

Teachers and Administrators: A Vision of Prophetic Practice

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Introduction

We are two educators and school administrators who believe that education is a human endeavor that must be passionate and prophetic. We believe that if educators are to make any difference in a world filled with injustice, indifference, despair, and environmental degradation, then we must take a different approach to schooling than the traditional philosophies and practices that have dominated education in America. We ~~must~~ become fully engaged in a soulful life as expressed and communicated autobiographically. In other words, the foundation of the educational process for members of the learning community is characterized by an openness to the wonder of the universe, a willingness to take risks, a commitment to life-long learning, excitement about the discovery and construction of new ideas, an activist stance in the realm of the socio-political milieu of the local and global community, and an examination of the inner life. We believe that this vision will help those preparing to become teachers work effectively with administrators and have a meaningful and consequential impact upon the learning communities in which they participate.

As administrators and university professors, our life experiences and our professional responsibilities in schools and classrooms have shaped this vision. I (Patrick Slattery) began my career as a high school English and mathematics teacher. After several years of

intense and personally satisfying experiences that involved rigorous academic teaching, creative activity planning, and rewarding interactions with students, I decided to study school administration. Assuming that I could alleviate many of the problems that I faced as a classroom teacher, I embarked on a seven year odyssey into the realm of K-12 school administration. Frustrated by the bureaucracy, political posturing, budget constraints, apathy, and a myriad of social problems, I left the schools to study curriculum theory at Louisiana State University. For the past several years I have taught curriculum studies, hoping to share both my positive and negative experiences with university students so that they will be better equipped to understand the nature of K-12 schooling and help to improve our current schooling crises. In addition to my university teaching, I have always remained connected to K-12 schooling through my three school-age children and my association with local school districts in staff development programs. I am committed to a quality educational experience for all children. In order for this vision to become a reality, educators, support personnel, and parents must work together in the reconceptualization of curriculum and schooling. In this essay I hope to contribute to a conversation that will help you to become an active participant in this process so that you can effectively work with administrators to bring about a renewed vision.

I (Rebecca Spehler) have served as classroom teacher, district program coordinator, elementary principal, and adjunct university professor. Although the specifics of my professional vision have evolved through the years, the spirit of this call upon my life to inspire and evoke human growth has remained constant. My ability to influence students, parents, colleagues, and administrators has been directly related to my willingness to share the stories of my own growth process. Of primary importance, then, has been the commitment to remain constant in the quest for growth as an individual and as a member of families, learning communities, and the larger global community.

We realize that as pre-service education students, you have many thoughts and feelings about your classroom, your students, and your teaching styles. Some of you may

have even developed a broader vision of the impact you wish to have on the social, political, economic, and religious dimensions of our society. Others of you may have been working for years developing a rich inner life--possibly including autobiographical reflection, journal writing, spiritual renewal, dream analysis, or vision quests--which have contributed to your sense of the importance of the relational aspects of the teaching and learning process. Included here would be your concern for the physical, emotional, and psychological well being of students, colleagues, the environment, and yourself. We affirm this process that you have begun; indeed, we are on this same journey with you. In order to inspire other human beings, create meaningful learning environments, and establish healthy community relations, we have discovered that it is essential that the growth of the inner life and concern for broader social visions remain foregrounded in our work as educators. Working with administrators, students, parents, and colleagues will certainly be challenging--and sometimes frustrating. You will find, from time to time, that your vision will conflict with the expectations of building administrators and/or district leaders. However, the development of the traits we describe above will serve you well in your work as a teacher. Why? Because these are essential dimensions of being human; for a teacher is not a machine but a human person touching the lives of students and colleagues in the learning environment.

Understanding the Context

If we are to allow our vision to have an impact on our students within the context of the school community, we must learn to distinguish the framework through which the administrator views the local school community. As we observe and internalize environmental cues--such as spoken language, body gestures, physical surroundings--it is possible to give meaning to the context of the particular school community in which we work. As you develop this understanding, it may become possible to communicate your

vision in terms that will increase the likelihood of acceptance on the part of your building administrator.

