

“With Eyes Wide Open and a Broken Heart” Teaching Against Hope Through a Curriculum of Positive Deviance

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To let go of the desire to cure or rescue, to sit with the pain that compels us to reach for quick reforms, mindlessly write yet more grants that purport to offer, yet again, the solution to one or more horrible problems, to reframe standards in terms of our ability to remain open, to articulate and reflect on what we are feeling and experiencing, to face the terrors that gnaw at us, and to work through the fantasies that structure our thinking, to do these would be to begin to act ethically. (Taubman, 2000, p. 31)

Prologue: Fantasy Disguised as Hope

Peter Taubman wrote the words above as our education systems succumbed to the standards movement and descended into fantasy disguised as hope. Taubman (2009) later characterized the standards movement and high-stakes testing as “audit culture” comprising “systems of regulation in which questions of quality are subordinate to logics of management and in which audit serves as a form of meta-regulation” (p. 108). Heroically marketed as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), audit culture’s proponents promised to cure the achievement gap affecting “at-risk,” “deficient,” and “underperforming” students and schools. Audit culture coalesced in an axis of “edupreneurs” (Smagorinsky, 2013), who sold the fantasy through an ideology of marketization, and as a nation, we bought it. Yet the standards and high-stakes testing movement has yielded a paradox. It has failed monumentally in its promises to ensure that all children are educationally “proficient” and to

Words Discussed

Taubman, P. (2000). Teaching without hope: What is really at stake in the standards movement, high stakes testing, and the drive for “practical reforms”. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 16(3), 19-33.

Taubman, P. (2009). *Teaching by numbers: Deconstructing the discourse of standards and accountability in education*. New York: Routledge.

eliminate the achievement gap. It has also left unaddressed any meaningful attention to much deeper structural education and social justice issues, which continue to reify and reinforce oppressive social hierarchies through education (Rothstein, 2013; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Berliner, 2013). Simultaneously, our public education systems have transferred scarce funds to the edupreneurs who write the textbooks, ancillary materials, and tests aligned with the standards. Failing to acknowledge this paradox, most states, despite some recent pushback, have committed to perpetuate audit culture rebranded as Common Core.

Fantasy disguised as hope is “linked to a lack in the here and now ... that constitutes the very structure of that here and now” (Taubman, 2000, p. 26). Viewed as historical narrative, fantasy disguised as hope perpetuates a defining sense of crisis and the urge to “do something” in which we lose ourselves in fantasy and lose our mindfulness of those with whom we sit and ostensibly serve:

The more we busy ourselves with designing set curricula, with perfecting exams, with testing out new hypotheses, with locating “best practices” for some generic student, the more we risk keeping things exactly as they are, because we are no longer dealing with flesh and blood students or teachers, we are manipulating fantasy figures; we are simply perpetuating our fantasies. (Taubman, 2000, p. 26)

Standards offer a prescription to cure curriculum, students, and teachers of the contingency of life, teaching, and learning by proscribing values of difference, desire, and lived experience in curriculum and teaching. As such, Taubman (2000) characterizes standards as to-do lists, which rationalize, segment, prioritize, sequence, and categorize knowledge, students, teachers, and schools. Palmer (2012) expresses the to-do list metaphor as a cultural obsession with effectiveness as measured by outcomes, which actually has nothing to do with educating children. The culture of effectiveness incentivizes taking on increasingly smaller tasks because the outcomes associated with small tasks are more easily measurable. Yet Palmer (2012) insists:

If we want to take on big tasks like love, and mercy, and justice—tasks that we’re neglecting in our democracy right now—we need another standard by which to measure our actions. And I think that standard is faithfulness. ... Am I faithful to the gifts that I possess, to the strengths and abilities that I bring to the world? Am I faithful to the needs I see around me? Am I faithful to those points at which I intersect with the needs of the world and have a chance to serve? (Palmer, 2012)

As edupreneurs and education policy makers attempt to shepherd us compliantly into the Common Core era, we are re-witnessing the phenomenon about which Taubman (2000) wrote more than a decade ago: a nationwide standards and testing initiative accompanied by a reductive contempt for curriculum, teaching, and learning as lived experience. Both emerge in the nexus of our consciously-held beliefs, hopes, and desires as well as our unconscious terrors and desires (Taubman, 2000). These beliefs, hopes, terrors, and desires find expression in the assumption that science as a method of objective measurement will offer “surety as well as hope for the future”

by preventing the educational “chaos” that will reign in the absence of measurable standards, an “apparent commitment to social amelioration” by fixing broken students, schools, and teachers, an obsession with a standardized, sequenced instructional model, and a view of agency—using reductive and enticing code words such as “choice”—as a mechanism of accountability (Taubman, 2000, pp. 23-24). Audit culture reflects a cynical, assumption-laden agenda of hope, which exploits fear and desire through a crisis manufactured to create and sustain a market predicated on a single commodity: failure.

