THE KEY TO THE GRAIL
IS TEACHING WITH COMPASSION

by

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Abstract

The Key to the Grail

Is Teaching with Compassion

My purpose in undertaking this thesis was to explore, determine, and articulate my unexamined belief in the ontological humanity of compassion and thus its necessity for pedagogy.

I read what authorities have written on the importance of being human in the world, personally, professionally, and pedagogically. These authorities--novelists, poets, researchers--are situated in the concreteness of lived subjectivity, lived intersubjectivity, and evoke a phenomenological description of being human in lived experience. I abstracted and re-lived, then self-consciously and concretely reflected upon, analyzed, wrote, and re-wrote poignant moments from my own life story as a teacher--in a dialectical process of separating, decontextualizing, confronting myself, as a teacher, in order to engage, involve, and ground myself as a compassionate teacher.

I learned that compassion is the physical manifestation of the realization that we share the same Being; and thus it is part of all authentic human interaction. Without compassion, students cannot experience the feelings of acceptance necessary for self-esteem, necessary for realizing their best selves, as learners and
as human beings. Without compassion, teachers cannot realize their best selves as human beings, to be their best selves as teachers.

During my reading and writing, vivid experiential themes emerged that raised my consciousness from knowing the truth of the importance and significance of compassion in all human interaction intellectually to feeling the truth of it emotionally, spiritually, substantively.

"And the end of all [my] exploring
[Was] to arrive where [I] started
And know the place for the first time."

(Eliot, 1987, p. 2535)

From authoring these reflections on my lived experience with my students, I realize profoundly my authorship in these and all such experiences. My lifeworld, now mediated by this realization, is deeply and forever enhanced and clarified by this realization. Henceforth, for me to live authentically, for my life to have meaning, I must be animated by and grounded in compassion in the life I live, and especially in the life I live with my students.
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The key to the Grail . . .

is teaching with compassion.
"The key to the Grail is compassion,
suffering with, feeling another's sorrow
as if it were your own.

The one who finds
the dynamo of compassion
is the one who's found the Grail."

Joseph Campbell
This thesis is dedicated to my mother who raised me

with the lived experience of joy in and compassion for all life.
Chapter 1

*Tat Twam Asi*

The first law of life

I looked up "pedagogue" in the dictionary and found it was a pejorative term: A pedagogue is "a pedantic, narrow-minded teacher" (Funk & Wagnalls, 1976, p. 482). I was discomfited by this definition until I read the definition of "pedagogy" immediately following: "the science of teaching" (p. 482). Ah, yes, of course--a "pedagogue" is one who excels in "the science of teaching". She is competent in her subject area, is well-versed in the latest research, and employs the latest methods. But, she is not a teacher. A pedagogue teaches courses. A teacher teaches children...young people...fellow human beings! Fellow human beings with the same fears, hopes, needs, and desires: fears of failure, hopes of success, needs of acceptance, desires for love. Human beings share these most profound, most basic, and most life-driving (life-enhancing?) characteristics because we share the same ground of being...the same Being.

Schopenhauer asks, "How is it that suffering that is neither my own nor of my concern should immediately affect me as though it were my own, and with such force that it moves me to action?" (in Osbon, 1991, p. 53) We all have witnessed
or read of many instances of people risking, and sometimes losing, their lives to save others. For Schopenhauer:

the foundation of morality ultimately rests on the truth . . . expressed in the mystical formula 'tat twam asi' (This art Thou), by which is meant every living thing, whether man or animal . . . The recognition of one's own essential being in another, objectively present individual is most clearly and beautifully evident in those cases in which a human being already on the brink of death is anxiously and actively concerned with the welfare and rescue of others. (in Hollingdale, 1970, p.140)

He goes on to tell of a servant girl bitten by a mad dog and, believing herself beyond hope, seized the dog and locked it in a kennel, so that "no one else should fall victim to it" (p.140), and of "a scene often reproduced in copperplate print in which a soldier kneeling to be shot by a firing squad is violently shooing away his dog, who is running up to him" (p.141). Joseph Campbell describes this behaviour as:

a breakthrough of the reality of this life that lives in us. At such moments, you realize that you and that other are, in fact, one. It's a realization. Survival is the second law of life. The first is that we are all one. (in Osbon, 1991, p. 54)

**Compassion—the manifestation of the first law**

And thus a teacher acting from the centre of her Being, acting from her heart, realizes, strengthens, makes manifest, nurtures, and is nurtured by, the connectedness and interdependence of herself and her students, and her students and her students. Even the duality of Martin Buber's I-Thou dissipates; what is achieved and made manifest is a fundamental unity, a "fellow-feeling"—one of the original definitions of "compassion" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p. 489).
Thus, a true teacher is one who teaches with and teaches for compassion. According to Schopenhauer, compassion makes the wall between I and Thou "thin and transparent; indeed it sometimes tears the wall down altogether, whereupon the distinction between I and Not-I disappears" (Hollingdale, p.134).

A true teacher, a compassionate teacher, is guided by her intimate awareness of the "fellow-feelings" of her students: their fears, hopes, needs, and desires. Through all her interactions with her students, she recognizes, respects, and responds to their individuality, their sense of self, their pride. She continuously attempts to develop, build, enhance their feelings of self-worth, their beliefs that they are necessary, contributing, valued, and beloved; that the world, at least her world, would be a lesser place, a less interesting place, a less joyful place without them. How does she do this? She lives this awareness, this belief—physically, concretely—through her eyes, her voice, her gesture, her stance.

The curriculum of being and becoming

I said that a teacher teaches fellow human beings; but, as Van Manen (1990) says, "a human being is not just something you automatically are ; it is something you must try to be" (p. 5). A true teacher must see, see profoundly, his students and himself not as human "beings", which suggests completion, but as human "becomings", which suggests possibility, hope, growth, education, pedagogy--"pedagogy", from the Greek "paedos"--a child and "aogus"--leading (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p. 2110). That is pedagogy. That is "The curriculum of
being and becoming" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7). And a true pedagogue is one who embraces, who lives the meaning of human becoming, who lives the meaning of pedagogy; and who, therefore, must ask what contributes towards the good of the student, to the "becoming" of the student. When a teacher lives the meaning of human becoming, she lives the experience of "fellow-feeling" with her students; and compassion, understanding, warmth, and comfort permeate her relationships and interactions with her students; it becomes the atmosphere, mood, and climate of the classroom. The students see themselves in their teacher: They see that she too has fears, hopes, needs, and desires. And the level of compassion, understanding, warmth, and comfort rises and pervades their interactions with the teacher and with each other. When the teacher lives as a human becoming, she seeks knowledge and laughter and joy and nurturing from her students. But she is the teacher, and her relationship with her students is that of the teacher, the pedagogue, "the leader of children". She has a longer life experience; she has the greater knowledge; she has the responsibility of acting pedagogically, of constantly questioning how the student is experiencing the situation, what the student is learning from the situation, and how the situation is contributing to the student's becoming--and not just academically, but morally, spiritually, and individually. And when compassion, fellow-feeling, characterizes not only what the teacher says but also how the teacher concretely behaves--the expression in her eyes, her tone of voice, her gesture--there is comfort in the situation, so that the student can grow and expand individually, morally, intellectually, and spiritually.
Many years ago, I taught in an inner-city, elementary school. Many of my students lived in situations where there was no comfort or security and, for some, no love. But these children came to school every day and every day would smile at me; every day would live as though this is indeed "the best of all possible worlds" (Leibniz), as though "God's in his heaven--/All's right with the world" (Browning). From their perspective of innocence, they did not see the injustice of their lives. Van Manen says that children live in "the realm of possibility" (1986, p. 13), the realm of hope; and we as pedagogues must not only support that attitude but live in it with them. We must model not only knowledge-seeking behaviour but also life-affirming behaviour. A true pedagogue sees, embraces, and exudes the joy and love and laughter of life. And a true pedagogue, a compassionate pedagogue, nurtures the joy and love and laughter in her students, and is nurtured by them.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) defines "passion" as "an object of love"; as "an eager outreaching of the mind towards something" (p. 2093). A true pedagogue has more than a command of the latest methodology (methodology?). She has more than competence in the content. She has passion for her subject. It is part of who she is, part of her lived experience of being truly alive. As Goethe (1963) says, "One learns to know only what one loves, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love, indeed the passion" (p. 83). The subject is "an object of love", and the communicating of one's knowledge, one's love, one's spirituality is "an eager outreaching of the mind" to the open, hope-filled minds of one's students, who, in
their innocence, trust, and vulnerability, are one's loving responsibility. It is "an eager outreaching" and connecting that is the desire to nurture the becoming of the students; an eager outreaching and connecting that is the very essence and radiance of pedagogy. The character of pedagogy is passionate engagement engaged in compassionately.

To be compassionate is to enter into the life experience of another person, another manifestation of Being, and to participate with the heart in that other person's fears, hopes, needs, and desires. To be pedagogic, one must be compassionate, because to be pedagogic is to enter into the world of the student and know, with the head and the heart, what that student is feeling--how that student is experiencing a situation, an idea, an event, a task--in order to cultivate, guide, sustain, enhance, and validate that student's unique manifestation of Being and becoming. Because each student is unique and experiences life uniquely, there are no rules for attaining the lived-meaning of pedagogic compassion. A teacher must be attuned to the interconnectedness, interdependence, vulnerability, potentiality, preciousness, and joy of human life; and she must embrace life in all its mystery, glory, shame, power, and possibility; and she must desire profoundly that her students desire profoundly to explore, enjoy, and embrace some of what it is to be a human being. She must understand and recognize her own fears, hopes, needs, and desires. She must recognize when her students are experiencing such feelings. She must understand the unique quality of the student's experience of those feelings. She must care about the student's feelings. She must make manifest to the student her understanding and caring, through her gesture, her
eyes, her voice, her words, her silence. She must modify the situation to protect and validate the student's feelings and to foster the student's learning, growing, and becoming. She must do these things always. But compassion founds and is founded by the interconnectedness of human beings; thus a teacher must reveal and allow her students to share in her humanity: her needs, hopes, fears, and desires; her questing and her questioning; her knowing and her not-knowing; her struggle for and her joy in her becoming. Such revelation and sharing establishes, strengthens, perpetuates the connectedness, the interdependence, the compassion of the teacher-student relationship and experience. Hence the teacher can influence the student's becoming, and she can model possible ways of being and paths of becoming for her students--life-enhancing, life-affirming, ways of being, paths of becoming.
Chapter 2

The child is father of the man

William Wordsworth

The origin and nature of pedagogical responsibility

Teachers are powerfully responsible for the becoming of the child to "the man", but

Responsibility . . . is not primary . . . what is primary is the expression of a fundamental way of being which was already constituted in the meeting with the child. Before I can take responsibility, I am already 'called' by the child 'by my most intimate name'. (Hellemans, 1984, pp. 128-129)

Because I am called by the trusting, vulnerable child within me.

Van Manen (1989) articulates the same "fundamental way of being": "The educator . . . cannot get around the requirement of being charged with pedagogical responsibility to the child--and this unconditional pedagogical responsibility is there from the beginning" (p. 250).

My first year of teaching, I was teaching in an inner-city, elementary school. I had forty-one students in my class, and only three parents--three mothers--came to see me to discuss their children the first parent-teacher night. These mothers, all of whom spoke only Portuguese, were not the mothers of the children about
whom I was most concerned. I remember one mother who knew one English phrase very well: "Mario good boy". No matter what I said, and had Mario translate for his mother, she responded, "Mario good boy".

I sat in my room waiting for other parents to arrive, but no one did. I felt very let down.

I went downstairs and saw Mrs. Weir standing in her classroom doorway. Mrs. Weir was sixty-five years old; she was retiring at the end of that school year, my first year as a teacher. She had started teaching "on permit" in 1920 when she was eighteen years old. Mrs. Weir had received four parents that night. She taught grade two.

"Mrs. Weir, why should we care, if the parents don't?"

"Because that's our job. We've got to care even if nobody else does, especially when nobody else does. Tara, every child you teach is depending on you to care about him and his future. Take my little Stevie [Stevie was a particularly difficult child--always in trouble at school, often in trouble with the law]. He doesn't seem to care if he learns arithmetic or not--at least he fights me no matter what I try, and his parents don't appear to care, so I have to care enough for all of us. I am responsible for his learning to read and do arithmetic. That's my job. I am his teacher. Tara, you have to care about every student you will ever teach, and you have to care the most about those who appear to care the least. That is, if you want to be a teacher."

Mrs. Weir's words have stayed with me. They resonate when I am trying to find a way to help the "learning disabled" student to understand the written word,
when I am trying to find a way to help the disinterested student find something of and for herself in her own and others' written expression, when I am trying to find a way to challenge the "gifted" student. And it is at these times, with Mrs. Weir's words informing me, validating me, encouraging me, that I am most proud of who I am. And who I am is a teacher.

Drucker (1963), addressing the business community, writes that "There is a great deal of talk today about 'empowering people'... Fundamental to the discipline of social ecology... is not a belief in power. It is a belief in responsibility, in authority grounded in competence, and in compassion" (p. 452).

But it is a powerful responsibility: to play a rôle in the becoming of a fellow human being; to play a part in the educating of "the intellect, character, mind, and soul" (Manning, 1875, quoted in the Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p.833) of a trusting, believing child, who empowers the teacher with the authority—a powerful authority. It is the teacher's pedagogical responsibility that that authority is indeed "grounded in competence and in compassion".
Chapter 3

Like to the lark at break of day arising

William Shakespeare

A true teacher is glad to see his or her students

No matter what is happening in my life, when my students come into class in the morning, they bring a smile to my face.

Three years ago I taught a boy who was considered non-academic and difficult. I certainly considered him non-academic and would characterize our relationship as difficult. I seemed to be constantly correcting his behaviour, but nothing major, and we kind of limped along, and he continued to come to class. He had quit attending his other academic classes. The last day of classes in June, I had just finished collecting the text books, the students were saying good-bye and leaving. I was at my desk checking text-book numbers when I heard Brent, standing on the other side of my desk say, "Thanks, Miss Sinclair".

"For what?" I ungraciously replied. I thought he was returning one of the hundreds of pens I had lent him, but he had nothing in his hand.

"For always being glad to see me." And he was gone.
I stood there, staring at the space he had occupied. I, with great guilt, could not and cannot ever remember consciously being so.

This was the story that I shared with my advisor Dr. Carl Leggo. The event had occurred just prior to my first meeting with Dr. Leggo to discuss the possibility of my writing a thesis. I was at a loss as to what I could contribute to the academic community, and Dr. Leggo said I must share my stories of teaching. I was still affected by what Brent had said and by the fact that Brent had said it. When I told Dr. Leggo about it, he said, "Exactly. I want you to write what you do in your classroom to create that."

Since that meeting, I have often remembered to reflect upon my lessons, my teaching style (I'm not sure I have one.), my interactions with the students in and out of the classroom. Quite honestly, I often cringe. But, I think the bottom line is when my students walk into my classroom, I am always glad to see them . . . and it shows. I am very strict with my students about their manners, their work habits, their assignments, and so on; but my students, whether in the halls, the parking lot, or on the street, go out of their way to say hello to me and have me see them and respond in kind. I realize now why they do this: They know that I am always glad to see them.

Teaching is about motivation. When you've got motivated students, the classroom is alive with energy. You've got to be enthusiastic about your subject matter, and you've got to want to work with your students. If they sense that you don't want to be with them, all the deliberation in the world isn't going to help you solve your teaching problems. (Henderson, p. 58)

I worked with a woman who had real joy in her, as long as nobody mentioned the classroom. Then, the smile went out of her eyes, the laughter went out of her
voice, and the complaints flowed. She had nothing good to say about the students, the parents, the community in which the school was located. Never even a humourous classroom anecdote. There was a steady stream of students to the counselling department, all wanting out of her classes. There was a steady stream of parents to the school, all wanting to address concerns. Many staff members tried to help: We liked her, and we didn't share her view of our students, parents, and community.

I taught many of the same students she did, and they never quit bemoaning being in her classes. But there was never a negative comment about her knowledge, her assignments, her evaluation methods. All I heard was, "She hates us." "She hates teaching." "Why doesn't she quit, if she hates it so much?" "She hates us, and we hate her."

I was setting up for a dance with one of the grade eleven student council members, whom I had taught in grades nine and ten.

"Miss Sinclair, they don't pay you enough, do they?"

"For what? Loading flats of pop?"

"No, Miss Sinclair," he chuckled, as he lifted a flat onto the counter in the cafeteria. "For teaching."

"What? Why do you say that?"

"Well, I was thinking that I'd really like to be a teacher, but Miss Robertson said, 'Never be a teacher. It's a crummy job, and you don't get paid enough'. How come you like it so much?"
"Because I spend my days with people like you. Araf, I don't care how much you get paid, if you hate how you spend your day, you're not successful."

"And you really love it. But I can see why Miss Robertson hates teaching. The kids give her a really rough time."
Passion for your subject

What you teach must be part of who you are, part of your experience of being truly alive.

Educators may look to a 'pedagogy of bliss' that Wear describes as 'a passionate engagement with something: the experience of awe and the experience of being connected with something greater than one's self'. Making one's bliss explicit to students is a starting point to 'awaken and nurture the kind of restless and reflective wonder' in students. (Drake & Miller, 1991, p. 331)

I am a member of a very energetic English department. We meet regularly and the group decides methods of evaluation, which books to order, and so on. Two years ago, at a meeting about which teacher would use which books and when, the majority decided that we should list which poems should be taught at each grade level, so that none of us would teach a poem that the students had already been taught.
Miss Sinclair, half the time in [the school acronym for our daily, school-wide, silent reading period], you're reading a poetry book. When I read a poem by myself, I don't understand a thing.

Sarita, that's not you. That's poetry. You have to read a poem more than once to get anything out of it. And some poems, you have to read many, many times to even begin to grasp what the author is saying or feeling or questioning about what it is to be a human being, about what it is to live in this world.

Heaven forbid that one of us teaches a poem that has already been taught. I commented that I thought we would do a better job of teaching poetry, if we taught the poems we loved. According to Miriam Waddington, "There is one basic principle--the teacher must know, read, and love poetry. That is the secret of stimulating students and of all good teaching" (McNeil, 1980, p. 91).

Miss Sinclair, I think the reason we get so much out of the poems we read in class is you read them with so much feeling.

That's because I feel so much when I read them.

How come? How come you don't get bored? You gotta teach this stuff every year.

Ya, from one the boys. We were talking about you the other night at dinner, and Ken--you remember my big brother, don't ya Miss Sinclair? I was telling him about that poem we took the other day that made the girls cry.

We were not crying, interrupted a chorus of girls. And so were some of you guys.
We were not, said the boys, setting that record straight rather vociferously.
And then quietly, We just liked it.

Well, Ken said that you taught them the same poem. I couldn't believe it. I thought it was the first time you taught it. All this stuff you teach, you get so excited and happy about.

Well, first of all, I teach the poems I love, and I'm always discovering marvelous poems, and I teach them. And with pieces of literature that are mandatory, I get so much more out of them each time I read them; and don't forget that every time I teach a poem or a short story or a novel, I have thirty intelligent, active people who expand and deepen my understanding, my questioning. Half the comments and questions I've written in my Lit 12 text have come from students.

"... I invite my students to join me in seeking truth(s) together. I tell them that I am caught up in affirming, questioning, exploring, hoping, despairing, embracing, rejecting, rebelling, be-com-ing" (Leggo, 1993, p. 23).

I think that's good that Miss Sinclair gets so excited, from one of the girls. It gets us excited too.

"What draws us to a Horowitz or Ashkenazy performance is not just the technical proficiency, but the depth and warmth of the performance" (Drake & Miller, 1991, p. 322). "... knowledge is not a matter of theoretical or intellectual truth, or the formal intellect alone. Knowledge as understanding is transformative or geistig--a matter of the depth of the soul, spirit, embodied knowing and being" (Van Manen, 1989, p. 234). Therefore,
Don't teach poetry if you don't like it. If the only form of literature you really like is the mystery novel, better to teach that. At least you will convey your enthusiasm rather than putting the student off. Love for the subject—any subject—is more important than showing off what you 'know'. (Atwood, quoted in McNeil, 1980, p. 91)

**True teaching is following one's bliss**

"The path of transformation should be a 'path with heart'. In Campbell's words, the path with heart is 'following one's bliss'. The teacher, then, should be engaging in practice that makes him or her feel fully alive" (Drake & Miller, p. 331).

