

Speaking of Teaching ...

Inclinations, Inspirations, and Innerworkings

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Heesoon Bai, Carl Leggo, Karen Meyer



SensePublishers

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TO THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER TO US AS TEACHERS

My work in this book is dedicated to my teachers who were crucial to all I have become to this point in my life: To Dr. Peter Lavelle, who when I was 26 and just starting out in my professional life, saw much more in me than I had any clue about, and at an extremely challenging time in my life. To Dr. David Berg who showed me a different philosophy and way of seeing and living in the world. I was stupefied when he killed himself. Even then, he was still my teacher showing me that life is uncertain and that every moment is precious. To Heesoon, my on-site personal Zen master; no more needs to be said. To Aunt Evalyn, who died yesterday, August 14, 2011 at the age of 101. She always, always saw what was good in me. And to the Great Teacher that is the relational field of our group.

Avraham Cohen

To Mrs. Everall, my Grade six teacher, who noticed, encouraged, and allowed me to believe in my artistic self; Mr. Chave, my high school English teacher who did the same for my identities as writer and scholar; and Dr. Robbie Case, doctoral mentor and friend, who brought it all together. Robbie's elegant scholarship, wisdom, intellectual creativity, and commitment to a community of scholars were pivotal in shaping who I am today. Most specially to Merv for your support and belief in me—Your humour, balance, and strength allow me to be.

Marion Porath

I have had many wonderful teachers, both formal and informal, including my students. However, there is one teacher who has had a sustained and substantive influence on my practice and who always provokes me to think differently about teaching: Professor Gaalen Erickson. I am, and will continue to be, his student.

Anthony Clarke

To all my teachers who tended my tender garden of mindbodyheartsoul. In particular, I dedicate this book to: my first and eternal teacher, my mother (Hahn, Jee-soo, 1915–2004); my daughters, Lumina and Serenna Romanycia, who taught me things about being an educator that only one's children can; my first Philosophy Professor, Dr. Kim, Yong-jung, in Korea, who set me upon a lifelong path of philosophizing; my first graduate supervisor in Philosophy of Education, the late Dr. LeRoy Daniels, whose generosity and kindness catapulted me into the

stratosphere of the academy; and to my partner for all seasons, Avraham Cohen, whose teachings overflow my cup.

Heesoon Bai

My whole life, even the parts full of holes, even the parts I now confess as less than holy, has been a sacred adventure of learning and teaching. I have known many teachers, and all my teachers have helped shape who I am and who I am becoming, and I am grateful for all of them, but especially thankful for Ted Aoki, Rita Irwin, and Barry Cameron, extraordinary scholars and mentors, and Madeleine and Mirabelle Reithmeier, my darling and daring granddaughters who remind me daily how to live in the particular moment that is the heart's beat.

Carl Leggo

I can picture her petite build and the grey streak in the front of her short brown hair, she the age of my mother. Inside grade 11 English, Ms. Woolley introduced me to the novel, to writing, to transcendentalist thinkers. More importantly, she sidetracked my melancholy and adolescent discontent with the world for moments so that I was free to live in my imagination and dream the world otherwise.

Karen Meyer

INVOCATION

Speaking of Teaching is a collection of texts about our lives, or should we say our inner lives, as six colleagues who gather regularly and talk about what inspires us inside out. We are teachers of many years. We are also learners who dwell inside particular personal practices, such as art, Daoism, and poetry. Our conversations and writing stay close to the heart of teaching and learning and their intimate connections to a living inquiry of being and creating in the world. The texts we have called ‘innerworkings’ are expressions and impressions of our conversations across several years as well as our lifelong inquiries of inner work.

The print on the cover of the book that holds our writing is a metaphor for this body of work. While a woodcut print is a tangible artistic product, each print made from the block is not a copy, but rather an original and unique ‘impression.’ Its making is an intricate process that involves the artist carving away essential parts of the block that will not receive the ink, requiring a simultaneous awareness of form and non-form while ‘seeing’ the whole design. The empty space created in the print is the ‘ma’ or interval, invoking the imagination to linger in possibilities that lie in pauses. We see our innerworkings as experiential pauses and invocations that speak of teaching and non-teaching as spaces of awareness and vision.

