**METHODOLOGIES OF RELATIONSHIP: RISKING SELF-(RE)DEFINITION THROUGH COMMUNITIES AND DIALOGUES OF DIFFERENCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Heather E. Epes: **METHODOLOGIES OF RELATIONSHIP:
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DIALOGUES OF DIFFERENCE**
(Under the direction of Todd Taylor)

This dissertation discusses methodologies of teaching stressing relationships
between class participants through the development of a "community of difference"
that uses a "dialogue of difference." In these classrooms, community creates a
constructive space for incorporating the lived experiences and multiple identities of
individuals into learning processes, favoring the development of critical thought,
individual voice, and awareness of difference. My pedagogy combines writing
center and composition studies models for writing and discourse communities with
the work of Black feminist theorists like Patricia Collins and bell hooks. These
women conceptualize community and identity theories that support the idea of self-
redefinition within community that may lead to greater understanding of difference.
I also draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "utterance" to call attention to the
ways language may represent individual experience and knowledge. An instructor
can employ language use and relationship in a classroom community as a dialogue
of difference that critically considers sociohistorical and immediate forces that affect
individual experience and identity. In addition to developing self-definition, this

kind of environment can also be used to stress continual self-redefinition within

community and a responsibility towards recognizing difference in community.

The autobiographical first chapter, "Biography of a Pedagogy," positions the

development of my pedagogical and methodological convictions at the cross-section

of my own sociohistorical circumstances and experience. I present my subsequent

theoretical work with a number of composition theorists and Black feminist theorists,

and Mikhail Bakhtin in the second chapter, and the last chapter addresses the

practice of relationship and research on the subject.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Daddy: a somewhat late Father's Day present. We are Dr. Epes, the gardener.

For Mama: We are the bookwoman, the heart in the hand.


The folks back home my family, Chris my good as brother, luna nyx my little,

Brenda my wise stargazer, Julie my support and balm, Carrie my anarchic single

white female, Julia my dearest, Adams my oldest, Suzanne and Paula my grrrls,

Shelley my angel, Margaret my medieval BollyBaby, Ellen my constant highlight,

Bill my pirate, that psychiatrist in L.A. my clarity, Deedee Laurilliard my guru,

Anne and Jon my porchside and perspective buddies, Bob my breath, Lily and Grace

my arts 'n' crafts and dress-up pals, the "delinquents" my teachers, Alesi my mantra,

my profs my models, my Committee my wonderers, Todd my persistence, Kim my

encouragement, remaining unnamed my disasters, Avalokitesvara my bodhisattva,

South Georgia's terrain my roots, Leigh the Flea my stalwart troublemaker, Kyle my

good memory, Sandy my lost friend, my students my reason and my hope…

we are me.

# PREFACE

Regrettably, in the standardized publication of this dissertation, a number of changes had to be made to the original text, which I would like to clarify for the reader.

The changes affect the demonstrative nature of the dissertation, an aspect that demands a reader to engage in a kind of methodology of relationship as she reads. Interruptive text and shifts in voice are an important performative aspect of the reading experience as a whole, acknowledging multiplicity and experience as they are explained in Chapter 2. The elements that were changed provided a kind of guide for the reader, offering cues. Their loss, in addition to affecting the meaning of the text, may in some cases also affect ease of accessibility.

Please see notes below on the state of the original text:

1. All italicized text was originally contained in each instance within a box frame, indicating a narrative of experience.

2. All zen parables were presented in "Papyrus" font.

3. In Chapter 1, page 19, the last line of the section "Threads of Community," beginning with "Namaste," is written in "Papyrus."

4. The first paragraph beginning on page 67 uses of "Papyrus" font, continuing through second paragraph on page 68. This font is also used for the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 69 up until the italicized font on page 71.

5. Footnote 9 on page 68 is written in "Papyrus" font.

6. The hip hop lyric that begins the first section of Chapter 3, page 133 was presented in "Fatboy Slim" font.

7. The second paragraph on page 154 uses "Papyrus" font, including its footnote. The closing line of this same section, "Composing Humans" in Chapter 3, reads, "Shanti, shanti, shanti," and is written in "Papyrus" font, page 163.

8. The closing line of "Learning Relationships" in Chapter 3 reads, "Rebel, rebel, rebel," and is written in "Fatboy Slim" font, page 175.

9. The "Student Sutra, Teacher Manifesto" in Chapter 3, pages 176 and 177, was written in "Papyrus" font.

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# CHAPTER 1
# BIOGRAPHY OF A PEDAGOGY:
# A TEACHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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### The Laughing Buddha

The Hotei lived in the T'ang dynasty. He had no desire to call himself or be called a Zen master. He walked the streets with a big sack into which he would put candy, fruit or doughnuts. He would give these to children who gathered around him in play and established a kindergarten of the streets.

Once as he was about his play-work another Zen master inquired, "What is the significance of Zen?"

The Hotei immediately plopped his sack down on the ground in silent answer.

"Then," asked the other, "what is the actualization of Zen?"

At once the Laughing Buddha swung the sack over his shoulder and continued on his way.

I have been accused of identifying too closely with my students. I have been

warned about being their friend. That kind of relationship has been deemed

inappropriate for the classroom. "You can't be their friend and their teacher, too."

Why on earth not? "Friend" seems to carry the negative connotation of ingratiating

oneself, self-compromise, immaturity, sacrifice of rigorous learning, cream puff idealism. The attitude seems to me to be a cynical, fearful, and impoverished comprehension of the words "teacher" and "friend," and possibly of relationship in general. A student is as real an individual as any friend I have, not an entity or object that can mysteriously taint my adulthood or teaching effectiveness. The teacher is remiss who would allow friendship to water down the quality of education and the amount of learning that is achieved in a classroom. An interested understanding of a student's history and personal contingencies should improve a teacher's chances of creating a dynamic learning environment, not the opposite. Education is not, after all, simply memorizing a date or writing an acceptable academic paragraph. A lasting understanding of the significance and meaning of information and the act of learning is always, let's admit it, in terms of self. What does it mean to *me*? If you haven't paid attention to who "me" is, you can't expect "me" to care. If you haven't paid attention to "me", how will you know how to relate to "me", to self, to others? How will you show "me" how to do so "myself"? What, then, can you teach me?

## Threads of Danger: Living and Learning Systemic Inequity

Valdosta, Georgia: The Azalea City, one of the last exits on 75 before you hit Florida, an hour and a half from the nearest Okefenokee entrance, and the Home of the Wildcats. It had all the trappings of a properly Southern town. Historic white houses with their own names, like "The Crescent" and "The Converse-Dalton

House", graced our downtown and the Fairview Historic district, which predates the incorporation of the city in 1865. The surrounding farmlands, mostly cotton, tobacco, tomatoes and greens, attested to a long tradition of agricultural community and economy, its nastier historical elements resting quietly under the rows of pretty crops.  It was a city small enough to still remember its notable family names, Langdale, Turner, Strickland, Vallotton, Dasher, and to still see their progeny show up on school rosters, in the Country Club, and in the names of businesses or landmarks.  Small enough that if you meet someone in North Carolina who knows someone in Valdosta, they'll even today go ahead and ask if you know that person or their family, and expect you to. There was always a social event buzz, the Junior League galas; the Ladies' Garden Society contests and exhibits; the Civil War era dances put on by Valdosta State College fraternities, complete with hoop skirts; the Daughters of the Revolution meetings, where I once presented a paper on Crispus Attucks; the Country Club evening to-do's; the Elk's Club raffles. These events were important enough to end up in the Valdosta Daily Times society page regularly. If the scene seems to have lacked a more current patriarchal presence, you could count in Moody Airforce Base and the institution of the Valdosta Wildcats high school football champions. To this day people irritate me in two ways when they find out I'm from Valdosta: asking "Is that where those onions are from?" and by getting way too excited about The Wildcats and their Sports Illustrated appearance umpteen years ago. Vidalia, incidentally, is much further north and east than Valdosta.

The Old South mentality supported a patriarchy that still guarded its women, as well as inhibiting them. For a youngster who hasn't yet learned the power of self-definition, the unrecognized effect was a comforting one of well-defined social order and promise for those who entered into the social contract. Indeed, there were no acceptable models for any other option. A young, white, middle-class girl could be lulled easily into a sense of safety by the protective societal patterns already tightly woven into place for her and her kith. You couldn't even see the weft; you just wore the thing. And if a corset's the only thing you've ever worn, it takes a while to notice the fit. Really, though, we should have seen it coming. According to my Mama, I was six when I began to resist saying ma'am and sir. I clearly remember my logic, thinking that it was a stupid ritual. Why should I show that kind of respect to someone who hadn't given me any reason to yet? And why didn't *I* get some kind of title? "Cutie" seemed an inadequate and diminishing return.

The only evidence of Second Wave Feminism in South Georgia was bizarre instances of backlash that didn't even realize they were, like GRITS: Girls Raised in The South. It was clever in its own way, unconscious or not. It got the women worked up about their role without challenging it in the least. GRITS keep their houses sparkly, themselves well-groomed for every social occasion, their husbands happy, and their children pristine. They are proud steel magnolias and endure in silence, like antebellum martyrs. The word "feminist" simply never came up, and if it did, it was usually used as a stand-in for "bitch" or an uppity over-educated woman. Even women I know at home now who support feminist ideology will

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insist nervously or adamantly that they are not "feminist." Long before I knew the word, however, I learned that to assert yourself as a woman and a person too loudly in my home community could be risky, just as it was risky for Blacks to anger our protective white men, and was certain danger to be openly homosexual. While steel magnolias might civilly forbear wrath even when judging others, those protective white men had duties to keep the social fabric whole and clean. Everything was their prerogative, from defense to maintenance, and we were to appreciate them for handling our difficulties and threats, for keeping us safe and our hands clean, whether they used violence, harsh words, or simple subtle rejection of personal choices and self-expression.

Instead of safety, however, it was life in Valdosta that taught me valuable lessons of danger and rage. If you felt that the price of self-expression for protection was too high, protection was no guarantee. This seemingly congenial and community-based social structure harbored a latent male violence, and not just towards women. To appear too different or ungrateful was an uncalculated risk, and your place in the social order could reveal itself as a strings attached deal. Rejected by my peers as odd and for being "smart," provided with female roles I couldn't make fit, surrounded by football and entitled white males, the oppressive nature of Southern patriarchal protection left me few options for flexing my own muscles. As I sometimes recklessly, sometimes with savvy, tried to assert my own identity, protection abandoned me. A growing cynical wisdom informed me that I wasn't safe even when I was good, even though I was smart, even though I had a good

family, and that Southern civility could act as a cover for other, darker patriarchal tendencies. I frequently responded in kind. Valdosta saw me endure an unusually animated and long-lasting rejection by my peers; become a constant target of sexual harassment beginning at twelve with the business man who grabbed me under the arm at a family eatery in an attempt to "coax" me to sit on his friend's lap; begin to sneak out at night with my friend Leigh; smash bottles in driveways in the middle of said nights once or twice; take up smoking at thirteen due to suppressed fury and boredom; manage to exit quickly as that gunshot went off during one of those middle-of-a-field-in-the-country parties; unintentionally incite a midnight car chase with the police; suffer date rape at thirteen; and tempt anorexia out of self-loathing and frustration. By age fourteen, I was on the edge and enraged about it. On the other hand, I didn't want to be anywhere near the center.

Beginning in second grade, I attended the only non-religiously affiliated private school in the area, The Valwood School. Let me stress the fishbowl effect: when I was there, Valwood boasted around 200 students, from K4 to 12th grade. My graduating class numbered seventeen. For the greater part of my sojourn there, my peers hated me. They figured out in third grade that I wasn't their kind of girl. I made good grades, I got along well with adults and older kids, read voraciously, processed information differently, asked too many questions, traveled, and icing, my folks couldn't afford Polo. Ralph Lauren was barely on the periphery of my parents' consciousness, but even if they had been aware of his crucial fashion influence, they wouldn't have given him their traveling money. And I wouldn't

really have wanted them to. It was only in my weakest moments that I wanted to be those other kids. My first, and some of my hardest, lessons in integrity were those that asked me to maintain an identity not based around shirts decorated with rich men playing a rich man's game.

I thought I was bored and unhappy at Valwood…until I tried three months of the public high school at the beginning of freshman year. The Valdosta Wildcats are Valdosta's greatest claim to fame after Moody Airforce Base, and the whole phenomenon represented everything I despised: silly girls and arrogant guys in constant crisis over popularity, the tendency of academic institutions to overemphasize athletics, teachers who wanted only right answers and no discussion, stifling patriarchal priorities. My only popularity to date had been of a brutally negative sort, and only a desire to escape my peer-defined roles at Valwood could have made me think the high school would be a better place for me. Once there, I began to understand why they were so crazy about the stupid Wildcats. There wasn't a whole lot else to get amped about.

I don't clearly remember the classes I took there. My English teacher didn't like me, which my classmates explained to me in my confusion was because I asked difficult questions about The Odyssey. My geometry teacher was a little beady and kept a bunch of junk in liquor boxes in the corner of the room. Matt, the guy who sat behind me, loved the song: "Nine little bears all in one bed, the littlest said, 'III'm, crowwwded; rolll over.' Eight little bears…" That's pretty much all I remember about that class. In chemistry I could take the history class across the hall, and in

government I could take the lit class next door. Someone had misunderstood the concept of "open classroom" in the seventies, and the school was mostly a honeycomb of partition walls, with random bits of furniture showing up in odd spaces. There were way too many people.

In the end, even cruelty at the hands of my longtime Valwood peers was preferable to the insipid character of Valdosta High School and its less than memorable classroom experiences. Valwood's teachers had already made me into a discerning student, insistent on substance, scornful of surface treatment and busywork. Interestingly enough, after a brief hiatus from school in general, I returned to Valwood and was within weeks shooed into the new "cool" group of skateboarders and alternatives, which also included old friends Adams and Garrett. Being a freaker suddenly became an asset.

Mixson Anderson, a fellow fixture at my school, and I were waiting for class to start in eleventh grade. Suddenly, Mixson ran his hand up the top of my thigh and informed me with a smirk, "'Bout time to shave, huh?" My brain exploded. Despite all my bravado when it came to smoking and sneaking out in the middle of the night, I didn't make a single move. Instead, we laughed as if he'd made a joke, as I weakly protested. My primary thought was, "But it's only, like, two centimeters long!" Later, I realized I was so mad I could've spat. I got increasingly angry as I realized the implications of this interchange. Mixson felt that he could assess my appearance, to the point that he scrutinized the length of my leg hair. Mixson felt that he could touch my thigh and instruct my femininity. As if I shaved for him! My

total compliance disgusted me and led to one of my first clearly formed feminist analyses. If I had pitched a fit, I had no doubt that I would have been treated at best as overreacting, at worst, as a bitch. I had already learned what protest got you if you were a girl. I had been immobilized. Somehow, Mixson's infuriating, although apparently harmless, comfortableness was intrinsically related to the abuse and shame I and girls I knew had suffered at the hands of other men. Something was telling these men that they had a right to my body one way or the other. Just who *was* I shaving for? And just why was I cooperating? Even in the most innocent of settings, my body somehow wasn't my own. My role as pleasing was clear, and the smallest infractions were tallied and registered. It felt like a conspiracy.

Like any human, I was (and still am) self-absorbed. While my education about gender roles and femininity vis-à-vis patriarchal structure proceeded apace, it took me a bit longer to contemplate patriarchal structure and race, much less my part in it. But my tenth grade year, I, as an officer on the Student Council, looked out of myself enough to participate in the city Meals-on-Wheels program. Four of us picked up the meals and our address list from an ugly brick church downtown. As we hung a left onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Street, I realized that we had crossed the tracks and were entering the All Black part of town. And I mean it wasn't even the projects over there. I could not have been prepared. There was decidedly no buzz about the Black south side of town just over the railroad tracks. It wasn't that people acted like it wasn't there; it was that they saw nothing problematic about its being there or their easy acceptance of it. The only trickle down information I got about

"nigger town" was its role as the city locale for drug use and various public disturbances. (Wealthy White cocaine, rampant alcoholism, and prescription drug use was a shocking discovery I made even later, as it was much less publicized.) My vague fears fostered by selective information gave way to a distinct horror as the hour passed, horror based on a challenging reality. Although in town, none of these roads were paved. These houses had no heat or air. They held up in disrepair, some even unsafe, some abandoned and falling apart. The neighborhood folks gave us guarded, impassive looks, evasive looks as we drove by in the shiny blue Jimmy. Suddenly I experienced a vague taste of that conspiracy thing, not an experience I had expected during our charitable activity. This wasn't about being poor in Valdosta. Even lower income white neighborhoods didn't look quite like this.[1] This was about being Black and poor in Valdosta.

We pulled over at the next house on our list, and Jackie carried a meal up to the door. After she knocked a bit, the lady on the porch next door volunteered shortly, "She done passed." Jackie, formerly Minnesotan, couldn't understand her even the second time and only figured it out half-way to the car. When she got in, she turned the whole thing into a big joke, laughing in plain view of the woman. I felt sick and was generally ashamed of our aborted attempt at assistance. We'll keep our lists and pack up our meals, play at community building, but we won't pay enough attention to the people we help to realize they've died and take their name off the list. We

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[1]I acknowledge that white poverty in the South frequently follows another route, one that leads out of town and doesn't necessarily have a neighborhood, but that falls beyond the scope of this particular discussion.

can't even understand them when they speak to us. Mostly I was ashamed of myself. Not because I was White, but because I was White and ignorant. I'd been riding past this neighborhood on the way to my extended family's jointly owned lake outside Valdosta all my life. I was as clueless as I habitually envisioned those stupid Wildcats cheerleaders to be. And a tickle in the back of my brain suggested that the social forces at work here somehow spoke to the danger and rage that I lived with as well.[2] I was rocked by a flash of cognitive dissonance, whereby I saw myself grouped together with those White men in the eyes of Black experience. My own ignorance was complicity, exactly the same way others' ignorance, ignore-ance, of my dangerous encounters and resulting behavior enabled those very occurrences. I was shaken by a glimmering of the connections between being at risk and institutionalized power dynamics that affect all of us differently, but also paradoxically could equally systematically create inequity and violence. In fact, I had a suspicion that inequity was violence, physically, emotionally, materially. I felt a desperate need for self-redefinition, for myself, but for my part in the world as well.

Fear became a default setting that even today I must constantly switch back off. I felt at risk all the time, and my behavior often enacted that simple truth. My body was dangerous, my peers didn't accept me, and I was starved for intellectual companionship. In my small ways, I continued to grow louder in my feminist and

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[2]I think of Mab Segrest, who puts it in her autobiographical work: "Both patriarchy and racism depend on creating a category of Other—or freak, not 'normal like me.' In Southern racism, it is the Black person; in patriarchy, the female" (27).

anti-racist dissent. My friend Leigh would warn others, laughing and informative at the same time, throwing up a hand to stop them and shaking her head, "Uh, you can't talk like that around Heather. She'll let you have it." I met raised eyebrows and confused looks, if not downright hostility or defensiveness. I felt like a freaker in a tightrope act on only a thread's worth of rope from the corset I had shredded, the social fabric I had torn. But my fear was opening my eyes, and my rage encouraged me to ask salient questions. I was beginning to make connections between my dangers and the kinds of risk others lived with as well. I was beginning to piece together the implications and complications of complacency, to understand the ignorance and violence that can underpin civility, and how we are all affected in a web of connections and influences.

My experiences of risk and damage are crucially important to the way I inhabit a classroom, the way I see my students and hope to see a little of their core, hope they see mine, hope in so doing to encourage them to see themselves and others. And as I bring my history and contingencies, so do they. We are all at risk. Learning to see the webs we weave and have been woven into can be a jarring cognitive and emotional challenge, no matter where we find ourselves situated within the patterns. And even more difficult can be adding to, ripping out, or reworking the threads of our lives, risking redefining ourselves and raising our voices. In any environment, while I am careful to cultivate compassion and understanding, I sure

don't have time for civility and appropriateness.[3] And don't you dare call me ma'am.

## Threads of Community: Living and Learning Compassion

When we say "The Azalea City," we mean it. R.J. Drexel, city parks developer, was our Johnny Appleseed of azaleas. I think we could have done without the cheesy downtown Christmas lights which proclaim it, but it's true. Spring in Valdosta really jumps out at you. The azaleas are rampant, with a camellia complement. Then tulip trees, wisteria, magnolia, blue hydrangea, crepe myrtle. Honeysuckle, viburnum, geraniums, lantana, forsythia. Lots of live oak and pecan trees. And two billion loblolly pines. Pretty idyllic.

My family is the origin point for my understanding of community. The Smith and Paine Southern conglomerate is so huge that youngsters are frequently asking each other and their parents how they're related to one of the cousins, and what to call that relative at The Fourth of July Picnic. I'm convinced it's partly this kind of big family interaction training that allows Southerners to master chat so well. Once you've asked someone knowledgeably about their recent trials, their mother, their child, cousin, and great-uncle, you've pretty much got them. And you've also been able to make any necessary communicative adjustments to make the rest of the conversation go smoothly. The family is as entrenched as the Langdales and Turners

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[3]Manners can provide a welcome politeness, but they can also function doubly and quite smoothly as a system of superficial posturing and smoke screens, often covering for the ugliest aspects of society.

in our own way. There's a Smith Street out where my Nana grew up at Wildwood, and a Loch Laurel Road named for our lake. People you run into about town know you five different ways even if you don't know them. And they don't hesitate to tell you who you favor, although there may be different opinions on who exactly you look like. Me, I always looked like my Mama (I do) and had her voice on the phone, and we both had my Nana's eyes. Actually, almost all my maternal family have my Nana's eyes. Rather than creating a sense of unfamiliarity, our large constituency created a tight weave of generations. Without question, by consensus, you belonged and belong, no matter how many times you snuck out of the house or how many cigarettes you smoked. You can test all you like. The only way you'll lose your thread is if you pull it out yourself, and good luck managing that, too, since it's connected to everybody else's.

My parents and my uncle, Chris, three years older than me, were my first best friends. My folks took me everywhere, and Chris let me follow him everywhere, even when he got to be a teenager. He checked up on me at school, and, since I was an only child, took over brotherly duties like tickling me til I cried, skipping stones, and teaching me how to time throwing firecrackers so they exploded just under the lake water. Chris was proud that I was smart and showed me off to his friends by getting me to read to them. I remember him taking me to his classroom before school started once, and the fifth grade crowded around my third grade self reading from one of their schoolbooks in a brief moment of glory. Like my oldest friend, Adams, an exception amongst my peers as we grew up, Chris made me feel that I

was good as Heather and didn't need to be anything else, corset on or corset shredded. They somehow trusted my decisions about who I was and what I was going to believe, and respected even my oddities. Some Southern men can be gentle and strong, prize decency and difference without moralizing or condescending overtones, and value relationship over roles. Between Chris, Adams, and Daddy, men in my life have a lot to live up to.

I learned an intense vocabulary for emotional realities and the importance of self-awareness from my Mama. It's through honesty that real relationships are built, and it's self-examination and spiritual quest that allow you to be honest. You learn about yourself, the world, and others only if you pay attention, only if you ask the right questions (which may, in fact, depend on who you are). It requires risking being human in some of the most difficult ways, sharing yourself and embracing vulnerability that always could, and inevitably sometimes will, result in pain. It requires humility, attention to detail, the willingness to develop deep empathy, a state of forgiveness of self and others. To step far enough outside your own turmoil to recognize the realities of the other person, but not to step out so far that you fool yourself into thinking you're being objective. You always bring yourself and your history to your interpretations of the moment or another person's behavior. Meaningful interaction all depends on where you are and where the other person is and if either or both of you understand those positions. If you want to be heard, if you want to hear, these things must be acknowledged. Otherwise, in the end, nobody's learning anything about themselves or anything else. And while that may

be okay for chat, it doesn't build fruitful or enlightening relationships, and things can even get in a terrible tangle.

My obsession with plant life is my Father's fault, with some help from Mama's African violets, geraniums, and impatiens. Daddy is a gardening man, and his yard attests. My Nana once brought a dead plant to him to bring back to life. Whatever little bit it had left in it, he brought out green again. The sacred nature of this work to him is plain enough that I recognized it clearly by the time I was eight. I had been raised open to all religions, but I was "trying out" an Episcopalian church with Mama. She was feeling a need for a spiritual center that involved community, and was searching. I remember being kind of surprised, but for some reason I thought it was better for her when I went too. Besides, it was really kind of interesting, and I liked the rituals. And I did love Father Carter. Like my Daddy in the garden, sacredness kind of hung around him in a quiet, enveloping way. But Brother Bill – or perhaps it was Brother Bob? Brother John? I can't remember – apparently thought church was about keeping score. He made it his special duty to plague my Mama about why Daddy didn't accompany us. Mama says this actually only happened once or twice, but in my memory, it has acquired rather pronounced proportions. Having dealt little with condescension and self-righteousness up to this point, I despised him in a most righteous manner myself; he was clearly missing the point, and it made me furious that he was picking on my little Mama.

One day, Brother Boob took it upon himself to approach me. I was flat out excited. Saccharine: "And why didn't we see Brother Peter today?" I stared quietly

and appraisingly at him until he was thrown off, and said something like, "My Daddy is in church. He doesn't need to come here. He's tending his garden." Brother Tim/Joe/Jim Bob opened his mouth, and that was about it. I smiled sweetly, which girls in Valdosta learn to do very early, before skipping down the church steps to Mama. Honestly, besides Father Carter, the stained glass, and the music, the best thing about church was the old Black man who would occasionally show up and do that hambone.[4] In fact, the kids just called him Hambone. "Here comes Hambone! Here comes Hambone!" He had treats in his pockets and could also play spoons most excellently while he sang. Though I don't remember an adult ever greeting him, the children flocked to him on sight. He was our Hotei, and understood far more about love than Brother Blah. He didn't think about it; he lived it, smiling back at our smiles.

Daddy's garden wasn't just flowers. There were bushes galore and a slow but steady acquisition of trees. Watching that garden change shape under his tending year after year affected my sense of time, perception of work, and my attitude towards production. My respect for attentive patience, patience that does more than wait, was born in the garden. Daddy didn't lose patience with a plant or himself because he didn't just garden for results. He gardened to see things grow. It's not the same thing. Plants appear to die but come back months later. Trees remain sickly for two years and then decide to burgeon. Sometimes you just have to move that

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[4]See <http://www.christophergross.com/becker/song.html> for a jazzed up version of the traditional song, which also includes some of the slapping rhythms. Hambone, or Pattin' Juba, is a type of traditional slave song and dance with West African origins.

rudbeckia to a different spot in the yard for it to bloom. And sometimes, you lose one no matter what you do. People, I've learned, don't behave much differently. It was good lessons to observe that having a green thumb, as demonstrated by Daddy, takes a lot of work and love, a lot of the same things Mama's approach to relationships fostered.

In my father's material and metaphysical gardens, the riotous flower bed of my family, and the bloom of my mother's heart, I experienced the grace of patience, honesty, forgiveness, and compassion. I wouldn't have survived the shredding effect of my various destructive behaviors without my family and their lessons by example. I've done things I never should have been able to with my kind of personal troubles, emotional difficulties, and mental fallout. I did well academically at a prestigious university, and worked hard to make it meaningful on a personal level. Despite my limitations, self-condemnation, and fears, both the will and ability to create meaningful and healthy relationships have grown within me. But these things happened only because I was given chance after chance (and still am), unconditional counsel and encouragement, and because they kept faith in me long after I had lost it, long before I got it back, through all my unravelings and reprioritizations. Every time I've been ready to abandon the loom of my life for good, they sat me down again and held my hands around the threads til I could myself.