As a first year teacher, I (Rebecca) had a well developed sense of my personal vision as an educator. When I met with my building administrator for the first time, I was eagerly anticipating an environment in which my vision would thrive and continue to grow.

However, at our first meeting, I was handed a set of teacher manuals tied neatly with a string and labeled "grade four." This single event, more than any other, created an awareness that my personal vision might be in conflict with the established expectations of my new administrator.

Among other textbook manuals, this set included a basal reading series complete with a very typical workbook emphasizing isolated reading skills. Since my vision involved creating a classroom where making meaning was not only encouraged, but honored, I struggled with the lack of depth and opportunity for incorporating the imagination in the district basal reading series. I wanted to create an environment that would encourage students to connect learning to their lives. In other words, learning is not a matter of transmitting information from the set of manuals to a group of receptive students, but it is a transformative process of coming to understand ourselves, our environment, our culture, and our world. This transformation occurs as an interactive process between the learner and the whole environment. Contemporary educational literature sometimes describes this vision as constructivism (Brooks and Brooks, 1993; Henderson, 1995).

Since I was determined to find a way to allow my own vision to thrive, I set about the task of determining the specifics of the orientation to the educational process that my principal was expressing through her administrative style. To do this, I believed, would give me valuable information about the kind of language I needed to use to communicate effectively with her. This examination led me to understand that she expected a very directive approach to instruction that would ensure coverage of all required objectives

over the course of the year and that growth would be quantifiable through standardized testing.

Knowing full well on an intuitive level that engaging the imagination of my students was primary in the development of life-long readers, I set out to create a plan for the year that would do just that, as well as meet the accountability demands of my administrator. This plan involved the use of trade book literature arranged in thematic units. These themes were selected because they were deep, broad-based, and would invite student initiated inquiry. Through the course of the next several years, these units evolved to incorporate student interests, not only in the area of language arts, but other subject areas as well.

Because I was able to communicate my ideas to my administrator within the context of her vision, and yet not sacrifice my own, I gained her trust as a first year teacher. As a result of this initial trust-building experience, I was able to continue this process so that my classroom practice would express my vision which often deviated from traditional classroom practice.

At the end of four years in this building, I transferred to another in the district to accept an assignment as the teacher for an intermediate level classroom for high ability students. The expectations for my teaching in this context were highly consistent with my own vision, and I was able to experience a great deal more freedom to express this vision within my classroom. However, I will always value the experience of my first years of teaching for what I learned about the importance of understanding the context of another's vision. This example illustrates the value of acting upon the intuitive sense so often attributed to a feminine sense of knowing and understanding the world (Belenky, et al., 1986).

Understanding the Political Reality

Despite our commitment to affirm our intuitive sensibilities for implementing our vision of a just, compassionate, caring, and academically challenging learning environment in our

classrooms, the political climate of the schools is often overwhelming and discourages even our most sincere efforts. Many teachers have shared with us their frustration with bureaucratic regulations, economic constraints, political maneuvering, and the like.

However, many teachers find themselves in a position where they do not believe they have the power to challenge the political system. Some are concerned about keeping their job, others are fearful that they will not receive tenure, many worry about family finances, a few are place bound and unable to relocate, and social pressure or peer pressure inhibit some from challenging the politically powerful. For all of these reasons--and others--many teachers find it almost impossible to challenge the prevailing political or administrative practices. As beginning teachers the political pressures will often seem insurmountable to you. However, our experience also tells us that young teachers do have the drive, energy, and commitment that allows them to see possibilities that veterans often overlook.

