falsehood throughout history and literature to generate complex stories or myths that are used to explain major events such as a government's failure, an empire's demise, a faith-based religious miracle, or a popular leader's death. These "true lies" that he calls a 'Theater of Illusions' (p. 274) pervade our history books and encyclopedias. Elaine demonstrates this power of falsehood on a more personal level. By manipulating discourse in this way, one can re-imagine reality in order to explain a person's failure, a career's demise, or the death of a friendship.

Elaine discovers that her 'Susie' is a perfect mythical entity that can be blamed for all of her mistakes and shortcomings. Elaine surely did not write that bad report – it must have been Susie. Elaine would never have written an insulting office memo - it must have been Susie. When Elaine is summoned to a meeting of four (Elaine, co-worker Peggy, supervisor Mr. Peterman, and the enigmatic Susie), the unreal ironically becomes even more real as more people are drawn into Elaine's imaginary world:

*Next day. Peterman and Peggy are sitting in his office. There are two empty seats.*

**Elaine** (entering, uneasy): Mr. Peterman, Peggy, I...guess we, should just get this over with. (sits)

**Peterman:** Just hold on a minute. Still one short.

**Elaine:** Oh. No, we're not--

**Peggy:** Susie has been very rude to me.

**Peterman:** Well, Elaine has nothing but good things to say about Susie.

**Elaine:** Look. (engaging smile) We don't have to name names, or point fingers, or...(breathes in) name names! (Indicates empty chair) Me and her have had our problems. She and I have had our problems! You and I, and she and you.

**Peterman:** Don't you drag me into this! This is between you and her, and her (indicating empty chair).

**Elaine:** Yes! And I am convinced that if she were here with us today, she would agree with me, too.

**Peterman:** Who?

**Elaine:** Uh-oh. Her?

**Peterman:** Where is she?!

**Elaine:** Ah--this is part of the problem!

**Peggy:** I thought I was, part of this problem

**Elaine:** [smiling, convincing] You're a huge part of the problem. But, I think that at its core, this is a Susie-and-Elaine problem that requires, a Susie-and-Elaine solution! And, who better to do that than...Elaine and Susie! Susie and Elaine!

**Peterman:** Well, now that we have that cleared up...why don't the three of us have lunch? (*Seinfeld*, 1997, Episode 149, The Susie)

The extent to which Elaine's discourse makes an 'unreal Susie' into a 'real Susie' can be evidenced at Susie's "funeral." After Elaine is passed over for top work assignments, which are given to Susie, Elaine announces that Susie has committed suicide. When office supervisor Mr. Peterman asks Elaine to arrange a funeral service so that friends

and co-workers can remember and honor all the good times they've had with Susie, Elaine carries out the request. Jerry and Elaine arrive to find that the faux funeral for an imaginary Susie is attended by over fifty real people. This prompts Jerry to sardonically ask where Susie found the time to meet so many people; and for Elaine to reply that Jerry's funeral attendance is not going to come close to Susie's.

Despite the ridiculousness of the situation, Elaine's use of discourse as a meaning-making tool has been effective. Her words draw many people into a fictionalized world where her mirage of truth (which is basically a lie) is accepted as a truth. If, as Joseph Campbell (1991) wrote, "mythology is the song. It is the song of the imagination," (p. 27) then does Elaine's *Song of Susie* qualify as a genuine demonstration of myth-making? Campbell suggests four key functions that myths serve: mystical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical (p. 38-9). Susie fails the first two criteria: her story neither provides insight into the meaning of the universe nor offers mystical explanations of physical occurrences.

Although the *Seinfeld* situation is both fanciful and farcical, its suggestion that discourse has the potential to bring fiction to life elicits pedagogical and sociological considerations. Sociologically speaking, Susie validates a social order in which a person's value – in fact their very existence - is derived from innuendo and gossip. Flesh, blood, spirit, and soul are no longer required. Her hollow existence is the antithesis of a human being's hallowed existence. At her well-attended memorial service, the prayers, testimonials, and rituals conducted on Susie's behalf serve as a sardonic parody of a society that values paper credentials over humanity, the facsimile of reality over flesh and blood, and the vacuous employment of customs and traditions devoid of substance and

meaning.

If regarded as a myth, what is the Susie discourse teaching about the mysteries of life, as well as people's relationships to each other and to the universe? Judging by the attendance at Susie's funeral, many people's lives have been touched by Susie; in other words, many lives have been touched by....nothing. Worse still, it is a nothing that is disguised as something deserving our prayers, rituals, and testimonials. On a pedagogical level, this amounts to what Gray (2002) called human life that "has no more meaning than the life of a slime mould" (p. 33) and what Barry Sanders (2009) called a world in which "the human being has disappeared, ghosts and shades began taking their place" (p. 8).

As a teacher, I fear that instructional discourse could become a Susie discourse. What happens when a student's existence is derived from assessment scores and numerical formative data banks? Will flesh, blood, spirit, and soul be discounted? Will the hallowed presence of students as individuals with hearts and souls be replaced by hollow brains that need to be filled with facts, figures, and Core Curriculum? Has the traditional graduation ceremony become a sardonic parody for a society that values credits over compassion and knowledge over wisdom? At what point do assessment scores trump humanity?

The Susie discourse is a warning of how easily bureaucratic demands, state mandates, and assessment projectiles can pull the humanity out of the teaching and learning process. To combat this concern, I have utilized one of Elaine's verbal tricks for minimizing human interactions and used it inversely to maximize the value of the human component. The middle school language arts activity I designed and have used frequently

derives from Elaine's use of the "Yada, Yada, Yada":

**George:** Listen to this. Marcy comes up and she tells me her ex-boyfriend was over late last night "and 'yada, yada, yada, I'm really tired today." You don't think she yada yada'd sex?

**Elaine:** (raising hand) I've yada'd, yada'd sex.

**George:** Really?

**Elaine:** Yes. I met this lawyer. We went out to dinner. I had the lobster bisque. We went back to my place, yada, yada yada, I never heard from him again.

**Jerry:** But you yada, yada'd over the best part.

**Elaine:** No. I mentioned the bisque. (*Seinfeld*, 1997, Episode 153, The Yada Yada)

In social studies class, I have offered students scenarios including: Rosa Parks catches the bus to get home from work ...yada yada yada....the Civil Rights movement explodes; and Lincoln goes to the Ford Theatre with Mary Todd...yada, yada, yada...Andrew Johnson is being sworn in as President of the United States. In literature class I have presented scenarios including: Ophelia is madly in love with Hamlet...yada, yada, yada...her body is found floating in the lake; and Orpheus and Eurydice are ready to take their marriage vows...yada, yada, yada...Hermes leads Orpheus out of the underworld leaving Eurydice behind forever.

The students then proceed to research the historical, psychological, and sociological complexity of each situation. As they investigate the events and emotions that lie between the single point A which proceeds the yada and point B that follows it, they are metaphorically removing the veil of linguistic over-simplification as they delve deeply in the heart of the matter. Although the research, sequencing, and writing skills involved in



this activity are valuable, more important is the exploration into the intricate complexities of human interaction, politics, and ethics. In this way, the yada, yada, yada that Elaine uses to de-humanize situations and to strip them of emotions and values is the yada, yada, yada I use with my students to *retrieve* the humanity, emotion, and ethical decisions missing from the de-humanizing ‘yada, yada, yada-ized’ versions.

Oftentimes my students get offended by the ‘yada, yada, yada’ situations I offer them. For instance, when I suggested that Adolf Hitler took power and became a prominent public figure...yada, yada, yada...six million people of the Jewish faith were annihilated, many of my students were offended. I am very happy when this happens. If my words inspire students to recognize and defend the humanity and significance of individual lives (especially lives of those who do not immediately impact the day-to-day lives of the students), then I know I am doing my part to contradict the cold and heartless irony of discourse spouted by the likes of *Seinfeld*’s Elaine.

If discourse is a mode of meaning making, and meaning making is rooted in a person’s beliefs and values, then apparently Elaine has no strong beliefs or values. Her drawing people into the world of Susie, and her de-humanizing use of the ‘yada, yada, yada’ are, in effect, drawing them into a world of nothing. In that world, I fear, the humanity of the instructional process is diminished; replaced by a cold irony wherein lies the hollow satisfaction in nothing.

#### **B. When having nothing is the same as having everything**

As George, Kramer, and Elaine demonstrate, when a person’s discourse willfully distorts reality, the results can be detrimental for that person. As educators dialoging with classrooms of students each day, however, the effects are multiplied. Michael Shermer

(2012) warns that even optimistic or idealistic distortions of reality can be harmful:

Pervasive optimistic bias can be detrimental. Most of us view the world as more benign than it really is, our own attributes as more favorable than they truly are. and the goals we adopt as more achievable than they are likely to be. (p. 78)

The dialogue of the Jerry character personifies this pervasive optimistic bias. Despite the ups and downs of life, Jerry adheres to a reality in which the rules that apply to others simply do not apply to him:

**Elaine:** Do you know what this is like? To have no control over a relationship? and – and you feel sick to your stomach all the time? Do you know what that's like?

**Jerry:** No, but I've read articles and I must say it doesn't sound very pleasant.

**Elaine:** You know, one of these days something terrible is going to happen to you.

It has to!

**Jerry:** No. I'm going to be just fine. (*Seinfeld*, 1996, Episode 121, The Rye)

Jerry's words create a veil through which life's hardships, trials, and ailments seemingly cannot impede. In this way, he becomes the proverbial 'Even Steven.'

**Jerry:** Elaine, don't get too down. Everything will even out. See, I have two

Friends. You were up. He was down. Now he's up, you're down. You see how it all evens out for me? (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 86, The Opposite)

Nevertheless, although failure may not be an option in the mind of an over-optimist like Jerry, it is all too frequent in reality. The irony of Jerry's words is that he believes in his overly optimistic distortion of reality. As a consequence, he fails to see that the veil which he uses to separate himself from the travails and disappointments of life is also separating him from fully participating in life itself. This is evidenced in this script excerpt in which Jerry casually breaks up with yet another girlfriend:

**Rachel:** Jerry.

**Jerry:** Yes?

**Rachel:** I've been doing a lot of thinking.

**Jerry:** Aha?

**Rachel:** Well, I don't think we should see each other any more.

**Jerry:** Oh, that's okay.

**Rachel :** What?

**Jerry :** Nah, that's fine. No problem. I'll meet somebody else.

**Rachel :** You will?

**Jerry:** Sure. See, things always even out for me.

**Rachel:** Huh?

**Jerry:** It's fine. Anyway, it's been really nice dating you for a while. And ... good luck. (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 86, The Opposite)

Jerry feels that he achieves everything he wants out of life by avoiding heartache, disappointment, and emotional chaos. Ironically, by ignoring the hardships of life, he is actually denying himself the fullness of what it means to be human. Campbell (1991) observed that "it is the suffering that evokes the humanity of the human heart" (p. 140). In this sense, it is the pain and suffering of life that nurtures that the metaphysical strength of the human spirit. By casting his reality within the illusion of a human existence without strife, Jerry is trapped in the same aesthetic stage as his friends. In fact, he even devises an idea for a television show based on everything he stands for – in other words, it is a show based on nothing:

**Jerry:** You want to go with me to NBC?

**George:** Yeah. I think we really go something here.

**Jerry:** What do we got?

**George:** An idea.

**Jerry:** What idea?

**George:** An idea for the show.

**Jerry:** I still don't know what the idea is.

**George:** It's about nothing.

**Jerry:** Right.

**George:** Everybody's doing something; we'll do nothing.

**Jerry:** So, we go into NBC, we tell them we've got an idea for a show about nothing.

**George:** Exactly.

**Jerry:** They say, "What's your show about?" I say, "Nothing."

**George:** There you go. (A moment passes)

**Jerry:** (Nodding) I think you may have something there. (*Seinfeld*, 1992, Episode 43, The Pitch)

Everything about the show is to be based on Jerry's life and yet Jerry has no problem describing it as a show based on nothing. The distortion is further magnified in that the television show he is discussing is actually a fictional facsimile of the real program he is acting in – which is actually based upon his real life. Over a course of seven years, approximately thirty million American viewers watched this self-proclaimed program about nothing.

If my instruction is not rooted in values, beliefs, and ideals that I feel strongly about,

then is the value of my instruction rendered meaningless? If my instruction serves as a veil over the realities of the world, then is my life's work as an educator really 'much about nothing'? Are my students tuning in every day to some sort of education reality show about nothing? If I cover everything in the formal, state-mandated curriculum, have I actually taught nothing dealing with the intricacies of what it means to be human? Jerry's dialogue represents the ultimate educator oxymoron: to teach everything...about nothing, and to teach nothing...about everything.

Unlike George, Kramer, and Elaine, Jerry exudes a veil of respectability that gives his words a veneer of realism. After all, he is not the one pushing down children to save himself from fire (George), changing jobs each week (Kramer), or inventing imaginary people to blame his problems on (Elaine). Compared to his friends, Jerry's dialogue sounds the most rooted in reality. Nevertheless, the reality he forges serves to trap him in the same aesthetic sphere that George, Kramer, and Elaine are caught in.

It is further ironic that the dialogue Jerry uses as he struts and frets his thirty minutes upon a soundstage in Hollywood echoes the words of Shakespeare's (1606) *Macbeth* as he "struts and frets his hour upon the stage" in Elizabethan England four hundred years ago. Jerry and *Macbeth* are both trapped in self-constructed prisons of delusion. Both characters operate in Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage as they pursue immediate personal satisfaction and gain without concern for the needs of others. Neither character ascends to an ethical or religious sphere; they develop no sense of commitment toward anyone or anything except themselves. Neither do they approach Kierkegaard's religious stage; their soulful space of inner consciousness is left barren. Thus, *Macbeth* eventually cries out:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time,  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle.  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing. (*Macbeth*, Act, 5, Scene 5, lines 19 – 27)

Without an inner consciousness to elevate the purpose of their lives beyond themselves, Macbeth and Jerry are merely the 'walking shadows' of complete people. Without approaching of any sort of ethical or spiritual illumination, they are merely "lighted fools." Their tales are those told by idiots in that neither character can see, hear, or understand the shallowness of their existence or the deprivation of their spirituality. Although the exterior of their lives at one time may have presented the illusion of their having everything (money, success, and a carefree lifestyle), beneath the exterior shell of their lives, their spirits and souls signify nothing.

If my classroom discourse becomes trapped in the same aesthetic sphere as Macbeth and Jerry, would I merely be the 'walking shadow' of an educator? If my instruction lacks ethical or spiritual illumination, would I simply embody a 'lighted fool' nurturing young 'lighted fools' to follow in this folly of an illusion? Am I an idiot who cannot even gauge the ethical levels of my instruction? And worst of all, does my instructional

discourse ultimately ‘signify nothing?’ Just as Banquo’s ghost haunts Macbeth, these questions pervade my reflections of classroom discourse and practice.

One set of activities inspired by these reflections is what I call Reality under the Disguise (RUD) lessons. The purpose of the activities is to engage my students in examining the meaning of words that lie beneath their surface. For example, after students view a *Seinfeld* clip from Episode 112, *The Postponement*, in which George selfishly declares that “a George divided against himself cannot stand,” they trace the origin of the allusion to Abraham Lincoln’s sobering 19<sup>th</sup> Century words. Once the reality of the words is examined, the students and I discuss what George’s use of the words reveals about the kind of person George is. Independently, students then create their own puns based on famous words. Popular student choices include ‘ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country,’ ‘the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,’ and ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’

Other RUD explorations include *Seinfeld* (1996) Episode 122, *The Caddy*, in which character dialogue is used to satirize popular real world courtroom trials; *Seinfeld* (1997) Episode 153, *The Yada Yada*, that features an anti-dentite pun on the term ‘anit-semite’; *Seinfeld* (1996) Episode 125, *The Cadillac*, and *Seinfeld* (1992) Episode 34 *The Boyfriend*, that use dialogue to parody the JFK assassination conspiracy theories and the Nixon impeachment respectively. In this way, we examine how dialogue can be used to create worlds of parody, pun, and satire – often without us even realizing that it is happening.

It is not uncommon for student discussions to delve into whether or not the satirical use of language is appropriate or inappropriate, respectful or disrespectful.

For instance, students who initially laugh at the ‘Seinfeldian’ use of the term anti-dentite, often feel differently when they discover that the pun’s humor is based on the original ‘anti-Semite’ bias. Similarly, students who giggle when Kramer is hit with “one magic lugee” in Episode 34 (1992), often feel differently once they realize that the entire sequence is a parody of the JFK assassination intended for laughs. When students make these kinds of realizations during my RUD activities, I feel that I am being successful at nudging them out of the aesthetic sphere of laughing at other people’s expense toward more of an ethical sphere in which they begin to consider the larger societal context of the discourse.

Using these RUD activities, I have become more conscious of the values, beliefs, and ideals that might be embedded – or even completely missing – from a variety of lessons. Together, my students and I continue to examine literature, music, and video in terms of exploring ethical realities that lie beneath the veil of the art form. In doing so, I feel that I am more likely to nurture illuminated human beings rather than mere “lighted fools,” and to foster respectful and often introspective discourse that helps pull us out of our “walking shadows.”

Unfortunately, the *Seinfeld* characters remain trapped in their self-imposed aesthetic prisons. It is appropriate that the *Seinfeld* series ends with the four characters on trial for being bad citizens. In his opening argument, the prosecuting attorney’s discourse portrays the behavior of people trapped in the aesthetic sphere:

**Hoyt:** Ladies and gentlemen. Last year, our City Council, by a vote of twelve to two, passed a Good Samaritan Law. Now, essentially, we made it a crime to ignore a fellow human being in trouble. This group from New York not only



ignored, but, as we will prove, actually mocked the victim as he was being robbed at gunpoint. I can guarantee you one other thing, ladies and gentlemen, this is not the first time they have behaved in this manner. On the contrary, they have quite a record of mocking and maligning. This is a history of selfishness, self-absorption, immaturity, and greed. And you will see how everyone who has come into contact with these four individuals has been abused, wronged, deceived and betrayed. (*Seinfeld*, 1998, Episode 179, The Finale)

This indictment of the characters is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's (1846) observation that humor "sets the God-idea into conjunction with other things and evokes the contradiction" (p. 451). When situations evoke responses that are contradictory to a larger moral or spiritual calling, one sees malice instead of kindness, selfishness instead of charity, and personal satisfaction instead of common welfare. These contradictory responses are expressed by the *Seinfeld* characters through dialogue ensconced in verbal irony.

Furthermore, the more the characters remain confined in their selfish worlds, the more that authentic personal satisfaction will not be achieved. Although the *Seinfeld* characters are fully aware that their choices are neither socially nor spiritually ethical, they pursue them notwithstanding:

**George:** Hey, I just found twenty dollars! I tell you this, something is happening in my life. I did the opposite of anything I ever thought was right. Up was down, black was white, good was –

**Jerry:** Bad.

**George:** Day was –

**Elaine:** Night.

**George:** Yes!

**Jerry:** So you just did the opposite of everything?

**George:** Yes. And listen to this. Susan's uncle works for the New York Yankees and he's going to get me a job interview – a front office job – assistant to the traveling secretary. A job with the New York Yankees! This has been the dream of my life ever since I was a child and it's all happening because I'm completely ignoring every urge toward common sense and good judgment I've ever had. This is no longer some crazy notion. Jerry, this is my religion.

**Jerry:** So I guess your Messiah would be the anti-christ. (*Seinfeld*, 1994, Episode 86, The Opposite)

This excerpt of *Seinfeld* dialogue demonstrates how the characters are operating far from what Kierkegaard (1940) calls moral and religious spheres. While audiences may laugh at this humorous discourse, however, it is sadly ironic that they are also laughing at a satirical portrait of themselves. In this way, whenever personal self-interest outweighs the common good or whenever immediate needs are pursued to the detriment of the larger society, the *Seinfeld* satire becomes reality. Similarly, when a person believes and accepts rules and protocols intended to promote the common good of society but speaks and acts out of greed and selfishness, he or she becomes humor and irony personified. Of this contrast between discourse and action, Kierkegaard (1846) wrote:

Contrast produces a comic effect by means of the contradiction, whether the relation is that the in and for itself not-ridiculous is used to make ridiculous the ridiculous or the ridiculous makes that ridiculous which is in itself not-ridiculous,

or the ridiculous and the ridiculous make each other mutually ridiculous, or in and for itself not-ridiculous and then in and for itself not-ridiculous become ridiculous through the relationship.” (p. 461)

As an educator who believes in the welfare of children, have my words ever unknowingly been tinged with malice when the situation warranted kindness? As an educator who believes that his work strives to promote social equity, when have I perhaps used words that inadvertently may have promoted personal satisfaction over common welfare? When might my classroom discourse have betrayed my sense of charity? When has my dialogue with students unintentionally denied them their sense of self-worth and value?

These questions demand careful reflection. It takes humility and courage to acknowledge moments when our words, however well intentioned, might have betrayed our sense of vision and purpose. By more carefully examining the words we use when interacting with our students, we can better ascertain to what extent our personal vision and mission as educators is an illusion or a reality. If, by the end of my career, I have only been a satirical shadow of an educator instead of a full-bodied one, I guess I would not be too much different than Kramer when he infamously replied to his boss after a poor job review: “That’s okay. I don’t even really work here anyway.”

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: As a classroom teacher, what are the values, beliefs, and ideals you feel you are *expected* to uphold? Which of these values are determined by outside agencies such as the State Board of Education, local or national government, or community priorities? Which of these do you support as a freethinking individual?

2: If our daily classroom protocol is rooted in the ideals of vision or mission statements, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, how much “liberty and justice for all” truly pervades our daily practice? How much of an authentic voice do our students have? How much of a voice do we have? What would we see if there was a measure with liberty on one side of the scale and classroom management (and an employee discipline code) on the other? What would we discover if there was a measure holding “justice for all” on one side of the scale and adherence to public policies and mandates on the other?

3: To what extent are we as educators merely hiding behind visionary words instead of using them as the foundation of our practice?

4: Can you identify any disconnects between the visionary words we speak as educators and the reality of what goes on in our classrooms?

5: As educators, are we operating in Kierkegaard’s aesthetic stage of existence (like Kramer) or in the ethical stage? If our work fills us with a sense of despair and hopelessness, are we then metaphorically imprisoned in the aesthetic stage, whose dominant feature is inevitable despair? If our work does not truly nurture and support the well-being of those we teach, are we, like Kramer, embracing a selfish world wherein we accept no responsibility or commitment to anyone but ourselves? At worst, are we similarly wallowing in the moral inadequacies and ethical shallowness personified by George?

6: As educators, which of Kierkegaard’s spheres best categorize our work? Like Kramer, are we trapped in an aesthetic sphere in which we adhere to the external trappings of the job without what Kierkegaard called an ethical sense of obligation to our students and to the larger society? In other words, are we working to live or living to

work? Is our external educational practice in synch with our inner consciousness and values? To what extent are we operating in Kierkegaard's religious sphere? Do our paychecks and medical benefits complete our sense of fulfillment?

7: What happens when a student's existence is derived from assessment scores and numerical formative data banks? Will flesh, blood, spirit, and soul be discounted? Will the hallowed presence of students as individuals with hearts and souls be replaced by hollow brains that need to be filled with facts, figures, and Core Curriculum? Has the traditional graduation ceremony become a sardonic parody for a society that values credits over compassion and knowledge over wisdom?

8: What value is there in evoking an ideology which has little to do with our individual practice or our personal beliefs and values?

9: If instruction is not rooted in values, beliefs, and ideals that a teacher feels strongly about, then is the value of instruction rendered meaningless? If instruction serves as a veil over the realities of the world, then is one's life's work as an educator really 'much ado about nothing'? Are your students tuning in every day to some sort of education reality show about nothing? If we cover everything in the formal, state-mandated curriculum, have we actually taught nothing dealing with the intricacies of what it means to be human?

10: If my classroom discourse is trapped in the same aesthetic sphere as Macbeth and Jerry, then am I merely the 'walking shadow' of an educator? If my instruction lacks ethical or spiritual illumination, am I simply a 'lighted fool' nurturing young 'lighted fools' to follow in this folly of an illusion? Am I an idiot who cannot even gauge the ethical levels of my instruction? And worst of all, does my instructional discourse

ultimately ‘signify nothing?’

11: As an educator who believes in the welfare of children, have your words ever been filled with malice when the situation demanded kindness? As an educator who believes that his or her work strives to promote social equity, have you ever used words that promoted personal satisfaction instead of common welfare?

12: Has your classroom discourse ever betrayed your sense of charity? Has your dialogue with students ever denied them their sense of personal self-worth and value? Can you recall moments when your words, however well intentioned, might have betrayed your vision and sense of purpose?

## VIII. DIALOGUE AS A VEIL

*Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley)

Although classroom discourse can be riddled with occasional sardonic, even ‘Seinfeld-esque’ insincerity, the potential of its meaning making capability cannot be underestimated. The relationship between our words and the reality of our classroom climate is what Mark Johnson (1998) called a “shared embodiment” (p. 410). How much of the meaning we are creating through our classroom discourse is genuine and authentic? Conversely, how much of its meaning tends to be insincere or shallow? Just as Jean Val Jean repeatedly asked of himself “who am I,” so must we educators ask this of ourselves if we are to understand the depths and complexity of the reality we are creating in our classrooms. What does our classroom discourse reveal about who we are? What does our verbal discourse with students divulge about our own sense of self? Michael Bamberg (2011) wrote that about the critical role interaction plays in establishing one’s identity: identities are established through interaction:

The referential world is constructed as a function of the interactive engagement. In other words, the way the referential world is put together points to how tellers “*want to be understood*”; or more appropriately, how tellers *index* their sense of self. (p. 16)

If one’s dialogue were viewed as a metaphor, as Alan Cienki (2008) suggested, then at what moments would our classroom discourse be a transparent veil that communicates our values and ideals? On the other hand, at what moments would the veil of our words be of an opaque nature? The discourse in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) demonstrates the emotional repercussions of wielding a transparent veil of dialogue versus an opaque one.

The sequences of dialogue between Victor Frankenstein and his creature are flavored with the themes of freedom, happiness, personal identity (individual and social), power, and redemption. Whether or not their words constitute a metaphorical veil of truth or of lies, however, is a question my students and I have wrestled with over the years. Our journey of exploration is a vital one in that it mirrors our own efforts to ascertain the extent to which our own discourse embodies reality or illusion. Furthermore, it demonstrates our efforts to discern the degree to which the discourse we receive from others is grounded in illusion or reality as well.

When dialogue functions as reality and the use of language supercedes the speaker himself, the person behind the words can be rendered a puppet of the language instead of the master of it. Daniel Chandler (2002) relates the semiotic significance of this phenomenon:

Over time...the content [of a discourse] comes to be accepted as a 'reflection of reality'... the medium and codes are discounted as neutral and transparent and the makers of the text retreat to invisibility. Consequently, 'reality' seems to pre-exist its representation and to 'speak for itself'; what is said thus has the aura of 'truth.'  
(p. 64)

Is this aura Chandler speaks of merely a mask over reality or a mask of reality? Do the words we use as educational professionals weave veils over reality or weave reality itself? To what extent do our words embody our genuine ideals and values? The dialogue Shelley invents for the *Frankenstein* text uses a supernatural device (an artificially assembled 'person') in order to differentiate between the hypocrisy and the sincerity often intricately and unconsciously intertwined within the nuances of our discourse. As



my students and I explore Shelley's discourse, we also embark on a reflection of our own dialogue.

**A. A veil of form and function**

During the dialogue passages between Victor Frankenstein and his creation, is Victor speaking to his creature, or to a part of himself? In most of these dialogue passages, Victor's lines are accumulated one after the other without the timely conversational replies the reader would normally anticipate. The content of the discourse represents a 'reflection of reality' in which the goodness of Victor's soul confronts the part of Victor's being that has embraced excessive pride and greed while ignoring love, compassion, and humility. In this sense, the speakers of the text 'retreat to invisibility' as the conflict within Victor 'speaks for itself.' The creature, which Victor has created, is Victor himself:

“Devil,” I exclaimed, “do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my wreaked arm on your miserable head? Be gone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!” (p. 82-83)

The expected form and function of discourse relying on dialogue between two speakers and involving the interaction of their thoughts, emotions, and values, are used here as a veil providing the reader a familiar setting within which to explore 'the aura of truth.' Beneath the non-threatening veil of dialogue between Victor and his creation, is a hypothetical discourse between Victor's inherent good nature struggling against the persona of avarice and greed which Victor himself has created by turning away from his

core values and ethics. In this way, Shelley uses dialogue to create an alternative version of reality:

“I expected this reception,” said the daemon. “All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.” (p. 83)

Again, this discourse lacks the expected reality of a conversational ‘give and take.’ Instead, it has the tone of a theatrical monologue. By manipulating the narrative logic of discourse, Shelley has created an alternative reality. Taking place underneath this veil of dialogue is the internal struggle between the part of Victor that values humanity and the part that is willing to betray it in order to achieve personal glory. In this way, the contrived discourse functions as a means to include the reader on Victor’s search for meaning.

As Victor enters the depths of his innermost humanity, the idealism of his values must confront the realism of his life choices. Under the veil of dialogue, the collision of idealism and realism implodes:

“Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! You reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed.”

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings

which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me and said-“Be calm! I entreat you to hear me before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, though hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom justice, and even clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather thy fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. (p. 83)

Victor’s ethical state of being is confronting his amoral state. Like the biblical Adam, Victor is torn between his ideal ethical heaven (aka the garden of Eden) and his earthly desires for fleeting fame and fortune. Mary Shelley uses the traditional form and function of dialogue to expose and explore the moments of ethical turmoil that define our humanity. In this way, she is using fiction, imagination, and metaphor to delve into the deepest recesses of our spiritual realities. The fictional discourse serves as a veil through which the reader can perceive the real conflicts of benevolence versus misery; community versus loneliness; and goodness and compassion versus fear and hatred:

“I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.”

“Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me;

we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.”

“How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing?” (pp. 83-84)

Victor longs to understand himself and his place in the world. He also wants to be understood and respected by his peers. His sense of self and his personal and social identities are being critically explored through this discourse. From this perspective, Victor is a prototype for each of us as we explore these deeply personal issues ourselves at different stages of our lives. For middle school students, who are facing these sorts of issues as they enter the identity-searching stage of adolescence, Shelley’s text is likewise a valuable resource.

In this sense, becoming literate means more than just reading and writing text. Just as Victor is struggling to become literate about his own identity, so can reading and writing instruction help students (and teachers as well) become more literate about themselves and each other. Similarly, Peter H. Johnston (2004) writes that how people narrate their lives is an indication of how they identify themselves and their circumstances as well as how they perceive the kind of person they are becoming:

Children in the classroom are *becoming* literate. They are not simply learning the skills of literacy. They are developing personal and social identities – uniquenesses and affiliations that define the people they see themselves becoming...they narrate

their lives, identifying themselves and the circumstances, acting and explaining events in ways they see as consistent with the person they take themselves to be.  
(pp. 22-23)

A set of classroom activities I call WIT (*What, If, Then*) allows students to play with language and to assume a variety of identities. The exercise begins with a set of questions that the students use to generate an interactive discourse. The creativity of the exercise encourages role-playing and experimentation as it allows students to think and interact in a variety of imaginative settings. Two popular WIT *Frankenstein* scenarios are:

*What if* you were a police officer and Victor came to you for advice? *If* you had only five minutes to speak with Victor, *then* how would you persuade him to proceed?

*What if* you were Victor's fiancée, and you got to know and sympathize with the creature? *If* you loved Victor but wanted to help the creature, *then* what would you say to the creature?

These activities help students think flexibly and metaphorically as they interact with others in a multitude of contexts. I have found that the more emotionally-charged the *Frankenstein* scene, the less inhibited the students are to express "their" emotions. Students who normally find it difficult to speak with others about their feelings generally discover that such highly charged discussions are easier to execute when they are "safely" beneath the veil of another character. In this way, the discourse they create acts as a mask behind which they can feel safe while giving voice to a wide range of emotions.

Although the immediate context is different, the emotions and themes embedded

throughout Shelley's text are the same that we all, as human beings, deal with. In the following brief excerpt alone, the emotional range encompasses anger, regret, loneliness, and rejection; the themes include equality, fairness, revenge, and justice:

“Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwind of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale; when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defense before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you to spare me; listen to me, and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.”

“Why do you call to my remembrance,” I rejoined, “circumstances of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form.” (p. 84)

Whether one perceives this discourse as between Victor and his creature or between Victor and himself, it remains a work of fiction. Victor's search for meaning, however, is

all too real. The dialogue, in effect, creates a schema - a form and a function - that is relevant to everyday life. Our own intrinsic strivings to understand ourselves and our place in the world are being dramatized. Shelley's text demonstrates how the way in which we see the world is influenced by the kind of language we use. The macabre imagery used in this discourse evokes the view of an external world devastated by torrents of misery and wretchedness and an internal reality cursed by whirlwinds of devils and fiends.