The interesting thing about chances for those of us who really need them, and maybe even when it doesn't look like it to others, is that the more of them there are,

the more precious they become, instead of less, as you might expect. We learn to see them, hear them, recognize them in the smallest of places; they burgeon in beauty, promising we can do the same. And one day I realized that every now and then, someone else, not kin at all, weaving wonderfully themselves, would bring me a bit of their own garden, would give me back a bit of myself I might have shredded or ripped up along the way. They might go out of their way to tell me what good they thought they saw in me, or give a small, that is to say large, gift of compassion like Hambone and Hotei treats. They may not even know what they have done. Most of these other people have been teachers or healers, in the larger sense of both of those words, and sometimes were one and the same. Some have been friends or mentors, and some have literally been strangers on the street. I realized that the community creatively keeping me afloat extended well beyond my kin, though they have felt it more keenly. The community that keeps me alive and healing is defined by compassion: the bloom in the heart, the patience that does more than wait, the Hotei's laugh, the Hambone's songs, the smile and steady hand on the street. The wisdom that reaches far beyond knowledge and without which knowledge is a seed only. Out of compassion arises a community of humanity, humans fully human who teach one another how to live well, to live for themselves, and to live for others. Namaste. A lotus for you, buddha to be, whatever it is you may at this moment be.

## Teachers, Tea, and Bluebirds: Living and Learning Education

**The Early Years**

My first grade teacher advised my parents to get me out of the public system. Mrs. Burt was a gentle, attentive teacher and could see the long view of my academic career in ways that my parents and I could not. And though the fish bowl effect of private school was horrible in some ways, it was also uniquely qualified to address my even sometimes desperate need to learn things, any thing, all things. I was initially there on scholarship, something I discovered much later. When my Mama started work as school librarian, I was in fifth grade. I'm pretty sure it was so I could continue to attend.

My parents approached life in general like interested and excited students. Any material would do. A marble or old fashioned truck dug up in the yard could become an opportunity to talk first about children's toys decades ago and then about life and culture in general decades ago. A bug on the geranium leaf could turn into a discussion about different kinds of bugs, their food sources, and their life cycles. Or it could become a discussion about what makes some plants more attractive to bugs and birds than others. Stargazing could lead to imagining the ball of fire that made the light and even to grappling with the idea that it was old light sent out by a star that at this point may well be dead. Puzzles could lead to the workings of jig-saws, mythology to comparative religion, and drip-drop sand castles to the Church of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

Both of my folks were excellent demonstrators of the recognition and applications of a research question. When I was in elementary school, I asked my Father once in the yard why it was that we call a chair a "chair." He tried a short answer referring to language development, but I wanted to know why those particular sounds and not some other sounds. He got rid of the pine cones he had picked up and took me into his study. He sat me on his lap and opened an atlas to Europe, Scandinavia, and the Mediterranean, and told me stories about barbarian migrations while showing me their paths on the maps. Since he was a foreign languages professor, he was able to give me concrete examples of language development. I, of course, did not get all of what he was saying, but that map was evermore etched in my mind, and I understand clearly the concepts of ancient migration and the melting pot that is language. Also, in a more fundamental way, time and history had begun to look a little different to me, and I looked a little different in relation to them.

The interrogative was an intrinsic part of dialogue in our lives. Per their example, I learned that the questions are at least as important as the answers. It's the questions that create a relationship with the world and its people. Two constant phrases were, "I wonder…" and "Why do you suppose…?" Another favorite was, "Come here, let me show you something!" They were comfortable ruminating about ideas and issues that have no or variable right answers, a concept they not only accept, but consider crucial to understanding other people, cultures, experiences in the world. I was a bit bewildered when I got older by peers who, for example, wanted to insist that Christianity was the only correct religion. What about all those

other people and faiths throughout time? What about all the ways religions are similar? Winning what appeared to be the Who's Religion is Best Game hardly seemed to be the salient issue to me.

Mama and Daddy believed in a hands-on teaching methodology, and we were constantly in the field, exploring Aztec temples, examining the architecture and features of Ludwig the Second's castles in Bavaria, romping through Redwood forests in California, contemplating saffron-picker frescoes at the Palace of Knossos. One did not simply look at the Aztec statuary; one climbed the temple steps and wondered about the rituals done there or how it would look under the full moon. One tried to imagine having dinner with mad King Ludwig, learned the Latin name for Redwood and how to be quiet so animals would approach, pictured how difficult it must be to harvest saffron by hand strand by strand. For reinforcement, and a way to remember the knowledge that had become personally significant, there was a book or guide to accompany everything and discussions ever after as we drew connections between all the things we'd seen and learned. The information has remained relevant and present in our minds, gaining in personal meaning, greater understanding, and applicability as time has passed.

**Elementary to Twelfth: Valwood School (Valdosta, GA 1980-1990)**

Mrs. Sally Bartmes was a study in faith and composure. She taught math, algebra, and calculus to junior high and high school students who mostly couldn't have cared less. Or, like me, they simply thought they weren't good in math. But every

day, Mrs. Bartmes would march right up to that board, take up a piece of chalk, and turn to look expectantly at us. Even when she knew a number of us hadn't done the homework, she still bestowed upon us that look of readiness, like she was just waiting for us to figure out that we had something to say about trigonometry. And more than under any other teacher who was sarcastic or fatalistic about student involvement or ability, students would squirm before this gesture of good faith. Despite the fact that it was math, you couldn't help but feel a little ashamed of disappointing her when she was doubtless that you could do it. No one cared if Mr. Mackey had to explain everything over again because no one did the work. We didn't dislike him at all; we were just too busy laughing about the way he said "box" and the fact that he said it a hundred times a day while doing problems. But it was kind of unbelievable the way Mrs. Bartmes would stand at the ready day after day, expecting our participation, looking forward to the numbers, filling the chalkboard up to erase it and fill it again. She was always covered in chalk.

Mrs. Bartmes did what most teachers didn't. She waited. She forced us to think about it, standing silent for long moments while one or another or any of us tried to work out a problem, waiting patiently and expectantly, and, ok, sometimes a bit wearily. She didn't just talk about math, she had us *doing* math, every class, all class long. And she wouldn't let students step on each other's toes, either, once someone was working on something: "No, wait, let him do it." Then she would give her signature blink to the struggling student. Mrs. Bartmes would simultaneously smile, blink at you, and nod her head quickly. Although it smacked of I Dream of Jeannie,

it was one of the greatest votes of confidence I've ever seen. It was encouragement and business all at once. It was honestly warm, even when Mrs. Bartmes was tired, and absolutely everyone rated it. Mrs. Bartmes cared about that math, but she also cared about us, wanted us to understand that we all could indeed do math, and a lot more if we would just do it.

My senior year, I had the option of taking calculus with Mrs. Bartmes. I was terrified of the course and told her I wasn't good enough at math to pull it off. I really didn't want to experience me not pulling it off. It was the first academic limit I had ever had to acknowledge. Mrs. Bartmes, however, refused to. She blinked and said, "Of course you can!" She made it clear that together we would make sure I got it. One fateful week, we were on imaginary numbers in sine and cosine charts. I didn't get it. I could keep the threads of thought up to a point, and then I just dropped all of it. Mrs. Bartmes blinked and smiled and said, "We'll do it again!" After three agains, I said, "Mrs. Bartmes. I'm never going to get this. It's just something I can't do." "Then we'll just keep doing it tomorrow. You'll get it." This seemed odd behavior for a teacher, but she made me laugh and carried me right along with her for two more days. And then, all the lights in the math section of my brain went on, and I did, in fact, get it. I didn't retain the information beyond that semester, but I had experienced a coup. I felt proud about my work in a way I hadn't with things that came more easily. Without Mrs. Bartmes' blinks and insistent faith, I never would have taken calculus at all, much less figured out imaginary numbers for any length of time. And just as valuable, I wouldn't have had such a fabulous

example of my stubbornness working to my advantage in the acquisition of knowledge, and in the face of fear.

Ms. Susan Turner was a small-boned Valdostan from a prominent family who had finally come home my junior year after getting a degree at Princeton and knocking about Java and Polynesia for a while. The rumor was that her mother had to lie to her about her grandmother's health to get her to come home. Susan was a mystery to us: young, insanely intelligent, multilingual, incredibly independent, clearly living simply despite her family's money. To a roomful of South Georgia juniors, she was positively unusual. Susan was more honest and open about herself than any teacher we had known, and most that I've known since. Her comfort level with us was notable, and we could feel it. She would speak Javanese for us, tell us stories about cultures we'd never heard of, talk about being lonely, take us to Six Flags, and try to tell us that we were fit for that huge world out there if we would just go get in it. She asked us to incorporate understanding and examples from our life experience into the essays we wrote about literature. As a result, she got more interest, participation, and honesty from the class than our literature-loving but rather formal senior English teacher ever did. For instance, students formerly too cool for class participation were dressing up like Emily Dickinson and doing skits of "Because I Could Not Stop for Death." And they were *boys*.

Mr. Rob Spinney goes down in history as the first teacher I remember comfortably, and bravely, saying, "I don't know." I've known few since who do so easily or regularly. My eighth grade year, Valwood began to creatively shuttle me

about classes other than my own, ostensibly so I could schedule to go ahead and take algebra, so I ended up in his tenth grade Twentieth Century History class, which was an absolute delight. I asked an obliquely related question about the material, he thought about it, and he said interestedly, "I don't know." He stood in front of the class, paused to consider, and then admitted that even after consideration he didn't have an answer. I had questioned whether it was possible to have an ethical center without a religion to prescribe morality. I really respected Mr. Spinney, and I wanted to know what he thought, and also, I sometimes have trouble keeping my mouth shut. He was a devout Christian as well as a young intellectual from Harvard and could have easily handled the question in short order, even if he wasn't giving a "correct" answer to it. Instead, he said he'd think about it some more, and we'd talk about it later. I knew that this was teacher code for: "Let's let that one go."

To my shock and admiration, he did indeed get back to me later to discuss his thoughts about my questions and his personal take on its implications. He spoke sincerely, honestly, and with passion, without trying to convince me of anything. I knew then that his willingness to share both his ignorance and his thoughts were not only sincere, but an extraordinary show of faith in my own ability to converse intelligently upon the topic.[5] It was a faith he demonstrated to the class regularly,

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[5]I feel it is important to note here that I use "ignorance" easily, and rarely with negative connotations, in which case I specify "ignore-ance." One of the first things I tell my students is that I am ignorant, they are ignorant, and we will all be ignorant all our lives in one way or another. That is why we come together to try and learn. It is from that place that we learn to listen; it is that place from where we learn humility. Mr. Spinney planted the seed that led to this realization.

even when it was to earnestly appeal to the abilities we had and weren't using, even when, like Mrs. Bartmes, we were clearly fatiguing him a bit. And like Mrs. Bartmes, it was hard not to squirm or lower your eyes when Mr. Spinney was looking you in the eye, waiting, earnestly insisting that you had way more to give than you were. He saw our potential, not just our shortcomings, and took on the responsibility of showing it to us, too. I learned an incredibly important lesson from him: saying you don't know could actually be an indication of greater depth and understanding rather than an embarrassing confession. Not only that, it can end up being way more educational for everyone involved.

**College Lessons: Duke University (Durham, NC 1990-1994)**

During junior high and high school, I was still under the thrall of traditional images of education and intellectualism. Interestingly enough, many of those impressions have more to do with material privileges than with education. It was the world of the polo players I refused to wear on my shirts, an ironic blind spot of mine. I invested, to some extent unwittingly, in the vision of an educational system ultimately drawing on the legacy of medieval university, one that promises erudition and speaks to institutional wealth, cultural and political influence, access and opportunity. I fantasized about old leatherbound books and their smells, interminable libraries with important tomes full of important reverberating words. I pictured individuals of such intellect that their every word glittered and clarified or teased and challenged. I imagined a life made up of cups of Earl Grey tea, snifters of

brandy, college dons by their fires, intelligent philosophizing and camaraderie, and a confidence in the importance of canonized knowledge and its keepers. What I was really dreaming about was escape. Time to wake up.

If I learned about racism and gender roles in Valdosta, I learned about class and gender roles at Duke University. I had learned at Valwood that it wasn't cool to wear clothes without icons, but I didn't know the first thing about elevators in people's houses. I spent some time with Anna Wilson of Wilson Sporting Goods, Annabeth Gish (Mystic Pizza, X-Files) was in my anthropology class, and my best friend Julia went out with one of the Dupont family. Parking lots were filled with Saabs, BMWs, Jaguars. Students came fresh out of hardcore Catholic and prep schools, many of them already well-networked socioeconomically and with plenty international connections. Welcome, ye big fish of small Valdosta pond. The bizarre combination of confidence and insecurity I had experienced in that environment was about to become even more complicated.

Duke was about fitting or being crammed into boxes in many ways. It was rich, ninety something percent "Greek,"[6] super-competitive academically, and practically everybody was at least cute, if not downright good-looking. There were very few fashion risks. Everyone double-majored, went abroad, and did something else they were fabulous at, like a sport or an instrument. I enjoyed the "work hard, play hard" ethic, and I did well, but once again, I did not exactly fit the box, which was a huge

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[6]One of the first three to five questions commonly asked when meeting someone was which sorority or fraternity you belonged to. More than once, boys who were met with my answer of, "Independent," were honestly startled. I'll never forget the one who found it so novel that he grinned and said, "Wow. That's cool!"

disappointment. I had naively expected an experience more like those idyllic summers I had been lucky enough to spend at academic programs like Duke's Talent Identification Program, or the Governor's Honors Program (known in other states as Governor's School). I lost my confidence, and my sense of smallness too neatly recalled my childhood traumas. And, unfortunately, this time the freaker group was one of the most dysfunctional communities I've ever been involved with, notable for fabulous displays of excess, from drug abuse to trust fund abuse. By the end of my college experience, depression, bipolar tendencies and panic began to affect my productivity and health. It's a battle I still suit up for every day, but the armor is at least lighter now, and I fletch my own arrows. At the time, I barely knew how to put armor on. More than once, it almost cost me my academic career, among other things.

The incredibly masculine presence on Duke's campus is still as subtly menacing as when I was there.[7] Only frats have dorm housing. Sororities have no housing specific to their groups. Everyday life, parties, late night carousing and attempts to get home from the library all happen on male territory. My first night at a frat party, I was manhandled, but at least it was in public. When I kicked him in the shin, there wasn't much he could do except yell at me while his buddies laughed. I was lucky compared to many of the stories I heard. On that count, I was smarter than they were, having learned my lessons, and was constantly enraged at the way girls

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[7]I responded to the recent lacrosse team fiasco grimly and cynically. I understand the complications associated with these events, but I've heard plenty of stories in my own time that would give me little cause to doubt the possibilities. I almost feel, unfairly I'm sure, that the publicity is karmically deserved, even if the entire incident were complete fabrication.

would abandon each other at parties. You'd have thought they were stupid. Today, I understand that they were simply compromised from the moment they walked on campus. The percentage of girls on campus with eating disorders is remarkable even now, and no surprise. Rich society girls are supposed to be pretty, charming, marry well, and at Duke, they also have to be smart. The atmosphere was particularly and quietly oppressive for them, as they smiled and ate their yogurt and flipped their sorority hair from side to side. Suffice it to say that by the time I graduated, I was thoroughly disenchanted, pretty disgusted, and depressed.

As I acquired more pieces of the puzzle that is systemic inequity, I also learned more about teaching and learning. Although I still harbor fantasies of leatherbound books and libraries, I became disinterested in my tweed and brandy fantasies as I grew more critical of typical teaching methods and attitudes about intelligence and intellectualism. The White, masculinist, and classist nature of these methods and attitudes stood out all the more in comparison to a handful of exceptionally creative teachers I had at Duke.

Dr. Thomas Ferraro taught a vibrant class in twentieth century literature. His assignments included The Godfather, Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love, During the Reign of the Queen of Persia, and Sylvia Plath. I remember thinking he had to be kidding we were actually going to read The Godfather. He often paid special attention to cultural representations of Catholicism, ethnicity (especially American Italian) and gender roles, with an eye towards pop culture, interests that are reflected in his more recent publications as well. What seemed like niche concerns

drove home to me that any interest you have can become a real source of academic interrogation. Ferraro made no attempt to hide his almost kid-like excitement about the subject matter. Every word of the text was vital and full of meaning. In fact, sometimes the words were so vital that they warranted something akin to an impromptu tapdance on Ferraro's part. Not only did he ask that you consider how the literature spoke to your own life and values, your emotional consciousness, but he also showed you how it spoke to him. There were times it seemed he would burst with emotion, giving us permission to embrace the text with a depth our good grades had not really required of most of us before now. Ferraro was incredibly insistent that we create meaning for ourselves, prodding us when we balked. We were expected to talk and got called on if we didn't. You didn't want to have nothing to say if it was you. Nothing to say to Dr. Ferraro and his students? Horrors! Our expectations of each other quickly rose to the same level as Dr. Ferraro's. We were dying to know what we could come up with, and got better at spotting points of interest and presenting salient questions.

He embraced the diatribe, doing us an enormous service by modeling associative thought and methods for gathering the thoughts into patterns, points, arguments. He would spin his thought processes out loud, eventually bringing it all back to a point, or just as often, a question, demonstrating that the questions are as valuable as the answers, that the questions come first, that ultimately all we may be left with is a probing question. After growing up with my parents, this was familiar and welcome territory to me. Then he would shake himself and put the class right back in our

laps, saying that was his thing, what was ours? And what did we have to say to each other about it?

Ferraro was also the first teacher I had who perambulated constantly. He abandoned the front of the classroom more than any teacher I had ever seen, pacing the space between the desks, speaking from behind us, making us move around to keep up with him. You never knew where he was going to be, and falling asleep wasn't really an option. This movement, along with his perceptions of our roles as students, changed the climate of the room entirely, transformed it into a different kind of learning arena with an authority who actively resisted the trappings of his role as authority. He truly didn't *care* about the authority. He cared about the text and what we thought about it. He cared about our individual presences.

I've always had a thing about signing my papers by hand, though I didn't always do so in grad school because it seemed, groan, inappropriate. When Ferraro received my first paper, he had written on it to come to him about my handwritten signature. He astonished me by telling me he thought that bit of ink was wonderful to see, that it meant I was really there, that it helped him to see me and know I was there. It reminded me of Mr. Spinney's honest address of my questions, his recognition of my individuality and personal growth. Dr. Ferraro knew how to make you feel alive, in class and out. His connections to the text, to life, to his students, to teaching, were all interwoven in the most motivating and affirming of ways.

Dr. Jennifer Thorn taught a course in twentieth century American women's autobiography, especially immigrant or ethnic narratives. Clearly versatile, Thorn's

primary interests lay in eighteenth century literature, sexuality, colonialism and the history of print, literacy and representation. Thorn emphasized a number of feminist issues: femininity and race, femininity and ethnic roles, lesbian relationships, personal voice, and self-definition. Through discussing the authors' narratives and gender struggles, she provided us with a new vocabulary for discussing personal issues and convictions of our own. As in the best women's studies classes, we dealt with these personal issues and their reflection of societal mores and assumptions while Thorn assiduously maintained a critical intellectual consciousness about the subject matter. Two of the most important books of my life as a woman came from this class: Maxine Hong Kingston's <u>The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts</u> and Audre Lorde's <u>Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography</u>.

Dr. Thorn was the closest thing to Susan Turner I'd seen since high school. She was young, obviously smart as a cracking whip, and a little quirky. I remember her telling us about her previous job: teaching English in state penitentiaries. And she had enjoyed it. Here was a woman who could most likely have her pick of academic jobs, and yet, she had found a meaningful niche in what some would consider one of the lowest of places. I was awed and, somehow, a bit humbled. There is, after all, an ocean out there beyond the hallowed halls of book learning, and she had jumped fearlessly right into it and swum around. It wasn't quite how I had been seeing things. Perhaps snifters of brandy and cups of Earl Grey weren't always the best possible beverages for quenching a thirst.

Our class meeting after reading the first autobiography, <u>Lost in Translation</u> by Eva Hoffman, was a bit of a surprise. We came in and sat at the round table she had specifically arranged for and looked expectantly at her. We could already tell this was going to be a cool class with interesting feminist material. "We" were, of course, all women. We found her looking expectantly at us, silent, waiting, leaning in slightly with the ghost of a smile. As the situation slowly dawned on us, Dr. Thorn asked, "Well? What shall we talk about?" We looked at each other as she looked at each of us, and then there was laughter. It was practically absurd to be put in such a situation by a teacher, given no guidelines, no predetermined material to imbibe diligently. Suddenly, although we were unsure about what we were supposed to be doing, we were very eager to discover how to do it and do it well. Thorn clearly valued and respected our thought and discussion, and we began to see that it was our voices she wanted to hear, that it was our voices she used to teach. She refused to come in and simply outline for us the substance of the course. Knowledge was approached as a thing we created together with careful and rigorous awareness, not a storehouse of definite riches to be doled out or even plundered. We were our own plunder; we were our own worth. Her class turned us into experts, authorities, thinkers; and indeed, we could hear our own scholarly women's voices grow stronger.

And the Most Humane Teacher Award in my experience at Duke goes to Dr. Julie Tetel, a well-known expert in linguistics and, to our amusement, a historical fiction romance novel writer on the side, though she never would tell us her nom de plume.

Like Mrs. Bartmes, she would approach the blackboard with purpose and expectation, fairly twinkling at you. She had a great sense of humor, and she brought it to class with her. Even if you thought linguistics was a tedious endeavor, it was hard to fall asleep with Tetel and all her energy bubbling away at the front of the room. She bore us along under the intensity of her own excitement and love of the material. I got kudos from her in class one day for being the one who could most closely approximate the pronunciation of "bench" on one of her tapes of Appalachian dialects ([bæ' ənch], with twang).[8] I'm not from South Georgia for nothing. She spent class time unabashedly trying over and over to say it, making one funny sound after the next, giggling away, "I just can't *do* it!"

I was taking her class when clinical depression and anxiety began to catch up with me. Concentration and efficiency are two of the first things to go, and then you feel bad about that, and then it just gets worse. Much to my humiliation, I was faced with an incomplete for the semester because I couldn't finish the final paper for her class in time. And it was clear that I absolutely had to get home. I left her a desperately apologetic message on her office answering machine. She called me back and said to me warmly as I sat on the floor of the kitchen in my Anderson Street campus apartment, "Heather, this is your mother speaking!" She cheerfully refused the notion of an incomplete. I explained my situation, and in not so much as a blink's time, she said, "Ok, this is what we're going to do." She sent me home, gave

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[8]I'm not from South Georgia for nothing. I was also the one in my graduate sociolinguistics class who could manage a certain regional pronunciation of "penny," earning a humorous, "Oo, oh yeah, you've really got it!" from the teacher. Interestingly, his delivery of "got it" registered not only that I could pronounce the word, but perhaps that I had some kind of organic growth on me.

me extra time I shouldn't have gotten, and let me send the paper on Gullah dialect to her by mail. She told me more than once with the same nurturing but inexorable quality of Mrs. Bartmes that she knew I could write this paper and wasn't in the least bit worried. Julie Tetel saved me at the end of that semester by creating a situation that best allowed me to produce the kind of work she was sure I was capable of. She knew I was capable of it because she knew me, and she allowed me to do it because she honestly cared about my success. Though perhaps a small thing, the idea that Dr. Tetel thought I was worth the extra space I needed kept me from giving up. I'd say that giving someone a reason not to give up in general is never a small thing.

**The End of an Era**

My high school and college educations were both largely examples of traditional teaching methods. I would not assert that all of the more traditional teachers were unsuccessful in their intent to impart knowledge or encourage thought. But attending Duke taught me that there is indeed a very large difference between being a bastion of intellect and being a forum of intellectual sharing. Although I am well aware that professors at Duke participate intensely in the research of their disciplines, a great many of the classrooms I occupied provided little in the way of actual exchange of thoughts.

As I looked around at my classmates in the more traditional classroom arrangements and power structures, I saw more spacing off and deer in headlights

looks than in the less traditional and more student oriented classrooms. Students

weren't confident in asking questions and weren't especially encouraged when they

did. Some teachers were in fact irritated when students attempted it. These teachers

sometimes actually would dodge answering a student's probing question by

repeating what they had already said, thus making it clear that was all to be said.

Teachers often appeared to consider students as lacking sophistication and saw the

material as bruised by their amateur handling of it. Exasperated students asked of

each other, "What else could we be but amateurs if the material is new?" In these

cases, it became clear to the students that the class was about the teacher and the

bestowal of his special knowledge, no dialectic in sight. It seemed somehow unfair

that we were expected to treat the content attentively and respectfully when we

were not treated that way. In sum, even though we were often high scorers and

good grade makers, we were bored and somewhat disconnected from the material

and its meanings.

However, to the beleaguered student's delight, some classrooms managed to

foster engagement with the material as well as create an environment noticeably

different from the standard. Students in these classrooms knew that something was

different and were galvanized by it, or at least affected in ways unusual to their

experience. In these classrooms it often required more effort to space off than to

listen up and participate. The work and efforts of several professors at each stage of

my institutionalized education provided those experiences and influenced greatly

my perception of what comprises a successful teacher.

I found that a successful teacher respected me as an individual as well as a student and encouraged my thoughts, leading me to my own discoveries of the content at hand, and even to create new content. Successful teachers had so much faith in my abilities that I was able to succeed just as they insisted I could, even when I doubted myself. They also all had faith in the ability of their students to think intelligently, and they behaved as if it were a given that we should be able to bring our thoughts to class and discuss them. This attitude was unwavering even when some of them were regularly confronted with lack of participation. They listened to me as willingly as they spoke to me, and even were willing to share their personal life experiences with someone not in the least their peer. Some allowed me and others to talk directly to other students during class question and answer sessions, something most of us had never done. They could wrench discussion and participation out of even a reticent crowd, often by appealing to students personally in relation to the content of the course.

I have gauged these teachers' successes by the personal transformations and academic growth they were able to guide me and other students towards and their ability to keep me thinking and questioning myself and accepted constructions. And beyond that, I have gauged their success by their care for me and their work in the world, which made me care about those things, too. In short, I recognize them through their respect of the individual as a thinking human that spills out unpredictably beyond her capacity in the role of student. I began to look for these

qualities in all my teachers, wondering why so few offered me these unique and

personal relationships with both academic material and with them.

## Accelerated Schools (Denver, CO 1994-1996)

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### A Cup of Tea

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

In fall of 1994, I moved to Denver, Colorado, and got a job teaching at an

accredited private school called Accelerated Schools. It turned out to be a most

enlightening teaching experience. This was the other half, live and on the air; this

was extreme teaching; this was dire learning. For the young middle-class well-

educated Southern girl, there were finally no ponds or fish of varying sizes

involved. Instead, it was just sink or swim for everyone.

Accelerated Schools provides alternative educational opportunities to students in

typically at-risk situations. The kids' choices are pretty clear at their point of entry:

get kicked out of the house or go to Accelerated; go to juvy or go to Accelerated; go

to jail or go to Accelerated. For some, rehab and/or therapy was also part of the

bargain. For others, part of the deal was not to live with their parents, their parents

being a salient contributor to their damage. Interestingly, there were also some students who attended Accelerated because they were "gifted." School was so boring for them that they got in trouble or had difficulty paying attention. It was, in fact, their capability that created a somewhat "at-risk" situation for them. Another handful of students came to Accelerated in the afternoons when school was over, to address learning gaps and "low performance."

Classrooms were open and variable. My "elementary" group, for instance, ranged from age 8 to 14 at one time. Students were tested to determine their grade level abilities in each subject. They then created individual contracts with their teachers and worked through their subjects, most often tackling different subjects at different levels, going back and forth between desk work and computer work. Contracts could be fulfilled as quickly or slowly as necessary, giving way to new contracts and "promotions" in each subject, reflecting their academic achievements. Once an elementary student fulfilled the prerequisites, they attended the junior high classes. Some students spent part of the day with the elementary group and part of the day with the junior high group. High schoolers were kept upstairs, and junior high students rarely crossed over into those classes until they were ready to take all of them. The main reason for this segregation were the psychological and physical differences between early and late teens and the more intense and dangerous nature of some of the high school students.

Contracts were drawn up so that a student had to fulfill a certain number of points in a day by completing the amount of work for which they were contracted.

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Repercussions of not meeting contracted points included losing the privilege to participate in afternoon activities and receiving additional assignments. Additional assignments could be completed at the rate the student chose, but until they were finished, their participation in activities and interaction with other students were curtailed. Behavioral problems were handled in the same way, with the additional measure of working in isolation, sometimes for a significant portion of the school day. However, only in extreme circumstances did students experience total isolation, which was considered counterproductive. For instance, a student would end up in a day of total isolation if they brawled, threatened a teacher, or brought a knife to school. Students also could get their pay docked.

