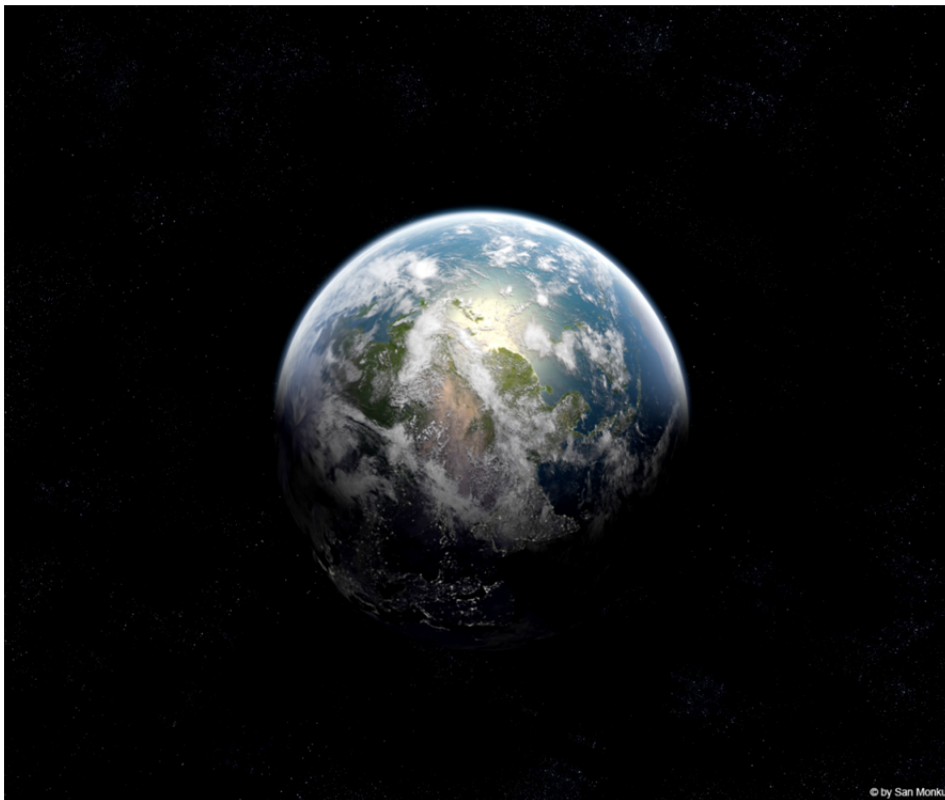


“We Ain’t Dead Yet!”

Sustaining Hope and Vitality in Teacher Education

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Introduction

I am honored to have been asked to give the 2014 William E. Drake Lecture.¹ The Society of Philosophy and History of Education has meant a lot to me. It has been a place to meet wonderful people, explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and receive thoughtful feedback without fear of ridicule. SOPHE has also been a place to present with my graduate advisees and to collaborate with colleagues not only from Oklahoma but across the country.

At SOPHE I have become part of an authentic intellectual community. I have been welcomed even though I am not formally trained as an educational philosopher, historian, or sociologist. Prior to entering the teacher profession, I worked as a group counselor – essentially a guard – in a large juvenile hall in central California. Before that I worked on a youth ward in a psychiatric hospital. My formal academic background is in the visual arts and curriculum and instruction, and I am always a little nervous combining traditional scholarship with personal teaching experiences, student artwork, fictional literature, and references to popular culture in an effort to develop a coherent argument.

I will admit that I was greatly reassured during one of my first SOPHE presentations when David Snelgrove provided personal insight on the art of public speaking. Prior to my session I privately, somewhat urgently, confided, “I don’t think I’m ready,” to which David replied, “My philosophy is that *something* will happen.” Although tongue-in-cheek, these words helped me relax and allowed me not to take myself quite so seriously. Experiences like these have helped immensely in my ability to present my work before my peers.

¹ This lecture was initially developed as a presentation and later formatted as a paper.

In today's talk I want to focus on the need for hope and vitality in teacher education in order to continue coping with the challenges we encounter in schools and society. I argue that we can generate hope and vitality by managing self-expectations, negotiating the relationship between critique and possibility, and acknowledging critical epistemological factors underlying our most fundamental challenges. However, this will require habits of mind that resist absolute and binary thinking, utilization of our capacity for humor, continued activity and celebration of hard won accomplishments, and ongoing creation and maintenance of authentic educational communities for our students and ourselves.

New Challenges

Most of us are aware of the traditional challenges in our profession. However, I want to begin by talking about new challenges that only became evident to me during the last couple of years. At a college faculty meeting we were divided into breakout sessions roughly consisting of "new" faculty, "more advanced" faculty, and "seasoned veterans." For the first time, I found myself sitting in the "seasoned veterans" group. This designation was disconcertingly consistent with the fact that I had recently been referred to as an "elder statesman" and that I had even begun hearing rumors of my impending retirement. I had never seen myself as "elder" or "seasoned," I had never considered retiring, and I was not quite sure how or when all of this had happened!

During our breakout session, a number of issues were identified, including the challenges of staying motivated, being valued by younger faculty, and coping

with misunderstandings of our motives and actions. Some of the strongest concerns involved loss of institutional memory and historical understanding, lack of critical distance, faculty assimilation for personal and professional gain, and loss of understanding of the relationship between information and wisdom. Some of these concerns reminded me of an exchange in Michael Crichton's (1990) novel, *Jurassic Park*, in which an exasperated mathematician, Ian Malcolm, explains to the impatient InGen owner, John Hammond:

Scientific power is like inherited wealth: attained without discipline. You read what others have done, and you take the next step. You can do it very young. You can make progress very fast. There is no discipline lasting many decades. There is no mastery: old scientists are ignored. There is no humility before nature. There is only a get-rich-quick, make-a-name-for-yourself-fast philosophy ...No one will criticize you...They are all trying to do the same thing. (p. 306)



Figure 1. Logo based on Michael Crichton's (1990) novel, *Jurassic Park*.