As a young teacher I (Patrick) found myself in such a circumstance in my first year of teaching. As with all beginning teachers I was thrilled to have been hired and willing to do almost anything to succeed. I even accepted--without complaint--a request by my new principal to teach one period of a subject outside of my areas of certification. Thus, in addition to my secondary English and math classes (my major and minor), I was assigned one section of eighth grade speech. It was late July when I received my schedule and textbooks, so I began planning furiously. A veteran teacher saw me on campus arranging my classroom and asked about my schedule. She offered her consolation when she heard that I had been assigned the speech class. She informed me that this was the "class from hell" that had driven away three teachers the previous year, and all of the tenured staff had refused to teach this class. The next day I learned from the principal that two boys in the class were on probation for drug distribution on campus, and that I was expected to join in the effort to catch these boys doing something wrong so that there would be enough evidence for an expulsion hearing. Everyone at the school wanted these two hoodlums to be removed, and it was now my job to support this effort.

I was uncomfortable with this assignment. I had always been taught to value the worth and dignity of each human being regardless of their race, gender, socio-economic status, religion, and the like. I had done volunteer work in a state penitentiary while in college, and I had come to realize that all human beings had the potential to contribute to society and grow. I was especially appalled that eighth grade students would be judged and condemned before the school year began. I was determined to reach all of my students, even the two on probation.

After a few days in my new classroom, I started to doubt my positive vision of the innate goodness of human beings. The "class from hell" was much worse than I could have imagined--like the students in Michelle Phifer's first class in the movie *Dangerous Minds*. I tried every learning method and teaching strategy I could remember from my teacher education classes. Nothing worked. The students were belligerent, lazy, obstinate, and surly. I was not covering the chapters in the speech book as required in the curriculum guide--even though I was always reading a chapter ahead so that I could learn the material before the students. This did not matter; the students would not read or present speeches. I longed for help and suggestions, but I was afraid to ask my principal or colleagues for advice out of fear of appearing to be a failure at my new job. I labored in vain waiting for the year to end--and it was only October!

One day quite unexpectedly help arrived from an unlikely source--my two students on probation. As I was introducing a unit on duet acting, I asked for two volunteers to role play a scene from "The Tortoise and the Hare" in the textbook. Rich and Tyrone, who were not only on probation, but also instigators who dominated the entire class, blurted out a challenge: "We'll do some acting if you let us do a drug bust in Harlem." My whole career as a teacher flashed before my eyes. Time froze. What was I to say? The curriculum guide clearly required that we only use approved texts; recent controversies in the district about violence, sex, and drugs in literary selections had forced the reassignment of the curriculum director. The principal had clearly warned me that these

two students were to be forced to conform to all school rules. The racial tension in this southern community was explosive; Rick, a white student, and Tyronne, a black student, were clearly at the forefront of racial antagonism on campus. And now they were volunteering to create a racial charged drug scene with Rick acting the part of a white cop and Tyronne acting the part of a black drug dealer.

I asked myself a hundred questions in the seconds between Rick and Tyronne's offer and my response. What if they were deceiving me and only intended to disrupt the class and embarrass me? What if someone found out that I allowed my student to perform a drug bust scene? Could my students really learn about duet acting from such a stunt? What if the class exploded in race riots? What if the principal came into my room? I was petrified at the thought of letting Rick and Tyronne take over my classroom. However, I figured that they were already in charge anyway, so what the heck. I looked them in the eye, and to their shock, I said, "Yes, let's do it!"

Rick and Tyronne performed a somewhat awkward, yet very realistic drug bust scene. They knew the language, the law, and the logistics! The class applauded enthusiastically. I was delighted, nervous, and shocked all at the same time. Other students began to volunteer to perform duet acting scenes that were of interest to them. For the next week I coached my students in techniques for improving their improvisational skits. When the time arrived for Rick and Tyronne to present their final performance, the class sat in hushed anticipation. The performance was flawless and dramatic. In fact, it was so realistic, that the principal, who happened to be walking down the hall, rushed into my classroom and grabbed Rick and Tyronne by the collar and shoved them against the blackboard saying, "This is the final straw. You are both out of here!" As the principal turned with the boys to exit he saw me sitting in stunned silence in the back of the room. "This is a duet acting scene, sir, " I said with awkward hesitation. The principal turned bright red, let go of the boys, and stormed out of the room. A few moments later the class erupted in applause. Not only were Rick and Tyronne good actors, they had won a moral

victory over the dreaded principal. While the class from hell had won a battle, I was afraid that I had lost the war.