A few years ago, grade seven students became part of our school, and so a few teachers, who had been teaching in elementary schools, joined our staff. There were five who joined the English Department, four of whom were dynamic, intelligent, very capable young women. One was a quiet, rather hesitant man, who had been teaching for a number of years. He did not fit in with the group of young women, who worked very closely together. He was what is known as a traditional teacher. Much to their chagrin, he did not use "reader response"; he did not use "conferencing"; he did not seem to know about any of the latest methods. *He must be so boring. He must be killing the programme.* But when they were bemoaning what a challenge some students' abilities were or some students' attitudes were, he was asking me, as the Department Co-ordinator, to read some little soul's paragraph and write something 'nice' on it, that the little person had really tried, and that he thought it would mean a lot to the child if I
said something nice. Or he was talking about what a sense of humour a child had-
how the student had made them all laugh so much. And every year, he couldn't
get over how smart his kids were. He used to worry that he was not smart enough
for them. I worked with that man for seven years, and I never heard one negative
comment about one student, never a negative comment about the very demanding
job of teaching.

His wife took very sick, and Frank retired early to stay home and look after
her. He loved his wife very much—he glowed whenever he mentioned her--, but
he would not allow any recognition of his retiring. When I tried to talk to him
about maybe just a little tea at my house, with just a few of his closest colleagues
from his years of teaching, he started to cry.

"Tara, can't you see my heart is breaking? I won't be teaching."

"Teachers must make students' education an integral part of their lives, not
something that's separate from their real world. . . . [Teaching] is exciting, joyful,
and fulfilling" (Henderson, 1992, p. 25).

Frank used very traditional methods when he taught, but he taught with his
heart. Over the years, I have taught many students who had Mr. Jacobson for
grade seven English, and he certainly did teach writing skills. But however he did
it, he did it well, and his students all comment about how kind he was, how much
fun he was. For twenty-seven years, he "followed his bliss", and his kids loved
him for it.
Teachers should seek out and explore new methods of delivering their subjects, but passionate, engaging teaching, teaching "with heart", involves something far different from using the latest methods. As Leggo (1993) writes, "... teaching is, at best, a messy business, unpredictable and multi-coloured, inextricably tied up with the emotions, the personality, the subconscious" (p. 22).

Caring and striving passionately and compassionately

Teaching is a passionate love affair, and it is this passion that engages your intuitive abilities. Certainly you will encounter problems as a teacher, but just listen carefully to yourself and to your students and appropriate solutions will begin to emerge. Studying educational research distracts you from your intuitive listening. How much of this research was conducted in passionate settings, anyway? What wisdom is discovered through carefully controlled empirical research? To be responsive, you must be connected to the teaching present--to the teaching moment (Henderson, p. 59).

You must be connected passionately to your subject and compassionately to your students.

"One should be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise" (Fitzgerald, in Leggo, p. 23). A teacher must not give up. At the end of this past school year, the members of the English Department were group-marking the grade eleven, cross-grade essay exams; and one of the younger members of the Department, who was just finishing her second year of teaching, was so disappointed when she read her class set of student essays.

"You guys? I feel awful. I thought my kids would do so well: We did so much writing this year. I thought I did such a good job, and I don't see any
difference in quality in this writing from the way they were writing at the beginning of the year."

My heart went out to her. "Sherry, you did do a good job. Each year at some time, I will be reading a student's writing and think, mean-spiritedly, Who taught this kid last year? Only to remember that I did."

"You feel like that after all your years of teaching? That's it, I quit."

"No, I was trying to make you feel better. You make a difference because you care, because you did do all that writing with your kids, and they wrote, and they enjoyed it."

Our efforts often do not leap off the page at us, but we continue. Even though sometimes, we feel like "the priest who perpetually renews the office before an altar to which no worshippers come" (Wilder, p.111), we continue. And we continue because we care. We care passionately. It is who we are.

I love teaching literature, but sometimes, when I am teaching the more challenging pieces of literature to a particularly heterogeneous group of young people; or, as in the case of one of my grade eleven classes this year, in which there were twenty-four boys, whose idea of challenging and satisfying reading was Car and Driver (I am not being sarcastic; I do not belittle reading), I will mentally step back from the scene and think that it would play well in a farce. One time I did stop and sincerely ask the class if they wanted me to continue.

"Why Miss Sinclair? Are you tired?" asked one of the biggest fans of "Car and Driver".
"No. I just wanted to know if you are enjoying the book." I had just started

**The Grass Harp.**

"It's okay. Let's keep reading."

Good enough for me. I continue.

As I said, I love teaching literature, but I must also isolate and teach a few of the standards of English usage. Every year, I hesitate about teaching some of the finer points of usage. But every year I teach the difference in the use of "who" and "whom" because every year there might be some student who will learn and use correctly the word whom, and that student deserves my teaching it. "It seemed to be sufficient for Heaven [and for me] that for a while . . . a disinterested love had flowered" (Wilder, p. 111). No, it is more than that. I always teach such bright, vibrant young people; and I want them to be the best they can be. I want them to have a strong and wonderful command of the English language. I care so much that my students will understand the written word, will appreciate beautiful use of the language, will be exposed to and touched by the best of literature, and that they will be able to articulate their thoughts and feelings in the best of ways. I care so much. I care passionately; but, as Alberto Manguel, the Canadian writer, says, "How can you feel good about yourself if you are not fanatically passionate about what you are putting forward?"

**Teaching with passion is teaching to the curriculum of life**

According to Leggo (1993),
English teachers . . . need to be celebrators of questing and striving and seeking for the beauty and truth and joy in life. . . . [They] need to teach literature with passion, . . . with respect for the author's questing and striving after truth, for the insights into life and living . . . for the beauty and power of the words and in a way that students become aware of that beauty and power and . . . learn to examine [themselves], to know [themselves], to transform [themselves], to construct [themselves] in new ways. . . . Teachers . . . must be committed to self-reflexive, risk-taking utopian pedagogy, characterized by a fearless quest for what is true and good and loving (pp. 23-24)—in their lives and in their classrooms.

I have been criticized, mocked, and corrected for teaching Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey, and even for teaching Truman Capote's The Grass Harp, to our increasingly more heterogeneous classes—to the point where I stopped doing so, and for a number of years safely taught (taught?) the novels of the curriculum, Lord of the Flies, and so on. My choice and my choices did not work. For me, there was no "questing and striving and seeking for the beauty and truth and joy in life". My students did not "learn to examine themselves, to know themselves, to transform themselves, to construct themselves in new ways". I did not intuit "a relationship between student and subject matter" (Van Manen, 1986, p. 45). There was no "fearless quest for what is true and good and loving". Last fall, I took that pedagogical risk. The first day of my grade eleven class, I wrote the following on the board:

Some say . . . that to the gods we are like the flies that boys kill on a summer day, and some say, on the contrary, that the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God. (Wilder, p. 7)

I told my students not to worry about writing skills, just to write whatever they had heard, or felt, or thought about the subject. They stared at me. We
discussed the metaphors in the passage and the profound question Mr. Wilder was addressing.

"But Miss Sinclair, what's the answer?"

"I don't know. I think the really important questions in life—the ones worth asking—do not have an answer. The value is in the asking. The value is in the wrestling with the question, in the trying to come to some sort of response for your self, your life. And right now, I am asking you to do that wrestling."

They began to write. And that night, when I was reading what they had written, when I was reading the visions informed by a sixteen-year-old's experience of life, when I was reading the visions informed by the disparate and wide-ranging cultural views of life and what it is to be a human being, I had one of those moments, outlined by Leonard, when "A delicate warmth slides into parts of your being you didn't even realize were cold" (1968, p. 8). And each class, as we wrestled with understanding Wilder's complex characters struggling with their humanness, struggling with "all the unavoidable suffering and quandries of human life" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 61), there would be moments when I would feel the literature become "a true subject: a subject which makes relationships possible" (Van Manen, p. 45), moments when I would feel a fundamental unity between the students and myself, between the students and each other, between the literary characters and us. I would feel "a little lurch as [my] own consciousness [as their own consciousness], [my] voice [,their voices], the entire web of sound and silence that holds the class together, the room itself, the very flow of time all shift to a different level" (Leonard, p. 8).
At the end of our study of Wilder—end? There is no end to the study of the ideas and questions posed by Thornton Wilder through his characters. At the end of the story, my students could not believe the characters were not real, were fiction. What a compliment to the artist! What a response, a response that "constitutes the very essence of the relationship between student and subject matter" (Van Manen, p. 45).

Teach what you can teach with your heart: "follow you bliss". Teach what "makes you feel fully alive" (Drake & Miller, p. 331). Take the "utopian, pedagogical risk" and be "fearless in your quest".

As Northrop Frye (1963) writes "... the end of literary teaching is not simply the admiration of literature; it is something more like the transfer of imaginative energy from literature to the student" (p. 55).

A colleague of mine, who is widely frowned upon for his eccentricity, for his not being a team-player, teaches The Iliad to his grade nines and The Odyssey to his grade tens. When I asked him about the time and effort demanded by these books, he said, "With these books, I can teach poetry, the short story, the novel; I can teach reading, I can teach writing. And the stories are glorious. The kids need to read about striving for good. The kids need to read about heroes." And he loves the books. This same man teaches King Lear to his twelves; he loves it. The students at our school line up to get into his classes.

One of the members of our English Department was a student of this man when she was in high school. At a meeting just this past June, she, along with the other members of the Department, was bemoaning his lack of collegiality, his
eccentric teaching methods and choices of literature. Another member of the Department said to her, "You had him as a teacher. What was it like?"

She paused before answering, as if going back in time, as if mentally she were suddenly somewhere else, and said, almost in a whisper, "It was pure magic."

"... teacher competency ... includes a sense of the aspects that draw the curriculums of math, English, social studies, art, or science to the curriculum of life itself" (Van Manen, p. 46). According to Irving Layton (1987):

It is usually from a gifted teacher that a child catches his first glimpse of harmony or wisdom and gets his first hint of the intellectual adventure which may engage him for the rest of his life.

But for a teacher to communicate the vision of the good life, he must first have that vision himself. If his own light does not burn steadily, he can not hope to kindle it in any one else. A teacher--what is he, if not an inspired seeker after the truth? In teaching as in the writing of poetry, techniques and formulae may support, but can never supplant inspiration. ... the knowledge which he acquires in his free time and which he shares with others eventually trickles into the remotest corners of the community he lives in and helps to enlarge the area of good sense upon which the preservation of civilized values ultimately depends. (p. 146)

A teacher must have a sense of joy and deep commitment to life, to the world, and to the subject matter that draws teacher and students into the world. ... a good teacher does not just happen to teach math or poetry; a good teacher embodies math or poetry. Good teachers are what they teach. (Van Manen, 1986, p. 47)

Good teachers teach their subjects with passion; they teach their students with compassion.
Chapter 5

Or what's a heaven for?

Robert Browning

Reaching for ours and our students' best selves

Compassion is the difference between "a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection, between a self measured against an abstract ideal of perfection and a self assessed through particular activities of care" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 35).

Many teachers develop feelings of inadequacy because they see their colleagues using new methods that appear more exciting for the students, or they read research that suggests that their methods of delivery are not contributing to their students' learning. There will always be teachers with different classroom activities--thank goodness for the students' sake. There will always be researchers questioning methods that others have supported and suggesting different methods--thank goodness for the teachers' sake. But teachers should not define or assess their value and effectiveness through what others are doing or saying, but through continued questioning whether the behaviours in which they engage are the result
of sincere, authentic care and concern for the well-being and success of their students. As the poet Kenneth Patchen said, "The one who comes to question himself has cared for mankind".

... teaching really does mean caring... not just warm and cuddly feelings about students. It means commitment to continued inquiry [emphasis mine] and a steady devotion to modes of interaction that will bring out the best self in each student and in each teacher, too. (Noddings, quoted in Henderson, 1992, p. viii)

We are not in the classroom to be our students' friend; we are there to be their teacher. I care about them, so I don't accept less than their best--in their learning, their deportment, their effort, their treatment of others, their attitudes. My best teaching self is connected to my students. My best teaching self cares passionately about my students becoming their best selves.

"The motivations of our best selves are virtuous. Our best selves are sensitive to connectedness and directed toward making positive contributions" (Henderson, p. 29); "a best-self orientation is grounded in contributive values" (Henderson, p. 35).

Teaching is a very demanding job: We must first examine and clarify, and then animate, exemplify, and exude those virtues that we want to develop in our students.

Good teachers... evoke [a] quality of depth which Emerson so aptly captures in a talk to teachers: According to the depth from which you draw your life, such is the depth not only of your strenuous effort, but of your manners and presence. ... Consent yourself to be an organ of your highest thought. (Drake & Miller, 1991, p. 322)

... we need to hold scrupulously to higher values, to operate with creativity, compassion, and community, and to become [teachers] who see the greater good
for [our students] as the motivating force for what we do" (Ray & Rinzler, 1993, p. 9).

Compassion reconciles the dialectic between actively striving for the becoming and attaining of an authentic best self and actively striving for the selflessness of connectedness.

The sense of connectedness and compassion characteristic of individuals with high levels of personal mastery naturally leads to a broader vision. Without it, all the subconscious visualizing in the world is deeply self-centred—simply a way to get what I want. (Senge, 1992, p.171)

But, "The spirit of connection is fragile. It is undermined whenever we lose our respect for one another and for each other's views" (Senge, p. 230).

... inclusion is the goal of moral consciousness--people who are really connected to the concrete situations in their life, whose knowledge comes not from detachment but from living in connection with themselves and with others, from being embedded in the conditions of life. (Gilligan, p.148)

Teachers "must find time to be self-contemplative. [They] must seek opportunities to become attuned to [their] innermost intentions--to examine [their] best-self purposes for teaching" (Henderson, p. 38). Teachers must find time to question, clarify, and confirm their best teaching selves.

Confirming yourself, or becoming sensitive to your own best self, requires that you take the time to listen to a deeper part of yourself that is not controlled by the analytical habits you have developed as a member of a modern society. Finding your best self is more a poetic embrace than an analytical triumph. (Henderson, p. 28)

"Being human is indefiniteness; humans make themselves through thousands of decisions. They make themselves by acting. The direction of this action is by no means previously fixed. Humans are their own project" (Hellemans, 1984, p.126). And, "by its nature, adolescence is a time of change; in fact, the Latin
root of the word adolescence is 'esso', which means 'becoming'" (Gallo, 1993, p. 3). Thus, grounding one's actions and interactions in the knowledge and scope of his or her pedagogical responsibility, the responsibility for the becoming of his or her students' best selves, is the teacher's own project.

I try to make a personal connection with my students at some time during the class--with a look, a touch, a comment--a personal connection that contributes to their becoming, that fosters their self-esteem, that enhances their realization of their best selves. I tell my students when I've learned of their talents, from their parents, the PA announcements, their peers, the media, their teachers. I tell them privately or publicly or both, depending on the student, the talent, the situation, the source.

Jerry was in my English 8 class. He was new to the school. He was not new to the English language but suffered with quite a strong speech impediment and was diagnosed as learning disabled: He had trouble processing language. He was receiving speech therapy. We got him a lap-top computer to help him compose, and I worked with him one-on-one on a regular basis with his reading. But, he did not contribute in class and did not interact with any of his classmates. I was concerned about his lack of friends in class and would look for him between periods and at lunch to see if he was mixing with others, but whenever I saw him he was always alone. I spoke with his other teachers and learned from his art teacher that he was gifted in art. She showed me one of his water-colours. It was wonderful. I asked her if I could have it, if it was alright with Jerry.
The next class, when he arrived and the others were still coming in, I went over to his desk and spoke quietly to him.

"Jerry, Mrs. Kennedy showed me one of your paintings. It is so beautiful. May I hang it in the classroom?"

"In here?"

"Yes, it would make the whole room look more attractive, and it would be nice for me to have something that lovely to look at."

For the first time, I saw Jerry smile.

"Okay," he answered quietly.

The next time his class came in, everybody noticed it, and Jerry heard comments of "Wow", "Is that from the AP Art class?", even "Did you do that, Miss Sinclair?"

"Good heavens no. Jerry is the artist."

"Wow," from one student.

"No one would believe that was done by a kid," from another student.

As the accolades continued, Jerry's smile broadened.

When I asked the students to work in groups of three on a mythology project, two girls who sat next to Jerry, asked him if he would form a group with them. He became very popular for group work. But, he didn't appear to feel used or exploited: He was wanted for a very special and enviable talent. His classmates no longer saw him as the boy with the learning problems or the boy with the stoppage in his speech, but as the boy with the incredible artistic talent. I saw him
as a boy interacting more and more often, and more and more easily, with his classmates—in the classroom, in the halls, and in the lunchroom.

**Reaching for our best requires a supportive environment**

"There is nothing more important to an individual [teacher or student] committed to his or her own growth than a supportive environment" (Senge, p. 173), an environment of "all those fundamental emotional conditions and sentient human qualities that exist between the educator and the child and which form the basis for every pedagogical relationship" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 5). "To the quality of the pedagogic relation belongs a reflective sense of . . . the meaning of being human, a sense of . . . the personal becoming of the child" (Bollnow, p. 11).

Students need to see their teachers as "questioning, challenging, probing individuals who seek personal and professional growth for themselves and intellectual, emotional, and social growth for their students through the process of inquiry" (Henderson, p. 25). They need to see their teachers continuously and authentically engaged in their own becoming, as a person, as a student, and as a teacher. They need to see them striving to be compassionate, caring human beings. They need to see them questioning, interpreting, and learning language and literature with them. They need to see them seeking out, exploring, and engaging in new methods of teaching.

[There are] some fascinating insights into the roots of authoritarianism in thinking. . . . [People] are convinced deep down that people above them know
what is going on, or at least they ought to know if they are competent. This mentality weakens them as individuals, and the [learning process] as a whole. At some level it absolves them of responsibility in the [learning process]. (Senge, p. 282)

I try to celebrate each student and each student's writing by sharing and applauding a line, a phrase, a word, at least once during the class, from every student's writing. I do not use models of writing, nor do I read exemplary student essays, written by my more gifted students, because they destroy my other students' confidence; they destroy my other students' desires to try, my other students' desires to realize their best selves as writers.

A few years ago, a student of mine submitted an assignment on a short story we had studied in class. The level of ideas and the fluency of expression were outstanding. I saved it and shared it the following year with a class. What a mistake! We had read the story and had had a very animated discussion about it, and I had given them the assignment.

"Before you start to work on your assignment, I want you to listen to what a student wrote last year. I think it is wonderful, and I'd like to share it with you."

As I read the composition to them, I heard the discouraging groans. By the time I had finished reading, I had totally destroyed not only their confidence as writers, but also their desire to try.

A best self is individual

"Each teacher needs to find the unique combination of ideas, methods, and philosophies that works best for him or her" (Henderson, p. 27).
I use the blackboard. They see me compose, and they help me compose. They see me edit, and they help me edit. I ask them to help me find the best word or best example. I do not give them duplicated sheets, of which they had no part in creating, of which they have no ownership, and in the creation of which they learned nothing. I have great respect for their skill and great belief in their imaginative powers. I try to take opportunity to instill that respect and belief in them. For these same reasons, I seldom use an over-head projector. I guess I'm like Al Jolson, who liked to have the house lights on: I need to see their faces to respond to them and involve them.

I want my students to be the best they can be, and I have great faith in their ability. And I tell them so.

"Miss Sinclair? How come all the other English 10 classes are doing Twelfth Night, and we're going to do Julius Caesar?"