The break-out session was disconcerting. I had never seen myself as “seasoned” (in my mind's eye, I have always been somewhere between 19 and 35, in spite of what the mirror tells me), and I had seldom considered factors such as striving to remain valued by younger faculty or justifying my continued presence in the college or the profession. The thought occurred to me that about

the time we begin to realize some of our highest professional aspirations, others may begin to see us as obsolete. I endorsed the seasoned veterans' decision to entitle our breakout report "We ain't dead yet!"

Old Challenges

Of course, realizing that new challenges exist does not negate the fact that there are still plenty of old problems in need of attention, including powerful, institutionalized structures that disproportionately impact students and untenured faculty. Other concerns include the ongoing (and accelerating) corporatization of education (Apple, 1979; McNeil, 2000; Houser, Krutka, Province, Coerver and Pennington, 2013); continued denials of structural inequities (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1972, 1977; Freire, 1970/1999; McIntosh, 1989; Nieto, 2000); devastation of indigenous populations as well as the environment (Houser, 2014; Quinn, 1992; Shepard, 1982); persistent belief in educational panaceas (such as the use of behavioral objectives, high stakes testing, online teaching, and some pretty bizarre combinations therein) (Lagemann, 1989; McNeil, 2000; Postman, 1992); seemingly perpetual cultures of educational "reform" and "accountability" (Houser, et al., 2013); surveillance and hegemony in public education (Foucault, 1977; Gramsci, 1990); and relentless efforts to "define the situation," shape the narrative, and naturalize the results (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006).

If simply listing these concerns is distressing, attempting to resolve them can be overwhelming! In 1939 Virginia Woolf described the work of women, traditionally expected to manage an infinity of time-consuming domestic

obligations, as “clawing through the cotton wool of daily life” (1939/1976, p. 72). Although the profession currently consists of women and men, both the minutiae and the gravity of working in a caregiving profession can be daunting. As Ruth Behar (1996) noted, we are living in an age of “compassion fatigue” (p. 86).

Here I am reminded of a brief conversation with Lucy Bailey a few years ago. It began something like this:

“How’s everything going?”

“Ugh! I feel like curling up into a fetal position.”

The following year we resumed our discussion:

“How’s everything going?”

“About the same as last year!”

Among all the problems we currently face, I am perhaps most concerned with how we, as teachers, students, and society in general, can keep ourselves going without succumbing to debilitating cynicism or despair on the one hand, or equally debilitating shallowness on the other hand (Ayers, Mitchie, and Rome, 2004). How can we avoid acquiescing to the fatalistic sense of inevitability of which Maxine Greene (1988) warned nearly 30 years ago, wherein human-created problems are perceived as being “hopelessly there”? (p. 22).

Ironically, it may be our “best and our brightest,” our most critical, caring, and reflective practitioners, who are least likely to survive in the profession. This is not because they do not wish to teach, but because they keenly perceive that what currently passes for “teaching” is but a pale reflection of what is necessary and possible. It is they who are most susceptible to developing empathy fatigue and ultimately dropping out of the profession, while those who fail to recognize

anything is amiss, who live what Milan Kundera (1984) calls an “unbearable lightness of being,” may still proceed relatively unscathed in an increasingly suffocating educational milieu.

Hope and Vitality in Teacher Education

What can be done to address these issues? How can we, in teacher education, generate the hope and vitality needed to continue asking these questions? Based on my own experiences as well as the literature with which most of us are familiar, I believe several things can be done. Among other things, we need to: (1) manage our self-expectations; (2) negotiate the relationships between critique and possibility; (3) acknowledge the sources of our most fundamental problems; (4) utilize our capacity for humor; (5) continue to move, and to celebrate our accomplishments; and (6) support community and other spaces of growth for our students and ourselves.

Managing Self-Expectations

One thing we can do to sustain our vitality is to better manage our self-expectations. Tremendous weight is experienced by educators at all levels. I strongly agree with the adage: “We cannot do everything, but we must do something.” Yet, failure to come to terms with the fact that we cannot do everything undermines our ability to care for ourselves *or* others. Here, selfish as it may seem, I am reminded of the international flight attendant’s injunction, in case of an emergency, to place the oxygen mask on oneself before attempting to

assist others. My own preference is to identify a few areas in which I believe I can make a difference, strive to do them exceptionally well, and let as much as possible of the rest of it go without placing undue responsibility my peers.

I also think it is important to preserve some of our energy for investment in the future. Many of us are deeply committed to our lifework and wish to “keep it up” and “pass it on.” I think in terms of preserving roughly 5-10% of my time and energy for investment in the future. However, such investments cannot occur if there is nothing left at the end of the day. It is difficult to know how many of those whose lives have ended prematurely may have expected more of themselves than they could reasonably have been expected to give.

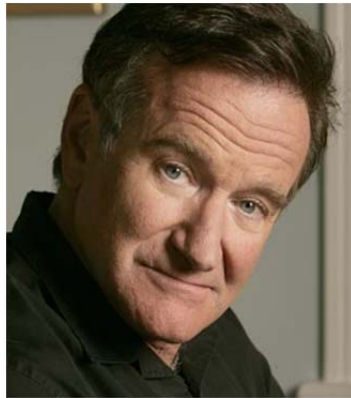


Figure 2. Robin Williams (1951-2014).