Similarly, the way in which we educators see the world is impacted by the language we use to talk or think about it. For instance, if teachers rely on military expressions such as referring to classroom teaching as being "in the trenches" or working in impoverished neighborhoods as being "on the front lines," a cold and harsh reality emerges. If on the other hand teachers talk and think about their work in terms of possibilities and potential, a much warmer and exuberant reality emerges. This power of words to act as a filter through which we see reality can be dangerously limiting as L. Buscaglia (1982) warns:

We also create words and words are supposed to free us. Words are supposed to make us able to communicate. But words became boxes and bags in which we became trapped...you, if you are a loving person, will rule words and not allow words to rule you. (pp. 21 – 22)

Frankenstein's creature is trapped in a world of loneliness, anger, and despair. The more he speaks, the more he becomes entangled in his solitary web of rage. In a final effort to unveil some compassion, however, the creature's dialogue takes the form and function of storytelling. By telling Victor the story of his misguided and misunderstood youth, the creature hopes to ascertain signs of sympathy, hope, and affection:

Still thou canst listen to me and grant me thy compassion. By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange, and the temperature of this place is not fitting to your fine sensations; come to the hut upon the mountain. The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself behind yon snowy precipices and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story and can decide. On you it rests, whether I quit forever the neighborhood of man and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow creatures and the author of your own speedy ruin. (p. 85)

Narrative storytelling and discourse is used as a form through which an author or speaker can expose a truth that otherwise seems to defy expression. Although Shelley's characters are fictional, their words speak to the spiritual and emotional heart of the readers. Literary theorist Catherine Belsey (1980) argues that this use of language is experienced well before understanding. Thus, she writes:

Words seem to be symbols for things because things are inconceivable outside the system of differences that constitute the language. Similarly, these very things seem to be represented in the mind, in an autonomous realm of thought, because thought is in essence symbolic, dependent on the differences brought about by the symbolic order. And so language is 'overlooked', suppressed in favor of a quest for meaning in experience and/or in the mind. The world of things and subjectivity then become the twin guarantors of truth. (p. 46)

Nevertheless, Shakespeare (1598) understood the capacity of discourse to stir the inner spirit of an audience. Even when words are spoken under the veil of an actor or the guise of a character, their essence resonates in the minds and hearts of the listeners. This



is evidenced when Hamlet writes a script and hires actors to unveil the malevolent thoughts and intentions festering in his uncle's heart:

I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play

Have by the very cunning of the scene

Been struck so to the soul that presently

They have proclaimed their malefactions....

The play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. (II, 2, 591- 594, 606 - 607)

In our role as educator, to what extent are our words stirring the inner spirits of our students? Where in our discourse will we 'catch the conscience' of our students? How much of our classroom dialogue is limited to strengthening the cognitive realm of the brain rather than illuminating the emotive spirit of the soul? It is this illumination that the creature tries desperately to evoke from Victor:

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me and troubled me. (p. 86)

Reflecting on the creature's dialogue through Belsey's (1980) framework of words used as symbols of an 'autonomous realm of thought' suggests that careful attention to the discourse of others can reveal glimmers of a deeper truth. In effect, to crudely

paraphrase Shakespeare: the classroom discourse's the thing wherein we'll catch the conscience of the learner – and of ourselves.

### **B. A veil of power**

Discourse that speaks to our intrinsic spirit in this way requires mutual respect and compassion. The same is true for classroom dialogue. If classroom discourse relies primarily on teacher-generated demands, commands, and compliance, however, a mutually free and communicative spirit is stifled. Verbal communication that hinges on issues of power and control destroys the free exchange of thoughts and ideas. Lisa Delpit (1995) argued that it is this 'culture of power' which causes alienation and miscommunication between teachers and students. The discourse between Victor and his creature shows how such a culture of power undermines healthy communication:

I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages, but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of a chosen few! (p. 101)

At first, Victor is portrayed as the 'master' whose power lies in his role as creator of life; while his creature is portrayed as a 'slave' to the injustices and prejudices of the world in which he is an alienated and misunderstood outsider. As the creature learns to read and write, however, he is acquiring the intellectual and communicative skills needed to confront his 'master.' This transformation is fully realized when the creature eloquently challenges the 'master-slave' relationship:

Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my

condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; obey! (p. 145)

The creature's success in turning the tables on Victor relied upon his success in acquiring the cognitive skills of the culture of those in power. By becoming literate and developing communicative strategies including reading, writing, and talking, the creature could now engage more equally with Victor in their power conflict. Nevertheless, to be fully accepted and content in the society within which he found himself, the creature demands the creation of a spouse comparable to his own likeness. His intellectual enlightenment has convinced him that he is entitled to have a spouse as marriage is an acceptable and oftentimes expected ritual in this society as a means to avoid loneliness and despair:

"You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do, and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede..."

"...I do refuse it", I replied; "and no torture shall ever extort a consent from me. You may render me the most miserable of men, but you shall never make me base in my own eyes. Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world? Begone! I have answered you; you may torture me, but I will never consent."

"You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and

triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery, I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. (p. 124)

Throughout this excerpt, a power struggle rages between slave (the creature) and master (Victor). Nevertheless, emanating from beneath the slave's veil is the dialogue of a master casting out his demands. Likewise, the discourse emitted from underneath Victor's master-mask is the dialogue of a man enslaved to the anger and desperation of his own creation. In this way, Shelley has created a dialogue that symbolically erases the boundaries dividing slave and master. The discourse between the two speakers personifies the metaphorical tug-of-war that fuels the reality of many interpersonal power struggles.

Lisa Delpit (1995) stated that similar issues of power directly impact American classrooms. She argued that one of the results of this 'culture of power' is a "silenced dialogue" (p. 24) induced by alienation and miscommunication:

The issues of power that are enacted in classrooms include: the power of the teacher over the students; the power of the publishers of textbooks and of the developers of the curriculum to determine the view of the world presented; the

power of the state in enforcing compulsory schooling; and the power of an individual or group to determine another's intelligence or "normalcy." Finally, if schooling prepares people for jobs, and the kind of job a person has determines her or his economic status and, therefore, power, then schooling is intimately related to that power. (pp. 24-5)

Although the 'teacher over student' power issue has been explored by many educators (e.g., Freire, 2007; Fromm, 1976; Kliebard, 1986; Kozol, 1991; Watkins, 2001), its continued influence over classroom discourse cannot be overlooked. Consider: when and where do our verbal communications with students elicit thoughtful and evaluative higher order thinking as opposed to recall or rote responses? To what extent are honest responses to these questions determined by *which* students we are teaching or by *which* school in *what* neighborhood we are located? How do student factors such as race, ethnicity, family background, financial profiles, and prior assessment scores influence the nature of our classroom discourse?

Similarly, Shelley's creature would never have been able to confront his creator until he understood the external factors that separated him from a sphere of power:

And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man...when I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (p. 101)

Reflecting on the creature's internal discourse, we find a figure whose physical

appearance, financial means, and lack of social connections alienate him from the culture of power. Because he is feared, his behaviors must be controlled. Allowing him access to an education that could better prepare him for opportunities of advancement or assimilation into the culture of power is considered pointless and even frightening.

Shelley's creature, not welcomed into the very society that created him, speaks metaphorically on behalf of groups and individuals who remain at the fringe of our society – and of our classrooms.

Despite the conditions that ostracized him from society, the creature not only taught himself to read and write, but secretly procured access to provocative ideas from a variety of philosophical treatises including ones by Plutarch, Volney, and Voltaire and texts ranging from the Bible to *Paradise Lost*. Would the creature (or his 20<sup>th</sup> Century metaphorical counterpart) be likely to be exposed to such a curriculum in our modern school setting? His initial assessment scores as a prospective student would likely have 'placed' him in remedial courses or a lower 'track' of instruction; and his initial assessment of vocabulary awareness and fluency would likely have restricted his access to such a wide variety of complex texts. Most likely, he would be set on a regimented path of vocational education, preparing him for work that required neither specialization nor cognitive prowess, further securing his social and economic immobility.

For the creature, learning to talk was only the first step in finding and expressing his voice. His discourse demonstrates that he is beginning to identify the strong emotions he suffers under as he finds the words to express himself to others. As the creature becomes more literate through reading and writing, he develops a better understanding of

the world and his place in it. His voice empowers him to succinctly express himself and his needs to others:

As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. "The path of my departure was free," and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?  
(p. 109)

Without an education, Shelley's creature would not have found his voice nor expressed it in this way. Similarly, to what extent are we helping our students find their voice? Conversely, to what extent are students learning to repeat the words they are taught to say; to reply with words they feel they are expected to say; or to say the words they think we (or authority in general) want to hear? In other words, how much of our classroom discourse nurtures a voice of submission to the culture of power, and how much nurtures thoughtful introspection of the world and their place in it? To what extent does our classroom discourse allow students to speak with authority, to dialogue from a critical perspective, or to challenge the political status quo on behalf of their own values, aspirations, and prospects?

Just as the creature's words haunted and tormented Victor ("I, a miserable wretch, haunted by a curse that shut up every avenue to enjoyment" p. 133), these questions I began asking myself have affected the lens through which I plan and reflect upon many

of my lessons. Rather than focusing on what I was teaching, I began focusing on the twin reflective questions offered by William Ayers (2004): “What am I teaching *for*? And what am I teaching *against*” (p. 11)?

Victor and his creation are entangled in a power struggle. Metaphorically, the struggle is one of humanization versus dehumanization and submission versus liberation. The creature is determined to claim as full a measure of power and authority as he can while fear forces Victor to withhold all measure of power and authority. In a world that dehumanizes the creature because of his physical appearance and background, the creature nevertheless reaches out to his creator for the tools he needs to achieve greater freedom. For me, the struggle that Shelley portrays parallels the dynamics of education described by Ayers (2004) that teach toward freedom and submission:

Teaching, at its best, is an enterprise that helps human beings reach the full measure of their humanity. Simple enough to say, and yet, in countless ways, excruciating difficult to achieve, and so it is worth restating and underlining at the outset: Education, no matter where or when it takes place, enables teachers and students alike to become more powerfully and self-consciously alive; it embraces as principle and overarching purpose the aspiration of people to become more fully human; it impels us toward further knowledge, enlightenment, and human community, toward liberation. And at the center of the whole humanistic adventure are students, and teachers in their endless variety: energetic and turbulent, struggling, stretching, reaching; coming together in classrooms and community centers, workplaces, houses of worship, parks, museums, and homes. They gather in the name of education, assemble in the hope of becoming better, smarter,



stronger, and more capable of rethinking and reconstructing themselves as subjects-lively, awake, and on the move – in the face of blockades and objects and objectification. (pp. 1-2)

In what ways does our daily teaching empower students to “reach the full measure of their humanity”? To what extent do our interactions with students help them in “becoming better, smarter, stronger, and more capable of rethinking and reconstructing themselves”? Having read and discussed *Frankenstein* (1818) with many groups of middle-school students over the past ten years has given me an effective forum within which to dialogue with students about these issues of attaining personal liberation and maximizing their potential. Candid discourse often finds the students empathizing with the creature’s sense of alienation, helplessness, and submissiveness.

To help my students find their voice and begin to discover the words through which their voices can be expressed, we again use role-play and dialogue. Building upon the themes of power and liberation conveyed in *Frankenstein*, my students and I use drama strategies to transfer the Victor-Creature discourse into historical, real world scenarios. Consider the following excerpt from one of the creature’s pleas to his creator:

“You are in the wrong,” replied the fiend; “and instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?” (p. 124)

In small groups, students role-play a conversation framed around this excerpt as if it were being spoken in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century between a Seminole Indian chief and President Andrew Jackson. Other students simulate this excerpt as if it were spoken between an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century slave and his/her ‘owner.’ Through this type of activity, students have

the opportunity to give voice to those who have been objectified and manipulated by others.

Consider another *Frankenstein* excerpt:

You... would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame.....shall I respect man when he condemns me? (p. 124)

Imagine the possibilities when students role-play a conversation framed around this excerpt as if it were being spoken in a World War II concentration camp between a Jewish prisoner and a high-ranking Nazi officer. What provocative issues might be raised if other students simulate a conversation based on this excerpt as if it were spoken at a 17<sup>th</sup> Century New Salem Witch Trial between an accused and her accuser? By giving a voice to the unempowered, students are simultaneously exploring and rehearsing their own personal voice.

For each student's dialogue that embodies the voice of the disenfranchised, other students speak from the perspective of those holding the power. In this way, their dramatized discourse reflects the larger drama of power as one faction rationalizes keeping power while the other bargains for equity and justice. In our post discussions, students often admit that they feel surprisingly ashamed to be speaking as the powerful characters in that their voice sounds greedy and self-centered. Students most frequently reflect that they can identify more closely with the struggling character, who is speaking out for fair treatment. This sort of personal introspection not only brings our analysis of the power struggle closer to the student's world, but it also begins an exploration of the

values and morals that lie beneath the discourse.

### C. **A veil of ethics**

Underneath these dramatized veils of words is a drama of power (the disenfranchised versus the privileged); beneath these veils of power is an intrinsic conflict of values (justice versus affluence and equality versus elitism). As Victor Frankenstein's creation rallies for justice and equality, echoes of ethical paradoxes pervade his dialogue:

Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honor that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm. (p. 101)

How important is it for teachers to develop a sound ethical vision of what life and education are about? To what extent does ethical judgment enter into our daily decision making as teachers? Karl D. Hostetler (1998) wrote about the importance of teachers being given the opportunity to reflect on their teaching in ethical terms, to dialogue with peers about ethics, and to seriously engage in teaching as an ethical practice (p. 204). Nevertheless, Hostetler pointed out that consciously maneuvering in ethical territory can be quite challenging:

The ethical life of teaching is continually, even if not constantly, a challenge to teachers' ethical understanding. This belief does not require that you agree with my claim about the possibility of ethical truth. Even if ethics is no more than a struggle for improvement and justified belief (and that has a lot going for it), dialogue and

argument still play a central role. In either view, essential to ethical educational practice is openness to the complexity of the ethical world. Integrity is essential, too. (p. 205)

While reading *Frankenstein*, a student once equated the power struggle between Victor and his creation to the political unrest which was taking place at the time in Bosnia. He argued that Serbia, like Victor, was acting solely to maintain and increase its own political and economic power at the expense of Bosnians and Croats, who, like the creature, were being victimized and alienated. The student argued that Serbian military attacks and their assaults against the civil rights of Bosnians dehumanized the Bosnian and Croatian people.

Being an avid fan of cable news programs, this student clearly watched this story (and related political commentaries and editorials) very closely. He eventually shared with our class his disillusionment with America in terms of its foreign policy choices in Bosnia under then President Clinton. Sounding very much like Victor's creature, he shared his frustration between his former view of America as being "so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent" versus an America he felt was now acting in a manner both "vicious and base." Unlike the "noble and godlike" America he had learned about in school, he felt that America's change in policy adhered more to an "evil principle" that trivialized the battle for equality and justice to a nominal boundary dispute.

He felt that America's change in policy toward Bosnia, which now benefited the Serbians, was being motivated by a greedy desire to increase America's political and economic interests throughout Europe at the expense of forcing the Bosnia and Croatian people to endure the "lowest degradation" of injustice and humiliation. I remember being

was quite impressed at the time with the analytical thinking inspired by the *Frankenstein* discourse. I was also pleased that my student felt comfortable exercising his free speech in my classroom. In response, I was very careful not to stifle his self-expression while I avoided showing support or bias toward any specific political platform.

I felt as though I was participating fully in what Hostetler called the “the ethical life of teaching.” It seemed to me at the time that the classroom discourse facilitated humanity’s struggle for improvement; promoted dialogue and argument that was open to the complexities of the modern world; and nurtured a respect for personal liberties and open debate. Nevertheless, what I didn’t know at the time was that this set of classroom discourse was about to entangle me in a complex web of ethical proportion.

My student repeated a commentary he had heard presented on a cable news network which argued that President Clinton’s actions were directly correlated with actions of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime. He argued that effects of the United States policies were similar to the Nazi-led political and military maneuvers that occurred in the Balkans in the 1940s. I admired the compassion and sincerity my student expressed. He again reminded me of words Frankenstein’s creature uttered:

I felt the greatest ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice, as far as I understood the signification of those terms, relative as they were, as I applied them, to pleasure and pain alone. (p. 109)

Two months later, a week before graduating, this student was nominated for an American Legion award for outstanding citizenship. After all, he was a high honor student who held and eloquently expressed thoughtful and passionate feelings about democracy, equality, and worldwide justice. Imagine my surprise when I was called into

the school administrator's office three days before graduation and questioned about the ethical nature of my instruction and the highly dubious student selection for the American Legion award. After all, didn't my instruction, as highlighted by our classroom *Frankenstein* discourse, personify what Ayers (2004) calls "teaching toward freedom" (p. 138)?

Before I knew what had transpired, I was bombarded with a barrage of questions as my student sat red and teary-eyed in a chair in the corner of the room. It is true that I was using the *Frankenstein* text to subvert United States policies? Why was I undermining the patriotism of my students? Didn't I believe in the American virtues of loyalty and fidelity? Why was I using my instruction to encourage cynicism over allegiance, lawlessness over democracy, and anarchy over patriotism? Had I unknowingly fallen into an ethical trap that Hostetler (1998) warned against:

Yet ethical teachers are open to, and actively seek dialogue and exploration.

Ethical character is not judged by the passion with which one holds dogmatically to some ideal. It is from such stuff that human misery is made. (p. 205)

I later learned the event that triggered this commotion: the Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem began on the school-wide intercom system while my student and others were setting up chairs for a school assembly. My student then proceeded to address the flag with a Nazi arm/hand Hitler-esque gesture. After being sent to the office by an offended teacher who was passing by, he explained that he was merely exercising his freedom of expression. He proceeded to share with the school disciplinarian his analysis of the United States-Bosnia-Croatia political landscape as inspired by *Frankenstein*.

Explaining the context of the *Frankenstein* lesson to my administrator was less

complicated than trying to converse with my student about the ethical complexities of the world. How could I encourage the spirit of his analytical thinking while at the same time explain the school demand for conformity to patriotic formalities? The student could eloquently and passionately explain and defend his rebellious gesture. How could I admonish him without appearing dogmatic and contradictory? While I did not want to squelch my student's independent thinking, I also feared how his actions and gestures could be easily misconstrued and offensive.

Although the student later apologized to the administrator and the offended teacher for being "blatantly disrespectful to his native country," his American Legion honor was revoked. Like Frankenstein's creature, the ethical life of my teaching was disrupted by this event. I began to ask myself the same questions the creature did when he first faced a world that proclaimed to value fairness and justice, but more often practiced cruelty and greed:

What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to answer them. (p. 109)

Was I, like Victor, too enamored of certain virtues to see where my practice was being negatively impacted? Victor had been mesmerized by the ancient writings of Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Marcus Aurelius and became obsessed with acquiring advanced knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that would benefit humanity:

The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes, and the actions of men were his theme; and his hope and his dream was to become among those whose names are recorded in story as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species. (p. 26)

Ancient Western philosophers filled Victor with the vision of creating humanity capable of excelling in the traits which his creature ironically most admired: being virtuous, magnificent, noble, and god-like; and to eliminate that which was base, vicious, and degrading. Victor came to understand that these qualities emanated from the human spirit, the human soul. The more he endeavored to create human life -body *and soul*- the more his pride, obsession, and thirst for wisdom were actually destroying his own body and soul:

A resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit...I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature should be completed. (p. 42)

Is it possible, as Hostetler warned, to adhere “dogmatically to some ideal” to the detriment of other important values? As an educator, had I favored the values incumbent with free speech to the detriment of patriotism? Had analytical thinking trumped loyalty; personal expression sidelined community spirit; and open-ended Socratic questioning waylaid the canon of national pride, unity, and respect?

Perhaps when Victor was reading Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations* (170-180 CE), he had neglected to heed some key points: “those who do not observe the movements of their own minds must of necessity be unhappy” (p. 11); “things do not touch the soul, for they are external and remain immovable; but our perturbations come only from the opinion that is within” (p. 25); and “the soul is dyed by the thoughts” (p. 42). Aurelius



identifies the complex milieu within which ethical conflicts (including Victor's and mine) arise:

About what am I now employing my own soul? On every occasion I must ask myself this question, and inquire, what have I now in this part of me which they call the ruling principle? And whose soul have I now? That of a child, or of a young man, or of a feeble woman, or of a tyrant, or of a domestic animal, or of a wild beast? (p. 40)

Victor's creation speaks from beneath the veil of a **repentant** soul ("Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! What does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?" p. 188); a **remorseful** soul ("I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror; I abhorred myself" (p. 189); a **hopeful** soul ("From your lips first I have heard the voice of kindness directed towards me; I shall be forever grateful" p. 114); and a **vindictive** soul ("Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch you with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom" p. 145). The changing disposition of his soul resonates from within the creature himself; his thoughts, expressed through his discourse, reflect the dynamic ethical landscape of the soul.

Similarly, Victor's dialogue reflects the intimate and fluid relationship among thoughts, words, and values as he speaks from beneath the veil of a **tormented** soul ("like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell" p. 182); a **passionate** soul ("Harmony was the soul of our companionship" p. 25); a soul **obsessed** ("Two years passed in this manner, during which I paid no visit to Geneva, but was engaged heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries which I hoped to make" p. 38); and a soul **proud** ("I was surprised that among so many men of genius...that I

alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret” p. 40).

Thus, the discourse of Victor and his creation personifies the on-going evolution of their thoughts, words, and values. The only constant in this interaction is the soul itself; the authenticity of our being that longs to be understood. The notion that within us lies a perennial truth that is greater than our ourselves is reflected in the relativist perspective of Richard Rorty (2005):

In the relativist vision, there never was, and never will be, a truth that is greater than we are. The very idea of such a truth is a confusion of ideals with power. As relativists like myself see the matter, the struggle between relativism and fundamentalism is between two great products of the human imagination. It is not a contest between a view that corresponds to reality and one that does not. It is between two visionary poems. (p. 17)

For me, classroom discourse remains a continuous search for expressing the true index of our genuine and eternal selves. Somewhere within the limitations of the temporal and spatial contexts of our lives and of our discourse lies the illumination of our soul and spirit. Perhaps instead of spending his time and effort “that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet” (p. 44), Victor Frankenstein should have been endeavoring to infuse a spark of life into his own being. At its best, this is what my discourse with students is capable of achieving for my students – and for myself.

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: How much of the meaning we are creating through our classroom discourse is genuine and authentic? Conversely, how much of its meaning tends to be insincere or

shallow?

2: Just as Jean Val Jean repeatedly asked of himself “who am I,” so must we educators ask this of ourselves if we are to understand the depths and complexity of the reality we are creating in our classrooms. What does our classroom discourse reveal about who we are? What does our verbal discourse with students divulge about our own sense of self?

3: If one’s dialogue were viewed as a metaphor, as suggested by A. Cienki (2008), then at what moments would our classroom discourse be a transparent veil that communicates our values and ideals? On the other hand, at what moments would the veil of our words be of an opaque nature?

4: Do the words we use as educational professionals weave veils over reality or weave reality itself? To what extent do our words embody our genuine ideals and values?

5: If the way in which we educators see the world is impacted by the language we use to talk or think about our work, then what kind of reality do the terms, phrases, or words we use create? For instance, do we rely on military expressions such as referring to classroom teaching as being “in the trenches” or being “on the front lines,” or do we talk and think about their work in terms of possibilities and potential? What kind of reality does the discourse we hear in the teacher’s lounge reflect?

6: In our role as educator, to what extent are our words stirring the inner spirits of our students? Where in our discourse will we ‘catch the conscience’ of our students? Or is our classroom dialogue limited to strengthening the brain rather than illuminating the soul?

7: When and where does our verbal communication with students elicit thoughtful and evaluative higher order thinking as opposed to recall or rote responses? To what extent

are the responses to this question determined by *which* students we are teaching or by *which* school in *what* neighborhood we are located? How do student factors such as race, ethnicity, family background, financial profiles, and prior assessment scores affect the nature of our classroom discourse?

8: To what extent are we helping our students find their voice? Conversely, to what extent are they learning to repeat the words they are ‘taught’ to say; to reply with words they feel they are expected to say; or to say the words they think we (or authority in general) want to hear? How much of our classroom discourse nurtures a voice of submission to the culture of power, and how much nurtures thoughtful introspection of the world and their place in it? To what extent does our classroom discourse allow students to speak with authority, to dialogue from a critical perspective, or to challenge the political status quo on behalf of their own values, aspirations, and prospects?

9: In what ways does our daily teaching empower students to “reach the full measure of their humanity”? To what extent do our interactions with students help them in “becoming better, smarter, stronger, and more capable of rethinking and reconstructing themselves”?

10: How important is it for teachers to develop a sound ethical vision of what life and education are about? To what extent does ethical judgment enter into our daily decision making as teachers?

11: Have you ever been so enamored with certain ‘virtues’ so that you were unable at the time to realize that your practice was ironically being negatively impacted?

## IX. DISCOURSE TWO

This imaginative discourse includes three literary characters from the proceeding chapters and myself. Together, we further discuss issues and conflicts that arose within the chapters. The dialogue of the speakers is genuine in that it is taken directly from its original sources. The authentic words of the literature are re-imagined within the context of a conversation about the intrinsic realities, fears, and aspirations of myself as educator.

**Edward:** My earlier discourse with Henry Fleming, Jean Val Jean, and St. Jimmy ended with the following idea: instead of focusing on teaching and learning that journeys from the *outside-in*, let's consider teaching and learning that emanates *from the inside out*. For this second discourse, I welcome three characters whose voices have provoked my attention, challenged my ideas, and inspired my imagination.

Welcome, Victor Frankenstein, brainchild of Mary Shelley (1818), who brings to our discussion original insight into the challenges of balancing the values of one's inner and outer lives. Welcome, Quentin Compson, invention of William Faulkner (1936), who injects into our discussion the limitless fluidity of humanity's stream of consciousness. Welcome, Jerry, alter ego of Jerry Seinfeld, whose sardonic voice keeps us humble.

Together, let's consider that teaching and learning *from the inside out* is about understanding ourselves and seeing ourselves and our world by means of an inner light. As teachers and as human beings, can we alleviate the scars of the outer world (i.e. prejudice, paranoia, alienation) so that they would fade as flowers?

**Victor Frankenstein:** "I have described myself as always having been imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature." (p. 28)

**Quentin:** “Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky.” (p. 210)

**Jerry:** “Well, I’m happy to help in any way that I can.” (*The Good Samaritan*).

**Edward:** Great. Then we’re on our way. Metaphysically speaking, let me make the following proposition based on Quentin’s thoughts: the *pools* of our consciousness (often referred to as our soul) are infinite and eternal; the *ripples* are caused by the barbs of the outer world (i.e. prejudice, greed, ignorance); and the injuries we suffer (i.e. discrimination, segregation, alienation, desperation) leave intrinsic *scars*. As teachers, is our instruction preparing students to persevere against prejudices, greed, and ignorance so as not to be a victim to them?

**Jerry:** “Boy, that brain never stops working, does it.” (*The doorman*)?

**Quentin:** “‘Wait wait’ now because it was that innocence again, that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredient of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out.” (p. 211-212)

**Victor:** “Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin.” (p. 29)

**Edward:** But if we as educators focus on what I call the *internal landscape* rather than exclusively on the external one (guided by curriculum maps and assessment scores) can’t

the teaching and learning environments we create champion equity over discrimination and understanding over alienation.

**Quentin:** “It will do no harm to hope – You see I have written hope, not think. So let it be hope.” (p. 302)

**Victor:** “Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind when it has once seized on it, like a lichen on the rock. I wished sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling.” (p. 102)

**Jerry:** “Nobody knows what to do. You just close your eyes, you hope for the best.” (*The mango*)

**Edward:** But that is exactly my point. If educators focus on facts and information, then what about thoughts and feelings? Do lichen think, feel, or reflect? The inner landscape that I have been trying to better ascertain from an educator’s perspective is, I believe, comprised of just that: thoughts, feelings, and reflections. Quentin, as you pieced together your turbulent family history, doesn’t this obstinate focus on knowledge and facts at the neglect of thoughts and feelings seem to characterize the violent actions of your father Henry? As you understand him, what battles of conscience and ethics did he endure?

**Quentin:** “Perhaps this is what went on, not in Henry’s mind but in his soul. Because he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately. He knew loyalty and acted it, he knew pride and jealousy; he loved grieved and killed, still grieving.” (p. 77)

**Edward:** And Victor, didn’t your obsession with gaining physiological knowledge of life and death also trample your interior landscape?

**Victor:** “My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or

sensation but for this one pursuit.” (p. 42)

**Jerry:** “Sometimes the road less traveled is less traveled for a reason.” (*The baby shower*)

**Victor:** “When falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of a certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice towards which thousands are crowded and endeavoring to plunge me into the abyss.” (p. 76)

**Quentin:** “You get born and you try this and you don’t know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don’t know why either except that the strings are all in one another’s way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can’t matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it’s all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they don’t even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn’t matter.” (pp. 100-101)

**Jerry:** “It pains me to say this, but I may be getting too mature for details.” (*The deal*)

**Edward:** These metaphors are reminiscent of Quentin’s earlier ‘pool of water with ripples’ imagery. The physical scratches (injuries) we endure on our external journey are finite and temporary; but the metaphysical scratches our souls suffer are infinite and



eternal. Likewise, the goals, extrinsic values, and aspirations that guide our outer lives are confined by space and time. The beliefs, intrinsic values, and ideals that guide our inner lives are boundless and eternal.

**Victor:** “Yet my heart overflowed with kindness and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice and make myself useful to my fellow beings. Now all was blasted; instead of that serenity of conscience which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures such as no language can describe.” (p. 74)

**Quentin:** “Conscience? Conscience? Good God, man, what else did you expect?” (p. 213)

**Victor:** “...if I was ever overcome by ennui, the sight of what is excellent and sublime in the productions of man could always interest my heart and communicate elasticity to my spirits. But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit what I shall cease to be - a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others and intolerable to myself.” (p. 138)

**Jerry:** “If you could perhaps conduct the psychopath convention down the hall.” (*The shower head*)

**Edward:** Tell us more, Victor, about this “bolt that entered your soul.”

**Victor:** “Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows and deprives the soul both of hope and fear.” (p. 74)

**Quentin:** "...if he had not bogged himself again in his morality which had all the parts but which refused to run, to move. Hence the proposal, the outrage and unbelief; the tide, the blast of indignation, and anger." (p. 224)

**Victor:** "I no longer see the world and its work as they before appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the accounts of vice and injustice that I read in books or heard from others as tales of ancient days or imaginary evils; at least they were remote and more familiar to reason than to imagination; but now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood." (p. 76)

**Jerry:** "The last thing this guy's qualified to give a tour of is reality." (*The muffin tops*)

**Edward:** So when your life's work focused exclusively on the manipulations of our external world and on the laws of the physical universe...

**Victor:** "The blood flowed freely in my veins." (p. 74)

**Edward:** And when your goals conflicted with your intrinsic values of loyalty and honor; and when your ambitions threatened your intrinsic aspirations for understanding and affection...

**Victor:** "A weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart which nothing could remove. Sleep fled from my eyes." (p. 74)

**Edward:** When your aspirations for fame and wealth usurped your ideals of charity and benevolence...

**Victor:** "I wandered like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description horrible, and more, much more (I persuaded myself) was yet behind." (p. 74)

**Jerry:** "You know, you really need some help. But a regular psychiatrist couldn't even help you. You need to go to like Vienna or something. You know what I mean? You need

to get involved at the university level. Like where Freud studied, and have all those people looking at you and checking up on you. That's the kind of help you need. Not the once a week for eighty bucks. No, you need a team. A team of psychiatrists working round the clock, thinking about you, having conferences, observing you. Like the way they did with the Elephant Man." (The *van buren boys*)

**Quentin:** "It will do no harm to hope – You see I have written hope, not think. So let it be hope." (*Absalom, Absalom!* p. 302)

**Victor:** "At these moments I wept bitterly and wished that peace would revisit my mind only that I might afford them consolation and happiness. But that could not be. Remorse extinguished every hope." (p. 75)

**Quentin:** "You mean, it don't matter to you?" (p. 260)

**Edward:** Could you not have turned to Elizabeth? Although she did not represent the fame, wealth, or position of the outer world, she embodied intrinsic hope, faith, and affection.

