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"The Power of Our Words and Flesh": An Experienced Literacy Coach's Love Letter to Incoming Educators about the Transformational Roles of Relationships and the Body in Learning

Christine Woodcock
Phyllis Hakeem

ABSTRACT: Framed by the importance of language, and the ways that knowledge is embodied, this study explores the "coaching side" of literacy coaching, providing tips to educators. Phyllis, an experienced coach nearing retirement, wanted to provide insights to incoming teachers as she reflected on the question "Why *do* we teach, anyway?" Without realizing it at first, Phyllis highlighted "the power of our words and flesh." The research evolved to center on the following three questions: How does an experienced, successful literacy coach develop sincere partnerships with teachers? How does the responsive literacy coach co-construct knowledge with teachers? What does it look like for coaches, teachers, and students to become responsible partners in social living? The authors co-constructed a participatory case study, informed by portraiture and autobiographical narrative methods, and analyzed using the Listening Guide, (e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992) a qualitative, relational, voice-centered, feminist methodology. Three themes emerged from the research questions: the power of words alongside the implications of voice and silence in our work as educators, the role of the teacher's body in (dis)embodied knowledge, and the multidimensional partnerships necessary to work together in empowered, democratic schools. Last, the authors conclude with a love letter of sorts, with a particular focus on tangible pedagogical insights for educators, focusing on the importance of teacher narrative and the three postures of relationships.

Key words: Literacy coaching, Embodied knowledge, Teacher language, Teacher relationships, Feminist methodology, Teacher narrative

Christine Woodcock and Phyllis Hakeem met more than a decade ago, when Phyllis was a student in Christine's classes at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. For the last six years, both have been adjunct instructors for American International College. Their "day jobs" are devoted to empowering students who have academic difficulties. Christine is the Learning Disabilities Specialist at Northwestern Connecticut Community College, and Phyllis is a literacy specialist at Williams Elementary School in Pittsfield, MA. Christine can be contacted at Christine.Woodcock@aic.edu and Phyllis at Phyllis.Hakeem@aic.edu.

Teaching, I was coming to understand, was a kind of romance… You… invited a relationship of sorts.
– Mike Rose (*Lives on the Boundary*, 1989)

Even though life is filled with transitions, changes often feel scary. A shift in the chapters of life renders us vulnerable. We feel it in our fluttering hearts and our turbulent stomachs. Most educators would confess to having "first day jitters," whether it is truly one's first day teaching, or it is one of many first days back amidst decades of teaching. Yet, what happens on the last day? As a seasoned educator, Phyllis, is embarking on retirement, she wishes to provide a humble gift—a love letter of sorts—to the incoming and newer teachers. She cannot help but reflect on, "Why *do* we teach, anyway?" When I asked Phyllis, an accomplished literacy coach, she highlighted "the power of our words and flesh." So, what are the impacts of our words and flesh as teachers? In a participatory, co-authored case study, she shares her reflections on the transformative roles of relationships and the body in how we learn.

Framed by the importance of our language, and the ways in which we embody knowledge, this study sought to better understand the "coaching side" of literacy coaching, providing tips to coaches and teachers who are newer to the field, and who are seeking insights. At its heart, literacy coaching is about relationships and growth (Blackstone, 2007). The ability to create and foster genuine relationships is the foundation of responsive, successful literacy coaching (Dozier, 2006). Yet, in most of the notable textbooks on the market for literacy coaches (e.g. Burkins, 2007; Hasbrouck & Denton, 2010; Toll, 2005; 2008; 2014; Vogt & Shearer, 2010; Wepner, Strickland, & Quatroche, 2013), very few, if any, go into any depth on how to establish and foster the healthy relationships necessary in a sincere educational partnership.

The dynamics between effective literacy coaches and teachers can be the catalysts for change in schools. The demand for literacy coaches has risen tremendously in recent years, yet in that time, a clear understanding of the complexities of coaching roles is still evolving (e.g. Niedzwiecki, 2007; Toll, 2014). Throughout this progression, the relationship-building, "coaching side" of literacy coaching is still vague. Instead, educators are swept into a whirlwind of standards, testing, and initiatives, such as The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, Common Core State Standards, and Response to Intervention, just to name a few. In the shadows of these reforms toil the teachers—always overworked, sometimes silent, and understandably disillusioned from the storm. The current study sought to provide insights on how the relational, coaching side of coaching could lead to more productive, empowered stances in education, even in the face of the storm.

As teachers and teacher educators, of course we all care deeply for the K-12 students whose lives we touch, yet in our constant, student-centered concerns, we sometimes neglect the teachers. Teachers are frequently forced into one change after another, all while being under the scrutiny of both the general public, elected officials, and administrators (Neher, 2007). In the current American educational milieu, how are teachers positioned to negotiate and construct knowledge?

Since scholars such as Lather (1991) have proposed that agency is unknowable, researchers have been pushed to instead study the ways that people construct knowledge. The current study supports the idea that some people relationally construct knowledge; this social conception of knowledge relates to the ways we embody knowledge in how we do or do not separate physical experiences from those that are emotional and cognitive in nature, because the experiences are holistic and interrelated (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003; Woodcock, 2010). As teachers and teacher educators, we must honor the body language, daily experiences, emotions, and perceptions of all of our students and colleagues. When we honor the relational construction of knowledge, it leads to richer, more embodied learning. Nearing the end of a fruitful career, an educator may not remember the test scores and will more likely cherish the relationships and the deeply embedded knowledge. When Phyllis asks herself, "Why *do* we teach, anyway?" she responds, "To co-create responsible partners in social living."

Taking all of these matters into consideration, the focus of the current research centers on the following

three questions:

- How does an experienced, successful literacy coach develop sincere partnerships with teachers?
- How does the responsive literacy coach co-construct knowledge with teachers?
- What does it look like for coaches, teachers, and students to become responsible partners in social living, and how is it accomplished?

First, the authors will situate the work theoretically by defining terms, such as the role of the literacy coach and how it is evolving, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of how relationships are developed. The relational construction of knowledge will be defined, as well as how it leads to embodied knowing. Second, the authors will explain the methodology. The authors co-constructed a participatory case study, informed by the methods of portraiture and autobiographical narrative, analyzed using the Listening Guide, (LG; e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Tolman, 2002; Way, 1998) a qualitative, relational, voice-centered, feminist methodology. Third, the authors provide the discussion of the case study, focusing on the three themes that emerged from the research questions: language, the body, and the role of relationships in learning. Last, the authors share concluding thoughts—a love letter of sorts, with a particular focus on tangible pedagogical insights for newer educators.

