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Cover Page Footnote

Carolina Mancuso, Assistant Professor in Literacy Education at Brooklyn College, CUNY, is currently researching the effects on new teachers of reflective practices in teacher education. She can be reached at .

Teacher Growing Pains

Carolina Mancuso

Solution comes only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light. But this reconstruction means travail of thought.

—John Dewey,
The Child and the Curriculum and The School and Society

In my family, ailments without a specific diagnosis became classified as “growing pains”: aches in the legs, butterflies in the stomach, mild roving annoyances that provoked complaint but didn’t warrant missing school. I waited impatiently to outgrow them, watched suspiciously as the diagnosis endured in my much older siblings’ adolescence. Still, there was hope. According to the cultural currency of the era, at twenty-one you “arrived,” became a finished product, an adult. Not until my budding adulthood did my parents’ insight seem ahead of its time. For, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when researchers heralded the series of transitions adults encounter, the cultural myth of a finished adulthood was smashed. Or was it?

Recognition of passages beyond the “phases” so touted in childhood lifted a great burden. Proving adulthood seemed a hopeless task, boding repeated failure. There was relief in accepting growing pains as intermittent and inevitable, and exhilaration in freeing the next generation from that heavy load. I delighted, as a single mother, in reassuring my son that he need not bear the old burdens of certain maturity (whatever that might be) at a given age. I delighted also in sharing my own multiple “phases.” Tough as they were, they marked progress along the path of adulthood, each survival signaling hope. However, I still harbored some yearning for completion, as modernist notions persisted, with societal pressure continuing on many fronts for me to “arrive.” Nor was I alone. Others periodically roiled through stormy seas; grew weary of facing the same issues repeatedly; suffered frustration at knowing a transition was appropriate, yet unable to raise much compassion for themselves; and, yes, found such topics taboo in most social circles, especially professional life. This last especially haunted me, merging the myth of adult-as-finished-product with the dis-ease of a rigid border between life and work. Gradually, I came to prefer a concept of adulthood akin to

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Julie Henderson's "current definition": someone for whom the "habituated response" will no longer do, "someone who trusts being able to respond in the moment." In the fields of writing, the theatre arts, and teaching, I had found some areas conducive to acknowledging growing pains as well as the unity of life and work. Yet, even in teaching, with students as relentless reminders of ongoing change, how often do we simply roll our eyes and neatly name their issues "a phase"?

My purpose here is not to synthesize the vast field of adult transitions but to contextualize my own journey through it in a conversation about its impact on education and our ability to grow in wholeness individually and in community. To do so, I will 1) begin with a somewhat homespun discussion of adult passages, grounded in educational theory; 2) continue with a look at the persistent positivist mythology regarding "teacher," which upholds such dichotomies as separation of life and work, even in schooling, a critical and primary contact zone between generations; 3) relate the story of a teacher education course I taught for six years that impelled me to grapple with the interrelationship of student and teacher growing pains in the classroom; and 4) conclude with ways in which that inquiry has shaped my practice and my life.

Growing Adults/Growing Students

No doubt prepared for this by my parents, I have likened adult growing pains, however manifested, to those of the child who, teetering on adolescence, still clutches a well-worn toy. Though today we are warned of some passages—who could avoid the media hype about mid-life crises?—these stages of transformation often occur unexpectedly, some with drama, some at first barely noticed. These stages of transformation often occur unwillingly. The way things have been is suddenly overshadowed by our sense of how they will be. In these gestations, we try on new selves—physically, intellectually, spiritually—not quite knowing whether to discard the old. Such change resonates to seasonal transitions, where the chill of approaching winter pierces the sunniest of autumn days, where spring overlaps winter, warring in our bodies and minds as well as the environment. Growing pains can be age- or circumstance-appropriate: marriage, divorce, child-bearing/rearing, illness, aging (our parents and ourselves), grieving, the tribulations of daily living. Some occur in every life; others, more selective. But no one completely escapes.

Pondering growing pains, I am drawn to Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" as an umbrella for our sojourns in various passages. As the distance between actual (independently demonstrable) development and potential development (guided or in collaboration), the zone references "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (86). I take inspiration also from a theme weaving through Maxine Greene's work: her vision of "incompleteness" as a project to be valued, cultivated, rooted in humanness itself, and capable of reciprocating with the gift of openness to possibilities, even those not yet foreseen (Releasing xi-xii).

