JOIN-UP:
LEARNING/LEADING PRAXIS THROUGH COUNTER-NARRATIVES

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Join-Up:

Learning/Leading Praxis through Counter-Narratives

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from Narrative Theory, Reflexive Inquiry, and Critical Pedagogy, the intent of this thesis is to position narrative as perspective, process, and product that together frame a transdisciplinary method to construct theoretically new ways of conceptualising and practising learning. My aim in this research is to provide a methodological means of explicating dominant stories that, for me, are problem saturated. Evoking the power of metaphor and utility of analogy, my goal is to position counter-narratives as a way to bring together theory and practise in a space where readers might reflexively examine their own experiences and, therein, improve praxis. Join-up is central to this process as I untangle learning moments situated within three unique learning environments: schools; the field; and corporate learning organisations. After critically deconstructing experiences of praxis that are operating and transformative, I aim to reconsider them in terms of the metaphors they present. The pervasive and recurring question throughout involves the role of personal meaningfulness in creating spaces for individuals to join-up with learning. Specific questions include: "How does remembering self in moments of praxis construct educational perspectives through narrative?"; "What does a critically-framed reflexive narrative methodology uniquely contribute to understanding praxis?"; "What metaphors are common within each of the three unique learning environments?"; and "What might these commonalities suggest regarding the role of join-up in learning/leading praxis?"

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DEDICATION

To Dillon –

May I be as patient and supportive of your learning endeavours

as you continue to be of mine.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Cultivating a Personal Ecology of Education

I grew up in a stimulating learning environment on a small island in Eastern Canada. My mother was an English teacher, and my father was both farmer and businessperson. Together, they modelled learning in almost every avenue of my life. From a very young age, I was encouraged in academics, in agriculture, in athletics, and in music. I saw my parents actively engaged in community development and learned from them the importance of responsible citizenship.

By the time I entered formal schooling, I had a certain understanding of the world – one based on multidimensional involvement and commitment to personal growth. Because this worldview was so deeply woven in my formative fabrics, I often felt conflicted in systems of schooling that exalted some of my interests and marginalised others. Determined to make my schooling more personally meaningful, I eagerly sought out a university that was noted for celebrating marginalised groups.

Young and naïve, I assumed that I would find there a space free of both political agenda and unexamined bias. In the course of my studies, though, I learned about more than the melodious depth of Renaissance and Romantic literature and the influence of the African Diaspora on United States and Canada as developing nations. I also came to understand that, although facts are elusive, individual agendas compel people to position and defend their interpretations as truth. By the third year of my Arts degree, my frustration was beginning to manifest itself as generalised anxiety and acute panic attacks. Convinced that they were symptomatic of my disillusionment, I finished my

degree and decided to pursue a career in education. I was determined to return to a place of personal disengagement and create there a space for others to engage more meaningfully with learning.

Armed with the self-righteous indignation that only a young scholar can conjure, I began a Bachelor of Education degree. The next 18 months forever changed me. Embedded in a system that I thought demanded personal disconnection, I came to understand organically the pain that can lead people to despair. I felt vulnerable and alienated all the time. Worse than that, I had no control – not even over myself. All of a sudden, I was not learning: I was being taught. I was reduced to passivity and powerlessness. I felt as though my passion for facilitating learning was being diminished in value, and I was being asked to consent to a life of propagating a singular view of teaching: one that was curricula-driven and that negated the experiences of both teacher and learners.

My carefully constructed world began to crumble around me. The generalised anxiety and acute panic of the previous year resurfaced with a vengeance. By November, when I was to enter the public school system to complete my first practicum, I was beginning to come undone. *It is just so hot in here. Can't anyone else feel it? I look around the crowded staff room; they all seem comfortable. I can't even hear . . . why are all the sounds blurring? I think I'm going to be sick. I need to get out of here, but it's my first day of the practicum . . . what will everyone think? Just sit still and smile –it'll pass. Who is that in my head screaming, "Get up, Ellyn"? Dear God, I think it's me. All right. All right. I'll get out of here. As I rise from my chair,*

the room spins into nothingness.

After that episode, I finally went to see my family doctor. He suggested that I was bordering clinical burnout and asked if I could take some time off. When I said that I could not, he prescribed Xanax, a mild tranquilizer, to take the edge off the panic attacks. He warned me that it was not a cure, only a medium to help me survive. I thanked him and left. With three weeks remaining of that first practicum, I resigned myself to getting through the days with the help of medication. But as I pushed forward, I became increasingly unwell.

The few weeks off at Christmas did nothing to restore me. Quite the opposite, I was in even worse shape when I returned to school for the second semester. It took me longer, but I could still manage to get up, dress myself and, with the help of chilled Country Time Lemonade, get through the day. Silly, maybe, but without that freezing can biting into my hands, I wasn't sure if I was there – or anywhere. That same frozen can became a fixture in my left coat pocket, and I clung to it like a life preserver. The days began to blend with the nights as sleep continued to elude me. The noise inside my head magnified in volume, and I was being consumed by my anxiety. I paced around trying to shake off something that had crawled inside me. Consumed by fear and chaos, I roamed, cried, pleaded, prayed, begged, and bargained, but nothing worked. I was imprisoned by my self and had no idea what freedom looked like. I could no longer cook, clean, study, drive, eat, sleep, or work. The only thing I did was sedate myself to attend class. I finally hit bottom a couple of weeks later.

It's funny how seemingly meaningless objects become significant. Sneakers. That's what finally pushed me over the edge – the sneakers I put on every morning to walk to class. It was January 23rd, 1997. I opened the closet door to retrieve my sneakers so that I could once again face the hypocrisy that I had chosen as my future. Seemingly innocuous, they dared me to put them on. I couldn't breathe. The room started to spin. The walls closed in and the door loomed in front of me. It was with absolute certainty that I knew I was not going back to school.

Having withdrawn from all systems of formal schooling, I found myself without a learning community for the first time in almost 20 years. Both emancipated and alienated, I eventually sought community in the work of theorists who could help me to understand both my disintegration and how to create spaces for undividedness in learning. Although many theorists from varied backgrounds influenced me (Behar, 1996; Britzman, 1991; Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Dewey, 1938; Elbaz, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellsworth, 1997; Foucault, 1984; Freire, 1974; Freire, 1976; Greene, 1988; Greene, 1995; Grumet, 1981; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2002; Neilsen, 1994; Palmer, 1993; Palmer, 1998; Richardson, 2000; Shor, 1992; VanManen, 1990; and Willinsky, 1990), there were a handful who engaged me in a dialogue through which my own voice became clearer.

Because personal meaningfulness and writing were the nucleus of this process, I felt an immediate and enduring kinship with qualitative theorists in general and

narrative experts in particular. This community of scholars, specifically Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Cole and Knowles, 1994, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; and Ellis and Bochner, 2000, provided me with an alternative to the detachment and fragmentation of objectivity. Denzin and Lincoln (1998a, 1998b) introduced me to qualitative research as a paradigm. A method of inquiry that was developed to honour an in-depth examination of human behaviour and motivation, qualitative inquiry seemed to me an appropriate vehicle for asking the how- and why- questions I faced not only regarding my own disintegration, but also those pertaining to education systems in general. With their focus on subject-centred inquiry, which necessitates careful consideration of context, lived experience, language, and voice, qualitative approaches seemed to me to exalt personal meaningfulness.

As my reading broadened, I met theorists who were named within qualitative fields but who seemed to focus more specifically on the merits of narrative research. As this field developed in various directions, I found myself returning to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who named narrative as both process and perspective. Less concerned with its manifestations, Clandinin and Connelly focused on narrative as a method of garnering and organising knowledge. Richardson (2000) also discussed narrative as a method when she named writing as a way of knowing. Although I was excited by the qualitative promise of subjective importance and the notion that I could write my way into knowing, I was left wanting more. Specifically, I didn't think that positioning narrative as a method or a tool in the process of meaning making went far enough. It seemed to me that the act of writing one's way into knowing had deep epistemological implications. Further, because writing was both personal and reflexive,

I thought narrative positioned as a methodology required critical framing that would front the researcher's own biases.

My desire to honour personal meaningfulness and undividedness, coupled with my concern that the unavoidable biases be named, led me to the work of Ellis and Bochner (2000). Through their scholarship on autoethnography and critical ethnography, they further legitimized personal experience. Immersion in their research led me to questions first about the nature of experience, and second about temporality. I turned to Dewey (1938) to unearth more about the nature of experience. Because he viewed experience as having both personal and social meaning, he implied that experience seemingly related to only one individual had, by association, valuable social ramifications. He also wrote extensively about the continuity of experience; that is, neither people nor their experiences exist in isolation: both are influenced by other people and events that brush up against them. Because of this continuity, our understanding of ourselves is continually negotiated. Dewey's notion of continuity prompted me to consider the role of temporality in knowing.

Cole and Knowles (1994, 2000), in their work on reflexive inquiry, brought together qualitative research, narrative inquiry, subjective integrity, and temporality. Specifically, they positioned reflexive writing as a way of exploring teacher learning and development, and they framed their methodology around notions of personal empowerment and the primacy of experience. Their positionality and approach validated so much for me, and became formative as I tried to etch out with integrity my teacher identity. Having legitimized subject-centred methods of writing toward

knowing, and having answered my concerns about temporality, I was left wanting in two regards: first, I wanted to encourage practitioners to embrace more deliberately their undivided selves as they explicated their professional identities; and second, I was still seeking a critical framework that would help me as researcher-practitioner name my biases up front and frame how they influenced my developing praxis.

My need for criticality was met largely by the critical pedagogues. The scholars in this area with whom I felt the greatest affinity were Freire, 1974, 1976; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994; McLaren and Kincheloe, 2002; and Shor, 1992. Freire's work is invariably concerned with understanding the relationships of power that continue to own the dominant stories and with negotiating paths to telling the counter-narratives. His notion of *conscientizaçao,* or *critical consciousness,* refers to the developmental process through which individuals evolve from unquestioning consumers of the dominant stories to critically awake individuals who create spaces to tell the counter-stories. With both writing and reflexive contemplation as core components, this movement toward consciousness raising has the potential to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed. Its capability is in exposing the social systems that continue to block social liberation. In his scholarship and activism, Freire emphasizes the importance of seeing persons as subjects and actively engaging them in dialogue. He compares this integration with the current social pedagogy that reduces persons to objects and rewards adaptation.

Shor (1992) embraces Freire's philosophy and grows it to unpack the importance of learning's being dialogic and student-centred. He names engagement as

a core component of meaningful learning and cites the danger of disconnection in the absence of engagement. Although Shor's work owes much to Freire, he diverges in an essential way. Whereas Freire positions the teacher as expert, Shor encourages critical deconstruction of all authority figures. Further, he challenges teachers to share authority and to engage in the education process as fellow learners. This approach is based purely in praxis through pedagogy, the joint process of theorizing experience and experientializing theory. This critical teaching, he posits, begins by fronting the connection between knowledge and power and is governed by student-generative themes.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) brush up against these same notions in their earlier collaborative endeavours, but these tend to be less action oriented than Kincheloe's later independent scholarship. Specifically, Kincheloe (2008) focuses on the unexamined relationships of power that continue to impede emancipatory education. Most recently named a postformalist, Kincheloe's scholarship and activism challenge critical educators to examine the politics of knowledge and epistemology and the ways they continue to mould human consciousness. The goal of his efforts, he said, is to create spaces where teachers, researchers, students, social activists, and policy-makers can form a community of solidarity and champion more equitable education and a sense of social responsibility.

My thirst for criticality quenched, I was still eager to connect writing as a way of knowing and the essentiality of honouring the undivided self in learning/leading praxis. So, I continued to write. What emerged were my own counter-narratives

through which I speculated that I would understand my disintegration only by re-entering those spaces where I had come undone. The reintroduction was anything but immediate.

In 1998, I joined the film industry as a coordinator for youth actors. Although I wasn't technically teaching, I successfully reintroduced myself to working with young people. This reintroduction positioned me as both their mentor and their advocate. As my relationship grew with the cast, their guardians, and the production companies, I was retained the following season as the private educator for that same youth talent. Because this new role required liaising with various systems of schooling, I was afraid that I would once again disengage and grow disheartened. However, because I knew both the cast and their needs, I accepted the position and was surprised by its fit. Not only did it uncover for me the importance of learner-centred approaches, but it also helped me realise that it wasn't teaching that was so damaging for me: it was system-driven approaches that marginalised some learners while privileging others, therein creating schooling practices in which learning was secondary. Moreover, I was faced with daily reminders that this crisis was not unique to public schooling. Thus, I began to consider my experiences as a teacher differently.

I continued to coordinate educational needs of youth actors for the next three years. Once I began questioning systems of schooling rather than reacting to them, I refocused my energy on seeking alternatives to those practices that I found problem saturated. Still, though, I was haunted by having failed within the traditional framework. I circled closer. In 2001, I was offered a position as an instructor in a

college. This position both situated me in a traditional classroom setting and required that I supervise practicum placements within the public school system. I accepted the post and, after the initial period of readjustment, enjoyed it. The challenge of working with adults encouraged my active and ongoing learning. Teaching began to feel like a collaborative endeavour in which everyone had a voice and valuable contribution. I began to feel more like a facilitator and less like a messenger.

Although I continued to feel uneasy in the school system, I was confirming the source of my discomfort. I needed space to encourage learning in personally meaningful ways, for both the students and myself. When I felt governed by curricula and held captive by fragmented practises, I was frustrated because the emphasis was being placed on teaching, rather than learning. Having gained broader teaching experience in both non-traditional and traditional settings, I challenged myself to consider a new definition of myself as teacher. Perhaps the failure was not simply my own . . . and maybe it wasn't the system's either. I began to wonder if I simply didn't fit within that framework. Growing more confident, I decided there was only one way to know for certain. In December 2003, I called the high school at which I had completed my practicum six years earlier to let them know that I was available to substitute. Finally, I arrived at a place where I was determined to face all the demons in one showdown.

Sleep did not come easily last night. I feel like an underdog in an old western showdown. I can almost taste the dust and hear the whispers as I check my six-shooter, readjust my hat, and make my way onto Main. It's all come down to this moment. I

shake myself from such a silly comparison and push beyond the familiar smell of cleansing agents and adolescents. I am in the main entrance surrounded by murals of everything from basketball to the Bard. There is comfort in the old familiarity, but not peace.

I turn toward the staff room, where I am greeted by a few of the long-timers. I smile in response to "Nice to see you, stranger," but I'm aware that my smile doesn't reach my eyes. I'm guarded. I feel as though I'm present not to rejoin, but to prove to myself that I have grown in strength and maturity. I drop my coat over a hook and head to the office to fill out the necessary paperwork and pick up my attendance board and classroom keys.

Down the hallway, through a few more corridors, I find myself in the English Department. I unlock the door to my past and find that very little has changed. Numbers approximating 40, there are still at least 15 too many desks in the room. In an effort to fit them all in, they are arranged in columns that prohibit collaboration and dialogue. Apart from the backs of heads, students face only the teacher, the transmitter of information.

I shake myself from my judgments and check the daybook. I have three 73-minute classes to deliver crosswords and cryptograms. Yes, the routine I know so well; it's familiar not only because I did the same crosswords as a student 15 years ago, but because I have babysat before. I chastise myself for the creeping bitterness and prepare to meet my class.

They whoop and holler as they come through the door, celebrating not only the nearness of Christmas Holidays, but also the fact that they have a substitute for the day. I don the old mask that smothered me for years and steady myself; I have about 10 minutes to teach this group to both respect and like that I am going to learn with them for the next hour. I begin the attendance, and one of the boys responds "here," when I call "Mary;" I smile, as he would be Mary for the rest of the day. The class giggles, but the point is taken. The rest of the roll call is smooth. Score one for me.

I suggest that they get ready for some trite Holiday activities and we'd all do our best to survive the boredom. I acknowledge their feelings about the pending assignment and set them up for a challenge. On cue, the class smart aleck says, "What the hell is trite?" As planned, I pitch a dictionary to him and say, "look it up." The class rallies around him waiting for the response. "Trite: stale through common use or repetition; worn out," comes the definition from the left wing of the classroom. "Great job," I reply. "So we've established that the upcoming activity is boring and old but we're going do it anyway. Let's have at it." The groans make me smile, but I know that I have scored another point. I am yet to meet the final archetype that is generally in every class but I figure she'll show herself soon.

"This fucking blows," is muttered just loud enough to require that I address it. I look up for the eyes locked on mine in a challenge. She places her feet up on the desk, removes her socks, and starts to paint her toenails. I can barely keep from laughing; it is a first for me. Nonetheless, I challenge that there are better places to refine personal grooming. In response, she actually pulls off her cardigan sweater, exposing only a

sports bra, and proceeds to apply underarm deodorant. I can hardly believe my eyes. The class waits for my reaction and I know I need to be careful. There is no point backing her into a corner. I don't want to attack, just shame a little. I curl my nose ever so slightly and, as I swing up cross-legged on top of the desk, I utter a single response – "classy." That's three down . . . all it ever takes. I immediately draw the class's attention to the work at hand knowing they are already on side. I am a little disdainful, slightly rebellious, yet perfectly in control. I am one of them. This is just like I remembered – a piece of cake.

The remainder of my classes that day were typical reruns of the first and so the day wound down. I sat at a desk, not my own, and processed the day. I had more than survived. I smiled a smile that reached my eyes as I packed up to leave with my slain dragons over my shoulder. I all but skipped from the school with my new confidence: I could teach in public school if I so chose, but I surely wouldn't. As I pushed open the door to the parking lot, I tasted a freedom I only dreamed about.

Here, I must interrupt myself to say two things: first, I recognise that my decision to remain apart from the system was due in great part to my perception of being unable to evoke systemic change. That perception coincided with a deep fear that, if I was unable to change the system, I would become part of it, thereby contributing to disintegration of future learners; and second, I recognise that the public system of education works for many people – both teachers and students – all of whom have my respect. So, too, do those for whom the system does not work, and it is these

latter individuals who continue to inspire renewal of my focus and commitment to education.

CHAPTER 2

The Inquiry: Practising Theory and Theorising Practise

Before I entered formal schooling, every avenue of my life had taught me the importance of integration and impact. Whether learning about crops, learning with animals, or learning through community, I was encouraged to embrace integration as I pursued growth and development. Having been so influenced in my formative years, I found systems of schooling that valued disintegration crippling. Committed to etching out a different path for myself as teacher and for my learners, I began to explore the role of counter-narratives as I struggled with learning/leading praxis.

Continuously seeking to understand praxis through the deconstruction of dominant discourse and the creation of counter-narratives, I embrace a methodology that encourages meaning making in an integrated way. Not simply a method, narrative is often seen as a collection of approaches that have in common a storied form. They are made narrative by their purposeful presentation of events to evoke in the audience a particular response (Jupp, 2006). When partnered with reflexive inquiry and critical pedagogy, narrative provides the framework necessary for me to theorize the process of doing reflexive narrative while uncovering a critical understanding of praxis as it has been informed by my perspective as educator, horse trainer, and businessperson. Drawing from theoretical positions put forth in each of these traditions, my aim first is to design and construct a theoretical analysis of praxis using counter-narratives to challenge the dominant discourse upheld by systems that continue to limit learning. Paradigmatically, narrative is within the qualitative approach; thus, my theoretical

introduction of it begins there.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is one of the major approaches to research in both education and business. At its most elementary, its concern is achieving an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons behind that behaviour. Because of its exploratory nature, it generally requires small focused samples rather than larger, more random ones. Perhaps the biggest distinction between qualitative research and its counterparts is that it fronts its assumptions, and it is understood that any subsequent interpretation is one constructed from that unique vantage point (Catterall, 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000; Goodall (2008); Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; and Paul, 2005).

Although there are many differing approaches under this qualitative umbrella, Eisner (1998) identifies six commonly held salient features: first, the context must be naturally occurring, not contrived or manipulated; second, the inquirer is considered an instrument of the study; third, because the methodology is concerned with understanding a human condition as experienced and understood by the subject involved, qualitative research is highly interpretive; fourth, expressive language and voice in text are key to interpretation; fifth, because the inquiries must be contextually situated and interpreted, attention to particulars is crucial (this includes temporal and demographical factors); and sixth, deductive analysis is disavowed in favour of inductive interpretation – so coherence, detailed insight, and instrumental utility must be clearly explicated.

These studies are by nature exploratory and open-ended. However, the work of several scholars (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Habermas, 2007; Harvey, 1990; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2002; and Paul, 2005) reminds me that it is not enough to put forth my assumptions or detail those reported by others. All knowledge has both a knower and a context, and these two entities are inextricably linked. Also, reality in all its forms is mediated by language. Therefore, I am accountable through my research to write in a way that honours both my telling and another's hearing of the story. It is through this engagement of intertextual dialogue that we may come to new understandings of our experiences and ourselves.

In addition to being an approach, then, qualitative research is also a theoretical perspective. Qualitative researchers work to show how the multifaceted nature of human experience demands more than a numerical explanation. As Habermas convincingly argues in Gibbons' (1985) examination of Grand Theory, one cannot study human social life empirically as though it were a natural science; such an attempt would produce mistaken findings because persons are capable of reason and, therefore, influence their own study. The position that science can account for or overcome culture and its social context is "an overestimation of the role of science as the only valid kind of knowledge" (p. 25). Drawing on the work of Polkinghorne (1988), Patton (2002) argues that the overarching power of qualitative data lies in its ability to tell a story. My goal, then, is to connect theories of qualitative research to those of narrative approaches and reflexive inquiry.

Narrative Theory

Informed by the work of several scholars (Behar, 1996; Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998, 2004; Elliot, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005; Gardner & Kelly, 2008; Goodall, 2008; Gough, 1997; Gudmundsdottir, 1995; MacEwan & Egan, 1995; Webster & Mertova, 2007; and Wheatley, 2009), I assume that narrative approaches adeptly explore the nuanced experiences of persons engaged in teaching and learning. Broadly, the power of narrative approaches is in their natural capacity to recount events that most deeply affect human understanding. Specifically, though, a review of current narrative literature leads Webster and Mertova (2007) to explore four questions which frame the usefulness of narrative as a research approach.

Their first question explores why researchers turn to narrative. In attempting to address this query, Webster and Mertova (2007) draw on the work of MacEwan and Egan (1995) and determine that narrative is appealing because it provides a medium for people to record the history of human consciousness as well as the major changes that mark the development of thinking human beings. Further, because narrative may be employed to record human consciousness, it also provides accounts of individual consciousness. In an effort to make sense of the human condition, an understanding of human consciousness is essential.

The second question posed by Webster and Mertova (2007) as they explore the usefulness of narrative as a research approach concerns the prominence of narrative in research. Here, they cite Bruner (1990) who positioned narrative as the basis for understanding behaviour. Such an elemental foundation situates narrative as universally

accessible to both researchers and participants as they, together, explicate human behaviour and motivation. They also draw on the work of Gough (1997), who explicitly names narrative as central to understanding human behaviour. Specifically, Gough claims that narrative is a way of examining any number of theoretical and practical problems in education. He maintains that stories, told and heard, reconceptualise the notion of practise in teacher education. In citing the prominence, Webster and Mertova (2007) also acknowledge the work of Shulman (1987), Elbaz (1991), and Fullan (2007), who use narrative evidence to investigate teacher knowledge across various disciplines. Ball and Goodson (1985), they say, promote autobiographical writing of teachers, and Clandinin and Connelly (1990) have done extensive work on teachers' stories as legitimate data. In addition to these noted by Webster and Mertova (2007), there exists a plethora of other scholars in a wide array of fields who are now employing narrative in research. Among some of the most influential are Grumet (1976, 1981) and Cole and Knowles (1994, 2000). Grumet (1981) beautifully articulates some compelling reasons to engage in this type of research. She writes convincingly about the roles of our stories in making visible our attitudes, choices, and values. I share her position that narrative has the power to illuminate how personal history shapes practitioner development. Grumet's (1976) earlier work says that narrative contributes to this development in two specific ways: first, through reflective processes, I can allow my mind to wander and weave rich tapestries of memory; and second, that narrative lends itself beautifully to analysis. Through careful and critical consideration of my memories, I can, she claims, reveal

the influences not only of incidents recalled, but also of assumptions and biases that might otherwise have remained hidden from me.

Having touched on both the utility and prevalence of narrative, Webster and Mertova (2007) next consider the recurring feature of narrative in educational research. They identify structure of the storied form as that which gives narrative the "aptitude for illuminating real life situations" (p. 19). This structure involves not only recounting events in a storied form, but also framing those events in a way that reveals the underlying plot. Although Webster and Mertova did not list it as a primary feature of narrative in research, I maintain that voice is of the essence. I draw from Neilsen (1994), who supports this view: "We are hearing the voices of reading and writing teachers who are claiming opportunities to 'read' their professional lives and 'write' their own classroom experiences and as a result claim authority for their professional growth" (p. 46).

Finally, Webster and Mertova (2007) ask if narrative provides a means to bring to the forefront features of human centeredness in research. Specifically, they conclude that

> narratives provide an organisational framework for viewing complexity. Using narrative, it is possible not only to look at human factors but to consider human factors within a range of learning theories (p. 22).

Although they go on to cite somewhat randomly various examples of this human centeredness, particularly useful is the work of theorist Gudmundsdottir (1995).

Gudmundsdottir claims that narratives not only help us uncover new meaning through assimilating experiences into narrative schema, but also that the connectedness of the story can be viewed as knowledge transfer.

Although these four questions are helpful in considering the usefulness of a narrative framework, I find that they fail to explore some of the deeper, more epistemological questions. Richardson (2000) pushes beyond the position of Webster and Mertova (2007) and argues that "writing is not just the delivery and dissemination of our findings; it is also a way of knowing" (p. 499). Claims of how we know what we know clearly enter the epistemological arena and elevate narrative from method to methodology. This reading is supported by Patton (2002), who maintains that methods are simply tools as opposed to methodologies, which have theoretical and epistemological considerations. Narrative, then, is the process of coming to knowledge as much as it is the knowledge itself or the dissemination of that knowledge. The important theoretical distinction to be made here is that narrative seems not to pre-exist its telling (Abbott, 2008). It comes into being as story or event and is conveyed through re-presentation. It is this process of coming to knowledge that lays epistemological claims at the feet of narrative approaches. In re-presenting our experiences, how best do we come to a clear understanding?

Reflexive Inquiry

Reflexivity is helpful in making sense of experiences. It is for this reason that I pair it with narrative. Reflexivity requires that I revisit the experiences that I recall as influencing praxis and continue to negotiate an understanding of them. It also gives me

the space to reconsider myself in continuous development because of my experiences. Bloom (1998) refers to this interpretive approach as emphasizing "an individual's experiences as a journey of becoming" (p. 65). The regressive movement, or ebb, she says, is reflective: "it takes one back on a journey of exploration among objects, people, places, and events which make up the grounds of one's being" (p. 162). It follows that each time I move forward again, I take with me an altered or deepened self-knowledge gained from my reflections on prior experiences. It is this continuous and critical ebb and flow that transforms reflection into reflexivity.

Autoethnography provides some valuable insights here as well. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography allows for a dual focus. First, it may encourage an outward view of the personal experience: that is, it demands a consideration of social and cultural aspects of lived experience. Second, it may encourage an inward look at the vulnerable self that may resist the cultural sphere surrounding it. Authors of these studies, say Ellis and Bochner, "use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Ellis and Bochner argue that situating research within this framework allows the researcher to "use 'self' to learn about other" (p. 741). Furthermore, as articulated by Ellis and Bochner, "by exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (p. 737). Thus, this approach is not only self-exploratory and reflexive; it also potentially advances the understanding of other researchers by encouraging practitioners to be responsible to this introspective growth. To quote Foucault (1984), this illuminated modernity is not strictly to "liberate man [*sic*] in his

own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (p. 42).

In this ebb and flow of negotiated meaning, I am increasingly interested in how my experiences inform my theoretical assumptions about teaching. Webster and Mertova (2007) interpret this process as the reordering of my educational experiences with the aim of promoting an understanding of how they inform praxis. It is the perspective of Cole and Knowles (1994; 2000) that, in order for me to develop professionally in this way, I need to understand "the formative as well as the continuing experiences and influences that have shaped and continue to shape" (p. 2) my perspectives and practises. Because praxis is rooted in the personal and imbued with subjective beliefs, values, perspectives, and experiences, reflexive inquiry involves the study of how the personal influences the professional. Cole and Knowles identify this as "the autobiographical nature of teaching" (p. 9). They suggest that this very characteristic makes it impossible to understand the teaching without understanding the teacher.

Ellsworth (1997) cautions me that there are some complexities in the consideration of self. In her opinion, the third person in every conversation seemingly dual in nature is the unconscious. This entity, she suggests, is always participating indirectly, thereby influencing not only what is communicated, but also what is understood. From her perspective, even if we strive to come to reason with self, our learning is only temporal because the self with whom we begin is never there upon return; it is "the inherent, irreducible difference between consciousness and itself" (p. 60). Ellsworth refers to this space as the asymmetry between "the self departed from

and the self returned to" as we reflect on our experiences (p. 65). As such, I struggle not only with negotiating understanding with others, but also with the temporality of my own knowing. Palmer (1998) extends the boundaries of temporality to include the evolving and multidimensional nature of each practitioner's own experiences and insists that each of us must learn to teach from a position that honours an integrated or undivided nature of being in the world.

Critical Pedagogy

Both narrative and reflexive traditions elevate the primacy of experience, but they do not necessarily provide the framework for me to deconstruct that experience. Abbott (2008) claims that "narrative is an instrument of power, and in fact many exceptionally powerful narratives reflect upon this power " (p. 40). The tone, the content, and the medium are all used by the author to direct the audience; indeed, together or alone, these devices have the power to change the way an audience views the world. Such power, he claims, must not be left unchecked. Making central the importance of this accountability, I draw from critical research, particularly that of critical pedagogy. The intersection of reflexive narrative and critical pedagogy demands at least three things. First, the narrative tradition challenges me to write my way toward uncovering how join-up has informed my learning/leading of praxis. Second, the reflexive tradition calls upon me to revisit those experiences from my past and consider how they may have informed praxis development. Third, critical pedagogy insists that I unpack what I have gathered through reflexive narrative and account not only for my selection and understanding of the experiences, but also for the

language I have chosen in their retelling.

Drawing from the work of several scholars (Apple, 1990; Britzman, 1991; Brookes, 1992; Freire, 1976, 1981; Giroux, 1997; Greene, 1988, 1995; Kincheloe, 2008; Lather, 1991; and Shor, 1992), I understand the agenda of critical pedagogy to be the collaborative pursuit of critical consciousness by educators and learners. This quest involves the role of personal agency in exposing assumptions, challenging dominance, and overcoming social injustice. As defined by Shor (1992), critical pedagogy examines

> habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (p. 129).

As such, critical pedagogy requires that I employ reflective and reflexive processes continuously to learn, unlearn, and relearn what Freire (1974) names *conscientizaçao*. The nuances of reflection and reflexivity regarding praxis might be compared to the difference between *recalling* past practise and *theorizing* past practice. Unlike recollection, theorizing practice involves a deliberate and ongoing practice and reformulation of theory. It requires continuous negotiation between symbolic analysis and concrete action, where language is central to the meaning making.

Shor (1992) expands on this importance of language by identifying critical pedagogy as having its roots in critical literacy. Critical literacy, at its most

rudimentary, involves teaching students to deconstruct language and the social construction of self to reveal the underpinnings of power and privilege. It encourages critical thinkers to read the world in a way that illuminates connections between the political and personal, the global and local, and the economic and pedagogical (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1974, 1976; Greene, 1995; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2008; Shor, 1992; and Willinsky, 1990). If we choose to educate critically, then, we are better able to engage in dissident discourse and promote social justice through counter-narratives. Freire (1981) discusses this movement in the context of his efforts in Brazil. He argues that "education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression" (p. 65). He contrasts this kind of education with "liberating education," which he says "consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (p. 67). I read Freire's (1974, 1976, 1981, 1992) work as making problematic schooling practices while encouraging teachers to see education as potentially emancipatory. He says that, in problem-posing education, all parties involved "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (p. 71). It also affirms persons "as beings in the process of becoming" and elevates education to a plane on which it "is constantly being remade in the praxis" (p. 72).

This act of doing praxis, says Shor (1992), involves employing critical literacy to theorize experience and experientialize theory simultaneously. This reflexivity returns us to the realm of critical pedagogy. Although there are several theoretical positions and almost infinite possibilities for application, Kincheloe (2008) lists several

general concerns of critical pedagogy. I understand these to include the following: first, education is political and often reflects the interests of new modes of colonialism, and thus, critical pedagogy demands that we expose these practices and overcome them as part of critical praxis; second, teachers must be respected as professionals and encouraged as scholars and researchers; third, education should synergistically encourage emancipatory change and the cultivation of intellect; fourth, the pursuit of social justice and the alleviation of oppression should guide education; and fifth, all positions including critical pedagogy itself must be problematized and questioned.

By introducing this element of critical pedagogy into my inquiry, I not only want to understand the storied data contextualized, but I also want to understand them as they relate to the power relations enveloping them. Moreover, I want to examine my own constructs critically and endeavour to unpack potential biases both of me as researcher and of the data I collect. The goal then becomes designing and constructing a dissertation that uses counter-narratives to challenge the dominant discourse upheld by systems that continue to limit learning.

Inquiry

As an educator, horse trainer, and businessperson, I have immersed myself in the literature of teaching and learning from various perspectives. I continue to find praxis of particular interest. Understanding praxis as the enactment of my theoretical assumptions about teaching, I have found it alluded to by many scholars but not often examined in its totality. Freire (1981) has discussed praxis as a synthesis of theory and practise, each informing the other. His agenda in its most primitive form, though, has been to deconstruct knowledge to reveal its underpinnings of power, privilege, and

utility. Cole and Knowles (2000) have explored the reflexive relationship between theory and practise in their work on practitioner research, but they have not focused on its explication outside schooling practises. Schön (1995) has discussed at length the benefits of practitioners reflecting on their reflection, but he has not explicitly named praxis as this critical analysis of practise. Although these scholars are among those whose research is foundational to my own, none has untangled for me the nuances of learning/leading praxis in the context of encouraging integrated selves in transdisciplinary education systems.

I assume that by making explicit the application of theoretical findings, and committing to reconceptualising continuously that which is learned from personally meaningful experience, theorists and practitioners alike improve practise. In this continuous commitment to understanding practitioners and learners as multifaceted individuals, reflexivity is central to becoming more awake to the theoretical implications of praxis development. Drawing from Ellsworth, 2005; Richardson, 2000; Wheatley, 2009; and Woods, 1993a, 1993b, I position writing as a way of knowing and, in doing so, construct a dissertation that upholds narrative as perspective, process, and product while examining epistemologically my claims of knowledge. Further, the purpose of my research is to articulate counter-narratives that position join-up as central in developing experiences of praxis that are operating, replicable, and transformative. This process owes a great deal to counter-narratives through which I recall learning moments situated within three unique learning environments: post-secondary faculties of education; the field; and corporate learning organisations.

CHAPTER 3

Education as Discipline: Learning with Academics

I have been immersed in formal learning for 30 years and higher education for almost 20 of them. This experience has been at times painful and jubilant, but always enlightening. At the determining centre of these experiences, I've often found personal relevance and practical application. My early childhood learning began in the church, where the teachings were about as theoretical as I've ever experienced. Despite the minister's sermons, I did not see God all around me, I could not feel His presence, nor could I sit down and talk to Him directly. Everything that He wanted me to know and do was communicated through other people. That mediation made me a bit wary, so I began to question.

First, I asked at home. *If God created everything and everyone and is all-powerful, why can't I see Him and why can't I talk to Him?* My parents, well accustomed to my need for answers, replied that He looked after the whole world, so He couldn't talk to everyone individually. Reasonable, I suppose. He created the whole world and everyone and everything in it, so he had a lot to look after. Made sense. *But if He created the whole world and everyone and everything in it, how did He create Himself,* I asked. My dad smiled and claimed he had to return to work. He gave me a pat on the head and my Mom a peck on the cheek and headed out the door. I turned my attention to her and waited. She opened her mouth as I eagerly looked on – and then she closed her mouth. She opened it again. Then closed it once more. It seemed she did not have the answer for me, though I give her credit for trying. We got as far as He was always there, to which I insisted that someone else must have created Him then and, if

that was true, why isn't that the One who gets to make all the rules and have the big following. Mom suggested that I ask the minister.

Looking back, that was an important moment. I was five and asking complicated questions that my parents couldn't answer. They did not silence me. They encouraged me to seek out the experts and pose my questions. They did not worry about my embarrassing them or appearing insubordinate or blasphemous; at least, they worried less about that than about my growing up acritical.

When Sunday came, I could barely wait to catch the minister. I knew the drill, though, and I would have to be patient. In the church and planted on my pew, I waited. And waited. And waited some more. I didn't think the sermon would ever end but, when it did, I made my way out as I did every Sunday, knowing he would be at the vestry doors to greet his congregation one by one as they filed out into the world for another week. Excited, I shifted my weight from foot to foot while he discussed the dairy business with Allison and Edith and the upcoming Presbytery meeting with June. Finally, he shook my hand and asked how I was on this fine Sunday. I blurted, *If God created the world and everything and everyone in it, how did He create Himself?* Paling just a little, he replied that He just did. Clearly unacceptable as explanations go, I said as much politely as I could. He tried again: apparently God was just always there. I explained to the minister that Mom had already tried that answer on me, and I didn't feel it really explained anything. *How was He just always there, and where is there, and how did He get there?* After a few more attempts at answers, my minister thanked me for bringing him such an important question but said he supposed God's origin was a mystery that none of us really understood. Disappointing, I suppose, but honest. I

carried on and found my mother waiting for me in the porch. She asked, as we left the church, if I got my question answered. I told her straight up *He doesn't know either*. That was another important learning moment for me: even as the experts, we don't have all the answers. Best thing to do in teaching the theoretical is acknowledge our imperfect and incomplete knowledge and celebrate the questions for having been asked. As this intellectually nurturing environment framed my formative years, public school was a bit of a disappointment.

