

Teaching and Time: Foundations of a Temporal Pedagogy

By Clifford Mayes

Introduction

Most federal reform agendas over the past two decades have echoed the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report that “the basic purposes of schooling” are to reestablish America’s “once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation.” Such pronouncements pound home the political message that the primary function of schooling must be the corporate goal of “educating the worker-citizen” (Spring, 1976). By this view, the only type of “intelligence” that matters is what can be psychometrically evaluated and managed to produce efficient and uncritical agents of the transnational, corporate capitalist project of creating and dominating markets (Giddens, 1990).

In this article, I will discuss this agenda as a world-historical project of “temporal colonization” that has grievous educational consequences. By “temporal colonization” I mean the imposition of a particular model of time to the exclusion of all others. This hegemonic time (I will call it “corporate time”) being strictly linear, impersonal, and mathematically manageable, is the ideal medium for maximizing productivity and profit. It is the same type which, beginning in the early 20th century, informed the social efficiency experts’ vision of public schools as streamlined extensions of the industrial capitalist state (Kliebard, 1986). When corporate time is the *only* time that is considered legitimate, then other experi-

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ences and embodiments of time come to be seen as threatening, even deviant. Such pathologizing of non-standard time has had a wide range of negative effects on the theory and practice of psychotherapy (Slife, 1993). I will discuss parallel effects in education, where students whose worldviews rest upon alternative temporal commitments become “problems” to be “reeducated and cured” by the very educational means that often created the problems in the first place (Foucault, 1980; Jeanierre, 1977; Ricoeur, 1976). Finally, I will discuss how teachers and students can resist these negative effects in the classroom through constructing, sharing, and enacting life-narratives that embody alternative visions and projects of psychological, cultural, and transcendent time.

A Brief History of (Commodified) Time

Most historians of Western conceptions of time agree that three interrelated phenomena were especially important in the growth of the modern obsession with mathematical, impersonal time: The emergence of capitalism in the 14th century, the growth of towns, and the invention of the mechanical clock (Aguessy, 1977; Boorstin, 1985; Whitrow, 1988). The rise of guilds signaled the emergence of early capitalism in Europe (Marx, 1976). At the same time villages, growing larger and more complex in their means and relations of production, were supplanted by towns, some of which would soon become the great industrial centers of Europe (Gurevich, 1976). And it was the clock — created in this proto-industrial context — that, perhaps more than any other single invention, best symbolized and advanced early capitalism (Whitrow, 1988).

The clock’s effects were immediate and dramatic. It measured (and in measuring, radically changed) the *lived* experience of “passage.” The clock was a teacher. “For generations, the town clock was the one complicated machine that hundreds of thousands saw every day, heard over and over again every day and night. It taught them that invisible, inaudible, seamless time was composed of quanta. Like money, it taught them quantification” (Crosby, 1997, p. 85). The varied patterns and purposes of agrarian life — vegetative, biological, familial, cultural, and mythic — began to yield to mechanical time, “parsing experience by novel grammars of measurement” (Boorstin, 1985, p. 369).

The need for making more precise and standardized measurements of bodies and surfaces, space and time, began to be felt. Merchants needed to be able to cover the distance between trading centers more quickly. Entrepreneurs were anxious to produce as much as possible within a given time and to increase the length of working hours; small craftsmen and workmen were interested in seeing that the hours of work were precisely measured. (Gurevich, 1976, pp. 240-241)

Little surprise, then, that from its advent in the early 1300s until the 17th century, no technology spread as fast as the clock (Nowotny, 1989).

The clock was inaugurating not only a new political and economic order but a

cosmological one, and it would find full expression in the Enlightenment notion that *the universe is itself a clock* (Crosby, 1997). The almost religious devotion to this image culminated in Galilean celestial mechanics and Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, where Newton made the astonishing assertion that there exists *only one kind of time* — and that it flows “of itself, and from its own nature . . . , equably without relation to anything external.” Thus hypostatized, mathematical time could now also be controlled as the independent variable t_r , whose derivatives, differentials, and integrals would, through the wonders of analytical geometry, light industrialists the bright path to maximum efficiency and profit. The clock was king. His edicts came forth in the new language of the calculus.