Reflecting on our work in PK-12 and university settings over the last 20 years, we are bearing witness to the effects of audit culture on our students and faculty. In this work, we reflect on our experience of returning purposefully and mindfully to Taubman’s (2000) work as we co-developed and co-taught a special topics course in education predicated on abandoning hope through a curriculum of positive deviance (PD). Our deviance lies in rejecting the fantasy of hope embedded in linear curricular narratives—measurable objectives and pre-determined outcomes integral to the course syllabus, a fundamental tool of audit culture. Instead, we lived with our students in and through the problems we saw in personally meaningful ways (Taubman, 2000). This process forced us to interrogate our assumptions about the meaning of and interdependence between curriculum, teaching, and learning through which we offer a counter-narrative to audit culture’s linear fantasy, which has become so insidious that it is nearly invisible. Hope as a desire to cure has enthralled so many that it has become the default starting point in most education “reform” discourses despite its failure—or perhaps because of it.

Story as Method, Understanding as Relationship

The history of all hitherto existing society is not the history of class struggles, but instead the history of narrative struggles. Storytellers, from the creators of hieroglyphics to the inventors of alphabets . . . stood in constant opposition to one another and carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open battle of narratives, a battle that each time ended either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of an old story that once held sway over entire populations and was thought to be true. (Goodall, 2010, p. 27)

Goodall (2010) illustrates the power of narrative, the historicized and contextualized struggle over dominant narratives, and most importantly the shifting nature of narratives over time and their susceptibility to the critique offered by counter-narratives. Reflecting on Goodall’s (2010) characterization of counter-narrative, we, as students of curriculum, politics, and American studies find great power in Historian Ronald Takaki’s (2008) counter-narrative to what he called the Master Narrative of American History. The Master Narrative represents a “powerful and popular but inaccurate story” in which “our country was settled by European immigrants, and Americans are white” (p. 4). Reductive standards and curricula are often complicit in reproducing this deeply embedded racist myth, which defines and contrasts American whiteness with unassimilable racial Others. Likewise, the conflict associated with the standards movement is a struggle between narratives in which the survival of a vibrant curriculum of personal meaning is increasingly under assault. The historic struggle for the American curriculum, and education more broadly,

as chronicled by scholars such as Kliebard (2004), Apple (2004), and Kumashiro (2008), is embodied in those who propagate narratives about success, failure, visions of the “good society,” the fundamental purposes of education, the status of knowledge, and the power dynamics and ideological assumptions underlying it all.

Taubman (2000, 2009) illustrates the foundational psychology and ideology through which prevailing contemporary narratives of education reform emerged and upon which they rest. Like Takaki (2008), Taubman (2000, 2009) critiques a Master Narrative that represents a powerful, partial, and inaccurate story, told and retold, about education reform for the 21st Century. The story is textured with code words derived from audit culture such as “choice,” “accountability,” “success,” “performance,” and “achievement” and woven together with the metrics by which to rank students, educators, and institutions at every level from the primary grades through higher education. The prevailing narrative is a hegemonic discourse, which Kevin Kumashiro (2008) aptly characterizes in *The Seduction of Common Sense* as “developed and learned and perpetuated over time” (p. 3). The narrative of standards and standardized testing emerges from a desire to cure and control (Taubman, 2000) and is laden with ideological assumptions about race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, culture, society, and other aspects of identity and positionality. As with all hegemonic discourses, relations of power underlie this narrative, which has perpetuated and solidified existing social, cultural, economic, and political stratification and reified those inequalities through education (Rothstein, 2013; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

We return to Taubman’s (2000) work as counter-narrative to dominant curricular discourses predicated on the manipulation of fantasy figures rather than on serving those with whom we work and live. We offer our counter-narrative through interpretive autoethnography, which Denzin (2014, p. 1) characterizes as performative stories about life and experience. Holman Jones (2008, p. 207) characterizes autoethnography as a balancing act between the self and the culture in which we write of the world and ourselves, a process animated by the flux between “story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement.” Currere, which is situated in the space where phenomenology and autobiography intersect, further informs our work (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004, p. 414). Understanding lived experience is a relational and existential process of negotiating strangeness and familiarity (Schwandt, 1999). Our goal lies in problematizing and complicating reductive, dualistic discourses to reveal their true complexity, paradox, and ambiguity. Anzaldúa’s (1987) *mestiza* consciousness, which opens space for contradiction and ambiguity as energy for creative motion through interrogating dualistic paradigms, is thus especially meaningful in our lives and work. We present our story in three thematic acts, which present our collective experience through autobiographical reflective writing collected throughout the spring of 2013. We also include manipulated digital images to visually represent our autobiographical text.