Having already struggled to make sense of the theoretical in my daily life, I found there were aspects of the K-12 system that resonated better with me than others. As a general rule, the primary grades made the most sense. There was a predetermined body of knowledge that I did not get to negotiate but, considering the necessity of being functionally literate, it was important that I learn to read, write, and do basic math. It was grade five before those skills were mastered well enough, I guess, for the teachers to turn their attention to things like science and social studies. As we created experiments and participated in science fairs, we learned about aerodynamics through paper airplanes, structural physics through Popsicle-stick bridges, and chemistry through dropping mints into bottles of cola. We had field trip adventures where we learned to tap for maple syrup and drill trees to determine their ages. We could identify animal tracks and make a compass with a paperclip and a leaf, and we knew that the moss grew thickest on the north side of a tree. Practical applications. We educators could learn a lot from elementary school.

Junior high, by comparison, was a bit like I imagine purgatory. Filled with self-absorbed souls lacking certainty and direction, it was a holding cell where people were

sorted and herded into the next phase of their existence – high school.

Although the early grades made me cognisant of which kids were bright and keen, we all continued to learn with and from each other somewhat regardless of intellectual agility. High school ended this practise and clearly branded the students as academic or non-academic by sorting us into intellectual or practical streams. Because I was on the former path but found practical application deeply meaningful, I often felt conflicted. One incident I recall with particular clarity occurred in my junior year in high school. During the first semester, I completed four out of the six required courses for the year. Having a bit of wiggle room, I opted to register for agriculture as one of my four courses in second semester. It fell on my roster before advanced placement English and after music theory. Shortly after my registration was submitted, I was called to the office and advised that there was an error on my registration form: apparently I was accidentally enrolled in agriculture. When I explained that the enrolment was deliberate, I was counselled to withdraw and warned that such a class would be a blemish on an otherwise exemplary transcript. Wanting to excel academically, I found myself having to deny these certain parts of my lived experience. Thus, I have come to understand high school as the place where my dissatisfaction with schooling practices began to take root.

As I continued through high school, I tended toward the humanities and the arts. Within these disciplines, I expected to find a space to make subjects personally meaningful as I struggled to generate my own theories. Unfortunately, my high school experience did not provide a space for this critical deconstruction; rather, it was a place

where poems still had correct interpretations and history still presented facts. As a result, I found myself increasingly frustrated and vocal about the lack of criticality and subjective interpretation. Desperate to leave it behind me for the university that I trusted would foster intellectual development, I pushed no harder than was permitted, which essentially meant that my excellent grades compensated for my sometimes disdainful attitude. Thus, I graduated with honours and accepted a scholarship to my school of choice, happy to leave that phase of study behind in favour of embracing one that I assumed would be more rewarding.

After enjoying the last summer of my relative youth, I packed up my assumptions and moved to Halifax, where I was registered to study for an Arts degree in English. I wrote entrance exams that allowed me to forgo first year studies, and I began with second- and third-year seminars. I was hungry for intellectual discussion so I threw myself into the texts and appeared in class ready to discuss them every day. Very quickly, however, I discovered that students were encouraged to discuss themes and archetypes, but only those articulated by specific learned critics. Interpretations outside those narrow parameters were regarded as faulty; they were even mocked on occasion. Individual experiences were diminished, and personal interpretations were marginalised. One incident in particular comes to mind, as it not only attacked notions of my personal identity, but it also denied me the space to refute or defend that which was presented as fact.

I was eager to get to class that day. Although I might have credited the resurgence of spring or the approaching completion of my degree, it was really Anne of

Green Gables who was responsible. I had read everything from Treasure Island to The Owl Service in my children's literature course that year, but that Thursday held the promise of LM Montgomery's beloved Anne. Having grown up on the Island, I knew her story as well as I knew my own. Still, I had reread that tale of my childhood and ardently awaited its examination. I arrived to a class nearing full capacity and discovered that we had a guest lecturer for the day. Apparently, he was a candidate being considered for a tenure-track position within the English department and today was an audition of sorts. "Fantastic," I thought. "He'll be top of his game and keen to engage with the class." I found an empty desk along the eastern wall and made small talk with those already settled. Promptly at 10:05, the professor called the class together and advised us that he had spent a great deal of intellectual investment in deconstructing the text and was eager to tell us "what it was really about." Without further preamble, he said that Anne of Green Gables was most appropriately viewed through the lens of Queer Theory because of Anne and Diana's covert lesbianism. I looked around the room to find baffled faces that mirrored my own confusion. Anne and Diana – lesbians? This was big news. I listened intently to his position: he cited Anne's hesitance to accept Gilbert's attention, Diana's socially prescribed marriage to Moody, and Anne and Diana's naming each other as 'bosom buddies.'

When he stopped speaking and invited questions, I suggested an alternative understanding: first, perhaps Anne did not accept Gilbert's attention because she was at her core proud and stubborn, and so her refusal of him could be regarded as equal part feminism and traditional courtship; second, Diana was expected to marry because

she had forsaken education in favour of girl's finishing school in preparation to be a wife and mother, a behaviour that was typical of both time and culture; and third, that 'bosom buddies' was an endearment born partly of the time and partly of Anne's dramatic flare. He laughed. He called me naïve and provincial, and in doing so, successfully pre-empted all dialogue for the remainder of the class. Having the floor all to himself, he broadened his deconstruction to include LM Montgomery's life history and challenged that it had not been properly understood either: the depression that was noted later in her life, he said, actually predated Anne of Green Gables, which people mistakenly understood as innocent and pastoral. In truth, it was perhaps her very darkest work. Cowardly and covert, he insisted, Anne was really a subversive novel about the small nature of Prince Edward Island mentality that forced a strong-willed feminist to hide her homosexuality, settle for second rate schooling, and marry a man whom she did not love. As he eventually stepped off his metaphorical stage and concluded his great soliloquy, we filed out of class and many of us congregated to debrief. Our reactions ranged from eye rolling to indignation, but we were unified in our annoyance with his practised arrogance. I recall our group expressing frustration with his singular view of the text and his unapologetic marginalisation of other voices. What I remember most clearly, though, was never speaking of it again. There was no point – he was hired the next week.

The faculty's decision to hire that candidate fuelled my growing disdain for the way in which English literature was being presented. Namely, it was being taught through presentation of published critiques: we were simply called to bear witness.

Although I did have rewarding learning moments in my Arts degree, I found it pervasively problematic that I was given the skills but denied the space to critique. This limitation created for me a desire to etch out room for critical examination not only of texts, but also of learning practices. As a result, when I completed my Arts degree, I enrolled in education. It was my hope that this professional degree would prepare me to become the type of teacher that honoured lived experience and struggled to make learning meaningful, relevant, and safe for all voices.

Having only four months until I was scheduled to begin my education degree, I decided to spend my summer restoratively. I returned to the Island and the comfortable fold of working the land, learning with horses, and walking the beach. I returned also to reflexive writing through which I realised that my lived experience outside of school encouraged me to deconstruct those things that I found problematic and then work to evoke change. My experience within systems of schooling often seemed to hone my critical skills but left me powerless to affect that which I identified as problem saturated. Determined to champion a personally meaningful approach to learning, I moved toward my Education degree with hope.

When I began the process of becoming an accredited teacher, I had no idea I was embarking on the most debilitating journey in my life. I suspect that the despondency was made all the more severe because I had had such hope for renewal. Rather than the anticipated space for growth and solidarity, I found a system steeped in divisiveness and toxicity that I have yet to see equalled. The dissonance began at orientation, where members of our class were divided by primary-destined and secondary-destined

educators. As a member of the secondary stream, I was among those herded into a room on the third floor and congratulated for joining a group that would actually do something more than make finger puppets with kids. That introductory summation was indicative of the brokenness of the programme. Not only were students encouraged to other themselves from colleagues who would teach at different levels; this division marked the beginning of a secondary training programme in which the arts in particular and creativity in general were marginalised. It also served to punctuate a particular dissension where I imagined there to be collaboration and support. As I wandered through the next year of education studies disillusioned, three incidents imprinted themselves on me: the black paper; the red book; and the gray meltdown.

I looked forward to taking the educational foundations course because it provided a rare opportunity for primary and secondary teachers to share a learning space. Unfortunately, the course was a mockery. Not only was there a decided lack of cohesion because of the chasm crafted between us, but the curricula were narrow, providing chiefly a retelling of colonialism that was half-heartedly cloaked as the spread of educational enlightenment. Additionally, the professor was openly disdainful, acritical, and smug. The only tangible requirement of the course was to produce a paper on the evolution of education practices in North America. Given no other parameters, I set out to complete the task, but with some meaning. I not only researched the highpoints of educational development; I also tied them to their origins in the practices of other nations and attempted to deconstruct them.

Weeks had passed since we had submitted our research, and still there was no

feedback. With only one class left, finally someone asked when we might expect our papers back. In his typical manner, the professor made a diminutive comment about minions waiting to find out their worth. He did, however, arrive the next week with our grades: that's it – grades. Each student teacher received a piece of torn foolscap paper that contained two pieces of information: his or her name and a corresponding number. There were no papers, no comments, no indication of how he arrived at the grade, and certainly no suggestions about how we could improve our product. There was not even a way to substantiate if he had read them. It was so outrageous, I could barely suppress a giggle; it had to be a joke. As I was trying to make sense of the situation, one of my peers asked what I imagine we were all thinking: was this it – did we not get our papers back with written feedback? He was positively indignant as he responded that they were his papers and, if we wanted them back, we shouldn't have given them to him. He promptly dismissed class and retreated to the dankness of his cluttered office.

I was vaguely aware that the class was emptying, but still I sat. I looked down in disbelief once again: Ellyn Lyle - 87%. This was a mockery. I got up from my desk and followed him to his office. I knocked. He didn't answer. The door was ajar, so I nudged it open with my foot as I called his name. The space was shocking. Having been in the offices of several other professors, I was unprepared for the state of his. Rather than the bright clean environment of his colleagues, he had window coverings so dark that I could barely see. Still, despite the obscurity, his office appeared to be some sort of storage cell. Papers were piled waist deep in every corner and eyeball deep on his desk. I called his name again. From behind a mountainous mess, he demanded to know

what I wanted. I met his question with equal directness and I requested my paper. He refused. I persisted, explaining that I wanted to know where I had room to improve so that I would continue to develop professionally. He again refused insisting, that the paper was his property now. Frustrated and incredulous, I named his refusal as inappropriate and an abuse of his position. He roared at me, calling me insubordinate. Offended on so many levels, I told him I believed I was entitled to my paper and, if he would not produce it, I would raise my concern with the dean. With the smug satisfaction that led me to believe he had a long history of not being held accountable, he said I could suit myself and then told me to shut the door on my way out.

Having been summarily dismissed, I went to the dean's office and explained the incident and those experiences that led up to it. I was kindly but firmly told that the professor had been conducting himself this way for years, and he would undoubtedly insist on keeping the paper. I challenged the dean that people continue to do what is wrong if those in power do not insist that they behave more appropriately. He actually replied that possession was nine-tenths of the law and, thus, I was unlikely to see my paper again. Furious and disillusioned, I said that I was unable to accept such conduct and would go further to have it addressed. Only then did the dean agree to talk to the professor.

The next week I was summoned to the dean's office, where I was told that I had gained permission to view my paper in the confines of the professor's office providing that I return it to him. Assuming that I was not likely to garner any better offer, I accepted. I went to his office directly to review the paper. Under glowering resentment,

I thumbed through the first couple of pages slowly and then the rest of the document more quickly. There was not a single mark anywhere on the more than 30 pages. "Is this why you don't give them back?" I asked, "Do you even read them?" He retorted that he was only required to grade them. I don't remember if he took my paper back from me or if I dropped it, but I left the office without it and went directly to the dean who condescendingly told me that the professor having made no marks on the paper was of little consequence. Furthermore, I should feel celebratory; I was the first student in his memory who had won the right to see her paper again. I didn't feel victorious and, try as I might, I was unable to rally enough people willing to take on the injustice. I eventually filed it in my mind under positional power abuse, professional laziness, and institutional protectionism.

The red book incident was less demoralising but equally ridiculous. Part of our assignment as practising teachers was to keep detailed lesson plans in our red books. Having already been a licensed and practising teacher for four years, I tended toward the abbreviated approach to lesson plans. It seemed perfectly reasonable to me that I write *novel study* in the little block beside *8A*. After all, that was exactly what I planned to spend third period doing. My supervisor, though, had insisted that I prepare detailed notes to guide my teaching in each of the classes. Although I regarded it as a bit of a nuisance, I assumed he wanted to ensure that I had something planned and that there was some discernible coherence to it. I abandoned my abbreviated approach and began writing my lesson plans in detail.

Today, my supervisor would find detailed lesson plans for each teaching block

as well as a plan that clearly mapped out my vision for the unfolding unit of study. Predictably, when he arrived, he asked to see my notes. I delivered them to him and was somewhat stunned when he criticised me once again for the incompleteness of my daybook. I asked what I had overlooked. He said that my notes were still a bit truncated, as I had not even included a salutation to my class. Was he actually overlooking all of my thoughtful preparation to assert that my notes should be scripted to begin with "good morning, class. Today we are going to . . ." I resisted the urge to ask if many teachers forgot to say good morning and if it threw the students into a spin. Rather, I asked only if there was something in particular about my leading of the class that could be improved upon. He said he noticed that, when I write on the board, I tended to slope slightly downhill to the right. With no further constructive criticism, he wished me continued luck in the practicum and left.

Both the black paper and the red book incidents occurred during first term. I had a few weeks left until Christmas break, and I was having an increasingly difficult time reconciling myself to being in such a programme. I was feeling disillusioned, fragmented, and exhausted. Terrified that I would not be able to complete the degree, yet unable to imagine myself as anything other than a teacher, my panic attacks of the previous year returned with intensity. By the end of term, I was feeling unnerved and somehow outside of myself.

I have only a single memory of the Holiday season that year. It was Christmas Eve and, as was tradition, my family was at my grandparents' home. I was in the kitchen, alone, doing the dishes. I could hear hushed murmurs coming from the other

room, and I was vaguely aware that they were of concern for me. I heard someone coming, and I tried to wash with more energy because I seemed even to myself to be in slow motion. I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder and turned to see my mom. She looked at me with such empathy it would have broken my heart if I could have felt anything. I tried to smile and watched as a single tear patterned its way down her cheek. She kissed my head and returned to the living room. I didn't know why she cried so looked in the mirror to see what was wrong with me. I raised my eyes to my reflection and saw only emptiness looking back. Christmas 1996.

I have come to understand the gray meltdown as the result of being too long in this state of conflict. I left high school in search of an educational experience that understood the relational importance of merging theory and practise while honouring the integrity of teacher and learners. With each passing year, my experiences grew more disheartening. At this mid-point in my second degree, I met fully and unabashedly my own disintegration.

I feel like I've stopped functioning. Things so mundane are monumental now – even caring for myself seems impossibly difficult. I can barely crawl across the floor and into the bathtub. It takes an embarrassing amount of concentration to manipulate the taps so that the water comes. I am so depleted by the time I get undressed and in to bathe, I often lie there long after the water is cold. Invariably, I stay until I can summon the energy to crawl back out of the tub. Once, when I pulled my frame up in front of the vanity, I saw a stranger staring back at me. Her eyes were a kaleidoscope of pity, fear, and condemnation; then, they were vacant.

My flat was emptied, and I moved home to my parents' place. Mom and Dad knew that I was unwell; like me, though, nothing could have prepared them for the seriousness of my disintegration. Their independent and energetic daughter was a broken embodiment of anxiety and depression. I spent my days in a rocking chair in front of the fireplace. No longer possessing the strength to figure out what was wrong with me, I sat and cried. I don't recall how I felt apart from the deep sense of failure and guilt. My family, of course, rallied around me. Where they used to congratulate me on academic and extracurricular awards, they now praised my every bite of food and any effort at personal grooming.

Still, I could not begin to recover. I was consumed by fear of losing my year and having to endure the degree all over again. It never occurred to me to simply quit; that would have been the ultimate admission of defeat. I was a teacher and I would have the credential to prove it. I convinced my mother that seeing my professors and saving my degree would alleviate some stress in my life. Desperate to help in any way, she drove me to the university. I remember her worrying that I wouldn't be able to make the walk from the car to the education building. I recall thinking she may be right.

I made the walk across campus, but the three flights of stairs up to the education faculty took all the energy I had. When I finally ascended the last one, one of my professors greeted me with an odd blend of shock, concern, and self-righteousness. He helped me to his office and literally propped me against a wall. I confessed (not that denying it would have done any good) that my health was poor and I was being pulled

from school on a medical leave. I recall mumbling something about overextending myself and experiencing exhaustion. In fact, I think I convinced even myself of it.

I listened while he told me that not everyone was capable of holding up under the rigorous and progressive programme and the stress of this career. I remember feeling confused by his statements because I hadn't encountered rigour or progressiveness anywhere in the vicinity. Nonetheless, I saw it as my failure so I said nothing. I assured him that all of my assignments would be submitted by the deadlines, and I would complete my practicum on schedule. He said that he could not promise that my efforts would be sufficient to entitle me the degree, but I could hope for the best.

I had similar conversations with two more professors who cautiously offered to be supportive in any way the faculty would permit. In the office of my fourth and final professor, I rambled out my rehearsed speech once again. She did the most amazing thing – she asked how I was coping. It stopped me cold. For the first time, I voiced my fear that I was losing my mind in this breakdown. She seemed to grow taller and indomitable as she informed me that I was not having a breakdown, but rather a break-up. It happens, she said, when we are made of curves in a square world and, in her opinion, if more people had them, the world would be a much more beautiful place. She'd had one herself, she said, when she was about my age, and always counted herself lucky to be intelligent enough to recognize and challenge the insanity of the world at such a young age. Think of the inconvenience of having to do it in mid-life, or worse, never. I smiled. For the first time in months, I thought I might survive.

In those few minutes, she changed the way I saw the world and myself in it. The shackles weakened. I was undoubtedly exhausted and undeniably wracked with anxiety, but I would survive. I simply needed to refer to my experience in a way that was personally meaningful. At that moment, I began to understand my struggle to negotiate a space as teacher: the systems of education that I had encountered were implicitly (perhaps even accidentally) teaching me to critique. Ironically, what I critiqued and uncovered were systems that seemed inflexible and unable to accommodate the breadth and diversity I was seeking. As I gained the skills that helped me to recognize the imperviousness and intolerability to change of the system, I was trapped in it with no way of constructing knowledge in a meaningful way. Despite this realisation, I was more than half way through a degree that I was desperate to complete, so I trudged ahead.

Disillusioned and frustrated I completed my course requirements, albeit in absentia. I was emotionally depleted and physically exhausted despite having been bodily out of any school setting for three months. The only barrier to my degree completion was the final practicum. I requested a placement in the high school from which I graduated. The cooperating teacher had been my English teacher and knew me well. She showed a great deal of trust in handing me her class for six weeks and encouraged me to make it my own. Because I remember much of my school experience as one giving rise to disconnection, my goal was to create a unit of drama that demanded critical thought while encouraging personal meaningfulness. This attempt at creating spaces for engagement, though, was met with resistance.

Shakespeare's *MacBeth* had been taught at the school for about 20 years. I wanted to teach *Hamlet*. My request to the office for texts resulted in my being summoned there. I was reminded how long *MacBeth* had been on the curriculum and asked why I felt compelled to introduce change. I explained that *Hamlet*, in my experience, offered more fully developed and complex characters. I also voiced that, although *MacBeth* was a fine choice, my cooperating teacher had encouraged me to make the unit my own and seemed pleased with my selection. I was informed that I would need to create a unit from scratch and it would be subject to review. Word travelled quickly through the English department that I had opted to teach *Hamlet* rather than *MacBeth*. I had drop-in visits, was queried by other teachers, and was eventually "invited" to host my class in the gym. It felt somewhat like a dare and couldn't have come at a worse time, as we were rehearsing reader's theatre. Nonetheless, off to the gymnasium we went for scrutiny. It seemed a great deal of fuss in the name of swapping one tragedy for another, but that ended up being the least significant of the challenges.

The remainder of the term proceeded quietly with little interference, at least until the final assignment. Wanting to provide every opportunity for students to engage with their learning and make it personally meaningful, I created an assignment that was negotiated within parameters. The overarching requirements were to demonstrate understanding of the themes and character development as contextualized by the time period and each student's personal experience. The effort was allowed to be artistic (poetry, drama, painting, etc.) or traditional (written paper on approved topic), but both

had to contain written and oral components. It was a fun assignment to create and rewarding to review. Although there were many delights among them, two students in particular remain in mind almost 15 years later – one for his excellence and the other for her attitude.

He wore torn jeans, belted with chains, ratty heavy-metal tee shirts, combat boots, and had long unkempt hair: all black. His course load included general math and science and my advanced English course. I was told that he fought for his right to take my course and was almost denied because of his track record in the general courses. Fortunately, the school had no policy that could refuse him entrance into English 611. He was granted a seat with a sneer that it was his to fail.

He kept to himself in class, a definite misfit among the upper caste. Despite an apparent chip on his shoulder, he seemed to be articulate and thoughtful. For his final assignment, he designed and constructed The Globe theatre. He made hand puppets and wrote a script based on a contemporary version of Hamlet Act III:ii. With excellent pronunciation and flawless delivery, he performed it. He not only demonstrated comprehension and creativity, he presented beautiful craftsmanship. He earned a high 90 for his effort.

She was tall, willowy, and graceful: a ballet dancer. She treated school with tolerance and delighted in recognition for her talents. She had a fine command of the written word and delivered a template type paper again and again. When she came to me before submitting the assignment, I challenged her to abandon her template and endeavour to be creative. If she chose still to write a paper, I suggested that she

consider writing creatively as a break from the formal essay. If she chose to stay with the formal essay, she might at least avoid a simple read-type delivery for her oral component. While I suggested these alternatives and encouraged her to challenge herself, she responded with mild boredom and disdain. She submitted a typical formal essay and then sat at her desk and read it verbatim to the class. She earned a low 80 for her assignment. She approached me, waving the paper, reminding me I wasn't a real teacher and slinging accusations about my trying to ruin her future. I calmly reminded her of the assignment and the conversations we had shared about the standards for the oral presentation. She said she didn't need to do any more than she did; she was a 90s student, and everyone with a brain knew it. I told her that all of my students were welcome to improve their projects, resubmit, and be re-graded. She called me a bitch and told me to go to hell.

The experience still bothers me. I truly felt bad about her frustration regarding her mark, but I could only grade product, not track records nor reputation. She was given every opportunity for success but projected an attitude that said she was above the standards that governed other students. I had no alternative but to grade her effort as I would grade anyone else's. Had that been the end of it, the event might not still be so fresh in my mind. However, it didn't stop there. She went to the cooperating teacher and complained. That teacher came to me for the background on the situation. I shared with her the assignment and the submission, as well as the details of my conversations with the student. She spoke with the student and expressed her support of the grade received. The student filed an escalated complaint, citing the young man's success as

proof of my idiocy. As requested by the office, I forwarded the assignment and her submission. I was asked to make his available. I said I had no idea what his product had to do with her grade. Still, both were requested and delivered. Upon review, I was told three things: he was not capable of success; she had a history of achieving grades that exceeded 90 percent; and I was rocking the boat. Sickened, I replied respectively: clearly he was capable, as they had the proof; I was not grading her history, but her submission; and so what?

Although I don't know if the administration eventually overturned the grades, the marks stood when I left. The practicum was finished, and the degree was granted. Feeling far less than celebratory, I did not attend convocation. I threw myself into substituting, hoping it was the degree to which I was allergic. Afflicted by dreams at night and panic attacks through the day, one week became two. Tormented by my own choices and able to fix neither schooling systems nor myself, I withdrew even in the staff room. On my prep period, one of my advanced English teachers, now a colleague, joined me on the bench by the window. Without preamble, he told me to run. *This place will suck the very marrow of life from you. I was like you once, full of hope and determination to change the world and broaden minds. But the system has injected its poison and insured the failure of us all: we've got 40 kids per class, 30 of whom regard us with disdain, if not blatant hostility. Get out, Ellyn, before it steals your soul.* Some would berate him for not offering support, but it seemed to me an omen. From that day, I not only refused calls for supply teaching, I withdrew my name from the board. It was

time to turn my attention inward as I sought to make sense of my personal disintegration.

It was a long process finding my way back to the classroom but, ironically, the journey led me to the same school that I had once found so crippling. I had heard rumours during my Education degree that the faculty was facing a major transition: in fact, the government and public had demanded it. The term after my convocation, a new dean was recruited to be the change agent and champion of a renewed programme and faculty. Guided by a vision to grow whole teachers, a two-year integrated programme emerged. Tired and fragmented curricula were replaced by courses in critical pedagogy and integrated foundations. Faculty members were once again required to contribute to research, and accountability was imperative. Those who opted not to support the new vision were presumably offered alternatives, as they were not present when the new programme commenced in the fall.

Although change came too late for my cohort, its arrival still validated for me that my programme had indeed been problem saturated. It also planted a seed in my mind: maybe systems can change, and perhaps we can return to places and know them for the first time. The journey back started with a conversation. I had errands to run in the city and, bolstered by the beautiful autumn day, I decided to visit that one education professor who actually listened. That's how I still remember her. She was the one who, during that gray meltdown, actually heard me. She recognised the deep disengagement underlying my faltering health and she named it. Somehow that honest acknowledgement marked the beginning of my healing. Having never told her as much,

I decided to drop in and say thank you. It was not easy, though. In truth, I had not set foot on the campus since my nervous breakdown four years earlier. I did not return for convocation, and the parchment that was sent in the post has never been mounted. Truth be told, despite my determination never to spare it a glance, my pulse still quickened every time I drove past the place. Today, it ended.

Tired of being held prisoner by my own fear, I slowed as I approached the fork in the road and guided my car into the left turning lane. Reminding myself to breathe, I signalled and pulled on to campus. I began to shake, whether from fear remembered or adrenalin experienced, I could not honestly say; I suspect it was a combination of both. I parked the car and consciously drew in a steadying breath. I got out, locked up, and negotiated my way along an old familiar path. I tried to focus on the fresh, crisp day, the beautiful autumn colours, and the New England feeling that the centre block always conjured up. I'm not sure I was successful, but I managed to distract myself long enough to get to the door of the education building. I gulped a breath of air as though I were a diver preparing for a deep plunge. I pushed through the door and, on trembling legs, climbed the stairs. The smells were the same – dank and stale – symbolic of my experience there. I reminded myself that I was not beholden to this place any longer and could come and go as I pleased. I made my way down the hall and found her office where I had last left it. I knocked tentatively and heard her call out from the other side to enter.

She was at her desk, looking very much as I recalled, a comforting blend of academic and maternal. Her face lit with surprise and pleasure when she saw me and,

as I greeted her, the hold of the past weakened. After she invited me to sit and said how nice it was to see me, she asked what brought me to the city. I explained that I was in to run a few errands but wanted to stop by and thank her, that I recognised I would not have come through the other side as I did without her support. "Poppycock." That's what she said. She pooh-poohed the notion and insisted that my allergic reaction to the programme was only further proof of my intelligence. We chatted about the dark ages of the faculty and she updated me on the changes: new professors thanks to some encouraged retirements; new dean specifically recruited to re-envision the faculty's future direction; new courses that encouraged critical pedagogy and intellectual development; and a new graduate programme for leaders and thinkers to write their way into professional growth. I was delighted for her and said that I often wondered how she continued to thrive in that old environment. She confessed that she hadn't; she said she had quit the same year I did and had returned only when there was renewal and hope. Through our conversation I realised that, regardless of our rank or role, we can choose to walk away from places that silence and harm us. Likewise, when offered the promise of renewal, we can return. We can revisit old places and make them new by finding empowerment and engagement where previously there was none. As she talked, I listened and responded where appropriate. Only as our conversation was coming to an end did I realise that she was sharing her own journey with the hope of inspiring me to set out again.

When she first mentioned the wonderful renaissance of the faculty, I was pleased only for her. As she continued to discuss it and its potential for faculty and students alike, she piqued my curiosity. Through the extended dialogue about journeys of

personal healing and professional growth, I was slowly enticed by her metaphor. Still, when she suggested that I come back to this place for graduate school, I was stunned. Stunned, but both curious and tempted. Having given me much to think about, she bid me farewell with a challenge: it's not enough to complain about perceived injustice or misrepresentation, she said; we have to take ourselves seriously enough to reflect deeply on our experiences, generate ideas from them, and present greater possibilities. *Before I made it back to my car, I had decided to apply for graduate school. Successful in my application, I was slated to begin the Master of Education programme the following September.*

In the space of time between my application and programme commencement, I had begun my work with adult learners in a local processing plant. I recognised that I was leading the creation of a programme that was truly learner-centred and generative. I was not, however, theorising the experience; nor was I deconstructing my role in it. With the support of the employee participants in a workplace learning centre, I set out to use my Master of Education programme as a way to give voice to learners whose previous silencing within systems of schooling led them to disengage from learning. My goal in giving voice to these stories was to enter into a dialogue, both with the learners and the theory, which would help me understand academic disengagement and potential ways to re-engage.

In thus partnering theoretical explication and practical application of my learning, my experience in the Master of Education programme was fortifying, validating, and deeply meaningful. Newly inspired by this approach to learning, I was

able to shift my focus from resisting problem-saturated systems of schooling to cutting paths for new ways to learn/lead praxis.

Based heavily on Freirian philosophy, which regarded me and my learners as independent, abstract, complex, and conscious individuals, I began positioning education as emancipatory. This "liberating education," which Freire argued consists in "acts of cognition, not transferrals of information," (p. 67), encouraged us all to understand schooling as dynamic praxis.

Along this journey of moving between theory and practise, I uncovered some foundational principles of adult education that aid in achieving what I have come to understand as *join-up* with learning. Honouring the importance of the situated nature of constructing knowledge, I invite you to the field where I first learned about join-up, and then to learning organisations where I deconstructed the principles of adult education.

CHAPTER 4

Education in the Field: Learning with Horses

Although my telling of my schooling experiences sometimes paints a bleak picture, each of my degrees has given me a gift of insight that has been central to learning/leading praxis: my Arts degree taught me about perspective; my Education degree instilled perseverance; and my graduate degree introduced me to praxis. My most recent gift, which I unwrapped during the process of researching and writing my doctoral dissertation, is a profound recognition of the role of join-up in learning. Founded on the principles of consistency, predictability, and replicability, join-up employs deep communication, trust, and choice to establish engagement. Because I was first introduced to join-up through my work with horses, I invite you into the field with me.

Spotty. He was my first memorable lesson in the field – well, the orchard, actually. We were perfectly suited, he and I: we were both about half the height of others in our species (he was a small Shetland pony and I was 5 years old); equally independent in thought, we were both determined to control the outcome of our first conjoined experience; and cocky, neither of us had any doubt we'd persevere.

It was 1980. The day was warm and humid, and the August apples were thick on the trees. He was covered in burdocks, and I was sticky with perspiration and horsehair. I finally had him tied in the paddock after cornering him in the field, luring him with oats, and then quickly snapping a lead on him when he was least expecting it. My cousin and I dragged the pony saddle and pad from the barn and threw it on his

back. We replaced the halter with a headstall, a bit, and a pair of reins. Feeling like the unstoppable mistress of my newly found freedom, I nodded at my cousin, and she opened the gate to world.

Like coming out of the shoot in bronc riding, I knew too late that this was a ride I should have reconsidered. Spotty caught the scent of freedom in the air and broke into a hacksaw jog around my aunt's house. He was single-minded in getting to the apple orchard that he could normally only gaze upon longingly from within his barbed-wire enclosure. As I continued to saw on his mouth and implore him to whoa, he showed me the same disrespect I had shown him in preparing for our ride: eager to rid himself of a pest, he headed for the lowest hanging apples. Those apples were attached to the lowest branch. That branch was attached to an ancient but very solid tree. To this day I maintain that a cartoon character couldn't have looked any more ridiculous: my neck caught on the branch and I was unceremoniously plucked from the back of my mount who then immediately dropped gait, came to a halt, and began his lunch.

Thirty years and dozens of horses later, I understand how I set us up for failure and why Spotty responded as he did. I let us down in so many ways. I did not invest the time in grooming him, which is so important. Imagine putting on clothes and a hiking pack if you had thistles in your flesh and dirt caked on your skin. Horses are no different in that regard. It's crucial that we show them the care of proper grooming before we tack up. This process not only ensures their comfort and physical well being; it also establishes trust.

Think for a moment about dogs. They run and play and wag to greet us. When we return the affection, they roll over on their backs and put their feet in the air. I've

learned over the course of many years that when a dog shows you her belly this way, she is actually saying, "here are my vulnerable areas, and I'm going to trust you to play nice." She can do this because she is also a predator. Yes, our dogs are predators. More importantly, though, so are we.

Think now for a moment about eyes and their placement. Where are they on dogs? Where are yours? Go ahead and have a look if you like. Seriously, this is important stuff. Where are eyes on horses? Take notice of the difference in their placement. That's right: horses' eyes are on the sides of their heads. This eye placement gives horses a broader range of vision so they are better able to protect themselves from predators, or front-eyes like you and me. Because a dog is a predator as well, it is hard-wired to protect itself and therefore can choose to be submissive. By comparison, a horse is a prey animal and is naturally predisposed to flight for self-preservation. In short, we are natural enemies of horses. Time spent in grooming establishes a routine of trust building wherein we can run our predatory hands and foreign tools over the body of the horse and show it only care.

Several equine experts (Camp, 2008; Irwin, 2007; and Roberts, 1997a, 1997b, 2002, 2004) confirm that our every action and reaction when working with horses is critical. This extends even to basic grooming. I use a metal currycomb on the fleshy parts of the horse like the body and neck. The teeth bring only pleasure and positive attention while leaving the horse free from caked-on earth. I then groom with a soft brush and extend my attention to the bony areas like the legs. I am careful to keep my motions fluid and gentle as I work out the dirt. I use a small palm brush for his face so the soothing strokes appear to be delivered by my hand. When grooming the tail, I

stand to one side, respecting that horses are most comfortable when I remain in their peripheral vision. Before combing the forelock, which involves my intruding on his personal headspace, I rub up over the ears until the horse drops his head inviting me to touch between his eyes. I take care when cleaning hooves to support legs and feet and communicate that I value the trust being shared by giving up his power of flight.

These same equine experts attest that the greatest success with horses comes from approaching them in partnership and asking them to engage with me. This request for join-up requires an enduring commitment to understanding and communication. Knowing that I am regarded as a natural enemy has helped establish a trust-building routine in grooming. I have circled the horse and caused him to think about my presence as non-threatening. But will he stay with me? Will he come to trust me as a safe place when we go out into the world together?

To move toward this join-up, I draw heavily from the work of internationally respected horseman and founder of Equus University, Monty Roberts. Several of his publications (Roberts, 1997a, 1997b, and 2004) focus primarily on join-up. The principle is simple: horses are flight animals, but they are also herd animals. Even during the flight impulse, horses rely on their herd for protection. In order to have a strong and sustainable relationship with a horse, I need to become the leader of that herd.

Although I've joined-up now with several horses, I want to share with you the story of Beanz. Born to my favourite mare, he was strong, solid, square, and full of beans from the moment he hit the straw. He was up on his feet within minutes, and I was immediately in love with this colt. Because he was born on the date that my

grandfather Frank died, I registered him as Frankly Unforgettable with the stable name of Beanz.

Beanz was immediately distrustful of me and I watched as he consistently bounded behind his mother to put distance between us. His mother, though, was such an intelligent mare, one with whom I had a trustful relationship. Each time I entered the stall, I approached her. In soft tones, I rubbed her barrel, her muzzle, her neck, murmuring what a good job she had done in birthing such a strong colt. Having always deferred to her as the protector of her colt, I was at first confused when she started circling away from me. I began to replay my actions as I came into the stall: I never looked her directly in the eye, as that communicates aggression; in deference, I always approached her, not the colt; I gently massaged vulnerable areas to remind her of our bond of trust; and I always made certain that she was between me and her colt. Still, by day three, she circled to the back corner of her stall. I took a chance and reached out for the colt, approaching him from his shoulder, cooing "good boy." As expected, he sniffed at my hand and then tried to dart behind his mother. She held firm to the corner, forcing him to stand between her and me. She nickered. Then I knew: through her circling to the back, she was inviting me to meet her foal. In standing her ground, she was insisting that her foal accept the introduction. As I realised she had positioned me as part of their herd, I was moved to tears. I turned away from the colt, squatted to be lower than his height, and waited. It was less than three minutes before his nose was on my shoulder. "Ok", he was saying; "Mum says you're safe, so let's see how this goes."

Although I had accomplished join-up with several horses before that moment, it

was always in the field as I prepared to start them. This join-up was different – so immediate. I have since used this approach with every foal of my acquaintance and, although it always humbles me, I was truly changed by that experience.