While giving due credit to the many undoubtedly useful innovations enabled by industrial models of time, Nowotny (1989) also reminds us of the heavy toll its hegemony has exacted: the erasure of other ways of knowing and telling time (Ermarth, 1992, p. 6). All of this makes of time much more than just a question about the periodicity of subatomic particles. It *is* that, of course, but it is also a political issue. “With the responsibility for measuring time passing to the State, the State [begins] to proclaim its time as the only true time and impose it on all its subjects” (Gurevich, 1976, pp. 242-243).

Enter *A Nation at Risk*, *Goals 2000*, and *No Child Left Behind* with their systems-engineering approach to structuring schools, cybernetic models of mind, mathematical paradigms of assessment, and expansionist agendas — in short, their full curricular apparatus for exterminating alternative ways of seeing and being in time.

Types of Time

Although my focus in this article is on autobiographical, culturo-historical, and spiritual time, I am making these divisions only for interpretive purposes. Isolating strands of time should not blind us to its *actual* nature not as an “analytical minimum” but as a “spiritual maximum” (Ricoeur; 1976, p. 13).

One of the best known parsings of time is Fraser's (1981) image of five concentric circles. Beginning with the outermost circle, *nootemporality* refers to our ability to use language, the arts, and artifacts to narratively transform our experience. This is subjectively lived time. *Biotemporality* refers to our various biological rhythms and sensations in a pre-thematic present (Fischer, 1981). *Eotemporality* is the time of “the massive aggregates of matter, the astronomical world of galaxies” (Fraser, 1981, p. xxxii). *Prototemporality* references the often “fuzzy” nature of matter and energy at the atomic and subatomic levels, where “Nature so conspires that . . . temporal positions in the atomic world may be known only in statistical, probabilistic terms” (p. xxxiv). Finally, *atemporality* is the “absolute elsewhere” of the General Theory of Relativity. It is the Buddhistic realm of the Great Void (*sunyata*), where, “above time,” according to Vedantic philoso-

phy, “has been placed a vessel full to overflowing.” This vessel of atemporal transcendence overflows with watery time (Pannikar, 1976, p. 63).

In another approach, Marie-Louise von Franz (1978) has represented time as four concentric circles, with the outermost circle being *ego time* (daily individual and communal life); then *aeonic time* (stellar configurations); next *illud tempus* (“once upon a time,” when the mythic heroes founded the society); and finally the sacred meta-time of *the timeless center*.

Time I: Autobiographical Time

According to Gadamer (1977) there have basically been two major time traditions in the West: The Augustinian/Kantian one, in which the “‘Numbered Presents’ [are] referred to only in the context of the inner dimension of consciousness, i.e., of the inner life . . . ;” and the Aristotelian/Newtonian tradition, in which time is simply an external “parameter for the measurement of motion” (p. 42; Benjamin, 1981; Castoriadis, 1991). The Newtonian tradition governs much of the theory and practice in education despite the fact, amply demonstrated by conceptual-change researchers over the last two decades, that deep changes in a student involve her existential identity as matters of “hot” and highly subjective, not “cold” and dispassionately analytical, cognition (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993). For time is “a feeling before it is an abstraction. From the very inception of mental life, time and emotion are closely intermingled” (Arlow, 1989, p. 85; Cohen, 1991; Merloo, 1981).

Heidegger (1993) insisted that humans, whom he calls *Dasein*, stand out from all other existents because *Dasein* “does not simply occur among other beings. Rather, this being is concerned *about* its very being” (p. 54). This *focus* of *Dasein*’s concern, “the meaning of that Being we call *Dasein*, proves to be temporality” (p. 61). For *Dasein* is the being that is aware of the certainty of its death. Thus, *Dasein* creates meaning by making stories about itself that meld past, present and future. *Dasein*’s memories and expectations, coalescing in its present consciousness, determine both *Dasein*’s governing narratives and phenomenological horizons (see also Barrett, 1967). Clearly, such “inner time . . . cannot be adequately segmented into equal units without doing violence to its intrinsic articulation” (Luckman, 1991, p. 154). It is precisely this violence that corporate education inflicts.

