Like a Phoenix Rising: The Pedagogy of Critically Reclaiming Education—an Autoethnographic Study

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Abstract

In many institutions of higher education across the land, a resounding cry for reform echoes loudly, disrupting thriving projects and well-constructed programs. When our college's reform agenda left us little space for critical pedagogical interactions with our students and colleagues, we intuitively stepped away from the ashes of what we had known to engage in discussions that brought to light the critical processes of justice in education, not only for our students, but also for ourselves. We constructed guiding questions for our exploration to critically reclaim our professional lives: 1.) What insights can be gleaned from our experiences with reform in higher education for teacher educators who are confined by "reform" oriented, outcome-based educational cultures? 2.) What might our own interior narratives—woven with the writing of others—tell us about which characteristics and practices can potentially inform a more holistic critical pedagogy? We drew from writings on spirituality in education and Palmer's classic myth of objectivism for generating narrative and constructing thematic insights. We noted the need for increased, new spaces to rebuild an integrative critical pedagogy and wrote into particular loss-related happenings to reclaim spaces for critical thinking. Our narrative portrays our processes and discoveries—our tales of interiority—through collaboratively interweaving our individual meaning making with the voices and wisdom writings of others. The current writing grows out of the scarring and pain of the moral struggles over several years, yet builds on the belief that these experiences will encourage others with a message of hope to create new images that can move through intellectual time and space to open new integrative critical pedagogical interactions in education.

Keywords: *critical pedagogy; higher education reform; creative paradox; auto ethnography*

Demonization, Demoralization and Redemption

Voices rising like a phoenix—glorious out of the ashes
Once we were whole, and wholly existent
We listened to and heard each other's voices.
Respect and ethical behavior allowed us freedom
To research and write about the things and people we loved.
Schools, teachers, interns, and what made them curious about lived experiences.
What their voices had to say about students, pedagogy, assessment and success.
Now we are fractured, Bullied into oblivion.

Allowed to recede and allowed to be silenced.
Out of context and out of sight, we will be heard again.
Our voices will rise in unison to reclaim our value in the academy.

In many institutions of higher education across the land, a resounding cry for reform echoes loudly. Primarily the cries come from politicos and corporate moguls who believe that the realm of higher education is to maintain and support the interests of the market-driven economy (Torrence, 2015). Giroux (2014) states that "increasingly, pedagogy is reduced to learning reified methods, a hollow mechanistic enterprise divorced from understanding teaching as a moral and intellectual practice central to the creation of critical and engaged citizens" (p.39-40). As a result of reducing teaching and learning to a training exercise, faculty in colleges and universities find themselves engaged in the circular (and often futile) gathering of multiple forms of data to legitimatize their positions. "Faculty members are increasingly defined less as intellectuals than as technicians and grant writers" (Giroux, 2014, p. 39).

This is the environment which we found ourselves operating in 2012. Our ideal of giving students a broad, overarching view of the world and supporting their engagement in critical thought was suddenly viewed as trivial. The imposed neo-liberal, patriarchal, measurement-driven model was described as being a "Revolution in Education." The three of us were educated at Tier One research institutions and prided ourselves in our involvement in educational and civic engagement. Almost overnight, all that we had worked to build within our college was removed and replaced by a pre-packaged structured "reform" agenda. Our own academic writing and ongoing instruction of doctoral students was deemed unimportant in comparison to the work of our new leadership's business model reforms; however, decreasing our involvement with our doctoral students was out of the question. Therefore, our thoughts turned to how to reshape mandates to fit with our own hard-won convictions and priorities.

However, trying to maintain academic writing and to support doctoral students' work became increasingly more difficult. Wading through directives that continued to become more numerous, complicated, time-consuming and undefined, we were often uncertain how to equip and empower our students to creatively meet their life goals and to thrive within their programs. Eventually, due to our college's reform agenda, our workloads became too heavy, and we experienced the *almost total demise* of our own well-constructed plans and once thriving projects. Denzin and Giardina (2014) explain that any research unaligned with the narrow scope of *evidence based research*—or those that cannot be appropriated by the corporate marketplace for profit—is often debunked. Critical thinking is devalued. As knowledge has become something of a commodity even within academic settings, those who wish to escape this imposition must intentionally step outside it. Doing so may entail a literal journey, a metaphorical journey, or a synthesis of both; but in any case, "stepping outside the academy" constitutes questioning academic assumptions and practices; stepping outside existing paradigms. Therefore, we stepped away from the ashes of what we had known, and to the extent that practicality would allow, retreated from our professional context with the new realization that our commitment to critical pedagogy would have to be enacted outside the Academy. Moving past obstructions to critical thinking, we sought what would help both ourselves and others to practice a critical pedagogy.