Join-up in the field is equally wonderful. Usually initiated with two year olds, it frames the way I begin their formal training. I bring the horse into a round pen, and I take my place in the middle. With a long, lightweight line, I shoo the horse away from me. Predictably, the horse takes flight in response to what it understands as my aggressive behaviour. I maintain an aggressive position and I continue to push the horse away from me. As the horse keeps to the rail and lopes circles around the pen, I turn with him, always keeping my shoulders square on him and my eyes locked on his. When he seems to be getting comfortable in this exchange, I abruptly flip the line a few paces in front of him, causing him to pivot and flee in the other direction. What I am communicating is that I am not willing to join up with him, so he best look for a way out of the situation. He does. First, as he flees one way; then, as he flees the other. My behaviour does not change. As Irwin (2007) reminds me, horses don't like ambiguity, so I remain with my shoulders square and my eyes locked on the horse. Again, when the horse seems to be settling into a comfortable gait, I force him to change direction.

Then I wait and watch carefully for the expected signs. The horse will slow his gait to a jog and his inside ear invariably flicks inward and points to me. He is saying, "Okay, I'm listening." Next, the horse will drop his head, first just below the level of his shoulders, and then almost to the ground. Roberts (2004) says this is the horse's way of saying, "I'm ready to negotiate; if you want to call the meeting, you can be the

chair." Finally, the horse will begin to chew and lick, indicating an eagerness to have the conversation. At this point, I look away and drop my shoulders off to a 45-degree angle. My body language communicates that I understand the horse has accepted my invitation and I am ready, too. I then turn my back and wait. The horse will slow to a walk and tentatively circle in toward me. I remain still with my back turned as the horse approaches me. He will sniff a bit; soon I will feel his breath on my neck, and he will softly nudge my shoulder with his nose: join-up. I turn then, eyes averted, and gently rub between the horse's eyes. Then I walk away. The horse follows me. I stop. He puts his nose on my shoulder. I repeat the action. He repeats his response. In this response-based learning, we are communicating successfully. Each of us understands the other, and we are engaged with the process. We are now ready to begin learning together. Predictable and replicable magic. Every time.

Irwin (2007) has an interesting perspective on this magic:

> It's magic because what horses need to hear from us is what many of us would like to hear from ourselves. They want us to have a calm, focussed assurance. They want us to be consistent. They want us to be both strong and compassionate. In short, horses need us to be our best selves. And by being so sensitive to our self-doubt and fear, they help us find where we keep our inner betrayals so we can root them out (p. 13).

The difficult part of training horses is really its requirement to learn about ourselves, our strengths and challenges, as we attempt to collaborate with others in mutual respect and trust. This centrality of self-awareness to teaching reminds me of Palmer's (1998)

insistence that we teach who we are. Several scholars, in fact, (Elbaz, 1991; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005; Friere, 1974, 1992; Palmer, 1993, 1998; VanManen, 1990; and Wheatley, 2009) discuss the significance of teachers' self-awareness because of the inevitability of bringing their lived experience into the classroom. This tendency leads me to discuss, at least briefly, a related theoretical area of interest: lived experience.

I was first formally introduced to the concept of lived experience by Van Manen (1990). At its most basic, says Van Manen, lived experience "involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life" (p. 35). Other scholars (Dilthey, 1985; Gadamer, 1975; and Schutz, 1967) have argued that the importance of lived experience resides not in the experience alone but in our reflexive awareness of it. I find the work of Schutz (1967) of particular interest. He writes:

> Meaning does not lie in the experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively . . . It is, then, incorrect to say that my lived experiences are meaningful merely in virtue of their being experienced or lived through . . . The reflective glance singles out an elapsed lived experience and constitutes it as meaningful. (pp. 69-71)

In these same pages, Schutz discusses the notion of lived experience as something *constituted;* that is, he says that its meaning is found in retrospective reflection through acts of remembrance, narration, or meditation. Burch (1989) seems to support Schutz's view but criticises him for focussing on the construction of meaning without explicitly unpacking the implications of subjectivity. I support Burch's criticism but problem-

pose the word *meaning* as it implies there exists one; *understanding* is more congruent with this discussion of personal knowledge that is constituted through reflecting on lived experience.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), any examination of personal knowledge involves an explication of the social and cultural aspects of that individual's lived experience. They make at least three interesting points in this discussion. First, they remind me that individuals "use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Second, Ellis and Bochner argue that situating research within this framework allows me as researcher to "use self to learn about other" (p. 741). Third, they suggest that, because of the complexity of considering how people take up cultural practices, it is important to contextualise *voice*. In a thesis designed to examine the importance of personally meaningful learning practises, I assume it is important to consider theoretically what it means to have voice.

Explicating the intricacy of voice, Ellsworth (1997), introduces the concept of a *trialogue*. In her opinion, the third participant in every conversation seemingly dual in nature is the unconscious. Impossible to account for completely, the unconscious creates a space between what is said and what is heard.

Palmer (1993) also discusses the theoretical importance of voice. In particular, he highlights the voice of the subject in the triangulation of "the teachers, the students, and the subject itself" (p. 98). He suggests that, because of the nature of consciousness, entering into this discourse with other makes our own speech become clearer (p. 101).

Likewise, Cole and Knowles (1994) posit that, by beginning with an exploration of self, the researcher is better able to investigate phenomena (p. 19).

Lived experience and voice as we communicate through self-other interactions bring me back to lessons in the field. Roberts (1997a, 1997b) maintains that we learn not only through our experiences, but also by reflecting on how those experiences frame our self-other interactions as we go forward in the world. For him, and I agree, communication is central to establishing safe learning spaces as we negotiate these lessons. Meaningful communication, he reminds us, is so much more than words: it is heavily reliant on the subtleties of tone and body language.

Recall the round pen and join-up. The position of the trainer's shoulders and direction of her eyes communicate with the horse whether or not he is invited to join her. The horse, in this response-based learning, communicates in return through the position of his head and the chewing motion that he wants to join his trainer. This *deep communication* (Roberts, 2001) enables join-up, but trust and choice are central to keeping the learning alive.

The effectiveness of this learning experience is contingent upon each participant behaving in a consistent and predictable manner. The trainer must use her body to keep the pressure off the horse once join-up has been achieved. The horse must follow up by shadowing the trainer around the pen not only to demonstrate his commitment to following the trainer as his new herd leader, but also as a testament to the new trustful partnership as they continue learning together. If either the trainer or the horse breaches this bond, the process must start from the beginning once more. Not surprisingly, if

this happens, there can be some hesitation and wariness on the part of both horse and trainer because each recalls the lack of trust from the previous failed attempt at establishing a learning relationship.

People also approach learning with some hesitation because they may carry with them past experiences of disconnection. This disconnection often makes learners vulnerable and increases the criticality of achieving join-up on the first attempt. I came to this realisation when I was given the opportunity to establish a workplace learning centre. Guided by this acknowledgement, I spent the first two weeks in that setting meeting individually with each potential learner. Every one of them approached me with trepidation, carrying a story of disengagement. I did what I had learned was best: I listened. I heard stories stemming from places of anger, defeat, disappointment, self-reproach, and fear. When it seemed appropriate, I asked questions about dreams that had been silenced and goals that might be resurrected. I worked relentlessly to understand each of the learners and create spaces for them where they could learn. Committed to trust and honesty, I did not always find the journey easy. It involved unlearning some tightly held assumptions and a willingness to be open to seeing ourselves and our relationships with learning differently.

Although each participant had unique educational goals and motivation, we had a collective mandate as well: restored confidence in ourselves and in our ability to succeed in learning. We worked toward achieving this purpose in innumerable small ways. The first time it really began to take shape was about eight weeks into the programme. Some learners had begun to express uneasiness about the approaching end

of school, as we were set up only as a 12-week pilot programme. I encouraged them to take ownership of their new opportunity and to write letters to management expressing their desire to continue learning. There were at least three very important outcomes as a result of those letters: first, they felt confident in communicating with management their desire for continued learning opportunities; second, they learned to create business correspondence; and third, in being granted an eight-month extension of their programme, they experienced empowerment.

Bolstered by new confidence and success, they soon decided to make another request. They wanted to know how the plants operated so they'd be better informed of advancement opportunities. As a result, learners once again practiced their letter-writing skills and once again experienced success as they were granted guided tours of the plants, which outlined the potential for mobility within the corporation. Similarly, as I worked to make their learning meaningful, they began to discover geometry in the operation of cranes, physics in mechanical work, and integers through temperature and personal banking. With each new discovery, I came to understand how join-up guided our learning.

The Learning Centre took on a life of its own and became a place of engagement and empowerment. A bright room away from the processing plant, the centre had 12 personal computers, Internet and network connections, and a small but diverse library. The walls were alive with colourful learning charts, a world map, photography, and inspirational quotations. In the centre of the room, there were three large conference tables placed to form an "I" – a reminder of why we learn and

strategic in its design, it allowed learners individual space but was also conducive to discussion and interaction. The trust and collaboration allowed us to create a space where the centre grew to accommodate the growth of its students. Originally established to assist in the attainment of General Educational Development (G.E.D.) certificates, the centre soon became a space for anyone who wanted to learn. Courses included adult basic education, secondary credits in English and mathematics, post-secondary refresher courses, and Red Seal training. Computer courses, creative writing, and training in personal and professional correspondence were also offered. Because the learning environment was founded on the philosophy of join-up and committed to making learning relevant and personally meaningful, a sense of solidarity developed. Because of that solidarity, the members of our learning community felt safe to examine their biases and assumptions about teaching and learning. Through reflexively considering our learning experiences, many of us were able to reconceptualise what it meant to go to school.

In addition to trust and communication, choice is central to establishing a positive learning relationship. Roberts (2001) reminds us that, just as the horse must choose to join-up, so too must people. In his work with large corporations, he found that both leadership and change initiatives were markedly more successful if the participants chose to be involved. Choice, or buy-in, establishes shared ownership and makes the desire for success more intrinsically important. It also removes resistance born of feeling like something has been done to you, rather than co-authored by you. Founded on the principles of consistency, predictability, and replicability, join-up

employs deep communication, trust, and choice to establish engagement. Finally, the join-up process asserts that violence, either bullying or coercion, is never the answer. This latter assertion reminds me of the principles of adult education and the context in which I first deconstructed them. Having introduced you to join-up, I invite you to explore with me the principles of adult education that operate within successful learning organisations and the way they aid join-up in those settings.

CHAPTER 5

Education in Business: Learning with Organisations

The philosophy and principles of join-up are colloquial and customary amidst the community of horse trainers. My goal in this chapter is to help make explicit how these same principles are consistent, operating, and replicable within learning organisations. First, though, I think it is important to consider briefly the conceptual and practical evolution of the learning organisation.

The learning organisation, as a conceptual framework, has its origins in organisational learning theory. Often used interchangeably, I understand these two entities very differently. Organisational learning is a heavily theoretical area of study that examines learning models used within organisations and then posits theories based on those studies. It is specifically interested in understanding how organisations learn as units, how individual learning contributes to collective learning, and how learning affects the organisation's overall ability to adapt to its environment (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Czarniawska, 1998; Marquardt, 2002; Schön, 1995; Senge, 1990; Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003; Teare & Dealtry, 1998; Toffler, 1990; Van Buren, 2001; Wheatly, 1992; and Woodman, 1989).

Learning organisations, in comparison, represent the practical application of organisational learning theory. They use the theoretical findings of organisational learning to inform the ways in which they might foster continuous improvement through effective learning practices. Viewed this way, learning organisations are the dynamic representative of the theory (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Marquardt, 2002; Schön,

1995; and Senge, 1990). The phrase *learning organisation* gained traction in the 1980s in reference to businesses that leveraged learning to maximise growth and resilience in the increasingly competitive markets (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004; Marquardt, 1996; and Senge, 1990). The term was further popularised in the next decade with the publication of Senge's (1990) *The Fifth Discipline*. He conceptualised learning organisations as places where

> people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire; new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; collective aspirations are set free; people are continually learning to learn together (Stewart, 2001, p. 143).

Thus, at the root of learning organisations is the commitment to providing a framework for their people to be awake to and engaged in the work environment. Learning organisations support both individual and team learning with the aim of fostering creative and critical thinking across boundaries. This support is instrumental in helping people join-up with their work and become a meaningful part of the collaborative whole that contributes to organisational success (Larsen, 1996). In turn, fostering engagement in this manner encourages workers to learn, problem-pose, collaborate, and innovate in a continuous fashion that enables sustainable development of both individuals and businesses.

Understanding the fundamental difference between organisational learning theory and learning organisations allows me to focus on the latter and offer a characterisation that situates learning within them. Drawing from the work of Argyris

and Schön, 1995; Marquardt, 2002; Overmeer, 1997; Owen, 1991; Schön, 1995; and Senge, 1990, I posit that learning organisations have at least three characteristics: first, they develop both individual and collective knowledge; second, they use learning to improve performance and boost competitive advantage; and third, they continuously enhance their capacity, through reflexive praxis, to adapt to their external environment. Interestingly, though, even in the presence of these essential three characteristics, learning organisations can vary greatly in their organic development.

My first real emersion in a learning organisation came well before I was able to identify it as such. Having fled the public school system and then spent years circling back around places where I might etch out space for more integrative learning, I finally found my opportunity to return to the classroom full-time. This prospect was at a local processing plant. The company was a large enterprise with more than 800 employees at its busiest season. With no previous experience of offering learning and development opportunities for its employees, the company initially approached learning with tempered enthusiasm and expectations. It assigned the initiative to the training department that had previously focussed primarily on compliance-based certifications. Not really knowing how the programme would evolve, or if it would be sustainable, the head of that training department posted an advertisement for a workplace instructor and decided to leave the programme's parameters and development to the successful candidate.

As that successful candidate, I inherited an empty room, a couple of dozen potential learners, and 12 weeks to prove myself. After rounding up some tables and

chairs, bookshelves, and learning materials, my first stop was to visit the human resource manager. I introduced myself and asked what the motivation was for creating this programme. He said upgrading had been previously limited to basic literacy tutoring that he had personally offered. This new pilot programme was the result of an employee satisfaction survey in which the feedback indicated that employees wanted better opportunities for upgrading their education. He had partnered with the provincial adult and workplace education department, whose staff had conducted an organisational needs assessment and recommended that providing on-site training might improve performance and retention. He agreed to three months to test the theory. In short, he was in the production business, not the education business. If education improved production, the programme would be extended.

Next I asked him if he had a particular vision for the programme. He said that it had to be accessible but not coercive and that it couldn't interfere with production. Beyond those parameters, he said he trusted I knew what I was doing, and that he'd keep an ear to the ground to be sure I did. He invited me to come to him if I needed something to give the programme a fair shot at success, and then he wished me luck. Sensing I was just dismissed, I replayed the conversation in my mind as I returned to the learning centre. It seemed clear that he would support any reasonable requests, providing learning did not interfere with productivity.

Having gotten a sense of management's motivation, I was eager to meet with the employees. I dedicated the next two weeks to having one-to-one chats with each interested individual. All of them carried unique stories of disconnection as well as

personal reasons for wanting to re-engage. Although each story was equally important, I remember one specific encounter with particular clarity.

I was sitting at my makeshift desk, a table in front of a plate glass window, looking out over the front grounds. I was lost in a reverie about my own experiences of disintegration and those shared with me that morning. I was jarred out of my contemplation by an impatient knock and the formidable presence of one of the biggest men I'd ever seen. There was no point inviting him inside as he had already closed half the distance between the door and where I was seated. Noticing the mud on his boots, he stopped, fixed his eyes on me as a little smirk tugged on his red, bearded face, and then stomped his boots clean in the middle of the classroom floor.

"Hope you gotta broom," he said.

"Don't worry about it," I replied. "Have a seat wherever you like."

He picked up a chair as if it were one of those little seats in primary and dropped it within a foot of my desk.

"Here good?"

"Sure," I replied.

"Don't wanna get too close and get dust on that fancy suit of yours," he goaded.

I asked him what brought him in to see me. He said that he had come to get his "edubacation." I sensed he was having a bit of fun at my expense, so I figured he was

confident enough to approach directly. I responded that I was pleased to help and asked what education he was after. He said he wanted to get his grade 12. I explained that we could proceed in one of at least two ways: he could self identify a level and we'd go from there; or he could take an assessment and we'd establish his level and build on that. He asked when he could be tested, and I replied that I was available at his convenience.

"No time like the present," he said. "You best git out yer abacus and slates to see whatcha gotta learn me."

I invited him to move to the centre table where he had more room, and I gave him a package that I used to assess baseline of those I assume are quite literate, perhaps about a grade 10 or 11 equivalency. It normally takes about an hour to complete but he handed it to me in 35 minutes. I thanked him and asked when he wanted to come in for a follow up so we could develop a learning plan.

"What – yer not gonna grade it?"

I explained that I generally completed the assessments after participants left so that I could prepare a recommendation for them.

"Just get out yer red pen, Teach, and tell me how I did."

I invited him to read while I went through his assessment. Instead, he wandered around as I found section after section of his assessment completed and correct. Delighted, I told him that he was ready to begin at G.E.D. preparation and I anticipated that he would breeze through his high school equivalency.

"Geez, Teach, you must be surprised. A big woolly bugger off the farm knowing his ABC's, huh? Who'da thunk it?"

Deciding it was time to call out his attitude, I replied, "having grown up on 1000 acres not 10 miles from here, I figure there's a few of us hayseeds that can count to ten. Perhaps since you're so bright, we'll see if we can give you a little extra-credit work to help you overcome your judgments." Without further preamble, I turned my attention back to my desk and left him to find his own way to the door. He sat quietly for a minute before he got up. As he made his way to the door, he barked out a laugh.

"Teach? If you're a farm girl, you probably got some jeans. Why don't you retire that fancy suit and put on some real clothes."

I didn't dare look back or respond for fear I'd laugh. I wanted to create a space for real people to engage meaningfully with learning. Well, it didn't get a whole lot more real than this.

I continued to meet with prospective learners and, when we opened the doors to the learning centre, we had 32 students. Together, we created a programme that was truly learner-centred and generative: learners opted in to the programme without coercion or recommendation; their programmes were developed individually, based on a careful needs assessment; the individual learning plans were kept confidential; and there was no reporting mechanism back to human resources or supervisors. Word of the learning environment travelled and the enrolment grew. Within six months the 32 had become 60 and by the end of the year more than 100 employees were enrolled.

Although the programme originated to help employees earn high school equivalency diplomas, the needs were as diverse as the learners, so the programmes evolved to include a range of courses from adult basic education and essential skills to masters-level degrees.

Having based the programme heavily on Freirian philosophy, I assumed it would empower employees, improve their opportunities for advancement, boost morale, and position the company as a place of opportunity. Further, by offering programmes for all levels of learning and staffing, I hoped the learning centre would transcend traditional barriers and become a place relatively free of rank. Long before we could determine our overall effectiveness as a learning centre, we saw evidence of success.

I was living in a world of hats. I realised this almost immediately after taking the job. You see, the front-line employees wore only white hats. The white hat suggested rank, pay level, and lack of power. The green hats were worn by maintenance. They were items of envy because they were not among the hated blue hats but essential enough to production to be spared wearing a white one. The blue hats were resented by all who didn't wear them. Under them were the supervisors, a most unenviable position in my estimation. Having the appearance of power to those below them and only obligation to those above them, supervisors represented the highest turnover and lowest engagement. Then there were the no hats. These folks were management and generally regarded with disdain by all who wore hats. The hats (or lack thereof) were evident on the floor, in the yard, and at lunch. They determined who

sat with whom on breaks and even where you parked your vehicle. The hats had amazing power. Their power was so awesome that, in checking the hats at the door, the learning centre became a place of equality. I'll never forget the day that it all began to change: a senior manager who had been in his role for more than 30 years joined the learning centre. Of course, we had met privately to establish a baseline and to build his learning plan, but the other learners did not know that a manager was about to join them. The first day he walked in to the classroom, the atmosphere grew thick with tension. Two of his employees already at the table looked at me with a combination of suspicion and fear. I spared them a quick glance of reassurance as I welcomed their manager to the table. He sensed the tension and handled it brilliantly. He knew I would not disclose why he was at the learning centre, so he simply asked if there was any room at the table for a man with only a grade-eight education. As looks of surprise replaced looks of suspicion, the barriers weakened. Within a week, the manager asked one of his employees for a bit of extra help with his fractions. A month later, they were poking fun at each other as the manager struggled to make sense of algebra. Overhearing the conversation, I suggested that they think of their chemical formulas as algebra and work backward to see how unknown variables are useful. Their learning became both collaborative and relevant, and more barriers fell away. Six weeks after that first manager walked through the door, two more followed. In a world so strictly governed by rank, this egalitarianism was radical.

I was delighted with evidence that the learning centre was indeed becoming a place free of rank. It was an important step along the way to creating a safe learning

space. Still, as the programme was closing in on its first year, I was eager to substantiate our progress. I decided to conduct surveys and hold informal interviews to determine if the programme was successfully meeting the needs of both individual learners and the organisation. The results were clear: as individual knowledge grew, collective organisational knowledge was growing; this new learning boosted the performance of individuals, departments, and the organisation; supervisors reported significant improvement in morale; and turnover among the learner population was two percent compared with the nine percent among non-learners. These returns, together with the breakdown in the caste system, indicated that we were indeed transitioning the company into a learning organisation.

I was pleased with the results, but I wanted to go deeper. Having some assurance that the company was transitioning to a learning organisation was important; however, the trends only spoke explicitly to the learning environment. We were not deconstructing the principles that guided learning on an individual level. As I continued to theorise our experience, I uncovered the seminal work of Knowles (1970), wherein he named six principles of adult learning. I was interested to determine if they were applicable and present in our learning centre.

First, *adults are autonomous and self-directed.* The adult learners with whom I was working had a wealth of life experience. In an effort to honour them and engage them, I fostered a space where they were encouraged to express their views and direct their own learning. This practise took form as I met with each individual, and we co-

authored a learning plan based on his or her baseline and goals. The interim learning objectives and classroom schedule were developed to suit each person's requirements.

Second, *adults have life experiences and knowledge that must be honoured and incorporated into their learning*. Exalting the centrality of personal meaningfulness, we were consciously committed to connecting work, family, and lived experience to each learner's new endeavours so that their studies were meaningful. This commitment often meant that geometry lessons happened on crane sites, and that writing was practised in business requests and correspondence.

Third, *adults are goal-oriented*. Every one of the learners re-entered the classroom with a particular goal in mind. We named that goal during our first meeting and collaboratively developed a plan that would move us toward successful completion.

Fourth, *adults are relevancy-oriented*. Each learner was taking time away from work and home to engage with learning, so it was essential that the studies have some tangible benefits. As a result, the theories and concepts were often practised through real-life scenarios like banking, budgets, meeting minutes, or requests for proposals.

Fifth, *adults are practical*. The adults with whom I was learning tended to focus on lessons that had the most potential to be useful and meaningful in their day-to-day experiences. Thus, we tried always to merge theory with its application. This merger not only gave value to the learning, but it also encouraged the learners to examine theory for relevance and even generate new theory from their practical experience. I

saw this happen most often in mathematics and science, where I learned more from them than I ever taught. Having proceeded through school in the academic stream, I learned the formulas and executed them without ever deconstructing them. The shortcuts and competency-based applications that my learners revealed to me left me both humble and grateful.

Finally, *adult learners, in particular, need to be shown respect.* The wealth of lived experience and the daily demands of work, family, and community entitle adult learners to respect in the classroom. Through respect, we were able to establish a learning environment founded on the principles of equality and the spirit of reciprocal learning.

Deconstructing these principles helped me to understand and name those values that guided the learning in our centre. Further, they represented an approach to learning that honoured personal meaningfulness. Built on deep communication, trust, and choice, engagement was at the core of each of these principles. Further, governed by consistency, replicability, and predictability, we were creating spaces for join-up.

Thus far, I've articulated primarily the perspective and commitment of the learners as we created spaces for them to join up with me in their quests for schooling. The company also made some important contributions that facilitated this process. For example, the programme was entirely employer-funded, yet it was completely employee self-selected and governed. Additionally, the employees were compensated in one of two ways to attend: they were either paid half of their regular hourly wage to attend off shift, or they were permitted one two-hour learning period twice weekly

during their paid shifts. The philosophy behind this compensation was that learning benefits both the employee and employer, and therefore it should be should be cost shared. Presumably coming back to school on days off involved fuel to drive in, childcare, time away from other part-time work, etc. Thus for every two hours spent in learning on the employee's own time, the employer paid one hour's wage. Those employees who worked the same hours as the centre was open, and who were therefore unable to come to school, were permitted four hours weekly of paid study time. The trade-off for this latter group was that there was no extra compensation available to them for time spent in learning. Perhaps the company's most important contribution was its distance. Other than receiving attendance reports to facilitate compensation, the organisation was wholly uninvolved. There were no strings, no payback clauses, no reporting mechanisms, and no loopholes. Learning became personally meaningful, relevant, and integrative: it was indeed radical.

This type of programme also presented some challenges. Entirely employer-funded programmes are often cost prohibitive, which make them difficult to sustain for many organisations, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses. In addition to the salary of a full-time teacher and the cost-share initiative with employees, the programme required extensive infrastructure: classroom, computers, and learning materials. The organisation must also have a large enough employee base to cover those participant-learners who leave the floor to study in two-hour blocks of time. Finally, scheduling must be agile enough to accommodate the diverse needs of many

employees. Both financial ability and staffing agility demand a high level of commitment from the learning organisation.

In this particular company, though, the programme was a tremendous success for everyone involved: in the four years I was with them, more than 200 learners succeeded in meeting their goals across more than 18 programmes; the organisation received national and international attention for its commitment to workplace education while benefitting from more skilled and engaged employees; and I found a space where education was collaborative, personally meaningful, and integrative.

In our fourth year, the programme had brought benefits to the company significant enough that I was offered the opportunity to move to its corporate office and develop the model of learning further so that it might be rolled out to the corporation's six other business units and made available to its more than 7,000 employees. Excited about the possibilities, I accepted the opportunity to join the corporate team as its Organisational Development Specialist. After hiring a replacement for our learning centre, I transitioned to the corporate offices. Almost immediately, though, I recognized serious barriers to successful inter-business implementation.

At the corporate level, the company did not have the framework to be a learning organisation. First, the corporate headquarters were independent of all business units and by design physically removed from all business sites. As such, any individual learning was contained in silos and therefore could not contribute to organisational knowledge. Likewise, because the learning occurred in silos, it was unable to affect overall organisational performance. Finally, because the corporate level was primarily

executive, it was not organically involved with practical operations of the individual business units. These factors left us unable to move between theory and practise continuously to negotiate new praxis.

Perhaps the most serious barrier to effectively leveraging learning across the businesses was situating it within the corporate headquarters. An elite distant unknown to most of the businesses and their people, the corporate office did not have the trust of its independent units. It was regarded with disdain and reputed to know little about the ground-level operations of each business and therefore believed to implement one problematic solution after another.

Had the actual learning model created in that first business been shared with each of the other businesses and then grown organically in house, thereby honouring the principles on which it was founded, there might have been an opportunity for success. Unfortunately, because the company was determined to leverage one solution through one person to multiple businesses all across North America, I could not envision paths to successful join-up. Having recognized this incongruence, I brought my concerns to my executive, where I learned that the structure was unlikely to change. With no foreseeable solution, and unwilling to become mired in another ineffective system, I tendered my resignation.

The move to corporate, although unsuccessful, led me to an important realisation: learning seemed to be most successful when it was grown organically on site. Eager to continue to develop programmes that would benefit employees, I accepted an offer to join a global Human Resource firm as its National Manager of

Learning and Development. Since its inception 40 years earlier, this company had become respected as a premium provider of Human Resource solutions aimed at helping clients optimise their own capacity by reducing costs, improving efficiency, and finding, engaging, developing, and paying their talent. A trusted partner of more than 40,000 Canadian customers, it is a part of a global corporation with almost 9,000 employees serving more than 130,000 customers.

Unlike the processing plant where learning was internally focussed, this new organisation had a dual concentration: it was a learning organisation itself and, as such, promoted employee learning and development; but as a global Human Resource firm, it also sold learning and development solutions externally. As one of its leads in learning, I had the unique opportunity to experience the inner machinations of a learning organisation while assessing its capacity to leverage solutions to external clients. Both lenses accorded valuable lessons from a perspective of learning/leading praxis.

From an internal perspective, this company is a solid example of industry best practise. It has been repeatedly recognised as one of the 50 Best Employers in Canada, one of the Top 100 Employers, and one of the Best Workplaces in Canada. It offers its employees an above industry standard of 10 paid training days and 2,000 dollars tuition reimbursement per calendar year. These initiatives not only encourage continuous learning; they also ensure communication between employees and managers regarding growth and advancement opportunities. Additionally, employees have gratis access to more than 4,000 electronic courses and e-books to assist them with personal and

professional development. These resources cover topics ranging from time management and resilience to project management and strategic operations.

In addition to the self-directed learning opportunities, employees are also offered face-to-face training developed and delivered by the company's internal training team. These courses are designed to make transparent the internal leveraging of performance management, engagement, operational changes, or strategic initiatives. The internal team also hosts learn-at-work blitzes, which feature courses selected by the employees.

In strategically offering these opportunities that align employee development to organisational growth, the company optimizes both individual and collective knowledge. Also, by making learning plans a central part of its performance-management system, it focuses on both employee development and on organisational performance. Finally, this company continuously enhances its capacity, through reflexive praxis, to adapt to its external environment. Through engagement surveys with both its employees and its clients, it systematically collects and acts on empirical data to stay abreast of industry trends and the global marketplace. Collectively, these practices establish the company as a reputable learning organisation.

Confident that I had joined a learning organisation, I was interested in applying the lens through which I had assessed my previous employer and deconstructing the individual learning to determine if it encouraged engagement and personal meaningfulness at a level that would foster join-up. Once again, I turned to Knowles' (1970) six principles of adult education.

The first principle, *adults are autonomous and self-directed*, appeared to be honoured in more than one regard. As previously mentioned, the company allocates up to 10 paid training days per year for each employee. Additionally, each employee is entitled to 2,000 dollars per year for tuition reimbursement. Moreover, all employees have free and open access to electronic learning resources, through which they can engage in self-directed and personally meaningful studies. Finally, all employees have individual learning plans based on their career objectives and opportunities for mobility.

Second, *adults have life experiences and knowledge that must be honoured and incorporated into their learning*. Celebrating the importance of personal meaningfulness, the company consciously and deliberately solicits employee feedback to determine internal training initiatives. This is particularly evident in week-long learning blitzes that feature sessions identified by employees as areas of interest. This commitment is apparent also in the company's open policy on self-directed e-learning.

Third, the company provides a framework that respects employees as *goal-oriented adults*. Each employee has a performance management plan that ties individual learning goals to organisational goals. Not only does this practise ensure transparency; it also emphasizes the importance of individual contribution to company success.

Fourth, *relevancy* is respected in several ways: individual learning plans are built into departmental and organisational strategy so that professional development training can be applied to advancement and mobility; open access to electronic

resources allows employees to pursue studies that are both professionally relevant and personally meaningful; and internal learning initiatives feature seminars identified by the employees as relevant points of interest.

Fifth, *adults are practical*. The employees are encouraged, through learning plans and performance management systems, to participate in training that will enhance their performance and improve their opportunities for advancement. Also, the company provides several forums, through talk back and round tables, to voice concerns and make recommendations for improved performance or culture. All suggestions are posted and celebrated, and recognition and rewards are given for improvements implemented.

Finally, *adult learners, in particular, need to be shown respect.* Through recognising and rewarding suggestions for improvement as well as funding training and encouraging feedback, the company is demonstrating its respect for its employees.

Explicating the ways in which the company honours these principles once again helped me to understand and name those values that guide learning. Based on transparency, fairness, and equal opportunity, engagement was once more at the core of each of these principles. Further, governed by consistency and predictability, the company was creating spaces for join-up at work.

As one of its employees, I was delighted that the organisation successfully created spaces for its own employees to engage with learning in personally meaningful ways. As its national manager of external training, though, I was tasked with a different challenge.

I had just completed my residency and was delighted to be offered a position with a global firm newly established back home. Although I did not have a full understanding of what my role would entail, it seemed that the company had a sizeable learning and development contract that was in jeopardy and was looking for someone with a strong background in education and business management to create realignment and grow the external learning department. This was an exciting opportunity, as it would challenge me to find an avenue through which external learning could be organically grown and successful.

When I arrived in my new office, I discovered that I had a disengaged team, a disappointed client, and disintegrated curricula. Because I maintain that all else evolves from engagement, I began with my new team. I met with them as a group to get a sense of their understanding of current issues and potential solutions. It seemed that there was a damaging misalignment with previous management that had left them with no leadership or cohesion. Since the removal of that leadership, however, the source of the team's stress had changed: it was no longer stemming from hostility and oppression; it was a result of uncertainty and fear. Honouring the principles of join-up, I aimed to foster a consistent and predictable space in which each individual on the team was safe to have voice.

I hosted a round table at which we all named our understanding of what we could contribute and what we required for support. This approach helped to create transparency and alignment. Next, we brainstormed requirements for success. This exercise helped us to create a shared vision of learning and development. Third, we

negotiated role expectations so each of us had clarity and, as a team, we could identify gaps. At this point, we arrived at a place where individual roles were evolving, a shared vision of learning and development was budding, and gaps were being uncovered. Because the team so quickly collaborated to problem-pose challenges and identify potential solutions, I asked that we check our assumptions against the expectations of the client.

I contacted the client and invited its point people to join my team for lunch. Around the table, we chatted informally about hopes and expectations so that, by dessert, I was able to ask some very pointed questions about objectives and desired deliverables and then suggest paths to successful implementation. At the heart of the client's requests was the desire for highly customised curricula that spoke to its unique culture. My team of trainers expressed eagerness to meet these requests, and the client was excited. Cohesion was burgeoning, but we needed new curricula.

The current curricula were highly Americanised, private-sector laden, and decidedly acritical. Considering the client was in the Canadian public sector, we decided to throw everything out and begin anew. Guided by the principles of join-up, we established several meetings at which my team and our client could collaboratively identify areas for professional development. Thus exalting the importance of communication, trust, and choice, we all participated in identifying the intent of the new curricula. Once this intent was articulated, our client began a communication campaign to reintroduce learning and development to its employees, and our team began the task of development.

After months of collaboration and research, we had a canon of 24 professional development seminars, and we began leading learning. Having facilitated more than 400 sessions in the past two years, our team continues to honour communication and choice: we encourage learners to complete evaluations after all seminars and suggest areas for improvement. These evaluations are collated and analysed annually, and both the raw data and the executive summaries are forwarded to our client. Now entering our third year, we continue to develop new seminars and programmes to address our client's evolving needs.

I had been hired first to create realignment, foster engagement, and build a sustainable client relationship, and second to grow our professional development seminars into curricula that could be leveraged nationally as a learning solution for new and existing clients. Having risen to the challenge to the first task, I turned my attention to the second one.

Outsourced learning and development was to be the company's newest product/service. The addition of this training service would position the company as an end-to-end provider of Human Resource solutions: payroll, employee assistance programmes, and talent management, the latter of which includes both recruitment and training. It was this last service that would give the company the distinction of providing products and services for every major market niche within the Human Resource sector.

In addition to managing the requirements of our existing clients, I was asked to become a member of an executive steering committee that would lead the development

of learning as an externally marketable product. I sensed serious misalignment from the initial meeting: the project manager insisted on accountability and timeliness of delivery; the product manager was focused on branding and marketing for consistency and repeatability; the training manager was driven by engaging sales and providing delivery collateral for a network of contract trainers; the director was committed to collaboration so that various business units could successfully coexist while meaningfully contributing their areas of expertise to the development of a new product; the executive vice-president on the team was strategically focused on long-term fit for market growth; and I was determined that we bring nothing less than theoretically sound and practice-proven programmes to our clients.

For my part, which is really all I can speak to, I struggled with conceptualizing learning as a product to be sold. Additionally, bringing to the team curricular expertise, I disagreed with the notion that all training should be standardized and sold as a boxed solution. My arguments in favour of organically grown learning initiatives, the engagement imperative, and curricular integrity were outweighed by the seduction of a low-maintenance, one-size-fits-all approach to securing a high profit margin.

Committed to contributing and determined to encourage what I assumed to be best practice, I agreed to provide a generic curricula given that all contract trainers would be educated in subject matter and prepared by my team for a dialogic approach that would let them customize the curricula to suit the needs of individual clients. My team worked tirelessly to meet our commitment and submitted a canon filled with professional development programmes. It was then that the steering committee decided

training the trainers was too costly; they opted instead to use scripted facilitator guides. This approach was so incongruent with dialogic teaching that I went on the record as strongly opposed and withdrew my support. Although I continue to sit on the steering committee and advise development of the company's external learning product, I do so as the voice that questions the approach and reminds our group that we are promoting a solution decidedly incongruent with how we position learning internally.

There are numerous differences in how the company positions external learning. The curricula are standardized and placed within a blended approach that is a boxed solution to common organisational pains. Through face-to-face classroom seminars, group coaching, and optional self-directed assignments, learning is commoditized and marketed to small- and medium-sized businesses that are unable to staff internal learning and development experts. Thus, these programmes are designed to be off-the-shelf solutions to meet the general needs of diverse groups of learners.

