As teachers, we share experiences with one another. It is a way to make sense of our teaching lives and teaching selves. *Ways of Being in Teaching* is that kind of sharing; it is a scholarly conversation that will appeal to teachers who are tired of the tips and tricks, and want to talk more deeply about how to flourish in this profession.

Most of us know ways to strengthen and sustain self, soul, heart, identity, and how these key touchstones also strengthen teaching. This book recognizes that who we are, where we are, and why, is as much a social process as a personal one. Attending to life purpose is a way of attending to teaching. Chapters in this text are insightfully forthright, challenging us to undertake the rigorous work of discovering who we are as human beings and how this impacts who we are with our students. Canadian curriculum scholar Cynthia Chambers asks us to listen for what keeps us awake at night, and with *Ways of Being in Teaching* we bring what we have heard into the daylight, into the conversation.

"This collection of reflections and conversations does more than provide provocative reading for the reflective teacher. It invites practitioners to find their own place at the table of sharing and to welcome the stories that will certainly come as a result of engaging with this community of life writers." – Carmen Schlamb, Professor, Seneca College
Ways of Being in Teaching
Ways of Being in Teaching
Conversations and Reflections

Edited by
Sean Wiebe, Ellyn Lyle, Peter R. Wright, Kimberly Dark, Mitchell McLarnon and Liz Day

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INTRODUCTION

Life Writing While Writing Life

Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle…

(Freire, 1970, p. 23)

With contributors from North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Australasia, the phrase ‘Ways of Being’ celebrates differences in teaching styles, methods, and philosophies. What emerges in these differences can appear chaotic and messy. As editors, we have learned to be patient at these times and to resist the temptation to in this volume to reduce teaching to tidy boxes and neat platitudes that emphasize only our commonness. Engaging in discussion about our commonness and uncommonness both through the volume and in our discussions about it, we open ourselves to sharing practices and what has informed them in terms of those that have ‘worked’ and those that have not. As teachers, we have encountered failure and continue to learn to fail better, always hopeful of becoming as a work in progress. In this volume, we share our histories, our stories, our art, our poetry, and our human moments in all their tumultuousness and vulnerability. In these, our ways of being in teaching, our differences and commonness come together in a shared sense of humanity. The ways we sustain and strengthen self, soul, heart, and identity can strengthen teaching and ways of being.

We are not writing and compiling this volume because we have found the right way, or that we believe there is ‘a’ right way of being in teaching. We are doing this because through sharing our stories our private lives move into the public sphere, for as much as stories are autobiographical, they are also profoundly relational. In relating with one another, and by sharing our voices, we can begin to empathize with the life stories of others and locate ourselves more fully within the world of teaching. As we listen to each other’s stories, we embrace and attend to this notion of otherness, becoming better listeners, as teaching cannot be separated from how we understand our relationships in terms of people, place and culture.

In these relational spaces we become oriented to who we are with others. Being oriented in communities gives us a place to contribute and grow. Being oriented recognizes that who we are, where we are, and why, is as much a social process as a personal one, and this is why we claim that attending to our purpose in life is also attending to our teaching. We are also each navigating multiple types of identity—some of which have been lauded as aspects of the “good teacher” and others we were taught to put away, or subvert because they simply don’t apply to the role “teacher.” We carry so much of ourselves into the classroom. While the stories differ, there is unity in sharing them, community in dialogue about them, and possibilities that are always present within them.
INTRODUCTION

Drawing on our different existential contexts, each contributor offers critical reflection on their unique way of being in teaching. In our conversations, we have encouraged one another with the importance of living an undivided life (Palmer, 2009b). Such living is more relevant now than ever. In our observations, we see too many educational initiatives supporting corporate aims over humanistic ones. By contrast, we support educational endeavours that sustain and support human beings individually and collectively, holistically and spiritually, heartfully and artfully, playfully and seriously, fiercely and tenderly. As education leans toward large-scale, quantitative research that finds its knowledge generation through numbers and the tsunami of ‘big data’, we view our stories as a way of celebrating humanness and returning the heartbeat to our work. Knowledge generation through the humus of our humanity resists systematization, functionalism, and reductionism. Because the work of being human is not a thing one tells another, we invite you to approach the chapters ready to converse with us, ready to practice your own freedom, ready to doubt, contest, attend, love, let go, see anew.