Having 60+ years in education among us, our work was our passion, our gateway to critical engagement with schools, students and faculty colleagues. Starting with our passion for change, it was not long before we embraced Chittister's (2003) understanding that "struggle is what forces

us to attend to the greater things in life, to begin again when life [our educational life] is at its barest for us, to take the seeds of the past and give them new growth," (p. 40).

It is our role as educators that defines our professional life. We have been educators in public schools, in undergraduate and graduate programs. We have been academics as well. We realize our responsibility to the propagation of academic thought. "…academics as engaged scholars can further the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope…" (Giroux, 2014, p. 53). Outside our space within the academy, inside the space of our critical pedagogy, we gave our voices freedom to speak.

Following our metaphorical and literal moments of "time away" from impositional "norms," we did indeed encounter emergent joy as we engaged in discussions that brought to light the critical processes in which we had engaged. Our journey became a matter of justice not only for our students, but also for ourselves. Through discussion, the three of us—two associate professors and one new faculty administrator—constructed guiding questions for our exploration of how we might critically reclaim our professional lives and field:

> 1.) What insights can be gleaned from our experiences with reform in higher education for teacher educators who are confined by "reform" oriented, outcome-based educational cultures?
>
> 2.) What might our own interior narratives—woven with the writing of others—tell us about which characteristics and practices can potentially inform a more holistic critical pedagogy?

Knowing that our intrinsic mountains were at least as formidable as the obstacles imposed upon our journey paths by extrinsic "reforms" and outcomes, we aligned our research queries with Huebner's (2008) assertion that the question educators need to ask is what gets in the way of "the journey of the self or soul" (p.402). However, in addition to focusing on obstacles that needed to be removed, we also revisited moments in which obstacles were reshaped or transcended. Our memory work centered on past interactions and practices that had yielded generative work involving critical thinking, pedagogy and problem-solving. Distanced from such moments over time, we were able to observe a connected practice and event that held promise for generating spaces for critical thinking in the midst of reform limitations.

Having routinely set up critical questions for students within our courses to explore, we "watched" in retrospect as they spoke and *wrote into* meaning, joy, and clarity within their lives and practice.[1] As we re-envisioned past practices, one moment yielded another, and it hit us: It is the *writing into* that makes the difference. In prayer, in work, in mental reframing, in students' lives, in disappointments, *writing into* can become a tool for alternately covering and uncovering with insight's healing rhythm. Key to generating spaces for our students' critical thinking, it would seem that *writing into* held the potential to aid faculty in promoting critical thinking, as well. Writing into issues fraught with limitations or chaotic imposition, we were better able to reconstruct our interior and exterior worlds.

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1. The phrase "writing into" differs from the expected "writing about" a topic because it describes finding your way through writing. When overwhelmed by affective concerns or life's complexity, writing is often not so much a tool used for description, but one that is used to uncover what is inside the heart. For us, this phrase describes something that is not only therapeutic in nature but that also generates new ideas and fresh dispositions—often simultaneously. It is empowering; an assertive act of diving into a situation, rather than avoiding it. It is safe, because it allows for privacy and processing as long as they are needed. The motivation for this practice is to effect change—even if that change is only within a writers' interior world. It is not meant to be a pretentious phrase, but a powerful one.

Committed to structuring our exploration as a collaborative auto ethnographic study, our *writing into* was propelled by the work of interactive interviews (Ellis, 2004), and inquiry through writing (Richardson, 2014). Through these acts of *writing*—and at times talking—*into*, we pinpointed possibilities for transcending well-worn mechanistic habits of mind by looking to our own experiences and the narrative work of others. Our sense of collaborative autoethnography was similar to that identified by Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2013) in that we sought to use our autobiographical experiences, individually and collectively to attempt to understand what was happening around us.

Each of us hit upon particular areas that promised fresh insights slated to better ground and equip us to critically reclaim humanizing characteristics within education. In doing so, we drew a great deal from writings focused on spirituality in education (Chittester, 2003; de Waal, 1993; Palmer, 1993, 2010), and utilized Palmer's (1993) now classic myth of objectivism as a springboard for generating narrative and constructing thematic insights. Stockbridge (2015) speaks to the role of spirituality and ethics through critical pedagogy when he identifies the theological roots that are found in the concepts of love, freedom and hope so often mentioned in the writings of critical pedagogues. "Our work of education for the mind and body are good to the extent to which they can bring us to transform this material world" (p.35). In the shadow of these writers, we found that we could construct spaces of critical thought and teaching with our students.