A unique aspect of Accelerated was a quite literal take on a reward system for work done. Accelerated made an agreement with the guardians paying for the student's tuition that specified how much money per contract point fulfilled was to be paid out at the end of a school day. Guardians could also agree to pay rewards per page or several pages of work done. There were parameters to ensure that a page did not consist of only twenty words or many skipped spaces. The range of payouts varied widely depending on the student's age, guardians, and circumstances. Some of my elementary students received only ten cents or a quarter per point, but there were high schoolers who were being rewarded enough money to serve as a significant monetary resource roughly equivalent to at least a part-time minimum wage job. These were most likely to be the students who weren't allowed to live with their parents. In fact, it had been arranged for some students to treat

their income from school as their primary monetary resource, and they paid rent and groceries with it. If contract points remained unfulfilled, the student's pay was docked. This may seem an excessive system at first, but especially under the circumstances, it makes good sense. In America, we tend to measure valued work in terms of money (which doesn't necessarily mean the work is essentially valuable, and certainly not that we necessarily monetarily recognize all work that is valuable), and our livelihoods are indeed usually dependent on how much effort we are willing to put into cooperating with societal and economic expectations.

These students were learning some very practical lessons about managing money and their lives in addition to learning traditional subject matter. Since the inability to manage their lives due to damaging contingencies was the main interference with their learning experiences, it was necessary to address both issues in tandem. Indeed, for an individual to succeed academically and in their own lives, to even be able to establish the parameters for a successful life, the relationship between knowledge and practical application and the consequences of certain kinds of decisions must be learned.

Accelerated's methodologies were nothing I had seen before. Besides the contracted learning and payment for academic work, there were a number of other teaching and learning methods. The Peterson Technique was devised by Carl Peterson, founder of the school. This technique had been proven especially useful for non-native English speakers and students who had learning deficits or difficulty with language use. Students received pages of words written in rows, the same

word per row written three or four times. Usually as a group, occasionally

individually, the class would read the words visually while saying them aloud with

the teacher. Accelerated was also the first place I saw consistent use of collaborative

learning, especially when there were reading components to the material. Teachers

and students would read the material aloud, sometimes twice, while the others

listened. Students were then given a few moments to take notes on what they had

heard, and a few more moments to share their notes with each other. After

discussion on the material, students were tested for comprehension and critical

assessment of the subject matter. Accelerated's teaching methods in general stressed

the role of writing in learning and in practical life applications. If guardians

arranged for it, and they were encouraged to, money rewards would be paid for any

kind of student writing as long as it was a clearly engaged piece of work.

Socialization activities were an important part of Accelerated's pedagogical

approach. I took as many as thirteen students, often with the help of another teacher,

to lunch, museums and museum programs, bookstores, art classes, the park, the

planetarium, the IMAX theater, puppet shows and plays.  It was somewhat of a

risky enterprise. Just because students had behaved in order to participate did not

mean that they would behave once they were participating. These outings and

activities served as a kind of public or forum-based and socially interactive learning

environment for kids who had learned to hold society in contempt or to distrust it in

general. The range of events required different sets of social interactions and

communications skills. Students learned, some with more difficulty than others,

adaptability, self-restraint, responsibility, good decision making, acceptable social behavior, and the relationship between these things and consequence. The various activities were aimed at demonstrating to them through experience that there are other ways of existing in the world besides their modus operandi, ways that are not only acceptable, but rewarding, interesting, and worth the time and effort.

Participating in these teaching methodologies and experiencing student responses to them provoked on my part a reexamination of teaching, learning, the role of education, and the relationships between teachers and their students. Accelerated was a last ditch effort for individuals who were drowning in a sea of contingencies for which they could not compensate alone. With these students, building an understanding of the practical and personal value of educational success, especially through writing and communication, was of paramount importance. While discipline and academic expectation were an important part of their success, those elements alone were not equal to the task. As hardened and cynical as they may have been or acted, they needed to regain a sense of control over their lives. They needed a space in which to define themselves in some other way than in response to constant crisis and mental duress. One of the things I learned at Accelerated is that once a person is at-risk, it is often necessary to create a safe as well as disciplined space for them to take in and actually experience these lessons. If academic and personal success were the shoreline, Accelerated's teachers were the coast guard.

Unsurprisingly, all of Accelerated School's teachers were unusual. I saw in them a frankness that echoed teachers like Dr. Thorn and Ms. Turner. At first, I also thought

I saw something edgy, but it was elusive. It was simple to imagine it was attributable to a kind of toughness you must need to have to work with these kids. But as I got to know them, this explanation seemed less apt. Celie did have a kind of toughness; she was a hard-talking, chain smoking kind of biker chick who adored Harley Davidsons and road trips. But Mrs. Downy dressed like some of my college professors and came off as an intellectual type. Tad, who taught art, was an earthy sort; and Sherri, who taught NNES, was young and rather up-and-coming business-like. Duffy, the other elementary teacher, was a wise-cracking spaz. It took me a while to figure out, oddly enough, that what felt like edge was actually care. These teachers knew that whatever happened at Accelerated ultimately had to be on those kids' terms. Disciplinary structures were in place, but they had been designed to work for the kids, not against them, to motivate them, not turn them off. Academic standards were maintained, but the way material was presented and discussed had to accommodate the special needs of this population. If we couldn't reach the students, there was no point to any of it.

The teachers accepted this, and more, embraced it, and that's what made them seem so different and edgy. They had a real respect for these students who dragged themselves in almost every day when the rest of their lives were in shambles or on the edge of a knife, sometimes literally. They intensely wanted them to succeed, to find themselves, to right the capsized boat, to swim instead of sink. They hoped to be something a student would finally come to trust and hold on to, even standoffishly. And they were willing to do any kind of tango the kids wanted to

dance in order to do it. Accelerated teachers were incredibly flexible. An enlightening aspect of this attitude was that it made the teachers stronger, not more likely to give way. Precisely because they respected the students and understood their emotional struggles, they would stand up to them, refuse to entertain inappropriate or dangerous behavior towards them or anyone else. When they got irritated, the irritation didn't come from a perception of the kids as troublemakers or lost causes you would expect that kind of behavior from, but instead from a conviction that the kids had much better in them. More than once I heard teachers explaining all of this in no uncertain terms to students, and in whatever language was going to work for that student. These teachers also understood that building a solid relationship with the students meant that when the time was right, they were clear about their own feelings and shared their own life struggles, successes, defeats, bad decisions, all of it. They didn't want to "mainstream the at-risk," with straight up social and academic assimilation as the goal, but to bring out on an individual level each student's ability to cope practically with and learn from their surroundings. Nobody at Accelerated, neither students nor teachers, had much need or time for manners. It was all far too real for that.

### Me and Them and Us

 Before working at Accelerated, I wouldn't have defined myself as an at-risker. But there was too much of myself I recognized  in these struggling kids. I was never dramatic enough to think that I had problems like some of them did, but their behavioral language was one I

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*understood fully. And I related to their contempt for and distrust of society and its*

*representatives. Every day was a test with a subterranean flow. "How bad can I screw up?*

*Can I make her mad at me? Is it possible to make her give up on me? Or will she give me*

*another chance?" And hidden even more deeply, " There's no way I can be worth that. My*

*talents lie in fucking things up. So why should I care or try or count on anybody? I probably*

*can't trust her anyway." I learned a lot about myself. Surely they were testing themselves,*

*but really they were testing me, and ultimately, perhaps, humanity. Attempting redemption*

*can feel like the biggest risk of all, and you intuitively know who you're safe with and who*

*can't handle you.*

*Nick was a fifteen-year-old time bomb constantly on the edge of blowing himself up. He*

*was strung so tight that some days he looked like he was vibrating. He liked to sneak off and*

*hang with the high schoolers, but sometimes he just flat out disappeared. The day Nick locked*

*himself in a room with a knife, I was terrified for him. Luckily, it wasn't suicide he was*

*looking for, just a slightly mutilated arm. I felt like I was bleeding for him, despite the fact*

*that he could make you so mad you wanted to smack him. Eventually, even when I was*

*angry, there was only a calm spot for me when it came to Nick. I'm not sure why, unless I*

*recognized an even more extreme version of myself. Creative self-destruction had been a*

*theme of my own, though usually under the radar.*

*Who knows what I said, but Nick, who had been Mr. Jitters all day, suddenly hit me with,*

*"You're such a bitch!" It was a non sequiter to the conversation, and surprised me. Dying to*

*know what made Nick tick, I locked him unintentionally in a wordless eye to eye.*

*"I hate it when you do that."*

*"What?"*

*"Just look at me like that." I had not known this was a habit of mine.*

*"Why?"*

*"I don't know. It's like you're looking right into me."*

*"Well, Nick, I'm trying to." As still as possible, " Why did you need to say that to me?"*

*Nick's stance changed, he looked down, and for just a moment, Mr. Jitters Ticking Time Bomb was gone. He was honest. "I really don't know. I was mad."*

*I figured that was fair enough and nodded. I'm not saying Nick and I had a harmonious relationship after this point, but somehow I had gotten to at least a piece of him. I never felt the force of anger directed at me again, even when he was angry, and occasionally, he behaved as if he might be downright fond of me. Just for a moment, but it was enough. If Tick, Tick Nick could trust a person like me, the privileged little girl from Duke, there was hope for everyone.*

*My best chance of earning and learning trust did not lie in minding my manners or fulfilling a given role. Better to mind my honesty and try to draw it out of others, even when it was terrifying or potentially humiliating and painful for me. To my surprise, I found that a little pain seemed, and still does, every bit worth the price of someone's trust. Every moment Nick could exist without vibrating internally meant we were more likely to get him to talk, even to smile sometimes. Every time Coy, a nine-year-old with rage disorder, felt comfortable crying or talking about his anger, he was less likely to have a fit that ended with blood and bruises. Every time I managed to convince silent Fiona I really wanted to have a conversation with her led to a few more words shared about her very difficult life. She even*

*started to initiate conversation. I had no doubt that the trust healed and encouraged, however slowly.*

We hear the phrase "at-risk" all the time, throw it around, even. It is unarguable who is materially at-risk, proven and priority. In this immediate list are the easily labeled: those with learning disabilities, those with notable learning differences, those hailing from particular socioeconomic brackets, those enduring the effects of broken homes or abuse. We have a supposedly clear understanding of these individuals and their problems. There are less well-defined categories: families that are unstable as opposed to broken, fissured families; individuals dealing with mental instability, their own or others'; youth exposed to criminal elements or even pressured by them; kids so smart or creative that they find themselves in a world of trouble due to boredom and being misunderstood; the list is interminable. But after my work at Accelerated, I found myself wondering about who we choose to label "at-risk," and at what point, and why that might be. These "at-riskers" didn't seem to behave so differently from other individuals I knew, or have needs so different, just behavior and needs intensified by individual experience. I was brought again to my earlier glimmerings of consciousness about individuals situated within systematically operative constructs of power.

The presence of the small number of "gifted" students who attended Accelerated provided a valuable perspective on my observations of at-risk students in this unique learning environment. They provided a check to what would otherwise have

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been a series of developing pedagogical convictions based on assumptions about who responded how to what kinds of teaching and what kinds of environment. It wasn't only the at-riskers who benefited from the methodology used at Accelerated and appreciated the unusual relationships between teacher and student. I began to see both kinds of students as part of the same continuum. The needs so obviously displayed by those "at risk" began to look like an extreme, and therefore elucidating, example of the kinds of needs any human being has, student or not. It looks like we wait until dire straits to label the at-risk and address individual concerns, psychology, and learning differences. We feel no need to approach education in the spirit of daily flexibility and alternative possibilities in our institutionalized environments—we reserve that for the "freakers" and "failures," the last-ditch efforts and sinking ships. I couldn't help but wonder if it is the very absence of this approach that leads to the creation of freakers and failures while also denying our more "adjusted" or "gifted" students a variety of learning experiences, stimuli and opportunity. Indeed, mainstreaming is what standardized education is all about, and usually without the relationship that Accelerated teachers provided their students, without the acute attention to individuality and identity, creativity and difficulty.

Through my unexpected work at Accelerated, I developed a vehement protectiveness towards the crowd of "typical" at-riskers whose representatives I had worked with, as well as the more atypical crowds represented by my own experience, which included bouts of mental instability and cultural elements that

worked against an individual's sense of ability or self. As I examined my emotional reactions, I recognized a concern with social justice that grew naturally out of my growing understanding of socially systemic inequity, a concern that could be turned to practical application. At the same time, I began to feel that the phenomenon of humans at risk was an even more complicated permeating issue than generally recognized, created at large by power structures in society and various culturally constructed institutions. Although I felt tied to clearly and materially at-risk groups, I felt that the picture was much bigger.

We name groups to bear the representation of dysfunction within our cultural and national community, and are often content to consider those groups as the places where those particular dysfunctions play out. We successfully detach ourselves from their experiences and the way our own societal roles relate to them. As a result, we don't question what the phrase actually means; we don't critique our own lives for the ways we have been at-risk, are at-risk. But in the end, we're all at-risk in this world of systemic inequity, violence, dehumanization and limitation. We lose opportunities for self-definition and redefinition of ourselves as humans in relation to other humans, as individuals and in community. There are those of us at-risk of not succeeding due to extreme contingencies, those of us at-risk of not seeing those people and contingencies clearly, and those of us at-risk of living within the regulated roles that are laid out for us by society because we don't see ourselves clearly. If being at-risk is about limitation of choices due to individual circumstances, then those of us who fulfill our social contracts without incident may

be as at-risk as anyone else, as a number of choices may have been made for us. We become blind and deaf in strange ways. Ways that allow us to drive by entire neighborhoods of poor black people for years without even realizing they are there, and so participate in the way that they are there. While materially a better place to be than Nick or Fiona, it also appears to be a more irresponsible and just as socially limited one.

Ultimately, as a teacher, I was left with the question, wouldn't anyone benefit from the kind of treatment that Accelerated students were receiving? Must we wait for a shipwreck before engaging on such personal and creative levels?

**UNC Masters Program (Chapel Hill, NC 1996-2000)**

I had decided to return to school as part of a continuing Ph.D. program due to many of my experiences at Accelerated Schools. I missed being a student and had an odd itch to apply some of what I had learned there in college classrooms. Dr. Kaye Losey taught a teaching methodology class graduate students were required to take if they planned to teach as part of their funding. Since Teaching Fellows were assigned almost exclusively to first year composition classes, her class focused on that teaching environment. Composition theory felt like a revelation. I appreciated the considerations of teaching writing specifically, but was especially struck by the pedagogical implications of a great deal of it. It seemed strangely related to my Accelerated experiences. Here was the group work, a notable attention to learning differences, a recognition of the role of writing in academic endeavor and personal

success, to name a few elements. I could begin to build and apply a working vocabulary for talking about pedagogical philosophy. I had not expected to stumble upon a community asking some of the same questions about learning and the role of teachers and students in the classroom. Losey modeled many of the methodological aspects of composition theory, and I was lucky enough to see at least a glimpse of what sort of dynamic that created in a classroom, not that the grad students were any more cooperative that some of Accelerated's students had been, frankly.

I began to take note of how people responded to these new approaches to teaching and being with students in a classroom. Some of the motivations behind negative responses were rather transparent. Those who responded most extremely in the negative were traditionalists. I could just see their cups of Earl Grey perched on the corners of their desks. According to these particular graduate students, literature was paramount, only particular uses of language indicated intelligence, some people were simply born stupider than others, and elements like socioeconomics, culture and gender were laughable, eye-rolling considerations. They often seemed to conflate superficial indications of scholarly ability with actual indications of academic capability or potential, indeed were not interested in potential and only in already superior performance. I kept catching a particular tone of vehemence in their voices that puzzled me, until one day it struck me that they were talking about and defending themselves. They saw their academic images at stake, their special abilities, their superior identity, their exceptional quality. It was blasphemy to suggest that others might be much higher achievers if we simply

made some reasonable and creative accommodations to real life contingencies. They wanted to convince us that this was a ridiculous, cream-puff enterprise. Finding their behavior distasteful and disrespectful to students and anyone who disagreed with them, I found I had somewhere along the way finally and completely lost a taste for their superior grade of tea. At the same time, they made me sad. Their vehemence smacked of desperate behavior I'd seen before, mine and others', in totally other worlds.

Dr. Bob Johnstone taught early American literature, and due to his general interest in American culture, often related it to current literary and pop culture trends. He also had an interest in Native American literature. Johnstone had a knack for perceiving his literary period as it manifested in every period after it, reflecting and influencing culture. We shared a penchant for Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, and he is the starting point of my wholehearted academic embrace of the underrated literary genre of comics. Who would have thought Batman had anything to do with the late eighteen-hundreds? Like Dr. Thorn, he would sit down at our table and refuse to begin the discussion himself, looking expectantly and eagerly around. He would adamantly remind us that this was our education, our project, and practically speaking, our money! And the way he spoke, he made the real question clear, "Why are you here?" It wasn't an imperious question; it was sincere in its hope that we would search our hearts, find a purpose that fit our own minds, not just do the work. He was daring us to be free, to do things for our own reasons and choices entirely.

Before I had met Johnstone, my incoming masters class was required to take a research methodology and bibliography course, one we all agreed was rather unsuccessful. One class had been designated for professors to represent their areas of study to us. Some stuck to discussing their studies, but some commented in general on the graduate school experience. Most of those comments were a bit oppressive, and the audience began to catch one another's eye, feeling glum about the choice they'd made to continue their education. It was oddly as if they were trying to discourage us before we began. There were two representatives for early American literature, and Johnstone was one. I noticed him right away, leaning his back against the wall, knee out in front with a foot resting back on the plastering. As the first representative talked, the air became so uncomfortable that you could hear murmurs from the crowd. You'll work like a dog. You won't necessarily enjoy it. You're not here to find your bluebird of happiness. Some of you are probably not cut out for it. The job market will be hell. That was the general jist of it. No joy to counterbalance the difficulty.

Johnstone sauntered out next, and twinkled at us with a smile for a moment. Johnstone began, "Well, I'm here to make an argument for the bluebird of happiness." The crowd quieted at this new tack, straight into the wind. By the end, we were twinkling back at him. We chose to come here, and there was a reason for it. We were already unusual. We were lucky. The search for your bluebird could be a part of everything you do, and in his opinion, should be looked to for inspiration in the undoubtedly difficult times ahead, whatever and wherever they were. I was

astonished at the effect of his relatively short speech. The graduate students got their keels even again, figured they were ready to work hard, and had something to think about why they wanted to do so.

Johnstone understood people, and for him, learning was about people, not necessarily standardized performance. Frankly, without Johnstone in those first two years of graduate school, I'd never have gotten my Master's degree. He made me feel human, especially when my own personal contingencies made even feeding myself and brushing my teeth a difficult task, let alone performing well academically. He helped me struggle, and so helped me to do well, just as he knew I could. As he saw it, being a teacher meant that was his first priority, whatever it took. He was like those Accelerated teachers in a different environment, and I needed him as much those students had needed those teachers. After I saw what could happen to my fellows when working with professors who could not see their students as primarily people before scholars, I became certain that a teacher's personal (or ignore-ance of personal) interaction with a student could make or break them. I also became certain that breaking a student was egregiously irresponsible, as both a teacher and a human. There are limits to what a teacher or any other person can do to help an individual, but it seems odd that a teacher should actively not help or support their charges.

Teachers, as well, are affected by these kinds of interactions. Unfortunately, the UNC English Department lost Bob Johnstone the year I received my Master's degree. There wasn't enough room for his bluebird.

**Teaching First Year Composition**

These were my inspirations and lessons as I first dove into teaching composition classes. Both my students and I were guinea pigs as I tried to enact the theories I had contemplated, my convictions about social justice, and the teaching methodologies I had seen at work over time. The difficult work of incorporating the truth of myself into classes while staying true to the material of the courses began. Of course, the point of honestly and wholly bringing myself to the classes, besides simple integrity, was to coax students to bring themselves as well. How does one invite the bluebird into the room? Especially when it represents an entire philosophy about community, learning, relationship, convictions about social justice and personal responsibility. That is one big bird, or a really loud one. How does one go about convincing a room full of students that they are supposed to talk, supposed to think, supposed to be honest about how they feel? For me, it happens when I've asked them to do so up front and shown that I will do the same. You prove, as with the at-riskers, that you're for real, that they *can* say anything and you'll remain steady, that they should talk as much as you do, that they should talk to each other, that folks can argue to learn instead of to win, that you value what they have to say even when they miss the mark.

It's a messy business, and a personal one. The path to this space isn't always clear. I wasn't sure I'd know when the bird began to flit. But as time passed, and my practice became more defined, I noticed certain behaviors more consistently from the students. They quit asking about grades in class in favor of more productive

information about content or writing, and they asked for advice on how to make a paper better instead of suffering undue anxiety over the grade they got. Their emails got longer, and they asked more questions, not only about class, but about other classes or their life. They brought their other courses or their life into class to illustrate a point. Students more often told me and their classmates their troubles, especially if it related to class discussion. They told me and their groupmates why they were going to miss a class, even when it was a reason I couldn't excuse and they knew it, but they wanted us to know in case it affected class. Some groups regularly met outside of class and became valuable resources to one another. Students got on each other to step up, in their groups and during discussion. They wanted to explain why they hadn't been able to get their work done but then followed up by saying sincerely they knew it was their responsibility, and they didn't expect any favors. They began to feel comfortable disagreeing with me and one another and could do it respectfully and productively. I was able to remain quiet for prolonged amounts of time while students carried class conversation. The in-class sleeper was rare, and genuinely trying hard to stay awake. They dragged out of the classroom with unfinished discussions instead of all bolting. And I walked out feeling like I'd learned as well, and was lucky to know so many interesting and capable people.

Not only must we see students in a new light, but we must shine a light upon ourselves. A teacher doesn't just provide information and test for it, just as healer

doesn't simply diagnose and cure. We are used to doctors, not healers. We are used to teacher *roles*, not to *you*.

### Roger (Re)Defines

*Roger was conservative. No doubt about it. He was outspoken and confident in his political identity. In his khakis and button-downs and groomed business look, he stuck out like a sore thumb in contrast to the shorts, t-shirts and flip-flops, caps, tennis shoes and sometimes near pajamas of the other students. Within days, the class was abundantly clear that, among other things, he supported the war against Iraq and thought that the Bush administration was right on target. He was so outspoken that the other students began to notice a neoconservative bent. He muttered under his breath, or not so much under his breath, as he sneered at the ideas that power is created and maintained at the expense of others, and that in fact those others tend to be the same kinds of groups over and over: ethnic, low income, women, gender benders and challengers, those born into poverty, etc. He made most of his other classmates alternately uncomfortable and incredulous, even if they were conservative, too. His behavior was superior and disruptive. He was obviously daring the teacher to address it. For a while, she ignored him, waiting to see how the other students would deal with him in a highly interactive classroom. Waiting to see if ignoring him would frustrate or silence him, push him or calm him down. Although his behavior lost its aggressive and somewhat disturbing edge, he continued to demand attention one way or another, exhibiting an unshakable certainty that he was right pretty much about everything ideological and political. He had figured it out, and he liked the way it fit and made sense,*

*suited his position and identity. He refused to question himself or listen to anything*

*different. Ignoring Roger wasn't going to encourage his personal or academic growth at all.*

*Eventually, both students and teacher began to address Roger rather directly and calmly. Even when students would speak to the general forum, it was clear when they were rebutting Roger or insinuating a lack of understanding on his part. They had had a discussion at the beginning of the course on respectful conversation and idea sharing. Roger was never attacked or talked down to. If he had been, not only would the teacher have responded, but you can be sure that Roger would have, too. In fact, the students were noticeably adept in their subtlety.*

*One day, rather than ponder the idea that socioeconomic and ethnic realities in America might limit an individual's chances for education and therefore for a fair crack at the American Dream, Roger immediately scoffed, interrupting the teacher and general discussion, and insisted that those people had as much chance as anybody and just didn't try hard enough. In short, Roger basically advanced the "lazy Indian" argument. A few people in the class tittered. He didn't let on that he noticed. In a class invested in discussing issues of diversity and sociocultural inequity, Roger was unwilling to accept or respectfully consider challenges to his beliefs, even ones his peer group presented or supported. A class discussion ensued that provided Roger with more than one student's personal story about someone they felt had been limited by their circumstances, and by some discussion about the interaction between social constructs and economy.*

*But Roger was indefatigable. When asked to write a short response paper answering specific thought questions on the war in Iraq, he declined, turning in a rather shocking paper.*

*He declared that African natives were responsible for the destruction of Afrikaaner culture. He claimed that these native weren't even indigenous, and that no tribes had been south of the Zambezi before the Dutch moved in. Therefore, the south of Africa was forfeit to the Afrikaaners. He railed against the natives' filth and criminal tendencies, their ignorance and stupidity, indecency and lack of interest in bettering their conditions. The teacher sat. And sat. And began writing questions. "But I didn't think the Afrikaaner culture had been destroyed — do you just mean the fall of apartheid? That's not quite the same thing." She looked up information on the tribes that had migrated south of the Zambezi before the arrival of the Dutch, and asked if he had heard of them. She commented that he sounded really angry, that the scathing invective and over-familiar tone wasn't appropriate for an academic piece, even if it were a short response, even though he was entitled to his opinion. She asked how much time he'd spent with natives and in their towns. She asked what history books he had studied and gave him websites to check out. She was afraid. But he was smart, and she wanted him to think, even if he didn't agree.*

*She never heard Roger's take on that piece. But things changed rather rapidly. He dropped that tone for papers and in class. He talked less and listened more. He asked questions rather than making aggressive assertions. In fact, oddly enough, Roger seemed a lot more comfortable. The day came, however, that Roger couldn't accept another ideological challenge. He insisted, though without the edgy tone he previously sported, perhaps because of his newfound comfort with the classroom forum in general, that those who can't read and write well can't think well either. The class had just, through a group forum, arrived at the conclusion that this was a flawed preconception. Despite the class discussion about different*

*kinds of literacy, he felt that inability to read and write indicated ignorance, and that what he*

*considered literacy indicated superiority and greater intelligence. He said he'd never met*

*anyone who couldn't read or write who was intelligent or wise. The class made disbelieving*

*sounds, and the teacher repeated his assertion back to him as a question. He demanded that*

*she give him an example and was rudely triumphant when her sheer bafflement kept her*

*tongue tied. Class was almost over, and the teacher didn't have a pat answer, so she let it go.*

*Later, she thought abruptly of her Grandpa. He was a greenhouse tomato farmer, and he*

*read, especially the Bible and nonfiction, but he didn't write a lot. He came from a country*

*family and had attended an agricultural college, something that wouldn't count for Roger.*

*He valued education and knowledge. He farmed in Cuba and Haiti when he was young, and*

*then set up Cecil Farms with a friend when he returned. He had the moxie to marry her*

*Nana, who had a baby and three children at the time, the oldest of whom was twelve. He and*

*Nana had another child as well. Later he set up the Valdosta Plant Company with some*

*partners. Regardless of his disinclination to write, he could tell a story like few who wrote*

*could. His gift for narrative was unusual. He appreciated discussion of politics, world issues,*

*culture, the spiritual. While she didn't agree with all his opinions by a long shot, she could*

*say he certainly was intelligent enough to discuss them. And he had his own fair share of*

*wisdom as well; he had shown her examples of hard work, taking risks, faith, and*

*unconditional love, without ever giving her a lesson, important things an education alone*

*could never provide.*

*The next class meeting, the teacher commented that Roger had brought up an important*

*point, and was entitled to wonder about their assertions concerning literacy if he had never*

*encountered someone who gave him a reason to think differently. She agreed that each person*

*is formed by his or her experiences. She then told the class she'd therefore like to share her*

*Grandpa with them, and did. She did not look at Roger any more than anyone else. The class*

*was attentive (they were always interested in the teacher's life) and clearly curious about*

*how Roger would react. Roger listened. Roger's wheels were turning. Roger looked up after a*

*short moment, and though the teacher hadn't really expected any response, he looked her in*

*the eye, raised his eyebrows, and said quietly and sincerely, "I can't argue with that." From*

*the teacher's vantage point, she could see that the class appeared surprised and pleased. The*

*teacher smiled back sincerely and said she was glad it had made some sense.*

*It was the last time that Roger behaved confrontationally or asserted himself in a superior*

*way, which is certainly not to say that he quit expressing his opinions. He achieved an*

*amazing shift in his interaction with the teacher, his group, and the class at large. The more*

*he listened and honestly questioned, the more he was able to back up and consider his*

*convictions, and the smarter he got about analytical thinking. His writing, logic, and*

*analytical abilities improved. And, he was far more interested in the material than he had*

*been at the beginning of the semester. He talked more freely with the other students. The*

*teacher and Roger had a number of workshopping conversations in which he responded well*

*to her role of a devil's advocate who understood that in the end she would respect however he*

*was working it out for himself. He began to ask questions that in fact encouraged the*

*teacher's role as devil's advocate. By the end of the semester, Roger had repositioned himself*

*and reconsidered his identity to the point that he could write a multiperspectival and*

*objective paper on racial profiling and police brutality. The bulk of this achievement, which*

*has clear political implications, was attained through his experience of learning to listen to and hear others in a group with differing points of view without losing his own voice.*

*Roger wrote the teacher an email after classes were over and grades had gone out to tell her he thought she was a very good teacher. She laughed at Roger's last surprising statement.*

## College of the Canyons and Pasadena City College (Santa Clarita and Pasadena, CA 2000-2002)

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### The Stone Mind

Hogen, a Chinese Zen teacher, allowed four traveling monks to build a fire in his yard for warmth. He overheard them arguing about subjectivity and objectivity.