Act 1: Lives and Histories Merging

At the root of all the harm we cause is ignorance. Through meditation, that’s what we begin to undo. If we see that we have no mindfulness, that we rarely refrain, that we have little

well-being, that is not confusion, that's the beginning of clarity. ... This is the liberation that naturally arises when we are completely here, without anxiety about imperfection. (Chödrön, 1997, p. 37)

Chödrön (1997) calls us to journey toward understanding ourselves, others, and the world through relationship, mindfulness, and letting go of our fear of our own imperfection. Letting go requires reframing and embracing vulnerability as the courage to confront social, political, economic, and educational cultures of fear and shame built on the pretense of certitude (Brown, 2012). Like Chödrön (1997), Taubman (2000) writes of the psychology and ideology underlying standards and standardized assessment as a response to the fear of chaos, uncertainty, and incompetence—our fear of our own imperfection. Bram Hammovitch, in *Socialization Without Voice: An Ideology of Hope for At-risk Students* (as cited in Taubman, 2000, p. 27), makes visible the fear of imperfection in his critique of popular and persistent narratives, such as the “conservative ideology of hope,” which purports that anyone can succeed if only they work hard enough. Hopeful ideologies that stigmatize imperfection, regardless of their political assumptions, diminish the “irreducible specificity of each situation” and imprison us in “overdetermined scripts or fantasies” (Taubman, 2000, p. 27). Our object of critical reflection lies in the scripted fantas(ies) associated with the course syllabus, an increasingly intrusive tool of surveillance, control, and prediction inherent in audit culture both in secondary and higher education. Our PD curriculum requires every member of a learning community to relinquish the illusion of control, mastery, and expertise. This, we have found, is where authenticity lives. Courageous in our flaws and imperfection, we then venture into the borderlands between familiarity and strangeness.

Coffee Talk: Our Deviant Agenda, Our Deviant Curriculum

We met shortly after we arrived to take up our new positions at South Dakota State University, a rural land grant university, in 2011. Jim, author one, a White male and former high school teacher in the Washington, DC area, is an assistant professor in the College of Education. Jaime, author two, who identifies as White/Latina, is the university's first full-time Chief Diversity Officer and has worked in higher education for nearly 25 years. We both had spent years working with an abiding concern for social justice, and as we became friends, we often met and sat together in coffee shops for hours talking, laughing, and enjoying silences that spoke volumes. A gray, frigid January afternoon found us again sitting in a coffee shop contemplating a special topics course in education entitled: “‘With Eyes Wide Open and a Broken Heart:’ Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Inclusive Democratic Healing.” We had talked about collaborating on a course for more than a year, and as the reality of meeting our students that evening approached, anxiety and anticipation replaced the thin veneer of certitude manifested in an educational culture obsessed with measureable outcomes, yet contemptuous of mindfulness, complexity, ambiguity, and paradox.



Figure 1. A scene from a coffee shop, where we sat, talked and wondered.

Through our course, we desired to interrogate, in relationship with our students, numerous prevailing education discourses through autobiographical reflection contextualized in wider, overlapping “common sense” social, economic, and ideological discourses. To do this required us to step off the linear curricular path embodied in the syllabi our students had come to take for granted and under which students and teachers increasingly labor. We desired to explore the poverty of indifference generated through hyper-individualism and consumerism—a form of poverty both afflicting and perpetuated through increasingly reductive curricula, which many educators with whom we work actually conflate with standards. Thus, we embrace Smyth’s (2011) positive social justice model, which exposes “the inadequacy of individual rights models” and requires educators to work “in ways that challenge what is taken for granted in their teaching and operate from the position that there may be other more just, inclusive and democratic ways that overcome various forms of classroom disadvantage” (p. 40). We framed the course in Palmer’s (2011) “Healing the Heart of Democracy” and Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin’s (2010) “The Power of Positive Deviance” (PD). Both advocate for just, sustainable communities, embracing tension and paradox, and recognition of “the community’s latent potential to self-organize, tap its own wisdom, and address problems long regarded with fatalistic acceptance” (Pascale, et al., 2010, p. 7).

