



THE PATH OF MY EXPERIENCE:

An autoethnographic journey through the culture of education

José M. Tirado

Dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

March 2025

School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

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culture of education

by

José M. Tirado



Ágrip

Í meira en 50 ár hef ég verið að læra, kenna, veita ráðgjöf og hvetja fólk til þátttöku á sviðum tengdum búddisma, sálfræði og aktívisma. Þetta eru þær megin stoðir sem vitsmunalegur þroski minn hvílir á. Ég geri mér núna grein fyrir því að hver þessara stoða felur í sér menntun og því hef ég alla tíð stundað bæði símenntun og verið kennari við margvíslegar aðstæður. Doktorsrannsókn mín beindist upphaflega að umbreytingu menntunar meðal nemenda sem taka þátt í Alþjóðlegu námi í menntunarfræði við Háskóla Íslands þar sem ég hafði verið BA-nemandi. Í þessu ferli tók rannsókn mín nýja stefnu. Ég áttaði mig á því að ég átti í stöðugri samræðu við sjálfan mig. Persónuleg og grípandi umræðuefni sem voru hluti af mínu eigin ferðalagi komu upp. Hvers vegna varð nám, formlegt og óformlegt, svona mikilvægur hluti af lífi mínu og hvað leiddi mig hingað? Þannig varð mitt eigið ferðalag um veröld menntunar að meginviðfangsefni doktorsrannsóknarinnar, Markmiðið var að leggja fram mína eigin sögu til frekari rannsóknar og greiningar. Í þessari ritgerð sem byggir á sjálfsögulegri aðferðafræði, beini ég sjónum að lífi mínu á ýmsum skeiðum ævinnar og rýni í hvernig þessar stoðir urðu sífellt samþættari.

Þessi ritgerð er í fimm hlutum: „Formáli: The Accidental Heurist“ eða hvernig ég sjálfur varð „óvart“ að meginviðfangsefni rannsóknarinnar, „Að segja söguna“, „Skipulag viðfangsefnisins“, „Að skilja söguna“ og „Eftirmáli: Slóð reynslu minnar“.

Í „The Accidental Heurist“ er vinnan og ferlið kynnt, sem varð til þess að ákveðið var að styðjast við sjálfsögulega aðferð til að leita svara við þeim rannsóknarspurningum sem fram komu. Í formálanum kynni ég verkið og ferlið sem leiddi til þess að ég ákvað að beita sjálfsögulegri aðferðafræði. Í kaflanum „Að segja söguna“ fer ég síðan yfir lykilatriði í lífi mínu, sem ég skipti í þrjú, um það bil 20 ára tímabil. Þriðji kaflinn er svo einskonar brú í ritgerðinni þar sem ég kynni stoðirnar þrjár (búddisma, sálfræði og aktívisma). Að lokum kynni ég í kaflanum „Að skilja söguna“ hugtakarammann sem skapaður er af stoðunum þremur, auk menntunar, og notaðar eru til að skoða og skilja þau þemu sem ég greindi.

Ég hef stuðst við sögulega frásögn við að setja fram og íhuga annál lífs míns og hvernig þessar vitsmunalegu stoðir eiga sér allar rætur í ákveðinni reynslu. Ég skil núna að menningin sem er afhjúpuð smátt og smátt í rannsókn minni á eigin ævi er engin önnur en menntunarmenningin sjálf.

Með því að nota mikið af ljósmyndum og sögum frá 60+ árum, frá New York til Japan, frá Warner Bros. kvikmyndum til sjúkrahúsprests, afhjúpa ég flókin feril manns sem tókst á við margar óþægilegar breytingar í lífi sínu en var alltaf áhugasamur um nám og skuldbundinn því að hjálpa öðrum.

Þó að virkur búddismi sameini það sem kallað er aktívismi við grunnreglur búddisma í einstakri samsetningu, studdi fyrra nám mitt og starf í sálfræði einnig þennan þroskaferil minn. Ég áttaði mig á að búddismi, sálfræði og aktívismi voru ekki einu stöðirnar sem knúðu áfram þroska minn. Menntun kom þar einnig við sögu, einkum þegar ég fór að gera mér betri grein fyrir að menntun var samnefnari þessara stöða. Þessar þrjár stöðir voru samtvinnaðar menntun alveg frá upphafi og mynduðu samsettan aktívista-kennara, sem ég nefni Virkjara, sem endurspeglar djúp áhrif umhyggjusamra og einlægra leiðbeinenda sem hafa gegnt mikilvægu hlutverki í lífi mínu. Trú mín á mannúð, að styðja aðra til að tileinka sér hana, ber vitni um gagnkvæman kærleika.

Abstract

For over 50 years, I have been studying, teaching, counseling, and rallying people in three distinct arenas: Engaged Buddhism, psychology, and activism. I have long referred to these as my pillars as I felt they upheld my intellectual development. I now realize that each of these pillars is fundamentally educational by nature, and that therefore, I have been both a lifelong learner as well as a teacher in a variety of settings. My initial doctoral research focused on educational transformation among learners participating in the University of Iceland's International Studies in Education Program (ISE) in which I had been a B.A. student. I realized, however, that I was in a constant dialogue with myself; more personal and captivating topics that were part of my own journey arose, such as why was learning, formal, informal, and non-formal, such an important part of my life and what led me here? Thus, my journey in education became the main topic of my doctoral research. The purpose was to offer my personal story for further investigation and study. The present work, a heuristic autoethnography, focuses on my life in a variety of educational settings and how each of those pillars became increasingly integrated in my life.

This dissertation is in five parts: Prologue: The Accidental Heurist, Telling the Story, Framing the Story, Understanding the Story, and Epilogue: The Path of My Experience.

In *The Accidental Heurist* I introduce the work and the process of determining autoethnography as best suited to the research questions raised. In *Telling the Story* I review key aspects of my life in three roughly 20-year periods. *Framing the Story* serves as a bridge in the work and in it, I introduce the Three Pillars. Finally, in *Understanding the Story*, I use the conceptual framework created by the three pillars, plus education, to examine and understand the identified themes. I used an historical, narrative approach in presenting a reflexive chronicle of my life, describing the ways those intellectual pillars all grew out of specific experiences. I now understand that the culture being uncovered bit by bit in the study of my life is none other than the culture of education itself.

Making extensive use of photographs and stories from New York City to Japan, from Warner Bros. Pictures to hospital chaplaincy, I uncover the complex trajectory of someone whose life endured many discomfiting changes but who always retained an enthusiastic embrace of learning and a commitment to helping others learn, too. While Engaged Buddhism unites what is called activism with Buddhist principles in a unique combination, my prior studies and work in psychology also supported this journey. I

realized that Buddhism, psychology, and activism were not single pillars that held aloft my development to which education was then added. Instead, these four clusters were interconnected from the very beginning, producing a combined activist - educator, I name an Activator, a reflection of the deep influence of caring and committed mentors who have played crucial roles throughout my life. My belief in this humanistic drive to assist others in becoming whole, in becoming more human, is a testament to the value of their love for me and is mirrored in my own love for the students with whom I work and whose life stories brought them here.

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PROLOGUE:

THE ACCIDENTAL HEURIST

Creating the study

*“We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long,
but it bends toward justice.”*

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“My last semester as a student in the BA in International Studies in Education Program (ISE), was going to be the end of my life in Iceland. I would soon get a BA in education, the last credential I needed for employment overseas. I would be teaching English again, just as I did more than 20 years before, when I lived in Japan. And though I already had another BA (in religious studies), two MAs (in Buddhist studies, and psychology) and had done doctoral work in psychology up to a first draft of a dissertation, this final degree would enable me to make more money than I had ever been able to here in Iceland. But it meant leaving my kids and sending money home. Just like my father did out of necessity so many years before. ‘What the Hell am I doing?’ I asked myself constantly, hating every second of that plan which was so near coming true.

But, as luck, or Fate would have it, that was not to be.”

There are many ways to tell a story. In 1974, French filmmaker, Claude Lelouche released *And Now My Love* (French title, *Toute une vie*), a love story told in a most unconventional manner. Instead of the typical “boy meets girl, they fall in love, and live happily ever” after narrative, LeLouche began his movie with the couple’s grandparents’ lives, and then their parents’ lives, carefully documenting the ways these prior generations intersected in such a way as to make the modern couple’s meeting inevitable. His movie ends with their fateful meeting.

I begin this project with an excerpt from my story at a time when I was ready to leave Iceland. Instead, I decided to stay, to begin a doctorate in a new field and in the process, I ended up here, with this very project. I will tell a story about my research journey, using my life to ground the research in a living, breathing manner. This is because, as a former chaplain, I was influenced by one of modern chaplaincy’s founders, Anton Boisen, who described people as “living human documents” (Boisen,

2005). He believed patients' lives must be engaged with in toto and likewise, I believe that examining the "document" of my entire life, as told through stories, photographs, and anecdotes contributes to the value of autoethnographic research in education. Education may be the last of my intellectual pursuits, but as will be seen, education has been there all along, the one uniting glue, holding all my diverse life interests, my three pillars of Buddhism, psychology, and activism, together. I refer to them as pillars because I saw them as upholding the structure of my life, from the foundations to the metaphorical roof. That perspective changed dramatically during the course of this research. This project explains how that realization came about: by accident.

In order to get here, to the present dissertation, I have made use of my own story, beginning 64 years ago and including various incidents which created me, to demonstrate that education has always been a present and vibrant force in my life. Along the way, I hope to uncover the vital role of the affective dimension in learning and education and to reveal its importance through the various movements of my life.

I tell this story by highlighting major events, documenting them with photographs taken throughout my life, sharing key episodes of interest, and an atypical storytelling narrative (the use of significant, thematically placed quotations, for example) so that my arrival into education can be seen, as in LeLouche's film, as the inevitable outcome of all that came before. I am here, at this point, because there can be no other ending to this process, and this process ends, as it began and was sustained throughout (unrecognized by me), in education.

One caveat is in order at this point. My use of the word education throughout this work should be understood and delimited as fundamentally meaning *learning*. However, neither formal, informal and non-formal learning alone encompasses the range of meanings I attribute to this concept. It is simply more accurate to say that learning, in formal, non-formal, and informal senses of the word, has dominated my intellectual and spiritual development and affected my life-skills, including cognitive and emotional learning. Learning is one of the most fascinating fields of research, with people crossing boundaries and deepening our understandings of our world and how to live in it. In my case, much of my learning was personal, informally cultivated on my own, formally enhanced while in school, and non-formally in a range of settings and situations. I also use the word *education* as I tell my stories and analyze my learning experiences.

In addition, as storytelling plays a vital historical role in Buddhism, I present my story as one which may, like so many Buddhist parables, offer some examples which might inspire others, not by suggesting that others attempt a parallel journey, but to instead pay attention to the unfolding nature of their own journey as one which continually

teaches, “updating” one’s assessments as the years pass and morphing into a deeper understanding of the process itself. Such openness to discovery exemplifies the heuristic nature of Life’s journey and my own was no exception. In my case, the three pillars served as guideposts whose importance shifted every so often, but it was only upon reflection years later, for this work, in fact, that I saw their unification within an educational context or frame.

These pillars (huge clusters, fields, or arenas¹ of often competing theories and expressions): Buddhism (Engaged Buddhism more specifically), psychology, and activism, were each created and folded into my life in a roughly chronological manner and are documented in that order here.

The “moral arc” mentioned by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. above, its spiritual call for a better world, represents for me *Buddhism* in its religious orientation and my introduction to it from a very early age. The series of traumatic events which characterized my earliest years introduce *psychology*, as I attempted to understand these events in an unemotional, clinical manner, partly indicative, I believe, of traumatic maladaptation. My continuing commitments to rectifying wrongs I perceived resulting from poverty, prejudice, and injustice, were the beginnings of an awakened *activist* stance in the world; with me wanting to heal wounds others have felt that I knew all too well myself. Each represents the core threads which connect my life but, as we shall see, it is education which has run through them all.

These influences are now seen as an integral part of my self-journey as a researcher and valuable to the field of education in which I am a part of and engaged in studying.

Throughout the dissertation, a unifying theoretical theme is uncovered, one that incorporates my tripartite intellectual influences and the educational theories which inform each. By these “educational theories” I am referring first (and perhaps most importantly) to Buddhism’s use of spiritual instruction to develop and foster the ability to uncover one’s inherently awakened nature. For psychology, this refers to a similar attempt to assist others in awakening to healthier dynamics of living that the individual can use for their own psychological growth. Lastly, in activism, there is a component of

¹ Note that the words fields, arenas, and clusters are used somewhat interchangeably throughout the text to describe what I call my *pillars*. This is because, depending upon the frame I use at the time, these pillars may be seen as 1. A singularly large intellectual space (akin to an open field which is expansive and holds many different elements such as people, sports paraphernalia, etc.), 2. An arena (an enclosed space which within holds different participants and audience members), or 3. A cluster (a group of competing units or teams). Thus, when I say *pillar*, I am looking at them as foundational structures which uphold my life, but they can be seen as more fluid supports of a different nature.

educating others about historical and systemic injustices or inequities against which we can then collectively create more just and sustainable social ways of living together. The three formally came together in my involvement in Engaged Buddhism, a field in which I took an MA degree, and which led to my work as a chaplain.

Finally, I began my educational journey at the University of Iceland as a BA student in the International Studies in Education program and somewhat hesitantly moved into the doctorate program where I am now a doctoral candidate and occasional Lecturer. This dissertation is an effort to understand that journey through education as part of the wider journey that education often travels, from the head, down to the heart, and out onto the world. The role this affective dimension of education played in my own life is also acknowledged as universally critical in the education process.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography refers to “a form of critical self-study in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience” (Hughes, Pennington and Makris, 2012, p. 209) using their observations of a phenomenon or group and bringing both the researcher and the researched subject together in one project.

In addition, Sparkes (2000) has described autoethnographies as “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (p. 21). While I believe my work here to be of sociological value, it is *its educational relevance* that I am most concerned with. Nevertheless, while recognizing its ostensible value, I am a diffident autoethnographer. Throughout this process, I realized that I remained wedded to a notion of the researcher as a somewhat distant figure, if not one as above, at least some careful distance away from their research subject, documenting with evidence and objective precision what that subject is and how it relates to the researcher’s research question(s). The idea of turning that observational lens onto myself neither appealed to me at the outset nor was it easy to envision this as a valid project.

So, how did I approach autoethnography? I began to read as many different autoethnographies from many different fields and perspectives as I could (for example, Burdell, and Swadener, 1999; Chang, 2008; Drew, 2023; Herrmann, and Adams, 2022; Knapp, 2017; Lynch, and Kuntz, 2019; Pace, 2012; Quicke, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Tien, 2019).

I then found Keleş’ *Writing a “Good” Autoethnography in Educational Research: A Modest Proposal* (2022) (Figure 1) a good place to begin creation of my own autoethnography. He includes five ways to enter and evaluate the world of autoethnography and begins by first dividing it into two poles on a spectrum.

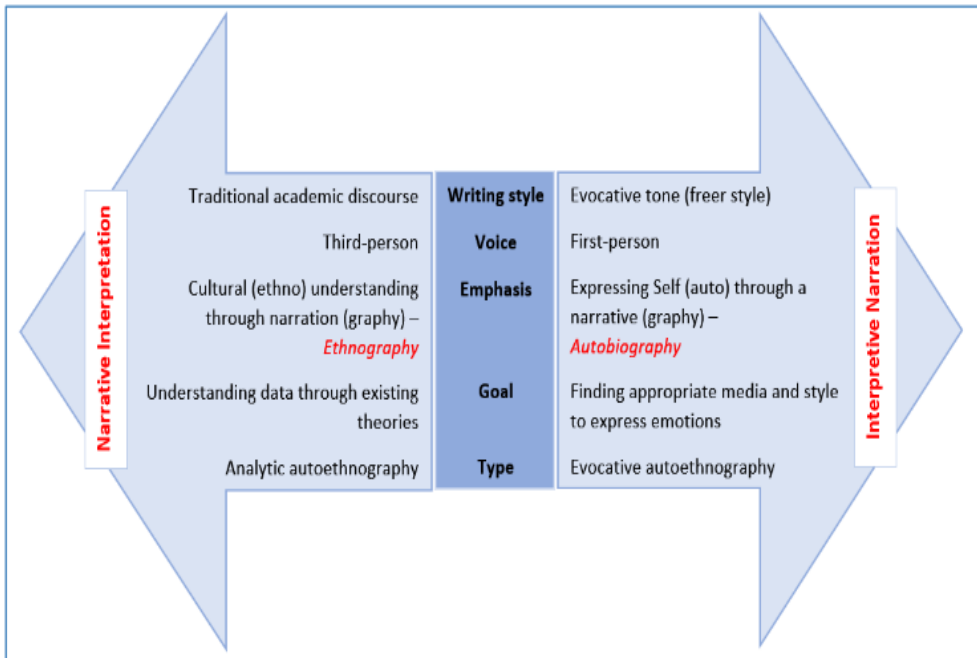


Figure 1: Determining an autoethnographic direction: *Autoethnographic Spectrum* taken from Keleş (2022) p. 2028:

On one side is “narrative interpretation” and on the other, “interpretive narration,” bisected by differences in “writing style,” “voice,” “emphasis,” “goal” and “type”. The former is more traditionally academic, third person, focused on narration but analytic, while the latter is more evocative (“freer style”), first person oriented and expresses the self through autobiography. Within that schema, I stood firmly in the middle, somewhere between wanting to be personally evocative while also struggling to come to a “cultural understanding through narration”. Continuing his examination of what would make a good autoethnography though, Keleş (2022) then lists a number of descriptions, “thinking like an ethnographer, writing like a novelist”, “Understand self to understand others”, “[creating] an unfolding story of a life that points backward into the past and forward into the future”, “a provocative weave of story and theory” and more. These descriptions summarize many current autoethnographers’ views on the topic. Finally, he offers his own set of criteria, applicable to any form of autoethnography, though he cautions these are totally subjective and thus only suggestions. They are six in number:

create a sense of transformation through a story of illumination, healing, understanding, and/or learning; engage readers as a companion rather than passive audience through commonalities and particularities; go beyond personal confessions by mindfully offering autobiographical and

background information; use appropriate tools and sources and explain why using them makes sense; denaturalize social issues by making invisible power dynamics visible; and embrace the subjectivity of the memory and interpretation (Keleş, p. 2022).

I felt this list an excellent, if difficult, starting point for my intended project and then determined to search through the different forms of autoethnography hoping to find one which would suit my interests, and my story (as well as my style of telling that story) best. Ultimately, I came to agree with Dashper (2016) that a good autoethnography “transcends the individual by ‘focusing both outwards on social and cultural aspects of the experience and inwards, exposing a vulnerable self that transcends the socio-cultural’” (p. 215).

The forms of autoethnography examined in this project

According to Poulos, autoethnography is an observational, participatory, and reflexive research method that uses:

writing about the self in contact with others to illuminate the many layers of human social, emotional, theoretical, political, and cultural praxis (i.e., action, performance, accomplishment) ... In other words, autoethnography is an observational data-driven phenomenological method of narrative research and writing that aims to offer tales of human social and cultural life that are compelling, striking, and evocative (showing or bringing forth strong images, memories, or feelings). (2021, p. 5)

I thought my story was compelling enough and pertinent to education. I looked at the many forms of autoethnography and four were considered relevant for this study:

[1] *narrative ethnographies* [which] incorporate the ethnographer’s experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others ... [2] *reflexive ethnographies* [which] document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork ... [3] *layered accounts* ... [which] often focus on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature ...[and] [4] *personal narratives* ... stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives...” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, 17-19 [emphasis added]).

From those four, I selected elements from each, initially creating a *reflexive, layered account* of my life (primarily around the issue of parental attempted suicide and its effects on children), using *analytic*² as well as *narrative* autoethnographic methods and an *evocative* style. I chose autoethnography realizing that only by inclusion of myself as a legitimate part of the research, as someone who understood the dynamics of the program in an intimate way as both student and now teacher, could I use the formative elements of my academic and intellectual life which I regard as essential to the legitimacy of this project.

Crafting a heuristic autoethnography

In a typical *ethnography*, the researcher “studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). They “typically employ a relatively open-ended approach ... to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are to be studied ...finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves” (Hammersley, and Atkinson, 2007).

In *autoethnographies*, “every manuscript must use personal experience (*auto*); illuminate and interrogate cultural beliefs, practices, and identities (*ethno*); and take the craft of representation seriously (*graphy*)” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2022, p. 11). Each autoethnography not only “foregrounds the *author’s* personal experience and reflections” by “seeking to tell a carefully written, vibrant story that revels in rich description”, but also, “embraces how personal experience is infused with cultural norms and expectations” engaging in “rigorous self-reflection – often referred to as ‘reflexivity’ – in order to identify and interrogate the intersections between self and social life” (Adams, Jones and Ellis, pp. 3-4).

Nevertheless, despite strict adherence to using a proper and articulate delineation (*graphy*) that joins the self (*auto*) to a specific culture (*ethno*) in a careful examination, one prominent critic of the use of autoethnography to describe related works that lack that triple combination of elements (such as a *reflexive analysis*, or a *confessional*), admits that, “[t]here is no one definitive form or containing category of autoethnography owned by individual scholars regarding how it should be done, or how it should be represented” (Sparkes, 2020, pp. 291-292 [emphasis added]).

² “[A]nalytic autoethnography refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.” (Anderson, 2006, p. 375)

In addition, the weight given to any one of the three main components may differ significantly as “the emphasis on each may vary with a project,” as might be the case in this work which “foreground[s] personal experience (auto) and evocative representation (graphy) but may [only] implicitly reference extant research or discern patterns of social interaction (ethno)” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, p. 14). I will obviously leave such an assessment to the readers, stressing only that there is, and should be, considerable space given for the expansion of autoethnography into new ways of implementation and presentation.

As autoethnography’s use expanded, its forms changed as well as its concerns. These have come to include “analytic, Black feminist, collaborative, critical, evocative, impressionistic, indigenous, interpretive, meta, performative, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic” (Sparkes, 2020, p. 292) autoethnographies. Where I fit along this scale, I remain unsure of although psychoanalytic, as well as evocative, critical, and other elements are used.

In the present work, the stages I went through to examine my life story for patterns that were relevant to the research I began at the ISE were the basis of the original research plans. In the following figure, I show them as first *creating*, then *deciding*, *exploring*, *wondering*, and finally, *realizing*. The last stage pointed to an unexpected form of autoethnography (Figure 2).

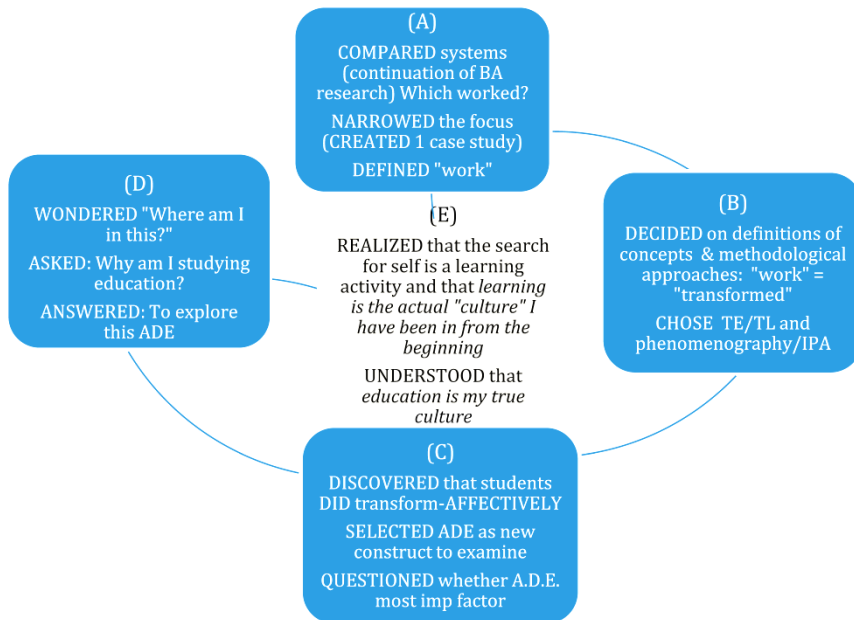


Figure 2: My five stages of research

- (A) CREATING
- (B) DECIDING
- (C) EXPLORING
- (D) WONDERING
- (E) REALIZING

Explanation of the five stages

- A. In the initial stages of the project, continuing the work I had begun during the BA seemed the logical choice. I would keep examining several systems of education and attempt to *create* a new, more extended investigation of these systems in order to determine what "worked" about them. We decided on the ISE and perhaps one other to look at in the end.
- B. In this stage, we (I along with Allyson) began *deciding* on strategies, concepts, and methodologies. What was meant by "worked" equaled "transformed". Transformation, good or bad, was key, so Transformative Education/Transformative learning would be used to frame the research. In order to capture the lived experience of transformation, phenomenography (to determine differences in descriptions) and

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (to examine commonalities in descriptions of transformation) were selected.

- C. Discovering that students in ISE DID transform, particularly *affectively*, made us turn our attention to the *affective dimension of education* (A.D.E.) as a construct for us to examine further, *exploring* whether it was the most important factor.
- D. It was here at this point that I began to *wonder* about my role in the research and to believe that it should have some place and that it did have relevance to my course of study here, as well as in every other place I'd studied. I asked, "*why am I studying education?*" answering that it was to explore this A.D.E. but feeling inside that the connection, and the question, went much deeper.
- E. After the autobiographical material was written and the form of the research to follow became clearer, I *realized* something big: that *my search for self is itself a learning activity and that learning is the actual "culture" I have been in from the beginning* and carry with me wherever I go. In fact, education is my true culture, the only one I have ever truly felt at home in. I had discovered "Me", a core me which had been involved in education from the very beginning.

My stages were different, but, I believe, meshed somewhat well with those of Moustakas' six stages of heuristic research (1990).

1. Creating 2. Deciding	1. Initial engagement
3. Exploring	2. Immersion 3. Incubation
4. Wondering	4. Illumination
5. Realizing	5. Explication 6. Creative synthesis

Moustakas' stages proceed from the initial formation of a research question related to a subject or topic of interest to the researcher and should be something that concerns the researcher to the point of inspiring them to delve deeply into it in pursuit of answers. In my case, an initial question concerning transformation began the doctoral inquiry, but the gaze soon turned inwards towards a subjective examination of the

researcher. I created an initial study program but decided on another as the study progressed. For Moustakas, this parallels the *initial engagement* and *immersion/incubation* phases wherein, upon consideration of the problem the value of new questions or directions are recognized and pondered. The next stage for Moustakas, *illumination*, reflects “a change in perception of the subject of inquiry” (Kenny, 2012, p. 8) which for me entailed a deep reconsideration of whether I should redo the entire project, or continue a track I had already felt weakened by new insights into the importance of my own journey in the research trajectory itself. Lastly, in *explication* and *creative synthesis*, Moustakas’ stages corresponded to my own realization that a dramatic shift in focus should occur and that a newly devised but related topic should be the focus in which all the former aspects of the initial plan were subsumed, for example, the affective dimension of education, and transformative learning, into a newer configuration.

During this process, however, I wondered, how do I classify this work which continually expands into areas I have not planned for? To help me answer that particular question, I reviewed several related qualitative research strategies. These included *action research*, *double-loop learning*, *hermeneutics*, and *heuristic research*.

Action research is defined as “a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action” in which the researcher “proceeds in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1946, pp. 35, 38). This was helpful in terms of describing part of the discovery *process*, but such was an after-the-fact effect. The difficulty with viewing the work here as action research relates mainly to intentionality. I originally entered doctoral research to compare different educational systems in several countries, only to narrow the focus to ISE solely with an eye to investigating transformation in learning only. I did not expect to discover that confirmation of transformation among the interviewees would lead to me looking at my own transformation nor examine the various cultures in which my own education, formal and non-formal, took place. While I may have hoped whatever it was that I was doing would help the ISE program, it was not part of my intended goals.

Putnam (2014) describes Argyris’ “double loop learning” model (Figure 3) as a “re-framing how we define situations, how we construct our role, and what we take to be desirable outcomes” and more specifically as “behavioral learning that changes the governing variables (values, norms, goals) of one’s theory-in-use, the theory of action that can be inferred from behavior” (Double-loop learning, 2014). This felt closer to my arrangement as it seemed to mirror the sequential process above. In fact, in Figure 2 above we could say that in the gap between stages D and E, examining the affective dimension of education to see where that goes, represented what could be said to be

the beginning of the second loop in the process, leading outward away from the original plan and towards a newfound task and subsequent discovery. This felt closer, but again, it showed me *how* I did things, not *why*.

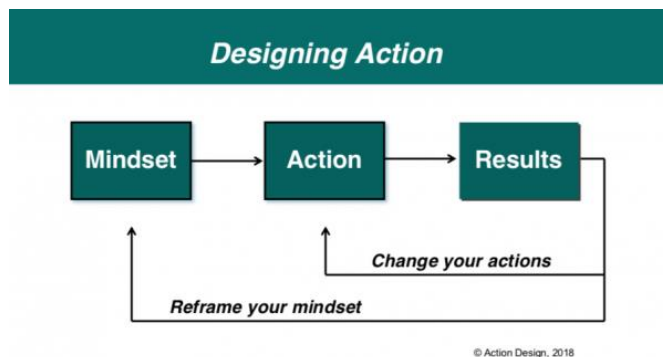


Figure 3: Looking at different research strategies: The double-loop process from <https://actiondesign.com/resources/readings/double-loop-learning>

I entered this project with the inherent belief that the lived experience was of great value, perhaps more so than any interpretive reflection a post hoc intellectual portrayal of experience provides. Nevertheless, I was extremely reticent to reveal my own history for fear the youthful vulnerabilities I suffered might reflect badly on my currently well-constructed sense of self as competent, insightful, and wise, even. As I began to reflect upon the research into ISE after assembling the interviews, I felt the stirrings of a realization that suggested the separation of my own background from the project was unnecessarily limiting. As we continued and made note of this affective dimension in the recollections of the students' experiences in the program, this inner call became stronger as I saw my own experiences through school as affectively rooted, more than that which accompanies intellectual curiosity and the joys of discovering that one can reason and reflect and achieve some pride in knowing new things as a result.

In this way I began unfolding new meanings from the initial writings I was doing until it culminated in acceptance of my own journey into ISE as a major part of the experience. Without really knowing it, I was both engaging in a *hermeneutic* exercise of creating a narrative and as I did so, and *re-read what I had written*, revealing new interpretations of that narrative that I had not considered before. As Bruner (1996) notes, "What does it mean to say that the comprehension of a narrative is hermeneutic? ...[I]t implies that no story has a single, unique construal" (p. 137). Continuing in this manner I found that the process of recollection, compiled via my own memories and assisted by informal interviews and deep, recent conversations with my mother, brother, and sister, was creating a narrative of a person I knew, but of someone whose experiences were different than I sometimes initially recalled. Many of the earliest events of my life were seriously traumatic and left deep wounds I had not

considered before in any formal way. But in this revealing process, new insights took hold.

As mentioned elsewhere, I realized that while researching my life in education it became clear that *my life in education was the main story*. It united the different stages of my life as well as the investigation I was undertaking. This circular process of recollection, recording, reflecting, and then realizing new interpretations of the narrative continued and is described as the “hermeneutic circle” (Figure 4). This approach focuses, however, primarily on *textual* interpretation and reinterpretation.

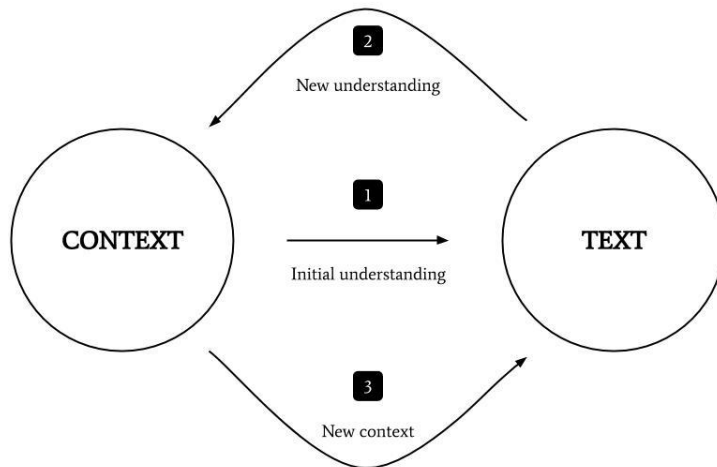


Figure 4: Looking at different research strategies, 2: The hermeneutic circle

But something else was occurring related to a different philosophical orientation. It wasn't just the text I was writing that was opening up. I was seeing something new within me, discovering elements that I had neither anticipated nor planned for. Another realization began, connected to a different attempt to understand human experience. While I was looking at the text I was writing, it was my life that I was examining, not a set of separated past events to look at, but *a continuing lived experience of being who I am*.

I continued writing with this on my mind and in this desire to fulfill proper standards for autoethnography, and, though willing to stretch its limits as needed, I realized a far bigger element than I had originally conceived: the very culture I thought I was looking for to fulfill this *ethno* aspect of autoethnography was *not* the different *national* cultures of countries like Japan, or Iceland, the smaller sub-cultures of *schools* in New York City or Miami, Wisconsin, or elsewhere, nor even the *ethnic* cultures I belonged to,

rejected, took on, absorbed, or later reclaimed such as “Puertorican,” “Latino”, “Zen Buddhist”, “Japanophile”, “activist”, “labor union president”, etc. No. my constant immersion in educational *environments* was the key. In each enterprise I undertook, I wanted to learn, and then teach others.

The *culture of education* (stage E) was the one culture I have always belonged to. Not education in the exclusively formal, institutionalized kind, though, of course, schools and universities were included. No, it was only in moving from one learning environment to another that I felt safe, I felt my own promise, I felt part of a world I conceived of as ideal, where reason and concern for growth flourished and as such, I could be a competent contributor to that “world” when I was in school or learning/teaching. *Education, more specifically, learning, was and is my culture.* This culture of education refers to a continual process of explicitly and implicitly attempting to acquire knowledge, skills, and hoping to learn from my experiences and be transformed by them. This process is both formal and informal. It is characterized by a constant seeking out for such an environment to create a more holistic balance of values, and viewpoints, which are then allowed to be safely questioned and revised continuously in the face of new experiences and new information.

This realization, though assisted by a somewhat hermeneutical process of textual writing and reading only to re-read and reinterpret, was actually a *heuristic* one. This is because, in “heuristic inquiry, transformation happens because the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and thus has direct access to and intimate involvement with whatever is *emerging throughout the course of the study*” (Sultan, 2019, p. 13 [Emphasis added]). Heuristic research is not only “phenomenologically aligned” but “process and content focused” and “discovery-oriented” (p. 5), encouraging new, emergent interpretations to arise from the process of research itself. What had emerged in my case was a startling new understanding of the *culture* I was examining, revealing that *the learning environments I had continuously participated in were the culture* I had been studying. I had inadvertently entered heuristic research domains, creating, in effect, a *heuristic autoethnography*.