In an era rich with scholarship on multiple ways of learning and knowing

and alternative approaches to facilitating students' engagement, many educators writing about the spiritual side of teaching remind us that as teachers we are role models of adulthood, however unwittingly, with attendant responsibility. Mary Rose O'Reilly, for one, frames the task of teaching as assisting students in the quest to find the "inner teacher" so they might place themselves within their own journeys (5). She intends this also for teachers, exhorting us to practice acceptance even when students' inner teachers disagree with our own. Space for reflection in the classroom, she believes, is key to discovering and expressing inner truths, making the atmosphere "a lot more edgy and astonishing" (7). She describes a practice of "deep listening" in which she engages with a friend, each permitted to speak nearly uninterrupted for a length of time, a rare exposure to being truly heard (17). This is listening not to change but to acknowledge the other, a kind of attention critical in education where "[p]eople are dying in spirit for lack of it. In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument.[...] [P]eople often listen with an agenda" (19). Peter Elbow also addresses this phenomenon in his exploration of the "doubting game" and the "believing game," the former in which skepticism supercedes any other reaction and the latter in which one extends openness to another's possibility, even without proof, in the effort to understand (147-49).

In my efforts to bring more awareness into the moment, I have used the term "deep listening," not in a construct of an exclusive time frame for talking and being heard, but to remind myself to listen between the lines; absorb pauses and silences, body language and emotional tenor; extend beyond syntax and choice of words. I see this as linked to good parenting and good counseling, thus to another notion I feel compelled to raise with student teachers: unconditional love or "redemptive love," which bell hooks, using Howard Thurman's definition, describes as an affirming love that aims to touch and release "the core of one's being" (118). I think of "unconditional love," like "deep listening," as based not necessarily on liking but on a compassionate and intentional caring, i.e., valuing and making room for each student to be and to become. It relies on compassion and the desire for growth, for the best of what an individual's life can be.

A Human Face and the Prevailing Image of Teacher

The fiction of "completed growth" bears heavy responsibility for the separation of being and doing, of life and work that sometimes appears as a hallmark of education. In fact, the unsettling requirement to move between "the analytical and intuitive aspects of life" accompanies us nearly everywhere in our society (O'Reilly 33). I can only describe it as good fortune that my first teaching experiences reinforced holistic values and a theoretical base to support them. In the 1970s, I stumbled upon an alternative school founded upon the principles of Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and the British Infant Schools. Unlike traditional settings of the time, these pre-school to eighth-grade children did not sit in rows facing the front of the room, quietly waiting for teacher to direct the show. They moved around, talked, and worked (even noisily) in small groups across age and ability levels, and sought and pursued their compelling interests, i.e., displayed the

boundless curiosity the young usually do until repressed in the name of “good” behavior or schooling. That was an “edgy and astonishing” milieu, one I wanted for both my son and myself, a place where adults (teachers and parents) and children interacted as people, learning and teaching together, with teamwork the key to an ever-evolving sense of community. The highest value, articulated and manifested, was holistic growth and change, lifelong learning with mind, body, and spirit. It was a work site where my growing pains were as welcome as the children’s. The four years I spent there powerfully shaped all the rest to come.¹

Of course, I knew that this milieu was a hothouse flower. Traditionally, schools have been places where teacher and students can remain quite separate, in spite of continual contact. A kind of class system exists, not just in terms of expertise and authority, of course, but also in terms of humaneness. Take a look at what was/is in most educational settings. Teachers inherit a legacy of myth and image decrying “person-in-process,” frequently an unexamined legacy they model and pass on. Forget exploding the myth for students, even among colleague. Teacher development and collaboration often remains a low priority, if recognized at all. Among the myth’s demands are acceptance of specialization (despite its limitations), expert knowledge within that area (supposing static boundaries), mastery of students’ multiple learning needs, facility as strict disciplinarians, composure of self at all times, and the ability to do it all singlehandedly in an isolated classroom. Intense days with minimal planning time at school and the long nights and weekends working at home are overlooked in the cultural joke that teachers have summers off and banker’s days. The mere fact of having attended school makes people self-appointed arbiters of teaching quality. Teaching is notoriously low on salary and respectability scales, which surely stalls greater professionalization and no doubt influences students in ways we may not perceive. Yet teachers are the folks who bear a primary responsibility for nurturing society’s greatest resource. What is missing in their preparation that might promote the expression of their humanity rather than the perpetuation of mythology?