"Well, quite frankly, the other English 10 teachers decided that even though Julius Caesar has been on the English 10 curriculum for many years, they felt that increasing numbers of students were finding it too challenging. But, it is a wealth of beautiful language and thought-provoking ideas. And, you are intellectually very capable of not only understanding the language and ideas, but also enhancing your skills and thoughts from studying it. It is a well-known play that many people far less capable than you have studied and understood. I would feel guilty if I deprived you of such an intellectually interesting experience and also of the opportunity to realize how capable you are."
For these same reasons, all my students study what I consider to be very fine literature. I tell them their time is valuable, that we have only a certain allotment of time together, and we are going to make it count. We are going to study literature for which they need me and their classmates to discover, focus, or clarify ideas and their responses—study literature that articulates, addresses, questions what it is to be a human being; literature that uses language aesthetically, beautifully. My students seem to enjoy being given the chance to explore, grapple with, and share their thoughts and ideas about what it is to be a spiritual being, the interconnectedness of all life, and so on. And, they enjoy being given the language of Shakespeare or Thornton Wilder to help them express their "sacred sense of life" (Henderson, p. 42).

Evelyn was what is classified as a non-academic student. We had just finished reading and discussing a chapter of Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey.

"I love this book. I mean it's hard, but he talks about things we all kinda wonder about. And I love when we talk about it in class."

"And look at the composition you handed in last week."

"I showed my dad. He couldn't believe I knew those words or could talk about things like that."

"I know," interrupted Stephanie. "I love learning these new words. I don't think I've added one new word to my vocab since I was ten. Look at all the new words we're using. The other day my little brother was sucking up to my mom, and I called him an 'obsequious little sycophant'. My mom nearly died."
I do not alter the literature I teach in class for my ESL students: They need to be given the chance and respect to advance and express their thoughts on such ideas. And we need the deepening, widening, and enhancing of our class questioning and arguing, resulting from the differing, interesting, and enhancing cultural and philosophical visions of human living and valuing in this world. Moreover, all my students have outside reading on a novel of their choice. I try to suggest novels that they can enjoy on their own, novels for which they don't need me.

I want my students to feel good about themselves. I want them to realize how capable they are. "I want them to feel special about themselves and their unique talents and to experience the constant wonder of discovery" (Henderson, pp. 42-43). I want them to have an awareness of how much they have to offer. Thus, I always try to teach to and at their best selves' level.

**Becoming our best selves through confirmation and compassion**

"Confirmation, the loveliest of human functions, depends upon and interacts with dialogue and practice. I cannot confirm a child unless I talk with him and engage in cooperative practice with him" (Noddings, 1984, p.196). We must promise ourselves to learn from our students. We must try to be authentically "present" to our students and allow them to be truly "present" to us, in the sense outlined by Buber (1965, p. 67) and Van Manen (1986, p. 42). We "must be dominated by being" (Buber, p. 27) and engage in positive, affirming,
compassionate dialogue to elicit responses to become privy to our students' thought processes, to help our students and us discover their best selves, their talents, their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations. I use Nancie Atwell's (1987) method of individual novel study: My students keep individual journals, in which we write personal and candid letters--"friendly" letters, in the true sense of the word--back and forth to each other about the novels we are reading. Very often, in sharing our responses to our own and each other's novels and reading, we share much more about ourselves. I find these letters support my efforts in the classroom to discover my students' best selves and what is important to them. They further help me "see the cared-for as he is and as he might be--as he envisions his best self" (Noddings, p. 67). "... independence and self-responsibility are ... aims for the ... present. ... The only help children need is that they be offered the opportunity for help" (Hellemans, pp.125-126). The compassionate teacher offers that help by confirming who they are, both who they want to be now, how they want to see themselves, and who they want to be in the future.

Even when we think our students are not acting from a best-self perspective, we must try to "attribute the best possible motive consonant with reality to the cared-for, [because when] we confirm him ... we reveal to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts" (Noddings, p.193).

We must be introspective about our behaviour and the way our behaviour affects the student's identity and view of himself.
... the educator has to pay careful attention to any such impulses of distrust, which can easily arise from his or her professional experience, because his or her distrust has a disastrous influence, drives the child into obduracy, and hinders the child's free development. (Bollnow, 1962, p.198)

It hinders the child's becoming his or her best self.

Think about the learning problem and its solution from the best-self perspective of each of your students. Your problem-solving referent should be each student's personal aspirations, not some academic or research tradition. How can they have a happier, more fulfilled life? What is best for them in the long run? (Henderson, p. 60)

A teacher is a teacher, and therefore wears the mantle of pedagogical responsibility, wherever she is in the company of her students. Even if it is just helping the students realize that they must know and practise language appropriate to the situation, she is helping them become their best selves.

I really believe the truth of Tolstoy's statement that science teaches you how to build a house; the humanities teach you how to live in it. I feel a pedagogical responsibility to foster my students' abilities and mine to live well—for ourselves, with ourselves, with the natural world, and with our fellow beings. I openly applaud when students exhibit those qualities that help us "live in the house", and I remind those who are careless about being kind or gracious or polite to each other, how important such behaviour is, to foster respectful behaviour and attitudes to others, to enhance, or even develop, compassionate behaviour and attitudes--to help my students and me realize our best selves.
Chapter 6

*If gold rust, what then will iron do?*

Geoffrey Chaucer

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**Teachers are rôle models**

Years ago I worked in a juvenile detention centre. I worked with the senior boys, ages sixteen to eighteen. Many of the boys were members of the First Nations, and their homes were reservations, mostly in the North. Their first language was not English, but they had become fluent in some of the more colourful and historic words and phrases of Old English. I did not realize that I used the expression "jeepers" or that I used it so much until I heard one of my boys saying "jeepers" where he used to say "fuck". At this point I had become so used to the latter that I could not say which was the more offensive to the ear, but I learned a powerful truth about teaching: *Teachers are powerful rôle models.* The language you use is the language the students learn. The manners you use are the manners the students learn. The values you embody are the values the students learn and emulate.
"Modeling by adults is a powerful means for a child or young adult to acquire and practice behaviour" (Henderson, 1992, p. 92).

A colleague, with whom I worked very closely, continuously gave her time and energy to extra-curricular activities. She worked very closely with students for the good of students, but she constantly engaged in gossip with students about other students and staff and was constantly having to tell students not to.

Every interaction with students must be governed by what the student is learning during the interaction and what lesson or pattern of behaviour or value the student will take with him or her from the interaction.

Another colleague of mine, who was also an English teacher and a man whose knowledge and teaching methods I admired very much, was standing with me outside the school door as some of the grade twelve students were writing the scholarship component of one of their government exams. One of the students in the parking lot let out a whoop because he had just finished his last exam. My colleague immediately yelled, "Hey! Jerk off! There are kids still writing. They need it quiet." The student looked embarrassed; I was embarrassed . . . and shocked and disappointed, because a teacher had modelled such disrespectful behaviour, because a teacher had modelled such foul language.

We are powerful in their lives, and we must respect that power, and always stand in a pedagogical relationship to them. We will be their English 10 or Physics 12 or grade six teacher for the rest of their lives. Whatever relationship we establish continues.

Through sensitive, caring interactions the teacher models what it is like to be a member of a trusting social community. When students feel a desire to be like
their teacher, whom they see as kind and concerned about others, then the teacher has succeeded in establishing a positive leadership presence. Then the students are learning appropriate conduct in the most concrete way—through positive adult example. (Henderson, p. 102)

As educators, we must try to like, love, and respect all others in our lives; and we must try to be likeable, loveable, and respectable in order to move children's lives. Senge (1990) expresses the same important message:

The core leadership strategy is simple: be a model. Commit yourself to your own personal mastery. Talking about personal mastery may open people's minds somewhat, but actions always speak louder than words. There's nothing more powerful you can do to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery than to be serious in your own quest. (p. 173)

I strongly believe that the most effective thing a person can do to increase his or her command of and facility in a language is read. My students see me read.

Our school has a fifteen-minute silent reading period each day at the beginning of the last morning block. Many of my colleagues do not like the block: They say it is a constant battle to get the students to read, that many of the students just spend the time doing homework. The principal asked me, as one of the initiators and great supporters of this programme, to walk around the school during the silent-reading time and see how many students were not reading. What I saw was the powerful rôle-modelling of teachers. Generally speaking, in the classrooms in which the teachers were marking, the students were doing their homework; in the classrooms in which the teachers were reading, so were the students.

I once had a father phone me at lunch-time. He said he was off to buy his son a dictionary. "Miss Sinclair, I can't believe it. Last night William said he wanted a dictionary. He said that you were always looking things up and always asking
the kids to look things up and that you have a little one that you always keep with you and that he would like one too. His mom and I were thrilled. Maybe William is starting to want to do well?"

"William is fine."

"Miss Sinclair, whatever you are doing--keep doing it. The other night William was reading a library book. Listen, I won't keep you. I'm in a bookstore in Pacific Centre, and there are so many dictionaries. I want to get the right thing. What kind of dictionary should I buy?"

"The Concise Oxford. I have other dictionaries in my classroom, but that is the one the kids are always grabbing off my desk."

I use a dictionary: My students use a dictionary. I read: My students read. When I am reading to my students, I can't help but notice and share a beautiful phrase or image with them. I realize that many of my students do the same when I am reading and when they are reading. I love poetry. I read it. I read it often. I often re-read it. Poetic lines and phrases often inform my vision, often creep into my expression. They often creep into my students' expression--orally, and almost always in their cards and letters to me.

I am careful about enunciation. One day after recess, one of my girls came into the room. "Miss Sinclair! Guess what? I was just out having a smoke and I said 'stupid', like you say it, not 'stoopid'. I felt so dumb." Only a teacher would find a compliment in there.

Teaching is not a skill; it is a relationship. And to be an effective relationship, it has to be a powerful relationship. And when it is a powerful relationship, the
teacher is a powerful model. Thus, it is the teacher's pedagogical responsibility to be a model of hope and joy and compassion, a model of striving for goodness, for knowledge, for being the best she can be, a model of becoming.
Chapter 7

The deepdown ownself part of you, that's the good part

Catherine, in Truman Capote's The Grass Harp

Being authentically present and compassionate

Buber "singles out the interhuman as a separate dimension, qualitatively different and essentially significant. . . .

The unfolding of the sphere of 'the between' Buber calls the 'dialogical'. The psychological, that which happens within the souls of each, is only the secret accompaniment to the dialogue. The meaning of this dialogue is found in neither one nor the other of the partners, nor in both added together, but in their interchange. (1965, p. 26)

Buber points to "dialogue as the intrinsic value, and self-realization as only the corollary and by-product, rather than the goal. . . .

Only as a partner can a man be perceived as an existing wholeness. To become aware of a man means to perceive his wholeness as person defined by spirit: to perceive the dynamic centre which stamps on all his utterances, actions, and attitudes the tangible sign of oneness. Such an awareness is impossible if, and so long as, the other is for me, for example, the detached object of my observation, for he will not thus yield his wholeness and his centre. It is possible only when he becomes present for me. (p.27)
A teacher must allow her students to be "present" for her for a pedagogic relationship to exist. This allowance flows from the awareness of them as fellow-beings--"This art Thou". And more significantly, the awareness of them as fellow-becomings--fellow-becomings, who are dependent upon her for this awareness.

A colleague of mine, as he meets his students in the first class of the year--before he hands out text books, introduces classroom expectations, or hands out course outlines--has the students write to him about themselves. When they enter and sit down, he hands out paper to those who need it and asks them to spend the hour writing, without any concern for style, about their hopes, dreams, desires, worries, concerns, needs, strengths, and so on--personally, socially, academically. He told me that he tells them that they must include a statement revealing some aspect about themselves about which they feel good or confident or proud. He then--God bless him--goes home and carefully reads and responds to each one. He returns the papers to the students for them to read, but they have to return them to him because he refers to them throughout the year to modify his curriculum and his responses to them. Thus his students are authentically present for him.

But for there to be "dialogue", for there to be an authentic pedagogic relationship, the teacher must be "present" for the students. The teacher too must "yield his wholeness and his centre".

A young and insecure teacher who desperately tries to feign an air of self-confidence soon gives away his or her real state of being. Children will quickly sense it in an awkward gesture, a false pose, a look in the eyes. So much that happens between teachers and students transpires through the face
and eyes. A powerful teacher is a man or woman who has a powerful presence. (Van Manen, 1986, p. 42)

To have "a powerful presence" is to be authentic, is to behave authentically:
Your "observable teacher behavior . . . is [not] a profound contradiction of the way [you] exist in the world, or better, in the school, in [the] classroom, with [your students]." (Van Manen, p. 43)

I had a colleague, a very handsome, charming, and "with-it" man, on whom many of the young women among the student body had tremendous crushes—at least when he first arrived at the school. He worked hard at being liked by all the students, but forgot what teaching really is. He wanted to teach the seniors, but spent his time in the classroom playing his guitar and singing songs he had written. The students were not as successful as they deserved to be on their Provincial exams. He attended dances, but would not sign up for any particular area of supervision to help the dances be a success for the students. He spent his time dancing and talking with the young women, and the young men did not appreciate having to compete with someone they could not. He organized some of the senior boys into a rock band, but it was only to feature himself. The boys were there to sing back-up. The crushes faded.

Compassionate [teaching] is nothing but a pipedream if it isn't sincere. [Students] might be fooled for a short time, but eventually most will see through [teachers] who try to play-act the role. [Teachers] who think they can succeed by manufacturing an appearance of empathy are likely to learn otherwise; [students] seem to possess internal radar to detect a [teacher's] lack of conviction. And they will resent and reject those who they think tried to exploit them by turning on the sensitivity only when they wanted or needed something. (Pincus & DeBonis, 1994, p. 189)
I had another colleague, also a handsome and charming young man, on whom many of the senior girls had crushes—at least when he first arrived. He worked hard at making his subject accessible and enjoyable to all his students; he worked very hard at helping them be the best they could be. He too attended every dance, but he spent his time standing outside, usually in the rain, securing the dances for the kids. He is a football-player and powerfully built, and spends much time weight-lifting. He organized a weight-training programme for the students and spent many extra-curricular hours in the basement of the school helping the students build their physical ability and build their confidence.

The Student Council organized a student talent show to raise funds for a very worthy cause. The first colleague I described said that he would participate. He played and sang and just plain looked so good, it was hard to remember he was a teacher. The second colleague I described also wanted to support the cause. Not many students had signed up to perform, so he did; and he challenged the student body on the PA to join him. He did not sing, and he did not play the guitar, but at some time in his life, some music teacher had worked very hard to teach him to play a version of "The Blue Danube" on the accordion. When he arrived on stage to play for the audience, I must with great shame admit that I hid my face in embarrassment: He was trying so hard to play the piece correctly. But as he courageously continued, I realized the depth of the sincerity of his caring and commitment, and I saw all around me that the audience—his students and their parents—were recognizing and touched by the authentic compassion of this
teacher. With his continued, selfless, authentic caring for the students, throughout the year, the crushes became love.

The essential problematic of the sphere of the between, writes Buber, is the duality of being and seeming. The man dominated by being gives himself to the other spontaneously without thinking about the image of himself awakened in the beholder. The 'seeming man', in contrast, is primarily concerned with what the other thinks of him, and produces a look calculated to make himself appear 'spontaneous', 'sincere'. or whatever he thinks will win the other's approval. This 'seeming' destroys the authenticity of the life between man and man and thus the authenticity of human existence in general. The tendency toward seeming originates in man's need for confirmation and in his desire to be confirmed falsely rather than not to be confirmed at all. To give in to this tendency is the real cowardice of men, writes Buber, to withstand it his real courage. (Buber, 1965, pp.27-28)

A real math teacher [an authentic math teacher] is a person who embodies math, who lives math, who in a strong sense is math. . . . The way we stylize subject matter is a telltale expression of the way we hold it. We may possess a certain amount of information in literature, math, or science, but only the knowledge we embody has truly become part of our being. A real English teacher [an authentic English teacher] tends not only to love reading, writing, and carrying poetry under one arm during coffee break, a real English teacher cannot help but poetize the world--that is, think deeply about human experience through the incantative power of words. (Van Manen, pp. 45-46)

If we tell our students that being on time for class is important, but we are late; if we tell our students that reading is important, but we do not read, and so on,

We may be physically present to children [but] something essential is absent in our presence. Similarly, we may be physically absent from children while in a different sense they remain present in our lives after school, and we remain present to them." (Van Manen, p. 43)

A few years ago, one of my grade twelve students surprised me, and touched me deeply, when at the end of the year, she asked me if I was going to be around after school, that she had something to show me. She arrived at my room after school with a book of quotations that she had put together over the school year.
There were lines of poetry that she had liked from poems we had studied; there were lines of poetry that I had said in class that I particularly liked, and there were lines quoting me. She had decorated this book with her own art work and said that she planned to keep it. "I've come to enjoy reading poetry, Miss Sinclair, and whenever I find a line or phrase that I like and I know you would like I'm going to write it in my book."

She came to see me last Christmas. She had just finished her under-graduate degree and was planning to travel and work for awhile before starting post-graduate studies. She arrived at my door clutching her book, which had now become two books. We spent a wonderful hour, reading the lines from the year we had shared, reading the lines she had added. She was so excited to share what she had added in the intervening four years. I was so touched and warmed by her notations to me throughout about the beauty or significance of a line or phrase. She said she would be back when she graduated with her Master's. "Our book will probably be three volumes by then."

Two years ago, one of my grade nine girls was in Disneyland during her summer holidays. At the start of school, she gave me a picture from the movie "Lady and the Tramp". It was a picture of the scene where the two dogs are eating spaghetti in the moonlight in a back lane. She said she bought it for me because I had said that it was the most romantic scene in the movies. I can't remember saying such a thing, but it is certainly something I would say.

Just last fall, a man, whom I had taught at least ten years ago, came to see me. He and his wife had been holidaying in England; and when he was in Stratford, he
said it was as though I was right there with him, and he handed me a beautifully-bound little book of Shakespeare's sonnets. "I bought you this little book to say thank you for introducing me to Shakespeare and the power and poetry of his writing. When my wife and I arrived in England and were planning where we would go and what we would see, I said that we had to go to Stratford. When we arrived there I said, Miss Sinclair would love this."

A couple of years ago, I received a long-distance phone call at school from California. "Miss Sinclair? It's Kathryn Strom. I just had to phone. I finally finished my degree. I was so undecided about what I wanted to do. I loved English, but I didn't know what I could do with a degree in English. I've been working in the Registrar's Office since I graduated, and I've finally decided what I want to do. I'm so excited. I couldn't wait to tell you. I've been accepted in the Master's programme for a degree in twentieth-century American literature, and I hope to go on and get my Doctorate so I can teach at the University. I really like working and being at the University, and I like working with that level of student. I'm so excited. Aren't you happy for me Miss Sinclair?"

"Yes" did not begin to address how happy I was for her and how much I wished her well in her future.

Over the years, many previous students have come to see me to show me papers they have written and of which they are very proud. And I have had a previous student come to see me to introduce me to the person he had asked to be his wife.
About five years ago, I had a student whose sense of humour and joy in life I really enjoyed. But our relationship stalled one day when something came up about hunting, and I must have made negative noises about the activity. I just remember Brad's speaking up abruptly that I just didn't know enough about hunting, and my saying that I didn't want to know, and his responding that he was going to set me right in the next essay he wrote, that I would have to read it. To which I responded that I did not have to read anything, and that I certainly would never read anything that would offend me. I was responding authentically, but not as a compassionate teacher: I had sunk to what Drake and Miller (1991) call an "ego level of teaching" and was relating to Brad "on the basis of [my] own needs", becoming "resentful", and "involved in an emotional struggle to maintain [myself and my view of the world] in a particular way" (p. 327). Somewhere deep inside me I have carried guilt for my part in and responsibility for that interaction. One of my colleagues is Brad's parents' neighbour. "Tara, I have a message for you from Brad Armitage. He works in Oregon. He graduated from some university down there a few years ago. Well, he was home for Christmas and he told me to tell Miss Sinclair that he no longer goes hunting."