**Victor:** "Eternal woe and tears she then thought was the just tribute she should pay to innocence so blasted and destroyed. She was no longer that happy creature who in earlier youth wandered with me on the banks of the lake and talked with ecstasy of our future prospects. The first of those sorrows which are sent to wean us from the earth had visited her, and its dimming influence quenched her dearest smiles." (p. 76)

**Quentin:** "Don't say it. Because I would know you are lying." (p. 260)

**Victor:** "Thus not the tenderness of friendship, nor the beauty of earth, nor of heaven, could redeem my soul from woe; the very accents of love were ineffectual." (p. 77)

**Quentin:** “And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something – a scrap of paper – something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even to bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another.” (p. 101)

**Jerry:** “You know how hard it’s getting just to tell people I know you?” (*The butter shave*)

**Edward:** Quentin has a relevant point here. This brings to mind a piece of wisdom from Leo Tolstoy’s (1869) *War and Peace*:

Love hinders death. Love is life. All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love. Everything is, everything exists, only because I love.

Everything is united by it alone. Love is God, and to die means that I, a particle of love, shall return to the general and eternal source. (Book XIII, Chp. 16)

**Jerry:** “Did you know that the original title for *War and Peace* was “War, What is it Good For?” (*The marine biologist*)

**Edward:** I think Quentin is saying that our inner lives are nourished by affection and fueled by compassion. The outer world presents us with alternatives to affection and compassion that misdirect our energies and attention.

**Jerry:** “I saw someone on the street eating M&Ms with a spoon.” (*The pledge drive*)

**Edward:** Thus, instead of pursuing a path guided by our intrinsic need for compassion and harmony, we get diverted by a hunger and greed for power, possessions, and privilege.

*Quentin did not answer. He sat quite still, facing the table.* (p. 176)

**Jerry:** “I don’t know about you, but I’m getting a hankering for some Doublemint gum.”

*(The pie)*

**Edward:** The actions, words, and gestures that enrich our inner lives are those, however small, that touch our hearts with love and inspire us with compassion. Material wealth and possessions are external and therefore die.

**Jerry:** “Why do I always have the feeling everybody’s doing something better than me on Saturday afternoons?” *(The parking garage)*

**Edward:** I think I’m on to something here, Jerry. Stop riffing on me!

**Jerry:** “No, I’m not riffing. I’m ignoring. Do you understand the difference?” *(The movie)*

**Edward:** True compassion, love, and affection, however, do not die; instead, they constitute the eternal intangibles. Don’t you see this, Quentin?

*Quentin did not answer him, did not pause, his voice level, curious, a little dreamy. (p. 177)*

**Quentin:** “...and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone can’t be *is* because it never can become *was* because it can’t ever die or perish.”  
(p. 101)

**Edward:** While the external landscape will perish, the inner landscape is eternal.

Similarly, while teaching and learning that is directed *from the outside in* benefits our immediate outer existence (which certainly is important), can we really afford being informed from the *inside out*? Remember the cautionary words of James Joyce (1916) :

...we have been sent into this world for one thing and for one thing alone: to do

God's holy will and to save our immortal souls. All else is worthless. One thing alone is needful, the salvation of one's soul., What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his immortal soul? Ah, my dear boys, believe me there is nothing in this wretched world that can make up for such a loss (p. 104).

**Victor:** "I listened to this discourse with the extremest agony." (p. 77)

**Jerry:** "...not that there's anything wrong with that." (*The outing*)

**Edward:** Being guided solely by the pursuit of external knowledge and ignoring the needs of your inner life have injured you badly. I think there's a lot wrong with that.

**Victor:** "I was encompassed by a cloud which no beneficial influence could penetrate. Then wounded deer dragging its fainting limbs to some untrodden brake, there to gaze upon the arrow which had pierced it, and to die – was but a type of me." (p. 77)

**Jerry:** "This [man] is bending my mind into a pretzel." (*The pie*)

**Edward:** But Victor, isn't the despair you are describing emanating *from the outside in*; isn't it the external despair that has infiltrated and infected your inner soul? If your inner voice were stronger and if your inner drive for compassion and affection were recognized, honored, and heeded, wouldn't your tragic tale be altered?

**Victor:** "Sometimes I could cope with the sullen despair that overwhelmed me, but sometimes the whirlwind passions of my soul drove me to seek, by bodily exercise and by change of place, some relief from my intolerable sensations." (p. 77)

**Edward:** I think it is significant that you speak of the 'whirlwind passions of the soul' while in my earlier discourse Jean Val Jean called for us to 'make thought a whirlwind' as we 'teach, enlighten, and enkindle' (p. 503) our hearts and souls. He asked us to 'think

only of what threatens our souls' (p. 25).

**Quentin:** "Imagine us, an assortment of homogeneous scarecrows." (p. 103)

**Jerry:** "Oh yeah, I like this idea." (*The package*)

**Quentin:** "Thank God (and this restores my faith not in human nature perhaps but at least in man) that he really does not become inured to hardship and privation: it is only the mind, the gross omnivorous carrion-heavy soul which becomes inured; the body itself, thank God, never reconciled from the old soft feel of soap and clean linen and something between the sole of the foot and the earth to distinguish it from the foot of a beast. So say we merely needed ammunition. And imagine us, the scarecrows with one of those concocted plans of scarecrow desperation which not only must do work, for the reason that there is absolutely no room for alternative before man and heaven, no niche on earth or under it for failure to find space either to pause or breathe or be graved and sepulchred; and we (the scarecrows) bringing it off with a great deal of élan, not to say noise." (p. 103)

**Victor:** "My internal being was in a state of insurrection and turmoil; I felt that order would thence arise." (p. 36)

**Quentin:** "Perhaps a man builds for his future in more ways than one, builds not only towards the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but toward actions and the subsequent irrevocable courses of resultant action which his weak senses and intellect cannot foresee but which ten or twenty or thirty years from now he will take, will have to take in order to survive the act." (p. 196)

**Victor:** "During these past days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blamable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature and was

bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention.” (p. 187)

**Edward:** As you reflect upon your most desperate and selfish actions, you can nevertheless ascertain a spark of humanity and compassion? Are you no more than a homogeneous scarecrow?

**Quentin:** “No more tonight. We’ll get to sleep.” (p. 206)

*Quentin...sat hunched in his chair, his hands thrust into his pockets as if he were trying to hug himself warm between his arms, looking somehow fragile and even wan in the lamplight, the rosy glow which now had nothing of warmth, coziness, in it. (pp. 235-6)*

**Victor:** “He endeavors to fill me with hope and talks as if life were a possession which he valued. He reminds me how often the same accidents have happened to other navigators who have attempted this sea, and in spite of myself, he fills me with cheerful auguries. Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence; when he speaks, they no longer despair; he rouses their energies, and while they hear his voice they believe these vast mountains of ice are mole-hills which will vanish before the resolutions of man.” (p. 184)

**Edward:** I think you have reached a moment of epiphany, Victor. In spite of your misguided decisions and harmful obsession with fame and power, Quentin’s words have awakened an eloquent humanity that survives beneath your sea of despair and regret. He has restored your faith that the mountains of tragedies and crimes you have created can vanish before a deeper set of resolutions. Homogeneous scarecrows have no hope because their physical beings are barren; human beings, on the other hand, possess an infinite intrinsic nature (a soul) that frees it from such desperation and hopelessness.



**Victor:** “I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves and fills me with delight...inspired by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent and vivid...it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight.” (p. i)

**Jerry:** (Crying) “What – what is this salty discharge? This is horrible! I care! I don’t know what’s happening to me.” (*The serenity now*)

**Victor:** “There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand.” (p. vi)

**Jerry:** “I think I may have made a big mistake. All of a sudden it hit me; I realized what the problem is. I can’t be with someone like me. I hate myself! If anything I need to get the exact opposite of me...It’s too much...it’s too much...I can’t take it... I can’t take it” (*The invitations*)!!!

**Victor:** “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me; let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips.” (p. xiii)

**Jerry:** “No matter how desperate we are that someday a better self will emerge, with each flicker of the candles on the [birthday] cake, we know it’s not to be, that for the rest of our sad, wretched pathetic lives, this is who we are to the bitter end. Inevitably, irrevocably.” (*The visa*)

**Victor:** “And do I dare to ask of you to undertake my pilgrimage, to endure the hardships that I have undergone? No; I am not so selfish.” (p. 180)

**Jerry:** “You don’t understand what I’m up against. This is a force more powerful than anything you can imagine. Even Superman would be helpless against this kind of stench.” (*The smelly car*)

**Victor** (to Edward): “My thoughts and every feeling of my soul have been drunk up by the interest for my guest ... I wish to soothe him, yet can I counsel one so infinitely miserable, so destitute of every hope of consolation, to live? Oh, no!” (p. 181)

**Edward** (to Victor): Isn’t this what Jean Val Jean meant when he remarked that we need to ‘make thought a whirlwind’ and to ‘teach, enlighten, and enkindle’ (p. 503) one another’s hearts and souls?

**Victor**: “Despair had indeed almost secured her prey, and I should soon have sunk beneath this misery... Oh! With what a burning gush did hope revisit my heart! Warm tears filled my eyes, which I hastily wiped away.” (p. 179)

**Jerry**: “Hey, everybody. I’m on no sleep, no sleep! You don’t know what it’s like in there; all night long things are creeping and cracking. And that red light is burning my brain! Oh, I’m stressed.” (*The chicken roaster*)

**Victor**: You are well acquainted with my failure and how heavily I bore the disappointment. (p.ii)

**Jerry**: “Well, with so many people in the world deprived and unhappy, it doesn’t seem like it would be fair to be cheerful.” (*The visa*)

**Victor**: “Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.” (p. xiii)

**Jerry**: “Knowing you is like going into the jungle. I never know what I’m going to find next, and I’m real scared.” (*The gymnast*)

*Quentin lay still too, as if he were listening too, though he was not; he just heard them without listening.* (p. 299)

**Jerry:** “When someone is lying, is it true that their pants are actually on fire?” (*The beard*)

**Quentin:** “I see you are going to collect full measure for my unfortunate misconception – even ridicule.” (p. 270)

**Jerry:** “An’ what if I did do it? Even though I admit to nothing, and never will. What does that make me? And I’m not here just defending myself either but all those pickers out there who’ve been caught. Each and every one of them, who has to suffer the shame and humiliation because of people like you. Are we not human? If we pick, do we not bleed? I am not an animal!” (*The pick*)

**Quentin:** “I was wrong. I misunderstood your feeling about the matter.” (p. 270)

**Jerry:** “I’m in the unfortunate position of having to consider other people’s feelings.” (*The gymnast*)

**Victor:** “Despair had indeed almost secured her prey.” (p. 179)

*Quentin didn’t answer. He lay still and rigid on his back with the cold New England night on his face and the blood running warm in his rigid body and limbs, breathing hard but slow, his eyes wide open upon the window, thinking ‘Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore. (pp. 298-9)*

**Victor:** “What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?” (p. xiii)

*So much had been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein. (p. 36)*

**Edward:** It looks as though Victor and Quentin have both left our discourse. But their words, I believe, resonate deeply on the matter of attending to our intrinsic human needs and concerns. Jerry, surely you agree?

**Jerry:** “Uhm, the thing about eating the black and white cookie is you want to get some

black and some white in each bite. Nothing mixes better than vanilla and chocolate. And yet somehow racial harmony eludes us. If people would only look to the cookie all our problems would be solved.” (*The dinner party*)

**Edward:** Yes, Jerry. Even something as simple as a black and white cookie can have metaphorical significance beyond satisfying our hunger.

**Jerry:** “Carrot cake? Now why is that a cake? You don’t make carrots into a cake. I’m sorry.” (*The dinner party*)

**Edward:** Maybe as teachers we need to continue searching for questions and resources that, like food, provide nourishment for our hearts and souls.

**Jerry:** “Black forest: Too scary. You’re in the forest. Oohh....” (*The dinner party*)

**Edward:** Victor and Quentin both demonstrated that knowledge alone does not satisfy the human spirit. Quentin mentioned earlier that ‘the ingredients of morality were like the ingredient of pie or cake.’ Maybe we should not limit the ingredients we teachers use to only the ones with external measures and qualifications.

**Jerry:** “Napolean? Who’s he to have a cake? He was a ruthless war monger. Might as well be Mengle.” (*The dinner party*)

**Edward:** Perhaps the most valuable ingredients in our instructional recipes are not the tools that we purchase, but the resources that emanate from within our selves.

**Jerry:** “All right. That’s it for me. You’ve been great. Good night everybody!” [leaves]  
(*The dinner party*)

## **X. JOURNEY AS METAPHOR**

*Odyssey* (Homer)

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven  
far journeys, after he had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.  
Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of,  
Many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea,  
Struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions. (*Odyssey*,  
Lines 1 – 5, p. 27)

Inspire us, O Muse, my students and I, with the exploits of Odysseus' journey;  
transform us with tales of the intrinsic challenges he endured; and guide us, O Muse, as  
we, like Odysseus, attempt to transcend mind and body toward greater self-realization  
and illumination of ourselves as teachers – and as human beings. Elena Semino and  
Gerard Steen (2008) postulate that poets use conceptual metaphors (such as 'life is a  
journey') as pathways toward understanding:

Metaphor is a ubiquitous and indispensable linguistic and cognitive tool, which we  
use systematically to conceive of our more abstract, subjective experiences (e.g. the  
workings of our minds)... Poets challenge and extend the ordinary ways in which  
we think and express ourselves by using creatively the same metaphorical tools that  
we all use in everyday language. (pp. 236-7)

For the better part of twenty years, students and I have metaphorically traveled with  
Odysseus as he confronted extrinsic and intrinsic monsters and nightmares. Externally,  
he battled in the name of his home, his family, and his life. Internally, he engaged in  
challenges that tested his values, morals, and personal commitments. In this way, his

journey as an odyssey of body, mind, and spirit echoes what Lama Surya Das (2007) describes as a route toward illumination:

Enlightenment is the evolution of consciousness beyond the illusion that one has a separate existence. It's a realization that transcends mind and body, yet includes both of them, as well as all and everything else. It is a maturation of our innate awareness that leads beyond immaturity, dependence, gullibility, delusion, confusion, misperceptions, and misknowing. This inner realization, or illumination, opens into the ultimate form of direct, trans-conceptual seeing, what Buddhists call Clear Vision and Wise Knowing, by means of which we perceive things just as they truly are. This is the wisdom of Awareness. (p. 126)

Homer's *Odyssey* challenges my students and me to extend the perimeter and depth of how we think about each other and about ourselves. His epic poem inspires an introspective examination of the values and motivations that define the essence of our human spirit. As an educator, metaphorically journeying with *Odyssey* is a perennial expedition of epiphany. Sharing this journey with my students deepens the experience as it allowing it to resonate even more deeply on personal, professional, and communal levels.

#### A. **Journey of inspiration**

*Odyssey*' success or failure in addressing a variety of physical and mental challenges depends as much upon what he has control over as on what is imposed upon him by a greater, outside force. Thomas Armstrong (2007) explains these phenomena using the Greek mythic tradition of the *Daemon* (divinity) and the Roman tradition of a *genius* (to beget). The former refers to supernatural forces that influence our situations,

and behaviors; the latter references voluntary choices and personal decision-making. Although often referred to as a conflict between fate and free will, Armstrong proposes perceiving these as two sources of human inspiration operating in tandem:

These nurturing images [*daemon* and *genius*] may be, from a *body up* perspective, the positive hormones secreted by a mother in utero, but from a *spirit down* point of view they represent aspects of the spiritual universe that cradle the growing fetus. (p. 27)

As my students and I read and reflect on Odysseus' many adventures, we examine the mutual interdependence between Odysseus' personal strengths and weaknesses (over which he has control) and the demands of the spiritual and natural world (over which he has no control). Odysseus neither combats the supernatural by relying exclusively on his human resources nor remains completely passive in the face of forces beyond his control. In this way, Odysseus demonstrates an innate ability to balance his faith in *spirit down* forces with trust in his *body up* reserve of will, character, and fortitude. Thus, Odysseus' journey is an inspirational metaphor for humanity's capacity to live by faith, trust, and inner strength.

Two episodes, one early in his journey and one near the end, demonstrate Odysseus' inspirational balancing act between *spirit down* and *body up* forces. Although Odysseus admits that divine fate led him and his crew to the island of the Cyclops ("So we have come. So it has pleased Zeus to arrange it" (Book IX, line 262, p. 144), he finds the inner strength to deal with the crisis with patience ("We too would have perished away in sheer destruction, seeing that our hands could never have pushed from the lofty gate of the

cave....We waited, just as we were, for the divine dawn” (lines 304-6, p. 145). Even when Odysseus realizes that his prayers for help were being denied (“We cried out aloud and held our hands up to Zeus, seeing the cruelty of what he did, but our hearts were helpless” (lines 294-5, p. 145), he still draws upon his inner resources of cleverness and bravery:

But I was planning so that things would come out the best way, and trying to find some release from death, for my companions and myself too, combining all my resource and treacheries, as with life at stake, for the great evil was very close to us. And I thought, this was the plan that seemed best to me. (Lines 420-424, p. 148).

Similarly, Cyclops treats the sacred wine of the gods with disrespect (“Cyclopes do not concern themselves over Zeus of the aegis, nor any of the rest of the blessed gods” (lines 275-6, p. 144), while Odysseus cleverly acknowledges the supreme power of the gods (“He [Apollo] gave me glorious presents...a sweet wine, unmixed, a divine drink” (lines 201, 204), and ironically uses the divine wine as a weapon against the Cyclops. At the same time, while Cyclops passively relies on the fates to unconditionally take care of him (“all grows for them without seed planning, without cultivation.... These people have no institutions, no meetings for counsel” lines 109, 112), Odysseus faces the hardships thrown upon him and addresses them directly with his own resources (“Then I took counsel with myself in my great-hearted spirit” line 299, p. 145).

Later in his journey, Odysseus is again powerless to defy divinity’s decree when he is fated to return to Ithaca unrecognizable to his family and friends. With his princely identity gone, he would be seen only as a weak, elderly beggar to be cruelly ridiculed



by enemies:

So he [Eurymachos] spoke and addressed Odysseus, sacker of cities:

‘Stranger, if I were to take you up, would you be willing

To work for me on my outer estate-I would give you adequate

Pay-assembling stones for fences, and growing the tall trees.

(Book XVIII, lines 356-359, p. 279)

Rather than surrendering to helpless despair or misguided anger, Odysseus quietly but cleverly endures his immediate situation. Never losing faith in his cunning and fortitude, Odysseus continues to operate by his wits, always clinging to his personal faith that in the end, his trials would not be in vain. Even when harassed by the worst of the ‘spirit down’ enemies, Odysseus summons an inner strength of ‘body up’ resilience:

But since all the work you have learned is bad, you will not be willing  
to go off and work hard; no, you would rather beg where the people  
are, and so be able to feed that ravenous body.’

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him:

‘Eurymachos, I wish there could be a working contest  
between us, in the spring season when the days are lengthening,  
out in the meadow, with myself holding a well-curved sickle,  
and you one like it, so to test our endurance for labor. (lines 362-369)

Although he cannot change his predestined predicament, Odysseus nevertheless lays the foundation for retribution and the return of justice. He plants the idea of a contest between himself and the defiant suitors as he stirs their anger and pride:

He spoke, and the anger mounted in the heart of Eurymachos,

and looking darkly at him he addressed him in winged words:

‘Wretch, I will do you an injury for the way you are talking,  
boldly and at length among many men, and your spirit  
knows no fear. The wine must have your brains; or else always  
you are such a mind in your mind, a babbler of nonsense. (Book XVIII, lines 387-  
392, p. 280)

Ironically, Eurylochus the speaker is correct on two accounts: Odysseus’ spirit truly does ‘know no fear’, and the wine Eurylochus speaks of will again become the sacred drink used by Odysseus as a divine weapon against unjust enemies just as it was against the Cyclops. Despite his weakened position, Odysseus manages to manipulate the suitors to his advantage (“But the suitors all through the shadowy halls were raising a tumult” line 399, p. 280).

Despite his lowly outward appearance, Odysseus uses his words to trick the suitors into unknowingly revealing their true values so as to differentiate the truly wicked men from the basically good men (if any good men are, in fact, among them):

Now they were addressed and spoken to by Amphinomos,  
The glorious son of Nisos, son of the lord Aretios:  
‘Dear friends, no man must be angry, nor yet with violent  
answers attack what has been spoken in justice. And do not  
strike the stranger, as you have done, nor yet any other  
serving man who is in the house of godlike Odysseus.  
Come now, let the cupbearer pour wine in our goblets,  
so we can pour a libation and then retire to our houses;

and in the halls of Odysseus we shall let Telemachos  
look after the stranger, since it is his house that he came to.’ (Book XVIII 412-421,  
p. 281)

To avoid further harm while displaying humility under duress, Odysseus tells the Cyclops that his name is ‘No Man.’ Ironically, when Amphinomos comments that ‘no man must be angry,’ his choice of words reminds the reader of the remarkable restraint Odysseus uses to delay his response until the proper time. Just as Odysseus uses wine to subdue the Cyclops, his words now agitate the suitors so much that they also turn to wine. Because of Odysseus’ vexing words, Amphinomos insists that Telemachos leave to attend to Odysseus. This also works in Odysseus’ favor as it leads to Odysseus’ reunion with his son, which proves pivotal to reclaiming his kingdom and issuing out justice.

These episodes inspire my students and me to reflect upon those parts of our lives over which we feel we have no control over such as who our parents are, which neighborhood we were born into, what faith we might adhere to, which economic class our families operate in, and what natural skills or talents we may have innately been blessed with. These represent the outside forces (the *daemon*) that influence our lives. Using the resourcefulness of Odysseus as our model, we then examine how our voluntary choices and personal behaviors (the *genius*) impact these outside forces to help shape our lives.

Can we identify which of our students is an Odysseus waiting to embark on a journey? Which of our students have yet to test their ideologies against the hardships of life? Which are the ones who have not yet had their beliefs and values challenged? In terms of these students and where they are on their life’s odyssey, have our classroom discussions, projects, and experiences helped prepare them for their journeys ahead? Has our

instruction fortified them with the perseverance, faith, and inner strength they will need? How often does our work with students allow them opportunities to explore their intrinsic identities, strengths, and weaknesses?

Can we ascertain which of our students is the Odysseus who has been through many trials but has returned home a stranger? These are the students who have returned to our school or classroom in the fall or after an extended break wherein they dealt with crisis situations such as parents divorcing, domestic abuse, homelessness, or episodes of drug abuse. Although they have returned to a familiar setting, they are as strangers nonetheless, no longer the individuals they were before. On the outside, these students may look familiar, but internally and psychologically, they are changed. Have we as teachers noticed these changes? If so, has that in any way affected or redirected our teaching and learning?

Can we spot the one who is an Odysseus lost and alone in a sea of despair? Unfortunately, many students come to mind who fit this profile: the seventh grader, practically lethargic in class, whose high school girlfriend just gave birth to his baby; the eighth grade girl who's been living in a homeless shelter with her younger brother and sister while her mother remains living with an abusive and alcoholic husband, and the third grader whose parents are active members of a street gang, and bring him along with them on their nighttime escapades. At his most desperate and darkest moments, we the readers know that underneath all of Odysseus' hardships lies a hero of merit and perseverance. Do we harbor the same heroic assumption for these students?

Which student of ours is an Odysseus currently engaged in battles against monsters? Who is battling the Lotus-eaters of drug addiction? Who is engaged in a tryst with the

Sirens of eating disorders? Do our daily efforts meet the emotional and psychological needs of these students? If these Homeric battles are left unaddressed, conventional remediation efforts such as sending these students to detention for misbehavior or to after school homework club for missing work will be futile.

Educators rightly invest significant time, effort, and planning to differentiate instruction based on individual learning styles, language diversity, and skills deficiencies. We also need to differentiate among the ‘Odysseuses’ in our midst. Classroom discourse that demands reflection on where we (my students and I) are on our life’s journey is critical. By better understanding *ourselves*, we can better discuss and understand a myriad of topics including college choices, careers, interpersonal disputes, current events, social turmoil, and a variety of economic, historical, and political events. Leo Buscaglia (1982) emphasized the importance of this sort of introspective thinking and learning:

We teach everything in the world to people, except the most essential thing. And that is life. Nobody teaches you about life. You’re supposed to know about it.

Nobody teaches you how to be a human being and what it means to be a human being, and the dignity that it means when you say “I am a human being.” (p. 129)

On a professional level, the individual *Odyssey* episodes are reminders of the dangerous habit of seeing the educational landscape through restrictive Cyclopean vision. After all, if my educational vision focuses too closely on the standards and benchmarks of *what* I am teaching, I could easily lose sight of *whom* I am teaching. When Odysseus was facing the suitors, he was careful to ascertain their individual motives so as not to rashly judge them all the same. Likewise, I am reminded that I need to look beyond the “label” that might be given to a group of students (i.e. gifted, special needs, difficult,

slow) in order to understand the uniqueness of each student. This intrinsic vision is reflected in what Buscaglia (1982) called the “I of I”:

Those of us who work with children should be bound and determined that we’re not only going to find in ourselves the “I of I” so that we can share it with these kids, but we’re also going to help them and set them free so that they can find the “I of I” in themselves, develop it, revel in the wonder of it, and then share it with others. When you have come to grips, for instance, with what is essential about yourself, only then will you be able to decide what is essential about your children. And the truth of it is that so often we professionals tend to see children as their externally manifested bits and pieces. We tend to divide them up. We tend to see each other, also, as our bits and pieces, instead of our external whole. (p. 92)

In this way, Odysseus’ spirit inspires not only my external journey as a teacher, but my internal one as a person as well. His ability to navigate the external forces that impacted him positively and (oftentimes) negatively relied upon his understanding that his identity was not composed of disassociated bits and pieces. His roles as father and son, friend and enemy, captain and beggar, hero and instigator, and husband and lover were not segregated pieces of his being.

In the Cyclops adventure, for instance, he was both the instigator of the monster’s anger *and* the hero who rescued himself and his men. In this way, his thoughts and actions reflected his princely hubris and his soldier’s wits. In the suitors adventure, he was both dirty beggar *and* disguised king; the father avenging his son *and* the husband devotedly returning to his wife. His choices simultaneously reflected his imposed humility, underlying cleverness, paternal urgency, and compassion for his wife.

Similarly, Odysseus reminds me that my identity as teacher is not isolated from the other roles that constitute who I am. My compassion as a friend, empathy as a caregiver, perseverance as a swimmer, and patience as a gardener are not disassociated pieces separate from my work as an educator. This inner realization inspires me to strengthen my vocation of teaching with patience; to nurture it with empathy; to sustain it with perseverance, and to deepen its affect with a compassion for the well-being of others. In this way, Odysseus' journey is a metaphorical pathway toward a better understanding of myself which in turn helps me nudge students toward a better understanding of themselves.

Like her husband Odysseus, Penelope lives under the duress of a difficult fate. Because of circumstances beyond her control, she is forced to raise her son and to protect her husband's kingdom against a mob of violent foreign intruders - for twenty years! Against these externally imposed misfortunes, she maintains faith that her husband will return and uses her inner strength and intelligence to keep control of the kingdom. Penelope is bombarded with a barrage of demands from the suitors. She is under severe pressure to respond to the political realities of running the kingdom of Ithaca in her husband's absence. Although she keeps her faith in Odysseus, the administrative realities continually pose threats and challenges.

I suggest we metaphorically regard Penelope's suitors as the bureaucrats knocking at our doors. They visit us every day in our classrooms with an array of paperwork demands; they are outside our classroom doors with a barrage of central office requests; and they loom over us as effigies of the political realities we face in terms of funding, tenure, and professional accountability. Can we, like Penelope, face these bureaucratic

demands while preserving our faith in the good works we do? Can we satisfy these administrative tasks without depleting our positive energy as well as our necessary focus on the students? Can we meet the political demands of our positions while keeping alive the flames of our personal ideologies?

Penelope is perseverance personified. Despite the difficult choices she is forced to make, she never compromises her integrity. She cleverly manipulates the suitors so that she can be true to her values and her faith in Odysseus, while averting a full blown political catastrophe at the same time. Her cleverness inspired the now-famous ruse of the never-finished tapestry:

And here is another stratagem of her heart's devising. She set up a great loom in her palace, and set to weaving a web of threads long and fine. Then she said to us: "Young men, my suitors, now that the great Odysseus has perished, wait, though you are eager to marry me, until I finish this web, so that my weaving will not be useless and wasted... Thereafter in the daytime she would weave at her great loom, but in the night she would have torches set by, and undo it. So for three years she was secret in her design. (Book II, lines 93-98, 104-106, pp. 41-42)

In our journey as teachers, we are also, like Penelope, weavers. Whereas Penelope is a weaver of threads and knots, we are weavers of mind, spirit, and body. As educators, we weave webs of connections among cognition, emotion, and spirit. The tools of our labors range from classroom discourse to experimentation, from problem solving to collaboration, and from chalkboards to SMART-boards. The fabric of our tapestry is composed of ourselves (the teachers), our students, and the subjects and topics with which we engage each other. As our journeys lengthen, so does the depth of these



connections and relationships. And, if we're lucky, while we are weaving a world for ourselves, our students are also learning to weave worlds for themselves. P. Palmer (2007) expounded on this metaphor of the 'weaver-teacher':

The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts – meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self... the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart – and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (pp. 11-12)

Odysseus and Penelope are defined by the valor, courage, cleverness, and patience they use throughout their journeys. Nevertheless, the true life-source of their steadfast perseverance and tenacity is their respect and affection for each other. For both of them, the destination of their journeys is the same: home. Metaphorically speaking, home is the place where one is most at peace and unity with themselves, with others, and with the eternal space of their souls. Upon their being reunited, Homer tells us:

She [Penelope] spoke, and still more roused in him the passion for weeping.

He wept as he held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous.

And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,  
after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open

water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy  
 seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward  
 by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,  
 and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;  
 so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him. (Book XXIII, lines  
 231-239, p. 341)

Like Odysseus and Penelope, our journey as educators and as human beings is less to acquire knowledge and more to gain insight and wisdom about ourselves: who we are and what defines our authentic selves. Surya Das (2007) called these the ‘big questions’ that drive all of our journeys through the unknown (p. 1):

Who among us can say they really know themselves, without illusions, beyond the face in the mirror, their name-rank-and serial number role in the world, their personas, defense mechanisms, and self-deceptions? Do we distinguish between when we are being authentic and inauthentic? Do we know what we really feel about things, what our true values and priorities are, what lies below the surface of consciousness, and what makes us tick? (p. 55)

## **B. Journey of transformation**

Odysseus helps my students and me explore these ‘big questions’ as we begin to distinguish between what Joseph Campbell (1991) called “the mortal aspect and the immortal aspect of one’s own existence” (p. 287). Odysseus might be extrinsically identified by his cleverness in blinding the Cyclops, but he is intrinsically defined by his compassion and commitment to Penelope. While the Cyclops confrontation is temporal, Odysseus’ compassion and commitment defy space and time and are eternal. In this way,

reflecting metaphorically on Odysseus' journey allows us to see moments of epiphany hidden in *Odyssey* action sequences; and to glimpse radiant ideas embedded in the words.

Campbell (1991) not only insisted that "poetry consists of letting the word be heard beyond words," he further wrote that "everything that's transitory is but a metaphorical reference" (p. 286). Thus, when the *Odyssey* nudges us out of a narrow temporal understanding, my students and I become free to experience moments of transformation. Examining Odysseus' journey metaphorically means that we are endeavoring to discern intrinsic meaning that lies somewhere beyond the words. As Campbell (1991) reminded us, "words are always qualifications and limitations" and meaning is essentially wordless (p. 287). While reading the *Odyssey*, my students and I embark together on a journey that transforms the temporal constraints of space and time into possibilities; our discussions, and discourse endeavor to extend our understanding beyond the external limitations of words into intrinsic pathways of understanding and epiphany.

One such pathway Odysseus forges for us is the journey into Circe's palace. For centuries, human beings have been drawn to this dangerous island with its tantalizing sounds, smells, and mysterious beauty. Once there, however, an unexplainable metamorphosis transforms them into a menagerie of beasts:

In the forest glen they came on the house of Circe. It was  
in an open place, and put together from stones, well polished,  
and all about it there were lions, and wolves of the mountains,  
whom the goddess had given evil drugs and enchanted,  
and these made no attack on the men, but came up thronging  
about them, waving their long tails and fawning, in the way

that dogs go fawning about their master, when he comes home  
 from dining out, for he always brings back something to please them;  
 so these wolves with great strong claws and lions came fawning  
 on my men, but they were afraid when they saw the terrible big beasts.  
 They stood there in the forecourt of the goddess with the glorious  
 hair, and heard Circe inside singing in a sweet voice  
 as she went up and down a great design on a loom, immortal  
 such as goddesses have. Delicate and lovely and glorious  
 their work. (Book X, lines 210-224, pp. 157-158)

If we were one of Odysseus' men, what kind of animal would we transform into, keeping in mind that the choice of creature must match our nature and temperament? The nature of this question not only invites students to reflect on their physical traits and abilities, but also upon their personality, values, and relationships with others.. After all, in addition to strength, a lion also represents leadership, courage, and survival prowess. This question also nudges students to think metaphorically about themselves and their world.