In approaching autoethnography I was also inspired by the notion that “new ways of doing scholarship” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis, 2022, p. 11) were possible with it. I didn’t want to indulge in the “excesses of objectivity” (p. 44) that are so prevalent in other forms of writing but at the same time I did not anticipate the deep, looping process of discovery that was obtained in using autoethnography to write about my life in education. I conceived of a two-part division: at first planning on one style of writing for the more biographical material, a more personal tone, for example, and then carry on by more “objectively” writing about the various theories and personalities that served as inspiration for the project. I wanted there to be a strict separation of

narrative styles. As I did so I noticed a diminishing of authenticity and Allyson commented a number of times that “it seemed like there were two of you”. I had to return to reconceive, and in many parts rewrite, the material so that it read differently. I did this deliberately fearing it might take away from the weighty questions of validity and theoretical depth, but I was guided by a sense that only by continuing the personally revelatory manner and conversational tone could I both maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of the research as an autoethnography.

Adoption of autoethnography was a reluctantly made decision in no small part because of its first-person orientation. I am not shy, but I am reticent to reveal much of my personal life and in an autoethnography it is precisely my personal life (as encased within a specific culture) that is examined. However, in autoethnographies, the “based unit of analysis is *you*, the author, and the researcher” (Cooper, and Lilyea, 2022, p. 198 [emphasis in original]) ... “[it] is a narrative form of research writing because the researcher “[i]ndividually or collaboratively...[uses] narrative dialogue, self-study/autobiographical and memory work to construct stories of their own experiences” (p. 197).

In this project, I sought for and have found my own way. It is not a simple critical analysis of a specific group; a phenomenographic examination of differences in the lived experiences of transformation among a group of international students; an autoethnographic rundown of my life, its traumas and other events which led me to Iceland and, subsequently to ISE and a doctorate in education. Nor is it a straightforward doctoral project with broad theoretical underpinnings in the three dominant spheres of my intellectual life: Buddhism, political activism, and psychology, with education serving as the unifying thread and critical analysis that binds these disparate fields together. It is, instead, a cautiously entered into attempt to use my life and its various professional and personal facets and to speak about how and why education is so important to me and how I believe it is, in its broadest sense, our collective hope for the future.

I am not so self-centered as to desire to write about myself. I have no hesitation to write and speak about what I think about, but it has been the hardest project of my academic life to actually write this much and in this much detail about myself. Yet I remain convinced that something in my life is of value to this discussion and I have attempted here to demonstrate it and indicate that the through line in that story is that the compassionate concern that yearns to bring out the best in others as was done for me, has inspired the same in me for others. My life is a path, not one foreordained, but one lived and altered as circumstances required and this creation of a “path of my experience” hopefully contributes to the field of education through its detailing and reflection on the life of one person immersed in the culture of learning and education

throughout his life. And perhaps some of that formula, that particular combination of, first and foremost, Buddhist compassion as represented in its drive to benefit all sentient beings, in psychology's drive to understand and then develop the humanistic vision of assisting each to fulfill their highest potential, and finally, the activist goal of stirring the hearts of people to nurture their sense of justice and fairness in an attempt to create a better world, can be replicated in others. For, as we Buddhists pray, the benefit of all sentient beings. It is my hope that, barring that ambitious wish, it may at least be recognized.

The structure and approach of the present work

The remainder of this dissertation has three main parts.

In *Telling the Story*, I begin the autoethnographic study of my life in a chronological manner, in three chapters, roughly two decades at a time.

Chapter one concerns the years 1959-1980, my most formative period and gives some background to my family's ethnic and cultural heritage. The narrative is at first focused on relationships and events within the family circle moving outwards over time.

Gradually, certain themes and connections are highlighted, including the introduction of psychology.

In chapter two, I review the years from 1980-2000, as Buddhism and activism came to form essential parts of my identity, and this period includes my five years in Japan. Both my study and work life experiences, in the United States and in Japan, move into the frame. It was during this time that I began Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) which was to have a major influence on my life and my views about how Buddhism should be practiced and how I could be with people more authentically. Those years in chaplaincy were pivotal, representing the most significant educationally related transformation in my life and a turning point in who I have become.

Chapter three, *My Last 20 Years*, covers the time in which I came to Iceland and eventually entered the International Studies in Education program. It features my studies in psychology at Saybrook University as I advanced to my dissertation stage only to have to leave prematurely. It also contains a history of the ISE program and a summary of the research we (my supervisor and I) did. In these sections, I will be describing the work at ISE and the educationally relevant ideas from Buddhism, activism, and psychology which formed my life and personal teaching style, (interspersed with more biographical material) so that gradually, an integrated picture of my life and its diverse but complementary strands, all linked to the educational purpose intent in this research will be presented.

It is in this last period, while I have been in Iceland, that education emerges as a fourth pillar. I will be reflecting upon the dynamics which were formative in my intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social development and which have coalesced into what I believe to be an interesting and valuable admixture, worthy of examination and contributing to the fields of both education and of autoethnography.

In *Framing the Story*, I have inserted *My Three Pillars* which gives an initial look at these important factors plus education.

Understanding the Story, begins with chapter five and the conceptual frames upon which the research was founded. In the remainder of this section, I speak of the methodologies and theories which inform the research, giving greater attention to, 1., people who were most influential, 2., the historical influences (the various schools of Buddhism I was a member of for example), 3., the psychological theories I was influenced by, and 4., the institutions and causes I was most active in during my years as labor leader and social justice activist. Chapter six centers on education and the aspects of education most important for the research.

What will be different in the following two chapters will be the focus on people. We do not just learn from books; we learn from contact with others. Teachers and students, mentors and mentees are all in a relationship and learning is not only the exchange of the contents of expertise. It is in human interaction that learning takes place, and this may be likened to a dance. One does not generally dance alone. One engages with a learning partner, so to speak, in which during the process, information, facts, or expertise is exchanged and assimilated.

Thus, in chapters seven and eight, the literature reviewed there is often twinned with the persons whose lives intersected with mine and whose presence, as much as expertise in their respective fields, transformed me. It was through these human encounters that the transmission of the greatest bulk of the knowledge I now possess in each of these arenas occurred. In Buddhism, via my teachers and fellow practitioners, in psychology, through professors and other exemplars of their respective specialties, in activism, via the people who not only wrote but lived in ways that reflected their beliefs, and most continuously, in education through my many teacher-mentors, and students. They are all "living human documents" and it was through them I learned and became who I am today.

Discussions are included at the end of several chapters and chapter sections as reflective interludes within the narrative to both recap important insights gleaned from the preceding material and to serve as connectors to what follows.

In chapter ten, Review & Reflection, and chapter eleven, Final Themes, I present the dénouement to the project.

In keeping with the heuristic orientation of the project, however, I end with an Epilogue offering the reader a twist in its questioning of my interpretations.

Lastly, following the References, The ISE Project examines the originally intended ISE research (Appendix A) and a list of material which served to inform the work here, though not directly cited, is included in Supplemental Readings (Appendix B).

There are four diverse topics which are each directly linked to relevant sections within the main body and contribute further to the story and the context in which the story should be read. *Trauma, learning, and a call for something new* (7.6) opens the issue of trauma and its significance in my life and is near the end of the section on psychology. The important role of visual representations in both Buddhism and my life is highlighted in *Maps, mandalas, and matrices* (6.3). Finally, *'The Trinity of Affinity'* (7.7), which ends the chapter on psychology, elaborates on the Three Streams hypothesis of Eugene Taylor (2009) which explains my own epistemological orientations within the Existential-Humanistic and Transpersonal framework contained in his history of psychology.

The uses of critical analysis

In much of my prior academic work, I used critical analysis in various attempts to unify, in different combinations, the main themes (Buddhism, activism, psychology, and education) and discoveries (affective dimension of education) I have made throughout the years, and which are now relevant to this work.

While autoethnography serves as both the dominant method and methodology used in this dissertation, and Engaged Buddhism, psychology, activism, and education frames that serve as the complementary methodologies which arose at varying points to influence my life, critical analysis plays a basic role throughout each. According to one rather simple definition,

critical analysis refers to the method of evaluating and interpreting a concept, a piece of work, or a situation in an objective and analytical way. It involves the examination of various elements of a subject to gain a deeper understanding and develop a valid interpretation or judgment. It's not just about identifying the subject's strengths and weaknesses, but

also understanding the underlying implications, assumptions, and context³.

Both in the telling and in the understanding of my story, thoughtful consideration as to what occurred followed by interpreting that material in order to gain insights were essential in order to bring this work to its current form. Critical analysis was the approach I took to record and then examine one theme to another, or different frames of reference and to then, as I discovered new aspects to each event or period to attempting to understand what it all meant. My past uses of critical analysis might be instructive and of some use here.

My Naropa MA thesis, named *From Applause to Affect*, documented the movement away from a stilted and overly intellectual approach to pastoral care, to a way of being that brought me into presence and the ability to help others empathetically, from the heart. I examined my interactions at the beginning of the program and compared them to the ways they changed over the course of that crucial first unit of CPE: greater empathetic presence, fewer mini lectures about suffering, a strengthened reliance on presence versus presentation. My experiences in CPE, their cultural ethos of care and healing in a Christian context, forced me to reconcile my Buddhist faith with a less cerebral approach to its doctrines which, after all, addressed suffering quite eloquently. I documented how deep consideration of this overly intellectual approach was not necessarily a fault of Buddhism but instead the result of how I had used Buddhism. I wrote about this transformation which was due in no small measure to this immersion in a learning culture of care.

My Saybrook MA thesis was *A critical analysis of a Buddhist meditation-based somatic counseling program*, and it was based upon the counseling groups I had been leading here in Iceland where I taught four different forms of Buddhist meditation alongside group sessions that involved physical, proprioception exercises (See footnote 30). I looked at the creation of the group form as well as content, included evaluation forms filled out by the members, and assessed its potential for future iterations (which I did for several years afterwards). My years at Saybrook inspired two other pieces with relevance here. Two papers I had written were considered by the respective professors as worthy of publication and, with some rewriting they became my first two peer-reviewed articles: *Money Cannot Be Eaten: Nonviolent Resistance in Struggles Over Land and Economic Survival* (Tirado, 2011), and *The Buddhist Notion of Emptiness and its Potential Contribution to Psychology and Psychotherapy* (Tirado, 2008). As can be seen, both are reflective of different interests, politics in the first, Buddhism in the second, but they demonstrate that I have been writing about these fields for years now

³ <https://mythesis.academy/dictionary/what-is-critical-analysis/>

and yet have kept them relatively separate investigations until very recently (*Buddhism's Non-Preferential Problem*, Tirado, 2018). I have, throughout the various publications I have submitted to, attempted to maintain a critical distance through the use of personal anecdotes when needing to make a larger point. Using a first-person narrative to examine my own growth and development and then to maintain an open enough researcher stance to incorporate newfound discoveries, represents a new form of writing for me.

The use of critical analysis was also a major part of my unfinished Saybrook PhD. Each of the three required essays before having to leave the program employed a careful analysis of a selected topic. The first essay was a methodological critique of a dissertation on the origins of human subject research for spaceflight. The second began the research for my proposed thesis and was a literature review of meditation research done until 2010, and the third was a critical analysis of the insufficiencies in psychological testing and preparation for extended stays in space. There was, and remains, a noticeable dearth of psychological evaluation and even less training in the event of individual or group psychologically stressful events (both of which have occurred). I titled this last essay *The black holes in space medicine* to highlight this deficit of psychological research into the effects of long-term spaceflight.

During my time in Saybrook, two research papers I had submitted in two different courses were singled out by my professors as worthy of expansion and submission for peer review. The first, *The Buddhist Notion of Emptiness and its Potential Contribution to Psychology and Psychotherapy* (2008) hypothesized the relevance and value to psychotherapy of the Buddhist concept *śūnyatā*, or emptiness. I suggested that the nature of self-identity is existentially more malleable than we perhaps accept, and that emptiness might be helpful in cutting through neurotic attachment to an egotistic self that too often leads to socio-pathologies. Buddhist meditation, which acts as a deconstructive exercise in part, can be helpful in reducing unhealthy ego patterning, I suggested.

The second work, *Money Cannot Be Eaten* (2011), examined the efficacy of non-violent resistance to encroachments on land and indigenous resources by local populations in history, concentrating in the 20th century. As I had been long involved in several indigenous struggles albeit from a distance, I wanted to learn more about such conflicts elsewhere and used the writing to make a case that successful resistance need not always be violent to succeed. Both papers arose from my pillars: the first from Buddhism, the second, activism.

At the University of Iceland, my BA for the ISE program was *Critical pedagogy in action: a brief, comparative examination of educational systems in Bhutan and among the Zapatistas in Mexico* (Tirado, 2016 a). That work was the first time I had considered education as a field of study, but I wanted to see what worked in two very different cultural contexts. In this project, I compared and contrasted the form and structure of

the educational systems in these two very different societies, noting the greater stability in the bottom-up version created by the Zapatistas versus the ostensibly benign but top-down Buddhist system so praised by the West. It was this research that I had originally wanted to continue when I entered the doctoral program, expanding it by adding the Rojava community of Kurds. Nevertheless, I did continue critically examining the ISE program and that led to a series of fortuitous discoveries which have brought about the present autoethnography.

Positioning myself in the research

It has become rather commonplace for researchers to declare at the outset their own positionality vis-à-vis the research they present. The idea of positionality refers to “an individual’s worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). This involves ontological assumptions the researcher has about social reality, epistemological assumptions regarding how we know what we know and assumptions about our relationship to the social environment around us (Holmes, 2020). Declaring one’s positionality at the outset serves to allay concerns about hidden or unseen biases that might arise through unstated dimensions of the researcher unknown to readers. The researcher clearly states what position they take with regards to the subject the researcher is studying, the participants being studied, and the context of the research itself (Holmes, 2020). While such declarations do not provide fool-proof means to avoid unfair or mischaracterized descriptions of any of these dimensions, they do contextualize the researcher within the research.

At the same time, Campbell (2016) refers to this subjective immersion of the researcher as something which we are conditioned to regard seen as a “contaminant” but that “[i]t is our involvement in the study—not the precise replication of the event—which can provide strong theoretical insight” (p. 100). In order for the positionality statement to be accurate, the researcher is required to be reflexive about their cultural, political, social and other values that impact their perspective. Nevertheless, at the same time the researcher should acknowledge that “their positionality is never fixed and is always situation and context-dependent” (p. 2). The need to declare one’s positionality early in the research process “is the opposite of a positivistic conception of objective reality” because it suggests that “there is no way we can escape the social world we live in to study it” (p. 3).

Elements related to the ISE research, as it was abandoned in favor of the autoethnography, are examined briefly in other places within this text and will not be detailed here. Components related to positionality in that section, however, include, for example, my being older, male, somewhere in-between being a student and teacher, and all are mentioned both in the biographical section and in The ISE Project (Appendix A). With regards to my positionality within the larger project of

autoethnography, I should add several things not explicitly mentioned in Ethical Considerations.

When I speak of certain psychological dynamics which I attribute to others' behavior or which I undertook because of others' behavior, I am reconstructing the position of a child who felt responsible for certain situations I believed others were not assuming. This is, in part, the fundamental perspective from which I view the early events of my life: as taking on within myself a role akin to a caretaker, a wise-beyond-his-years child. This is wholly my own interpretation and should be seen in that light. Nevertheless, it colors my descriptions of others and, as a lens through which I see the world, is crucially determinative in how I record and reflect upon my life.

When I examine *my family*, I am an insider *emically* attempting to relate my family's dynamics as I understood them and to report faithfully as best I can an incident or anecdote with what I consider to be authenticity. When I *examine* my family, I am presuming a more *etic* stance wherein my status is ontologically suspended in the descriptions I give. Neither are mutually exclusive within an autoethnography, and both are acknowledged and sometimes entwined within the same description. "Researchers may straddle both positions ... [thus]... ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process is necessary" (Holmes, p. 7). Therefore, when I speak of my time in ISE, I am acknowledging my then-current student status while looking at that period through a researcher's lens acknowledging that even at the time I was an in-between figure, older and occasionally seen as more a teacher-colleague while simultaneously a fellow student involved in group projects and a regular participant in classwork. Depending upon the issue discussed, the assignment given, or the particular conversations held between students and/or our professors, my position was always changing.

In this work, using autoethnography rather than conducting a more traditionally ethnographic examination of ISE, led to unexpected discoveries forcing me to adjust my view of the role of education in my life. Not only did my position regarding research change, but the questions I was asking changed and the study transformed into one about the researcher, over the researcher's originally selected topic.

Several objective circumstances and a number of more subjective ones define my position with regards to the research done here. I am a man, 64 years old, a Puerto Rican-American, a poet, Buddhist, activist, socialist, and priest. I am a parent and a grandparent. I am also a psychologist by training, a writer by choice, an activist by conviction, and priest by calling. I am all these things and more. Perhaps the most salient reference point(s) by which to locate myself in this work is through Buddhism, however.

Buddhism has two fundamental roles in this work: first, via its theoretical structures which I use, and secondly, as the very position from which I construct this framework.

As a Buddhist, I operate under several important presuppositions about human beings relevant here. For example, I believe each person to have within them a seed of Buddhahood, that all of us are potential Buddhas and that therefore, it is an imperative to assist others in recognizing this so that they may awaken to this knowledge of themselves and transform. Accepting that others have this latent potential is to also acknowledge that I too possess it. In keeping with Mahayana Buddhist notions of interdependence and *bodhicitta*⁴, the aspiration for all beings to become awakened, I can only access this to the degree I have awakened this aspiration *for others*. To either wish Buddhahood for others without accepting that I too can achieve it or, conversely, to work towards my own awakening without simultaneously striving for other's benefit, are both untenable positions which are to be rejected. When I look out upon my students in a classroom, a client for counseling, a friend on a Messenger chat or even a worker at a store, I see a being who is innately capable of reaching the penultimate state as taught in my religious faith and who must therefore be accorded the honor of having this held in my heart, hoping that my treatment of or interaction with them in some way triggers or, at the very least, assists this transformational process in them. This is the most fundamental framework upon which I stand and construct my moral, ethical, and intellectual life.

I also use Buddhist perspectives as a lens to view other theoretical ideas and therefore, when examining education, or activism, or psychology, I apply this Buddhist lens to each, noting the areas of confluence or divergence and I make the attempt to inform each with such Buddhist ideals. For example, as an activist I had to frequently remind myself that my political opponents were not objects or "enemies" but simply people with opposing views (as well as potentially enlightened beings) and that I must acknowledge this always, softening any hostility or rigidly held onto viewpoints about them. In psychology, I found that what is called the "growth-oriented dimensions" of being human are wholly congruent with the aforementioned ideas about Buddhahood and that informing my practice with such is to complement the secular vista of a therapeutic encounter with a sacred element in all my interactions. And in education, each student is like a vibrant seedling yearning to grow into its own majesty and as a

⁴ "Bodhicitta (Skt.) ... An altruistic aspiration to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Bodhicitta is cultivated on the basis of certain mental attitudes, principal among them the development of love and great compassion towards all beings equally" (Coleman, 1993, p. 285).

teacher-fellow learner, I can offer my skills or knowledge and cultivate a space for them to grow into who they really are.

I hesitantly reveal personal details of my life among friends and colleagues therefore to do so within a publicly available academic project is a difficult process. Selection of autoethnography not only came late, but it also came only after deep reflection and the knowledge that it could not be carried it without a degree of openness that I otherwise would normally shy away from. This openness is informed and made possible by Buddhist teachings of diminishing one's ego in service to others.

Thus, I accept that only to the degree I can reveal my own self authentically in this work, can I achieve a primary ethico-religious commitment to be of benefit to others. As the notion of being "of benefit to all beings" is part of the vows I have taken, it must override my own reticence to reveal my inner failings or weaknesses in service to the proper creation of the best autoethnography I can submit. Adherence to this principle has been a difficult and repeatedly tested one during the course of the writing.

Lastly, admit that the positions I observe from, as well as my interpretations of those things or events which I witness are themselves somewhat relative notions which may fluctuate as I learn more from simply living. I believe that while our lives may be understood, "understanding" itself is essentially a snapshot of our life taken at a particular time and place. New insights, new data, new exchanges with living people and Life itself may affect not only what is seen but our definition of the seer. Our "positionality changes over time" Herod (1999, p. 301) declares, and this should be acknowledged. Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who lived in the 5th century BCE might have concurred, saying, "everything flows" meaning that there is no static reality, further elaborating that "you cannot step into the same river [twice]" (Wheelwright, 1959, p. 29). Perhaps, then it is best to say, (modifying Kierkegaard's observation that while lives are lived forward, they are only understood backwards, i.e., retrospectively (Marino, 2014, pp. 128-129)) that our lives may be lived *ontologically*, but are understood *heuristically*.

Ethical considerations

Throughout this research I have attempted to be extremely open about my life and many events which I would otherwise keep personal. To execute the examination of my history, inner dynamics, their causes, and effects upon my later movement towards education, it was necessary to approach uncomfortable incidents and my reactions to them as transparently as possible. I am telling my story and therefore detail matters.

I have chosen to put ethical considerations here before the main body of the work as its very nature as autoethnography places sensitive issues immediately into the hands of readers. Thus, I thought it more appropriate to bring matters of ethics forward rather than to include it later in the dissertation where it might be more traditionally included.

But there is a “moral imperative” (Hogue, 2019, ¶¶ 8-9) involved with how I relate and refer to the people who were a part of the community of my life and thus, co-participants in this work. In *Evocative Autoethnography*, Bochner and Ellis (2016) refer to “relational ethics” as a guiding principle behind doing autoethnography. They speak of this as the intention to “honor our relationships with participants and make wise decisions about fulfilling our responsibilities toward them, especially when we engage in research about intimate and/or traumatic events that might engender strong emotions”. They describe how we do this as “mindful self-reflection about the researcher’s role, motives, and feelings during the research process ... as we figure out ways to contribute positively to them” (p. 139). I believe I have been careful in my descriptions of those people who figured in my life, living or dead, believing that inclusion of them in my story an essential part of my life story and that such inclusion serves the mission of my life’s work to honor all who have contributed to the matrix of my life experiences in education.

Still, as this work is an autoethnography, issues concerning ethics are somewhat complicated. Concerns about my mother’s “event” for example, as well as the names of potentially identifiable figures in the many photographs of family members and associates required thought as to initializing them or naming those who had already died was most appropriate. As many of the members referred to have died, and I have been respectful of their memories, acknowledging openly that these are my own recollections, I believe I have acted in an ethically responsible manner.

All interpretations of the incidents I refer to here as events are my own and no account should be read under the presumption that my description is anything but my understanding of situations I subjectively regard as of particular significance. Interpretations of other’s behavior, too, should be seen in that same light, as personal interpretations are not objectively concrete recollections if such is even possible. I take full responsibility for these descriptions and attest that they have been written in good faith, intending only to be collected and spoken about in this study to describe my life and the ways I reacted to it. “Autoethnography opens space for the reader to see the intentions – and not just the theories and methodologies – of the researcher. It opens us to a deeper form of judgment. That is the core of its ethics” (Dauphinee, 2010, pp. 812-813). I hope such was achieved in the present work.

In some cases, I have used initials for those people who I know or assume are still living and who I am unsure if they would have given me permission to refer to them openly. Those who I know have died, I use their real names. In addition, information regarding students has been masked. Initials instead of names were used there as well and the students' geographical origins too were masked to conceal the particular countries of origin.

For individuals whom I have met or who are or have been in the public eye (e.g., Noam Chomsky, Rev. Vincent Harding) I have used their names openly or displayed identifying material when unavoidable. A few people identifiable in newspaper photographs or from magazines which are publicly available have also appeared within the text though I have used their initials when writing about them. I believe that, in the main, these precautions fulfill to the best of my ability, the standards regarding "Responsibility to participants" as contained in the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (4th ed., 2018.)

I further attest that I have, to the best of my ability, read and complied with the other sections of the BERA document including "Responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders in research, responsibilities to the community of educational researchers, responsibilities for publication and dissemination, and responsibilities for researchers' wellbeing and development". In addition, I have been directed to and have read all relevant ethical guidelines for University of Iceland students and researchers as well as to those specific to the School of Education guidelines available. The authorship of all material is mine with acknowledged assistance in composition and editorial content by my supervisor, Marey Allyson Macdonald, and with the guidance given to me over the period of this texts' composition by my committee. All errors and omissions are mine.

A note on the title of this work: Shortly after I moved to Iceland, I developed an expanded program of meditation training that combined the group counseling skills and exercises I had learned via CPE, with what was then more than 20 years of extensive practice in Buddhist meditation. I wanted to demonstrate that our journeys towards self-discovery involved not only trips away from who we have created over the years, towards a newer, more revised version of the self we craft along the way. I suggested that instead, in the process, we are returning to who we truly are, transformed, and on familiar ground. I called this idea "the path of my experience" and named the program, *The Path of My Experience: Personal Transformation Through the Culture of Meditation*. I used the word "culture" there in part because one word frequently used to refer to the psychospiritual practices which are said to lead to Buddhist awakening is *bhavana* which means "cultivation". Cultivation is also a word frequently used to describe forms of ethical or spiritual practice in Taoism and Confucianism. But it was only much later, as I was completing this work that I realized

the phrase's applicability to my journey through education culture and I therefore took it and altered it for this study.

Rationale

Transformation is the point of education. The field of transformative learning is rich in explorations of how and why learners transform. It was my original intention to delve into the transformations of students who were in the same international program as I was, using the theories of Transformative Education/Transformative learning. But in the process, deeper questions arose, mirroring a deeply unsettling but ultimately enlightening question I was asked more than 20 years ago when I applied to a chaplaincy program. "Do you think you're so interested in suffering because *you* have suffered?" In this case, when I reflected that perhaps my interest in transformation was because I too have transformed, a metaphorical light went on in my head and I realized that this area, consideration of all the things that brought me to where I am today, might be just as important as unfolding a story from the students.

Like the two protagonists in LeLouche's movie, I am here because an entire life has brought me here. To demonstrate this is to acknowledge and support the lives of all those who enter education and to honor them by honoring the myriad experiences which brought us together into the same classroom as I, whether as fellow student, or teacher. To do this effectively, I felt autoethnography was the best methodological choice.

Coda: A moral dimension

Shortly before he was murdered on April 4, 1968, when I was nine years old, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said something that has remained with me all these years: "*We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*" (Smithsonian Institution: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) In the intervening years, I have used this reflection: of our lives as something encased in a wider dimension, part of a larger and more meaningful enterprise that ends in the Good (or, as Dr. King put it, "toward justice"), to reflect on my own life's journey. I always wondered, towards what end does the "arc" of my own life bend? And in the intervening years I thought, what role does education, which I have spent so much of my life in, play in that end?

The universe of education may not have a distinct "moral arc" but its importance in the world we live in is rarely disputed. And this importance may be essential in helping to solve some serious problems facing humanity. In the context of the present work, I have taken that powerful quotation and turned it towards the purpose of education, its transformative nature, and its relevance for our collective future. In a world filled with many enormous, potentially catastrophic crises, the importance of education seems a

given. Yet, around the world, we are seeing education being redirected away from training in critical thought, informed by ennobling moral visions such as Dr. King's, and instead, towards a more uniform, neo-liberal standardization with often nationalistic, more narrow-minded objectives. At the same time, the influence of critical theory and with it, attendant progressive ideas about human rights, feminism, and other formerly marginal views (which have been an increasing part of education in the last 30 years or so) are now being attacked as subverters of a prior order, leading to calls for a "return" to "just education" and away from inclusive language, progressive perspectives, and more humanistic ideologies.

My entry into the field of education has, in six decades, taken me through five different colleges or universities, three continents, several changes of careers, and *de facto* exile from my country of birth and my cultural background, not once but twice. Nevertheless, throughout it all the importance of learning, formal, informal, or non-formal has remained one constant that informs my life as an Engaged Buddhist, a psychologist, and activist but, most importantly for the work here, as an *educator*. And in each of these fields, a moral dimension of care, of love, is the constant thread which binds them. It is with this realization that I begin my story.

TELLING THE STORY

1 My First 20 Years, 1959 - 1980

"My Mother Always Loved People Who Read Books"



Figure 5: She “loved people who read books”: Two pictures of Octavia Tavaréz de Tirado, my paternal grandmother

1.1 Questions of identity: my family⁵

I was born on August 24, 1959, in Queens Hospital in New York City to Carmen Maria Trillo (b. 1936) and Steven Concepción Tirado (1926-1999). I was their middle child and the only one of their three children to have not been baptized at birth. I

⁵ Demographic material in this section and elsewhere concerning Puerto Ricans in the United States has taken from Historical population change data (1910-2020)

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html>; Lopez, (1987) *Doña Licha's island: Modern colonialism in Puerto Rico*; Perez, (1976) *Puerto Rico: U.S. colony in the Caribbean*.

knew this was significant as a child because I heard it discussed innumerable times at family meals or gatherings, with my father demurring at its significance, and my mother expressing some vague (and a sometimes not-so-vague and even panicky) worry about my soul. Still, I later took this as an auspicious sign towards my eventual movement to Buddhism, but it brought no end of regret to my deeply pious, but non-denominationally Christian mother.

Both my parents (Figure 6) knew serious poverty firsthand: in my mother's case, the desperate poverty of rural Puerto Rico in the years preceding the Second World War, and in my father's case, the grinding urban poverty of the Depression-era Bronx, in New York City. We were a bit more fortunate, though lower middle-class; my earliest memories of Jackson Heights, in Queens where we lived, are sketchy but filled with joy.

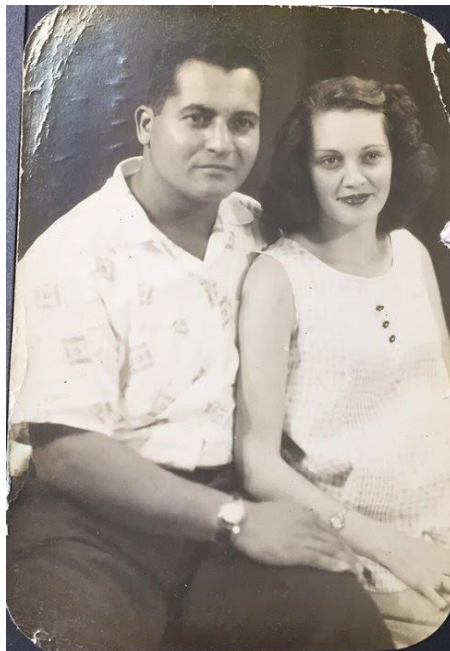


Figure 6: Young newlyweds: My parents in 1956 (my mother was pregnant with my older brother here)

My father was a merchant mariner who was gone about six months a year, in alternating blocks of time home, and time away. Sometimes that meant weeks, sometimes, months. When he was home, I remember his Popeye-sized strong arms and dark skin, his short, curly hair, thick Bronx accent, and the ubiquitous khaki pants with dress or work shirt. And his fingers! They were so thick he couldn't lift a coin from a tabletop, needing instead to point down on top of it and sweep it to the edge of the

table, catching it before it fell to the floor. While steeped in a working-class cultural background, interestingly, he also studied opera, a skill he'd cultivated using his G.I. Bill⁶ benefits and was a man who, despite having left school at 13, read constantly. He always regretted quitting so young and admired intellectuals and those who were more formally educated, erudite and well-read. In addition, opera was an art form he associated with "class", as in having a cultured and refined taste in something, and as he was so familiar with the different great singers (primarily, but not exclusively Italian) throughout opera's history, it made him proud. This image of a hardcore working-class man with aesthetically refined hobbies was a striking juxtaposition which has remained with me all these years.



Figure 7: A mysterious, early connection to Buddhism: My father's gold Buddha
But more on that later⁷.

While thoughtful and oftentimes quiet, he was also a *bon vivant* at other times, an avid storyteller who would regale us all at family gatherings (which were wonderfully

⁶ The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known colloquially as the "G.I. Bill", provided financial benefits to World War 2 veterans which included benefits for home ownership, (low-cost mortgages, for example), low-interest loans, and tuition monies for high school, college, or vocational training.

⁷ A pensive, remarkably well-read man who once wanted to be a writer, my father always searched for short aphorisms or easily digestible ways to speak to his varied interests, and he said that, during one occasion at sea when he was alone, he looked Heavenward and asked for the meaning of Life and heard in his heart the response, "to love, to hope, and to give." So, he had those three initial letters, L, H, and G, etched into his Buddha image.

frequent) of his time in the war, his Occupation Duty years in Japan, and the many experiences he had traveling the world. He also developed an unusually strong interest in Buddhism, wearing a triangular-shaped gold image of the Buddha with a ruby in its center and some cryptic letters on the back on each point (L, H, and G) and "WPC" etched in the center. I later came to believe the "WPC" stood for "World Peace Council" (regarded as a communist front organization in the United States) and right there, in all that was scratched on that little medallion (which I am wearing as I type this, Figure 7) I see why so much of my later life revolved around both leftwing politics and religion (primarily Buddhism). I also retained his dual-natured extroversion coupled with an introspective love of quiet.

I remember my mother as a lovely and delicate, light skinned Puerto Rican woman with a beautiful smile and hazel eyes who loved me with ferocity and protectiveness. She had a quick wit and was occasionally sharp-tongued with a country-earthiness I loved to see displayed against my father's streetwise demeanor. She doted on us as kids even though she was a fairly strict disciplinarian (having a rambunctious older son, a frail me, and later, a dilettantish daughter, she had to juggle so many different needs with often few resources) and our first teacher. She taught each of us to read long before we went to school and purchased whatever materials we needed, books, pencils, etc., sometimes sacrificing her own needs such as cigarettes or clothes, to ensure all our educational needs were always met first. She was always cooking, always cleaning, making sure our home was spotless and smelled good and any moment she had free, she'd sit in the kitchen and smoke a cigarette telling us stories about her childhood in Puerto Rico and the many hardships she endured. She was lively and friendly and a very affectionate mother whose welcoming warmth made her beloved by all my friends.

Unbeknownst to me, I was quite a sickly child (Figure 8). This may explain why I felt always doted upon and so warmly loved by people wherever we went. They knew. Apparently, I suffered from some seizure disorder which began at around nine months in which I might have a dozen or more grand mal seizures in a single day, prompting a need to regularly take anticonvulsants such as Phenobarbital and Dilantin (information I only acquired much later). And I never remembered having to take any medication. I do not recall the seizures nor any behavior that was unusual, but I do recall frequent episodes of "spacing out" for long periods, where I simply stopped everything and feeling almost immobilized, looked at the floor, or through a window at the sky, which I now realize were most likely what are known as "absence seizures"⁸.

⁸ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/petit-mal-seizure/symptoms-causes/syc-20359683>

All this persisted until around 1969 when, after a serious car accident in which I suffered a severe concussion and was knocked unconscious, the seizures suddenly stopped, and my life changed forever.