Theoretical Grounding

Coaches as Partners, Teachers as Whole: Relationally, Co-constructing Knowledge

In the last decade, the United States has experienced a gradual understanding of the role of a literacy coach in today's schools. Slowly, literacy coaches have evolved into "partners alongside teachers, executing job-embedded professional learning that enhances teachers' reflection on students, the curriculum, and pedagogy for the purpose of more effective decision making" (Toll, 2014, p. 241). While traditional reading specialists frequently provide direct instruction to students on a daily basis, a literacy coach's primary responsibility is to support teachers, working with them to respond to teachers' needs and concerns about literacy instruction (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2010; Shaw, 2007; Vogt & Shearer, 2010).

In America, many literacy coaches are hired for the purposes of focusing on initiatives, such as Common Core State Standards, or Response to Intervention (e.g. Toll, 2014; Wepner, Strickland, & Quatroche, 2013). The savvy coach does not allow the initiatives to overshadow the important work of coaching. Instead, the savvy coach still establishes teachers as her main focus and partners, while wisely and judiciously attending to the educational initiatives. A successful literacy coach makes strides to fully understand educational initiatives, yet allows the focus to remain on the sincere partnership with the teacher (Toll, 2014). Coaching is about embracing the wholeness of people. "Coaching is not about fixing someone. No one is broken, and no one needs fixing. It's not about giving advice, providing 'constructive criticism,' making judgments, or providing an opinion. Coaching is a relationship" (Barkley & Bianco, 2005, p. 4; cf. Froelich & Puig, 2007).

Toll (2008, 2014) refers to the relationship between a teacher and a coach as a partnership. This distinction is important because the term "partner" implies mutuality. In a sincere partnership, much like a traditional business partnership, everyone shares a commitment to success. "In the case of literacy coaching, then, a partnership is not likely to exist when the coach [or the principal or any mandate] decides what the teacher should do. That is a manager-subordinate relationship… but not a partnership" (Toll, 2008, p. 47). Just as someone may have a committed, healthy partnership in his/her personal life, coaching partnerships with teachers should also be based on similar traits, such as: respecting one another, listening to one another, honoring how the other person feels, supporting the other's decisions, and recognizing the unique traits each person brings to a partnership (Toll, 2008). Relationships give meaning to practice (Hicks, 2002, p. 151).

The overriding framework of this study will uphold that knowledge is constructed within the context of relationships. The relational construction of knowledge does not in any way dismiss the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978), but instead adds emphasis on the dimension of the

relational dynamic between one's self and others that contributes to the knowledge gained in socializing an experience (Gilligan, 1996; Malaguzzi, 1993; Woodcock, 2005). Within the relational construction of knowledge, attention is paid to the textures of quality and trust in relationships (Raider-Roth, 2005; Woodcock, 2005).

Since knowledge is shaped through socializing experiences with others, it is often necessary to have trusting, comfortable relationships with one's self and others in order to effectively socialize experiences. In order for individuals to trust what they know (Raider-Roth, 2005), and to trust others to help them socially construct what they know into new knowledge, it is helpful to have supportive relational contexts in which to express ideas and questions. In relationship with others, communication can potentially be adapted and harmonized in order to ensure understanding in a two-way exchange, rather than a one-way, solitary event (Paramore, 2007).

Affective and relational dimensions should not just be emphasized in the education of young children, but should instead be considered in the education of each individual, regardless of age.

In the vision of both Malaguzzi (1993) and Gilligan (1996), all knowledge is based in relationships, and an active relationship with one's self is embedded in the social construction of knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) upheld that all knowledge is constructed in the context of social interaction. Rogoff (1990) extended Vygotsky's ideas to emphasize and elaborate on the two-way exchange of creating knowledge and sharing meaning. Taking in knowledge is not a one-way street, or simply an individual endeavor, even in a social context. Offering fresh reflections on the social construction of knowledge, Malaguzzi (1993), of the Reggio Emilia approach to education, highlighted the affective domain in learning, which previous scholars, for example Piaget, had simply mentioned, but had not emphasized. Affective and relational dimensions should not just be emphasized in the education of young children, but should instead be considered in the education of each individual, regardless of age. Such relationships among adults, argue Estola and Elbaz-Luwisch (2003), "are also embodied and teachers carefully read one another's body messages" (p. 710).

Historically, there is an intricate model of affect as central to human functioning (Tomkins, 1963, as cited in Probyn, 2004). Anyone can relate to 'the goose bump effect,' when an educational moment ignites a frisson of feelings, memories, thoughts, and bodily reactions (Probyn, 2004, p. 29). This more provocative, multisensory learning is anchored in our bodies and emotions. Since language is the primary medium through which knowledge is shared and processed (Bakhtin, 1981; Dewey, 1933; Vygotsky, 1978), it is essential to consider people's knowledge as it is constructed through their relationships with their entire selves: their emotions, their words and ideas, their bodies, and their actions. One must holistically consider all of the relationships that underlie the knowledge people construct, as well as the body's various roles in this knowledge construction.

(Dis)embodied knowledge

As the teachers tell it, they know about being a model—one who is watched and "the figure that they copy"—yet at the same time they are teaching to help pupils learn, to keep them active and involved. The episodes suggest that teaching is such a dynamic activity that teachers are forced to assume different body positions simultaneously. A teacher's body is on stage, and at the same time it is "in the audience," close to pupils. This [positioning] underlines just how complicated and ambiguous the notion of presence in teaching is, and yet it seems to be essential to teachers' ways of understanding their work. (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003)

Time and time again we see that people do not change when they are forced to do so; rather, people can change themselves, often profoundly, when they are trusted, inspired, and empowered to do so (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Yet,

education is a pressure-filled world of high-stakes tests and one-size-fits-all instruction. Americans are in the midst of the blame-game, and one of the favorite targets is the teacher. Teachers are perceived as broken and needing fixing (Burkins, 2007; Toll, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). In the typical American school, coaches and teachers are working in a climate of mandates and pressures of measured accountability. Sadly, the average American school culture is one of growing requirements and shrinking resources. Understandably, administrators, coaches, teachers, and students are frustrated, discouraged, and it may be argued, disembodied from their knowledge. Embodied knowing, and how some educators are disconnected from it, may be the missing key in the fullness or success of some teachers and students.

In the last couple of decades, scholars have illustrated how much theorizing on the body tends to be disembodied and distanced from the day to day experiences of corporeality, and instead urged future research to talk about the body in the ways it is connected to us, and to our knowing, but also in sincere ways that relate to our day-to-day lives (Light & Kirk, 2000; Mulcahy, 2000). Bordo (2003) has argued that "Body can never be regarded merely as a site of quantifiable processes that can be assessed objectively, but must be treated as invested with personal meaning, history, and value that are ultimately determinable only by the subject who lives within it. There is a 'disregard for personhood' in how we sometimes speak of our bodies as though they are separate from us" (p. 74). There is an obvious need to study the role of (dis)embodied knowledge in teachers.