In *A Life in School*, Jane Tompkins laments the minimal preparation teachers receive for what they will “encounter in a human sense,” especially the reality of how powerfully students’ everyday lives shape each day in the classroom. She notes: “Teaching, by its very nature, exposes the self to myriad forms of criticism and rejection, as well as to emulation and flattery and love. Day after day, teachers are up there, on display; no matter how good they are, it’s impossible not to get shot down” (90). The relationship between teachers and students is indeed far more intimate than ordinarily acknowledged, with potential for growth on each side closely related to the quality of their interaction. Contact and visibility seem higher than in most other professions, with some teachers in near-daily contact with their “clients” for as much as a year. Teacher “transparency” is inevitable. Students too know how teachers’ lives shape their days. They can detect insincerity or trouble brewing. They may not know it’s due to an age-appropriate “phase,” but the fallout for them is clear.

¹ The New School of Utica (New York) was founded in 1974 by Anna Roelofs, also founder and co-director of Primary Source, a resource center for humanities teachers in Boston.

As models (however unwilling) of adulthood, why do teachers not admit the reality of continual growth and change, giving students a sense of developing personhood, holding a mirror to their future evolution? Could that admission itself be the core of our attendant responsibility? Why not illuminate the foibles of the unattainable yet also tarnished image of “teacher”? Clinging to pretense only increases division, supports ageism on each side. We rightfully expect students to face the sufferings engendered by meaning making. We worry if they don’t. Yet we withhold our own, missing opportunities, preserving unwarranted power. I’m not suggesting that we confide our deep life transitions to students but that we confirm their existence, especially when they affect the dynamic of a class. Nor am I suggesting that confiding is easy. Institutions, and often colleagues, rarely support such revelations.

Enacting change always requires moving away from what Dewey calls “fixed” meanings and towards a curriculum which brings work and life together and makes the classroom a site for what Kristie Fleckenstein calls “exploratory pedagogy.” When often misfocused emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing supplants opportunities for broadening vistas in the classroom, teachers must support each other in the most rigorous endeavor: the quest for wholeness for our students and ourselves. Wholeness, after all, is not doneness; rather, it accepts, even anticipates, the pains of growing and the transformations they bring. The exploratory pedagogy, as Fleckenstein defines it, allows enactment of such a quest by using nontraditional means as complement to “social, liberatory, and cognitive approaches[. . .]. [Its] potential [. . .] to create a spiritual center lies in its efforts to acknowledge the importance of affect in cognition, affirm the worth of personal experience, transform our concept of the self, and build meaning dialectically” (27).

An admission of human flaws takes courage in teaching as in everything. Yet, at any level, a heartfelt discussion of life’s lessons can have deep ramifications for constructing new knowledge, offering inspiration, clearing the air. Good practice compels us to examine what happens in the classroom. Why not invite students into that practice of reflection as well? Learning, after all, is hard to name, its roots in discomfort often hidden. With reflection a low value in our society, students may not see connections, just as we can miss them in ourselves. Strengthening their metacognitive processes might make their growing pains more bearable, as it does ours.

An Autobiographical Expedition: Life, Work, and Growing Pains in the Classroom

In the past decade, launching a career in teacher education, I have watched these concerns crystallize in my vision of teaching and learning as communal holistic human growth. The deepening of this vision, which still exists mostly in my “zone of proximal development,” sparked my decision to become a teacher of teachers. In midlife, teaching had become even more, as Wendy Bishop puts it, about both “avocation and vocation” (131). Seeking to unify professional and personal growth, I wanted the chance to help others to find the “human side of teaching” while learning to live it myself. I had begun to know the particular

burdens of later life passages, as mortality looms and meanings and perspectives on the future dramatically shift. Working on the practice of compassion, I reminded myself that in any group of students, many (maybe most) may also be passing through turbulent life stages at any one time, perhaps exacerbated by the injustices within our society. At the very least, they must cope with the transformations demanded by learning. And I had learned by then that, at any age group or level, aside from certain privileges and responsibilities, what I am doing in the classroom as a teacher is at core nearly indistinguishable from what they are doing as students.