... compassion can be the most critical factor in bridging the trust gap [that] can severely strain a [teacher's] ability to communicate in meaningful [authentic] ways and mold lasting [authentic] relationships. ... Compassionate teaching demands more than merely being intellectually sensitive to [students'] needs. The [teacher] must also be emotionally empathetic--in plainly visible ways--to people's feelings and needs and be willing to respond to those feelings honestly and candidly. It's a [teacher's] genuine responsiveness--that rare, unvarnished form of honesty, expressed openly and freely--that provides the basis for authentic trust and constructing long-term relationships. (Pincus & DeBonis, pp. 188-189)
I was just finishing off my last Lit 12 class in June of this year, when a man came in to see me. As the students were leaving, I recognized him. I taught him years ago.

"You're still the iron lady of Lit 12?"

"What?" I had never thought of myself, or heard myself referred to, as the "iron lady". I must be stricter than I thought.

"Miss Sinclair, can we talk?"

"Sure." I closed the door and sat down beside him.

"Miss Sinclair, I've been living in New York for the past few years. I've been trying to get home to see you since last summer. I came in the side door here; I don't want to see anyone. Miss Sinclair, I'm gay. I fought it all through school, but it is who I am. My problem is I have a wonderful career. I love what I do, and I'm good at it. But I'm afraid that if people in my field found out about me, it might destroy my chances of success in my field. Sorry to dump all this on you."

We talked for a long time--the night custodian threw us out--about his parents' reaction. He had just told them the night before when he arrived. They were very supportive. I asked him about his friends from school; he had had many. He said that he was seeing them that night but had wanted to talk to me before he saw them. At one point during our discussion, Clint said "hell" or "damn" and then quickly put his hand over his mouth and apologized, and then laughed and said, "You've still got that power, Miss Sinclair. I don't think any of us could swear in front of you."
We parted in the parking lot. He hugged me and said, "Thanks, Miss Sinclair. I knew you'd be supportive, but I needed your advice. I feel pretty good about what you helped me decide."

We went our separate ways to our cars. As I was getting into my car, he yelled across the parking lot, "Are you still turning kids on to Keats?"

"I hope so," I yelled back.

"God, I loved him. Bye."

"True [authentic] compassion is more than being accessible or mouthing concern; it requires that the [teacher] consistently demonstrate a desire to understand and do something about [students'] anxieties and expectations" (Pincus & DeBonis, p.189).

Five years ago, a young woman, whom I had taught in grades ten, eleven, and twelve, graduated from our school. Last year her family was involved in a very serious incident, and there was a great deal of media coverage. Soon after, she came to see me at school. I hadn't seen her in five years. She had grown so beautiful, so terribly thin, such a stricken, frightened look in her eyes, such beautiful eyes, but such a look of pain, lostness, and age. She was trying to hold the family together, as she had always done. She was trying to be "present" for her parents and her four brothers and sisters. I am glad that someone had remained "present" for her.

**Authentic questions, assignments, and curriculum**
students respond to literature to the extent that instruction promotes ownership by helping students relate personally to what they read. One way teachers do this is by asking 'authentic' questions, questions without prespecified answers. (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993, p. 15)

I begin our study of Capote's The Grass Harp by writing the following passage on the board and asking the students to write a response:

We are speaking of love. A leaf, a handful of seed--begin with these, learn a little what it is to love. First, a leaf, a fall of rain, then someone to receive what a leaf has taught you, what a fall of rain has ripened. No easy process, understand; it could take a lifetime, it has mine, and still I've never mastered it--I only know how true it is: that love is a chain of love, as nature is a chain of life. (Judge Cool, in Truman Capote's The Grass Harp, p. 44)

I do this because I want them to think deeply and authentically about the spirituality of love; I want them to think deeply and authentically about what it is to be a spiritual being. And I want them to be personally engaged in the reading of the novel. But mostly I want to hear and learn from their responses, and I want them to hear and learn from each other's responses. My experience has been that as they begin to share their responses, our discussion reaches a level where we feel the connection, the Being, that we share; and my own response is deepened and expanded.

Authentic teacher questions promote ownership because they show that the teacher takes students' ideas seriously. . . . during discussion involving authentic questions and follow-up questions, what the teacher says is partly shaped by what students say, and the resulting discourse displays a coherence approximating conversation. (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, p. 15)

I begin our study of Julius Caesar by writing the following passage on the board and asking the students to argue from either or both perspectives: "... if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (Forster, 1969, p. 43).
I do this because I want them to think deeply and authentically about what friendship, loyalty to one's country, and having to choose between friendship and one's country means to them. And I want them to begin our study of the play feeling connected to the characters and their choices in a personal and authentic way. And again, the dynamic conversation precipitated by their responses deepens all our questionings about such ideas and choices.

An authentic education needs to be focussed on the interaction of teachers and students . . . collaborating in the shared adventure of living on this planet. . . . Students and teachers are participants in the life experience, both singular and common in mind and body and heart and soul. Students and teachers need opportunities to share and challenge and question . . . in a compassionate environment, with others, all growing in understanding and the exercise of their free wills. (Leggo, 1993, pp. 23-24)

Authenticity to connectedness to rapport

As a compassionate, authentic teacher, your interactions are grounded in the awareness of "the unique, unrepeatable person and the unique, unrepeatable situations in which that person is addressed and must respond" (Buber & Friedman, p. 49).

You must look for the problem-solving style that fits you as a person. If you can't be your own person in the classroom, how in the world are you going to connect with your students? If you're not authentic, how are you going to establish rapport? (Henderson, 1992, p. 59)

In the world of business, managers who aren't afraid to display their true feelings—and are believed—can overcome many other mistakes and deficiencies. Says Jean Pierre Garnier, executive VP of health-care giant SmithKline Beecham, "The most important characteristic to being a good communicator is being yourself and not trying to portray someone you're not.” Why? Because, fundamental to any meaningful business relationship is people connecting with people through emotions and feelings, rather than through memos and balance sheets. . . . When a person is just himself, allowing the real him to surface, he's most believable and, therefore, most
effective as a corporate leader. . . . Business leaders must be able--and willing-
to express their passions . . . This point is being reinforced in an emerging
body of research on gender differences in management and leadership styles
which offers an engaging new perspective on the role of compassion in
management-employee relationships. (Pincus & DeBonis, p. 189)

[Teachers] can connect with students at a deeper level. It is not a forced
state but rather a natural place [that is, an authentic place] of caring and
compassion. And it is from this place of the heart that students can connect to
the ground of Being which in turn adds meaning and purpose to their lives.
(Drake & Miller, 1991, p. 333)

Wayson (1984) writes that

. . . true teaching occurs in the hallway conversations, on the playground,
during home visits, in the after class conversations teachers hold when they
'are not teaching' . . . whenever the teacher and the student can interact with
one another as human beings and not within the confines of institutionalized
roles. (p. 232)

But an authentic teacher is the most human of beings. If your relationship
with your students is an authentic relationship, that is, a pedagogical relationship,
being the students' teacher is who you are, wherever you are with them.
Wherever you are with them, you are pedagogically responsible for their
becoming the best they can be; and you respond authentically, from the
"deepdown ownself part of you" that is their human, vulnerable, imperfect, but
caring and compassionate teacher.
May God us keep / From single vision

William Blake

Openness--for connection, communion, compassion

Living authentically, living as a human becoming, is living characterized by openness. Senge (1990) writes:

The learning process of the young child provides a beautiful metaphor for the learning challenge faced by us all: to continually expand our awareness and understanding, to see more and more of the interdependencies between actions and our reality, to see more and more of our connectedness to the world around us. We will probably never perceive fully the multiple ways in which we influence our reality. But simply being open to the possibility is enough to free our thinking. . . . Einstein expressed the learning challenge when he said: [the human being] experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. (p.170)

As a teacher, it is our pedagogical responsibility to do so and to model such a view of life, such a value for life, for our students. When we act authentically, when we act from "our hearts, our Being" (Drake & Miller, 1991, p.327), we can
act with openness and "connect to others and the universe in a more direct and compassionate way" (p. 327).

Phenomenologically, Being is experienced as unmediated awareness. This awareness is characterized by openness, a sense of relatedness and by awe and wonder. . . . we see part of ourselves in our students. At the deepest level we may experience brief moments of communion with our students. . . . [and may develop] a communal bond with each student. (p. 325)

I had a boy in a grade eight English class, who was so difficult. We had many negative times when I was trying to get him to stop interrupting his classmates' learning, my teaching a story, and so on. I felt as if we were in a constant struggle with each other. I can't remember what the class and I were discussing, but somehow I was telling the students that I have to guard what I watch on the News, that some scenes and events I find so deeply and personally horrific that the images continue to "flash upon that inward eye".

Suddenly, Larry looked at me intently and said, almost in a stage whisper, "Yes."

I looked at him and found myself physically leaning towards him. I have had this problem with horrific images all my life. I don't think I have ever spoken of it to anyone. I guess it is one of those personal hang-ups of which one becomes increasingly more accepting with age. Larry's "yes" and the look in his eyes told me, told the heart of me, that I was not alone in my spirit. As I found myself physically leaning towards my companion, the physical attention of Larry relaxed and a warm, almost smiling look entered his eyes. Larry's attention span did not increase; he continued to be restless and energetic, but less aggressively so. Both he and I became warmer and more sympathetic with each other.

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Bobbi was in one of my grade twelve English classes. She was a together, aloof, sophisticated--I think one could say street-wise--young woman. She attended regularly, did her assignments, and was always polite to me when I spoke to her, but she never responded to me or anything that arose in class. I felt she wasn't getting what she could out of the literature we were studying nor expanding her ability as a writer because she seemed to remain so disconnected--from her classmates, from me, and anything I said, read, or asked her to do. Her boyfriend came into the class to get her at the end of the day. He and I were talking about movies while Bobbi was collecting her books.

"I saw a movie the other night, but you would have to be me to know how that movie touched me. It was about a helpless, little soul who loses his mother."

Bobbi, from across the room, looked at me and said, "Was it 'Bear' Miss Sinclair?"

"Yes, it was, but I don't even want to talk about it. It was so . . . ."

Bobbi, who had walked up to where we were standing, said, "I know. It was so . . . .", and she curled her right hand into a fist and pressed it against her chest just under her chin, "gripping. Do you have trouble watching movies like that Miss Sinclair?"

"I do. It seems so dumb. I kind of don't like to tell people that I'm forty-three years old, and I have trouble watching movies about animals because I get so emotionally involved."

"I know, I know," said Bobbi and her face lighted up with a smile.

"I didn't know you felt like that," said her boyfriend.
"I know. I don't tell people. I go to see the romance movies with my friends, and they think I am so unromantic because I'm not in tears when someone is dying. But if I let myself see an animal movie, I'm hiding my face to hide the tears."

"Oh, exactly." I responded. As we looked at each other, we started to laugh—at ourselves, at life, to laugh with warmth, with understanding, with the joy of finding each other.

Bobbi's marks did not jump from B to A, but she became much more involved. She contributed with insight and enthusiasm to class discussions. She wrote more and more often and with more of herself in her writing. At the end of the year, I found a tiny, stuffed bear on my desk with a note that said, "See you in the movies".

I was teaching a beautiful and evocative story by Maara Haas to my grade nines. As I read the last paragraph, the catch in my voice openly revealed the emotion I felt. I raised my eyes from the page, looked into the eyes of one of my boys, and, as my eyes filled with tears, so did his. I reached over and squeezed his arm. We were always closer and more open with each other from then on. An openness that supported his talking to me when he so needed to have someone to talk to a few months later when his family was torn apart by a very serious incident.

... the ego ... desperately strives to control and manipulate the universe to its own ends, while ... our Being listens and is subject to a 'vast and sudden enlargement of power'. At this level the teacher lets go of the ego and reaches a fundamental harmony with his or her students. (Drake & Miller, p. 324)
Teachers must move "beyond ego to a compassionate service level of consciousness. . . . to an open heart and compassion" (p. 328). At this level, a teacher can be "lured by a softening eye, / Or by a touch or a sigh, / Into the labyrinth of another's being" (Yeats).

Passionate, authentic pedagogy is grounded in openness

English literature is a subject that invites us to be open. It "asks us what it means to be human. . . . what it means to be alive, to be ourselves. It allows us to talk freely about things like our fear of death, our fear of falling in love, the confusion of being in love" (Henderson, 1992, p. 21) and very often it gives us the language to do so. But as Greene writes:

[when] we find ourselves thinking in front of the class with the end open, unresolved. . . . There is something about open-endedness and even the uncertainty involved that enables us to reach out to our students, to communicate a kind of passion to them, no matter what we are teaching. (1987, p. 12)

I felt so good, so validated in my choice to teach Romeo and Juliet to my Communications 12 class (Shakespeare was definitely not on the curriculum.), the first year the programme was mandated by the government. My class had not warmed to the idea of studying Shakespeare when I suggested it. They had said they couldn't do it because they couldn't understand his language. I had responded to their reluctance with the faith that they would relate to the story and the faith that they would understand the feelings Shakespeare expresses in his
poetry. At one point during our reading of the play, one of my girls said, "Miss Sinclair, I've felt that, but I could never put the feeling into words."

In her face and in her voice, I saw and heard my reaction to the same passage, both as the teen-aged girl I had been and as the woman I was.

I taught J. D. Salinger's "For Esme, With Love and Squalor" to an Advanced Placement Literature class. The reading of that story precipitated a deeply personal exploration among my students and me about love, the spirituality of love; about human being, the spirituality of human being; about the possibility of love and its power to enrich and expand human being and human becoming. I cannot begin to articulate the involvement, the challenging, the questioning, the denying, the affirming, the individuality, the mutuality, the openness, the passion, the love of that experience. The bell rang, but none of us moved. One of the boys slammed back in his chair and said,

"God, we've known each other for years, but we've never talked about these things. Joanne, I never knew you felt that way, and Brian, God, Brian. I can't get over what you said. I never figured you ever thought about stuff like that."

"Hey you guys, this conversation stays in this room," interrupted one of the other boys.

"You got that right," said one of the girls.

"I feel drained," said one of the other boys.

And they left for their next class. I didn't move. I remember thinking, That's what Buber meant by a dialogical relationship. I was still sitting on the desk top
with Salinger's story in my lap—I wish he could have been there—when my next
class came in.

Learning and growth are grounded in openness

"Each day be open to the world, be ready to think; each day be ready not to
accept what is said just because it is said, be predisposed to reread what is read;
each day investigate, question, and doubt." (Freire, 1985, p. 181) And try to
encourage your students to.

... when people come to recognize that nobody has the answers, it liberates
[them] in a remarkable way.... To search for understanding, knowing that
there is no ultimate answer, becomes a creative process—one which involves
rationality but also something more.... the state of being open. (Senge,
1990, p. 282)

At some point during the beginning of the school year, I like to present my
classes with an exercise that fosters an appreciation for the truth of Senge's
statements that "nobody has the answers", "that there is no ultimate answer". This
year, I asked my classes to formulate a written response to the question "What
does the owner of a lumbermill see when he looks at a forest?" I gave them a few
minutes to write, and then collected their responses and began the day's lesson.
The first few minutes of the next class were spent formulating a response to the
question "What does an environmentalist see when he looks at a forest?" The next
four or five classes all began with the same exercise, with my changing the person
viewing the forest to a wood-carver, a landscape painter, a botanist, a wild-life
conservationist, and so on. There are many exercises of this sort available to
teachers, and I find them of great value in encouraging my students to "be predisposed to reread . . . investigate, question, and doubt". We inevitably end up in lively discussions about the use of absolute statements and "the state of being open". My hope is that they,

realize . . . that any 'answer' [even mine] is at best an approximation--always subject to improvement, never final. . . . Then curiosity . . . is free to surface. The fear that 'I don't know, but perhaps he or she does', or, 'I don't know but I should', dissolves. (Senge, pp. 282-283)

Such a realization lifts a great burden from a teacher's shoulders: She or he doesn't have to know all the answers, that she or he is just as capable and maybe more effective when she or he doesn't know the right answers, but maybe just the right questions.

We come to peace with knowing that we do not know, or as Einstein said, that 'the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science'. . . . Unfortunately, the way knowledge is organized and structured in contemporary society destroys this sense of mystery. . . . Life comes to us whole. It is only the analytic lens we impose that makes it seem as if problems can be isolated and solved. When we forget that it is 'only a lens', we lose the spirit of openness. (Senge, p. 283)

When we remember it, "judgement becomes more tolerant and less absolute" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 149). It becomes compassionate. "Only genuine openness allows people to deal productively with problems for which there is no one right answer" (Senge, p. 284).

"Expert problem solving is conducted in an open and inquiring manner" (Henderson, 1992, p. ix).

When assertion no longer seems dangerous, the concept of relationships changes from a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic of interdependence. Then the notion of care expands from the paralyzing injunction not to hurt others to an injunction to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection. A consciousness of the dynamics
of human relationships then becomes central to moral understanding, joining the heart and the eye in an ethic that ties the activity of thought to the activity of care. (Gilligan, 1982, p.149)

"Dialogue guided by an ethic of caring is open to the interplay between feeling and thinking" (Henderson, p. 3).

Teachers frequently speak of how their students can instill in them a sense of wonder...we see our students as Zen masters who with their directness can awaken us if we remain open...When we experience Being we tend to perceive quality in a more direct and open manner. (Drake & Miller, p. 326)

If I were not a teacher, I would never have met Jimmy, who, as the pitcher of my grade six boys' softball team and the shortest boy on the team in 1968, taught me the importance and power of inner strength, the importance and impact of remaining calm when others are becoming increasingly more emotional.

I would never have met Abid in 1985, who, as the adored star of our rock musical, always retained a sense of self when all others were losing theirs.

I would never have met Elizabeth, who taught me friendship, true spiritual friendship, what it means to "grapple a friend to your heart with hoops of steel". She and Susan were in my grade eight English class. I put one of them in each corner of the room because they never stopped talking. They were together again in my grade nine English class. It was about half-way through the year, after Susan had been absent for a few days, that I got a note in my mailbox that Susan had been diagnosed with cancer. Susan attended school in between bouts of sickness and going for cancer treatments throughout grades ten, eleven, and twelve. She had lost all her hair by grade ten and was very thin. Elizabeth was always there for her--academically, socially, constantly. They were both in my Lit 12 class. I had a terrible time teaching Keats's heartfelt sonnet "When I Have
Fears That I May Cease to Be" with Susan sitting right in front of the desk on which I usually perch. Susan was so strong, so positive. Elizabeth was wonderful--always laughing with her friend, always getting her friend to laugh. I only saw Elizabeth lose her optimistic veneer once, and then very quietly--no one else noticed. It was in about March, and we were studying number 54 of Tennyson's elegy for his friend, "In Memoriam". I learned later from the librarian that Elizabeth had come in to find the other passages from the poem. But by May, Susan had completed her chemotherapy and radiation treatments and had started to improve. Both girls graduated.

During the summer, I saw them having dinner at Earl's. I asked them what their plans were, and Elizabeth said, "We were going to start university this Fall, but Susan hasn't been feeling that well, so I have a job, and I'm going to work while Susan gets her treatment, and then we're both going to go next Fall."

Susan died during the winter, and Elizabeth left for university, somewhere in the U.S.

**Being open about yourself, your students, your lessons**

What makes facing a class different (scary?) is they are not a faceless crowd, but an often large group of challenging, demanding, egocentric, expectant, needful individuals. You must respond to them as such, but with a sense of self--who you are, what behaviours you admire, and so on.
My advice to any teacher entering the classroom for the first time is to relax, to feel at home, be open. Be open to them as individuals. Do not label the students as a group. Stereotypic labelling precludes connections, compassion, becoming. Be open about who you are, the mood you are in, your strengths, your weaknesses.

A few years ago, sometime in the first or second month of school, I was about to begin my Advanced Placement Language class—a small class of students who appeared to be strangers to each other--and I hadn't had enough sleep the night before.

"Oh, you guys... you'll have to bear with me. I didn't get enough sleep last night, and you know how it is--everything seems an effort."

"How come you didn't get enough sleep?" I think they wanted to hear I had been out partying.