Johnson (1989) was one of the first to document the significance of emphasizing attention to bodies in education. He demonstrated how experiences are embodied and how language also has an embodied basis. We experience the world by living in it (Woodcock, 2010). Davis (1997) defines embodiment as individuals' interactions with and through their bodies with the social, cultural, and historical worlds around them. Embodiment involves both a negotiation and composition of physical as well as discursive space. The process is dynamic and reciprocal, involving continual movements between bodily organization and expression, as well as discursive accounting for them (Gillies et al., 2004). In the daily practice of a literacy coach, the seasoned coach often values the less tangible qualities of successful teachers, such as flexibility, the ability to shift gears, or to listen to and follow one's intuition (e.g. Dozier, 2006). How are those traits taught, measured, and celebrated, though? In a way, we desire "(t)o read what was never written" (Dixon & Senior, 2011, p. 473). Yet, when pedagogy is understood as a relational practice, the affective interactions between bodies give shape to the pedagogical moments. Dixon and Senior observe that "body-to-body pedagogy asserts that our bodies, feelings, histories are as much pedagogical as our minds. The ways we feel about each other, our relationships—physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual—are pedagogical material used in the process of teaching and learning" (p. 478). In recent years there has been growing awareness of the body's corporeal significance in how students learn in educational settings (Evans, Davies, & Rich, 2009). The current study wishes to extend and apply those understandings to the roles of teachers, and how they grow, learn, and transform.

When we know how we come to know, and how that knowledge is embodied, we can remain more connected to our bodies and our ways of knowing and relating to others. In short, we learn more effectively when we learn in an emotional, embodied manner. One cannot deny peoples' capacities for knowing and feeling, and the ways the two notions are interconnected, as noted by Luttrell (1997): "(W)hat is most memorable about school is not what is learned, but how we learn it. Unspoken and unresolved emotions (a taboo subject among most educators) and the ethical and political dimensions of

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relationships make a difference in the learning process" (p. 122). When teachers can say what they really know and experience to others in relationships, their knowledge becomes more stable, embodied, and able to be examined with purposeful intention.

Method

> "I learned, too, how the stories we hear and the stories we tell . . . shape the meaning and quality of our lives at every stage and crossroad." (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, p. xvi).

By sharing this participatory case study, informed by the methods of portraiture and autobiographical narrative, the co-authors intend to provide an intimate glimpse into the life of an experienced literacy coach. We present this case to detail ways to enhance relationships and to honor the body for more successful educational partnerships. At the onset of the study, the initial researcher sought to study the focal informant, Phyllis, in a somewhat traditional manner. As the research unfolded, however, "the researcher and the researched" evolved into a participatory method, so that Phyllis's voice remained fully intact, and the relationship between the researcher and participant was honored. Tolman and Brydon-Miller (2001) argue that "Embedded in these methods is the importance of trust and relationship between researchers and participants; such work is anchored by the goals of understanding the experiences of others and working collaboratively with them to generate social change and knowledge that is useful to the participants" (p. 5).

The co-authors sought to create a rich, detailed description of the focal informant, Phyllis, and her teaching environment, as well as the nuances of the multidimensional relationships therein. As researchers, we were committed to rendering a documentation that was illustrative of the depth of the human experience.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), portraiture is a genre of empirical research that reads more like a story or narrative form of literature because it takes into consideration not only the informant, but her entire surrounding context as well, including physical setting, personal perspectives, historical background, and aesthetic features. This rich context plays a vital role in painting a clearer, more holistic picture of the informant, keeping her and her surroundings respectfully intact. To Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, "The portraitist, then, believes that human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context—a context where relationships are real [and] where activity has a purpose" (p. 43). In the method of portraiture, detailed attention is paid to the voice of the informant, providing ways of attending to people and thoughts that may have otherwise gone unnoticed or been kept silent.

Wortham (2001) asserts that "Telling a story about oneself can sometimes transform that self" (p. xi). As the study progressed, Phyllis expressed a natural desire to take a more active role in sharing her story, leading to more of a hybrid autobiographical narrative approach. This inclusive approach makes a distinct valid contribution to the field in the ways it backgrounds the researcher's voice and studies relational and emotional patterns systematically (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001; Wortham, 2001). Autobiographical narrative helps to organize the human experience, recognizing the multiple layers of meaning in experiential narrative, which were co-constructed in various interview contexts, including in-person exchanges, email, and both structured and less structured formats. Narrative, argue Tolman and Brydon-Miller, "is especially sensitive to the relational nature of research and how researchers can and must negotiate their own and their participants' subjectivities in collecting and analyzing interview data" (p. 7).

Context of Study and Data Sources

Phyllis is a full-time literacy coach at a public elementary school in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. It is located in the southeast portion of a city, in a residential area. At the time of the study, the school had 343 students, and the average student/teacher ratio was approximately 16.3 to 1. The cultural diversity at the school has increased significantly in the last several years. The school is not considered a low-income school and does not receive any Title I funding.

The predominant data source in the study was interviews. Phyllis was interviewed at least four times, with most interviews lasting two hours each. The interviews took place in mutually agreeable spots, such as a restaurant, or her office at school.

The interviews were audio-recorded. Every interview was transcribed as soon afterward as possible so that memories were still fresh, and also so that subsequent interview questions could be based on previous interviews.

The interviews were unstructured and informal, consisting of open-ended questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), which created a discourse that was collaboratively constructed (Mishler, 1986). This approach lent itself to a conversational context that was conducive to the flow of personal stories (Borland, 1991), often referred to by qualitative researchers as "conversations, but conversations with a purpose" (Merriam, 2001, p. 71).

Other interviews were slightly more structured and were facilitated through email exchange. Although the emailed interviews had pre-selected questions and were less conversational, the varied interview formats provided freedom to everyone involved, yet still provided the researcher some degree of control to seek insights to research questions, while fostering discussions of the experiences that were important to the informant (Riessman, 1986).

The second data source was field notes from visiting the school where Phyllis works. During school visits, the researcher would handwrite notes in a journal, as well as photograph the setting, to provide the material from which to narrate aspects of the physical environment at a later time. The third data source was the researcher's journal. Directly following each interview and site visit, the researcher wrote about the experience and any reactions to it. This process helped to ensure validity while serving as an additional data source to document what was not captured in field notes or interview recordings, including such contextual features as the aesthetics of the school or areas in which discussions took place, or any other environmental circumstances not discussed on recordings or in field notes. The journal served as an excellent source of not only organization, but also as a source of future interview questions.