Again, good fortune drew me to a program with an atmosphere of collaboration and the commitment to change schools, society, and lives. In this new setting, how would I deal with the passages, personal and professional, still ahead? What would it take to live the complexity my vision described, to trust my response in the moment? What follows is a long-term (thus frustrating) and recent (thus scary) story of learning to see double, to discern when students' and teachers' growing pains coincide (or collide), and to pursue the arduous decisions that recognition requires.

From 1994 to 2000, I had the pleasure and the challenge of teaching a course entitled *Autobiographical Expedition: Who I Am and Who I Will Become*, required for the Master of Science in Teaching (MST) degree for pre-service teachers at New School University (formerly New School for Social Research) in New York City.² The opportunity to teach such a course was nothing short of a gift, a perfect fit to my aspirations as a teacher educator. Grounded in self and the world, it invited teaching to, and from, the whole person. It offered an environment conducive to examining other ways of knowing, held the promise and inspiration of personal and social agency, and provided an ideal context for an inquiry into growth and change. I will describe that context through the two main course components—personal writing and experiential learning activities—which often evoked particular kinds of growing pains in students and in me.

Focused on educational autobiography, the course was intended to guide prospective teachers toward discovery of their visions of teaching, their assumptions and beliefs about education, and their identities as learners by remembering past learning experiences. The course also explored the uses of personal writing in learning in general. Before my arrival, it had been taught only once, in the program's first year. Writing had been the primary means of inquiry, though this was not considered a writing course. As a teacher and writer of fiction and non-

² The MST program emphasizes educational reform, social change in a pluralistic society, and an interdisciplinary curriculum. It provides site placements in public urban secondary schools, either founded as alternative or engaged in restructuring. Students have ranged in age from early 20's to late 50's, a few with some teaching experience, others directly from college, and a great many from careers in very diverse fields. By graduation, they obtain New York City Board of Education Licenses and New York State Initial Certification in their disciplines. Until 1999, the program was full-time only: yearlong intensive coursework in pedagogy and philosophy of education concurrent with in-depth school experiences in triads with a peer partner and cooperating teacher, amid a cohort of other MST students and extensive presence by university mentors. In 1999, a part-time option began and, under the direction of Dr. Wendy Kohli, a revised full-time program is underway.

fiction, I was intrigued by its potential in educational theory and writing practice and by personal narrative as a method of inquiry. I had always found nontraditional means a powerful way to burst the staid classroom bubble and used my background in the arts and my commitment to holistic learning to seek opportunities for other means of inquiry as well.

The broad theme of educational autobiography allowed me to choose texts offering an eclectic content, including autobiographical works, readings on educational psychology and philosophy, diversity education, multiple intelligence theory, emotional literacy and moral education, integrated history or science, spirituality in education, and ethnographic research, among others.³ With life playing a central role, the course was intrinsically interdisciplinary, implications for teaching and learning sprouted in many directions and raised numerous pedagogical issues.

As I redesigned the course, I kept in mind that these students came from different disciplines with mixed emotional responses to the act of writing itself. Many had to adjust to the controversial notions of using personal writing in school and viewing their work as texts for inquiry. Thus, I urged them to focus on the story of each memory rather than on the angst of writing it, to consider the writing “informal,” using it to learn and to discover. Students kept journals on current class and field site experiences, wrote reading logs, and engaged in writing activities during class. The primary writing, however, was the Autobiographical Reflections, the near weekly assignments narrating past learning moments. The accounts were not limited to school-learning and therefore might involve not just teachers but also family, friends, or strangers. I always stressed the notion of audience and the writers’ responsibility to reveal only what was comfortable and appropriate. The writings often recalled painful moments, underscoring the frequency of in-school associations with the negative, including insult, trauma, and abuse. The fact of regularly sharing their writings with peers usually inspired a high level of respect, compassion, and engagement in the “believing game.”

At mid-semester, I gave an assignment in autobiographical fiction writing called the “Experimental Revisions Project,” which I had previously designed and taught in an undergraduate writing course. Fiction writing had not been used before at the MST, but in the first year, a concern had arisen about students’ difficulties in analyzing and re-envisioning their life events. At the encouragement of the founder and then director, Dr. Cynthia Onore, I adapted the Experimental Revisions Project as a catalyst for attaining greater distance. It contributed greatly to an atmosphere where our mutual growing pains could and sometimes did intersect.