Leaning heavily on spirituality and art therapy, we noted the need for increased and new *spaces* from which to rebuild an integrative critical pedagogy and wrote into particular loss related happenings in order to reclaim new spaces for critical thinking. By doing so, we exposed a recurring pattern of connection between *the role of paradox* and *an integrative critical pedagogy*. Cited by de Waal (1993) as necessary for thinking through what is most meaningful in life, understanding life paradoxes requires "thinking with the heart"—a practice that potentially opens the way for creative problem-solving and healing justice. We embraced the notion that much that is generative, is born from struggle. As Chitteser (2003) explains, "To struggle is to begin to see the world differently…it requires an audacity we did not know we had…it leads to self-knowledge…tests our purity of heart and brings total metamorphosis" (p.19).

Speaking into the lives of individuals, Chitteser's (2003) words also resonated with the roots and the history of critical pedagogy, and they demonstrated the importance of "thinking through the heart" a component of an *integrative critical thinking* that has aided us in recognizing and removing distortions, which we came to know as an ongoing and foundational part of claiming just spaces for ourselves and others.

We have not constructed an autoethnography *primarily* concerned with physical, chronological events, or even memories. Rather, we have written our own stories of *integrative critical thinking.* In particular, our narrative portrays our processes and discoveries—our tales of interiority—that came to be through collaboratively interweaving our individual meaning making with the voices and wisdom writings of others.

Finding our way through Distortions

Over time, our visions for more holistic thinking and practice within education not only became more refined, but they also expanded as we uncovered edges we wished had been sharper and resources we wished we had not so often neglected. Analysis of our contexts in the light of accepted theory, or the presentation of well-developed rationales in support of justice are not enough to critically reclaim education. Buechner (1992) counsels that we are "to listen to our

lives," and by doing so we noted that for too long, educators in favor of critical theory and holistic education, have taught and reasoned as if the limitations pervasive mechanistic paradigms necessitated were acceptable. In an effort to appear reasonable, to be pragmatic, to work with what we have, our visions of holistic practices have often been reduced to "tweaking" within the confines of the status quo. However, distortions woven into the fabric of an entire field's identity, cannot be shaken off; but each thread must be pin pointed and gently removed, one-by-one.

Walking "reform's" treadmill of measurement and meetings, we wondered why reciprocal listening was so scarce, why scores on a page were held supreme. Why was it that thriving work, time, teaching and discovery were so tenaciously sacrificed at the altar of quantifiable score production? Measureable outcomes do not ensure that wider connections, deeper understandings, or meaningful commitments have been made. Contexts are important; listening is important. Recalling the work of Palmer (1993), we were reminded that "the root meaning of 'objective' is 'to put against, to oppose" (p.68). He explained that

> once the objectivist has "the facts," no listening is required, no other points of view are needed. The facts, after all, are the facts. All that remains is to bring others into conformity with the objective "truth"…By this view, we are not required to change so that the whole community might flourish; instead, the world must change to meet our needs. (p. 68)

Denzin (2015) demands that we should not be tolerant of the numbers dominated world and that critical inquirers must develop quality measures as moral criteria of what we do; we must "honor sound partisan work that offers knowledge-based critiques of social settings and institutions" (p.33). But how was this to be done? Listening to Palmer's (1993) words; listening with the ear of our hearts, we recognized our own recent experiences within higher education. The myth of objectivity loomed large, and we had been choking on it. Reformation, reform, reforming; who knew that it could be taken so literally?

 If, as Palmer (1993) noted, the oppressive danger inherent within objectivism is that it "tells the world what is rather than listening to what it says about itself" (p.69), what dangers are inherent within more integrative modes of thought? If our subjectivism is rooted in what Palmer (1993) defines as a "decision to listen to no one except ourselves" (p.67), its results would be little different than those perpetuated by the myth of objectivity. Both modes are potentially heavy with distortion; yet, Palmer's (1993) work also hints at possible paradox—integrative thought that originates in *both the personal and the public*. He emphasized that is possible for "personal modes" of knowing or subjective research to be "subject" to the truth of the content or situation studied.

Particular topics call us to face particular realities about the world that are outside of ourselves. Therefore, our private, interior journeys can be challenged by the realities, problems and possibilities attached to the subject or context at hand. In addition, personal modes of knowing should also be subject to the checks and balances of community and collaborative interactions. It is this type of knowing that calls us back into service—to students, to communities, the field, and even to ourselves. It is in honoring the realities of content and lived contexts that equating education solely with world measurement, is replaced by a relational discipline devoted to understanding the world. *Looking to the truth situated within contextual realities or subject matter studied and making a way for it; checking our thinking through collaborative interactions; acknowledging the bigger picture of paradoxical possibilities and truth that is larger than ourselves is a place to start*—an echo of Denzin's call for moral criteria, a flexible framework from which to move—in our ongoing construction of a more integrative critical pedagogy. *Writing into* our own and the

wisdom narratives of others, we developed the above criteria to promote what Denzin (2015) calls a safe space "where writers, teachers, and students are willing to take risks, to move back and forth between the personal and the political, the biographical and the historical" (p. 46).