He said, "There is a big stone. Do you consider it to be inside or outside your mind?"

One of the monks replied, "From the Buddhist viewpoint everything is an objectification of the mind, so I would say that the stone is inside my mind."

"Your head must feel very heavy," observed Hogen, "if you are carrying around a stone like that in your mind."

In 2000, I moved to Pasadena for two years, choosing the community college arena as my next learning venue. Community college students often have fairly complicated lives. I had gotten used to students who, for all our professorial complaints, come notably well-prepared for work in the world of university. My imagination had become rather limited when it came to the life of a student. The range of individuals I encountered in California pushed my UNC Writing Center

adaptability training into a new arena. I had to adjust to their lives, not just their

abilities, if I hoped to create a space that could give them what they needed.

My strategies for UNC students fell short of many of my encounters with

community college individuals. Their needs and points of reference were so varied.

Business people come back to school had strong work ethics and confidence, but

they were out of touch with academic endeavor. Twenty-somethings who had been

working since high school for various reasons had not always developed solid work

ethics where academics were concerned. Often, they did not understand exactly

what was being asked from them in terms of content or method. Some of them were

motivated and some weren't. Adults returned to school to start on a new career

path. Mothers came to school after their children had grown. One of my students

was trying desperately to distance himself from the gang element he had been a part

of. Non-native English speakers were struggling for language and cultural

acclimation. Put them all in the same classroom, and university teaching methods go

out the window in large part.

Accelerated Schools had brought home the need for the element of honesty and

an awareness of individuality. It also had reminded me, thankfully, of the elements

of attentive patience and creativity. Graduate school as well had pointed out, and

would continue to in the future, the ways I myself have benefited from, survived on

really, the attentive patience of others. Additionally, between my time in the

classroom and my time at the UNC Writing Center, I had identified some of the

more concrete methods I considered important to building a relationship with my

students and that encouraged learning through personal and engaged interaction, including their interaction with one another. These included a highly verbal and conversational classroom, student participation in creating assignments and developing grading standards, and working in groups. And the one-on-one tutoring I had been doing at the Writing Center had made abundantly clear the need for an element of quick adaptability, apparently a concrete method, but really a various and constantly morphing one.

The necessity for shifting tone, approach, questioning methods, familiarity, accessibility, and information dissemination according to individual needs as an element of teaching and learning can not be overestimated. It's a difficult and exhausting, though rewarding and effective, task. It would be accurate to say the practice of adaptability requires paying close attention, but I think it's a little more complex than that. Feeling out a person's mind and individual character, including emotional state, in order to communicate with them honestly, demands more than paying attention to the questions they ask, the correct responses they give, or the mistakes they make. In this way, we may begin to understand what information is going in and coming out, but not necessarily comprehend who the person is and how to reach them further. In short, we may continue to try to communicate and teach on our own terms and not theirs, something we learned at Accelerated Schools can be largely ineffective or superficial. I think sometimes it looks like it works because some students have learned to be adaptable themselves, perhaps more than their teachers, and are willing to do that work for us and with us. Community

college students were excellent teachers for a student of adaptability, reteaching me the lesson of developing openness to individuals in order to reach out to them.

I had been taking baby steps in my exploration of Zen and Zen Buddhism for years. A more serious approach to these philosophies at the same time that I began my experiences in community college yielded unexpected insights into teaching and learning for me. In Zen studies, there is an element of harmonious living discovered and strengthened through meditation, called mindfulness. Paying attention mindfully leads to a depth of interaction easily missed in day to day life. If you were frying eggs mindfully, for instance, you wouldn't do the normal routine of cracking eggshells, letting them cook to the right consistency, perhaps doing something else as you waited, and then scooping them onto your plate. You instead would note the particular thin sound of the crack, and if it was a clean one. You'd notice the specific color of the yolk, the gradual transformation of the clear whites to opaque. You'd notice the way the smell of it feels in your nose and the way your stomach reacts. You'd think about the chicken that laid the egg and even the chick it might have been if not for nourishing you. You might even go so far as to thank it. Obviously, we aren't monks who have unlimited time to note every single thing we do. But perhaps we have more time than we think. If we regard mindfulness as an aspect of teaching and a methodological element, our priorities require a shift. If we approach interaction and communication with others through the practice of mindfulness, the experience increases in depth, gains new meaning, facets and aspects previously unnoticed.

If we teach our students mindfully, we can notice much more about how they learn: what creates blocks for them and why; how they react to our communicative styles; what language works best for them; what we may wrongfully assume they already know; what emotional issues, such as lack of confidence or anger, might be complicating their academic endeavors; what small cues they may give us, even in the most discreet of body language. In addition to awareness, mindfulness requires that we then respect these things as we would respect the things we find most important in our lives, or at least as close as we can get to that sense of relevance. When we strive for this kind of mindful attention, we instruct our capacity for and willingness towards adaptability.

As individuals, when we embrace the concept of mindful teaching, we can begin to notice our own patterns and question our assumptions about how we do what we do. In a logical extension, ruminations on how we teach should lead to addressing an equally complicated though seemingly apparent issue.  Why do we teach? Do not read by the words quickly. Why does teaching occur? Why, in the end, do you teach? Who do you teach? Ultimately, the learning process is much more about students and much less about us. We may be cooking the egg, but it's the egg that carries the greater meaning.[9] Even when we care that our students learn material and make good grades, we can forget that simple fact.

About the same time I started teaching at community college, I started drinking a lot of green tea. It's a well-known antioxidant, and clears those damaging free

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[9]"When you boil rice, know that the water is your own life."

radicals right out of there, something Earl Grey can't claim. Appropriately enough, the community college experience seemed to clear out some of the last doubts I had about my methodological convictions. The anxiety of enacting them, especially in a university setting, didn't disappear, but my openness to them became permanent. Community college was an exercise in practicing what I preached. The more I thought about mindfulness and respect, the more I wondered in what ways I didn't follow through. Was I really treating my students as individuals with the right to every choice they made, or was I still judging them by my own expectations and self-image? Was I approaching each of them as a real learning person, or was I still playing teacher? Every time I caught myself rolling my eyes at a grade or feeling personally offended by my students' lack of scholarly behavior, I knew I was missing the point.

As I reviewed the elements of my pedagogy and teaching methods so far and identified the next ones to work on, I realized that I needed an element to organize the others and elucidate those still undefined. I had teaching experience and composition theory under my belt, and I had my gut under my belt, too. But, mentally embracing an idea and acting on the instincts to move you closer to it doesn't mean you have indeed moved on to completely enacting it. It didn't feel like all the pieces had fallen together yet. It wasn't until I began to contemplate seriously the element of humility in my own life and in my role as teacher that I saw a direct correlation between it and the ability to concentrate less on myself as a teacher and more on the student as a person or the class as people.

Humility helps clarify the ways we allow student performance to be about our image of ourselves or concern about the image others will have of us. A teacher's image of herself involves a bit of pride. I suppose we should all be proud of what we do, but I've begun to think that our sense of pride is missing the point. At any rate, it can be a limiting thing, a little blinding even for the most earnest of us. To maintain pride, the opposite of which would be a feeling of failure or lack in performance, a teacher almost inevitably begins to invest in her students' successes not just for them, but for herself. But students are not there to feed our pride or make us feel good about what we do. They are students even without us, just as we are necessarily students of the world ourselves, wherever we are, aware of it or not. It is they who make us teachers, not ourselves alone. We are not teachers who await them; we are made teachers by them, as they teach us. It is the ongoing, and admittedly confusing, attempt to understand humility that keeps me most honest, enabling attentive patience and demanding mindful thinking. All three things in turn contribute to a keener and quicker adaptability. And along the way, hopefully, it is humility that keeps me minding my integrity instead of maintenancing my pride.

Humility was the missing element that made sense of all the others. Through humility, honesty, attentive patience and mindfulness became more accessible. Through humility, I was able to begin the neverending work of incorporating all these elements into my teaching. Ultimately, this meant that I was not able to consider myself as teacher only and manage to make changes. Instead, I was forced

to consider myself as an individual who teaches. Only through personal integrity could I reach a point of true methodological integrity. Contemplating the nature of humility, and the paradoxical exercise of trying to attain it, brought me closer to Nan-in's empty tea cup. It made me listen closer, think harder, take chances, prioritize students' and other people's thoughts and contingencies. I became more comfortable with not knowing and with the possibility of being wrong. I became more vulnerable. I became a better learner. I began to know the meaning of real respect and faith, and how endlessly I must work to enact that meaning.

### *The C is Not about Me*

*I was dying to give Jorge higher than C grades. He had a good mind, worked hard, and was improving steadily. But, given his background, he had started out with more ground to cover than many other students. He asked for help and explanations for grades without debating them. But he couldn't quite get to the B's yet, according to standardized collegiate requirements. I was concerned that all those C's would make him think he was a C, and he'd give up. I didn't realize it, but I felt terribly responsible for his success. I was going to feel bad if he didn't make that B. I decided to have an honest and encouraging conversation with him about his ongoing improvement.*

*Jorge smiled and said the previous year, he had taken the same class. He said he had meant to be serious, but he hadn't understood yet what was expected of him, what school would demand of him. He failed solidly. As he told his story, I was astonished; Jorge was absolutely cheery about the whole thing. He explained, "It's the best thing that's happened to*

*me, really. It changed the way I thought about school and work and my life. I learned that if I*

*wanted to do this, I was going to have to work for it. It made me want to do better."*

I was humbled. I had never seen a student behave this way over a failing grade. I understood that my feelings about failing students were complex and wrapped up in my preconceptions of good students and good teachers. But Jorge was a person who was fully capable of making choices and learning from them, and he deserved my respect. I didn't need to take on responsibility for students that ended up robbing them of their own responsibility. And in addition, I didn't need to look at a failing student as a failure or an insult. As teacher, as student, as people, we make our choices and then have to work with them. If choices lead to a failing grade, then I must respect that grade and the person's choices. And if an engaged person is satisfied with C's, then I should give C's happily! Listening to Jorge, and learning to fail people allowed me to develop a respect that truly allows people the room to fail, to try again, to care or not care, to remain the humans I should see them as anyway without my judgment.  Rather than pushing students to make good grades, it began to look like the best thing I could do as a teacher would be to make sure people were aware of their choices and the consequences, possibilities, and benefits, without evaluating them.

At the same time I was recognizing the logic I was learning from Jorge, I was also working once again with the occasional student who seemed to fail because of life contingencies. They didn't fail so much as they fell, or drowned. These folks were

not in quite the same position as Jorge, usually feeling the pressure of multiple complications. As a teacher, as a person, my ability to create opportunities for them was limited, which was frustrating. I tried to apply what I had recently learned, and found that approaching them by stressing their choices instead of their performance could be productive in these situations as well.

### Cal (Re)Collects Himself

*Cal was in my College of the Canyons basic writing course. He sported enough testosterone for three boys his age, toting around a huge chip and maintaining a thick defense wall. He was one of the few students who have driven me to sharp irritation, probably because he bore a close resemblance to angry rednecks I'd known back home. He had all the trappings of someone who couldn't have cared less, missing class and scoffing liberally. But there was an anxiety about him that at this point in my experiences made me wonder. As his grades steadily dropped, the bags under his eyes got darker.*

*One day at the beginning of class, as others were getting settled, he approached me at the front of the room, highly agitated. He began by complaining about the work load and seemed on his way to picking a fight. Although this fellow could have swatted me down like a fly, there seemed only one real and mindful way to deal with it. I interrupted after a moment and a breath, "Cal, you seem really upset. Is this just about class?" In shades of Nick the Ticking Time Bomb, Cal started and then stood down. He looked more tired than ever as he told me about his two jobs, one full time, his ailing mother, his coursework load.*

*I looked at him and said, "Cal. Nobody can do all that. Why are you trying to do that all at the same time? Do you have to?" Cal said he needed to finish, but also looked a little confused. I pointed out that this wasn't going to get him finished, and suggested that he cut himself a little bit of slack and get reasonable about the whole thing. He had many more choices than trying to do it all at the same time. It was as if he had seen me for the first time.*

*"Yeah. Maybe you're right." Cal remained in the basic writing class, but he did drop one of his others. He took control of his situation, and as a result, there was a noticeable change in his attitude. His edginess subsided, and his mood improved. He was ready to learn.*

Community college taught me in relief what I had learned at Accelerated and what I already believed: underestimation of an individual is not only a mistake; it can be a defining one. While we are responsible for the success of our students inasmuch as we provide for them in a clear manner the material they need to use as tools, we also have responsibilities as humans who teach humans, not just teachers teaching students in a standardized, monolithic manner. I think we sometimes do an odd thing by expecting students to treat the information we give them as worthy of respect and capable of changing their lives, but simultaneously tending to define for ourselves what their lives should be rather than letting them do so for themselves. In this way, we are more likely to judge students according to our own lives and academic values rather than letting students teach us about their worlds, thereby actually limiting learning moments. This behavior also dovetails with investment in our own concepts of ourselves as teachers, professors, and academics.

Rather than stressing grades or products and pushing students as usual to excel in order to reach a standardized bar, perhaps we should stress options and leave it to the student to choose which bar in which arena they wish to attain. It is their right to succeed; it is their right to fail and try again. In fact, it is their responsibility as individuals, just as it is ours. With nonattachment to the idea of failure, it may be our greatest responsibility to relate to our students in terms of choices, having the humility and respect to let them define themselves and their lives.[10] We can fulfill this responsibility by mindfully making clear to them not only the material of a course or subject, but also the crucial nature of each choice they make, and by showing them how to imagine what the consequences or benefits could be. Through embracing nonattachment and humility, teaching becomes less about the teacher and more about the students, less about teacher and student and more about an exchange between individuals.

On the other hand, it is foolish and irresponsible to indulge ourselves in the myth of the American Dream or social Darwinism. No one gets anywhere without help, and some of us need it more than others. Sometimes the choices are woefully few, so few that the project of self-definition and redefinition ends up almost dead in the water.

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[10]Nonattachment is the Zen/Buddhist lesson Jorge so effectively taught me. In fact, it even kind of hit me in the face on the spot, like the "Katz!" moment a koan is meant to provoke, traditional in the Rinzai school of Zen practice (the Sanskrit version is "Iha!"). Nonattachment doesn't necessarily mean not caring; it most certainly does mean without judgment resulting from personal investment.

*Bootstrapless*

*Meet Alesi. She's about 23. She is named for her grandmother, Ísela, only backwards. She attends Pasadena City College. She can only take a few classes at once because she doesn't have enough money or time otherwise. She is one of the proud Hispanic women I met in California working her ass off to improve her life and economic situation without giving up their culture, their traditions, their community, their home. Such a fine line they walk, knowing that in the end, it is not their culture's, but their own integrity that is at stake.*

*Alesi is married and has a young toddler. Neither her husband nor her mother support her educational endeavors. They both think she should be at home. Her mother refuses to help much with the baby when it has to do with juggling school and home time. Her husband gets angry at her for reading and tells her she's lazy. He refuses to learn English and wants to be paid under the table, so this means, since we're in the L.A./Valley area, he's mostly doing white folks' yard work. I don't have a problem with never learning English or getting your money under the table if you live under certain conditions. Except when you insist that your young wife and child should subsist on that pay while you refuse to support her effort to improve the situation through her education. Then you need to collect your under-the-table pay all by your damn self.*

*Alesi is smart. Alesi can change her entire life with a little more education. She is on an economic and sociocultural cusp. Most people we know would take one look at her writing and think, "Oh boy. This is…really awful." Undeniably, Alesi has had no practice to begin with and has been out of school a few years to boot. But she is smart. And she wants it. Alesi thought she was dumb. We straightened that out, although I don't think she ever completely*

*believed it. But Alesi tries and talks and participates. She tells me about her mama and her husband and her baby.*

*Alesi's husband disappears. I hope he doesn't come back.*

*Alesi misses a few classes. Her baby gets sick. Alesi begins losing weight so fast it almost makes noise dropping off. She has a look I know all to well and don't want to see on someone who deserves it so little. Alesi occasionally looks like a little hunted thing scrunching down in her desk. Alesi's eyes glitter with uncried tears that threaten and threaten and threaten.*

*Alesi comes to me and apologizes. Not for not doing work, as you might expect, but for turning in what she considered shoddy work. Afraid that she's frittering something away, afraid she's dumb, afraid I'll write her off, afraid she's not good, afraid, afraid, afraid. Alesi is so strung that I can feel the energy coming off her skin, like little vibrations, like grabby little tentacles that can't find anything to hold onto. Alesi stops talking then. If she breathes, she'll cry. Maybe die. I can't understand all the things in her eyes. I say, "Alesi. What's going on?" Alesi's face melts with instant tears, hurting me.*

*She says, "Do you know what I'm feeding my baby this week?" I stare at her, feeling my eyes sticking open. I'm holding my breath. She whispers, she gasps, she is stricken: "Saltines."*

*"Alesi." She is in my arms, and her head rests tired on my neck. We weep. The tentacles dig in.*

*Alesi's husband did come back.*

*Alesi tried, but she couldn't make it to the end of the semester.*

*Alesi is my mantra. Alesi, Alesi, Alesi.*

As my respect for and faith in my students grew, the space within my classrooms changed. The more room I give them, the more they talk. The less I push my own scholarly agenda, the more they seem to care on their own account, and perhaps counter-intuitively to our usual mind set, the more they behave like scholars. Questioning and community consultation become framework and method. The more I ask them about their lives, the more they are willing to create meaning from the material we discuss and write about. Course material and the act of writing take on an unexpected depth. They notice the space; they notice me noticing them. Since the stakes involved in learning have shifted, they do not try to take advantage of my flexibility, as there is no point to it. We try to treat each other as equals, and it raises us both up. It's not as if a lotus flower opens in every class, but over time, when my students speak, I hear bluebirds, both theirs and mine. Me and them becomes us, the learners, the seekers, comrade scholars.

It is as a consequence of this kind of interaction that many of us become friends in the most honest sense of the word. We share a common purpose, even when approaching it from different ground. We respect each other's perspectives and are unafraid to question one another. We mindfully admit our limitations and invite assistance. We learn together in a space of our own making. The work improves, the questions gain in substance, and the effort comes from a place of caring. The project of developing a meaningful engagement with the work at hand is ongoing. And as we well know, it is just this kind of engagement that leads to the best scholarship, the best research, the most interesting work, the most satisfying lives.

**UNC Doctoral Program (Chapel Hill, NC 2002-present)**

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Bodhidharma brought Zen from India to China. Dogen writes in 1004 that after nine years, Bodhidharma wished to go home. He gathered his disciples to test their apperception.

Dofuku said, "In my opinion, truth is beyond affirmation or negation, for this is the way it moves."

Bodhidharma replied, "You have my skin."

Soji said, "In my view, it is like Ananda's sight of the Buddha-land—seen once and forever."

Bodhidharma answered, "You have my flesh."

Doiku said, "The four elements of light, airiness, fluidity, and solidity are empty and, and the five skandhas are no-things. In my opinion, no-thing is reality."

Bodhidharma commented, "You have my bones."

Finally, Eka bowed before the master—and remained silent.

Bodhidharma said, "You have my marrow."


If there ever were models of patience, my dissertation committee has been them.

My director, especially, discovered the contradictions that are me. I can want a thing

intensely, and yet, I will not simply take it. I am frustrating that way. I am not

practical. The path to the thing consumes me, each step a risk that conjures up the

feel of being at-risk. Each step a reflection of the meaning that has also resulted from

risks I have chosen to take and live. How will I do what I mean? It must not be done

only because it must be done. It must be done in honor of all that has made it

possible, the voices of those by whose grace it has been animated singing between

the lines.

So here I am, struggling through a dissertation, the exercise and purpose of which

doesn't seem to be about marrow or bluebirds at all. I am uncomfortable in the proof

of performance. I feel I have lost my knack for it. My language does not seem to fit. When the Zen master asked the Hotei for the meaning of Zen, the Hotei threw his pack upon the ground and was still. When the master asked for how one should enact Zen, the Hotei threw his pack back over his shoulder and went merrily on his way. Before his Master, Eka silently bows. Koans arrange words in such a way to leave us speechless with brief moments of understanding or confusion. Words can try and testify, but they are sometimes only words. It is in living that we say what we mean. In humility we take risks to foster a mindful integrity. Let me be the marrow of my students. Let their bluebirds speak instead of me.

# CHAPTER 2
# METHODOLOGIES OF RELATIONSHIP:
# THEORIZING LIFE'S LESSONS

The theoretical work in this chapter is an attempt to translate into academic analytical language what I have learned about teaching from practice, and then to translate it back into the practice again. In some ways, Chapter 3 may present a clearer picture of what a methodology of relationship does, as it will concentrate more specifically on what happens between people in learning situations. A methodology of relationship is above all a practice, a way of being together, rooted in language use but far outstripping language's capability. A methodology of relationship addresses how we as human beings react to other human beings both practically and emotionally, in the classroom and in the educational forum of our lives of which classrooms are only a part. What I present here are several theories that serve as expressions of my political convictions as they relate to teaching and learning, as well as the conceptual underpinnings of what I call "community of difference" and "dialogue of difference." Composition and black feminist theory provide a focus for my discussion of community and political intent, while several of Mikhail Bakhtin's basic concepts of language use and its social nature contribute to my ideas concerning language use in the classroom.

## Disruption in the Classroom: Resisting Roles

A composition classroom can claim to be about writing, but, like any other classroom, its primary layer is composed of politics and personal narrative. These factors inhabit the classroom space fully before any given subject matter has even introduced itself into the mix. As a community, the classroom reflects political reality, both socioeconomic and cultural, in its curriculum and perceived purpose, its language use, its demographics, its inhabitants, its interpersonal dynamics. As a result, classrooms, especially classrooms that encourage the development of "voice," are some of the most personal spaces around, despite their containment within somewhat neutralizing narratives of institutionalized education and academic professionalism. The accepted body of knowledge of a community and its power dynamics underlie any piece of writing or narrative, including a teacher's or student's tacit and continual narrative of themselves, each other, and their classroom. Because we bring our most intimate selves with us when we communicate, writing never can be innocent or pure, and neither can teaching or learning.

To be fully aware of underlying power dynamics in the classroom, a teacher must actively acknowledge the sociopolitical realities of each student through the workings of the classroom itself. In addition, a teacher should acknowledge the capacity of a student to understand her own sociopolitical conditions, and not only that, but also her right to understand them. In doing so, teachers must respect those learning with us as simultaneously autonomous and contingency-bound humans,

not as monolithic "students." At the same time, we must work to replace our own monolithic concepts of "teacher," seeking to inhabit the classroom in a more complicated manifestation of our human selves. We, as teachers, learners, and humans, are involved in the development of politically aware selves, also growing aware of themselves as necessarily political selves. The selves are not only those of the students; they are our own as well.

Moving further from an intellectualized expression of classroom environment, I would say we, students and teachers together, are on the path of figuring out what kind of humans we are, what kinds of risks we'll take, how we'll maintain our integrity. The responsibility is large, and teachers, with all our intellect, ought to know and allow for it. The responsibility exponentially multiplies when we extend our involvement to the development of student political selves, growing aware of self. If we acknowledge the magnitude of the endeavor, it becomes clear that bringing academics alone to the classroom will be insufficient for a methodology that completely fulfills our responsibilities as teachers. We must also bring our humanity, our voices and a willingness to create relationships with our students which allow us to experience their voices in all the complexity humans have to offer.

I identify three major aspects of this shift to methodologies of relationship and the self-redefinition within classroom community it implies: 1) the integration of a black feminist sense of community and ethics into composition theories of community to create what bell hooks calls an "engaged pedagogy" in transformational space, 2) a Bakhtinian dialogic approach to the use of language based on the concept of the

"utterance," both written and spoken, in order to create meaning and a community body of knowledge in class, and 3) a resulting radical change in the way teachers and students perceive teacher and student roles in collegiate classrooms. All three points require a dedication to disruption. In a classroom that supports transformation through self-redefinition, self-concept and preconceptions are disrupted through exposure to others' experiences; in a classroom based on dialogism, constructs of the self and truth as singular are disrupted; and in a classroom community defined by relationship, perceived roles of teachers and students are disrupted. By aligning these theories, creating engaged relationships and applying them to the way we inhabit a classroom, we may be able to bring ourselves and our students more mindfully into the moment of learning, allowing for greater engagement with the creation of meaning and knowledge, self-definition, and the application of critical thought.

A methodology of relationship, as I have conceived it, has its primary interest not in students learning subject matter per se, but in students using subject matter, community, and critical thinking to learn about themselves, others and their places in the world. Through this practice, students have the opportunity to develop their political consciousness, ethical awareness and ability to redefine self in the face of new and challenging information or experience. Using their education to create identity leads to the kind of "personal autonomy" summarized by Mark Tennant and Philip Pogson in chapter six of their book, Learning and Change in the Adult Years: A Developmental Perspective, on teacher response to stages in student ego

development: "the capacity to think rationally, reflect, analyze evidence, and make judgments; to know oneself and be free to form and express one's own opinions; and finally, to be able to act in the world" (123). However, although it receives the greatest weight in institutionalized education, acquisition of information or academic skills solely does not reliably result in the type of autonomy for our students that can lead to continual and open-minded development of identity.

Robert Brooke has pointed out in his seminal article, "Underlife and Writing Instruction," that a correspondence between development of identity and academic performance does exist, albeit one apparently unsupported openly in most classroom settings. He states, "the identities which may be developing for students in writing classrooms are more powerful for real academic success than the traditional identity of the successful student" (141-2). Brooke's assertion seems to indicate that students who manage to find their own voices, defining themselves in response and relation to the world around them, have a more productive educational experience. After all, most of us would agree that an original and critically savvy voice is what makes for excellent writing as well as leading to research and theoretical thought worth remark. The student-centered classroom must become even more student centered, for the sake of learning, but also for the sake of the people who are our students.[11]

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[11]And perhaps for the world. Mahayana schools of Buddhism hold that liberation of the self (a profound redefinition) liberates the world. The bodhisattva is the ultimate expression of a human who has reached liberation through the enlightened wedding of wisdom and compassion and therefore chooses to help others liberate themselves. The spiritual expression of ideas like this may be considered inappropriate in academics, but the concept is not so different from feminist and activist

Because teachers have expertise in a subject or subjects, though not always in teaching, education's power dynamic places us at the front of the classroom, looking like the authorities.[12] While it is naive to attempt escape from the institutional power and responsibilities our expertise gives us, it's something else to resist a position of ultimate authority in favor of a different kind of relationship with our students and even with the practice of teaching and learning. In fact, the onus is on us to enact and maintain personal and academic integrity by resisting our own personal tendencies as humans to be tricked by the comforting affects of identity and power into inattention towards their political influence. Though we are accustomed to the idea that teachers act as guides, leaders and directors, I have found that my teaching and my students' learning have improved and deepened since I learned to take direction from them, as well as creating opportunities for them to direct the class, themselves individually and themselves as groups.[13]

Brooke also states that, "Writing involves being able to challenge one's assigned [as well as, I would add, accepted] roles long enough that one can think originally; it involves living in conflict" (141). Similarly, a classroom predicated on the development of autonomy and identity (for teachers as well as students) calls for a disruption of traditional teacher and student roles through a disruptive adjustment

convictions that political action can change cultural conditions, and that we have a responsibility to participate in this liberation. Both are revolutionary.