As metaphor, who is the Circe in our lives? Who or what in our lives is “singing in a sweet voice” the music that at once enchants and imprisons us? Is it the “lovely and glorious” voice of drugs and alcohol that some cannot resist? Or perhaps it is the “goddess [or god] of glorious hair” that lures others into corporal relations for which they are emotionally unprepared? Student responses to this query vary depending on where they are on their life journey.

Continuing to advance this metaphorical analysis of the Circe in our lives, what are we transformed into? Like Odysseus' men, do we surrender our ability to make rational choices to her tantalizing presence? Do we compromise our values to her promises of immediate enchantment? Will we forego our individual and independent voices as we fall victim to her deceptive bullying? In what ways are we transformed by the Circes of our lives?

Because exploring this level of introspection can be difficult for some students, we often turn to history and literature. Popular student-generated topics have included: what Circe transformed President Nixon into a leader forced into resignation? what embodiment of Circe transformed Othello from a trusting soul to a vindictive, violent one? what facsimile of Circe transformed Victor Frankenstein from a scientist dedicated to helping humanity to a madman consumed by his desire for power and fame?

The students are not alone on this journey of introspection. As an educator, I also ponder what representations of Circe have affected who I am as a teacher. When has some alluring Circe enchantment of increased salary transformed my more altruistic motivations for teaching and learning into ones driven by greed or blind self advancement? At what points along the journey of my professional career has the "sweet voice" of alluring career advancement transformed my passion for social justice into a drive for personal gain? What enchantments have I faced in my personal life may have negatively transformed my instructional practice from student-centered to me-centered? The responses to these questions again vary according to when they are addressed in my personal and professional odyssey.

The most frightening ‘Circe-esque’ transformation that I have experienced as an educator is the time I spent being a cockroach. The transformation that Franz Kafka (1915) described in his story *The Metamorphosis* became my own. The alienation and helplessness that Gregor Samsa experienced were mine:

When Gregor Samsa awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. He lay on his back, which was hard as armor, and, when he lifted his head a little, he saw his belly – rounded, brown, partitioned by archlike ridges – on top of which the blanket, ready to slip off altogether, was just barely perched. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his girth, flickered helplessly before his eyes. (p. 11)

I discovered that having returned to classroom teaching duties in the school where I had previously been an Assistant Principal (after having left a Principal position due to a belligerent staff) was not dispiriting enough. Apparently there was room for further humiliation and degradation. I became the target of bullets of condescension and alienation. I became victim to random acts of administrative spite and rancor. The overall dehumanizing effect left me a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Gregor Samsa:

He had plenty of time in which to think without disturbance about how he should reorganize his life. But the high open room, in which he was compelled to lie flat on the floor, filled him with anguish, although he couldn’t discover the reason for it, because, after all, it was a room he had occupied for five years - and - making a semiconscious turn, not without a slight feeling of shame, he dashed under the couch, where, even though his back was a little squeezed and he could no longer lift his head. (p. 26)

Not a day went by when I was not reminded that I was no more a teacher – was even *less* a teacher – than anyone else in the building. As a cockroach, getting out of bed in the morning became close to impossible. As an undesirable insect, I was be ‘punished’ daily just because of *who* I was. Because the residue of this transformation still lingers upon my spirit, my explanations here may not be clear to the reader. This, too, is symptom of the Circe-like spell:

To be sure, he now realized that his speech was no longer intelligible, even though it had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ears were getting used to it. (p. 19)

This agonizing episode has served to remind me of two things: first, that teaching is a highly personal act, one that cannot be easily separated from who we are; second, that we need to be ever vigilant in protecting our spirit, our values, and our sense of self. This experience, much like Homer’s poetry, defies temporal restraints. It inspires my students and me to reflect upon dangerous allurements (either conscious or unconscious) that can aggressively undermine the essence of who we are and what we believe in. This sort of introspection can have a profound effect on how we view ourselves and each other, the world around us and within us.

Reflecting upon difficult moments in our careers (and our lives) can at its best force us to affirm intrinsic values and motivations. I believe that moments of affirmation, if we are lucky (or blessed) can constitute authentic transformations of spirit. Such transformations are the luminaries that embed the tapestry of my teaching journey with energy, hope, and faith in the potential for teaching to transform lives. I remember the shy girl whose reticence imprisoned her talent and personal voice until we began a student dramatic

production of *The Odyssey*. To everyone's surprise, after she volunteered for the role of fashion/costume designer, her silence and restraint transformed into a font of discourse and social interaction. Once the student's creative skills were awakened, her inner spirit of creativity and imagination emerged. Like Penelope, her 'weaving' (as in material design and creation) continues today as she is attending college (the first in her family to do so) to pursue her talent and ambition in fashion design.

Similarly, I recall a repeatedly truant student who displayed behaviors of low self esteem (including negative self-talk, poor personal hygiene, and self-imposed ostracism). *The Odyssey*, like Circe's magic food, seemed to be the elixir that transformed him from the absent student to the one in school every day by 10:00am when *Odyssey* instruction began. But was this only a temporary transformation whose effect would not outlast Odysseus' return to Penelope? A chance meeting with this student ten years later would answer this question.

Just as the unfolding of fate would wash Odysseus to the shores of strange lands, the unexpected breakdown of my bathroom-ceiling fan lead me to an isolated town in rural Indiana in search of an obsolete mechanical part. Emerging from behind the workroom curtain was the familiarly shabbily dressed student with his eyes still avoiding direct contact with me as we spoke (as was often his habit). After I introduced myself, I saw the transformation occur! His eyes turned upward with the light of recognition and a sparkle of excitement. There was no talk about the former days of elementary school and no chitchat about our lives. Instead, he spoke only about the *Odyssey*. He recalled favorite characters and retold favored episodes in surprisingly thorough detail as his voice raised, his body straightened up tall, and his face became animated.



His final words to me were: “I was never good in school and I never went to college. I probably don’t even remember what I had for lunch today. But I *do* remember everything about Homer’s *Odyssey*. *That* is a *great* book.” These last five words were spoken with extraordinary confidence, certainty, and (I do believe) pride. For those five to ten minutes in which we spoke, I witnessed a remarkable transformation of spirit. Here at a dismal-looking, dusty and dirty mechanical store far from neighborhoods and paved roads, a slovenly-looking clerk was transformed into the epitome of Greece’s Golden Age of Heroes.

When Odysseus had been transformed into a dirty, broken-down beggar, only two beings (his blind nursemaid Eurykleia (Book XIX) and his twenty year old faithful dog, Argos (Book XVII)) saw through his haggard physical visage and recognized the triumphant spirit beneath. His dirty appearance was temporary; his vibrant spirit was eternal. Likewise, I wonder how many people have seen the vibrant spirit lying deep within this student of mine? I have seen it; and in this case I believe that the transformation was inspired by the timeless ideas of inner strength, perseverance, and hope on which the *Odyssey* is rooted.

Another metaphorical road leading to pathways of intrinsic understanding and epiphany is the supernatural path forged by Kalypso (*Odyssey* Book VII). As I read the *Odyssey* with my students each year, I continue to ascertain the Kalypsos in my own life who inspire transformations personally and professionally. Nevertheless, there remains but one Kalypso above all others whose impact upon me continues to be the most profound. Just as Irene Adler was to Sherlock Holmes, to me “she is always *the* woman” (Doyle, 1892, *A Scandal in Bohemia*, p. 241) :

I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen; but, as a lover, he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a glib and a sneer. These were admirable things for the observer-excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results...And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory. (Doyle, 1892, p. 241)

As a teacher, my “own delicate and finely adjusted temperament” defined my practice with highly organized planning and a commitment to the rules and academic expectations of the school. An unforeseen metamorphosis was about to transform my methods and outlook:

There was the daughter of Atlas, subtle Kalypso,  
lives, with ordered hair, a dread goddess, and there is no one,  
neither a god nor mortal person, who keeps her company.

It was unhappy I alone whom my destiny brought there  
to her hearth, when Zeus with a gathered cast of the shining lightning  
shattered my fast ship midway on the wine-blue water.

There all the rest of my excellent companions perished. (Book VII, lines 245-251, p. 117)

Over the course of two years, the new teacher (a.k.a. Kalypso; a.k.a. Irene Adler) assigned to work with me would ‘shatter the fast ship’ of my overly organized ways and replace them with spontaneity and playfulness. ‘The rest of my excellent companions’ including ‘Mr. Rigid Rule Enforcement’ and ‘Ms. Don’t Stray from the Lesson Plan’ perished. Like Kalypso, my teaching partner used ‘a gathering cast of shining lightning’ composed of honesty, trust, and genuine affection to weave a spell of enchantment. Instead of working until the final hour before Winter Break, my students and I could now be found ice skating and having a snow ball fight. Instead of explaining our academic credentials and discussing the statistical academic growth we would be targeting each quarter, we could be heard explaining to our students that we were there because we cared about them and that we were committed to helping them (and ourselves) become better people.

For seven years, Kalypso transformed Odysseus’ mind and body as he became drenched in “immortal stuff Kalypso had given” (lines 259-260). Similarly, I found my teaching methods, outlook, and perspective transformed into much more student-centered practices: laughter replaced silence, exploration took the place of memorization, and spontaneity trumped rigidity. Instead of reading Shakespeare together from our seats, I participated in drama workshops so as to develop a theatrical unit wherein the Bard’s words and characters could be explored through movement, improvisation, and theatrical playfulness. Planning and engaging in this sort of highly creative, interactive, and experimental activity were a remarkable transformation in my entire outlook of what

teaching could be:

I am thinking and planning for you as I would do it  
 for my own self, if such needs as yours were to come upon me;  
 for the mind in me is reasonable, and I have no spirit  
 of iron inside my heart. Rather, it is compassionate. (Book VII, lines 188-191,  
 p. 93)

Rather than reviewing a lesson on the history of the first Thanksgiving, I could now be found (at 1:00 am) in my kitchen preparing a twenty pound turkey that I would bring to a classroom Thanksgiving dinner the next day. Vocabulary words of the day were replaced with daily inspirational quotations to be discussed. Instead of correcting daily student writing samples, I could now be observed actually communicating with students via interactive journals that were intended to explore and share thoughts and feelings. Instead of a casual dialogue about student after school events such as sports, we teachers could now be discovered at 80% of the games in the front row amidst parents, neighbors, and other family members.

What mystical source other than a Kalypso could be responsible for such sweeping transformations within so short a time? Who other than an Irene Adler could have successfully ‘introduced such distracting factors’ upon my ‘admirably balanced mind’ and methods? Furthermore, when she would be reassigned after two years, what force would be left to nurture sustain the metamorphosis?:

...and she sent me on my way on a jointed raft, and gave me  
 much, bread and sweet wine, and put immortal clothing upon me,  
 and sent a following wind to carry me, warm and easy. (Book VII, lines 264-266,

p. 118)

One could argue that Kalypso gave Odysseus nothing that was not already within him in the way that L. Frank Baum's (1900) *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* did not allow the wizard to grant the Cowardly Lion courage. He merely led him to find the bravery that was waiting to be discovered all the while. Similarly, my journey into Kalypso's realm led me to discover my inner playfulness and spontaneity. Like the Cowardly Lion, I discovered the courage to infuse the compassion of my teaching spirit, the laughter in my heart, and the values of my convictions into the classroom.

Kalypso's gifts transform a tired and dispirited Odysseus into a man determined and strengthened to return "home" to his personal values and to the treasure of a life surrounded by family and friends. Armstrong (2007) called this transformation a return to "the richer dimensions of life":

This is what it means to be fully human: to find the balance between the demands of outer necessity and the call of the inner life; between what is yet to come and what has passed. The journey of life draws us to Ithaca, but it also invites us to take in all the rich scenery along the way...to look at your own journey, as well as the journeys of those around you, with a renewed sense of compassion and wonder.

(p. 14)

### C. **Journey of transcendence**

This 'inner life' to which Thomas Armstrong (2007) alludes is what Joseph Campbell (1991) describes as "the world of your requirements and your energies and your structure and your possibilities" (p. 68). Campbell explained that world mythologies, including Homer's *Odyssey*, are intended to "open up to us the transcendent that informs it [our

outer world], and at the same time forms ourselves within it” (p. 61). In this sense, our temporal life journey begins to assume transcendent possibilities, as Campbell explained:

I think of mythology as the homeland of the muses, the inspirers of art, of poetry. To see life as a poem and yourself participating in a poem is what the myth does for you. I mean a vocabulary in the form not of words but of acts and adventures, which connotes something transcendent of the action here, so that you always feel in accord with the universal being. (p. 65)

Being inspired by poetry to gain insight into the essential meaning of ourselves and of our identity and work as educators is, as Ann Jauregui (2007) muses, “the most ephemeral thing in this worldly world” (p. xxviii). Nevertheless, as a psychotherapist and educator, Jauregui recounts numerous stories wherein the science of psychology merges with the transcendence of spirituality to lead her patients to remarkable moments of revelation and epiphany. She argues that, at its best, the language of poetry constitutes a life spark and a force of soul:

“You can’t touch its wings!” a child will say of the butterfly on her sleeve. And you can’t touch an epiphany either, not with words...but short of the poet who can point at things without hurting them, how can anyone hope to speak of consciousness transcending the body and spreading out all over the north woods and beyond. (p. xxviii)

Lyric passages of the *Odyssey*, involving human beings interacting with physical manifestations of the supernatural, are, for me, examples of poetry that facilitates this intersection of science and spirituality:

So Pallas Athena spoke, and breathed into him [Odysseus] enormous

strength, and, making his prayer then to the daughter of great Zeus,  
he quickly balanced his far-shadowing spear and threw it...

Odysseus and his glorious son fell upon their front fighters,  
and began to strike with swords and stab with spears leaf-headed.

And now they would have killed them all, and given none of them  
homecoming, had not Athene, daughter of Zeus of the aegis,  
cried out in a great voice and held back all the company:

‘Hold back, men of Ithaka, from the wearisome fighting,  
so that most soon, and without blood, you can settle everything. (Book XXIV, lines  
520-522; 526-532, pp. 358 –9)

Odysseus’ muse, the well-spring of his strength, is the physical embodiment of the supernatural Athena. She is the personification of his soul; the source of his fortitude and courage. At this critical moment in Odysseus’ journey, he has no one to turn to except himself. In the physical world, Odysseus is weakened after his twenty years of trials; his strength and endurance have been depleted. Athena represents the eternal life force within Odysseus (within humankind) that can neither be seen nor heard by human senses, but is nonetheless real.

Furthermore, the strength is tempered with humility (‘making his prayer’ before battle) and the aggression balanced with restraint (‘holding back from the fighting to settle things’). Odysseus is transcending not only the limits of his physical nature, but of his emotional turmoil as well. Unlike the Incredible Hulk who endures a metamorphosis from helpless victim to aggressor, the more noble values of Odysseus (wisdom and restraint) are also revitalized.

At those classroom moments when my patience has been low, my compassion depleted, and my temper short, where have I found the strength to teach? From where have I summoned the humility of remembering that I have as much to learn from the students as they might learn from me? Where is the wellspring of restraint and wisdom from which I my spirit could be replenished? *The Odyssey* continues to teach me that the only place to find these resources is within myself.

Many of the days I now regard (in retrospect) as days of effective teaching and learning have been those days when the physical evidence alone suggested otherwise. Only recently, for example, I began the school day with three strikes of apprehension: physically ailing from an allergy flair-up, emotionally nursing an injury to my pride after being ‘reprimanded’ by ‘Cyclopean’ administrative voices, and psychologically anticipating unfocused chaos times seventy as it was “student dress any way you want” day. Like Odysseus, my strength and fortitude were physically run down and depleted. Nevertheless, rather than oxymoronicly screaming for silence, I spoke softly. Instead of carrying a big stick of disciplinary threats, I initiated a dialogue with students about Anne Frank and the Holocaust as it was the month of International Holocaust Remembrance.

What followed was a day of reading, writing, drawing, and conversing that touched upon issues ranging from fate versus free will, bullying and genocide, generalizations and prejudice, and democracy versus totalitarianism. What inspired this level of student engagement? Where did this inspired day come from? The strength, patience, creativity, and imagination that transpired could not have been mustered by myself alone. Like Odysseus, I must have had some supernatural being breathing wisdom and fortitude into my spirit. As unscientific as it sounds, it was as if the breath of inspiration and life



welled-up from somewhere deep within my soul. Somehow what Joseph Campbell called “the world of your requirements and your energies and your structure and your possibilities” (p. 68) was tapped into.

In *The Odyssey*, supernatural deities are metaphors for the sources of strength upon which we can draw to tap into our intrinsic resources of spirit and wisdom. It can be difficult, however, to recognize such moments of transcendence:

Then in turn the dark dream image spoke to her (Penelope) in answer:

‘Take courage, let your heart not be too altogether frightened,  
such an escort goes along with him, and one that other  
men would have prayed to have standing beside them, for she has power,  
Pallas Athene, and she has pity on you in your grieving,

And it is she who has sent me to tell you of these things.’ (p. 86)

Penelope is looking for hope and faith that her husband (as well as justice and fairness) will return to her life despite all signs to the contrary. Athena speaks to her in a disguised voice, in a dream. Can reality be embedded in a dream? Or is this dream really a metaphor for imagination, creativity, and the voice of a muse? Are there voices, messages, and pieces of wisdom and faith that simply cannot be expressed any other way? Are there times when that little voice within us is truly our conscience, our soul, speaking to us and guiding us? Do we hear the message? Do we believe in what our heart is telling us, even when it defies any scientific basis or physical reality?

In the classroom, do we listen to what we are saying to the students, beyond what our words are telling them? Although we speak about temporal issues of rules and discipline, what are we teaching them about timeless values of equality and empathy? Even though

we lecture pragmatically about being punctual and organized, what are we saying to them about the altruistic values of responsibility and commitment? Similarly, do we listen to what the students are telling us? Somewhere beyond their words complaining about the fairness of a test, are they beseeching us to take the time to better connect with them and their world? Perhaps underneath their protests of being ‘bored’ is the lament for a more meaningful curriculum.

*The Odyssey* also provides episodes that demonstrate what can happen when a person is deaf to this intrinsic voice, denies it, or chooses to ignore it. Denying the voice of one’s spirit is forgoing one’s true self:

Now to these men came the daughter of Zeus, Athene,  
likening herself in voice and appearance to Mentor.

Odysseus was happy when he saw her, and hailed her, saying:

‘Mentor, help me from hurt, and remember me, your companion...

He spoke, and Athene in her heart grew still more angry,  
and she scolded Odysseus in words full of anger, saying:

No longer, Odysseus, are the strength and valor still steady  
Within you, as when, for the sake of white-armed, illustrious  
Helen, you fought nine years...

How is it now, when you have come back to your own possessions  
and house, you complain, instead of standing up to the suitors? (pp. 326-7).

By doubting his innate resourcefulness and losing faith in his destiny, Odysseus in this excerpt turns a blind eye to the transcendent truths that define his spirit. As a result, at this point in his journey he only comprehends what the physical world is showing him

and his senses: the number of enemies are statistically unbeatable, the amount of his physical strength is diminished, and the odds that his kingdom will be recovered defy the tangible data.

It is at this crucial moment that Odysseus must embark on the most important journey of all: the journey back home (not to Ithaca) but back home to his *self*, into his true consciousness that is his eternal life source, the intangible space where his being exists. This is the space Ann Jauregui (2007) spoke of when she bemoaned that “short of the poet who can point at things without hurting them, how can anyone hope to speak of consciousness transcending the body” (xxviii)? Thankfully, for me, Homer can.

Instead of asking where our journey as teachers is taking us externally, Odysseus inspires me to ask where our journey as teachers is taking us *intrinsically*. Are our daily interactions with students trapped between the *Scylla* of core curriculum standards and the *Charybdis* of standardized assessment scores? Is our odyssey of teaching and learning guided only by the constraints of space and time as dictated by the *Sirens* we know as our curriculum maps?

Furthermore, what episodes of our classroom odyssey are given to encouraging our students to look for questions and answers not only in their textbooks, but *within* themselves? Where are the spaces within our teaching that inspire our students to think, to create, to express, to imagine, and to listen? These are the questions and queries that have come to frame my personal and professional odyssey toward greater self-realization and illumination. Like Odysseus, these questions help me maintain a balance between what Thomas Armstrong (2007) called the ‘body-up’ pragmatic daily decision-making

of teaching with the innate ‘spirit-down’ spiritual nature of who we are as human beings (p. 27).

Surya Das (2007) cautions against the dangers of falling “into living as we are not” and losing “who and what we actually are” (p. 63). Odysseus’ journey is metaphorically our journey: the road home to our true, eternal selves. As captain of his men, and the leader of the people of Ithaca, Odysseus had the opportunity (and the responsibility) to share this journey with others and to lead, guide, and protect them on their own odysseys. As teachers isn’t it also *our* privilege to share a piece of our journey with our students as we help lead, guide, and protect them on their own odysseys? In this way, I agree with Surya Das who maintains that asking ‘who am I’ may not be as important as asking who am I *being*:

Given that the self is more a process than an entity, the present moment is the one that matters, the one in which we live our life. The past is over, and the future is unknown. We can dwell in the imagined worlds of yesterday and tomorrow if we choose. But the more we do so, the more we miss out on life itself as it is happening, moment by moment, and the more we fail to realize who we actually are, moment by moment. (p. 64)

#### D. **Topics for reflection**

1: What sorts of *spirit down* forces weigh upon your spirit and motivation as a teacher? What sorts of *body up* resources are mustered to deal with them?

2: How can better understanding *ourselves*, and guiding our students to better understand themselves improve classroom discussions ranging from college choices, careers, interpersonal disputes, current events, social turmoil, and a variety of economic,

historical, and political events? Can you identify moments of introspective thinking and learning that have been important parts of your own education?

3: Can you recall instances when you, your administrator, your school board, or your students' parents viewed the educational landscape through restrictive Cyclopean vision? When has '*what* I am teaching' overshadowed the '*whom* I am teaching'? What were the short term and long term consequences?

4: Odysseus' roles as father and son, friend and enemy, captain and beggar, hero and instigator, husband and lover were not segregated pieces of his being. They each contributed either directly or indirectly to his responses in a variety of circumstances and trials. What roles do you assume in your life and in what ways do they impact your teaching?

5: If you wandered onto Circe's island, what kind of animal would you transform into keeping in mind that the choice of creature must match your nature, temperament, personality, values, and interactions? Would the animal that represented you as a teacher, be the same that identified you as an overall person? In other words, how similar or dissimilar is your professional persona from your personal one?

6: As an educator, what representations of Circe have affected who you are as a teacher? What enchantments have you faced in your professional or personal life that may have positively or negatively transformed you or your instructional practice?

7: Who have been the Kalypsos in your life journey who have inspired transformations personally and professionally? Were they some of your own teachers or peers; family members or administrators; real or fictional role models?

8: How can we as educators find the balance between the demands of outer necessity

(lesson plans, accountability reviews, data projectiles, etc) and the call of the inner life (values, spirit, compassion, and wonder)?

9: At those classroom moments when patience is low, compassion is depleted, and temper is short, where can you find the strength to teach? From where can you summon the humility of remembering that you have as much to learn from the students as they might learn from you? Where is the wellspring of restraint and wisdom from which you can replenish your spirit?

10: Think about your best days of teaching and your most inspired classroom moments. What inspired this level of student engagement? Where did this inspired day come from?

11: Can reality be embedded in a dream? Or is this dream really a metaphor for imagination, creativity, and the voice of a muse? Are there voices, messages, and pieces of wisdom and faith that simply cannot be expressed any other way? Are there really times when that little voice within us is truly our conscience, our soul, speaking to us and guiding us? Do we hear the message? Do we believe in what our heart is telling us, even when it defies any scientific basis or physical reality?

12: In the classroom, do we listen to what we are saying to the students, beyond what our words are telling them? For example, although we speak about temporal issues of rules and discipline, what are we teaching them about timeless values of equality and empathy? Even though we lecture pragmatically about being punctual and organized, what are we saying to them about the altruistic values of responsibility and commitment?

13: Do we listen to what the students are telling us – beyond what their words are saying?

14: Are our daily interactions with students trapped between the *Scylla* of Core Curriculum standards and the *Charybdis* of standardized assessment scores? Is our odyssey of teaching and learning guided only by the constraints of space and time as dictated by the *Sirens* we know as our curriculum maps?

15: What episodes of our classroom odyssey are given to encouraging our students to look for questions and answers not only in their textbooks, but *within* themselves? Where are the spaces within our teaching that inspire our students to think, to create, to express, to imagine, and to listen?

16: As teachers, isn't it our privilege to share our journeys with our students as we help lead, guide, and protect them on their own odysseys? How have we done this? How can we continue to do this?

## **XI. NIGHT AS METAPHOR**

*Night* (Elie Wiesel)

If we, like Odysseus, are to embark on an intrinsic trek ‘back home’ to our authentic inner selves, we must be prepared to confront the monsters attempting to impede our journey. In the physical world, a conscious knowledge of ourselves as teachers and productive citizens defines our reality. The monsters we fight (ignorance, illiteracy, injustice, inequality) are outside of ourselves. Carl G. Jung (2006) warned, however, that when our goals and motivations rely exclusively on environmental conditions, technical resources, and external data, our innate instincts and unconscious realities can be uprooted:

This task is so exacting, and its fulfillment so advantageous, that he forgets himself in the process, losing sight of his instinctual nature and putting his own conception of himself in place of his real being. In this way, he slips imperceptibly into a purely conceptual world where the products of his conscious activity progressively replace reality. (p. 79)

What would we find within our unconscious realities that lie beneath the conscious physical world? How would our ‘inner person’ feel about the things we say and do in the outer world? Underneath the layers of knowledge that sustain our external world, what sort of faith or set of beliefs and values would we discover nurturing our inner spirit? L. Thomas Hopkins (1954) called this inner core of a person the “real, true, genuine, and intimate self” which is the “center of all behavior, for the self *is* the learning, the interacting, the maturing” (p. 320-1).

Hopkins asserted that education at its best is capable of promoting and shaping the growth of the self to higher levels of maturity, awareness, and operation through methods



of learning that not only require one to observe, but to question; not just to accept, but to challenge. It values insight over answers, dynamic reflections over static bodies of knowledge, and deepening self-awareness over final end-products (pp. 322-3).

Embarking on this inward journey, however, involves unique challenges. Jung (1957) warned that each person “harbors within himself a dangerous shadow and opponent who is involved as an invisible helper in the dark machinations” (p. 99) of the external world. Unless a person becomes aware of his or her unconscious reality, he can unknowingly be operating from beneath these shadows:

One would therefore do well to possess some “imagination in evil,” for only the fool can permanently neglect the conditions of his own nature. In fact, this negligence is the best means of making him an instrument of evil...they lead to projection of the unrecognized evil into the “other.” This strengthens the opponent’s position in the most effective way, because the projection carries the *fear* which we involuntarily and secretly feel for our own evil over to the other side and considerably increases the formidableness of his threat. What is even worse, our lack of insight deprives us of the *capacity to deal with evil*. (p. 96)

How we deal with conflicts encountered between our conscious perceptions and our unconscious reality reveals a great deal about who we really are as educators – and as human beings. How we navigate between concrete bodies of knowledge of the outer world and the esoteric foundations of faith that nurture our inner selves is a metaphorical gauge indicating how we are being to our authentic intrinsic lives. At least Odysseus could easily identify the monsters he battled on his outward journey home. On an inner

journey, however, identifying and combating the villains within ourselves can be much more challenging.

What if our inner journey reveals a monstrous Siren, calling us to indulge in cruel and vengeful attitudes and behaviors? Isn't this the kind of beast we normally project onto others and try to combat? Would we even *recognize* such a monster within our selves? What if our journey into the unconscious reveals a clandestine Cyclops spewing about toxic prejudices and biases? What might be the consequences over time if our conscious *image* of ourselves is operating at odds with the reality of the shadows rummaging through our psyches?

These are the kinds of questions and wonderings Elie Wiesel (1960) explored in his memoir *Night*. Wiesel takes the reader into the dangerous shadows of mankind's darkest machinations; demonstrates the fine line between an 'imagination in evil' and its physical world systematic implementation; and explores a person's capacity to deal with evil. As he recalls his experience as a child imprisoned in a Holocaust death camp, the reader experiences firsthand how Wiesel's subconscious nightmare became his reality.

As a metaphor, the physical night is stripped of its scientific value. Its physical laws and powers are rendered meaningless. After the Holocaust strips Wiesel's world of its fragile physical reality of comfort, justice, and equality, what's left are the underlying shadows (i.e. the night) of humankind's hidden monsters (greed, prejudice, power) run amok. In this subconscious world, it is the darkness, ironically, that serves to illuminate the monsters...and the monsters are ourselves.

As a teacher and as a person, reading Wiesel's memoir is a powerful experience. For me, it continuously calls into question the harmony (or disharmony) of one's inner and

outer lives. It raises awareness of the struggle between one's conscious values and one's subconscious beliefs; between the knowledge a teacher imparts versus the faith that sustains him or her; and between one's outer nature and his or her inner spirit. Nevertheless, these private musings and reflections did not prepare me for the surprises and revelations that would transpire when I began sharing the text with middle school students.

#### **A. Undiscovered self**

The first person Wiesel's memoir introduces is Moshe the Beadle: a wise, aged scholar. Although Moshe only appears in the opening pages of the memoir, like all good teachers, his influence is felt throughout Wiesel's life:

He explained to me with great insistence that every question possessed a power that did not lie in the answer.

"Man raises himself toward God by the questions he asks Him," he was fond of repeating. "That is the true dialogue. Man questions God and God answers. But we don't understand His answers. We can't understand them. Because they come from the depths of the soul, and they stay there until death. You will find the true answers, Eliezer, only within yourself."

"And why do you pray, Moshe?" I asked him.

"I pray to the God within me that He will give me the strength to ask Him the right questions..."

And throughout those evenings a conviction grew in me that Moshe the Beadle would draw me with him into eternity, into that time where question and answer would become *one*. (pp. 2-3)

Wiesel's journey into this spiritual 'oneness' is soon interrupted by the horrors of the Holocaust. External forces driven by political, economic, and social motives and prejudices came to control his physical existence. He was seen by the outer world only as a Jew; a propaganda-fueled target of hatred and discrimination. His inner being became imprisoned within this externally imposed conception of who he was.

What are the external forces that threaten to imprison *our* inner spirit and nature? To what extent are we thinking, feeling, and interacting with others according to our innate subconscious values and beliefs versus according to an externally imposed conception that we have come to regard as our reality? And how would we know the difference? I ask these questions of myself and I offer them to my students for reflection and contemplation.

The answers to these questions bring me face to face with the harsh interior monsters of intimidation, lies, and humiliation whom I first met as a middle school student. Being more interested in classical music than hard rock; more inclined to read and write than play baseball; and more apt to walk away from a physical challenge than to fight, my adolescent self silently endured innumerable episodes of teasing and ridicule. Upon reflection, I realize that the emotional and psychological wounds of such episodes can be even more detrimental than physical injuries.

One of the long-term effects of these attacks on my psyche and spirit is a self-defeating inclination to revert to this externally imposed negative persona and its accompanying behaviors as if they were in fact my true inner reality. Although the monsters may be silenced for a time, they remain lurking within my subconscious, always ready, like a hungry, agitated Hydra, to pounce on my self-esteem.