Constructing such a place, we found, requires recognizing some of the soul wounds around us and then attending to our own. Far from the proverbial exercise in "navel gazing," this awareness is key for removing obstacles within our educational journeys. Palmer is often quoted for his assertion that "we teach who we are"; if this is true, then attention to "soul wounds" is essential for critical thinking and pedagogy, for promoting healing justice.

Soul Wounds: Removing Obstacles to Reclaiming Critical Pedagogy

Silenced and injured, we saw our everyday work reconfigured in ways that we feared harmed our preservice teachers, our classroom teacher partners, and the children they taught. We were directed to step away from research, position ourselves as secondary to practitioner instructors, and relieve ourselves of being in schools where we had become fixtures. Where we once had been collaboratively involved with teachers/principals/central office administrators, we were asked to step away. The directive was to "listen to our constituents" and re-order the teacher preparation program with ideas that contradicted the professional standards and best practices that drove our previous methods for meeting needs of diverse body of students across content areas in our region. Practices challenged our very core values.

In their recent work on "Soul Repair" with veterans recovering from moral injury after war, Brock and Lettini (2012) explain that moral injury occurs not only from our own actions but also by "seeing someone else violate core moral values or feeling betrayed by the person in authority requiring such actions…that can lead to a loss of meaning" (p. xv). The cumulative effect of the injury reaches to the very depths of our soul. When our core moral values are continuously violated, we suffer moral injury which Brock and Lettini (2012) define as a "violation of core moral beliefs" (p. xv). As educators, we have deep moral convictions concerning the value of each person. Thus, when our work with future educators was reduced to random numerical reports on a series of meaningless tasks, we struggled to respond to the requirement. It was particularly odious when it separated students into two groups—the successful and the unsuccessful. We could not throw away students who could become competent caring teachers for the children in our community.

To heal moral injury, according to Brock and Lettiner (2012), requires particular attention to address the guilt associated with violating core moral beliefs even in response to orders by those in authority. Recovery among some war veterans seems to be helped by talking with others who have similar experiences. To begin the process of healing from moral injury, according to veterans' stories shared by Brock and Lettiner (2012), the injured must have places to talk with others sharing similar horrific experiences; they need friendships with veterans to connect with war and friendships with civilians to connect with return to community; those willing to engage in friendship with the morally injured must be willing to do "deep listening" to stories they find uncomfortable; they need to regain a sense of life purpose and meaningful service in the larger community. The recovery from moral injury is not only with the individual, but also with families, communities, and societies as we all seek to regain a sense of moral conscience.

It follows, then, that educators who have received injuries within the same vein must also receive some healing and cleansing to restore the wholeness in relationships with students and teachers harmed by separation from a nurturing educative school experience. These may include

cleansing through forgiving relationships, links to the richness of mentored professional relations, telling the story of the pain and injury, and growing into renewed hope for education that recognizes the strengths of students and nurtures that growth over time. Starting with ourselves through the practice of writing into and interactive interviews, we see the possibility of integrating such practices work with students. Whether outside or within the academy, assignments can be structured for personal and collaborative storytelling. Mentoring and nurture can take place. Moving into a space for gleaning insights on what it means to generate an integrative critical pedagogy, this brings us hope.

Generating an Integrative Critical Pedagogy

Writing into what it means to construct an integrative critical pedagogy, we noted overall dispositions and habits of mind that seemed to hold the potential for equipping marginalized students and faculty towards safe and generative spaces for thinking, validation and growth. The practical realities attached to the quest for safe spaces was well-described by Palmer (1993), when he explained that—

> Space may sound like a vague, poetic metaphor until we realize that it describes experiences of everyday life. We know what it means to be in a green and open field; we know what it means to be on crowded rush-hour bus. On the crowded bus we lack space to breathe and think and be ourselves. But in an open field, we open up too; ideas and feelings arise within us; knowledge comes out of hiding…These experiences of physical space have parallels in our relations with others…To be in a class where the teacher stuffs our minds with information, organizes it with finality, insists on having the answers while being utterly uninterested in our views, and forces us into a grim competition for grades—to sit in such a class is to experience a lack of space for learning. But to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn…is to know the power of a learning space. (pp.70-71)