The Student’s and Teacher’s Autobiographical Time

Eisner (1985) characterized autobiographically narrative approaches to education as *self-actualization curricula*, for they grew out of the humanistic/existentialist psychologies of the 1950s and 1960s with their pedagogical project of “[caring] for the child, that is, [enjoying] him and his growth and self-actualization” (Maslow, 1968, p. 693). This ideal is best exemplified by the curriculum theory of Maxine Greene (1975), who said that education should offer the student the “possibility for him as an existing person [to make] sense of his own life-world [by providing]

occasions for ordering the materials of that world, for imposing ‘configurations’ by means of experiences and perspectives made available for personally conducted cognitive action” (p. 299). Such curricula “remind us of what it means for an individual to be present to himself [and] suggest to us the origins of significant quests for meaning” (p. 314).

For Greene, the best way to promote the student’s narrative self-construction is through deep engagement with works of art. Ideally, the phenomenological intensity of creativity will also guide the teacher and students as they narratively redefine, and thus reclaim, their lives. Before reconstructing their worlds, however, they must first deconstruct them, exploding the comfortable emotional geometries of daily existence. This aesthetic project of perspectival rupture followed by reconstruction underlay cubist painting, which explains Greene’s call for a “Cubist curriculum.” Although virtually any subject matter has the potential of stimulating autobiographical exploration, Greene focuses on arts-based curricula.

A 36-year-old art teacher who had taught high school for 12 years told me how she helps students not only survive autobiographical ruptures but use them artistically for psychic growth:

Art allows me to get to a more personal level with my kids because sometimes they are using their paintings as therapy — to get through a hard time, or to deal with a past experience, or even try to understand some fear about their future. They don’t even realize why they are doing certain pictures or certain sculptures a certain way. And you get to really know the kids deep down. Sometimes you live with them from crisis to crisis, and you’re trying to put them back together. Sometimes it’s just crazy, but it’s also so wonderful to see them respond to you, to see them find ways to put all the shattered pieces of their lives back together again in new patterns. A light goes on inside them: “Oh, I think I see!” And suddenly their life makes sense to them again — but in a different way, a different story! It’s a wonderful thing to be part of!

In a recent study (Mayes, 2003b) I interviewed a master-teacher named Christy Ann, a 60-year-old woman who had taught for 35 years. Reflecting on some of the most significant moments and issues in her career, she frequently spoke of helping her students autobiographically (re)construct their lives through the study of literature:

I found a job teaching at a boy’s school in Hawaii. I taught lower SES (socio-economic strata) kids I was a “haole” — a white woman — in an all-boy’s school with mostly male teachers This was a group of boys that liked me. They opened up their hearts to me and as a result I was able to just move into that space Mine was a very inviting classroom because the school was run by strict Catholic monks and I provided opportunities for them to speak and perform and display their poetry, etc. I taught literature and creative writing, and because of the Polynesian cultural tendency to want to take flights of fancy and “talk story,” they were very grateful to me for the opportunity to really get into the literature. They would draw illustrations and write poems about it I arranged for them to be on

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television, their works were published, and we won a national award for our little poetry magazine . . . I got great pleasure playing the role of the one who releases them from their captivity. Of course, it all fit into my 60s stuff as well — you know, at Berkeley. “Power to the people!” I mean, boys who had a 200-word vocabulary (I’m not exaggerating!) found their own personal voices through poetry . . . They understood the poems, and when they would get up to present them to the class (and remember, they had fathers who had given up and were fishermen and just sat around and stared and drank) it had great meaning for them . . . (Mayes, 2003b, p. 91)

Christy Ann spoke of using an archetypal narrative — the myth of the Holy Grail along with the Monte Python spoof — to help her students examine and amplify their own personal narratives. This is consistent with Feinstein and Krippner’s (1998) use of mythic narratives as a tool for introspection, reframing, and growth. “We had a fabulous time with [the movie]. We had discussions about their own beliefs and how they are knights too, and what their grail quest was, all from a mythical point of view: who they were, who they wanted to be, how they planned to accomplish it” (Mayes, 2003b, p. 93).