Nevertheless, for the past twenty years I find myself ironically teaching middle school students - the very battleground where many of these intrinsically harmful episodes took place. It is also the space where those monsters of intimidation, lies, and humiliation (with whom I am so familiar) continue to undermine the spirit and identity of many of my adolescent students. I have come to believe that this is the sort of 'true intrinsic awareness' of which Moshe was speaking. Furthermore, I find that this reflective awareness is a critical component of my identity as a teacher. In his treatise on what it means to be a human being, G. Marian Kinget (1975) succinctly described how the components of consciousness, identity, values, and conscience are critical to true self-awareness:

Language is one-dimensionally linear and discursive; its expression occurs over time. Consciousness, on the other hand, is so rich in dimensions, directions, and overtones, that it is truly implosive, occurring along several interlocking, looplike, and centripetal lines. This peculiar circularity of human awareness is obviously at the root of that primary – if usually implicit – datum of human experience that is the self: a symbolic structure of attributes, capacities, values, purposes, assumptions, illusions, and so on, pertinent to the “I” or “me”... This guiding self-image is also the basis of individualism and the necessary requisite for conscience, self-scrutiny, guilt, pride, and a host of characteristics that constitute identity or personality. Because he is a reflective center, man is a person, a self. (p. 24)

Just as Wiesel's physical being was enslaved in chains and imprisoned in the barracks of a Nazi death camp, the depths of his authentic inner self, which Moshe urged him to explore, were being stifled beneath the prejudices and cruelty of external forces. The

realm of spiritual oneness that Moshe described as the “place where questions and answers become one” became for Wiesel what Jung (2006) called “the undiscovered self” (p. 107):

There is an unconscious psychic reality which demonstrably influences consciousness and its contents... All the same, nobody can deny that without the psyche there would be no world at all, and still less, a human world. Virtually everything depends on the human soul and its functions. (p. 82)

I am indebted to the ‘Moshe Beadle’s’ of my life; those who had the insight and compassion to encourage me explore, acknowledge, honor, and live by my ‘undiscovered self.’ I can still hear Dr. David Plesic, my high school Latin teacher, asking why someone interested in philosophy would *pretend* to enjoy playing baseball instead of exploring the museums and libraries throughout Chicago. In his tacitly subtle way, Dr. Plesic was affirming my innermost identity as a thoughtful, sensitive individual before I was anywhere near accepting (let alone respecting) myself. Consequently, I have come to measure my most meaningful teaching episodes as those in which my questions, observations, or discourse with students have nurtured what I have come to refer to as one of these true ‘moshe-moments.’

Wiesel’s ‘moshe-moment,’ however, was soon devastated by his and his family’s arrest by Nazi officers and their subsequent deportation to a death camp. The greater the cruelty and physical torture Elie was forced to endure, the more his ‘unconscious psychic reality’ was neglected and denied. His world and his spirit became, as Jung cautions, less and less human.

Moshe's advice that Wiesel pray for "the strength to ask Him [God] the right questions" became buried beneath questions that focus exclusively on the physical world, to the denial of any greater spiritual reality or oneness. Just as Jung warned, the physical world finds Wiesel "putting his own conception of himself in place of his real being" and allowing the "products of his conscious activity [to] progressively replace reality" (p. 79).

To what extent do we allow the *conception* of ourselves as teachers to replace the *reality* of our 'real being'? When we contemplate the effectiveness of our instruction and the quality of student learning where do we look for feedback? Standardized assessment results, quantitative allocation of time and physical resources, alignment with state educational core curriculum standards, and individualized computer tutorial sessions are often used to measure whether instruction meets extrinsically imposed assessment criteria. Although these components are important tools to ascertain trends in the acquisition of segregated skills-based objectives, in terms of our inner consciousness and the development of identities as human beings, however, they are inadequate.

Although externally important, assessment scores do not reflect or enhance a person's inner reality. Although extrinsically valuable in our bureaucratically driven society, quantitative data does not enrich our spiritual nature. Although we rely upon external measures to validate our positions in terms of earning paychecks to provide essentials such as food, shelter, clothing, and health care, do they need to become our exclusive focus at the expense of our intrinsic selves? Inspired by the spirit of Moshe the Beadle, Dr. Plesic, and all the other 'moshes' who have touched our inner lives, I have discovered that novels such as Wiesel's *Night* have the capacity to nurture our 'undiscovered selves' without compromising the external curricular standards.

Wiesel's search for what he called the right questions to ask began at age twelve with queries that included "why do you pray?" (p. 3) and who could be the most suitable master in his studies of the cabbala (p. 1). These questions, which Moshe promised could raise Wiesel toward God, were quickly replaced with queries such as "Why should I bless his name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank him for?" (p. 31) and "Where is God now?" (p. 62).

Is there a higher power or some sort of supernatural existence greater than ourselves? If so, what is its role? What is the relationship between our finite selves and this infinite being? Are there sources of wisdom and fonts of spiritual nourishment beyond what our physical world provides or what our scientific knowledge can detect? Is there a spiritually driven force of fate guiding our lives or are we subject to merely random actions with no deeper purpose. These are the kinds of questions Wiesel inspires me to ask myself – and my students. Each time these classroom moments arise, however, I wonder whether I should even be asking these sorts of questions in the middle school classroom.

Students quickly realize that these kinds of questions cannot be answered by simply searching the text. Instead, they have to search themselves. Comments about alien conspiracies usually begin our discourse as students relate stories they have heard or seen on the internet or a history cable channel that involve human events that have been influenced by some mysterious intergalactic interference. The array of comments that surface next usually deals with religious ideas and dogma concerning God's role in creation and His will as enacted in an individual's destiny. At this point, I begin perspiring again. Should I even have begun such a profound discourse with these young



people? Do they have the cognitive and emotional maturity necessary to ponder these profound issues? Maybe this is a conversation better saved for late high school or college.

To my mind (and to my heart) it is at this point that our dialogue is closest to touching upon intrinsic issues of identity, consciousness, self-awareness, and conscience. After all, Wiesel himself was thirteen years old when he faced these kinds of issues.

Nevertheless, when classroom discourse ponders the role personal beliefs and faith play in our lives when we are faced with moments of crisis, I still feel apprehensive: shouldn't we stop our discussion now and review our vocabulary word list? Perhaps this would be a good time to review for Friday's prefix and suffix skills quiz. Should we pull out the test-preparation workbooks now?

Again I acknowledge that my role as a teacher is to nurture the inner as well as the outer life of my students. In this spirit and with this intention, I persevere. Student-generated ponderings over the years have included powerfully intrinsic queries: Why are some prayers heard and answered while others are neglected? How can innocent children killed in a Nazi death camp be part of God's plan? Shouldn't Wiesel and others fight back and stop relying on God to protect them? Isn't it true that 'God helps those who help themselves'? Don't events like the Holocaust happen because of people's choices and their free will? Isn't everything that happens a part of 'God's plan'? How does the Holocaust fit in with 'God's plan'? Or maybe there is no grand plan.

Each question elicits more questions than answers. In this way, Moshe's observation that "the most important questions and answers are one" comes to life. Episodes of classroom discourse of this caliber go beyond knowledge into realms of faith. They turn our thoughts and ideas away from the world outside of ourselves toward the intrinsic

universe within us. Wouldn't it have been simpler if I had decided to review the vocabulary list instead of taking this intrinsic journey with my students? Of course. To me, this is what Parker Palmer (2007) means when he wrote this about the courage it takes to teach:

The only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in. We must enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our students well....Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. (pp. 2-3)

Similarly, Moshe asserted that true wisdom is discovered only by exploring one's inner, often undiscovered, life. Finding the right questions to ask, he continued, entails exploring the depths of one's soul. After his first night in a Nazi death camp, however, Wiesel writes that any meaningful connection to his soul may have been permanently severed:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp which turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of

the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never. (p. 32)

What Wiesel had known as reality became an illusion. Nightmare, with all its surreal violence and unexplainable phenomena, is now his reality. It is as if his warm home, family and friends, comforting synagogue, and the very routine of his life were all a matrix of unreality imposed to protect him from the real unpredictable and random evils that lie beneath the facade of safety and security. Campbell (1991) wrote that dreams enhance our consciousness by demonstrating we are more than we think we are and that our world is more than we think it is:

There are dimensions of your being and a potential for realization and consciousness that are not included in your concept of yourself. Your life is much deeper and broader than you conceive it to be here. What you are living is but a fractional inkling of what is really within you, what gives you life, breadth, and depth. (p. 70)

In this sense, night is a metaphor for what Jung (1957) called “humanity’s black collective shadow” (p. 95). He wrote that “whether the crime lies many generations back or happens today, it remains the symptom of a disposition that is always and everywhere present” (p. 95). Wiesel witnessed the real potential of humanity’s capacity for evil as it has been projected onto its victims. His memoir takes us with him through shadows of our darkest selves.

What evil, either inside of ourselves or projected unto us, has the potential for the kind

of destruction that Wiesel describes (“moments which murdered my God and my soul”)? In the face of such evil, what resources can we rely upon to protect our dreams, our souls, and our desire to live? Would we rely upon our scientific expertise or our instincts; our knowledge of the world or our faith in a higher being? These are the questions and reflections that help me get in touch with my inner person, my inner teacher. The more clearly I understand the values that define my authentic identity, the more honest, meaningful, and humane my instruction can be.

I share these questions and pondering with my students as well. After one classroom discourse wherein we discussed Wiesel’s ‘nightmare turned reality,’ a student remarked to me, “You are a philosopher.” I was thoroughly surprised by this observation. Upon further inquiry, the student remarked that he was trying to say that instead of teaching reading, he felt that I was teaching ‘living.’ In a way, this might be the greatest compliment I have ever received.

#### B. **Metaphorical crucifixion**

As a metaphor, Elie Wiesel’s night is a journey into a realm of evil that has the capacity to crucify both the body *and* the soul. Although Wiesel initially proclaimed to have “believed profoundly” (1) in his quest for achieving a spiritual oneness with the universe, the physical abuse and torture he endured in the death camp lead him to proclaim:

Some talked of God, of his mysterious ways, of the sins of the Jewish people, and of the future deliverance. But I had ceased to pray. How I sympathized with Job! I did not deny God’s existence, but I doubted His absolute justice....How we would have liked to believe. (pp. 42-3)

What defines our inner reality as teachers? What beliefs, faith, or ideals do *we* choose to believe in? Which ones guide and nourish our spirit and inner strength? Do we consciously choose to embrace these values and beliefs or are they simply assimilated into our consciousness through family lineage and tradition? When dispiriting times challenge our values, what sustains our faith?

These are the questions that have arisen at critical moments during my odyssey as an educator. For instance, when my implementation of transparent book-keeping procedures and accountability lead others to rally a vindictive ‘witch-hunt’ that cost me a principal’s position, these reflective questions haunted me. When an administrator’s ire motivated her to remove me from a prestigious position in a middle school gifted program (that I helped create), these questions taunted me. Nevertheless, I discovered that these are the questions that define who I am as a person – and as a teacher. Like the Biblical Job whom Wiesel refers to, it was the shadow-lands scattered along the path of life that forced me to consciously choose and to embrace the values and beliefs that lived at the foundation of my spirit.

The ‘night’ times in my life and my career have taught me that while monsters such as greed, prejudice, and petty anger are temporal, my values including compassion and integrity are innermost and eternal. As a teacher, a nightmare landscape of disrespect, humiliation, self-doubt, and anger has sometimes become my reality. What defined me as a teacher and a person is whether I would be true to the compassion, humility, and sense of duty that brought me to teaching in the first place.

Because of the extreme conditions imposed by the Nazi regime, Wiesel’s spiritual life (“To the very last moment, a germ of hope stayed alive in our hearts” p. 13) would

succumb to hopelessness at the hands of his enemies (“A dark flame had entered my soul and devoured it” p. 34) as his world became a wasteland of death and misery. The degree and extent of the unexplainable violence and unprovoked hatred of the Holocaust did not just challenge Wiesel’s faith, it trampled it:

“What are you, my God,” I thought angrily, “compared to this afflicted crowd, proclaiming to You their faith, their anger, their revolt? What does Your greatness mean, Lord of the universe, in the face of all this weakness, this decomposition, and this decay? Why do you still trouble their sick minds, their crippled bodies?”  
(p. 63)

As Wiesel’s memoir takes us deeper into the night-shadows of evil, more critical questions emerge: when evil times prosper under a metaphoric shadow of greed, prejudice or inequality, how firmly do we still cling to our belief systems? When our good intentions and altruistic goals are thwarted by injustice, elitism, or pettiness, how firmly will we adhere to our values and faith that seem to have become meaningless and ineffectual? How will we adjust and adapt to life trapped within a night of shadow after our belief systems seem to have betrayed us into despair and hopelessness?

Classroom discourse over the years, focused on these and related queries, has elicited a variety of responses. One student asserted that because he believed in the church as he was always taught, nothing would happen to him that God didn’t want to happen. This sparked a deluge of thoughts and responses including: one student who remarked that she believed one’s fate was something created and not imposed upon by supernatural forces; another student who offered information about his uncle who was fatally injured in the

war in Iraq; and yet another student who shared the story of her mother who recently died from illness.

What guides my facilitation of this and similar discussions? I am convinced that if I were guided by temporal values of greed, fame, or prejudice, the discussion would have erupted in shouting, tears, and a deluge of complaining calls from agitated parents. Instead, I have come to believe that by staying true to my innermost values of compassion, humility, and service, the discussions were supportive instead of inflammatory, empathetic instead of judgmental.

Wiesel's 'night,' on the other hand, leads him to a much different epiphany. As he endured physical and mental torture at the hands of evil personified, a Pandora's box of suffering is opened, releasing a league of unexplainable and unjustifiable monsters including pain, sorrow, betrayal, humiliation, and death. In this existential and surreal nightmare turned reality, these beasts supply the nails of doubt, anger, hopelessness, and surrender that secure his spiritual crucifixion:

Why, but why should I bless him? In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had had thousands of children burned in His pits? Because He kept six crematories working night and day, on Sundays and feast days? Because in His great might He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death? How could I say to Him: "Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praised be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on Thine altar? (p. 64)

Of all the Wiesel passages, this is the one that elicits the strongest and most diverse emotive student reactions. It is not uncommon for responses to range from shock at his lack of faith to defense of his retaliation; from horror at his blasphemous declaration to a moral support of his outburst; and from sympathy for his plight to quiet insistence that despite what we cannot understand, ‘God’s will be done.’ Students often begin to try to view Wiesel’s situation through the lenses of their own religious or spiritual upbringing. Because the student population I work with is predominantly of a Christian background, the discourse often turns toward issues of personal faith and belief.

What beliefs, entities, or values are we willing to sacrifice our lives for? Is it family, friends, country, wealth, or religion? What (if anything) do we believe in so strongly that its value outweighs our own lives? Using Hopkins’ (1954) terminology, I discovered that when classroom discussion evolves to this level of discourse, it is as if one’s “outer sheaf” is removed and his or her “inner core or real, true, genuine, and intimate self” is open for exploration. (p. 320) This is the sort of teaching environment that I believe begins to bring to life the intrinsically charged environment Hopkins wrote about:

The widest perception of the world of reality and the highest operating level of thinking of which the individual is capable at that moment are the basis of the spiritual quality of moral values or behavior. While every individual creates that quality for himself, he cannot achieve these highest levels alone. He must grow up in an environment that helps him reach out and up in himself and in his world... each individual must criticize and appraise his specific behaviors to integrate them into a few generalized values which are more dependable in revising upward his subsequent actions. Thus, he becomes a self who is flexibly secure, intelligently



creative, and spiritually moral in all of his value judgments. (p. 318)

The best questions we can ask are the ones without answers. The most relevant answers are not found in our teacher manuals, but inside of our *selves*. While a teacher facilitates a lesson, what one learns or takes from that lesson is of a highly personal and subjective nature. Whereas an external journey is fueled by facts and physical evidence, an inner one is guided by thoughts and ideas.

I confess that leaving behind the ‘security’ of prescriptive (and scripted) lessons and stepping away from the ‘safety’ of objective ‘test-prep’ learning questions can be as frightening as navigating between a Scylla and a Charybdis. Nevertheless, I am reminded of George Bernard Shaw’s assertion in his preface to *Misalliance* (1914) that authentic learning cannot take place when students are protected “against shocks to their opinions and convictions, moral, political, or religious [because] it is from the conflict of opinion that we win knowledge and wisdom” (p. 125). Whenever my students and I embark on a profoundly personal discourse that challenges our innermost beliefs and values, I recall Shaw’s (1914) words:

The abler a schoolmaster is, the more dangerous he is to his pupils unless they have the fullest opportunity of hearing another equally able person do his utmost to shake his authority and convict him of error. (p. 125)

In this way, Wiesel’s text is less a tool for instruction than it is a springboard for musing, contemplation, and introspection. This is profoundly demonstrated as Wiesel described his nightmarish experiences being forced to watch the executions of innocent victims. Simultaneously, he depicts the metaphoric crucifixion of his own moral, political, and religious convictions. As he witnessed the public executions of many

prisoners at Auschwitz, including young children, his own idealistic spirit was crucified as well:

Three victims in chains – and one of them, the little servant, the sad-eyed angel....

To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The galleys threw its shadow over him...

“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting

“Bare your head!” yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

“Cover your heads!”

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive....

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

“Where is God now?”

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

“Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows....”

That night the soup tasted of corpses. (pp. 61-62)

Each time I revisit this passage, whether with a group of students or on my own, I can't help but to envision it through the lens of my own Roman Catholic spiritual upbringing. Although facts, figures, and statistics inform my mind, the images Wiesel uses (the public execution of three prisoners, one of whom is described as a "sad-eyed angel"; the sun setting beneath the galleys; spectators asking "Where is God?"; the surreal struggle between life and death; the notion that God Himself "is hanging there on the gallows"; and the reference to the victim's flesh and blood used as sustenance for others) stir my heart and spirit.

In this way, I am transported into Wiesel's memoir. His words push me to consider the fragility of my own moral, political, and religious convictions in an outer world that too often honors pride over humility, wealth over integrity, and personal gain over common welfare. Which set of values defines my work as a public school teacher? On a continuum marked by nurturing an unexamined patriotism and nationalistic pride at one end and modeling the humility to objectively view multiple points and perspectives, where does our work as teachers lie? At what point does an intrinsic commitment to maintaining personal integrity in our instruction sometimes conflict with the external goals of the school district, school board, or local administrators?

What recourse do we have when the line between professional (external) goals and personal (internal) values is crossed? When we feel as though our ethics or integrity has been compromised, the psychological and spiritual suffering hurts. In extreme scenarios, it can become so intense that it can break one's spirit.

William Faulkner's (1932) protagonist Joe Christmas personifies this degree of intrinsic suffering. Christmas is forced to choose between life (by denying his ancestry, accepting a false lineage, and accepting a depraved status) or death (a public execution on false charges if he insists on claiming his true parentage and bloodline):

Sunday evening prayer meeting... Yet even the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music. It was as though they who accepted it and raised voices to praise it within praise, having been made what they were by that which the music praised and symbolized, they took revenge upon that which made them so by means of the praise itself. (p. 367)

As Joe Christmas agonizes over his dilemma, he listens to the sacred music of the Protestant church - the same church whose congregation is demanding his decision to live a lie or to die in disgrace. Beneath the pious veil of the music, Christmas hears the undertones of death, revenge, and self-loathing. If he remains true to his authentic inner self and to his personal integrity, he will be publicly humiliated and his body will be crucified. If he renounces his true identity and sells out his integrity, his physical body will be spared, but his spirit, his soul, will be crucified instead:

Listening, he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his envied blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the

violence identical and apparently inescapable *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?* he thinks.

(pp. 367-8)

Christmas was an outsider within his own church just as Wiesel was an outsider within his German homeland. The church elders secure their power and superiority by denying the rights of others, just as the Nazi government fortified its political strength by denying the rights (and humanity) of the Jewish people. The congregation veils its thirst for blood and violence under its anthems, symbols, and rituals. Wiesel's German oppressors do the same under their own nationalistic gestures, rituals and speeches:

It seems to him that he can hear within the music the declaration and dedication of that which they know that on the morrow they will have to do. It seems to him that the past week has rushed like a torrent and that the week to come, which will begin tomorrow, is the abyss, and that now on the brink of cataract the stream has raised a single blended and sonorous and austere cry, not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. 'And they will do it gladly,' he says, in the dark window. (p. 367-8)

Christmas ponders living the shell of an outer life wherein his inner self and authentic identity are sacrificed into an abyss; or renouncing his physical existence to an abyss of death. A mass grouping of people is forcing this decision upon his individual self. Jung (2006) warned that when individual thinking is replaced by blind submission to the will of a larger group, "propaganda and advertising dupe the citizen with political jobbery and

compromises, and the lie reaches proportions never known before in the history of the world” (p. 76).

The crucifixion of the sad-eyed child angel that Wiesel witnessed demonstrates how effective this sort of propaganda and advertising can be in usurping an individual’s mind and conscience. Consequently, as Christmas observed, whether it’s stoning a man because he is black, hanging a child because he is Jewish, or any number of other crimes of humanity against humanity, “they will do it gladly, gladly. That’s why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible” (p. 368).

As teachers, to what extent are we unknowingly instructing students with political or social propaganda? To what extent do we honor the voice, opinion, and respect due to the *individuals* on each side of the issues? To what degree do we adhere too closely to externally imposed municipal/political/social mandates to the detriment of our inner values, beliefs, and conscience? Carl Jung (2006) warned that being ignorant of one’s role (however small) in larger societal ills or even denying society’s capacity for evil, only further weakens our capacity to identify evil and to combat it:

But even if the smallest and most personal stirrings of the individual soul – so insignificant in themselves – remain as unconscious and unrecognized as they have hitherto, they will go on accumulating and produce mass groupings and mass movements which cannot be subjected to reasonable control or manipulated to a good end. (p. 99)

As the crucifixion of his inner spirit continues, Wiesel exclaimed that “in the depths of my heart, I felt a great void” (p. 66). The ‘most personal stirrings of the individual soul’ were being starved and beaten out of him. What sort of educated people were able

to engineer and execute this genocide of the soul? They must have had some extraordinarily talented teachers. After all, what kind of an education could have so completely buried the inner conscience of so many individuals beneath a mandate for worldly wealth and power? What caliber of education could have replaced the ‘personal stirrings of the individual soul’ with an indestructible allegiance to the external voice of the outer world?

These reflections remind me that like any useful tool or skill, there is a great responsibility inherent in the practice of teaching. Teaching and learning have the capability to liberate one’s spirit or to crucify it. As Wiesel’s spirit drowns in despair, he explains “I’ve got more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He’s the only one who’s kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people” (p. 77). This reminds me of the prophetic words James Joyce (1991) wrote in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “One thing alone is needful, the salvation of one’s soul. What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffers the loss of his immortal soul” (p. 104)?

### **C. Descent into Underworld**

Nevertheless, Joseph Campbell (1991) insisted that a metaphoric inner death is imperative if we are to ascend from the emotional immaturity of childhood to the self-actualization of adulthood:

To evolve out of this position of psychological immaturity to the courage of self-responsibility and assurance requires a death and a resurrection...leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition. (p. 152)

Jung (2006) argued, however, that if a person is unable to differentiate the shadows of

night from the illumination of the light itself, the shadows will take the place of the light; a person will then come to mistake the shadows as the source of illumination (p. 101). A resurrection into the light of truth and reality will only take place if a person is able to navigate his or her own way through this dark labyrinth. The only authentic and reliable compass is authentic self-knowledge which can be acquired only by exploring one's own soul.

This theme of death and resurrection is developed in Joyce's (1991) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as hero Stephen Dedalus travels through the surreal underworld of his own soul in order to awaken his inner potential to become a self-actualized hero. Three of the challenges Dedalus faced in the underworld parallel Wiesel's ordeal in *Night*. The first of these is the de-humanizing monster of human deconstruction:

In hell all laws are overturned: there is no thought of family or country, of ties or relationship. The damned howl and scream at one another, their torture and rage intensified by the presence of beings tortured and raging like themselves. All sense of humanity is forgotten. (p. 116)

When Elie Wiesel first entered the concentration camp prisoner barracks, he referred to it as an "antechamber of Hell" filled with "so many crazed men, so many cries, so much bestial brutality." (p. 32) As his connections to family, friends, religion, government, and society were replaced with torture, hunger, and humiliation, his functioning as a sensitive and empathic human being was also interrupted:

We were incapable of thinking of anything at all. Our senses were blunted; everything was blurred as in a fog. It was no longer possible to grasp anything. The instincts of self-preservation, of self-defense, of pride, had all



deserted us. In one ultimate moment of lucidity it seemed to me that we were damned souls wandering in the half-world, souls condemned to wander through space till the generations of man came to an end, seeking their redemption, seeking oblivion – without hope of finding it. (pp. 33-34)

As surreal hellish experiences replaced Wiesel's external reality, traces of his humanity itself became lost. He recalls men fighting for a crumb of bread:

Men threw themselves on top of each other, stamping on each other, tearing at each other, biting each other. Wild beasts of prey, with animal hatred in their eyes; an extraordinary vitality had seized them, sharpening their teeth and nails (p. 95); digging through piles of corpses to breathe:

...I was crushed myself beneath the weight of other bodies. I could hardly breathe. scratched. I battled for a mouthful of air. I tore at decaying flesh which did not respond (p. 89);

and forsaking family for food:

I spent my days in a state of total idleness. And I had but one desire – to eat. I no longer thought of my father or of my mother. (p. 107)

When stripped of everything that formerly defined his external reality, what was Wiesel left with? "In one way or another," William Barrett (1987) writes, "we are all nailed to the cross of ourselves" (p. 125). Metaphorically, the apocalyptic images Wiesel described represent a deconstruction of the external world and self. When physical substance is gone, what essence remains? What spirit survives after flesh, family, and other worldly connections are taken away? In his analysis of human physiology versus

human consciousness, Eliezer Sternberg (2010) argued that while the physical world has finite importance, it is the infinite inner world of our thoughts that defines our humanity:

Our understanding comes from a wealth of knowledge about human history, about the interactions of people in the world. It comes from our grasp of concepts like death, suffering, weeping, struggle, growth, birth, youth, joy, hope, striving, and success – things we have learned about through experience. Our experience is what teaches us about the sanctity of human life. Not a list of facts or formulas. (p. 160)

Can a textbook teach us more about the human condition than one's personal experiences can? Can scientific explanations better inform us about the nature of suffering or despair? Can facts or statistics trigger a greater understanding of what hope, despair, life, and death mean? Wiesel's 'hero journey' through the dark night of humanity's capacity for evil has schooled him on the depths of courage and desperation, compassion and hatred, and despair and hope. When my students and I read and reflect on Wiesel's experiences, we are pilgrims journeying through the storms, travails, and triumphs of his inner spirit.

Is our instruction useful for students as they prepare to embark on their own hero's journey? Does the scope and depth of our teaching embrace issues of humanity beyond facts, figures, and formulae? And where am I on my own hero's journey? To what extent have our own inner values and intrinsic spirit been put to the hero's test? Do we have the necessary understanding and sensitivity to engage our students in what Clifford Mayes (2005) calls "the miracle of soulful teaching" (p. 59)?

Through the mirror of the subject matter, the teacher helps students see into their own hearts and thus find freedom from the psychological, social, and spiritual

forces that have heretofore enslaved them. (p. 59)

The second monster both Dedalus and Wiesel encounter is the threatening ‘lying senses’:

The faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony. He felt the deathchill touch the extremities and creep onward towards the heart, the film of death veiling the eyes, the bright centres of the brain extinguished one by one like lamps, the last sweat oozing upon the skin, the powerlessness of the dying limbs, the speech thickening and wandering and failing, the heart throbbing faintly and more faintly, all but vanished, the breath, the poor timid breath, the poor helpless human spirit, sobbing and sighing, gurgling and rattling in the throat. No help! No help! (Joyce, p. 106)

As Joyce describes the powerlessness of Stephen Dedalus’ eyes, I am reminded of Wiesel’s description of eyes that “would become blank, nothing but two open wounds, two pits of terror” (p. 72). As Joyce describes the environment as a “film of death” I recall Wiesel’s vision that reality had become no more than a “masquerade” of reality (p. 79). Joyce’s use of a metaphoric veil camouflaging reality brings to my mind Wiesel’s use of snow as a blanket over reality as: “it snowed relentlessly” over the prison block (p. 80); “the snow never ceased” falling on the tree-lined road to the work camp (p. 80); the thick “snow was like a carpet” upon which he slept (p. 84); and snow fell thickly and formed a blanket over the prisoners, making the living and the dead indistinguishable (p. 92).

What if our work with students were informed exclusively on information and data

received from our physical senses? What if the data were as environmentally controlled, let's say, as snowfall? Would the external information tell the entire truth? What inner realities would be missing? Without the external data being filtered through the human lenses of empathy, compassion, understanding, experience, and sympathy, the inner reality might never be ascertained.

When working with students, do we see more than what our eyes are showing us? During my tenure as an Assistant Principal, I was committed to upholding high standards for student behavior. Although I was serving as an administrator, I wanted the teachers to understand that I supported their efforts in the classroom. Having recently worked as a classroom teacher myself, I was sensitive to the frustrations teachers experienced with disruptive students. When viewed through external lenses, one particular third grade boy caused a great deal of teacher stress almost daily. His misbehaviors were a litany of teacher frustration: not staying in his assigned seat, speaking out of turn, never completing his homework, arriving late for class, complaining of ailments that prevented him from assigned tasks, and distracting others from their work. Needless to say, this student spent a great deal of time in my office.

One morning arriving at the school late after returning from a meeting, I stopped by the local convenience store for a cup of hot coffee. Just outside entranceway was a small figure in a dirty, oversized coat. Although a vintage Chicago White Sox hat was covering most of his face, I suspected that I knew the person underneath who was soliciting for money from store patrons. When I called him by name, the gig was up as he responded without thinking: "Good morning, Mr. Podsiadlik!"

Once we returned to school, the usual interrogation began: why are you disguising yourself as a vagrant? Why are you asking strangers for money? Although you are not eligible for a free or reduced breakfast or lunch at school, why didn't you ask your mom for the money you needed to purchase them at school? Although his repeated response was simply "I don't know," having seen him resort to this display of vagrancy and solicitation helped me to begin to 'see' him in a different way. Perhaps there was more going on than mere classroom infractions.

Six weeks later when school dismissed for December break, I returned to my office once the school grounds were clear. The boy who always seemed to want to be anywhere except in school was now hunched in the corner of my office sound asleep using his book bag for a pillow. We talked and got to know one another better. After an hour, the boy went tearfully home. I realized that there was so much more to this boy than anyone's eyes were seeing.

Similarly, do we hear more than the vibrations our ears are detecting? What stories lie between the words? What fears or aspirations, doubts or desires are simmering beneath the surface? Furthermore, when we speak to our students, what ideas, thoughts, or experiences are *they* hearing? As we stand in our classrooms, on the playground, or in the lunchroom, what images or attitudes, prejudices or fears are *they* seeing?

The third monster Dedalus and Wiesel face is the fire of truth. Although folk wisdom maintains that "the truth can set us free," some truths can be monsters in that they imprison our inner spirit within human bondages of fear, self-doubt, and anger:

The fire of hell gives forth no light. As, at the command of God, the fire of the

Babylonian furnace lost its heat but not its light so, at the command of God, the fire

of Hell, while retaining the intensity of its heat, burns eternally in darkness. It is a neverending storm of darkness, dark flames and dark smoke of burning brimstone, amid which the bodies are heaped one upon another without even a glimpse of air. Of all the plagues with which the land of the Pharaohs was smitten one plague alone, that of darkness, was called horrible. What name, then, shall we give to the darkness of hell which is to last not for three days alone but for eternity? (Joyce, p. 114)

As Wiesel and his neighbors were being transported to Birkenau, the reception center for Auschwitz, all were silent except one Madame Schachter who would scream “Fire! I can see a fire! I can see a fire....Look! Look at it! Fire! A terrible fire! Mercy! Oh, that fire” (p. 22)! After Wiesel and the others could see no light or reflection of any flames, they concluded “she were possessed by an evil spirit which spoke from the depths of her being.” (p. 23) Of course, they had no idea how correct their observation of Madame Schachter was until their train stopped at the camp:

We saw this time that flames were gushing out of a tall chimney into the black sky...We looked at the flames in the darkness. There was an abominable odor floating in the air. Suddenly, our doors opened. Some odd-looking characters, dressed in striped shirts and black trousers leapt into the wagon. They held electric torches and truncheons. They began to strike out to right and left, shouting...in front of us flames. In the air that smell of burning flesh. It must have been about midnight. We had arrived. (p. 25-6)

With her inner eye, Madame Schachter ‘saw’ the truth concerning the evil that human

beings are capable of. Wiesel and the other prisoners could not see this truth for their fear, doubt, and denial. Their idealistic demands blinded them to the reality of the inner world of darkness and night they were about to enter. On a hero's journey, one cannot find his way through the labyrinth of evil and fear unless he or she first ascertains the danger for what it is, however unimaginably it challenges one's faith.

This sort of epiphany is what Jung (2006) called the “unconscious *Zeitgeist*” wherein a person's insight into their own capacity for good and for evil influences others in his environment:

What does lie within our reach, however, is the change in individuals who have, or create, an opportunity to influence others...I do not mean by persuading or preaching – I am thinking, rather, of the well-known fact that anyone who has insight into his own action, and has thus found access to the unconscious, involuntarily exercises an influence on his environment. The deepening and broadening of his consciousness produce the kind of effect which the primitives call “mana.” It is an unintentional influence on the unconscious of others, a sort of unconscious prestige, and its effect lasts only so long as it is not disturbed by conscious intention. (pp. 108-9)

Without such an ‘inner eye’ for insight, how can we as teachers ever hope to guide our students through the episodes of darkness and danger they might encounter? Moreover, how can we navigate our *own* selves through such episodes without an awareness of the “unconscious *Zeitgeist*” that we are operating in or that is imposed upon us?