The Experimental Revisions Project places fiction writing in the curriculum as a practice of reflection through a specific structure for rewriting and analyzing the same memory from different perspectives. It is informed by readings and

³ Texts used frequently included, among others, Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings' *Stories Lives Tell*, Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*, Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School*, John Dewey's *Moral Principles in Education*, Steven Glazer's *The Heart of Learning*, and excerpts from the work of bell hooks, Jerome Bruner, Maxine Greene, Howard Gardner, Daniel Goleman, Louise Rosenblatt, and the organization Facing History and Ourselves.

discussions about genre and the indeterminacy of memory and imagination, not only as part of writing but also as critical understandings in teaching and learning. After students chose one of their memory writings to work with, I reminded them of what I had proposed earlier as a working definition of “autobiography,” i.e., the attempt to remain as close as possible to what they had perceived as happening. For the fiction, I asked that they retain the core of the action and perhaps some dialogue but attempt to re-envision the incident from the viewpoints of two other participants in the event, producing two fictional pieces from the same memory. I urged them to intentionally choose “make believe,” to engage in what I call “conscious fiction.”

The assignment’s highly structured process—not a traditional fiction writing approach—afforded most students the freedom to focus deeply on how others in the memory may have perceived the event. Despite occasional reservations, a majority each semester described changes, even dramatic shifts, in attitudes and understandings from this concentrated effort to imagine other epistemologies. They felt they could more easily consider sensitive questions in the conditional milieu of “make-believe.” Entertaining a range of perspectives through their classmates’ writings as well as their own, they found themselves considering widely divergent opinions on such social issues as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. They claimed breakthroughs in tolerance and compassion. Some said that, in years of repeated reflection on the situation, they had not conceived of a perspective beyond their own nor imagined how their behavior might have been viewed by the other participants. These insights did not necessarily move the students to new ground immediately; they did, however, offer glimpses of eventual change. For the moment, the insights were works-in-progress, sometimes accompanied by anger, confusion, or pain, as the insights exposed existing growing pains or triggered new ones.⁴

Exercises in mind-body-spirit awareness and experiential learning activities stimulated similar shifts in attitude and understanding. My belief that a course preparing new teachers should offer a rich environment for learning in multiple ways with diverse students at different ages inspired me each semester to try new activities as well as to draw from the repertoire I had previously used. All of the activities—music, movement, drama or art—became opportunities to learn to exercise different intelligences to unite mind, body, and spirit. They enabled research through firsthand observations and stimulated connections between theory and practice. Linking them with texts and their writings complicated discussions and provided refreshing ways to experience what Dewey frames as the means toward “solution.” Of course, I hoped they might be pleasurable as well. Many were, but not always at once.

Though the fiction writing elicited reservation, the embodied learning components aroused the most controversy, following closely behind such topics as diversity issues, emotional literacy, and spirituality in education. Despite students’ interest in nontraditional means, the challenges did loom large. In

⁴ Many also appreciated it as their first opportunity to write fiction in or out of school. A number expressed interest in using the project with their students, even across the curriculum, and did so in student teaching and later in their own classrooms.

experiential learning, agreeing to suspend judgment is key to participation. Even in a course and program encouraging openness to varieties of inquiry, students who theoretically embraced the concept could suffer misgivings when faced with actual tasks. Only over time could they grasp the overall purpose of the course and the relevance of all the components to each other and to the exploration of self and self-in-context.

In experiential work, age and level are critical factors. The enthusiasm and ease of children for this work dissipates gradually with each grade. By graduate school, responses vary widely. Certain activities worked well for some or even most individuals while completely failing for others. Meditation, when I began to brave it in the classroom, was both welcomed and repelled. Movement—whether stretching, yoga, qi gong, or wandering in the room during a guided memory search—was a monumental challenge. Not only do students need to consider the pedagogical value of movement exercises, they also need to deconstruct the typical classroom whose size, furnishings, lights, ventilation, and so on are beyond their individual controls. My students found liberating our class's attempt to use classroom space differently (e.g., not just rearranging seating but also adding mobility and altering ambiance). Drama-in-the-classroom, e.g., constructing a tableau or enacting a critical teaching incident, drew uneven response, but its focusing power often won students over, much like projects in art. The suggestion to use crayons, scissors, markers, and glue in a higher education setting could elicit a strong case of the "doubting game," though the lure of childhood memories usually held sway. Music was often easiest in the classroom. Scarcer than crayons in most schools, its presence elicited a kind of childhood glee.