To express one’s life individually says something about how to understand what it means to live collectively. The value of critical self-reflection has been widely discussed in education. We align our perspectives with Paulo Freire’s (1970) notion of praxis and dialogue. The Freirean notion of dialogue, which can be described as informal education built on mutual respect, depends on equality, love, cooperation, and a collaborative understanding within communities. Praxis refers to the action of practice and reflection within communities to understand their social realities. The action of praxis is informed by theory and values, and the reflections are meant to be critical with social justice as a touchstone. William Pinar builds on Freire’s (1970) work through his conception of “complicated conversation” (2011), which he describes as:

…conversation in which interlocutors are speaking not only among themselves but to those not present, not only to historical figures and unnamed peoples and places they may be studying, but to politicians and parents dead and alive, not to mention to the selves they have been, are in the process of becoming, and someday may become. (p. 43)

Through his life work, Pinar has created community with those whom have come before him and shaped his worldview. As you will experience in this book, our chapters are in dialogue with thinkers like Paulo Freire, William Pinar, bell hooks, Parker Palmer, and Maxine Greene. Complicated conversation depends on a way of being in community where there is both unity and dissensus—the power lying in both. Recognizing the combination of unity and dissensus recalls Freire’s (1970) reminder that too often our visions of unity are instruments of conformity.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and
INTRODUCTION

bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970, p. 34)

ABOUT US

We invite you to imagine this introductory chapter as a scholarly conversation amongst friends, one that includes you as the reader. In our conversations, we highlight arts-based education, place-based education, critical self-reflection, identity, power sharing, compassion, and love. Through our discussions, we have represented many ways of being in teaching, but we have also left many out. We have shared how we have navigated the teaching ephemera; however, a conversation cannot be about everything at once. Feminist author and activist bell hooks (1995) suggests that discussion is the unit of social change. We have learned to listen and attend to each other in these caring and careful ways, and we encourage these kinds of critical discussions to take place elsewhere with hook’s challenge in mind.

Parker Palmer (2009a) suggests that “a conversation is only as good as the question it entertains” (p. 4). Much like Palmer (2009a) asks, “How can the teacher’s selfhood become a legitimate topic in education and in public dialogues on education reform?” (p. 3), we frame our discussion around the value of teachers identifying their identities and self-positions, as well as the processes they undertake to do so. We invite you to listen critically, creatively, heartfully, and hopefully about our concerns. As an editing team, we all care deeply about the who, how, and why of our differences. We seek to practice our freedoms through generosities of difference. In our evolution as teachers and human beings, it is important to understand where we come from and who we are becoming. In this collected volume, we have actively sought to consider the nature and dynamics of our conversation, its diversity and multidimensional nature. At its best, it is a provocation that generates abundance in ours and others’ lives.

As teachers, we recognize that we live in story and that we can story our experiences with one another. It is a way to make sense of our teaching lives and teaching selves. There are multiple ways of being in teaching, and the paths we travel toward humanness are equally multiple, subjective, and varied. We encourage all teachers to share their stories of living: within these ebbs and flows, we become more aware of the whys and hows of who we are becoming. Existentially, over the lifespan, as who we are changes alongside our aspirations, what we write also changes.