Interestingly, a letter came in the mail the next week from the local university advertising a junior high speech tournament. I had another bright idea. I asked my class if they would like to do their duet acting skits at a speech tournament. They gaged. "Not with all of those speech nerds," they protested. Again Rick and Tyronne intervened. When they said yes, then the entire class wanted to attend. Not only did we attend the speech tournament, but Rick and Tyronne won the first place trophy for duet acting. It was now November, and I was not only enjoying my first year of teaching but I actually looked forward to being with my "class from hell." Little did I know that all of my efforts were about to be undermined.

It was the custom in this school to announce all student awards and accomplishments on Monday morning. Trophies were presented in the office and displayed in the front window. I was thrilled to bring Rick and Tyronne's trophies to the office before announcements. My "class from hell" was anxiously awaiting their first public recognition in the school community, not only because of their pride in their work, but also, I believe, as a way of proving their dignity to the principal and staff that had labeled them for years. When I brought the trophies to the principal, he confiscated them and said, "Students on probation are not allowed to receive awards." I was shocked. When I returned to my classroom and explained the situation to my students, they were furious. While they never blamed me personally for the lack of recognition, they quickly returned to their old behaviors. Despite my best efforts, the class was never the same again.

In this case, administrative rules and regulations prevented learning from flourishing. As a young teacher I wanted to make a difference in the lives of my students. I also wanted them to learn to become public speakers. I saw a glimmer of success. However, I was not able to overcome the conflicts between my vision and the administrative philosophy. In an effort to balance my intuitive sense of injustice in this case and my

desire to keep my job, I waited until the end of the school year and went to a local trophy house and bought two new trophies for Rick and Tyrone. I told them that they had been outstanding speech students, and I encouraged them to develop their talents in the future. I still believe that I made a difference in the lives of the students in "the class from hell" despite the conflict with the administrative philosophy of the school. You, too, will have to constantly find ways to implement your vision within a school system whose rules, regulations, or philosophies are in conflict with your own intuitions and beliefs. This story from my first year of teaching is a metaphor for my entire career.

Proleptic Vision

The two stories above illustrate the reality of the lived experience of teachers as they work with administrators in schools. Sometimes visions are shared, sometimes compromises are easily negotiated, and sometimes conflicting visions remain unresolvable. You will find yourself in all of these situations throughout your career. However, in order to maximize the opportunity for you to implement your philosophy and to have a greater impact on the lives of your students, we believe that it is essential to develop a proleptic vision.

William Faulkner once wrote, "There is no such thing really as was, because the past is" (Faulkner, 1942, p.288). Faulkner was trying to explain that historical events continue to have an impact on present generations. The experiences of "the good old days" are never really over. The impact of childhood memories continue to influence our behavior and attitudes today. In schools we often teach history and literature as depositories of ancient texts, dates and ideas to be memorized, or information to be repeated on standardized tests. We challenge this concept of teaching and learning. We are committed to the idea that texts, historical information, and literary selections are living artifacts that can and should be reinterpreted, reexperienced, and reinvigorated continuously. For example, every time we listen to a musical selection, watch a movie, or read a book, we get new

insights into the meaning of the selection, film, or book as well as new insights into our selves. You know this to be true. Do you ever enjoy watching a movie several times? Do you ever get new feelings or insights when you hear a song over time? Words, dates, scientific data, stories, and songs are living artifacts that require a participant in the experience to give them meaning. (Note that this is similar to the constructivist philosophy that we introduced above.)

Pablo Picasso believed strongly in the power of the participant to create meaning. Picasso (1971) wrote:

A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished it still goes on changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a natural enough, as the picture lives only through the man who is looking at it. (p. 268)

As we understand Picasso, a painting from the past continues to inspire new ideas and interpretations over time. If this were not the case, why would people continue to research any topic? There is always something new to discover and construct.