PD acknowledges that once communities discover and leverage existing solutions by drawing on their own resources, “adaptive capacity extends beyond addressing the initial problem at hand” and enables “those involved to take control of their destiny and address future challenges.” Two elements of PD are particularly relevant to curriculum and education more broadly. First, community engagement is crucial and “individual difference is regarded as a community resource” (Pascale, et al., 2010, p. 7). Second, attention to the process in which each community must engage to “discover its latent wisdom” provides a path of self-discovery (Pascale, et al., 2010, p. 8). PD rejects the premise of outside “experts” descending on a community to impose culturally and socially irrelevant, decontextualized, and unsustainable solutions based on the manipulation of fantasy figures. In other words, PD, relinquishes the desire to control, cure, and fantasize final solutions and instead requires listening, mindfulness to context, and finding new ways through

problems by living in and reflecting on how we are related to them. We therefore committed to explore co-creating curriculum with our students, most of whose education experiences and expectations of curriculum, learning, and teaching have occurred in the context of content standards and standardized testing.

Curriculum contextualized in the complexity of social, cultural, economic, and ideological discourses questions the power dynamics, ideologies, and psychological processes through which those processes emerge. A curriculum predicated on PD rejects the “cult of expertise” in which students are “passive recipients of expert knowledge rather than active participants in the process of inquiry, discovery, and co-creation” (Palmer, 2011, p. 133). Positive deviance engages students-teachers and teachers-students in emergence from spectator roles in the “audience” toward occupancy of spaces as participants. Similar to Freire’s (2009) analysis of the banking method, Palmer (2011) firmly rejects the cult of expertise:

When experts are given the “guru” voice, the only voice that counts ... probing questions are stifled, dissenting voices are silenced, and the experts go unchallenged. We never hear from people who have deep experiential knowledge without benefit of expert credentials. We never learn how to hold tension creatively because there are no ambiguities, only claims of certainty, in the cult of expertise. (p. 133)

As we sat together attempting to prepare to meet our students, our anxiety grew. We had no answers. We had no plan. We emptied our lungs and prepared to breath in fresh air.

I am: Curriculum as Personal History in Public and Political Spaces

But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now. (King, 2003, p. 29)

As we experience each other’s stories, we in fact will carry each other’s stories. What will we do with the truths we now carry with us? What will I do? I want to give these stories wings, turn them into butterflies, transformed and transforming—as they have changed me. I realize just how fortunate I am to have the opportunity every day to make a difference. Today, this is where my gratitude lives. (Jaime)

Darkness comes very early in the cold of January in South Dakota. We met our students the evening of January 15, 2013. Amanda is a Native doctoral student. Poni, a sophomore, is a young woman originally from Sudan, whose parents brought her as a child to the U.S. via Kenya as refugees. Kyle, a White freshman, took a break from school to work and returned that spring. Anthony, a White senior, is active in campus and state politics and plans to attend law school. Josh, a White, openly gay senior, has been a campus and community activist for the LGBT community. In appreciation of the power of stories to bind and connect us, we introduced ourselves to our students, and our students to each other, by inviting them to sit in pairs, listen to and hear each other. One person in each pair simply asked: “Who are you?” “What do you want?” and “Who do

you pretend to be?” The person asking the questions simply listened with no crosstalk. Finally, the person who had been answering the questions asked her/his partner: “Who do you think I am?” The pair then switched roles. Even the students who knew each other felt a deeper sense of connection, discovered something new in each of themselves, and found new commonalities. They also commented that the most difficult part of the conversation was simply listening quietly and attentively to the other.



Figure 2. Dusk gathers on a winter afternoon near our classroom on campus.

None of our students had ever done anything like this before in a classroom. Participating in a simple, unstructured conversation with another, these students experienced the quietness and mindfulness that Taubman (2000) wrote of—sitting in a space created through giving up the desire to cure and control and sensing what was occurring in their classroom and in their lives through relationship to another. They experienced the contingency of life and learning by engaging in an experience not predicated on a measureable predetermined outcome, without striving for a correct answer, just sitting and developing some understanding, however transitory, of themselves and others.

The power of personal story and the sharing of personal history also offers a counter-narrative to what Taubman (2000) powerfully critiques as the processes embedded in the standards movement that attempt to locate “‘best practices’ for some generic student,” the manipulation of “fantasy figures,” and the perpetuation of our own fantasies (p. 26). Reflecting on Taubman (2000), in order to elicit and contextualize our own work as teachers in their personal histories, we invited our students to free write about the first time they had experienced, witnessed, or perpetrated discrimination. This process resulted in stories such as Amanda’s:

I am 14 years old. It’s the first day of yet another new school year, early in the morning, the sun already crested the horizon. The grass is still damp with dew, but the air in the bus is already growing hot and uncomfortable as we pull into the lot of the high school. The driver stops at the edge of the faculty lot and orders us to leave her domain. We exit the bus slowly, trying to hold on to the last precious moments of carefree summer. As we lumber past the teachers’ cars, my brother pauses and tilts his head toward one of the cars. I turn to see what he’s noticed. “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” says the bumper sticker. We hurry along past the offending

car, having already been stung by it. In the next row we pass a truck, “Save a fish, spear an Indian” says the sticker on this one. We paused and wondered at the one next to it “Indian Pride,” a reference to the school mascot. We turn and look at the building we are about to enter, and my brother nudges me with his elbow. “You can pass,” he says. “Don’t tell them what you are unless you have to.” I am 14 years old.