Data Analysis: The Listening Guide

The Listening Guide (LG; e.g., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Tolman, 2002; Way, 1998) provides a qualitative, relational, voice-centered, feminist analytic method. The LG differs from other means of analysis in that it places emphasis on the psychological complexities of humans through attention to voice. It does so through the creation and special analysis of voice poems, as well as by attending to silences. Furthermore, the LG is distinctive in its emphasis on the importance of human relationships, and its feminist grounding provides spaces to hear those who may previously been silenced (Woodcock, 2010, p. 364).

The LG distinctly varies from traditional methods of coding, because the researcher listens to, rather than categorizes or quantifies, the text of an interview. A researcher may listen for an aspect of experience that has been rendered invisible by an oppressive ideology (Tolman, 2001), such as the relational, embodied aspects of learning, vis-à-vis the achievement-oriented culture of American education. Gilligan et al. (2003) maintain that "The Listening Guide method provides a way of systematically attending to the many voices embedded in a person's expressed experience… allow[ing] for multiple codings of the same text" (p. 158). The procedure behind the Listening Guide calls for each interview to be listened to at least four discrete times. In the first listening, the researcher listens for themes and silences. A crucial phase of the second listening is to actually extract a series of "I" statements from the informant's narrative transcript, and then create an "I poem," or voice poem. During the third and fourth listenings, the researcher extracts themes of the narrative that melodiously intereact with one another, or that are in tension with each other (Raider-Roth, 2005). This tension or interweaving of the two themes is termed by Gilligan et al. (2003) as contrapuntal. The key is to look at these two themes as being in relation to one another.

Findings

As Phyllis contemplated her retirement from the field of literacy coaching, she wanted to create an offering to newer teachers. Incoming teachers are often hungry for advice, especially practical suggestions,

and words of wisdom from those who have seemingly experienced it all. When Phyllis was initially interviewed, it became apparent that she wanted to play a more involved role in the research, so the study evolved into a participatory case, borrowing techniques from autobiographical narrative and portraiture, analyzed with the Listening Guide (LG). Although Phyllis was not originally asked questions regarding the role of relationships and the body in teaching, those trends, along with the theme of language, all emerged, as Phyllis continued to emphasize "the power of our words and flesh." After multiple interviews, site visits, and journaling, the co-researchers were able to explore the three themes of: language, the body, and relationships in some depth, which will be explored in this section.

The Power of Our Words: The Language

Anyone who has been in New England during the autumn season knows what a sincere treat it is for all of the senses. Driving to the school where Phyllis teaches, nestled in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts, one may marvel at the colorful leaves, the crisp air, and the sweet smells of harvest. Although the façade of the elementary school appeared relatively traditional, the inside gave way to winding corridors of glass, with windows showcasing courtyards. The courtyards were purposeful in the ways they provided meaningful connections to the curriculum, in such ways as community gardening and outdoor space for art lessons.

The principal in Phyllis's school, a middle-aged woman, was warm and welcoming. Phyllis had described the principal as smart and supportive, which is important to emphasize in the work of a literacy coach. The keen understanding of an administrator is essential in the career of a coach. This principal's background as an artist was evident in the large spaces established for art education, the lines of inspiring poetry painted on the walls, and the aesthetic, personal touches in the common areas. Even the teacher's lounge had a lovely, seasonal centerpiece on the table, and there was a buzz in the air about an upcoming community mural project.

In many ways, Phyllis's classroom was a reflection of the person she is as well: organized and efficient, yet colorful and cozy. She was careful to point out "what a mess" the room had been when she was first hired at the school a few months prior. Phyllis was no stranger to renovation, since she and her husband had just restored their classic Victorian home. In a similar, loving fashion, Phyllis transformed her classroom into a space where teachers and students could seek not only academic materials and assistance, but also comfort and a soft place to land.

Phyllis was clear to point out, "Whenever teachers are new to a position, they need to sort out all of the logistics first… the systems, the materials, the curriculum. Once all of the logistics are organized, you can really focus on what matters—relationships." In that spirit, Phyllis had clearly systematized her classroom, which showcased a U-shaped table, and all of the leading products in the field for word study. There were multiple shelves of clean, visually appealing literacy centers and leveled book baskets, all of which could also be borrowed by classroom teachers. In addition, there was a carefully selected lending library of professional literature for colleagues.

"This is Vegas!" Phyllis exclaimed with a knowing smile. "What happens here, stays here," she added. This was not the first time Phyllis had explicitly upheld her dedication to confidentiality. The teachers in Phyllis's school knew that her classroom was a safe place to breathe, talk, or simply sit in silence to decompress after a difficult day. Phyllis did not just have cutting edge materials for literacy—she also had a rocking chair and a faux fireplace in her classroom for the teachers. Likewise, there were stuffed animals for the children, which not only brought academic concepts alive, but also brought forth the comfort and trust required in any relationship.

Unlike many in the field of literacy coaching, Phyllis was not recruited for her literacy expertise or certifications, or even because she was a reading specialist. Instead, Phyllis specifically chose the vocation and used the word "coach" purposely. As she explained it, "for me, I have viewed this latest re-creation as a calling that would bring together much of what has informed my person." Phyllis not only embraced her role, but even carved it out for herself, while many colleagues in the role of coach were asked to take on that role, or fell into it (Toll, 2014; Wepner, Strickland, & Quatroche, 2013). In the role of coach,

the nuance of the language is paramount, considering the connotations that come with the word "coach." An athletic coach may conjure up images of yelling or forcing, while a life or job coach may invoke impressions of mentoring, listening, and empowering.

According to Phyllis, as literacy coaches, "we need to hear and see beyond the obvious. I need to be still and listen. I already know a lot about literacy. Now I can pay attention to body language and my language." Once again, Phyllis emphasized that need to get beyond the logistics of background knowledge, materials, and methods. Once there is a solid foundation established in methodology, a coach may spend more time with language.

Although final grades matter, all of the steps along the way matter as well. Walking the hallways of a charming elementary school, marveling at student work displayed proudly on bulletin boards, outsiders need reminding of the human beings who all had a hand in creating that work. It is one thing to peruse test scores, and it is another matter entirely to witness the joy of a child applying math skills in a community garden, or a teacher's pride in implementing a new initiative, yet in her own, personalized way, by independently creating a pocket chart display. Phyllis was careful to admire the intricacies with which each teacher uniquely implemented a new initiative, recalling an old expression she created: "Pedagogy can be directly translated to 'boy learner.' Instead, I believe in what I refer to as mystagogy—the mystery or mysticism of learning."

Once again, we are so focused on the students that our gaze consistently gets away from the physical and emotional wellbeing of the teachers.