We agree with emerging postmodern scholarship that contends that the world has reached a point where we must be open to a multiplicity of interpretations and understandings. There are a variety of ways of looking at the world. Our differences do not need to separate and divide us. Rather, the goal of education should be to affirm the beauty and richness of many cultures, religions, artistic styles, and philosophies. The philosopher Robert Bellah, in the book *Beyond Belief*, explained it this way:

We may be seeing the beginning of the reintegration of our culture, a new possibility of the unity of consciousness. If so, it will not be on the basis of any new orthodoxy, either religious or scientific. Such a new integration will be based on the rejection of all univocal understandings of reality, or all identifications of one conception of reality with reality itself. It will

recognize the multiplicity of the human spirit, and the necessity to translate constantly between different scientific and imaginative vocabularies.

It will recognize the human proclivity to fall comfortably into some single literal interpretation of the world and therefore the necessity to be continuously open to rebirth in a new heaven and new earth. It will recognize that in both scientific and religious culture all we have finally are symbols, but that there is an enormous difference between the dead letter and the living word (cited in Tarnas, 1991, p. 415).

We agree with Bellah that there is a difference between inert information--dead letters--and imaginative thinking--the living word. It is in the realm of imagination and living that human persons find hope, and the sense of hope only arises when the past is experienced as an integral part of the present moment. With Faulkner, Picasso, Bellah, and so many other contemporary artists, authors, and philosophers, we insist on a constructivist approach to life. In education this means creating classroom environments where students and teachers are alive with creative ideas, imaginative interpretations, and a passion for understanding. This is the first step in the development of proleptic hope.

The second step in the process involves the future. Just as the past is not inert and irrelevant data about ancient texts, science, ideas, so too the future is not predetermined and remote. The future, while not yet complete, is already present in the choices that we make today. John Dewey (1938) writes: The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. Hence the central problem of an education based on experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences. (p.28)

In your classrooms this means that you will have to stop saying things like, "You will need this algebra one day in the future," or "you are the future of America." You see, students today are the past, present, and future of the world all at once. Empowerment of students--indeed all citizens--means legitimizing their unique contribution to the global

community in the present moment. This empowerment is what we mean by proleptic hope. Students and teachers armed with a renewed sense of their possibilities will be able to exercise their imaginative, intuitive, and transformative powers in the educational process. It is only with such renewal that our vision of a just, caring, and ecologically sustainable global community is possible. Therefore, a sense of proleptic hope is the essential ingredient in our proposal for educational reform. If you develop this sense of proleptic hope, then we believe that you will be equipped to work effectively with administrators--albeit with struggle and frustration at times, especially when these leaders lack such a vision themselves. We challenge you to develop a sense of hope, not only for the sake of your students, but also for your own personal growth.

Developing Inner Life and Vision

Having been empowered by a sense of proleptic hope, each of us must journey through the process of developing fully our own inner life, through which our vision will arise. If we are to make a difference in the lives of others and thus impact our learning communities, we must first begin with the development of this inner self. Working with students, teachers, or administrators requires that we engage in a process of influencing others. The ability to influence is a process of inspiration which first begins with our own contact with meanings, realities, and values that lie beneath the surface of every day experiences (Sergiovanni, 1988).

How do we begin to make connections with these elements that are so much a part of daily life? Human beings in various cultures have sought to make contact with meanings in a variety of ways. For many, reflective experiences such as meditation, prayer, or journaling provide a path to the inner self. Some find the inspiration for this process in the aesthetic experience through interaction with the arts or with the natural world. Others may enter this process through human interaction found in friendships or a more

formal counseling relationship. What is essential is that we find the ways most meaningful and most likely to encourage our continued participation in the process.