Equally as important as the student’s autobiographical time is the teacher’s. The growing teacher reflectivity movement over the last two decades has encouraged both prospective and practicing teachers to reflect deeply about the personal forces that have led them to teaching, that shape how they currently teach, and that inform their vision of how they would like to develop as teachers (Mayes, 1998, 2003a). This movement arose as a response to the depersonalization of technist, competency-based approaches to teacher education, which, as Ginsburg (1988) has argued, promote behaviorist, corporate agendas. In that context, preservice teachers reproduce a package of predetermined skills in the “correct” manner and sequence. Such “technical rationality” obviously militates against autobiographical richness (Schön, 1987). However, these types of teacher education predominate in the U.S. today (Bullough, Patterson, & Mayes, 2002).

A few examples of the kinds of questions that prospective and practicing teachers ask themselves in autobiographical reflectivity are: *What psychological dynamics (i.e., personal needs, hurts, hopes, abilities, and fears) were involved in my decision to become a teacher in the first place? (How) are these dynamics and needs getting addressed and expressed in my classroom? Are they changing as I develop as a teacher? Are they benefiting me and my students — or are they ever destructive or inappropriate? What can I do to cultivate the conditions that enrich my professional autobiographical narrative? What can I do to resist and change the conditions that impoverish it? How might all of this work to shape my practice five years from now? Ten years? What forces stand in the way of attaining my ideal of myself as a teacher? What can I do about it, individually and with others?* (Mayes, 1998, 2001).

Autobiographical reflectivity can occur as journal work, dyadic encounter, group encounter, reflective seminars, contemplative exercises, artistic creation, reading circles, in-services, retreats, and various other individual and group

activities. I have done this with undergraduate teacher education students (Mayes, 1998; Valli, 1993) and graduates in educational leadership (Mayes & Blackwell-Mayes, 2002b). These are but a few of the many different ways that teachers at any stage in their careers can proclaim and reclaim their autobiographical time, thereby resisting corporate temporal colonization.

Time II: Culturo-Historical Time

In our increasingly racially and ethnically diverse society, it is crucial that educationists increase their sensitivity to differential approaches to time, for time is “an essential component of social consciousness” (Gurevich, 1976, p. 229). Indeed, cultures understand themselves narratively in myths, chronicles, and exempla. Even a culture’s laws rest, as Bruner (2000) has shown, upon narrative foundations. This leads to culturally variable views of time, a point that even Whitrow (1998) — not a multiculturalist but a theoretical physicist — has stressed: “Just as our intuition of space is not unique, for we know that there is no unique geometry that we must necessarily apply to space, so there is no unique intuition of time that is common to all mankind” (p. 10).

A vast body of research has shown how minority students differentially express their cultural sense of time and space in the classroom in many ways. For instance, Au and Kawakami (1985) demonstrated that Hawaiian children’s classroom discourse is characterized by the South Pacific Islander rhetorical patterns of “talk story.” The vibrant rhetorical devices of talk story include tall tales, flashbacks and flash-forwards, recursion and embroidery for dramatic effect, multilayered digression, and overlapping utterances among speakers. These narratives — communally constructed and enjoyed — do not generally fit the discursive conventions of the standard public school classroom: individual ownership, strict sequentiality, and empirical accuracy and parsimony. But when teachers began to accommodate “talk story,” allowing the students to shape their narratives in ways that seemed dramatically and thematically good to them, the students showed marked improvement in their reading.

Macias (1986) studied how Odham children of Southern Arizona began to thrive academically in classroom environments where those more deliberative, less demonstrative rules and rhythms of interaction that set the pace of their culture also governed the relationship between the teacher and the student. The standard classroom expectation for a student to respond *quickly* and demonstrate his *individual* accomplishment and excellence violates the Odham way of thinking deep and long about a question, observing a master perform a skill, and then practicing it many times oneself before performing it in public, and never behaving in a way that calls special attention to oneself as better than others. When the quick-fire rhythms and individual-ownership ethos of much standard classroom instruction are aimed at Odham students, they may well come off looking as if they are unprepared, unable, or uninterested — usually an educationally

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devastating misimpression resulting from insensitivity to the Odham sense of time.