One of Phyllis's largest concerns for newer teachers was their perceived lack of autonomy and voice in what Phyllis referred to as the "achieve versus learn culture." In Phyllis's vision, "Teachers need a voice. They must be asking, 'What is the meaning and purpose of everything we do?'... Teachers need to be a pathway to the change. Instead of focusing on initiatives, we need to look at real change, and get rid of deep wounds." Yet, these very teachers were in the midst of not one, but four new initiatives, with Phyllis as their leader. Within a matter of weeks, Phyllis had emailed and phoned, freely admitting such tremendous anxiety that she was nearly ready to bow out of co-authorship of this study, due to the demands of the multiple initiatives.

"I'm overwhelmed," she said. "I'm backing out of our project due to these demands to head-up four new initiatives at school. We have a new basal, we need Lexia scores... I have to take things off my plate. I don't want to end up in the hospital."

The Power of Our Flesh: The Body

Undeniably, our bodies are important. They house and sustain us. They are a part of whatever we do, including our work with literacy education. Phyllis's line was echoing and haunting: "I have to take things off my plate. I don't want to end up in the hospital." Human's bodies can only handle so much. No matter how passionate she may have been about our research, something had to give. In the end, however, we found manageable ways for Phyllis to still participate in the research in a healthy, fulfilling way. Ultimately we couldn't help but wonder whether, in the face of the educational initiative storm, how one's body, morale, and professional relationships could all stay afloat.

When Phyllis emailed and called one autumn evening to share her extreme discomfort with juggling four new initiatives, she emphasized how she felt the need to protect the children from the anxiety surrounding the assessments associated with the initiatives, referring to her shielding as "preserving their dignity." What about the dignity of the educators, though? Once again, we are so focused on the students that our gaze consistently gets away from the physical and emotional wellbeing of the teachers. Perhaps the initiatives are not so positive for anybody.

Phyllis's voice was anxious and apologetic on the phone. The tension was broken by our hearty laughter when Phyllis jokingly referred to how she had supposedly buried her dedication to "co-create responsible partners in social living." As may be

recalled, those were Phyllis's words when she was originally asked why she teaches. "The co-creating is taken away by the demands. Instead of thinking through a long-term vision, instead the goal of schools is marketing." Despite Phyllis's ongoing pleas for teachers to have more autonomy, even she was feeling defeated, saying, "We need to be open to nurturing the life of the student, and preserving the dignity of the individual. We take it on. We wear it. It's heavy. We feel it in our bodies."

By creating a voice poem, I was able to attend to Phyllis's language, although her words didn't resemble the voice poems I was used to creating (e.g. those modeled in Gilligan et al., 2003; see Woodcock, 2010). Usually, voice poems highlight "I" or "you" statements, yet Phyllis meaningfully referred more to "we" and "it." As may be seen in the voice poem below, Phyllis began to un-pack her terms of "co-creating" and the opposing energy force, the "demands." Under those designations, the "demands" become an "It" with which to be reckoned. Beneath "It" there were no "I"s or "you"s, only "we"s, which I interpret as solidarity between fellow educators.

Co-creating
Long-term vision
More autonomy
We need to be open

Demands
marketing
defeated

It
We take it on
We wear it
It's heavy
We feel it in our bodies

Since the focus of the research was on how literacy coaches develop partnerships with teachers and co-construct knowledge with teachers, it was imperative to place a firm focus on Phyllis's language; hence the voice-centered quality of the LG, as well as the bridges or barriers to partnership; and hence the relational aspect of the LG. Although the poem noted above is not what Gilligan et al. (2003) refer to as a voice poem, the purpose of constructing voice poems is twofold. First, it is to listen to an informant's voice to attend to any distinctive patterns within it. Second, this methodical attention to voice provides researchers with opportunities to hear how an informant speaks of herself in relationship to herself and others. By constructing this voice poem, a reader may gain deeper insight into what "co-creating responsible partners in social living" means to Phyllis, such as openness, autonomy, and long-term vision. Phyllis feels that hierarchically imposed demands get in the way of that creative freedom, since public schools have to look successful in the mainstream marketing stream, rendering teachers defeated. That defeated, disembodied "It" is expressed in the "we" statements, signifying a comradery among teachers who feel disengaged in the face of the storm.

In fact, it was fascinating to see how much notions of the body arose in just that one school observation, because there had never been any mention that the research was centered on the role of the body. Yet a fellow coach, Phyllis's office mate, exhibited tremendous stress. Although she later voiced how upsetting her day had been, it was obvious by the way she was hunched over in her seat, almost violently chomping chewing gum while grading tests. Then, a first grade teacher named Sherry appeared at the door. Sherry's eyes, her lowered shoulders, and her strained expression all told that she was troubled. Sherry did not speak, and instead just quietly made her way to the rocking chair next to the faux fireplace and began rocking.

We all knew Sherry, so perhaps words were not necessary. School had dismissed, and Sherry needed to decompress after a trying day, and everyone knew that Phyllis's classroom was Vegas. Phyllis had once mentioned that teachers sometimes entered her office, rocked in the chair, never spoke, and left. That day though, Sherry did share her emotional story. A student in her first grade class, who may have been struggling with mental health, finally experienced a big breakdown in the classroom, in front of his peers. In the aftermath of such a traumatic school event, it undeniably affected the emotional wellbeing and the bodies of the teachers and students. Rocking slowly in the chair, Sherry said, "My students talked with the school counselor after the mess and kept saying how they felt upset throughout their bodies—in their tummies and in their throats."

Of course, there are times when educators discuss literacy endeavors, test scores, and academic

concerns. Yet, it is ridiculous to dismiss the personal, relational side of education, on a traumatic day, or on an ordinary day. As Sherry was ready to leave Vegas, she shared how she wanted to end on a positive note. Even though there had been lots of stress in her classroom for the first month of school, Sherry was still excited about how well her students were doing with reading comprehension strategies. Phyllis had been coaching Sherry on how to use kinesthetic movements with explicit comprehension strategies.

Sherry concluded, "The muscle memory with all of the movements—it's so multisensory, they all remember it, and seem excited about it. Some of the parents have even noticed it, so I know the children are doing the movements at home." Even at the end of a horrible day, there is nothing more rewarding for a teacher than to know that a new skill has been used and transferred to the home. By stimulating their bodies in multisensory lessons, the students were retaining and applying literacy skills across contexts.

After this compelling exchange with Sherry, Phyllis reflected by saying, "I develop vulnerably intimate and confidential relationships with teachers. There are moments of hope and respite for many of them. There is such power in our words, not only on emotions, but also on bodies." Phyllis appeared to have so many positive partnerships with colleagues, it invited the question most coaches wonder: What do you do about those few, seemingly difficult people? Phyllis said,

> I have learned that academic literacy coaching isn't foremost about changing people, even though that is what often happens. For me, deep resistance signals an equally deep wound. Often, those who resist the most, need to be genuinely heard. I have discovered that authentic presence and silence move a resistant colleague sometimes to vent in whatever manner they need, and then come the tears.