[12]Lad Tobin expresses this condition nicely in his article "Teaching Without an I.D." in <u>Reading Student Writing: Confessions, Meditations, and Rants</u>.

[13]"Learning is the very essence of humility, learning from everything and everybody, there is no hierarchy in learning. Authority denies learning and a follower will never learn." Jiddu Krishnamurti, <u>Notebook</u>.

in methodological approach, prioritizing self-definition through relationship over course content and traditionally measurable success. Appropriately enough, this disruption is done in favor of disruption. A methodology of relationship embraces the idea that individuals benefit from the experience of conceptual "cognitive dissonance" in an environment that encourages ideological exchange on a personal level.[14] In such an environment, facile resolution of cognitive dissonance's discomfort is discouraged in favor of thoughtful engagement with it instead. Rather than giving in to the human tendency to tune out or censure other voices or experiences and values in an absolutist or legalistic manner, participants in a methodology of relationship work at a real attempt to hear, grasp, and respond thoughtfully to whatever or whomever disrupted their sense of balance in the first place. Conflicting ideas are probed, considered analytically, and presented as a useful mode of investigation and growth. However, engaging with cognitive dissonance in this way as a class can only be achieved in a highly interactive community immersed in ongoing dialectic, regardless of course content.

It follows that a teacher supporting student-centered pedagogy (be she radical, feminist, or post-whatever) must therefore identify with and support her students'

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[14]The concept of "cognitive dissonance" was presented by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1957 in his article, "A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance," to describe the dynamics of "cognitive consistency" and attitude or behavior adjustment. When a person is faced with cognition/s that conflict/s with already accepted cognition/s, she experiences "cognitive dissonance," which creates tension and a need for resolution in the individual. Basic strategies for coping with dissonance include: 1) changing the perceived importance of one of the cognitions ("being monetarily and socially successful as a doctor is more important than becoming an artist even though that's what makes me happy"), 2) adding more consonant cognitions ("she may say I'm wrong, but all my friends agree with me"), or 3) simply erasing or avoiding the dissonant cognition/s (claiming another person's convictions are the result of stupidity, misguidance, evil, or insanity, for instance).

efforts to find their voice or voices, even when it spills over the usual boundaries of classroom activity and expectation. As Brooke says, "When a teacher worries about her student's 'voice,' she is also worrying about her student's 'identity,'" though often enough we seem to avoid taking the risk of fully addressing identity issues openly and thoroughly in the classroom (149). Truly identifying with students searching for self, experimenting with voice, and attempting to give themselves voice in discussion and writing might seem difficult for some of us. We might feel comfortable with the voice we've already negotiated for ourselves as teachers, as academicians, as researchers, as adults. We also might feel insecure enough about our negotiations that it feels dangerous to look closely at the processes we went through to make them. But I would bet that identification with our students turns out most fruitfully when teachers are also actively defining themselves in relation to the world around them, especially their students. Everyone is always already doing so, but a teacher who does so mindfully is constantly aware of the multiplicity and variability of identity, the force of experience and exposure (or lack of it) on ethics and values, the real difficulty of maintaining integrity of conviction while negotiating the gigabytes-worth of conflicting and value-laden information that comes our way every day, the moments of vertigo when looking in the mirror and suddenly facing what we fearfully hide from others, in short, the confusing state of human (self-)consciousness. A teacher walking through her days building this kind of awareness provides a model of the real and real messy personal work involved in building a sense of self, an integrated human with a strong voice and intelligent

application of critical thought; and she also remembers how hard and frustrating it can be, realizes that asking students to accomplish it unguided is at the very least unreasonable, and at the worst perhaps a power play.

In his article, "Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy," Todd Taylor points out that composition research and theory appear to remain a bit squeamish when addressing the personal workings of our students: "our interrogation into such apparently extracurricular influences tends to stop short of the really big, though traditionally taboo, issues that determine student experience," like drugs and alcohol, music and television, sex, and, of course, sleep deprivation (135). Rather than letting our students' lives direct our research at some point, while we have been leading student-centered classrooms, we have continued to do a great deal of teacher-centered research, even when students are the subject. Taylor asserts that "we need to attend much more intimately to the material lives of students: what they think about, their priorities, what they want, who they are, how their minds and bodies operate" (138). I would say that this needs to happen in the classroom as well. Taylor's use of the word "intimate" is apt, though perhaps also a bit nervous-making for some of us. But as I have said, it is disingenuous to ignore the intensely personal space of a classroom, particularly a writing classroom or any classroom concerned with voice. Fully acknowledging this aspect of education within classroom space calls for disrupting accepted concepts of classroom etiquette and boundaries in favor of new approaches to learning through community and relationship.

Patricia Collins has described Afrocentric feminist thought as a "culture of resistance," and it is resistance I would like to invite into our classrooms (12). I would like to encourage professors and students alike to recognize the ways in which we as individuals coexist in the classroom, and to question how our relationships may be reconceived. As we address tacit constructs that underlie the boundaries we set, we can begin to re-envision what it means to acceptably relate to our students and for them to acceptably relate to us and one another. By resisting typical roles as student and instructor, even as we see them functioning within our current student-centered and collaborative methods, we have an opportunity not only to foster successful writing and academic facility, but also to take part in a much more difficult endeavor, that of creating knowledge that leads to personal political change for students and teachers. As students and teachers re-define themselves in the classroom, they also re-define the way they choose to be in the world.

## Communities of Difference: Composing Selves in Community

I suggest that we rethink the purpose and employment of classroom teaching methodologies in order to create opportunities for our students to engage more deeply not only with the material of a course, but also with the experiential, and therefore often conflicting, knowledge that they can bring to one another as individuals functioning within a community. To that end, rather than perceiving our methodologies as functioning only to communicate a particular course of

information through a classroom setting, I wonder if we may consider teaching methodology also as a mode of relationship and community, through which students and teachers collaboratively construct their identities and voices. Tennant and Pogson cite Rita Weathersby's observation in her 1981 article, "Ego Development," that, "Exposure to higher level reasoning, opportunities to take others' roles and perspectives, discomforting discrepancies between one's actual experiences in a situation and one's current explanations and beliefs" are the things that facilitate a student's development into an autonomous individual (Tennant & Pogson 125-6).[15]

As indicated by statements like this one, and as we already know, it becomes clear that any self-definition and redefinition must happen in relation to community. I feel that relationship and community built for this purpose in a classroom can also foster a sense of community and self that can move beyond the overdeveloped individualism our culture encourages, to an individual whose continuing project of self-redefinition appreciates and responds to difference.[16] While virulent prejudice

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[15]Weathersby applied Jane Loevinger's stages of psychological ego development in order to outline stages in the development of a student's perceptions of the purposes and meaning of education.

[16]There may be some confusion about my use of the word "individual" to indicate a material human self and the specific reference to "individualism" I use here. In this case, I am invoking the Western tradition of a unified self, which, taken to its extreme, can result in a singularly egocentric mode of self, for whom the concept of "rights" has become less about, for instance, "civil rights" and civic community, and more about a sense of personal entitlement accompanied by a conflation of deserving what one may "want" with what one may in fact "need." Individualism also lends credence to certain American national myths, such as the idea that one may lift oneself up by the bootstraps in order to fulfill the American Dream. Such a belief allows the erasure of at least two things: 1) the fact that almost all successful people have received some sort of assistance or support in order to achieve their success, an overwhelming number of them having had monetary, social, and/or educational privilege, and 2) the fact that many socioeconomic realities simply preclude the possibility or probability of self-propulsion into success unaided.

can not always be convinced to have a conversation, more general prejudice often finds it somewhat difficult to deny the presence of an individual representative of a group perceived as unacceptable, and just as often is difficult to explain or adequately justify itself. Interestingly enough, often a general prejudice will in fact be stalwartly denied in favor of particularized acceptance. I think of my very traditionally Christian friends who love me dearly despite my more agnostic/Eastern blend of spirituality, or my Mother without question fully accepting my lesbian college friend Jamie at a time when she was still not completely comfortable with the idea of homosexuality or sure how she felt about it. I also think about how now she will sincerely say that love is love, however it expresses itself.

My concept of methodologies of relationship combines two theoretical traditions of community. The first tradition, the concept of discourse communities, has been rapidly developed and variously applied in the last two decades by composition theorists. The second tradition of community I will draw on functions as one of the pillars of black feminist political thought. It is from a distinctly feminine experience of being black in America that many black feminist theorists have developed their perspectives on hierarchy and the relationships between oppression and identity. I hope to combine composition's current pedagogical undertakings with the work of black feminist theorists, particularly Patricia Collins and bell hooks, to expand not only our concepts of classroom community, but also our perception of its pedagogical and methodological possibilities.

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Methodologies based on relationship seem particularly suited to writing

pedagogy, which embraces the concept of process. Writing, as we know, is a messy

matter. We defer readily to its recursive and often idiosyncratic nature, and we

espouse the idea that "good" writing develops with practice, acknowledging the

organic growth that results in increased academic ability and personal expression.

We acknowledge the difficulty this poses for traditional educational concepts

surrounding measurability and grading.[17] Composition theorists also realize the

importance of language and community as part of the developmental process of a

student's ability to articulate their own ideas and express them clearly in writing.[18]

Contemporary process classrooms, as a result, are generally student-centered and

often try to find creative ways to honor various sociocultural contingencies affecting

student limitations and abilities. Writing classrooms built around the concepts of

process and collaborative work are therefore particularly suited for engagement in a

mutual project of repositioning ourselves in relation to the world around us as we

develop voice and expression.

Let us consider the work composition theorists have done in the last thirty years

with the ideas and application of community and collaboration in the classroom.

The conceptualization of discourse communities determined by academic discipline

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[17]Similarly, in yoga practice, the idea that you are always exactly where you should be is a basic and abiding principle. Measurable success is not simply antithetical to the philosophy of the Yoga Sutras, it is somewhat irrelevant.

[18]The role of community is also considered a crucial facet in yoga practice. The experience and energy of those around you contribute to your own practice and development. The role of community is important as well to Zen and Zen Buddhist study and meditation. Most individuals need a regular experience of community as part of a growing awareness that may lead to enlightenment.

and classroom communities engaged in collaborative work has revolutionized the college writing classroom. Rather than teaching writing through a focus on grammar and proscriptive genres and rules of good writing, compositionists stressed process and peer feedback. Classroom material shifted focus from studying and imitating traditional literature and essays to studying student writing itself, or some combination of the two. The idea of developing a student's sense of authorial and authoritative voice gained ground. Writing was seen less as an artistic talent and more as a composite effort that encompassed aspects of both art and skill, but that in both cases required ongoing practice and feedback more than anything else. In short, writing looked and became in fact more accessible than it ever had before, and for more kinds of learners.

The identification of discipline-related language and standards of scholarship resulted in new ways to approach teaching students how to successfully gain entry into those disciplines.[19] Considering disciplinary expertise and expectation as a process of the creation of knowledge through group interaction demystified the steps an individual could take to write and speak themselves successfully into those academic milieus. The idea also recalled the anthropological and linguistic concepts

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[19]For instance, David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" (1985), Bennett Rafoth's "Discourse Community: Where Writers, Readers, and Texts Come Together" (1988), Joseph Harris's "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing" (1989), Peter Elbow's "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues" (1991), and Patricia Bizzell's Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness (1992).

of self-identification within social groups.[20] Recognition of this dynamic prompted compositionists to further consider the position of students entering the classroom from their perspective. We began to ask, if the forces of disciplinary groups are so influential for our students' writing success, what other community based realities are they bringing with them already that are also as influential?

As a result, compositionists, teachers, and pedagogists also began to reconsider the roles of teachers and students in the classroom, questioning assumptions about skills development, intelligences, language use, and curriculum in works like Mike Rose's "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University" (1985), Michele Farr and Harvey Daniels' Language Diversity and Writing Instruction (1986), Henry Giroux and Roger Simon's "Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy: Everyday Life as a Basis for Curriculum Knowledge" (1989), and Joyce Bishop's continuing work with Howard Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences."[21] In addition, theorists like Anne Gere, Shirley Brice Heath and Harvey Weiner have explored the idea of writers and speakers as members of communities, exploding the perception of good writers only as individuals or artistes toiling in isolation. All of this good work contributed to classrooms in which students work together to accurately, or authentically, assimilate the conventions of a professional and/or academic writing community.

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[20]The practice of identification of outgroups reinforces group self-identification through definition of outsider status.

[21]We can also consider works like Pamela Annas's "Silences: Feminist Language Research and the Teaching of Writing" (1987), and Elizabeth Flynn's "Composing as a Woman" (1988).

The social constructivist view was advanced that in no case is there a writer who composes outside of a community context. Even a person marooned on an island writes with concepts of what counts as writing. Diary writing, for instance, is relevant as a genre only in that it involves writing for self in contrast to writing for an outside group. The existence of the outside group assists in the definition of what counts as diary writing material and style. Even if not writing a diary, but still for self, it is the self from which writing emanates, and that self was formed in response to a community or, most likely, communities. Externalists developed the social constructivist view further by stressing the idea that meaning is achieved only when an individual is interacting dialogically with her surroundings. Therefore, although an individual is necessarily influenced by her specific circumstances, externalists do place an emphasis on individual participation that shapes the meaning imposed by a sociohistorical moment. Because we do not write in a vacuum, composition classrooms developed the writing group to reflect more accurately the experience of composing and writing, bringing in aspects of social structure and group meaning-making.

My concept of community builds on both the concept of discipline specific communities and the use of community to refer to a group of people who are working collaboratively in the same writing class. I'd like to add the concept of a community of difference. In this case, students and teachers establish together an initial class community and its coursework, sharing the direction of the course. The point of the community of difference is not agreement or acquisition of particular

knowledge or skills. In this methodology, the point of community is the practice of relationship. The class community is built by its participants, rather than taking its identity from already defined parameters. Students and teachers create a self-defining community through discussion and interaction which may or may not specifically encompass their writing at any given moment. It unmakes the concept, however subtle, of self simply as one of the students of English 101 or Composition and Literature and replaces it with a far more complex community that has decided for its selves what their presence in English 101 really means. Rather than seeing themselves as subsumed by a monolithic curriculum experience, students come to see the starting point of the class as themselves, their individuality and community, not the coursework.

The development of a community of difference recognizes the social structures that define community in order to bring to bear the political realities of its members. In order to build a successful new community, members must recognize which communities they and others currently represent. Student and teacher knowledge and identity up to this point in their educational experiences have been based on what was relevant to them and those around them. Asking them to share that knowledge in community results in the creation of a new knowledge base, negotiated by students and teachers together. This practice reflects Kenneth Bruffee's ideas about conversation, the creation of knowledge, and collaborative learning, but extends the parameters of collaborative learning to include authority-resistant teachers and students with the authority to direct, and to encompass not

only course material, but the material of daily lives and what it reveals about sociopolitical realities.[22] Class members develop relationships by sharing personal experiences and ideas, paying deliberate attention to social and cultural contexts. As they look for common ground to establish their sense of class and group community, the class will find it necessary to create meaningful connections from multiple and potentially conflicting narratives. In this way, students gain an understanding of the impact of sociocultural influences on community and identity. By emphasizing our identities as individuals, unbound by our perceived roles as students or teachers, the attention to personally constructed community will simultaneously disrupt the typical dynamics of classroom space and increase the possibilities for safe space, allowing for Bakhtinian dialogism as a typical mode of interaction.

Even if only in a systemic manner, the hierarchal nature of the teacher-student power relationship usually still does echo patriarchal constructions of domination. A classroom that attempts to rearrange institutional power constructs with the dynamic created by the politics of transformation will follow the critical feminist move Collins describes here: "African American women have overtly rejected theories of power based on domination in order to embrace an alternative vision of power based on a humanist vision of self-actualization, self-definition, and self-

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[22]In "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," Bruffee draws connections, by way of Richard Rorty by way of Thomas Kuhn, between "conversation and reflective thought" and learning processes (639). He also discusses the creation of knowledge as a social endeavor, dependent upon "social justified belief" (649). I would stress in this case that socially justified beliefs come from community interaction and personal experience.

determination" (224).[23] Collins also sites as examples bell hooks, Audre Lorde,

Angela Davis, and Filomina Steady as black feminists who have expressed this

value, among others. Re-definition and re-cognition for an individual can only

happen when information and skills are personally meaningful beyond a

masculinist mastery of concepts approach, creating challenge or change in a person's

perception of self and self in relation to the world. In a classroom that echoes the

ethos Collins describes here, the role of relationship in general shifts into place as the

main locus of learning. However, the move from course content to creating space for

the personal realities of the students and teachers involved does not disengage with

course content; learning through relationship can do just the opposite. It is through

forging relationships and establishing a dynamic classroom community that the

content can be made meaningful and applicable in the lives of both student and

teacher.

The prioritization of conversation and community in the classroom creates space

for the scrutiny of language use itself. By examining the kind of language used, from

vocabulary and semantics to historical background, students can begin to see the

way that the meaning they create with their words always includes the implications

of their context. Since the speaker in a conversation is clearly recognizable (although

perhaps not entirely knowable), the practice also brings home the responsibility an

individual has for the words she uses. Students who begin to understand social

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[23]I feel that rather than referring to a pronounced individualism, Collins evokes "humanism" in opposition to absolutism and with a stress on "human." Her brand of humanism is evident in her embrace of subjective experience as an authoritative source of knowledge.

context and rhetorical responsibility have begun to recognize the lack of innocence in language use. The connection between writing, voice, and authorship can then be made more effectively. They can begin to see their writing, as their speech, necessarily shaped by a network of communities, and a writer as a reflection and extension of the self in community, in relation with others and their communities, which always has sociopolitical significance.

I think of Joseph Harris' suggestion that, "Rather than framing our work in terms of helping students move from one community of discourse into another…it might prove more useful (and accurate) to view our task as adding to or complicating their uses of language" (17). Few things are more difficult than transplanting from one's home community into a more diverse one; in the case of university, it is a change especially difficult for first years, returning students, or transfer students on unfamiliar ground. Creating relationships with those who seem similar to us can be difficult enough, but does not necessarily require a significant or conscious shift in language use or interpretation. However, the work to create a community of difference with students and teachers complicates thought processes and critical aptitude. The shift in classroom roles alone is enough to cause discomfort for some, including teachers. The shift in language use is tantamount to a shift in relation to the world.[24] The expression of self to others who may or may not agree with you in a

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[24]The significance of this shift may be more apparent if one considers a materialist approach to interpreting language as a social artifact with historical and material consequences. In another kind of example, a forward-looking one, we can see a connection with the Buddhist concept of chant, a particular kind of language use, exerting a material influence on the state of the world, creating reality as we experience it, a concept not unfamiliar to some recent academic theorists.

diverse community setting requires further self-redefinition in order to achieve clarity. Not only does accurate use of language become more important, but clarifying your own ideas to yourself is necessary in order to communicate them well.[25] Additionally, adjusting to the voice of others often means learning new ways of interpreting language and its meanings, even the rhetoric used in the delivery of language. More exciting still is the possibility that the cognitive dissonance caused by these linguistic interactions will spur a self-redefinition in relation to the world achieved through awareness and critical consideration.

In their article "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," Linda Flowers and John Hayes, discrediting the concept of the discovery of ideas, state that "writers don't *find* meanings, they *make* them" (21). They go on to explain that this kind of mental gymnastics occurs while an individual at the same time must "juggle all the constraints imposed by his or her purpose, audience, and language itself" (21). Their idea is that "good" writers develop rich contexts for their writing, considering audience, expectations, affect and effect. Although the idea of "discovery" can be a problematic one, it is not wholly inappropriate to think as well of Donald Murray's idea of the "uncalculated discovery" that may occur through writing and rewriting (88). The problematizing of the concept of "discovery" could be seen as a semantic issue that depends largely on how the word is applied. If we

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[25]I like Peter Elbow's concept of writing that "tries to render experience" as it may be applied to the spoken word (136). Elbow defines rendering as the ability "to tell what it's like to be me or to live my life," to supply a "sense of experience." I see this as language that teaches others and clarifies for the speaker. As students try to verbally render their ideas and knowledge so that others may understand, they are practicing language use that will be invaluable for successful academic writing.

see the word as implicating a positivistic approach to the manifestation of thought

and ideas, we run into the problem of a monolithic truth out there waiting to be

discovered. However, perhaps it would be useful in the case of our classroom

community of difference to consider the concepts of creating knowledge and

discovery together. We could reapply "discovery" instead to indicate the discovery

of the capability to create knowledge, whether it happens through discussion or

writing.

   One could argue that students and teachers discover complex contexts from the

interaction of a community of difference, a sense of self and others' experiences

which leads to creation of knowledge and new ideas. And perhaps this awareness of

multiple individual contexts then makes another kind of discovery possible. Perhaps

the rich context Flowers and Hayes refer to then allows for discovery not of a

positivistic truth but of many truths, personal truth, another person's truth. Perhaps

we are looking at a symbiotic discovering of "contexts" in order to make, a making

through discovery. Meanings available to a creator are limited by experiences and

awareness of the experiences of others. In short, people are limited by their

sociohistorical parameters. Broadened experience through the practice of ideological

interaction can widen those parameters and make a greater imagination and

understanding possible. Students begin to discover the complexities of others, the

variability of knowledge and truth, and their ability to challenge their own self-

concepts, leading to the creation of new knowledge that will inform their decisions

about who they are, how they will express that, how they will behave in relationship with the world.

It should be clear at this point that what may feel professionally safe, or acceptable, does not necessarily create the kind of environment that is safe for the messy business of real minds and real bodies getting together to participate in the "blunt" speech that bell hooks advocates. Learning through the creation of meaning, or knowledge, by a community is an intimate thing, whether it occurs in accord or in discord, collaboration or anger. It requires reconciling little bits of ourselves with bits of others and the world in an attempt to increase understanding. But if we want to see our students making personally transformative choices, we must give them not only information, but somehow provide for personally relevant meaning. By reevaluating the ways we perpetuate teacher authority at the expense of fostering relationships with students and resisting those habits and impulses, by risking the development of a course that provides space for student-direction that extends even our present student-centered methods, by shifting the role of relationship and self-redefinition into place as the main locus of learning, we can work in a classroom that actively values both individual and community. In so doing, we change our classrooms, we change ourselves, students change themselves, and just possibly, we change the world.

## (Re)Defining Self in Relationship: Life and Liberation in the "Matrix"

At this point, I wish to connect composition discourse about community and writing communities to the particular brand of political language that many black feminist theorists use as they discuss individuals and identity. Black women continue on their own terms a long-standing philosophical and theoretical conversation about a sense of self, identity, and internal and external constituents of identity. Theorists like Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Deborah King, as well as writers like Audre Lorde, speak of a self that is necessarily made up of multiple identities in a way that extends beyond general conceptualizations of the seat of self in a person and begins to address more directly the social construction of an individual on a lived day-to-day basis. They root their convictions and theory squarely in the lived experiences of black women and women of color, an inescapably overlapping experience of race and gender. Their conceptual models, which share the ideas of webs and multiplication of influence, are helpful in imagining the possibilities for identity and the complexity of its generation.

Black feminist concepts of identity, community and knowledge challenge Eurocentric masculinist constructions of the individual and community still influencing thoughts and habits concerning constructions of appropriateness of relationship in learning and teaching environments.[26] These constructions support

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[26]By "black feminist theorists" I do not mean to assert that only black women can do the work of a black feminist. But while I agree that sex/gender need not be a restriction of this category of feminist theory, I remain unsure about blackness as a prerequisite. For instance, although I as an individual

the myth of a unified "I," an identity that is static upon arrival. As a construct, a static "I" constituted solely by an individual contributes to grand narratives of mastery both for individuals and for specific groups in power, narratives that routinely excise the experiences and participation of other/ed individuals and groups or cast them in a negative light as part of the preferred narrative. Under scrutiny, the unified "I" of individualism becomes recognizable as a cultural contrivance that creates a sense of exclusivity, safety and rectitude. One of the systemic effects of this approach to identity results in a grand narrative of education in which institutionalization of student-teacher roles has an abiding effect on an individual's experience of acquiring and using knowledge. Lester Faigley warns us that institutional narratives privileging the preservation of monolithic construction tend to suppress contradiction in institutional and personal identity and lead to the perception of what Faigley calls a "truncated rational subject," resulting in an incomplete vision of an individual participating in her own education (133). As a result of these constructs, both teacher and student are objectified, treated as monolithic roles relating within a power dynamic that limits education to a largely linear exchange of information from teacher to student.

Trends in composition theory have moved towards an ethically responsible observation of sociopolitical functions of society in our classrooms. We have raised

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may develop an understanding of the thought behind black feminist theory or the theory of other people of color, I will always be white and have not lived with day to day experiences of being black. If we gave this kind of theory another name and credited black feminists with its origin, then I might feel comfortable claiming it as a methodology of my own as well, but for the moment am satisfied to refer to it as black feminist theory.

questions about the relationship between identity and language, language use, education, literacy, voice, and authenticity. We have also wondered and discussed how all these things may relate to our interaction with students in the interest of producing "good" "writing." Given the nature of our inquiries and the political focus of black feminist theory on identity and self-determination, I think it may be a productive project to consider the possible application of their theories in our classrooms. When we recognize students as political entities, individuals for whom knowledge can never be disinterested or disconnected, we can see the classroom as a potential site for recognizing and honoring simultaneity of experience and difference in others in order to create relationships that contribute to the development of critical consciousness both in students and teachers.

Black feminist thought adamantly insists that what is commonly understood as a self can not stand alone in its definition, but is always interdependent from start to finish, in oppression, expression, and rebellion. bell hooks says that she and other black women have learned from their communities that "the self existed in relation, was dependent for its very being on the lives and experiences of everyone, the self not as signifier of one 'I' but the coming together of many 'I's, the self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community" (Talking 30-1).[27] This

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[27]In Buddhism, the third traditional level of wisdom is *prajna-paramita*, "the perfection of wisdom," transcendent wisdom. This insight holds that all things are "empty," which means they are not self-existent. Red Pine explains in his discussion of the Heart Sutra, "Nothing can be characterized as permanent, pure, or having a self" (31). However, phenomenologically oriented, neither does Buddhism deny a concrete experience of self, instead speaking of it in terms of overlapping sense and perception, defined through the Five Skandhas: form (*rupa*), sensation (*vidana*), perception (*sanjna*), memory (*sanskara*), and consciousness (*vijnana*). In Mahayana Buddhism, the greatest delusion is not

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experience of self in community has led hooks and Collins, among other black feminist theorists, to insist upon a balance of practice and theory. It is their conviction that not only must theory be informed by the lived experience of material reality, but also that theory informed by experience must do the double duty of then resulting in activism and material change in the world. They also assert that academic intellectuals are not the only ones doing the theorizing.