Shared stories powerfully demonstrated that while we all brought different experiences and perspectives with us, we all held much in common. Max van Manen (1991) characterizes pedagogy as “a fascination with the growth of the other” (p. 13). Although differences in experience are inherent in pedagogical relationships, the essence and intentionality of curriculum and pedagogy lies in the ability to open “possibilities of being and becoming” (van Manen, 1991, p. 14). The power of curriculum and pedagogy holds the power to build relationships between and among students, teachers, and the worlds through which we walk. Reform discourses predicated on audit culture’s obsession with standards and assessments denigrate the deep relationship between personal history and experience in curriculum and pedagogy for both teachers and students. The logic of systems management (Apple, 2004) and audit culture (Taubman, 2009) deeply embedded in standards and standardized assessment reify oppression, ranking, classification, and the perpetuation of hegemonic hierarchies of authority. Discourses around standardization inherently perpetuate the myth of curriculum, teaching, and learning as objectified, quantifiable, and de-politicized. Whose interests does this serve? Reflecting on, reconstructing, and sharing our personal histories and positionalities was uncomfortable, sometimes painful. Giving up the desire to cure and control as well as our anxiety about our imperfection (Chödrön, 1997) allowed us to leave our “safe harbors” (Carlson, 2002) and journey toward a horizon over which we could not see.



Figure 3. Reaching out: vulnerability, courage, and connection through story.

Act 2: Transgressing Audit Culture: The Paradox of the Course Syllabus

It seems to me that if one were to give up hope and the striving for control and cure, a space might open up in which one could more closely hear or sense what was happening in a classroom

or in one's teaching or in one's own life. One could live in the problems one saw and by living in them, find ways to live through them, ask oneself how one relates to these problems, find new questions that may solve old problems. (Taubman, 2000, p. 31)

As a verb—currere—curriculum becomes a complicated . . . conversation in which interlocutors are speaking not only among themselves but to those not present, not only to historical figures and unnamed people and places they may be studying, but to politicians and parents alive and dead, not to mention to the selves they have been, are in the process of becoming, and someday may become. Education requires subjectivity in order for it to speak, for it to become concrete, to become actual. Without the agency of subjectivity education evaporates, replaced by the conformity compelled by scripted curricula and standardized tests. (Pinar, 2012, p. 43)

Taubman (2000) and Pinar (2012) describe curriculum in terms of the complexity of lived experience contextualized in subjectivity and positionality. Currere embraces the complex relationship with the self and between self, Others, and the world. Curriculum driven by theoretical understanding is a messy process, just as learning, teaching, and democracy are, and should be, messy processes. Taubman's (2009) teaching by numbers metaphor encapsulates the fear of chaos and an obsession with learning science, the reduction of teaching to questions of technique and menus of strategies, and the framing of curriculum as a corpus of linear, predetermined, measurable outcomes. The marketization of education, and most other aspects of public life for that matter, which Apple (2013) refers to as the "Wal-Marting of America," finds expression in discourses of consumerism in which educational institutions provide products to customers. Pinar (2012) notes: "too many students have morphed into consumers of 'educational services,' not subjectively existing individuals struggling to understand themselves in the world through the curriculum they study" (p. 44). As a corollary, schools, universities, and teachers have morphed into providers of educational services. We have struggled to understand how audit culture and the Wal-Marting of education affects teachers and their ability and willingness to reflect purposefully and critically on their own teaching lives. How are we contributing to the devastation of our own lives' work?

We confront the audit culture inherent in the "Wal-Marting" of America as we meet students, particularly in teacher education, whose whole educational experience has occurred in the context of standardization and scripted linear curricula and teaching. Kyle wrote in his first class reflection: "I am pumped and uncertain!" He expressed our collective discomfort in deviating from what our academic audit culture expects of and frames as normal for teachers and students. It is a culture increasingly intolerant of mistakes, driven by order, structure, and certitude, and characterized by curricula segmented into decontextualized, fragmented dissemination of content. Jaime expresses the discomfort we both felt as teachers in our transgression against the course syllabus, the icon associated with academic audit culture:

As a teacher with an abiding concern for curriculum as dynamic lived experience, who works in an education culture increasingly obsessed with "metrics" and "measurable outcomes and objectives," I certainly felt discomfort in negotiating the appropriate balance between structure and possibility. I struggled with how to balance the need for having enough structure to ground

the course with allowing the room for the course to be co-developed with all participants. How is the discomfort I am experiencing tied to what I have learned I need to be as a teacher, administrator and even in my role as a parent? Being more in charge and in control creates a level of comfort. Or at least I am comforted by the illusion of control. And yet, I have come to appreciate the power of being authentic, and know that we must be willing to muck around in the unknown to create meaningful change. For me this concept is central to this class. I know that the most important thing to do in this is to attend to the process. In doing so we move away from being results-driven and instead are open to all that is possible.