Cynthia Chambers (2004) reminds us to take the path with heart. “Like all paths,” she says, “[your chosen path] leads nowhere, but it will make you strong. If you find yourself on a path, then you must stay on it only if it has heart, and it is only your heart that can tell if it is so” (p. 6). With teaching, as with conversation about teaching, there are no guarantees. This can mean that there is no one path, much like there is no one way of being in teaching; there is no need to privilege one style of thinking over another. What matters more than the guarantee of where the path leads is how that path shapes who you become.
INTRODUCTION

Despite the challenges in uniting our lives with our teaching selves, we raise the question: “Who is the self that teaches?” (Palmer, 2009a, p. 7). In describing this journey, Palmer (2009a) expresses that it takes courage to embrace the ambiguity of discovering our teaching selves. Chambers (2004) notes that the words courage and heart share the same Latin etymology, *cor*. Perhaps this means that courage ought not to be reserved for those special moments of life’s intensities, but is something needed in a more daily way, something necessary in the same way that our hearts are necessary. But what exactly do we mean by this? Does it require courage to get up, have breakfast, do work, and enjoy the company of others? If, as Camus (1955) argues, the only really serious philosophical questions is “why live?” then perhaps the ways we learn to be alive deserve serious attention, a courageous commitment to listen deeply to what our hearts and others’ hearts are saying. Because who we are becoming with one another “makes visible and audible the complicated interconnections between the topic of the writer’s gaze, and her ideas, values and beliefs, as well as the feelings she attaches to each of these” (Chambers, 2004, p. 2). It requires courage to listen from the heart.

Beyond listening to ourselves, we listen to what surrounds us. As we evolve, our audiences can change along with our identities. “To give your audience your full, sympathetic, and thoughtful attention. To be all ears is the capacity to attend to others with full awareness” (Chambers, 2004, p. 7). But it is also the courage to be a truth teller, to speak heartfully from the particulars of experience. This is what makes the narratives of lived experience trustworthy. Veracity in life comes from “the complicated map of the inquirer’s ideas, beliefs and feelings [that are] drawn from particular places, events and experiences” (Chambers, 2004, p. 2). Bringing listening and speaking together means listening and speaking about that which matters to both oneself and to others. What matters, says Chambers, “arises from the complex almost unmanageable chaos” (p. 7) that is the specificity of our lived experience, experience that is profoundly ours. For educators, this complexity and chaos is our classrooms, our relationships, and our lives. Underscoring her point, Chambers (2004) advises us to pay attention to what keeps us awake at night. What we think about at night is what we care about:

I have found what matters shows up in obvious spots such as relationships with family and students and co-workers; in names of places and people and situations; in questions asked and questions left unasked; in declarations of love and independence and rebellion; in photo albums and mission statements; in moments of joy and those times when you are surprised or startled by tears and grief. What matters shows up in novels and poems and essays, as well as movies and documentaries, newspapers and current events. But I have also found that what matters hides in improbable places such as dreams, just beneath the surface of a story or a lie or memory; and what matters springs up in the middle of the contradiction between what I say and what I do. (p. 8)
INTRODUCTION

As a group of editors, we are listening to ourselves, each other (our community), our students, and to the world around us. We listen for connections to others and ourselves. We are listening to the contributions we make as beings in teaching, and the contributions others are making to who we are becoming in and through our teaching. Sometimes in our listening we can hear the needs and vulnerabilities that we express to one another, and sometimes, though not always – ours and others’ contributions meet these needs. As Chambers reminds us: we are listening for what keeps us awake at night.

CLOSING

As described earlier, Ways of Being in Teaching illustrates the importance of a holistic and global vision of how education may be dissimilar, yet how the act, art, and love of teaching also brings understanding. We hope that this book invites you to reflect critically on your identity and what it means to your teaching self. By sharing our histories, our stories, our art, our poetry, and our human moments, we hope that you will have the courage to share your stories with your students, friends, families, and colleagues.

REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

CELESTE SNOWBER

1. LIVING, LOVING, AND DANCING
THE QUESTIONS
A Pedagogy of Becoming

Because the beloved wants to know, unseen things become manifest.
Hiding is the hidden purpose of creation: Bury your seed and wait.

(Rumi)

Teaching and artmaking are endeavours of wonder and discovery. One never knows which seed sprinkled in a class will come to bloom many years later. I tell my student teachers over and over again that, even with the best curriculum or greatest instruction, in reality you walk into the classroom and you are there on your feet, in your full body, and nothing you prepared may be what makes the ultimate teaching moment. The moments we wait for as artists, poets, and teachers are the ones that often come to us, unannounced, yet the soil has been prepared. The soil is our bodies, hearts, and minds.