To create space for learning, or "openness," we need to "to remove the impediments to learning that we find around and within us" (p.71) and to equip students (or, as the case may be, faculty) with the room and respect to do the same. Palmer's description resonated with our experiences. It was multi-leveled, in that it acknowledged the power of physical openness and interior worlds, exterior input and our interactions among the three. All are necessary. While some cannot function well, if at all, within impositional environments that ignore identity and affective realities, others will continue to produce what is required. However, even when outward products or scores are satisfactory or even improved through instruction rooted in outcome-based, numerical assessments, the power of learning spaces within those environments and individuals is diminished. In integrative critical pedagogies, knowledge is represented by multiple ways of knowing, listening with the ear of the heart—context, connection and identity—the thinking and learning that cannot be easily measured is necessary if what is more readily measured is to have a larger meaning. Krikorian (2015) identifies the sense of personhood, being reduced to a mere number, such as standardized test scores, diminishes what alternative indicators might project for student potential. Critical pedagogical strategies take into account the affective and varying ways of knowing.

Carving out safe environments (both within and without) is one part of creating learning spaces, but so, too, is validation. Ignoring identity and affective realties lead to walls that marginalize. With impediments from within torn down, what is best within individuals and the learning community needs recognition and nurture. Awareness—being subject to the realities within individuals and a community—requires ongoing construction. Learning to look at the world and at each other in new and inventive ways is key. It equips us to remove the walls that marginalize and to pull disenfranchised parts of self and others into the center, allowing insights, intelligences and ways of knowing most often neglected within school contexts often come to light. Experiencing validation and sharing it with others became evident in each of our space-making narratives.

Following are three narratives, one representing each of the authors, yet possible due to our interactive writing and interviews. Moving past reform-inflicted wounds, each narrative embodies insights regarding ways to live out an integrative critical pedagogy within higher education reform. Writing into a hope of space for integrative critical pedagogy, each story points to contextualized, yet potentially transferable choices and strategies that have led us to validating spaces. While some possibilities for space and critical pedagogy require leaving one setting behind in favor of another, others highlight potential ways of reclaiming integrative critical practices within technocratic arenas.

Making Space for Critical Pedagogy through Reclaiming Passion—Reese's Story

For me (Reese), after years in elementary and middle schools, I knew that preparing K-6 teachers encompassed teaching and learning in the classroom plus extended engagement in the community. So when I experienced a tightening of programmatic parameters and diverting resources away from graduate programs in the name of reform in the university setting, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the new focus. The reforms separated me from interactions with my students in schools, community events, and museum education. Suffocating assessments and prescribed lesson presentations meant we could no longer participate in meaningful work such as partnering with classroom teachers to provide enrichment activities (i.e. giant floor maps in schools), act as assistant directors in school programs, or sponsor coat drives for children in our field-placement schools.

Losing the link between academic teacher preparation at the university and community action tore at the very core of my values as an educator. How could our future teachers learn to take care of our children when we could not show them how permeable the spaces between school and community really are in the lives of children? How would they understand and respect the cultural richness the children brought to the schoolhouse if they only focused on test scores? Where would they find their own voice to listen to children? I tried to bridge that chasm for several semesters until I finally understood I could not alter the path of the oncoming freight train of the reform "revolution." I left the academy, and, from a distance, tried to shepherd a few more students through the process to graduation and certification. I did not realize at the time how much I had been wounded by the constant hammering at the very core of my being. I left the academy, not seeking a new position, but taking time to regain my enthusiasm for teaching and learning.

Personal healing began with the opportunity to develop curriculum in relationship with valued museum colleagues. Grant funding with the Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center opened space for me to prepare curriculum to engage in-service teachers in building meaningful links between state history standards and Native American contributions to our state. Over the course of a year, museum colleagues and I created a series of lessons to accompany traveling

trunks of information and hands-on artifacts. In the beginning of our work together, the museum director showed me materials someone else had created for them with the comment, "We cannot use any of this; it does not match the story we want to tell at the museum." I took that as a challenge and vowed to create materials that honored the rich heritage of the Comanche people. Resources also had to make sense to non-indigenous educators, if they were to be useful in communicating the Comanche story. Two comments affirmed for me that I was meeting the challenge:

> **Museum exhibit curator**: "May I use some of your materials in our exhibits at the museum? May I include your introduction about spatial learning in the grant report?"

> **Teacher Participant Evaluations (Summer Institute)**: a) "Being able to see history as a living and breathing object helps teachers realize the importance of teaching the history of Native Americans. Seeing how important the Comanche people were and ARE to our country helps show us that we need to really add better curriculum to teach about the Comanche people then and now." b) "PERSPECTIVE is so IMPORTANT! Why do we teach history from one viewpoint when we could use another perspective, such as the perspective from the Comanche people?"