Guided by a one-size-fits-all approach and governed by profit margin, external learning does not honour the principles of adult education: *autonomy and self-direction* are not central because e-learning and post-work are the only opportunities for independent study, and both of these are optional; because the learning is boxed and standardized, *life experiences* are not *incorporated into their learning*; likewise, *goals* are defined by the curricula, not the participants; *relevancy* is limited to the learners' ability to transfer generic material to their particular experiences; because the seminars are generic by design, they tend to be theoretical and hypothetical, thereby limiting *practicality*; and although the physical learning environments are respectful, it is

arguable that the absence of the previous five principles conspire to create a space disrespectful to learners' individual needs. The functional absence of these principles will, I assume, preclude join-up.

As the product was brought to market only six months ago, its eventual success remains unknown. Our outcome as a group is much more apparent: we failed to become a team. The presence of competing agendas created misalignment. The lack of process resulted in unpredictability and inconsistency. As this space became a breeding ground for misunderstanding, communication was neither safe nor respectful. Because the group theoretically believed in collaboration but was unable to practice it, it paid only lip service to teamwork, which resulted in one more transgression: distrust.

The absence of effective communication, the breakdown of trust, and the impossibility of choice impeded join-up within our executive group. Likewise, the competing agendas of profit margin and best practice led to misalignment and the commoditization of learning. Traction so far has been disappointing. Learning, as a sellable solution, is falling desperately short of anticipated revenue and failing to entice both new and existing clients. Its lack of success to date, I assume, is partly due to the sales and marketing model that positions learning as a product and does not understand it as a process. Also, I maintain that the lack of market uptake is due in part to the product itself, which does not present learning as organic, collaborative, and dialogic. Some of my colleagues insist that sales are talking to the wrong people. I push back by saying that they are having the wrong conversations.

As sales continue to fall short, we have turned to naming our own functional challenges as we struggle to create realignment within our own group. Drawing from the work of Smith (1999), I understand this struggle to be common among working groups wherein some view learning as a product while others understand it as a process. Learning as a product is driven by outcomes and measured by observable changes in behaviour. In short, it is assessed in terms of change and valued by getting the most change for the least investment. Tending toward the quantitative approaches, some theorists within this field (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; and Säljö, 1979) do push its boundaries into qualitative spheres and discuss learning as more than an external commodity. They suggest that there is also an internal conceptualisation: learning can be a personal endeavour undertaken in an attempt to understand the world and one's place in it.

Learning conceptualised as a process exalts the importance of the journey and acknowledges that the variables of human capacity and lived experience often make learning outcomes unknown (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Bruner, 1977; Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1981; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984; and Lave & Wenger, 1991). Still change centric, this conceptualisation views learning as open-ended and tends to juxtapose the purpose and process of learning while questioning the influence of the systems on this matrix.

Understanding more fully the nature of our divisiveness, members of our executive group unite in our commitment to bringing the best learning opportunities to the market. Situated in private enterprise and driven by sustainable profit, learning is

inarguably positioned as a product. Given our varied backgrounds and divergent passions, we often remain divided regarding our vision. Still, learning from the principles of join-up, we endeavour to communicate through our challenges in an open and consistent manner. As it is with horses, though, trust lost is difficult to regain. We continue to move around each other cautiously.

CHAPTER 6

Join-up Metaphors

Learning/leading praxis in three different environments has exalted for me the importance of relevance and applicability in learning. Additionally, the experience has taught me that communication, trust, and choice are central to fostering engagement. As all of these lessons have culminated in my assumption that join-up is central to learning, I am interested in considering the many varied forms of join-up common to these three environments: academia; the field; and learning organisations.

Because the experiences are diverse, metaphor is helpful in identifying incidents of join-up. According to the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphor is an elemental mechanism of the mind that enables people to make sense of their experiences. "The essence of metaphor," they maintain, "is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Guided by their work, I have identified four metaphors that suggest the centrality of join-up in learning.

Engagement metaphor

Engagement is central in this inquiry and, thus, is the main metaphor. Present in various forms, I note it first in learning with academics. In the academic setting, engagement most often refers to student engagement. From this perspective, it is rigorously researched and theoretically examined. Schlechty (1994) writes primarily about the importance of increasing engagement, while Newmann (1992) and Kuh, Cruce, and Shoup (2008) examine student engagement in terms of its effect on achievement. Chapman (2003, 2003b) advocates for assessing student engagement rates. Invariably, research on student engagement notes the centrality of relevance,

applicability, and choice. Assuming that personal meaningfulness is integral to engagement, Fletcher (2005a, 2005b) argues that that engagement is most seamless and sustainable when students are respected partners in education. This partnership often constitutes a gap in academic learning.

Cognizant of the importance of increasing engagement, Jones (2009) maintains that the single most notable challenge is lack of a systematic approach:

> A key to increasing student engagement is finding efficient ways to measure it. When something is measured, summarized, and reported, it becomes important, and people pay attention. Some school improvement initiatives such as reading levels are carefully constructed, viewed appropriately through the lens of a school's mission, driven by data, and accountable to multiple stakeholders. Other initiatives, such as student engagement, however, are not so meticulously conceived. Rather than allowing data to drive goal setting and decision making, some schools still are guided by good intentions, hunches, and impressions . . . the quest for student engagement must be conducted in the context of a comprehensive data system for measuring student learning. The same holds true in pursuing the implementation of successful engagement practices that foster student learning. (p. 23)

Jones (2009) introduces a second gap: accountability. Learners are rarely asked to participate in engagement surveys and not consistently offered the opportunity to complete class critiques or professorial evaluations. In short, comprehensive learner feedback is not systematically solicited, and any data that are collected are not often

acted upon. This gap not only diminishes the value of student input, but it also reduces the opportunity for improved praxis. This incongruence between the theoretical importance of engagement and the lack of its systematic pursuits often results in learner disconnection.

Discussions of disconnection encourage me, though briefly, to turn to the literature of disengagement. Palmer (1993, 2004) refers to disconnectedness as a form of disengagement that occurs when an individual experiences feelings of detachment from her learning. He further explicates this theory in *The Courage to Teach* (1998). Specifically, he posits that learners experience four unique stages of disconnectedness.

According to Palmer (1998), the first stage involves differentiation between spiritual leave and physical leave. In my understanding of his text, spiritual leave results when a learner feels estranged from the learning but is able to remain physically within the learning environment. Freire (1976) discusses this crisis in terms of integration versus adaptation (p. 4). He explains that integration respects learners as subjects and encourages meaning making with respect to individual lived experience. Contrarily, adaptation treats students like objects and focuses on teaching, not learning. Freire insists that schools force adaptation and, in leaving students unable to perceive critically, "enslave[s] [them] by method of education" (p. 11).

This discussion of spiritual versus physical leave brings me back to learning with horses. It was once a common practise to break horses. Stripped back, that language was deliberately chosen to reflect the often cruel method of making horses safe to ride. This process was designed to break the spirit of the horse and replace that

spirit with blind obedience. Often with whips and hobbles, the horse was abused into submission and kept compliant by physical consequence. Although this physical violence is not tolerated in organisations, coercive compliance can still be forced: those who do not buy in to or engage with the vision of their business or academy almost certainly face consequences that can result in the spiritual or physical leave explained by Palmer (1998).

The second stage of disengagement, according to Palmer (1998), is communal; this stage is identifiable when learners who continue to seek paths to connectedness search for contexts that promote and enable it. This stage sees learners confront self doubt born of disconnection and create support networks as they attempt to remain committed to their studies. This is evident in the establishment of networks. Whether it is the horse slowing his gait a wee bit and considering a relationship with me, or an employee or learner seeking committee work, this stage is specific to individuals seeking safe spaces with those whom they hope are like-minded.

Palmer's (1998) third stage of disconnectedness often involves learners going public to share their personal experiences and to encourage others to have voice in naming disconnection. They not only engage in praxis dialogue as encouraged by Freire (1976), but they also educate themselves and others to "enable resistance to the status quo" (Greene, 1995, p. 135). This, perhaps, is the most important stage in seeking re-engagement. I am reminded here of the mare, Charlie, who encouraged her colt, Beanz, to join up with me. Against her natural instinct, the mare identified me as one of her herd and encouraged her foal down the same path of learning. In business,

this is most evident in focus groups and feedback forums. Relying on open and honest communication, individuals quickly align with others who share their passion and commitment. In academic faculties, I see these same trends as both professors and students carefully select which committees they wish to join and which research projects they opt to support.

The fourth and final stage of disconnection, as posited by Palmer (1998), allows learners time to reflect on the paths to re-engagement on which they embarked, again highlighting the importance of reflexivity in professional growth and development. This stage is exemplified in follow-up with horses. In that situation, I walk away, and the impetus of responsibility for remaining engaged falls to the horse. He will typically drop his head and follow me through a series of turns, starts, and stops as we communicate with each other our commitment and understanding. Reflexivity in business tends to be application based. The ongoing strategic planning reflects the lessons learned and data gathered from the previous year. Reflexivity in academic settings tends to lead to further theoretical research as well as improved praxis.

Having considered academic theories of engagement and associated disconnection, I think it is important to reflect on engagement both in the field and in learning organisations. First, let's return to learning with horses. You'll recall that in join-up I first establish an environment for learning: a round pen free of obstruction and distraction. I then ask the horse to follow his flight instinct and continue to move away from me. I encourage him, using my body language and a light line, to explore the rail of the pen for possible escape routes. When he becomes somewhat comfortable that the

direction he his travelling offers him no way out, I flick the line several feet in front of him, thereby encouraging him to take flight in the opposite direction. He will then explore the rail from this perspective to look for his escape. Once he is comfortable again that no such escape is possible, I ask him to change his focus from fleeing from me to working with me. As he considers this option, we begin to communicate with each other. He drops his head, and I invite him into the circle by changing my stance and averting my gaze. He opts for join-up, and we have established our commitment to listening to each other's needs as we embark on the learning journey.

Engagement is clearly discernible when learning with organisations as well. In this environment, engagement is often discussed in terms of stakeholder buy-in. The stakeholders are those who affect and are affected by organisational decisions. Strategic businesses depend on an abundance of tools to ensure buy-in: focus groups; feedback forums; change communications; and employee summits. Perhaps the most common tool, though, is the employee engagement survey. Generally required annually and conducted anonymously, often by a third party to ensure anonymity, engagement surveys help businesses measure their success rates in keeping their employees engaged. These surveys are also used to collect data regarding uptake of training and advancement opportunities, communication across the organisation, and general satisfaction with the organisational culture. The data collected from these surveys, as well as the feedback gathered from focus groups, forums, change communications, and summits, are used to inform strategic planning for the upcoming year.

In addition to the engagement metaphor, I have identified three other ideas that are metaphorically connected to join-up and identifiable in each of the three unique

learning environments: communication; balance; and reflection.

Communication

Of the three learning environments, I have experienced academia as struggling most deeply in leveraging communication to achieve join-up. Although it is a space rich with articulate and meaningful speech, it is sometimes scanty in dialogue. I have found this absence particularly evident at the undergraduate level. Whether it is an assumption that students at this level are ill prepared to engage in critical dialogue, or whether it is the sometimes prohibitive class sizes, the professor is often positioned as expert and leads the class through curricula in a non-dialogic delivery. This approach leaves fewer opportunities for students to enter into conversation with both the texts and their colleagues. This lack of personal connectedness can make it more difficult for them to engage and highly improbable that they will join-up.

When learning with organisations, dialogue is actually secondary to clarity. Before communication can be leveraged to achieve join-up, understanding must be attained. From *action lists* to *zombie bonds*, business practices a vernacular that is almost meaningless to those not in the field. Even more challenging is the heavy contingent of acronyms.

I recall one incident in my first year as a business partner when I was asked about my SOW. Had not a colleague eager to discuss a new contract interrupted, I might have embarrassed myself by clarifying that I owned horses, not pigs. I was admittedly preoccupied through the remainder of the meeting and, immediately upon its adjournment, consulted a desk resource that defined a SOW as a Statement of Work, a document wherein the particulars of service delivery are stipulated. Another

memorable moment for me occurred during a conference call. With dozens of us dialled in from across the country, the executive vice-president asked for a report on all STDs within our branches. I've no doubt that I physically removed the phone from my ear and looked at it with more than a little measure of shock. As colleagues spewed out numbers that left me sputtering, I determined that STD indubitably had a different meaning in business. Sure enough – Short-Term Disabilities.

Although seemingly silly examples, these experiences made it apparent to me that the business sector employed a language all its own in which I needed to become fluent. Additionally, organisations had an entirely different mode of communicating their way to join-up. Learning with organisations really pushed me to reconceptualise my understanding of dialogical communication. An environment dependent on engagement surveys, focus groups, and knowledge forums, learning organisations favour routine collection of opinion on targeted questions. The findings from these modes are then collated, summarised, and shared with the employee population. Task forces and special project committees develop to address identified gaps, and subsequent surveys indicate whether engagement improved as the result of intervention. The system itself is quite efficient, so much so that I struggle with the often-overlooked theoretical implications of its approaches. Again, that is my struggle: with one foot in the academy and the other foot in business, I am often frustrated by the presence of theory or practise without its balancing other that can elevate them both to a state of praxis.

The balance I seek in communicating to join-up I find when I am learning with horses. In the field, communication is singularly practised to encourage and sustain

join-up. The language of Equus has fascinated me for years. It has continued to remind me that communication is contingent upon listening with my whole being. Unlike when I am communicating with people, I have no common base with horses on which to fall back. Because of this lack of common ground, the focus of communication shifts from making myself understood, as is often the goal in human interaction, to establishing a pattern that is conducive to reciprocal exchanges. Where human dialogue would resort to gestures, charades, or pictorial representations when facing communication challenges, Equus relies on reading each other's whole body and perception of the surrounding environment.

Understanding that a horse is instinctively a flight animal allows me to use these cues to push him away and make him seek an escape route. When none is found, I change my body language to invite him to join me, thus appealing to his herd instinct. When the language is understood and used with predictability, horses invariably join-up. Predictability, though, is the key as unpredictability equals danger for horses and is likely to brand me poorly with the animal. Finally, not only are clarity and predictability crucial, but so is honesty. Horses don't lie. They respond to cues in accordance with their instincts. Because their instincts are so deeply embedded, horses respond immediately to fraud. If I adopted the join-up technique to win a horse's trust, but did not embrace its philosophy, I would eventually focus on my commands rather than the negotiation of a learning relationship. Horses detect such subtleties and, through behavioural response, expose the dishonesty in communication. This language, with its dependency on consistency, predictability, and honesty, is central to communicating my way to join-up.

Balance

Based loosely on the work of Heider (1958), my understanding of balance involves achieving a state of psychological satisfaction when internal motivations and desires are congruent with external influences. Its relational foundation in motivation theory ties it to feelings of engagement, thus metaphorically connecting balance to join-up.

Balance can suggest many things in many spheres, but for me, academic balance refers to the relationship between theoretical considerations and practical applications. Understanding theory as that which motivates me internally, I continue to seek ways to apply practically those ideas that resonate. This quest for praxis continues to challenge me. Although I find intellectual pursuits both stimulating and rewarding, I am often frustrated by the tendency of theory to accumulate dust rather than grow legs. Often insightful and rich with potential, there seems to be a weak link between the creation of theory and its practical application.

This disconnect can create a deep sense of discontentment in at least two ways. Not only is it disappointing for those who generate new theory to see it underutilised, but it can also be frustrating for practitioners who are seeking critical examination. Moreover, this disconnect can cause pervasive problems for both academics and practitioners. Academia and learning organisations are inextricably linked: academic research requires funding, often from external stakeholders; businesses depend on current research and readily available talent to help them remain competitive. As such, businesses are sometimes stakeholders who fund academic research. As with all stakeholder agreements, continued support often depends on the return on investment.

That is to say that businesses establish partnerships and fund research with the belief that there will be a favourable return. That return might take the form of future talent, innovation, positive press, or tax incentive. Similarly, many academics work tirelessly to contribute meaningful research. Their reward is generally more funding and recognition of expertise within their fields. Because both businesses and academies pursue success, each rewards its employees for advantageous partnerships. Together, and in balance, theory and practise have a much greater opportunity to effect positive growth and development of their talent and the institutions that house it.

Balance, in the context of learning with horses, often leads people to think about the physical ability to stay on the horse's back. This physical balance, inarguably, is imperative to riding. Often referred to as keeping one's seat, physical balance is dependent on core strength and the rider's ability to maintain that core centrality through any series of physical transitions. There exists another balance, though, when working with horses – one that is less tangible. This balance has always seemed to me a kind of spiritual oneness. The human-horse relationship is delicate and deeply dependent on each one's ability to predict consistently the behaviour of the other. Even more than that, there must exist a fundamental respect for the needs of the other. I don't pretend to know the mind of a horse, but horses' behaviours continue to teach me a great deal about teaching and learning, particularly the importance of mutual engagement, consistency, and predictability.

I have learned with dozens of horses. Years ago, I was pretty quick: I met the horse, gave it a pat, picked up its feet, maybe I lunged it to see how it moved, maybe I saddled it, but often I just hopped on and rode it out. I rode so many that way. Then I

really started to invest, in both the horses and myself. I believe this change came about the time I got pregnant with my son. I knew it was no longer safe just to hop on and hope for the best. I had to be confident that the horse was ready for me and that we would join-up as a team with no real incident.

The two mares I worked with during this time taught me the importance of groundwork. I spent time in handling them, in teaching them to walk, jog, lope, and whoa by voice command and by light pressure of longlines run through the loops of a surcingle. For the first time in my experience of starting horses, they already knew all their commands before I got on their backs. It worked. There was no fuss, no bucking, just a period of adjustment as they figured out why I was on their backs rather than in the middle of the pen. It was almost seamless.

When my son was born, I promptly forgot what I had learned. I got a huge gelding named Gimme. He was not yet three, already more than 17 hands and 1200 pounds. He was a beautiful beast, but a beast he was. No one had ridden him. He kicked. He bit. He was unpredictable and even mean. I gave him a pat, picked up his feet, threw a saddle on him, and hopped on. He bucked like nothing I had ever ridden before. Positively incensed, he tore around the field like a cougar was on his back. Then he stopped. Just like that – stopped cold and stood quietly. "Hmmm", I thought. "Still got it, Ellyn, and it's been a year." Full of self-confidence, I shifted my weight and leaned over his neck to adjust the stirrups. That's when he bolted. Twists and turns, pops and whirls, and then a big thud. The latter, of course, was me. I had never been wrecked like that in my life. Hitting the ground with such ferocity gave me a couple of minutes to think about things. I still recall what went through my mind: Can

you move? Yes. Can you breathe? Not yet. Oh my God, I have to get back on him. *So there you have it – my eating-dirt checklist. I was not paralysed; therefore, I had to correct the horse. He had to learn that throwing me was unacceptable. I got up, found him grazing nearby, and collected his reins. I took a deep breath and slid my trembling boot into the stirrup. I gathered the rein on the offside so he could not step out on me and, as I swung up into my seat, I kept his head drawn in to minimise his bucking and rearing. I managed to ride his antics out and, at the end of the sessions, knew one thing for certain: I had better revisit the approach I learned while I was pregnant, because I didn't bounce like I used to.*

Learning with horses has taught me that balance is not only about keeping your seat; it's about respecting the partnership by doing the groundwork. Only from a place of mutual engagement and consistency can I anticipate join-up.

Learning with organisations teaches me balance as well. Not only does it remind me to temper practical application with theoretical exploration; the very nature of business insists that I consider a different kind of balance. The growth of the global marketplace and the increasingly integral role of technology in business process have created an environment in which business never sleeps. Coupled with fierce competition and personal ambition, people can easily forget to balance their professional responsibilities and aspirations with their personal requirements for family time, personal leisure, and spiritual peace. Because it is essential to employee health and wellness that each person establishes a balance between work and personal requirements, businesses are increasingly creating work/life balance initiatives to encourage whole health.

Learning organisations, with their focus on growing talent and reducing turnover (Marquardt, 1996, 2002; Senge, 1990), encourage whole health through a series of initiatives. They offer training to promote growth and development aligned to performance management. The performance management outlines with transparency both personal and organisational goals. Because each of the personal goals is self-selected and then aligned to incentives, engagement is intuitively built in. In the effort to build on this engagement, businesses also commonly include access to a range of counselling services targeting psychological, social, and emotional health. Honouring the centrality of family, these services are often extended to the employee's immediate dependents. Additionally, there may be wellness dollars aligned to fitness subsidies, weight-loss programmes, and smoking cessation. Finally, work/life balance is encouraged through mandatory vacation. Organisations are increasingly implementing policies that require employees to take their accrued vacation as opposed to payment in lieu. These initiatives are critical in establishing work/life balance.

Reflection

I was formally introduced to the power of critical reflection by the writings and teachings of Palmer (1993). In his 1998 text, *The Courage to Teach,* he further explicates the importance of criticality and names that we teach who we are. "Teaching, like any other truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse" (p. 2). He reminds me that teaching comes from a place of good questioning. He says that we most commonly ask "what" questions, and only when the conversation becomes deeper do we ask "why." Rarely do we ask "how," and almost never "do we ask the 'who' question – who is the self that teaches? How does the

quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?" (p. 4).

Consider for a moment the role of critical reflection in self-awareness. Consider also the incongruence between how we understand ourselves and how we are perceived by the world. Palmer (1998) names the contradiction between the former and the latter as creating a crippling sense of fraudulence that can lead us to feel deeply disconnected. This state of disconnectedness, he says, is actually encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth. Often giving priority to the rigour associated with the teacher-centred model, academic institutions tend to marginalise individual experience. Palmer insists that we learn to listen to self again and celebrate an impassioned commitment to critical and continuous learning. Dynamic critical reflection, or reflexivity, is an essential companion along this path. Only in knowing self can we move toward understanding the self who teaches. Several scholars concur: Cole and Knowles, 1994; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997; and Foucault, 1984.

In learning with horses, I have passed hundreds of hours in critical reflection. Perhaps there is something in communicating across language barriers that encourages deep introspection and reflective thought. Maybe it is in the unapologetic honesty and humility it breeds. I chuckle aloud even as I write these words. If humility is indeed good for the soul, mine must be greatly helped. I have never known myself to be arrogant or obtuse in my relationships with people, but somehow horses have told me that I can be both. Frankly, Beanz tells me as often as I dare to listen. The three-year old paint, whose mother first introduced me to join-up in a pen, is magnificent. Already

15.5 hands, and topping 1100 pounds, he is the embodiment of sinewy muscle, fierce pride, and boundless energy. He loves me as I do him; of that I am certain.

When I come to the field, he greets me with thundering applause from acres away and skids to a halt a foot from the ground I have finally learned to stand. Yes, that was hard-won territory. As a yearling, he took sport in alternatively firing his rear hooves at my head and chasing me from the field as though I were a steer he was destined to pen. Little is more humbling than being chased off your own property by your horse. But see, we are both instinctual animals. Although schooled in proper response training for horses, when confronted with physical threat, I ran. Butt in the air and pride long gone, I'd skid under the nearest fence to save my own hide. Beanz learned to control his field through aggression. I taught him that. Realising as much, I experimented with correcting his learned behaviour by meeting it with comparable aggression. I began to carry a lunge whip with me so that, when he made for me, I could whip it in the air and turn him from me. I gained the right to be back in my field by teaching Beanz he could not chase me away. Unfortunately, I also taught him that I was dangerous and could bring him harm. Really, I created for him the learning environment he initially created for me – one based on fear.

As he came two and I started training him, I was ever wary of his feet. In grooming, I used caution around his hindquarters, and in training, I watched his eyes and ears for cues that he was waiting for the opportunity to strike. Disappointed and frustrated, I knew I had to lay the whip aside and approach his training differently. Gathering all the courage I could muster, I entered my field with only a lead line and called "C'mon; c'mon." His head came up, ears forward, and he came barrelling

toward me. Wondering too late if there were gods of horses I should have brought onside through fervent prayer, I held my ground. I locked my eyes on his and, as he approached, I did not move. I uttered only a single word – "whoa!" Amazingly, he listened. He stood up tall before me, exhaled hard through his nostrils emitting a roar-like sound and at that moment, I began to understand. His behaviour was the result of frustration with me, and it was the roar that got my attention.

Several years earlier, I had had a beautiful Appaloosa mare named Navajo. She was stubborn and independent and free-spirited and, because I shared those qualities, I never had the heart to discourage them in her. I often received criticism from other trainers, because she was reputed to be impossible. She ran when she wanted, stopped when she chose, and cut her own path: consequences be damned. I loved her for it. Of course, no one else would ride her, because they did not understand her. If you asked her to do something, she would concede almost unfailingly. If you demanded something of her, you'd best get off or hold on tight because she was about to teach you a lesson. I learned these things about her over the course of several years, but the most memorable lesson came one day as I repaired a fence. I dropped the gate, pulled my bright yellow truck inside, and then reclosed the gate. Nav jogged around, head held high, inspecting the truck and assessing its threat. I chatted away with her, sparing her the occasional rub between the eyes, as I rounded up my fencing tools and headed to the south side of the pasture. The pasture spilled down a grassy knoll toward the bay that skirted the south and east boundaries of my property. At the far corner, I began the ritual well known to me. I slipped on my leather gloves, secured my tool belt, took care not to drop any hazards when loading my belt with spikes and insulators, grabbed my

hammer and fence puller, and set off toward the eastern corner.

Muscles tense from exertion, I stopped to grab a drink when I finished the first boundary. Back at the truck, Nav was still curiously circling around, blowing and flicking her ears. Had I paid more attention to her and less to fencing, I might have learned my lesson there and then. Obtuse, I returned to fencing and began the other boundary. As I made the corner, I heard a horrible crunching that I couldn't identify. I stopped hammering and listened. The sound ceased momentarily then persisted. That's when it dawned on me: her curiosity, the blowing and flicking ears. I dropped my tools and loped up the crest of hill toward my truck where I found Nav bonding. Seeing herself in my metallic yellow hood, she was scratching it with her teeth and flicking her ears as she joined up with my pick-up. Feeling horror and humour in equal parts, I came between my two rides to find a valuable lesson. Navajo saw herself in a reflection but, as is often the case, it was not a self she recognized. Still, the image mirrored her own responses, thereby engaging her and winning her trust. She joined up.

Amazement aside, my mare had to stop eating my truck. I came between her and her reflection and demanded she back up. She stood taller somehow, posture proud, and emitted the closest thing I had ever heard to a horse roar. Chest puffed, she acknowledged that she was willing to listen, but I had better talk clearly and quickly. I did. I hopped in the truck and laid on the horn. She reared, turned her back on the vehicle and, as I removed it from the field, she pranced nervously awaiting my return. Because our join-up was solid, and she recognized me as part of her herd, the blaring of the horn she presumably understood as the truck's sudden aggression. My removal of the truck confirmed for her that I was safe. I carried on with my fencing. She

returned to grazing nearby.

Years later, Beanz is before me emitting that same roar, and I finally heard him. He was willing to listen, but I had better make it fast and clear. I snapped the lead on his halter and asked him to back up. When he did, I rewarded him with a pat. I turned him away from me and walked to his hindquarters, careful to stay in his line of sight, and gave them a pat. I released him and walked away. He was curious, so I had his attention. I turned toward him again and clucked. He moved toward me cautiously and stopped within inches of where I stood. He was still stopping too closely, so I snapped the lead on again, asked him to back up out of my space, and then rewarded him with a pat for his cooperation. That was the turning point for us. He has not lifted his feet in aggression or chased me from the field since that day.

I understand now that he joined up with me when he was merely three days old. Somehow, I had become a part of his herd, and he was challenging me to be the leader. I misread his behaviour as aggression and responded poorly, therein creating images of each other and ourselves with which we could not identify. When I recognised his attempt to see himself in me so that we could learn together, I could appropriately establish some groundwork and begin the process anew. That process is ongoing, but I recognize that any problem in him is a reflection of me. It was a valuable lesson to have cost me only three years and a new hood.

Learning with organisations also leverages the power of critical reflection. Although lived in mentor programmes, formal and informal coaching, and job shadowing, critical reflection is perhaps most implicit in performance management systems. Strategic organisations, learning organisations in particular, invest heavily in

performance management. Committed to ongoing growth and development opportunities as a means of maintaining competitive advantage, improving employee engagement, and reducing turnover, learning organisations are increasingly relying on individual learning plans (ILPs). These ILPs are developed based on both employee competencies and organisational capacity. The former is dependent upon the unique talents and aptitudes that the employee demonstrates. The latter refers to how these talents and aptitudes can be fostered through employer-sponsored learning and then leveraged to maximize organisational effectiveness. It's what businesses like to name a win-win situation: employees receive learning opportunities aligned with organisational capacity and are, through this process, increasing their own reward while adding value to their company. In short, personal growth and organisational growth are reflective of each other and join up to create a more sustainable and competitive business.

The role of reflection brings me back to the place from which I began. I return changed, though, and seek the space to examine once more how learning in three diverse spaces has informed praxis.

CHAPTER 7

Negotiating Spaces

Shor (1992) suggests that we engage in critical teaching to make learning more student-centred and learning environments safer. This position requires that I explore at least two additional questions: what common characteristics help me to be more learner centred in my praxis?; and what kinds of learning spaces do these characteristics lead me to create? When considering the characteristics that help me to be more learner-centred, a range of traits comes to mind. Ironically, many tend to do so in paradoxical pairs: clear communication and careful listening; ability to lead and willingness to follow; predictable consistency and agile flexibility; and standing alone above them all is a commitment to honesty and fairness.

When learning with others, clear communication is imperative. Whether one is articulating the requirements for assignment completion or negotiating the rules of conduct in a learning environment, lack of clarity can contribute to frustration and disappointment. This ambiguity is sometimes guarded against through learning plans, which clearly define parameters, goals, and each other's expectations. Where these written agreements do not exist, it is all the more crucial that communication be clear.

Implicit in communication is careful listening. We must listen to our students as we develop the learning plan. Ideally, the learning plan should be born of the student's goals and honour her lived experience. Listening carefully and asking wise questions are essential abilities for me as teacher. As we begin the learning journey together, I must remember that learning is indeed a process through which all persons engaged grow and develop. As such, teachers and learners must listen carefully along the

journey for indications that we need to renegotiate the path on which we originally agreed. This ongoing and cyclical nature of communicating our expectations and listening for those of our students sets us up for an engaged and successful learning experience.

Related to the communication paradox is the delicate relationship between my ability to lead and my willingness to follow. Just as it is important that I can both communicate clearly and listen carefully, I must be as adept at encouraging learners to follow my leadership as I am at embracing theirs. Any truly relevant learning experience, where power is shared and the process is negotiated, is reciprocal in nature.

Predictable consistency and agile flexibility may also appear to be strange bedfellows. However, upon closer consideration, the two are perfectly aligned in establishing learner-centred praxis. Predictable consistency allows learners to feel safe to examine the learning relationship critically. It frames their experience in a way that shelters them from uncertainty and allows them to plan for success. It can also, however, be limiting. As we learn, we grow and develop. This process may lead us to paths we were previously unable to imagine. Agile flexibility provides both learners and teachers with paths to reconceptualise the learning journey and follow it in an engaged, undivided manner.

Underlying all these characteristics and guiding the development of learning relationships is a commitment to honesty and fairness. At their essence is respect. Each of us, teacher and student, is a learner at heart. We approach the journey with unique experiences and knowledge that can enrich each other and augment our own learning. I must acknowledge the power inherent in my role as teacher but never allow it to

overshadow the opportunity to learn with my students.

Having identified at least some of the characteristics that encourage me to be more learner-centred, I am curious about what kinds of learning spaces these characteristics lead me to foster. Interestingly, Palmer (1998) names paradox as partner in crafting pedagogical space. He identifies six characteristics that I find helpful.

First, he says the space should be both bounded and open. A learning environment must have enough parameters to make it safe; otherwise, it risks becoming a void. Both in my reading of Palmer (1998) and in my own studies of praxis, these parameters may take the form of desired outcomes, subjects for study, relevant materials, and negotiated rules for safe learning spaces.

Second, Palmer (1998) says that the space should be both welcoming and "charged" (p. 74). The risk of creating a learning environment that is open is that the competing agendas and diverse passions of those participating may grow the space into a place of potentially risky discovery. Caution must be partnered with passion so that learners are safe to engage in the learning community without fear of being silenced, judged, or lost.

Third, and certainly closely related, Palmer (1998) advises that the learning space should honour the voices of individuals and the collective voice of the group. This requires a structure that encourages dynamic group exploration and respect for individuals who make up that group.

Fourth, Palmer (1998) suggests that there is space for both the "little" stories of the learners and the "big" stories of the disciplines (p. 74). Although I agree that a good learning space makes room for both individual and cultural sharing, I challenge that he

positions these two types of stories in a way that exalts tradition and marginalises individual experience. From a position of criticality, I suggest that teachers and learners must be prepared to deconstruct all the stories to which we are exposed and look for the undercurrents of power and privilege in them; and then use our findings to generate less oppressive paths to learning.

Fifth, Palmer (1998) names both solitude and community as important components of space. The latter provides context for our experience and epistemological claims, while the former provides the space to examine them reflexively.

Finally, Palmer (1998) recommends both silence and speech. Again, this characteristic of space is about trying out our ideas in communities of practise and then having the space to turn inward as we struggle to learn/lead praxis.

Although these characteristics of both teacher and space may seem uncomplicated, when they are understood across three different learning environments, they have implications far beyond standard classroom practise. They go straight to the heart of praxis. Moreover, in explicating learner-centred approaches en route to personally meaningful education, they uncover paths to join-up.

Conclusion

Drawing from Narrative Theory, Reflexive Inquiry, and Critical Pedagogy, I have positioned Narrative as perspective, process, and product that together frame a transdisciplinary method to construct theoretically new ways of conceptualising and practising learning. As a perspective, Narrative has informed both the theoretical approach (methodology) and the practical application (method) of my research. As a process, I have immersed myself in the literature that upholds writing as a way of knowing. Finally, I have created a narrative product through which I have re-presented my storied experience in a way that is designed to simultaneously lay bare my assumptions and claim new pedagogical space for learning/leading praxis.

In addition to exposing my own assumptions as I explicate new pedagogical spaces, I have referenced the importance of writing as a way of knowing. Inferred by Abbot (2008) and explicitly named by Lakeoff and Johnson (2003), our very nature as human beings leads us to think in categories and claim knowledge by making sense of new experiences in terms of those already lived. This is the essence of metaphor. In this research, I have consciously chosen to unpack the power of metaphor implicitly by deconstructing personal experiences to reveal dominant stories that may be operating in oppressive ways. Once they are deconstructed, I have examined the influence of counter-narratives in uncovering pedagogical possibilities. Thus, evoking the power of metaphor and utility of analogy, I have brought together theory and practise in a space where readers are able to examine their own experiences reflexively and, by doing so, improve praxis.

Setting this research in three diverse settings not only demonstrates the

versatility of such an approach to learning/leading praxis; it also reinforces the secondary goal of my thesis: to make plain my assumption that fostering personal meaningfulness in learning not only honours the enduring significance of Knowles' (1970) principles of education, but also highlights the imbedded centrality of relevance, consistency, and respect. Such an approach to learning/leading praxis fosters deeper engagement and sustainability of both teachers and learners. I have come to understand this deep and sustainable engagement as join-up.

The process of join-up is aided greatly by fostering a learning environment conducive to clear communication, predictable consistency, and flexibility. Additionally, any burgeoning learning relationships are enhanced by the centrality of honesty and trust. Whether learning with academics, learning with horses, or learning with organisations, join-up exemplifies not only the criticality of partnering theory and practise, but also the necessity of continuously moving back and forth between them. This dynamic re-visitation is at the heart of learning/leading praxis. Finally, there is an elemental value of knowing and honouring self. Each of us comes to learning with varied and diverse lived experiences that inform not only what we know, but also how we know. To deny these experiences, or bar them from the learning environment, is detrimental to those trying to engage with learning. Further, it is apt to result in conditions incongruent with join-up, thereby damaging the potential for personally meaning and sustainable learning to occur.

Because I chose to pursue the potential for pedagogical growth and improved praxis from a Narrative perspective, certain areas of interest were beyond the scope of this research. In particular, recent studies in neuroscience continue to examine the

human capacity to think metaphorically. This predisposition, they argue, leads people to knowledge acquisition through processes like writing that illuminate thinking (Lakeoff & Johnson, 2003). Additionally, experts in neuroplasticity are now making claims that not only are we neurologically predisposed to think metaphorically, but also that our engagement with learning actually changes brain composition and neurological processes (Audiblox, 2010; Draganski & May, 2008; Pascual-Leone, Amendi, Frengi, & Merabet 2005; and Taubert *et al.*, 2010).

Although I have not been able to address the role of neurology in etching out new pedagogical spaces for learning/leading praxis through counter-narratives, I am hopeful that my research will contribute to the growing canon that continues to explore writing as a way of knowing. Implicit in pedagogy are methods of instruction and the theoretical implications of those methods. In an attempt to champion spaces for students to engage more fully, I continue to maintain that education is made more joyful when approached with an undivided heart. As teacher/learner, bruised and embraced both, I maintain that denying aspects of my experience is to do violence unto myself; having learned this, I am unwavering in my commitment to fostering learning that honours the multifaceted nature of the human self. As I continue to learn/lead praxis, I encourage others to embrace the philosophy of join-up as they struggle to create collaborative spaces where meaningful learning can grow.