Figure 8: During my earliest epileptic period: My mother and I c. 1960

That story too, will come later.

My relationship with my culture and Puerto Ricans in general was always complicated. My parents spoke to us in both Spanish and English (in that order) and as the years progressed, it flipped until it was almost exclusively in English. This was common among many in my family (and among many immigrant communities in the United States, in fact) and partly due to rather regular debates in our family about the need to assimilate and succeed being crucially dependent upon fluency in English. I can't recall how many times I heard it said about this or that uncle or cousin who so isolated themselves in the

Bronx or some other insulated Puerto Rican community, that they "never got anywhere" because they couldn't speak English well.

Unfortunately, this also gave me the impression that Spanish was to always be downplayed and thus, by extension, being Puerto Rican as well (and how could it be good if it was so easily discarded, I asked myself as a child). Adding to that, the disparaging way my father spoke of the poorer Puerto Ricans on the island as "*jibaros*"⁹ (vaguely, Spanish for "hicks"), and the deprecating manner in which my mother described her people as "simple," together created a vague discomfort that gradually turned into dislike of who I was and my ethnic identity. I believed, without really being able to articulate it, that *not* being Puerto Rican was better than being one, and that emphasizing my "Americanness" was for the better. That, too, changed later, rather dramatically in fact, after I returned from Japan and will be discussed further.

⁹ The word's origins are of a rural worker or small farmer and is etymologically derivative from the Amerindian tribe, the *Jívaros*, who lived in more tropically rural regions.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jibaros>

As I have written elsewhere,¹⁰ my parents' sense of identity, too, was complex. My father served in the United States Navy during the last two brutal years of the Second World War and regarded himself as "an American" who had "served my country". But Spanish was his first language and despite a thick Bronx accent, he never spoke badly about Puerto Rico or his Latino heritage, though he did retain a "city slickers'" attitude toward his ethnic compatriots from rural regions. (A prejudice I unfortunately inherited it seems). My mother, having been born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, felt proudly Puertorican. Coming to the United States in the 1950s, she nevertheless felt the obligated gratitude to the United States shared by most of my family from the island for helping alleviate Puerto Rico's wartime poverty conditions, conditions which were rarely explored and understood as caused by United States' policies soon after acquiring Puerto Rico. Yet both spoke mainly in Spanish to each other, and our food and company were always with the tightly bound family who had left Puerto Rico or New York for Florida as we had done in the mid-1960s. So, mixed messages about a complicated understanding of cultural identity were present throughout my youth.

Of the two sides of my family, I knew my father's family (Figure 13) much better, simply because of proximity. We lived in New York City¹¹ and most of his family were there (and later in Florida where we too had gone) while most of my mother's family remained in Puerto Rico. I did meet several of her brothers who visited New York and two of her sisters moved to New York City. One, Naomi, had first married my father's brother, Johnny, leaving the novel situation of two brothers marrying two sisters a hallmark of our family conversations. When we moved to Miami, "Títí Dixie", as we called her, soon followed with her four children and I grew up with her and those cousins near enough to us that we saw each other almost invariably every weekend. Nevertheless, while living near my mother's sister and around the women of the family led me to side more often with the women's distresses (the most often heard ones concerned infidelities, gambling, excessive alcohol use, occasional physical abuse, and untoward absences) my father's family retained the more direct association to New York and thus, to me, a more "glamorous" image. These contradictions bothered

¹⁰ <https://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/27/thinking-about-a-recovered-identity/>

¹¹ New York City per se, is made up of five districts, or boroughs: Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx. While each are distinct, when referring to the place I was born, I simply say New York City as our lives were linked to the other boroughs regularly because of family who were spread across three boroughs: Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. In addition, my travels with my father's glamorous sister, Angie, were almost exclusively in the ritzier parts of the Manhattan borough where the United Nations and the Fifth Avenue/Broadway districts are located.

me a bit at the time but became visibly jarring only many years later. They shifted into an urban versus rural inclination, and a prejudice towards islanders versus those Puerto Ricans who had come to the United States.

Of my mother's family, (Figures 9 and 10) I knew only a few well. Most importantly was my aunt "Títí Dixie", mentioned above, who married my father's boxer brother, John in the 1940s. Because she moved to Florida soon after we did, we grew up with her kids and she became a surrogate mother for us on many occasions. In addition, my aunt Anna, who also left Puerto Rico for New York City and who, with her husband Benjamín, visited us a lot while we lived in New York, my mother's birth mother Rosario Noriega, whom



Figure 9 and 10: A "simpler" family: My mother in Puerto Rico (Títí Dixie is second from right, my mother, third from left); my mom and Títí Dixie in front of our house in Miami, both taken in the early-mid 1980s.

I met when we took a trip to Puerto Rico in late 1963 or very early 1964, and my mother's adopted mother, Luz Noriega, the childless wife of my mother's uncle, who adopted four children: my mother, and three siblings from a family who had lost both parents (Figures 11 and 12). Though I met several of my mother's brothers in New York briefly, they, as well as the rest of her family, remained distant both in terms of physical distance from New York (and later, Miami) and emotionally.



Figure 11 and 12: Luz Noriega, the only grandmother I ever knew, and with all the children she adopted, my mother on the far right.

Puerto Ricans in the United States, Part One

Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States by Spain in 1898 after the Spanish-American War ended. In 1900, when the U.S. population was more than 76 million, there were just over 1500 Puerto Ricans living inside the continental borders. By 1917, Puerto Ricans were given U.S. citizenship (essentially to serve as fresh cannon-fodder for the First World War). By 1920, Puerto Ricans within the United States numbered over 11,000.

Textbox 1: Puerto Ricans in the United States Part 1

Another influential incident related to my mother's family occurred when we took that trip to Puerto Rico. I apparently impressed my family there with my courage for not crying after an accident on my grandfather's jeep requiring that I receive a number of stitches in my chin which I did, they said, without crying or complaining. (For years, every time we met some of her family, they would invariably speak of this event with a measure of astonishment and pride.) I loved my grandmother—my mother's adoptive aunt, the one who took my mother in when her birth mother abandoned the family and many of the children were given to close relatives to raise—and felt the warmth of rural Puerto Rican life, but New York City was where I felt I belonged more.

When it comes to identity, if I had to choose one core identity, the one I felt closest to, it was always associated with the first memories I had of *place*, that is, of New York City. I always called myself a "New Yorker". I still do. While I lived longer in Florida (and interestingly, our house in Miami was literally surrounded by other New Yorkers) and have lived longer in Iceland, (20+ years now, with five years in Los Angeles, five in Japan, three in Boulder, Colorado, one in Wisconsin, three in the San Francisco Bay Area, among others), I still feel the city, its smells, its manic streets, its ethos of busyness and near-chaos, the constant sounds of music and car horns, the sharp-eyed, hyper-alert nervousness that keeps one safe, and being enthralled by the many different races, ethnic groups, styles, fashions, and forms of humanity all in one place – all this remains me. While I don't think I could ever live there again, there is no place I have ever been to where I feel as much at home. In fact, the only place I have ever truly felt at home was in New York City.

Puerto Ricans in the United States, Part Two

Between 1950 and 1960, the "West Side Story generation" as I call it (among whose numbers included my mother and several of her sisters) those Puerto Ricans who migrated to the United States from Puerto Rico increased dramatically. From 226,110 in 1950, to almost a million (892+ thousand) in 1960 (the U.S. population at large had increased to 179 million). This meant that in those ten years over 60,000 Puerto Ricans were migrating to the United States yearly, averaging over 1000 per week, most to the New York City area and this influx was noted culturally in musical or motion picture productions such as *West Side Story*. That story reflected the lives of so many of my family: the urban, U.S. born generation who had come before the War, versus the newer migrants who came post-war and the differing attitudes about the possibilities of success and the tribulations of being a Spanish-speaking minority during a time of great social, economic, cultural, and political change in the United States.

Textbox 2: Puerto Ricans in the United States part 2

My first ten years, from 1959 to 1969, are seminal to all of what followed. Violence, an intensely sensitive reaction to suffering, a preoccupation with grief and death, the desire to help, a commitment to the poor, deep reflection, thoughts about suffering, and a bent towards Eastern religions, all developed in those ten years and frequently in dramatic, even traumatic ways. I recall tremendous love from my parents, and love for my extended family but also a growing disconnect between my emotions and intellect. For example, while I thought in English, I *felt* in Spanish, and it has remained that way to this day.

Life in New York City though was magical for me. Our extended family (Figure 13) was large – my mother had eight siblings and my father the same – with dozens of cousins everywhere, often from multiple marriages (or from not-so-licit relationships outside of marriage) and of all ages. We played in the snow, frequently met up with our parents’ siblings for raucous discussions over dominoes, ate fabulous Christmas meals with *coquito* (a Puerto Rican eggnog-type drink made from rum, coconut and condensed milks, and spices), delicious *pasteles*¹² and *arroz con gandules* (flavored rice mixed with pigeon peas) and often heard my father sing some Italian aria which all asked him to. We slept on fire escapes during hot and humid summer nights, watched older kids play stickball in the streets, and my brother and I would, when visiting our closest cousins (children of “Titi”¹³ Dixie”), wander the streets of their Bronx neighborhood, playing among railroad tracks where we’d place a penny on the track and wait until a train passed, excitedly retrieving the now thinly flattened oval-shaped copper and then fearing less for our safety than for the possibility we would get arrested for destruction of United States’ currency. Another time, when my brother and I were playing in our Queens neighborhood one day, I snuck into a neighbor’s garage with my brother holding it shut. Terrified, I begged him to open it and, failing that, I threatened to break a window to crawl out from. He wouldn’t relent, so I smashed the window with my bare hand and, while I know we got in trouble for this, my mother seemed easy to forgive the incident and move on. That’s the way I remember most things in that period: sometimes dramatic, mostly fun, often adventurous, but on the occasions we got into trouble, we would get disciplined, but quickly move on. It was the most memorable period of my life.

¹² A Puerto Rican dish similar to a *tamale*, made into a starchy, rectangular shell from mashed green plantains and stuffed with savory pork, beef, or chicken in a spiced tomato sauce base and then wrapped in banana leaves, tied, and then boiled.

¹³ Diminutive for “tía”, or aunt.



Figure 13: They looked elegant to me as a child: My father’s family in June 1954 – the only time they were all photographed together.

On other occasions my father’s sister, Tífi Angie, a tall and (for me) glamorous stewardess for Pan American Airlines, would visit us, always armed with gifts and stories of her travels. She reminded me of the lead character in a musical from the time, *Mame*, about a wealthy, glamorous woman who travels the world and adopts her fatherless nephew, regaling him with her tales and, at the end, taking him with her. Angie had briefly lived with us and stayed several times during her time in New York while my father was at sea. With her, I saw more of New York than just Queens. She took me to Manhattan frequently, for example, to Radio City Music Hall to see the Rockettes, to the United Nations where she introduced me to diplomats she knew, to “fancy” Manhattan restaurants, to opening nights at the movies, and to plays. She doted on me lavishly; unmarried and never having had a child of her own, I was, as she often said to my mother, her favorite nephew and she continued picking up things for me on her travels until my mid-teens. Indeed, after hearing about my burgeoning interest in Japan, one year she brought me a large 14-inch-tall Samurai statue, which I placed on one side atop of my already-then considerably large bookshelf; opposite a seated Buddha and underneath on each side, were my books on politics and activism, and Buddhism and spirituality on the other. That prescient pairing of opposites was at the beginning of high school, significant for this study, and another story for later.

But life in New York City was not without darker memories. Once, around the summer of 1964 or 1965, my father took my brother and me to a hamburger place he loved and there, while eating these huge, delicious burgers, we heard around six loud POP-POP! POP! POP! POP! POP! sounds - unmistakably gunshots. Along with many others from the restaurant, we immediately ran outside. In front of the restaurant, we saw a

tall, thin, African American man in a light blue jacket and pants, on the ground, propped up against a fire hydrant with at least 5 bullet wounds – in his thigh, several in his chest and abdomen, and one or two in his arm. The story we heard from bystanders was that he'd murdered his family and police had chased him, finally cornering him there, in front of our restaurant. I clearly remember the dazed look on his face, his eyes gradually becoming distant, and my brother and I wondered why he had urinated on himself as well. It was striking and has never left me to this day. That look, and the violence which caused it – his as well as the police's - made a huge impression on me.

New York scared me in other ways as well, not only because of the incredible numbers of people or the potential for crime. Ordinary people in the city seemed tougher to me. There was an abruptness to the way they spoke and acted, a fast-talking sharpness, and a vigilant air that always had me on edge. For example, I remember my father taking me to the Maritime Union Hall (Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17) a few years before we moved to Miami where he would bid for jobs. The men there, White, Black, Latino, Eastern European, etc., were intimidating to me, seemingly strong, tough, and often in leather jackets and khaki pants, many with big hands, like my father had. My father, seeing me grow timid as we walked near them, said to me one day, "Joe, they're just guys", slapping some on the back whom he'd sailed with, greeting old buddies by first name all around us. It took me years, but I understood he meant that they were just *workers* like him, stronger than the average worker, maybe, because of the physical labor they did, but nothing to be afraid of. This lesson helped me many years later when organizing workers at a labor union in Los Angeles.



Figure 14: Maritime Union Hall, New York City, c. 1964.



Figure 15 and 16: Pictures of post-war maritime workers. The wide ethnic and racial mix among workers in a single industry was a novel one for the time. The National Maritime Union.



Figure 17: My father in the early 1950s as a merchant seaman.

While New York had that raw toughness, at least it also had all those exciting places Titi Angie took me to, and the glittering stories that other extended family members showered us with. And New York City was filled with stories. I associate my love of a good story with the many times I heard about this or that event an uncle, or cousin had seen or been involved in, mainly from my father's family who were always around us. My uncle Johnny ("Kid Dynamite" was his boxing name), for example, was a professional boxer and World Middleweight champion Jake LaMotta's sparring partner. Uncle Dimas (Figure 18) was a well-known dancer in South America, a conga player, and notorious ladies' man who had once auditioned in Hollywood for the part of Rudolph Valentino in a movie they were making about his life. My other paternal aunt, Ramona (Figure 19), was once a singer with Xavier Cugat. And my uncle Carlos, the oldest of the siblings who served in the Second World War in Europe, was a trumpet player who came home "shell-shocked", suffering from what is now referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



Figure 18 and 19: Two of my father's more glamorous siblings, Tío Dimas and Titi Ramona

My memories of living in New York City are my own, but life there was shared with an older brother and later, a younger sister. I always felt special partly because everybody kept telling me I was special, and this laid the groundwork for what I perceived as some competitive early tension between me and my brother at times. I felt that he was envious of this, but I relished it nonetheless. Still, he was both protective of, and bullying with me, my hero on the one hand, and a tension-filled presence on the other, who always seemed to be at war with my father or our home life. I came to believe he was revealing fears and worries I had little notion of, worries about our family's finances, for example, anger at my absent father and his sometimes-lackadaisical approach to fathering as well, and anxieties about our mother. My brother bore the

brunt of my father's absences hard, I believe, feeling it keenly and that caused many fights later, which finally brought about my brother's leaving for the Marines just before his 18th birthday.

I also shared the home with my sister, born in 1964. She was the apple of my father's eye, a princess in a Puertorican household where an older son dominated the cultural and domestic landscape simply by virtue of being the first-born son (a major source of pride within our culture) and a beautiful little girl who exhibited remarkable musical talent at an early age, eventually playing violin, piano, flute, and piccolo, who became the star of the family. She was frequently dressed like a princess and behaved as one, and there were tensions there as well. This was mainly due to my sense that, as a middle child, I was in a certain way, being left on my own, to emotionally fend for myself, and, while receiving plaudits for my talents, they received something I felt I did not: direct love for simply being who they were, not for what they *did*. I was already being seen as capable of handling myself, at least intellectually – something I had learned to cultivate – but this was alienating me further from what I wanted, from what I *felt* about. I often felt unsafe, and not infrequently, unloved. That is, I felt as if I was given too much credit, that even before I was ten, I had “grown up too quickly” while I wanted to just be a little kid. Like other children around me. But I was locked into playing for the crowd and, while receiving applause, I wanted simply to be embraced. Being extra sensitive to others' needs, wanting to make sure no one felt left out, cultivating an intuitive sense of when someone was alone or needing to be reached, all these dynamics were created at this time. And it got a number of extra thrusts in the following few years.

1.2 Miami and my mother's “event”

There were many significant events in this first period of my life. Witnessing that shooting, moving to Florida, etc. While difficult to recount, possibly the most influential event of my formative years was the attempted suicide of my mother, not long after we arrived in Florida.

I was in second grade in 1966, and just seven years old. We'd been in Florida for only a short time, and while I did have a few friends, adjusting to the heat, humidity, and style of living was somehow jarring. I enjoyed the elementary school across the street, the long walks with my mother to local stores, the visits with family at the beach, playing with my brother and cousins in the warm rain, etc. But there was something always bothering me: I wasn't quite at home inside. There was an excitement I missed in Florida, the urban grit and magic of New York City was lacking.

At the same time, though, Florida was alien in other, more cultural ways. My father had few relatives in South Florida, and apparently, my parents had long considered moving there when the family grew. But it wasn't long before I heard men call my

father “nigger” on the road and while he would laugh it off, this saddened and frightened me, and would have been unheard of back in New York. The Black/White racial segregation too I noticed, nevertheless, I still felt closer to the Blacks who lived in a separate section of Miami than with the growing numbers of Cubans remaking 8th Street (Calle Ocho) nearby. While Cubans had just begun to fly in from Cuba—as this was the period of the first waves of Cuban exiles seeking refuge in the United States—and my mom picked up some from the airport and drove them to their new homes, their class pretensions prevented me from feeling any solidarity with them. In all the years I lived in Florida, I only remember one Cuban friend invite me to their house – the rest seemed suspicious of us more ostensibly liberal Puertoricans, as well as often displaying attitudes about working class people I knew in my heart as wrong – and partly directed at us. They had come from more affluent circumstances in Cuba and often treated my mom as a servant. I resented them and their snobbishness, and this ended up being one more reason for me to disdain any early pan-Latino identity. I just didn’t fit. But life in Miami soon got even more troubling. My father was gone about half a year and, while broken up into a month here, two months there, etc., even he began to feel to me as a stranger in some ways.

1.3 Trauma and learning

One morning in 1967 (Figures 20 and 21), possibly in the spring, just before my brother and I were to go to school, I knew something was wrong. I remember my mother wasn’t awake as usual. I went into my parent’s room with my brother and tried to awaken her but couldn’t. She just wouldn’t wake up. We didn’t panic – at least not immediately – and I remember calling the police; “my mom won’t wake up,” I told them, surprisingly calm with a clinical strength in my voice I didn’t realize I possessed. I also quickly understood that it was me – not my older brother – taking the lead, assessing that we should call the police, then actually making that call. There was something wrong with that picture, too, I felt. But all of it was big, too big for me to comprehend. *I had acted decisively it seemed, quickly separating my emotions from what needed to be done.*

What followed next is hazy ... I remember being in school (just across the street) and soon after, a PA¹⁴ call to my classroom from the principal’s office saying that my aunt’s partner R. had arrived. I liked him. I remember leaving school and then almost nothing of what happened that day or of the immediately following days. I know it was

¹⁴ “PA”, referred to the public address system that was set in in all schools where speakers were installed in each classroom, usually for school-wide announcements from the principal’s office but also used to call individual teachers or students.

tumultuous and scary. We stayed with my aunt Ramona, and I do remember a weakened mother returning home with Titi Dixie hovering about, cooking for us and vigorously defending my mother to the family members from my father's side who had descended on Miami wondering if they should intervene with our care. There was a strange mixture of feelings I do recall from the weeks that followed, though: an inner discipline to look at something clinically and unemotionally engage it, a repression of fear and tears, and perhaps more importantly, I sensed that I'd lost a certain innocence, that my rock, my stable, beautiful, loving island of a mother, was weak, fallible, and might not be around forever. Worse still, she had tried to leave us. It was terrifying and so I leapt up into my head, wanting to analyze this problem, straining to anticipate what might follow for us. I wanted to *understand* so that I could prepare myself. But I also desperately just wanted to be safe and neither seemed guaranteed anymore. I knew my father, who had quickly returned from sea, would have to leave again; we were staying with his sister, Ramona and her partner, and I vaguely understood that she wanted us to live with her – something my brother and I both hated and feared.



Figure 20: My favorite picture of me, seemingly glowing with promise: Just before my mother's "event"

Neither understanding, nor safety, happened for many, many years thereafter. Something died inside of me then. And a certain brightness in my eyes disappeared,

leaving only glimpses of it in small sparkles of joy, and never again would there be such an exuberantly bright hopefulness as seen in the picture above (Figure 20).



Figure 21: My lovely mother circa 1967 or 1968

This event shocked me. No other event in my life has come close to fundamentally altering my mindset, my stability, and my emotional foundations more than that. I wanted to scream but I couldn't. I had nightmares nightly, probably lasting several years and I remember crying myself to sleep almost every night after that until I went to junior high school. I was scared but I had already internalized a certain disposition to resist vulnerability and instead, to project competence. A behavioral blueprint had begun. More significantly, I wanted to understand this process. Suddenly, learning took on an increasing importance. Learning, for me, had its own laws, rules, and functions; because I was enthusiastic about pretty much everything I read, I had to not only pace my enthusiasm, but literally watch my mother count pennies to meet my growing demand for reading material. My parents soon bought a World Book Encyclopedia, and a number of Time-Life volumes on *The Body*, *The Mind* (my favorite and the one which propelled me into an interest in psychology) and others, and when he was home, my father would often take me to the main library in Miami, where he'd pick up books on opera for himself and I on everything else. My mother too would walk with us to the local Bookmobiles which were frequently in our neighborhood, speak excitedly about Puerto Rico and her family, which were more distant to us than my father's family. It was strange, I thought. She never referred to the event until many years later. In the meantime, I was constantly reading.

This began a pattern which exploded in the years to come. In those days, we didn't get "allowances", we were always told there wasn't enough money for that; but helping my mother out in the house or later, mowing the lawn or washing the car made it easier for my parents to hand over a little extra money for me to buy books (or, later, to go to concerts). And buy I did! I went to new bookstores and used bookstores. I bought fiction as well as science fiction, books on politics as well as psychology, books on history, as well as spirituality. My parents (and the rest of the family) couldn't believe how vast and all-consuming my passion for reading was over the years. Even I couldn't believe it at times.

For a period, I read so much partly because being out and about was too difficult, shameful at times, even. My mom's attempted suicide was not much of a secret at school, and I knew it got me pity from teachers, who, I thought, were even nicer to me than before. I think they felt that encouraging me with learning would help me heal. And perhaps it did. But it also served to isolate me, as I felt too awkward for long stretches to speak to anyone or even play. It made me refuse to ask for anything (except books).

Also, no one taught me to ride a bicycle so I had to conceal that lack of skill as best I could and avoid any gathering that my friends would cycle to. These were, as one can imagine, many in elementary school through to junior high school. In addition, I also couldn't swim yet, so pools were out, but beaches were the exception as most of us just played in shallower waters, and ocean trips were limited. I could go to friend's houses and play, but I walked there and oftentimes even this became too difficult for me so, for a few years, probably between the ages of 10-14, I basically holed up in my room and just read books, gained weight, cried nightly, and spent the dark before sleep feeling afraid.

1.4 "The accident" and a huge jump

In my family's mythology, what happened to us in the summer of 1967 has become known simply as "the accident". Coming less than a year after my mother's event, it meant a period of extreme change that we all had to adjust to. For me, it was in some ways my second birth. That year, most likely sometime in late summer, my mother, brother, sister, and grandmother Luz Noriega (who frequently visited from Puerto Rico) took a road trip back up to New York. I believe we were going to visit my father who had some time in port there and to visit with relatives (our family's Comet Caliente trunk was filled with oranges, so it was clear we were going to give them as gifts to relatives up north). Somewhere outside of Baltimore, late at night, a car slammed into us from behind. I remember only a few details, fragmented images, really: my sister flying from the back seat to the front dashboard, a massive thud, some

tumbling, then black. When I woke up, it was raining and the car was very quiet – and empty, or so I thought at first. My brother was still there with me, though, and we went out, confused as to what was happening. Some distance away I saw an ambulance and could vaguely hear my mom crying – she was in there, I knew it. I didn't see either my sister or grandmother and my brother and I sat down at the edge of the sloping hill near the freeway, in the rain as cars passed by us. Soon a highway patrolman came by and took us into his car. I then remember vomiting on his back seat and apologizing for that. Then things got hazy again. There were vague memories of the experiences after that – reunited with my mom and grandmother in the hospital, continuing our trip to New York, sharing harrowing details of the accident with relatives. Apparently, I had suffered a severe concussion, and, at the time, my mother was convinced I was dead. So, she ran hysterically out of the car trying to get help, but as she was unable to control herself, she was taken in the ambulance while we were transported to the hospital in that patrolman's car.

But of all the outcomes of that accident, one thing I did not realize, but which my mother did immediately, was something she later thought miraculous: my seizures completely stopped. After that accident, I never had another one. But there was more. It was that event that catalyzed, in a manner that others thought miraculous as well, an incredibly enthusiastic, heightened embrace of reading and learning. If I was a precocious reader before, things took on a whole new dimension after this event. Suddenly everything was even more interesting to me, and it was then that I began to devour everything around me as a subject to be mastered. The accident had certainly done something to me – it gave me an enhanced wonder about everything, as if a fog had dissipated and suddenly, everything appeared clear, and fascinating. I might have been a curious and possibly even gifted child before, but after that event, my intellectual urges became stratospheric. In second grade, the school librarian, Mrs. Cruz saw this and began handing me books one or two grades higher than what I was in. When I complained that "I'm only in second grade, this is a 4th grade book" she would point her finger at me and mockingly chide me, "*¡Cállate!* [Shut up!] *You can do it!*" In the sixth grade (11 years old) she asked me if I would like to take an IQ test to which I said yes. I scored 129 (Figure 22). In junior high I took it again and it was 136. The very last time I took it, the summer after my first year in college, I scored 149. Something certainly had happened.

Joe
 Interpretation of dreams
 #2 July 29-30, 1971
 Body: I remember I was in a super market. I was getting some eggs. I remember it pretty well. I paid for the eggs and the man said "You better get here its some trouble and lightning like a storm".
 "Alright" I said.
 I walked away going toward the bubble gum machine. I asked the guy "Do you want some gum?" I got some money. "I don't know what he said" "Yes" or "no". I put in a penny and got some gum from the machine. I went outside a little

Figure 22: Obsessed with psychology at an early age: My attempted dream analysis after having read Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, dated July 29-30, 1971, when I was only 11 years old.

1.5 Teaching and performance

Reading wasn't only a nervous escape. It was true that I loved learning, but it was just as true that I loved *sharing* what I'd just learned with my brother or sister, my friends, or my parents, or any relatives who came by: basically, with anyone who would listen. Very quickly I was seen as a super smart kid and "*El doctorcito*" (the little doctor) became the nickname my mother's friends and family gave me as I was frequently (and timidly, at first) hauled out of my room to impress them with some comment on their ailments that were usually accurate. I was also getting fat from too much inactivity and since *I craved love, I fell in love with the attention*. (Years later I found the perfect expression of this in the one art form I began early and have continued working on, poetry.) Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the USAmerican Beat poet once wrote, "*Prospecting for love / We dig flesh*" (Ferlinghetti, p. viii, 1962). I understood that, in looking for one thing, we often find, along the way, something shinier, perhaps, that distracts us enough to pull us away from what we more earnestly seek.) I knew I was special, but I also knew I could bypass all the embarrassment of things I could not do that most kids my age did by getting the accolades for knowledge that seemed advanced for such a young child, and remarkable to so many of our people. I couldn't compete as a normal kid so I would be as unusual as possible. I would be a super kid!

But there was something else, as well: *I wanted to help my family*. I craved their attention, but I also wanted to share with them all I had learned about space or Buddhism, or the weather, or about some disaster I had read about, or the Roman

Empire, or astronomy, everything. I could feel my mind grow and with unlimited curiosity, I explored practically everything that came to my attention. I thought that it could make their lives as rich as mine was becoming, and even though I was lonely and isolated, I felt enriched by what I was learning. I saw how good and decent my family were, but that they had made sacrifices for their children, skirting education, many dropping out of school early, and I saw their regret and, partly as a result, that they were so proud of me. *I loved them so much, I wanted to help them - by teaching them.* And this, perhaps more than any other psychological revelation, has affirmed the centrality of education in my development. I also realized that, in gaining knowledge, I could help them manage their traumas, as well, that, if they had as much as I was gaining, they could navigate life with a little more patience and dispassion. Results, no doubt, of my own attempts to control the inner fears I had been consciously trying to understand.

While a part of me resented them for not teaching *me* things and forcing me to learn so many things on my own later than most kids, I still loved them as people. I saw all too clearly their vulnerabilities, their limitations, their fallibilities, more than their strengths, and this ate me up inside, tearing me away from them while simultaneously ... *feeling* that they were my people and that I had something that they wanted. Those were difficult years for me, after my mom's suicide attempt, and things didn't clear up until midway through junior high school. One could easily argue that it wasn't until adulthood and then doing deep psychological work, that I was able to understand just how big an influence my mother's suicide attempt, for example, was on how I related to women, my feelings of abandonment, and my thoughts on how staying alone was safer, while at the same time craving connection and teaching as a way to get that attention, albeit from a safer distance.

Another interesting, related development I noted early in my life and then later as something I saw in my work (as union president, or as a teacher in Japan, Iceland, and on the ISE program), was a gnawing sense that, in order to teach, an element of presentation, as manifested in *performance*, had to be cultivated and then delivered. Even though I felt sincerely accessible, even authentic, I knew early on that I was a performer when I taught, and that I had to take time to prepare. A lot of time. ("You should have been an actor..." my lawyer friend David said to me years later after a press conference announcing the formation of the Latino Writers Group we had started in Los Angeles. "You're a natural at this.") This element of performance was an exteriorization of my insights and knowledge and as such, I felt it had to always be entertaining as well as informative. Thus, while in many ways, I defined myself as an introvert, this led to a transformation - at least while teaching - into an extroverted, socially skilled facilitator, someone who loved negotiating between ideas or persons and whose keen sense of poverty or marginalization allowed me to quickly discern

who in my audience needed help and how I could possibly intervene and provide it. Gradually but inexorably, I relished being in front of people, knowing that I was helping them, getting “applause”, and consequently, feeling admired, respected, feeling loved.

All this contrasted with another essential side of me that was its opposite: I was also a deeply private lover of solitude and silence, and reflective by nature to such a degree that, when I think about the happiest days of my life, a clear majority center of them on my times, years later, in Zen Buddhist monasteries where silence and ritual reigned and extended periods of sitting meditation dominated (up to 17 hours a day on week-long intensive retreats called *sesshin* 攝心, literally, “touching the heart-mind”). During those in-between years, I would walk the streets of Miami, sometimes for hours, often getting lost and depending upon the uniform street design to get home (“avenues” went north-south; “streets” and “roads” went east-west). Sometimes I just walked across the street and sat in the middle of the large open field, thinking, talking with imaginary friends, and just communing with Life.

Into that quiet, all my doubts, fears, and insecurities were allowed to lay bare, without undue scrutiny but also in a vaguely broad context of a delicately vibrant spaciousness which felt warm and friendly to me. In such silence, I was freed from all pressures to perform. And I never wanted anyone else to feel abandoned or uncared for as well. I came to understand this as a dynamic that I should explore formally and that came eventually – years later when I worked as a chaplain.

I also began to identify with a small part of the Buddha’s life story: when he was a young boy he fell into a peaceful “trance” and, remembering the peace that it brought him, he used that memory to propel him towards his ultimate Awakening. I wondered if in the deep contemplative quiet he seemed to possess, that there was where I too might find my own answers and I began trying meditation at this time.

In conclusion, in the ten years from 1959 to 1969, every dynamic which made me who I am now was firmly established. I became a restless intellectual, fearfully overcompensating for fear of being left alone, without support, who labored mightily to soften the blows similar issues had on others, constantly searching for others’ wounds to heal and spaces to fill with safe joy and exciting ventures into the magic of learning, hoisting the flag of learning, righteousness, and justice, and desperately wanting to be part of a process of goodness. I had a burning ambition to overcome any smallness I suffered (and there was much) and instead, become so big I’d be inured to the pains average people endured. In short, I wanted to get past all emotional insecurities and rise, capable and competent enough to overcome my limitations and by so doing, assist others to overcome theirs.

I had seen death and the terrible effect that had on survivors. I had seen poverty and the aching mentality it fostered on those who'd come from there. I also saw the magic of love and devotion in my mother's eyes and saw reflected in me the terrifying fear of abandonment at the same time, weathering the confusion of why someone who loved me so deeply would want to leave me, leaving me to wonder if that love, or any love, could ever be trusted. I also saw the lure of psychological healing through the ability to listen carefully to what people said and to discover the patterns behind the words. This was no mean feat for a child, but the instincts of a child when sharpened can become emotional scalpels which can cut open the artifices of adults and reveal hypocrisy or shallowness. In my case, I learned quickly that most people were simply afraid: afraid of dying, afraid of living, afraid of people, success, failure, afraid of their innermost yearnings, etc. *Fear is our most shared emotion*, I understood, so conversely, I realized as a child that what comforted people most was displaying stability, simply remaining there with them, letting them know they were heard, sounding competent, and emanating confidence. That's it. Sure, it was an act at times, but at others it was all too real.

Yet another event highlighted this period as seminal. Soon after my mom's "event," my cousin Valerie died in 1968 at the age of 18, of a drug overdose we were told. My whole family was devastated. We were at my aunt's house in Hollywood, Florida (my mom's sister, Titi Dixie) when the call came in from the Bronx where Valerie had gone to be near her father (my uncle Johnny, the boxer). She was a vivacious, affectionate, chubby, soul music-loving girl who hadn't wanted to move to Florida but she did and had been our baby-sitter at times. She was so sweet and kind to me and her laughter was deep and infectious. I remember my aunt collapsed in the kitchen, my mother weeping and desperately trying to console her. We were all stunned in the living room and could hear the screams of anguish and whatever TV show we were watching became quickly irrelevant as a mournful and awkward silence enveloped us. Gradually, we gathered around her, not knowing what to do, but hugging her and crying. I then did something I came to do a lot afterwards: I went to her and, putting my arm around her, I did my best to keep her calm and help plan the trip back to New York. I saw myself acting disciplined, kind, almost professional. Coming so soon after my mom's suicide attempt, I saw myself as someone who could look clearly at the emotional situation and work to **do** something about it. It was both charming and unnerving, and I knew it was my way of leaving the pain and instead, handling the situation with a determined, unemotional, and almost clinical, calmness. I was ten.

1.6 I was ten.

Within just a few years, my mother had tried to kill herself, a dear cousin had died, and I had been in a life-threatening car accident that had transformed my life forever.