Although many coaches see themselves as being in the business of change, Phyllis illustrated how change is a happy coincidence when people are allowed to practice their resistance. Phyllis saw the resistance as embodied, as a deep wound, and once those seemingly resistant people were provided with the opportunity to be heard, often in a safe, trusted relationship, then real change occurred. According to Phyllis,

> Critical reflection leads to transformation. When schools are being audited, or undergoing mandatory initiatives, I've witnessed the physical and emotional anxiety of administrators, teachers, and students. I would welcome a forum to give valued autobiographical voice to these experiences. There is an impact on educators' ability to change when they are forced to do so.

Furthermore, Phyllis maintained that there is a "legacy of certainty in perfectionist thinking" that extends into the school realm (Hakeem, 2005)[1]. Due to standardized testing, state standards, and various mandated initiatives, there is a perceived code of perfectionism that administrators, teachers, and students all feel the need to uphold. In anyone's attempts to be perfect, we run the risk of compromising our instincts, our health—our emotional and physical wellbeing. Pipher (2005) argues that the pursuit of perfection runs deep in one's body, and one example is eating disorders. Phyllis went on to explain, "When individuals link self-worth to performance, perfectionism manifests itself in the forms of pathology, depression, and hopelessness. . . . there's a lot of self-deprecating should-talk. . . . We must examine the ways that teachers have historically been silenced in these ways."

During LG analysis, third and fourth listenings, referred to by Gilligan et al. (2003) as *contrapuntal*, are a more in-depth way for a researcher to re-visit research questions and explore the ways themes either melodiously interact or are in tension with one another. Contrapuntal third and fourth listenings are a way to examine themes further and to analyze how they relate to one another. The voice poem depicted in Figure 1 shows the ways in which silence and body overlap. This intersection has implications for the ways knowledge is (dis)embodied.

Figure 1 shows how, according to Phyllis, happy change occurs when teachers may practice resistance, leading to embodiment, as experienced through being

[1] Note that Phyllis and Hakeem are one and the same. We refer to her as Phyllis in the narrative and as Hakeem as a reference.

heard in a genuine relationship. Mandatory initiatives produce physical anxiety. Force does not equal true change. Voiced, embodied experience gives way to real change. Perfectionism does not equal physical wellbeing. Lack of wellbeing is disembodiment, which is linked to silence. In the end, we must return to the first statement, which is that happy change occurs when teachers can practice resistance, feeling embodied and heard in sincere relationships. Through the help of Figure 1, we may see how silence and body overlap, implying how knowledge is embodied or (dis)embodied, often related to the availability of a trusted relationship.

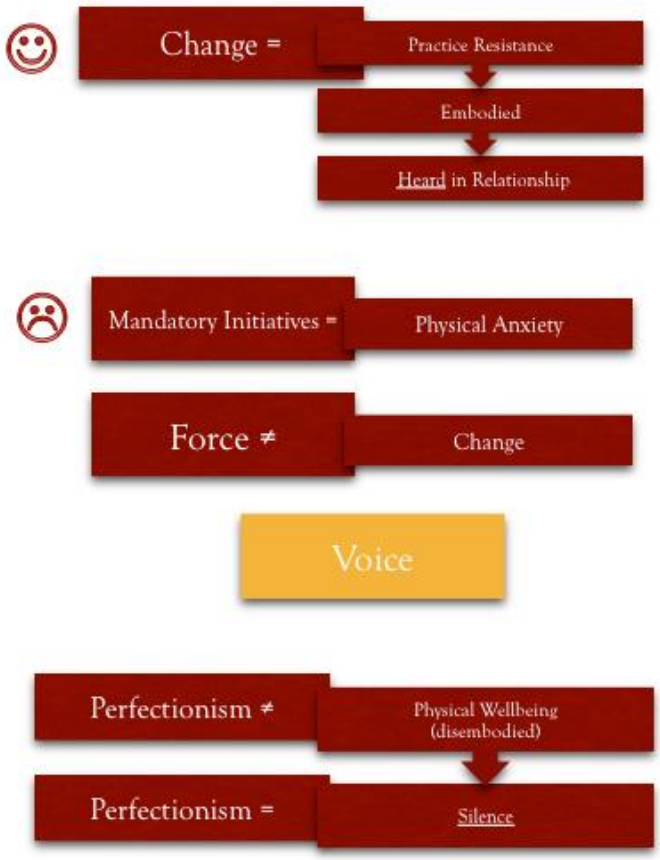

Figure 1

Our Arms Linked: The Role of Relationships

One gray, drizzly day, Phyllis and I met at a trendy Asian fusion restaurant. Its lavish décor, with statues of the Buddha and gorgeous fabrics draped on high shelves, was the ideal setting to discuss our reflections on how the research was unfolding. Sipping a warm mug of tea, Phyllis was excited to share a story about a recent professional development workshop she had attended. The workshop was led by Jan Hasbrouck (e.g., Hasbrouck & Denton, 2010), who asked the participants to stand and partner up with someone next to them. Then, she asked the partners to face one another in a near embrace. Although that stance felt awkward, and the intense eye contact seemed limited and uncomfortable, there was a much different reaction from the crowd when Hasbrouck instructed the participants to all lock elbows, and to stand side-by-side, facing out to envision focusing on their students.

Understandably, this experience resonated with Phyllis. It is a powerful representation for how we need to be student-centered in our approaches to teaching and coaching. Phyllis concluded her story by stating, "When you're in relationship with students, you're in relationship with the larger community." Although I agree, the description of the workshop exercise irritated me. Why are we so queasy to face colleagues in a vulnerable, intimate way, when it is in everyone's best interests? In order to best serve our students, we need to meaningfully partner with the whole community, most especially colleagues. We need to face back inward, toward one another. Since many people construct knowledge in relational ways, we contend that the relational components lead to richer, more embodied learning—not just in our child or adolescent learners, but also in ourselves, as adult learners and educators.

Upon being asked about specific ways she fosters relationships with colleagues, Phyllis replied, "A key to my success was in becoming transparent… accessible. One of my most successful professional development workshops was a conference I developed for paraprofessionals about relationships. There were tears. Now, not just the teachers, but the assistants, too, they come to me saying, 'This is Vegas, right? I need a hug.'" Although many schools focus on professional development for teachers, Phyllis was careful to carve out unique time for the paraprofessionals in her building. When we are okay with feeling vulnerable, showing others that we are human and accessible, we reach each other in transformative ways, which inevitably impacts our work with our K-12 students.