My task in teaching is no different than my life in being, creating, or mothering. I open up a space—one that is wide and generous, and filled with both paradox and delight—and we go through the space together. I seek to invite students to fall in love with curiosity again and again. Wandering into wonder is the art of being, living, and teaching; it continually invites us to never stop asking questions. I tell my students that a teaching life is all about living in the questions. As Rilke (1984) has so beautifully said, “love the questions, as if they were books on a shelf...stay in the questions, not knowing the answer, and someday it may come” (p. 34).

Curiosity is often thought of as the domain of children but I love to discover: a new piece of sea glass found on the beach, or the colours of a starfish, or a sea urchin in its magnificence. My roaming along the Atlantic in a small island town off the coast of Boston, Massachusetts, offered my early exposure to the lived curriculum. Of course, I did not know that term then, nor did I understand what ontology or epistemology were, ways of being and knowing. But I was in love with discovery and took hours ruminating on the edge of sea and land. This initial school of the natural world honed my love for questions, discovering, and contemplating the world. I took that into my research, performance, writing, and, most of all, ways of being in teaching.
From an early age, I was encouraged that all of life was connected and, as I grew into my vocation years later, integrating teaching, dancing, writing, scholarship and education, I continued to dive into the choreography of interconnectivity. Thankfully, I arrived in the field in education, specifically curriculum theory and arts-based research, which, in turn, honoured the connection to lived experience. The emergent curriculum and the lived curriculum were articulations of knowledge and learning that I could not only relate to, but also thrive within. Over the course of two decades of teaching in a university, I have been thankful for the opportunities to engage in what I would call a philosophy of the flesh and a “body pedagogy” (Snowber, 2005). The body is not neat or predictable and neither is teaching. Our biggest gift for teaching, as Parker Palmer (1998, p. 2) says, is “we teach who we are.” However, who are we? Are we just talking heads? Or are we full human beings, embracing the complexity and beauty of a life lived in the mind, heart, spirit, limbs, belly, imagination, mystery, and even limitations? And how do we embrace all those parts of us as human beings, in a time that is so absolutely compressed on all sides? How do we ultimately become human beings instead of just human doings, or let our human doings come out of our beinghood? And, ultimately, how does one train for such an endeavour?

I used to be very jealous of those who had so much support around them, either physically or emotionally. I am not proud of being jealous, but as a single mother of three amazing sons and carrying a tenure track Faculty position, with both my parents gone and all extended family thousands of miles away, I have often felt alone. In that aloneness, I did not have the capacity to participate in or compartmentalize life in neat ways; subsequently, everything became interrelated and connected. My children’s play became a place of reflection; my cooking supper weaved them into dances; and my daily walks became poetry and performances of site-specific work. My stability and consistency lie in taking solitude every day with myself in the form of walking and writing; this has led to a 25-year practice of finding the beauty in small things and knowing that inspiration comes in and from attending to the moment. The connections between the holy and the ordinary have been my food group and a mainstay for the inspiration for all my teaching, writing, and performing. It is here in these moments, where breath and vitality fill me, that my ideas truly become part of all my being.

I now have all my undergraduate and graduate classes engage in the practice of solitude in some form. I emphasize the connections between solitude and physicality, which have the capacity to connect to a place of flow—whether it is walking, writing, resting, dancing, or drawing. I invite students to leave the details behind so the fast-paced monkey mind can settle; then expanse is granted to mind and body, and passion for inquiry is cultivated. The practice of writing is inextricably connected to these times of solitude and allows for writing to emerge from a different place, where breath turns to ink and the instincts of the belly form on the page. Here is the opportunity for both a reflective practice and an openness to insight that springs from the body’s wisdom.
We are often harder on ourselves than anyone else. Standards and accountability are ways of pursuing excellence, but they are closed-minded about much that matters, such as when one is dealing with grief, or a loss, or a teachers’ strike. The world is filled with disruptions, and what emerges in those times of difficulty can be a place of great creativity. The alchemy of our lives occurs in the cracks. Light is in the cracks, places of brilliance dwell there too. The challenge is to intentionally leave more room to live in the cracks, and pay attention to what seeps through our lives. Discomfort reigns here, but it can be the sacred space for perceptions to shift and new ways of becoming to be given birth. These cracks are the entrance into magic—where the poetry of our lives is met in the mundane. Summer squash and zucchini are announcing the beauty of yellow and green. A few quiet moments become a pilgrimage, and a student’s insight becomes the inspiration for being a teacher. It is the surprise I wait for, but it always comes unannounced, and I am once again turned to the miracle of what being alive is all about.