"Well, first I was reading such a good book; and when I was finally going to put out the light, Panda [my dog--all my students know who Panda is.], who had been asleep beside me, suddenly jumped up, stared down the hall, and continuing to stare, got into a crouched position, and growled. I froze. She soon stopped, and I put out the light. But I was awhile listening to every sound in the house before I went to sleep."

One of my boys, who had not seemed to relate to me or anything that I had tried to teach him, who seemed just to do the work, listen to the lessons, but not really participate in anything I or his classmates said, suddenly responded.
"Ya, I know. Last Friday night, everyone in the family was out but me. I was in the TV room and there are sliding glass doors onto the patio. I was watching TV when, all of a sudden, my dog jumped up and stared at the sliding glass doors and growled. I couldn't see a thing. The windows were all black. What an awful feeling."

The other students shared similar stories--some of which were so funny. We all laughed, and I began the day's lesson. Such a small incident, but such connections were made. Be open to and with your students.

My students know when I am touched by a piece of literature. They tell me it is in my voice. It is okay to let them know when you are feeling something: It opens the interaction for them to share when they are touched by a piece of literature. Be open. You really will find them to be the most accepting, forgiving, nurturing people.

Many teachers also struggle to time their lessons, so that they can give "closure" before the bell. Teachers exert "Tremendous energy... to maintain their view of how things should be, rather than relating openly to the situation as it arises" (Drake & Miller, p. 328). But no closure can be good for learning.

The second-to-last class before Christmas this past year, the bell rang before I could finish reading a wonderful Christmas story by Dylan Thomas. I was upset with myself for not watching the time during discussion. I like to read a short story in one sitting, and particularly this story, and next class was during the last day of school before Christmas holidays; my students would be wanting to eat
candy and sing. But when the class arrived, they couldn't get their books out fast enough to continue the story.

I have found this same enthusiasm for getting class started if we have been cut off in the middle of a discussion. When the bell rings, I ask the students to write down what they were going to say and bring it next class. I have had many students go home, think about the topic, and write something to contribute to the on-going discussion. No "closure" can leave students thinking, questioning, involved.

A teacher must be able to "relate to his or her work in the open, intuitive manner that . . . is necessary for good practice" (Drake & Miller, p. 333), that is necessary to teach with compassion. "It is essential to keep the mind open, full of trust in the unexpected which the future may bring" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 47).
Chapter 9

Caring is daring--oh you know it

Kenneth Patchen

Compassion means trust

Pincus and DeBonis (1994), addressing the business community, write:

Compassion--the expression of genuine caring--may do more to cement a relationship with followers than any other quality a leader can possess. It can transform the CEO in others' eyes into a real person who isn't merely an order-giver or taskmaster to be feared or scorned, but someone with feelings and emotions not all that different from anybody else. . . . compassion is . . . shaped by who the CEO is: his or her personality, philosophy of leadership and personal value system. . . . Compassion means showing concern for and understanding others' emotional, as well as pragmatic, needs. Simply stated, genuine compassion involves relating to how others see and feel about something, and then letting them know you care about what's important to them. . . . Ultimately, compassion, or the absence of it, is what generates--or destroys--people's belief in a leader. (p. 188)

Ultimately compassion, or the absence of it, is what generates--or destroys--students' trust in a teacher. "Without . . . trust even masters of method cannot succeed. . . . The existential trust between [teacher] and [student] . . . makes the relationship a [pedagogical] one in the fullest sense of that term" (Buber, 1968, p. 38).
Trust is grounded in security

Trust is a prerequisite for all healthy human development. Only in an atmosphere of security can the child grow in the right direction, and only in this medium does the world reveal itself to the child in all its reasonable order. (Bollnow, 1989, p. 12)

In 1968, I was teaching grade 6 in an inner-city school. My class had forty-one students, only one of whose natural parents were married to each other and rearing the child. Many of the students lived in volatile, insecure situations.

Billy remains actively in my memory. He was angry, explosive, bitter, untrusting, cynical, difficult to love, and impossible not to love. The first two weeks of school, Billy and I seldom had an interaction that did not involve his sneering at me and my trying to conjole, bribe, order him to try engaging in the math, spelling, reading, or art lesson. He fought me no matter what I was trying to involve the class in.

My second attempt at an "art lesson"—I was so thrilled: Billy had created a brightly coloured, beautiful painting. I did not go near him as my interference always seemed to produce a negative response. When the children were displaying their creations, I unwisely exclaimed, "Billy, that is beautiful!"

He retrieved his painting, took a black pastel, completely blackened all the wonderful colours, and re-hung the blackened rectangle.

I spoke to the principal about the incident, and he told me about Billy’s life.

Billy lived with his mother and two step-brothers. His father, a black man, had not married his mother and was not a part of Billy’s life. His mother was seldom home, often out all night. She continuously told Billy that he was nothing
but a "dirty little nigger" and that he had better watch out because the whole world was going to "pick on him".

I was horrified. I had led such a sheltered life. I tried to be patient. I smiled; he sneered. And so our antagonistic relationship continued daily throughout the year.

In about March, I developed strep throat and missed one day of school. When I returned, the principal stopped me before class to inform me of the difficult time the substitute had had with Billy and that Billy had not returned to class in the afternoon. (Billy never missed school--would that he did.) I entered my classroom almost hoping that Billy would not be attending that morning either, as I was not feeling as strong as I believed I needed to be to "deal" with Billy that day. But, no . . . Billy came in, sneered at me, and went to his desk. He didn't do any work, but he did remain in his desk that morning. After I had finished introducing the lesson and was visiting the students individually, I hesitantly approached Billy's desk. He had been so quiet. I didn't want to precipitate any altercations or outbursts. He looked me straight in the eyes, which he never did, and asked, almost venomously, "Where were you yesterday?"

I felt as though I had played hookey. "I was sick." I answered lamely and hoarsely. I almost apologized.

"You gonna be sick again?"

"I don't think so. I hope not."

I spoke to the principal about Billy's sullenness and apparent anger and distrust at my being absent from school. He explained to me that school and I
were the only constants in Billy's life and that was why Billy never missed a day and was so upset when I did.

That night just after "God Save the Queen", Billy was hanging around my desk, pulling at the front of his hair.

"Are you gonna be here tomorrow?"

"I'm sure I will, Bill. I'm usually a very healthy person, and I was really bored sitting home yesterday."

"Should [an] atmosphere of security be missing, then the world remains a shocking, threatening, encroaching power" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 12).

**Trust alleviates feelings of fear and insecurity**

The compassionate teacher "humanizes that which is strange . . . and removes the threatening invasion of what is unfamiliar. She makes it harmless" (Bollnow, p. 14).

In the same grade 6 classroom in the same year, I was teaching arithmetic when I noticed one of my students--a thirteen-year-old girl newly arrived in Canada from Portugal--looking deeply concerned, deeply worried. I stopped my explanation of multiplication of fractions and spoke to my students--not as my math class, but as my trusting, expectant, anxious, vulnerable children who live with often over-whelming problems and pressures and who look to me for help and approval.
"Ladies and gentlemen. Do not be concerned if you have no idea what I'm talking about. I will stop." I then related my experiences of being introduced to fractions and how I was so-o-o worried because everyone else seemed to be understanding and busily calculating in their notebooks while I stared blankly at the page. They laughed. I laughed.

"Mathematics seems to have always been the subject that can strike terror in the hearts of so many students. Always remember: It is only math. An answer, a method can be found. You just need to be shown how and that's my job."

I then busied the students with some hands-on equipment to help them understand the concepts, had them work in pairs, and so on, as I visited them individually. There were three girls in the class who were new to Canada from Portugal, and I grouped them together to work on the fraction problems. All of these girls did the cooking and baking for their families, and thus did not have difficulty understanding the concepts once they could talk in those terms and in their own language.

My point was and is that math is only math. The students are what is important. I have also found it beneficial to let my students know from time to time that I frequently had, and still have, difficulty understanding problems, both in the classroom and in the world. They are not alone in their concern or confusion; they have me for company. It is okay not to understand.

Pedagogical responsibility is a profound trust
A teacher must not only remove worried expressions from her students' faces but also warrant their trust in her that she would not ask them to engage in something at which they would fail. Moreover, she must meet her entrusted pedagogical responsibility of raising their academic achievement and instilling trust in them in their own intellectual abilities.

In 1985, I taught my first Communications 11 class. I introduced my students to Shakespeare.

"Shakespeare is not on the Communications 11 curriculum, but I do not want you to be denied the beauty and power and magic of his words. How many of you have heard of the characters Romeo and Juliet?" All the students raise their hands. "Well, you cannot go through school without ever having read the play. You will love it. It is a story about young love, not love, young love. The story would not unfold as it does if Romeo were not so young. Mr. Shakespeare is so widely studied so long after his death because he was able to put into words feelings that we all experience at some time or other but cannot put into words. He writes about what it is to be a human being. In Romeo and Juliet, he writes about what it is to be a young human being desperately in love in a world of hate. Do not be at all concerned if you do not fully understand every line; you will totally understand the thoughts, feelings, emotions, characters, and story. You are bright, literate, sensitive people, who are old enough to understand and relate to the love and anguish of this young couple. I have total faith in your ability to understand and enjoy the play."
"Yeah, but Miss Sinclair", responds one of my boys, "this guy writes in that 'Old English'. Why couldn't he write in normal English?"

"Did they talk like that when you went to school?" asks one of my girls.

"No. I didn't take my schooling in Old English. Do not think that I have some special gift for understanding Shakespeare. It is just that I have read it so many, many times, and every time I read it I get more out of it. You will be exactly the same. I will translate words and phrases as we begin, but you will need me to do that less and less because you will develop an ear for the language as we go, and besides Mr. Shakespeare's language touches the heart."

Throughout the study of the play, we stop and discuss the feelings expressed, and I ask them if they have experienced such feelings, anxieties, fears, hopes, dreams. I do not have a special methodology for teaching Shakespeare: I have faith in him and in my students. Very often my students develop a fondness for him and ask if we can "do" another of his plays. My passion for his writing is infectious. It is difficult to study a play with someone who has such joy in exploring it and sharing it and not be affected by that enthusiasm for and love of the play. I have had many students begin to point out lines and phrases that they find particularly effective. I have even had students record favourite lines in a journal that they have shared with me at the end of the year. Such experiences provide this English teacher with the energy, enthusiasm, and faith needed to face the most reluctant classes with a Shakespeare lesson in hand.

Trust means having faith
... trust ... is a reciprocal relationship. ... Trust demands a response. There is no trust without faith which we have toward a person who has trust in us. ... if a person is aware of our confidence in him or her, then our confidence tends to encourage and improve this person's particular ability. The person who feels that we have confidence in him or her increases his or her self-confidence and will try to justify (already unconsciously) our confidence. (Bollnow, 1989, p. 38)

The compassionate teacher shows regard for and trust in, even in small ways, the thoughts, abilities, expertise, and sense of responsibility of her students.

When I first started teaching, I couldn't work the film projector. Such things still do not worry me at all: My ineptitude provides the opportunity for me to show my faith in, and for the class to witness my faith in, a young person who may need someone to have a little faith in him or her. It also provides the young person with a chance to do something that Miss Sinclair cannot, and to demonstrate that ability to the class. Nowadays, the VCR provides me with the same opportunity to reveal that Miss Sinclair does not "know everything", and that's okay, and that Miss Sinclair acknowledges, appreciates, and needs their expertise and them.

I ask a student to whom working with or for a teacher is not a behaviour he or she has previously embraced or in the case of this year, a quiet, hesitant student who is new to the culture, country, and school, and a student who needs a break from sitting, a break from listening to a teacher--if they would mind watering the plants each class. The plants are gifts from students and are therefore important. This year I asked the most reluctant learner, the most easily distracted student, and, in one case, the student who seemed to greet me each class with a sneer, to fill in the attendance sheets each class, a job that I had to put absolute faith and
trust in the student that he or she would never forget to do the attendance and would do it with absolute accuracy. One student's own attendance improved. His mother told me that her son couldn't miss a day because "Miss Sinclair needs me". "I do not have trust only in certain single attributes and virtues of this person, but in the whole person" (Bollnow, p. 41).

Before I bought a new car radio, I asked a few of the boys what kind to buy for my purposes and where to buy it. Such a small thing, but they were so pleased to advise me and so protective of me that I wouldn't be talked into buying what I didn't need.

Years ago I asked one of my students, who was a member of a local gang and had had countless brushes with the law and used to terrorize my grade six girls' softball team when we had late practices, to help me coach the team. He was wonderful—at least to me and the girls, and about coaching.

I always ask the students to recommend a movie or give me their thoughts on one I have planned to see. They know me and how much I censor what I see on TV and at the movies. And, of course, I always ask my students what they are reading, and I am continually borrowing books from them. My students have introduced me to some very fine authors.

**Trust is daring**

True pedagogic trust is not blind. The true educator clearly sees the child in his or her human weakness... Nevertheless, this educator will muster new trust after all the emotions of disappointment have passed, because he or she knows that without it educational help is fundamentally impossible. In fact,
this trust is never more important than at new beginnings after educational crises. (Bollnow, pp. 42-43)

Wes was a young man in my Literature 12 class a few years ago, who was very bright, sophisticated, and witty: He could really see the humour in a situation and enjoyed greatly the wit of Oscar Wilde. But he was so emotionally on edge. There seemed to be so much anger just beneath the surface. Every once in a while the anger would surface; he would lash out at a classmate who had teased him in the wrong way.

His marks had really slipped during second term, and one day after class, after receiving poor results on a test, he snapped at one of his classmates and became enraged when she tried to offer words of encouragement. She left and he glowered at me and said through clenched teeth that he was quitting Lit 12, that he couldn’t have such low marks on his transcript.

“Wes, I don’t want you to quit. You’re good at Lit regardless of what your marks say, and I don’t want you to feel negative for the rest of your life every time the word ‘lit’ or ‘poetry’ or ‘Chaucer’ or ‘Shakespeare’ or ‘Wordsworth’ is mentioned.”

"Miss Sinclair," much more calmly, "I can’t risk failing the government final."

"You have the ability to do very well on that final. How about if you just attend class and continue to read and discuss the selections with us, and continue to write the tests, etc., but I will not count any marks you don’t want me to?"

"Miss Sinclair, you can’t do that. It wouldn’t be fair to the other kids."
"You let me worry about the other kids. You know that most of them would not put the energy into learning the content if they thought their marks didn't count. I do not want you missing out on everything Lit 12 has to offer."

"I love the course."

"I know you do. Think about it. Let me know."

Wes was waiting outside my classroom door the next morning when I got to school.

"Miss Sinclair? I've decided to continue with the way things are."

About a month later, Wes had a badly bruised neck, a broken blood vessel in one of his eyes, and the pores on his face looked like red pin pricks. I did not say anything to him; he might not have wanted me to have noticed or to know that much about his private life. I spoke to the principal at lunchtime, and he said he would call Wes to his office on the pretext of a grad requirement or something and then "notice" Wes's appearance and see if Wes wanted to share the cause of it. As it turned out, Wes's father had attempted to strangle him when Wes had tried to stop him from beating his younger brother. The principal immediately called Wes's older brother, whom I had taught and who had graduated a few years prior to this time. John was pleased the principal had got involved and said that Father had been beating Mother and the four children as long as he could remember, and that he would testify. The social worker was called in, pictures were taken of Wes's neck and face, papers were signed, and the police removed Father from the home. Wes blossomed--no more seething anger. He not only starred in the
school musical and wrote four Advanced Placement exams, but also attained the highest mark that year in the provincial Lit 12 examination.

He came to see me in September.

"Did you see the mark I got on the final?"

"I sure did, Wes."

"Miss Sinclair, I couldn't believe it. I felt the exam went well, but 99%! Do you remember how I wanted to quit?"

"But you didn't."

"You stopped me. You had such faith in me. I couldn't let you down. And somehow you believed in me so much, I felt I kinda owed you. But also I thought if you believed in me so much, maybe I could do it."

"Trust is only fruitful if the trusting person is fully convinced of it" (Bollnow, p. 43); that is, if the trust is authentic. And trust "only works if the other person, to whom improvement is promised, believes in it" (p. 43). A teacher must have "that deeper sense of trust and belief without which a teacher is no longer an educator" (Van Manen, 1986, p. 46).

... trust does not work with the inevitability of a law of nature, especially because one must presume and accept the other person's freedom which is in principle not predictable. ... there is fundamentally no protection from the possible abuses of trust. ... [but] One must not try to circumvent the risk by only playfully pretending to have trust for pedagogical reasons, whereas in reality one is still sceptical. Such an attitude can never convince and is bound to fail from its own intrinsic dishonesty. ... The educator must create in his or her own heart the power of trust. (Bollnow, pp. 42-44)

"Caring is daring".

Trust, like compassion, "cannot be created intentionally. Only that person will receive [trust] who knows himself or herself supported by a general trust of
being and life " (Bollnow, p. 44), and only that person will receive compassion who knows himself or herself supported by "a wide fellow-feeling for all that is human" (Eliot, 1860, p. 628).
Chapter 10

*a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human*

George Eliot

Situations and students that require the strongest reaching-out, the strongest compassion

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Letting go of ego

... the shifting relationship between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it ... because ... the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight ... the insight that comes ... from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide, fellow-feeling with all that is human. (Eliot, 1860, pp. 627-628)

When I first became a teacher, I thought that I must establish classroom rules and guard their enforcement. And then I met the children. Nothing in my teacher-training course had prepared me for "the shifting relationship between passion and duty". I outlined rules for myself of what behaviours I would accept and what behaviours I would not. And then I broke the rules as soon as I had to apply them to a trusting, vulnerable, fellow human being, who was eleven years old and doing his or her best to live in the world. I do not remember when I started living the realization that my duty was not to guard the enforcement of
rules, but to answer my students' pedagogical trust in me by guarding their psyches, feelings, egos, and vulnerabilities, and to quit feeling that I was not doing my duty when I constantly made exceptions to my rules; but I'm afraid it was not in my first year or two of teaching. Would I had it to do over.

A compassionate teacher understands

the trust of the child in the adult who remains truly present to the child through gathering 'the child's presence into [her] own store as one of the bearers of [her] communion with the world, one of the focusses of [her] responsibilities for the world'. (Buber, 1965, p. 28)

Buber refers to the phenomenon as "'inclusion', that 'experiencing the other side' of the relationship that enables one, without losing anything of [her] own reality, to live through the common event from the standpoint of the other"" (p. 28).

One of the boys, whom I had not taught before and did not know, was called to the counselling department during the first class of English 12 this year. He returned about ten minutes before the end of class. He wore the smile of a young man who is terrified. I cannot explain the expression, but I recognized it.

"Miss Sinclair, I have to sign out of your class," he said, holding out the sign-out sheet for me to initial.

"James, you flunked, didn't you?" from one of the students.

"Do you have to go back to grade eleven?" from another student.

"You're not going to graduate!" from another.

"What did you do?" from me. "Did you skip?"

"No. I didn't do my homework."
"Why don't you see if you can challenge the grade eleven exam?" from another classmate.

"I wrote the exam and passed it, but it doesn't count for enough."

"James," I had now learned his name, "I'm going to write a note to the counsellor, asking that you remain in my English 12 class for the year along with the English 11 class. You have to do the work demanded by English 11, but I'd like to see you graduate with your classmates."

"Oh God, thanks, Miss Sinclair. I hope they agree."

I do not believe that teachers do students any favours by giving them credit when the students have not done anything to earn it, but I also know that not finding some way to alleviate the despair that students can feel can do lasting and real damage to their lives. I did not know James at the time, but I could not help but feel and respond to his fear and regret.

He came into my room after class. The counsellor had agreed to our request. He was so overjoyed and grateful and excited that I could barely understand what he was saying.

The next day he came by my room again and said, "Miss Sinclair, I owe you a bottle of wine."

I said, "No. What you owe me is to be the best English 11 and 12 student you can be."