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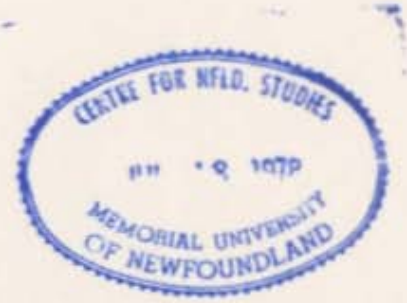
JOIN-UP:
LEARNING/LEADING PRAXIS THROUGH COUNTER-NARRATIVES

ELLYN LYLE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Join-Up:

Learning/Leading Praxis through Counter-Narratives

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from Narrative Theory, Reflexive Inquiry, and Critical Pedagogy, the intent of this thesis is to position narrative as perspective, process, and product that together frame a transdisciplinary method to construct theoretically new ways of conceptualising and practising learning. My aim in this research is to provide a methodological means of explicating dominant stories that, for me, are problem saturated. Evoking the power of metaphor and utility of analogy, my goal is to position counter-narratives as a way to bring together theory and practise in a space where readers might reflexively examine their own experiences and, therein, improve praxis. Join-up is central to this process as I untangle learning moments situated within three unique learning environments: schools; the field; and corporate learning organisations. After critically deconstructing experiences of praxis that are operating and transformative, I aim to reconsider them in terms of the metaphors they present. The pervasive and recurring question throughout involves the role of personal meaningfulness in creating spaces for individuals to join-up with learning. Specific questions include: "How does remembering self in moments of praxis construct educational perspectives through narrative?"; "What does a critically-framed reflexive narrative methodology uniquely contribute to understanding praxis?"; "What metaphors are common within each of the three unique learning environments?"; and "What might these commonalities suggest regarding the role of join-up in learning/leading praxis?"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the following people who, in their own ways, made this journey possible: to Dr. Barrie Barrell, who has been a consistent source of guidance and encouragement; and to Dr. Anne-Louise Brookes, who has been the light at the end of many dark tunnels. I thank you both for your enduring friendship.

DEDICATION

To Dillon –

May I be as patient and supportive of your learning endeavours

as you continue to be of mine.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Cultivating a Personal Ecology of Education

I grew up in a stimulating learning environment on a small island in Eastern Canada. My mother was an English teacher, and my father was both farmer and businessperson. Together, they modelled learning in almost every avenue of my life. From a very young age, I was encouraged in academics, in agriculture, in athletics, and in music. I saw my parents actively engaged in community development and learned from them the importance of responsible citizenship.

By the time I entered formal schooling, I had a certain understanding of the world – one based on multidimensional involvement and commitment to personal growth. Because this worldview was so deeply woven in my formative fabrics, I often felt conflicted in systems of schooling that exalted some of my interests and marginalised others. Determined to make my schooling more personally meaningful, I eagerly sought out a university that was noted for celebrating marginalised groups.

Young and naïve, I assumed that I would find there a space free of both political agenda and unexamined bias. In the course of my studies, though, I learned about more than the melodious depth of Renaissance and Romantic literature and the influence of the African Diaspora on United States and Canada as developing nations. I also came to understand that, although facts are elusive, individual agendas compel people to position and defend their interpretations as truth. By the third year of my Arts degree, my frustration was beginning to manifest itself as generalised anxiety and acute panic attacks. Convinced that they were symptomatic of my disillusionment, I finished my

degree and decided to pursue a career in education. I was determined to return to a place of personal disengagement and create there a space for others to engage more meaningfully with learning.

Armed with the self-righteous indignation that only a young scholar can conjure, I began a Bachelor of Education degree. The next 18 months forever changed me. Embedded in a system that I thought demanded personal disconnection, I came to understand organically the pain that can lead people to despair. I felt vulnerable and alienated all the time. Worse than that, I had no control – not even over myself. All of a sudden, I was not learning: I was being taught. I was reduced to passivity and powerlessness. I felt as though my passion for facilitating learning was being diminished in value, and I was being asked to consent to a life of propagating a singular view of teaching: one that was curricula-driven and that negated the experiences of both teacher and learners.

My carefully constructed world began to crumble around me. The generalised anxiety and acute panic of the previous year resurfaced with a vengeance. By November, when I was to enter the public school system to complete my first practicum, I was beginning to come undone. *It is just so hot in here. Can't anyone else feel it? I look around the crowded staff room; they all seem comfortable. I can't even hear . . . why are all the sounds blurring? I think I'm going to be sick. I need to get out of here, but it's my first day of the practicum . . . what will everyone think? Just sit still and smile –it'll pass. Who is that in my head screaming, "Get up, Ellyn"? Dear God, I think it's me. All right. All right. I'll get out of here. As I rise from my chair,*

the room spins into nothingness.

After that episode, I finally went to see my family doctor. He suggested that I was bordering clinical burnout and asked if I could take some time off. When I said that I could not, he prescribed Xanax, a mild tranquilizer, to take the edge off the panic attacks. He warned me that it was not a cure, only a medium to help me survive. I thanked him and left. With three weeks remaining of that first practicum, I resigned myself to getting through the days with the help of medication. But as I pushed forward, I became increasingly unwell.

The few weeks off at Christmas did nothing to restore me. Quite the opposite, I was in even worse shape when I returned to school for the second semester. It took me longer, but I could still manage to get up, dress myself and, with the help of chilled Country Time Lemonade, get through the day. Silly, maybe, but without that freezing can biting into my hands, I wasn't sure if I was there – or anywhere. That same frozen can became a fixture in my left coat pocket, and I clung to it like a life preserver. The days began to blend with the nights as sleep continued to elude me. The noise inside my head magnified in volume, and I was being consumed by my anxiety. I paced around trying to shake off something that had crawled inside me. Consumed by fear and chaos, I roamed, cried, pleaded, prayed, begged, and bargained, but nothing worked. I was imprisoned by my self and had no idea what freedom looked like. I could no longer cook, clean, study, drive, eat, sleep, or work. The only thing I did was sedate myself to attend class. I finally hit bottom a couple of weeks later.

It's funny how seemingly meaningless objects become significant. Sneakers. That's what finally pushed me over the edge – the sneakers I put on every morning to walk to class. It was January 23rd, 1997. I opened the closet door to retrieve my sneakers so that I could once again face the hypocrisy that I had chosen as my future. Seemingly innocuous, they dared me to put them on. I couldn't breathe. The room started to spin. The walls closed in and the door loomed in front of me. It was with absolute certainty that I knew I was not going back to school.

Having withdrawn from all systems of formal schooling, I found myself without a learning community for the first time in almost 20 years. Both emancipated and alienated, I eventually sought community in the work of theorists who could help me to understand both my disintegration and how to create spaces for undividedness in learning. Although many theorists from varied backgrounds influenced me (Behar, 1996; Britzman, 1991; Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Dewey, 1938; Elbaz, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellsworth, 1997; Foucault, 1984; Freire, 1974; Freire, 1976; Greene, 1988; Greene, 1995; Grumet, 1981; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2002; Neilsen, 1994; Palmer, 1993; Palmer, 1998; Richardson, 2000; Shor, 1992; VanManen, 1990; and Willinsky, 1990), there were a handful who engaged me in a dialogue through which my own voice became clearer.

Because personal meaningfulness and writing were the nucleus of this process, I felt an immediate and enduring kinship with qualitative theorists in general and

narrative experts in particular. This community of scholars, specifically Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Cole and Knowles, 1994, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; and Ellis and Bochner, 2000, provided me with an alternative to the detachment and fragmentation of objectivity. Denzin and Lincoln (1998a, 1998b) introduced me to qualitative research as a paradigm. A method of inquiry that was developed to honour an in-depth examination of human behaviour and motivation, qualitative inquiry seemed to me an appropriate vehicle for asking the how- and why- questions I faced not only regarding my own disintegration, but also those pertaining to education systems in general. With their focus on subject-centred inquiry, which necessitates careful consideration of context, lived experience, language, and voice, qualitative approaches seemed to me to exalt personal meaningfulness.

As my reading broadened, I met theorists who were named within qualitative fields but who seemed to focus more specifically on the merits of narrative research. As this field developed in various directions, I found myself returning to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who named narrative as both process and perspective. Less concerned with its manifestations, Clandinin and Connelly focused on narrative as a method of garnering and organising knowledge. Richardson (2000) also discussed narrative as a method when she named writing as a way of knowing. Although I was excited by the qualitative promise of subjective importance and the notion that I could write my way into knowing, I was left wanting more. Specifically, I didn't think that positioning narrative as a method or a tool in the process of meaning making went far enough. It seemed to me that the act of writing one's way into knowing had deep epistemological implications. Further, because writing was both personal and reflexive,

I thought narrative positioned as a methodology required critical framing that would front the researcher's own biases.

My desire to honour personal meaningfulness and undividedness, coupled with my concern that the unavoidable biases be named, led me to the work of Ellis and Bochner (2000). Through their scholarship on autoethnography and critical ethnography, they further legitimized personal experience. Immersion in their research led me to questions first about the nature of experience, and second about temporality. I turned to Dewey (1938) to unearth more about the nature of experience. Because he viewed experience as having both personal and social meaning, he implied that experience seemingly related to only one individual had, by association, valuable social ramifications. He also wrote extensively about the continuity of experience; that is, neither people nor their experiences exist in isolation: both are influenced by other people and events that brush up against them. Because of this continuity, our understanding of ourselves is continually negotiated. Dewey's notion of continuity prompted me to consider the role of temporality in knowing.

Cole and Knowles (1994, 2000), in their work on reflexive inquiry, brought together qualitative research, narrative inquiry, subjective integrity, and temporality. Specifically, they positioned reflexive writing as a way of exploring teacher learning and development, and they framed their methodology around notions of personal empowerment and the primacy of experience. Their positionality and approach validated so much for me, and became formative as I tried to etch out with integrity my teacher identity. Having legitimized subject-centred methods of writing toward

knowing, and having answered my concerns about temporality, I was left wanting in two regards: first, I wanted to encourage practitioners to embrace more deliberately their undivided selves as they explicated their professional identities; and second, I was still seeking a critical framework that would help me as researcher-practitioner name my biases up front and frame how they influenced my developing praxis.

My need for criticality was met largely by the critical pedagogues. The scholars in this area with whom I felt the greatest affinity were Freire, 1974, 1976; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994; McLaren and Kincheloe, 2002; and Shor, 1992. Freire's work is invariably concerned with understanding the relationships of power that continue to own the dominant stories and with negotiating paths to telling the counter-narratives. His notion of *conscientizaçao,* or *critical consciousness,* refers to the developmental process through which individuals evolve from unquestioning consumers of the dominant stories to critically awake individuals who create spaces to tell the counter-stories. With both writing and reflexive contemplation as core components, this movement toward consciousness raising has the potential to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed. Its capability is in exposing the social systems that continue to block social liberation. In his scholarship and activism, Freire emphasizes the importance of seeing persons as subjects and actively engaging them in dialogue. He compares this integration with the current social pedagogy that reduces persons to objects and rewards adaptation.

Shor (1992) embraces Freire's philosophy and grows it to unpack the importance of learning's being dialogic and student-centred. He names engagement as

a core component of meaningful learning and cites the danger of disconnection in the absence of engagement. Although Shor's work owes much to Freire, he diverges in an essential way. Whereas Freire positions the teacher as expert, Shor encourages critical deconstruction of all authority figures. Further, he challenges teachers to share authority and to engage in the education process as fellow learners. This approach is based purely in praxis through pedagogy, the joint process of theorizing experience and experientializing theory. This critical teaching, he posits, begins by fronting the connection between knowledge and power and is governed by student-generative themes.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) brush up against these same notions in their earlier collaborative endeavours, but these tend to be less action oriented than Kincheloe's later independent scholarship. Specifically, Kincheloe (2008) focuses on the unexamined relationships of power that continue to impede emancipatory education. Most recently named a postformalist, Kincheloe's scholarship and activism challenge critical educators to examine the politics of knowledge and epistemology and the ways they continue to mould human consciousness. The goal of his efforts, he said, is to create spaces where teachers, researchers, students, social activists, and policy-makers can form a community of solidarity and champion more equitable education and a sense of social responsibility.

My thirst for criticality quenched, I was still eager to connect writing as a way of knowing and the essentiality of honouring the undivided self in learning/leading praxis. So, I continued to write. What emerged were my own counter-narratives

through which I speculated that I would understand my disintegration only by re-entering those spaces where I had come undone. The reintroduction was anything but immediate.

In 1998, I joined the film industry as a coordinator for youth actors. Although I wasn't technically teaching, I successfully reintroduced myself to working with young people. This reintroduction positioned me as both their mentor and their advocate. As my relationship grew with the cast, their guardians, and the production companies, I was retained the following season as the private educator for that same youth talent. Because this new role required liaising with various systems of schooling, I was afraid that I would once again disengage and grow disheartened. However, because I knew both the cast and their needs, I accepted the position and was surprised by its fit. Not only did it uncover for me the importance of learner-centred approaches, but it also helped me realise that it wasn't teaching that was so damaging for me: it was system-driven approaches that marginalised some learners while privileging others, therein creating schooling practices in which learning was secondary. Moreover, I was faced with daily reminders that this crisis was not unique to public schooling. Thus, I began to consider my experiences as a teacher differently.

I continued to coordinate educational needs of youth actors for the next three years. Once I began questioning systems of schooling rather than reacting to them, I refocused my energy on seeking alternatives to those practices that I found problem saturated. Still, though, I was haunted by having failed within the traditional framework. I circled closer. In 2001, I was offered a position as an instructor in a

college. This position both situated me in a traditional classroom setting and required that I supervise practicum placements within the public school system. I accepted the post and, after the initial period of readjustment, enjoyed it. The challenge of working with adults encouraged my active and ongoing learning. Teaching began to feel like a collaborative endeavour in which everyone had a voice and valuable contribution. I began to feel more like a facilitator and less like a messenger.

Although I continued to feel uneasy in the school system, I was confirming the source of my discomfort. I needed space to encourage learning in personally meaningful ways, for both the students and myself. When I felt governed by curricula and held captive by fragmented practises, I was frustrated because the emphasis was being placed on teaching, rather than learning. Having gained broader teaching experience in both non-traditional and traditional settings, I challenged myself to consider a new definition of myself as teacher. Perhaps the failure was not simply my own . . . and maybe it wasn't the system's either. I began to wonder if I simply didn't fit within that framework. Growing more confident, I decided there was only one way to know for certain. In December 2003, I called the high school at which I had completed my practicum six years earlier to let them know that I was available to substitute. Finally, I arrived at a place where I was determined to face all the demons in one showdown.

Sleep did not come easily last night. I feel like an underdog in an old western showdown. I can almost taste the dust and hear the whispers as I check my six-shooter, readjust my hat, and make my way onto Main. It's all come down to this moment. I

shake myself from such a silly comparison and push beyond the familiar smell of cleansing agents and adolescents. I am in the main entrance surrounded by murals of everything from basketball to the Bard. There is comfort in the old familiarity, but not peace.

I turn toward the staff room, where I am greeted by a few of the long-timers. I smile in response to "Nice to see you, stranger," but I'm aware that my smile doesn't reach my eyes. I'm guarded. I feel as though I'm present not to rejoin, but to prove to myself that I have grown in strength and maturity. I drop my coat over a hook and head to the office to fill out the necessary paperwork and pick up my attendance board and classroom keys.

Down the hallway, through a few more corridors, I find myself in the English Department. I unlock the door to my past and find that very little has changed. Numbers approximating 40, there are still at least 15 too many desks in the room. In an effort to fit them all in, they are arranged in columns that prohibit collaboration and dialogue. Apart from the backs of heads, students face only the teacher, the transmitter of information.

I shake myself from my judgments and check the daybook. I have three 73-minute classes to deliver crosswords and cryptograms. Yes, the routine I know so well; it's familiar not only because I did the same crosswords as a student 15 years ago, but because I have babysat before. I chastise myself for the creeping bitterness and prepare to meet my class.

They whoop and holler as they come through the door, celebrating not only the nearness of Christmas Holidays, but also the fact that they have a substitute for the day. I don the old mask that smothered me for years and steady myself; I have about 10 minutes to teach this group to both respect and like that I am going to learn with them for the next hour. I begin the attendance, and one of the boys responds "here," when I call "Mary;" I smile, as he would be Mary for the rest of the day. The class giggles, but the point is taken. The rest of the roll call is smooth. Score one for me.

I suggest that they get ready for some trite Holiday activities and we'd all do our best to survive the boredom. I acknowledge their feelings about the pending assignment and set them up for a challenge. On cue, the class smart aleck says, "What the hell is trite?" As planned, I pitch a dictionary to him and say, "look it up." The class rallies around him waiting for the response. "Trite: stale through common use or repetition; worn out," comes the definition from the left wing of the classroom. "Great job," I reply. "So we've established that the upcoming activity is boring and old but we're going do it anyway. Let's have at it." The groans make me smile, but I know that I have scored another point. I am yet to meet the final archetype that is generally in every class but I figure she'll show herself soon.

"This fucking blows," is muttered just loud enough to require that I address it. I look up for the eyes locked on mine in a challenge. She places her feet up on the desk, removes her socks, and starts to paint her toenails. I can barely keep from laughing; it is a first for me. Nonetheless, I challenge that there are better places to refine personal grooming. In response, she actually pulls off her cardigan sweater, exposing only a

sports bra, and proceeds to apply underarm deodorant. I can hardly believe my eyes. The class waits for my reaction and I know I need to be careful. There is no point backing her into a corner. I don't want to attack, just shame a little. I curl my nose ever so slightly and, as I swing up cross-legged on top of the desk, I utter a single response – "classy." That's three down . . . all it ever takes. I immediately draw the class's attention to the work at hand knowing they are already on side. I am a little disdainful, slightly rebellious, yet perfectly in control. I am one of them. This is just like I remembered – a piece of cake.

The remainder of my classes that day were typical reruns of the first and so the day wound down. I sat at a desk, not my own, and processed the day. I had more than survived. I smiled a smile that reached my eyes as I packed up to leave with my slain dragons over my shoulder. I all but skipped from the school with my new confidence: I could teach in public school if I so chose, but I surely wouldn't. As I pushed open the door to the parking lot, I tasted a freedom I only dreamed about.

Here, I must interrupt myself to say two things: first, I recognise that my decision to remain apart from the system was due in great part to my perception of being unable to evoke systemic change. That perception coincided with a deep fear that, if I was unable to change the system, I would become part of it, thereby contributing to disintegration of future learners; and second, I recognise that the public system of education works for many people – both teachers and students – all of whom have my respect. So, too, do those for whom the system does not work, and it is these

latter individuals who continue to inspire renewal of my focus and commitment to education.

CHAPTER 2

The Inquiry: Practising Theory and Theorising Practise

Before I entered formal schooling, every avenue of my life had taught me the importance of integration and impact. Whether learning about crops, learning with animals, or learning through community, I was encouraged to embrace integration as I pursued growth and development. Having been so influenced in my formative years, I found systems of schooling that valued disintegration crippling. Committed to etching out a different path for myself as teacher and for my learners, I began to explore the role of counter-narratives as I struggled with learning/leading praxis.

Continuously seeking to understand praxis through the deconstruction of dominant discourse and the creation of counter-narratives, I embrace a methodology that encourages meaning making in an integrated way. Not simply a method, narrative is often seen as a collection of approaches that have in common a storied form. They are made narrative by their purposeful presentation of events to evoke in the audience a particular response (Jupp, 2006). When partnered with reflexive inquiry and critical pedagogy, narrative provides the framework necessary for me to theorize the process of doing reflexive narrative while uncovering a critical understanding of praxis as it has been informed by my perspective as educator, horse trainer, and businessperson. Drawing from theoretical positions put forth in each of these traditions, my aim first is to design and construct a theoretical analysis of praxis using counter-narratives to challenge the dominant discourse upheld by systems that continue to limit learning. Paradigmatically, narrative is within the qualitative approach; thus, my theoretical

introduction of it begins there.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is one of the major approaches to research in both education and business. At its most elementary, its concern is achieving an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons behind that behaviour. Because of its exploratory nature, it generally requires small focused samples rather than larger, more random ones. Perhaps the biggest distinction between qualitative research and its counterparts is that it fronts its assumptions, and it is understood that any subsequent interpretation is one constructed from that unique vantage point (Catterall, 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000; Goodall (2008); Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; and Paul, 2005).

Although there are many differing approaches under this qualitative umbrella, Eisner (1998) identifies six commonly held salient features: first, the context must be naturally occurring, not contrived or manipulated; second, the inquirer is considered an instrument of the study; third, because the methodology is concerned with understanding a human condition as experienced and understood by the subject involved, qualitative research is highly interpretive; fourth, expressive language and voice in text are key to interpretation; fifth, because the inquiries must be contextually situated and interpreted, attention to particulars is crucial (this includes temporal and demographical factors); and sixth, deductive analysis is disavowed in favour of inductive interpretation – so coherence, detailed insight, and instrumental utility must be clearly explicated.

These studies are by nature exploratory and open-ended. However, the work of several scholars (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Habermas, 2007; Harvey, 1990; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2002; and Paul, 2005) reminds me that it is not enough to put forth my assumptions or detail those reported by others. All knowledge has both a knower and a context, and these two entities are inextricably linked. Also, reality in all its forms is mediated by language. Therefore, I am accountable through my research to write in a way that honours both my telling and another's hearing of the story. It is through this engagement of intertextual dialogue that we may come to new understandings of our experiences and ourselves.

In addition to being an approach, then, qualitative research is also a theoretical perspective. Qualitative researchers work to show how the multifaceted nature of human experience demands more than a numerical explanation. As Habermas convincingly argues in Gibbons' (1985) examination of Grand Theory, one cannot study human social life empirically as though it were a natural science; such an attempt would produce mistaken findings because persons are capable of reason and, therefore, influence their own study. The position that science can account for or overcome culture and its social context is "an overestimation of the role of science as the only valid kind of knowledge" (p. 25). Drawing on the work of Polkinghorne (1988), Patton (2002) argues that the overarching power of qualitative data lies in its ability to tell a story. My goal, then, is to connect theories of qualitative research to those of narrative approaches and reflexive inquiry.

Narrative Theory

Informed by the work of several scholars (Behar, 1996; Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998, 2004; Elliot, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005; Gardner & Kelly, 2008; Goodall, 2008; Gough, 1997; Gudmundsdottir, 1995; MacEwan & Egan, 1995; Webster & Mertova, 2007; and Wheatley, 2009), I assume that narrative approaches adeptly explore the nuanced experiences of persons engaged in teaching and learning. Broadly, the power of narrative approaches is in their natural capacity to recount events that most deeply affect human understanding. Specifically, though, a review of current narrative literature leads Webster and Mertova (2007) to explore four questions which frame the usefulness of narrative as a research approach.

Their first question explores why researchers turn to narrative. In attempting to address this query, Webster and Mertova (2007) draw on the work of MacEwan and Egan (1995) and determine that narrative is appealing because it provides a medium for people to record the history of human consciousness as well as the major changes that mark the development of thinking human beings. Further, because narrative may be employed to record human consciousness, it also provides accounts of individual consciousness. In an effort to make sense of the human condition, an understanding of human consciousness is essential.

The second question posed by Webster and Mertova (2007) as they explore the usefulness of narrative as a research approach concerns the prominence of narrative in research. Here, they cite Bruner (1990) who positioned narrative as the basis for understanding behaviour. Such an elemental foundation situates narrative as universally

accessible to both researchers and participants as they, together, explicate human behaviour and motivation. They also draw on the work of Gough (1997), who explicitly names narrative as central to understanding human behaviour. Specifically, Gough claims that narrative is a way of examining any number of theoretical and practical problems in education. He maintains that stories, told and heard, reconceptualise the notion of practise in teacher education. In citing the prominence, Webster and Mertova (2007) also acknowledge the work of Shulman (1987), Elbaz (1991), and Fullan (2007), who use narrative evidence to investigate teacher knowledge across various disciplines. Ball and Goodson (1985), they say, promote autobiographical writing of teachers, and Clandinin and Connelly (1990) have done extensive work on teachers' stories as legitimate data. In addition to these noted by Webster and Mertova (2007), there exists a plethora of other scholars in a wide array of fields who are now employing narrative in research. Among some of the most influential are Grumet (1976, 1981) and Cole and Knowles (1994, 2000). Grumet (1981) beautifully articulates some compelling reasons to engage in this type of research. She writes convincingly about the roles of our stories in making visible our attitudes, choices, and values. I share her position that narrative has the power to illuminate how personal history shapes practitioner development. Grumet's (1976) earlier work says that narrative contributes to this development in two specific ways: first, through reflective processes, I can allow my mind to wander and weave rich tapestries of memory; and second, that narrative lends itself beautifully to analysis. Through careful and critical consideration of my memories, I can, she claims, reveal

the influences not only of incidents recalled, but also of assumptions and biases that might otherwise have remained hidden from me.

Having touched on both the utility and prevalence of narrative, Webster and Mertova (2007) next consider the recurring feature of narrative in educational research. They identify structure of the storied form as that which gives narrative the "aptitude for illuminating real life situations" (p. 19). This structure involves not only recounting events in a storied form, but also framing those events in a way that reveals the underlying plot. Although Webster and Mertova did not list it as a primary feature of narrative in research, I maintain that voice is of the essence. I draw from Neilsen (1994), who supports this view: "We are hearing the voices of reading and writing teachers who are claiming opportunities to 'read' their professional lives and 'write' their own classroom experiences and as a result claim authority for their professional growth" (p. 46).

Finally, Webster and Mertova (2007) ask if narrative provides a means to bring to the forefront features of human centeredness in research. Specifically, they conclude that

> narratives provide an organisational framework for viewing complexity. Using narrative, it is possible not only to look at human factors but to consider human factors within a range of learning theories (p. 22).

Although they go on to cite somewhat randomly various examples of this human centeredness, particularly useful is the work of theorist Gudmundsdottir (1995).

Gudmundsdottir claims that narratives not only help us uncover new meaning through assimilating experiences into narrative schema, but also that the connectedness of the story can be viewed as knowledge transfer.

Although these four questions are helpful in considering the usefulness of a narrative framework, I find that they fail to explore some of the deeper, more epistemological questions. Richardson (2000) pushes beyond the position of Webster and Mertova (2007) and argues that "writing is not just the delivery and dissemination of our findings; it is also a way of knowing" (p. 499). Claims of how we know what we know clearly enter the epistemological arena and elevate narrative from method to methodology. This reading is supported by Patton (2002), who maintains that methods are simply tools as opposed to methodologies, which have theoretical and epistemological considerations. Narrative, then, is the process of coming to knowledge as much as it is the knowledge itself or the dissemination of that knowledge. The important theoretical distinction to be made here is that narrative seems not to pre-exist its telling (Abbott, 2008). It comes into being as story or event and is conveyed through re-presentation. It is this process of coming to knowledge that lays epistemological claims at the feet of narrative approaches. In re-presenting our experiences, how best do we come to a clear understanding?

Reflexive Inquiry

Reflexivity is helpful in making sense of experiences. It is for this reason that I pair it with narrative. Reflexivity requires that I revisit the experiences that I recall as influencing praxis and continue to negotiate an understanding of them. It also gives me

the space to reconsider myself in continuous development because of my experiences. Bloom (1998) refers to this interpretive approach as emphasizing "an individual's experiences as a journey of becoming" (p. 65). The regressive movement, or ebb, she says, is reflective: "it takes one back on a journey of exploration among objects, people, places, and events which make up the grounds of one's being" (p. 162). It follows that each time I move forward again, I take with me an altered or deepened self-knowledge gained from my reflections on prior experiences. It is this continuous and critical ebb and flow that transforms reflection into reflexivity.

Autoethnography provides some valuable insights here as well. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography allows for a dual focus. First, it may encourage an outward view of the personal experience: that is, it demands a consideration of social and cultural aspects of lived experience. Second, it may encourage an inward look at the vulnerable self that may resist the cultural sphere surrounding it. Authors of these studies, say Ellis and Bochner, "use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Ellis and Bochner argue that situating research within this framework allows the researcher to "use 'self' to learn about other" (p. 741). Furthermore, as articulated by Ellis and Bochner, "by exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life" (p. 737). Thus, this approach is not only self-exploratory and reflexive; it also potentially advances the understanding of other researchers by encouraging practitioners to be responsible to this introspective growth. To quote Foucault (1984), this illuminated modernity is not strictly to "liberate man [*sic*] in his

own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (p. 42).

In this ebb and flow of negotiated meaning, I am increasingly interested in how my experiences inform my theoretical assumptions about teaching. Webster and Mertova (2007) interpret this process as the reordering of my educational experiences with the aim of promoting an understanding of how they inform praxis. It is the perspective of Cole and Knowles (1994; 2000) that, in order for me to develop professionally in this way, I need to understand "the formative as well as the continuing experiences and influences that have shaped and continue to shape" (p. 2) my perspectives and practises. Because praxis is rooted in the personal and imbued with subjective beliefs, values, perspectives, and experiences, reflexive inquiry involves the study of how the personal influences the professional. Cole and Knowles identify this as "the autobiographical nature of teaching" (p. 9). They suggest that this very characteristic makes it impossible to understand the teaching without understanding the teacher.

Ellsworth (1997) cautions me that there are some complexities in the consideration of self. In her opinion, the third person in every conversation seemingly dual in nature is the unconscious. This entity, she suggests, is always participating indirectly, thereby influencing not only what is communicated, but also what is understood. From her perspective, even if we strive to come to reason with self, our learning is only temporal because the self with whom we begin is never there upon return; it is "the inherent, irreducible difference between consciousness and itself" (p. 60). Ellsworth refers to this space as the asymmetry between "the self departed from

and the self returned to" as we reflect on our experiences (p. 65). As such, I struggle not only with negotiating understanding with others, but also with the temporality of my own knowing. Palmer (1998) extends the boundaries of temporality to include the evolving and multidimensional nature of each practitioner's own experiences and insists that each of us must learn to teach from a position that honours an integrated or undivided nature of being in the world.

Critical Pedagogy

Both narrative and reflexive traditions elevate the primacy of experience, but they do not necessarily provide the framework for me to deconstruct that experience. Abbott (2008) claims that "narrative is an instrument of power, and in fact many exceptionally powerful narratives reflect upon this power " (p. 40). The tone, the content, and the medium are all used by the author to direct the audience; indeed, together or alone, these devices have the power to change the way an audience views the world. Such power, he claims, must not be left unchecked. Making central the importance of this accountability, I draw from critical research, particularly that of critical pedagogy. The intersection of reflexive narrative and critical pedagogy demands at least three things. First, the narrative tradition challenges me to write my way toward uncovering how join-up has informed my learning/leading of praxis. Second, the reflexive tradition calls upon me to revisit those experiences from my past and consider how they may have informed praxis development. Third, critical pedagogy insists that I unpack what I have gathered through reflexive narrative and account not only for my selection and understanding of the experiences, but also for the

language I have chosen in their retelling.

Drawing from the work of several scholars (Apple, 1990; Britzman, 1991; Brookes, 1992; Freire, 1976, 1981; Giroux, 1997; Greene, 1988, 1995; Kincheloe, 2008; Lather, 1991; and Shor, 1992), I understand the agenda of critical pedagogy to be the collaborative pursuit of critical consciousness by educators and learners. This quest involves the role of personal agency in exposing assumptions, challenging dominance, and overcoming social injustice. As defined by Shor (1992), critical pedagogy examines

> habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (p. 129).

As such, critical pedagogy requires that I employ reflective and reflexive processes continuously to learn, unlearn, and relearn what Freire (1974) names *conscientizaçao*. The nuances of reflection and reflexivity regarding praxis might be compared to the difference between *recalling* past practise and *theorizing* past practice. Unlike recollection, theorizing practice involves a deliberate and ongoing practice and reformulation of theory. It requires continuous negotiation between symbolic analysis and concrete action, where language is central to the meaning making.

Shor (1992) expands on this importance of language by identifying critical pedagogy as having its roots in critical literacy. Critical literacy, at its most

rudimentary, involves teaching students to deconstruct language and the social construction of self to reveal the underpinnings of power and privilege. It encourages critical thinkers to read the world in a way that illuminates connections between the political and personal, the global and local, and the economic and pedagogical (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1974, 1976; Greene, 1995; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2008; Shor, 1992; and Willinsky, 1990). If we choose to educate critically, then, we are better able to engage in dissident discourse and promote social justice through counter-narratives. Freire (1981) discusses this movement in the context of his efforts in Brazil. He argues that "education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression" (p. 65). He contrasts this kind of education with "liberating education," which he says "consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (p. 67). I read Freire's (1974, 1976, 1981, 1992) work as making problematic schooling practices while encouraging teachers to see education as potentially emancipatory. He says that, in problem-posing education, all parties involved "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (p. 71). It also affirms persons "as beings in the process of becoming" and elevates education to a plane on which it "is constantly being remade in the praxis" (p. 72).

This act of doing praxis, says Shor (1992), involves employing critical literacy to theorize experience and experientialize theory simultaneously. This reflexivity returns us to the realm of critical pedagogy. Although there are several theoretical positions and almost infinite possibilities for application, Kincheloe (2008) lists several

general concerns of critical pedagogy. I understand these to include the following: first, education is political and often reflects the interests of new modes of colonialism, and thus, critical pedagogy demands that we expose these practices and overcome them as part of critical praxis; second, teachers must be respected as professionals and encouraged as scholars and researchers; third, education should synergistically encourage emancipatory change and the cultivation of intellect; fourth, the pursuit of social justice and the alleviation of oppression should guide education; and fifth, all positions including critical pedagogy itself must be problematized and questioned.

By introducing this element of critical pedagogy into my inquiry, I not only want to understand the storied data contextualized, but I also want to understand them as they relate to the power relations enveloping them. Moreover, I want to examine my own constructs critically and endeavour to unpack potential biases both of me as researcher and of the data I collect. The goal then becomes designing and constructing a dissertation that uses counter-narratives to challenge the dominant discourse upheld by systems that continue to limit learning.

Inquiry

As an educator, horse trainer, and businessperson, I have immersed myself in the literature of teaching and learning from various perspectives. I continue to find praxis of particular interest. Understanding praxis as the enactment of my theoretical assumptions about teaching, I have found it alluded to by many scholars but not often examined in its totality. Freire (1981) has discussed praxis as a synthesis of theory and practise, each informing the other. His agenda in its most primitive form, though, has been to deconstruct knowledge to reveal its underpinnings of power, privilege, and

utility. Cole and Knowles (2000) have explored the reflexive relationship between theory and practise in their work on practitioner research, but they have not focused on its explication outside schooling practises. Schön (1995) has discussed at length the benefits of practitioners reflecting on their reflection, but he has not explicitly named praxis as this critical analysis of practise. Although these scholars are among those whose research is foundational to my own, none has untangled for me the nuances of learning/leading praxis in the context of encouraging integrated selves in transdisciplinary education systems.

I assume that by making explicit the application of theoretical findings, and committing to reconceptualising continuously that which is learned from personally meaningful experience, theorists and practitioners alike improve practise. In this continuous commitment to understanding practitioners and learners as multifaceted individuals, reflexivity is central to becoming more awake to the theoretical implications of praxis development. Drawing from Ellsworth, 2005; Richardson, 2000; Wheatley, 2009; and Woods, 1993a, 1993b, I position writing as a way of knowing and, in doing so, construct a dissertation that upholds narrative as perspective, process, and product while examining epistemologically my claims of knowledge. Further, the purpose of my research is to articulate counter-narratives that position join-up as central in developing experiences of praxis that are operating, replicable, and transformative. This process owes a great deal to counter-narratives through which I recall learning moments situated within three unique learning environments: post-secondary faculties of education; the field; and corporate learning organisations.

CHAPTER 3

Education as Discipline: Learning with Academics

I have been immersed in formal learning for 30 years and higher education for almost 20 of them. This experience has been at times painful and jubilant, but always enlightening. At the determining centre of these experiences, I've often found personal relevance and practical application. My early childhood learning began in the church, where the teachings were about as theoretical as I've ever experienced. Despite the minister's sermons, I did not see God all around me, I could not feel His presence, nor could I sit down and talk to Him directly. Everything that He wanted me to know and do was communicated through other people. That mediation made me a bit wary, so I began to question.

First, I asked at home. *If God created everything and everyone and is all-powerful, why can't I see Him and why can't I talk to Him?* My parents, well accustomed to my need for answers, replied that He looked after the whole world, so He couldn't talk to everyone individually. Reasonable, I suppose. He created the whole world and everyone and everything in it, so he had a lot to look after. Made sense. *But if He created the whole world and everyone and everything in it, how did He create Himself,* I asked. My dad smiled and claimed he had to return to work. He gave me a pat on the head and my Mom a peck on the cheek and headed out the door. I turned my attention to her and waited. She opened her mouth as I eagerly looked on – and then she closed her mouth. She opened it again. Then closed it once more. It seemed she did not have the answer for me, though I give her credit for trying. We got as far as He was always there, to which I insisted that someone else must have created Him then and, if

that was true, why isn't that the One who gets to make all the rules and have the big following. Mom suggested that I ask the minister.

Looking back, that was an important moment. I was five and asking complicated questions that my parents couldn't answer. They did not silence me. They encouraged me to seek out the experts and pose my questions. They did not worry about my embarrassing them or appearing insubordinate or blasphemous; at least, they worried less about that than about my growing up acritical.