Black women have been theorizing according to these principles for a long time, moving from their experiences of oppression and community in day to day life to the expression of a critical consciousness. In the introduction to <u>Home Girls</u>, Barbara Smith states, "History verifies that Black women have rejected doormat status, whether racially or sexually imposed, for centuries" (xxiii). She cites documentation of black women's resistance to slavery, their presence in First Wave Feminism "organizing around specific Black women's issues" and rights, a number of nineteenth and twentieth century poets, and black women singing the blues as examples of activism arising from the critical consciousness of black women that arose out of their specific experiences of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw says of the well-known example of Sojourner Truth's challenge to white male stereotyping of women at a Women's Rights Conference in 1851 that she was "using her own life to

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that there is an experience of self, but that there is *sva-bhava*, a "self-existent existence." Every entity becomes what it is in response to all other entities, "Thus, nothing exists by itself, and nothing exists as itself. There is no such thing as a self" (68). At this point, we can imagine further discussion using the idea of "identity," an experience of self resulting from myriad influences. Interestingly, Prajnaparamita is also feminine (*-ita*), the name of the Goddess of Wisdom. Zen uses some of the same vocabulary to explain a similar sentiment, that "emptiness" is "no-thing," a state of no separation between an individual and everything else.

reveal the contradiction between the ideological myths of womanhood and the

reality of Black women's experience" (Crenshaw 153).[28] Hazel V. Carby, in her

article "It Jus' Be's Dat Way Sometime," explores the notion that blues singers like

Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, and Ma Rainey expressed a critical consciousness, saying,

"The music and song of the women blues singers embodied the social relations and

contradictions of black displacement: of rural migration and the urban flux. In this

sense, as singers, these women were organic intellectuals" (14). She also states that

the songs explored the ways in which "the differing interests of black men and

women were a struggle of power relations" (16).[29]

    Black Women expressed an awareness of the lessons of experientially based

critical consciousness when, in the Combahee River Collective's statement of

political intent in 1974, they explained that "we...see as our particular task the

development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major

systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates

the conditions of our lives" (qtd. in Smith 272). The tradition of black women

talking, singing, and organizing around their sense of oppression due to both race

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[28]Truth begins her declaration, "Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman?"

[29]This tradition of a critical consciousness of self and community expressed in black music has been well-represented to date. Consider the highly popularized examples of Aretha Franklin's 1967 hit version of "Respect" or Sister Sledge's pop chorus, "We are family; I got all my sisters in me," which made the charts in 1979, then resurfaced remixed in 1984, and was re/presented again in 1993. Destiny's Child's recent hit, "Girl," exhorted the importance of lasting female relationships and the strength that comes from them, as well as addressing poor treatment of a woman by a man. For examples of women asserting their power and independence, Janet Jackson's "Control" is a classic, and Missy Elliott's aggressive raps make it clear who's in control.

and sex, and also class often enough, coalesced with this declaration into a focused vision of the conditions of black women's oppression. In the thirty years since, black feminist theorists, writers, and activists have engaged continuously with the project of identifying and analyzing the overlapping aspects of their sociopolitical conditions and working towards a liberated condition of self-determination.

Black feminists have done this by reconceptualizing the social conditions in which our identities are forged. Crenshaw identifies a historical "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" and feels it is the result of imagining identity and experience as occurring on "a single-axis framework," one that has been dominated by constructions based on representations of blackness through the conditions of black men or representations of femaleness or femininity through the conditions of white women (139). She examines three Title VII (Civil Rights Act) legal cases in which black women were caught between rulings based on their status as women and rulings based on their status as blacks.[30] The laws weren't formulated to allow definition of an individual in a combined state of being female and black, to address the "intersectionality" of their identity (140). It is limitations of societal and legal imagination such as this that deny what Crenshaw calls the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience" (139). Deborah King refers to these multiple oppressions as "interactive

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[30]DeGraffenreid v General Motors, Moore v Hughes Helicopter, and Payne v Travenol were all cases concerning race, sex, and discrimination in job promotion and pay.

oppressions" (265) and various theorists, including Cheryl Wall and Barbara Smith,

refer to a "simultaneity of oppressions."

Patricia Hill Collins, in direct opposition to the single-axis nature of patriarchal

grand narrative, introduces the more complex and multifaceted model of a matrix to

explain socially constructed identity and relationship. Her "matrix of domination"

recognizes that oppressions may be varied and simultaneous, and that someone

may also simultaneously be oppressor and oppressed (Collins 225). For instance,

though I have been under particular threat of male sexual assault due to my female

sex and feminine gender, the fact that I am white and middle class has also allowed

me, as a willing or unwilling participant in systemic oppression, privileged

experiences that are unavailable to some. She also addresses the idea that an

oppressed person may participate in her own oppression, unknowingly or not.[31]

Collins herself uses the word "axes" to explain the way the matrix overlaps. King

calls the matrix "interdependent control systems" (270), and hooks refers to it as a

function of a "dominator culture."

I think it is also helpful to imagine Collins' matrix as an endless web of threads.

Each thread represents an element of personal experience resulting from material

societal reality, falling into one of three categories: "the level of personal biography;

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[31]In the 1999 film, <u>The Matrix</u>, which curiously echoes some of the concepts of oppression presented here, Morpheus asks Neo as they spar within the matrix simulation and Neo is unable to fight to his potential because he thinks Morpheus is a faster fighter, "You think that's air you're breathing now? Hm." Even after a supposed liberation, Neo continues to be limited by continued participation in the oppression of the mind. When Morpheus tells Neo, "I'm trying to free your mind, Neo, but I can only show you the door. You're the one who has to walk through it," he says much the same thing Bob Marley does in "Redemption Song," exhorting those of us in the same condition to, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds."

the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (227).[32] While it is possible to name the elements, the moment of experience, however, occurs on the node where those threads meet. For instance, Audre Lorde, in her book <u>Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: An Autobiomythography</u>, speaks directly to a number of threads of experience, including being an American black, being the daughter of a Caribbean (Carriacou) immigrant, being a woman, being lesbian, and belonging to lower economic strata. However, she does not experience any one of these things without it being influenced and shaped by the others.

In her article, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness," King speaks of simultaneous threads of identity as a "multiplicative" experience of self (270). The concept of multiplicative is in direct opposition to what Collins calls an "additive" approach to describing the node on the web. The distinction lies in resisting the impulse to think of these conditions as a self plus a self plus another self, but instead to consider them as an issue of boundaries and identities that merge and overlap, influencing the meaning of each other.[33] Her term should not imply a given product from set variables, but be seen as an ever-shifting relationship in which the value of one element of identity, one thread, may register more strongly in one instance or another. It also seems possible to me that there may be instances when an element of

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[32]I wish to acknowledge here that these elements extend beyond the "big three" of race, class, and gender.

[33]Ching-chueh explains, "The *Madhyamaka-karika* says, 'What I call "me" is the combination of the Five Skandhas, not something that is fixed." (Red Pine uses a collated edition of Ching-chueh's commentary on China's Northern School of Zen published by Fang K'uang-ch'ang.)

identity appears not to overtly manifest or influence, as occurs in "passing." However, that element would still be present in the sense that this instance would result from extreme role-playing, which can be seen as a matter of repression or suppression related to oppression supported by external pressures, or by external pressures that have been internalized.

The matrix of domination provides a way to conceive of the complexity of knowledge created through an individual's experiences, dependent on her interaction with those around her, in contrast to knowledge and ideas attained through a patriarchal approach to systems of thought and learning that champion study and mastery. Black feminist theorists insist on the validity of "standpoint epistemology," a concept explored by sociologists as well. In standpoint epistemology, the perception of overarching truths or correctness that grand narratives create gives way to the truth of day to day life and diverse individual experience. The knowledge and insight that an individual has gained through life's experiences and the development of identity, often as a result of oppression or struggle, is seen as a valuable source of credible information. Testifying this body of knowledge can lead to rich analysis of personal and social conditions as surely as what we consider objective knowledge may contribute. Indeed, critically studying this kind of knowledge can lead to insight and understanding that objective fact can't access.

Inhabiting specific nodes on the matrix gives rise to what Collins calls "situated knowledge" and Cheryl A. Wall and Gloria Hull call "positionality."[34] An individual speaks to the meaning of experience from what her position on the matrix has taught her. The knowledge situated within an individual's experience may not necessarily be accurate in perception or reflect an understanding of why she believes what she does. Even so, when considered analytically, her convictions may in fact reveal something about the sociohistorical contingencies influencing her, and are valuable sources. Her knowledge is also valuable simply by virtue of its status as human experience, and acknowledging that value amounts to a politically charged theoretical move. Viewing personal experience as a credible source of knowledge about the convergence of social influences on identity requires accepting plural perspectives in all their complexity, contradiction, and self-contradiction. Such an epistemological approach challenges categorical or monolithic treatment of individual or group experience, resisting grand narratives and objectification of the subject.

Our task as teachers, then, is to see students primarily as individuals, each in their particular spot in the matrix, rather than as "the student" first, and to create an environment that encourages them to consider their individuality and its implications, as well as their classmates'. In addition, rather than seeing ourselves as

[34]When her work is taken as a whole, it is clear that Collins is not wholly relativist and values the concept of an individual in relation/ship with community and others. Valuing subjective experience can be employed, rather than to support extreme individualism, in order to examine human experience in the interest of social equity of opportunity and healthy collectivity. Black feminist theory in general asserts that care must be taken not slip into either self-defeating relativism or self-interested individualism.

"the teacher" first, we must consciously recognize that we bring our criss-crossed identities to class with us, a teacher among other things. Students and teachers are defined by the intensely individual and specific convergence of historical, ideological, and material circumstances, and so enter classrooms with all the wealth of a certain "standpoint." In my vision of the matrix of domination, I'd like to add a possible element of repositioning in relation to standpoints through critical consciousness and self-redefinition. I would like to assert that through participation in a community of difference, a developing critical awareness of the nature of individual standpoint may then allow for repositioning through recognition leading to re-cognition. For instance, while I may not be able to change the thread that indicates I'm white, I may be able to reposition myself in relation to that thread. While I may not be able to deny the threads of my life, I may be able to augment or deepen my understanding of those threads and therefore make conscious choices that redefine my identity and affect my actions in the world, thereby affecting the world and those in it. My critical awareness can lead to a change in practice. It is my conviction that for this to happen, I must also be able to see the threads affecting other standpoints while participating in a communal space that encourages discussion and blunt speech.

Exactly because of our standpoints, we as individuals possess only "partial perspectives" (Collins 234). In addition to whatever knowledge and wisdom our position may afford us, we simultaneously occupy a space of partial perspective. Partial perspectives create, in their lack, room for "oppositional knowledge." We

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have an understanding of what we have experienced in our lives, but we are part of larger sociohistorical trends and influences, as are others. We may experience our knowledge as a having a wholeness to it, but there is always more to learn about what we have lived, how and why we believe what we believe and become what we have become. In the space left open by partial perspective lays the possibility for change and redefinition. In this case, the partial perspective of an individual functions as oppositional knowledge for those from whom it has been obscured or by whom it has been silenced. What has been obscured will vary from person to person according to their life experiences and store of situated knowledge.

When a person's sum of experiences and the resulting convictions clash with those of another person, creating dissonance and disruption, an intense adjustment must be made on both sides. Whether either ultimately alters their beliefs or not, a negotiation must be made in order to enable communication and understanding. Participating in this negotiation in a classroom based on a community of difference and relationships, students learn and practice a way of being in the world that allows for difference and relies on thoughtful examination of individual perception and those of other individuals. Through this practice it becomes possible for students to identify their own oppressions and limitations, gaining an understanding of their own situated knowledge, the circumstances of their own perceptions and assumptions. Learning our place on the matrix can introduce the idea of a multiplicative self, which amounts to difference in self. I feel that acknowledging our multiple selves must be a simultaneous project with opening

ourselves to difference in others. Accepting difference within ourselves requires a shift in consciousness that may then lead to recognizing difference in others.

A better understanding of one's own position on the matrix also potentially leads to a more complex comprehension of the way an individual's own behavior may contribute to someone else's experiences, including oppression and liberation. Valerie Lee, in her discussion of the multiple sociocultural positions black women occupy simultaneously, would call this "reading double-dutch," learning to jump back and forth between different perspectives and positions (2). Individuals with a deeper understanding of the material development of society and their own positionality may be more likely to take on active social roles that embrace responsible and intelligent participation in both political and personal arenas.

Black feminist theorists identify the weave of identities within an individual as a locale for rebellion against oppression and institutionalization, a space to make the choice to stand up and be heard and understood rather than passively inhabit. Like Freireistas, these women have made a point of stressing the important role of self-determination in redefining relationship to oppression, what Audre Lorde calls "self-definition," and bell hooks calls "self-actualization." Collins asserts that the "level of individual consciousness is a fundamental area where new knowledge can generate change" (227). I assert that the interaction between partial perception and oppositional knowledge can result in a literal re-cognition of self in relationship to the complex web of race, class, gender, sexuality, history, personal experience, and ideology. This repositioning marks an opportunity for transformation, an opening

for rebellion. Ongoing self-determination stands as the ultimate freedom of choice, acts as an ongoing rebellion against institutionalization of self and community, against the policing of roles that rather than strengthening community, robs it of the individuality of its members.

The experiential knowledge a student brings with her to the classroom affects her ability to access, process, understand, and apply her education. A pedagogy that does not aggressively incorporate an individual's positionality or acknowledge her situated knowledge fails to recognize the complex nature of learning processes and contributes to perpetuation of monolithic roles in a grand narrative of education. If it does not, entire realms of meaning are thrown to the wind, voices lost, awareness truncated, and development arrested. It is my belief that a class acknowledging simultaneity of experience and oppression not only challenges the either/or dichotomy endemic to Western theoretical thought, but can also be more conducive to the development of critical intellects sensitive to the development of identities.

If we as teachers consciously recognize the matrix that weaves its way through our classrooms we can invite our students to do four things: 1) recognize and better understand their positions as individuals within it, 2) realize the position of other individuals on it, as well as how the positions relate, 3) use this knowledge actively in their own learning experiences, and 4) apply this knowledge further in their lives, engaging in self-redefinition, thereby effecting material change in the world. When these things are part of the classroom and learning, teachers and students together can participate in hooks' "transformational politic" (Talking 19), an activity that

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operates within what Deborah King dubs a "politics of liberation" (276-7). In this

model, liberation is not a utopia we attain through gaining awareness, it is the

continued practice of developing awareness of situated knowledges, contributing

social conditions, and identity formation and responding critically to it. It is the

practice of exercising our freedom to make choices about our identity and actions in

a way that has real material effects on self, others, and the world, and it is a risk.

Liberation always is. We risk disapproval, misunderstanding, the difficulties even

within ourselves that change brings. The risks of self-redefinition as a choice and the

stakes of rebellion can be high, and to respond to one another and our own shifting

identities bravely requires catalyst, encouragement and space. But as teachers, we

have the chance to establish the environment for a transformative event, in which a

group of strangers can develop into a community of difference. From that space,

relationships in which students and teachers see each other as societally complex,

multidimensional individuals can liberate us from being objectified role-players

locked into a patriarchally constructed academic narrative.

## Dialogues of Difference: From "Utterance" to Meaning

I have to agree with Bruffee's assertion that "behind our enthusiasm for

discussion lies a fundamental distrust of it" (645). Perhaps this is because it can lead

to the very need to grapple with disruptive concepts such as "liberatory voice" and

"transformative classrooms." Contemporary writing pedagogies do accept the

importance of group work, peer feedback, and conferencing; we embrace the idea of

the interrelated nature of language and thought, the need to increase facility and imagination in the use of language. But it seems that we remain, understandably, preoccupied enough with the end product of discourse specific writing that we may pass over the opportunity to allow students a fundamental understanding of the function of language by participating through community discourse in the creation of knowledge *on their own terms*. It is here that a community of difference could provide an arena for students to use as part of a practice the knowledge and language they already possess. If we accept that meaning making and writing are both in fact communal events, it seems counterproductive to limit conversation or community interaction in a way that excludes the personal register of situated knowledge when trying to obtain that which will lead to intellectual development and effective writing: voice and self-definition.

Shan Guisinger and Sidney Blatt, in their article on psychological theories of individuality and relationship, explain that development depends on the "individual's perception and experience of the other rather than of the self. ...relationships and some form of dependency constitute a fundamental matrix for all personality development" (par. 23). They state that participation in this matrix to develop sense of self and self in relation to others occurs through an "interrelated, transactional and dialectical manner" (par. 31). A classroom based on a methodology of relationship will support a dialectic between the development of individual voice and relatedness on two fronts, something we can call a dialogue of difference. A sense of self within a matrix will be facilitated by the establishment of a

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community of difference, and the use of Bakhtinian dialogism will promote the expression of self and an understanding of others.

An acceptance of the model of a matrix of forces, per Collins as well as Guisinger and Blatt, acting on individual identities can be complemented by the recognition of a Bakhtinian conceptualization of heteroglossia, which in this case we can think of as written or spoken expressions of individual situational knowledge occurring simultaneously. Each unique position on a matrix creates a unique voice, and a classroom reflects on a smaller level the heteroglossic effects of multiple voices and registers within a language and society. Often enough, a classroom also houses residual heteroglossic effects from languages other than the primary one being used in the class, due to speakers of English as a second or foreign language and the importation of heteroglossic meanings salient to their native language. Taking into account the actuality of sociopolitical conditions demands a re-ordering of classroom dynamics and activities in a way that takes into account multiple contexts. We are accustomed to prioritizing the context of learning course content, but we can not escape the reality that we are particular individuals involved in that endeavor together, from different sociocultural environments, ethnicities and races, speakers of different languages, members of cliques, in that classroom, at that time. No word can be spoken or expression made that does not reflect the positionality of each speaker in relation to everything perceived in her educational environment, in relation to everything being taught.

Laura Rogers and Carolyn Statler, in their consideration of heteroglossia in "Disruptions, Differences, and Bakhtin's Dialogic," state that it "ensures the primacy of context over text" (71). For us in the classroom, this means that heteroglossia ensures the primacy of positionality, community, and language use as much as the objective of learning course content. If we consider the text of a course to be its supposedly measurable content, two contexts we must consider are the classroom and learning moment itself and the positionality of each class member, along with the resulting class heteroglossia. Primacy of a heteroglossic context can be acknowledged in classroom interaction that honors positionality through language use in a community of difference. Thinking and speaking critically as individuals within community provides practice that can then be turned to methods of critical thought applicable to course content. This kind of practice grounded in language and relationship affords a blending of context and text.

Through Bakhtinian dialogue in a community of difference developed for this purpose, students and teachers may bring to bear their partial knowledge. As students and teachers begin to know one another and hear each other's reactions to class and conversation material, they testify to the store of knowledge that their life so far has afforded them. Testimony in this community should include not only material traditionally deemed appropriate for the classroom, but also the kind of material that Taylor noted teachers don't address in their research of composition

and students.[35] The disruptive material of life should be part of an ongoing dialogue between teacher and students: our fears, our anger, our joy, our hangovers, our mistakes, our insomnia, our families and our personal struggles. This knowledge reflects both privilege and oppression in different facets of life and can be mined for greater meaning through analytical exercises, especially in relation to the knowledge of others. Individuals, no matter how successful as students or teachers, have no reason to ask themselves questions that require them to redefine their self-concept or identity unless they are challenged in some way by those around them. Through critical engagement with differing personal stores of knowledge, difficult questions present themselves, stereotypes are challenged and misconceptions addressed, hopefully leading to the kind of engagement with self-redefinition supported by black feminist thought.[36]

The basic unit of speech in Bakhtinian dialogism is "the utterance," which he applies in his discussion of heteroglossia in "Discourse in the Novel." The utterance, by definition, takes on form and meaning through interplay with the other. It exists as an organic element in a heteroglossic ocean of possible meanings, discovering its

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[35]See pages 8-9 of this chapter for Taylor's comments in his article, "Design, Delivery, and Narcolepsy."

[36]Buddhist *prajna*, or wisdom, has three aspects, one of which is language. Yin-shun teaches that, despite its limitations, "...if we don't rely on speech, we have no other means to lead beings from attachment toward understanding" (Red Pine uses the scholar of early Indian Buddhism's publication Po-jo-ching chiang-chi, published by Cheng-wen in 1998, which presents his Heart Sutra commentary originally delivered in the form of a series of talks in 1947.)

own meaning in dialogue with the other utterances surrounding it.[37] At its extreme, the utterance can be represented by no more than a sound, a grunt, a moan, a laugh. So, in addition to seeing that a symbolic representation of meaning, like spoken or written language, takes its meaning in relation to other symbols, we also see that meaning is created in relation through even the most basic levels of communication, even, I would argue, silence and body language.[38] The utterance speaks from within its own context to those contexts surrounding it, which simultaneously give voice to their own utterances. This is the dialectic that a community of difference aims for: situated knowledge that speaks from within its positionality to other individuals speaking from their positionality, both bluntly and respectfully engaging in a dialogue of difference.

The vitality of an utterance is not generated by the fact of a solitary existence. The energy of the utterance stems from its function as an expression that, as such, requests, and perhaps demands, a response from others.[39] The interchange of expressions is vital to this community because the resultant energy supports the

[37]The state of the utterance recalls the linguistic concept that "cat" means cat because "dog" means dog, and "door" means door, and so on, not because there is an intrinsic relationship between "c-a-t" and a feline, thereby illustrating the inherent symbolic and interrelated nature of language and meaning making. It is also complimented by the anthropological and psychological tenets that community and individual definition is maintained in relation with others. Even when we seem to be defining others, the endeavor also identifies self through comparison or opposition.

[38]Prompted by feminist criticism that has recognized the importance of deliberately inserted or maintained silence as a part of "feminine language," I would argue for the embrace of silence as an utterance, an essential part of all language and communication, often rife with information. Silence as utterance plays other roles as well, acting as oppression or ignore-ance; self-limitation if the result of inability to speak out due to conditions or fear; and, more positively, an indication of intent to listen responsibly.

[39]I think of African-American call and response traditions as a mode of communicative interaction with intent to support and indicate understanding and solidarity.

practice of constant self-definition and redefinition, continual creation of meaning,

knowledge, life, the very utterances themselves.[40] If we imagine not only the

utterance itself, but the individual and intent behind it, we can begin to take the

attitude that language use searches for meaning in relation with contexts of the

moment and with others, even when the individual may not recognize their

verbiage as a seeking entity. Our utterances must be recognized by others to bring

our intentions to fruition in an expression of meaning. In the classroom, dialogue

can be turned towards a search for understanding as part of that intention, a

deliberate interaction with others to inspire readjustment, growth, self-redefinition.[41]

In this case, it is important to note that silence with the intent to listen is a skill that is

crucial to productive exchange. If students are not learning to hear each other and

the world intentionally, then the heteroglossia resulting from positionality becomes

merely cacophony without the chance of connection and education.[42] Meaning

stagnates, truncates, falters, and students are left with little to work with as they

encounter their world and the business of redefining self.

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[40]The Buddhist idea that the mere mention of Avalokitesvara or the chanting or writing of *om mani padme hum* can affect change in the world indicates in a nonacademic context a similar belief in the power of the word to affect the reality of the world. This belief is not so far from academic theories that explicate the power of the word and symbol in the creation and reflection of reality.

[41]Bakhtin refers to "the ideological becoming of a human being" (341). The idea of "becoming" nicely complements the concept of ongoing self-redefinition, a continual becoming human.

[42]"There is a way between voice and presence/where information flows./In disciplined silence it opens./With wandering talk it closes." Jelalluddin Rumi

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin also distinguishes between "the externally authoritative word" and the "internally persuasive word" (342).[43] The external word can be seen generally as societal and institutionalized discourse, and also may be particularized in our case to academic discourse, while the internal word is an expression of an individual's voice, her own use of language. This does not mean that the internal word springs in parthenogenesis from a unified and independently creative "I." This language, does, however, express identity or identities, necessarily incorporating the sociopolitical influences enmeshed in a position on the matrix of domination. A classroom community of difference will attempt to address unexamined individual and group participation in societal narratives as part of a dialogue of difference that works to comprehend an individual's own situated knowledge as well as understanding others. This practice complements the previous section's concern with the idea of containing "others" within ourselves, speaking and recognizing our own contradictions and aspects. By looking for ways we encompass dialogue within ourselves, we also learn to interrogate narratives of authority that act on our lives and decisions. Even if such interrogation results in a confirmation of our current participation, the act of affirming participation requires a critical response to self and to self in community.

It is no wonder that the heteroglossic ocean may be experienced by those learning to listen to others and the others within self as cacophony and dissonance, or what

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[43]The Buddha developed his Five Skandha philosophies from an earlier concept of *nama-rupa*, which can be seen as a division of subjective mind and objective mind, rather than a Cartesian explanation of internal self and external forms.

may sound like a confusing clamor of what Mae Henderson, in her application of

Bakhtinian dialogic specifically to black women writers, calls "speaking in tongues,"

which encompasses both the concepts of glossolalia and heteroglossia (122).[44]

Students may feel confused, threatened, or disoriented by cognitive dissonance

when confronted with so many other voices and life experiences, so that what they

hear is cacophony. In a classroom supporting methodologies of relationship, one of

a teacher's most important activities and efforts lies in teaching students how to

hear, instead of cacophony, the lively polyphony of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, the

many voices of experience and presentation challenging and informing one

another.[45] The discovery of other voices and development of one's own can lead to

meaning making through the ideological clash that language use may present to

members of a diverse community.[46] Students must negotiate agreement,

disagreement, and probably qualified agreement as well, in order to make choices

about what they ultimately think and identify with. Part of maintaining a dialogue

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[44]Henderson asserts the existence of multiple voices within self, reflections of inner dialogue/s with the social world. She also applies this idea to black women's speech being aimed at multiple Others (in this case, black men, white men and women, sometimes the upper class as well), which is true of all of us, though perhaps not so obviously. The idea of "speaking in tongues" is nice because it indicates that not only do logic and the practical play a part in the determination of meaning, but that the spiritual, the intuitive, the mystery of the symbolic are present as well, as an individual "testifies" to her experience.

[45]To illustrate, learning to discern vowel sounds in the Chinese language or appreciate the sounds of North Indian classical music is generally difficult for Western ears. The vowel and tonal sounds run together, and the notes can seem out of tune. It is not unusual for a Westerner to say they find both of these sounds abrasive. However, a person can learn to hear distinct vowel sounds and tones and understand how they are articulated. And in enough time, a person can learn the complexities of North Indian time signatures and composition, as well as the very different scales they use, which include notes between what we recognize as notes.

[46]By "language use" I mean not only general conversation, but the manner of speaking that a group employs, including lexicon, idiom, sentence construction, and so on.

of difference will include practicing the ability to clearly present the reasoning and feelings behind choices to identify with a certain standpoint or opinion. By asking students to engage in this disruptive exercise and potential cognitive dissonance, we are setting them up for later analytical and writing efforts, academic or otherwise, with the ability to think disruptively, or independently, within a discourse or community, after they have fully grasped its conventions.

Psychologist Dieter Frey has added to Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance by specifying that humans are less likely to employ avoidance mechanisms in response to dissonance if the dissonance doesn't seem threatening.[47] Taken together, these observations indicate that continued and rigorous development of standpoint and identity through analytical thought can most effectively be done through the exchange of diverse voices within a community that has together created what is perceived as "safe" space. Collins explains that "Afrocentric models of community stress connections, caring, and personal accountability," elements crucial to a community of difference and for a dialogue of difference to be successful (223). Paule Marshall describes the kitchen conversations amongst the community of women she grew up in as talk that "restored to them a sense of themselves and reaffirmed their self-worth" (6). This experience occurred for these women because of the responses they got from those around them. A classroom community of difference should create a space much like the "wordshop

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[47]I refer here to Frey's work with the phenomenon of "selective avoidance," the tendency for humans to pick companions of a like mind, thereby avoiding cognitive dissonance.

of the kitchen" Marshall describes, in terms of creating a space for honesty and connection (12).

It is not that this community is looking for consensus, however. The idea that everyone must agree can be perceived as threatening in and of itself, and indeed, can limit severely the amount of productive and critical conversation that occurs. The objective is to practice critical thought through the experience of self in community, which may lead to self-redefinition, whatever form that may take, as long as it is done respectfully. Neither must an individual achieve complete consensus within self, but instead work towards an attentiveness to states of self-contradiction and the multiplicative nature of identity. Such an endeavor can be read as sincere engagement with integrity and ethical responsibility as a human being towards other human beings. These approaches to relationship and language in community work well with Bakhtin's musings and convictions about "answerability," which he presents in <u>Art and Answerability</u>. Helen Rothschild Ewald points out that Bakhtin's use of "answerability" implies both the sense of being answerable to and the sense of a literal answer to (340). We must ask ourselves how we are responsible, accountable, answerable to one another and pay attention to how we answer one another. In a dialogue of difference, answerability must take the form of respect, honesty, silence with intent to listen, and consistent use of language that does not diminish other individuals or their beliefs. Given the opportunity to encounter the experiences and potentially conflicting knowledge, or cognition, of others in a nonthreatening community, students and teachers may

practice the work of self-definition, and so create and further develop political consciousness and ethical awareness, using education to create identity and voice.