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AVRAHAM COHEN

INVITATION TO THE INNER WORLD OF EDUCATORS

As a child of 11, just after going to bed one night, I had a revelatory experience. I was suddenly aware that everything in this unimaginably vast universe was interconnected.. I didn't rationally figure this out, nor had I read about it. I felt with absolute certainty that this was the only sensible understanding of the world. This understanding emerged whole in my young consciousness. I explained all this to my six and a half year old brother, Stephen, who was lying in the bed beside me, and as I later discovered was asleep during my animated explanation. I didn't bother checking to find out if he was awake or not. Since that day long ago, I have searched for wholeness and clarity about everything, including what it is to educate and to be educated. As well, I have been in search of people with whom I can share and further work on my vision of education. It dawned on me after many years, and after immense personal struggles and concerns about what might be wrong with me, that I didn't seem to see the world as most people did, that my vision was often at odds with everyone else's, which certainly helped clarify why it had not been easy to find kindred spirits. As life went along, I have found some kindred spirits here and there, and when I engaged in my doctoral work in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, I was fortunate to come across like-minded and innovative scholars, including, notably, those who eventually were the members of my thesis supervisory committee, Karen, Carl, and Tony. Marion, who was not on my committee but served as a mentor, and Heesoon, who is of like-mind and my companion in all things.

I have been a psychotherapist for many years, although involved in various forms of delivering education as well. Since 2001, I have been a faculty member at City University of Seattle at the Vancouver BC, Canada site in the Master's of Counselling Program. Previously I taught at a community college in a certificate program in counselling. In my work as a psychotherapist I work with individuals, most of whom would likely have been assessed as gifted as children, and while they most frequently come to work on personal and relational issues, what invariably emerges is how they can access their optimal potential. My intention is to create an environment within which their creative potential and wholeness is invited to emerge. I pay attention to what is there, and perhaps, most importantly, what is not there and which is somehow making itself known by way of small flickers. An outcome of my own sensitivity and inner work (Cohen, 2009) is an enhanced ability to notice these flickers at whatever level of subtlety they appear. My training and experience provides me with methods with which I can facilitate the growth of these flickers into full and embodied realities. Surprisingly, perhaps,

some of the richest veins initially show up as the darkest and most objectionable personal material. This material may appear as unwelcome and unacceptable thoughts and feelings, body symptoms, relationship problems, or as ‘problems’ in the world. As well, I invite people to share their dreams (and nightmares)—both the day and night varieties. Inner work on dreaming processes and content is laden with the potential that lies within individuals, relationships, communities, and world circumstances. Perhaps a small example about dream work will give you an idea of what unlocking a mystery within a dream can look like.

Many years ago I was working with a young woman who shared a dream. As she described it, she mentioned that there seemed to be something behind her and slightly to the right, and she stated emphatically that she didn’t think this was important. I asked if she was open to spending a few minutes checking this ‘thing’ out. She was a little skeptical but agreed to do so. I had her get up from the chair and go and stand where this thing seemed to be. I had her ‘feel’ her way into this place and space, and suggested that she speak a few words from that place. What emerged was the loss of her maternal grandmother to whom she had felt incredibly close and whose loss had been devastating to her as a 12-year old girl. She had never grieved this immense loss. Her mother had no ability to help her with this at the time, as she did not know how, and she was, no doubt, overwhelmed with the loss herself. What emerged were her wounds and her potential that was tied up in not feeling this loss. Her inner relationship with her grandmother began to heal and grow, and she was able to enrol her grandmother as an ally and support for her life in both her inner and outer worlds.

I see dreams as unexpressed possibilities in individuals, relationships, communities, classrooms, the world, and specifically in groups such as ours. Our book, and its potential contribution, is one small manifestation of this dream emergence.

Similarly, groups represent unrealized dreams and possibilities. Our group is an excellent example of this. At the outset we had a better starting point than most groups. All the members knew and had positive feelings for each other. Each member of the group knew the others—to greater and lesser degrees. I have worked with groups for many years and have the view that their positive potential is almost invariably untapped. Common mistakes made by groups are: 1) we know each other; 2) we don’t need any structure to make the group work; and 3) we deal with stuff when we have to; all great ideas. However, if it worked this simply and easily, then most of us would enjoy being in groups and look forward to them. The reality is that groups are the combined reflections of each person’s family background, organizational and institutional experiences, and commonly, people have been participants in group environments and their experience is all too familiar; groups that are frustrating to be in, deadening, unable to perform well, and for some members intimidating and frightening. My intent with the processes that I introduced to the group (Cohen, 2009) was to set up conditions that would predispose the group to be authentic in the moment, get to know each other in a deeper way, develop the community dimension of the group, and create conditions that would allow the group to go well beyond mere prevention and into the farthest