Wiesel and Dedalus, much like Odysseus and Jean Val Jean, survived their heroic journeys through the metaphysical crucifixion of their ethical immaturity and death of their ego-centric childhoods. They re-emerge with an inner awareness and courage with which to guide others. Campbell (1991) calls this transformation the “grace of the crucifixion” (p. 72):

...if you read that “Jesus ascended to heaven” in terms of its metaphoric connotation, you see that he has gone inward – not into outer space but into inward space, to the place from which all being comes, into the consciousness that is the source of all things, the kingdom of heaven within. The images are outward, but their reflection is inward...The injured one again becomes the savior. It is the suffering that evokes the humanity of the human heart. (pp. 68, 140)

Where in our teaching do we “evoke the humanity of the human heart”? Do we have the requisite grace to see and to nurture this world of inner transformation? To what extent can we see the humanity of our students - and of ourselves - as we carry out our instructional duties? These questions remind me of the wise fox’s message at the conclusion of Antoin de Saint-Exupery’s (1943) *The Little Prince*:

And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.’

‘What is essential is invisible to the eye,’ the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember. (p. 21)

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: What are the external forces that threaten to imprison our inner spirit and nature?

To what extent are we thinking, feeling, and interacting with others according to our



innate subconscious values and beliefs versus according to an externally imposed conception that we have come to regard as our reality?

2: Who are the ‘Moshe Beadles’ of your life to whom you are indebted? What teachers have had the insight and compassion to encourage you to explore, acknowledge, honor, and live by your as yet ‘undiscovered self’? When have you been a ‘Moshe’ to your students?

3: As a teacher, are you asking myself the right questions in terms of the effectiveness of your instruction and the quantity of student learning? Are you asking your students the right questions in terms of state educational core curriculum standards?

4: Describe classroom moments when you found yourself wondering whether the lesson brought you and your students to topics or questions that perhaps should be left alone. How did you deal with such moments? In retrospect, what would you have done differently?

5: As an educator, what evil, either inside of ourselves or projected unto us, has the potential for the kind of prejudice or hate that Wiesel describes (“moments which murdered my God and my soul”)? In the face of such evil, what resources can we rely upon to protect our dreams, our souls, and our desire to live? Would we rely upon our scientific expertise or our instincts?

6: What are the innermost values that guide your instruction?

7: When evil times prosper under a metaphoric shadow of greed, prejudice or inequality, how firmly do we still cling to our belief systems? When our good intentions and altruistic goals are thwarted by injustice, elitism, or pettiness, how firmly will we adhere to our values and faith that seem to have been become meaningless and

ineffectual? How will we adjust and adapt to life trapped within a night of shadow after our belief systems seem to have betrayed us into despair and hopelessness?

8: Which set of values defines you and your work as a public school teacher? For example, on a continuum, where does your instruction fall for example, between nurturing patriotism and pride in our country versus the humility to objectively view multiple points and perspectives? At what point (if any?) does insistence on maintaining integrity in your work compromise external goals for yourself, your students or your school district?

9: As a teacher in a public school, am I unknowingly instructing the students in political or social propaganda without honoring the voice, opinion, and respect due to the *individuals* behind the secular issues? As a person, am I adhering too closely to the externally imposed municipal mandates to the detriment of my inner conscience?

10: What sort of educated people were able to engineer and execute this genocide of the soul? What kind of an education could have buried their inner conscience beneath a mandate for worldly wealth and power? What caliber of education could have replaced the ‘personal stirrings of the individual soul’ with an indestructible allegiance to the external voice of the outer world?

11: Ask yourself and reflect upon the following queries: Is my instruction useful for students as they prepare to embark on their own hero’s journey? Does the scope of my teaching embrace issues of humanity beyond facts, figures, and formulae? And where am I on my own hero’s journey? To what extent have my own inner values, my intrinsic spirit, been put to the hero’s test? Do I have the necessary understanding to engage my students in what Clifford Mayes (2005) calls “soulful teaching”?

12: What if our work with students was informed exclusively on information and data received from our physical senses? Would the external information tell the entire truth? What inner realities would be missing? Without the external data being filtered through the human lenses of empathy, compassion, understanding, experience, and sympathy, the inner reality might never be ascertained.

13: When working with students, do we see more than what our eyes are showing us? Do we hear more than the vibrations our ears are detecting? What stories lie between the words? What fears or aspirations, doubts or desires are simmering beneath the surface?

14: When we speak to our students, what ideas, thoughts, or experiences are *they* hearing? As we stand in our classrooms, on the playground, or in the lunchroom, what images or attitudes, prejudices or fears are *they* seeing?

15: Consider what Jung calls the “unconscious *Zeitgeist*” wherein a person’s insight their own capacity for good and for evil influences others in his environment. Without such insight, how can we as teachers ever hope to guide our students through episodes of darkness and danger? More than that, how can we navigate our own selves through such episodes without an awareness of the “unconscious *Zeitgeist*” that we are operating in or that is imposed upon us?

16: Where in our teaching do we “evoke the humanity of the human heart”? Do we have the requisite grace to see and to nurture this world of inner transformation?

## **XII. DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AS METAPHOR**

*The Souls of Black Folk* (W.E.B. Du Bois)

When my middle school students and I discuss Antoine de Saint-Exupery's (1943) observation that it is "only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye," the topics of friendship and personal identity invariably arise. Through discussion and observation I have noticed that students often perceive their friends as possessing the practically exclusive capacity to reveal to them their true identities. If this means that the construction of authentic identities is predicated solely upon external relationships with peers, what becomes of one's inner values and intrinsic life? My own thoughts during these discussions turn to what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) calls the development of a double-consciousness: "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 5).

Through journal entries, I get a better understanding of what my students are thinking and feeling. Generally, their responses fall into two categories. First is the collection of students, usually with a wide network of friends, who reinforce each others' positive traits (i.e. athleticism, good looks, outgoing personality). Second are the students who express a dissatisfaction about themselves based on what their peers have observed (i.e. undesirable physical attributes, social deficiencies). To me, this exemplifies what Du Bois (1903) called a psychological 'two-ness' that cannot yield a true self-consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness...two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals. (p. 5)

If, on the one hand, the identity projected onto someone is based solely on positive

traits that are praised by one's friends, one's self-consciousness is only half complete. As Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* (1960) demonstrated, human beings are, by nature, characterized by their capacity for good as well as for evil. A self-actualized person needs to identify that which defines his inner being, whether it is immediately seen or unseen by his peers; he or she needs to come to terms with his own capacity for good and ill.

On the other hand, if the identity projected onto someone is based solely on the negative traits perceived and vocalized by peers, one's self-consciousness is again only half complete. As evidenced through Wiesel's memoir, surrendering one's true identity to the prejudices and bullying of the outer world, can dangerously stifle one's authentic self. This 'double-consciousness', the conflict between what the outside world labels us versus the authenticity of our inner being, is what fuels the struggle between being accepted and successful by the standards of the outer world versus compromising or surrendering one's true intrinsic reality.

Where does our work as educators lie in this field between external achievement and inner authenticity? Do our efforts as teachers nurture both sides of this 'double-consciousness' for our students? Du Bois' fear was that too many people lived beneath an imposed external veil (p. 170) that denied their true integrity; rendered invisible their self- of self-respect (p. 25); and silenced the voice of their inner self (p. 161). He wrote that this veil produced a 'double-consciousness' that restricted one's inner and outer worlds, leaving "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (p. 5).

Using Du Bois' imagery, I wonder: to what extent are we – and our students learning together beneath a societal 'veil'? To what degree are we teaching from above

a ‘veil’ to students trapped beneath it? To what extent is our instruction mired in a ‘double-consciousness’ that inhibits the integrity of our students and/or ourselves? How much of our personal integrity or our intrinsic humanity is being nurtured; how much stifled? Reading Du Bois’ text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), on my own as well as with my students, inspires me to examine these critical intrinsic issues.

#### **A. Identity and integrity discovered**

Our intrinsic identities, unfortunately, are often the ones left undiscovered. Du Bois wrote that his personal story is “the story of the human heart...the tale of a black boy who many long years ago began to struggle that he might know the world and know himself” (p. 176). Calhoun (1995) classified those individuals who, like Du Bois, are continuously searching to better understand and to integrate their outer and inner worlds as ‘persons of integrity’. She wrote that living with integrity means consistently trying “to discover what in life is worth doing” based on a balanced understanding of one’s inner and outer desires and goals, needs and values:

Persons of integrity treat their own endorsements as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators. Absent a special sort of story, lying about one’s views, concealing them, recanting them under pressure, selling them out for rewards or to avoid penalties, and pandering to what one regards as the bad views of others, all indicate a failure to regard one’s own judgment as one that should matter to others. (p. 258)

How much of our work as educators is rooted in this explanation of integrity? To what extent is our work with students guided by such integrity? How much of this sort of integrity are we attempting to nurture within our students? More importantly, how can

this sort of integrity be nurtured? Is it even possible? Du Bois wrote that for this level of self-awareness, it is critical for a human being to journey between the inner and outer folds of his or her double-consciousness:

Three temptations he met on those dark dunes that lay gray and dismal before the wonder-eyes of the child: the temptation of Hate, that stood out against the red dawn; the temptation of Despair, that darkened noonday; and the temptation of Doubt, that ever steals along twilight. Above all, you must hear of the vales he crossed, - the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. (p. 176)

To me, this intrinsic voyage is akin to Joseph Campbell's (1991) archetypal hero journey, Odysseus' *Odyssey*, and Wiesel's (1960) trek through *Night*: In each, a human being faces his deepest challenges and fears; and endures a spiritual crucifixion at the hands of his personal doubts and internal monsters. If successful, a metaphorical resurrection transpires in which he or she returns 'home' no longer a child, but a self-reliant individual with a more mature, wise, and adult perspective.

Hate, Despair, Doubt, Humiliation, and Death are the intrinsic monsters lying undiscovered within ourselves; unless we acknowledge, understand, and confront them, we cannot begin to tap into or live by the integrity that lies at the root of our inner selves. What kinds of teachers are we if we are ruled by Hate and Despair? What is the value of teaching and learning when they are veiled with Doubt and Death? If we teach by humiliation, what are the students learning? Du Bois (1903) warned: You might have noted only the physical dying, the shattered frame and hacking cough; but in that soul lay deeper death than that (p. 183).

These words tug at my heart; I can recall numerous students who looked fine outwardly, but within whom their “souls lay deeper death than that.” Consider the introverted, science-obsessed boy who was playing baseball with his father when his father was suddenly struck by lightning and killed? As an aspiring teacher with integrity, had I the wisdom or empathy to ascertain the battles of despair or death that may have been raging within this student? Had I the maturity, perspective, and sensitivity to pursue not only the curriculum that I was expected to teach, but to teach what was worthwhile for that time and place?

Schubert (2009b) called this the *what’s worthwhile question* that encompasses “what is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, sharing, contributing, and wondering” (p. 1). These questions have influenced my teaching tremendously. Instead of prescribing how long a research assignment needs to be, I now suggest that an assigned report needs to be as long as necessary to say all that one feels is worth saying, worth knowing, and worth sharing. What should be the thesis for a writing prompt? That now depends upon what the author has to say and what the author feels is important to tell his or her reader. Should the final assignment be a written report, a diorama, or a graphic novel? That depends on how you can best express yourself, how you feel you can best communicate your message, and how you feel it will be best received by your audience.

I have witnessed firsthand how this perspective empowers students to assume greater ownership in their education. It also frees them from the chains of doubt and despair triggered by more prescriptive directions and expectations. Recently, for instance, when students were assigned to explore themes of naturalism and transcendentalism in



19<sup>th</sup> Century American literature, one student chose to write original lyrics and guitar music to express his emotive understanding of and reaction to Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne. As I listened to the five minute live performance of his original work, I could see that my student had selected a mode of communication that best expressed his message in a meaningful way. Furthermore, his despair at not having more time to spend with his self-professed ‘true passion’ (his music) was replaced by using his natural talent to communicate his ideas through music.

In this way, Du Bois (1903) reminds me that the search for one’s undiscovered self also demands a commitment to servicing others:

So the man groped for light; all this was not Life, - it was the world-wandering of a soul in search of itself, the striving of one who vainly sought his place in the world, ever haunted by the shadow of a death that is more than death, - the passing of a soul that has missed its duty...the hard rasping question kept gnawing within him, “What in God’s name am I on earth for?” (pp. 183-4)

Consider the student who arrived at school each day severely emaciated. Beyond my bureaucratic referrals to the counseling team (servicing the entire school two days a week), was I a teacher of integrity with the compassion to see the monsters of Despair and Humiliation who must have been lurking beneath the tell-tale surface symptoms of malnutrition and neglect? Had my own hero’s journey empowered me with the tools necessary to assist another human being through their own personal night?

As I reflect upon these and similar interactions with students, I still wonder whether or not I served them well. Surely I ‘groped for light,’ some illumination of wisdom; but

was my personal discourse with these students effective in helping them fight their own battles against Hate and Despair? Had I ‘missed my duty’ in educating my students about life itself? If so, I share Du Bois’ (1903) mantra-like cry: What, in God’s name, am I on earth for? (p. 184)

Where does our work as educators lie in this field between external achievement and inner authenticity? Although we educators set external goals and standards for measurable growth in math and reading, what are our internal goals and standards? Whereas statisticians can retrieve data that measures student growth in meeting external targets, what data attempts to measure intrinsic student growth? If we attend only to extrinsic reality, the inner life suffocates beneath what Du Bois calls an “the shadow of the veil” (p. 170). If students are evaluated solely by external measurements, Du Bois (1903) vision “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 5), is fulfilled.

Du Bois (1903) wrote that once a person faces the demons of his inner self, he can return to the outer world strengthened by that wisdom:

Out of the temptation of Hate, and burned by the fire of Despair, triumphant over Doubt, and steeled by sacrifice against Humiliation, he turned at last home across the waters. Humble and strong, gentle and determined he bent to all the gibes and prejudices, to all hatred and discrimination, with that rare courtesy which is the armor of souls. He fought among his own, the low, the grasping, and the wicked, with that unbending righteousness which is the sword of the just. He never faltered, he seldom complained; he simply worked, inspiring the young, rebuking the old, helping the weak, guiding the strong. (p. 183)

Can the same be said of us educators? In what ways do our efforts in the classroom ‘inspire the young, help the weak, and guide the strong’? Are we humble enough to accept our place in the bureaucratic chain of command (that lies outside the veil) while at the same time strong enough to engage our students in meaningful teaching and learning (within the veil)? Can we sustain a double consciousness that is gentle enough to show sensitivity and empathy to the individuality of our students while simultaneously is determined enough to fight against the systemic monsters of Humiliation, Prejudice, and Hatred?

What constitutes the ‘armor of our souls’? Du Bois suggested that courtesy and righteousness are the best suits of armor our souls can have in terms of being protected from the slings and arrows of discrimination and inequality. As teachers, what do we really stand for? To what extent are our classroom communities insulated against the barbs of injustice, hate, and despair? Cheshire Calhoun (1995) asserts that a person of integrity must stand for something that not only sustains oneself, but respects and nurtures others in their community (p. 259).

By contrast, however, Du Bois acknowledges that human beings have the capability to construct outer shells of cruelty and greed as shells around their souls as protective devices. He recognizes humanity’s capacity for evil as well as for good. While lamenting the death of his infant first-born son, he ponders the mercy of an early earthly death over the prospect of a lifetime of mockery, lies, and degradation:

Blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the Veil, - and my soul  
whispers ever to me, saying, “Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free.”  
No bitter meanness now shall sicken his baby heart till it die a living death, no

taunt shall madden his happy boyhood. Fool that I was to think or wish that this little soul should grow choked and deformed within the Veil. (pp. 173- 4)

Du Bois grieved over those who are caught within man-made veils of cruelty and prejudice that bind one's liberty, taunt one's values, choke one's spirit, and deform one's self-identity. He considered it better to sacrifice one's outer life than to live with a suffocated and dying inner life. This excerpt usually elicits candid responses and reflections from my middle school students that focus on issues of bullying. The extent and the depth of the discourse inspired by Du Bois always amazes me.

A thirty-minute session from this past spring dramatizes the extent to which Du Bois' 19<sup>th</sup> Century words reach the hearts of my 21<sup>st</sup> Century students: One girl described the bullying she endured at her previous school because she was Hispanic in a largely African-American community; a boy shared his anger over the daily humiliation he faces at the receiving end of the name-calling taunts 'gay' and 'faggot'; another boy then talked about his older brother who dropped out of high school because of incessant intimidation and threats from rival gang members; a shy girl, who rarely speaks during classroom discussions, shared the story of her cousin who recently took his own life after being ostracized by his peers because of his perceived sexual orientation; and near the end of this intense session a girl removed her jeweled wristbands to show us the cuts she recently made into her skin to help her forget the pain she felt over being harassed by peers.

As these students shared their stories and emotions, I could feel the venom of hate, despair, humiliation, and anger dripping from their words. I realized while they spoke that the monsters Du Bois warned of were still alive and causing mischief. The "sense of

always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 5) that Du Bois described was still polluting the self-identities of human beings. Within the classroom that day, Du Bois' images of 'dying a living death', of 'taunts that madden one's childhood', and of 'meanness that sickens the heart' all came to life. As I listened to the candid student discourse, I wondered what "soul armor" they had to combat these attacks.

Would the anger, hate, and bias that were being described by my students eventually encase their souls as some sort of a defense mechanism? Would then the culture of death, humiliation, and hate be perpetuated? Would the 'hated' become the 'haters'? I wonder if these sorts of thoughts are similar to those that had been tormenting Du Bois as he grieved for his son:

For what, forsooth, shall a Negro want with pride amid the studied humiliations of fifty million fellows? Well sped, my boy, before the world had dubbed your ambition insolence, had held your ideals unattainable, and taught you to cringe and bow. Better far this nameless void that stops my life than a sea of sorrow for you.

(p. 174)

For my students, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) provides a powerful forum for self-reflection and peer discussion. For me as a human being the text similarly elicits heartfelt introspection. Du Bois' words transport me to high school Latin where a studious seventeen year old desperately struggles to translate and to understand Virgil's *Aeneid*. I was intrigued and remain enthralled with the notion of Aeneas as a man torn between the heroic Roman virtues of pietas and furor, between integrity and war. Over the course of his hero's journey, Aeneas must choose between his desire for earthly lust and his

responsibility to his family and his descendents; between his fury to fight until the enemy is completely annihilated or to retreat in order to fulfill his national duty to establish a new nation. Although he struggles between these conflicting desires, Aeneas chooses self-restraint over violent passion and duty over personal glory.

Whereas Odysseus' trip to the underworld is fueled by anger and revenge and Wiesel's voyage into night is laden with despair, Aeneas' underworld trek is illuminated by the eternal wisdom and compassion fervent in the landscape of souls:

First, then, the sky and lands and sheets of water,  
 The bright moon's globe, the Titan sun and stars,  
 Are fed within by Spirit, and a Mind  
 Infused through all the members of the world  
 Makes one great living body of the mass.  
 From Spirit come the races of man and beast,  
 The lie of birds, odd creatures the deep sea  
 Contains beneath her sparkling surfaces,  
 And fiery energy from a heavenly source  
 Belongs to the generative seeds of these,  
 So far as they are not poisoned or clogged  
 By mortal bodies, their free essence dimmed  
 By earthiness and deathliness of flesh.  
 This makes them fear and crave, rejoice and grieve.  
 Imprisoned in the darkness of the body  
 They cannot clearly see heaven's air. (Book VI, lines 973 – 988, p. 185)

Whereas Du Bois angrily decried being ‘imprisoned in the darkness of the body’, Aeneas affirmed a ‘fiery energy from a heavenly source’; and while Du Bois despaired as his ‘free essence dimmed’, Aeneas basked within ‘bright moon’s globe, the Titan sun and stars...fed within by spirit and a mind’. Du Bois remained trapped in a veil of anger, spite, and despair as monsters continued to ‘poison and clog’ his compassion and humanity. Aeneas’ journey, on the other hand, offers a vision of what lies ‘beneath...sparkling surfaces’ to ‘see heaven’s air’ that is ‘infused through all members of the world’ and ‘makes one great living body of the mass.’

Aeneas’ quest was to forge a life that defies the prison of anger and fear. His duty-bound mission was to lead others on a metaphysical path toward intrinsic spiritual illumination. His commitment to these noble endeavors embodies the Roman ideal of pietas. His sense of responsibility to himself, his family, and all people he comes into contact with infused his words and actions with integrity. Since the day I first met Aeneas, these qualities of pietas and integrity have been my ‘holy grail.’ In many ways, Aeneas’ quest is my quest; his pietas and integrity are my elixir of life. This is why I am a teacher. This is why I believe that my teacher journey, much like Aeneas’, is a sacred one.

## **B. Self-respect realized**

*The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) speaks to me as a teacher on a deeply personal level. Consider how W.E.B. Du Bois described his moment of epiphany regarding the mission that would become his life’s work:

Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power, - a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to

guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of “book-learning”; the curiosity...the longing to know...the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-Respect. (pp. 9-10)

Like Du Bois, my thoughts and reflections about integrity, pietas, and the unlimited potential of our inner lives have affected not only my perception of mind and soul, but of school and work as well. To ‘guide the unguided’ and to enable ‘book-learning’ to ignite the ‘pillar of fire’ by which my students (and I) could achieve ‘self-consciousness, self-realization, and self-respect’ are ideals that resonate deep within me. They have become my unspoken mission. For me, this moment of epiphany echoes Du Bois’:

In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, - darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. (p. 9)

Du Bois’ urgency for maintaining a self-identity with integrity was strengthened with the more personal vision of living one’s life with a genuine sense of self-respect. To awaken one’s sense of self-worth, Du Bois heralded the capability of the average person to learn, to reason independently, and to think critically (p. 50). He insisted that the importance of education was not simply to acquire manual skills as job training, but to re-connect with one’s humanity (p. 90), to nurture one’s soul (p. 183), and to live within a spirit of self-worth (p. 146):

The function of the university is not simply to teach breadwinning, or to furnish



teachers for the public schools, or to be a center of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. (p. 70)

Similarly, J. Dewey and E. Dewey (1915) decry the state of laborers who are “following blindly the intelligence of others instead of his own knowledge of materials, tools, and processes” (p. 139). Like Du Bois, J. Dewey and E. Dewey assert that education’s purpose is respectfully bridge the gap between the one’s inner life and the outer life surrounding him:

To give the child an education which will make him a better, happier, more efficient human being, by showing him what his capabilities are and how he can exercise them, both materially and socially, in the world he finds about him. (p. 36)

For me, this gap between what Du Bois called “that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life” (p. 70) can be traversed with the timeless ideas passed from generation to generation by thinkers and writers including Shakespeare, Homer, Faulkner, and Hugo. These texts continue to reveal to me insights about humanity that are at once intimate and universal. In my heart I understand that it was my high school Latin teacher, Dr. David Plesic, who raised my standard of knowing from basic skills to dawning self-consciousness; from rudimentary lessons to burgeoning self-realization; and from rote memorization to an emerging self-respect.

Until this life-changing moment, my public school education had been generically targeted to all members of my industrial, working class neighborhood. After all, why teach literature and critical thinking to children headed for a lifetime employment at the steelworks factory or the assembly line? Nevertheless, Du Bois argued that this thinking

inherently diminished an individual's self-worth (p. 179). He argued for an education that would realize one's potential, rather than deny it:

The final product of our training must be neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man. And to make men, we must have ideals, broad, pure, and inspiring ends of living, - not sordid money-getting, not apples of gold. The workers must work for the glory of his handiwork, not simply for pay; the thinker must think for truth, not for fame. (p. 72)

To what end is it to acquire employment, if one's inner potential is denied? What gain is there in merely following orders while one's inner voice is silenced? Again, it is of note how John Dewey (1938) frames these queries in the context of the classroom:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (p. 49)

Like Dewey and Du Bois, my high school Latin teacher believed in the intrinsic value of sharing literature and critical thinking with *all* his students. I can remember for the first time in my young life feeling a sense of self-worth; that somehow this teacher believed that I was 'worthy' of interacting with Caesar, Virgil, Aristotle, and Plato. By awakening this personal sense of self-respect it became 'acceptable' for an industrial laborer's son to study Shakespeare; for a second generation U.S. citizen to aspire to a college-prep curriculum; for a lower middle class urban public school student to acknowledge and

explore the philosophic stirrings of his inner self.

Du Bois rallied against the segregation of teaching workers to work and teaching thinkers to think. He understood that the “Jim Crow Car” represented not only a physical segregation based on color, but a spiritual divide as well (p. 93). Inferiority, submission, and passivity are weapons used to oppress not only the body, but the soul (p. 57). They slowly devour all sense of self-respect that lies at the core of one’s inner being. Education was the path to end this “spiritual turmoil” (p. 148) and restore one’s self-respect:

And all this is gained only by human strife and longing; by ceaseless training and education; by founding Right on righteousness and Truth on the unhampered search for Truth; by founding the common school on the university and the industrial school on the common school; and weaving thus a system, not a distortion, and bringing a birth, not an abortion. (p. 72)

Nevertheless, as a teacher who believes in (and attempts to act upon) the ideas espoused by Du Bois and Dewey, I continue to be bombarded with an assortment of (perhaps) well-meaning queries: Why teach Homer’s *Odyssey* to low-income/high poverty students? Why share Shakespeare’s dramas and sonnets with students for whom English is a secondary language? Why introduce the writings of Wiesel and Du Bois to students on a track headed to menial employment (not college)?

The profiling inherent in these questions reflects Du Bois’ image of a double consciousness: the duality of a public school that segregates students as college bound or labor-restricted; the ‘twoness’ of providing a government supported ‘education for all’ that unevenly distributes resources; and the division between an academic curriculum

taught ‘above the veil’ with a rudimentary one used ‘beneath the veil.’ Why should I be surprised, then, when I find myself in a public school (servicing a 98% Hispanic/low income student population) providing yearlong staff development centered on the metaphor that we teachers need to be doctors: our students are sick. We need to fix them: to find a cure for what is making them weak. We need to diagnose and root out what is wrong with them: to find the right medicine necessary to nourish their deficiencies. If we do this correctly, maybe then they can be college-bound.

As I listen to this metaphor, I feel trapped under what Du Bois (1903) called “the shadow of the veil” (p. 170). I wonder if the same metaphor is used in schools ‘above the veil’? As the staff development proceeds to extol the virtues of test preparation materials over novels and extended reading and math skill-instruction over the fine arts, will I succumb to the anger that is brewing within me? Will I surrender to a malaise of despair and hopelessness? Du Bois’ words console and inspire me:

There must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. Such souls aforetime have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine gold, they shall again. Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange renderings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these days that try their soul, the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and

guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black. (p. 90)

Instead of calling for an education that removes what is ‘wrong’ with students, Du Bois’ eloquent plea was for an education that would free the creativity, imagination, and intrinsic possibilities that lie within all our students. Similarly, John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey (1915) asserted that “every pupil must have a chance to show what he truly is, so that the teacher can find out what he needs to make him a complete human being” (p. 82). Nevertheless, at what point does external data (racial, economic, social, etc.) transform our perceptions into biases? To what degree do interpretations of scientific data dictate a student’s self-perception?

Mike Rose (2009) questioned the role these factors play in public education. After all, to what extent is external assessment data used as a metaphorical ‘measuring tape’ to identify, sort, and label students:

If we believe common work to be mindless, that belief will affect the work we create in the future. If we don’t appreciate, if we in some way constrict, the full range of everyday cognition, then we will develop limited educational programs and fail to make fresh and meaningful instructional connections among disparate kinds of skill and knowledge. If we think that whole categories of people – identified by class, by occupation – are not that bright, then we reinforce social separations and cripple our ability to talk across our current cultural divides. (p. 86)

These sorts of biases restrict what Du Bois called the “sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development” (p. 90). How can our students acknowledge let alone explore their ‘sovereign human soul’ without having an authentic sense of self-worth and self-respect.

Du Bois urged that people *on both sides the veil* deserve the chance ‘to soar in the dim blue air.’ Too often, however, those beneath the veil become metaphorically invisible.

Ralph Ellison (1947) paints a portrait of this invisibility:

Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but he doesn’t digest it. Already he is – well, bless my soul! Behold a walking zombie! Already he’s learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He’s invisible, a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!”  
(*The Invisible Man* p. 94).

I also am, at times, an invisible man. Whenever I retreat – personally or professionally - behind a veil of hurt or fear; and whenever I am hiding beneath a cloud of hopelessness or uncertainty, I am he. How many of our students are suffering beneath similar veils or comparable clouds? Consider Ellison’s (1947) plea on behalf of invisible souls:

But for God’s sake, learn to look beneath the surface,” he said. “Come out of the fog, young man. And remember you don’t have to be a complete fool in order to succeed... learn how you operate...you’re hidden right out in the open – that is, you would be if you only realized it. They wouldn’t see you because they don’t expect you to know anything, since they believe they’ve taken care of that. (*The Invisible Man* p.154)

I am privileged to share time with Shakespeare’s sonnets as I ‘to soar above the smoke’ and continue to contemplate “what’s in a name” (*Romeo and Juliet*) and ponder whether I would “compare thee to a summer’s day” (*Sonnet 18*). As a teacher, I feel equally privileged sharing Shakespeare’s works with my students as they in turn embark on their own journeys of contemplation and self-knowledge. I am honored to be guided

by Homer's poetry as I 'look beneath the surface' of the outer world; and I am equally honored to take my students along as (together and individually) we embark on our journeys of 'expansion and self-development.'

I want neither to be the emotional zombie Ellison describes, nor the victim of a 'double-consciousness' that Du Bois detailed:

The words within and without the Veil of Color...must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt. (p. 165)

I've learned that respecting oneself involves fully participating in the perpetual quest to better understand my inner self and my relation to the outer world. As a teacher, I endeavor to use literature as my "magic carpet" which my students and I board to venture beyond the treacherous pretences and biases of double-consciousness. If I did not respect my students, I would not invite them along on this inner journey to nurture self-consciousness, promote self-realization, and cradle self-respect. Again, I defer to Du Bois (1903):

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not... I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? (p. 90)

To respectfully paraphrase: My students and I sit with Shakespeare and Hugo and they wince not. We move arm in arm with Shelley, Homer, and Faulkner where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out our souls that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the illumination of the stars I summon Ellison, Virgil, and Crane and what integrity we will, and we come together graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, we dwell above the outer world's Veil of bias, hatred, and greed. Who would grudge us this honor?

### **C. Inner life acknowledged**

Relying exclusively on the outer world for one's identity and self-worth is, as W.E.B. Du Bois warned, equal to "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 5). "The sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 5), he cautioned, is to deny our inner "soul-life" (p. 164). Similarly, the Lama Surya Das (2007) wrote that while our external identities and sense of self are transitory and even illusory, it is what we are *underneath* that is eternal:

From the Buddhist point of view, the truth is that what we call the self is only a bundle of aggregates that constantly shift. Each of us is more than all of these aggregates put together. Each of us experiences and reflects all humanity, as well as the universe. And each of us is experienced and reflected by that same universe...a separate, permanent essence or eternal soul. (p. 61)

Du Bois cautioned that such inner exploration was an intense task: "All this must mean a time of intense ethical ferment, of religious heart-searching and intellectual unrest" (p. 165). Whether on my own or with a class of students, reading Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Odysseus' *Odyssey* into the underworld, or Henry Fleming's sojourn into battle



provokes this sort of ‘intense heart-searching’ and ‘ethical unrest.’ Each of these texts adheres to the criteria set by Surya Das: they transcend the shifting experiences of an individual confined in space and time; and they reflect the infinite and eternal spirit of the universe, of humanity’s soul.

For instance, while reading *Night*, my students and I ponder what we believe in so totally for which we would be willing to sacrifice our lives: Is it our country, our family, our friends, our religion...or nothing? Furthermore, we contemplate where such devotion comes from? Do we believe what we do because we were taught to do so or because of a conscious decision we have made? While reading *Red Badge of Courage* (1895), we compare and contrast the meanings of glory, duty, and commitment as opposed to our perceptions of them. Odysseus’ voyage to the underworld leads us into reflections and meditations regarding life after death.