Negotiating Critique and Possibility

Another way to maintain hope and vitality is to negotiate the relationship between critique and possibility (Freire, 1970/1999, 1992; Giroux, 1985; Greene, 1988). Concerned educators have long advocated a critical orientation. In 1960, James Baldwin wrote the following in *A Talk to Teachers*:

The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look

at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. (1960/1988, p. 4)



Figure 3. James Baldwin (1924-1987).

A decade later, Paulo Freire (1970/1999) published his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, calling for the development of critical consciousness. Consistent with the aims of scholars like Baldwin (1960/1988) and Freire (1970/1999), many educators have sought to promote a sense of critical consciousness in and through their teaching. In my case, I have pursued these goals through my classes in social studies and integrated arts education.

A regular assignment in my integrated arts education class for elementary preservice teachers involves using art to engage in social critique and critical reflection. Essentially, I ask my students to identify and represent (via various artistic media) a problematic social norm or institution they believe ought to be carefully examined. Over the years students have identified various norms and institutions including gender stereotyping (Figure 4) (Butler, 1990; Kilbourne, 2012), racial discrimination (Banks, 1989; Nieto, 2000), social indoctrination

(Foucault, 1977; Gramsci, 1990), hidden curricula and secret education (Anyon, 1979; Christenson, 1994), manipulative media marketing (McChesney, 2013), international exploitation via colonization and neocolonialism (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1987, 1995), and various challenges involving social media.



Figure 4. Project depicting the silencing and judging of women and girls.

Many elementary education majors have chosen to explore ways in which women and girls are represented in the media. In Figure 4, a child's doll is covered with eyes, indicating surveillance and judgment, her mouth is taped shut, suggesting silencing, she is strapped to her chair, indicating that she must mind her place, and a tag has been pinned to her foot stating "Lie about your age."

Others have also explored issues of control and conformity. The student in Figure 5 utilized the Tetris computer game to express her thoughts regarding external pressures to conform. Her captions include: Where do you invest your WORTH? What is your STANDARD? Determine your future, BUT make sure that it makes you look "perfect."



Figure 5. Art project critiquing external pressures to conform.

Similar views were communicated by another student who added financial success, domesticity, and child-rearing to her list of external expectations (Figure 6). Set in a living room with exquisite wallpaper but shattered windows, an



Figure 6. Pressures to marry, raise children, and become financially successful. expectant “Barbie Doll mother” reclines on a pile of pink and blue books labeled with dollar signs. The book in her hand is entitled “My Baby the Successful.”

In addition to the imposition of external expectations, students have also explored issues of racism, religious domination and intolerance, and colonial and neocolonial relationships. In Figure 7 an international doctoral student depicts her



Figure 7. Art project on the history of colonization in Taiwan.

island home, labeled with names such as Taiwan, Taipei, Ila Formosa (“Beautiful Island”), and ROC (Republic of China). According to the student, her island, displayed behind dark vertical bars, has been officially named at least twenty-two times during its 400 year colonial history, not once by its indigenous inhabitants.

Another doctoral student, whose father was Jordanian and mother was a US citizen, used various color combinations, symbolic devices, and organic and geometric designs to represent aspects of her personal, social, and professional identity (Figure 8). The student was born and raised in Jordan until she was eleven, moved to the US where she attended middle school and high school, eventually married a Jordanian citizen and, at the time of the class, had begun

raising a family in the heart of the southern Midwestern US. Some of the tensions she experienced are represented in a powerful poem addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (immediately following Figure 8).



Figure 8. Constructing identity and equity in a colonized world.

A Tear

With a tear, I glance to the West.
 I see our neighbors standing with you,
 Working at training their young,
 Maneuvering through the motions of caring for their own,
 And teaching their disinterested sons to always look for more.
 My gaze slowly shifts.
 I see your eyes focused on me.
 I cannot deny the fires that ruined your home.
 I will not refute the injustice in the flames in that ripped through your sanctuary.
 But when you jumped to escape the blaze, your body fell on mine.
 You broke my legs and leaped forward unaware,
 Only concerned with finding new hope.
 When I showed you my pain, you dismissed my cries.
 When I cried some more, you asked me to be silent.
 When I would not be silent, you smashed my arm.
 When I still would not be silent, you crushed the other.

And then they came, our neighbors from the West,
 Ready to help you rebuild, but dismissing my surging hurt.
 And now their children ask why.
 Why do I hold a match at your door?
 And I wonder what you tell them as a victim of wrong.
 Can you give reason for the new flame at your gate?
 Do you feel the fire you lit in my hand?

Finally, in recent years, strong concerns have emerged regarding the uses, abuses, and effects of various forms of social media. Students have identified tendencies for users to exaggerate their status, manipulate their appearance, and enhance their personal accomplishments through interactive media such as Facebook. They have also discussed the excoriation of strangers simply because it could be done anonymously, fear to engage in face-to-face conversation due to lack of practice, and reluctance to communicate even with loved ones due simply to a desire not to be bothered.

Figure 9 depicts two family members, physically present but emotionally disconnected. Both are plugged into personal communication devices, unsuccessfully attempting to bridge their differences via social media. One figure's thought bubble includes words and phrases such as: Lonely. Replaced. How does this look to our children? Would he still love me without the alcohol? When will he spend time with me sober? I wish he would get help? The other figure's thought bubble states: Anger. Abandonment. I wish he'd come visit. I wish he cared more. I wish I didn't have to win his approval. Am I not good enough? Is money more important to him than I am?