According to Phyllis, professional relationships are carried out on a continuum, and partnerships are multi-dimensional:

> Today, I describe my coaching as relational. Depending on the situation and the person, the relational quality remains diverse. There has emerged a continuum of relationships ranging from collegial to close. Having learned from my past failings, [I believe that] there are two characteristics that prove necessary to relational coaching. The first is non-judgmental empathy, and the second is confidentiality. Being non-judgmental affords mutual engagement in healthy discernment that often leads to empathy. Confidentiality builds trust, which has proven to be foundational. Last, my coaching has emerged as a vulnerably intimate exchange. Sometimes the exchange is between individuals, teams, or a larger community.

Although the depth of relationship varies from colleague to colleague, Phyllis contended that a relationship of some sort is necessary. As hard as it may be at times to remain neutral of judgment, or to extend our compassion to others, those pathways, alongside of strict privacy measures, often lead to productive partnerships. There is such a thing as professional intimacy, or vulnerability in work spaces, whether we like it or not. Of course, one of the most important of all school relationships is that of coach and principal. To Phyllis, "The relationship between the building principal and the academic literacy coach is analogous to a close marriage. When both parties come together as informed professionals embracing a common vision with the staff, students, families, and greater community, the ground is set."

Phyllis shared three tangible practices that she values, and that she feels foster relationships. First, she is adamant that she is provided time for regular meetings with teachers. "In my experience, relationships grow when time is respected, so there are no 'lazy' agendas." Regular communication, with documentation during regular meetings with meaningful agendas, is key. Second, when Phyllis is faced with a seemingly resistant colleague, she does not even approach the person at first. Instead, Phyllis finds that the colleague inevitably observes her with students or other staff, which piques the curiosity of the seemingly resistant person. "Demonstrated trustworthiness over time without prejudice is my mainstay!" Third, Phyllis explained how she aims to listen and respectfully probe for clarity—in what is being said and not said. "We have to move from conversation to deep discourse… It is navigating through dissonance amidst a backdrop of ambiguity where relational coaching becomes transformative." Indeed, when we are ready to tackle issues that cause us discomfort, while being okay that there might not even be a clear answer, we often grow exponentially.

How do we get to that point, though? According to Phyllis, "Teachers can feel autonomous, empowered, and emancipated in their work, when they are working towards progressing a socially just democracy" (Hakeem, 2005, p. 7). When teachers and students feel as though they are being heard, and making a difference in their community, their voices remain intact. Bomer and Bomer (2001) describe this responsibility as follows: "We have to stop thinking of ourselves as working for bosses, and instead understand that we are leaders in the interests of people" (p. 18).

> "As coaches, we need to be more inviting. Schools need to move beyond tolerant to hospitable… There is a reciprocity between the roles of guest and host."

Phyllis explained that "As coaches, we need to be more inviting. Schools need to move beyond tolerant to hospitable… There is a reciprocity between the roles of guest and host." A place of learning cannot be a place of should, would, and could, because a high stakes climate perpetuates the ideal of perfect. "That ideal of perfection silences and disempowers people… Finding voices is challenging because it is uncomfortable." In contrapuntal third and fourth listenings, this passage is compelling in the ways we are reminded of how this idea of perfection perpetuates silence and disempowerment. Yet, the only true pathway out of that silence is voice. Having space and opportunity for voice can be uncomfortable, though. We may feel that discomfort in our bodies. We need trusting

relationships in order to have our voices heard. Although voice can feel risky, vulnerability is not the opposite of strength; we need layers of vulnerability in order to be strong.

Social justice is difficult. Exploring topics surrounding critical literacy can feel uncomfortable. Bomer and Bomer (2001) describe this risky process by saying, "There is no reason to think that crafting democracy in classrooms will be easy… A big part of teaching is deciding what relationships people in the classroom will have to one another" (p. 59). At the beginning of our research, Phyllis claimed that she came to teaching to "co-create responsible partners in social living." Phyllis contemplated the ways in which she implements that theory into her practice. Just when I assumed she would provide an example with her K-6 students, she did not. Instead, Phyllis told a story about adult learners becoming teachers in a college-level class that Phyllis taught: "The students shared the need to just be listened to… they just wanted to talk… They wanted to be heard." This need for recognition reminded her of the arms-linked story again, except this time, Phyllis had a different response. "Maybe my eyes aren't on the children after all… My eyes are on the co-creators—the teachers!"

Discussion

As Phyllis neared retirement, she wanted to provide insights to the newer teachers by reflecting on, "Why *do* we teach, anyway?" Without even realizing it at first, Phyllis highlighted "the power of our words and flesh." In her desires to be more involved in the research, she became a co-author, as we developed a participatory case study, sharing the transformative roles of relationships and the body in how we learn. In the Discussion, the co-authors will conclude the study by offering the final love letter, as well as suggestions for educators moving forward in similar endeavors: the value of teacher-produced narrative as a pathway to promote empowerment and social justice, and tangible ways to connect professionally with the Three Postures of Relationships (Marlowe, 2009).

Teacher Narrative

In much the same ways educators agree that we need to equip adolescents with critical literacy to read the world with a critical lens, teachers, too, need opportunities to critically engage. As teachers and teacher educators, how can we expect our child-learners to critically engage, when we may not be critically engaged ourselves (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006)? Teachers need to be provided with meaningful occasions to engage critically, and one pathway for that could be by simply sharing their stories—producing narratives of their educational experiences, in the same way Phyllis has done in this case study.

In discourse communities, engagement provides people with a sense of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Teachers should not simply be thought of as consumers of culture, but as producers of it as well. Production theorists uphold that power and privilege are awarded to some groups and not to others, as the result of capitalism and patriarchy, and that there is a potential for change inherent in the practice of production (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). Cultural production is one avenue through which marginalized populations either empower themselves or unknowingly perpetuate traditional subordination. When teachers produce their own educational narratives, they are authors with agency.

There was an obvious richness in Phyllis's story. Bodily activities have a narrative structure with a starting point, a series of contiguous intermediate points, a path, and an end (Johnson, 1989). "[N]arrative, too, is a bodily reality— it concerns the very structure of our perceptions, feelings, experiences, and actions . . . [I]t is what we live through and experience prior to any reflective 'telling' of the story in words" (Johnson, 1989, p. 374-375).

In this study, the contributing elements of the methodology cannot be underestimated. This study evolved on its own, yet the methodology itself played a key role in the critical engagement of the teacher researcher. Teachers' voices are curiously absent from reform. Yet Dana and Yendel-Hoppey (2008) contend that "Teacher inquiry is a vehicle that can be used by teachers to untangle some of the complexities that occur in the profession, raise teachers' voices in discussions of educational reform, and ultimately transform assumptions about the teaching profession itself" (p. 2). Not only was this study a form of teacher research, but it was also a form of autobiographical narrative, and analyzed with the LG. With the LG, voices remain intact. By producing narrative, Phyllis

was empowered by sharing her story in an organized, transformative pathway, illustrating Lather's (1991) point that "The potential for creating reciprocal, dialogic research designs is rooted in… people's self-understandings… Such designs lead to self-reflection and provide a forum for people to participate in the theory's construction and validation" (p. 65).