... what Buber calls 'making present'... means 'to imagine the real', to imagine quite concretely what another [person] is wishing, feeling, perceiving, and thinking. This is no empathy or intuitive perception, but a bold swinging into the other which demands the intensest action of one's being... the realm of one's act... is the particular, real person... whom one seeks to make

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present as just so and not otherwise in all his wholeness, unity, and uniqueness. (p. 29)

Senge (1990), addressing those involved in or interested in effective leadership, writes:

The discipline of seeing interrelationships gradually undermines older attitudes of blame and guilt. We start to develop a much deeper appreciation of the forces within which we all operate. We are used to thinking of compassion as an emotional state, based on our concern for one another. But it is also grounded in a level of awareness. In my experience, as people see more of the systems within which they operate, and as they understand more clearly the pressures influencing one another, they naturally develop more compassion and empathy. (pp.170-171)

I was interviewed for my present teaching position by the two vice-principals of the school. One of them asked me what I would do if a student told me to "fuck off". (I later learned that they were trying to find a teacher for a rather difficult class.) I responded that I had always tried never to put a student in a position in which he or she had no choice but to tell me to do just that. Working with young people, you become aware of the great pressure that many are under to retain a sense of self, especially in front of their peers, and especially those students whose only way they have to save face is to tell you to "fuck off". A teacher loses his or her sense of self, loses face, when he or she belittles her students. The student does not lose; the teacher does.

According to Drake and Miller (1991):

The ego is the source of our sense of separateness and thus by gradually letting go of ego we connect to others and the universe in a more direct and compassionate way. Griffin has described different levels of teaching. Two levels that he refers to are the ego level and the compassionate service level of consciousness. At the compassionate service level the teacher feels connected to his or her students.

You do not feel set off against them or competitive with them. You see yourself in students and them in you. You move easily, are more relaxed, and
seem less threatening to students. You are less compulsive, less rigid in your thoughts and actions. You are not so tense. You do not seem to be in a grim win-or-lose contest when teaching.

At an ego level, teachers tend to relate to students on the basis of their own needs. When things do not turn out the way they expect, they can become jealous, frustrated, and resentful. Teachers become involved in an emotional struggle to maintain themselves in a particular way. (p. 327)

Each year, more and more parents of the more difficult, the less successful students request that their sons and daughters be placed in my classes because, although I am quite demanding in my academic expectations, I very seldom experience discipline problems. The students, for the most part, seem to enjoy coming to class, participating in class activities, and attempting to do well. But a couple of years ago, I had a boy in an English nine class, who had a strong sense of self and a strong sense of what he would spend his time reading and what he would spend his time writing about. Whenever the class and I were reading and discussing a short story, he would appear to be reading a book about Nietzsche. I never interfered with his reading independently because my first concern is that my students read. I never interfered with his choice because, as I have a degree in Philosophy, I thought this was an area in which he and I could connect: We could discuss Nietzsche. But part of me wanted to interfere because very often the story the class and I were reading was a particularly beautiful and evocative story addressing what it is to live in this world, and I believed he would enjoy the story, if he would give it a chance, and I believed he would have so much to contribute to our reading of the story. But, no. Whenever I asked him to write a paragraph about a piece of literature or a topic of debate, a paragraph that I wanted the class to draft and edit and submit a good copy, along with the draft, he would hand in a
first-draft about Nietzsche. His sentence-writing skills and his lack of understanding about what he had read were such that I could not figure out what his thoughts were.

On our last occasion together, I called him up to my desk. I had always treated him the way one would treat one's mother's fine crystal: very gently, very carefully. On this occasion, I quietly and tentatively addressed his first sentence (there appeared to be three sentences, none of which I could grasp the meaning).

"Ernie, I'm just not sure what you are saying in this sentence."

"Well, that's your problem."

"Yes, it is. But I thought that since you want me to mark it for you, you could help me."

"Your problem is you just don't understand Nietzsche."

"Ernie, I've read quite a bit of Nietzsche, and I would love to discuss his thoughts with you, but I can't understand what you are saying in your paragraph."

"That's because you think that the way you understand Nietzsche is the only way."

I think that that was the point at which I left the "compassionate service level of consciousness" and entered the "ego level". The interaction had not "turned out the way I had expected", and I became "frustrated and resentful".

"I do not think that, but I think you are talking about Nietzsche's 'Will to Power', and I think you are saying that Nietzsche says that it's good to be powerful and do whatever you want. That is not what he says."
"See, there's no talking to you because you think that only you are right. Why don't you admit that you don't understand Nietzsche?"

"Why don't you be more polite?"

"Why should I? I don't have to stay in this class."

"You sure don't. I'll speak to the counselling department and have you transferred."

"That's great with me."

And that was our last exchange. It is not good to remove a student from your class: The feelings the student takes away with him are negative--about you, about your subject matter, and maybe about attending school. You have permanently removed the chance to rebuild, or build, the relationship. What happened between Ernie and me might not have happened if I had not sunk to "engaging in an emotional struggle", if I had maintained a "compassionate level of service".

A common spiritual foundation

According to Bollnow (1989), obedience is a natural part of a relationship with a caring, helping teacher, that

quiet, natural obedience ... [that] arises as a matter of course in an accommodating, orderly world. ... behind any acquiescence to some ... request stands a common spiritual foundation, namely the trusting readiness of the [student] to accept the request with a joyful affirmation and to identify with it. (p. 30)
I have a hat rack in my classroom for the students' baseball caps, and my students automatically and without argument take off their caps as they enter my classroom. Part way through this past school year, one of my girls asked if her boyfriend, could sit in class with her. After learning that he had dropped out of school, I asked him if he really wanted to sit in on our study of Macbeth. He kind of mumbled and nodded assent. He came into the room, and, as he was following Rebecca to her desk, my boys yelled, "Your hat!" He stopped and looked questioningly at them. "Your hat! Put it on the hat rack!" He turned back, hung up his cap, ran his hands through his hair, and went and sat beside his girlfriend.

I wasn't going to mention his hat. I thought we could relax the rules for a guest, but the boys had given their directive in an almost welcome-to-our room demeanor, so I started the class.

**Restoring the relationship**

Bollnow writes that students "do not feel good about disobedience, and they are glad when they can come back into life again . . . [that] educators must forever set themselves the fundamental task of restoring [the] original pedagogic atmosphere" (p. 31), for the students and for themselves. Whenever I become angry with a student, no matter how natural the reaction is, I feel broken, dejected, depressed. And the feeling won't go away. It stays with me throughout the day, both at school and at home. I have trouble getting to sleep and staying asleep. I know that I am too sensitive. I knew it my first year teaching, but my then
principal said it was what made me a good teacher. But it makes me so vulnerable. "Caring [really] is daring".

I was working with one of my grade nine boys this past year. He does not find the world of academia interesting or inviting, so I always try to include him in class activities. I was at the board composing with the class, and I asked him to help me think of an example. Before he could speak, one of the girls snapped, "Why don't you leave him alone? You're always picking on him!"

"Miss Sinclair’s not picking on me. What's your problem?"

"I'm outa here." And she picked up her books and headed for the door.

"Would you like me to make that official?" was my unprofessional, unthinking, very regrettable retort.

"You do that."

The door was slammed, she was gone, and I was sick. Never, never engage in a war of words with a student: You will always lose.

I continued the class without missing a beat, but my kids are also very sensitive and so supportive. When the bell rang, the boy who had been at the centre of the scene said quietly to me as he was leaving, "Don't worry about Kelly, Miss Sinclair. She gets like that."

But it wasn't enough. Nothing throughout that day or evening could remove the black cloud. It was the first thing on my mind the next morning, and it stayed with me as I drove to school, as I taught my morning classes, as I ate my lunch. Kelly's class was first period after lunch. She wasn't in class. I had just started the lesson when there was a knock at the door. I went to the door.
"Miss Sinclair? Can I talk to you?"

"Of course," I said as I stepped into the hall, closing the door behind me. I felt sure she was here to have me sign her transfer-out slip.

"Miss Sinclair, I'm sorry."

"Oh Kelly, I'm sorry too."

"Then you're not gonna throw me outta your class?"

"No! My class wouldn't be the same without you. Kelly, I'm going to go into the class now. You go and get your books, and come in when you are comfortable."

"Thanks, Miss Sinclair."

"Thank you, Kelly."

Bollnow claims that "Ungrateful individuals, as long as they remain in this state, cannot be cared for" (p. 31). But it is at such times that the teacher must care for the individuals the most. It is at such times that the teacher must practise the deepest reaching out to another being, must practise the deepest compassion, respecting the individual's integrity, safeguarding the individual's dignity. Because, as Bollnow writes, "without fail, this condition of thankfulness and obedience will be experienced by children as fortunate when, after tensions and hardships, they find themselves again in a reconciled relationship" (p. 31).

Providing atonement
We must give the students the opportunity to erase the tensions and reconcile the teacher-student relationship.

There was a situation wherein five of the allegedly tougher members of our senior boys were engaged in a physical altercation with a man immediately outside the window of my Lit 12 class. I was teaching Jane Austen.

"Miss Sinclair! There's a fight!"

"Speaking of 'socially-sanctioned male stupidity'." I put down my Lit 12 text and went out the school door immediately adjacent to my classroom to interfere somehow.

"Gentlemen! Stop this at once!"

"This asshole started it, Miss Sinclair!"

"Steven! Stop your swearing! I don't want to hear who started anything. Sir, [as I duck under their arms to get between them, hoping they don't continue swinging their fists] whoever you are, you can't win this. Please go in and see the principal. You can't hit them, and they'd love for you to try! Go! Now!"

I was jostled around a bit by all these menfolk, young and old, swaggering threateningly at each other, cursing through clenched teeth, flexing their muscles. The behaviour of all of them was disgraceful, but I was determined that no one was going to physically hurt anyone. After what seemed to me a great deal more flexing, cursing, spitting, and swaggering by all of them, the man headed into the school.
I had to get back to my class, all of whom were at the windows; and, therefore, I had no opportunity to address the boys' physical and verbal behaviour with them.

After class, I sought out the principal and asked him to call the boys to his office to meet with me and apologize to me. I needed his help because none of the boys were in any of my classes, and the severity of their behaviour warranted the formality of apologizing to me in the principal's office. My relationship with all the students in the school is a pedagogic one, and all my interactions with all the students are grounded in pedagogy. I wanted to explain to the boys that it is my job to insinuate myself into a situation in which they might hurt someone or be hurt by someone, and that I had had to stop my lesson, leave my students, and exit the school on their behalf and that they had greatly offended me with their language and behaviour, that I was not free to walk away, and that I would like them to apologize to me.

The principal ignored my request. Thus, the situation, which could have taught them decorum, restraint, what is and is not appropriate, that to speak that way is something for which to apologize, and so on, only gave them something about which to swagger in front of their friends and something to make them avoid me in the halls. Prior to this event, we had had a happy relationship. Steven had often helped me by carrying my computer to and from my car. And I had encouraged him and the other boys to have their rock band perform at our school talent show. We had always greeted each other in the halls. Maybe that is why I felt that I wouldn't be on the receiving end of a fist during the altercation.
Maybe that is why I thought they might listen to me. But our relationship ended. The situation could and should have had educational value. The boys could and should have been given the opportunity to erase the tensions and reconcile the student-teacher relationship.

The compassionate teacher provides "for a form of atonement [at-one-ment] by means of which . . . pedagogic relations can be restored" (Evans, 1991, p. 87). For me, apologizing teaches students decorum and provides for atonement; it has always been the extent of my "punishing". Evans writes that, "From the child's point of view it is extremely important that such opportunities be granted so that he not be condemned to labour indefinitely under the educator's bad opinion of him" (p. 87). The compassionate teacher understands the student's need to return to an earlier state of consciousness characterized by a free and open relation with the world. " . . . this is different from punishing for retributive reasons, to demonstrate a power relation or to convince a child of the wrongfulness of his or her actions" (p. 87).

The ontological location of schools

Evans discusses the "ontological location of school . . . It is a place where we introduce children to the world, but it is not the world" (p. 87). To paraphrase Evans: A teacher's practice is not a legal practice or a bureaucratic practice or managerial practice; it is a pedagogic practice, a normative practice (p. 87). Thus, a teacher has a pedagogical responsibility whether in the classroom, the
halls, the playground, or the parking lot, and responsibility for the students whether they are currently enrolled in her classes or not. The relationship with the students is a pedagogic relationship at all times and in every situation. *No matter what the teacher does, she is teaching.* If students are using foul language or pushing another student or throwing garbage on the floor when a teacher is walking past them in the hall, and the teacher does not respond, she is teaching them that such behaviour is fine, that it is not inappropriate. She is shrugging her pedagogical responsibility.

"Schools . . . are places where children learn to become someone" (Evans, p. 88). Every interaction with students must be governed by what the student is learning during the interaction and what lesson or pattern of behaviour or value the student will take with him or her from the interaction. "To be a [teacher] in a strong sense is to understand how the deep structure of educational activity can only be arrived at through an attentiveness to . . . the meaning and nature of pedagogy itself" (Evans, p. 85): to teach the students how to live in the world, to engage in behaviours requisite to a happy, successful life.

Pedagogical responsibility is being responsible for students being and becoming the best they can be. How a teacher responds depends on the situation: the place, the students involved, the emotional state of the students, and so on. But the students must know that the teacher is responding because she cares for them. How do they know this? They learn it from every interaction she has with students. She is the person currently telling them to watch their language, but she is also the person who always says good morning to them, who always says thank
you when a student holds a door for her, who always speaks politely to them, who always has a smile for them, who is often seen laughing with students, and so on. Students will take correction from a person who respects them, cares about them, and is always glad to see them.

I started teaching at my present school, which is located in a very affluent neighbourhood, fourteen years ago. I had just moved from the Prairies, where I had spent the previous two years teaching the senior boys in the Detention Centre. At my new school, there was a group of boys who were infamous in the district for terrorizing teachers, custodians, administrators, the local constabulary, and other students. They had all signed up for Law 11, supposedly to give the vice-principal, who was to teach the course, a heart attack. I was hired just before the start of school; the vice-principal in question decided that I should teach Law 11 that year. Being able to teach the course wasn't a requirement.

My first day of class. Thirty-three very tall boys, wearing identical sunglasses, were standing across the back and along the side of the room.

"Was there a sale on?"

"Sale?!? These are very expensive sunglasses! Haven't you ever seen Vuarnets?!?"

"Your sunglasses have a name? Sunglasses with a name. News to me."

"Where you been?"

"Teaching in a gaol."

Silence.

"Gentlemen, would you sit down please?"
They sat.

As I didn't have any books yet, I spent the rest of the hour fielding questions and telling the boys about the only things I knew regarding the law: what happens to young men and women picked up by the police for breaking the law. I was a terrible Law 11 teacher, but because of my previous teaching experience, my boys thought I was an authority; and I enjoyed them: They were so-o-o cool, but so full of life and promise and energy, and so-o-o naïve and vulnerable about what they thought they were so cool.

Standards of discipline and behaviour very much depend on the situation and the students involved. As George Eliot wrote in 1860, "... judgments must remain false and hollow unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot" (p. 628).

In the Detention Centre, I tried to get the boys just to write or read or smile. At my present school, I stress decorum, manners, literacy.

One day, well into the school year, one of the more infamous members of my Law 11 class was wearing a T-shirt with a very offensive picture and caption on it. I walked over to his desk, and I wasn't smiling.

"Nardo. Take your shirt off."

"What?!?"

"Take your shirt off."

"Okay. Okay," he said, as he was pulling it over his head.

"Turn it inside out."

"Okay. Okay."
"Now, put it on. You wore that to offend. You succeeded."

At lunch time, in the staffroom, one of the teachers commented that Nardo was wearing his shirt inside-out.

"Oh," I said. "That's my fault. Right-side-out, it is very offensive."

"You told him to take off his shirt and wear it inside-out and he did? He wouldn't do that for the rest of us. Only you could get away with that."

Why did he "do that for me"? Why could I get "away with that"? Because I enjoyed his being in my class. Because we made each other laugh. Because I respected him. Because I wanted him to be the best he could be. Because he knew all of the above.

We learn from those we admire

Children have a special need; they want to admire and honour their teacher. They want to feel a sense of awe over the knowledge and competence of the teacher . . . This concerns not just the teacher's actual subject-matter knowledge but more the fact that the teacher is seen to have so much knowledge. (Bollnow, p. 34)

Miss Sinclair? Who built the first sailing ship?

I have no idea, Billy.

Why doncha wanna tell me?

". . . it is this kind of sentiment which essentially readies the child to learn from the teacher" (p. 34), and which essentially precludes any discipline problems.

I taught with a gentleman, who retired from teaching last year. He was more than a teacher of mathematics: He, as Van Manen would say, embodied
mathematics (Van Manen, 1986, p. 45). His knowledge was awe-inspiring. He was what used to be known as a teacher from the old school. His students sat in rows, facing him at the blackboard. The only decorations in his classroom were a picture of the queen and a picture of Albert Einstein. He spoke very quietly. The only other sounds in his room were the sounds of pencils on paper and the sounds of calculators. He had disconnected the PA system years ago.

When I first witnessed his class in action, I thought the students were terrified of him, but I soon learned from incidental student comments that they thought he knew "everything" in the full sense of the word and did not want to miss a word he said. Students in grades seven to twelve wanted to be in his classes. I don't think he really understood what the rest of us meant by "discipline problems". His students learned the language and meaning of mathematics. His grade twelve students always attained scholarship results on the provincial examination. His Advanced Placement Calculus students never received marks lower than five, the highest a student can attain.

[Students] want to be proud of their teacher and . . . do not really rejoice in . . . failures or weaknesses . . . they discover . . . rather, they feel distressed. Children tend to want to learn, but they are prepared to learn without resistance only from a teacher who deserves their respect. (Bollnow, p. 34)

A colleague of mine, who suffered with discipline problems, often complained to me about students not handing assignments in on time, often not until marking gathering time at the end of term. She complained about the excuses they gave, about how she didn't really believe them, but that she couldn't be bothered arguing. I was very shocked and distressed when I overheard the students talking about how bad they were in her classes, how they never learned anything, about
how "stupid" she was, that they could give her any excuse and she would believe them.

"The feeling of adoration awakens in the child a desire to stand victorious before the honoured person and to be acknowledged by this significant person" (Bollnow, p. 34).

Miss Sinclair? Don't ya think I've improved? Don't ya think I'm doin' pretty good? What do ya think I'll get this term?

[It] is a strong motivation to strive harder. It is a powerful, forward-pushing force... the adoring affection opens the child to the influences of the educator. The childlike sentiment to take part in the beckoning flight of the inspired and inspiring... teacher is another example of one of those fertile pedagogical relationships. (p. 34)

Bollnow says "the inspiring young teacher", but I received a poem about just such a sentiment and influence when I was forty-three years old and had been teaching for twenty-four years.

Learning to live in the world

Evans (1991) writes that

we cannot base our actions or our conceptions of what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour on the norms and values that inform the conduct of the real world. To do so would be pedagogically inappropriate. It would be to deny the very idea of school its internal validity. (p. 85)

But we must ground our responses to a student's behaviour in the reality that the student does live in the world, and will very soon live in the adult world. When I first started teaching, many of my students had very serious emotional problems, resulting from deplorable home situations, problems which often
produced very negative behaviour. I was so reluctant even to correct them, but my principal taught me a very real truth: Their emotional problems explained their behaviours; they would never excuse them. Years later, teaching in the Detention Centre, the cruel truth of that statement was revealed to me.

[The teacher] needs to hold to his adult value as one worth holding, [but must also] recognize the [student] . . . as a [person] in the process of becoming. This, in a sense, is why we have schools, so that [students] who are not yet adults can [have their behaviour responded to] in a sympathetic and forebearing way. (Evans, p. 85)

Two years ago, the counsellor of one of my grade eight boys was telling me what problems the boy had, how he had attacked the girl who sat in front of him with a pair of scissors, but the counsellor didn't want to remove him from the class. I asked how it happened that the boy's problems were the fault of the girl who sat in front of him. He told me not to be so unfeeling. I asked the counsellor if I could talk to the boy about the situation. I only knew the child as a dear little soul who liked to read and who wrote with a beautiful, poetic style. But I did often hear his name in connection with various misdemeanors throughout the school, and I did often see him in the office, waiting to see the vice-principal in charge of discipline. He came to see me that day after school.