When Sunday came, I could barely wait to catch the minister. I knew the drill, though, and I would have to be patient. In the church and planted on my pew, I waited. And waited. And waited some more. I didn't think the sermon would ever end but, when it did, I made my way out as I did every Sunday, knowing he would be at the vestry doors to greet his congregation one by one as they filed out into the world for another week. Excited, I shifted my weight from foot to foot while he discussed the dairy business with Allison and Edith and the upcoming Presbytery meeting with June. Finally, he shook my hand and asked how I was on this fine Sunday. I blurted, *If God created the world and everything and everyone in it, how did He create Himself?* Paling just a little, he replied that He just did. Clearly unacceptable as explanations go, I said as much politely as I could. He tried again: apparently God was just always there. I explained to the minister that Mom had already tried that answer on me, and I didn't feel it really explained anything. *How was He just always there, and where is there, and how did He get there?* After a few more attempts at answers, my minister thanked me for bringing him such an important question but said he supposed God's origin was a mystery that none of us really understood. Disappointing, I suppose, but honest. I

carried on and found my mother waiting for me in the porch. She asked, as we left the church, if I got my question answered. I told her straight up *He doesn't know either.* That was another important learning moment for me: even as the experts, we don't have all the answers. Best thing to do in teaching the theoretical is acknowledge our imperfect and incomplete knowledge and celebrate the questions for having been asked. As this intellectually nurturing environment framed my formative years, public school was a bit of a disappointment.

Having already struggled to make sense of the theoretical in my daily life, I found there were aspects of the K-12 system that resonated better with me than others. As a general rule, the primary grades made the most sense. There was a predetermined body of knowledge that I did not get to negotiate but, considering the necessity of being functionally literate, it was important that I learn to read, write, and do basic math. It was grade five before those skills were mastered well enough, I guess, for the teachers to turn their attention to things like science and social studies. As we created experiments and participated in science fairs, we learned about aerodynamics through paper airplanes, structural physics through Popsicle-stick bridges, and chemistry through dropping mints into bottles of cola. We had field trip adventures where we learned to tap for maple syrup and drill trees to determine their ages. We could identify animal tracks and make a compass with a paperclip and a leaf, and we knew that the moss grew thickest on the north side of a tree. Practical applications. We educators could learn a lot from elementary school.

Junior high, by comparison, was a bit like I imagine purgatory. Filled with self-absorbed souls lacking certainty and direction, it was a holding cell where people were

sorted and herded into the next phase of their existence – high school.

Although the early grades made me cognisant of which kids were bright and keen, we all continued to learn with and from each other somewhat regardless of intellectual agility. High school ended this practise and clearly branded the students as academic or non-academic by sorting us into intellectual or practical streams. Because I was on the former path but found practical application deeply meaningful, I often felt conflicted. One incident I recall with particular clarity occurred in my junior year in high school. During the first semester, I completed four out of the six required courses for the year. Having a bit of wiggle room, I opted to register for agriculture as one of my four courses in second semester. It fell on my roster before advanced placement English and after music theory. Shortly after my registration was submitted, I was called to the office and advised that there was an error on my registration form: apparently I was accidentally enrolled in agriculture. When I explained that the enrolment was deliberate, I was counselled to withdraw and warned that such a class would be a blemish on an otherwise exemplary transcript. Wanting to excel academically, I found myself having to deny these certain parts of my lived experience. Thus, I have come to understand high school as the place where my dissatisfaction with schooling practices began to take root.

As I continued through high school, I tended toward the humanities and the arts. Within these disciplines, I expected to find a space to make subjects personally meaningful as I struggled to generate my own theories. Unfortunately, my high school experience did not provide a space for this critical deconstruction; rather, it was a place

where poems still had correct interpretations and history still presented facts. As a result, I found myself increasingly frustrated and vocal about the lack of criticality and subjective interpretation. Desperate to leave it behind me for the university that I trusted would foster intellectual development, I pushed no harder than was permitted, which essentially meant that my excellent grades compensated for my sometimes disdainful attitude. Thus, I graduated with honours and accepted a scholarship to my school of choice, happy to leave that phase of study behind in favour of embracing one that I assumed would be more rewarding.

After enjoying the last summer of my relative youth, I packed up my assumptions and moved to Halifax, where I was registered to study for an Arts degree in English. I wrote entrance exams that allowed me to forgo first year studies, and I began with second- and third-year seminars. I was hungry for intellectual discussion so I threw myself into the texts and appeared in class ready to discuss them every day. Very quickly, however, I discovered that students were encouraged to discuss themes and archetypes, but only those articulated by specific learned critics. Interpretations outside those narrow parameters were regarded as faulty; they were even mocked on occasion. Individual experiences were diminished, and personal interpretations were marginalised. One incident in particular comes to mind, as it not only attacked notions of my personal identity, but it also denied me the space to refute or defend that which was presented as fact.

I was eager to get to class that day. Although I might have credited the resurgence of spring or the approaching completion of my degree, it was really Anne of

Green Gables who was responsible. I had read everything from Treasure Island to The Owl Service in my children's literature course that year, but that Thursday held the promise of LM Montgomery's beloved Anne. Having grown up on the Island, I knew her story as well as I knew my own. Still, I had reread that tale of my childhood and ardently awaited its examination. I arrived to a class nearing full capacity and discovered that we had a guest lecturer for the day. Apparently, he was a candidate being considered for a tenure-track position within the English department and today was an audition of sorts. "Fantastic," I thought. "He'll be top of his game and keen to engage with the class." I found an empty desk along the eastern wall and made small talk with those already settled. Promptly at 10:05, the professor called the class together and advised us that he had spent a great deal of intellectual investment in deconstructing the text and was eager to tell us "what it was really about." Without further preamble, he said that Anne of Green Gables was most appropriately viewed through the lens of Queer Theory because of Anne and Diana's covert lesbianism. I looked around the room to find baffled faces that mirrored my own confusion. Anne and Diana – lesbians? This was big news. I listened intently to his position: he cited Anne's hesitance to accept Gilbert's attention, Diana's socially prescribed marriage to Moody, and Anne and Diana's naming each other as 'bosom buddies.'

When he stopped speaking and invited questions, I suggested an alternative understanding: first, perhaps Anne did not accept Gilbert's attention because she was at her core proud and stubborn, and so her refusal of him could be regarded as equal part feminism and traditional courtship; second, Diana was expected to marry because

she had forsaken education in favour of girl's finishing school in preparation to be a wife and mother, a behaviour that was typical of both time and culture; and third, that 'bosom buddies' was an endearment born partly of the time and partly of Anne's dramatic flare. He laughed. He called me naïve and provincial, and in doing so, successfully pre-empted all dialogue for the remainder of the class. Having the floor all to himself, he broadened his deconstruction to include LM Montgomery's life history and challenged that it had not been properly understood either: the depression that was noted later in her life, he said, actually predated Anne of Green Gables, which people mistakenly understood as innocent and pastoral. In truth, it was perhaps her very darkest work. Cowardly and covert, he insisted, Anne was really a subversive novel about the small nature of Prince Edward Island mentality that forced a strong-willed feminist to hide her homosexuality, settle for second rate schooling, and marry a man whom she did not love. As he eventually stepped off his metaphorical stage and concluded his great soliloquy, we filed out of class and many of us congregated to debrief. Our reactions ranged from eye rolling to indignation, but we were unified in our annoyance with his practised arrogance. I recall our group expressing frustration with his singular view of the text and his unapologetic marginalisation of other voices. What I remember most clearly, though, was never speaking of it again. There was no point – he was hired the next week.

The faculty's decision to hire that candidate fuelled my growing disdain for the way in which English literature was being presented. Namely, it was being taught through presentation of published critiques: we were simply called to bear witness.

Although I did have rewarding learning moments in my Arts degree, I found it pervasively problematic that I was given the skills but denied the space to critique. This limitation created for me a desire to etch out room for critical examination not only of texts, but also of learning practices. As a result, when I completed my Arts degree, I enrolled in education. It was my hope that this professional degree would prepare me to become the type of teacher that honoured lived experience and struggled to make learning meaningful, relevant, and safe for all voices.

Having only four months until I was scheduled to begin my education degree, I decided to spend my summer restoratively. I returned to the Island and the comfortable fold of working the land, learning with horses, and walking the beach. I returned also to reflexive writing through which I realised that my lived experience outside of school encouraged me to deconstruct those things that I found problematic and then work to evoke change. My experience within systems of schooling often seemed to hone my critical skills but left me powerless to affect that which I identified as problem saturated. Determined to champion a personally meaningful approach to learning, I moved toward my Education degree with hope.

When I began the process of becoming an accredited teacher, I had no idea I was embarking on the most debilitating journey in my life. I suspect that the despondency was made all the more severe because I had had such hope for renewal. Rather than the anticipated space for growth and solidarity, I found a system steeped in divisiveness and toxicity that I have yet to see equalled. The dissonance began at orientation, where members of our class were divided by primary-destined and secondary-destined

educators. As a member of the secondary stream, I was among those herded into a room on the third floor and congratulated for joining a group that would actually do something more than make finger puppets with kids. That introductory summation was indicative of the brokenness of the programme. Not only were students encouraged to other themselves from colleagues who would teach at different levels; this division marked the beginning of a secondary training programme in which the arts in particular and creativity in general were marginalised. It also served to punctuate a particular dissension where I imagined there to be collaboration and support. As I wandered through the next year of education studies disillusioned, three incidents imprinted themselves on me: the black paper; the red book; and the gray meltdown.

I looked forward to taking the educational foundations course because it provided a rare opportunity for primary and secondary teachers to share a learning space. Unfortunately, the course was a mockery. Not only was there a decided lack of cohesion because of the chasm crafted between us, but the curricula were narrow, providing chiefly a retelling of colonialism that was half-heartedly cloaked as the spread of educational enlightenment. Additionally, the professor was openly disdainful, acritical, and smug. The only tangible requirement of the course was to produce a paper on the evolution of education practices in North America. Given no other parameters, I set out to complete the task, but with some meaning. I not only researched the highpoints of educational development; I also tied them to their origins in the practices of other nations and attempted to deconstruct them.

Weeks had passed since we had submitted our research, and still there was no

feedback. With only one class left, finally someone asked when we might expect our papers back. In his typical manner, the professor made a diminutive comment about minions waiting to find out their worth. He did, however, arrive the next week with our grades: that's it – grades. Each student teacher received a piece of torn foolscap paper that contained two pieces of information: his or her name and a corresponding number. There were no papers, no comments, no indication of how he arrived at the grade, and certainly no suggestions about how we could improve our product. There was not even a way to substantiate if he had read them. It was so outrageous, I could barely suppress a giggle; it had to be a joke. As I was trying to make sense of the situation, one of my peers asked what I imagine we were all thinking: was this it – did we not get our papers back with written feedback? He was positively indignant as he responded that they were his papers and, if we wanted them back, we shouldn't have given them to him. He promptly dismissed class and retreated to the dankness of his cluttered office.

I was vaguely aware that the class was emptying, but still I sat. I looked down in disbelief once again: Ellyn Lyle - 87%. This was a mockery. I got up from my desk and followed him to his office. I knocked. He didn't answer. The door was ajar, so I nudged it open with my foot as I called his name. The space was shocking. Having been in the offices of several other professors, I was unprepared for the state of his. Rather than the bright clean environment of his colleagues, he had window coverings so dark that I could barely see. Still, despite the obscurity, his office appeared to be some sort of storage cell. Papers were piled waist deep in every corner and eyeball deep on his desk. I called his name again. From behind a mountainous mess, he demanded to know

what I wanted. I met his question with equal directness and I requested my paper. He refused. I persisted, explaining that I wanted to know where I had room to improve so that I would continue to develop professionally. He again refused insisting, that the paper was his property now. Frustrated and incredulous, I named his refusal as inappropriate and an abuse of his position. He roared at me, calling me insubordinate. Offended on so many levels, I told him I believed I was entitled to my paper and, if he would not produce it, I would raise my concern with the dean. With the smug satisfaction that led me to believe he had a long history of not being held accountable, he said I could suit myself and then told me to shut the door on my way out.

Having been summarily dismissed, I went to the dean's office and explained the incident and those experiences that led up to it. I was kindly but firmly told that the professor had been conducting himself this way for years, and he would undoubtedly insist on keeping the paper. I challenged the dean that people continue to do what is wrong if those in power do not insist that they behave more appropriately. He actually replied that possession was nine-tenths of the law and, thus, I was unlikely to see my paper again. Furious and disillusioned, I said that I was unable to accept such conduct and would go further to have it addressed. Only then did the dean agree to talk to the professor.

The next week I was summoned to the dean's office, where I was told that I had gained permission to view my paper in the confines of the professor's office providing that I return it to him. Assuming that I was not likely to garner any better offer, I accepted. I went to his office directly to review the paper. Under glowering resentment,

I thumbed through the first couple of pages slowly and then the rest of the document more quickly. There was not a single mark anywhere on the more than 30 pages. "Is this why you don't give them back?" I asked, "Do you even read them?" He retorted that he was only required to grade them. I don't remember if he took my paper back from me or if I dropped it, but I left the office without it and went directly to the dean who condescendingly told me that the professor having made no marks on the paper was of little consequence. Furthermore, I should feel celebratory; I was the first student in his memory who had won the right to see her paper again. I didn't feel victorious and, try as I might, I was unable to rally enough people willing to take on the injustice. I eventually filed it in my mind under positional power abuse, professional laziness, and institutional protectionism.

The red book incident was less demoralising but equally ridiculous. Part of our assignment as practising teachers was to keep detailed lesson plans in our red books. Having already been a licensed and practising teacher for four years, I tended toward the abbreviated approach to lesson plans. It seemed perfectly reasonable to me that I write *novel study* in the little block beside *8A*. After all, that was exactly what I planned to spend third period doing. My supervisor, though, had insisted that I prepare detailed notes to guide my teaching in each of the classes. Although I regarded it as a bit of a nuisance, I assumed he wanted to ensure that I had something planned and that there was some discernible coherence to it. I abandoned my abbreviated approach and began writing my lesson plans in detail.

Today, my supervisor would find detailed lesson plans for each teaching block

as well as a plan that clearly mapped out my vision for the unfolding unit of study. Predictably, when he arrived, he asked to see my notes. I delivered them to him and was somewhat stunned when he criticised me once again for the incompleteness of my daybook. I asked what I had overlooked. He said that my notes were still a bit truncated, as I had not even included a salutation to my class. Was he actually overlooking all of my thoughtful preparation to assert that my notes should be scripted to begin with "good morning, class. Today we are going to . . ." I resisted the urge to ask if many teachers forgot to say good morning and if it threw the students into a spin. Rather, I asked only if there was something in particular about my leading of the class that could be improved upon. He said he noticed that, when I write on the board, I tended to slope slightly downhill to the right. With no further constructive criticism, he wished me continued luck in the practicum and left.

Both the black paper and the red book incidents occurred during first term. I had a few weeks left until Christmas break, and I was having an increasingly difficult time reconciling myself to being in such a programme. I was feeling disillusioned, fragmented, and exhausted. Terrified that I would not be able to complete the degree, yet unable to imagine myself as anything other than a teacher, my panic attacks of the previous year returned with intensity. By the end of term, I was feeling unnerved and somehow outside of myself.

I have only a single memory of the Holiday season that year. It was Christmas Eve and, as was tradition, my family was at my grandparents' home. I was in the kitchen, alone, doing the dishes. I could hear hushed murmurs coming from the other

room, and I was vaguely aware that they were of concern for me. I heard someone coming, and I tried to wash with more energy because I seemed even to myself to be in slow motion. I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder and turned to see my mom. She looked at me with such empathy it would have broken my heart if I could have felt anything. I tried to smile and watched as a single tear patterned its way down her cheek. She kissed my head and returned to the living room. I didn't know why she cried so looked in the mirror to see what was wrong with me. I raised my eyes to my reflection and saw only emptiness looking back. Christmas 1996.

I have come to understand the gray meltdown as the result of being too long in this state of conflict. I left high school in search of an educational experience that understood the relational importance of merging theory and practise while honouring the integrity of teacher and learners. With each passing year, my experiences grew more disheartening. At this mid-point in my second degree, I met fully and unabashedly my own disintegration.

I feel like I've stopped functioning. Things so mundane are monumental now – even caring for myself seems impossibly difficult. I can barely crawl across the floor and into the bathtub. It takes an embarrassing amount of concentration to manipulate the taps so that the water comes. I am so depleted by the time I get undressed and in to bathe, I often lie there long after the water is cold. Invariably, I stay until I can summon the energy to crawl back out of the tub. Once, when I pulled my frame up in front of the vanity, I saw a stranger staring back at me. Her eyes were a kaleidoscope of pity, fear, and condemnation; then, they were vacant.

My flat was emptied, and I moved home to my parents' place. Mom and Dad knew that I was unwell; like me, though, nothing could have prepared them for the seriousness of my disintegration. Their independent and energetic daughter was a broken embodiment of anxiety and depression. I spent my days in a rocking chair in front of the fireplace. No longer possessing the strength to figure out what was wrong with me, I sat and cried. I don't recall how I felt apart from the deep sense of failure and guilt. My family, of course, rallied around me. Where they used to congratulate me on academic and extracurricular awards, they now praised my every bite of food and any effort at personal grooming.

Still, I could not begin to recover. I was consumed by fear of losing my year and having to endure the degree all over again. It never occurred to me to simply quit; that would have been the ultimate admission of defeat. I was a teacher and I would have the credential to prove it. I convinced my mother that seeing my professors and saving my degree would alleviate some stress in my life. Desperate to help in any way, she drove me to the university. I remember her worrying that I wouldn't be able to make the walk from the car to the education building. I recall thinking she may be right.

I made the walk across campus, but the three flights of stairs up to the education faculty took all the energy I had. When I finally ascended the last one, one of my professors greeted me with an odd blend of shock, concern, and self-righteousness. He helped me to his office and literally propped me against a wall. I confessed (not that denying it would have done any good) that my health was poor and I was being pulled

from school on a medical leave. I recall mumbling something about overextending myself and experiencing exhaustion. In fact, I think I convinced even myself of it.

I listened while he told me that not everyone was capable of holding up under the rigorous and progressive programme and the stress of this career. I remember feeling confused by his statements because I hadn't encountered rigour or progressiveness anywhere in the vicinity. Nonetheless, I saw it as my failure so I said nothing. I assured him that all of my assignments would be submitted by the deadlines, and I would complete my practicum on schedule. He said that he could not promise that my efforts would be sufficient to entitle me the degree, but I could hope for the best.

I had similar conversations with two more professors who cautiously offered to be supportive in any way the faculty would permit. In the office of my fourth and final professor, I rambled out my rehearsed speech once again. She did the most amazing thing – she asked how I was coping. It stopped me cold. For the first time, I voiced my fear that I was losing my mind in this breakdown. She seemed to grow taller and indomitable as she informed me that I was not having a breakdown, but rather a break-up. It happens, she said, when we are made of curves in a square world and, in her opinion, if more people had them, the world would be a much more beautiful place. She'd had one herself, she said, when she was about my age, and always counted herself lucky to be intelligent enough to recognize and challenge the insanity of the world at such a young age. Think of the inconvenience of having to do it in mid-life, or worse, never. I smiled. For the first time in months, I thought I might survive.

In those few minutes, she changed the way I saw the world and myself in it. The shackles weakened. I was undoubtedly exhausted and undeniably wracked with anxiety, but I would survive. I simply needed to refer to my experience in a way that was personally meaningful. At that moment, I began to understand my struggle to negotiate a space as teacher: the systems of education that I had encountered were implicitly (perhaps even accidentally) teaching me to critique. Ironically, what I critiqued and uncovered were systems that seemed inflexible and unable to accommodate the breadth and diversity I was seeking. As I gained the skills that helped me to recognize the imperviousness and intolerability to change of the system, I was trapped in it with no way of constructing knowledge in a meaningful way. Despite this realisation, I was more than half way through a degree that I was desperate to complete, so I trudged ahead.

Disillusioned and frustrated I completed my course requirements, albeit in absentia. I was emotionally depleted and physically exhausted despite having been bodily out of any school setting for three months. The only barrier to my degree completion was the final practicum. I requested a placement in the high school from which I graduated. The cooperating teacher had been my English teacher and knew me well. She showed a great deal of trust in handing me her class for six weeks and encouraged me to make it my own. Because I remember much of my school experience as one giving rise to disconnection, my goal was to create a unit of drama that demanded critical thought while encouraging personal meaningfulness. This attempt at creating spaces for engagement, though, was met with resistance.

Shakespeare's *MacBeth* had been taught at the school for about 20 years. I wanted to teach *Hamlet*. My request to the office for texts resulted in my being summoned there. I was reminded how long *MacBeth* had been on the curriculum and asked why I felt compelled to introduce change. I explained that *Hamlet*, in my experience, offered more fully developed and complex characters. I also voiced that, although *MacBeth* was a fine choice, my cooperating teacher had encouraged me to make the unit my own and seemed pleased with my selection. I was informed that I would need to create a unit from scratch and it would be subject to review. Word travelled quickly through the English department that I had opted to teach *Hamlet* rather than *MacBeth*. I had drop-in visits, was queried by other teachers, and was eventually "invited" to host my class in the gym. It felt somewhat like a dare and couldn't have come at a worse time, as we were rehearsing reader's theatre. Nonetheless, off to the gymnasium we went for scrutiny. It seemed a great deal of fuss in the name of swapping one tragedy for another, but that ended up being the least significant of the challenges.

The remainder of the term proceeded quietly with little interference, at least until the final assignment. Wanting to provide every opportunity for students to engage with their learning and make it personally meaningful, I created an assignment that was negotiated within parameters. The overarching requirements were to demonstrate understanding of the themes and character development as contextualized by the time period and each student's personal experience. The effort was allowed to be artistic (poetry, drama, painting, etc.) or traditional (written paper on approved topic), but both

had to contain written and oral components. It was a fun assignment to create and rewarding to review. Although there were many delights among them, two students in particular remain in mind almost 15 years later – one for his excellence and the other for her attitude.

He wore torn jeans, belted with chains, ratty heavy-metal tee shirts, combat boots, and had long unkempt hair: all black. His course load included general math and science and my advanced English course. I was told that he fought for his right to take my course and was almost denied because of his track record in the general courses. Fortunately, the school had no policy that could refuse him entrance into English 611. He was granted a seat with a sneer that it was his to fail.

He kept to himself in class, a definite misfit among the upper caste. Despite an apparent chip on his shoulder, he seemed to be articulate and thoughtful. For his final assignment, he designed and constructed The Globe theatre. He made hand puppets and wrote a script based on a contemporary version of Hamlet Act III:ii. With excellent pronunciation and flawless delivery, he performed it. He not only demonstrated comprehension and creativity, he presented beautiful craftsmanship. He earned a high 90 for his effort.

She was tall, willowy, and graceful: a ballet dancer. She treated school with tolerance and delighted in recognition for her talents. She had a fine command of the written word and delivered a template type paper again and again. When she came to me before submitting the assignment, I challenged her to abandon her template and endeavour to be creative. If she chose still to write a paper, I suggested that she

consider writing creatively as a break from the formal essay. If she chose to stay with the formal essay, she might at least avoid a simple read-type delivery for her oral component. While I suggested these alternatives and encouraged her to challenge herself, she responded with mild boredom and disdain. She submitted a typical formal essay and then sat at her desk and read it verbatim to the class. She earned a low 80 for her assignment. She approached me, waving the paper, reminding me I wasn't a real teacher and slinging accusations about my trying to ruin her future. I calmly reminded her of the assignment and the conversations we had shared about the standards for the oral presentation. She said she didn't need to do any more than she did; she was a 90s student, and everyone with a brain knew it. I told her that all of my students were welcome to improve their projects, resubmit, and be re-graded. She called me a bitch and told me to go to hell.

The experience still bothers me. I truly felt bad about her frustration regarding her mark, but I could only grade product, not track records nor reputation. She was given every opportunity for success but projected an attitude that said she was above the standards that governed other students. I had no alternative but to grade her effort as I would grade anyone else's. Had that been the end of it, the event might not still be so fresh in my mind. However, it didn't stop there. She went to the cooperating teacher and complained. That teacher came to me for the background on the situation. I shared with her the assignment and the submission, as well as the details of my conversations with the student. She spoke with the student and expressed her support of the grade received. The student filed an escalated complaint, citing the young man's success as

proof of my idiocy. As requested by the office, I forwarded the assignment and her submission. I was asked to make his available. I said I had no idea what his product had to do with her grade. Still, both were requested and delivered. Upon review, I was told three things: he was not capable of success; she had a history of achieving grades that exceeded 90 percent; and I was rocking the boat. Sickened, I replied respectively: clearly he was capable, as they had the proof; I was not grading her history, but her submission; and so what?

Although I don't know if the administration eventually overturned the grades, the marks stood when I left. The practicum was finished, and the degree was granted. Feeling far less than celebratory, I did not attend convocation. I threw myself into substituting, hoping it was the degree to which I was allergic. Afflicted by dreams at night and panic attacks through the day, one week became two. Tormented by my own choices and able to fix neither schooling systems nor myself, I withdrew even in the staff room. On my prep period, one of my advanced English teachers, now a colleague, joined me on the bench by the window. Without preamble, he told me to run. *This place will suck the very marrow of life from you. I was like you once, full of hope and determination to change the world and broaden minds. But the system has injected its poison and insured the failure of us all: we've got 40 kids per class, 30 of whom regard us with disdain, if not blatant hostility. Get out, Ellyn, before it steals your soul.* Some would berate him for not offering support, but it seemed to me an omen. From that day, I not only refused calls for supply teaching, I withdrew my name from the board. It was

time to turn my attention inward as I sought to make sense of my personal disintegration.

It was a long process finding my way back to the classroom but, ironically, the journey led me to the same school that I had once found so crippling. I had heard rumours during my Education degree that the faculty was facing a major transition: in fact, the government and public had demanded it. The term after my convocation, a new dean was recruited to be the change agent and champion of a renewed programme and faculty. Guided by a vision to grow whole teachers, a two-year integrated programme emerged. Tired and fragmented curricula were replaced by courses in critical pedagogy and integrated foundations. Faculty members were once again required to contribute to research, and accountability was imperative. Those who opted not to support the new vision were presumably offered alternatives, as they were not present when the new programme commenced in the fall.

Although change came too late for my cohort, its arrival still validated for me that my programme had indeed been problem saturated. It also planted a seed in my mind: maybe systems can change, and perhaps we can return to places and know them for the first time. The journey back started with a conversation. I had errands to run in the city and, bolstered by the beautiful autumn day, I decided to visit that one education professor who actually listened. That's how I still remember her. She was the one who, during that gray meltdown, actually heard me. She recognised the deep disengagement underlying my faltering health and she named it. Somehow that honest acknowledgement marked the beginning of my healing. Having never told her as much,

I decided to drop in and say thank you. It was not easy, though. In truth, I had not set foot on the campus since my nervous breakdown four years earlier. I did not return for convocation, and the parchment that was sent in the post has never been mounted. Truth be told, despite my determination never to spare it a glance, my pulse still quickened every time I drove past the place. Today, it ended.

Tired of being held prisoner by my own fear, I slowed as I approached the fork in the road and guided my car into the left turning lane. Reminding myself to breathe, I signalled and pulled on to campus. I began to shake, whether from fear remembered or adrenalin experienced, I could not honestly say; I suspect it was a combination of both. I parked the car and consciously drew in a steadying breath. I got out, locked up, and negotiated my way along an old familiar path. I tried to focus on the fresh, crisp day, the beautiful autumn colours, and the New England feeling that the centre block always conjured up. I'm not sure I was successful, but I managed to distract myself long enough to get to the door of the education building. I gulped a breath of air as though I were a diver preparing for a deep plunge. I pushed through the door and, on trembling legs, climbed the stairs. The smells were the same – dank and stale – symbolic of my experience there. I reminded myself that I was not beholden to this place any longer and could come and go as I pleased. I made my way down the hall and found her office where I had last left it. I knocked tentatively and heard her call out from the other side to enter.

She was at her desk, looking very much as I recalled, a comforting blend of academic and maternal. Her face lit with surprise and pleasure when she saw me and,

as I greeted her, the hold of the past weakened. After she invited me to sit and said how nice it was to see me, she asked what brought me to the city. I explained that I was in to run a few errands but wanted to stop by and thank her, that I recognised I would not have come through the other side as I did without her support. "Poppycock." That's what she said. She pooh-poohed the notion and insisted that my allergic reaction to the programme was only further proof of my intelligence. We chatted about the dark ages of the faculty and she updated me on the changes: new professors thanks to some encouraged retirements; new dean specifically recruited to re-envision the faculty's future direction; new courses that encouraged critical pedagogy and intellectual development; and a new graduate programme for leaders and thinkers to write their way into professional growth. I was delighted for her and said that I often wondered how she continued to thrive in that old environment. She confessed that she hadn't; she said she had quit the same year I did and had returned only when there was renewal and hope. Through our conversation I realised that, regardless of our rank or role, we can choose to walk away from places that silence and harm us. Likewise, when offered the promise of renewal, we can return. We can revisit old places and make them new by finding empowerment and engagement where previously there was none. As she talked, I listened and responded where appropriate. Only as our conversation was coming to an end did I realise that she was sharing her own journey with the hope of inspiring me to set out again.

When she first mentioned the wonderful renaissance of the faculty, I was pleased only for her. As she continued to discuss it and its potential for faculty and students alike, she piqued my curiosity. Through the extended dialogue about journeys of

personal healing and professional growth, I was slowly enticed by her metaphor. Still, when she suggested that I come back to this place for graduate school, I was stunned. Stunned, but both curious and tempted. Having given me much to think about, she bid me farewell with a challenge: it's not enough to complain about perceived injustice or misrepresentation, she said; we have to take ourselves seriously enough to reflect deeply on our experiences, generate ideas from them, and present greater possibilities. *Before I made it back to my car, I had decided to apply for graduate school. Successful in my application, I was slated to begin the Master of Education programme the following September.*

In the space of time between my application and programme commencement, I had begun my work with adult learners in a local processing plant. I recognised that I was leading the creation of a programme that was truly learner-centred and generative. I was not, however, theorising the experience; nor was I deconstructing my role in it. With the support of the employee participants in a workplace learning centre, I set out to use my Master of Education programme as a way to give voice to learners whose previous silencing within systems of schooling led them to disengage from learning. My goal in giving voice to these stories was to enter into a dialogue, both with the learners and the theory, which would help me understand academic disengagement and potential ways to re-engage.

In thus partnering theoretical explication and practical application of my learning, my experience in the Master of Education programme was fortifying, validating, and deeply meaningful. Newly inspired by this approach to learning, I was

able to shift my focus from resisting problem-saturated systems of schooling to cutting paths for new ways to learn/lead praxis.

Based heavily on Freirian philosophy, which regarded me and my learners as independent, abstract, complex, and conscious individuals, I began positioning education as emancipatory. This "liberating education," which Freire argued consists in "acts of cognition, not transferrals of information," (p. 67), encouraged us all to understand schooling as dynamic praxis.

Along this journey of moving between theory and practise, I uncovered some foundational principles of adult education that aid in achieving what I have come to understand as *join-up* with learning. Honouring the importance of the situated nature of constructing knowledge, I invite you to the field where I first learned about join-up, and then to learning organisations where I deconstructed the principles of adult education.

CHAPTER 4

Education in the Field: Learning with Horses

Although my telling of my schooling experiences sometimes paints a bleak picture, each of my degrees has given me a gift of insight that has been central to learning/leading praxis: my Arts degree taught me about perspective; my Education degree instilled perseverance; and my graduate degree introduced me to praxis. My most recent gift, which I unwrapped during the process of researching and writing my doctoral dissertation, is a profound recognition of the role of join-up in learning. Founded on the principles of consistency, predictability, and replicability, join-up employs deep communication, trust, and choice to establish engagement. Because I was first introduced to join-up through my work with horses, I invite you into the field with me.

Spotty. He was my first memorable lesson in the field – well, the orchard, actually. We were perfectly suited, he and I: we were both about half the height of others in our species (he was a small Shetland pony and I was 5 years old); equally independent in thought, we were both determined to control the outcome of our first conjoined experience; and cocky, neither of us had any doubt we'd persevere.

It was 1980. The day was warm and humid, and the August apples were thick on the trees. He was covered in burdocks, and I was sticky with perspiration and horsehair. I finally had him tied in the paddock after cornering him in the field, luring him with oats, and then quickly snapping a lead on him when he was least expecting it. My cousin and I dragged the pony saddle and pad from the barn and threw it on his

back. We replaced the halter with a headstall, a bit, and a pair of reins. Feeling like the unstoppable mistress of my newly found freedom, I nodded at my cousin, and she opened the gate to world.

Like coming out of the shoot in bronc riding, I knew too late that this was a ride I should have reconsidered. Spotty caught the scent of freedom in the air and broke into a hacksaw jog around my aunt's house. He was single-minded in getting to the apple orchard that he could normally only gaze upon longingly from within his barbed-wire enclosure. As I continued to saw on his mouth and implore him to whoa, he showed me the same disrespect I had shown him in preparing for our ride: eager to rid himself of a pest, he headed for the lowest hanging apples. Those apples were attached to the lowest branch. That branch was attached to an ancient but very solid tree. To this day I maintain that a cartoon character couldn't have looked any more ridiculous: my neck caught on the branch and I was unceremoniously plucked from the back of my mount who then immediately dropped gait, came to a halt, and began his lunch.

Thirty years and dozens of horses later, I understand how I set us up for failure and why Spotty responded as he did. I let us down in so many ways. I did not invest the time in grooming him, which is so important. Imagine putting on clothes and a hiking pack if you had thistles in your flesh and dirt caked on your skin. Horses are no different in that regard. It's crucial that we show them the care of proper grooming before we tack up. This process not only ensures their comfort and physical well being; it also establishes trust.

Think for a moment about dogs. They run and play and wag to greet us. When we return the affection, they roll over on their backs and put their feet in the air. I've

learned over the course of many years that when a dog shows you her belly this way, she is actually saying, "here are my vulnerable areas, and I'm going to trust you to play nice." She can do this because she is also a predator. Yes, our dogs are predators. More importantly, though, so are we.

Think now for a moment about eyes and their placement. Where are they on dogs? Where are yours? Go ahead and have a look if you like. Seriously, this is important stuff. Where are eyes on horses? Take notice of the difference in their placement. That's right: horses' eyes are on the sides of their heads. This eye placement gives horses a broader range of vision so they are better able to protect themselves from predators, or front-eyes like you and me. Because a dog is a predator as well, it is hard-wired to protect itself and therefore can choose to be submissive. By comparison, a horse is a prey animal and is naturally predisposed to flight for self-preservation. In short, we are natural enemies of horses. Time spent in grooming establishes a routine of trust building wherein we can run our predatory hands and foreign tools over the body of the horse and show it only care.

Several equine experts (Camp, 2008; Irwin, 2007; and Roberts, 1997a, 1997b, 2002, 2004) confirm that our every action and reaction when working with horses is critical. This extends even to basic grooming. I use a metal currycomb on the fleshy parts of the horse like the body and neck. The teeth bring only pleasure and positive attention while leaving the horse free from caked-on earth. I then groom with a soft brush and extend my attention to the bony areas like the legs. I am careful to keep my motions fluid and gentle as I work out the dirt. I use a small palm brush for his face so the soothing strokes appear to be delivered by my hand. When grooming the tail, I

stand to one side, respecting that horses are most comfortable when I remain in their peripheral vision. Before combing the forelock, which involves my intruding on his personal headspace, I rub up over the ears until the horse drops his head inviting me to touch between his eyes. I take care when cleaning hooves to support legs and feet and communicate that I value the trust being shared by giving up his power of flight.

These same equine experts attest that the greatest success with horses comes from approaching them in partnership and asking them to engage with me. This request for join-up requires an enduring commitment to understanding and communication. Knowing that I am regarded as a natural enemy has helped establish a trust-building routine in grooming. I have circled the horse and caused him to think about my presence as non-threatening. But will he stay with me? Will he come to trust me as a safe place when we go out into the world together?

To move toward this join-up, I draw heavily from the work of internationally respected horseman and founder of Equus University, Monty Roberts. Several of his publications (Roberts, 1997a, 1997b, and 2004) focus primarily on join-up. The principle is simple: horses are flight animals, but they are also herd animals. Even during the flight impulse, horses rely on their herd for protection. In order to have a strong and sustainable relationship with a horse, I need to become the leader of that herd.

Although I've joined-up now with several horses, I want to share with you the story of Beanz. Born to my favourite mare, he was strong, solid, square, and full of beans from the moment he hit the straw. He was up on his feet within minutes, and I was immediately in love with this colt. Because he was born on the date that my

grandfather Frank died, I registered him as Frankly Unforgettable with the stable name of Beanz.

Beanz was immediately distrustful of me and I watched as he consistently bounded behind his mother to put distance between us. His mother, though, was such an intelligent mare, one with whom I had a trustful relationship. Each time I entered the stall, I approached her. In soft tones, I rubbed her barrel, her muzzle, her neck, murmuring what a good job she had done in birthing such a strong colt. Having always deferred to her as the protector of her colt, I was at first confused when she started circling away from me. I began to replay my actions as I came into the stall: I never looked her directly in the eye, as that communicates aggression; in deference, I always approached her, not the colt; I gently massaged vulnerable areas to remind her of our bond of trust; and I always made certain that she was between me and her colt. Still, by day three, she circled to the back corner of her stall. I took a chance and reached out for the colt, approaching him from his shoulder, cooing "good boy." As expected, he sniffed at my hand and then tried to dart behind his mother. She held firm to the corner, forcing him to stand between her and me. She nickered. Then I knew: through her circling to the back, she was inviting me to meet her foal. In standing her ground, she was insisting that her foal accept the introduction. As I realised she had positioned me as part of their herd, I was moved to tears. I turned away from the colt, squatted to be lower than his height, and waited. It was less than three minutes before his nose was on my shoulder. "Ok", he was saying; "Mum says you're safe, so let's see how this goes."