In *Ways with Words*, a classic sociolinguistic investigation of time, space, and relationship among three different groups of elementary school students and their families in an Appalachian community — a low-SES African American community, a low-SES white community, and a middle-SES racially mixed community— Heath (1983) studied the linguistic growth of these children from the cradle to elementary school. She showed how each group's space and time assumptions shaped how they differentially viewed and used language, especially in the classroom. Heath found that lower SES white parents, for instance, taught their children that there is only one correct order to things, both temporally and spatially, and that they must conform to that order unquestioningly. Kept on rigid play, sleep, and feeding schedules as infants, the children learned somatically from early on that time is a taskmaster who brooks no deviation from the one "correct" sequence. Toys could only be taken down from the shelves at specified times, could only be used in approved spaces, and had to be returned to their approved slots on counters and in shelves when this particular unit of time had expired and the next scheduled space-time segment began. Heath concluded that these parents were preparing their children to be obedient workers in the low-paying factory jobs which they themselves had filled. Unlike their African American counterparts in this study, whose narrative experimentations with time and space were too flexible for classroom success, these children's discourse was too "stiff," leading their teachers to adjudge them cognitively deficient.

Despite these and other socio-temporal studies that show how a student's socio-temporal "fit" with the governing culture of the school impacts his performance (Riordan, 1997), there is still a great need for more empirically rich and culturally specific research along these lines (Nieto, 2000). Of course, the teacher cannot be expected to understand all of her students' cultural temporalities. Nevertheless, knowing that such variations exist — and, what is more, being able to explore them in order to cultivate them in some cases and offer more productive alternatives to students in other cases — can help the teacher be more compassionate and effective in the multicultural American classroom. For example, according to Heath (1983), the whole class can be drawn into the mutually edifying cultural project of exploring each other's temporality, for "teachers can become 'practical ethnographers' and students can become 'ethnographic detectives'" (p. 327).

A teacher becomes a practical ethnographer when she begins to reflect on her own culture's spatio-temporal assumptions and how they may be affecting her practice. She can then use what is pedagogically fruitful in her cultural assumptions and discard or modify what is not. Teachers as ethnographers can also become more conversant with various aspects of their students' cultures. For instance, they may study eating protocols or patterns of play and politeness; they can turn an anthropologist's eye to the student's home life to link school to home in classroom

activities — and thereby encourage minority parents to take part in classroom projects. Heath has also reported particular success using “texts” generated by students as classroom material for all of the students to study. This engenders what she calls a cultural “meta-language” that members of the class can use to discuss their cultural similarities and differences. Telling stories, writing poems, or composing expository or argumentative essays that everyone in the class listens to or reads, the students jointly analyze these texts to unearth different cultural styles and perspectives. In this process, students “meet very different notions of truth, style, and language appropriate to a ‘story’ from those they have known at home” (p. 294).

Fully and authentically honoring a student’s cultural rhythms also has a larger historical dimension. For, just as it is impossible to separate an individual from her culture, it is impossible to separate a culture from how it understands its own history (Sherover, 1986, p. 283). Sherover has thus called for greater awareness of the “temporal context of our inherently historical sociality” which, as the ground of our thought and speech, means that even our most private thoughts have historical colorations (1986, p. 284; Vygotsky, 1986). Anciently, as well as in various contemporary indigenous cultures, the individual’s identity is quite intertwined with her understanding of and commitment to the macro-temporal patterns of tribal and cosmic history (Eliade, 1976). Put simply, a Navaho child’s personal rhythms in the classroom cannot be separated from her sense of her people’s history and, in turn, the place of that history in terms of larger cosmic rhythms and purposes (Deyhle, 1986; Wax, Wax, & Dumont, 1964; Whorf, 1964; McCluskey, 1993).

The melding of cosmic/cultural history with individual identity continues to characterize many indigenous, first-nation cultures today (Abou-Zeid, 1979). The ethically reckless corporate project of forcing students to slough off historical memory (for, after all, there is no way to extract money out of the past), the constant acceleration of the present (in order to legitimize and increase production and consumption), and the reduction of the future to statistical models (to stabilize current markets and anticipate potential ones) makes no sense to indigenous cultures given their religiously conservative nature and the fact that “time is seldom regarded by villagers in these societies as a mere tool that should be exploited in achieving certain well-defined objectives” (Abou-Zeid, 1979, p. 119; Kagame, 1976).