BODYPsalM FOR BECOMING

Know there is a flow 
working within the vessels 
of your life and blood 
through each spiritual artery and vein 
a current all to its own

You cannot stop the life stream 
only enhance its surge 
listen for the sounds 
inhabiting the map of your path 
let what is unseen carry you 
give into the wave 
of the ebb and flow 
of your own pulse

who knows where your journey will lead 
or what you will discover

You are in a new chapter 
of your own autobiography 
rewriting your own narrative 
every moment you take a breath.

Let the air breathe you 
allow the mist of the unpredictable 
to caress your plans 
widen your embrace 
of what is possible in the impossible
where the process of becoming
will have its way
and find you once again
with an open heart
to touch the sky
and inhabit your dreams.

Our lives are research and we are both individually and collectively co-creating the artfulness of living, being, and teaching. I often find myself roaming as I teach, not able to stay in the classroom. In the classes I teach on Embodiment, I bring my graduate students into the world as the classroom. We walk around a lake in the coolness of the forest in silence, opening all the fibers of our beings to the smells, textures, and colours of the natural world. Often, this is juxtaposed with the chatter in the mind, but here we slowly let go to hear the new words that form from the hundred shades of green entering the visceral imagination. We go to galleries and performances, or leave the classroom and share our writings around the building. It fascinates me that everywhere students are attached to a device, and yet the most sensational and sensate device is within. The inner spirit is longing for attention, waiting patiently as a lover to bring the heart to all one does; whether it is science or artmaking, the full body wants more real estate in our lives.

To attend with all of our bodies, hearts, minds, and spirits is a radical act. This alone is entering the fullness of beinghood and has a direct effect on living and teaching. One becomes wide awake, as beloved philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) says, and no syllabus could be more astounding than bringing the full self to small and large gestures. Incremental steps of being present. Here. Hear. Listening in the cracks.

The 14th century Persian poet Hafiz says, A poet is someone/Who can pour Light into a spoon/Then raise it/To nourish/Your beautiful parched, holy mouth (Ladinsky, 1996, p. 59). Teaching is to nourish the beautiful, parched, holy mouth. I have a practice in my teaching to integrate the arts as a place of inquiry. Dancing, painting, singing, and writing the questions of our lives gives way to the discoveries that will arise. We are not only lifewriting, but lifedancing and lifesinging and lifepainting. Our lives are research and a place of being created anew. We are an artwork and nothing can be more magnificent than creation and recreation of each day.

Connecting the arts to inquiry provides an entrance to humanity and, herein, is the lived curriculum (Snowber, 2012). An entrance to our own humanity is an invitation to the humus and humour of our own journeys. We are of the earth and live in both fragility and miracle. These stories are the paints and notes of our lives. Trust the colours of your own history, and it surely will make new colours.

I tell my students over and over again that the most important thing they can do is to “show up” for their own lives. It is an appointment that no one else can fulfill. In the pain and suffering and joy, which claims our own autobiographies, these are the entrances to compassion for ourselves and others. Compassion is being with passion and the capacity to “be with.” Presence is all that is asked. And this is magnificent. And here is a pedagogy of becoming.
REFERENCES


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2. LOVING TEACHING

In this chapter I explore how I have come to understand teaching, or how I choose, or how I need, to live as a teacher. I also write about what I have encountered as welcome and celebration, or distrust and resistance, as responses to my ways of being as a teacher. Moving beyond my thirtieth year working in the field of education, I move back to some of my own teachers and I move ahead to the teachers I now work with as a teacher educator. A narrative inquirer and a poetic inquirer, I use both story and poetry in this exploration as a way of bringing readers into the moments I share. Also, I hope that this chapter will open up spaces for others to share their own stories and poems as we continue to move and grow into those spaces we create for each other.