In the immediate years that followed, I, the youthful counselor, prodigy, performative “el doctorcito” continued my trajectory into family fame and finding it emotionally rewarding, did what any lonely and insecure kid with a talent for impressing adults would do: externally, I cultivated this persona with even more passion, still, I was only ten. But it all came at a cost: internally, I retreated, becoming guarded, introverted, and seriously obese (Figure 23) within a few years.

1.7 Role models

My early years in Miami were not only filled with traumatic events such as deaths and suicide attempts. There were also many significant, positive events and figures as well. My teachers had begun to take what I only realized later, was a more active interest in me, likely based upon their knowledge of my family’s issues. The librarian was regularly pushing me to read more, which I did happily. A reading teacher from second grade, Mrs. Reisberg, along with the librarian Mrs. Cruz were the first to begin to take an interest in my abilities and to constantly encourage me in ways I suspected were related to my mother’s event, but I was not entirely sure. Nevertheless, very quickly I found that each year there seemed to be at least one teacher who took a keen interest in me and whose kindness and friendship (as well as academic push) made a huge difference. As my grades soared, so did my pride, but simultaneously, I became afraid to share my insecurities, which had no name at the time, but gradually I regarded it as a fear of being caught unprepared. This led to a kind of hyper-vigilance which, while useful on many occasions, served to exhaust me at times. Nevertheless, I could rely upon teachers whose encouragement and support would distract me from my fears and encourage my intellectual growth. That pattern continued throughout not only these early years, but well into college.



Figure 23: Me around 6th grade, introverted and overweight.

I prepared and prepared for school. I read more than I could handle, begging my parents for more books monthly. And each day, back at school, the teachers noticed. When I was ten, Mr. L. a kindly Jewish man with a slight lisp, seemed to encourage me to read aloud more and more in class. He recommended books and I believe it was at his suggestion that I read Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* in the fifth grade. The following year another teacher befriended me and although he had to transfer out after a few months, he stood out in my mind as someone so gracious, so enthusiastically supportive of my academic development that some years later, when I was in high school, I remember looking up his phone number in the Miami phone book and thanking him for being such a supportive teacher while I was still in elementary school.

Those last years before high school were filled with many big news events and, as my father, when he came home, always read the newspaper, and paid close attention to current affairs, I began to follow his example. I remember the 1968 Democratic Convention, a police riot, they called it, coming on the heels of a horrible few months: the assassinations of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sen. Robert Kennedy, both events shocking our family. In my mind they were the "good" people who held our world captive through their charisma and commitment to the people, and I felt their losses deeply. I wanted to be like them – people who could reach out and offer help,

but I also sensed a darker truth about such ambitions – they were dangerous and could get one killed.

I listened to the conversations among the grown-ups and felt their distress about the Vietnam War which was getting worse daily. My parents, staunch Democrats, were disheartened when Richard Nixon was elected, and I felt some distant rumble approaching as I frequently heard my father, a World War 2 veteran opposed to the conflict, tell my mother that he would “send Stevie and Joe to Canada if this war is still going on when they come of [draft] age.” Soon another big event was coming, and this got the school excited positively: the USAmerican Apollo Moon missions were becoming closer to their goal of a moon landing “before the decade is out” as President Kennedy had promised, monthly. In December of 1968 we saw the first broadcast of the Earth as seen from another world (the Christmas Eve orbiting of the Moon by Apollo 8). I was riveted. It seemed the personal events at home were displaced by the influence of a much more profound outside world and I was delirious with relief. I wrote to President Nixon and to the Department of Defense asking for information about the space program and the Civil War respectively and found, to my parents’ downright surprise, I received letters back from both. I had received a subscription to National Geographic a few years earlier from an aunt in New York and I became fascinated with the world away from Florida. I learned about Japan and the South Sea islands, about Iceland, and Tibet, about the Samurai and Buddhist monasteries around the world. I wanted to see these places, to go there, to meet these people. Events outside my Florida world began to take on an aura of magic, and I dreamed of travel.

At home, there were also influential TV shows like *The Smothers Brothers* or *Laugh-In*, both subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) counterculturally subversive which started me intellectually questioning the established truths of our country as being something great or special, particularly considering the Vietnam War, the assassinations, the weekly riots and the generally tempestuous nature of USAmerican society in this period. I began to seriously wonder about all the Truths we had been told and I saw even my father question not only the war, but the very system that seemed to produce endless wars. But there were also the summer storms and the daily urges to hide from friends and instead retreat into my contemplative cell of books at 8630 SW 32nd St in Miami, Florida. There were still picnics with Tíí and family and visits to her house in Hollywood (near Ft. Lauderdale, about 45 minutes north of Miami) where my cousin B. seemed to have also retreated into a shell after his sister’s death and daily immersed himself in his guitar. Soon we had walked on the Moon, and I remember all of us gathered to watch it live, unbelieving at how much, and how seemingly fast, everything had changed in just a few years.

1.8 Writing and recording a busy life

In my last year of elementary school, much happened. I began reading and writing poetry, plays and short stories. I became the school Spelling Bee champion and though selected to represent my school in the national championships, my mother arrived there late, due to an earlier visit with an elderly friend of hers, and so I began to hate my relatives, my cultural heritage, separating myself from them, resenting them and rejecting them, until I was 28. I began to keep a journal regularly. I also wrote a play—about drug use which was staged at school before the fifth and sixth grades—and began writing poetry seriously. I kept a journal in which, like Thoreau, I began to reflect on the meaning of my life. There were so many incidents to record, I remember filling old notebooks I found around the house made from my brother's early years in school. Events became "events" for me to write about, no doubt in an effort to distance myself from them emotionally and to more rationally attempt to understand them.

My mother was involved in several car accidents (none of which were her fault) and it seemed I was always with her when they happened. I think this too contributed to a nervous preoccupation with safety with me over the years, especially later one year. As my mother and I were driving with an elderly friend of hers, B., I slammed the car door on the poor woman's index finger which was nearly severed and this traumatized me for years thereafter. I began the first stirrings of wanting to be a man but couldn't escape my physical limitations and yet I knew junior high school would be different. But death was never so far away. One afternoon my mother had heard of some accident that had happened only a few blocks north of our house, so I walked with her there and near the Westchester shipping center, an outside "mall", there was a canal where several police cars and an ambulance rested at its edge. We moved close and saw two men hauling up from the canal in a body basket an elderly woman, her light-colored dress mud-stained and wet, frozen in rigor mortis in a slightly contorted position with her arms extended. It was shocking and deeply disturbing. I looked at her corpse impassively, already inured it seemed, clenching my teeth, saying nothing.

1.9 Older and wiser: a new decade

Sometime just after the moon landing in July 1969, my family's dynamics began returning to normal, but the undercurrent of sorrow and a vague discomfort followed me. I had gained a lot of weight which kept me isolated, but being a voracious reader, I began excelling so much in school, I was expected to know "this or that", no matter what the subject was. When some talk of the Apollo Space Program came on the news, family members would often turn to me asking if I had read anything about that. Or if a hurricane was on its way to Florida, I was the one asked about its daily progress

and whether we should prepare beyond the taping of windows. I became a reliable source of information and an eager disseminator of the same. As junior high school approached, I felt apprehensive not about my academic abilities, but about me. I was awkward, overweight, and the stirrings of girls had begun but, looking as I did, I felt even less sure of myself than perhaps I might have been.

School, though, was fine, and I remember walking there with some of the older boys on our block and enjoying exposure to the upper-level classes many of them were not able to get into. I was exposed to Shakespeare and French, I took Spanish and several advanced reading courses, and generally got all A's in my classes.

My brother, by contrast, had become a star athlete, a weightlifter, baseball player, track and field man, and American football player to boot. He excelled in every macho way I felt inferior about, and he too was a model for me, determined, fiercely competitive, and singularly concentrated on his goals. He possessed a visceral strength and courage and was frequently in fights with one neighbor's son a few houses down from us. He was also more and more out of the house and his exchanges with my father more tempestuous, often over not being supported by my father's presence at his games and practices. During those years he and I shared a room, and I hated his easy physical confidence, with friends and with girls. I looked up to him but felt his anger as an uncontrollable disaster waiting to happen and I felt he frequently took his anger out on me. While his athleticism had enormous promise, it came to a shattering end one evening a year or two later when he played high school football and was tackled so hard that his right leg bent into a near impossible angle and the injury was so serious, doctors told my parents that he might have to have it amputated. Thankfully, that did not happen, but his dreams of becoming a professional athlete had died. With incredible determination, he rebounded physically enough to decide to leave and just before he turned 18, my brother joined the Marines.

After he had left, for the first time, I was alone in my own room and saw my inner life grow. I soon discovered one of my brother's old track suits and determined to lose weight. I was sick of feeling fat and like a complete outsider. I began jogging, eventually jogging three miles daily up and back from a large mall and the weight was soon shed.

Junior high came and went without too much happening, although the beginnings of a young adult were already in place. I had found my voice in dealing with friends and convincing them that I was a competent young intellectual. I had lost the weight that had so oppressed me, I excelled in school, I was thin and noticed that I was getting better-looking. I was still shy, in many ways, but in other, more performative ways, I was a young student who was listened to by peers and retained the admiration of the

adults around me. During a course on comparative religions, for example, one teacher had asked me to prepare a lecture about Buddhism. The separation between an internalized trauma and a more ebullient, public manner of being was becoming more visible. I was ready for high school.

1.10 High school and beyond

High school was upon me, and I relished the whole experience but for a few occasions. It was a time of fine-tuning a personality already skilled at performance and competence and yet filled with a mixture of bravado and timidity. It was a time of sharpening my intellectual skills, and it was a time of personal growth. From 1974-1977 I was at Southwest Senior High School in Miami. My first year in high school was an adjustment period in which I had lost the weight of the preceding years and noticed that I was growing facial hair and starting to look properly handsome. I had a girlfriend at the time, and we had a relationship for several years, so that part of me was cultivated and thriving. Intellectually, little happened that first year other than another car accident which had far-reaching implications for me.

One night I took my father's car out, testing my driving skills which were then new as I was still in "Driver's Ed", a mandatory course in our freshman year. My parents had gone out for a few hours and left the keys, "just in case". Coming home I saw that they had returned early, and, panicking, I drove straight into a cement light pole. It was a traumatic event because I knew how much it would set us back financially and because it was all my fault. I didn't drive for years afterwards, too traumatized to even try until much later.

During my second year of high school there was a civics program called Close-Up (Figure 24), for high schoolers who were interested in government¹⁵. It involved a week-long trip to Washington, D.C. where we would attend lectures and workshops while being able to meet politicians and see Congress in action. We would have to raise the funds ourselves (we did car washes) and write a paper afterwards for academic credit. Fortunately for me, a major set of hearings on illegal activities by the CIA had just started: the "Church Committee", led by Idaho Democrat, Sen. Frank Church and officially known as "the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities". It documented, to the shock of US Americans, assassinations and attempts to assassinate foreign leaders, illegal spying against US citizens (including some members of the committee itself),

¹⁵ <https://www.closeup.org/high-school/programs/>

and a probable CIA connection to the JFK assassination¹⁶. All of this was earth shattering news and fed a growing distrust among the public of institutions once held in high esteem.



Figure 24: By 16 I was already inspired by politics and leadership: At Close-Up school trip to Washington, D.C., 1975

I met and got autographs from Sen. Edward Kennedy, CIA Director William Colby, Sen. Barry Goldwater, sat in for hours on the committee's hearings and literally saw/heard dozens of revelations about CIA assassinations which was a jolt of seeing power as it truly is: amoral and directed by men whose lust for power was more important than their commitments to democracy or justice. It was also led by vulnerable men; vulnerable, as when our Close-Up teacher jokingly demonstrated how easy it would be to shoot another Kennedy; this he did as he walked behind Sen. Ted Kennedy on his walks to the Senate chambers early in the morning and, for dark amusement as the Senator passed him, he would turn around and point his finger in a gun-like fashion and pull the imaginary finger. He wasn't being mean, nor was he unsympathetic to the Senator's history. He was making it very clear to us all that these political figures, whom we regarded as giants, are actually vulnerable people. This simple example served as a great lesson to me over the years as I checked my own fascination with historical figures and realized quite quickly after I met many of them, that they were, as he, and my father said, "just people". But the revelations that the

¹⁶ <https://www.maryferrell.org/php/showlist.php?docset=1014>

United States' government had done all the things we accused the Soviet Union of—spying on its own citizens, murdering people abroad, etc.—affected me deeply.

The net effect of the Close-Up trip on me was to create a lasting interest in public affairs, and I began to devour books on politics and develop an interest in socialism. Luckily for me, a new club had appeared on campus, made up of upper classmates who asked me to join. It was called USA (United Student Action) (Figure 27) and while most of our goals were tepid (getting information to students about abortion, mental health, and other services) or slightly "elitist" (critical of "pep rallies" as tools for unthinking conformity) and not all that controversial by today's standards, at the time, we drew an inordinate amount of negative attention from the teachers and even the local school board. Calling our newsletter RPM (Revolutions Per Minute), no doubt helped draw some of that attention. But, made up of ambitious, smart, and very liberal students, we sometimes found cheeky ways to deflect much of the vague critiques and channel our non-conformist energy humorously. For example, we did this through quoting Thomas Jefferson on our masthead ("God forbid we should go more than 20 years without a revolution") and refusing to choose a club "president" out of egalitarian convictions and instead, selecting me as "ambassador".

On weekends, my more spiritual side led me to the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) free Sunday feasts, with public chanting, Indian music, and delicious vegetarian food (along with free books which, despite not being Buddhist, I read and collected for my non-Western religion library) in whose presence I could at least taste a bit of a growing interest in Eastern spirituality. I also went to bookstores, both new and used, buying any Buddhist books I could find. The awkward juxtaposition of religiosity and politics took formal form during those years which soon added a third element, already a part of me, though now began to become a major influence, psychology.

1.11 An unorthodox introduction to psychology

Aside from the strong intellectual interests in religion and spirituality, in high school, I was not much different from other kids my age, struggling with notions of cultural and political identity, my future, my place at home, girls, etc., all in flux. To complicate matters, growing up in Florida during the late 1960s to the 1980s also meant an unusually comprehensive exposure to recreational drugs. When I started high school (1974) marijuana had overtaken both oranges and tourism as the number one industry in the state and recreational use of it was more widespread than anyone cared to admit. However, as this was the early 70s, an association with the counterculture remained to an extent and this recreational use of drugs, at least marijuana and the psychedelics such as LSD or psilocybin ("magic" mushrooms), was still partly associated with the literature about the mind-bending benefits of altered states of

consciousness. These titles included the mystical writings of William Blake, Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, Baba Ram Dass' *Be Here Now*, and the three main works of Carlos Castañeda: *The Teachings of Don Juan*, *A Separate Reality*, and *Journey to Ixtlan*, each of which I devoured multiple times. I discovered more than just infantile thrills; however, I discovered mental connections and an ability to ruminate on topics which later had a profound influence on me. I would also say that I learned more about my mind and of the mystic states I had only read about for years through experimentation with these substances than via the printed word. That also meant a deepening curiosity about psychology.

I was fascinated about the various mental states we manifest and, no doubt partly inspired to find answers to my own suffering, I joined a peer-counseling program led by our school psychologist J.B., an intense but kindly-looking woman in her mid-forties with whom I immediately felt at ease. The room we met in was empty aside for maybe five or six large bean bags on the carpeted floor in a deliberate attempt to create what we would now call a cozy "safe space". There were also several posters on the wall, one of which was the "Gestalt Prayer" (Figure 25), and the room was painted in light shades of blue. She introduced us to the ideas of Fritz Perls' (Gestalt Therapy), Transactional Analysis, and active listening skills which she modeled quite well. With her I was able to speak about my mother's suicide attempt, my family's marginal status, and some of my own insecurities. She was enormously helpful and a major inspiration for my later formal studies in psychology. And in that peer-counseling course, I learned skills I would later apply throughout my life, both professionally and personally. What surprised J.B. as well as me, though, was how natural I was at these processes, and how years of "practice" had enabled me to take to the skills taught with a preternatural speed (creating a warm, safe space to speak openly, active listening, asking appropriate questions, etc.).

During the course, I became eager to explore the various issues which had affected me, and did this openly with the group, such as my father's absences, my mother's suicide attempt, and my own economic fears and insecurities. It was there that I saw that many of my peers also suffered similar and, in some cases, worse traumas, and that behind typical teen facades of smoking and swagger were equally vulnerable youth who struggled to find purpose in school and in their lives. Because of those sessions, I also began to gain a reputation as someone who would listen to others and who cared. I began to take a deeper interest in psychology and started dreaming that a future after high school might be in psychology.

J.B. wasn't the only teacher who made a difference though, and like in my earliest years in grade school, mentors figured prominently in high school. Three in particular stand out. B.P. was a graphic arts teacher who, in a "Commercial Art" course I was obviously not very skilled at, allowed me to simply try and, in frequent talks at his desk, he would ask me questions about my interests and much of that term was spent simply

talking at his desk. He magnanimously gave me a “C” for the course but in my yearbook, he wrote kindly, “I’m expecting a lot from you! B.P.” G.H., the Honors English teacher in 11th grade (Figure 26), an elderly, dignified woman with silver-white hair and a regal bearing (she shared authorship of the English literature textbook we used), had met me the year before when I had won a poetry reading contest. She knew I was a bit of a rebel, but she still always encouraged me to write. (I had chosen “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg, and she had asked if I only wanted to read it for the words “shit” and “fuck” to which I responded with a heartfelt, “No ... it just says something to me about how I feel”). During those classes, where she had us memorize selections of great poets or soliloquies from Shakespeare (many of which I remember to this day) *I saw the light in her eyes sparkle as it became immediately clear she loved what she was teaching, and that enthusiasm inspired me to learn.*

Lastly was B.L., our “Introduction to Philosophy” instructor. An unusual man with a single hoop earring who lived on a boat moored at Coconut Grove harbor, he also taught a college prep Vocabulary class in which, through teaching us hundreds of Greek and Latin roots of English words, enabled us to learn over 900 new words in a single term. He was a favorite of many for his incisive intellect and his invitations to graduates (Figure 28) to visit him and celebrate “with a glass or two of red wine”, which many took him up on. He too, cared about his students, taking calls at night when many of us needed some advice or in the hallways convincing the bored and restless among us from quitting school or from doing something which might get us into trouble.

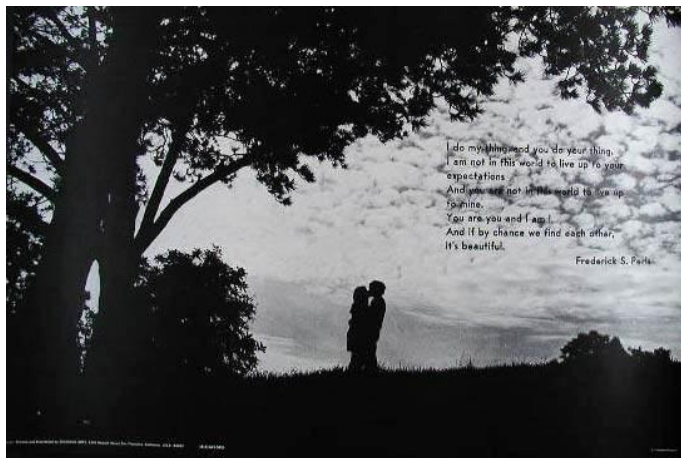


Figure 25: One of the posters in the peer counseling room in high school: Fritz Perls’ Gestalt Prayer

It reads: "I do my thing and you do your thing. / I am not in this world to live up to your expectations/ And you are not in this world to live up to mine. / You are you, and I am I, / and if by chance we find each other, / it's beautiful."

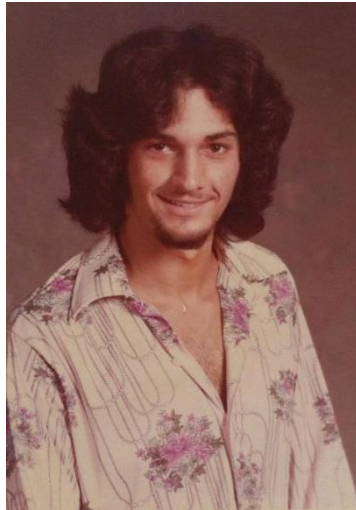


Figure 26: Gaining in confidence: My 11th-grade yearbook photo.

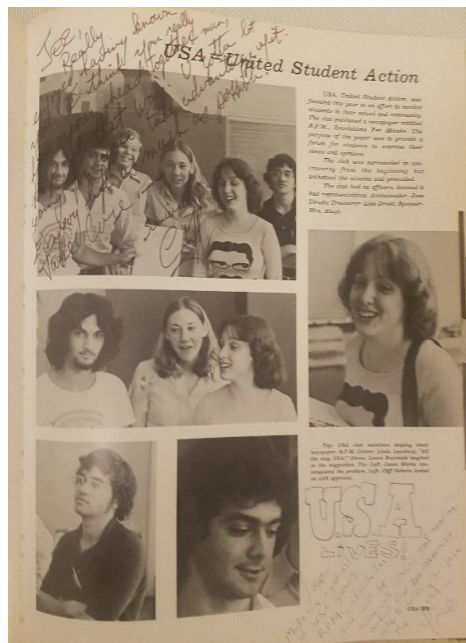


Figure 27: United Student Action (USA) the radical group we started with a fine-tuned sense of humor.

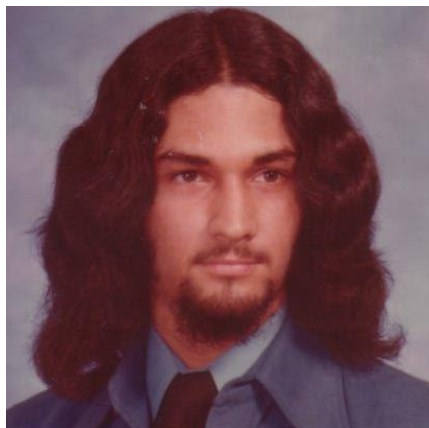


Figure 28: The hippie activist facing an uncertain future: My high school senior photo

1.12 Activism – The beginnings

During the same high school years, I participated in several protests, inspired by my time in Washington, D.C. There was one nuclear power plant in Florida, Turkey Point, and for years, regular protests (Figure 30) occurred out of fears of leakage and ruination of Florida's Everglades National Park, near to where it was situated. There were also new political winds blowing as the Vietnam War only ended upon the fall of Saigon which was in April of 1975 and so the focus shifted to new environmental issues and calls for a shift away from Cold War military spending and increased commitment to social justice concerns. I subscribed to many of the leading left publications such as *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Utne Reader*, and others, and I began to write letters to the editor at local newspapers. My father, noticing my enthusiasm, but also my good fortune at occasionally getting my letters published, warned me with compassionate concern, that despite being an effective and articulate writer, I could get myself into trouble and that it might be best if I "kept my mouth shut". I was exposed to so many injustices I'd never heard of before the revelations of the Church Committee, and, feeling cocky about my own articulateness that I soon became enthralled at the prospect of getting my concerns heard. I occasionally fantasized about entering politics and when I finally did go to college, I veered between East Asian studies and politics. But three more years were to pass before I would get to that point.

1.13 A three-year "gap year"

When I graduated in 1977, I may have had little idea about my future, but I was confident in myself that, taking some time away from school, I might figure it out. Between 1977 and 1980, I worked in construction and for the Department of

Agriculture, spraying citrus fruits with pesticides. I worked every spring at the Dade County Youth Fair and took the occasional dishwasher or laborer jobs at various construction sites. I went to concerts and hung out with friends. For that three-year period, I also read incessantly, wrote a lot, and wandered aimlessly from disco to disco, with my friend "Pudge" (Figure 29) who encouraged me to get out of my intellectual shell and be his "wingman" when he went chasing girls.



Figure 29: "Pudge" and his intellectual "wingman"- me - in Miami, c. 1978

I grew in confidence but wrestled with my future, and watched as my friends took one of three options after graduating high school: I was afraid of making a decision. They either joined one of the military service branches, went to college, or, like I did, spent time in-between, flitting from one job to another, without a firm commitment to anything, often ending up in lower middle-class positions and remaining in some cultural limbo I did not want for myself. Neither did my parents, who regularly asked me what I planned to do with my life. They didn't have the money to pay for my college, and I was too afraid to even broach the subject with them. For three years this is how it went, back and forth, always vacillating between wanting more and figuring I was destined to remain unimportant, and I wasn't satisfied with any of it.

Discussion

In this first period of my life, all the building blocks of my pillars were constructed. Buddhism became the larger of the three simply because it contained a clear message: suffering is part of life, a big part. I felt Buddhism was an answer to a vague something I knew was happening but something I feared to articulate. I was scared and suffering from a vague fear that everything might disappear suddenly, and I would

be left alone. And afraid I was. In these earliest years, I had so many incidents I only now regard as traumatic, and my fear was an inchoate reaction to a deep-seated sense that something was going to happen. Something awful, scary, life changing. In these years I was frightened and cried myself to sleep waking up the next morning oblivious to the night's powerful reactions and carrying on with my life. One that grew further and further away from my emotions, and more into my head.

Watching a man shot to death, moving to Miami, feeling alienated, my mother's suicide attempt, slamming a woman's finger in a car door, the death of Valerie, my teen cousin, the big accident when I suddenly stopped having seizures, these were just some of the large events that took place in my first ten years. I think that, while many good and loving memories are there as well, I felt that period was one of great instability and stress.

Buddhism explained my suffering and softened my fear, representing a way to experience suffering by the acceptance of suffering as part and parcel of living in *samsara*. Though I did not have a way to speak about it, reading that our lives are full of suffering and that there was a way out of suffering made sense to me. That is, it offered a reasonable, if sobering, explanation that we will all witness birth, old age, sickness, and death again and again. This was the very nature of existence and careful acceptance of this could lead to a kind of radical peace. Buddhism spoke in measured terms of the human habits of clinging to the impermanent that resonated deeply with me. Unfortunately, Buddhism's more heartfelt expressions of compassion and its pastoral side were not visible to me in this period, only its rational, carefully thought-out explanations for human suffering. But, at the time, that was enough to offer some relief – that is, if I thought carefully enough, I could figure things out and accept them as they were.

I later understood that, of my three Pillars, Buddhism provided me a deep understanding of suffering in life through contemplation of impermanence and our collective resistance to the acceptance of impermanence, while psychology and activism were the ways for me to work to practically alleviate it. Each upholds my inner life and its external expression.

The attempt to understand my earliest experiences did not begin long after I was in the midst of those experiences. For example, I had already exhibited a reflective nature, attempting to understand the various tragedies that befell my family. I was a bright and gregarious child but much of that changed after my mother's event which dealt a serious blow to my personal sense of safety and seemed to have been the major event of my developing emotional life.

It is this tumultuous period which has most relevance to social cognition theories about development (Janssen et al., 2022). All the most common behavioral manifestations of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) “characterized by intrusive thoughts or flashbacks, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, negative alterations in mood and cognitions, and hyperarousal features” (p. 35) were present in me. For most PTSD sufferers, “the ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to other people” (pp. 35-36)—what social cognition is constructed upon—decreases. But instead of compromising my ability to “understand others’ mental states” I developed the opposite: a hypersensitive and performative set of reactions that enabled me *to project a sense of emotional competence and strength that I did not fully possess*. I believe the loving support of teachers, family members and later, mentors alleviated the most deleterious effects of the traumatic experiences which otherwise left such an imprint on me. Managing to find other ways to gain recognition, I became guarded with a keen sense of pattern recognition that served to emotionally distance myself from others.

In my case, *by age ten, I had developed a sophisticated system for determining how others thought about me and what that meant*. Often it was simply appreciating the love and natural concern given to me by family and schoolteachers. But I also intuited from their concern that I was able to deflect real pain and instead present myself as someone more intelligent and more capable of rationalizing events that might otherwise cause distress. As “el doctorcito” I also saw that this could be used to my advantage at the times I felt insecure. I could say or do someone seen as precocious and receive instant positive feedback, thus buttressing my confidence, but not addressing any deeper dynamics which actually needed more attention.

1.14 Two signs I needed to get out

Another incident which only later struck me as traumatic involved hitchhiking to and from a Led Zeppelin concert. My friend J. and I were coming back from Tampa, some 280 miles away from Miami where we lived, and we had managed one or two long rides which got us close to Miami. Neither of us had a car or could borrow one; it was 1975 and we were both just shy of being 16. We were near Ft. Lauderdale when a large Cadillac pulled over for us. We both joked that it was probably a drug dealer. J. got in on the passenger side; I sat behind the driver. He was a younger man, dressed very well, probably in his late 20s, early 30s and he spoke quickly, brashly and confidently, and in such a manic way we thought he was high on cocaine, a very commonly used drug among the wealthy in those days. After we had driven maybe 20 minutes, I saw a metallic silver box underneath the driver’s seat. I asked him, “Is that a gun case?” and he answered, “Yeah, it is. You wanna take a look?” I said “Sure”, and he added, “Go ahead, open it, take it out”. We were approaching a red light as I pulled the box from under his seat and removed what I know now to be a .45

automatic, a deadly pistol first designed strictly for military use. I held it in my hands as he was breaking for the stop light when he turned his head around toward me and very quickly said, "Let me show you something", whereupon he took the gun from my hand, placed it against my left temple and suddenly pressed the trigger. He laughed, and I was too stunned to realize what had just happened but, sensing that we were in the presence of a seriously unstable individual, we asked to be let out very shortly afterwards and made our way home on foot.

For weeks I shook when I remembered this and spoke of it to very few. I wondered, what if there had been just one bullet in the chamber? What was I doing hanging out with people like this? I knew I was aimless and indecisive about my future, but I also knew I wasn't spending time with the right crowd. Another incident further confirmed this.

I was with my friend "Pudge" (many of us from New York had nicknames: mine was "Wolf", others included Chow Mein, Slimbo, Jimbo, Chino, and Mouse) whom I had met at a graduation party held on the beach. He was from New York City as well and had a reputation as one of the "coolest" guys in school. Each year high schools in the Miami area would get together and celebrate the last day of classes on the first weekend after school had ended and often this was on Crandon Park beach where alcohol, local bands, and pot were plentiful. Pudge and I became inseparable for a couple years, working for the same odd jobs, and weekly cruising the clubs for girls. One night we had been drinking and carousing till around 2 am when we found ourselves at a bar in Miami Beach. There was a quiet, odd-looking character seated next to us at the bar and he seemed unusually interested in what we were saying. We confronted him and he backed away a bit but then offered us some coke and several Quaaludes, a soporific popular at the time. We accepted and kept talking and we thought of him as just some harmless, lonely guy who thought we were "cool" and wanted to hang out with us. After a while (and a few drinks and more cocaine) he offered to show us some guns in his car. He said he was a gun dealer and then offered to take us shooting. This was perhaps 4 am and we went to a section of the Everglades where he showed us a trunk full of weapons, semi-automatics and automatics. We took turns snorting cocaine, drinking from a shared bottle and shooting automatic weapons against a cement wall for several hours until the sun had fully risen. We parted ways and afterwards both Pudge and I wondered about this act – how brazen and dangerous it was to trust a total stranger like we did, mixing drugs, booze, and guns. But we did. And after several years of this kind of activity, I sensed I needed to find another way.



Figure 30: Already getting the attention of older activists: Me at an anti-nuke protest in Miami, c. 1979.

1.15 1980: A pivotal year

I was to turn 21 in August of 1980. I had gotten sick of the endless partying and the aimlessness, the on and off jobs and the general malaise of knowing I could do better, but what precisely “better” meant, I hadn’t a clue. One night, after hours of chasing girls in bars and then recapping the events in front of the house with Pudge, I realized I was done with this life; that I had to get out or I would regret it. I went into my room and watched as he pulled away and knew that my decision meant I would leave Miami forever and a life that I had gotten used to, behind me, once and for all. But I didn’t know how to begin.

Shortly after, I contacted J.B., the high school psychologist who had introduced me to the study of psychology in the peer counseling class. She remained one of the guidance counselors at the school and, after three years away she not only remembered me fondly, but she was eager to help me get a place to take the SAT required for college entry. I had few expectations as my parents didn't have the money to pay for my school and I was timid about taking a test after having finished high school three years earlier. But J.B. reassured me that my probable scores would be high enough to get me grants and potential scholarships. This may have been a bit optimistic, but she understood something I didn't – that after three years of not being in school, but working, I had put my considerable learning into practical effect, and she felt I was a safe bet as a result. She was right. I scored 1250 on the SAT – 700 in English alone would have put me in a very high bracket. I was shocked and excited. My father had always told me, "My mother loved people who read books" and when I first heard this, I understood how much she had wanted for her children to become educated in this new country she had moved to and now, here I was, ready to go to college! I had no idea how to plan this nor did I feel comfortable at the prospect of being around kids from higher socio-economic backgrounds than mine, intuitively fearing their ease with cultural capital I lacked. But I was excited. I felt optimistic, hopeful for my future, and I allowed myself to dream.

I applied to four schools: Hunter College in New York City, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, New College in Sarasota, Florida, and Eckerd College in St.

Eckerd College

Founded in 1958 as Florida Presbyterian College it changed its name to Eckerd College after Florida drugstore-chain owner Jack Eckerd donated 12.5 million dollars in 1972. It is a private, liberal arts college on Florida's west coast in the city of St. Petersburg, retaining a "covenant relationship" with the Presbyterian Church. At the time of my enrollment, (1980-1983) it had 1250 students and now has just 1800. Its lovely location on the Tampa Bay makes it a desirable place for northerners to study and a large percentage of the student body was from the northeast when I attended. While it had a reputation as a party school with its tolerant alcohol policies and allowance of pets on campus, it also had a good reputation as a serious and innovative school. It was the first school to initiate an "autumn term" exclusively for incoming freshmen as well as a Winter Term where one course was focused on. In addition, over 90% of its full-time faculty had PhDs (higher at the time than Harvard) and when faced with having to integrate, when the Board of Trustees balked, the entire faculty resigned en masse. Its East Asian Studies and writing programs appealed to me as well as its close distance to Miami.

Textbox 3: Eckerd College

Petersburg, Florida. All had good political science or creative writing departments but the latter two had the advantage of being closer to home coupled with East Asian Studies teachers or programs. I was accepted to all four and chose Eckerd College because it was small (1,250 students) and had a better East Asian Studies program than the others. I could not believe my luck! No one in my family had gone to college but for my father's youngest brother who was a Colonel in the Air Force.