The discomfort that we and our students felt resulted from entering a classroom without a comprehensive course syllabus filled with boilerplate statements of university, college, and departmental policy, a linear calendar of readings and assignments, and predetermined measureable objectives, outcomes, and metrics of assessment. The course syllabus symbolizes the fantasy of control, cure, and manipulation of some generic student (Taubman, 2000). Syllabi have also become an increasingly intrusive and oppressive technology of disciplinary surveillance aimed at students and teachers alike, “a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Foucault, 1995, pp. 170-171).

We represent our counter-narrative to the fantasy of cure, control, manipulation of fantasy figures visually in Figure 4. The image illustrates our understanding of currere as a rolling landscape, a winding road, a horizon over which we cannot see, a journey with no real end in sight. The course syllabus could be analogous to a topographic map that shows the features of the landscape and presents myriad possibilities for a process for the discovery of a non-prescribed path. The path is at the forefront rather than the destination. Instead, much like Taubman’s (2009) paint-by-numbers metaphor, course syllabi mark safe, well-trodden routes to predefined destinations, treasure maps that promise a prize if only our students mind the posted landmarks—the standards. Dispensing with a syllabus as treasure map and inviting our students to join us in interpreting the topography of the problems in which lived was a spiritual journey that transcended “hope and fear” and leaned “toward the discomfort of life” rather than protecting ourselves from it (Chödrön 1997, p. 15-17).



Figure 4. Transgressing the linear curricular path.

Act 3: We're All in this Together

I believe we would all be much better off if we spend more time quietly sitting with ourselves, one another, and our questions, and facing the fears that so often drive us to “do,” drive us to distraction, drive us to fantasize final solutions. (Taubman, 2000, p. 32)

All serious and original thinking is ultimately revolutionary—revolutionary in a broader than political sense. And so to become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask for such action. (van Manen, 1990, p. 154)

As our course ended, we invited our students, and they agreed, to write final reflections about how they experienced the course, how their thinking may have shifted over time, what they learned about themselves, each other, and the world, and what we might be able to do differently in the future. They included their final reflections as part of their course portfolios. They indicated that their experiences in terms of curriculum and teaching were unique in their own educational histories. We offer excerpts from three of our students’ work—their performative stories—as we conclude our own.

In explaining this class to a friend, he asked me what I haven’t discussed. I think that speaks to the very soul of this course. From day one, we set the rule that nothing was off-limits and due to that, I have grown more than I thought possible. I think it is safe to call this course transformational. In reality, it operated more like a family than a university-sanctioned class. I think that may be why it really is sticking with me. Much like Palmer asks of us, I have learned to appreciate the differences of others, developed the courage to recognize that my opinion is not always right, and allowed my heart to “break open” to discover unknown things. (Anthony)

I have grown to appreciate both my inner self, as well as my involvement in the community. We spend too much time planning our wants and needs and daydreaming of change, which distracts us from any form of action. This class was an experience that I never thought would be a part of my higher education. Having this become more of the norm would be splendid. I feel like we were never limited with our thoughts and feelings. With that in mind, I would like to bring up the Buddhist mindset: We all have what we need within. In this world, there are so many Buddha's to interact with. (Kyle)

As an American Indian scholar I sometimes think about the irony of my having chosen a career in education. When I was younger, as an indigenous student I was often told that I could not possibly do as well as I did academically. In contrast to that I had Native students question my identity as a native person because I did well in classes, or sometimes I had Native adults get upset with me for submitting willfully to colonial rule. There are certainly people in Native communities who see academic success in American (colonial) education as a form of betrayal, of subscribing to the ideas of the oppressor. Indeed, I would be lying if I said that during the course of my education that I hadn't been labeled "traitor" or more often an "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside). I hold the tension that exists for me between the idea that by continuing to pursue education—the very institution that has been used as a weapon of mass destruction against many Native communities—that I am betraying somehow my identity as a Native person and on the other side my realization that as Native people, we need to have tribal members who are well-educated to lead our nations and defend our sovereignty. Even as a kid, I wondered how as a nation we would ascertain our legitimacy as a sovereign nation if we did not possess the credentials demanded by the white world that surrounded us. Wouldn't it be better if we as Native people earned the papers, the degrees, that others required so that we could defend for ourselves our rights as Native people, so that we could determine what education of our own people would look like? So while I on the one hand have to defend my identity as a native person as I continue in education, on the other it is my acquisition of education and credentials that best put me in a position to insert indigenous knowledge and methodologies into mainstream classroom. We cannot indigenize the academy (or anything else) if we do not engage those institutions which we seek to change. (Amanda)