3 Postures of Relationships and a Love Letter

As Phyllis embarked on retirement after a successful career, she kept asking herself why she loves to teach, and what words of wisdom she wanted to leave behind for newer educators. As her final words, I asked Phyllis to contemplate her statement—that she teaches "to co-create responsible partners in social living," to unpack that statement and break it down into tangible suggestions for fellow teachers. For Phyllis, the purpose of this study rested in understanding that in order to actualize a pedagogy of democratic social justice in public schools, educators need volitional emancipation (Zeichner, 1991) from what Phyllis refers to as an "ordeal of perfect." Phyllis's pathway to this emancipation has been the three postures of relationships (Marlowe, 2009). Phyllis's synthesis of the material in this section rests heavily in the thesis she wrote to obtain her Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study.

For Phyllis, the ordeal of perfect represents the experiences of administrators, teachers, and students being afforded little choice but to conform to mandates that afford less opportunity to be creative (Mumford, 1968/1952; Sternberg, 2001), to problem-solve, to develop as wise democratic citizens (Dewey, 1975/1909; Goodman, 1989; Spring, 2006), and to engage in open inquiry and "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). Phyllis describes volitional emancipation as "emancipatory learning" where "critical reflection and self-reflection" facilitate transformations (Saavedra, as cited in Edelsky, 1999, p. 305).

1st Posture: Invitation. The dynamic of invitation challenges communities to move beyond tolerance to hospitality (Marty, 2005). However, there remains reciprocity between the roles of guest and host. In addition, invitation is understood as a radical openness to others (Fowers & Davidov, 2006) and places of learning (Ellsworth, 2005). The moment the "experience of the learning self in the making" is named, the person that entered and engaged with the "place of learning" no longer exists, but has been somehow transformed (Ellsworth, pp. 35-36). Ellsworth references the Holocaust Memorial, the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, and the Civil Rights Memorial as exemplary places of learning.

Building on this understanding, Phyllis believes that those are environments of experiencing the full continuum of being in and of the world relationally. She simply stated, it is the space without should, would, and could. Phyllis maintained that the coercive "high stakes" climate of the ordeal of perfect represents an adverse place of learning (Hakeem, 2005).

2nd posture: Witness. In advocating witness as a vital movement, it is maintained that educators must rise as a "forum" to provide a space to hear the voices of those traditionally silenced (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Bruner, 1986). Phyllis defined witness as autobiographical discourse that excavates excluded stories, embraces paradox, and calls on the classical notion of an informed citizenry that needs to "witness" together (Marcy, 2002, p. 10). Standish (2005) suggests that "we stand in need of a serious language in which we can talk about education, just as we need a more serious language in the political realm" (p. 381). Acknowledging the disparity between the number of men and women employed in education, consideration of gender remains important (Martin, 1994). Finding voices to bear witness proves most challenging because witness "requires an audience" and "may be profoundly uncomfortable" (Schudson, 1997, p. 299).

3rd posture: Sending forth. Sending forth includes taking actions despite the finite weight of existential anxieties named by Phyllis as the *ordeal of perfect* (Hakeem, 2005). It is a "mission of educating the young for satisfying, responsible participation in a social and political democracy [that] is endangered if society is democratic in name but not in understanding and functioning" (Goodlad, 2001, p. 87). The act of sending forth, especially when experienced by educational leaders, has the potential to put an end to the "ordeal of perfect" and its stated implications (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996).

Maybe it is not enough to have a fireplace and rocking chair in one's office, yet it is certainly a step in the right direction to create an atmosphere of comfort and confidentiality known as Vegas. Phyllis's actions and the environments she has sculpted imply that she is an open-minded host. Even though it may feel uncomfortable, we need to ensure that teachers' voices are heard, perhaps through various means as autobiographical narratives, action research, and blogs. The ordeal of perfect is felt in our bodies, just the same as perfection weighs on the body of someone afflicted with an eating disorder. That same aim to perfection is making us sick as educators, and it is avoidable by telling our stories, sharing our words, in empowered ways.

A Love Letter

Invitation. *I am addressing the corpus of men and women who hold the role of academic literacy coach (reading, intervention, writing, and/or language arts). It is my belief that you have been charged to support educators, administrators, staff, families, and legislators, in order that students experience the fullness of being literate. It is in the mystery of relational exchanges of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and contemplating, that we move ever closer to manifesting the transformation in becoming "responsible partners in social living!" I greet you as friend so as to invite and inspire you to reflect on your storied work, own your strengths and challenges, and prize yourselves as beacons of hope in what is currently a recursive turbulent tragedy of missing the mark in educating our students.*

Bearing witness. *I will attempt to bear witness to the paradox at the heart of our work. Education is proclaimed as a democratic constitutional right and is to be studied and practiced as a humanity. However, the paradox lies in the fact that the humanity has been chiseled away by corporate greed and governmental legislated control. During coaching sessions, we bear the witness of countless educators who give testimony to psychological and spiritual wounds due to mandated abuses of scripting of teaching, time-line coverage of standardized curriculum, and inordinate time spent on preparation for high stakes testing and evaluation procedures. When we allow our literate freedom to articulate curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments to be thwarted, we have scarified not only the humanity of education but also our own literacy and the literacy of future generations of students.*

As coaches we must remain steadfast in our acts of relational literacy. We need to be in a genuine relationship by practicing with compassion authentic listening so as to honor the voice of other in dignifying their experience. We cherish our gifts to be silent and to speak words that empower, encourage and serve as a healing balm to wounds that often have been harbored far too long. We humbly acknowledge our talents as we courageously advocate for resources, time, collaboration, mentoring and study so our coaching informs through collegial literate acts of reading, writing, and contemplating. Through our example we bear witness to the joy of learning rather than the burden of equating self-worth to achievement. Our accountability is in reflecting on whether we helped facilitate learning experiences with those we coach-- that inspire.

Sending forth. *Many questions remain and many questions will continue to emerge. Humans are perpetual questioners. It is a guidepost to avoid platitudes of certainty and marketed measured solutions that promise perfection. It is in the questions of how to move this field forward that you make a difference. It is your perseverance in relishing in "ah, ha" moments of learning with those you coach that your questions will take shape and be graced in the asking. Grounded with positive intentions you will build upon my legacy of seeing beyond the directly observed with eyes of faith that each person is worthwhile and deserves access to the power of words. In sending you forth, I ask that you meditate on your experiences with those you have coached, reflect how both of you were changed, and to inscribe them in your heart. The challenge is to ponder the experiences that were convicting and unpleasant with equal vigor. It is often those sessions that allow us to reflect on our own challenges. They certainly did for me!*

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