Figure 9. Coping with emotional disconnection via social media.

As important as it is to critique society, it is imperative to engage in critical reflection, to reflect on *our* thoughts and actions, to interrogate our *own* beliefs and assumptions. For Dewey, reflection was the most elevated form of inquiry, involving “active, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions toward which it tends” (1938, p. 87). Following Dewey, scholars like Freire (1970/1999), Noddings (2004), and McIntosh (1989) have placed a premium on *critical* reflection, utilizing reflection to interrogate personal beliefs and activities, weighing them against ethical standards of justice and equality.

Since social critique and critical reflection are both vitally important, I ask my students (and expect myself) not merely to interrogate problematic societal norms, but to consider ways in which we may also, albeit perhaps unintentionally, contribute to their perpetuation. Moreover, since the point is not simply to expose our students to the value of critique and reflection, but to nurture these habits and

pass them along, I also urge them to envision ways to foster critique and reflection among *their* students, and to essentially keep it up and pass it on ad infinitum.

The student in Figure 10 demonstrated both social critique and critical reflection regarding the problem of scapegoating. (The poem is enlarged in Appendix A.)



Figure 10. Art project expressing social critique and critical reflection.

As opposition to social criticism mounted during the 1970s, and as social activists and concerned educators grew increasingly fatigued, it became clear that critique alone was insufficient. What was needed, according to some, was a way to continue addressing problematic social conditions without ultimately devolving into cynicism, despair, or exhaustion. In 1970, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* answered the call, combining a hard-hitting language of critique with a more nurturing language of community, relationship, hope, and possibility.

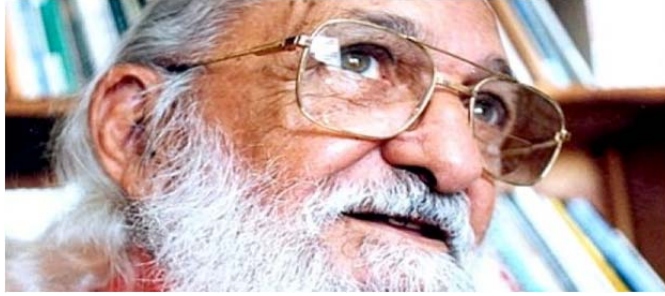


Figure 11. Paulo Freire (1921-1997).

Others followed Freire’s lead. In 1985, Henry Giroux called for both a language of critique and a language of possibility to help teachers become “transformative intellectuals” (p. 376), and in 1988 Maxine Greene combined



Figure 12. Maxine Greene (1917-2014).

social critique and the power of imagination in a dialectical quest for the “achievement of freedom by people in search of themselves” (p. xi).

Inspired by these works, I spent considerable time negotiating the relationship between critique and possibility both in my teaching and in my personal life and philosophical worldview. Yet, leery of succumbing to false consciousness, it has been difficult for me to see possibilities rather than limitations in many social and educational situations.

Turning to the arts, I began playing with the idea of foregrounding possibility while back-grounding (but not eliminating) critique. In the arts, some information is inevitably emphasized while other information is subordinated; nonetheless, all information is important to the larger composition. Experienced artists are as attentive to the background as they are the foreground, even though the foreground may be the primary focal point. Perhaps, I reasoned, I could begin to change the equation by shifting my primary focus to a dialectical search for new possibilities while using critique as a means of informing the search.

About this time a critical young English teacher, enrolled in one of my graduate courses, gave a compelling presentation on how he thought classroom practitioners should respond to the current crisis in public education. Time and again he returned to a simple idea: “We need to tell them what we need.” The message resonated. Of course. We need to tell them what we need. We need to *tell* them, in ways they can hear, what we *need* – for the good of their children, our citizens, our society and world. Here was a concrete example of what I sought: positive action informed by critical understanding in search of better alternatives.

I recalled Maxine Greene’s (1988) discussion of the idea that imagining what is possible is a necessary precursor to recognizing an obstacle *as* an obstacle. Until there is a perceived possibility that things could be otherwise, an “obstacle,” by definition, does not exist. Conversely, as we begin to imagine possibilities, obstacles materialize and must be addressed. Here was a new place for social critique and critical reflection. Having begun to change my own orientation, I was finally in a position to share these ideas with others. With a primary emphasis on

imagining and enacting better alternatives, critical insight could be gained in route to student implementation of their own evolving ideas.

Figure 13 represents a student's thoughts on learning to accept ourselves as we are rather than striving to be someone else. This was a positive effort to actually *address* previously-stated concerns involving external pressures to conform. Although the project did not identify deeper social or psychological sources of the problem (e.g., desires for control), it did represent a legitimate



Figure 13. Art project on the importance of accepting ourselves as we are.

response to a tangible situation, and it opened a way for further discussion of the nature of the problem and viable solutions.

Another effort to imagine and enact viable alternatives focused on the need for connectedness (Figure 14). Based on the idea that “no man is an island,” a lone woman stands on an island, supported by an elaborate but invisible community. The student argued that maybe it is time to emphasize greater societal

dependence rather than *independence*. Here again the primary emphasis was on what could be *done*, while a secondary emphasis addressed what was wrong.



Figure 14. Art project on the need for community and connectedness.