Figure 5. A young Lakota boy from Pine Ridge Reservation.

My point is that rather than rush to submit another grant for another project, we might be wise to reflect, not on the hopes we say are behind the projects, but on the fantasies behind them and what they mean to us. We might then start with what is in front of us. Perhaps, for those of us in schools of education, we might begin to work on how we can create space to reflect and come together as a faculty. We might work on our own biases or our own writing rather than urgently create some anti-bias or writing program for the schools or even our own students. We might begin to develop our own sense of community and connection, explore the obstacles to these, rather than write another grant for how to build communities “out there.” We might be able to reflect together on how we came to be where we are, what the needs are or problems are that are directly related to our lives, and how we might go about thinking about and addressing these. (Taubman, 2000, p. 32)

Giving up is not the same as giving in. Chödrön (2013) explains the meaning of the Buddhist term *shunyata* or “emptiness” as a practice of letting go, which is the “essence of mindfulness” (p. 154). Similarly, Taubman (2000) asserts that teaching without hope is not synonymous with despair. Rather than clinging to hope, “teaching, and writing about teaching and education, may mean giving up hope, renouncing the desire to cure, reform, or rescue, and taking a much more modest view of our own free will” (Taubman, 2000, p. 25). We must, therefore, let go. Fantasy disguised as hope has perpetuated violence against curriculum, teaching, students, and communities, by reducing curriculum and teaching to linear to-do lists of pre-determined outcomes delivered from menus of instructional strategies. Audit culture has conflated curriculum with standards, textbook “systems,” and reductive, biased metrics purported to measure mastery of a corpus of static, de-contextualized “facts” and “skills.” Our devotion to and obsession with the standards movement emerged from the desire to “do something” provoked by fear, to fantasize a final solution, and to provide the comfort and safety of an equally fantastic safe harbor (Taubman, 2000; Carlson, 2002). Lost are the extremely complex, relational human processes involved in curriculum, teaching, and learning.

Chödrön (1997) writes that the path is the goal, but she emphasizes that the path “is not prefabricated. It doesn’t already exist. The path that we’re talking about is the moment-by-moment evolution of our experience” (p. 143). Deviation from the prescriptive curricular straight line represents our collective journey on a path that didn’t already exist, a path on which our experiences unfolded moment-by-moment as we walked together through an undiscovered landscape. Reflecting on Taubman’s (2000) *Teaching Without Hope*, we ponder curriculum and teaching in terms of Anzaldúa’s (1987) borderlands, in which teachers and students together negotiate strangeness and familiarity and reframe the real/imaginary lines that separate, unite, and guide us as permeable, where transgression and deviance occur as a matter of routine. Doing so might help us out of our safe harbors to take-up Chödrön’s (1997) journey beyond hope and fear. In the process we could sit quietly with each other, interrogate our assumptions, reflect on our lives and relationships as educators, and perhaps come to understand that, as Palmer (2011) defines his first democratic habit of the heart: we are all in this together.

Finally, in our work in both secondary and higher education, we have witnessed and experienced the spread of audit culture and the marginalizing pressures it places on students, teachers, and communities. Through this work, we join Taubman (2000, 2009) in expressing grave concerns about the role of teacher education in inculcating a generation of teachers who leave our programs with little if any deep understanding of curriculum theory, the interdependence between curriculum and pedagogy, little critical awareness of issues related to education policy, and a disturbing lack of a sense of advocacy for themselves, their profession, and the students and communities they will serve. Most troubling to us, however, is our perception of young teachers leaving teacher education programs lacking the ability to critically self-reflect on and interrogate their own biases, assumptions, and positionalities, which we regard as a crucial contribution in Taubman's (2000, 2009) work. We would do well to breach the artificial border that sanctimoniously separates "higher" education from our PK-12 systems and realize that what occurs at every step in the complex processes inherent in curriculum and pedagogy at every level directly affects us all. To do this would indeed be "to begin to act ethically" (Taubman, 2000, p. 31). Fantasy masquerading as hope is truly hope misplaced.