That such a person’s sense of time ill suits him to deal with the fevered pace of high-stakes, norm-referenced testing in American public schooling is a well established fact (Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). Students with alternative temporalities are thus bound to fail on tests, the results of which are then cleverly offered as evidence of the students’ “deficits” — scientism in the service of temporal colonization.

Time III: Spiritual Time

For many individuals and virtually all cultures, personal and social reality rest on faith commitments that are “transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos

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rather than in human needs and interest, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization, and the like . . . Without the transpersonal, we get sick, violent, and nihilistic, or else hopeless and apathetic” (Maslow, 1968, p. vi). A large body of clinical research over the last 30 years has illustrated the role that spiritual commitments play in psychosocial health. Indeed, faith in transcendent time has a unique way of infusing the experience of biographical and cultural time with redemptive possibilities (Boorstein, 1996; Ferrer, 2002; Fowler, 1981; Greeley, 1972; Richards & Bergin, 1998; Walsh, 1993; Wilber, 2000). Profoundly honoring cultural differences in the classroom, therefore, entails serious consideration of the infrastructural role that faith commitments play in the personal and cultural worldviews of many students and teachers. As Tillich said, “Religion is the soul of culture and culture the form of religion” (1959, p. 33).

The last century has witnessed a shift from collective, institutional forms of spirituality to personal, idiosyncratic ones (Berger & Luckmann, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Johnstone, 1997). However, what remains constant across the various types of spiritual commitments is an encounter with and faith in what Otto (1958) called “the idea of the holy” — an idea quite inseparable from time itself, for the holy is the *transcendence* — or as I prefer to see it, the *in-folding* — of all other forms of time into transcendent time. Time which is untouched by the transformative power of sacred time has classically been considered “profane” by most cultures (Eliade, 1959) — merely the rise and fall of feet on a desolate road winding only towards death. In this sense, the hegemony of technist time in corporate education is deadly. Rooted in no significant past, galvanized by no present experiential intensity, and oriented to no ethically or spiritually significant future, corporate time is profane time *par excellence*.

Despite the academic devotion to the postmodern dogmas of relativism (Nord, 1994), belief in and celebration of *absolute transcendent time* (and its ability to absorb and enrich other forms of time) is as important now to most people as it has ever been (Berger, 1995; Greeley, 1974; Johnstone, 1997). In brief, most people still believe in the holy. This faith in some form of transcendentally redemptive time should not be surprising. As long as individuals and cultures must confront that ultimate temporal fact of human existence — death — there will be faith commitments regarding time. Where did we come from? Where are we going? Is there any other sort of time for us to experience after we die? And if such a transcendent time does exist, will our present actions and behaviors in this realm of time have any consequences in that other sphere? Cultures and their narratives represent responses to these questions. “Every human society is, in the last resort, men banded together in the face of death. The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it” (Berger, 1967, p. 52).

Accordingly, in doing life-history interviews with both teachers and school leaders, I have often observed spiritual themes whether the interviewee was a

Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Taoist, or simply “spiritual, but not really in any formal way.” Typically, this spirituality manifest itself as the conviction that one’s “call to teach” (Stokes, 1997) issued from a higher temporal realm. Frequently, this conviction has developed in small and subtle steps over many years. A 33-year-old woman who had been a 5th-grade teacher for 10 years told me,

I just loved to play school more than anything else when I was a girl. I was the oldest child in the family, so I’d have all my four brothers and sisters be my students. I’d set up a little classroom in the living room. That was always my favorite game. Later, in high school, I thought I was going to be a stockbroker. So I began as a business major in college. But there was always this voice inside me that kept saying, “This isn’t the path for you, Linda! If you follow it, you won’t be *unhappy*, but you won’t be especially happy either — at least, not as happy as you could be. You won’t be using the talents that God gave you in the best way possible, in the way that’s of the most service.” So I prayed and prayed about it — I even fasted — and then, guess what? Those early days of playing school came back to me. I started thinking of all the teaching positions I’d filled in the church, in clubs, in community projects. And I *knew* I was meant to teach!