1.16 Eckerd College 1980 – 1983

My mother was ecstatic, and she continually said how proud my father was of me (he was far shyer about openly expressing these sentiments than she). In those last days before leaving for college, I asked my mother to teach me to iron, to sew, to cook and whatever else I might need to do. We planned a trip up to St. Petersburg for an orientation evening for the families where they would drop me off. A few weeks before that, my friend F. and I drove up to St. Petersburg to check it out and I came away with good feelings. Eckerd College was unique in the US at the time for allowing pets in individual dorm rooms and having an "autumn term" solely for incoming freshmen from early August to the third week in September. Every day I was getting more and more excited. I had picked a roommate from Tennessee who was into punk music like I was and who, in addition, had a red-tailed hawk which he would keep as a pet. It all sounded beguilingly big! At the end of the orientation night, an occasion where families gathered in the Chapel for a celebratory convocation, I walked my parents back to the parking lot where they and my sister were to drive back home. I hugged both my mom and sister, then, before I was to hug my father, I grabbed his hand in a manly congratulations-type handshake, then I hugged him and, pulling away, I saw the look of joy and pride in his teary eyes. It was a beautiful moment, but I still couldn't wait to begin on my own and start college life. They drove away, I pulled out a cigarette and ran to meet the new friends I'd just made.

Little did I know that, within a month, another violent incident would shatter my world permanently.

1.17 Entering college and new roles

The three-week Eckerd College "Autumn Term" began for me the moment my parents went back to Miami, and I was left to return to my new dorm room with my southern roommate and his red-tailed hawk (named Sid Vicious) to talk through the rest of the night about who we were and what we wanted for the rest of our lives. It was the first time I'd been away from home alone, aside from that one-week Close-Up¹⁷ trip to

¹⁷ <https://www.closeup.org/high-school/programs/>

Washington, D.C. when I was 16, and, while I was a bit nervous and awkward around my fellow first year classmates, I gradually noticed something comforting.

I was just about to turn 21 and during the first collective meals at the school cafeteria, with the usual cocky bantering and occasional food fights, I realized that, aside from the teachers, janitorial staff, or other college staff, I was the oldest person around. Most were 17 or 18 and, at that age, a three-year difference was a big deal. This lent me a cache that I hadn't realized might be useful. Inside, I felt like the awkward one, whose parents had never finished high school, much less attended college, whose income was lower than most of my peers' parents, and whose racial and cultural background stood out. But among my first-year peers, apparently, I stood out, but for other reasons: I was thought of as more self-possessed, "worldly", and confident than they. I had been working for three years, had seen a bit of the world, and therefore was considered an older and wiser peer. It was a new role, and it took me little time to learn how to play it to full advantage. Particularly with women – a major concern at that age. Nevertheless, the days were filled with classes, often outside in the warm Florida sun, lots of reading, and one major class led by a professor who would be our officially assigned "Mentor" throughout our undergrad years; a novel set-up Eckerd College had pioneered. My mentor was tailor-made for me, it appeared: he was a long-haired hippie who was a Princeton PhD in political science and was both involved with Eastern religions and radical politics.

I had made one friend, J.S., an upperclassman who worked in the summer on campus, so he made my transition very enjoyable. I worked with him at the Student Activities Board and our job was to set up all the entertainment activities with speaker systems, decorations, or even beer kegs, riding our golf carts all over campus, hauling equipment here and there. In the process I got to meet a handful of the upper classmates (who were closer in age to me) who also had stayed for the summer. Other than class time, our days were filled with frisbee, sunbathing, trips to the beach or local eateries, and nights with concerts, dances, and lots and lots of talks with the new students from around the country. I relished it all and was amazed at how successful I was at navigating this transition. I was filled with hope for my future, dreaming of being a writer or specializing in politics or East Asian Studies – all three appealed to me equally. I would graduate college and bring pride to my family and success to myself. I felt on top of the world.

The three weeks of Autumn Term ended, older students were returning, and I quickly found I had two distinct peer groups to flit to and back from: the older students who were my age, and the newer ones who, like me, were new to college life. I felt loved and admired by both and some have remained in contact with me to this day. As the first semester of regular school began, I got the earliest inkling that, while it would be harder than a single, intensive course for three weeks, I could actually handle college. A few weeks into September, I finally received my first college grade, an "A" for the

Autumn Term. I ran back to my dorm with the letter in my hand, thrilled beyond words. I entered my dorm house and just as soon as I got in one of the students said, "Oh, José... we were looking for you. You have a call from your aunt" (there was one pay phone in the corner of both floors). I picked up the phone and immediately a recognizable but worried voice came on, "Joe ... this is Títí [Dixie] ...*mira* [look]...your father had an accident at work, and they don't know if he will make it. Joe, *you have to come home*. Your mother needs you here." I stammered a few questions, but nothing was clear; this had only just happened, and she said that it was "really bad", that he had smashed his head on the deck of the tugboat (Figure 31) where he now worked and that the doctors weren't sure if he would survive even the next few hours. With the letter still in my hand, I felt my world collapse. Everything I had worked for, wanted, and hoped for, all my academic dreams that I had so fervently cultivated, I felt immediately drifted away from me and I stood there, depleted from emotion, too shocked to even reply, vulnerable, and totally crestfallen. I mumbled something about finding a way home to Miami, then hung up. The Resident Adviser, A., usually a Senior in charge of small house issues had quickly come downstairs and tried talking with me but I waved her off and then ran outside, across the field and to the seawall that faced the Gulf of Mexico a few hundred yards away. I fell apart there, crying, cursing my bad luck, damning my Life, scared, and very confused. I was sad and desperate, and I had no clue how I could get down to Miami (a 4+-hour drive south) immediately, much less deal with a life-altering event like this one. I had never felt so alone. I wailed more deeply than I had ever done. Soon A. came over and sat next to me, putting her arm around me asking if there was anything she could do to help. It was a terribly sad, tenuous time.

Within a few hours I managed to quickly pack a few things and find a ride to the airport where I flew back to Miami. On board, and seated next to me was a tall white haired Catholic priest, P.N., with whom I opened a conversation with the impolite but sincere, "Father, I am not Catholic, nor even a Christian, but my father is dying, and do you mind if I talk with you?" He looked a bit shocked at first but then quickly grasped my quandary and began asking me questions about my family, who I was, what I was doing, about my father, etc. He offered me a drink which I received with shaky hands and then, when we got to Miami, he not only gave me a ride to the hospital, but he stayed with my family for most of that night, giving my father the Anointing of the Sick and the Viaticum ("Last Rites"). Unbeknownst to us, he was not only a priest but the president of a major college and so we were all surprised and most impressed with this man's informal, pastoral manner. He became yet another role model for me in a long line of spiritual teachers; from even those of a different faith (the Rev. Vincent Harding and Rabbi Mordecai Twersky are just two others from my time at The Naropa Institute). This began a pattern of interfaith dialogue and the

attempt to unify the deep academic knowledge I was cultivating within myself and translate that into a more pastorally practical expression, via these examples I was encountering, which served me well years later when I actually became a chaplain.

My father did not die that day—that awful occasion did not come until almost 20 years later—but the father that I had known all my life was effectively gone and another man, severely compromised both physically and mentally, survived. After the accident, he remained in a coma for well over a month. When he came to, we realized how much everything had changed. He had a massive blood clot removed from his brain, and he suffered serious brain damage that left him mentally compromised and permanently paralyzed on his right side for the remainder of his life. His accident became another milestone for me, a marker of what was before and what came after being two interrelated but very different parts of my life. While he still survived, the years following his accident were filled with great distress.



Figure 31: Possibly the last picture of my father before his near-fatal accident on the tugboat he worked on.

Upon my return to Eckerd College (Figure 32), I was adrift for the longest time, not knowing if he would survive—he was given low odds at the time—and my grades plummeted for the rest of that first year. I returned home frequently, later spending the summer working while living at our house, and I even considered quitting school. My mother, however, insisted I stay in college. She also ended up suing the towing company he worked for and won a substantial settlement due to the negligence of the captain of the tugboat which had caused my father’s accident. This settlement was

enough to provide my father with constant care at home until his death (with round-the-clock nurses). While this situation seriously altered the family dynamic, at the same time, it kept him with us until December 27, 1999. The years in between are the focus of the next section.

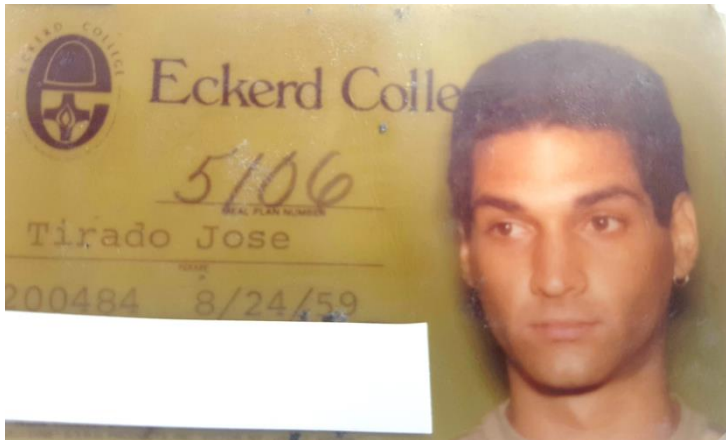


Figure 32: From hopeful hippie to cynical punk: At Eckerd College, 1981.

Discussion

In this section, my second ten years, I continued the story of my life with an eye towards documenting the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. In reviewing the first part of this story, I was struck by the number of critical incidents which I had never, until I began compiling them for this research, considered as anything but normal. But, upon reviewing them, I realized that they truly were anything but normal. The sheer numbers of accidents and stressful situations (a mother's attempted suicide, watching a man shot to death, slamming a car door on a woman's finger, death of family members, etc.) were unusual and it was in the middle of writing them that I began to see them as traumatic events which probably had a far bigger and long-lasting emotional impact than I had previously understood. I believe all the core dynamics which followed, a personal guardedness, a sensitivity to injustice, a fear of abandonment, a yearning to help others who I sensed were afraid or adrift, and a deep kinship with and desire to understand suffering, all took root in this period. In fact, though historian Stephen Mintz (2015) calls the years between 18-28 "the most pivotal decade in a person's life" I have come to see my first decade as the most important for me. Coupled with an early period of medicalization which might have dampened latent intellectual abilities and then a traumatic head injury from a car accident which seemed to have ushered in an almost manic desire to learn, everything which followed were amplifications of, or reactions to, events that occurred then. I also

benefited from mentors and role models who seemed to have sense of my psychological injuries and who were extra kind and helpful as a result. And this process of influential teachers appearing at key points in my life continued in the second decade.

Other dynamics were at play during this time period. I came to regard my family, often poor, unlearned, unsophisticated, etc. as both something to reject and something to pity. I loved them – and they loved me, the performer that I became. But I was hiding a terrible insecurity and a growing distance from my cultural heritage which I came to regard as inadequate. I came to pity them and to want to help them, but, at the same time, I began to lose my identity *with* them.

By the time I went to college I had lost much of my Spanish-speaking ability and rejected being a part of them. I was “just American” on those rare occasions I thought about it, but otherwise I had cut a valuable tie which only began to repair itself years later, beginning with the death of my grandmother just before I returned from Japan.

The second ten-year period became a testing ground for skills I had begun earlier, and which transferred quite easily into future educational activities. I became keenly interested in psychology and began wondering if I should later pursue a career in psychology. In high school, I joined a radical club, began attending protests, and became politically involved after a high school trip to Washington, DC. I also bummed around after high school graduation working construction jobs and taking large amounts of drugs while knowing that I was wasting my time. I returned to education after a three-year lull and found that I could compete, in fact, that I could excel in school, but this newfound excitement underwent a dramatic setback with yet another traumatic event, the near fatal brain injury to my father within weeks of having begun college. After just over twenty years, I had a world of experience behind me and I felt tired, but much more was soon to come, and to carry my life forward in even more dramatic ways.

2 My Second 20 Years, 1980 - 2000

When I returned to Eckerd College, some three weeks after my father's accident, I was greeted enthusiastically by many of the newly made friends I had just left and, while we had only known each other for a raucously intensive month, it felt quite genuine. And yet, while I felt secure in the embrace of this new community of mine, lurking in the back of my mind every single day, was the very real fear that my father was now "broken", and that, given the seriousness of his condition, he might not live much longer. The doctors had said as much to us, warning that because the clot on his brain was so large, and its removal involved taking with it a significant amount of the surrounding dead brain tissue, all things considered, he would never be the same. This also meant that at any moment, I might have to leave again, discarding all my emotional and intellectual investments in pursuing college and returning instead to an uncertain and what I felt would be certainly a death to a future out of Miami, a place where I had never really felt at home. Thus, I lived in a liminal space neither fully present nor committed to school and my friends there, nor to either my mother or father.

For the next year or so, I reentered school with a careless abandon (Figure 33), immersing myself in too many drugs, too much alcohol, and too many journeys in search of intense thrills with no care about my future, always fearing it would end with another jarring phone call. For more than a year, I struggled, dropping several classes, failing a couple, barely scraping by in the remainder. I divided my world into two parts, one part nervously ever vigilant about an impending crisis which would forever take me from the first place I felt I could shine on my own, and the other ebulliently celebrating in every way conceivable the day and nights as they occurred. I rarely slept. My frantic reputation solidified into becoming "No Doze Joze", the moniker I chose for radio shows (the alliterative "No Doze Joze Show") I did as a DJ at night at the school radio station. It reflected a shared observation among many at the school that I seemed to always be out and about, at any hour, every day. I spoke to the American Friends Service Committee on punk rock's social relevance and I was the MC at a major on campus concert of dance-punk sensations Bow Wow Wow. I was everywhere and everywhen and only my closest friends understood that I was desperately squeezing everything I could out of my college experience, since it might end at any minute. But no one broached the subject, and I certainly wasn't going to do that myself.



Figure 33: Descending more deeply into craziness: At an Eckerd College Sid Vicious Dance party, 1981.

By 1982, things in Miami had stabilized somewhat and my father had returned home to constant care from nurses. My mother was in the process of suing the company my father worked for and eventually she was awarded a significant sum of money. I found an understanding girlfriend and my grades improved. In 1983, my last year at Eckerd, I had all A's and, coupled with an upcoming summer course at Cornell University, I felt confident that I would soon graduate and probably move on to graduate school.

2.1 The Seminar on the Sutras

One day my new mentor and professor of Buddhism had showed me a poster he'd hung up in his office advertising an upcoming "1983 Summer Seminar of the Sutras" at Cornell University¹⁸, his alma mater. My eyes lit up as the program was a gathering of some of the world's most eminent Buddhist scholars for three weeks, bookended by two Zen *sesshin* (intensive, seven-day practice periods) led by Joshu Sasaki Roshi (1907-2014), a pioneer in the bringing of Zen to the West, then 76. Sasaki Roshi would also be one of the lecturers during the seminar, so this was a unique

¹⁸ I wrote about this event shortly after Leonard Cohen died. He too was a student of Sasaki Roshi's and a participant at the same seminar, the occasion of an unforgettable meeting with a legendary singer-songwriter: <https://naftali2012.wordpress.com/2016/11/28/zen-the-art-of-ouzo-remembering-leonard-cohen/> (in Tirado, 2016b)

opportunity to both practice and study Zen in an academic environment with a famous Zen master and many well-known Buddhist authors.

For nearly a month I was immersed in a world I could hardly have imagined beforehand for several reasons (Figure 34). First, it took place at an Ivy League school's fraternity house. The idea of staying in an Ivy League school seemed by itself to be an accomplishment of sorts, given my family's relationship to education, and I felt out of place immediately, surrounded by White, well-educated students who were enrolled there at Cornell. Second, this was my first trip outside Florida since that accident which had ended my seizures and, being on my own, was intimidating, though quite exciting. Last, this was a crucial moment for me for it would be the first time I would live and spend time with Buddhists, immersing myself in the Japanese Zen experience, testing whether I could not only physically manage the process but also enter a world I had only read about. Crucially, it would also plant the seed of actually going to Japan which I did within a year, leaving Eckerd and eventually staying about five years.

I surreptitiously kept notes during that weeklong *sesshin* and planned on making them the core of my senior thesis. At that time, there were very few accounts of the traditional process by which a Rōshi and a student interacted, particularly during those periods when they met privately, known as *sanzen* and an "answer" was given for their assigned "koan"¹⁹. Presenting these notes to G.L. after I returned, he agreed that, as I was contributing to the then current understanding of what was generally

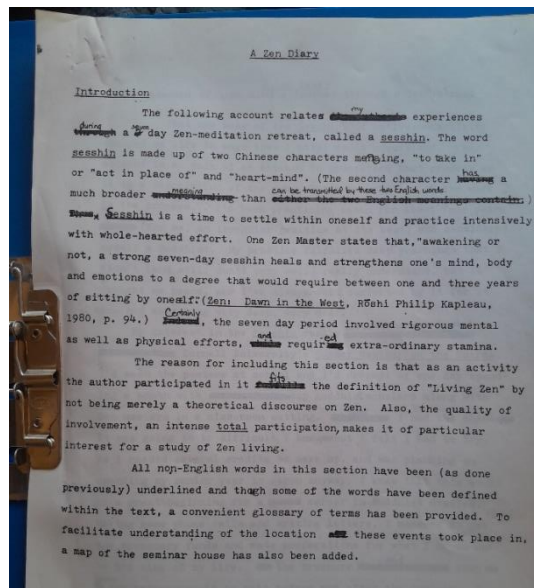


Figure 34: Seeking a new direction: "A Zen Diary: Meetings with a Zen Master" the notes intended for my senior thesis at Eckerd College

¹⁹ A *koan* is a traditionally un-logically-solvable conundrum taken from dialogues between master and student in Zen/Chan Buddhism ("What is the sound of one hand clapping?" is a famous one) used to shock the student into a non-ratiocinative state which is said to be a non-dual apprehension of Reality, a moment of enlightenment. In Rinzai Zen, the school of Sasaki Rōshi, koans were given for the students to spontaneously answer and advancement through the process said to be indicative of the depth of a student's insight.

considered a secretive process, I definitely should spend some time in Japan. It began to dawn on me that, as I had an already advanced knowledge of Buddhism and as I was a serious practitioner as well, maybe I could become a Buddhist scholar and a low-level, but palpable (if ambitious) career possibility began to take shape. Soon thereafter, plans were being made for me to become an exchange student with Nanzan University and a whole new world opened up – because, like my father before me so many years ago, I was going to Japan.

2.2 1983-1988 Contradictions: Buddhism and life in Japan

In the early summer of 1983, a few months before my 24th birthday, I was on a plane headed for Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan (Figure 35) along with about 20 students from several Ohio universities. This was the culmination of years of dreaming about both the country and Buddhism. I was to spend my senior year there as an exchange student. I was ecstatic.

I was assigned a host family with three small children who were thrilled to have a *gaijin* (“foreigner”) living in their house. My host mother, Mrs. T., shuttled me to various places of interest those first few months but, being a little older than most exchange students, I was restless to live on my own and began looking almost immediately for my own apartment which I found within a few months. Immediately I threw myself into both intensively learning Japanese language, arts, and history during the day in school, while flinging myself into Japanese nightlife with manic abandon. I felt at home in Japan, I loved the social manners and the subtleties of the language and in how people acted. I felt safe socially and entranced psychologically. I loved the local shrines and temples often next to grocery stores, railway stations or schools. The unique Japanese juxtaposition of old and new was stunning and left a deep impression on me immediately. This included what I learned to regard as the intriguing Japanese “religio-aesthetic” that sacralizes everyday items and activities (Pilgrim, 1977).



Figure 35: A new adventure far from home: At Nanzan University, in Nagoya, Japan. Standing, far left, second row.

I spent a lot of time after school frequenting two establishments, *Gomitori*, a *robatayaki* (basically a bar and grill) in which I was such a regular I was personally asked to recruit foreigners to assist in the opening of their new stores a few years later, and *Café Yuri*, a jazz-themed coffee shop. I took my books to both places and would study for hours and hours on end. My studies went well, and I was amazed at how quickly I learned the language and felt comfortable in a cultural matrix many of my Western peers felt restrictive. At night I frequented the many discos and bars and very soon I became a staple of Nagoya's nightlife. I felt like a king – I was independent, teaching English both privately and as the Head Instructor at an English language school (Figure 36) in Hekinan City, a short train ride outside Nagoya, studying in school, and very popular among the women. After finishing my first year, I extended it to a second year to further deepen my language skills and to continue my immersion in Japan and its culture. Eventually, I managed to stay three more years. I wanted to stay forever. I took frequent trips to Kyoto and Osaka and spent weekends in monasteries in the north and western parts of the main island, Honshu. I regularly followed the sumo tournaments, meeting some of its greatest champions (Figure 37), went to concerts and spent time with many of the musicians afterwards (INXS, Echo & the Bunnymen, for example), translated short stories from Japanese to English, wrote articles reviewing Nagoya nightspots, and became a life-of-the-party sort among a growing circle of ex-pats from around the world and a hipster Japanese crowd, confident and possessed of more multi-ethnic friends than their parents ever dreamed possible. My years there remain the most memorable of my life.

I also smoked too much and drank too much, and the contradictions eventually got me wondering if, in fact, I was using my time in Japan to avoid my family dynamics and the more elevated spiritual yearnings which had brought me to Japan in the first place. I foolishly married a young woman (as much for a visa as for love) and when it inevitably collapsed after she told me she was sleeping with men on the side to save money for a trip she had been planning on for a year, I fell apart inside. Another trauma, another shock to my system that I had almost come to expect in my life. I wondered if there wasn't more to my life than being a degree-less vagabond Buddhist adrift in the glaring contradictions of living a monk's life one week and an English-teaching playboy's life the next. On and on that internal debate continued.

2.3 Teaching: becoming a teacher

The reason I was able to stay in Japan as long as I did was because I taught English. During the 1980s, Japan was experiencing an unprecedented economic boom²⁰ and its financial ascendancy was proclaimed on magazine covers such as Time and Newsweek regularly at the time. I had never taught before, and yet, *at another level I had been doing nothing but teaching since I was young*. When I first heard about the trend among the exchange students of doing "Ei-kai-wa" (英会話 "English conversation") for money, I didn't understand how valuable a native speaker truly was. Businessmen sometimes paid the equivalent of 100\$ an hour to just sit across from a foreigner and practice their English skills. Waitresses, housewives, young college students, and your average city worker all did the same, at less, but still lucrative rates (between 20\$-60\$ an hour). When one of the native English-speaking Nanzan students was leaving, often after just one semester, they would hand over their clients to another native speaker. "Hey, I have a couple of clients but I'm leaving ... you want them?" was heard so often we joked that it was like selling drugs! And like drugs, we uprooted college students became quickly addicted. It paid for our partying and our meals. I got my first clients within two months of arriving and after a couple of years, not only had I become the Head Instructor of a small, but prosperous school that taught children to adults, but I also had maybe 10 regular clients who saw me between one to three times a month.

Soon I would be teaching one night a week at Dentsu, Inc., then the world's largest advertising agency in their international bureau. I realized early on that their collection of conversational English books was not only inadequate to the task of helping them advance their skills, but they didn't know how or where to begin. Their understanding of English was actually pretty good, and they were quite familiar with business and

²⁰ <https://factsanddetails.com/japan/cat24/sub155/entry-5616.html>

financial terms but they had no opportunities to practice such and thus took any articulate, ambitious native English speaker and basically begged them to help them learn English so they could help their company, and by extension, their country, thrive in this heady era. I put aside all the usual books and began using selected articles from *Time* and *Newsweek* which, as mentioned earlier, often featured Japan during this new period. I asked them to read the articles and then each come up with one question and we would go around the room, and they would be explaining, extracting, and experiencing a new level of English, relevant to their interests and livelihoods far more than simple, "Where are you from?" or "I am from Japan, and I work at an ad agency"-type conversation levels. They loved it, loved me and I loved being able to do this. I made the process of learning English relevant to their lives, constructing a program in which they could increase their vocabulary, develop a repertoire of English skills applicable to their jobs, and have fun doing it, all at the same time. Here I was, living in Japan without even a bachelor's degree, and I was teaching executives at a world-famous agency English that was applicable to their professions. After work, they invariably would take me to some restaurant for food and drinks and several times when they, as a department, had to take business trips to Kyoto or Osaka, they also took me along with them, all expenses paid, of course. *I was a natural teacher*. Years later, I understood this ability as German writer Rainer Rilke had described it, saying, "*The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens*" (Rilke, 1934/1954) [emphasis added]. While this was the first time I taught for money, it had come as the culmination of years of informal teaching, for free. In Japan, my skills had been put to the test, and I passed successfully, giving me a confidence I hadn't possessed before, and this successful stint at teaching determined much of what was to follow personally and professionally.

The advertisement is for UNC International, a school for English instruction. It features a large red and white logo at the top left. The main headline is "無料 英語体験入学" (Free English Experience Enrollment) in large, bold characters. Below this, there are several sections labeled A through F, each describing a different course. Section A is for elementary school students, B for middle school students, C for high school students, D for social English, E for business English, and F for social English. The dates "3月5日-11日" (March 5-11) are prominently displayed. A photograph of a man, presumably the instructor, is shown in a circular frame on the right. At the bottom, there is a registration form titled "体験入学申し込み書" (Experience Enrollment Application Form) and the UNC logo with contact information.

Figure 36: “Head Instructor”: Advertisement for UNC International in Hekinan City, Japan, where I taught English.



Figure 37: I was passionate about Japanese culture and this included Sumo: With Sumo Ōzeki champion Asashio Taro (朝潮 太郎) c.1985.

2.4 Too much of a good thing?

By 1987, I had grown restless. I was making decent money, but I spent it as soon as I got it; I had many friends in Japan, but I still felt lonely, and I was already divorced. I loved the country and dreaded returning to the US, but without a degree, I felt like I couldn't advance in any professional direction in either country. While I had also begun writing articles, I realized I needed more work on that craft and more contacts. And finally, my trips to Buddhist monasteries for short retreats were very satisfying but grew more infrequent as I worked more. I also felt that I had let down my family and my faith. It dawned on me that my thoughts of becoming a Buddhist scholar were dying. I wasn't going to go on and study Pali and Sanskrit and/or one of the other Western languages like German which was used in the earliest translations, and I realized that I probably did not have that kind of discipline. I was too active, too "street" for that life. And yet, I was too much of an intellectual to be fully "street". In short, I was ready to leave.

I had just gotten a girlfriend, K., but she was to leave for college soon in the States, so I assumed we'd just go our separate ways. I contacted my mother, who sent some money saying I could come home for a while before deciding what to do next. But I couldn't go back to Eckerd College. I felt that I had broken a promise and was too ashamed to try that again. And finally, my grandmother, the only "abuela" I had ever known, was dying and, in a novel arrangement at the time, my sister called me in Japan to connect me in a three-way call to Puerto Rico where she was. I found myself unable to really express how I felt with her, and the call ended unsatisfactorily for me.

"Latino" or "Chicano"?

The terms "Latino" and "Chicano" are not technically interchangeable terms although in the Los Angeles area they were sometimes confusedly used that way.

"Latino" refers to a pan-Hispano linguistic and cultural heritage, centering itself primarily in the United States from the perspective of each group being a Spanish-speaking minority in the United States and, when working together in arenas of representation or civil rights concerns, would gather as one political unit to assist the others.

"Chicano" refers to persons born in the United States of Mexican descent. Thus, while in Los Angeles the largest single group of Latinos were Mexican-Americans or, Chicanos, (and this is true also for the United States at large) Puerto Ricans, Guatemalans, El Salvadorans, Panamanians and others put aside their differences and came together to work for greater and more accurate representation in the entertainment industry, as in my work at the Latino Writers Group and Nosotros. Jokes about the tenuous convenience of such were frequent, one went like this: in a group of "Latinos" in the US, the Mexicans generally hung out together, the Puerto Ricans likewise, as well as the Salvadoreans, etc. If an Anglo was in the room, however, we'd all magically transform into "Latinos", putting aside differences that only moments before might have had us at each other's throats.

Textbox 4: "Latino" or "Chicano"?

I never recovered from that and began to rethink who I was and where I belonged. I bought some books in Spanish and determined to at least begin there. So, I left Japan and went back to the States and spent a little time with my mother, my father, and his round-the-clock retinue of nurses in Miami. It was soon clear to me that I couldn't stay there too long, the emotional intensity was too much, and my mother understood, helping me plan to go elsewhere. I remembered that my friend F. had left Miami for New Hampshire so I thought I might go there to start afresh.

For a few months I lived at his place in Concord, New Hampshire, basically feeling unsure of my life but at that point, in my late 20s, I felt I could afford such indecisiveness for a little while longer. We went to Boston on weekends for concerts, beer, and bookstores, and for a short time that was fun. When K. later invited me to go live in Albany, New York where she was studying, I decided to join her but, within less than a year my mother had grown exasperated with taking care of my father and plaintively asked if I could go down to help. I did, and for almost a year I did my best to help her in the house, cleaning, keeping her company and her spirits high, and dealing with my father whose progress was now understood to have ended and his own realization of this bringing him tremendous frustration, anger, and sadness. It was difficult for me, too, and I felt torn by my obligation to my family and my need to do something with my life. I was the only one of us three available to help: my sister was in Los Angeles working in the entertainment industry at Columbia Pictures, and my brother in northern California with a wife and two small children. Finally, by the summer of 1989 my mother again just suggested I try something else, that my father was her burden and hers alone and that I should go off and try to make my own life.

2.5 A restless time: 1987-1999

Los Angeles – Hollywood, screenplays, & Latino writers

When I arrived in Los Angeles, it was an unbearable 113°F (45°C) at the airport with heavily polluted air and with a wall of heat that stunned me as my sister picked me up. She had been living in Los Angeles for a few years and was an assistant to R.S., one of Hollywood's most famous producers who had been responsible for discovering a world-famous Oscar and Emmy award winning actress and singer. My sister lived in North Hollywood, and I stayed with her for a few months before finding a job at a press clipping bureau in downtown Los Angeles. She began to introduce me to her circle of friends, perhaps most importantly David Dantes, a former Maoist Progressive Labor Party activist who was now an entertainment attorney. David became one of my most important mentors, 13 years older and a former revolutionary who still cared deeply for the dispossessed and who retained a former leftist's vocabulary and critique of oppression and capitalism. We had met at a social event where, in some

passing conversation I corrected someone's account of the Second World War (they had said the United States had "won the war against fascism") I told them that, if anyone did, Soviet Marshal Zhukov probably "won the war" as it was the Soviet Union's sacrifice of nearly 40 million of its people that truly defeated fascism. He overheard this and immediately coming over to me said, "Tirado²¹ we have to talk." From that point on, we were inseparable buddies, with him mentoring me about left politics, Latino movements, and where we could go as Latinos in the entertainment industry (like me, he too aspired to writing screenplays), and he brought me into contact with many more people in the industry, finally recruiting me to be the head of a new organization he was trying to begin exclusively for screenwriters. It was to be called The Latino Writers Group (LWG) (Figure 38) and it was the first organization for the advancement of Latino screenwriters, ever, anywhere. We held workshops with top writers and directors (Harlan Ellison, Wes Craven), had roundtable discussions, and generally provided a forum for newer and older Latino writers to exchange ideas and share their work (one person we discovered and cultivated, J.L. became an award-winning screenwriter, and many others went on to work as TV show and feature screenwriters).

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-08-10-ca-300-story.html>



Figure 38: Glory days as a Latino activist in Hollywood: At the press conference for the formation of the Latino Writers Group of screenwriters, with director Luis Valdez ("La Bamba", "Zoot Suit") independent filmmaker Kurt MacCarley, and David Dantes.

²¹ It is very common among Latinos to refer to someone by their last name.

Almost immediately after my arrival in Los Angeles I joined *Nosotros*, the “oldest Latino arts advocacy organization in the United States”²², dedicated to increasing Latino representation both in front of and behind the camera. I met and became friends with many Latino actors and directors including Edward James Olmos, Moctezuma Esparza, Esai Morales, Lupe Ontiveros, and others. I also joined the Hispanic Academy of Media Arts and Sciences which was geared more towards improving the Latino imagery in the major media, and I started writing for both organizations (Figure 39). Eventually I became a writer and editor of *Nosotros’ Golden Eagles Award program*, and I began to turn my attention to screenwriting. I soon found a job at Warner Bros. West Coast Feature Story Dept., and it was there I stayed for almost five years, a period of enormous magic and transformation for me personally.

My time in Los Angeles was, at first, concentrated on my work at the studio and learning how to work on the computer system for the storage of screenplay “coverages”, 3–5-page synopses of the scripts written by story analysts and containing a recommendation (almost always a “no” as the studio only purchased 11 out of 15-25 thousand submitted yearly). The department was shifting from paper to digitizing its massive collection of screenplays and we in the Story Dept. were also charged with maintaining the archive of screenplays kept underground in a storage facility that included the onionskin typed *The Jazz Singer*, the first talkie, as well as thousands of reels of films dating back to the 1920s and which included many of Hollywood’s golden age blockbusters. At this point, my personal goal was to become a story analyst myself while I learned the ropes of writing them.

For the Latino Writers Group, we had asked J.B., Senior Story Analyst at WB to conduct workshops for aspiring Latino screenwriters and I soon became his part-time assistant. This, along with my access to scripts during the day, allowed me to read hundreds of screenplays that came into the studio. I was regularly thrilled, but always exhausted; my days were excessively long most times: waking up at 7am to get to work by 9am, processing sometimes hundreds of screenplays into our system, copying and sending them to our term-deal producers such as Irwin Winkler, Clint Eastwood, Madonna, Joel Silver, etc., before 5pm. Then I’d go to a Latino Writers Group meeting or a class led by J.B., meet for drinks usually before (and afterwards) with David to plan for activities we’d need to do for the week, then get home by 11pm to usually follow up with another long phone conversation with David about something we had missed. During the days, I smoked a lot of cigarettes and drank huge amounts of coffee and was constantly sleep-deprived but the excitement of working in Hollywood kept me going. I hadn’t forgotten Buddhism – nor Japan nor any other part

²² <https://nosotrosorg.com/about/>

of my life, in fact – but I had a cool job and was becoming a bit of a little big shot in a big industry, so I plowed ahead.



Figure 39: An early writing gig: My article for *Vida Artistica* featuring Mexican actress, Dyana Ortelli.

At the same time, I was also re-connecting, (perhaps more accurately, just connecting) to a wider community of Latinos (predominantly Mexican-American in this area) proudly assertive of their heritage and eager to defend it against discrimination of any type. I had quickly gone from a nobody who had just returned from Japan to being surrounded by famous people with Spanish surnames who looked at me as one of them, someone with a spark that could help "the cause". My sister's friends and the contacts I met with D.D. were giving me a first-class informal education in what Latinos had been struggling with throughout the US' history and I heard for the very first time stories about the Zoot Suit Riots²³, the Chicano Moratorium²⁴, the Puertorican Young

²³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20020403225452/http://www.pbs.org:80/wgbh/amex/zoot/>

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicano_Moratorium

Lord's Party²⁵ and other events and movements that were part of the Latino history of resistance in the United States during a time when most of what I knew about was the Civil Rights struggles of Blacks and women. I learned about the deportation of tens of thousands of Mexican-Americans whose families had lived in what is now the United States for hundreds of years before these areas became states, simply because they were considered outsiders. I learned about the involuntary sterilization of one third of Puerto Rican women²⁶ (including many of my own family) because of racist eugenic policies which still prevailed in the mindsets of many in the medical establishment. I learned of the day-to-day discrimination Latinos faced in employment, in housing, and I felt terrible that I had never realized that I was connected to all of it, either by birth or linguistic identity. It is now fashionable to speak of such concerns as "identity politics" but I had begun to see how being marginalized and ignored, repressed, and disrespected all had taken a toll on the Chicano community in Los Angeles and the Latino community at large.