As we continue to participate in activities that encourage the development of the inner life, we will likely be amazed with the connectedness of the events of our lives that we begin to notice. Jung (1960) called this phenomenon synchronicity. Can you recall events that appeared to be coincidental and yet had an impact upon the direction of your life? During this past year, I (Rebecca) made a decision to seek an avenue for expressing my singing talent in a more involved way. Several weeks after, I met three others who had been longing to do this as well. We formed a quartet and are currently enjoying singing contemporary folk music at local coffee houses. I find that the development of my inner life through meditation, prayer, dream journaling, aesthetic involvement, and meaningful conversation with others gives direction to the vision I have for my life and is connected to the synchronicity that I experience.

Thomas Moore (1996) describes the soulful life as one that is enchanted. In other words, it is a life that is connected lovingly and intimately with the world and the people in our families and communities. He describes enchantment this way:

An enchanted life has many moments when the heart is overwhelmed by beauty and the imagination is electrified by some haunting quality in the world or by a spirit or voice speaking from deep within a thing, a place, or a person. Enchantment may be a state of rapture and ecstasy in which the soul comes to the foreground, and the literal concerns of survival and daily preoccupation at least momentarily fade into the background. The soul has an absolute, unforgiving need for regular excursions into enchantment. It requires them like the body needs food and the mind needs thought. Yet our culture often takes pride in disproving and exploding the sources of enchantment, explaining away one mystery after another and overturning precious shrines, dissolving the family farm that has housed spirits of

civility for eons, or desecrating for material profit a mountain or stream sacred to native residents. We have yet to learn that we can't survive without enchantment and that the loss of it is killing us. (p. ix,x)

David Ray Griffin (1988) speaks of reenchancement in the realm of education when he describes a similar approach to science which involves a sense of mystery and wonder so much unlike our modern approach to science education.

We encourage you, if you have not already, to embark upon the exploration of the inner life. On this journey, you will find many moments of inspiration and guidance as you seek to continually develop a vision for your life as an educator. As you communicate this vision within the context of your local learning community and possibly the global community, you will find that the cultivation of your inner life will provide the inspiration necessary to effectively communicate with and influence those around you.

Community of Support

The development of a community of support is vital to the sustainability and re-enchancement of personal vision. We need, at times, to gain encouragement, direction, and perspective from one another in our learning communities. How can we go about the process of establishing such a community within the context of our school environments?

It is essential to seek community within the context of your professional life. You will need to find a base of support from which you gain security as you seek to take the risks necessary for growth. Begin by committing to your own personal growth through the exploration of the inner life, and then find others who can share this journey with you. We are convinced that one alive and caring individual can begin the process of building a visionary community within the context of most school environments.

After you have found others with whom to share your own growth, it is important to find ways to formalize the structure of your community experience. Study groups, discussion groups, or groups brought together for the purpose of aesthetic experiences

can be a more formal expression of a caring community. Sometimes, less formal but regular, gatherings for meals and informal conversation can provide opportunities for members of a community to share the development of their inner vision. As individuals come together in this way, they are better able to find ways to develop and express a corporate vision.

Avoiding Dualisms / Creating Synthesis

In order to develop a proleptic vision of hope and build a community of support, educators must be committed to synthetic processes. This necessitates an attitude that rejects "either / or" dualisms. There are very few, if any, "black and white" answers to the complex problems that we face. There are a variety of interpretations to every issue. Rather than becoming entrenched in an extreme, visionary educators look for dialogue and acceptance of diversity in their schools. There is no one best way to teach. There is no single correct interpretation of a work of art or literature. There is no one right religion. There is no perfect way to construct a game plan. Variety and ambiguity are a part of our lives and our schools. We support efforts to be inclusive. Like the yin and yang of eastern philosophy, our world is a better place when opposites work together instead of fighting against each other. Our schools and communities can be places of hope when black and white, native and Hispanic, gay and straight, Jew and Christian, male and female, young and old, conservative and liberal, atheist and religious, athletic and academic, nerds and jocks, etc. can all live together in mutual respect and support. We do not support division and dualism in our school communities.