Although I had accomplished join-up with several horses before that moment, it

was always in the field as I prepared to start them. This join-up was different – so immediate. I have since used this approach with every foal of my acquaintance and, although it always humbles me, I was truly changed by that experience.

Join-up in the field is equally wonderful. Usually initiated with two year olds, it frames the way I begin their formal training. I bring the horse into a round pen, and I take my place in the middle. With a long, lightweight line, I shoo the horse away from me. Predictably, the horse takes flight in response to what it understands as my aggressive behaviour. I maintain an aggressive position and I continue to push the horse away from me. As the horse keeps to the rail and lopes circles around the pen, I turn with him, always keeping my shoulders square on him and my eyes locked on his. When he seems to be getting comfortable in this exchange, I abruptly flip the line a few paces in front of him, causing him to pivot and flee in the other direction. What I am communicating is that I am not willing to join up with him, so he best look for a way out of the situation. He does. First, as he flees one way; then, as he flees the other. My behaviour does not change. As Irwin (2007) reminds me, horses don't like ambiguity, so I remain with my shoulders square and my eyes locked on the horse. Again, when the horse seems to be settling into a comfortable gait, I force him to change direction.

Then I wait and watch carefully for the expected signs. The horse will slow his gait to a jog and his inside ear invariably flicks inward and points to me. He is saying, "Okay, I'm listening." Next, the horse will drop his head, first just below the level of his shoulders, and then almost to the ground. Roberts (2004) says this is the horse's way of saying, "I'm ready to negotiate; if you want to call the meeting, you can be the

chair." Finally, the horse will begin to chew and lick, indicating an eagerness to have the conversation. At this point, I look away and drop my shoulders off to a 45-degree angle. My body language communicates that I understand the horse has accepted my invitation and I am ready, too. I then turn my back and wait. The horse will slow to a walk and tentatively circle in toward me. I remain still with my back turned as the horse approaches me. He will sniff a bit; soon I will feel his breath on my neck, and he will softly nudge my shoulder with his nose: join-up. I turn then, eyes averted, and gently rub between the horse's eyes. Then I walk away. The horse follows me. I stop. He puts his nose on my shoulder. I repeat the action. He repeats his response. In this response-based learning, we are communicating successfully. Each of us understands the other, and we are engaged with the process. We are now ready to begin learning together. Predictable and replicable magic. Every time.

Irwin (2007) has an interesting perspective on this magic:

> It's magic because what horses need to hear from us is what many of us would like to hear from ourselves. They want us to have a calm, focussed assurance. They want us to be consistent. They want us to be both strong and compassionate. In short, horses need us to be our best selves. And by being so sensitive to our self-doubt and fear, they help us find where we keep our inner betrayals so we can root them out (p. 13).

The difficult part of training horses is really its requirement to learn about ourselves, our strengths and challenges, as we attempt to collaborate with others in mutual respect and trust. This centrality of self-awareness to teaching reminds me of Palmer's (1998)

insistence that we teach who we are. Several scholars, in fact, (Elbaz, 1991; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005; Friere, 1974, 1992; Palmer, 1993, 1998; VanManen, 1990; and Wheatley, 2009) discuss the significance of teachers' self-awareness because of the inevitability of bringing their lived experience into the classroom. This tendency leads me to discuss, at least briefly, a related theoretical area of interest: lived experience.

I was first formally introduced to the concept of lived experience by Van Manen (1990). At its most basic, says Van Manen, lived experience "involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life" (p. 35). Other scholars (Dilthey, 1985; Gadamer, 1975; and Schutz, 1967) have argued that the importance of lived experience resides not in the experience alone but in our reflexive awareness of it. I find the work of Schutz (1967) of particular interest. He writes:

> Meaning does not lie in the experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively . . . It is, then, incorrect to say that my lived experiences are meaningful merely in virtue of their being experienced or lived through . . . The reflective glance singles out an elapsed lived experience and constitutes it as meaningful. (pp. 69-71)

In these same pages, Schutz discusses the notion of lived experience as something *constituted;* that is, he says that its meaning is found in retrospective reflection through acts of remembrance, narration, or meditation. Burch (1989) seems to support Schutz's view but criticises him for focussing on the construction of meaning without explicitly unpacking the implications of subjectivity. I support Burch's criticism but problem-

pose the word *meaning* as it implies there exists one; *understanding* is more congruent with this discussion of personal knowledge that is constituted through reflecting on lived experience.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), any examination of personal knowledge involves an explication of the social and cultural aspects of that individual's lived experience. They make at least three interesting points in this discussion. First, they remind me that individuals "use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Second, Ellis and Bochner argue that situating research within this framework allows me as researcher to "use self to learn about other" (p. 741). Third, they suggest that, because of the complexity of considering how people take up cultural practices, it is important to contextualise *voice*. In a thesis designed to examine the importance of personally meaningful learning practises, I assume it is important to consider theoretically what it means to have voice.

Explicating the intricacy of voice, Ellsworth (1997), introduces the concept of a *trialogue*. In her opinion, the third participant in every conversation seemingly dual in nature is the unconscious. Impossible to account for completely, the unconscious creates a space between what is said and what is heard.

Palmer (1993) also discusses the theoretical importance of voice. In particular, he highlights the voice of the subject in the triangulation of "the teachers, the students, and the subject itself" (p. 98). He suggests that, because of the nature of consciousness, entering into this discourse with other makes our own speech become clearer (p. 101).

Likewise, Cole and Knowles (1994) posit that, by beginning with an exploration of self, the researcher is better able to investigate phenomena (p. 19).

Lived experience and voice as we communicate through self-other interactions bring me back to lessons in the field. Roberts (1997a, 1997b) maintains that we learn not only through our experiences, but also by reflecting on how those experiences frame our self-other interactions as we go forward in the world. For him, and I agree, communication is central to establishing safe learning spaces as we negotiate these lessons. Meaningful communication, he reminds us, is so much more than words: it is heavily reliant on the subtleties of tone and body language.

Recall the round pen and join-up. The position of the trainer's shoulders and direction of her eyes communicate with the horse whether or not he is invited to join her. The horse, in this response-based learning, communicates in return through the position of his head and the chewing motion that he wants to join his trainer. This *deep communication* (Roberts, 2001) enables join-up, but trust and choice are central to keeping the learning alive.

The effectiveness of this learning experience is contingent upon each participant behaving in a consistent and predictable manner. The trainer must use her body to keep the pressure off the horse once join-up has been achieved. The horse must follow up by shadowing the trainer around the pen not only to demonstrate his commitment to following the trainer as his new herd leader, but also as a testament to the new trustful partnership as they continue learning together. If either the trainer or the horse breaches this bond, the process must start from the beginning once more. Not surprisingly, if

this happens, there can be some hesitation and wariness on the part of both horse and trainer because each recalls the lack of trust from the previous failed attempt at establishing a learning relationship.

People also approach learning with some hesitation because they may carry with them past experiences of disconnection. This disconnection often makes learners vulnerable and increases the criticality of achieving join-up on the first attempt. I came to this realisation when I was given the opportunity to establish a workplace learning centre. Guided by this acknowledgement, I spent the first two weeks in that setting meeting individually with each potential learner. Every one of them approached me with trepidation, carrying a story of disengagement. I did what I had learned was best: I listened. I heard stories stemming from places of anger, defeat, disappointment, self-reproach, and fear. When it seemed appropriate, I asked questions about dreams that had been silenced and goals that might be resurrected. I worked relentlessly to understand each of the learners and create spaces for them where they could learn. Committed to trust and honesty, I did not always find the journey easy. It involved unlearning some tightly held assumptions and a willingness to be open to seeing ourselves and our relationships with learning differently.

Although each participant had unique educational goals and motivation, we had a collective mandate as well: restored confidence in ourselves and in our ability to succeed in learning. We worked toward achieving this purpose in innumerable small ways. The first time it really began to take shape was about eight weeks into the programme. Some learners had begun to express uneasiness about the approaching end

of school, as we were set up only as a 12-week pilot programme. I encouraged them to take ownership of their new opportunity and to write letters to management expressing their desire to continue learning. There were at least three very important outcomes as a result of those letters: first, they felt confident in communicating with management their desire for continued learning opportunities; second, they learned to create business correspondence; and third, in being granted an eight-month extension of their programme, they experienced empowerment.

Bolstered by new confidence and success, they soon decided to make another request. They wanted to know how the plants operated so they'd be better informed of advancement opportunities. As a result, learners once again practiced their letter-writing skills and once again experienced success as they were granted guided tours of the plants, which outlined the potential for mobility within the corporation. Similarly, as I worked to make their learning meaningful, they began to discover geometry in the operation of cranes, physics in mechanical work, and integers through temperature and personal banking. With each new discovery, I came to understand how join-up guided our learning.

The Learning Centre took on a life of its own and became a place of engagement and empowerment. A bright room away from the processing plant, the centre had 12 personal computers, Internet and network connections, and a small but diverse library. The walls were alive with colourful learning charts, a world map, photography, and inspirational quotations. In the centre of the room, there were three large conference tables placed to form an "I" – a reminder of why we learn and

strategic in its design, it allowed learners individual space but was also conducive to discussion and interaction. The trust and collaboration allowed us to create a space where the centre grew to accommodate the growth of its students. Originally established to assist in the attainment of General Educational Development (G.E.D.) certificates, the centre soon became a space for anyone who wanted to learn. Courses included adult basic education, secondary credits in English and mathematics, post-secondary refresher courses, and Red Seal training. Computer courses, creative writing, and training in personal and professional correspondence were also offered. Because the learning environment was founded on the philosophy of join-up and committed to making learning relevant and personally meaningful, a sense of solidarity developed. Because of that solidarity, the members of our learning community felt safe to examine their biases and assumptions about teaching and learning. Through reflexively considering our learning experiences, many of us were able to reconceptualise what it meant to go to school.

In addition to trust and communication, choice is central to establishing a positive learning relationship. Roberts (2001) reminds us that, just as the horse must choose to join-up, so too must people. In his work with large corporations, he found that both leadership and change initiatives were markedly more successful if the participants chose to be involved. Choice, or buy-in, establishes shared ownership and makes the desire for success more intrinsically important. It also removes resistance born of feeling like something has been done to you, rather than co-authored by you. Founded on the principles of consistency, predictability, and replicability, join-up

employs deep communication, trust, and choice to establish engagement. Finally, the join-up process asserts that violence, either bullying or coercion, is never the answer. This latter assertion reminds me of the principles of adult education and the context in which I first deconstructed them. Having introduced you to join-up, I invite you to explore with me the principles of adult education that operate within successful learning organisations and the way they aid join-up in those settings.

CHAPTER 5

Education in Business: Learning with Organisations

The philosophy and principles of join-up are colloquial and customary amidst the community of horse trainers. My goal in this chapter is to help make explicit how these same principles are consistent, operating, and replicable within learning organisations. First, though, I think it is important to consider briefly the conceptual and practical evolution of the learning organisation.

The learning organisation, as a conceptual framework, has its origins in organisational learning theory. Often used interchangeably, I understand these two entities very differently. Organisational learning is a heavily theoretical area of study that examines learning models used within organisations and then posits theories based on those studies. It is specifically interested in understanding how organisations learn as units, how individual learning contributes to collective learning, and how learning affects the organisation's overall ability to adapt to its environment (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Czarniawska, 1998; Marquardt, 2002; Schön, 1995; Senge, 1990; Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003; Teare & Dealtry, 1998; Toffler, 1990; Van Buren, 2001; Wheatly, 1992; and Woodman, 1989).

Learning organisations, in comparison, represent the practical application of organisational learning theory. They use the theoretical findings of organisational learning to inform the ways in which they might foster continuous improvement through effective learning practices. Viewed this way, learning organisations are the dynamic representative of the theory (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Marquardt, 2002; Schön,

1995; and Senge, 1990). The phrase *learning organisation* gained traction in the 1980s in reference to businesses that leveraged learning to maximise growth and resilience in the increasingly competitive markets (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004; Marquardt, 1996; and Senge, 1990). The term was further popularised in the next decade with the publication of Senge's (1990) *The Fifth Discipline*. He conceptualised learning organisations as places where

> people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire; new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured; collective aspirations are set free; people are continually learning to learn together (Stewart, 2001, p. 143).

Thus, at the root of learning organisations is the commitment to providing a framework for their people to be awake to and engaged in the work environment. Learning organisations support both individual and team learning with the aim of fostering creative and critical thinking across boundaries. This support is instrumental in helping people join-up with their work and become a meaningful part of the collaborative whole that contributes to organisational success (Larsen, 1996). In turn, fostering engagement in this manner encourages workers to learn, problem-pose, collaborate, and innovate in a continuous fashion that enables sustainable development of both individuals and businesses.

Understanding the fundamental difference between organisational learning theory and learning organisations allows me to focus on the latter and offer a characterisation that situates learning within them. Drawing from the work of Argyris

and Schön, 1995; Marquardt, 2002; Overmeer, 1997; Owen, 1991; Schön, 1995; and Senge, 1990, I posit that learning organisations have at least three characteristics: first, they develop both individual and collective knowledge; second, they use learning to improve performance and boost competitive advantage; and third, they continuously enhance their capacity, through reflexive praxis, to adapt to their external environment. Interestingly, though, even in the presence of these essential three characteristics, learning organisations can vary greatly in their organic development.

My first real emersion in a learning organisation came well before I was able to identify it as such. Having fled the public school system and then spent years circling back around places where I might etch out space for more integrative learning, I finally found my opportunity to return to the classroom full-time. This prospect was at a local processing plant. The company was a large enterprise with more than 800 employees at its busiest season. With no previous experience of offering learning and development opportunities for its employees, the company initially approached learning with tempered enthusiasm and expectations. It assigned the initiative to the training department that had previously focussed primarily on compliance-based certifications. Not really knowing how the programme would evolve, or if it would be sustainable, the head of that training department posted an advertisement for a workplace instructor and decided to leave the programme's parameters and development to the successful candidate.

As that successful candidate, I inherited an empty room, a couple of dozen potential learners, and 12 weeks to prove myself. After rounding up some tables and

chairs, bookshelves, and learning materials, my first stop was to visit the human resource manager. I introduced myself and asked what the motivation was for creating this programme. He said upgrading had been previously limited to basic literacy tutoring that he had personally offered. This new pilot programme was the result of an employee satisfaction survey in which the feedback indicated that employees wanted better opportunities for upgrading their education. He had partnered with the provincial adult and workplace education department, whose staff had conducted an organisational needs assessment and recommended that providing on-site training might improve performance and retention. He agreed to three months to test the theory. In short, he was in the production business, not the education business. If education improved production, the programme would be extended.

Next I asked him if he had a particular vision for the programme. He said that it had to be accessible but not coercive and that it couldn't interfere with production. Beyond those parameters, he said he trusted I knew what I was doing, and that he'd keep an ear to the ground to be sure I did. He invited me to come to him if I needed something to give the programme a fair shot at success, and then he wished me luck. Sensing I was just dismissed, I replayed the conversation in my mind as I returned to the learning centre. It seemed clear that he would support any reasonable requests, providing learning did not interfere with productivity.

Having gotten a sense of management's motivation, I was eager to meet with the employees. I dedicated the next two weeks to having one-to-one chats with each interested individual. All of them carried unique stories of disconnection as well as

personal reasons for wanting to re-engage. Although each story was equally important, I remember one specific encounter with particular clarity.

I was sitting at my makeshift desk, a table in front of a plate glass window, looking out over the front grounds. I was lost in a reverie about my own experiences of disintegration and those shared with me that morning. I was jarred out of my contemplation by an impatient knock and the formidable presence of one of the biggest men I'd ever seen. There was no point inviting him inside as he had already closed half the distance between the door and where I was seated. Noticing the mud on his boots, he stopped, fixed his eyes on me as a little smirk tugged on his red, bearded face, and then stomped his boots clean in the middle of the classroom floor.

"Hope you gotta broom," he said.

"Don't worry about it," I replied. "Have a seat wherever you like."

He picked up a chair as if it were one of those little seats in primary and dropped it within a foot of my desk.

"Here good?"

"Sure," I replied.

"Don't wanna get too close and get dust on that fancy suit of yours," he goaded.

I asked him what brought him in to see me. He said that he had come to get his "edubacation." I sensed he was having a bit of fun at my expense, so I figured he was

confident enough to approach directly. I responded that I was pleased to help and asked what education he was after. He said he wanted to get his grade 12. I explained that we could proceed in one of at least two ways: he could self identify a level and we'd go from there; or he could take an assessment and we'd establish his level and build on that. He asked when he could be tested, and I replied that I was available at his convenience.

"No time like the present," he said. "You best git out yer abacus and slates to see whatcha gotta learn me."

I invited him to move to the centre table where he had more room, and I gave him a package that I used to assess baseline of those I assume are quite literate, perhaps about a grade 10 or 11 equivalency. It normally takes about an hour to complete but he handed it to me in 35 minutes. I thanked him and asked when he wanted to come in for a follow up so we could develop a learning plan.

"What – yer not gonna grade it?"

I explained that I generally completed the assessments after participants left so that I could prepare a recommendation for them.

"Just get out yer red pen, Teach, and tell me how I did."

I invited him to read while I went through his assessment. Instead, he wandered around as I found section after section of his assessment completed and correct. Delighted, I told him that he was ready to begin at G.E.D. preparation and I anticipated that he would breeze through his high school equivalency.

"Geez, Teach, you must be surprised. A big woolly bugger off the farm knowing his ABC's, huh? Who'da thunk it?"

Deciding it was time to call out his attitude, I replied, "having grown up on 1000 acres not 10 miles from here, I figure there's a few of us hayseeds that can count to ten. Perhaps since you're so bright, we'll see if we can give you a little extra-credit work to help you overcome your judgments." Without further preamble, I turned my attention back to my desk and left him to find his own way to the door. He sat quietly for a minute before he got up. As he made his way to the door, he barked out a laugh.

"Teach? If you're a farm girl, you probably got some jeans. Why don't you retire that fancy suit and put on some real clothes."

I didn't dare look back or respond for fear I'd laugh. I wanted to create a space for real people to engage meaningfully with learning. Well, it didn't get a whole lot more real than this.

I continued to meet with prospective learners and, when we opened the doors to the learning centre, we had 32 students. Together, we created a programme that was truly learner-centred and generative: learners opted in to the programme without coercion or recommendation; their programmes were developed individually, based on a careful needs assessment; the individual learning plans were kept confidential; and there was no reporting mechanism back to human resources or supervisors. Word of the learning environment travelled and the enrolment grew. Within six months the 32 had become 60 and by the end of the year more than 100 employees were enrolled.

Although the programme originated to help employees earn high school equivalency diplomas, the needs were as diverse as the learners, so the programmes evolved to include a range of courses from adult basic education and essential skills to masters-level degrees.

Having based the programme heavily on Freirian philosophy, I assumed it would empower employees, improve their opportunities for advancement, boost morale, and position the company as a place of opportunity. Further, by offering programmes for all levels of learning and staffing, I hoped the learning centre would transcend traditional barriers and become a place relatively free of rank. Long before we could determine our overall effectiveness as a learning centre, we saw evidence of success.

I was living in a world of hats. I realised this almost immediately after taking the job. You see, the front-line employees wore only white hats. The white hat suggested rank, pay level, and lack of power. The green hats were worn by maintenance. They were items of envy because they were not among the hated blue hats but essential enough to production to be spared wearing a white one. The blue hats were resented by all who didn't wear them. Under them were the supervisors, a most unenviable position in my estimation. Having the appearance of power to those below them and only obligation to those above them, supervisors represented the highest turnover and lowest engagement. Then there were the no hats. These folks were management and generally regarded with disdain by all who wore hats. The hats (or lack thereof) were evident on the floor, in the yard, and at lunch. They determined who

sat with whom on breaks and even where you parked your vehicle. The hats had amazing power. Their power was so awesome that, in checking the hats at the door, the learning centre became a place of equality. I'll never forget the day that it all began to change: a senior manager who had been in his role for more than 30 years joined the learning centre. Of course, we had met privately to establish a baseline and to build his learning plan, but the other learners did not know that a manager was about to join them. The first day he walked in to the classroom, the atmosphere grew thick with tension. Two of his employees already at the table looked at me with a combination of suspicion and fear. I spared them a quick glance of reassurance as I welcomed their manager to the table. He sensed the tension and handled it brilliantly. He knew I would not disclose why he was at the learning centre, so he simply asked if there was any room at the table for a man with only a grade-eight education. As looks of surprise replaced looks of suspicion, the barriers weakened. Within a week, the manager asked one of his employees for a bit of extra help with his fractions. A month later, they were poking fun at each other as the manager struggled to make sense of algebra. Overhearing the conversation, I suggested that they think of their chemical formulas as algebra and work backward to see how unknown variables are useful. Their learning became both collaborative and relevant, and more barriers fell away. Six weeks after that first manager walked through the door, two more followed. In a world so strictly governed by rank, this egalitarianism was radical.

I was delighted with evidence that the learning centre was indeed becoming a place free of rank. It was an important step along the way to creating a safe learning

space. Still, as the programme was closing in on its first year, I was eager to substantiate our progress. I decided to conduct surveys and hold informal interviews to determine if the programme was successfully meeting the needs of both individual learners and the organisation. The results were clear: as individual knowledge grew, collective organisational knowledge was growing; this new learning boosted the performance of individuals, departments, and the organisation; supervisors reported significant improvement in morale; and turnover among the learner population was two percent compared with the nine percent among non-learners. These returns, together with the breakdown in the caste system, indicated that we were indeed transitioning the company into a learning organisation.

I was pleased with the results, but I wanted to go deeper. Having some assurance that the company was transitioning to a learning organisation was important; however, the trends only spoke explicitly to the learning environment. We were not deconstructing the principles that guided learning on an individual level. As I continued to theorise our experience, I uncovered the seminal work of Knowles (1970), wherein he named six principles of adult learning. I was interested to determine if they were applicable and present in our learning centre.

First, *adults are autonomous and self-directed.* The adult learners with whom I was working had a wealth of life experience. In an effort to honour them and engage them, I fostered a space where they were encouraged to express their views and direct their own learning. This practise took form as I met with each individual, and we co-

authored a learning plan based on his or her baseline and goals. The interim learning objectives and classroom schedule were developed to suit each person's requirements.

Second, *adults have life experiences and knowledge that must be honoured and incorporated into their learning*. Exalting the centrality of personal meaningfulness, we were consciously committed to connecting work, family, and lived experience to each learner's new endeavours so that their studies were meaningful. This commitment often meant that geometry lessons happened on crane sites, and that writing was practised in business requests and correspondence.

Third, *adults are goal-oriented*. Every one of the learners re-entered the classroom with a particular goal in mind. We named that goal during our first meeting and collaboratively developed a plan that would move us toward successful completion.

Fourth, *adults are relevancy-oriented*. Each learner was taking time away from work and home to engage with learning, so it was essential that the studies have some tangible benefits. As a result, the theories and concepts were often practised through real-life scenarios like banking, budgets, meeting minutes, or requests for proposals.

Fifth, *adults are practical*. The adults with whom I was learning tended to focus on lessons that had the most potential to be useful and meaningful in their day-to-day experiences. Thus, we tried always to merge theory with its application. This merger not only gave value to the learning, but it also encouraged the learners to examine theory for relevance and even generate new theory from their practical experience. I

saw this happen most often in mathematics and science, where I learned more from them than I ever taught. Having proceeded through school in the academic stream, I learned the formulas and executed them without ever deconstructing them. The shortcuts and competency-based applications that my learners revealed to me left me both humble and grateful.

Finally, *adult learners, in particular, need to be shown respect.* The wealth of lived experience and the daily demands of work, family, and community entitle adult learners to respect in the classroom. Through respect, we were able to establish a learning environment founded on the principles of equality and the spirit of reciprocal learning.

Deconstructing these principles helped me to understand and name those values that guided the learning in our centre. Further, they represented an approach to learning that honoured personal meaningfulness. Built on deep communication, trust, and choice, engagement was at the core of each of these principles. Further, governed by consistency, replicability, and predictability, we were creating spaces for join-up.

Thus far, I've articulated primarily the perspective and commitment of the learners as we created spaces for them to join up with me in their quests for schooling. The company also made some important contributions that facilitated this process. For example, the programme was entirely employer-funded, yet it was completely employee self-selected and governed. Additionally, the employees were compensated in one of two ways to attend: they were either paid half of their regular hourly wage to attend off shift, or they were permitted one two-hour learning period twice weekly

during their paid shifts. The philosophy behind this compensation was that learning benefits both the employee and employer, and therefore it should be should be cost shared. Presumably coming back to school on days off involved fuel to drive in, childcare, time away from other part-time work, etc. Thus for every two hours spent in learning on the employee's own time, the employer paid one hour's wage. Those employees who worked the same hours as the centre was open, and who were therefore unable to come to school, were permitted four hours weekly of paid study time. The trade-off for this latter group was that there was no extra compensation available to them for time spent in learning. Perhaps the company's most important contribution was its distance. Other than receiving attendance reports to facilitate compensation, the organisation was wholly uninvolved. There were no strings, no payback clauses, no reporting mechanisms, and no loopholes. Learning became personally meaningful, relevant, and integrative: it was indeed radical.

This type of programme also presented some challenges. Entirely employer-funded programmes are often cost prohibitive, which make them difficult to sustain for many organisations, particularly small- and medium-sized businesses. In addition to the salary of a full-time teacher and the cost-share initiative with employees, the programme required extensive infrastructure: classroom, computers, and learning materials. The organisation must also have a large enough employee base to cover those participant-learners who leave the floor to study in two-hour blocks of time. Finally, scheduling must be agile enough to accommodate the diverse needs of many

employees. Both financial ability and staffing agility demand a high level of commitment from the learning organisation.

In this particular company, though, the programme was a tremendous success for everyone involved: in the four years I was with them, more than 200 learners succeeded in meeting their goals across more than 18 programmes; the organisation received national and international attention for its commitment to workplace education while benefitting from more skilled and engaged employees; and I found a space where education was collaborative, personally meaningful, and integrative.

In our fourth year, the programme had brought benefits to the company significant enough that I was offered the opportunity to move to its corporate office and develop the model of learning further so that it might be rolled out to the corporation's six other business units and made available to its more than 7,000 employees. Excited about the possibilities, I accepted the opportunity to join the corporate team as its Organisational Development Specialist. After hiring a replacement for our learning centre, I transitioned to the corporate offices. Almost immediately, though, I recognized serious barriers to successful inter-business implementation.

At the corporate level, the company did not have the framework to be a learning organisation. First, the corporate headquarters were independent of all business units and by design physically removed from all business sites. As such, any individual learning was contained in silos and therefore could not contribute to organisational knowledge. Likewise, because the learning occurred in silos, it was unable to affect overall organisational performance. Finally, because the corporate level was primarily

executive, it was not organically involved with practical operations of the individual business units. These factors left us unable to move between theory and practise continuously to negotiate new praxis.

Perhaps the most serious barrier to effectively leveraging learning across the businesses was situating it within the corporate headquarters. An elite distant unknown to most of the businesses and their people, the corporate office did not have the trust of its independent units. It was regarded with disdain and reputed to know little about the ground-level operations of each business and therefore believed to implement one problematic solution after another.

Had the actual learning model created in that first business been shared with each of the other businesses and then grown organically in house, thereby honouring the principles on which it was founded, there might have been an opportunity for success. Unfortunately, because the company was determined to leverage one solution through one person to multiple businesses all across North America, I could not envision paths to successful join-up. Having recognized this incongruence, I brought my concerns to my executive, where I learned that the structure was unlikely to change. With no foreseeable solution, and unwilling to become mired in another ineffective system, I tendered my resignation.

The move to corporate, although unsuccessful, led me to an important realisation: learning seemed to be most successful when it was grown organically on site. Eager to continue to develop programmes that would benefit employees, I accepted an offer to join a global Human Resource firm as its National Manager of

Learning and Development. Since its inception 40 years earlier, this company had become respected as a premium provider of Human Resource solutions aimed at helping clients optimise their own capacity by reducing costs, improving efficiency, and finding, engaging, developing, and paying their talent. A trusted partner of more than 40,000 Canadian customers, it is a part of a global corporation with almost 9,000 employees serving more than 130,000 customers.

Unlike the processing plant where learning was internally focussed, this new organisation had a dual concentration: it was a learning organisation itself and, as such, promoted employee learning and development; but as a global Human Resource firm, it also sold learning and development solutions externally. As one of its leads in learning, I had the unique opportunity to experience the inner machinations of a learning organisation while assessing its capacity to leverage solutions to external clients. Both lenses accorded valuable lessons from a perspective of learning/leading praxis.

From an internal perspective, this company is a solid example of industry best practise. It has been repeatedly recognised as one of the 50 Best Employers in Canada, one of the Top 100 Employers, and one of the Best Workplaces in Canada. It offers its employees an above industry standard of 10 paid training days and 2,000 dollars tuition reimbursement per calendar year. These initiatives not only encourage continuous learning; they also ensure communication between employees and managers regarding growth and advancement opportunities. Additionally, employees have gratis access to more than 4,000 electronic courses and e-books to assist them with personal and

professional development. These resources cover topics ranging from time management and resilience to project management and strategic operations.

In addition to the self-directed learning opportunities, employees are also offered face-to-face training developed and delivered by the company's internal training team. These courses are designed to make transparent the internal leveraging of performance management, engagement, operational changes, or strategic initiatives. The internal team also hosts learn-at-work blitzes, which feature courses selected by the employees.

In strategically offering these opportunities that align employee development to organisational growth, the company optimizes both individual and collective knowledge. Also, by making learning plans a central part of its performance-management system, it focuses on both employee development and on organisational performance. Finally, this company continuously enhances its capacity, through reflexive praxis, to adapt to its external environment. Through engagement surveys with both its employees and its clients, it systematically collects and acts on empirical data to stay abreast of industry trends and the global marketplace. Collectively, these practices establish the company as a reputable learning organisation.

Confident that I had joined a learning organisation, I was interested in applying the lens through which I had assessed my previous employer and deconstructing the individual learning to determine if it encouraged engagement and personal meaningfulness at a level that would foster join-up. Once again, I turned to Knowles' (1970) six principles of adult education.

The first principle, *adults are autonomous and self-directed*, appeared to be honoured in more than one regard. As previously mentioned, the company allocates up to 10 paid training days per year for each employee. Additionally, each employee is entitled to 2,000 dollars per year for tuition reimbursement. Moreover, all employees have free and open access to electronic learning resources, through which they can engage in self-directed and personally meaningful studies. Finally, all employees have individual learning plans based on their career objectives and opportunities for mobility.

Second, *adults have life experiences and knowledge that must be honoured and incorporated into their learning*. Celebrating the importance of personal meaningfulness, the company consciously and deliberately solicits employee feedback to determine internal training initiatives. This is particularly evident in week-long learning blitzes that feature sessions identified by employees as areas of interest. This commitment is apparent also in the company's open policy on self-directed e-learning.

Third, the company provides a framework that respects employees as *goal-oriented adults*. Each employee has a performance management plan that ties individual learning goals to organisational goals. Not only does this practise ensure transparency; it also emphasizes the importance of individual contribution to company success.

Fourth, *relevancy* is respected in several ways: individual learning plans are built into departmental and organisational strategy so that professional development training can be applied to advancement and mobility; open access to electronic

resources allows employees to pursue studies that are both professionally relevant and personally meaningful; and internal learning initiatives feature seminars identified by the employees as relevant points of interest.

Fifth, *adults are practical*. The employees are encouraged, through learning plans and performance management systems, to participate in training that will enhance their performance and improve their opportunities for advancement. Also, the company provides several forums, through talk back and round tables, to voice concerns and make recommendations for improved performance or culture. All suggestions are posted and celebrated, and recognition and rewards are given for improvements implemented.

Finally, *adult learners, in particular, need to be shown respect.* Through recognising and rewarding suggestions for improvement as well as funding training and encouraging feedback, the company is demonstrating its respect for its employees.

Explicating the ways in which the company honours these principles once again helped me to understand and name those values that guide learning. Based on transparency, fairness, and equal opportunity, engagement was once more at the core of each of these principles. Further, governed by consistency and predictability, the company was creating spaces for join-up at work.

As one of its employees, I was delighted that the organisation successfully created spaces for its own employees to engage with learning in personally meaningful ways. As its national manager of external training, though, I was tasked with a different challenge.

I had just completed my residency and was delighted to be offered a position with a global firm newly established back home. Although I did not have a full understanding of what my role would entail, it seemed that the company had a sizeable learning and development contract that was in jeopardy and was looking for someone with a strong background in education and business management to create realignment and grow the external learning department. This was an exciting opportunity, as it would challenge me to find an avenue through which external learning could be organically grown and successful.

When I arrived in my new office, I discovered that I had a disengaged team, a disappointed client, and disintegrated curricula. Because I maintain that all else evolves from engagement, I began with my new team. I met with them as a group to get a sense of their understanding of current issues and potential solutions. It seemed that there was a damaging misalignment with previous management that had left them with no leadership or cohesion. Since the removal of that leadership, however, the source of the team's stress had changed: it was no longer stemming from hostility and oppression; it was a result of uncertainty and fear. Honouring the principles of join-up, I aimed to foster a consistent and predictable space in which each individual on the team was safe to have voice.

I hosted a round table at which we all named our understanding of what we could contribute and what we required for support. This approach helped to create transparency and alignment. Next, we brainstormed requirements for success. This exercise helped us to create a shared vision of learning and development. Third, we

negotiated role expectations so each of us had clarity and, as a team, we could identify gaps. At this point, we arrived at a place where individual roles were evolving, a shared vision of learning and development was budding, and gaps were being uncovered. Because the team so quickly collaborated to problem-pose challenges and identify potential solutions, I asked that we check our assumptions against the expectations of the client.

I contacted the client and invited its point people to join my team for lunch. Around the table, we chatted informally about hopes and expectations so that, by dessert, I was able to ask some very pointed questions about objectives and desired deliverables and then suggest paths to successful implementation. At the heart of the client's requests was the desire for highly customised curricula that spoke to its unique culture. My team of trainers expressed eagerness to meet these requests, and the client was excited. Cohesion was burgeoning, but we needed new curricula.

The current curricula were highly Americanised, private-sector laden, and decidedly acritical. Considering the client was in the Canadian public sector, we decided to throw everything out and begin anew. Guided by the principles of join-up, we established several meetings at which my team and our client could collaboratively identify areas for professional development. Thus exalting the importance of communication, trust, and choice, we all participated in identifying the intent of the new curricula. Once this intent was articulated, our client began a communication campaign to reintroduce learning and development to its employees, and our team began the task of development.

After months of collaboration and research, we had a canon of 24 professional development seminars, and we began leading learning. Having facilitated more than 400 sessions in the past two years, our team continues to honour communication and choice: we encourage learners to complete evaluations after all seminars and suggest areas for improvement. These evaluations are collated and analysed annually, and both the raw data and the executive summaries are forwarded to our client. Now entering our third year, we continue to develop new seminars and programmes to address our client's evolving needs.

I had been hired first to create realignment, foster engagement, and build a sustainable client relationship, and second to grow our professional development seminars into curricula that could be leveraged nationally as a learning solution for new and existing clients. Having risen to the challenge to the first task, I turned my attention to the second one.

Outsourced learning and development was to be the company's newest product/service. The addition of this training service would position the company as an end-to-end provider of Human Resource solutions: payroll, employee assistance programmes, and talent management, the latter of which includes both recruitment and training. It was this last service that would give the company the distinction of providing products and services for every major market niche within the Human Resource sector.

In addition to managing the requirements of our existing clients, I was asked to become a member of an executive steering committee that would lead the development

of learning as an externally marketable product. I sensed serious misalignment from the initial meeting: the project manager insisted on accountability and timeliness of delivery; the product manager was focused on branding and marketing for consistency and repeatability; the training manager was driven by engaging sales and providing delivery collateral for a network of contract trainers; the director was committed to collaboration so that various business units could successfully coexist while meaningfully contributing their areas of expertise to the development of a new product; the executive vice-president on the team was strategically focused on long-term fit for market growth; and I was determined that we bring nothing less than theoretically sound and practice-proven programmes to our clients.

For my part, which is really all I can speak to, I struggled with conceptualizing learning as a product to be sold. Additionally, bringing to the team curricular expertise, I disagreed with the notion that all training should be standardized and sold as a boxed solution. My arguments in favour of organically grown learning initiatives, the engagement imperative, and curricular integrity were outweighed by the seduction of a low-maintenance, one-size-fits-all approach to securing a high profit margin.

Committed to contributing and determined to encourage what I assumed to be best practice, I agreed to provide a generic curricula given that all contract trainers would be educated in subject matter and prepared by my team for a dialogic approach that would let them customize the curricula to suit the needs of individual clients. My team worked tirelessly to meet our commitment and submitted a canon filled with professional development programmes. It was then that the steering committee decided

training the trainers was too costly; they opted instead to use scripted facilitator guides. This approach was so incongruent with dialogic teaching that I went on the record as strongly opposed and withdrew my support. Although I continue to sit on the steering committee and advise development of the company's external learning product, I do so as the voice that questions the approach and reminds our group that we are promoting a solution decidedly incongruent with how we position learning internally.

There are numerous differences in how the company positions external learning. The curricula are standardized and placed within a blended approach that is a boxed solution to common organisational pains. Through face-to-face classroom seminars, group coaching, and optional self-directed assignments, learning is commoditized and marketed to small- and medium-sized businesses that are unable to staff internal learning and development experts. Thus, these programmes are designed to be off-the-shelf solutions to meet the general needs of diverse groups of learners.