Questions of identity never seriously occurred to me until this period. I was growing more connected to a Latino identity I had up to then either rejected or dismissed and in truth, still knew far too little about. I felt ashamed of my ignorance and became filled with a new pride in my culture and with Latinos at large. Sometimes for fun, I went to salsa clubs with my sister's boyfriend, a Puerto Rican cop with a winsome smile and a willingness to introduce me to the nightlife of Los Angeles' Latino communities. He began introducing me to the music of our people and for the first time in my life I began to consider myself a "Latino", no longer just an "American whose family came from Puerto Rico". I began to feel *a sense of belonging* and I started writing a TV show with just that name which I hoped to pitch to WB at some not-too-distant date. I was learning, rather late, perhaps, but still learning who I was.

2.6 Standing up, taking over a union, and more activism

Soon though, I was to be distracted by another kind of politics or activism which would dramatically change my direction yet again. The position I was in at the Story Dept. was originally called "Story Clerk," eventually we became "Assistants to the West Coast Story Editor." It was an arrangement made by a moribund "company union" called the Warner Bros. Office Employees Guild, (W.B.O.E.G.) servicing some 700 workers in the three divisions of WB, the majority at the Burbank Studio where I worked. The union represented several hundred office workers considered the "cushiest" division with the aspiring screenwriters, filmmakers, and others often with

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Lords

²⁶ <https://www.library.wisc.edu/gwslibrarian/bibliographies/sterilization/>

higher ambitions within the studio, warehouse employees, dozens of trades workers in the props department, as well as mailroom staff, delivery people, and many others.

One day V., an Armenian friend who worked in the mailroom, came to me and urged me to check out our union contract which was up for renegotiation later that month. In addition, there was to be an election soon for President and a new Board of Directors amid widespread murmurs of dissatisfaction, along with a pained resignation among the membership about the leadership's relative impotence in the face of a corporate giant's arrogance and bullying. V. knew about my activist work outside WB and thought I could help resist the union leadership's acquiescence to a new contract that reduced our yearly sick time from ten to six days. Warner Bros. at this time was the most profitable of the Hollywood studios with major movies coming out regularly so, in that light, this anti-worker position seemed an egregious slap in the face to hundreds of employees. I demurred; I was willing to pay the monthly dues but otherwise I paid little attention to my union's positions with the studio, preferring to focus on my ambition to write screenplays and not to antagonize my potential future employer (who coincidentally was my then current one which also played a role in my disinterest in getting too involved.) He insisted that I at least go to an upcoming general meeting (my first after almost three years there) where it was to be discussed.

What I saw at that meeting was completely demoralizing. The union's attorney was nice, but he seemed haggard-looking and fatalistically reconciled to our fate, telling us this was "the best we could expect" considering the company's strength. The president was a sad-faced woman who obviously had no fight left in her, and it was said that she had improperly agreed with the cutbacks in a private meeting with the company's negotiator without consulting with the Board (though they were not eager to disagree with or challenge her for fear of angering the company and possibly getting an even worse offer). The Board were equally resigned, looking beaten and yet, I realized, the implications were enormous. Losing 40% of our sick time while the studio was making nearly a billion dollars a year seemed beyond unfair to me. It seemed so obvious that we should fight against what was clearly an unjust contract offer by a company so wealthy it could buy Range Rovers as gifts to millionaire actors (the main cast of *Lethal Weapon*) whose value at \$38,000 was greater than the yearly pay of 90% of our workers.

I knew this statistic and, overpowered by a gnawing sense of disgust as I watched the meeting drone on about how this was a "tough decision", I stood up, introduced myself, and, in a moment of clarity and conviction that startled even me, I argued passionately for some resistance, some display of righteous indignation against this company that was so big it could easily be embarrassed. People applauded. The lawyer looked remarkably happy, but the President saw me as a threat, answering back "So, what are we supposed to DO, José?" "Fight", I said, "we can't win anything without a fight and it's time we stopped this and what *you did* was wrong". There was

now huge applause, as well as groans of anger at me (“Who are YOU? Where have YOU been all this time?” “You’re going to get us all fired!”). I was a bit shaken but still determined to make a point. I kept going. At last, one man, apparently known to the audience, stood up, pointed at me saying loudly, “Let’s make HIM President!” (of the union). There was a huge and immediate reaction, the room divided between people wildly applauding his suggestion and others just as passionately repeating the line that resistance to the deal would only get us all fired.

I knew instantly what I was about to do.

My whole life had led me to this point. I would help get rid of the President, take back the acceptance of the “offer,” lead a resistance to the deal and, taking over the union, I would beat Warner Bros. Pictures. It was audacious and instantaneously as clear as anything I had ever envisioned. I couldn’t articulate it right then, it was much too ambitious, but inside, I knew that that was what I was about to set into motion. At the time, no one would have believed it possible, and no one could have anticipated the outcome. And yet, within one year, all of it came true.

First, I threw myself into reading the new contract, reading the previous one, and reading the rules for negotiations with the studio that were part of our constitution. The President had violated a major clause prohibiting private meetings with the company’s negotiator but no one had ever challenged the leadership’s manner of negotiating. I did. Then I called the union lawyer and shared with him the rules for a disciplinary hearing which could be brought by any member in such cases. It was a risk as it would require a majority vote of the Board, but I was certain I could make a convincing enough case for her removal and a formal renegotiation of the proposed agreement. Finally, I began to individually call the members of the Board who seemed the least hostile to me in the hopes of getting some allies for the upcoming elections. While I wouldn’t yet admit it, I knew in my heart that I would run for president and then find some way for us to affiliate with a stronger, more legitimate union and then lead the negotiations for a better contract. It was a quiet ambition that I wouldn’t allow myself to get too enthralled with, but I saw it clearly, saw the need for it, and knew within that *I could do it*.

Workers from many different departments had heard about my challenge and began either telling me to stop, that it could cost us all even worse, or excitedly began to encourage me to get rid of the old guard and help us beat the company. I made myself available every Wednesday at lunchtime to talk about these issues and soon I had dozens of people meeting outdoors during our Wednesday lunch breaks. I was building a following. Unfortunately, the trial failed; the Board felt she had done wrong, but they were too scared to remove her. Still, some quietly began encouraging me to run and when the president not surprisingly decided she wouldn’t run for another term

I immediately announced my candidacy and began walking the lot every day, up and down the streets, in and out of various soundstages, and over to the many offices spaces where our workers were spread, introducing myself and my ideas about the union and the contract and our future. I was getting unwanted attention as well from the executives who heard of this Story Dept. insurgent, and I knew I was risking my own personal advancement within the studio as a future screenwriter. Soon the elections came, and I won handily, by an almost 4:1 margin. I immediately contacted several unions and began to discuss affiliation. After months of exhausting work, we managed to narrow the choice to UE²⁷ (United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America) and our affiliation vote won easily (Figures 40, 41, and 42).

A crazy workload

One of the most remarkable things about this period is that, along with the union struggle in which I was educating the Board and the membership about other unions which we could affiliate to win a better contract, I was also working my usual 40 hours a week, managing with David the Latino Writers Group, helping J.B. with screenwriting classes, remaking the union Board meetings which had begun as 3-4 hour marathon sessions (I told them after the second such meeting that we would hereafter take 90 minutes to do all our work – which we did, much to the joy of even the hostile members), meeting daily with union members about grievances, learning about the tasks which I was supposed to perform as president, and actively working on a strategy to force the company to back down by embarrassing them in the media.

I was also occasionally meeting with the media, writing (or attempting to write) a screenplay, and being an active part in publicizing Texas attorney Jennifer Harbury's book, *Bridge of Courage*. This book eloquently chronicled the lives of the Guatemalan resistance forces during a brutal US sponsored civil war which had cost 200,000 – 300,000 lives and was still raging while she was trying to bring attention to the disappearance of her husband. I met the children of many of these fighters, telling them truthfully, "Your parents are my heroes" and gave them tours around the studio lot, delighting them to no end. I was also meeting with First Nation's representatives, giving away my collection of screenplays to a group of students from the Diné nation and managing a relationship with a girlfriend. All these things came to a head between 1993-1994. I wondered if I could continue at this pace.

I was quietly looking for a way out because I was exhausted, constantly. I had succeeded in doing everything I had ever put my mind to, but I was now a 34-year-old

²⁷ <https://www.ueunion.org/>

burnt out activist without even a BA. In what I now regret as an ill-timed maneuver, when the affiliation vote succeeded, I announced that I would be leaving that upcoming Fall as I would be returning to school. This announcement demoralized many of our members who had faith in the new people I had brought in and trained, and I realize now that this was mistimed, and I should have waited at least another year before leaving. However, as much as I realize this now, at the time, I couldn't. I felt I needed to complete my education if I was truly to make something of my life. And I knew that there was still much ahead for me.

Between 1992 and 1993, amid all these activities, I had felt on top of the world and supremely confident in myself and my abilities. And yet, I still had no degree and felt nowhere near where I should be. Where that was, I was unsure, but I had begun to wonder about Hollywood. I was sick of the sycophants, the pettiness, and the grinding competitiveness that sacrificed anything, and anyone, to achieve even a modicum of success in "the industry". It was true that I was enamored with attention and felt the great rush of excitement at being a minor celebrity in my little world. I was even getting calls from major unions suggesting I run for Congress in my district. "You won't win", they said, "not this time. But it will get your name out there as a real pro-union Democrat who knows how to win fights. Rep. X (the veteran Congressman of my district) would pounce you – but that is only because he has the connections now. You are the future," they said to me. And the said incumbent Congressman was challenged in the next election and won easily. But in this brazen attack on a political icon, it exposed his out-of-touch vulnerability and the following election, the candidate who had challenged him and lost, finally won, exactly as my friends had predicted for me.

But I still wanted out and so very quietly, I began to look for something else. Interestingly enough, what I was looking for then was something I had considered almost 20 years before.

Warner Bros. Union Affiliates with UE

BURBANK, Calif. — The desire to strengthen their independent union's position in an increasingly unorganized industry with the giant Time Warner Corp. convinced the Warner Brothers Office Employees Guild (WBOEG) to affiliate with UE. The affiliation was conducted July 26-27. The Warner Brothers workers voted for UE affiliation by a margin of better than four to one.

"We need affiliation in order to survive," said UE organizer Michael Duffy in the WBOEG newsletter WorldView, "because without it our guild will simply wither under the constant pressure from management."

Many of the workers who spoke out for affiliation with UE in the newsletter made similar observations. They say the company has changed, grown big and become impersonal over the years. "In the course of becoming Time Warner, they've become so corporate, they have all their family values and the business approach," said Executive Young.

"WBOEG may have been effective when the Warner brothers were alive," said Shirley Cohen, a member of the union's Board of Directors, "but we clearly do not have the power alone to deal with the giant conglomerate that is Time Warner."

STRONG ENDORSEMENT
UE organizers first made contact with the Warner Brothers employees in 1981 during a UE-sponsored regional meeting of independent unions. A year



THE LEADERSHIP OF NEW UE LOCAL 634 at Warner Brothers, Standing: From left Mark Ward, Peter Salazar, Angie Maldonado, Ben Barker, Kevon Woods, Art Menner, John Valles and Colleen George-Jowers. **Sitting:** Bill Givens, Joe Tranks and Shirley Cohen.

later, after doing its homework, the WBOEG Board of Directors recommended UE affiliation to its members.

Joe Tranks, WBOEG president at the time, explained that though the other unions considered had special qualities, "we saw UE's history of resistance to the democracy, competence, training and solidarity, and belief that nothing is impossible so long as the

The board scheduled meetings to explain its recommendations to the members. Employees voted at five locations in Hollywood, Burbank, Sherman Oaks and Chatsworth. Two hundred, twenty-eight workers voted to affiliate, only 51 voted "no."

COMING TO LIFE

The most immediate task for the new local is to expand the stewards system of Warner Brothers. The first training session took place Aug. 13. Other sessions plus seminars on other aspects of trade union work, are planned. "We're trying to get everybody involved," said Salazar, "and get the people who voted for the affiliation."

Peter Salazar already sees people "coming to life" and exhibiting a new-found pride in the union. He's optimistic about the prospects for building a strong local that can service members effectively.

Over 20 WBOEG members worked on the affiliation campaign. UE organizers who worked on the campaign include: Bill, Carol, Lorraine and David Johnson, Paul Dyer, Mary Erin Cook, John Fernandez and Peter Kowitz. They were assisted by Local 634 members Dan Greene, an employer at KPFF-FM in North Hollywood.

The union won a 30-cent wage increase, the continuation of the Gain Share Program, and an end to half pay for absences work during the period when the workweek has been reduced to 32 hours. (Item dates paid)

Locals 633, 634 Settle with Ue

WARREN, Pa. — UE Local 633 might successfully to negotiate a new contract with Delco-Morad Storage Systems, Inc. (formerly Delco-Morad), a spin-off of the company's ongoing financial work.

The union won a 30-cent wage increase, the continuation of the Gain Share Program, and an end to half pay for absences work during the period when the workweek has been reduced to 32 hours. (Item dates paid)



Figure 40 and 41: On top of the world: UE article on union victory and me with J.M. my closest friend at WB celebrating the victory on WB Studio's lot.



Figure 42: Hollywood Reporter article on UE's union victory over WB Pictures.

The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University)

The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) The Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado was founded in 1974 by the Tibetan teacher and author Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Featuring the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, its faculty has included poets Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, and spiritual teachers such as Ram Dass, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Rev. Vincent Harding, and many others, including all the major teachers of Tibetan Buddhism, (including HH the Dalai Lama). It was the seat of Tibetan Buddhism in the West as well as a beautifully situated place to practice Buddhism. It was there that I first felt the possibility of properly integrating my interests in Buddhism, psychology, and activism as I had entered a three-year BA/MA in Engaged Buddhism program, the first of its kind anywhere.

Textbox 5: The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University)

2.7 Tibetan Buddhism, The Naropa Institute, 1994-1997 and Engaged Buddhism

Sometime in the spring of 1993, I had made a crucial decision for my education and life: I was determined to leave Warner Bros. and go back to school. I had found a program that seemed to have everything I wanted. In a journal entry written just before I left Japan, I wrote that, disillusioned by my sojourn in Japan, perhaps what I needed was a different kind of challenge. I then recalled The Naropa Institute (Figure 43) as perhaps a place I could return to and not only immerse myself in Buddhist studies, but also work on my writing. Naropa was founded by author and “crazy wisdom” teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche ²⁸. I was interested in poetry, in finishing the BA and, as I had just discovered, they had a brand-new, innovative program, a combined three-year BA/MA program in Engaged Buddhism (EB). The EB program at Naropa was a godsend for me: it seemingly united all the different strands of my yearnings: Buddhism, activism, psychology (certainly focusing on the first two). I continued my union activities as if nothing was to change, but my inner intellectual restlessness was pushing me to seek what I thought would be a better trajectory for the future: finishing and expanding my formal education.



Figure 43: The Naropa Institute, Boulder, CO

With help from my friend J.M. from WB’s Story Dept., I moved to Boulder, Colorado just before school was to begin in August 1994. I had spoken to several people

²⁸ Cutting through spiritual materialism, 1973

looking to share an apartment but only one, a woman labor activist who had a small house near school, worked out. There was so much about life in Boulder that I appreciated that only a little can be said here. I had lived my whole life in urban environments and here I was, a mile above sea level amidst some of the most beautiful scenery I had ever been exposed to. Miami may have had its light, Japan its gardens and forests, Los Angeles had the hip environment, but Boulder had all that and more. It also had the Flatirons, a series of mountains just above the town and accessible by hiking trails I regularly walked in the three years I was there. My health improved, I got into shape quickly and, while it took a few months to get used to the altitude, I believe it was the most beautiful place I had ever lived in.

I was, according to Prof. Judith Simmer-Brown, Head of the Religious Studies Department at Naropa, the very first person to be accepted into their Engaged Buddhism program. She thought my union background as well as the other activist work I had done, along with my 20 years in Zen and experience in Japan made me a perfect candidate. I took to the program immediately, immersing myself in a Tibetan Buddhist environment I was first averse to, but later came to appreciate more and more. The “bells and smells” of Tibetan Buddhism were very different from Japanese Zen’s austere simplicity and “beginner’s mind” approach (Suzuki, 1982). The classes were led by teachers who had been Trungpa Rinpoche’s senior students, by and large, and along with the requisite historical surveys of Buddhism, I learned Tai Chi Chuan with Bataan Faigao, (a senior student of Cheng Man-Ching (1902-1975) the Chinese Tai Chi master), Tibetan language 1 and 2, and began studying the Engaged Buddhist courses designed for the degree.

As I was in a three-year BA/MA program, I had transferred all my earlier credits from Eckerd College, Nanzan University, and Cornell University which enabled me to obtain a BA in Religious Studies and minor in “Traditional Arts” which included calligraphy, flower arranging, as well as the Tai Chi courses. For the MA in Engaged Buddhism, we had many notable visiting teachers, some from outside the Buddhist tradition including Rabbi Mordecai Twersky from Denver, Rev. Vincent Harding (friend and speech writer for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Sudarshan Kapoor, Nobel Peace Prize nominee Sulak Sivaraksa, and others) (Figure 44). Our main classes were led by a senior student of Trungpa Rinpoche who had been involved in many social justice issues and I soon joined (and briefly became the head of) the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement in Denver.



Figure 44: At Naropa I met many remarkable activists including Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding (left) and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Sulak Sivaraksa.

Perhaps the most seminal part of the program involved the internships we were supposed to participate in. I had chosen a Native American reservation placement but unfortunately, they had to cancel and all that remained was a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) agreement with two local hospitals, Boulder Community Hospital and Fort Logan, near Denver. I remember thinking to myself “No hand holding chaplain here” but, because some residential placement was a requirement, I grudgingly agreed. That decision changed my life and has affected every aspect of all I have done since.

2.8 Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) – Engaged Buddhism in practice?

The CPE program I trained in had its group meetings and presentations in Fort Logan, about a 30-minute drive outside of Boulder, and the actual work with patients at Boulder Community Hospital. When I first interviewed for the program two representatives of CPE met with me and asked some perfunctory questions about why I wanted to do this (I didn’t, but, since I had to, I was willing to learn, I said) and then, when asked about why I had chosen Buddhism, which they found interesting and unusual, I remember giving a long, detailed, intellectual answer about suffering. B.P.,

a former Catholic priest and therapist who was to later become my lead supervisor thought carefully and then, without a hint of meanness, said to me something I have never forgotten, “Do you think you were so interested in suffering because YOU had suffered?” I had never been asked this before and his manner of psychologically exploring my inner dynamics as relating to my religious studies was an eye opener for me. It scared me but it also intrigued me.

For the next 12 weeks (one unit of CPE) I alternated between my life in Naropa where I felt confident and competent, and two days a week confusedly dealing with death, pain, loneliness, and how I could use all the theoretical notions I had formed about suffering in service to alleviating it. It was such a difficult task because, I came to realize, most of what I understood about Buddhism was intellectualized, possibly to protect me from the depths of my own suffering which B.P. had caught a glimpse of with his question. I came to realize that I was hiding, mainly from myself, but from others as well. I was using my confidence, my performance ability, and my quick grasp of a situation to categorize the elements that needed addressing for the situation I faced, and I would competently address them. This may have served me well as a union president, but it made for bad chaplaincy.

For example, during my first week at the hospital I had to sit in as W.R., the regular chaplain, had to go out somewhere and I remember within half an hour there, sitting at his desk, a call came over the intercom for “Chaplain Tirado” to come to the emergency room. One of our fellow chaplains, a woman in her early forties had literally just died minutes before; she had a heart attack while jogging and I was to sit with her body while her husband was on his way. I was shocked and felt completely without adequate words when he came, and I could tell afterwards that I had been of little compassionate use. That was a big moment for me. For the next three years, my life transformed into a learning curve of bringing Buddhism from my head to my heart, an effort I still find sometimes difficult today. The name of my MA dissertation at Naropa reflected this journey: *From Applause to Affect*, interestingly prefiguring my later observation with students in ISE that that dimension of education may be the most important one. That period took me from Naropa to Madison, Wisconsin where, after that initial single unit of CPE, I did a full year’s residency (Figure 45). This allowed me to later enter supervisory-level CPE in San Francisco, instead of using the credentials to apply as a certified chaplain. This was another step that I took towards teaching as an occupation.



Figure 45: Finding a new calling in Clinical Pastoral Education: Training as a Chaplain in Wisconsin

I realized I needed CPE not only to serve others better—something I was convinced I now had a calling for—but for my own well-being. And after that year-long residency, I continued for three more years in San Francisco as a Chaplain Supervisor-in-Training training to become what is formally known as a CPE *Educator* helping to bring others so similarly evasive or in hiding to be able to open up and be of benefit to those in difficult circumstances.

There were many more stories from that last period in Naropa, most centering on poignant episodes of work with patients in the hospital as well as the regular unraveling of my defenses in this movement from being a cognitively top-heavy thinker who uses his mind to distance himself from painful phenomena, to someone learning how to use tools such as empathy to help others. It was the helping of others which remained constant and thus while this was difficult, I carried on, believing I was becoming more integrated within and thus better able to help others facing similar journeys.

I will return later in this dissertation to discuss my experience of CPE and its impact on my development. I will end this section here, noting this last transformation as preparing the ground for another event, another death, and another journey. This next transition, my father's death, provided me with some new resources that tested my newly acquired pastoral skills and knowledge.

2.9 Death and rebirth – moving on

Steven C. Tirado, Dec. 8, 1926 – Dec. 27, 1999

When my father died in 1999, I was in Iceland on an extended three-week leave of absence from my work as a Chaplain Supervisor at California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) in San Francisco. I was teaching in their Clinical Pastoral Education program and a member of their ethics committee. The call came mid-week and I had to wait several days before I could get a flight back to Miami. I arrived on a Friday, I believe, and the burial was to be the following Sunday. Many relatives had gathered from New York City and elsewhere and I remember the greatest wash of emotion fell over me at the burial site when a small group of military veterans fired a three-volley salute.

I arrived at the airport and was picked up by my cousin Manny who drove me to the funeral home where my family had gathered for an open casket viewing. When I entered, the atmosphere was sad, and the room filled with aunts and uncles I hadn't seen in years. I prostrated three times before the casket (a Buddhist practice) and went to sit next to my mother. She was despondent, as was to be expected, but she had been prepared for this day for years. The enormity of the moment was in its finality. I felt this keenly and fought back tears. We went home and arranged for the interment which was to happen two days later. When all had settled and after a day at home, the funeral was held in the church near our family home. I was struck yet again at a certain dynamic which followed: I took the lead. When the family was to carry the casket from the church to the hearse, I positioned everyone in the proper order and the same happened when we took the casket out for burial at the cemetery. And again, after all had been spoken and the casket was finally lowered, I saw that no one knew what to do, so I threw in the first customary handful of dirt followed by my brother and the rest of the family. It was a dynamic that felt old, yet curiously, somehow no longer useful to me.

After the funeral we returned to the house and in a moment of painful honesty and near severity, my mother expressed how upset she was at me for not having visited as I had said I would many months before. "Tirado kept asking when you would come, and if it was Fall since you said you'd come in the Fall" she said sobbing. I ached at the reproach and had no easy answer to give (it was, of course, a combination of low finances, work, raising a young girl with my Icelandic partner, etc.). A few days passed without any more incidents until I had to return to San Francisco and await Fate's next blow.

Events moved quickly after my father's death. I returned to work at CPMC's Institute for Health and Healing (IHH) with one foot in and one foot out, and considered leaving the United States, yet again. The death of my father had dislocated me from a

spiritual certainty earned through years of study and practice and I experienced what is often described as a “crisis of faith”. I also felt professionally and personally adrift; chaplaincy was immensely rewarding but the pay was not very good and, living in the San Francisco Bay area meant that prices for everything were high. While I had a job, a relationship, and a young stepdaughter, I faced an existential crisis which nevertheless affected everything I did. And I was in the midst of a grief I did not fully understand; I was unable to determine what I should do next. My wife (an Icelander whom I had met while at Naropa) eventually suggested that, as I had lived abroad in Japan before, maybe transitioning to a life Iceland would be easier for me and that it would at least be temporary situation where the kids (we soon had a new baby, my daughter S. born in 2000) could be raised in a safer environment than in the urban United States. There was some money that came to me and so, after some deliberation, I decided to take it and invest it in a new life abroad. I wondered if I was doing the right thing in making yet another big move away from my family.

About CMPC

Before I speak of the move to Iceland, perhaps a few words about work at the Institute for Health and Healing at California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) would help place the movements of my life at this period in a better context. During the time I was at CPMC, I led psycho-spiritual groups, (Figures 46 and 47) training chaplains to become more sensitive and less unhealthily ensnared within their own narrow faith traditions and to deal with their own underlying psychological issues better in order to serve those from other faiths. Clinical Pastoral Education had embraced many of psychotherapy’s terms and processes while retaining its focus on spiritual healing. I discovered that chaplains were not only respected but generally viewed as important members of the hospital team of doctors, nurses and others who worked to assist patients. I was invited numerous times to participate in ethical conferences regarding end-of-life care and discussions on whether to terminate treatment and recommend hospice instead. Nurses frequently asked me to see their patients, hoping I might be able to effect a change of behavior or attitude that would aid in the healing process. In short, I felt respected and part of a professional identity that melded together psychology and religion in an innovative, meaningful manner.

CPE made use of a psychological language that was more personal, more emotionally connected than to the more clinically appropriate emotional detachment that is seen as a hallmark of proper psychological work. CPE was where spirituality and psychology met, but not in some theoretically abstract manner, but through personal engagement in another’s concrete suffering during hospitalization or dealing with the effects of a loved one’s hospitalization which often meant seeing families through the difficult processes of losing loved ones to illness. My years in CPE had not only transformed

me and my style of relating to others better but it had become the one place where I felt all my Buddhist training could be actually applied. As Buddhists we took vows to “benefit all beings” and here I felt no doubt that I was doing precisely that. Being an Engaged Buddhist came to have some real form in this period.



Figure 46 and 47: Rising to the top of a new, more meaningful profession: Chaplain Supervisor Tirado business card, and with Chaplain Students in San Francisco and Rev. Dennis Kenny my own Supervisor on the left

But it wasn't only my interventions with clergy that was getting a major part of CPE. I, too, as a Chaplain Supervisor, had to participate in on-going group sessions (process groups of my own with other supervisors-in-training), and to undergo at least one period of psychotherapy with a certified therapist of my choosing. This was an enormously helpful experience as I saw how many of the events of my life were traumatic and I had spent much of my life in a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), cultivating “an evasive personal dynamic” which affected my relationships and ability to get close to others. More relevantly, it prevented others from getting closer to me.

It was my own engagement with ministering to the needs of others that allowed me to for the first time confront the many disturbing events of my life directly and to view these events as traumatic episodes which led to a protective adaptation which ensured my emotional distance from others to avoid directly admitting to my own fear and the lingering effects of these events on my life. By confronting my own pain, I was able to become more authentic with others and better able to see when they too, because of some trauma or difficult period in their life, were hiding. Helping others then reach their own inner potential was a task I had set myself to no matter what the circumstance, whether in a hospital or a classroom. It was part of my Buddhist vows, and it was part of my nature as someone who had suffered and didn't want to see others suffer as I did. This journey to inner wholeness and outer healing was the beginning of a process of psycho-spiritual integration in which the disparate elements

of my inner and outer lives were coalescing and led to the last piece which needed exploration and affirming education and its role in my life. For the first time I thought that Engaged Buddhism, this feeling torn between spirituality and activism, had found a suitable expression in chaplaincy and that I needn't feel so torn as I had up until then. These pulls were quite possibly unresolvable, I concluded, and I could still fulfill my vows to benefit beings while debating situationally how best to do that.

Discussion

While my first 10 years set the intellectual and spiritual stage for everything that followed, it essentially ended what I call my foundation period. All my most displayed personal dynamics arose then, and despite years of psychological training and work, remain altered, but relatively in place, to this very day. The next 10 years however, represented the testing ground for each pillar of knowledge I pursued (Buddhism, psychology, social activism) and, achieving a measure of success in all three, itself set the stage for the last third of my life culminating in where I am now and representing my period in Iceland and leading to this very project.

In the period dealt with in this section, between 1980 and 2000, I entered college, left after three years for Japan, stayed longer there than I had planned on, imagining that I might live there permanently. In addition, while it was certainly true that I spent years exploring the inner realms of consciousness aided by psychoactive substances, these psychonautic journeys ended without much fanfare right after I returned to the United States in 1988 (and were only used a few times during my time in Japan). I remember Ram Dass' admonition that "when you get the message, hang up", and that was pretty much my approach towards hallucinogens. While taking them at first was simply for kicks, they were gradually used judiciously to "play" with my mind and understand its more fantastical dimensions. Regarding other substances, cocaine was way too expensive, and I never really enjoyed it as much as psilocybin mushrooms or other more psychoactive drugs, so that never became a problem. And while I had drunk more than my fair share during those years in Japan, I never hid alcohol, drank during work or school hours, nor drank alone. I could drink with friends for long stretches and then go months without even desiring alcohol.

This was mainly because, while I was often quite impulsive, mine was not an addictive personality – I valued control too much and feared any activity that might interfere with my intellectual coherency. Cigarettes, however, were another matter. I continued smoking cigarettes off and on until around 2000 when my daughter was born (having begun when I was around 11 years old, stealing my mother's Benson and Hedges). Coffee as well, something we drank as kids before school, turned into a daily thing and then a monster problem by the time I was at Warner Bros., causing severe *gastro-*

esophageal reflux disease (GERD) and probably playing a role when I had a minor heart attack at age 38 and subsequently advised to eliminate or seriously restrict my intake, which I have done quite successfully to this very day. Thus, I felt lucky: too many of my friends and family went down the road of addiction and I suspect it was seeing them that made me temper my impulsiveness with those potentially risky behaviors. And later, my time being seriously occupied with leading the Latino Writers Group and facing a union struggle while at the same time juggling different activities outside WB, I had to be focused – and sober.

I returned to the United States and in 1988 spent time in Miami to help my mother with my father in Florida, leaving to pursue my own life in Hollywood. For the next five years I tried balancing an increasingly busy activist life coupled with my own ambitions to become a screenwriter and saw those two aspects become an untenable weight to balance. So, I threw myself full on into a union struggle which I was very proud of and saw a potential opening for a different future. One related to activism: politics.

But at the same time, I felt that I couldn't get very far without a college degree and seeing an opening for a dual BA/MA in Engaged Buddhism I felt a rekindled yearning to complete the Buddhist study I had begun earlier. I didn't think I would become a Buddhist scholar anymore, as that dream had ended in Japan, but I still valued the example of the scholar-practitioner and felt I needed to continue in that direction. Taking the chance, I applied and entered The Naropa Institute where I entered a completely different Buddhist world of Tibetan Vajrayana, and the fragmented but sincerely approached new academic field of Engaged Buddhism. It was there that I became exposed to chaplaincy and discovered that a more personalized approach to alleviating suffering appealed to me. I saw how my care for others had become sometimes more of a performance in some ways and that the work with individuals instead pulled from within me a more sincere and thus more rewarding experience of helping. I was becoming a chaplain, an integrated Buddhist-activist-psychologist who could help the world on a smaller scale but more from his heart than from his head. For me, *this was engaged Buddhism*.

In order to further this trajectory, I left for Wisconsin to continue in a year-long chaplain residency, the minimum requirement in the United States for one to be called a chaplain. Half the year was spent in a geriatric unit where I dealt with the elderly. There, the dynamics of grieving over my father's condition came up many times and I saw on the other side, lonely older men, estranged from their own families and who needed the warm comfort from a caring person, and I was sometimes the only one available. This pulled at me. I felt resistant, realizing later that I was projecting a deep-seated alienation from my own father onto them. This moved me and I began to feel the disconnection from both my parents and my culture greatly. I had a young family

and was in the middle of my life, and so I couldn't easily return or, at that time, even visit but I felt the separation, the physical one as well as the cultural one, more than I had in years. I wondered how I was ever going to see them again, or repair what had been lost or broken between us.

The second half of that year in Madison, Wisconsin I was at Meriter Hospital where my units were cancer and end of life care, and I began working with a group who were dying almost every week. It tested my abilities to be present and compassionate, but I felt alive as I had never felt before in any other activity or job I had ever participated in. However, I also began to suffer the effects of extreme stress and one night after an on-call shift, I went to report to the office about the evening, but I was feeling weak and experienced chest pains. I was told to go to the emergency room and was later told I'd suffered a minor heart attack. I was 38.

We soon moved to the San Francisco Bay area (specifically Pleasant Hill, east of Berkeley) where I continued chaplaincy but this time in *an educator* capacity, in Supervisory level CPE. This was intended for eventual certification as a *CPE Educator*, a title that only much later struck me as yet another prescient reminder of what I had been doing for many years before I began education as a distinct field of study.

But it was while carrying on with chaplaincy that, upon my father's death, I felt like yet another rug had been pulled from beneath me and I despaired of completing anything. With the money I received from my father's death, I chose to leave everything behind; hoping a new life in a new country would make things easier. It didn't, but it carried me to a new place from which the integration that I yearned for of my three pillars could once again be attempted.

3 My Last 20 Years, 2000 – The Present

“They will never forget how you made them feel” – Maya Angelou

3.1 The Path of My Experience

Soon after moving to Iceland, I began combining the meditation course I had created first in Wisconsin and then used in San Francisco with a modified group counseling program modeled after the CPE groups I had been a part of. Calling it “The Path of My Experience: Personal Transformation Through the Culture of Meditation” (POME), we would have group sessions once or twice a week in which the use of four kinds of meditation (concentration or *kasina* meditation²⁹, calming, insight, and openness) were taught to give participants inner tools to use in monitoring and then adjusting personal issues they had presented to the group as goals to work on. There were also reflective journaling assignments in which self-progress was to be monitored and shared for feedback with the group. The group sessions included meditation training, group and somatic exercises, role playing, and unrehearsed process group periods in which all were allowed to speak about any concern they might have. We used techniques I had learned from Yalom (*The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*, 1993) and Mindell (*Sitting in the fire: Large group transformation using conflict and diversity*, 1995), both works I was introduced to in CPE and in the courses at Naropa. In addition, I combined elements of behavioral, existential, and person-centered group counseling (Corey, 1995) and felt that I had created a truly unique program which I described under the umbrella phrase, *Meditation-Based Counseling* (the principles first done in this program have continued in the regular, once a week meditation classes I have been offering for more than six years at the University of Iceland on a voluntary basis.) With my friend Björn’s help, I taught this program four or five times, first to a

²⁹ Kasina meditation is an early technique taught in Theravadin Buddhism aimed at the development of concentration and visualization focus. It may be the precursor to the advanced visualization practices of Himalayan Vajrayana Buddhism. It uses various shaped objects placed a certain distance away and in which the practitioner focuses on with eyes open and then attempts to retrieve the image clearly afterwards with eyes closed.

group of social workers in three iterations, then to cancer survivors, the teens at HH, and then to a couple smaller groups, and finally to individuals from various professions who had heard of my work and the program from 2005 to 2010. I didn't really know where this would lead, but I had enough confidence in myself to try something, an idea about combining meditation with psychotherapeutic group counseling. And for a period, it worked. I didn't make a lot of money from it, but it was a semi-regular source of income in those early years.