LOVING TEACHING: A REMEMBERED STORY

At the end of a year when I was teaching a class of Grade 6 students, a father of one of my students called me about a note I had written to his daughter in the last week of classes. In fact, I had written a note to each of my students thanking them for their contributions to the class and telling them what I saw as their strengths as they moved on to another school and, eventually, out into the larger world. The father was very grateful for my comments to his daughter. He was also very complimentary of the teaching his daughter had received from me that year. What was most remarkable for me, however, in that moment, and even now, is that the parent I was talking with communicated that he was surprised, not because of what he called my good teaching: “My daughter has had other very good teachers in the past,” he said, “but with you it’s something different; you take it very seriously and you seem to really enjoy it. For you, it’s something that is very important; I get the impression that you actually really love it.” I smiled into the phone and I thanked him for calling and for sharing those kind comments. Because I had, that year, some difficult challenges with colleagues who did not value my teaching in ways which that parent did, something I did not share with the parent, I said somewhat tongue in cheek, “I am inclined to ask you to put your words in writing.” He didn’t, perhaps because it was the end of the school year and he was busy, or perhaps because he wasn’t a writer. Whatever the reason, I am left with only the memory.

Only the memory…but, is it only, really? The impact of the memory has been deep and enduring, enough that, all these years later, I feel compelled to put my thoughts in writing. I frame this chapter as an expression of gratitude to a young girl and her father, and to all who have been a part of my teaching journey.
It hasn’t always been like that; not every moment has been a warm embrace.

I have come home in tears, hate sticking to me like spitballs.

Held through the night in my partner’s arms; released in the morning to return renewed.

A letter from a parent expressing concern and offering care, placed over the word wounds from yesterday.

A colleague at my door with understanding and support, and words that heal from the loud silence down the hall.

As I look back to that comment by the father who called me at the end of a school year, I am struck by how well he knew me and by how clearly he understood my work. Being known and being understood are desirable experiences; at least they are for me. That father’s words went to my heart, and to the heart of what I was trying to do, of what I was doing—engaging in teaching as something I was loving and as something that is loving. It was the first time a parent of a child I was teaching had used the word love to describe my approach to teaching.

The worst ones are the ones who know the talk.

Contempt couched in concern; care with an invisible suffix less.

Allies that are all lies; enemies that act like enemas.

Sometimes at faculty meetings, I feel empty.

For me, loving teaching had been there from my beginning years as an educator. Since my early days as an Educational Assistant, particularly in my work with a teacher who treated me as a respected colleague, who, even decades later, reminded me that I had taught a young man how to read in his Grade 8 year, I found that
teaching was as much, or more, a place for my heart, for my emotions, as it was for my mind and my skills. Even more clearly, I saw no separation between my heart and my mind, no separation between my emotions and my skills.

But it goes back even further than that. I experienced loving teaching as a child and as an adolescent. Mrs. Catherine Melvin and Mrs. Annie Hayes were my most memorable elementary school teachers. They both told stories, and I could tell that they loved what they were doing, and that they loved me. Mr. Gus Gibbons was my high school principal. He read my love poem to Bobby Sherman, a male superstar. A young man struggling with my emerging identities at the time, I received only affirmation from Mr. Gibbons. My high school English teacher, Mr. Leo Moriarity, noticed my love of writing and encouraged it. He even once recognized my writing style when I published anonymously. He, selflessly, advised me to go to university, where I would find an environment to continue to explore and develop my growing interests and skills. I did not, initially, take his advice and continued on a path that had been cleared for me to a Roman Catholic seminary in Dublin, Ireland; a year later, remembering my high school English teacher’s advice, that getting a degree would be something I would always have and that other decisions could come later, and also needing to be with a more diverse group of people with multiple interests, I left the seminary, returned to Newfoundland, and began a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Most notable from my year in the seminary was Reverend Jerome Twomey. He was a huge man, with a proportionally huge heart. I recall sitting in his office shortly after my eighteenth birthday telling him that I was gay. He was non-judgmental. In fact, his sense of humour and genuine respect for my right to self-determination had me leaving his office laughing and walking tall. More than three decades later, I am still warmed by the memory.