Thus, resistance was a constant companion in the classroom, providing multiple opportunities to note the intersection of students' issues with mine. A classic example comes from an activity, the High School Tour, which I have used many times. In brief, students take a partner, leave the room (even the building) and take a walk, giving each other imaginary tours of their high schools, pointing out places and describing events. Back in class, they draw maps of their schools in journals, noting memories for later writing. This exercise usually puzzled, then delighted most students, even those reluctant to leave their seats. In an early semester of the course, it became a touchstone when, during the reflection following the activity, an older change-of-career student vociferously expressed her anger. Her high school days had been so traumatic that she suffered in revisiting them and resented the suggestion that she should. I felt myself going through all the usual complications of reaction: defensiveness and frustration along with compassion and regret. My growing pains in a new program and new course, along with personal issues, increased my vulnerability. I had not offered her an option when she resisted at the beginning, instead urging her (gently, I hoped) to give it a try. Mustering the courage to swallow my teaching pride, I invited her to speak her mind. I had never witnessed such a diatribe from a student, but astonishingly, as the class and I listened, she moved past her rage, suddenly aware that other factors more than school had created that unhealed pain. Viewing the complex entanglement, she saw that separating one from the other might permit a different look at her schooling. She could also imagine how that endeavor might offer insight into her students' lives and influ-

ence her development as a teacher.

I recall sensing what felt like a miraculous transformation in the dynamic of the classroom. Offered “deep listening,” she could then hear the rest of the community and me, as we discussed the rationale for the assignment. Freedom to express her negative response without reprehension moved her to risk exploration of those uprooted growing pains and to learn from them.

Room for Growth

In *The Heart of Learning*, Stephen Glazer asserts that “spirituality in education is about intimacy with experience: intimacy with our perceptions—the experience of having a body; our thoughts—the experience of having a mind; and our emotions—the experience of having a heart” (2). Yet there is almost no preparation for that intimacy in the many years of traditional schooling. For some, embodied learning presents greater challenges than the usual higher education tasks. It would appear that, in our society, the learning behaviors of children—playfulness, make-believe, exuberance—are deemed so inappropriate for adults that they approach the vestigial. The sublimation of these characteristics is surely related to the myth of adulthood unencumbered by deep change, of the sort we begin in childhood but then presume to leave behind. Unprepared for the continuum of growing pains, we create yet more dichotomies and, in many ways, prime ourselves for difficulties in being able to respond in the moment.

The unpredictability of response to so many components of Autobiographical Expedition turned out to be the gift I sensed when I took the course on. Would I have been as eager, had I foreseen the turmoil that gift could cause in me? The palpable potential for resistance compelled me to rely on faith in the process and willingness to hear and attend to students’ needs. Each time I introduced an experiential learning task, I felt my growing pains ready to flare up as I braced for the skepticism so ingrained from students’ long sojourn in a domain consecrated to the cognitive. It was never easy to face the exchanges of raised eyebrows and recalcitrant glances, though humor guided my way. Humility, patience, and loving kindness didn’t always serve me; I’m sure my negative reactions were more visible than I wished. However, trepidation repeatedly surrendered to my belief in the importance of initiating iconoclastic change in classroom routine.

So much occurs beneath the markers of resistance. Often, what is expressed as boredom signals a great deal of inner activity: challenge, confusion, pain, or simply emotion, so rarely overt in the classroom. Committed to “exploratory pedagogy,” I searched for ways to understand resistance, my own and theirs, especially as a symptom of growing pains. However, intellectual awareness of our intertwining lives does not preclude the difficulty, in troubling moments, of facing the depth of my own responsibility. Naming resistance in students does not automatically help me name it in myself and face the depth of my responsibility. There are times when my own resistance—or response to theirs—is clearly at issue. Such moments point to passages I am moving through, professionally, personally, or both, still constrained by the image of teacher as “completed adult.” When students challenge me but refuse to consider my point of view, I can reach for my professional veneer, not daring to take time to read the perceptions and

emotions inside me, not allowing time for students to read their own. With repeated effort, I came to see how often my reflections have focused on their behaviors, needs, and inexperience rather than my own and how little I have expressed my conflicts and fears. That narrow view keeps us from complicating and enriching our understanding of what we are doing together. When, in fact, it is each other we resist and not the activity, where is the path to the “fresh light” Dewey promises?