Epilogue

Distance can often bring added insight into any experience. Nearly a year has passed since taking that journey with our five students, and we have just finished teaching our course again, this time with 13 students. We still hear from our original five students as they have gone to graduate school, law school, and have continued their doctoral and undergraduate studies. For all of us, one of the fondest memories of the entire experience lies in our remembrance of our last meeting together in our house having dinner and talking about the most important aspects of the course together. We all agreed that in embarking on that experience we truly left our "safe harbors" and sailed a non-prescribed course toward a perpetually expanding horizon. Anzaldúa (1987) taught us to walk in the borderlands between the strange and the familiar and to embrace the complexity and ambiguity of lived experience. We, as teachers, and our students have been living in an education culture that has increasingly succumbed to an ideology of control, measurement, and prediction—to set the destination and the path. We have increasingly experienced classrooms and curriculum as sterilized the contingency of life, fearful of sitting together with and in the unknown, and bereft of empathy. Learning and teaching have become stultifying, prescriptive, shallow, and in many ways devoid of passion and desire. Our experiences together reignited our passions and affirmed our desire to engage with the world and with ourselves in all of the complexity and paradox associated with teaching, learning, and living.

Embracing the vulnerability to genuinely know and to be known by others represents perhaps the most daunting aspect of the experience for us all. We found that in experiencing each other so deeply we also came to know ourselves more deeply as well—not always a comfortable process. Yet in creating that small community, we actually lived the tension between our obligations to each other in socially just democratic community and the hyper-individualism perpetually marketed to us through social, political, and educational systems predicated on what Langston Hughes, in *Let America be America Again*, called "the same old stupid plan of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the

weak.” Perhaps the most poignant and important piece of that experience lie in the histories we told and heard—the legacies of Harvey Milk, Angela Davis, the Women’s Peace Movement in Liberia, and our own unfolding stories. As Thomas King (2003) wrote, we have heard each others’ stories and have committed to carry those stories with us in our hearts.

South Dakota Spring 2012: We are all Africans Connected by a Shared Root System

Normally spring comes late and very tentatively to South Dakota. The first buds on the oak trees will cling tightly like children’s clenched toes testing the waters of summer’s first swim. The new spring sunlight and warmth cannot be trusted. It is that time of year where winter is still a breath away. The day can begin in earnest as spring when suddenly the sky will darken, temperatures drop and the winds blow in one more winter storm with inches of snow as though to remind us nothing is certain. The weather cannot be controlled. All we can do is describe what may be coming and prepare.

Last year as I sat on my deck on one of the first really warm days of late spring, I realized that spring came in this year with great confidence. There was none of the seasonal ambivalence usually experienced in the months of April through Mid-June. Global warming has created a kind of arrogance in seasons. Still, we who have lived through many, long, cold Midwest winters, (that last longer than any of the other seasons), are jubilant at the mere prospect of long warm days. We will ignore the signs that these changes in weather are telling us; that something is indeed very wrong.

That day as the wind moved through the poplar trees I heard and felt a quiet rustling, like a gentle hand trying to waken me from a long sleep. I remembered that there is a grove of aspen trees in Utah that is now known to be one of the longest living organisms on earth. This ancient 105-acre colony made of genetically identical trees, called stems, is connected by a single root system. This tree community began at least 80,000 years ago, when all of our human ancestors were still living in Africa. There are those who believe that this woodland could be as old as 1 million years, which would mean it predates the earliest humans by 800,000 years. Could this mean we are all Africans connected by a single root system? Did those strong and ancient roots call out to us? Did we hear the call on the Sahara wind? What was the Sahara like then? Was it an ocean? Was it a valley? Perhaps it was a grove of trees that listened to other trees from far away and they shared their secret longings with us so we could move for them and journey to new places.

Once a long time ago I was traveling by train from County Cork to Dublin. Sitting across from me was a family—a man, a woman and young boy who were speaking Gaelic. Their voices were beautiful and the sound of their language was music. I closed my eyes to really see what I was hearing. I could almost remember that language as my own. Something was there at the edge of my knowing. The train came to a stop and when I opened my eyes the boy was kissing me on the mouth. Before I could even identify a need to react, he was gone. He got off the train and I watched him fade away as the train moved away from the platform into the night.

He knew I was beautiful when I did not, and in that breath that sent his kiss to my lips—he reached out for me and whispered the truth to my bones; that I am not alone, that we are never truly alone.

Once there were great forests in Ireland. Now there are no trees—there is, however, the memory of trees; an ancient memory where there is no time, no space and we are all connected by a single root system and I remember the words of e.e. cummings:

... here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;
which grows higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
i carry your heart
(i carry it in my heart)

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