"Mr. Royce said you wanted to see me."

"Michael. You come to class everyday. The only time you are not listening to a lesson is when you are engrossed in a novel. You do all your assignments. Your poetry brings tears to my eyes. You always have a smile for me and your classmates. And two months ago, I heard about your trying to set fire to
somebody's books. I figured they had the wrong name. But this morning, I heard about your attacking a classmate with a pair of scissors."

At this point, I got very close to him, looked him straight in the eyes, and asked, "Do you figure aliens take over your body at random times and you don't know it?"

He laughed. "No, Miss Sinclair. That time before, I was just playing with a lighter that I found. I wanted to know if it worked. And yesterday, I was just playing with a pair of scissors. I was just pretending I was going to hit her with them. I wasn't really gonna stab her, but she had a fit, so Miss Lockhart threw me out and went to see Mr. Royce."

"But Michael, you probably scared the life out of her and Miss Lockhart. What would you do if a boy in class looked as if he were going to stab you with a pair of scissors?"

"I'd belt him."

"Well the girl we're talking about is probably not as big or as strong as you are, and probably doesn't know how to 'belt' someone."

"Na, probably not."

"Michael, I'd 'have a fit' if you raised a pair of scissors at me. And I know you would never hurt anyone intentionally. But that is the point Michael. I know you. I know you are a kind, sensitive, loving, and lovable human being; but if you did that to someone somewhere else, you could be charged with assault."

"I know. Sometimes, I just don't think."
"Noddings points out, when you confirm yourself or someone else, you look at things in a positive, growth-oriented way" (Henderson, 1992, p. 37).

... Buber emphasizes a confirmation which, while it accepts the other as a person, may also wrestle with him against himself. ... 'I not only accept the other as he is, but I confirm him, in myself, and then in him, in relation to this potentiality that is meant by him and it can now be developed, it can evolve, it can answer the reality of life ... 'I accept you as you are'. But this does not mean 'I don't want you to change'. But it says, 'I discover in you what you are meant to become'. (Buber, 1965, pp. 29-30)

... confirming a [student] as he is is only the first step. Confirmation does not mean that I take his appearance at this moment as being the person I want to confirm. I must take the other person in his dynamic existence, in his specific potentiality. In the present lies hidden what can become. This potentiality, this sense of his unique direction as a person, can make itself felt to me within our relationship, and it is that which I most want to confirm. In [teaching] this personal direction becomes perceptible ... in a very special way. In the strongest [misbehaving] that appears in the life of a [student], the highest potentiality of this [student] may be manifesting itself in negative form. The [compassionate teacher] can directly influence the development of those potentialities. (Henderson, 1992, pp. 38-39)

To engage in this uplifting confirmation, we must not adopt or use negative labels. Each person has a best self; we must use compassionate language, language that confirms the students' best selves, thus affirming our own best selves as educating professionals. (Henderson, p. 38)

The compassionate teacher validates the student: The behaviour is not the student. "[Teaching] does not mean bringing up the old, but shaping the new: it is not confirming the negative, but counterbalancing with the positive" (Buber, p. 39). "It [is] in this sense that schools [can] claim to be a preparation for life not in the narrower vocational sense that now prevails" (Evans, p. 88).

When the dialogue dies in seed
The compassionate teacher continues to strive even though the problem may be never fully resolved. She must persist because the problem is her problem because the students are part of her.

True confirmation means that I confirm my partner as this existing being even while I oppose him. I legitimize him over against me as the one with whom I have to do in real dialogue. . . . but . . . one's address to the other may remain unanswered and the dialogue may die in seed. (Buber, pp. 28-29)

In 1972, I was teaching a split, grade four-five class. One of the grade four boys had a temper and would lash out physically when upset. We talked about his anger, its causes, and how best for him to deal with it. And I could see he tried very hard not to react with his fists. He didn't do much damage when he did: Danny was only nine years old and weighed about sixty pounds.

In 1979, I was teaching the senior boys in the Detention Centre. A new boy was brought in by the police, charged with assault. It was Danny, who was now sixteen years old and weighed about one hundred sixty pounds. We talked again about his anger, its causes, and how best for him to deal with it.

I moved to Vancouver soon after this time.

In 1987, I was teaching in my present position. I was reading my Maclean's magazine one night after school. I read where a judge on the prairies had set a precedent in a murder case: A woman had shot and killed her husband, and the judge had ruled that it was a case of self-defense because the husband had beaten her so badly and so often. Danny was twenty-four years old.

According to Evans, schools are places "where becoming someone [is] . . . a process of conscientization in the full sense of the word . . . [because] If the moral growth we seek is to be a real phenomenon", that is, authentic, the student
must be able to see for himself the desired value "as a value worth preserving"
(p. 88).

[The compassionate teacher] actively seeks to engage the child in a process of moral reflection not simply so the child may become clear about the consequences of holding to this or that value, but with the active intent that the child will take up the desired (desirable) value. . . . There is no possibility here that the educator can guarantee the success of his or her efforts. Because the child must be free to choose there remains always the possibility that the child may choose despite, or even in the face of, the intentions and wishes of the educator . . . , a risk which the [compassionate] educator . . . must be willing to embrace. (Evans, p. 89)

Trust, mutual respect, and responsible decision-making for yourself and your students

"A positive learning environment is a physically and psychologically safe place in which trust and mutual respect exist among all the members. Physical, verbal, and psychological abuse have no place in a nurturing environment" (Henderson, p. 87). And they are quickly addressed by a teacher grounded in the meaning of compassion: "The feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it."; "com"--"together with"; "pati"--"to suffer" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p. 489).

"Students should not feel threatened, maligned, inferior, or inadequate. Each day students should enter the classroom with expectations of success and leave it with feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment" (Henderson, 1992, p. 87).

A compassionate teacher's "primary focus is on the quality of the relationships [she has] with [her] students, not on any particular authoritative role [she has] established" (Henderson, p. 87).
Good teachers give up some of their authority in the classroom because they recognize that autonomy and the acquisition of self-control are significant aims of the educational process. Students need to be supported in their development toward independence. Much time and effort must be spent on nurturing those skills. (Henderson, p. 88)

Dreikurs stresses that the 'teaching of discipline as a basic value is an ongoing process and is not to be resorted to only in times of stress and misbehaviour'. The teacher . . . sets the norms for the classroom community . . . The norms [of mutual respect] that must be internalized by the students. (Henderson, p. 90)

As do most teachers, I introduce my classroom expectations the first day of class.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there are two things that I insist upon in all my classes: respect and good manners. I will try to be always respectful and polite to you. I want you to try to be always respectful and polite to me and to each other."

And throughout the year, "I . . . remind students [and they remind me] of [our] ongoing responsibility to be the very best people [we] can be" (Henderson, p. 102).

"Teachers . . . strive to empower students to become independent, self-directing, self-disciplined, and responsible decision makers just as they themselves strive for these qualities in their own professional and personal lives" (Henderson, p. 91). "The classroom has to be designed to encourage students to construct their own knowledge about what it takes to live ethically in society" (Henderson, p. 97).

How do you get control of kids? Your whole being is there with them. You are present in a real way. There is no pretend acting and you tune into the real kids in front of you. You encourage them to be there for you and for each other, as well. You need to make time for students [and you] to think, to be alone, to be concerned and caring for each other. Give them [and yourself]
time to simply talk about what's important . . . to encourage sharing . . . and even love. (Henderson, p. 101)

Give them and yourself the requisite time for all of you to become authentic with and trusting of each other. "When students come to trust the adult in the classroom, they no longer have to act out to get attention. They get into the flow, the rhythm of the group" (Henderson, p. 101).

Finding a solution wherein the child sees himself or herself as necessary and valuable to the world

"When problems arise in the classroom . . . teachers [must] invest the time and energy necessary to find the solution that is best for the student, not just for themselves" (Henderson, p. 25). And it takes time and effort because "general rules [do not result in] justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality" (Eliot, 1860, p. 628), without actions and responses grounded in compassion.

We must see the child as contributing to the world, necessary to the world. If a student is hostile, "give the student a highly desirable duty that lets him know that he is a valued member of the class" (Henderson, p. 52), and that you respect and trust him. Try always to interact with the student's best self; "for the sake of the student's future, you must not give up" (Henderson, p. 52).

Billy was in my grade six class my first year of teaching. I was teaching in an inner-city school. No child should have to live in the situation he did. His mother constantly told him that he was not wanted and that no one would want him. His
father, who was not in the home, was black, and his mother always referred to Billy as a "dirty little nigger". Billy acted out constantly and did not really involve himself in the lessons or the assignments. When the first snow fell, the kindergarten teacher asked me if I would send a student to her room everyday fifteen minutes before the children went home for lunch and fifteen minutes before they went home at the end of the day. She wanted someone she could depend on. I asked Billy. When the other students were busy, I went over to his desk and spoke very quietly to him.

"Billy. Miss Linders needs someone to help put on mitts and scarves before hometime everyday."

"So," he sullenly responded, without looking up from removing a steel edge from someone's ruler.

"Would you mind helping her?"

He looked up. "Me?"

"Yes. You better watch the time."

"Okay," he said as he looked at the clock.

Billy never said a word about working with the kindergarten children.

A week later one of the grade one teachers asked me if I could spare Billy twice a week to work with her boys during P.E., to teach them to play soccer, referee their games, and so on. She said that she had mentioned she needed such help to Miss Linders across the hall, and that Miss Linders had said to ask for Billy, that he was so reliable, so patient, and the children loved him. Well, Billy assumed his increasing mantle of responsibility enthusiastically and quietly. I
never had to remind him, and he was dependable and punctual. My colleagues
told me the children adored him, that they hung on his every word, that the little
boys in his P.E. class thought whatever he said or did was wonderful. What a
difference in the classroom. Billy did not become interested in reading or
arithmetic, but he less frequently stopped anybody who was. The important thing
was that many, many children, and his teacher, thought that Billy was wonderful.

Seeing the positive

The belief of the educator strengthens the positive faculties which he or she
presumes present in the child. The educator is in a sense luring them out with
his or her belief. If the teacher thinks highly about a child's reliability,
sincerity, devotion, then his or her belief awakens and corroborates these
qualities in the child. . . . But the opposite is also true: All the bad things
which the educator suspects in the child are, in a sense, brought forth by these
very suspicions . . . Froebel . . . writes: ' . . . there . . . are . . . calamitous
individuals amongst educators [who] always see little, nasty, insidious,
lurking devils in children and boys, where others at most perceive an
overabundance of fun or the results of a somewhat unbridled joy of life'.
(Bollnow, 1989, p. 40)

Chris's mother visited me and asked if her son, who had been in my English
classes for grades eight to eleven, could be in my English 12 class. I strongly
believe that students benefit greatly from a variety of teaching styles, methods,
demands, and personalities; and so I hesitated in responding. She then told me
that I did not know what Chris was like in other classes, that he constantly
misbehaved to the point that he spent most of his time in the hall.

"I can't believe it. Chris is a warm and loving human being. He is fun and
happy and full of life, but he is not a behaviour problem."
"Exactly Miss Sinclair. You see him that way, and I do, but many of his other teachers do not see his behaviour that way, and then there are problems."

Thus the teacher has an "enormous responsibility . . . [His or her] beliefs have consequences on his or her behaviour and in this way they influence directly the [student's behaviour]" (Bollnow, p. 41).

To move beyond ego to a compassionate service level of consciousness, teachers must stop, relax, and take the time and opportunity to "develop sensitivity, a basic compassion, or what Trungpa calls the 'awakened heart'" (Drake & Miller, 1991, p. 328). A teacher must try to "infuse [his or her] existence with a basic sense of connectedness . . . [a] centredness and attentiveness [that] can be part of [a] living presence in the classroom that students can respond to" (p. 328).
Chapter 11

the deep power of joy

William Wordsworth

The unifying power of laughter

"Wherever laughter freely errupts, there is breached the feeling of separation, of contrariness, of reluctance to participate" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 20).

The teacher’s laughing with the students eases tensions, puts things in perspective, unites the students with the teacher and the students with each other. People who laugh together are involved with each other, are connected, are happy.

In 1970 I was teaching grade six in an inner-city school. In about October of the school year, a new student joined the class. He was a couple of years older than the majority of the class and was very "cool", disdainful, and stand-offish. He completed work expected of him but never appeared to be involved. He seemed to prefer to sit tipped back in his chair, gazing out the window. I enjoy sharing the humour I witness and experience in my daily life with my students and enjoy sharing in their humourous experiences. Consequently, there are many
instances in which I and my students laugh. I have never had a problem with these instances impeding learning or interfering with covering the curriculum. I have always let my students see me as human... as vulnerable and imperfect, as capable of making mistakes and sometimes even making a fool of myself. I have found that they become less judgemental and more accepting of me and my weaknesses. But more importantly, they see that many mistakes or instances of weakness or vulnerability are not the end of the world, just funny. And, perhaps they experience that the world and life can be a joyful place.

Softball season began in the spring. Phil attended our first game. I don't know what I was doing, but I heard Phil announce to the opposing team and fans, "That's our crazy teacher".

It was said with such warmth and such love... "That's our crazy teacher" remains one of the most loving compliments of my life. And, I had become "our teacher".

The importance of cultivating joy

Even the young child wants to become an adult and speaks with interest of the time 'when I'll be grown-up'. Later life stands in tempting beauty before the child as a land of promise... this morning freshness, ... this as yet aimless thirst for action,... this sense of purposeful readiness, to continually strive toward the highest form of human being,... is of special significance for pedagogy... The child's readiness to learn and will to grow and mature are grounded in these preconditions,... it is in the nature of the child to want to grow and to enjoy growing up. (Bollnow, 1989, pp. 23-24)

Readiness to be educated is definitely not rooted in the intellect; rather it is founded on the deeper and therefore much more securely progressive spirit of a morning-like atmosphere. Accordingly, education must take this notion as
its starting point: It should orient itself to the perfection of this spirit by guarding it and rebuilding it time and again when it is being destroyed. (p.25)

Fall, 1968, my first year of teaching. I am preaching to my grade six class of inner-city students that one must have an education to "get anywhere in this world". At the end of the day one of my boys approaches my desk looking very concerned.

"Miss Sinclair? I know ya hafta have an education. Ya even hafta have grade twelve to drive for Imperial Oil. I can't get grade twelve Miss Sinclair. I got three younger brothers. I hafta get a job."

Such seriousness, such sadness, such age in his eyes. Such resignation in his voice. I later learned that Charles's mother was a single parent, that each of her son's had a different father, that she was fourteen years older than Charles. I went from condemning her to forgiving her for putting such adult responsibilities on her eldest son's, her eleven-year-old son's, shoulders. She, like so many of the young women I would teach, embraced and built dreams around anyone who paid any kind of attention to her. So many of my young women having babies, longing for someone to love, longing to be loved.

Charles and his younger brothers were such a motley crew, with their hand-mended clothes, their mismatched buttons; but eleven-year-old Charles, as his grade three teacher, who was nearing retirement said, was one of the best of mothers.

I learned to celebrate the wonder and glory of Charles and tried very hard to have him feel good about who he was, not what society said he should be. I learned not to ask my students what they are "going to be", but to celebrate what
they are, and to try not to miss an opportunity to applaud their strengths and goodness.

I wanted so badly that he join our school speed-skating team in the winter months and then our softball team in the spring. I was the "coach", by virtue of the fact that I was the grade six teacher. The students enjoyed our after school practices, and of course our competitions against other schools. They had a chance to shine, and there were such feelings of comraderie, excitement, anticipation, and triumph. Charles needed to be part of the joy and energy of just being twelve years old. But, no. Charles could never be a part of or participate in the practices or the games: He had to hurry to a local hotel to wash dishes from 4:00 to 11:00 each night. When he told me how he spent his evenings, I asked him if he had any free time on Saturdays.

"Ya," he said. "Why?"

"Well, I am supposed to coach these teams, and I really know nothing about everything that is involved, and you are the most dependable, hard-working, patient, and responsible student I've ever taught. Charles, I really need your help. If I hold our major practices on Saturdays and gave you a list of those interested in being on the teams, a schedule of the games, equipment needed, etc., could you help me organize who's playing, who's right for what position, who needs practice, and where and when games are?"

"Sure I could, Miss Sinclair!" I had never seen such a change come over anyone's face: Charles was smiling the way a twelve-year-old child should smile. "I can do that, Miss Sinclair! Can we start this Saturday?"
"We sure can. And as team manager it is your job to let the kids know when the practices are, so you can announce it this afternoon." I thus created a situation wherein I would have many opportunities to praise and thank Charles for being Charles. I hope that I helped him realize what strengths he had and how needed they are in this world. It was my hope to make his eleven-year-old life more joyful and his future life more hopeful.

Wherever these preconditions are missing, wherever listlessness and languor grip the young person, wherever the future lies before the young person like an oppressive wasteland, there he or she must waste away, and there, education too can find no starting point where it otherwise could make an impact. . . . To foster and uphold this attitude of joyful hope is therefore one of the most basic demands of education. (Bollnow, p. 25).

The teacher must embody joy in order to actualize a nourishing atmosphere. The teacher cannot force or contrive such an atmosphere; she can only "cultivate a joyful atmosphere wherever it naturally arises out of the child's experience" (p. 21). And this she must do in order to remove concerned and serious and troubled expressions from the students' faces and replace them with expressions of joy and warmth and openness.

Teachers must embody a joyful present

"Innocent, overflowing joy belongs in a real sense to the morning spirit as well as to the life of youth. All full and rich development of the child is rooted herein. Therefore, no adult scepticism should darken this innocence" (Bollnow, pp. 25-26).
A new student signed into my grade 9 English class in the third week of school last year. When the students were packing up their books at the end of class, he said, "Miss Sinclair? You've been teaching a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"And you like teaching. Don't you Miss Sinclair?"

"Yes, I do. Doesn't it show?"

"Ya. It does. Miss Sinclair?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Why do some teachers keep teaching when they don't like it?"

"As in any profession, people have different personalities and different ways of enjoying their work. And, of course, there are days when you enjoy your work more than others." Blah, blah, blah . . .

Teachers must enjoy the company of their students. The students know if they do not and will resent them, and then it has to be the worst job in the world.

I knew the teacher to whom he was referring and knew the truth of his statement. I realized that I had come to avoid this teacher in the halls, office, and staffroom for that reason: always complaining, always seeking out every opportunity to absent herself from the classroom, always speaking venomously about the students, the administration, the building. I and many of her colleagues had tried unsuccessfully to encourage her to see the joy and humour and satisfaction in our job, only to be met with negative and often abrasive retorts. Why does such a person continue teaching? She is not enjoying her life, and she is modelling for her students that life is bleak and without joy. Young people
today are bombarded with messages of what a hate-filled, fearsome world they inhabit. Teachers have a pedagogical responsibility to embody and exude the joy and wonder of life and living, and must embody a "joyful future orientation" (Bollnow, p. 25).

In about April a couple of years ago, I was telling my Literature 12 class how much I had liked a poem of Wordsworth's when I was in school.

"Miss Sinclair, you're the only teacher whoever tells her age."

"My age is very much part of who I am. My age reveals many of my life's experiences, experiences that make up who I am."

"Ya, but most people don't want to be old."

"I know, but that never makes any sense to me. I mean it is only through luck, the grace of God, a guardian angel that I've made it this far, that I'm forty-four years old; and if I'm lucky, some day I'll be fifty."

"Yuck! Who wants to be fifty!"

"I do! Right now, I'm enjoying being forty-four, but I know I'll enjoy being fifty because life seems to get better and better. Children, you will enjoy each year you get older because life holds new experiences and joys for you, and the bad times you'll be better able to cope with because you realize that nothing really is the end of the world, that life does continue and along with it the chance of a better tomorrow--a cliché, but a cliché because it is true. You come to know and accept who you are. You get to know your strengths, your weaknesses, your hang-ups, and you come to accept them. You're not so hard on yourself."