However, I soon realized that I am neither a TED talker (a reference to Ted TALKS, popular on YouTube: (<https://www.ted.com/about>) nor business hustler and, sustaining a one person motivational business, albeit one that fulfilled my yearnings to help and make a difference in my world, was beyond my skill set. Nevertheless, I have on occasion continued individual counseling according to the same principles and my former clients have continued to communicate with me their thanks and feelings that the groups were life-changing events.



Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center (now Saybrook University)

Originally founded as the Humanistic Psychology Institute in 1971, Saybrook was started by luminaries in the humanistic-existential and transpersonal psychologies which were reactions to the dominant experimental and psychoanalytic traditions from the earlier part of the 20th century. Rollo May, Ruth-Inge Heinz, Amedeo Giorgi, Stanley Krippner, Daivid Lukoff, Donald Rothberg, Clark Moustakas, Jeanne Achterberg, and others all were all part of the faculty.

Textbox 6: Saybrook Graduate School and Research Institute (now Saybrook University)

3.2 Rev. Kōkai Tirado

Around this time, I also returned briefly to Japan after consultation with several important Buddhist scholars (Revs. Taitetsu Unno (1996) and Alfred Bloom, both now deceased) at taking ordination (Figure 48) with Jodo Shinshu³⁰, a Pure Land school I had been growing closer to following my father's death. In November of 2003 there was a special ordination for foreigners in Kyoto and, as I managed to receive

³⁰Two very different but excellent introductions to Shin Buddhism, as it is often referred to, include Aoki, S. (2002) *Coffinman*, and Unno, T. (1998) *River of Fire, River of Water*.

recommendation letters from both, I went and officially became a Buddhist priest. It was a wonderful and bittersweet return for me. I was choked up on my ride to Kyoto where we were to be isolated for several weeks as I reflected on the years in between my last sojourn in Japan. I had come so far from that time and here I was returning. It was a very personally fulfilling moment for me. Not least of which was because of the name I was given, one that I had requested in honor of my father, “Ocean of Light”, or *Kōkai* (光海).

3.3 The study of psychology: Saybrook University 2005 – 2010

In 2004 my son A. was born and now, with three young children, the pressure was on me to find something more regular and stable. While I valued the two academic degrees I had gotten from Naropa, I felt that they had not assisted me too much on a practical, career level. I had the occasional teaching job (private tutoring, and with places such as Mímir Símenntun where I taught conversational English, a screenwriting course, and a vocabulary course) and the occasional POME course, so between that and the children, I was very busy in this period. But eventually I considered school again.

I found out about a distance learning program at Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center (now Saybrook University) in San Francisco where I could go twice a year, in January and June, for their Residential Conferences and do the work from home in the interim. In addition, this school was well-established with a glowing list of professors in the fields of Humanistic-Transpersonal and Existential psychologies. Jeanne Achterberg, Stanley Krippner, Amedeo Giorgi, Allan Combs, Eugene Taylor, among others, were the distinguished faculty with whom we could study closely and choose, if we wanted, our own path of specialization. Many were direct students of some of the greatest luminaries in 20th century psychology including Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and even Carl Jung. I wasn't thinking of returning to the United States, nor was I sure if I would pursue the MA in psychology *and* a doctorate or just the MA for licensing purposes in order to practice in Iceland, but it felt like a good investment.



Figure 48: A proud, yet humbled priest: Shortly after ordination, Nov. 2003 back in Iceland

My first Residential Conference at Saybrook (since it was our first, officially it was called an RO – Residential Orientation) took place in 2005 and I was seated at a table that had cards with our names and where we came from on them. After the obligatory welcome talks were given and introductions had ended, there was a period where faculty members wandered around greeting the new students. An elderly man with penetrating eyes came over to my table and asked, “So, where is the person from Iceland?” I was shocked because not only was I the only person “from” Iceland at the conference, but I also knew who he was – Stanley Krippner, a pioneer in the fields of dream research, telepathy, altered states of consciousness, and shamanism, among others. I was touched, flattered, and deeply impressed. He was one of the many “rockstar” psychologists who were regulars at Saybrook, and I relished being around so many fascinating psychologists whose research interests dovetailed with my own. These included Eugene Taylor, Donald Rothberg, Ruth-Inge Heinze, Jeanne Achterberg, and others. I stood and extended my hand, and we hit it off immediately. He told me he was friends with psychologist and paranormal researcher Haraldur Erlendsson and that he had visited Iceland several times and loved it.

My first semester began in the MFT (Marriage, and Family Therapy) track which I initially thought a more “practical” consideration, but the reading list was extremely long and, as I had to buy books there and take them back here to Iceland, I knew that would be a bit cumbersome down the road, in addition to the reading and the care of little children I was doing back in Iceland. Also, my online contact with the professors, and those first conferences soon convinced me that moving into the regular MA in psychology would be more interesting to me and have more promise, at least intellectually.

The formal study of psychology during this period unleashed a torrent of intellectual creativity that I had not experienced before. Saybrook was a perfect fit for me, a coming home to a field that broadly seemed to contain all my varied interests: from spirituality to activism. One professor with whom I took a Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy course, Donald Rothberg, was also a major figure in Engaged Buddhism in the United States. My courses in the first year, aside from basic library research, Program Planning, and a broad research course, included Eastern Psychologies, the Psychology of Consciousness, Ethics for Human Sciences, Models of Consciousness, Personal Mythology & Dreamwork and two independent studies (I.S.) in which I would write a 30 page paper on a topic worked out with a professor in a particular field of interest, instead of writing three 10 page papers as was the norm for most regular three credit courses. My first IS was with Stanley Krippner and called “Designing a Buddhist Meditation-Based Counseling Program” inspired by the meditation groups I was leading in Iceland. He was excited about this work as he had not heard of any attempt to marry counseling (particularly group counseling) with meditation practice that was designed to fit into the goals of the client. He thought it very innovative, and I was pleased with his enthusiastic support.

The second I.S. was different, but related: it concerned an examination of the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866 - 1949), a Greek-Armenian mystic and psycho-spiritual teacher from the early 20th century whose work had a distinct *sub rosa* influence on what is now understood as transpersonal psychology and the New Age movement. I had befriended several former followers of his, quite elderly folks who remained in awe of his teachings, and I became something of an authority on Gurdjieff, attending and presenting at international conferences and writing *Beelzebub’s Buddhas: The influence of Buddhism and its Tibetan variants in Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way* which I presented in Loutraki, Greece (Figures 49 and 50) at an international conference called All and Everything. I seemed to be on a roll, I thought, as at home I continued the meditation groups, was happily and actively involved in raising my children (a commitment I had made to myself as I saw how much my own father could not, though he wanted to), was presenting at international conferences on a topic few understood, all while doing a master’s degree in psychology. It was a very

exciting time. My final Master's project, *A critical analysis of a Buddhist meditation-based somatic counseling program* was submitted in 2007 and enthusiastically received by Professors Allan Combs and Stanley Krippner who were my committee. Both had recommended that I pursue the PhD and I agreed, applying for, and being accepted into the PhD program in the Consciousness & Spirituality concentration. In addition, two of my research papers were restructured and submitted as peer-reviewed publications, one eventually forming a chapter in a three-volume set "Peace Movements Worldwide" (Tirado, 2011) and the other to the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology (Tirado, 2008). I was confident, a published research psychologist, and a promising doctoral student according to all my professors.

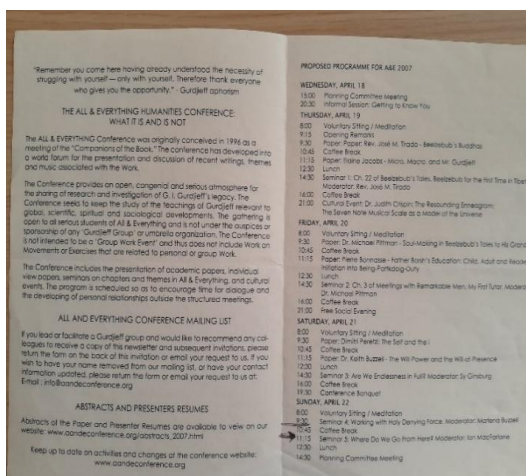


Figure 49 and 50: Expanding my spiritual expertise to include Western esotericism: In Loutraki, Greece, April 2007, with Ian M., delivering my presentation, "Beelzebub's Buddhas" at the All & Everything Conference

In between residential conferences I continued my life in Iceland and my involvement with activism with the occasional article in one of a number of publications I had started submitting to such as *Dissident Voice*, *CounterPunch*, *Synthesis/Regeneration*, and other predominantly progressive/left-wing publications that had a wide readership, mainly in the United States. Some of my articles, particularly those on *CounterPunch*, the most well-known of the group, got me attention – I was asked by the *Associated Press* to do an interview about expatriate US-Americans in Iceland, (Figure 51) and I received many letters from people around the world.



Figure 51: Photo from an Associated Press article on ex-pat USAmericans living in Iceland

My poetry, too, was getting noticed as I had reached out to a famous USAmerican poet, Gary C., sending him some of my best works and asked for his advice. When I sent him the first set of poems he immediately said, “José, you have a voice!” and for a few months he gave me pointers on editing my work and how to get published, recommending I seek out self-publishing versus established poetry journals which he thought uninspiring and not very creative anymore. This part of my life revealed something remarkable to me and relevant to the current work: when I am in a learning environment, even though I might be focused on one particular field, I seem to burst open with intellectual curiosity and creativity in other directions. I have noticed this in every school I have been in.

I started the PhD in psychology program at Saybrook in 2007 with four courses: a Writing Workshop course, Methods of Research & Disciplined Inquiry, History and Systems of Psychology (with Eugene Taylor, perhaps the preeminent William James scholar and historian of psychology), and Social Psychology. I remember feeling exhilarated at the prospect of me, a Tirado, doing PhD level academic work. But not only was I doing it, I was doing it and getting recognition that I was good at it. The Residential

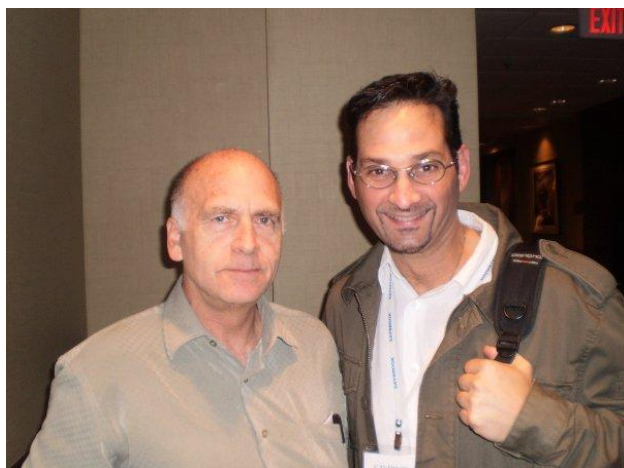


Figure 52: Bringing it all together in the Consciousness & Spirituality concentration of my psychology career: At a Saybrook Conference in San Francisco with friend, John Anderson.

Conferences were now gatherings of friends (Figure 52), people who had begun as MA students but were now seeking their doctorates.

During each subsequent trip to San Francisco, I felt a growing and wonderful coalescing of the disparate trends of my life. While chaplaincy remained the endeavor dearest to my heart, the pay in that field was low, and I felt the doctoral degree would allow me to move from a day-to-day work within a health care setting, to a hopefully higher paying, consultative research position either at a university or other institution. It was around this time that Prof. Taylor and I began thinking of doctoral research topics and, as I was now a fairly competent psychological researcher and a meditation practitioner and teacher, we agreed I might continue my work into meditation in order to find potential benefits for practical use in psychological settings, such as what I had created with the meditation-based counseling I was doing in Iceland.

Because I had seen that a proposed three-year mission to Mars was considered for the 2030s, I thought that here was an opportunity to propose something practical, that requires only training and not material (since weight is always a factor in these missions) and that would occupy a unique contribution to the field. With great enthusiasm he accepted, and I began immersing myself in the many studies on meditation efficacy as well as the human factors research that was part of the training program for astronauts. The novelty of the topic might have appeared strange to some, but my work was serious, and I was making great progress in a short amount of time. In fact, as a result of my research into the human factors of spaceflight, I began a correspondence with Dr. Nick Kanas, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco who was "Principal Investigator of NASA-funded research

on astronauts and cosmonauts...and author of *Space Psychology and Psychiatry*" (2008). He too was quite supportive of my research. I couldn't believe my good fortune and began to believe I was making a real contribution to psychology.

In 2008, however, an economic crash devastated Iceland, with many simultaneous effects around the world. It dislocated our own financial security, and I soon realized that I was literally running out of money (financing the school through a combination of loans and our own monies). I moved as quickly and determinedly as I could, but the exigencies of finances caught up with the family and, soon after I had completed all three of our required doctoral essays—one a methodological critique of another paper, the other two were focused on the state of meditation research, and the psychophysiological training for astronauts, respectively—the money situation began to look bleak. Traditionally the latter two would form the two main chapters of one's final dissertation but by 2010, I had a 150+ page draft completed when, because of the growing financial strains, I unceremoniously had to withdraw from the Saybrook psychology program.

I was crushed.

3.4 Changing course – the move to Iceland, publications, parenthood and The Path of My Experience

By the time I moved to Iceland, I was already over 40, with a partner, young stepdaughter, and a new baby. I had journeyed from New York City to Miami, to Japan, back to the United States, living for a time in New Hampshire and upstate New York, returned to Miami, and then to Los Angeles from where I left a position at Warner Bros. to return to school and complete my undergraduate degree and then take an MA in Engaged Buddhism. In the interim, I had become a chaplain and a father and with the loss of my own father, I had taken another journey far away, this time to Iceland, a place where I was to return to formal education once again. I was excited, but also tired of the many changes and transitions and dreamt of some kind of stability in which I could finally settle down and raise a family.

For the first few years I was kept busy by staying at home with the kids while my partner worked full-time outside the home. It was difficult getting used to the darkness and the culture, but I also felt happy to be in a place I thought was safe for children and whose remarkable natural environment was a balm to my heart. While I was awkward here, I still felt comfortable. I began to write articles for *CounterPunch* and other magazines online, and I was able to get my poetry published in *The Galway Review* and other poetry magazines. I also thought making an effort at the language was important but as I was pretty much homebound, I had far fewer opportunities to

practice than I had had when I lived in Japan. At first, I applied to the BA in Icelandic program at the University of Iceland because I thought it would give me an advantage later. However, the course was not taught very well in my opinion and with the responsibilities of the children occupying so much of my time after school, studying was difficult, so I floundered and soon withdrew. But I quickly regained my incentive; when being introduced to Björn V., a friend of my father-in-law, he had been told that I was a Buddhist chaplain and that I taught meditation. He asked me if I'd be willing to teach him as well as a group of teens (and his colleagues) he was working with at Hitt Husið (HH), a community center in downtown Reykjavík for 16 to 25-year-olds who needed a space for music practice, dances, leisure activities as well as counseling and education for unemployed, disabled, and troubled youth. I did this from 2002-2004. I had first put together *The Path of My Experience*, a meditation-based counseling program which I taught to colleagues of his beginning in 2002. After several iterations of the course, he helped me expand my contacts by introducing me to his project at HH focusing on outdoor education. The name of the course, I should note, was a prescient indication of later interests and work, including this project.

Working with Björn and his team opened my eyes to the possibilities of finding something meaningful to do in Iceland aside from raising my children. At HH I met high schoolers looking for something to do after school, those who had troubles at school and who needed a supportive space for counseling, and then those who were outsiders, artists, young creatives who didn't quite fit. The staff too was an interesting group, with outdoor education enthusiasts, sociologists and psychologists in training, social workers, and other adults who were invested in working with youth issues in Reykjavík. When I interviewed with their manager, I saw this as an opportunity to create a program that would unite the inner work of CPE, the meditation practices I had learned and taught, and the group counseling psychology format, coupling all of that with certain proprioception³¹ physical exercises and personality growth/testing resources. The manager accepted my proposal, and we latched onto a nascent program Björn had put together called The Train, or "Lestin" (Figure 53). I created a

³¹ Proprioception exercises are those designed to increase awareness of one's overall balance or individual body area in order to foster wider and more embodied awareness of one's environment and oneself within it. Gurdjieff employed many such as maintaining awareness of the bottom of one's left foot while eating or in his "movements" and they are also used for other purposes such as physical rehabilitation after a stroke or injury. Proprioception refers to our "body's ability to sense movement, action, and location" (<https://www.webmd.com/brain/what-is-proprioception>). Conscious training in proprioception plays a role in certain psycho-spiritual traditions including, but not limited to the deliberate use of slow movements in Tai chi chuan, and Gurdjieff's esoteric tradition, The Fourth Way.

ten-week program that had equal parts psychology, community-building, and meditation. Readings were assigned, exercises were done, journals were to be kept. I prepared a glossy bilingual Icelandic-English handbook that included material to be shared with the student's parents (part of the process included an opening two-day retreat in Snæfellsness as well as hikes and other outdoor activities), material about my background, articles on the benefits of meditation, and all in a reader-friendly format suitable for both parents and participants.

It was a novel situation: a foreigner in Iceland teaching meditation as a way to work with young people psychologically in a program that also included exercises and journal-keeping. The students seemed to enjoy it and once we had finished the ten weeks, Björn asked me to do another program with a different set of people. Soon after, through one of his contacts, I also taught the program to women with cancer and continued the program several times, I believe the last one was just before I began Saybrook. But key here is that I felt competent, it was early in my life in Iceland, and I felt like I just waltzed in and started teaching meditation and group counseling. Confident in teaching.

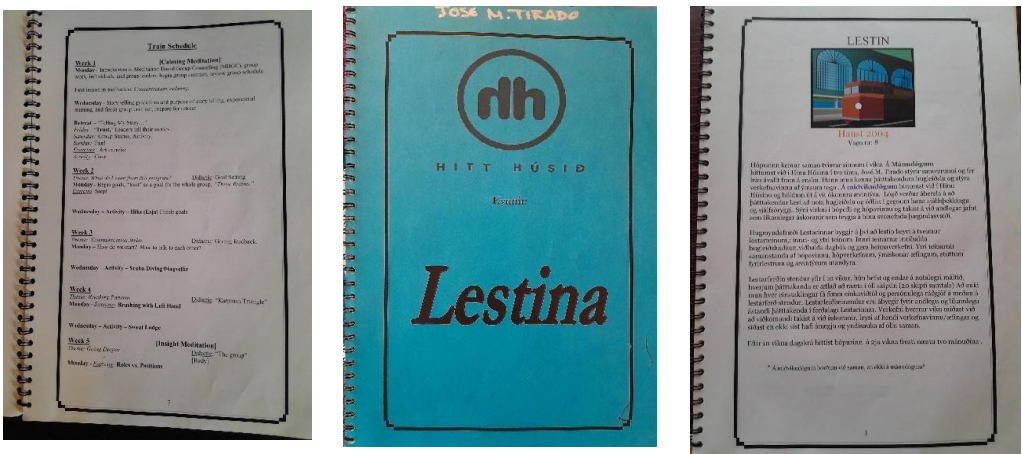


Figure 53: Teaching a meditation-based counseling program in Iceland: Three examples of The Train Handbook from 2004

3.5 Recovery and regeneration: studying education in an international setting, 2012 – 2022

After I withdrew from Saybrook, I was not only adrift career-wise, but I also felt adrift within, unmoored from any of the ambitions I had harbored or to any of the enterprises which I had pursued, alone on a cold rock in the north Atlantic with few friends and few prospects. I had been interested in psychology since I was a child and

much of the work I had done in the interim often relied heavily upon psychology as inspiration (work with the sick and dying as a hospital chaplain, meditation practice and teaching, etc.) and here I was, just about to graduate as a doctor in psychology, a hair's breadth away, and I had to stop. It was shattering to my ego. I maintained contact with my professors for a little while after that and all were very disappointed, but soon the reality had set in that I would not be a Doctor of Psychology, or probably of anything else. There was nothing they could do. I was over 50 years old and the best I could get was working occasionally as a part-time English tutor or (as I did for a time) as a cook in an elder care facility. It was the most soberingly low period of my life.

I did make an effort to reach out to the psychology department to the University of Iceland and was referred to one professor who, after hearing of my research and qualifications advised me that it would be near-useless to try and transfer my credits into the psychology program at the University of Iceland because the school was heavily invested in far more positivistic modes of psychology such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and that, in any case, they wouldn't be able to supervise someone whose research was so different than what they specialized in. This professor was not without sympathy, however, and in fact, said that not only was my research into such topics as meditation fascinating and timely but it was too far afield for the institution and unfortunately, I would most likely be rejected. Perhaps that was the most disheartening fact of them all – that institutional psychology as practiced in Iceland was precisely what schools such as Saybrook had been rebelling against for nearly 50 years in an attempt to broaden psychology's horizons to include more humanistic and other ways of doing psychology aside from the deterministic and experimentally rooted systems which apparently still dominated Nordic psychology.

I tried mightily to maintain a cheerful attitude around my young children and yet within I was deeply depressed. After some months I began working part-time again and abandoned hope of remaining in Iceland. I started searching for a way out. I began applying to schools around the United States (I thought that would be the easiest) and as well in Europe and parts of Asia such as Japan and Korea. I applied to community colleges as well as language schools, to universities seeking adjuncts or part-time instructors in language, religion, Asian studies, or psychology. All were areas I had some expertise in, and all were rejected. More than 200 rejection letters followed several years' worth of applications. I had told my children that I was searching for jobs abroad and they became uneasy, regularly asking me if I had to leave and why. It was heartbreaking.

At some point my wife had suggested that I look at BA programs at the University of Iceland which would at least keep me in Iceland while I continued to try for other positions. I felt I didn't need yet another BA nor did I want one; but when I discovered that there was a BA in education, I became curious. Most of the places I had applied to acknowledged and even appreciated my specialized degrees in psychology and religion, but they nearly always required at minimum a BA in education for new teaching positions, no matter what other specialties were possessed by the applicant. I quickly surmised that obtaining this last degree would be the best hope I had of teaching and that no matter that I had already a BA and two MAs, this was worth it.

A few words are needed in order to explain why I felt leaving Iceland seemed to be the best strategy for me at this time. While I had moved to Iceland at a dark time in my life, it had aided in my healing by offering me a safe space in which to raise my children which was a chief concern of mine. I had grown up with a father who, because his formal education was lacking, had to continue working at sea, leaving his family for long periods in order to support us. I loved Iceland's remote beauty, the quiet that was so readily available just yards away, and the cleanliness of its resources such as the air and its water. In addition, it had taken me a few years but by the time my daughter was about four, I stopped looking over my shoulder if I was walking anywhere at night. This struck me as startling. In every environment I had lived in, nighttime was a period of nervous travel as being mugged or worse might happen at any time. The chances of such happening in Iceland at this time were so infinitesimal, I

The University of Iceland's International Studies in Education Program

Founded in 2008 the International Studies in Education program describes itself as "a comprehensive interdisciplinary undergraduate program that focuses on education in the context of. Students take courses on education in contexts of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, multiculturalism, social and economic inequities and sustainable development concerns. The program provides an exciting opportunity for students whose interests lie in exploring education from multiple perspectives and the interconnections between the local and the global. The program offers learning opportunities for individuals who are interested in working with global International educational organizations as well as other educational contexts. The language of instruction is English in accordance with the aim of the program to meet the needs of a diverse student body."

Textbox 7: The University of Iceland's International Studies in Education Program

was told, that there was no need for me to worry about such things. Still, old urban habits die hard, and this was no exception. When I did finally stop, however, I was so changed by it that I wrote about it in an article about living in Iceland and my friends responded with shocked, but congratulatory, statements.

I also loved being in a novel cultural environment. I was hampered, however, by the language. I had attempted the BA in Icelandic for a very brief period shortly after my arrival, but I had to leave the program thinking my exposure to it at home would be enough for the time being. The problem was that, unlike my years in Japan, I was essentially a homebound father who rarely did anything but raise his children. I made breakfasts for the kids, packed their lunches, cooked their dinners, and drove them to and from events and sports practices. I read to them, took them to movies, talked about movies, taught them about Buddhism and psychology and regaled them with stories of my large family. My wife worked outside the home and this arrangement was fine for a while. But I did not go out at night with friends until the early morning hours like I had the last time I lived abroad and thus my exposure to conversational Icelandic was extremely limited. Once I had started Saybrook, my free time was diminished even more as I spent so much time studying. And my age too was a factor, being that I wasn't as sharp a learner as I once was, able to almost by osmosis absorb whatever came to me. In short, I was very happy to be with my children, but each year I was becoming a little more isolated from assimilating the culture in which I was surrounded by. This worked against me.

I applied to the BA in International Studies and was accepted easily. Many of my colleagues in the program were surprised to learn that I was not an MA student and occasionally I was even mistaken for one of the teachers in the program. When I entered the ISE program in the Fall of 2013, attending the orientation at the University of Iceland felt both familiar and odd. I was quite comfortable in academic environments having spent the better part of the previous 10 years either in school (Naropa from 1994-1997, Saybrook from 2008-2012) or in jobs that had educational components to them (CPE programs in Colorado, Wisconsin, and San Francisco from 1997-2002). But this time it was different. I was 54 years old and a father of three children. I was living again in a foreign country and was now surrounded by an interesting mix of young people from many parts of the world, often about half my age, many of whom appeared to share the excitement of being in upper education for the very first time. And I was very cognizant of the fact that the only reason I was there, was to be in a program that I viewed as a ticket out of Iceland, which I felt both necessary, and distressing.



Figure 54: Back to school: Me (sitting middle right) at the orientation for international students at the University of Iceland, 2013

Sitting in an undergraduate program orientation (Figure 54) in Iceland had only come after having to abandon the ambition of four years of graduate school in which I had gotten my master's degree in psychology and, within two years, had finished all the work of a PhD program in psychology that was so promising, including a draft of my dissertation. And that was *after* I'd already taken a BA in religious studies and an MA in Buddhist studies.

It felt almost embarrassing.

The first-year courses at ISE included: Educational Settings, Academic Skills, Educational Research, Development and Self, Globalization & Education, and Sociology & History of Education: Iceland in the community of nations. The readings were not particularly difficult, but they introduced me to the language and culture of education as a distinct academic field. While I had read a few theorists whose works were included in our assigned reading, such as Antonio Gramsci and Paolo Freire, I had never thought of educational theory as a unique intellectual discipline, and I found parts of it difficult. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting students from around the world, however, each with a different motivation for being in an English-language program on education in Iceland. Some had taught in their home countries and wished to return with greater certification in the hopes that they could lead a school eventually.

Some had family here and were looking for something that could help keep them in the country. Others wanted to become teachers in Iceland as the opportunities for such at home were limited. Still others were unsure of their trajectory but thought this program could assist them with English skills which they might translate into better paying jobs in Iceland from which they could send money home. A few were exchange students, mostly from other Nordic countries; a handful of Icelanders were present, and still others had entered ISE with no ambition towards education and no particular job aspirations but who were in a gray zone in their time in Iceland.

In my cohort many were from South Asia (and many of them already had family working in Iceland), western and eastern Europe, a few USAmericans, and others from various African countries. I enjoyed their company tremendously and several became friends. Nevertheless, I soon became seen as an older brother-type, someone others often came to for advice. In addition, I was teaching a Buddhist meditation group on the main campus, and several became my meditation students, with one in particular becoming a Buddhist partly through my influence. At other times, I was seen as someone whose long years in school could be of benefit if they had a question unanswered by the teachers or when doing projects together. I enjoyed this role.

With the teachers, I felt comfortable in a peer-like manner. It was easy for me to speak with them and ask questions during lectures and I tried to bring my background into each class when I could. Which meant that I had questions about everything. However, I struggled to master the language of “pedagogy” and other terms I might have been exposed to in other contexts. It wasn’t graduate work, but it was a completely new field for me. At least I thought so early on.

In the second semester, I opened up a bit more by presenting for the *Development and Self* course, a final project examining my identity as a Puer Rican and the many conflicts I had endured in reaching a comfortable space in which I could claim it. I was also becoming more accustomed to the educational theories and began to feel a nascent understanding of education as a field. In the second year, only three courses were mandatory: *Professionalism in Education*, *Pedagogy*, and *Comparative Education*. (We were encouraged to take electives on the main campus and during the second year and I chose two I felt would be helpful in teaching overseas: *Teaching language in the multi-cultural classroom* and, *EFL learning and second language acquisition*. A third elective, *Film and Philosophy*, I chose out of my dual background in film and interest in philosophy. It was in that course that I approached the professor suggesting that a disclaimer should have been given with the course clarifying that only Western philosophy was what was to be studied, not Eastern (or any other) philosophy. I asked if I could present a final project in *Eastern* philosophy and film, and this became one of the most successful events of my time at ISE. I began to attract attention outside of

ISE for my Buddhist background and it was from some members of that class that I was asked if I could instruct some of the students in meditation for a defunct group they had formed a year or two before. I agreed and it was this group that became the core of the meditation group I still teach to this day³².

It was around this time, in the second year, that conversations around the utility of the program were first asked to me and discussed among groups of students. Several friends were becoming worried, feeling as if theoretical issues around education were beginning to dominate and that more “practical” courses were needed. In addition, some felt that, when directly questioning whether the degree would lead to some kind of certification that would enable them to teach, certain teachers became defensive or evasive, leading to a number of intense discussions in the cafeteria where we often gathered. My case was different as I had intended on only taking a BA in education as that was sufficient enough for many of the locations I had sought employment at. But this question did cause several students to leave the program or to seek additional coursework or training in education (some then went on to the MA program at ISE, a few others simply dropped out and disappeared.)

It was also in this period that my differences from the rest of my student ISE peers became more noticeable. I had always enjoyed the periods hanging out with a core group who journeyed from required course to required course together, some from North America, the Philippines, and Europe. We would lunch together and debate contemporary issues and share our respective viewpoints on matters of concern regularly in a friendly manner. It was at this time that a full solar eclipse occurred, and the school was let out in order to go view it from outside. We left the classroom and stood outside with our special glasses and filters, and, at some point, I was asked by one colleague if I wouldn't mind “taking a picture of *our group*”. I did but it soon dawned on me that “our group” meant “their group” and that I was considered “in” yet somehow *apart*. It was not painful, nor did it feel maliciously delivered but it began a process in which I had become aware that my role in the classroom was different from other students.

Another incident at this time startled even me. In one of our classes a teacher had asked us to view and then later return to class to reflect upon the film *Freedom Writers*,

³² I have continued this work since, having been given permission to teach by my teacher in 1997 for the purposes of helping those I served as a Chaplain, I voluntarily teach meditation at the University now as the meditation instructor for the *Hugleiðsluhópur Háskólans* – “University [of Iceland] Meditation Group”. Surprisingly, we have almost 500 members, primarily students and former students, in our Facebook group, making it possibly the largest “club” on campus.

partly based on a true story depiction of one woman's journey to help her students in an underserved neighborhood of primarily African-American students succeed despite many serious obstacles. I watched the film with a seething anger at its stereotypical display of the drug-addled parents of African American kids whose only hope was the White savior who could challenge the system by being both a firm disciplinarian and dutifully going overboard with her compassionate actions in the classroom such as purchasing materials which were opposed by her recalcitrant school administrators. I had seen these kinds of stories before, and they infuriated me. When we assembled during the next session and the teacher asked us what we thought, I realized that I was the only one who thought it problematic, and I began to state my objections. I told them that I had lived and worked in Los Angeles (the site of the movie) and that I knew many Black and Latino teachers who put in 100% sometimes seven days a week to help students in poor neighborhoods but no one made movies about them. I said that this was a typical Hollywood trope, the Great White Savior figure who usually finds a poor community whose adult members are reprobates who care little for their own children until some White person with a beknighted conscience comes in their midst and changes all for the better. I was bitterly opposed by two students, one an Icelander who said she thought Whites were prejudiced against in the United States as she had spent some time there, and the other student from southern Europe who said the story was inspirational. The teacher was taken aback by the passionate exchanges and later, one of the students, (who became one of the interviewees for my ISE doctoral research) said this was the best class he had ever attended in his experience in Iceland. It didn't win me any friends, but apparently, I left a mark (the teacher later thanked me for my passion and my concerns and said she was not using the film anymore).

During the third year, I took three education-related courses outside the ISE program: *Transferable Academic Skills 1*, *Teaching English to young learners* and *Introduction to English language teaching*. I also added two courses related to life in Iceland: *Being Icelandic: Icelandic Folktales, Beliefs, and Popular Culture, Past and Present* and *Old Nordic Religion and Belief*. Lastly, I selected one course clearly related to my own personal interests, *Introduction to Asian Philosophy*, and was pleasantly surprised when I was invited to give a guest lecture for a section on Buddhism as the teacher, (now a part of my doctoral committee) became aware of my extensive involvement in Buddhism. That course encouraged me in ways I had downplayed: that I already could teach in a subject I was a specialist in, and that this topic was something I was more passionate about than some of the more theoretically educational courses I had been taking at ISE. Yet again, another dual dynamic seemed to pull at me: I was preparing to teach education, but I felt more trained and competent in Buddhism, one of the pillars I later selected for the doctoral work. My final project for the ISE program, a

comparative analysis of the Zapatista and Bhutanese education systems, was also indicative of this pull away from education per se, as it took activism (or politics) as its primary topic yet again, a field I still felt more conversant in than education. One can see this split within me as a constantly emerging dilemma with no apparent solution. But another split lurked in the background.

My last semester as a student in the BA in International Studies in Education Program (ISE), was going to be the end of my life in Iceland. I would soon get a BA in education, the last credential I needed for employment overseas. I would be teaching English again, just as I did more than 20 years before, when I lived in Japan. And though, as mentioned above, I already had another BA (in religious studies), two MAs (in Buddhist studies, and psychology) and had done doctoral work in psychology up to a first draft of a dissertation, this final degree would enable me to make more money than I had ever been able to here in Iceland. But it meant leaving my children and sending money home. Just like my father did out of necessity so many years before. 'What the Hell am I doing?' I asked myself constantly, hating every second of that plan which was so near coming true.