### *Jam Master Jamison*

*Jamison himself. Workin' the class that first day as they formed their groups based on our discussions of diversity. He was the only one who met everybody, shakin' hands, and he felt at ease with all of them. He even introduced some of them to each other. As a result, they felt good about him, too. Jamison was an easy going young black man from North Carolina, had a warm smile, thoughtful way about him, a soft but clear voice, a light but firm grip, and he looked you in the eyes. He just liked people.*

*Chad was white and from a Maryland all-boys prep school. He slumped down in his seat, comfortable and confident in his upper-middle class resistance to the whole school thing. He was here to play lacrosse and because it was expected of him. He wanted to be told a formula for his grade and fulfill the expectations with as little academic engagement as possible. His friend from home jumped right in after a day or two, however, and presented an interesting comparison with Chad.*

*We had been in provisional small groups, still getting used to each other and the classroom dynamic. Chad had resisted more than once the idea that we were going to be in small groups and talk to each other about things. He said specifically, "Why do we have to talk about everything? I mean, what is there to say over and over?" I laughed with the class and after a back and forth about what people in the class would really have to say to each other, I finally asked Chad, "Do you think there are any things worth getting together and*

*talking about with other folks?" We laughed again, and he said, "Well, yeah, but." Chad*

*really was experiencing some anxiety. He wasn't offended by our laughter because he knew*

*we weren't making fun of him, but his laughs were nervous. I said, "Well, maybe we can*

*figure out what some of them are." He was a little surprised, and nodded, realizing we were*

*just going to see what happened and try to find something that was worth it to him.*

*Jamison was sitting next to him, facing the class, and I had noticed he was following this*

*conversation closely. As Chad kind of relented and nodded with a friendly but exasperated*

*smile, Jamison looked up at me and said with a straight face, "He just don't wanna talk to*

*me." Every person heard the soft voice. Jamison was looking at me, but he was teasing Chad.*

*"He dudn't wanna talk to you?"*

*Jamison said smoothly, "Naw. 'S'cause I'm black." I was floored, and my reaction was*

*comparable to the class's. We registered the seriousness of the words, but for some reason, we*

*also smiled a little. Leave it to Jamison to put it out there. I smiled and raised my eyebrows at*

*Chad. Jamison's intonation for both phrases was absolutely masterful. It was clearly*

*intelligible as a serious challenge, but good humor played all along the words. What amazed*

*me the most, however, was what seemed to be compassion in his voice. Jamison*

*communicated not the slightest bit of animosity, superiority, nervousness, or irritation.*

*Jamison was jus' jammin' on what he thought was the truth, and I'll believe to this day,*

*helping me push Chad to be a little bit more.*

*Chad's reaction was telling. He was horrified that Jamison would think such a thing, and*

*I do think Chad honestly liked him. But there was enough of the awkward and quick in his*

*response that you had to wonder if a nerve had been hit, as his hands flew out in front of him*

*as if in defense. "No, no, no! No, that's not it."*

*Jamison looked over at him and teased with a smile, "Naw, tha'ss a'ight, man. I understand."*

*Chad finally laughed, too. After that whole anxious interchange about the small groups, it*

*was Jamison, with the baldest most anxious-making statement that could be made, who drew*

*the smile and ease out of Chad.*


Disruptive language use and interaction in the classroom guided by methods

drawn from principles of Bakhtinian dialogism gives students a chance to practice

dealing with both course content matter and personal situational knowledge,

thereby exploring the meaning making, expressive, and analytical aspects of

rhetoric. Through this interaction and awareness, students may develop strategies

for dealing with evaluation of and adjustment of a voice that expresses what they

wish to say and reaches their audience, whether it is an individual or a group. As a

responsibility for their words in relation to others is encouraged, and their strategies

of communication tested for effectiveness, they can begin to see language, and

writing as an extension, as a way of expressing who they are as human beings, as

something greater and more expansive than "the student" and "the teacher." Or,

perhaps even more exciting in its potential, their concept of what constitutes a

"student" will broaden to include a vision of education that includes classroom

learning but also extends beyond it, extending both potential and responsibility in

the individual in terms of choice, engagement and self-definition in relation to the

world and the communities in it.

# CHAPTER 3
## FROM AT-RISK TO TAKING RISKS:
## PRACTICING RELATIONSHIP

## Relate to Rebel: "Liberatory Voice"

Just a shell, just a shell, just a shell
until you decide to rebel
whether you're white or black, your soul does not dwell
inside your shell until you decide to rebel.
Worldly worldly people people allow your innersides
to intervene and circulate,
open your eyes open your ears.
Wouldn't it be great?
So what am I doin Am I really rebellin or am I just dwellin
in the sin, in the sin, in the sin
I've made up my mind
I've seen the design of individualism
and I don't want to be in it
The me generation's a dis-ease.
Just a shell
until you decide to rebel
Just a shell
until you decide to rebel
Rebel, rebel, rebel.
*Arrested Development, "Shell," Zingalamaduni[48]*

Systemic power dynamics define us, especially when we're not thinking,

listening, seeing, speaking. The narrative of the singular "I," a self-sufficient

classically heroic "me" who defines herself completely, encourages a kind of

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[48]From the Swahili: *mzinga* – beehive, *la* – of, *utamaduni* – culture. A discussion thread posting by Kasigae I read on The Kamusi Project site stated that "Mzinga la utamaduni" is slang Swahili for "one heck of a culture."

blindness when it comes to facing systemic influences and power. When we become too sure of ourselves, perceive an ultimate correctness in our actions, narrate ourselves as characters in complete control of our destinies, illusory as any of these things may be, it seems we are less likely to question the ways we may be influenced by outside forces. We find a comfortable position, become satisfied, and end up thoroughly enmeshed in our own self-regulated status quo. We, in fact, lose some of our ability to self-define by remaining unaware that there are no outside forces; everything is inside. By leaving social systems unexamined, we miss parts of our own identities. We are unable to recognize the communal "I," the ways in which we manifest not only immediate family or community, but also individuals we may not even know, who contribute to the socioeconomic realities of our lives.

If we are unaware of power dynamics playing out across the matrix of domination, limited in our concepts of community, we may fall prey to silence uncharacterized by intention, but fueled instead by ignorance. In perhaps unintended complacency, we exclude ourselves from potential dialogues of difference with other individuals and groups. In fact, even when an individual may become aware of difference, she may be unable or afraid to engage with it due to a lack of imagination. And even if we are able to imagine ourselves into a dialogue with difference, there is always the risk of being misunderstood, of being refused, of being thought inappropriate or out of place. It is difficult to imagine giving up a comfortable position for possible discomfort or even rejection.

Ignorance and complacency lend themselves to dictation, this side of the continuum from dictatorship. Unaware, we are easily manipulated by our circumstances and dictated to ideologically, politically, ethically, in a common, permeating sort of generalized oppression. We find ourselves playing out the story of our conditions instead of our humanity. In recognizing and speaking to humanity in ourselves and others, we may make a choice to rebel against the systemic grand narratives that thread their way through our lives and identities. While it may be impossible to make some kind of escape from culture, society, and their structures (and in the end, what would be the point of doing so?), it is possible to alter your own narrative in relation to them. And in relating a different narrative of your identity in relation to others, by bringing voice that reflects self-redefinition, you change the narrative of the world. It is no smaller than that, however small each of us may be. bell hooks defines her idea of "liberatory voice" as a "way of speaking that is no longer determined by one's status as object—as oppressed being. That way of speaking is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way" (15). In our case, using a "liberatory voice" can be seen as launching a rebellion against the effects of a grand narrative of the singular "I" (Talking 15). I would say that finding and raising your voice in a call for dialogue that embraces difference and acknowledges multiplicative identity is an enactment of liberation, an ongoing revolutionary cry.

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Rewriting self in the matrix can never be writing alone. To relate a story takes relating to others, intensely so in this case, where characters and audience can be the same. Becoming aware of self as a multiplicative identity within a system of power dynamics moves beyond a Foucauldian oppressor/oppressed relationship, in which we may still relate to only one role, and not the other. If we understand the nature of systemic power dynamics and identity, we accept that we are all both oppressor and oppressed simultaneously, complicated characters. There is no single evil structure to identify and bring down. Injustice and imbalance occur in a system of patterns, elusive threading. Under these circumstances, it may become unclear how a person changes anything in such a dispersal of power effects. The rebellion is in you. You are the overthrown. The revolution is your own. Rather than a rebellion mounted against a single perceived oppressor, the rebellion resists limitations in imagining ourselves and others. A shift in identity rewrites both past and present, as altering a sense of self requires reassessing everything you've been and learned, adding and adjusting, rearranging and deleting. It demands the openness and courage to risk the known for the unknown and new, certainty for possibility, comfort for liberation, a sea change.[49]

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[49]"Full fathom five thy father lies:/Of his bones are coral made:/Those are pearls that were his eyes:/Nothing of him that doth fade/But doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange" (Shakespeare, Temp., 1.2.457-462). After choosing my words, I revisited their origins. Though Ariel is speaking literally, I was reminded of how frightening a transformation of identity can be. In a way, we experience a little death of who we were before. This can be nothing but joy, and can also involve grief. It is one of the risks.

As complicated as anything else in the matrix, in my opinion, liberation is not a final destination. It is the freedom to move in relation to the threads of the web instead of being entirely bound by them. By choosing to see others in relationship, recognizing a community of difference, and participating in a dialogue of difference, an individual can develop liberatory voice. With this voice we can relate a narrative of change and possibility, define and redefine ourselves, tell and retell stories of humans and humanity. The story is never over, and the writing is never done; we are one draft after another, works in process.

As a teacher, participating in the revolution means fostering a rebellious classroom, where teachers and students break out of their usual roles.  To avoid systemic objectification of students, teachers, knowledge, and experience, teachers can develop classrooms working to create individual voices that contribute to a dialogue of difference. One way to do this is to foster a community of difference that incorporates the experiential knowledge of students and teachers, as I have discussed. Teachers must reposition themselves within the hierarchal power dynamics that feminists and compositionists alike have challenged, in favor of encouraging a classroom engaged in relationship, which clears a space for productive cognitive dissonance resulting from an exchange of individual voices and narratives.

In the eyes of many, one of the main things defining a teacher as teacher is her function as grader. Like a stockbroker, a teacher is in charge of informing an

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individual what she is worth. As a result, students are generally far more interested in their grades than in using course content and interaction with others to expand their concepts of self and other, and reasonably so. It is easy for both student and teacher to accept grading as the primary filter through which to view and assess their educational experiences. But this is tantamount to accepting the paradigm of mastery as the measure of knowledge. We have already seen the severe limitations of this approach to education, including its truncated and truncating understanding of what constitutes knowledge and how it is created, its denial of the role of context and community in self-definition and meaning making. Given that no teacher can single-handedly deny the current institutional necessity of grading, it falls to us instead to reimagine ourselves personally. The grand narrative of paradigmatic shift may itself be a red herring. Rather than an attempt to change the institution systemically through a complete revolutionary overhaul, perhaps we must situate the revolution within ourselves, shifting our identity to incorporate a liberatory voice expressing our complexities and self-contradictions as humans who teach, not only as "teacher" objects. I embrace Jane Danielewicz's description of developing teacher identity as a "becoming," and add that we can also mindfully work on becoming human (3).[50] By moving ourselves in relation to the threads of the matrix,

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[50]Consider the grateful phrase: "That's human of you." We use this when someone has shown us understanding or allowed us second chances or remark it to someone who we've seen behave this way towards someone else. To be a human, a participant in humanity, asks for more than simply being born *homo sapiens sapiens*.

we bring the paradigm shift into ourselves and immediately to those with whom we interact.

If I wish to change the way students relate to me as a human teacher and to each other as humans rather than "students," I must stage my own revolution and change my role. Paolo Freire calls for a mutual "humanization" of speakers before establishing a dialogue that can lead to critical consciousness. I must therefore find ways to resist a classroom hierarchy of relationship that leads to, in hooks' mind, "objectification of the teacher" (Transgress 16). By resisting or modulating the generally expected role of professor, in appearance or speech, for instance, I resist that which "reinforces the dualistic separation of public and private, encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the roles of professors" (16). My project becomes mindfully and honestly presenting myself to my students, as the complex and changing human individual I am rather than "their teacher."

In every case I attempt methods of humanization in the classroom, I have the pleasure of engaging delighted students, and in every case, I must risk engaging the ones unsure of this unexpected interaction. In every case, these groups of people behave differently from those I taught when invested in my teacher-defined self rather than my human self teaching. I share my personal narratives, my bits and pieces, dirt and pearls, to voice the relationship between learning and life, connecting my own story to the act of education, insisting that course subject matter

is worth more than a grade or mastery, as are the students who learn it. And as I've found with human beings outside the classroom and in a variety of situations, I find that humans step into the space made through that frightening risk. Students bring their own narratives to the table and the page, share more, talk more, laugh more, risk more honesty and more detail. They ask more questions, risk more asserting themselves in speech and writing, take more responsibility for the direction of their conversations and course work, and are interested more frequently, sometimes despite themselves. We know more about one another, and relate to each other with more purpose, without sacrificing the point or goals of the coursework. Part of my job is to ensure that our narratives weave into themselves the intentions of the course. I have in fact seen students become so comfortable with each other that they check on each other to make sure each is keeping up with their assignments or take each other to task for not participating in group activities enough.

While I think that we have begun to succeed in recognizing the political landscapes of the classroom and bringing politics into the classroom, we have been less successful at inserting an active personal locus as a significant teaching and learning force. We have made steps towards pedagogies that are politically informed and that take into account our own personal politics, but there seems often to be methodological gaps between that effort and the corresponding effect on students. While we may recognize the politics of identity and oppression, we don't have many classrooms that enact its realities as part of the course material and class

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community. It is possible to teach a class on identity politics, but never create the space for students to grapple with its meaning together in a personal way. Students may learn the concepts or be given examples, yet still not be able to understand or relate to the struggles of classmates in a lower income bracket, or who have endured prejudice as part of a racial or ethnic minority group, for instance. And further, once leaving the abstracted implications of the classroom behind, neither teacher nor student may think to apply the politics, mindfully asking herself on her way home how she treats the bus driver, the passer by, the cashier, or the homeless person. Rather than leaving the course having experienced a personally felt understanding of sociopolitical reality or identity, students too often leave with a grade and a new, somewhat abstract store of objectified knowledge. The information garnered from these courses is without a doubt useful and can increase opportunities immensely. But without an accompanying shift in self-definition or in interaction with others, the educational experience begins to look rather like the masculinist mastery of concepts approach.

An instructor may acknowledge the individuality of her students and still neglect to constructively engage the material realities and differences of her students as part of her daily methodology and classroom activities. We can take what can be seen as an "additive" approach to student difference, exhibiting a facile awareness of sociocultural or personal circumstances influencing student lives, which too often remains unengaged with the individuals themselves (Collins 225). Or instructors can

demonstrate through teaching methodology an understanding of the "multiplicative" nature of the differences making up a complex subject as overlapping and dynamic, multilayered and interactive (King 270). It is as if the realities of teacher and student are palimpsests under an overlaying narrative of institutional education, and our project is to read through the layers with the intent of acknowledging multiplicity and difference. A teacher's rebellion is not only to become human herself, but to speak to a human student rather than a student object. I believe that by making this shift, we will be able to develop a more student-centered, student-aware methodology aimed towards fostering critical thinking in such a way that it may lead to greater sociocultural and personal awareness and more active political engagement.

I have found in several teaching milieus that the more I allow myself to know about a person, and risk relating my own narrative with them, the more clearly I understand how each one's extenuating life circumstances or learning styles complicate or enhance their efforts. In the past, it became more difficult to ignore these circumstances as my ideas of teacher responsibility and objectives were constantly challenged. Especially with the embrace of feminist, postmodern, and cultural theories, it seemed hypocritical on a fundamental level not to acknowledge the impingement of the day to day on an individual's ability to engage in their learning experience and to succeed in their efforts. As teachers working in a world ostensibly complicated by theories that address these issues, it seems we should do

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more than acknowledge them in text and simply stop with awareness. We should move towards developing teaching methodologies that are creative, imaginative and rigorous enough to incorporate the many-faceted realities of an individual into our classrooms and the way that they function. I feel that the first step towards enacting this kind of methodology lies in considering the ways we may objectify ourselves as teachers and our students and in reconsidering the roles of relationship and identity in the classroom, as well as its incorporation into coursework.

Institutionalized education that proceeds by ignoring the possibility of relationship with students also can contribute to the perpetuation of societal divisions and labeling, from social class to ethnicity. When relationships between teachers and students alike are truncated, opportunities for encountering what has been perceived as "other" are stymied. In an obvious example, students whose cultural and social backgrounds have not prepared them adequately for collegiate study may have more difficulty succeeding under new demands. As a result, instructors and students may make assumptions about the general abilities of those individuals and possibly an entire group of people without understanding the circumstances in play. Beyond the development of that simple equation, when we teach without developing relationships between individuals, we participate in a sort of political complacency. The complacency can be well-disguised. We equate education with a facile imbibition of material and methods for manipulating that material. We assume that someone who can engage with academic theory, interpret

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it, even create their own, possesses a certain level of depth. However, manipulation

of material is not necessarily reflective of a personal philosophy or convictions, and

even philosophy and convictions are not necessarily open to difference in a

complicated and changing global landscape. We are not necessarily concerned with

fostering depth, heart, intuition, voice, humility, all the things that are necessary for

moving towards what we may have previously conceived as "other" and beyond

our ken, our kin. To live equitably in a world of difference is to live in a world of

relationship, not just voyeurism, analysis, comprehension, or concern.


### Do as I Say, Do as I Do

*While I received a stellar education as a student at a prestigious university, it often*

*seemed that my opinion about what I was learning was less important than regurgitating*

*accepted material or tailoring my responses to a professor's expectations. For instance, I*

*recall being taken down a letter grade on a poetry research paper because the professor didn't*

*agree with the interpretation solely on a personal basis. That was the only grounds he*

*ultimately could provide me when I questioned him closely about his rationale, and to*

*understand where I had gone awry with my interpretations. I had done the textual,*

*biographical, autobiographical, and medical research, and the logical argumentative use of*

*evidence was there. But my ideas about Sylvia Plath, blood imagery, and mental instability*

*were distasteful to him, and, I got the impression, not what one usually talked about when*

*discussing Plath. Or, at least, not in his class: the same professor shut down conversations*

*about homosexuality in conjunction with Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Howl." It seemed we*

*weren't saying what he would have said, so he wasn't interested in listening to our voices or ideas beyond superficially countering what we said in the interest of maintaining a sense of correctness instead of an atmosphere of dialogue. The maintenance of his sense of correctness played out in his grading methods and in the nature of class conversation, or lack of it. Many other professors weren't interested in conversation at all, and some were mostly interested in their own performances. There were some great and informative performances, but the class ended up being more about the professor than the students.*

*I had the eerie sense that something grand and systemic was at work, playing itself out in the psyches and on the minds of professors and students. It wasn't that people weren't learning; it was the way in which people were expected to learn that bothered me. After teaching students who were anything but typical in Denver, I became skeptical about many of the teaching methods I had been exposed to as a student. I could easily picture all the ways that my favorite delinquents had most likely been selected out of an education at any kind of prestigious institution. And it had nothing to do with their cognitive ability. In fact, they were more savvy than some of the graduate students and professors I've known since.*

### *Just What Does It Take?*

*My re-entry into graduate school included a course for graduate teaching fellows in preparation for instructing first year university composition courses. The course was based around composition and education theory readings, and the class structure reflected theories about student-centered learning, including small groups for conversation and paper feedback. The entire set-up made complete sense to me, and I was fascinated by the sometimes*

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*virulent opposition to and derision of both social epistemic theory and the classroom*

*activities. In each case, it seemed that the opposition sprang from a deep-seated need for*

*individuals to situate themselves as exceptionally smart, hardworking people, who could be*

*distinguished against those who were "just not as smart" as them, who just didn't have what*

*it took. The idea that socioeconomics and culture could play a definitive role in the academic*

*life of an individual was clearly counter to their own narratives of intelligence and self-*

*definition. I could see the crucial nature of the issue for them, but felt little sympathy. I had*

*seen kids who were smart as whips spend an hour locked in the bathroom with a knife*

*threatening to hurt themselves because of their emotional instability, which was in turn the*

*result of abuse and unstable early experiences. It wasn't that they were "just not as smart";*

*it was that life just wasn't fair. I'm not suggesting that we can change "life"*

*paradigmatically, but that's actually no reason not to behave as if we could. And it doesn't*

*mean we can't change the way we inhabit classrooms and interact with individuals.*

To achieve and foster liberatory voice, we "must confront the issue of audience—

we must know to whom we speak" (hooks, <u>Talking</u> 15). In a community and

dialogue of difference, we must also know *with* whom we speak. As students

develop voices with which to relate and the ability to hear other voices, they can

rebel against education's classroom constraints, and they may eventually find

themselves rebelling as well against oppressions of the mind and body, changing

their standpoints. A teacher must be willing to be fully a part of that process, to rebel

as well, collaborate, conspire. Too often, teachers and students "other" each other,

defining their roles against one another in a way that limits collaborative possibility.

Redefining the level of engagement in our classrooms requires that both students

and teachers develop liberatory voices together, purposefully, intently. As they each

tell their own stories, they are also together writing a narrative of all together.

## Composing Humans: Hearing Voices, (Re)Writing Self

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### Where Is Your Umbrella?

A Zen master's student, after studying for nine years, became enlightened and went on to take students of his own. After a few years, he decided it was time to visit his master. The weather was rainy, so he wore the elevated wooden shoes of the region and carried an umbrella, all of which he left at the door.

After pouring tea, the first thing that his master said to him was, "What side of your shoes is your umbrella on?"

The student did not know and decided to return to study with his master for seven more years.

Since social-epistemic approaches to writing acknowledge the important role of

community in writing, they also have the responsibility to recognize its personal

nature, the way that contingencies play out in an individual. We can see this

awareness, for instance, in assignments that ask students to write personal

narratives, sometimes inviting them to consider how writing ability might influence

other aspects of their lives, sometimes inviting them to consider the effects of their

socioeconomic contingencies on their lives. However, this is not as radical in terms

of classroom hierarchy as it might be. This invitation to the student to engage

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personally with their writing is not the same as a teacher enacting personal relationship by engaging with the student, or encouraging students to engage with each other, academically and otherwise. After teaching a class we are likely to ask ourselves, "Was I clear about the assignment?" or "Did I cover everything in the lesson plan?" We are far less likely to ask ourselves, "Was I a good human?" It seems an almost silly question because we take being human for granted.

Giroux's wish to "redefine the role of teachers as transformative intellectuals" requires that teachers "understand the nature of their own self-formation" (15). I think it is as easy to fall prey to the experience of self as a singular "I" as at any other time when trying to understand our own self-formation, or self-definition. Generally, when we represent our identity to ourselves, we choose the milieus we wish to consider ourselves in and the roles we wish to consider ourselves playing in them. It can become an exercise in unifying our identities for ourselves rather than turning a critical eye towards our narrative of self. As teachers, we are part of a strong educational culture that provides a clear checklist for the attributes and actions that qualify a person as "teacher." But if we consider the institutional qualifications only, we are participating in the objectification of self as teacher, fulfilling a unified, singular role. We aren't asking all the right questions.

To be part of a transformational experience, we must also ask ourselves what it means that our students typically may see us as unknowable or inaccessible on many levels, as an instructor only, a person lacking any other material existence or

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identity. When I once asked undergraduates in a composition course to anonymously write out their top peeves with professors, two of the most popular were not being listened to and feeling "manipulated" by the teacher, both academically and ideologically. One of my composition students and regular UNC Writing Center tutees, Kyle Slough, stated baldly, "I am expected to write only for them, when I'm writing for me." Kyle's problem wasn't with audience; it was with a learning process that encouraged rote academic behavior disconnected from his own identity and priorities.[51] When this is the situation, students are also disconnected from the humanity of their teachers.

To what extent are we responsible for relationships formed with our students in the ways we have presented ourselves, in the aspects of our identities we have chosen to sublimate? How much of the story have we told? How honest have we been about who we are, what kind of human we are with them and with ourselves? What are we composed of? What are the implications for education when both student and instructor encounter each other with limited imagination of the other person as an individual human and a potential member of community? A lack of imagination suggests to me missed opportunities for learning and growth, as well as possible misunderstandings.

Instructors participate in and are influenced by the same social matrix as their students. The classroom web of relationships and experience incorporates our

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[51]Kyle also said, not without humor, "It's ironic how learning and academics have the same goal, but it's almost like a clash between good and evil."

material reality as well as our students. Our selves are inescapable; we bring them to every moment, whether philosophizing, responding to an argument, or fixing dinner. Each of us embraces an identity enmeshed in the myriad threads of personal, social, and political elements: personality, previous education, previous experience, personal convictions, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, sense of responsibility, mental state and general health, and of course the daily and lifelong circumstances and contingencies in which we find ourselves floundering and flourishing. How aware are we of these contingencies, the position or standpoint we occupy on the matrix of domination? How aware are we of the ways we bring them into the classroom with us?

If we wish to make of education a "practice of freedom," as Freire suggests it can be, we must practice teaching undivided from learning undivided from any other part of our lives. His use of "praxis" for me refers not only to the development of pedagogy or methods, but to lifestyle and an integrity that threads through even a multifarious identity. It also implies that none of these things are ever fixed, but require a constant enactment of intention, a constant rewriting of identity in relation to our actions and to the identities and intentions of others. They, in essence, constitute a practice. I suggest that it is not the title of teacher that we should bring to our students, or anybody else, but the elements that make up our individual standpoints. Additionally, we should create the space for others to bring theirs. Then we are practicing freedom and teaching others how to do the same.

In my opinion, part of maintaining integrity in the practice of a methodology of

relationship begins with considering a teacher's answerability to her students as an

ethical imperative. In her discussion linking Bakhtinian concepts of answerability to

teaching, Helen Ewald states, "answerability is more of an attitude or stance than a

subject or 'hero'" (342). Her use of the word "stance" recalls the idea of standpoint,

indicating to me a lived condition, answerability as a day to day practice. She points

out applications of answerability to pedagogy, class content, and teaching methods,

but it is in the last few pages of her article that she begins to touch on my concerns

here. She suggests that "a more sophisticated response might be to feature dialogic

methods of instruction in the classroom" (343). Presenting ourselves with an honest

voice that reflects our standpoint and responds honestly to our students'

standpoints indicates a shift in responsibility more towards the students than course

content. As teachers, we often concentrate on dispensing information, and indeed,

our accepted grading systems don't obviously allow for other ways to interpret the

function of our teaching. If we prioritize students over content, however, our

function changes. Our main responsibility becomes our interaction with learners as

individuals and as a group, and their interactions with each other. Elsewhere, Ewald

states succinctly that for Bakhtin, "Answering is authoring. Authoring is

responding" (341). By making this shift in responsibility, answering our students as

humans navigating a sea of experiences, answering their disparate needs as learners,

and doing so by answering with a liberatory voice of our own, we rewrite our

identities in an ongoing manner, author ourselves, and contribute to narratives of communities of difference rather than grand narratives of education, something I see as an ethical responsibility.