Finally, the students in Figures 15 and 16 addressed self-expectations and ways to organize our lives. The student in Figure 15 explained that she had always striven to do everything perfectly, as exemplified by her perfect white box, and that she willingly sought and accepted the praise she received for her various accomplishments. However, in spite of her achievements she was not happy living to fulfill others' expectations. Resolved to begin living more for herself, her newfound freedom is expressed with bright swatches of paint freely distributed throughout the inside of her box. Along similar lines, the student in Figure 16 addressed personal challenges of living by the clock. Like the student in Figure 15, she seriously reconsidered her self-expectations regarding how to organize her life.



Figure 15 (left). Art project critiquing striving for perfection.
 Figure 16 (right). Art project critiquing being ruled by the clock.

Acknowledging the Sources of our Problems

Beyond monitoring self-expectations and negotiating critique and possibility, another source of hope and vitality involves understanding and acknowledging the sources of our most fundamental problems. I realize this assertion may seem paradoxical. Our problems are substantial, and understanding their magnitude can be truly disheartening. Yet, failure to be honest with ourselves can lead to an unsettling but accurate feeling that we are not privy to all we need to know. Like a patient avoiding news of a critical condition, false consciousness may delay, but cannot eliminate, the ultimate need to reckon with reality.

A fundamental source of our current condition involves the ways we think about the world. While it seems natural to many to attempt to isolate precise causes and solutions, others believe the challenges we face and their long-term solutions are complex and interconnected (Capra, 1996; Devall & Sessions, 1985; McIntosh, 1989; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1987, 1995; Spretnak, 1997; Merchant, 1994; Naess,

1973). According to ecological philosopher Fritjof Capra (1996), there are profound inconsistencies between our perceptions of the world and the nature of the world:

The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are interconnected and interdependent. For example, stabilizing world population will be possible only when poverty is reduced worldwide. The extinction of animal and plant species on a massive scale will continue as long as the Southern Hemisphere is burdened by massive debts. Scarcities of resources and environmental degradation combine with rapidly expanding populations to lead to the breakdown of local communities and to the ethnic and tribal violence that has become the main characteristic of the post-cold war era. Ultimately these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a *crisis of perception*. It derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world. (pp. 3-4, emphasis mine)

For Capra, our modern mechanistic and hierarchical view of an organic world constitutes a serious “crisis of perception.” He suggests that the world can more accurately be understood as a vast web of organic systems based on horizontal rather than hierarchical interconnections and interdependencies. Of course, the mere existence of analysis and hierarchy is not the problem. The problem is not with their existence, but with their prevalence. However, because many of our current imbalances have developed slowly over a period of centuries, there is a lack of awareness both of their presence and their destructiveness. Reliance on absolute and dualistic forms of thinking has emphasized isolation and competition at the expense of connectedness and community. Unfortunately, there is but a short distance between dualistic thinking and hierarchical thinking, and

hierarchical thinking has provided an intellectual foundation for domination and control (Fleener, 2002).

Among other things, the modern worldview is characterized by a relentless quest for certainty (Dewey, 1929; Dewey & Bentley, 1949) and is grounded in both absolute universalism and the dualistic logic of structuralism. While the former is perpetuated by grand theorizing, positivist science, and single vision, the latter limits our ability to think beyond either/or all-or-nothing categories such as good/bad, black/white, up/down, inside/outside, male/female, normal/abnormal. The perspectives work in concert, reinforcing an absolute and universal notion of reality.

Although a few educational theorists began seriously questioning the merits of universalism during the latter half of the 20th century (following two world wars and a devastating depression), critiques of absolutism may be as old as the history of thought itself. For example, Taoist wisdom, practiced for centuries by peasants in China before compilation in Lao Tsu's classic *Tao te Ching*, emphasizes principles of moderation, compassion, humility, unfinished potential, uncertainty, irreducibility, and harmony with nature as means of following the way or path of life. Related principles can be found in indigenous philosophies from Sub-Saharan Africa (Nyerere, 1968) to North America (Deloria, 1999; McLuhan, 1972), and the debate between absolute and relative ontological perspectives practically defines the history of Western philosophy (Roochnik, 2004).

Others, too, have challenged absolute universalism. Nineteenth century artist and poet William Blake (Figures 17 & 18) spent his adult life denouncing

single vision and embracing a much greater degree of interconnectedness and ambiguity than was embodied in the prevalent worldview of his time. In the poem



Figure 17 (left). William Blake (1757-1827).

Figure 18 (right). William Blake, *Ancient of days*.

below, part of a letter to Thomas Butt (dated November 22, 1802), Blake objects to the literalism of the Newtonian mindset:

Single Vision and Newton's Sleep

Now I a fourfold vision see,
 And a fourfold vision is given to me,
 Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
 And three fold in soft Beulah's night,
 And twofold Always.
 May God us keep From Single vision & Newton's sleep.

Rather than reducing meaning to single vision, Blake sees complexity and connection in virtually everything. Nowhere is this more evident than in the first few lines of perhaps his most famous poem:

Auguries of Innocence

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour...

Powerful deconstructions can sometimes be found in the most improbable places. In James Clavell's (1975) *Shogun*, set near the end of the Elizabethan era, an English pilot and Dutch crew are stranded off the coast of the forbidden Japanese islands. Taken into captivity, Blackthorn, the pilot, is confronted with a worldview entirely unlike his own. Embedded in a tumultuous tale of violence and intrigue, a tragic romance slowly develops between Blackthorn and Mariko, a samurai woman duty-bound to another. Blackthorn, accustomed to possessing what he desires, gradually begins to lose his center. Realizing the impossibility of his circumstances, including his love for Mariko and his plans for the future, he desperately casts about for solutions. Mariko assures him:

Look at this sunset, it's beautiful, neh? This sunset exists. Tomorrow does not exist. There is only *now*. Please look... (It will never happen ever again, never, not *this* sunset, never in all infinity. Lose yourself in it, make yourself one with nature and do not worry about karma. (p. 452)

Recognizing the liabilities of questing for certainty and perceiving possibility inherent in irreducible complexity, contemporary scholars have begun to address similar issues. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands* explores profound physical, geographical, social, psychological, religious, sexual, and linguistic tensions and ambiguities that can exist for those who have been displaced within

their homes and homelands. Anzaldua raises grave questions about the modernist proclivity to isolate, dichotomize, reduce, and control. How is it decided, for example, that the very land upon which a people are born should no longer be available for use either by them or their descendants? Who is entitled to determine who “owns” the land, the water, the sky?