Guided by a one-size-fits-all approach and governed by profit margin, external learning does not honour the principles of adult education: *autonomy and self-direction* are not central because e-learning and post-work are the only opportunities for independent study, and both of these are optional; because the learning is boxed and standardized, *life experiences* are not *incorporated into their learning*; likewise, *goals* are defined by the curricula, not the participants; *relevancy* is limited to the learners' ability to transfer generic material to their particular experiences; because the seminars are generic by design, they tend to be theoretical and hypothetical, thereby limiting *practicality*; and although the physical learning environments are respectful, it is

arguable that the absence of the previous five principles conspire to create a space disrespectful to learners' individual needs. The functional absence of these principles will, I assume, preclude join-up.

As the product was brought to market only six months ago, its eventual success remains unknown. Our outcome as a group is much more apparent: we failed to become a team. The presence of competing agendas created misalignment. The lack of process resulted in unpredictability and inconsistency. As this space became a breeding ground for misunderstanding, communication was neither safe nor respectful. Because the group theoretically believed in collaboration but was unable to practice it, it paid only lip service to teamwork, which resulted in one more transgression: distrust.

The absence of effective communication, the breakdown of trust, and the impossibility of choice impeded join-up within our executive group. Likewise, the competing agendas of profit margin and best practice led to misalignment and the commoditization of learning. Traction so far has been disappointing. Learning, as a sellable solution, is falling desperately short of anticipated revenue and failing to entice both new and existing clients. Its lack of success to date, I assume, is partly due to the sales and marketing model that positions learning as a product and does not understand it as a process. Also, I maintain that the lack of market uptake is due in part to the product itself, which does not present learning as organic, collaborative, and dialogic. Some of my colleagues insist that sales are talking to the wrong people. I push back by saying that they are having the wrong conversations.

As sales continue to fall short, we have turned to naming our own functional challenges as we struggle to create realignment within our own group. Drawing from the work of Smith (1999), I understand this struggle to be common among working groups wherein some view learning as a product while others understand it as a process. Learning as a product is driven by outcomes and measured by observable changes in behaviour. In short, it is assessed in terms of change and valued by getting the most change for the least investment. Tending toward the quantitative approaches, some theorists within this field (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; and Säljö, 1979) do push its boundaries into qualitative spheres and discuss learning as more than an external commodity. They suggest that there is also an internal conceptualisation: learning can be a personal endeavour undertaken in an attempt to understand the world and one's place in it.

Learning conceptualised as a process exalts the importance of the journey and acknowledges that the variables of human capacity and lived experience often make learning outcomes unknown (Argyris & Schön, 1995; Bruner, 1977; Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1981; Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984; and Lave & Wenger, 1991). Still change centric, this conceptualisation views learning as open-ended and tends to juxtapose the purpose and process of learning while questioning the influence of the systems on this matrix.

Understanding more fully the nature of our divisiveness, members of our executive group unite in our commitment to bringing the best learning opportunities to the market. Situated in private enterprise and driven by sustainable profit, learning is

inarguably positioned as a product. Given our varied backgrounds and divergent passions, we often remain divided regarding our vision. Still, learning from the principles of join-up, we endeavour to communicate through our challenges in an open and consistent manner. As it is with horses, though, trust lost is difficult to regain. We continue to move around each other cautiously.

CHAPTER 6

Join-up Metaphors

Learning/leading praxis in three different environments has exalted for me the importance of relevance and applicability in learning. Additionally, the experience has taught me that communication, trust, and choice are central to fostering engagement. As all of these lessons have culminated in my assumption that join-up is central to learning, I am interested in considering the many varied forms of join-up common to these three environments: academia; the field; and learning organisations.

Because the experiences are diverse, metaphor is helpful in identifying incidents of join-up. According to the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphor is an elemental mechanism of the mind that enables people to make sense of their experiences. "The essence of metaphor," they maintain, "is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Guided by their work, I have identified four metaphors that suggest the centrality of join-up in learning.

Engagement metaphor

Engagement is central in this inquiry and, thus, is the main metaphor. Present in various forms, I note it first in learning with academics. In the academic setting, engagement most often refers to student engagement. From this perspective, it is rigorously researched and theoretically examined. Schlechty (1994) writes primarily about the importance of increasing engagement, while Newmann (1992) and Kuh, Cruce, and Shoup (2008) examine student engagement in terms of its effect on achievement. Chapman (2003, 2003b) advocates for assessing student engagement rates. Invariably, research on student engagement notes the centrality of relevance,

applicability, and choice. Assuming that personal meaningfulness is integral to engagement, Fletcher (2005a, 2005b) argues that that engagement is most seamless and sustainable when students are respected partners in education. This partnership often constitutes a gap in academic learning.

Cognizant of the importance of increasing engagement, Jones (2009) maintains that the single most notable challenge is lack of a systematic approach:

> A key to increasing student engagement is finding efficient ways to measure it. When something is measured, summarized, and reported, it becomes important, and people pay attention. Some school improvement initiatives such as reading levels are carefully constructed, viewed appropriately through the lens of a school's mission, driven by data, and accountable to multiple stakeholders. Other initiatives, such as student engagement, however, are not so meticulously conceived. Rather than allowing data to drive goal setting and decision making, some schools still are guided by good intentions, hunches, and impressions . . . the quest for student engagement must be conducted in the context of a comprehensive data system for measuring student learning. The same holds true in pursuing the implementation of successful engagement practices that foster student learning. (p. 23)

Jones (2009) introduces a second gap: accountability. Learners are rarely asked to participate in engagement surveys and not consistently offered the opportunity to complete class critiques or professorial evaluations. In short, comprehensive learner feedback is not systematically solicited, and any data that are collected are not often

acted upon. This gap not only diminishes the value of student input, but it also reduces the opportunity for improved praxis. This incongruence between the theoretical importance of engagement and the lack of its systematic pursuits often results in learner disconnection.

Discussions of disconnection encourage me, though briefly, to turn to the literature of disengagement. Palmer (1993, 2004) refers to disconnectedness as a form of disengagement that occurs when an individual experiences feelings of detachment from her learning. He further explicates this theory in *The Courage to Teach* (1998). Specifically, he posits that learners experience four unique stages of disconnectedness.

According to Palmer (1998), the first stage involves differentiation between spiritual leave and physical leave. In my understanding of his text, spiritual leave results when a learner feels estranged from the learning but is able to remain physically within the learning environment. Freire (1976) discusses this crisis in terms of integration versus adaptation (p. 4). He explains that integration respects learners as subjects and encourages meaning making with respect to individual lived experience. Contrarily, adaptation treats students like objects and focuses on teaching, not learning. Freire insists that schools force adaptation and, in leaving students unable to perceive critically, "enslave[s] [them] by method of education" (p. 11).

This discussion of spiritual versus physical leave brings me back to learning with horses. It was once a common practise to break horses. Stripped back, that language was deliberately chosen to reflect the often cruel method of making horses safe to ride. This process was designed to break the spirit of the horse and replace that

spirit with blind obedience. Often with whips and hobbles, the horse was abused into submission and kept compliant by physical consequence. Although this physical violence is not tolerated in organisations, coercive compliance can still be forced: those who do not buy in to or engage with the vision of their business or academy almost certainly face consequences that can result in the spiritual or physical leave explained by Palmer (1998).

The second stage of disengagement, according to Palmer (1998), is communal; this stage is identifiable when learners who continue to seek paths to connectedness search for contexts that promote and enable it. This stage sees learners confront self doubt born of disconnection and create support networks as they attempt to remain committed to their studies. This is evident in the establishment of networks. Whether it is the horse slowing his gait a wee bit and considering a relationship with me, or an employee or learner seeking committee work, this stage is specific to individuals seeking safe spaces with those whom they hope are like-minded.

Palmer's (1998) third stage of disconnectedness often involves learners going public to share their personal experiences and to encourage others to have voice in naming disconnection. They not only engage in praxis dialogue as encouraged by Freire (1976), but they also educate themselves and others to "enable resistance to the status quo" (Greene, 1995, p. 135). This, perhaps, is the most important stage in seeking re-engagement. I am reminded here of the mare, Charlie, who encouraged her colt, Beanz, to join up with me. Against her natural instinct, the mare identified me as one of her herd and encouraged her foal down the same path of learning. In business,

this is most evident in focus groups and feedback forums. Relying on open and honest communication, individuals quickly align with others who share their passion and commitment. In academic faculties, I see these same trends as both professors and students carefully select which committees they wish to join and which research projects they opt to support.

The fourth and final stage of disconnection, as posited by Palmer (1998), allows learners time to reflect on the paths to re-engagement on which they embarked, again highlighting the importance of reflexivity in professional growth and development. This stage is exemplified in follow-up with horses. In that situation, I walk away, and the impetus of responsibility for remaining engaged falls to the horse. He will typically drop his head and follow me through a series of turns, starts, and stops as we communicate with each other our commitment and understanding. Reflexivity in business tends to be application based. The ongoing strategic planning reflects the lessons learned and data gathered from the previous year. Reflexivity in academic settings tends to lead to further theoretical research as well as improved praxis.

Having considered academic theories of engagement and associated disconnection, I think it is important to reflect on engagement both in the field and in learning organisations. First, let's return to learning with horses. You'll recall that in join-up I first establish an environment for learning: a round pen free of obstruction and distraction. I then ask the horse to follow his flight instinct and continue to move away from me. I encourage him, using my body language and a light line, to explore the rail of the pen for possible escape routes. When he becomes somewhat comfortable that the

direction he his travelling offers him no way out, I flick the line several feet in front of him, thereby encouraging him to take flight in the opposite direction. He will then explore the rail from this perspective to look for his escape. Once he is comfortable again that no such escape is possible, I ask him to change his focus from fleeing from me to working with me. As he considers this option, we begin to communicate with each other. He drops his head, and I invite him into the circle by changing my stance and averting my gaze. He opts for join-up, and we have established our commitment to listening to each other's needs as we embark on the learning journey.

Engagement is clearly discernible when learning with organisations as well. In this environment, engagement is often discussed in terms of stakeholder buy-in. The stakeholders are those who affect and are affected by organisational decisions. Strategic businesses depend on an abundance of tools to ensure buy-in: focus groups; feedback forums; change communications; and employee summits. Perhaps the most common tool, though, is the employee engagement survey. Generally required annually and conducted anonymously, often by a third party to ensure anonymity, engagement surveys help businesses measure their success rates in keeping their employees engaged. These surveys are also used to collect data regarding uptake of training and advancement opportunities, communication across the organisation, and general satisfaction with the organisational culture. The data collected from these surveys, as well as the feedback gathered from focus groups, forums, change communications, and summits, are used to inform strategic planning for the upcoming year.

In addition to the engagement metaphor, I have identified three other ideas that are metaphorically connected to join-up and identifiable in each of the three unique

learning environments: communication; balance; and reflection.

Communication

Of the three learning environments, I have experienced academia as struggling most deeply in leveraging communication to achieve join-up. Although it is a space rich with articulate and meaningful speech, it is sometimes scanty in dialogue. I have found this absence particularly evident at the undergraduate level. Whether it is an assumption that students at this level are ill prepared to engage in critical dialogue, or whether it is the sometimes prohibitive class sizes, the professor is often positioned as expert and leads the class through curricula in a non-dialogic delivery. This approach leaves fewer opportunities for students to enter into conversation with both the texts and their colleagues. This lack of personal connectedness can make it more difficult for them to engage and highly improbable that they will join-up.

When learning with organisations, dialogue is actually secondary to clarity. Before communication can be leveraged to achieve join-up, understanding must be attained. From *action lists* to *zombie bonds*, business practices a vernacular that is almost meaningless to those not in the field. Even more challenging is the heavy contingent of acronyms.

I recall one incident in my first year as a business partner when I was asked about my SOW. Had not a colleague eager to discuss a new contract interrupted, I might have embarrassed myself by clarifying that I owned horses, not pigs. I was admittedly preoccupied through the remainder of the meeting and, immediately upon its adjournment, consulted a desk resource that defined a SOW as a Statement of Work, a document wherein the particulars of service delivery are stipulated. Another

memorable moment for me occurred during a conference call. With dozens of us dialled in from across the country, the executive vice-president asked for a report on all STDs within our branches. I've no doubt that I physically removed the phone from my ear and looked at it with more than a little measure of shock. As colleagues spewed out numbers that left me sputtering, I determined that STD indubitably had a different meaning in business. Sure enough – Short-Term Disabilities.

Although seemingly silly examples, these experiences made it apparent to me that the business sector employed a language all its own in which I needed to become fluent. Additionally, organisations had an entirely different mode of communicating their way to join-up. Learning with organisations really pushed me to reconceptualise my understanding of dialogical communication. An environment dependent on engagement surveys, focus groups, and knowledge forums, learning organisations favour routine collection of opinion on targeted questions. The findings from these modes are then collated, summarised, and shared with the employee population. Task forces and special project committees develop to address identified gaps, and subsequent surveys indicate whether engagement improved as the result of intervention. The system itself is quite efficient, so much so that I struggle with the often-overlooked theoretical implications of its approaches. Again, that is my struggle: with one foot in the academy and the other foot in business, I am often frustrated by the presence of theory or practise without its balancing other that can elevate them both to a state of praxis.

The balance I seek in communicating to join-up I find when I am learning with horses. In the field, communication is singularly practised to encourage and sustain

join-up. The language of Equus has fascinated me for years. It has continued to remind me that communication is contingent upon listening with my whole being. Unlike when I am communicating with people, I have no common base with horses on which to fall back. Because of this lack of common ground, the focus of communication shifts from making myself understood, as is often the goal in human interaction, to establishing a pattern that is conducive to reciprocal exchanges. Where human dialogue would resort to gestures, charades, or pictorial representations when facing communication challenges, Equus relies on reading each other's whole body and perception of the surrounding environment.

Understanding that a horse is instinctively a flight animal allows me to use these cues to push him away and make him seek an escape route. When none is found, I change my body language to invite him to join me, thus appealing to his herd instinct. When the language is understood and used with predictability, horses invariably join-up. Predictability, though, is the key as unpredictability equals danger for horses and is likely to brand me poorly with the animal. Finally, not only are clarity and predictability crucial, but so is honesty. Horses don't lie. They respond to cues in accordance with their instincts. Because their instincts are so deeply embedded, horses respond immediately to fraud. If I adopted the join-up technique to win a horse's trust, but did not embrace its philosophy, I would eventually focus on my commands rather than the negotiation of a learning relationship. Horses detect such subtleties and, through behavioural response, expose the dishonesty in communication. This language, with its dependency on consistency, predictability, and honesty, is central to communicating my way to join-up.

Balance

Based loosely on the work of Heider (1958), my understanding of balance involves achieving a state of psychological satisfaction when internal motivations and desires are congruent with external influences. Its relational foundation in motivation theory ties it to feelings of engagement, thus metaphorically connecting balance to join-up.

Balance can suggest many things in many spheres, but for me, academic balance refers to the relationship between theoretical considerations and practical applications. Understanding theory as that which motivates me internally, I continue to seek ways to apply practically those ideas that resonate. This quest for praxis continues to challenge me. Although I find intellectual pursuits both stimulating and rewarding, I am often frustrated by the tendency of theory to accumulate dust rather than grow legs. Often insightful and rich with potential, there seems to be a weak link between the creation of theory and its practical application.

This disconnect can create a deep sense of discontentment in at least two ways. Not only is it disappointing for those who generate new theory to see it underutilised, but it can also be frustrating for practitioners who are seeking critical examination. Moreover, this disconnect can cause pervasive problems for both academics and practitioners. Academia and learning organisations are inextricably linked: academic research requires funding, often from external stakeholders; businesses depend on current research and readily available talent to help them remain competitive. As such, businesses are sometimes stakeholders who fund academic research. As with all stakeholder agreements, continued support often depends on the return on investment.

That is to say that businesses establish partnerships and fund research with the belief that there will be a favourable return. That return might take the form of future talent, innovation, positive press, or tax incentive. Similarly, many academics work tirelessly to contribute meaningful research. Their reward is generally more funding and recognition of expertise within their fields. Because both businesses and academies pursue success, each rewards its employees for advantageous partnerships. Together, and in balance, theory and practise have a much greater opportunity to effect positive growth and development of their talent and the institutions that house it.

Balance, in the context of learning with horses, often leads people to think about the physical ability to stay on the horse's back. This physical balance, inarguably, is imperative to riding. Often referred to as keeping one's seat, physical balance is dependent on core strength and the rider's ability to maintain that core centrality through any series of physical transitions. There exists another balance, though, when working with horses – one that is less tangible. This balance has always seemed to me a kind of spiritual oneness. The human-horse relationship is delicate and deeply dependent on each one's ability to predict consistently the behaviour of the other. Even more than that, there must exist a fundamental respect for the needs of the other. I don't pretend to know the mind of a horse, but horses' behaviours continue to teach me a great deal about teaching and learning, particularly the importance of mutual engagement, consistency, and predictability.

I have learned with dozens of horses. Years ago, I was pretty quick: I met the horse, gave it a pat, picked up its feet, maybe I lunged it to see how it moved, maybe I saddled it, but often I just hopped on and rode it out. I rode so many that way. Then I

really started to invest, in both the horses and myself. I believe this change came about the time I got pregnant with my son. I knew it was no longer safe just to hop on and hope for the best. I had to be confident that the horse was ready for me and that we would join-up as a team with no real incident.

The two mares I worked with during this time taught me the importance of groundwork. I spent time in handling them, in teaching them to walk, jog, lope, and whoa by voice command and by light pressure of longlines run through the loops of a surcingle. For the first time in my experience of starting horses, they already knew all their commands before I got on their backs. It worked. There was no fuss, no bucking, just a period of adjustment as they figured out why I was on their backs rather than in the middle of the pen. It was almost seamless.

When my son was born, I promptly forgot what I had learned. I got a huge gelding named Gimme. He was not yet three, already more than 17 hands and 1200 pounds. He was a beautiful beast, but a beast he was. No one had ridden him. He kicked. He bit. He was unpredictable and even mean. I gave him a pat, picked up his feet, threw a saddle on him, and hopped on. He bucked like nothing I had ever ridden before. Positively incensed, he tore around the field like a cougar was on his back. Then he stopped. Just like that – stopped cold and stood quietly. "Hmmm", I thought. "Still got it, Ellyn, and it's been a year." Full of self-confidence, I shifted my weight and leaned over his neck to adjust the stirrups. That's when he bolted. Twists and turns, pops and whirls, and then a big thud. The latter, of course, was me. I had never been wrecked like that in my life. Hitting the ground with such ferocity gave me a couple of minutes to think about things. I still recall what went through my mind: Can

you move? Yes. Can you breathe? Not yet. Oh my God, I have to get back on him. *So there you have it – my eating-dirt checklist. I was not paralysed; therefore, I had to correct the horse. He had to learn that throwing me was unacceptable. I got up, found him grazing nearby, and collected his reins. I took a deep breath and slid my trembling boot into the stirrup. I gathered the rein on the offside so he could not step out on me and, as I swung up into my seat, I kept his head drawn in to minimise his bucking and rearing. I managed to ride his antics out and, at the end of the sessions, knew one thing for certain: I had better revisit the approach I learned while I was pregnant, because I didn't bounce like I used to.*

Learning with horses has taught me that balance is not only about keeping your seat; it's about respecting the partnership by doing the groundwork. Only from a place of mutual engagement and consistency can I anticipate join-up.

Learning with organisations teaches me balance as well. Not only does it remind me to temper practical application with theoretical exploration; the very nature of business insists that I consider a different kind of balance. The growth of the global marketplace and the increasingly integral role of technology in business process have created an environment in which business never sleeps. Coupled with fierce competition and personal ambition, people can easily forget to balance their professional responsibilities and aspirations with their personal requirements for family time, personal leisure, and spiritual peace. Because it is essential to employee health and wellness that each person establishes a balance between work and personal requirements, businesses are increasingly creating work/life balance initiatives to encourage whole health.

Learning organisations, with their focus on growing talent and reducing turnover (Marquardt, 1996, 2002; Senge, 1990), encourage whole health through a series of initiatives. They offer training to promote growth and development aligned to performance management. The performance management outlines with transparency both personal and organisational goals. Because each of the personal goals is self-selected and then aligned to incentives, engagement is intuitively built in. In the effort to build on this engagement, businesses also commonly include access to a range of counselling services targeting psychological, social, and emotional health. Honouring the centrality of family, these services are often extended to the employee's immediate dependents. Additionally, there may be wellness dollars aligned to fitness subsidies, weight-loss programmes, and smoking cessation. Finally, work/life balance is encouraged through mandatory vacation. Organisations are increasingly implementing policies that require employees to take their accrued vacation as opposed to payment in lieu. These initiatives are critical in establishing work/life balance.

Reflection

I was formally introduced to the power of critical reflection by the writings and teachings of Palmer (1993). In his 1998 text, *The Courage to Teach,* he further explicates the importance of criticality and names that we teach who we are. "Teaching, like any other truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse" (p. 2). He reminds me that teaching comes from a place of good questioning. He says that we most commonly ask "what" questions, and only when the conversation becomes deeper do we ask "why." Rarely do we ask "how," and almost never "do we ask the 'who' question – who is the self that teaches? How does the

quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?" (p. 4).

Consider for a moment the role of critical reflection in self-awareness. Consider also the incongruence between how we understand ourselves and how we are perceived by the world. Palmer (1998) names the contradiction between the former and the latter as creating a crippling sense of fraudulence that can lead us to feel deeply disconnected. This state of disconnectedness, he says, is actually encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth. Often giving priority to the rigour associated with the teacher-centred model, academic institutions tend to marginalise individual experience. Palmer insists that we learn to listen to self again and celebrate an impassioned commitment to critical and continuous learning. Dynamic critical reflection, or reflexivity, is an essential companion along this path. Only in knowing self can we move toward understanding the self who teaches. Several scholars concur: Cole and Knowles, 1994; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellsworth, 1997; and Foucault, 1984.

In learning with horses, I have passed hundreds of hours in critical reflection. Perhaps there is something in communicating across language barriers that encourages deep introspection and reflective thought. Maybe it is in the unapologetic honesty and humility it breeds. I chuckle aloud even as I write these words. If humility is indeed good for the soul, mine must be greatly helped. I have never known myself to be arrogant or obtuse in my relationships with people, but somehow horses have told me that I can be both. Frankly, Beanz tells me as often as I dare to listen. The three-year old paint, whose mother first introduced me to join-up in a pen, is magnificent. Already

15.5 hands, and topping 1100 pounds, he is the embodiment of sinewy muscle, fierce pride, and boundless energy. He loves me as I do him; of that I am certain.

When I come to the field, he greets me with thundering applause from acres away and skids to a halt a foot from the ground I have finally learned to stand. Yes, that was hard-won territory. As a yearling, he took sport in alternatively firing his rear hooves at my head and chasing me from the field as though I were a steer he was destined to pen. Little is more humbling than being chased off your own property by your horse. But see, we are both instinctual animals. Although schooled in proper response training for horses, when confronted with physical threat, I ran. Butt in the air and pride long gone, I'd skid under the nearest fence to save my own hide. Beanz learned to control his field through aggression. I taught him that. Realising as much, I experimented with correcting his learned behaviour by meeting it with comparable aggression. I began to carry a lunge whip with me so that, when he made for me, I could whip it in the air and turn him from me. I gained the right to be back in my field by teaching Beanz he could not chase me away. Unfortunately, I also taught him that I was dangerous and could bring him harm. Really, I created for him the learning environment he initially created for me – one based on fear.

As he came two and I started training him, I was ever wary of his feet. In grooming, I used caution around his hindquarters, and in training, I watched his eyes and ears for cues that he was waiting for the opportunity to strike. Disappointed and frustrated, I knew I had to lay the whip aside and approach his training differently. Gathering all the courage I could muster, I entered my field with only a lead line and called "C'mon; c'mon." His head came up, ears forward, and he came barrelling

toward me. Wondering too late if there were gods of horses I should have brought onside through fervent prayer, I held my ground. I locked my eyes on his and, as he approached, I did not move. I uttered only a single word – "whoa!" Amazingly, he listened. He stood up tall before me, exhaled hard through his nostrils emitting a roar-like sound and at that moment, I began to understand. His behaviour was the result of frustration with me, and it was the roar that got my attention.

Several years earlier, I had had a beautiful Appaloosa mare named Navajo. She was stubborn and independent and free-spirited and, because I shared those qualities, I never had the heart to discourage them in her. I often received criticism from other trainers, because she was reputed to be impossible. She ran when she wanted, stopped when she chose, and cut her own path: consequences be damned. I loved her for it. Of course, no one else would ride her, because they did not understand her. If you asked her to do something, she would concede almost unfailingly. If you demanded something of her, you'd best get off or hold on tight because she was about to teach you a lesson. I learned these things about her over the course of several years, but the most memorable lesson came one day as I repaired a fence. I dropped the gate, pulled my bright yellow truck inside, and then reclosed the gate. Nav jogged around, head held high, inspecting the truck and assessing its threat. I chatted away with her, sparing her the occasional rub between the eyes, as I rounded up my fencing tools and headed to the south side of the pasture. The pasture spilled down a grassy knoll toward the bay that skirted the south and east boundaries of my property. At the far corner, I began the ritual well known to me. I slipped on my leather gloves, secured my tool belt, took care not to drop any hazards when loading my belt with spikes and insulators, grabbed my

hammer and fence puller, and set off toward the eastern corner.

Muscles tense from exertion, I stopped to grab a drink when I finished the first boundary. Back at the truck, Nav was still curiously circling around, blowing and flicking her ears. Had I paid more attention to her and less to fencing, I might have learned my lesson there and then. Obtuse, I returned to fencing and began the other boundary. As I made the corner, I heard a horrible crunching that I couldn't identify. I stopped hammering and listened. The sound ceased momentarily then persisted. That's when it dawned on me: her curiosity, the blowing and flicking ears. I dropped my tools and loped up the crest of hill toward my truck where I found Nav bonding. Seeing herself in my metallic yellow hood, she was scratching it with her teeth and flicking her ears as she joined up with my pick-up. Feeling horror and humour in equal parts, I came between my two rides to find a valuable lesson. Navajo saw herself in a reflection but, as is often the case, it was not a self she recognized. Still, the image mirrored her own responses, thereby engaging her and winning her trust. She joined up.

Amazement aside, my mare had to stop eating my truck. I came between her and her reflection and demanded she back up. She stood taller somehow, posture proud, and emitted the closest thing I had ever heard to a horse roar. Chest puffed, she acknowledged that she was willing to listen, but I had better talk clearly and quickly. I did. I hopped in the truck and laid on the horn. She reared, turned her back on the vehicle and, as I removed it from the field, she pranced nervously awaiting my return. Because our join-up was solid, and she recognized me as part of her herd, the blaring of the horn she presumably understood as the truck's sudden aggression. My removal of the truck confirmed for her that I was safe. I carried on with my fencing. She

returned to grazing nearby.

Years later, Beanz is before me emitting that same roar, and I finally heard him. He was willing to listen, but I had better make it fast and clear. I snapped the lead on his halter and asked him to back up. When he did, I rewarded him with a pat. I turned him away from me and walked to his hindquarters, careful to stay in his line of sight, and gave them a pat. I released him and walked away. He was curious, so I had his attention. I turned toward him again and clucked. He moved toward me cautiously and stopped within inches of where I stood. He was still stopping too closely, so I snapped the lead on again, asked him to back up out of my space, and then rewarded him with a pat for his cooperation. That was the turning point for us. He has not lifted his feet in aggression or chased me from the field since that day.

I understand now that he joined up with me when he was merely three days old. Somehow, I had become a part of his herd, and he was challenging me to be the leader. I misread his behaviour as aggression and responded poorly, therein creating images of each other and ourselves with which we could not identify. When I recognised his attempt to see himself in me so that we could learn together, I could appropriately establish some groundwork and begin the process anew. That process is ongoing, but I recognize that any problem in him is a reflection of me. It was a valuable lesson to have cost me only three years and a new hood.

Learning with organisations also leverages the power of critical reflection. Although lived in mentor programmes, formal and informal coaching, and job shadowing, critical reflection is perhaps most implicit in performance management systems. Strategic organisations, learning organisations in particular, invest heavily in

performance management. Committed to ongoing growth and development opportunities as a means of maintaining competitive advantage, improving employee engagement, and reducing turnover, learning organisations are increasingly relying on individual learning plans (ILPs). These ILPs are developed based on both employee competencies and organisational capacity. The former is dependent upon the unique talents and aptitudes that the employee demonstrates. The latter refers to how these talents and aptitudes can be fostered through employer-sponsored learning and then leveraged to maximize organisational effectiveness. It's what businesses like to name a win-win situation: employees receive learning opportunities aligned with organisational capacity and are, through this process, increasing their own reward while adding value to their company. In short, personal growth and organisational growth are reflective of each other and join up to create a more sustainable and competitive business.

The role of reflection brings me back to the place from which I began. I return changed, though, and seek the space to examine once more how learning in three diverse spaces has informed praxis.

CHAPTER 7

Negotiating Spaces

Shor (1992) suggests that we engage in critical teaching to make learning more student-centred and learning environments safer. This position requires that I explore at least two additional questions: what common characteristics help me to be more learner centred in my praxis?; and what kinds of learning spaces do these characteristics lead me to create? When considering the characteristics that help me to be more learner-centred, a range of traits comes to mind. Ironically, many tend to do so in paradoxical pairs: clear communication and careful listening; ability to lead and willingness to follow; predictable consistency and agile flexibility; and standing alone above them all is a commitment to honesty and fairness.

When learning with others, clear communication is imperative. Whether one is articulating the requirements for assignment completion or negotiating the rules of conduct in a learning environment, lack of clarity can contribute to frustration and disappointment. This ambiguity is sometimes guarded against through learning plans, which clearly define parameters, goals, and each other's expectations. Where these written agreements do not exist, it is all the more crucial that communication be clear.

Implicit in communication is careful listening. We must listen to our students as we develop the learning plan. Ideally, the learning plan should be born of the student's goals and honour her lived experience. Listening carefully and asking wise questions are essential abilities for me as teacher. As we begin the learning journey together, I must remember that learning is indeed a process through which all persons engaged grow and develop. As such, teachers and learners must listen carefully along the

journey for indications that we need to renegotiate the path on which we originally agreed. This ongoing and cyclical nature of communicating our expectations and listening for those of our students sets us up for an engaged and successful learning experience.

Related to the communication paradox is the delicate relationship between my ability to lead and my willingness to follow. Just as it is important that I can both communicate clearly and listen carefully, I must be as adept at encouraging learners to follow my leadership as I am at embracing theirs. Any truly relevant learning experience, where power is shared and the process is negotiated, is reciprocal in nature.

Predictable consistency and agile flexibility may also appear to be strange bedfellows. However, upon closer consideration, the two are perfectly aligned in establishing learner-centred praxis. Predictable consistency allows learners to feel safe to examine the learning relationship critically. It frames their experience in a way that shelters them from uncertainty and allows them to plan for success. It can also, however, be limiting. As we learn, we grow and develop. This process may lead us to paths we were previously unable to imagine. Agile flexibility provides both learners and teachers with paths to reconceptualise the learning journey and follow it in an engaged, undivided manner.

Underlying all these characteristics and guiding the development of learning relationships is a commitment to honesty and fairness. At their essence is respect. Each of us, teacher and student, is a learner at heart. We approach the journey with unique experiences and knowledge that can enrich each other and augment our own learning. I must acknowledge the power inherent in my role as teacher but never allow it to

overshadow the opportunity to learn with my students.

Having identified at least some of the characteristics that encourage me to be more learner-centred, I am curious about what kinds of learning spaces these characteristics lead me to foster. Interestingly, Palmer (1998) names paradox as partner in crafting pedagogical space. He identifies six characteristics that I find helpful.

First, he says the space should be both bounded and open. A learning environment must have enough parameters to make it safe; otherwise, it risks becoming a void. Both in my reading of Palmer (1998) and in my own studies of praxis, these parameters may take the form of desired outcomes, subjects for study, relevant materials, and negotiated rules for safe learning spaces.

Second, Palmer (1998) says that the space should be both welcoming and "charged" (p. 74). The risk of creating a learning environment that is open is that the competing agendas and diverse passions of those participating may grow the space into a place of potentially risky discovery. Caution must be partnered with passion so that learners are safe to engage in the learning community without fear of being silenced, judged, or lost.

Third, and certainly closely related, Palmer (1998) advises that the learning space should honour the voices of individuals and the collective voice of the group. This requires a structure that encourages dynamic group exploration and respect for individuals who make up that group.

Fourth, Palmer (1998) suggests that there is space for both the "little" stories of the learners and the "big" stories of the disciplines (p. 74). Although I agree that a good learning space makes room for both individual and cultural sharing, I challenge that he

positions these two types of stories in a way that exalts tradition and marginalises individual experience. From a position of criticality, I suggest that teachers and learners must be prepared to deconstruct all the stories to which we are exposed and look for the undercurrents of power and privilege in them; and then use our findings to generate less oppressive paths to learning.

Fifth, Palmer (1998) names both solitude and community as important components of space. The latter provides context for our experience and epistemological claims, while the former provides the space to examine them reflexively.

Finally, Palmer (1998) recommends both silence and speech. Again, this characteristic of space is about trying out our ideas in communities of practise and then having the space to turn inward as we struggle to learn/lead praxis.

Although these characteristics of both teacher and space may seem uncomplicated, when they are understood across three different learning environments, they have implications far beyond standard classroom practise. They go straight to the heart of praxis. Moreover, in explicating learner-centred approaches en route to personally meaningful education, they uncover paths to join-up.

Conclusion

Drawing from Narrative Theory, Reflexive Inquiry, and Critical Pedagogy, I have positioned Narrative as perspective, process, and product that together frame a transdisciplinary method to construct theoretically new ways of conceptualising and practising learning. As a perspective, Narrative has informed both the theoretical approach (methodology) and the practical application (method) of my research. As a process, I have immersed myself in the literature that upholds writing as a way of knowing. Finally, I have created a narrative product through which I have re-presented my storied experience in a way that is designed to simultaneously lay bare my assumptions and claim new pedagogical space for learning/leading praxis.

In addition to exposing my own assumptions as I explicate new pedagogical spaces, I have referenced the importance of writing as a way of knowing. Inferred by Abbot (2008) and explicitly named by Lakeoff and Johnson (2003), our very nature as human beings leads us to think in categories and claim knowledge by making sense of new experiences in terms of those already lived. This is the essence of metaphor. In this research, I have consciously chosen to unpack the power of metaphor implicitly by deconstructing personal experiences to reveal dominant stories that may be operating in oppressive ways. Once they are deconstructed, I have examined the influence of counter-narratives in uncovering pedagogical possibilities. Thus, evoking the power of metaphor and utility of analogy, I have brought together theory and practise in a space where readers are able to examine their own experiences reflexively and, by doing so, improve praxis.

Setting this research in three diverse settings not only demonstrates the

versatility of such an approach to learning/leading praxis; it also reinforces the secondary goal of my thesis: to make plain my assumption that fostering personal meaningfulness in learning not only honours the enduring significance of Knowles' (1970) principles of education, but also highlights the imbedded centrality of relevance, consistency, and respect. Such an approach to learning/leading praxis fosters deeper engagement and sustainability of both teachers and learners. I have come to understand this deep and sustainable engagement as join-up.

The process of join-up is aided greatly by fostering a learning environment conducive to clear communication, predictable consistency, and flexibility. Additionally, any burgeoning learning relationships are enhanced by the centrality of honesty and trust. Whether learning with academics, learning with horses, or learning with organisations, join-up exemplifies not only the criticality of partnering theory and practise, but also the necessity of continuously moving back and forth between them. This dynamic re-visitation is at the heart of learning/leading praxis. Finally, there is an elemental value of knowing and honouring self. Each of us comes to learning with varied and diverse lived experiences that inform not only what we know, but also how we know. To deny these experiences, or bar them from the learning environment, is detrimental to those trying to engage with learning. Further, it is apt to result in conditions incongruent with join-up, thereby damaging the potential for personally meaning and sustainable learning to occur.

Because I chose to pursue the potential for pedagogical growth and improved praxis from a Narrative perspective, certain areas of interest were beyond the scope of this research. In particular, recent studies in neuroscience continue to examine the

human capacity to think metaphorically. This predisposition, they argue, leads people to knowledge acquisition through processes like writing that illuminate thinking (Lakeoff & Johnson, 2003). Additionally, experts in neuroplasticity are now making claims that not only are we neurologically predisposed to think metaphorically, but also that our engagement with learning actually changes brain composition and neurological processes (Audiblox, 2010; Draganski & May, 2008; Pascual-Leone, Amendi, Frengi, & Merabet 2005; and Taubert *et al.*, 2010).

Although I have not been able to address the role of neurology in etching out new pedagogical spaces for learning/leading praxis through counter-narratives, I am hopeful that my research will contribute to the growing canon that continues to explore writing as a way of knowing. Implicit in pedagogy are methods of instruction and the theoretical implications of those methods. In an attempt to champion spaces for students to engage more fully, I continue to maintain that education is made more joyful when approached with an undivided heart. As teacher/learner, bruised and embraced both, I maintain that denying aspects of my experience is to do violence unto myself; having learned this, I am unwavering in my commitment to fostering learning that honours the multifaceted nature of the human self. As I continue to learn/lead praxis, I encourage others to embrace the philosophy of join-up as they struggle to create collaborative spaces where meaningful learning can grow.

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