Hooks exhorts us to reject conventional roles in favor of this kind of honesty, not only as teacher and student, but also as people, using blunt speech and remaining unconstrained by taboos and manners. She points out, "I don't for a minute think that we can be teachers who invite students into radical openness if we're not willing to be radically open ourselves, if we're not willing to be a witness to our students of how ideas change and shape us, how something affects us so that we think differently than we did before" ("bell" 5). Hooks speaks here of the imperative to bring honestly to the table the ways we have composed ourselves as humans. She refers to a practice of human "being" as active and ongoing, being human with those with whom we speak. The accompanying risks of tradition, acceptance, and image in order to display an honesty that inspires the same in others requires a humble activism. It is without a doubt a "courageous dialogue" that leads to a revolution of self-definition and redefinition (Freire 109).

Beyond ethical teacher behavior, a methodology of relationship enacted through a community of difference seems to call for relational ethics, or what Nel Noddings calls "an ethics of caring," which nicely complements the concept of answerability here (173). Noddings explains that an "ethic of caring is often characterized in terms of responsibility and response" (174). She asserts that this ethical orientation, rather

than being defined by codified legal justice, "remains tightly tied to experience because all its deliberations focus on the human beings involved in the situation under consideration and their relations to each other," in this case, everyone in the classroom (173). Concepts of fairness, equality, responsibility, and accountability are based on intimate knowledge of an individual and her particular contingencies. At its best, in such a system, community parameters are defined through the interaction between community members. One of my classes together concluded that it was indeed too distracting for one of the students to sit through class with his feet on the table, for instance. As he had no injury or other compelling reason for his feet to be on the table other than his own comfort, he complied with their recommendation.

Including an ethical dimension in critical analysis of the influence of the matrix can lead to the development of more complex thinking, better question-asking abilities, and clearer argumentation. When a community practices relational ethics, extreme individualism and a resulting legalistic treatment of ethics and judgment are called into question by the idea of multiple truths and contingencies. Students are challenged to move beyond black and white thinking, a foregone "I know" standpoint, and punitive directives, and instead to move towards critical assessment. They are encouraged to see the ways prejudice, ignorance, and circumstances, including their own, figure into any proclamation of truth, punishment, or classification of individuals or a group.

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As I have carefully, although increasingly boldly, experimented with conversation, both in and out of the classroom, that is not structured by civility or expectation based on roles, responses have been overwhelmingly positive across age groups and environments. Comparing responses, it begins to look as if people had been waiting for someone else to come clean first. When you take the risk, someone else is more likely to as well. I began to see a safe working space that can only be maintained when it is an exchange, when individuals participate to keep those lines open. It doesn't have to be an entirely balanced exchange to work, to address difference, and perhaps most often it is not. But if you can create this space in a classroom, unexpected things happen. Although not across the board, of course, even students who feel an initial strangeness and discomfort with unusual responsibilities answer with a quickening. I have learned to have dangerous faith in my students because they are forever encouraging me with the response of more active minds, more engaged interaction with their work, more honesty and expression with me and with each other.[52]

We could liken teaching with a methodology of relationship, maintaining a dialogue of difference and radical openness within a relational ethos, to riding the wave of the Tao. You perch, reading where to go as the information arises, trusting the water's signs, trusting yourself. There is no fixed plan, only a weather eye and a

[52]As a teaching assistant for an auditorium sized film class, I decided to use workshopping methods for my turn teaching the entire class. When I asked the professor if that was ok with him, he said, "Sure. I think you're insane, but sure." On that almost last day of class, more people spoke and more questions were asked than in any other class of the semester.

ready heart. There is no role, only humility, and the practice of continuing

adaptability and response. We can also think of teaching within a methodology of

relationship as a koan. If you want to learn, teach; if you want to teach, stop being

the teacher. It is a zen practice to deliberately throw oneself into moments of not

knowing, placing oneself in situations entirely unfamiliar; it is also zen practice to

admit that even in the midst of the familiar, we know so much less than we do know

that we are always in a moment of not knowing.[53] We must be willing to live within

questions, not just before or after class, but in the moment. What will this

relationship become as it unfolds? What will we become? From whom do we learn?

Who do we teach? How do we react to others as an emotional entity in the

classroom? What is the practice of relationship? Where are our hearts? Where are

our umbrellas?

   While I have found models in certain professors, my real teachers have been first

generation higher education students, non-native English speakers, at-risk youth,

students better adjusted to some of the difficult realities of life than myself, students

with learning disabilities, students belonging to groups disenfranchised due to

ethnicity and/or socioeconomic background, nontraditional students with families

and/or jobs, students coming from cultural or familial milieus that provide no

support for their efforts, privileged and sometimes overconfident students at

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[53]Lin Jensen, in his article "An Ear to the Ground," explains, "Zen ethics is grounded in the
realization that one does not know what's right. This 'not-knowing' is the refuge from which all
moral action originates…What's offered us in the place of moral certainty is doubt and love…When
the great Zen master Ikkyu was asked, 'What is Zen?' He replied, 'Attention! Attention! Attention!'"

prestigious universities, students, students, students. Each one brings a particular set of needs, both intellectual and emotional. All have needed encouragement and scaffolding accompanied by honest feedback on their academic efforts. Many struggle with a perceived lack of intelligence or an experience of significant disorientation or anxiety in an academic environment. All challenge me to hear them and respond honestly and helpfully.

I've tried to let their needs shape my responses and develop my classroom strategies. Becoming aware of and answering to their various needs required what sometimes felt like an inordinate amount of attention, compassion, and imagination. It also required a certain amount of boldness, perseverance, and faith. I found the most useful method to be quieting as much as possible the teacherly voice in my head and to listen as closely as possible to the human voices of my students. I found that I was just a human with humans trying to figure out how to learn together. I became a better teacher because I was no longer trying to be "the teacher." It is my feeling that almost without exception, those students with whom I cultivated a personal relationship embraced their learning process more fully and responsibly. This was evident to me by the shift or development in their academic strategies from the beginning of a semester, their approach to new material and synthesis of information, their attitude towards themselves as scholars and towards academic activities as personally meaningful or at the least useful to them. They gained in confidence when expressing themselves to the class or to me, and when practicing

analytical thought. They redefined what it meant to be a student, and helped me redefine what it meant to teach.

For instance, I was forced into a concreteness unfamiliar to me, a need for attention to literal detail both in content and in assignments. I learned, once again, never to assume that someone else is on the same page as you are. No matter how I wear it, I am well-trained in academics. It would be unreasonable for me to assume that people from different environments working with me will naturally follow me around the bend. It would also be unreasonable to assume that a scholar would be able to follow an ex-gang member, for instance, around the bend without some practice. And writing him off because of his past and his current identity would be unethical. Besides the obvious contextual concerns that affect language use and the ability to express ideas in an accessible manner, the intangible personal risks for both of us were great. Neither of us wanted to appear lacking in confidence, neither wanted to feel condescended to, neither wanted to lose credibility. Without communication that allowed for difference, without patience and adaptability, either of us could have gotten lost. I was lucky enough to have an easy-going, open-minded gangster who gave me the chance to say it til I said it right. In the end, we were both a little less ignorant because we learned to speak to and hear each other.

Participation in a community of difference that supports the development of liberatory voices can lead to critical awareness not easily attained in other situations. As students learn to hear voices and write themselves, their experience of content

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can lead to the capacity to bring their critical capacities to the page. Students at the very least experience a new flexibility with language, both understanding various uses of it and using it to express that which they wish to be heard. In my experience, I have seen this kind of verbal development reflected in student writing and improved communication skills.

A dialogue of difference connects with the composition concepts of voice, audience, and argument in a rich way. A classroom and methodology based on a community of difference can enrich an individual's personal and writing context with the insistence that a community must know itself, define itself through the relationships of its members. As students and teachers increase their understanding of the members that make up their community through the complexities of their situated or partial knowledge, they are also practicing understanding audience context in a more complicated way. They can begin to think of audience not only in terms of large groups marked by somewhat superficial parameters, but as more complicated entities made up by individuals defined by elements including psychology and emotion, in addition to interest and purpose. In other words, a member's experience of a community of relationship will enrich her idea of the complexities of individual experience as she conceptualizes a target audience. This can not only enhance perception of audience and imagination when it comes to composing for them, but can also create potential for the development of critical

thought through comparison of experience and the resulting personal store of knowledge.

The connection between writing, voice, and authorship can then be made more effectively. Students can begin to see their writing, as their speech, necessarily is shaped by a network of communities, a writer as a reflection and extension of the self in community, in relation with others and their communities, which always has sociopolitical significance. As their voice develops, they can begin to see their arguments and writing as an extension of their identities, something worth investing themselves in, instead of regarding as writing for an assignment and argumentation for its own sake. They may find that what they compose as humans requires them to compose themselves as humans as well.

Thus far, we can see Freire's ideas about humanization and dialogue leading to critical consciousness working with Patricia Collins' idea that situatedness can create a critical consciousness through experience. By hearing and learning languages of experience, students and teachers become more critically aware of circumstances and historical contingencies of others, thereby becoming a part of a community supporting difference and relationship. Learning the language of experience and situatedness in order to use it as evidence in argumentation and discussion is in turn an enactment of Bakhtin's idea of a true dialogue of meaningful exchange. Within this dialogue, an expression of self with intent, informed by an awareness of one's

identity, deliberately hearing the response to that expression, and answering again

enacts a mindful state of relationship that values a relational ethics.

I would like at this point to invoke the idea of "love" as embraced by Freire and

applied by hooks in the classroom (hooks, Talking Back 26). This is not the love of

*eros*, not simply the love of *agape*, but a love for others that translates into a love for

liberation, a revolutionary love. Hooks echoes Freire in her concepts of

revolutionary love and extends the implications to a revolution in the experience of

self. An exchange of voice and difference in community resulting in simultaneous

development and redefinition of identity is always a tiny revolution, in all the

meanings of that word. We turn to face ourselves. We turn to face others. We revolt

against the stereotypes and assumptions that have been driving us. We return to our

narratives and rewrite beginnings, middles, ends, revise purposes, intentions,

expressions. We practice freedom.

Ultimately, there is a link between dialogue, identity, writing, and changing

narratives for ourselves and for the world. Shana brought this home for me in one of

her self-evaluations, close to the end of the semester:

> Before this course, I had opinions relating to issues of religion,
>
> sexuality, and race. Yet, I could not verbalize those beliefs clearly.
>
> However, after taking [this] class...I feel that when I am confronted
>
> with a situation, I will be able to handle it and work my way through it
>
> with good arguments. For example, when I am confronted with a racist

person who feels that my Lumbee Indian tribe does not 'deserve' federal recognition, I will be able to use my intellect and my heart, instead of just my emotions.

It wasn't just that Shana's writing and argumentation had improved in clarity over the semester, although they had. To begin with, she had great difficulty expressing herself clearly. But I was struck with her choice of words and use of language here: "opinions," "beliefs," "handle it," "work my way through it," "arguments," "confronted," "feels," "intellect," "heart." Shana solidly presents a self that identifies with particular opinions and beliefs, indicating both a sense of identity and an investment in standpoint. She also indicates a sense of responsibility towards her standpoint by saying that she can "handle" a confrontational situation, and seems to indicate an understanding of arguments as a series of points that must be presented when she says she can: "work my way through it." By "it," in this case, I see a convergence of "situation" and "argument." Her use of "confront" communicates an awareness of other standpoints and the investment that other individuals will have in them.

But it was her response to that situation which stunned me; in response Shana plans to use: "my intellect *and* my *heart*, instead of *just* my *emotions*" (emphasis mine). Shana understands that good argumentation must be achieved through an intellectual engagement, a coherent logic with evidence supporting it. Shana also understands that a human arguing for a certain standpoint brings heart to her

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intellect. Her distinction between heart and emotions is remarkable. Shana does not

plan to use a rhetoric fueled by emotional manipulation or display. Her intellect

demands a more thoughtful approach. However, she has learned that good

argumentation also asks her not only to think about what she says, but to care about

it, and to say it as honestly as possible. Shana learned much more than how to write

while engaged in a dialogue of difference with her classmates, me, and her work;

her writing gained in clarity and sophistication throughout the semester as part and

parcel of what she learned.[54]

In Shana's words, and in her ability to handle her intellect with heart, we see

evidence of hooks' "transformational politic," the revolution we hope for (<u>Talking</u>

<u>Back</u> 19). Shana's experience has transformed her, and she will transform the world

by adding her voice to it, relating her own story, writing her changed self into the

larger human narrative. In our classrooms, we can create knowledge that leads to

personal political change. As students and teachers redefine themselves, through

conversation and composition, we also redefine the way we choose to be in the

world. We author ourselves. We write ourselves into the world together and

therefore may, using a "liberatory voice," mount a rebellion against the systemic

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[54]Especially since I knew Shana, of course, I felt that I had received one of those serendipitous reminders of true wisdom. I was reminded forcefully of *prajnaparamita*, the ultimate wisdom spoken of in the Heart Sutra, which is not simply intellect, but intellect enriched and deepened, humanized in fact, through compassion. In Shana's testimony, I can see a compassion growing in her, through caring about clarity and standpoint communication, which has the possibility of flowering into not only an awareness of another individual invested in their standpoint, but also a true compassion for that person whether they agree with her or not. Like living in the moment of a question, teachers can humbly find their work in the promise of possibility.

social structures that keep us at risk instead of taking risks, for ourselves and for those around us. Shanti, shanti, shanti.


## Learning Relationships: (Re)Search

In the third chapter of Jane Danielewicz's <u>Teaching Selves</u>, "A Pedagogy for Identity Development," she provides a coherent set of principals for a teaching pedagogy that will foster conscious development of a student's identity as a teacher (131-179). Their application results in the kind of classroom activities and assignments that foster relationship and an environment that can develop a community of difference. Danielewicz's work is specifically aimed at creating a teacher identity, which can be invaluable not only to students in education, but to those of us who are already teachers and attempting to reassess our identity in relation to our pedagogy and methods. In addition, her basic principles can be applied in classrooms focused on other aspects of identity, including a classroom interested in the formation of identity within Patricia Collins' matrix of domination model. Her work with "a pedagogy for identity development" thereby provides useful guiding principles on a fundamental level for creating and investigating methodologies of relationship.

Danielewicz provides two categories of principles to use in creating a dialectical course primarily interested in the development of a coherent teaching identity and the ability to enact that identity through an effective curriculum: structural

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principles and performative principles (139). The structural principals she uses to construct classroom activities are as follows: 1) discourse richness and openness, 2) dialogue and a dialogic curriculum, 3) collaboration, 4) deliberation, and 5) reflexivity. The performative principles, which make for ten principles in all, are: 6) theorizing in practice, 7) agency, 8) recursive representation, 9) authority, and 10) enactment (141). Some of her principles can be directly connected with my discussions here.

Deliberation and reflexivity are absolutely necessary for a dialogue of difference to occur in a productive manner. Danielewicz uses John Dewey's ideas about "deliberation" to talk about ways teachers can develop identities with an ethical center, imagine themselves acting in ways that reflect their convictions. Her discussion speaks to the limitations for community when individuals suffer a lack of imagination when it comes to redefining themselves and perceiving others. Reflexive thinking is a core activity in a community of difference, both when engaged in dialogues of difference with classmates, and when reviewing previous perceptions of self that have been challenge through a dialogue of difference. One of the teacher's responsibilities in maintaining a community of difference, in fact, is to incorporate reflexivity as part of the ongoing conversation, an overt reflexivity that asks students and teachers to look at their standpoints as they relate. The move can be as simple as asking a student why they think what they do after they have made a proclamation without realizing they have not presented an argument for it, or

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assume that it speaks for itself. Students can learn through metaconversation about the moment of that question to themselves recognize similar moments that merit question.

The two previous principles, the fourth and fifth, in conjunction with the sixth, "theorizing in practice," offer a way to think about identity in terms of relation and self-redefinition. Danielewicz values "grounded theory," which puts her on the same page as the black feminist theorists who have been mentioned here (159). We have already heard how they staunchly value lived experience as the source of critical thought and insist upon an individual's ability to voice those thoughts. In the practice of relationship, writing narratives of our identities, figuratively and literally, is a way of theorizing who we are in relation to the world around us. The eighth principle, which informs what happens in the previous three, "recursive representation," may not directly reflect the idea that each of us is a multiplicative entity, but it does forward the idea of identity as a presentation that may respond differently in different situations and that it can be redefined as part of an ongoing process.

Danielewicz's use of the word "enactment," the tenth principle, works well with my own interpretation of it: practice as a mindful call and response that not only discourses about praxis or pedagogy, but does it, be's it, verbs it. She explains, "How I behave in the classroom and what I ask students to do are enactments of my beliefs and self (the teacher I am at that moment)" (174). To me, in order to do this, a

teacher is already participating in a practice of relationship. In addition to the work Danielewicz does to connect principles to actions and activities in the classroom and prioritize the same elements I feel are essential for a community and dialogue of difference, I'd like to suggest that the practice of relationship inherent to Danielewicz's pedagogy could also be treated as a teaching methodology. How is it that Jane Danielewicz behaves? What is it that I think I'm doing when I create community and relationship with my students?

If we are including a practice of relationship as part of our project to humanize ourselves, and therefore our students, with a goal of self-redefinition on both parts, it seems that it would be useful to consider methods that address the practice of relationship itself. Or conversely, to look critically at what seems to be functioning as a practice of relationship and locate methods that may already be present. I persist in referring to what could be considered pedagogy as a methodology in order to emphasize relationship as a practice with methods of enactment that not only can mindfully reflect identity and pedagogy, but also emotional, ethical and spiritual facets of individuals as well. As hooks says, when we engage and risk ourselves in profoundly humanized conditions, we "teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students," something she says "is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (Transgress 13).

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I propose that future research be done with developing a multifaceted definition of relationship for the classroom, theorizing ways to incorporate the concepts into our pedagogies, and enacting a practice of relationship in teaching methodologies. The goal of researching relationship in the classroom, and here I would also like to suggest writing centers as a prime spot for this kind of research, is not to necessarily immediately connect better relationships to better education. That would be skipping a step, as well as falling prey to the quantitative mindset plaguing all levels of education today, from teaching to the test to proving to administrators that writing centers and other student services are worth keeping in operation. Rather, the goal would be to investigate ways that alternative teaching and learning relationships may lead to dialogic and honest communication, increased investment in community, and increased identity definition of all involved. It would be to investigate, especially in my case, the ways practices of relationship can be used in the classroom to address societal inequities in a complex manner and to incorporate real life circumstances into the learning process in an elucidating manner. It would also be a point of interest to look at the way relationships between teachers and learners can create a better understanding of mutual goals and differing priorities that can affect the learning process, as well as foster a sense of responsibility and compassion towards others and community.

In trying to imagine how this kind of research will work, I've pictured it as an ongoing think tank of qualitative research in data collection and analysis based on

teacher and student experiences of relationship. Our considerations shouldn't reductively look for which voice-and-response moments in relationship result in "positive" or "negative" happenings, but at what kinds of things make relationship happen at all, what brings difference out into the open. We should investigate the ways relationship affects learning moments and learners, and even look twice at who is learning or perhaps missing the moments to do so.  I suspect that doing this kind of research will also uncover a need to develop a vocabulary that usefully expresses the elements of relational strategies and interactions in education.

Relationships are not quantitative. If they were, our world would look more like some version of the societies described in Equilibrium, THX 1138, or Fahrenheit 451, societies supporting human interaction emptied of relationship and emotional attachment. In fact, the point of both these films and Ray Bradbury's novel is that human emotions and relationship are not quantifiable or containable. While qualitative research is often considered limited by those attempting measurable assessment, in the case of human behavior, it is quantitative research that falls short of handling the complexities, multiplicities, and simultaneities that must be addressed and considered. Quantification has trouble with context, and education must be one of the most context packed events around.

Quantitative research methods function to ascertain facts, which, per the Age of Reason, has lent itself to frequent enshrinement in Eurocentric constructs of an available singular truth. This type of research is caught up, however innocently, in a

power dynamic that traditionally values what is seen as scientific objectivism and can lead to gross materialism, narratives of progress, and social Darwinism. I'm certainly not advocating throwing over scientific method or disputing the idea that there are no facts whatsoever (at least, not here), but I am embracing qualitative research as a method of choice in this case not just for its aptitude concerning the subject matter, but as a political choice as well. It seems to me that an embrace of alternative roles in teaching should appropriately be mirrored by our research strategies as a matter of integrity and answerability. Consider what we could call quantitative teaching versus qualitative. Quantitative teaching values statistics-based scores and assessment, "right answers" to questions, and teacher authority to enforce those right answers. As a result, it fosters grand narratives of what constitutes academic excellence or success, progress, if you will. Quantitative teaching also makes assumptions about what kinds of knowledge are worthy. Qualitative teaching, on the other hand, values assessment that attempts in various ways to understand student needs and patterns, student perspectives and experiences, the process of learning in addition to progress, and open-ended questions that encourage critical thought rather than "right answers." If I value qualitative modes of interaction, it seems reasonable that I should demonstrate those values in the kind of research I choose to conduct.

Quantitative research usually begins with a hypothesis and ends when it's been proven right or wrong, whereas qualitative research usually begins with an open-

ended question or a topic that researchers want to know more about. Along the way, as information and examples accumulate, qualitative research allows us to ask new questions and try out new hunches, adjusting to the context of the endeavors. Rather than seeking to establish some sort of "fact" or objective truth, qualitative research seeks contextual information. Its methods and orientation acknowledge subjectivity, invite culture and difference, accept variability as part of the human condition and psyche, look for patterns and codes rather than "hard" facts, and invite multiplicity and difference. Ultimately, qualitative research focuses on relationships between people, people and their beliefs, and the expression of those beliefs. Finally, in a field and subject matter which privileges the words and language use of individuals and groups, it's useful to notice that qualitative research leaves room for finding meaning in subjective words. The language of experience and situatedness leads to a privileging of the individual as opposed to the individual's place as a part of statistical constructs and measurements. In effect, we are listening to multiple narratives of experience by participants and researchers, not only looking for the patterns that we find meaningful, but also for those things the narrators find meaningful.

As I began to contemplate the most advantageous uses of qualitative research for my purposes, one of my UNC Writing Center colleagues, Ken Kolb, a graduate student in sociology, introduced several of us to grounded theory, an emergent research methodology introduced by sociologists Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss

and Juliet Corbin. While I have not yet had a chance to study grounded research in depth, there are several principles that suggest its neat fit with the kind of research that would be useful for exploring the practice of relationship as coherent methodologies. Grounded theory is dedicated to working with subjective material by prioritizing context as a guiding element. Rather than setting up a framework before information gathering, a researcher starts with a question or situation and decides upon the types of information to collect, frequently interviews. It is only after and as the information has been collected that a researcher begins to develop a coding system in response specifically to that information. It strikes me as a relational strategy that looks to interaction and context in order to recognize meaning. A researcher looks for patterns and categories, themes and trends, and associations between them. In that way, theories will emerge from the situation and standpoints of the participants.

After our discussion, we realized that a recent research project had been motivated by many of the same intentions and methods as grounded research. In spring 2005, Director of the UNC Writing Center, Kim Abels, and graduate student tutors Julie Wilson (Education), Jon Wallace (Russian History) and I launched a longitudinal study of Writing Center tutees. Our research wasn't conducted in order to measure improvement in writing, but to learn more about how students experience their tutoring sessions and the period afterwards when writing for an assignment. We wondered what we could find out about what students were

getting from their sessions and how they applied what they might have learned. We were also curious about which strategies they felt worked best for them as they continued to write. We wanted to know, essentially, what did students do after they left the Writing Center? We developed a qualitative survey for students to fill out immediately after their tutoring appointment in order to get information on how they felt about their appointment and what they planned to do as they continued writing. The survey posed the following: 1) What did you and your tutor work on?, 2) Describe your plans for working on your draft, 3) What is the most important step you think you'll take?, 4) How much time did you spend writing before you came to the Writing Center?, and 5) How much time do you think you'll spend working on your draft? A few days after their visit, we sent a second survey by email asking how it went: 1) What did you work on as you finished your draft?, 2) Describe what you did as you worked on your draft, 3) What was the most important step you took?, 4) Was there anything you planned to do but didn't, and if so, why?, and 5) How long did you spend working on your draft? The first questions of both surveys asked that students check off options from a list.

We presented preliminary findings at the 2005 SWCA Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, and continued data collecting in the fall. From spring to fall, we learned we needed to refine our questionnaires in two ways. After taking cues from student answers to what they thought were important steps and what they did as they worked on their draft, we added more options for the first questions. We tried

to use language that reflected theirs in addition to tutorly speech, and added a few

options that we had not thought of ourselves. We also realized we had to be more

specific about how much time they were spending on their papers, specifying that

we were curious about the time they spent only after they left the Writing Center. In

this way, we used participant narrative of experience and context to adapt our

research more specifically to the situation at hand.

After collecting questionnaires, we color coded similar responses, looking for

trends and patterns in experience, including choice of words and composing

strategies. We kept a weather eye out for descriptions of student experience that

challenged our assumptions, as well. We compared student responses from the first

questionnaire to the second and all student responses to each question. The wealth

of information was a bit staggering. Among other things, we discovered that

students described following through with the plans they had laid out in the first

questionnaire, including time they would spend on the draft; that reading out loud

was an important tool; that students planning to work on lower order concerns often

worked on global concerns once they left the center; and that students spent less

time revising than we had previously perceived, one to two hours. In time, we were

able to recognize three major categories of post-appointment composition: re-

reading, re-envisioning, and revising. As a result of coding and categorization, we

were able to do some revision of our own tutoring processes. We realized that we

should ask more specifically how much time they planned to spend on a paper after

leaving. Asking a student how much time they have to work on a paper before it's due is not tantamount to how much time she plans or is actually able to work on it. We also decided to pay closer attention to constructing a concrete plan for students to take away with them since their time limits were so frequently constrained.

Grounded research can combine multiple narratives and types of narratives to glean information and form theories about a situation or event as well. For instance, in future research towards a methodology of relationship, which will include classrooms and writing centers, I will employ a participatory research element. As a researcher, I will enlist the point of view of participants when it comes to my coding and conclusions. We know that a researcher's point of view is also subjective, and this is one way to provide a check on her interpretations. Another way to gather more cross-checking data is to involve multiple observers or observers of researcher interviews, for instance. Other relevant information sources for teachers interested in this project would include ethnographies of relationship in the classroom, both student and teacher accounts of experience, and student interviews by someone other than the teacher. Additional areas of research could include feminist theory on relational ethics and community, psychological studies on cognitive dissonance and stages of self-definition, liberation pedagogy, and experiential learning studies.

Even working with both the idea of a methodology of relationship and the use of grounded or other emergent research requires an openness to difference and narratives of experience. We as teacher/researchers will have to be vigilant about

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creating and maintaining an identity that allows us to research without making assumptions about student motivations, abilities, and priorities, even as much as to hypothesize. Conducting grounded research could be rather like living within questions and occupying mindfully a space of not knowing that works against monolithic and objectifying constructions of teacher, student, classroom, researcher, researched, and assessment. Research offers us another salient arena in which to enact humanizing efforts for ourselves, our students, and ourselves as students. It is a place to testify with careful answerability. The narratives of humans are not for scholars; the narratives of humans are for the world to relate. My black umbrella is hanging by its brown finished wooden handle on the brace of the second unfinished wooden bar in the middle of my closet, in the back. Rebel, rebel, rebel.

# ☙ Student Sutra, Teacher Manifesto

☙ If you want to learn, teach.

☙ If you want to teach, stop being the teacher.

☙ A student deserves respectful responses.

☙ A teacher will learn respect through compassion and humility.

☙ A student has a good mind.

☙ A teacher will learn what speaks to it and how to hear it respond.

☙ A student may speak differently.

☙ A teacher will learn a new language.

☙ A student makes decisions using a reasonable rationale.

☙ A teacher will learn a new standpoint.

☙ A student cares.

☙ A teacher will learn about what.

☙ A student's well-being is important.

☙ A teacher will learn to be human.


**Practice:**

Hambone with the Hotei, empty your teacup, get the stone out of your head, ask the mindful question, and the next, and the next, remember your umbrella, keep it honest, keep it humble, brave the sea, bring your heart, go to the marrow, jam master it, "handle" it, burn the damn bootstraps, emancipate yourself, reposition

yourself, shout out in response, take your human's stand, risk it all, and rebel for the

revolution innerside. Katz!

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