In the end, Anzaldua defiantly claims her right – as *Chicana*, as *tejana*, as a “*new mestiza*” – to construct her *own* identity, never yielding to the reductions of others. Paradoxically, it is not in *spite* of the borderlands that Anzaldua can claim this right, but *because* of the borderlands that such an act is possible at all:

(O)nce again I recognize that the internal tension of oppositions can propel (if it doesn’t tear apart) the *mestiza* writer....an agent of transformation, able to modify and shape primordial energy and therefore able to change herself and others. (1987, pp. 96-7)

Others also eschew dreams of certainty, searching instead for meaning and possibility beyond conventional boundaries. Edward Said, Palestinian American



Figure 19 (left). Gloria Anzaldua (1942-2004).
Figure 20 (right). Edward Said (1935-2003).

author of *Orientalism* (1978), has explored the tenuous issue of how to position oneself within an academic organization. Unwilling to become either a fully enfranchised insider (beholden to the institution) or a disenfranchised outsider (relegated to the margins of society), Said takes the position of an “organic border intellectual,” standing always one foot in the institution and the other with the people he serves (Giroux, cited in Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006, p. 184). Scholars like Gloria Anzaldua and Edward Said resist subjective reduction, embracing instead the irreducible possibility that resides in the borderlands.

How does modern mechanistic and hierarchical thought relate to maintaining hope and vitality in teacher education? In my view there may be no more debilitating factor in the struggle for meaningful social, environmental, or educational change than our continual default to modernist thought. All-or-nothing thinking tells us, in essence, that if we cannot do everything, we may as well do nothing. Although we often apply such thinking to large-scale problems involving others, would this ever be an acceptable standard applied to ourselves or to those *we* love? Would it be acceptable for our physician to say, “I can’t save everyone, so I may as well not save you” (or your son or daughter, or mother or father)? Or for one of our teachers to conclude, “I can’t educate everyone, so I may as well not educate your child”?

I have never endured the magnitude of displacement and alienation described by Anzaldua, but I can appreciate the relief she must have felt in refusing to submit to others’ constructions. In my own experience it has been exhausting to presume that for every question there must exist an answer, that

these truths can and should be known, and that, as an agent of truth, I must know them and defend them against all challengers. It has been a tremendous relief to relinquish such assumptions, to consider that many truths may exist (cf., Kierkegaard's notion of truth as subjectivity), or that no truths may exist (e.g., metaphysical nihilism), and that I need not articulate and defend my own views of reality. By relinquishing my need to "know" with certainty, I have been able to consider more information, from more sources, than would ever have been possible before.

While modernist thought has been highly problematic, novelist/provocateur Daniel Quinn (1992, 1996) suggests that our challenges may be even greater than many have imagined. Among other things, Quinn explores the processes by which ancient agriculturists, once a tiny fraction of the human community, gradually expanded and imposed their ways of life upon others. Initial efforts to accommodate a growing population – the inevitable consequence of an expanding food supply – led to increasingly aggressive attempts to acquire additional land and resources. In turn, these additional resources supported the growing population. The inexorable need for additional resources eventually led to the development of totalitarian agricultural practices. Like other totalitarian entities, this new and growing "culture" utilized specialized mechanisms to eliminate its competition, including the annihilation of opposing perspectives and life-styles. What began as a novel way of life gradually evolved into a dominant worldview based on principles of acquisition, expansion, consumption, and control.

After thousands of years of expansion, this acquisitive agricultural worldview has finally prevailed on every continent – north, south, east, and west. While other cultural distinctions may persist, few remaining members of the human community have been able to resist adopting the basic premises of totalitarian agriculture. With time and repetition, a basic orientation anathema to human sustainability has become not merely the *prevalent* way of life, but the *only* way of life acceptable to its proponents. Totalitarian agriculture continues to expand, passing from generation to generation through mechanisms of social transmission and cultural invasion. The supreme irony, for Quinn, is that the destruction of alternative cultural perspectives has left us with only “one right way to live” – and such uniformity is the single greatest threat to the community of life (Quinn, 1992, p. 205).

The sheer historical expanse of the evolutionary process offers further insight as to how it may be possible for current problems to be so recognizable yet so difficult to understand and accept. Many contemporary perspectives are based on institutionalized assumptions that are invisible to their adherents. Further complicating matters, humans often construct explanations of reality that legitimize their own perspectives while discrediting others (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). With the passage of time, these explanations come to be seen as objective facts rather than social constructions.² Once subjective beliefs are construed as “objective reality” – as simply “the way things are” – further examination is considered pointless. As long as no serious threat challenges the

² This is the process of reification, which “implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 89). Reification, false-consciousness, and bad faith are closely related concepts.

perception that existing beliefs are objectively real, it is possible to act confidently and unreflectively on the basis of these assumptions.