Occasionally, the divine call to teach seems to have burst forth more dramatically. A 32-year-old wrestling coach, Phil had been a public-school teacher for nine years and had just entered the educational leadership program at my university. Recalling his high-school days, he said,

I didn’t know which way to go. Well, anyway, I was cutting weight [as a high school wrestler], and it’s just amazing what fasting will do for you. I fasted for quite awhile. It was winter and I couldn’t sleep, so I went out and I ran for a couple of hours, and the snow was coming down. And I lay down in the snow and I looked up in the sky — a clear Iowa sky with no lights around. And I just thought, “I’m so confused, Lord. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what *you* want me to do! All I want to do is your will. Let me know. I’m ready.” And then it came to me all at once — it flashed on me. “I should teach! That’s how I can affect people the most — how I can help kids believe in themselves and have confidence.” And I think that’s the point it all started.

Another dramatic example of the spiritual call to teach comes from a woman in her early 40s in a teacher education program at a state university:

I became involved with cocaine while living in San Francisco and met my son’s father. He was a very high-class dealer. I got *really* addicted. But when I decided that I couldn’t stand myself like that anymore and that I was done with that kind of life, a voice in my head seemed to say to me, “You have to get back on your spiritual path.” I was coming to see again that I had a job to fulfill on this earth-plane — and that that job was teaching!

I said above that the prime guarantor of the continued existence of spiritual commitment in individuals and cultures is death. In my experience as a teacher educator, the most poignant example of this came from a 41-year-old woman who

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had just returned to her religious roots and enrolled in a teacher education program at a public university:

About a year and a half ago, God slammed me in the face and said in effect, “This is what you are going to do with the rest of your life.” My husband was diagnosed with AIDS and I found out that I was HIV positive. He had been messing around with prostitutes at military bases where we had been stationed [as a family. Later when they returned stateside and he was diagnosed,] people started coming up to me suggesting that I be a teacher. People I hardly knew were coming up to me and saying, “You need to be a teacher.” They didn’t know my history, but it just kept coming at me!

For all of these teachers, either a single transcendent experience or a cluster of spiritually rich experiences has set the cadence of their lives and not only led them to the threshold of the classroom but accompanied them into it as well.

Furthermore, the rhythms of a higher temporality impact not only some teachers’ personal sense of “mission” but also their public classroom practice. A woman in her 50s who had recently decided to teach, framed her objection to standardized testing by invoking her commitment to Buddhism and egalitarian politics. She said she wanted to “get across to students the anti-Capitalist message that money is not the real driving force in life. It’s love. And you need to make that shift because everything in schools is focused on money, getting a job. But what is really important is love. Like [the Buddhist monk and psychotherapist] Jack Kornfield said, ‘Follow a path with heart.’”

Another student teacher, a recovering alcoholic, spoke of how her very personal brand of spirituality would be key in defining her own pace and purposes as a teacher in contrast to the fevered classroom rhythms required by the official curriculum: “I believe that showing respect, care, and compassion for other people is related to my beliefs, and that will definitely play into how I teach. I’m not a religious person, but I’m a spiritual person, I’d say. I gain spirituality through AA. It’s a different type of spirituality. And mine will be a different type of classroom.”

A high-school creative writing teacher vividly described how she and her class move into higher temporal realms and rhythms when they are all working on creating poems or short stories,

Those creative moments are the ones I live for as a teacher. And they make the clock seem pretty darn irrelevant! In fact, I see the clock as my enemy at those times. Getting your students into the frame of mind — and heart! — where they can, say, write a poem, or begin the first paragraph of a short story . . . well, you just can’t cut and dry that kind of thing up into these neat little 45-minute periods. So that’s always been my challenge! How to get that special kind of experience *going* with kids who stumble into my class after a day of moving to bells and hall monitors, and then, oh my!, how to *sustain that creative mindset* in my class. And then always comes the part I *don’t* like — how to ease my kids back into the so-called *real world* when I see by the clock on the wall that we’ve only got five or ten minutes left