“We need your voice,” one of my Religious Studies professors in university, Dr. Sheldon MacKenzie, once said to me, “and you won’t always know the positive impact of your voice.” This idea, that my voice had power, felt new to me, even though I had experienced and been affirmed in it before. The seminary, however, was not a place for individuality, or power; it was a place of submission—a place where my voice had grown almost silent—a place I had to leave to save my voice and, perhaps, my soul.

In addition to giving space for my voice to grow, university also was a place where I learned a language of love. In my first philosophy course the professor talked about love as it relates to teaching and learning, and to the relationship between teacher and learner. “The difference between love and respect,” said Dr. John Scott, “is just a matter of spelling.” I realized that the respect I felt from, and for, my teachers was another spelling for love.

NOT RIGHTEOUS WORDS

“You’re a queer, and that’s all you’ll ever be.”
“You must leave the priesthood;
homosexuality is your cross.”

“You’ll never be able to do it;
you’ll be back; I can assure you of that.”

“We shouldn’t be promoting faggots;
I was embarrassed that he was representing us up there.”

LOVING TEACHING: MORE THAN MEMORIES

As I look back to those loving teachers in my life, I see no fakes, no false uses of
words to ensnare me, or to make themselves look more important than me. Humility
is a word that comes to mind; maybe love makes room for humility. If I were to tell
those teachers how I remember them, I think they would be as pleasantly surprised
as I was by that father’s call. But what they have given me are more than memories
of teaching, although those memories are also great gifts. What they have given me
are more than examples of teaching, more than models of how to do it, more
than samples of best practices. What they have, in fact, given me are experiences of
having been taught in loving ways, of having had my realities respected while also
being challenged to stretch beyond what I saw as my limitations. They knew me
without hurting me. Indeed, they allowed me to know them, opening themselves to
vulnerability. In doing so, they called on my capacity for love; they awakened and
called forth my own desire to teach. They nourished me as a student; they continue to
nourish me as an educator.

IN THE PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE

A parent called to complain about my orientation;
it was not my pedagogical orientation.

A parent called because I kissed a man
in the parking lot.

A parent called because I was seen
looking at construction workers.

I was told that celebrating Lesbian and Gay Pride Week
is not appropriate for elementary school students.

I was told that we don’t celebrate Heterosexual Pride Week;
I guess someone missed fifty-one weeks.

A parent called because I wore a t-shirt
with “My Ontario includes Gay and Lesbian Families.”
A parent called because I wore a t-shirt
with “I support safe schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.”

I was told that my guest speakers would need to be pre-screened;
two lesbians and their baby were the only ones ever pre-screened.

A letter was received because I was interviewed on a local radio show
about our Pride Week unit in elementary school.

I was told that we don’t talk with students about personal matters;
adopter a child is a personal matter only when the parents are queer.

LOVING TEACHING: TENSIONS IN (BE)LONGING

After almost two decades working as a teacher, I resigned from my teaching position. The near daily presence of homophobia and heterosexism in the educational environments I worked in was the main reason I left teaching. Sometimes leaving is the only self-respecting choice. I left teaching because I felt I no longer belonged. I could not live lovingly where I did not belong—where I felt disconnected. Strangely, I found I could not really leave either. Teaching was not just what I did; it remains part of who I am. I returned to teaching as a teacher educator because I found that my desire to teach was a longing, and that longing is a way of being in teaching. I found a place for being in my longing, a place for (be)longing. That place is not so much physical as it is emotional; it is not so much temporal as it is remembered. When I am teaching, I am longing; I am loving.

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