I regard these discussions and conversations as some of the most meaningful moments of both my teaching and my personal life. Nevertheless, they are difficult. Du Bois (1903) noted that exploring the intrinsic landscape of dreams, beliefs, and ideals can be traumatic:

It is a hard thing to live haunted by the ghost of an untrue dream; to see the wide vision of empire fade into real ashes and dirt; to feel the pang of the conquered, and yet know that with all the Bad that fell on one black day, something was vanquished that deserved to live, something killed that in justice had not dared to die; to know that with the Right that triumphed, triumphed something of wrong, something sordid and mean, something less than the broadest and best. All this is bitter hard; and many a man and city and people have found in it excuse for

sulking, and brooding, and listless waiting. (p. 64)

Whether we are waiting for the ‘ghosts of our untrue dreams’ to strike us down; for the greed and bias of the outer world to vanquish our hopes and aspirations ‘that deserved to live’; or for the triumph of ‘something sordid and mean,’ that which Du Bois called ‘sulking, and brooding, and listless waiting’ is a withering of our inner spirit. Theodore Geisel (1990) called “the waiting place”:

For people just waiting. Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No or waiting for their hair to grow... Everyone is just waiting. (p. 24)

Being trapped in the ‘waiting place’ is like again being caught in what Du Bois called the veil of ‘double consciousness.’ Just as Odysseus is trapped between the Scylla and the Charybdis, we can become trapped between our inner and outer consciousness. To what extent are we motivated by external power and gain to the neglect of our inner capacity for compassion and empathy? How often are we tempted to succumb to outer bias and fear to the detriment of an intrinsic sense of equality and justice? Which road, the external or internal, is the real one? Geisel (1990) captured this quandary in this way:

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some windows are lighted. But mostly they’re dark. A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin! Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in? How much can you lose? How much can you win? And *IF* you go in, should you turn left or right...or right-and-three-quarters? Or, maybe, not quite? Or go around back and sneak in from behind? Simple it’s not, I’m afraid you will find, For a mind-maker-upper to make

up his mind. You can get confused. (pp. 19-21)

Of the inner and outer path, which is the dream and which is the reality? Is what we regard as our physical world a dream-like construction? Is what we perceive as dream actually reality itself? Another ‘Circe-esque’ transformation of which I am clearly aware is my metamorphosis into a phoenix. According to the laws of physical science, this transformation is dream-like, not real. But I know differently. The dream metamorphosis from educator to phoenix for me is reality. Dale Corey Dibbley (1993) traced the mythological origins of the phoenix to the writings of Herodotus (fifth century B.C):

The expression “rise from the ashes like a phoenix” is a popular metaphor for a person or institution that is thought to have passed its prime and become obsolete but is suddenly rejuvenated-making a comeback when least expected. It is also applied in situations where a disaster has occurred and the survivors muster their forces to rebuild their homes or their lives. (p. 170)

As an elementary school principal, I felt empowered (and morally obligated) to implement procedures that would replace what I saw as the racist, unfair, and segregationist policies currently in place. Being threatened, the school’s political and economic parent power base set out to destroy my credibility and spirit. Hidden cameras, clandestine microphones, a gossip-laden ‘trash-talk’ blog, and trumped up charges of incompetence were the nails used to crucify me to the cross of my good intentions. I was a phoenix being consumed by flames on the mantle of misguided but well-intentioned actions. My spirit, my reputation, and my altruistic intentions were disintegrating into ashes. This dream-like, nightmarish landscape had become my reality.

For three years I struggled to escape the subsequent physical, psychological, and professional damages and hurts. Would there be a resurrection of my values and spirit? Despite being tarnished with ashes of humiliation, I focused on my work with a small group of middle school students identified as ‘locally gifted.’ As their Language Arts teacher, the students and I immersed ourselves in the moral struggles of Henry Fleming and Elie Wiesel; joined in the ethical crusades of W.E.B. Du Bois and Jean Val Jean; and contemplated the meaning of life alongside William Faulkner and Homer. The ideas, thoughts, and reflections of these authors were a balm that began to heal my battered spirit. As the students engaged in projects, presentations, journal writing, and discussions, I too was engaged in an intrinsic journey of reflection and healing.

Although my path from teacher to reading coach to assistant principal to principal ... to teacher has been difficult, it has afforded me the insight and unique perspective of seeing the teaching and learning profession from a variety of perspectives. It has fortified me with a healthy dose of humility that transcends political rhetoric, economic greed, and social pretense. Consequently, I have begun to demonstrate the resiliency of a phoenix being resurrected from humiliation on the wings of humility and rejuvenated from despair by the rays of the rising sun of hope. I became like the mythological phoenix who possessed powers of rebirth; surviving a nightmarish crucifixion and beginning to be replenished with the glimmers of a resurrection of my spirit.

It can be easy to confuse the dream with the reality. The outer world reveals the portrait of a principal relegated to a classroom teacher position in the same building where he recently served as assistant principal. The inner world reveals a crucified phoenix rising from the ashes of a spiritual and moral death. Du Bois (1903) warned that

confusing a celluloid and tangible reality from its substantive intrinsic reality can have serious outcomes: “Thus we have two great and hardly recognizable streams of thought and ethical strivings; the danger of the one lies in anarchy, that of the other in hypocrisy” (p. 165).

Are we teaching from a place of anarchy or a perch of hypocrisy? To what extent do we see or nurture our inner spirit that lies beneath the matrix of the physical world? What happens if the painful sulking, bitter brooding, and listless waiting Du Bois described were to overtake our daily work with children? I learned as early as my high school Latin class from the writing of Marcus Aurelius (170-180 C.E.) that these internal pains cannot be ignored:

Pain is either an evil to the body – then let the body say what it thinks of it – or to the soul; but it is in the power of the soul to maintain its own serenity and tranquility, and not to think that pain is an evil. For every judgment and movement and desire and aversion is within, and no evil ascends so high. (p. 78)

These words rang true when as a class project my students reconstructed the post-World War II Nuremberg trials. Using improvisation techniques, students were assigned to speak and act from a variety of perspectives (whether they personally agreed with the point of view or not). I can still hear the voice of anarchy that poured from the mouths of students posing as jury; the voice of hypocrisy seething from the words of students as Nazi soldiers on trial; and the assorted voices of hatred, anger, and bias dripped with venom. What started as a ‘fun drama activity’ soon transformed into a somber examination of our humanity.

In our class debriefing, some students reported feeling ‘dirty;’ others sad. One or two

admitted feeling exhilarated by the experience. The reflections, however, turned more serious when a student observed that throughout the entire reenactment she had noticed no indicators of forgiveness, reconciliation, or compassion. Calls for justice were wrapped in retribution; demands for the truth were veiled under the cloak of a blood thirsty vengeance.

This class project brought all of us to a place we never anticipated. I felt that we were passing away from the external world of the courtroom to the internal landscape within human nature itself. Is justice driven by revenge and hate truly justice? At what point, if any, does compassion trump hatred? Was this exercise demonstrating that cruelty and evil are not imposed upon us but emanating from within? My students and I had arrived at what Geisel (1990) called ‘the waiting place.’

Several students mentioned Bible passages they had learned such as when Jesus, after being slapped on the right side of the face by an enemy, responded by offering the man his other cheek; and when Jesus, while being crucified, proclaimed “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” Where was the line between what we believed in and how we might choose to act in the outer world? When might that line be crossed? Would crossing the line be a betrayal of our intrinsic values? Would it prove our spiritual lives and values ineffectual or meaningless? How does one deal with the ethical and emotional turmoil of adhering to particular inner beliefs in an outer world that often seems to demand compromise (at its best) and ‘selling out’ (at its worst)?

Here the lines between my life as a teacher and my larger life as a human being also cross. Amos Oz (1999) describes this crossing as simultaneously personal and intrapersonal:

You must understand, I've told you this story not to make you feel uncomfortable but only to make a request, or rather to convey to you what I am asking myself and that is why I am asking you too. You don't have to answer. Naturally, all this will remain just between you and me. Or rather, between you and yourself. (p. 109)

And yet these words also bring to my mind another more somber Du Bois (1903) observation:

He did his work, - he did it nobly and well; and yet I sorrow that here he worked alone, with so little sympathy...And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor, - all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked, - who is good? not that men are ignorant, - what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men. (p. 185)

It is remarkable to me that Du Bois' words could capture the existential angst I experience as a teacher and as a human being in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The competition among teachers for recognition that breeds loneliness and isolation; the rivalry and distrust among peers that nurture hostility and antagonism; and the political angling for power, prestige, and status often lead me to 'the waiting place' as well:

Waiting for the fish to bite or waiting for wind to fly a kite or waiting around for Friday night or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake or a pot to boil, or a Better Break or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants or a wig with curls, or Another Chance. (Geisel, 1990, p. 24)

Why keep fussing in a world where 'men know so little of men?' Why bother being true to your inner self when it seems as though others are persevering and even thriving in the sphere of the physical world alone? Is having the double consciousness of an outer

and an inner life a curse that makes one weak and vulnerable to the outer world? Perhaps the wealth, power, conveniences, and fame of the external world should alone be our focus and driving force.

In this sense, what does an inner landscape of love and justice have to do with education? How can one's intrinsic understanding of justice thrive in an outer world often directed by anger, greed, and favor? How can an innate spirit of love and compassion survive in an outer world that prizes wealth and status? When faced with these questions, I am tempted to retreat to my 'waiting place' to wait 'for the mail to come or the phone to ring' with better news; or to wait for 'a pot to boil or a Better Break' that would enlighten me and provide guidance.

Instead, I turn, as I often do, to my literary role models; the archetypal characters who cast before me timeless glimpses into the heart of our humanity and who continue to inspire me as a teacher. There's Jean Val Jean (*Les Miserables*): The more committed he is to authentic justice and compassion, the more the anger of the outer world hunts him down as a criminal. There's Odysseus (*The Odyssey*): The more he is determined to return to his commitments to family and kingdom, the more monsters, conflicts, and the gods themselves intervene with physical tragedy, hardship, and distracting temptations. There's Aeneas (*The Aeneid*): The more he remains faithful to fulfilling a higher call of duty to serve others, the more he is forced to sacrifice personal wealth, comfort, and the love of the beautiful Dido. There's Henry Fleming (*The Red Badge of Courage*): the more he dedicates himself to achieving great acts for humanity, the more his physical world breaks down his very will to live.



What do these literary archetypes have in common? Each character persevered in living an outer life guided by compassion and justice; they each pursued duty over wealth, fame, and status; and because of their choices, they each suffered at the hands of external greed, anger, and folly. By living their lives guided by an intrinsic commitment to love and justice, they are, for me, the greatest educators. Although they may have been dubbed the ‘miserables’ by the external world, the strength of their values and the depth of their commitment and sacrifice garner them status as my personal pedagogical super heroes!

The intrinsic strength, sacrifice, courage and perseverance of these ‘super heroes’ to live their outer lives in harmony with their inner values and ethics are an inspiration to me. Will my external ‘rewards’ be diminished if my work as a teacher is similarly driven by an intrinsic sense of compassion rather than an external drive for power? Probably – but if that leaves me in the company of the likes of Odysseus and Henry Fleming, then I figure I must be doing something right. Will the extrinsic tokens of fame, wealth, or privilege I may receive be compromised or lessened? Very likely – but if that qualifies me as being even slightly as rich in spirit as Val Jean or Aeneas, then it can’t be all that bad or foolish.

After all, whom do you remember as your “best” or favorite teachers? Are they favorites because of their wealth, fame, or societal status? Do you regard them as your most memorable because of their possessions or because you admired their ambitions for personal gain and wealth? Or was it something else – something intrinsic to their attitude and spirit (i.e. patience, insight, generosity, enthusiasm)? This, of course, takes us back to Saint-Exupery’s (1943) observation that it is “only with the heart that one can see rightly;

what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

In his boldly titled text *Love, Justice and Education*, William H. Schubert (2009a) offers what he calls ‘riffs of hopes and dreams’ that for me help redefine the perimeters and depth of teaching and learning. Instead of focusing on the temporal and quantitative aspects of education, Schubert invites us to explore the ‘people orchards’ wherein the seeds of education are nourished within our hearts, minds, and spirits:

Education must evolve in mutually

Sharing

Unwrapping myself from the book paper

Entering the people orchards....

Sharing what? Sharing who I am

Who, at least, I think I am (p. 230).

Du Bois (1903) wrote that he regarded education as a ‘quixotic ninth Crusade’ (p. 22) that at its best could sow the seeds for a harvest of ‘Truth and Freedom and broad Humanity’ (p. 71); at its worst, a harvest of disaster (p. 47). Similarly, Schubert’s ‘riffs of hopes and dreams’ reminds us that education is more than schooling, and that more is happening in the classroom than our eyes and ears are directly aware of:

This must be seen as Education

Its central focus

Our journey of Experiencing, knowing, and doing

Needing and overcoming, Being and becoming

Sharing and contributing, Wandering and wondering

Where and when? How and with whom? (p. 231)

My journey as teacher is a never-ending one. In it, I remain a student of ‘being and

becoming,’ ‘sharing and contributing,’ and ‘needing and overcoming.’ Although answers are often elusive, contradictory, and obtuse, the journey is a vital one because, I believe, it strikes at the heart of being fully human. Yes, the journey sometimes involves pain, sacrifice, and disappointment. Nevertheless, these, too, are fundamental qualities of the human experience.

Du Bois (1903) told the story of a post Civil War schoolteacher, John Jones, who was committed to maintaining a school for emancipated ex-slaves in the Jim Crow South. His honesty and perceptiveness reveal an intrinsic truth of teaching and learning:

“John,” she [his sister] said, “does it make everyone – unhappy when they study and learn lots of things?”

He paused and smiled. “I am afraid it does, he said.

“And, John, are you glad you studied?”

“Yes,” came the answer, slowly but positively. (p. 197)

I am often reminded of this excerpt. My students and I shudder as we journey through Wiesel’s *Night*, and explore ‘man’s inhumanity to man.’ We reel with shock and astonishment as together we witness the destruction of Victor Frankenstein’s body and soul as his thirst for knowledge turns against him and humanity. We are blindsided by Henry Fleming as he sacrifices his humanity in order to become a ‘hero.’ We are morally outraged as we passively watch the outer world unfairly judge and punish Jean Val Jean. And am I glad I studied? Am I glad I brought my students along on the journey? My reply is yes. A ‘slowly but positively’ stated Yes.

#### **D. Topics for reflection**

1: Where does our work as educators lie in this field between external achievement

and inner authenticity? Do our efforts as teachers nurture both sides of this ‘double-consciousness’ for our students?

2: Using Du Bois’ imagery, take some time to wonder: to what extent are our students and ourselves learning together beneath a societal ‘veil’? Or to what degree are we perhaps teaching from above a ‘veil’ to students trapped beneath it? To what extent is our instruction mired in a ‘double-consciousness’ that inhibits the integrity of our students and/or ourselves? How much of our personal liberties or inner ethical values are being nurtured; how much stifled?

3: How much of our work as educators is rooted in this explanation of integrity? To what extent is our work with students is guided by such integrity? How much of this sort of integrity are we attempting to nurture within our students?

4: What kinds of teachers are we if we are ruled by Hate and Despair? What is the value of teaching and learning when they are veiled with Doubt and Death? When teaching is grounded in (explicit or implicit) humiliation, what are the students learning?

5: In what ways do our efforts in the classroom “inspire the young, help the weak, and guide the strong”? Are we humble enough to accept our place in the bureaucratic chain of command (that lies outside the veil) while at the same time strong enough to engage our students in meaningful teaching and learning (within the veil)?

6: Can we sustain a double consciousness that is gentle enough to show sensitivity and empathy to the individuality of our students while simultaneously is determined enough to fight against the systemic monsters of Humiliation, Prejudice, and Hatred? To what extent are our classroom communities insulated against the barbs of injustice, hate, and despair?

7: Who inspires your role as a teacher? What ideals drive your work as a teacher?

8: At what point does external data (racial, economic, social, etc) transform our perceptions into biases? How do we deal with these externally motivated perceptions?

9: Recall the times when you've been an 'invisible man – or woman.' When have you retreated – personally and professionally - behind a veil of hurt or fear; beneath a cloud of hopelessness? How many of our students are suffering beneath similar veils or comparable clouds?

10: To what degree do interpretations of scientific data dictate a student's self-perception? To what extent are external assessment data used as metaphorical "measuring tapes" to identify, sort, and label students?

11: Are we motivated by external power and greed to the neglect of our inner capacity for compassion and empathy? Do we succumb to outer bias and fear to the detriment of an intrinsic sense of equality and justice? What happens if the painful sulking, bitter brooding, and listless waiting Du Bois describes overtakes our daily work with children?

12: Which road, the external or internal, is real? Is there a real one? Is one more real than the other? Of the inner and outer path, which is the dream and which is the reality? Are what we regard as our physical reality and concerns really a false dream? Is what we perceive as dream really reality itself?

13: Where is the line between what we believe in and how we might choose to act sometimes in the external world? When might that line be crossed? Would crossing the line be a betrayal of our intrinsic values? Would it prove our spiritual lives and values ineffectual or meaningless? How can we navigate between knowing or professing our inner beliefs and values and living by them in difficult times?

14: What does an intrinsic landscape of love and justice have to do with education?

15: Whom do you remember as your “best” or favorite teachers? What qualities (external and internal) do you most remember them for? What are the qualities you hope that your students would remember you for?

### XIII. DISCOURSE THREE

This imaginative discourse includes the voices of three authors who were frequently referenced in the proceeding three chapters. Their dialogue here is taken directly from their fictional works. In this way, Virginia Woolf (1928), Homer (*The Odyssey*) and Virgil (*The Aeneid*) are free to ‘speak’ to us via pertinent passages from their respective works of literature. Together, we further discuss issues and conflicts that arose within the chapters. The dialogue of the speakers is genuine in that it is taken directly from its original sources. The authentic words of the literature are re-imagined within the context of a conversation about the intrinsic realities, fears, and aspirations of myself as educator.

**Edward:** Our previous discourse ended with the idea that perhaps the most valuable ingredients we teachers have in our instructional recipes are not the tools that we purchase, but the resources that emanate from within our selves. Knowledge alone does not satisfy the intricate nature of the human spirit. Following this thinking, we need as teachers to continue searching for the questions, the resources, and the inspiration that, like food for our bodies, will provide nourishment for our hearts and souls.

To continue this imaginative discourse, I welcome Homer, the author of the Greek epic *The Odyssey*, and Virgil, the author of the Roman epic *The Aeneid*. These stories provide archetypal portraits of heroes as leaders and teachers. The heroes, however, operate from very different spheres of intrinsic realities. While Homer gives us Odysseus who is motivated by a classical Dionysian perspective, Virgil offers Aeneas who is inspired by a more Apollo-esque point of view. Homer and Virgil not only share with us a plethora of heroic adventures, they also paint a portraiture of the intrinsic landscapes out of which these men lead, teach, and inspire those around them.

To strike a balance between these two voices, I welcome to this discourse Virginia Woolf's (1928) *Orlando*. Because Orlando's perspective and motivation are not limited by time, space, or gender, the character offers a unique opportunity to examine thoughts, issues, and ideas without being encumbered by these sorts of extrinsic limitations.

As heroes, as leaders, and as teachers, what intrinsic spirit, motivation, or drive inspires our work? For me, Aeneas is the living personification of duty, honor, and sacrifice. He even denies his personal love for Dido in order to complete his public mission of bringing the Trojans safely to Italy to establish what is destined to become the Roman Empire. Virgil, tell us a portion of the story that captures this spirit.

**Virgil:** "She [Dido] burst out raging now... I shall not detain you or dispute your story. Go; go after Italy on the sailing winds. Look for your kingdom, cross the deepsea swell! If divine justice counts for anything, I hope and pray that on some grinding reef midway at sea you'll drink your punishment and call on Dido's name! From far away I shall come after you with my black fires, and when cold death has parted body from soul I shall be everywhere a shade to haunt you! You will pay for this." (Book IV, lines 502, 525-536, p. 109)

**Woolf:** (and in this new power of bearing an argument in mind and continuing it with someone who was not there to contradict she showed again the development of her soul. (p. 176)

**Virgil:** "At this abruptly she broke off and ran in sickness from his sight and the light of day, leaving him at a loss, alarmed, and mute with all he meant to say... Duty bound Aeneas though he struggled with desire to calm and comfort her in all her pain, to speak to her and turn her mind from grief, and though he sighed his heart out, shaken still with



love of her, yet took the course heaven gave him and went back to the fleet. Then with a will the Teucrians fell to work and launched the ships along the whole shore: slick with tar each hull took to the water.” (Book IV, lines 502, 525-536, 539-542, 545-554, pp. 109-110)

**Woolf:** “Openness indeed was the soul of her nature.” (p. 189)

**Edward:** Aeneas’ commitment to his civic duties, despite personal sacrifice and sadness, reflects that he is operating from an internal reality that does not rely on external and temporal desires. By holding the public good over his own, selecting duty over temptation, and yet still being sensitive enough to feel the pangs of regret and sadness toward Dido, Aeneas teaches us that although being true to ourselves can be painful, its influence and impact are infinite.

**Woolf:** “But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation.” (p. 98)

**Edward:** In that sense, Aeneas is not basing his decision to leave Dido on any immediate whim or momentary satisfaction; instead his decision is in harmony with an eternal truth of his intrinsic nature.

**Woolf:** “How his eyes flashed, how his hand trembled, how he loved, how he lied, how he suffered.” (p. 209)

**Edward:** As teachers, how much or how often do we adhere to these Apollo-esque traits of patience and foresight? When in our instruction do we take the time to model such an elastic view of time? We need to take an honest look at our instruction and ascertain just how much of our effort is spent meeting deadlines, allocating minutes of instruction, and measuring quantitative growth. Although the clocks, calendars, and scope and sequence maps serve quantitative purposes, isn’t it equally valuable to explore the timeless depths of our humanity?

**Woolf:** “Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it - the poets and the novelists - can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where truth does not exist. Nothing exists. The whole thing is a miasma - a mirage.” (p. 192)

**Edward:** In this way, it is the poets (a.k.a. the dreamers) who are the harbingers of the truth. (Homer, as a renowned Greek poet, tell us a piece of Odysseus’ trek to the island of Polyphemus. Let’s try to ascertain the truth embedded in your poetry.

**Homer:** “We [Odysseus and his men] made a tour about the island, admiring everything there, and the nymphs, daughters of Zeus of the aegis, started the hill-roving goats our way for my companions to feast on. At once we went and took from the ships curved bows and javelins with long sockets, and arranging ourselves in three divisions cast about, and the god granted us the game we longed for. Now there were twelve ships that went with me, and for each nine goats were portioned out, but I alone had ten for my portion. So for the whole length of the day until the sun’s setting, we sat there feasting on unlimited meat and sweet wine.” (Book IX, lines 153-162, p. 141)

**Edward:** Odysseus is participating here in the same disrespectful behavior that the suitors are engaged in back in his homeland Ithaca. He merits the actions of the suitors to be inexcusable and worthy of the greatest penalties. He sees Polyphemus' retaliation, however, as a breach of hospitality. There is a major discrepancy, then, between Odysseus' actions on this island and the vicious vengeance he enacts upon his return home. To me, Odysseus' actions here teach that one's rationale for behavior ought to be contingent on the mood and context of any given moment. There seems to be no room here for any deep rooted values or ideals.

**Woolf:** "But what sort of passion, it may well be asked, could this be? And the answer is double-faced as Love herself." (p. 116)

**Edward:** Like a true disciple of Dionysus, Odysseus is guided by whatever feels good to him at the moment. Is this the kind of Dionysian spirit that emanates from our teaching? To what extent are we guided or inspired by this *carpe diem* spirit? Is there any truth or value that defies situational context and scrutiny?

**Woolf:** "It is these pauses that are our undoing." (p. 80)

**Edward:** Virgil, is there no episode you can share in which Aeneas teaches a counter perspective to these 'situational ethics'?

**Virgil:** (during battle) "Fatherly Aeneas would not sit by while this fury went further – so berserk Entellus was in the rancor of his soul. He [Aeneas] stopped the fight, and saved bone-weary Dares, saying to comfort him: 'Poor fellow, how could rashness take you this way? Don't you feel a force now more than mortal is against you and heaven's will has changed? We'll bow to that!' So, speaking loudly, he broke off the battle. And

loyal shipmates took Dares in hand, weak-kneed, his head wobbling from side to side spitting out teeth mixed with gobs of blood.” (Book V, lines 596-609, p. 141)

**Woolf:** “For though these are not matters on which a biographer can profitably enlarge it is plain enough to those who have done a reader’s part in making up from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of a living person; can hear in what we only whisper a living voice; can see, often when we say nothing about it, exactly what he looked like, and know without a word to guide them precisely what he thought and felt and it is for readers such as these alone that we write.” (p. 73)

**Edward:** Thank you, Virgil. Aeneas’ actions are guided by loyalty over rashness and compassion over rancor – even in the midst of cold-blooded battle!

**Virgil:** “They led him to the ships, and then, recalled, received the helm and sword, leaving the palm and bullock for Entellus. The old champion, glorying in his courage and his prize, spoke out: “Son of the goddess, Teucrians all, now see what power was in me in my prime, and see the death from which you rescued Dares.” He set himself to face the bull that stood there, prize of the battle, then drew back his right and from his full height lashed his hard glove out between the horns.” (Book V, lines 610-621, p. 141-2)

**Edward:** Hold on. This is not exactly the direction I saw this episode going.

**Woolf:** “Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher’s face and the butcher a poet’s; nature, who delights in muddle and mystery, so that even now we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea, and the sailors at the mast-head ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon: Is

there land or is there none? To which, if we are prophets, we make answer “Yes”; if we are truthful we say ‘No.’” (pp. 77-78)

**Virgil:** “The impact smashed the skull and fragmented the brains. Down went the ox aquiver to sprawl dying on the ground. The man stood over it and in deep tones proclaims: ‘Here is a better life in place of Dares, Eryx; here I lay down my gauntlet and my art.’ (Book V, lines 621-627, p. 142)

**Homer:** “Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven far journeys.” (Book I, Lines 1-2)

**Edward:** I get it. Our journey through life demands instincts of self-preservation and survival.

**Homer:** “Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of, many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea, struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions, hard though he strove to; they were destroyed by their own recklessness, fools.” (Book I, lines 3-8, p. 27)

**Edward:** Survival of the fittest...Darwinian logic...natural selection... preservation of favored races...are these the ideas that serve as the foundation of our instruction?

**Woolf:** “But the harpy is not so easily banished as all that.” (p. 118)

**Edward:** This discourse began with the prospect of how teaching and learning can provide nourishment for our hearts and souls. How can values rooted in a ‘survival of the fittest’ mantra accomplish this? My students and I have engaged in several units of study that defy this mantra and challenge the biases inherent in attitudes rooted in elitist tenets of natural selection. Together we weep with Wiesel (1960) as we reflect on his experiences in *Night*; we are challenged by the political, social and racial riddles suffered

by R. Ellison's (1947) *Invisible Man*; we rally behind Dickens' orphan *Oliver Twist*; we shudder as Du Bois (1903) (gives us a glimpse of life behind the veil-line of color in *The Souls of Black Folk*; and together we face the sacrifices incumbent with liberty and democracy as Val Jean fights for survival during the era of French Revolution.

**Woolf:** "Here is someone who does not do the thing for the sake of doing; nor looks for looking's sake; here is someone who believes neither in sheep-skin nor basket; but sees something else." (p. 146)

**Edward:** I believe that each of these classroom experiences serves to banish the harpies of externally driven elitism, bias, and segregation. Instead, they awaken our shared humanity, sear through layers of externally motivated prejudices, and inspire the inner life of our common humanity.

**Homer:** "And I saw Tantalos also, suffering hard pains, standing in lake water that came up to his chin, and thirsty as he was, he tried to drink, but could capture nothing; for every time the old man, trying to drink, but could capture nothing; for every time the old man, trying to drink, stooped over, the water would drain away and disappear, and the black earth showed at his feet, and the divinity dried it away." (Book XI, lines 582 – 587, p. 183)

**Edward:** Wait a minute! Are you trying to say that my efforts to teach with resources that emanate from *within* ourselves are futile? Is it your intention to mock my suggestion that education does not need to be viewed exclusively from the outside-in but that it can be accomplished from the *inside-out* as well?

**Woolf:** “No passion is stronger in the breast of man than the desire to make others believe as he believes. Nothing so cuts at the root of his happiness and fills him with rage as the sense that another rates low what he prizes high.” (p. 149)

**Homer:** “Over his head trees with lofty branches had fruit like a shower descending, pear trees and pomegranate trees and apple trees with fruit shining, and figs that were sweet and olives ripened well, but each time the old man would straighten up and reach with his hands for them, the wind would toss them away toward the clouds overhanging.” (Book XI, lines 587 – 592, p. 183)

**Edward:** Are you saying that when I speak of ‘banishing the harpies of bias,’ and ‘searing through layers of prejudice,’ I am engaged in some sort of unattainable quixotic mission? Am I Tantalus himself futilely chasing after illusory fruits of harmony and compassion?

**Woolf:** “We must shape our words till they are the thinnest integument for our thoughts. Thoughts are divine.” (p. 173)

**Edward:** Right now, however, my thoughts are far from divine as they are filled partly with anger and partly with humility.

**Woolf:** “Where the Mind is biggest, the Heart, the Senses, Magnanimity, Charity, Tolerance, Kindliness, and the rest of them scarcely have room to breathe.” (p. 213)

**Virgil:** “Have we not known hard hours before this? ...Now call back your courage, and have done with fear and sorrow. Some day, perhaps, remembering even this will be a pleasure. Through diversities of luck, and through so many challenges, we hold our course.” (Book I, lines 270-271, 275-280, p. 10)

**Homer:** “Also I saw Sisyphus. He was suffering strong pains, and with both arms embracing the monstrous stone, struggling with hands and feet alike, he would try to push the stone upward to the crest of the hill, but when it was on the point of going over the top, the force of gravity turned it backward, and the pitiless stone rolled back down to the level.” (Book XI, lines 593 – 598, p. 183)

**Virgil:** “Impelled by these words, by the powers of heaven, into the flames I go, into the fight, where the harsh Fury, and the din and shouting, skyward rising, calls.” (Book II, lines 450-453, p. 45)

**Woolf:** “Dazed and astounded, Orlando could do nothing for some time but watch the appalling race of waters as it hurled itself past him.” (p. 64)

**Homer:** “He [Sisyphus] then tried once more to push it up, straining hard, and sweat ran all down his body, and over his head a cloud of dust rose.” (Book XI, lines 598 – 601, p. 183)

**Edward:** Oh, I see. First you equate my ideals with Tantalus. Now you rank my efforts to achieve them with Sisyphus!

**Woolf:** “One can only believe entirely, perhaps, in what one cannot see.” (p. 198)

**Virgil:** “Son, why let such suffering goad you on to fury past control? Where is your thoughtfulness for me, for us?” (Book II, lines 780-783, p. 54)

**Edward:** How can Virgil support and even encourage my philosophically charged reflections concerning teaching and learning and at the same time tolerate Homer’s insinuation that pursuing an intrinsic path is as ludicrous as Tantalus trying to quench his thirst; and that teaching *from the inside out* is ‘Sisyphus-esque’?



**Woolf:** “For not only did he find himself confronted by problems which have puzzled the wisest of men, such as What is love? What friendship? What truth? But directly he came to think about them, his whole past, which seemed to him of extreme length and variety, rushed into the falling second, swelled it a dozen times its natural size, coloured it all the tints of the rainbow and filled it with all the odds and ends in the universe.” (p. 99)

**Edward:** As we consider and reflect upon issues such as love, friendship, and truth, and how these issues impact (or are impacted by) our teaching and learning, we need to employ a dual vision. Is this what you are trying to point out to me? We need to *balance* the Dionysian (earthly, outer world, external) concerns with the Apollo-esque (inner world, internal, spiritual) ones.