before their *next* bell. I mean, I look at the clock. Fifteen minutes left. And then I look at them — most of them so intent, chewing their pencils, frowning their brows, smiling to themselves because they just found the right word or just the right image! But I know that in five minutes or so I'm going to have to “wake them up gently” before the bell does it rudely! And I just look at them and think, “What the heck are we doing to these kids! It sure doesn't have anything to do with why *I* became a teacher!” And now there are all these new testing requirements being pushed down our throats with *No Child Left Behind*. I call it *No Child Left Breathing!* These new tests just make it all that much harder for me to do what I want to do, what *I need to do*, as a teacher. Maybe it will make it impossible. I don't know. I don't like to think that way because, you know, I'm a pretty positive person. I have to believe that there will be some kind of corrective in the collective consciousness of this nation . . .

When I ask such teachers, “What is the most important spiritual lesson you feel you can convey to your students in a public classroom?” the most frequent responses I get also have to do with time — namely, with instilling spiritually grounded hope in children, especially those from punishing emotional or financial circumstances. Without a narrative of ontological hope, children fall into neurosis, despair, and even sociopathic or suicidal behavior (Bullough, 2001; Bannister & Fransella, 1986). I have had the enormous privilege of knowing and working with many such teachers over the years. One of them, an African American special education teacher who has since become a principal, confided to me that “spirituality comes out the most in my classes in that I try to give my kids some kind of purpose for life — to hope and dream and move on and see that life can be wonderful . . . I may even use the word ‘God.’” Such teachers can authentically portray and convey hope, I believe, only because *they themselves have ontological hope rooted in a spiritual sense of redemptive time.*

The Case for Spiritual Reflectivity

I suggested above that biographical and political reflectivity provide powerful tools for helping prospective and practicing teachers engage in deep examination of themselves and their institutions. In addition, spiritual reflectivity offers many exciting ways of fostering teachers' sense of their own spirituality and of their students (Mayes, 2001). Teacher education has been impoverished by not sufficiently attending to spiritual matters (Buchman 1990, Clift & Houston, 1990; Serow et al., 1992; Tremmel, 1993). In addition to psychosocial reflectivity, there should also be a space as well for teachers to reflect on the spiritual dimension of their vocation. The lives of such martyrs as Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, and Archbishop Oscar Romero poignantly bear witness to the fact that rich lives and politically powerful acts often rest upon one's spiritual commitments.

I have called for both colleges of education and schools to provide ways for prospective and practicing teachers to engage in spiritual reflectivity. Even in the public schools, there are legally and institutionally permissible ways for teachers to

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do so (Fischer, Schimmel, & Kelly, 1999; Mayes & Ferrin, 2002), using the same modalities of reflection as in biographical and political reflectivity — journal work, dyadic and group processing at in-services, retreats, and reading circles (Mayes, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002a, 2002b). These can be of great benefit to teachers whose professional calling, practice, and vision emanate from their redemptive sense of transcendent time.

Conclusion

How we experience, interpret, and enact time — personally, collectively, and transcendentally — is educationally significant. Our temporal hopes and fears, limitations and potentials, are the fundamental stuff out of which is forged “the constitution of human life in time” (Luckmann, 1991, p. 151). I have offered various perspectives on individual, cultural, and spiritual time, suggesting alternatives to the reductionist linearity in most federal agendas for educational “reform.” I also offered a few suggestions about how to bring these alternative views of time to fruition in various educational contexts.

At the biographical level, I discussed helping students deal with psychological rupture through narrative reconstruction. I also stressed the importance of encouraging teachers to explore the autobiographical dimensions of their own sense of calling, current practice, and goals. Furthermore, I argued for the importance of teaching both our teachers and students to respectfully examine various *cultural views of time*. We have much to learn from each other’s temporal assumptions regarding psychological health, the significance of the family, social responsibility, shared historical memory, and a communal sense of cosmic relatedness. Finally, I discussed how *spiritual commitments regarding time* are vital because they buttress the delicate personal, political, and cultural edifice of many teachers’ calling and practice.

Goethe said, “My field is time.” The teacher might say the same thing.

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