It is also important to note that the differences between people are not as distant as some would have you believe. Some elderly people can be young at heart and full of innovative ideas while some young people can be stodgy. Some who are female have traits traditionally considered male, while some who are male have qualities of the feminine. Some conservatives can be very open-minded while some liberals can be quite

intolerant. Some very religious people can be very underdeveloped spiritually, while some who do not practice religion are very spiritual in nature. Toni Morrison (1989) has written that the "trauma of racism is, for the racist and victim, the severe fragmentation of the self" (p.16). She adds this further clarification, "We are not, in fact, 'other' " (p.9). As an African-American author, Morrison is trying to explain that objectifying people as "other" or "opposite" or "different" can lead to great tragedy and trauma. We agree. Educators committed to hope and community will find ways to see the complimentary nature of differences and affirm all persons in the schools.

How can you do this as a teacher? We believe that the most important step is developing vision. This will only occur when we are open to the wonder of the cosmos and the passion of living. Some call the experience of this vision as the "ah-ha moments." William Pinar and Madeline Grumet (1976) call it "synthetical moments." In the synthesizing moment there is a reconstruction of the self and an experience of solidarity of the intellect, the body, the spirit, and the cosmos, as well as an intrinsic coherence of time, place, and meaning. Michel Serres (1982) writes about a sense of contemporaneousness. Serres uses provoking metaphors and analogies to explain that there is convergence in particular events where many things come together and similar forms provide a passage for making connections on the journey of life. While Serres insists on keeping things separate, his analogies help to make connections through which we experience contemporaneousness. Both Pinar and Serres provide options for rethinking modern obsessions with establishing causal links in space over time. Linear explanations are replaced by concepts of contemporaneousness, convergence, and syntheses. Such meaning-full and awe-full moments are integral to the postmodern curriculum and not peripheral. Herbert Kliebard (1992) warns:

(Humanism) has come to be associated with a set of subjects, a segment of the school curriculum, believed to have the power to stir the imagination, enhance the appreciation of beauty, and disclose motives that actuate

human behavior.....The arts--music, painting, sculpture, poetry--(are) the highest forms of expression by which human beings convey their experience and their aspirations. These, it turns out, are the very subjects that have suffered the steepest decline in the American school curriculum during the course of the twentieth century, a decline which, if continued, will at best make artistic expression and appreciation the province of a handful of sensitive souls. (p. 3)

We take Kliebard's warning to heart and prioritize artistic and aesthetic experiences, especially as these endeavors will support synthetical self-understanding in teachers and in the schooling process. We hope that you will be open to such experiences.

Prophetic Voice

The development of a prophetic voice allows the impact we have as educators to expand beyond the realm of our classrooms. Our sphere of influence is increased in great measure as we take on the role of the prophet--one who calls and inspires others to attend to matters of great significance. Not only do we have the opportunity to change the course of events for our own students by our willingness to act upon our vision, we can also have an even greater impact as we engage in the process of evoking vision in others. This means that we must take the risk to share our vision and challenge injustices in our local community. As has often been said, our goal should be to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." This is the prophetic stance. When we encounter situations where students or colleagues are being treated unjustly or when policies and procedures ignore the plight of individual persons, we must find ways to peacefully and thoughtfully counteract these problems. We must offer friendship and support to those persons in the learning community who are marginalized by the majority. This might include students with handicaps, language differences, or learning disabilities. It might also include gay,

lesbian, racial minority, or religious minority persons. In short, whenever there is affliction, our goal must be comfort.

Likewise, we will confront situations where the majority or powerful leaders are comfortable with the status quo. Often, the status quo ostracizes and marginalizes minorities. True educators find ways to challenge the dominant power structures and enlighten the whole community about issues of concern. This might take the form of environmental impact studies in a science classroom or alternative historical analyses in a social studies classroom. It might involve speaking out for minority rights, or simply talking to an administrator about examples of injustice within the school community. Some might encourage their administrators or districts to provide diversity awareness training to staff members and students. For many, it might involve becoming active in the issues of inequity involving the funding of our nations schools. For some, a strong commitment to remain teaching in the poorest of our nations neighborhoods will provide a way to challenge the dominant power structures.