Establishing trust for working together grew slowly over time as stories of broken partnerships were shared. Not only did we need to speak and listen respectfully, but as a non-Indian educator, I also needed to treat the stories and traditions as gifts entrusted to me. In a non-material, oral tradition culture, the stories, songs, and dances honoring heroes are repeated with great accuracy over time and are treasures of great value. The People taught me about traditions and gently guided me through some pivotal experiences that I could then share with eighteen teachers in a 3-day summer institute. It was an opportunity to reconnect with my passion for teaching by negotiating the historical chasm of cultural differences and promoting respect and appreciation for the contributions of the Native American culture. That would benefit children in our K-12 classrooms.

In planning for the workshop, I prepared materials and proposed a flexible schedule to respond to participants' knowledge and experiences. I wanted to tap into the excitement of teaching and learning, beginning with some open-ended interactive learning activities, small group sharing, general exploration of the museum space, and then focusing on geography/history content. Museum partners were very uncomfortable with such a format. They wanted to begin with a presentation of the history of the People followed by the expectations of what teachers should learn from the workshop. They did not want to spend time with teachers working through the lessons and investigating resources on their own between presentations. That was not their way of learning. I intentionally stepped back from my plan out of respect for my colleagues. Their history already had enough white privilege. The program began with a lecture and video presentation, followed by a short supper time, and then another presentation. Limited interaction among participants occurred as they sat in rows at small tables. The following day was spent as a field trip around the area on a bus with tour guides. The hour dedicated to teacher workshop activity that was supposed to develop the link between field experiences and classroom learning activities lasted less than 30 minutes. I was frustrated with the lack of interaction that I know is critical for bridging gaps among cultural groups.

Our differences in expectations reflected issues found in other educational environments seeking tight control of particular content rather than a more dynamic learning structure allowing for an exchange of curricular applications among professionals. The evidence of a well-organized

workshop, according to the partners, included structured, measureable benchmarks of time and space/place that avoided any potential messiness of figuring things out. Perhaps it emerged from a concern that participants would not draw the right conclusions as they made sense of the immersion experience. The many previous failed efforts to bridge the cultural differences may have served as reminders of broken trust and misunderstood traditions. The cross cultural conversations offered rich learning opportunities and according to group interaction theory, (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), the way we get past group stereotypes is by building relationships with individuals within that particular group. From that experience, new perspectives on the whole group are more likely to emerge.

We had engaged in a truth-telling experience through an ongoing construction of looking at each other in new and inventive ways. Non-native participants walked away with deeper understanding of indigenous people and the stories of their contributions to state history.

At the end of the institute, the Comanche museum educators gave me a shawl to wear at the summer tribal powwow and I was invited into the dance arena to give a gift from our teachers to the tribe. It was a powerful, humbling, emotional experience for me and one that participants clearly understood. My follow up conversations with teachers and museum colleagues confirm that what they saw from our Comanche colleagues spoke louder than a re-structured institute program might have said. Respect, honor, trust are enduring core values and can be nurtured among educators in community settings beyond the academy. It took time and my own immersion into a gentler, grounded Comanche space to recover from the moral injury received in the academy. As one of the Comanche elders told me, "Take time to meditate." She was right.

Reclaiming Historical Contexts as Space for Critical Possibilities—Peggie's Story

Writing into our history, I seek spaces for promoting and walking out an integrative critical pedagogy. I have been a part of our college for almost two decades. In my department, I am one of the senior-most remaining faculty members. Sally, and then Reese came to us in a period of expansion in which their ideas and philosophies about teaching and learning were most welcomed. Along with a large group of others who have since left, we evolved into a collaborative, interactive, intellectually inquisitive team that co-constructed undergraduate and graduate courses, regenerated programs, researched our work, presented at conferences, and offered up our research in journal articles. We created history together. We were encouraged to engage in our individual and collective educational passions. Whether it was engaging in the work of professional development schools, developing writing groups with middle school girls, creating lessons and preservice teacher teaching experiences with traveling maps, we felt comfortable offering our time and energy to something we loved to do. It was our own golden age of professional participation. For at least a decade we enjoyed academic freedom and the collective joy of coming to work with people we truly admired.

With administrative change, we suddenly found ourselves facing something that none of us had ever considered; a loss of our ability to utilize our creative talents with those we most wanted to reach and teach. Our world was literally turned upside down when a new dean was hired. What came next was a complete dismantling of our approaches to working with and in the schools. Our research agendas were put on the back burner while we reorganized our college into an image of Chrysler Motors through mindless meetings in which we had no voice in the outcome.