**Virgil:** “Why do you go so far afield for reasons? Has your trust in me gone elsewhere.” (Book VIII, lines 528-530, p. 243)

**Woolf:** “Already - it is an effect lists have upon us - we are beginning to yawn. But if we stop, it is only that the catalogue is tedious, not that it is finished.” (p. 109)

**Homer:** “There is still time for hope.” (Book XVI, line 101, p. 242)

**Virgil:** “Here was the sign! The sign I often looked for in my prayers. I welcome it. I see the gods behind it.” (Book XII, lines 354 – 356, p. 377)

**Woolf:** “What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables.” (p. 176)

**Homer:** “Easily you perceived it, nor are you otherwise without sense; but come, let us think out how we will act in these matters.” (Book XVII, lines 273-274, p. 260)

**Virgil:** “Let us follow where our fates may lead, or lead us back. Whatever comes, all fortune can be mastered by endurance.” (Book V, lines 919-922, p. 150)

**Woolf:** “But remember we are dealing with some of the darkest manifestations of the human soul.” (p. 240)

**Edward:** (to Homer) What lessons of endurance are personified by Odysseus in the Kikonian episode?

**Homer:** “From Ilion the wind took me and drove me ashore at Ismaros by the Kikonians. I sacked their city and killed their people, and out of their city taking their wives and many possessions we shared them out.” (Book IX, lines 39-42, p. 138)

**Virgil:** “And hard Ulysses kept watch over the plunder. Piled up here were treasures of old Troy from every quarter, torn out of burning temples: altar tables, robes, and golden bowls. Drawn up around them boys and frightened mothers stood in line.” (Book II, lines 992-997, p. 60)

**Woolf:** “I am growing up...I am losing some illusions.” (p. 174)

**Edward:** What lessons of endurance are personified by Odysseus in the Polyphemos episode?

**Homer:** “But when I was as far from the land as a voice shouting carries, I called out to the Cyclops, taunting him...once again in the anger of my heart I cried to him “Cyclops, if any mortal ever asks you who it was that inflicted upon your eye this shameful blinding, tell him that you were blinded by Odysseus, sacker of cities.” (Book IX, lines 473-474, 501-504, pp. 149-150)

**Virgil:** “Then the night came when Diomedes and that criminal, Ulysses, dared to raid her [Pallas Athena] holy shrine; they killed the guards on the high citadel and ripped away the statue, the Palladium, desecrating with bloody hands the virginal chaplets of the goddess.” (Book II, lines 226-232, p. 39)

**Woolf:** “I am growing up...I am losing my illusions, perhaps to acquire new ones.” (p. 175)

**Edward:** Driven by greed and violence, Odysseus robs, rapes, and plunders the Kikonian people to increase his own booty, wealth, and stature as a masterful hero. Despite his demonstration of shameless hubris and lack of self-control, Odysseus publically humiliates and blinds the Cyclops while still managing to rescue his own family and kingdom.

**Virgil:** “Then by the guile and envy of Ulysses – nothing unheard of there!” (Book II, lines 122-123, p. 36)

**Edward:** Yes, Odysseus teaches endurance, but at what price?

**Woolf:** “The light of truth beats upon us without shadow, and the light of truth is damnably unbecoming to us both.” (p. 207)

**Edward:** Virgil, what lessons of endurance are personified by Aeneas, say, in the Polydorus episode?

**Virgil:** “Should I tell this or hold my peace? A groan came from the mound, a sobbed muffled in the depth of earth, and words were carried upward: ‘Must you rend me, derelict that I am, Aeneas? Spare me, now I am in the grave; spare your clean hands defilement....Leave this shore of greed!....For Polydorus, therefore, we held a funeral: on his grave we heaped up earth and altars to the Dead were decked with night-blue bands and cypress gloom.” (Book III, lines 54-61, 88-91, p. 67)

**Homer:** “It is not piety to glory so over slain men.” (Book XXII, line 412, p. 331)

**Woolf:** “High battlements of thought; habits that seemed durable as stone went down like

shadows at the touch of another mind and left a naked sky and fresh stars twinkling in it.”  
(p. 176)

**Edward:** What lessons of endurance are personified by Aeneas in the Dido break-up episode?

**Virgil:** “Duty-bound, Aeneas, though he struggled with desire to calm and comfort her in all her pain, to speak to her and turn her mind from grief, and though he sighed his heart out, shaken still with love of her, yet took the course heaven gave him and went back to the fleet.” (Book IV, lines 545-551, p. 110)

**Homer:** “So he [Odysseus] spoke and the women all in a huddle came out with terrible cries of sorrow, and the big tears falling. First they carried away the bodies of all the dead men and laid them under the portico of the well-built courtyard, stacking them on each other. Odysseus directed them and hurried them on...their heads were all in a line and each had her neck caught fast in a noose so that their death would be most pitiful.” (Book XXII, lines 446-451, 470-471, pp. 332-333)

**Woolf:** “While one drowns us the other gnaws us. If we survive the teeth, we succumb to the waves. A man who can destroy illusions is both beast and flood. Illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth. Roll up that tender air and the plant dies, the colour fades. The earth we walk on is a parched cinder. It is marl we tread and fiery cobbles scorch our feet. By the truth we are undone. Life is a dream. ‘Tis waking that kills us. He who robs us of our dreams robs us of our life.” (p. 203)

**Edward:** In these two episodes, Aeneas teaches endurance driven by mercy, forgiveness, and compassion.

**Woolf:** “Upon my soul, what a life is this!” (p. 212)

**Edward:** I wonder whether Odysseus and Aeneas actually represent two sides of the same metaphorical structure. While Odysseus embodies realities of the outer world (i.e. greed, anger, pride), Aeneas personifies realities of the inner world (i.e. compassion, mercy, and duty). In this way, as pedagogical devices, these characters instruct both the mind (the outer) and the heart (the inner).

**Woolf:** “It is all an illusion (which is nothing against it, for illusions are the most valuable and necessary of all things, and she who can create one is among the world’s greatest benefactors), but as it is notorious that illusions are shattered by conflict with reality, so no happiness, no real wit, no real profundity are tolerated where the illusion prevails.” (p. 199-200)

**Edward:** So we are back to the question of dream versus reality. Does Odysseus embody reality while Aeneas personifies the dream? Or is it the other way around?

**Woolf:** “These selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will...for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him – and some are too worldly ridiculous to be mentioned in print at all.” (pp. 308-309)

**Edward:** Are you suggesting that Odysseus and Aeneas are reflections of our own ‘different selves’? In this way the range of their extrinsic attitudes, values, choices, and commitments both repel *and* reflect the dynamic nature of our outer humanity. Their intrinsic struggles, trials, and challenges, on the other hand, mirror the inner nature of our souls.

**Homer:** Never fear. Let these concerns not trouble your thinking. (Book XXIV, line 357, p. 354)

**Woolf:** “Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? So all this chatter and praise, and blame and meeting people who admired one and meeting people who did not admire one was as ill suited as could be to the thing itself – a voice answering a voice.” (p. 325)

**Virgil:** “By these spoken vows they sealed the pact between them.” (Book XII, lines 291-292, p. 375)

**Woolf:** “What a world we live in! What a world to be sure.” (p. 241)

**Edward:** Even though our “conversation” is ended for the moment, it has left me with more questions than answers; fewer conclusions and more wonderings.

**Woolf:** “Hence the most ordinary conversation is often the most poetic, and the most poetic is precisely that which cannot be written down. For which reasons we leave a great blank here, which must be taken to indicate that the space is filled to repletion.” (p. 253)

## **XIV. EPILOGUE**

### **A. Personal Hopes and Future Possibilities**

This intrinsic journey has opened for me inner landscapes that lie between hope and despair, ideal and reality, and limitation and possibility. The painful and sometimes difficult work of my meandering through this emotional, psychological, and spiritual labyrinth has exposed and thereby made vulnerable my innate identity as an educator and as a person. My immersion into pieces of literature has helped me transcend the outer constraints of teaching and learning and to address some of the deeply rooted ethical and personal struggles that define and inform my identity and work as an educator. Despite the complexities of this landscape (or maybe because of them) and in spite of the fears implicit in such vulnerability (or perhaps by virtue of them), the journey has given me the freedom to reflect on my work and on my role as educator in new ways.

The exploration has only begun. Acknowledging the dynamic world of teaching and learning while honoring the infinite complexities and nuances of my own lived experience demands that I counter repression with imagination, embrace contradiction with reflection, confront limitation with possibility, and defy containment with meaningful introspection. My personal hope is that this adventure continues to inspire my capacity to rethink, reimagine, and revitalize my teaching and learning as an educator and as an individual.

Experiencing literature as a means to reflect upon human experience, thoughts, and feelings remains at the heart of my curriculum inquiry. It is my hope that educators will continue to find pathways through literature in which to reflect upon and nurture the values, ideas, beliefs, and hopes that intrinsically sustain their identities as educators. Each chapter of this qualitative study has demonstrated the meaningful use of literature to unveil the conflicts that underlie my efforts and intentions as an educator. Although the tensions are not resolved, neither are they buried or denied. In this way, acknowledging

them becomes the first metaphorical step in better understanding one's self and one's work. My task now is to refer back to each chapter of the study to highlight a central tension that emerged from the work. My purpose in doing so is to glean central threads of introspective ponderings that I believe have the potential to challenge and inspire others.

#### **B. Chapters One – Three: Character as Doppelganger, Conscience, and Nemesis**

One of the reasons why I proposed that Henry Fleming and I are *doppelgangers* is that we have both been prisoners of words. Cartesian limitations - bound in linguistic packages of *right or wrong, good or bad, yes or no, pass or fail* – disregard the complexity of our humanity. As a teacher, I often find myself in dilemmas wherein these *either/or* choices are inapplicable and inappropriate. Journeying with Henry allowed me the flexibility and creativity to consider choices that are simultaneously both good *and* bad; and to assess situations wherein right *is* wrong and wrong *is* right; and to reimagine the boundaries of pass and fail as mutually inclusive. What would curriculum and instruction look like if there were a shift from finding the *one right answer* to understanding that *more answers exist* than we could ever imagine?

Although using language to label, classify, and quantify is valuable in scientific/rationalistic disciplines, humanity defies such deterministic thinking. Jean Val Jean personified for me the gaping abyss that lies between the call of one's linear duties and the call of one's conscience. Although the tension between these voices vexes me, it also helps define my values and ethical character. Jean Val Jean presses me to examine where conscience, values and ethics reside within the discipline of curriculum work as well as in the daily routines and decision-making of classroom teaching and learning.

As my nemesis, St. Jimmy became for me the embodiment of despair, betrayal, and disillusionment. He forced me to consider the tension that exists when the bureaucracy of a school system conflicts with an individual's values and when the systemic mechanisms of a school system constrain an individual's moral conscience. At this point, the intricate considerations of curriculum and instruction scholarship were reduced to the two



essential questions raised by William Ayers (2004): “What am I teaching *for*? And what am I teaching *against*” (p. 11)?

### **C. Chapters Four – Six: Dialogue as meaning-making, irony, and veil**

The William Faulkner novels I selected provided a unique conceptual framework that removed the restraints of time and place. Faulkner’s stream of consciousness dialogue created a space in which past, present, and future converged as one. This literary technique allowed me to suspend my own reliance on linear time and place, and to reflect through the singular and inseparable lens of my own past, present, and future. The teaching and learning my students and I are engaged in is intricately bound to our three-dimensional identities. Within this complex landscape, the fears, aspirations, and conflicts that comprise who I am as a person and as an educator cry out to be explored. Only when I reached this plateau of thought and reflection did the fundamental curricular question proposed by William H. Schubert (1986) truly come to life:

What is worth knowing and experiencing? What kind of a life does such knowing and experiencing assume is good for both individuals and the society? How can we know if it is provided? (p. 411)

Conversely, the discourse cited from the *Seinfeld* television scripts brought me to a much different place. In *Seinfeld* discourse, ethics and values are replaced by irony and farce while morals and altruistic goals are replaced by sarcasm and satire. This discourse propelled me into a surreal landscape in which humanity was replaced by the *shadows* of humanity. By ignoring the lessons of past and denying the possibilities of the future, the characters are content to forego reality and to live within an animated suspension of disbelief. Similarly, to what extent does the tension between the reality of my teaching and learning and the quantitative morass of assessment data threaten the humanity of the classroom? To what degree do standardization and assimilation threaten the integrity of individual learners?

These tensions are often hidden beneath veils of words. Outer words act as a veil when the reality they espouse contradicts, misrepresents, or even betrays the speaker's inner values or beliefs. When Victor Frankenstein speaks to his creation, his angry and violent words veil his personal fears, regrets, and moral confusion. Are these words serving *to protect* his inner self that is in torment or are they used *to deny* a reality he would rather not face? As a teacher, how often are my words protecting my values or denying them? This space between denial and protection is for me a place of tension and ambiguity within which I struggle as a teacher and as a person. Parker J. Palmer (2007) warned that when our inner feelings and values are separated from our outer persona and words, we are left with "lifeless results":

We separate head from heart. Result: minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think. We separate facts from feelings. Result: bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote and ignorant emotions that reduce truth to how one feels today. (p. 68)

**D. Chapters Seven – Nine: Metaphors of journey, night, and double-consciousness**

How much of Odysseus' successful twenty year journey home was the result of his deliberate free will and decision-making and how much was the result of an intervening fate? To what extent is Odysseus an autonomous leader versus a victim of forces larger than himself? To what degree is he the captain of his crew and to what extent is he merely another passenger? This persistent tension between free will and fate continuously fills my journey as a teacher with emotional and ethical turbulence. To what extent am I metaphorically 'driving' the teaching and learning and to what extent am I merely just 'along for the ride'? Where do we stand on the continuum between teacher and student?

These conflicts are intensified in Elie Wiesel's (1960) memoir *Night*. His text raises tormenting scenarios in which the 'truth' of one's conscious reality is contradicted by the underlying truth inherent in one's unconscious. In the same way, the complicated landscape of teaching and learning is laden with "null curricula" (Eisner, 1979) and

“hidden curricula” (Schubert, 1986) that, although not readily seen or heard, can impact curriculum and instruction in profound ways. W.E.B. DuBois’ (1903) memoir also speaks to a hidden curriculum – in this case, a curriculum of hatred, bigotry and injustice that discriminated against race and color. To protect the integrity of his soul, DuBois described living within a “double consciousness” that adhered to an external mask of courtesy and meekness while insulating and protecting his authentic inner self. This disconnect between an inauthentic exterior mask and an authentic internal reality underneath characterizes a plethora of contradictions, dilemmas, and struggles that comprise the turbulent intrinsic landscape that I feel is indicative of the complex matrix we know as curriculum and instruction.

#### **E. Directions for further inquiry**

In many ways, this qualitative investigation is in its infancy. The intrinsic conflicts and contradictions exposed and explored here warrant further exploration. In order to better understand the nature and complexity of teaching and learning, I suggest we delve more deeply into the tensions that exist between an individual’s values and the underlying ethics of an organization or educational system within which the individual works. In order to better understand the intrinsic nature of curriculum and instruction, we need to further explore the conflicts that exist between the external reality of school and the unconscious and internal personal truths that lie beneath. This unique inquiry process that synthesizes literary analysis, autobiographical essay and reflection, phenomenology, and imagination has a long way to go in transcending the exterior masks of educators in order to explore the authentic inner selves underneath.

My hope is that others will be inspired by this personal journey. Perhaps some of the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions that I experienced will resonate with the lives (internal and external) of other educators. Perhaps some of the insights and epiphanies that I stumbled upon will speak to the experiences of others. I believe that the unique opportunities for introspection and reflection nurtured by this kind of a journey can serve to improve our understanding of curriculum and instruction. I am confident that the liberating spirit of this exploration can help us transcend the limitations and restrictions inherent in bureaucratic systems of teaching and learning.

The aesthetic, reflective, and imaginative components of this inquiry are worthy of inclusion in teacher and principal preparation programs. Pre-service and beginning teachers and administrators can deepen their understanding of teaching and learning by reflecting on the intrinsic realities that inform and define their identities as educators. Such reflection can help them better understand complexities and contradictions inherent in the field of education. School and district-wide professional development sessions would benefit from the metacognitive and introspective nature of this kind of exploration. It could serve as a meaningful entryway for professionals to collectively and individually contemplate underlying tensions, dilemmas, and conflicts that quietly affect the quality of their work.

The contribution of this study has been to explore, describe, and grapple with the inner tensions that shape teaching and learning and are shaped by the unique experiences, thoughts, values, and hopes of an educator. Integrating personal experiences with the universality of literature offers a host of possibilities for further exploration, contemplation, and meaning-making. The potential for insights, epiphanies, and

revelations - collective and personal - is vast. If readers have comments, thoughts, or reflections about this study, I would hope for and appreciate continuing this discourse. It is my hope that the ideas, thoughts, and suggestions inherent in this text will ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and of each other as together we persevere on our lifelong journey of teaching and learning.

## CITED LITERATURE

- Adams, H. (1906). *The education of Henry Adams*. New York: Dover.
- Adorno, T. (1962/1989). *Kierkegaard: Construction of the aesthetic*. (R. Hullot-Kentor, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Armstrong, B. J. (2001). *International superhits* [CD]. Oakland, CA: Reprise Records.
- Armstrong, B. J. (2004). *American idiot* [CD]. Oakland, CA: Reprise Records.
- Armstrong, B. J. (2009) *21st Century breakdown* [CD]. Oakland, CA: Reprise Records.
- Armstrong, T. (2007). *The human odyssey*. New York: Sterling Publishing.
- Aurelius, M. (trans. 1909). *Meditations*. (G. Long, Trans.) New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ayers, W. & Tanner, R. A. (2010). *To teach: The journey, in comics*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ayers, R., & Crawford, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Great books for high school kids: a teacher's guide to books that can change teens' lives*. Boston: Beacon.
- Bamberg, M. (2011). Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity. *Theory and Psychology*, 21(1), 3-24.
- Barthes, R. (1967). Writing degree zero & elements of semiology. (R. Howard, Trans.). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 1006-1010), New York: St. Martin's
- Barrett, W. (1987). *Death of the soul*. New York: Anchor.
- Baum, L. F. (1900/2004). *The wonderful wizard of Oz*. New York: Kensington.
- Belsey, C. (1980). *Critical practice*. London: Methuen.
- Bettleheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York: Random House.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 71(3), 691-709.
- Bullough, R. V. (1989). *First-year teacher: A case study*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Buscaglia, L. (1982). *Living, loving, and learning*. Thorofare, New Jersey: Charles Slack.
- Calhoun, C. (1995). Standing for something. *Journal of Philosophy*, XCII, 235-260. in Cox, D., La Caze, Marguerite and Levine, M. Integrity. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Spring 2012 Edition). E. N. Zalta (ed). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/integrity>
- Campbell, J. (1991). *The power of myth*. New York: Anchor.
- Chandler, D. (2002). *Semiotics: The basics*. New York: Routledge.
- Charles, L. (Writer), & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1994). The fire [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Cienki, A. (2008). "Why Study Metaphor and Gesture?" In A.J. Cienki & C. Muller (Eds.), *Metaphor and Gesture*. (pp. 5-25), Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Collodi, C. (1883/1996). *Pinocchio*. (E. Harden, Trans.). New York: Puffin Classics.
- Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (2000). *Narrative inquiry*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cowan, A., & David L., & Seinfeld, J., (Writers) & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1994). The opposite [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer) *Seinfeld*. NY: NBC Broadcasting.
- Crane, S. (1895/1970). *The red badge of courage and selected stories*. Ed. R. W. Stallman. New York: Signet.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Dalai Lama. (1999). *Ethics for the new millennium*. New York: Penguin Putman.
- D'aulaire, E., & D'aulaire, I. (1962). *D'aulaire's book of Greek myths*. New York: Doubleday.
- David, L., & Levin, L. (Writers), & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1992). The boyfriend (a.k.a. the new friend) [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- David, L. (Writer), & Cherone, T. (Director). (1992). The pitch [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer) *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- David, L., & Seinfeld, J. (Writers), & Ackermen, A. (Director). (1996). The Cadillac [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- David, L., & Seinfeld, J. (Writers). & Ackerman, A. (Director). (1998). The finale [Television series episode]. In J. Seinfeld (Executive producer) *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children*. New York: New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Capricorn Books.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, Touchstone.
- Dewey, J. (1943). The act of expression. In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*.



### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Dewey, J. (1958). *Experience and nature*. New York: Dover.
- Dewey, J., & Dewey, E. (1915). *Schools of tomorrow*. New York: Dutton and Co.
- Dibbley, D. C. (1993). *From Achilles heel to Zeus's shield*. New York: Fawcett.
- Dickens, C. (1838/2002). *Oliver Twist*. New York: Dover.
- Dickens, C. (1859/2004). *A tale of two cities*. New York: Barnes and Noble.
- Doyle, A.C. (1890/1950). *A scandal in Bohemia*. In E. W. Smith (Ed.), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (pp. 3 – 123). New York: Heritage.
- Doyle, A. C. (1892/1950). *The cardboard box*. In E. W. Smith (Ed.), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (pp. 3 – 123). New York: Heritage.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. New York: Penguin.
- Eco, U. (1972). The myth of superman. (N. Chilton, Trans.). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 1006-1010), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Eco, U. (2002). *On literature*. (Martin McLaughlin, Trans.). New York: Harcourt.
- Egan, K. (2008). *The future of education: Reimagining our schools from the ground up*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Eisner, E. (1967). *A comparison of the developmental drawing characteristics of culturally advantaged and culturally disadvantaged children*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Eisner, E. (1969). Instructional and expressive objectives: Their formulation and use in curriculum. In W.J. Popham (Ed.), *AERA monograph on curriculum evaluation: Instructional objectives* (pp. 1-18). Chicago: Rand McNally.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Eisner, E. (1979). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York: Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Eliot, T. S. (1921). Tradition and the individual talent. In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 466-471), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Ellison, R. (1947). *Invisible man*. New York: Random House.
- Faulkner, W. (1936/1990) *Absolum, absolum!* New York: Vintage.
- Faulkner, W. (1932/1990) *Light in August*. New York: Vintage.
- Faulkner, W. (1929/1984). *The sound and the fury*. New York: Vintage.
- Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2008). *Education for critical consciousness*. (Myra Bergman Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Geisel, T. (1990). *Oh, the places you'll go!* New York: Random House.
- Gray, J. (2003). *Straw dogs*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Greene, M. (1965). *The public school and the private vision*. New York: New Press.
- Greene, M. (1971). Curriculum and consciousness. *Teachers College Record*, 73(2), 253-270).
- Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Grumet, M. (1978). Songs and situations: The figure/ground relation in a case study of *currere*. In G. Willis (Ed.), *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism*. (pp. 276-315). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Harris, S. (2010). *The moral landscape*. New York: Free Press.
- He, M. F. (2003). *A river forever flowing*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Hersey, J. (1946). *Hiroshima*. New York: Knopf.
- Hillman, J. (1996). *The soul's code: In search of character and calling*. New York: Random House.
- Holland, N. (1975). The question: who reads what how? In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 1232-1239), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Homer. (1965). *The odyssey*. (Richard Lattimore, Trans.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Homer. (2007). *The iliad*. (W. H. D. Rouse, Trans.). New York: Signet.
- Hopkins, L. T. (1954). *The emerging self in home and school*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Horace. (18BCE). The art of poetry. (B. Raffel, Trans.). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 68-77), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Hostetler, K. (1998). *Ethical judgment in teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Hugo, V. (1862/1992). *Les misérables*. (C. E. Wilbour, Trans.). New York: Random House.
- Irwin W. (ed.). (2011). *Superheroes: The best of philosophy and pop culture*. New Jersey: Wiley.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Iser, W. (1976). The reading process: A phenomenological approach. In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 1219-1232), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Jackson, P. (1968). *John Dewey and the lessons of art*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- James, W. (1920). *Collected essays and reviews*. New York: Longmans/Green.
- Jauregui, A. (2007). *Epiphanies: Where science and miracles meet*. New York: Atria.
- Jefferson, T. (1776). The declaration of independence. In *American history desk reference* (pp. 9 – 12). New York: Scholastic.
- John Paul II, Pope. (2005). *Pope John Paul II: His essential wisdom*. Carol Kelly-Gangi (Ed.). New York: Fall River Press.
- Johnson, M. (1998). Metaphor and cognition. In S. Gallagher & Schmicking (Eds.), *Handbook of phenomenology and cognitive science* (401-414). New York: Springer.
- Johnston, P. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children's learning*. Portland: Stenhouse.
- Joyce, J. (1916\1993). *A portrait of the artist as a young man*. New York: Vintage.
- Jung, C. (1951). On the relation of analytical psychology to poetry. (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 656-665), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1957/2006). *The undiscovered self*. New York: Signet.
- Jurgens, D., Ordway, J., Simonson, L., & Stern, R. (1993). *The death of Superman*. New York: D.C. Comics.
- Kafka, F. (1915/1996). *The metamorphosis*. (Stanley Appelbaum, Trans.). New York: Dover.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Kavet, G. & Robin, A. (Writers), & Ackerman, A. (Director). (1996). The caddy [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Kelly E. F. (1975). Curriculum evaluation and literary criticism: Comments on the analogy. In G. Willis (Ed), *Qualitative evaluation*. (pp. 112-138), Berkeley. CA: McCutchan.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1845/1967). *Stages on life's way*. (Walter Lowrie, Trans.). New York: Schocken.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1843/1959) *Either/Or*, Vol 1. (David Swenson & Lilian Swenson, Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1843/1971) *Either/Or*, Vol 2. (Howard Hong & Edna Hong, Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1846/1968). *Concluding unscientific postscript*. (David F. Swenson, Trans.). New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kinget, G. M. (1975). *On being human*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Hoffman Davis, J. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lincoln, A. (1863). The Gettysburg address. In *The Civil War chronicle* (p. 235). Lincolnwood, IL: Legacy.
- Kretzmer, H. (1985). *Les misérables the musical sensation [CD]*. London: Exallshow.
- Mandel, D. (Writer), & Ackerman, A. (Director). (1996). The bizarro Jerry [Television

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- series episode]. In J. Seinfeld (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Mandel, D. (Writer), & Ackerman, A. (Director). (1997). The susie [Television series episode]. In J. Seinfeld (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Martin, N. (2000). Peterman and the ideological mind of paradoxes of Subjectivity. In William Irwin (Ed.). *Seinfeld and philosophy* (pp. 38 – 58). Chicago: Open Court.
- Mayes, C. (2005). *Teaching mysteries*. MY: University Press.
- Mehlman, P. (Writer), & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1993). The visa [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Mehlman, P., & Franklyn, J. (Writers), & Ackerman, A. (Director). (1997). The Yada, Yada [Television series episode]. In J. Seinfeld (Executive producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: NBC Broadcasting.
- Miller, J. (1998). Autobiography and the necessary incompleteness of teachers' stories. In W. Ayers & J. Miller (Eds.), *A light in dark times: Maxine Greene and the unfinished conversation*. (pp. 145-155), New York: Teachers College.
- Miller, J. (2005). *Sounds of silence breaking: Women, autobiography, curriculum (complicated conversation)*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Morris, M. Ed. (1998). *Goodbye, Seinfeld*. Northbrook, IL: H & S Media.
- Oz, A. (1999). *The same sea*. (N. de Lange, Trans.). London: Harcourt.
- Palmer, P. (2007). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pinar, W. F., & Grumet, M. (1976). *Toward a poor curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Pinar, W. (1978). Currere: A case study. In G. Willis (Ed.), *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism*. (pp. 316-342). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Rand, A. (1957). *Atlas shrugged*. New York: Random House.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. (Pope Benedict XVI. (2005). *The blessings of Christmas*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Rorty, R. (2005/2011). *An ethics for today*. (W. McCuaig, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rose, M. (2009). *Why school?* New York: New Press.
- Saint-Exupery, A. (1943/1971). *The little prince*. (K. Woods, Trans.). New York: Scholastic.
- Sanders, B. (2009). *Unsuspecting souls: The disappearance of the human being*. Berkeley: Counterpoint.
- Schon, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schubert, W. H. (1986). *Curriculum: Perspective, paradigm, and possibility*. New York: Macmillan.
- Schubert, W.H. (1991). Philosophical inquiry: The speculative essay. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of educational inquiry*. (pp. 61-76), Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Schubert, W. H. (2009a). *Love justice and education: John Dewey and the utopians*. NC: Information Age Publishing.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Schubert, W. H. (2009b). What is worthwhile. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 9 (1).
- Semino, Elena, & Steen, Gerard. (2008). *Metaphor in Literature*. In R.W. Gibbs, Jr. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. (pp. 232-246), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (1598/1988). *Hamlet*. New York: Oxford University Press. (many sources)
- Shakespeare, W. (1606/1988). *Macbeth*. New York: Oxford University Press. (many sources)
- Shakespeare, W. (1603/1988). *Othello*. New York: Oxford University Press. (many sources)
- Shakespeare, W. (1597/1988). *Romeo and Juliet*. New York: Oxford University Press. (many sources).
- Shakespeare, W. (1609/1988) *Sonnets*. New York: Oxford University Press. (many sources)
- Shaw, G. B. (1914) *Misalliance with a treatise on parents and children*. In Simon (1958) *Shaw on Education*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shaw, G. B. (1947). *Back to Methuselah: A metabiological pentateuch*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Shelley, M. (1818/2000). *Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus*. New York: Signet.
- Sheriff, J.K. (1989). *The fate of meaning: Charles Peirce, structuralism and literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.



### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Shermer, M. (2012). Opting out of optimism. *Scientific American*, 78.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2001). If meaning is constructed, what is it made from? Toward a cultural theory of reading. In *Review of Educational Research*, 71 (1), 133-169.  
Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Smith, D. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of educational inquiry*. (pp. 187-209), Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Sternberg, E. (2010). *My brain made me do it: the rise of neuroscience and the threat to moral responsibility*. New York: Prometheus.
- Surya Das, Lama. (2007). *The big questions: How to find your own answers to life's essential mysteries*. New York: Rodale.
- Tolstoy, L. (1869/2002). *War and peace*. (C. Garnett, trans.). New York: Random House.
- Tolstoy, L. (1898). From *What is Art?*. (A. Maude, Trans.). In D. H. Richter (Ed.), *The critical tradition*. (pp. 437-445), New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Vallance, E. (1991). Aesthetic inquiry: Art criticism. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of educational inquiry*. (pp. 155-172), Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (1978-79). An experiment in educational theorizing: The Utrecht School. *Interchange*, 10. 48-66.
- Virgil. *Aeneid*. (R. Fitzgerald, trans. 1981). New York: Random House.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *The aims of education and other essays*. New York: Macmillan.

### CITED LITERATURE (continued)

- Wiesel, E. (1960/1982). *Night*. (S. Rodway, Trans.). New York: MacGibbon & Kee.
- Wigginton, E. (1985). *Sometimes a shining moment: The foxfire experience*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.
- Willis, G. (Ed). (1978). *Qualitative evaluation: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism*. Berkeley, California: McCutchan.
- Willis, G. and Allen A. J. (1978). Patterns of phenomenological response to curricula: implications. In G. Willis (Ed.), *Qualitative evaluation* (pp. 34-71). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Willis, G. & Schubert, W. H. (Eds.). (1991). *Reflections from the heart of educational inquiry*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Woolf, V. (1928). *Orlando*. New York: Harcourt.
- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. New York: Harcourt.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **EDWARD PODSIADLIK III**

#### **EDUCATION**

- 2013 Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago  
Dissertation: *Anecdotes and Afterthoughts: Literature as a Teacher's Curriculum*  
Chair: William H. Schubert
- 2005 Reading Endorsement, Gr. K-12 Dominican University
- 2004 MA in Educational Administration Saint Xavier University
- 1997 ESL (English as a Second Language) endorsement Governors State University
- 1995 MA in English Literature and Writing Purdue University
- 1990 BA in Elementary Education Saint Xavier University

#### **WORK EXPERIENCE**

- August 2012 – present University of Illinois at Chicago Clinical Lecturer/Asst. Professor
- August 1993 – June 2012 Chicago Public Schools: teacher, administrator, reading coach
- July 1990 – July 1993 Archdiocese of Chicago elementary teacher

#### **RECOGNITION**

- Who's Who Among America's Teachers* (2000-2007)  
Golden Apple Finalist (2002)  
Aquin Guild Distinguished Service Award (2001)  
PTA-sponsored Teacher of the Year (2004, 2008)

#### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP**

- International Reading Association (IRA)  
Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago Classics Club  
American Classical League  
Aquin Guild of Chicago  
Phi Theta Kappa (Na. Honor Fraternity)  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

## CURRICULUM VITAE (continued)

### PUBLISHED ARTICLES

Paradigm Shifts that Nurture Improved Middle School Reading Instruction. (2008).  
*Forum on Public Policy*. London: Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com/archivesum07/podsiadlik.pdf>

*Homer's Odyssey for Grades 7 and 8*. (2002). *Prima: Elementary Excellence through Classics*, Volume 7, Issue One.

### COLLEGIATE PRESENTATIONS

*Literacy: Educational Strategies and Initiatives*. (2007). Presentation at the Oxford University Literacy Round Table Oxford University, London.

*Using Seinfeld as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Connection to the Ancient World*. (2006). Workshop at American Classical League (ACL) Institute, University of Pennsylvania.

*Lights! Camera! Odyssey! Using drama to teach reading and writing*. (2005). Workshop at ACL Institute, University of New Mexico.

*Using Seinfeld in the Social Studies Classroom*. (2003). Workshop at National Council for Social Studies Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

*Finding Your Pedagogical Method* (1998). Workshop at the ACL Institute, San Francisco State University.

*Pedagogical Implications of Whole Language Theories*. (1994). Workshop at AC Institute, University of Colorado, Boulder.