Thus, although some problems are certainly the result of conscious indiscretion, others involve genuine lack of awareness (Anyon, 1979; Baldwin, 1988; Freire, 1970/1999; McIntosh, 1989). Unfortunately, today's institutionalized mechanisms of social and environmental destruction are among the factors about which many remain unaware. For this reason, Quinn (1992) argues that we are "captives of a civilizational system that more or less compels [us] to go on destroying the world in order to live." We cannot escape because we are "unable to find the bars of the cage" (p. 25).

It is natural to feel frustrated as conditions become increasingly grim. However, our students possess varying degrees of experience and concern, and we must continue to identify and utilize their prior understandings. Returning to the artwork discussed earlier, issues of domination and assimilation were addressed in student projects on societal and familial pressure, and problematic gender construction was addressed in at least two of the projects utilizing dolls. Principles of ecological thought were present in the project based on the theme that "no man is an island," and the idea of living within our means was introduced by the student who suggested learning to accept ourselves as we are. Problems of false consciousness were present in the "scapegoating" poem, and even the management of self-expectations was addressed in works such as the perfect white box and the challenges of being ruled by time.

Exercising Humor

Another means of sustaining hope and vitality in teacher education involves the exercise of humor. I cannot think of a single member of the SOPHE community who does not take his or her work seriously. Nor can I think of a member who does not find humor in work and life! Humor is essential because it provides much needed relief from tension (Mead, 1934). It can also act as a form of criticism that garners less attention than more “serious” social critique. Thus, in the recent anarchist drama *V for Vendetta*, popular comedian Gordon Deitrich gets away with considerable political lampooning before ultimately succumbing to governmental tyranny. Similarly, contemporary comedians like Jon Stewart, Dennis Miller, Stephen Colbert, and Bill Marr, who also engage in scathing political satire, receive less scrutiny than do their more prosaic counterparts precisely because their medium is “comedy.”

According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), humor has historically had a grounding, renewing, and democratizing effect on society. Bakhtin meticulously traces the history of laughter in European society, particularly vulgar, bawdy, “lower stratum” humor, epitomized by sixteenth century humorist and philosopher Francois Rabelais and associated with Medieval carnival, travesty, puppetry, street festivals, and side show barkers. Bakhtin argues that lower stratum folk humor, originating with and perpetuated by the masses, has historically had a cumulative effect of undermining social hierarchies, deflating and even occasionally overturning stodgy, self-important officialdom. More recent parallels might include the twentieth century Theater of the Absurd (Houser, 2006), certain venues of standup comedy, and especially irreverent, tongue-in-cheek, carnivalesque

television programs like *The Simpson's*, *South Park*, *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, and the *Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert.

To understand Bakhtin's claim that humor can have a democratizing effect, undermining social hierarchies and deflating stodgy officialdom, consider a common educational parallel. What teacher has not at some time or another observed a student furtively smile and catch a classmate's eye? We instinctively understand that these exchanges are not intended for us. Indeed, they often occur at our expense! Similarly, principals, superintendents, department chairs, and deans realize that they are not the intended audience for the suppressed smiles and stealthy glances of faculty and staff. Bakhtin might suggest that these are mild instantiations of the age-old impulse for human beings to preserve the dignity and the authorship of their lives. The cumulative effect is to check institutionalized hierarchies, continually returning social authority to its base.

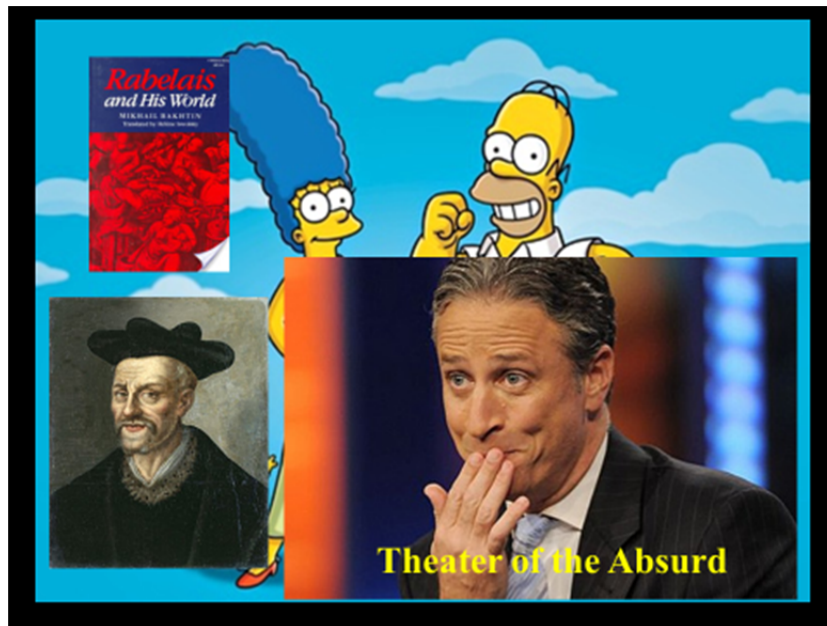


Figure 21. Francois Rabelais (left); Jon Stewart (right).
Moving and Celebrating

Yet another way to preserve hope and vitality in teacher education is to continue to move, and to celebrate hard won efforts and accomplishments. Contemporary scholars associate various forms of action and hope. Maxine Greene (1988, 1995), for example, explores complex relationships between the creation of physical, social, psychological, and dialectical spaces and the imagining and enacting of new possibilities. Cornell West (1997), on the other hand, explains that many African Americans whose ancestors arrived on the continent in chains have historically associated movement with hope. A small action (of mind or body) can be a prelude to a larger action, which can lead to greater action still. The critical moment, the vital line of demarcation, is between moving and not moving. Without the initial impulse and tentative first step, no subsequent action can follow. This basic realization, essential in the continued struggle for freedom, challenges the paralyzing logic that we must either do everything at once or nothing at all.