The first best response, I believe, is some form of deep listening because it fosters authenticity. Deep listening can also lead to genuine dialogue about how our lives intertwine and how we can speak frankly. In such an atmosphere, I have learned over time that, though my issues must necessarily take a back seat, admitting their existence and at times even their content can reassure and inspire us all. If nothing else, taking such a stance also provides an opportunity for students also practice caretaking, deep listening, even unconditional love.

My student’s response to the High School Activity, which provides a striking example of student and teacher growing pains colliding, is echoed in many more common and fleeting moments. Our repertoire of ways to address them may not always be accessible, appropriate, or humanly possible. For all our desire to facilitate caring communities, at times, there are larger forces in effect—group growing pains, in a sense. The unique character and dynamic of each class mean that some will cohere easily while others struggle just to be together. Occasionally, entire semesters remain troubled. Even with group issues as the driving force, I have found ways that my growing pains interlock, whether from distractions of family issues or concerns about my development as a teacher or from aspects of practice I want to work on. On the other hand, another semester can be sheer delight, the difference perhaps serendipity: the chemistry, the size of the group, the fit between people and content, the spirit in the room. Or we are all at a rare moment, temporarily released from growing pains and able to risk together.

To risk showing more of my human face as a teacher has taken me a long time. Gradually gaining confidence, I began with small moments, admitting an undercurrent I brought to our interaction. Later, a serious family illness and critical events in my father’s aging forced me to share more of the contents of my preoccupation. Since then, it has become easier to share other matters, always conscious of defining the boundaries of relevance, of receiving graciously the signs of their acceptance of teacher/person-in-process as well as receiving humbly the acceptance they cannot yet give.

It can be tougher to show my human face while talking about my developing teacherhood. An explanation of professional decisions, actions, or resistances can evoke intense vulnerability. It can also enlighten my students’ teaching paths and lead to our collaboration, joint compromise, and mutual agency. Acutely aware of my “transparency”—the positive and the negative of what I model—as a teacher educator, I joke with students that in this field I am “the thing” I’m teaching. A sobering thought, really. But as students embrace more of their teaching selves, a certain camaraderie arises which affirms this as not just a choice of “right liveliness” but a labor of love. Yet teacher education only makes more visible the realities of all teaching, everywhere.

After much travail I have concluded that the only sure way to prepare myself and my students to greet growing pains as thresholds toward wholeness is also the hardest: by working towards Henderson's notion of trusting our responses in the moment, a thought as thrilling as it is unnerving. For all the good planning, teaching is always an improvisation, always a felt sense, always a venue for surprise. Students make the experience with us. Or will make it without us, if we choose to force the way.

bell hooks reminds us that students often long for "sameness or security" in a teacher, long "to find the absence of mystery [. . .] the absence of imperfection in the teacher," the very imperfection "so crucial to the teacher's capacity to know," i.e., as students need to be known (129). Teaching a course so close to the bone has brought the mirror of my imperfection closer. In a setting where students continually gave gifts of memory to me and to each other, I could recognize my own growing pains *in media res*. I was part of the expedition, and, as they wrote and rewrote their own autobiographies as well as each other's, they just as surely wrote and rewrote mine, re-creating all our selves in deeper and broader contexts. Yet, just as I'm still occasionally embarrassed to admit to certain growing pains, I sometimes forget that my students are as well and that we all, learners of any age, need to be known through patience, compassion, freedom, and unconditional love. It all works best when I can ask for care as well as give it, express my reservations as well as listen to theirs, refrain from hiding my imperfections as well as generously accept the revelation of their own. I lean now towards teaching Maxine Greene's words as a mutual mantra: "I am who I am—not yet" (Pinar 1). Students or teachers, we meet and move together in the throes of change. We may as well do so in a "fresh light." ☺

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