Prophetic teachers are desperately needed in society today. Most people fear getting involved and working for justice. We hope that you will have the courage to be a true educational leader who makes a difference in the lives of students and in our global community. However, before you begin this journey, remember to "count the cost" as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from a Nazi prison cell. There are many sacrifices to be made by prophets, but our experience tells us that the joy of making a difference in the lives of people far outweighs the risks. Comfort the afflicted. Afflict the comfortable.

We affirm and encourage your efforts to allow your vision to be voiced within the context of your school community. Your decision to embark on the prophetic journey will lead you to depths of experience that others, who do not choose this journey, will miss. We cannot know this depth without the ability to risk what is certain, secure, and familiar. One of the pathologies of the modern person is to cling to the security of certainty even when a dysfunctional situation is causing extreme pain and suffering.

Witness the battered spouse or abused child who remains in a family situation out of the fear of the unknown. Consider the worker who feels trapped and manipulated in a career or job situation, but cannot find the strength to make a change. As a student you may feel this kind of pressure at times. Possible a parent or relative pressures you to make a decision about your career, about the person you date, about your lifestyle, or about the expression of your faith or religious beliefs. Have you ever experienced the difficulty of following your own inner convictions in such a situation?

We once had a friend named Mike who was a talented singer. He performed with his church choir in high school and joined the university chorus in college. However, most of his time was devoted to his pre-law studies. Mike's father was a high powered corporate lawyer, and had already designed his career path to a prestigious law school. Mike finished his undergraduate program with a 4.0 average at the top of his class. He had his choice of law schools, and his financial and career future was clearly bright. An interesting thing happened during his senior year of college, Mike attended a musical performance by "Up With People" on his campus. At the end of the performance, the audience was invited to audition to perform with the group for a year and travel the world. On a lark, Mike auditioned. His talent was immediately recognized, and Mike was issued an invitation to join the group for the next semester. Since he was graduating, Mike decided that it would be fun to take some time off from his studies before entering the high pressure of law school. When he told his father of his plans, Mike's father said, "If you waste a year of your life traveling with this stupid singing group, I will take away your trust fund and you will never get my support for law school." Mike was devastated. He was being forced to choose between his won vision for this life and his father's pressure to follow a predetermined path for his career. The pressure of the trust fund and parental obligation was too much for Mike to overcome. He passed up the opportunity to sing and travel and went straight to law school. To this day Mike is a powerful corporate lawyer

in his father's firm. However, he often tells us that his is not happy and he wishes that he would have spent more of his life following his true love for music.

Too many people in our society make decisions about their life, career, family, and relationships based on pressures from parents, pastors, teachers, finances, expediency, and the like. Prophetic teachers are those who can "follow their bliss", as Joseph Campbell has insisted, and recognize that their vision will lead them to true joy. As a prophetic teacher you will find the strength to follow your vision if you are truly in touch with your inner life, beliefs, and values. This is why we have stressed these principles so forcefully in this chapter. We can no longer tolerate a society that forces people into life decisions based on fear, financial pressures, parental expectations, administrative demands, or other assumptions about the "way things ought to be." Robert F. Kennedy challenged our society to think in such terms nearly 30 years ago when he quoted George Bernard Shaw, "You see things and you say why. But I dream things that never were and I say why not."

Clearly, there will be times when you will be able to express your vision in some manner while remaining within the context of existing circumstances. At other times, however, you will need to heed the call to "shake the dust and move on." You may need to reevaluate your existing placement, location, or even career focus. Be encouraged by knowing that nothing of great importance was ever accomplished without risk. At times, leaving the known for the unknown can be likened to a leap of faith into the dark. It has been our experience that these "leaps" have yielded much in terms of growth, both professionally and personally. Think about what risks you are capable of taking within the parameters of good judgment, and then take the leap!

Our vision of education supports teachers who see clearly that justice, compassion, inner autobiographical investigations, and ecological sustainability are central to not only the survival of the planet, but also to the maximization of joy in the human community. We hope that you will choose such a prophetic proleptic vision to form the basis of your life journey.

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