"But Miss Sinclair, you can't do lotsa stuff anymore."
"But that's okay because God or Life or Something looks after you: You no longer want to do those things anymore. There are other different things you want to do. Now I'm going to get off my soapbox, and we're going to continue trying to figure out what Mr. Wordsworth saw as important in his life because I think that you'll probably enjoy June '93 of your life more if you pass your Lit 12 exam."

**Morningness strengthens with age**

Herbart, as outlined in Bollnow (p. 25), believed that a teacher must be young, but it is my experience that the unselfconsciousness required to embody "joyful hope", "morningness", and so on, becomes stronger with age, with the increasing acceptance of one's self that comes with age, with the experience both of teaching and of living.

... the true educator will never really sink into ... an evening attitude of growing weariness because, in his walk through life, he or she lives with children and continues to participate in the morning spirit of youth. As the educator shares their expectations and their dreams, with all their living freshness, he or she is rejuvenated and absorbed by the atmosphere of morningness with them. (Bollnow, p. 26)

Three years ago, I was discussing the intensity of John Keats's life as a poet and the brevity of his life period—that he had died so young—only twenty-five. I said to my class of Literature 12 students, "I realize that twenty-five does not seem that young to you, but to me he hadn't even begun to live."

One of my boys said, "Miss Sinclair. You're not old. I know you're the same age as my mother, but... somehow you're young."
"It's true Miss Sinclair," added Lisa.

"It's your energy, and . . . you laugh," said Caroline.

Somehow, out of all the things they say to me and about me during the course of a day, those comments surfaced as I was driving home that night; and I thought, How nice--such warmth.

And then my thoughts travelled back . . . back twenty-four years. My first year of teaching.

I was teaching grade six in an inner-city school. At the end of the year the children brought records, snacks, and games for a party. I was standing by the record player with a group of students. We were listening to the Beatles' song "Revolution". I had been listening to the Beatles since I was thirteen years old and had seen them on "The Ed Sullivan Show". I remember my mother, upon witnessing my reaction to them, was concerned something had happened to her daughter. Well, we listened to the record; and when it was over, David, who was thirteen years old and six years my junior, turned to me and said, "Miss Sinclair? What kinda music did they have when you were young?"

Isn't that interesting: I'm younger now that I'm a quarter of a century older.

I've always said that teaching keeps you young.

Joy and laughter prevail

When my students were handing in their Lit 12 textbooks on their way to write this year's Literature 12 government exam, one of my girls said, "Miss
Sinclair? If I don't get married and have a bunch of kids, will you adopt me so that I could live with you?"

"What? Why do you want to live with me?"

"Cause then I'd always have fun." From Casey, a student with whom I'd often been stern because of lateness, missing quizzes, and so on. Joy and laughter prevail.

A joyful living into the future

Bollnow (1989) speaks of

'the feeling of morning-ness'... the experience of a fresh, happy, forward-looking sense of life... an active, forceful pull toward the future which is indispensable for human development... a mood which cannot contain itself but which wants to overflow... the making of far-reaching plans, and the hope-filled working toward their fulfillment... a joyful living into the future... a future oriented sense of life of the soon-to-be-adult young person. (pp. 22-23)

I experienced a rather extreme example of this characteristic of young people this past summer. I was at a funeral for a much-beloved colleague. Many students were there. A few of my grade eleven boys fell in beside me as I was leaving the service. We had been hit very hard by the death and the suddenness of it. We were quietly talking about the man's two sons, who attend our school, and the support they will need. Peter, one of the most hyper-active and vivacious students I have ever taught, jumped in beside me and said, "Miss Sinclair, I've signed up for Lit 12. Do you think I'll be able to do it? Is it hard?"
"No, Peter, it is not hard; it is long. So you have to be there every class. If you are away on Tuesday, and come back and ask me, 'What did I miss?' I'm going to say 'Wordsworth, and we're now on Byron'."

"Gee. Well, I attended pretty good this year. And I've decided that I'm not going to miss any classes next year, 'cause it's grade twelve, and I gotta do well."

The other boys all made noises about how hard they were going to work, starting in September, wished me well, and left me at my car.

Their egocentricity, excitement, anticipation, and sheer joy in being alive pulled me out of my feelings about the bleakness, the tenuousness, and the tragedy of life.

"...this universally joyful sense of expectation which infuses the child's entire soul...[requires] careful attention by the educator" (Bollnow, p. 26).

The compassionate teacher, grounded in the connectedness between herself and her students, sees the pedagogical opportunity in the moment of disappointment and does not allow disappointment or disillusion to overwhelm the student, or "The future loses its beckoning magic" (Bollnow, p. 27). And her students do not allow disappointment, disillusion, or tragedy to overwhelm her.

**The atmosphere of warmth and happy willingness**

Bollnow speaks of the serenity that can come with age as being "open and dedicated to the life world--reflectively thoughtful and yet still completely in this world" (p. 54).
...the quiet, steady serenity which does not originate in a single incident but which emanates from the depth of the soul. Such a state of serenity does not just happen on its own; rather, the human being must learn it and wrestle it from the difficulties of life. . . . Serenity is a warm relation in which . . . the child finds himself or herself accepted in a loving and positive manner. . . . such serenity does not just animate a love of life and good temper in others, but in addition creates trust and confidence in their own abilities. . . . Serenity . . . does not mean a *take it easy approach* with respect to one's educational responsibility. The teacher does not excuse the child from real requests and tasks. Rather these are demanded with a quiet self-evidence without making a great deal of fuss about it. (Bollnow, 1989, pp. 55-57)

I am strict with my students regarding due dates of assignments, general work habits, manners, and so on. "But because the children's involvements are requested in a serene mood, an atmosphere is created which lets the tasks be assumed without resistance and with happy willingness" (Bollnow, p. 57). My colleagues and the parents of my students find it remarkable that my boys automatically remove their baseball caps when they enter my classroom. Maybe it is because the students put up the hat rack . . . no, that was years ago. It is because I ask them to.

**Humour can lighten life's burdens**

From this gentle serenity grows at once the kind of humour which is typical of the real educator, . . . the ability to see the small worries of the child from the perspective of a certain preponderance and so to take them lightly. . . . with humour the educator relaxes the tension. He or she is taking the burden not quite as seriously as the child and thus is able to lighten the situation and to provide the child with the possibility to overcome problems. . . . children still vacillate easily from states of extreme happiness to states of abysmal desperation. This means that at any instant the child is fully and undividedly exposed to the present situation against which he or she is personally defenseless. [The adult] has gained from a longer life experience an inner balance and a distance which allows him or her to see things with a sense of relativity which appear, for the child, absolute and insurmountable in the
momentary situation. . . . If a mishap occurs to the child, making him or her feel inconsolable, then humour may correct it. (Bollnow, 1989, pp. 57-58)

Sharon, a grade ten student, whom I had taught English 9, was in the office looking so down, as I was walking through the office. I stopped when I saw her.

"Oh, Miss Sinclair," eyes brimming with tears.

"Sharon, what's the matter?" As the tears spill over and run down her cheeks, my eyes fill. No serenity here.

"Miss Sinclair, why are you crying?"

"I don't know. I guess because you are. Why are we crying?"

Sharon is now laughing and crying. "I'm just having such a bad day. I think I flunked my math test, and Miss Williams doesn't like my essay topic, and I worked so hard on it."

"And you stayed up late studying, and you're overtired and everything seems awful. (I have regained my composure.) I know. I know. I understand."

"You do, don't you. Miss Sinclair, will you look at my essay topic and see what you think?"

"Of course. Let's sit down." She told me her ideas for her essay. They were wonderful, interesting ideas that she just needed to pin down a bit more precisely, which she did in just a few minutes of explaining them to me.

As we stood to go our separate ways, Sharon looked at me, laughed, and said, "Miss Sinclair, you're so funny. I feel so much better. Thanks."

Sometimes, when we have done our best, and it is not good enough, a little warmth, a little empathy, a little laughter, and a little compassion go a long way.
Pain must enter into its glorified life of memory

"... the educator has the gift of humour because he or she sees beyond the child's immediate perception of the situation's possibilities [and often sees] ... the typical recycling of general human conditions" (Bollnow, 1989, p. 59). And some aren't funny, and to a young person, they feel like the end of the world. Often, it is just an older person who knows they are not, an older, compassionate person, grounded in "a wide fellow-feeling for all that is human" (Eliot, 1860, p. 628); "for pain must enter into its glorified life of memory before it can turn into compassion". (Eliot, 1871-1872, p. 714)

I am co-sponsor of our school's student council. One evening my colleague and I were working with some council members in the back of our cafeteria selling potato chips, and so on, when one of my grade twelve boys came in. I cannot describe the look on his face, only to say that it demanded that I put my arms around him and tell him that I was so sorry, that I understood, that I had been there, that we all had been there, that it would get better. "From this view the world [loses] some of its severity when the uniqueness is taken away and when we consider that life [does] continue" (Bollnow, p. 59). "Growing up is the understanding that one's unique and incredible experiences is what everyone shares" (Lessing, 1993, n. p.).

When we were alone, my colleague asked me what was wrong with Edward.
"An affaire d'coeur," I answered quietly.
"How did you know? I taught him for two years, and I didn't even notice anything was wrong."

"He's in my block four. Didn't anybody ever break your heart?"

... Serenity and humour are fruitful in pedagogical relations only if they are embedded in ... goodness... [that] turns especially toward the human being who suffers... Goodness is different from serenity in that it orients itself in a helping way to other people by understanding their sorrows and by alleviating these sorrows... It consists in the profound knowledge of all the unavoidable suffering and quandaries of human life. (Bollnow, pp. 60-61)

And the knowledge that life continues and always offers new chances, new opportunities. "Humour ends when we are confronted with serious questions, deep sorrows, binding demands" (Bollnow, p. 62). But goodness and compassion continue.
Chapter 12

the other side of silence

George Eliot

I realized about the end of March that Anne-Marie hadn't spoken at all since about the beginning of February. She was one of about 120 students in an "open-area" classroom of grade five and six students in an inner-city school.

She was new to the school in September, and she was very quiet; but many of my Métis students were quiet, soft-spoken, hesitant about contributing or asking for help.

I tried several times quietly approaching her when the other students were involved with projects, and so on. I kept hoping that she would speak, but there was no response. I didn't try hard enough. I didn't hear "that roar which lies on the other side of silence".

I got in touch with the Child Guidance Clinic and was told that the case worker assigned to our school would look into the situation, that Anne-Marie's name would be put on a waiting list.

April, May, June--Easter holidays, softball season, track meets, and end-of-year parties--all came and went.

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In July, I read in the paper that Anne-Marie's step-father had received a two-year suspended sentence for raping her, that she had been placed in a foster home because her mother had accused her of "trying to take her man away".

"If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (Eliot, 1871-1872, pp. 177-178).
Chapter 13

*Tread softly because you tread on my dreams*

William Butler Yeats

Evaluating with compassion

When a student submits a piece of work to be evaluated, the compassionate teacher sees the student in the work--sees the effort, the hope, the sense of self-worth... the vulnerability--and her response is informed by the meaning of the word "evaluation": "the act of valuing" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p. 904); because in a real sense, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (Yeats)

Working within the traditional system of grading

If a student cannot read, how does putting a failing grade on her reading ability, teach her to read? It doesn't. Getting rid of the traditional system of grading is the best thing we could do to ensure better reading and writing. (Blynt, 1992, p. 66)

But many of my students' dreams are dreams of being accepted at a university. It is my pedagogical responsibility to help them realize those dreams. Therefore,
it is my pedagogical responsibility to enable them to achieve the grades demanded by the universities. I cannot do so by ignoring "the traditional system of grading".

Failing grades are a "self-defeating prophecy. There is no good to be gotten from the process of consistently pointing out people's shortcomings. We need to find and encourage every person's individual competencies. That is our job. That is why we are teachers" (Blynt, p. 67). That is pedagogy. It is not our job to tell the students that they cannot read or cannot write. If they cannot, they already know. It is our job to teach them to read or to write. What is more, it is our job to make engaging in reading and writing activities positive, joyful, self-enhancing, self-fulfilling.

"Our students should grow. Our job is to nurture that growth. Continuing to grow has to be the most important thing, all the time, for all people. Any legitimate evaluation procedure needs to reflect that growth" (Blynt, p. 67).

If we believe that, literally, then the poorer student who enters my class and doubles or trebles his skills as a writer should receive a 'grade' that reflects that growth. Just as the good writer who ostensibly studies with me, but remains complacent with his initial degree of aptitude and does not grow, should not receive a satisfactory evaluation. If we truly want to foster lifetime learning, then we cannot contribute to the 'there, I've got it, I don't need to work any more' attitude. If we honestly value process over product, and this world demands that we do, then we have to change the way we divvy up the rewards. (Blynt, p. 67) Brava!

"Students know, even more than teachers... that grades do not equal learning" (Blynt, p. 67). But good grades mean university acceptance. Thus, for many students, especially those who are struggling, "the only thing our traditional grading system does is teach kids to cheat better" (Blynt, p. 68).
I had quite a few students in my English eleven class this year who were new to the English language. One young woman in particular was under great pressure from home to get the marks needed to be accepted into university. She had very little command of English, and I could not get her to even try reading a novel written in English. Every time I assigned a piece of writing, she would submit something written by a very literate tutor. The pressure of our "traditional grading system" and the pressure on her to achieve high marks resulted in her not learning, in her not achieving. I tried to explain to her that I needed to see her writing, so that I could help her. She would stare at me blankly and continue to have her tutor complete her assignments.

I stopped giving her writing assignments to be done outside of class. I stopped giving her writing assignments. When I asked the class for a written response to a piece of literature, I would sit beside her and ask her to put down her pen and tell me what she thought or felt about some aspect of the literature that could be answered in a sentence or two. My heart went out to her: It took such effort and courage for her to frame her thoughts in English, aloud, to her English teacher. When she did, I responded orally. When she became a little more comfortable with responding orally, I began asking her to pick up her pen and write down exactly what she had just given me orally, not worrying about spelling or correctness, just to write down what she had said and put it in her writing file. Sometime before the next class, I would write my response to her thoughts immediately under her text.
She seemed to enjoy reading our "conversations". They became longer. Lucy was reading and writing English! I gave her an "In Progress" for first term. By second term, when the class was submitting multi-paragraph compositions, Lucy was submitting multi-sentence compositions for which she received well-earned marks, making her feel a part of the class, making her feel proud of her achievement. "... self-esteem in a classroom connects the students to the group" (Blynt, p. 76). "When learning and writing are real, the importance of the grade diminishes. The evaluation comes in the form of honest response" (Blynt, p. 68).

Self-esteem comes from achievement.

Growth does not occur on schedule

"Not only is the methodology behind traditional grading questionable, but its frequency begins to make it an end in itself" (Blynt, p. 70): interims, phone calls in which parents want to know grades; counsellors wanting to know current grades; first-term reports; parent-teacher interviews; interims; parent-teacher interviews; second-term reports; interims; exams; final reports—all of which require working out a percentage. As a very wise and witty man, who was an administrator at our school said, "We weighed the pig so often we forgot to feed him". Emily Carr, the Canadian writer and artist, expressed the same sentiment, probably more poetically and with more appealing imagery: "One does not keep digging up a plant to see how it grows" (Blynt, p. 70).
Ms Blynt goes on to say that "growth doesn't occur on schedule. And it is not always visible nor immediately discernible" (Blynt, p. 70).

Dora had been in Canada and exposed to the English language only six months when she arrived in my grade eleven English class. She watched my face intently whenever I was speaking. I could see her concentrating, brow furrowed, silently mouthing the strange words I was uttering, courageously and unobtrusively asking for clarification, courageously and quietly testing her interpretation of the literature we were discussing. Dora always had a novel from the library. She read every night, Chinese-English dictionary in hand. She wrote every day, trying out new vocabulary, incorporating every skill or usage convention I reviewed in class. She would approach me after class or when the class was working independently and ask me questions about the meaning of expressions or the appropriate use of expressions. "Miss Sinclair? What does it mean to be 'beside you self?'" "Miss Sinclair? What does it mean to 'laugh you head off'?'" Dora worked. She wanted to learn. She made me work. She made me learn.

Dora was an A student. But first term ended the end of November, and Dora and Dora's parents and the universities (grade eleven marks are on the students' transcripts) want marks that reflect Dora's ability in reading and writing the English language. At the end of term, I asked Dora to stay after class.

"Dora?"

"Yes, Miss Sinclair." She looked so worried.

"Dora, I don't want to give you a mark this term."
"No, Miss Sinclair. ["students balk at not getting a grade at least as much as educators worry about not giving them" (Blynt, p. 69).] Please, I must have mark." She was close to tears.

"No, no my dear. Do not be troubled. You have done outstandingly well. You work so hard, and it shows. You have learned so much! But you know that your final mark for grade eleven is an average of the three terms?" She nodded. "And you know how much you have learned and how much more you will learn by the end of second term?" Another nod. "Well, your second-term mark will be much higher than your first-term mark, and I don't want your first-term mark to bring down your mark for English 11, so I am going to give you an 'NM' [No Mark] for this term. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes." The worry began to leave her face.

"Can you explain it to your parents?"

"Yes, I can." She looked relieved. "Thank you, Miss Sinclair." She smiled and left the room.

"We [should be] accountable for waiting for students who are not ready to take the next step, not penalizing them for not having taken it yet" (Blynt, p. 71).

Blynt's claim that "Testing isn't teaching, and neither is grading" is self-evident, just as weighing the pig is not fattening it, to continue my vice-principal's homely analogy. But Ms Blynt goes on to say that "we should be righteously insulted by regulations that force us into the role of test proctor and bookkeeper" (Blynt, p. 70), and I have to disagree. I, and my students, find external evaluation far more meaningless and threatening than the evaluation that takes place in our
classroom, because I grade according to growth, not an external set of criteria, and not in competition with other members of the class. My grade twelve students write Provincial examinations, and my other classes write cross-grade examinations. Thus, all my students experience being evaluated by an external marker and in competition with other students at the same grade level; but growth determines sixty per cent of the students' final mark for my grade twelves and eighty per cent of the students' final mark for my other grade levels.

With the current trends toward accountability, shouldn't our own growth be that we are held most responsible for? Isn't it our job to find the best ways to teach every student entrusted to us, not simply to deliver material at an accepted and unvarying rate? (Blynt, p. 71) Absolutely!

Seeking out and celebrating

When I am reading a piece of writing that a student has handed in to me to be marked, I feel great intimacy with and care for that student: She is so vulnerable, so dependent upon my response, so trusting that I will do right by her. I am her teacher and, therefore, must validate her by validating her writing, and I must nurture her growth as a writer.

I use a pencil when I am writing comments and suggestions on a student's paper. I find the markings of a pencil to be softer, more gentle than the ink of a red pen. And I celebrate every student's writing: I find an appealing word or phrase or sentence from each student's writing for which I can compliment the student; I read these phrases aloud to the class when I am returning the papers. A student's mother wrote me a letter this past year telling me how excited her son
was when I had found his writing so good that I had read some of it to the class. She said that he would never tell me because he was "too cool", but she wanted me to know how much it meant to him. She didn't have to tell me, and she didn't have to know that it was only a phrase: Ronald became so enthusiastic about his writing. He began to believe me when I told him and his classmates that they were all writers. His confidence and enthusiasm led to more writing and more creativity, and what began as a beautiful phrase became a fluent and distinctive style of writing.

I have never been afraid to praise; "I've always been more afraid of being the English teacher who failed e.e.cummings" (p. 70).
Afterword

_the thing with feathers that perches in the soul_

Emily Dickinson

My hope is that the exegetical structuring of my stories of education and being educated with the thoughts of authorities on education, being human, lived experience render, awaken, re-awaken, strengthen, confirm the knowledge of Joseph Campbell's first law of life, "that we are all one".

My hope is that my stories and the thoughts of the authorities I have chosen serve as a dialogue that tells of the importance of being pedagogically responsible; of being authentic, open, passionate; of the importance of joy, trust, and striving to be our best selves; of the importance of modelling all of the above; and of the importance of grounding all our responses, actions, and interactions in compassion.

My hope is that my effort supports every teacher's effort to find the key to the Grail.
Bibliography


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