In John Steinbeck's (1939) classic *The Grapes of Wrath*, young Tom Joad, recently released from prison, has managed to survive through keen observation, keeping his nose out of other people's business, and simply "puttin' one foot in front a the other" (p. 223). Joining his family in the move to California, Tom notes the searching reflection of the strange Reverend Casy. Unable to deny the results of Casy's relentless "figgerin'," Joad gradually perceives the mechanisms, powerful and subtle, by which the "Okies" are kept subservient first in Oklahoma, and finally in California.

Confronted by Casy with the need to expand the scope of his concern, Tom acknowledges a philosophy of personal survival, “I’m jus’ puttin’ one foot in front a the other. I done it at Mac for four years, jus’ marchin’ in cell an’ out cell an’ in mess an’ out mess....Couldn’t think a nothin’ in there, else you go stir happy....An’ by Christ that goes for the rest of it! I ain’t gonna worry...”

“They’s gonna come somepin outa all these folks goin’ wes’—outa all their farms lef’ lonely. They’s gonna’ come a thing that’s gonna change the whole country.”

Tom said, “I’m still layin’ my dogs down one at a time.”

“Yeah, but when a fence comes up at ya, ya gonna climb that fence.”

“I climb fences when I got fences to climb,” said Tom.

Casy sighed, “It’s the bes’ way. I gotta agree. But they’s different kinda fences. They’s folks like me that climbs fences that ain’t strang up yet—an’ can’t he’p it.” (pp. 223, 224)

During the cordoning of the west, then and now, climbing fences when there are “fences to climb” and anticipating fences that “ain’t strang up yet” are essential to survival. However, at the most basic level, these greater possibilities are dependent on the fundamental capacity simply to keep “puttin’ one foot in front a the other.”

Returning to teaching and teacher education, sometimes even just moving can feel remarkably basic. Get up. Get coffee. Get started. Do *something*. Do something else. Put one foot in front of the other. If an obstacle arises? Find a way to deal with it. If an obstacle *likely* to arise has not yet done so? Anticipate it, and

respond accordingly. How could things be made better? What would need to occur, what would *we* need to do, and who could we get to help? How can we tell them what we need, in ways they will hear? How can we address the inevitable obstacles encountered along the way?

Supporting Community and other Spaces for Growth

Finally, generating hope and vitality to address our ongoing challenges will require the continued development and maintenance of supportive communities and other spaces of growth for our students and ourselves. Maxine Greene wrote:

The aim is find (or create) an authentic public space...in which diverse human beings can appear before one another as, to quote Hannah Arendt, “the best they know how to be.” Such a space requires the provision of opportunities for the articulation of multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being. It requires...a consciousness of the normative as well as the possible: of what *ought* to be, from a moral and ethical point of view, and what is in the making, what *might* be in an always open world. (1988, p. xi)

This is what SOPHE has been for me. Authentic public spaces are not merely physical, but social, psychological, and emotional as well. They are also critical, caring, and highly collaborative, but most of all they are *inclusive*. They are places in which all willing participants are made to feel welcome and wanted. I believe spaces like these can ultimately be spiritual, in Palmer’s sense of the word, offering a means of connecting “with the largeness of life” (2007, p. 5).

There has been much talk about the value of community – communities of learners, communities of scholars, communities of congruence. I buy it. For me, community is not merely a want; it is a fundamental need. Community, as the

name implies, involves a coming together to create a greater unity, and such a unity cannot be forced. Rather, it must be invited, encouraged, nurtured, and supported. We can do our part by continuing to create and maintain the necessary spaces for future generations of students and educators to explore the depth and range of their *own* experiences, and to imagine how they, too, might keep it up and pass it on. As Palmer aptly observes, by remaining in “life-giving communion with the young,” we serve not only the future but also ourselves (2007, p. 49).

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Appendix A:

SCAPEGOAT

So many problems
 Not enough time
 These problems are yours
 While these problems are mine

I wish I could blame you
 Believe me I've tried
 Instead I should bring out
 The demon inside

A beautiful garden
 That festers with lies
 The promises wilting
 As the sun slowly dies

We're so quick to fire
 Bullets laced with the blame
 But we're all going to lose
 This unending game

We won't face our problems
 We can't face our fear
 We're so far away
 While the problem's right here

Determination is gone
 And replaced with desire
 Our prayers in the flames
 Of this treacherous fire

It's not you, it's not me
 It's all those in between
 Once our scapegoat is found
 Then we wipe our hands clean

Who knows where to look?
 We shall search far and wide
 But it's the demon inside us
 The one we call pride

I don't want to look
 I choose to be blind
 If I open my eyes
 Who knows what I'll find?

I will never admit
 That it's my fault as well
 I'll ride this train down
 To our synthesized hell

No one will stop this
 We'll all look away
 'Til there's nowhere to look
 'Cause it's dark every day

We're as much the problem
 As we are the solution
 So let's break our own rules
 In our cold institution

When our hope barely shines
 And our faith's nearly done
 Our first inclination
 Is to tuck tail and run

But now we shall fight
 As the storm rages on
 But the lightning still strikes
 When the rain clouds have gone

It all has two sides
 Which on will you choose?
 But resistance is futile
 We're all gonna lose

You ask who's to blame?
 The answer's quite clear
 Just look out in front
 And stare straight in the mirror.