As educators, we had never experienced a leader who was from the corporate world. In our college, most of us were K-12 educators in our former lives. We had over a century of public

school experience. Our experiential knowledge in teaching and in the public schools of our community was vast. Suddenly what we had done in the past was not only devalued, it was denigrated. We were told that our professional time was to be spent on a "vision" that had been determined for us. Year 1, nine major initiatives mandated by the new Dean. Year 2, four new initiatives added to the list. Year 3, three more. I often equated the situation as reminiscent of the circus performer whose act was spinning multiple plates on sticks in the air. As soon as one plate started to falter, the performer had to run to it and get it equalized before running to the next. Plates on sticks in the air need constant maintenance. So also do mandated initiatives in a college of education. We were constantly dividing our research and service time to maintaining imaginary plates on sticks! As I assumed the position of department chair, I saw a veritable change in the demeanor of the faculty. Soon, as faculty discovered that they could no longer pursue their professional interests, office doors which had once been open and inviting, were now closed and the offices empty. As I wander the halls and remember the laughter and the joy, I am struck by the loss. My colleagues and friends are gone. Their contributions are not only forgotten, but are buried under mounds of useless data that had to be collected as measures of accountability. Data that is meaningless in that it shows nothing of the true teaching and learning that is generated by true academics and their students. We became invisible as curriculum theorists, critical pedagogists, critical researchers, and teacher educators. Cannella and Lincoln (2009) give light to the narrowing of scholarship and the corporatization of knowledge as an eradication of critical pedagogy and qualitative research. "Scholarship in higher education must actively work to counter corporatization of knowledge from within by challenging controlling, narrow discourse of accountability, quality, and excellence" (p. 62). One of my friends and colleagues has chosen to do this outside the realm of the academy, while another is connected through online delivery. Their gain is my loss. Chittister (2015) brings the "joy" of loss into a realistic space for me. "Loss is not loss. It is simply the invitation to find the more of ourselves that is waiting to become the rest of ourselves" (p. 105). While our journeys and space making differ, we are each committed to stepping off a technocratic mill and into freer spaces. We can promote an integrative critical pedagogy when we make spaces for our voices to be heard—whether that space is within or outside of the academy.

Redeeming the Time: Writing into Integrative Critical Thinking with Choral Reading—Sally's Story

Most of my teacher-life has been spent equipping both myself (Sally) and my students to remove the lies that tangle our journeys and to replace them with truth. Reading Huebner's (1993) assertion that the question educators needed to deal with involved "What gets in the way of the soul's journey?" was like arriving home for me. Writing into the question of what has impeded my own journey, the practice of a more integrative critical theory, I arrive at a space where I want the time back—what has been lost re-forming my context into its outcomes based image. I want to redeem the time lost to technocratic duties, to activity that I do not value as "real." Recalling where I was when I first met higher education re-forming, I think of what those close to me were experiencing at the time. My home was a lesson in juxtaposition.

In spite of the record keeping, the bureaucracy, the personality conflicts, the observable pain and insipid waste woven into his daily existence, as an addictions counselor, my husband enjoyed what he did. *It was real.* The joy of it was clear, not shadow-hidden or sleepy blanketed; but bubbling from within, spilling into the lives of others. Smiling through the remembering, I

write into this moment, looking for clues— for real questions—leading back to forgotten work, to hidden spaces.

Program *Re*-form: A Choral Reading Re-visited

Hours, days, weeks are gobbled ravenously by the business of reforming.
We are one committee training to critique program plans;
Shape shifting definitions—just eluding our grasp…
In two afternoons
—Around a conference table—
I ask: What *is* an **acceptable** *distinctive trademark*?
"How can you stand this?" my friend whispers. Five hours, ten hours training;
In two afternoons
—With circular logic and errant formulas—
I am answered: "We don't know, yet; but programs *have got* to get them *right*!
No one notices—a ten hour trip down a rabbit hole.
Reformation, reform, reforming; can we redeem this time?

Retreating from this place and stepping back into life, time related themes seemed to meet me at every corner.

Redeeming the Time, or Anyone in the Market for a Tessaract?

Sally: Walking through the halls of a first grade museum field trip, I am struck by a prairie painting. A vicious grey twister curving near an abandoned farm house strikes a momentary pose for the painter's imagination. Wound around its funnel are several brightly colored wrist watches—unexpected time pieces—or pieces of time?

Wisdom Seeker 1: In *Walking on Water*, Madeleine L'Engle explains that one word could not encapsulate the meaning of time for the Ancient Greeks. *Chronos* time, which conceptualizes time as we know it, was the word they used for ordinary, measureable, passing days and moments: time as it is registered in a calendar or on a clock. Whereas, *Kairos* was the word they used to describe a part of the nature of time that cannot be measured. As L'Engle (2001) explains, "real time" or "God's time," known as kairos, is

> That time which breaks through chronos with a shock of joy, that time we do not recognize while we are experiencing it, but only afterwards, because kairos has nothing to do chronological time. In kairos we are completely unselfconscious, and yet paradoxically far more real than we can ever be when we're constantly checking our watches for chronological time. (p. 109)

Sally: Watching my son flying across a soccer field, kicking the ball with focused earnest, *his* moment of real time becomes my own…In researching our memories, in artful play, we move beyond ourselves to a sometimes-redemption of moments lost to chronos.

Our *writing into* those moments when we recall joy—points when kairos time broke into everyday realities, offers hope and direction. Environments laden with imposition and restricted by a *measured* linearity, leave little space for creativity or the disruptions of wristwatch spiraling. While initial anger can motivate, a long-term bitterness is stultifying. Recalling those moments when joy broke through, I glean what I can to inform new habits of mind—both for myself and my pedagogy. Awakened by my museum trip, observations that would yield validation in later moments, spoke once again of listening to our lives. Watching my son run within and into moments of joy, both of us were absorbed by what was larger than ourselves. As I write into these realities, into the truth that Kairos can be controlled, I also write into paradoxes—key to my holistic thinking about thinking. In order to make spaces, I must fill them—fill them with what is real, with what calls to my life. In order to save time, I must sacrifice it. Time set aside to serve with joy, to rest, to focus on what is larger, makes space for removing "what obstructs the soul," for thinking with a holistic clarity—even at times—for a Kairos disruption. It stirs the soul with its juxtaposition of technocratic schooling and integrative knowing. Empowered by these spaces, I can better evaluate my contexts and teach my students to do the same. No matter how much time is demanded, no matter how much space is filled with outcome-based demands, I must creatively recognize it for what it is and remove what I can as I work for change. "Do not despise small beginnings" I have been told. Healing justice and clear thinking now have a place to thrive. The smallest space filled with joy, shocked by Kairos, has amazing powers of expansion. In the midst of outcome-based requirements, I provide choices, validation through feedback, and questions focused on listening to subject at hand. In the midst of outcome-based requirements, we engage in collaborative work with space for differing voices. In the midst of outcome-based requirements, there are grace periods for time redemption, for space making. In the midst of outcome-based requirements, we write into; we listen. And listening, I know whether to step away and build something new, or to generate new spaces where I am.

Conclusion: Experiencing Joy in Creating the Space for Critical Pedagogical Growth

We have known each other for well over a decade. Collectively we have experienced both professional and personal triumphs, defeats, and deaths. While "spatially" we are apart, our thoughts are cognitively intertwined. We have watched how Reese has been renewed and overjoyed by her work with the Comanche people. How she has shared her own critical pedagogical understanding of a way of life and knowledge of nature that otherwise would have been left unseen/unheard by countless school children and adults; opening their lives to new understandings. We have witnessed how through bi-weekly volunteer work, Sally has regained her passion for educational possibilities by working with children and teachers in a diverse school setting that potentially critically challenges reform mentalities by allowing for spaces for genuine teaching and learning. Although still heavily ensconced in reform mandates through online teaching, programmatic tasks and committee work, she is physically removed. While retired, Reese is still connected to the lives and work of her colleagues. However, their physical distance from the day-to-day pounding of the measurement, objectivist gavel has given them the space to acknowledge that our lives as educators are not worthless. They are transformed by hope. At the same time, by making spaces to connect with hopeful enterprises and relationships that are alive and real, Peggie has gained the insights and stamina necessary to continue in her journey towards an integrative critical pedagogy.

> The important things in life, one way or another, all leave us marked and scarred. We call it memory. We never stop remembering our triumphs. We never stop regretting our losses. Some of them threaten to mark us with bitterness unless we tend to those wounds. But all of them can, if we will allow them, mark us with wisdom. (Chittister 2003, p. 102)

Devoid of time spent attending to integrative instruction, wisdom narratives, and writing into paradox—currently marginalized ways of knowing and being inside the Academy—there is little possibility that critical thinking will flourish. Far from being a reductionist formula or product, critical thinking and pedagogy emerge from human beings and the tangled, yet beautiful mess of their subjectivities. Listening to our lives, we write into our stories and the wisdom narratives that have informed them. We recognize wounds, attend to healing, and make spaces within restrictive environments. By doing so, we integrate life back into the meaning and purposes of critical pedagogy. Hopeful, we encourage others to do the same.

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