But, as luck, or Fate would have it, that was not to be.

During one of the last lectures in one of the last courses in the ISE program one teacher who was knitting near the side of the classroom, close to where I sat, briefly stopped herself and leaning close, whispered to me, "José, what are you doing here?" I was a bit perplexed and asked what she meant. She looked directly at me and said "You should be teaching this course. Come see me after class."

I saw her in her office, and it was there that she proposed that I apply to the doctoral program at ISE. I was flattered and shocked at the same time. Should I try another doctorate? I leaned against it, but part of my shakiness was also seeing that it just might be possible, and this scared me.

I didn't want to leave my children, and this was the most obviously difficult part of my plan. It mirrored my father's absence from my early life, and I swore to myself that I would not repeat the same dynamic with my children. Yet here I was, planning precisely that very same thing. I had been gearing up for what I thought would be, at the very least, being gone part of every year, perhaps nine months and then coming home for summers. I had envisioned internet calls weekly, daily, if possible, to my children and had even plotted time zones, calculating that, if I lived in Japan or China, they were eight hours behind, but if in California, they would be seven hours ahead. I had steeled myself to leave and now I had to envision myself staying - but that was only possible if I tried for a doctorate again.

Complicating things was the fact that while psychology was an old love of mine, as was Buddhism and activism (and as an academic field I thought of it as political science), all of these were more natural fits than education which I still felt uncomfortable with. How could I even try a doctorate in a new field that I had never considered as an academic discipline? I was confused and at the same time, trembling with excitement.

It is possible, I concluded.

When I finally entertained her idea to apply for the doctorate program, here was a way back in, I thought. (In fact, it was the material from that BA dissertation that formed the initial core of my projected PhD work.) It flattered me that as I was nearing completion of the program someone thought I might succeed in doing a doctorate *in education* when I still felt like an absolute beginner. Within a few weeks we came up with an adequate enough proposal in which I was accepted into the education doctoral program. I was still hurting from my previous attempts at a doctorate and when I expressed my doubts about how this might turn out, she looked directly at me and said, "You **can** do it!"

But something remarkable occurred. It wasn't until I began recalling incidents such as these for the present writing that I recalled that more than 40 years before, Mrs. Cruz, the librarian at Banyan Elementary School in Miami, had said those exact same words to me in encouragement for reading above my grade level.

3.6 Doctoral research at ISE and the move towards completion

In this project, I document a human journey through education, telling a story whose documentation, and life examples, might be helpful in sharing the inherent magic of learning that ennobles the human condition. In the course of my research among a group of students at the International Studies in Education Program (now simple ISE) I discovered that a major component of the program's success was its ability to tap into and stimulate that humanistic and affective dimension of education. Yet, as that became clear, it also became apparent that my own participation in the program was itself a product of a long line of caring teacher-mentors and life experiences whose approach to education were crucial in my development as an educator and researcher. Documenting and expanding upon that journey became the revised focus of my research examination.

My project design was originally formulated in 2019 as an open-ended, triangulated qualitative study of the construction and implementation of the International Studies in Education (ISE) at the University of Iceland which had been established in 2008. In that early stage of research, I wondered what sort of problems could be studied in this somewhat permeable field, and how? I began exploring a comparative examination of

different educational systems hoping to discern areas which might be beneficial to the Icelandic educational system.

From the outset, I decided to apply my own areas of expertise: Engaged Buddhism, psychology, and activism, and read the literature in the area of transformation and transformative learning (TE/TL) which I felt had elements congruent with Buddhist ideas. I wanted to focus on students and learning, eventually conducting interviews with 15 students, done in two stages, with nine interviews done prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, six post Covid-19. The data from the interviews clarified important issues and some problems and affirmed that this examination of transformation was a worthwhile endeavor which led to richer avenues of research possibilities.

Now the main study emerged; I narrowed the focus to my own experiences of learning, and I took on autoethnography as the main method to support research that would be part of developing and diversifying the ISE program. My own diversified life story would be told as part of further developing the ISE program and assisting learners in overcoming their own traumas and difficult social circumstances and instead, succeed as learners and educators themselves.

The present work then refocused on my journey and details how my three pillars distinctiveness for years masked a mutual reliance on learning, or education. I examined two interlocking stories, and two interlocking theoretical frameworks. One story concerned research into transformation at the University of Iceland's International Studies in Education Program (ISE) in which I was a student. I wished to examine the experiences learners had and document how those experiences were similar and how distinct they were from each other. However, a second story emerged that seemed to have a more compelling relevance, and that was my own journey in the arena of education.

The theoretical and methodological frames I used are Engaged Buddhism and autoethnography. Engaged Buddhism combines modern social and political activism with Buddhist principles in a unique combination. In addition, I have been deeply involved in Buddhist education since the late 1970s in diverse contexts, including five years in Japan as a student and teacher as well as at The Naropa Institute, and three different *sanghas*, or, Buddhist communities where ritual practice, academic debates, theoretical teachings along with meditative practices, were all included and taught in different ways and in differing contexts. Autoethnography is the analytical method used to examine my stories to reveal their relevance to education, in particular international and higher education.

I have used an historical, analytic approach in presenting a critical narrative of my life and the ways those intellectual “pillars” all grew out of specific experiences fundamentally related to education.

In this section I have documented much of my life in Iceland which began in 2002. In that time, I taught; I taught my children, I taught adult learners at Mímir, I taught meditation to teens and cancer survivors, I taught screenwriting and English vocabulary, and in my time at ISE, both as BA student and doctoral candidate, *I taught and yet, I still never felt like an educator*. I was conflicted in this aspect of professional self-identity, perhaps too cautious to identify with this field since I had attempted and failed at several. In addition, *I remain tied to an anachronistic view of “teacher” as possessing not only specialized knowledge but also wisdom and authority based upon an almost magical power to teach*. I believe this came from my parents’ and their parents’ view of education, especially higher education, as a thing of wonder, something able to create new worlds far away and richer than their simpler lives.

But I instinctively knew that I had an ability to combine an *enthusiastic embrace of learning* with the area I was teaching and that learners at all levels responded positively. This gave rise to the metaphor of lighting one candle with another, itself taken from Buddhism although in a much different context. But all this teaching had an underlying, and yet unspoken objective: *I wanted to light a fire within others, to ignite the tools they could use to heal, to help awaken others so that they could lead better, richer, and more fulfilling lives*.

This period in Iceland supported a free development of whatever I chose to do, on the one hand, while on the other, cultural and linguistic restraints inhibited such development to only particular areas. I knew I could never be a union organizer here, for example, and the practice of psychology would require a far greater fluidity with the language than I would ever muster. (And licensure in psychology would be even more difficult given the nature and thrust of the Icelandic psychological system). But connecting what I knew to Buddhism and using that, via meditation primarily, to further my goals seemed to work. Teaching POME was far more fulfilling than being a cook’s assistant at Sólvangur and yet maintaining a personal connection to those I worked with seemed important as well. In teaching the meditation groups, I was counseling while also engaging in a personally fulfilling way and helping others to live through their hearts as well. A blending of the pillars was tested.

The Activator, the name I chose for the *type* of educator I became, sheds some light on this idea. I aim to kickstart within those I work with, some connection to the topic I teach or am speaking about. I do this with stories from a varied life and from trying to unite the many different strands of my own intellectual journeys. But I do this also to

activate within the other person a positive response. This may explain praxis somewhat, but it still does not touch on teacher identity (sense of self).

This question of teacher identity has continued throughout the writing process. In *Developing a teacher identity in the university context*, authors van Langveld, et al. (2016), conducted a review of 59 studies trying to understand factors that promoted or inhibited teacher identity. Four external strengthening or constraining factors were identified: “direct work empowerment”, “wider context of higher education”, “contact with students”, and “staff development activities”. These external factors had some obvious institutional elements - “the “direct work environment”, for example, which could either strengthen or constrain teacher identity. The broader “context of higher education” was generally seen to be constraining, and “contact with students” and “staff development” were both viewed positively as strengthening teacher identity. Each of these are described as, in the main, outside the control of teachers.

But it was the inner or psychological processes which intrigued me more and which were more salient to my own identity process, namely: “1. a sense of appreciation, 2., a sense of connectedness, 3., a sense of competence, 4., a sense of commitment, and 5., imagining a future career trajectory.” (pp. 332-333). Each of them has relevance to my own trajectory but in different degrees.

Feeling appreciated, either by students or colleagues as well as through rewards such as grants or acknowledgements, seems an easy one to imagine. I learned to quickly assess the nodding off heads or the glazed eyes and to quickly adjust my “performance” and thus instant feedback I thought was always available if one was just keen enough to pay attention.

The second, feeling *connected*, the authors associated most with colleagues, that sense of camaraderie and shared competence with others in the same field. But I felt this most with students in each space I taught in, and the “students” were often simply receivers of my assessments (fellow union members) but in all contexts I felt connected and this I credit to the Buddhist view of interdependence.

Competence was and remains the most problematic for me. While I have never felt fully or completely competent as a *teacher*, it is clear I always had enough confidence in my abilities to feel comfortable in *teaching*. I always possessed an inner knowing that if I stood up and said something (like at the WB union meeting) people would listen, and I would have an impact. I knew inside me, even from an early age, that I was competent, not in my professional identity perhaps, but in some inchoate way that others recognized. That, if I stepped up, I could do it, whatever “it” was, and that it would inspire others. Nevertheless, I retain a sense of incompetence when viewed from the perspective of *credentials* (teaching in Japan men and women with sometimes

graduate degrees despite my not even possessing a BA) seeing myself to this day as a usurper of the title “teacher” as I only recently entered education. This may be a reflection of my family’s background and the lingering effects of a “colonial psyche” as Fanon (1967) describes it.

A *sense of commitment* seems the most obvious and the authors connected this to a “caring for students”. While their review concerned teaching in higher education, I think all my endeavors examined here, my youthful interventions with grieving family members, the union struggle, chaplaincy, etc., are all cultures of learning in which not only was I seriously committed, but always felt at ease in.

Lastly, the ability to *imagine a future career trajectory* as a teacher is another element I have felt woefully inadequate in and unprepared for. To teach is one thing, to be regarded as a professional teacher, is quite another. The authors write that “when teachers saw limited or no career development possibilities, the potential to envision themselves as senior teachers in the future was curtailed” (p. 333). But I can see myself in a teaching career here in Iceland while still not feeling fully competent for the recognition.

I often heard that the students in ISE were not only part of the program but that they were the program – that our presence and the stories we brought with us were the main resources of the program itself. I agree. But how do we get to know those stories? For most of those in the program this is a piecemeal process whereby we gradually shared our knowledge and stories, first to our peers, and then to the professors who taught us. But there is still much that we hold to ourselves, revealing little of the complex circumstances that made us who we are and that brought us together in Iceland.

When I first entered the ISE program, as a BA student, I had already held many positions, had lived in many places, including Japan, had already written two peer-reviewed papers and many articles and poems published in half a dozen different publications, and had led a vibrant, and sometimes dramatic, life. I stood out and knew it. But as I got to know my peers in the BA program, I saw how rich their lives were as well and by the time I was in the doctoral program, I felt that exploration of the students’ lives would be a valid and interesting research topic. In my consultations with Allyson, we agreed that my abstract examination of other systems in other countries might not be sufficient for the doctoral committee here and that adding a look at the program, or the students in the program, would be better and could make a valuable contribution. Eventually, this adjustment became the focus with me dropping the idea of comparing systems.

In Books, Ragnarsdottir, Jónsson and Macdonald (2011), the earliest instructors and developers of the program wanted to examine ISE both with intrinsic as well as instrumental purposes in mind. That is, they wanted to study what they had created:

to gain a better understanding of this particular case: an educational studies program with a global focus where English, not the national language, is the language of instruction ... [but] also ...it suggests what is or might be possible within the realm of higher education and under what conditions (p. 127).

Similarly, at this point, I wanted to understand both the nature of transformation among ISE students, and to use this information to inform and possibly improve the program. And to understand transformation, workable definitions were sought using the traditional literature from the field of Transformative Education/Transformative learning (TE/TL).

3.7 Creating a foundation in TE/TL

Because of my background in activism, I approached the task of investigating transformation among the students in ISE through a critical philosophical stance (Merriam and Kim, 2012, pp. 56-72) as my goal was “to know how the transformative experience shapes or re-shapes the broader social context” in which the learner is encased in, whether that is back home (should they return) or here in Iceland (should they decide to stay). However, what I didn’t see was that the impetus for this investigation came from years of transformations within an educational framework (both formal and informal) that I had been undergoing for most of my life. Once it became clear that the maintenance of critical objectivity was unnecessarily restraining my ability to use my own life story to inform this research, my creative juices began to flow freely. The ability to tell my story and demonstrate the nexus linking my activist, Buddhist, and psychology interests with the field of education, was an eye-opener for both me and my supervisors.

There were several stages to this development, however. A movement from attempts to define and understand transformation within an educational context, to the discovery of the importance the affective dimension had upon learners, changed into the personal realization that these were not only not separate facets of being a student who undergoes transformation, but the core of transformation itself. And that, as I was examining this and hoping to combine this material later with personal stories and theoretical frames from my own diverse work and intellectual history, I came to a radical conclusion. That is, the very difficulties I was experiencing in finding a suitable framework in which it all these understandings cohered could be ably avoided if I simply chose to use autobiographical methods to describe my own educational

transformations and use *that* as a way to make the ISE material, with which I had been working on with so much difficulty, salient in the manner in which I originally had hoped. Once that direction was decided upon, I was able to accelerate the work, finding myself liberated in the newfound understanding that the way *forward* was to begin *inwardly*.

3.8 Adding phenomenography and hitting an impasse

At first, I wanted to ascertain the most fundamental aspects of transformation and for that I chose to use phenomenologically influenced research methods such as *phenomenography*. This choice of phenomenography was to expose the qualitative *differences* in the lived experience of transformation by the interviewees. Soon it became clear that noting the *similarities* between how transformation was understood was as important to understanding the phenomenon as the *differences*, and so I then amended my direction to theoretically include both aspects of similarity and difference. My search for methods and methodologies to examine the transformative material included *thematic analysis* and it was at this point I began to realize the cumbersome nature of his project and my ambitions.

It was not that my disparate interests and theories were irreconcilable, *per se*. It was more that finding a way to include both the broadly focused examination of transformation in a manner that honored my initial vision with an understanding that I needed to contextualize the importance of some of those understandings with my varied academic and intellectual background was becoming too difficult. In consultations over this with Allyson, I saw what appeared to be the intractability of the situation and I despaired at uniting all these different ideas but, when she saw how alive I became when discussing my Buddhist background or my years as an activist, she suggested that I should perhaps begin there. After a bit of struggle, I returned with a newfound enthusiasm for the project and began by assessing ethnographic analysis with autobiographical material and we agreed that an autoethnography which still used the ISE research would be a feasible and useful option. I had already done one ethnographic study while at Saybrook and so I began to form in my mind some combination of biography with ethnography and the movement towards autoethnography began in earnest.

Allyson reminded me that my relationship to the faculty as an older student with a long professional life that had preceded my entry into ISE, made me uniquely accessible to both groups and thus a valuable pair of eyes to look at the program in novel ways. One moment I'd be carrying one student's baby, a precedent that Allyson had set, and the next I'd be adding to a class discussion informed by my years at Warner Bros. Pictures. She saw that I was comfortable in a multi-cultural environment, and that I was

quick to come to the defense of any perceived injustice or slight against someone in passionate ways. Allyson felt that I had some unique insights as such and that therefore I should begin exploring them openly. With the proper focus and some latitude to use my own life story, Allyson thought this new dual direction promising, and I agreed. I was becoming determined to finish this time, as a doctorate had always been the academic peak I had wanted to reach since I was a young man.

3.9 The ISE project: early decision for the doctoral study

The initial project began as an examination of transformation within the accessible cohorts: my own from 2013-2016, and later, those which had followed. Interviews were taken with eight students who all shared enthusiastically positive responses to their experience at ISE with most saying they had transformed or that they had transformative experiences connected to their period in the program. However, it was noted that each of these initial responses were couched in deeply affective terms which opened a new avenue in the study. Preliminary results were presented at the Scottish Educational Research Association's (SERA) conference in Edinburgh, in 2019.

But what does it mean that the memories of the students and their transformation experiences, whether explicitly or implicitly wrapping them in verbal descriptions, are recalled through affective lenses? Was there something lacking in the intellectual vigor of their academic program? Or was it that their transformative experiences left such deep impressions that they can only be recalled affectively? Was there something particularly affective in the program's pedagogical approach, curriculum, or in the nature of the teachers? Is it possible, we wondered, that the *affective dimension of learning*, a part of the learning experience not commonly considered, plays a bigger role in learning than typically understood? Or is this something unique to the students in ISE and the particular conditions which bring foreign students from around the world to study in a university in Iceland?

These were some of the questions we pondered after the presentation in Scotland and several months later I began expanding this consideration and considering its relevance to education in general. We needed a larger group, and plans were made to increase the number of interviewees, intending on reaching about 20. We eventually settled upon 15 students and the presentation of these larger plans to the School of Education's committee for doctoral students, my Interim Evaluation, was successfully approved in June 2021. It appeared clear to the committee (which included a specialist in Chinese religion who was very familiar with Buddhism, and a psychologist who is now head of the DISE) that I was not only ready but fully capable of doing doctoral work on this topic. I felt validated.

Nevertheless, the committee's recommendations included suggestions to be more explicit about what it was I wished to understand, to further tighten my methodological intentions, and to further clarify the role Buddhism and psychology would play in my analysis. In short, they felt that I had a fascinating topic but that again, it seems, my broad research focus required narrowing to succeed. I was pleased with the results and continued apace but attempts to respond specifically to the methodological questions made it clear that I was stretched thinly, and my focus still not quite settled.

Elements of phenomenologically derived methodologies³³ were considered: *phenomenography*, to detail the differences in the lived experiences of the students, and *IPA*, or *interpretative phenomenological analysis*, to showcase the similarities in the various responses. I also began to look more openly at ways to incorporate my past experiences in activism, psychology, and most importantly, Buddhism, into the final project. It was around this time that we (Allyson and the other committee members) began to see that those other elements played a far greater role in my views on education than even I had allowed and thus, as we progressed, Allyson began to encourage my exploration into my own past as not only relevant, but possibly essential to the research I was engaging in. I struggled with this, fearing that a complete makeover was beyond my capacities.

3.10 The autoethnographic epiphany

For several months I wrestled with this, until I presented an amended view of the project as one that took an auto-ethnographic character. Now, *I* would be the prime object of research, and the three major influences in my development: psychology, Buddhism (primarily Engaged Buddhism, the subfield I had gotten my MA in some years before), and activism, would each be seen as rolling into the narrative of my life through which my unique perspective on education (what I have come to tentatively call, for want of a better formulation, *neo-humanistic education*, incorporating elements from each of these strands) evolved. I characterize this as *neo-humanistic* in that I use elements taken from Buddhism which are absent from other formulations of "humanistic education"³⁴. More will be said of this in Chapter Four. The ISE project, then, would shift and become the springboard for a changed trajectory and the

³³ "Phenomenology aims to clarify the structure and meaning of a phenomenon ...

Phenomenography denotes a research approach aiming at describing the different ways a group of people understand a phenomenon ... In other words, phenomenology focuses on similarities while phenomenography focuses on differences" Wallroth, V., Larsson, K., & Schröder, A., (2022), p. 3.

³⁴ See chapter 6.2.10

impetus for revising a research originally designed to partake of an objective look at an outer phenomenon, changing to a careful look at the subjective self who has evolved into someone who entered education as an academic field later in life, but for whom the entirety of his intellectual (and personal) trajectory has been influenced by education in one way or another the entire time. In the process of external exploration, an internal discovery was made. One that reminded me of the T. S. Eliot poem “Little Gidding”³⁵ whose lines below were always inspirational but never felt descriptive or a reality until the work of this research led me to this same conclusion:

*We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

Here in Iceland, as I began education as the last pillar, though the underlying ground on which everything else I had done was planted, I finally felt something stable, and actually familiar, because it had been there all along, from the very beginning.

As soon as I shared with her this new plan, Allyson said my excitement was palpable. It appeared that a big weight had lifted, and I could now truly begin the process of researching transformation within the educational context. This was because I understood transformation, and the transformative effects of education, firsthand.

My entire life had been an educational movement of transformations fueled by three very different but eventually interlocking themes culminating in the formal examination of education through a uniquely constructed observational frame. I have come to see the world as full of potential which needs only “maieutic” help for it to flower. Such assistance might be in the form of psychological counsel, as spiritual guidance (such as teaching meditation, which I have been doing since 1997, in weekly sessions at the University of Iceland for the past 6 years), or as an activist leading people toward some political or economic end, e.g., my union presidency at Warner Bros. was a clear example of this. I had previously seen myself as unlearned in education, its pedagogical bases, its foundational principles, etc., but once I realized that I had been acting in an educational way throughout my professional life, I began to see “education” as something I was already intimately familiar with, and thus, always had some understanding of as well. It was from this point that it became clear that the research would be different than originally conceived and more significantly, that I had now reached a critical point in my educational career.

³⁵ <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/history/winter/w3206/edit/tseliotlittlegidding.html>

Discussion

The period of my life since moving to Iceland reflects a culmination of many disappointments and several attempts to make the best use of my time to raise my children in a more comfortable environment than that in which I had grown up in. Chief among these concerns was to be able to stay with them, to raise them in a manner my father had been unable to raise us. I felt that, while quality time with our children is essential, quantity time matters as well. Unfortunately, my father was unable to give that to his children so I promised that I would do all I could to provide that for my children. As well, I had not wanted to move to Iceland, I only made that decision because, after my father's death, I was adrift and knew that I could benefit from a change. Lastly, it was a way for me to find a place where I might accomplish my desires to keep my children safe and away from the kinds of violent episodes I witnessed. In this sense, I succeeded.

But professionally, however, I remained in a murky, liminal region, feeling that I was not quite successful in any field I had attempted before such as Engaged Buddhism, psychology, activism, or chaplaincy, but not successful here either. All of them had begun promisingly enough but fell flat, collapsing after some external incident or dramatic internal shift had occurred in me. It wasn't until my entry into ISE that I began to locate a field whose language was initially foreign but whose displays were quite familiar to me: *education, a yearning or drive to know, to learn, in order to better understand and then share this understanding with others* (see page 26 and my use of "culture of education").

My whole life I had been teaching: my family, my friends, then later as an activist and through the Latino Writers Group, my union presidency, too, was an educational project as well as all the part-time teaching of English I had done during my years in Japan and even to the meditation courses I taught. All of it was educational, involving learning and instruction. Even chaplaincy itself required an educational process in both entering that field and in the very activities I engaged in as a chaplain who counseled people in distress over death or sickness. In short, entering education formally was a shock only because I was engaging in research and being introduced to formal principles of pedagogy and education as a social science. But this mutually interconnected process of learning and teaching was very recognizable.

This was a new field only insofar as I had never given much thought to education, as such. But it is the conclusion of this work that quite clearly, I have been "doing" education my whole life and therefore, the last twenty years of my life were the preparation for the remainder of my life as an educator. The kind of educator I am - what I call an *activator* - refers to the combination of principles I have derived from being an Engaged Buddhist, psychologist, and activist. In addition, I believe those

combined elements are a valuable and unique amalgam that may offer others something to enhance their own life in education. It's also descriptive of the manner in which I educate and thus includes those performative (in the most positive ways at its best) elements that have served me well in more public activities.

Where does this go from here? In Part Two, I will look at this combination and pull out the elements I feel most useful, using that as a guide for this last period of my life and hopefully offering it as a rough template which may be beneficial to others. Each of these pillars will be explained, the methodological and theoretical choices given, and the whole explored outlining a coalescing personal system with relevance to the field of education.

FRAMING THE STORY



4 My Three Pillars: (Engaged) Buddhism, Psychology, & Activism

The three theoretical fields which have most informed my life and thus, this work, are Engaged Buddhism, psychology, and activism.³⁶ While Buddhism has been possibly the most influential factor in my inner life, *my* Buddhism has always been “engaged” even before I had heard of this phrase. The years I began to study Buddhism coincided with a turbulent period of social and political upheaval in the United States concerning war and social injustice. I felt connected to both Buddhism and these difficult issues, passionate about their relevance in separate ways, but I still felt they were connected. Nevertheless, what I often did, was jump towards Buddhism’s ultimate answers (suffering is inherent in life, a wider and dispassionate view was to be cultivated towards worldly issues, for example) and gingerly avoid questions relating to specific strategies to solve social problems such as violence versus non-violence. This was because there were tensions between what a part of me felt was Buddhism’s *best* (non-violence as arising from compassion) and that part of me which felt such strategies were *unrealistic* in all contexts (could non-violent resistance have stopped the Holocaust for example, or the ethnic cleansing of Guatemala’s Maya?).

4.1 Engaged Buddhism

While I have previously mentioned the notion of pillars above and throughout this work will be expanding on their importance in my development, here I will provide a short summary of this fundamental set of influences. Each of my pillars represents what are more truly seen as clusters, or arenas of ideas which are gathered together and used as a roughly singular entity, and which have exercised enormous influence on my

³⁶For this work, the term “activism” encompasses the various political, and social justice concerns I have associated myself with, along with some related spiritual dimensions of societal engagement (such as hospital chaplaincy), which are outside ostensibly religious activity. I also regard activism as a “theoretical field” insofar as it embraces within my experience the influences of anarcho-socialism, feminism, eco-socialism, and other progressive analyses of issues of historical and contemporary concern such as labor relations, deforestation, gender relations, anti-nuclear power activism, United States’ foreign policy, immigration, global climate change, and others. It represents, and therefore refers to, an entire field of socio-intellectual engagement with the world at large.

ideas about self and the outside world. Each of them is as well an intellectual realm which explains suffering in their own distinct ways. Buddhism does so religiously-philosophically, psychologically through scientific study of mind and behavior, and personality, and activistically in socio-political ways.

My earliest exposure to Buddhism created within me an intense desire to understand the nature of suffering, both within me as an individual and in the collective suffering I saw around me. It provided me with a deep analysis of suffering's pervasiveness and tools to examine how it might be relieved. "Engaged Buddhism" or "socially engaged Buddhism" (Main, and Lai, 2013) refers to the "active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems" (Eppsteiner, 1988, p. xii). The term was first made popular by the Vietnamese Zen teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022) in 1963 describing "his attempt to form a non-aligned, non-belligerent Buddhist coalition that he described as 'an enemy-of-neither combatant'" (King, 1994, p. 14). It has since come to encompass Buddhist attempts to meld Western "ethical sensitivity, social activism, and egalitarianism" with a Buddhist "vision of interdependence, in which the universe is experienced as an organic whole" and in which "personal peace is connected to world peace on a fundamental level" (Eppsteiner, 1988, xiii-xiv). For his deep commitment to such a vision Nhat Hanh³⁷ was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Nobel Laureate the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1967.

As a person who felt distressed by poverty and violence and yet became attracted to Buddhism from a very early age, I have long identified with this movement although struggling with its sometimes-conflicting poles of deep spiritual cultivation versus courageous external resistance to violence and advocacy of social justice concerns. These conflicting responses I felt embodied within my own being and the struggle for *reconciliation* between these two poles is one that has never fully resolved itself. Nevertheless, some form of *integration* has occurred, beginning in the years I spent as a chaplain via Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) which took place at the end of a long period in which I had worked as an activist, labor union president, and advocate for Latino interests in the entertainment industry from my base at Warner Bros. Pictures. I left Warner Bros. to complete my education at a Buddhist institution of higher learning, The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) and I was the first person selected into their MA degree program in Engaged Buddhism in 1994. It was there that I discovered a different form of "activism" in which the wider urge to benefit beings in an impersonal, public capacity was substituted for a focus on health care chaplaincy. This had the effect of moving my activism from the head down to the heart (the name

³⁷ Two of his most influential books are *The miracle of mindfulness* (1975/1987) which was one of my introductions to the study of meditation and *Being peace* (1987).

of my Master's project at the time was, *From Applause to Affect*, and reflected this transition.) The movement from a cerebral, more analytical approach to understanding suffering, to one more practical, personable, and heart-oriented, was the beginning of an integration I had long sought for and it has led me here to my entry into education as a field via the International Studies in Education Program (ISE) at the University of Iceland and culminating in this doctoral project. Thus Buddhism, more particularly, Engaged Buddhism is the proximate cause of the journey which has brought me both to Iceland, and to this dissertation.

4.2 Psychology

The study of psychology began as one of the first intellectual fields I imagined myself becoming professionally involved with and which I had long prepared for because of my background. Even when young, I was not surprised that I was searching for some transformative explanation of the difficulties I had faced – and witnessed - while tying such knowledge to a yearning to provide help for others enduring similar experiences or from similar backgrounds. Like my attraction to Buddhism, my interest in psychology stemmed from attempts to understand suffering but in a more cerebral and behavioral manner. The time in high school participating in “peer-counseling” had also served the dual purposes of cementing this professional interest and in initiating the exploration of the traumatic effects I had been exposed to. Certainly, my mother's suicide attempt and my family's dynamic afterwards was a significant beginning to this attempt to understand why and to protect myself from its influence in my character.

When I speak of psychology, I refer most specifically to what my late teacher Eugene Taylor characterized as the *Existential-Humanistic and Transpersonal* depth psychologies which arose in the 20th century. This was a neologism created by Taylor and used in his *Mysteries of Personality* (2009), to link the most important psychological movements of the 20th century which originated in the break away from the experimental and clinical forms to a broader and more experiential stream. This tripartite model of psychology's “three streams” (Figure 55) was Taylor's innovative perspective on modern psychology³⁸ and I feel honored to have been exposed to this

³⁸ Taylor's innovation was not noting the similarities of the three streams and their distinctiveness from the early experimental and clinical antecedents. That was a long and detailed process understood by pioneers of each dissenting psychologist from the more positivistic, earlier trends. It was, however, in *uniting them in such a way as to present them as an informally tied together united set of experientially-oriented dynamic theories of consciousness which together stood apart from the earlier streams in a cohesive way*. The linking of each as “Existential-

novel structuring as he was writing it and to ally myself with these epistemological viewpoints.

These three epistemological assumptions form the basis of Taylor's three streams theory (referring to the *experimental*, *clinical*, and *experiential* strands of psychology) and each is linked to the formulation and impact on my development with parallels to my three pillars. I will speak about this a bit more in *The 'Trinity of Affinity'* which follows the section on psychology.

In Figure 55 below, I had originally written on the side of each entry of Taylor's epistemological assumptions how I thought my three pillars matched up. The transcendent assumption (which he aligns with the transpersonal stream) seemed the easiest to see parallels with Buddhism, as both share differentiated views on consciousness versus awareness, and that there are levels to consciousness which may be developed and enhanced via specific practices such as meditation. Likewise, the psychodynamic assumption, associated with the clinical stream, posits a separation between two domains of the conscious and unconscious, and the importance of the unconscious in furthering or hindering psychological growth. The last, positivist assumption, Taylor links to the experimental stream. I found this shared *some* similarities with the materialist and reductionistic positivism that has characterized much of modern Western thought. Nevertheless, I accept that direct parallels cannot be drawn but assert only that there exist some roughly analogous presuppositions between the two. Searching for direct counterparts with each of my pillars is more an exercise than a scientific hypothesis.

Humanistic and Transpersonal" was, as far as I have discovered, his original contribution (also see Note 58).

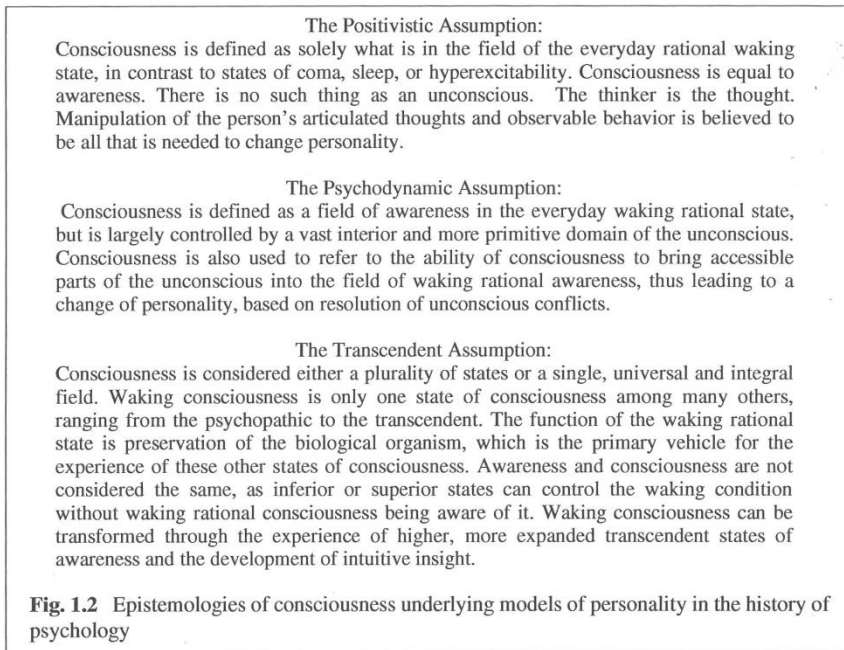


Figure 55: Finding a comprehensive psychological approach: Eugene Taylor's Three Streams' epistemological assumptions

4.3 From activism to The Activator: In word and deed

While activism is defined as “a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), for me, it more broadly represents any of the external responses to seeing suffering and the various social justice causes I was involved in to help others. It contains within it a diverse range of interests and activities such as environmental pollution, fighting against the use of nuclear power, protesting against USAmerican foreign policy interventions, union organizing, feminism, socialism, and more. The writer Alice Walker once referred to activism as: “the rent I pay for living on this planet” (Dreifus, 1989, p. 30). This sentiment echoes beautifully how I viewed the various actions which I took on causes dear to my heart. I felt they were obligatory manifestations of concern for that which sustains me as I live this life. To not decry deforestation or environmental degradation, to not protest the dehumanizing treatment of refugees and migrants into the United States, for example, would be to express ingratitude and selfishness. Thus, I always viewed activities such as attending anti-war protests, my union activities at Warner Bros., or the writing campaigns to free political prisoners as things I *should* do. And this began at a very young age for me. But my way of being an activist evolved over the years and part of my research has included

the discovery that my activist evolution has always had an educational component to it. As well, it has been heavily influenced by the Buddhist notion of the *bodhisattva* who works tirelessly for the benefit of all sentient beings and later, in Engaged Buddhism's attempts to marry Buddhist practice with overt concern for modern circumstances.

I use the term 'activator', a combination of *activist* and *educator*, as a descriptor of the way I have conducted myself throughout the various phases of and positions in my life. I was always bringing together a social justice orientation bred from my early years and family background with an innate need to teach others what I had learned or what I felt they needed to learn. This categorization of being an *activator* was the beginning of a self-realization that education has, in its broadest sense, been the through-line, perhaps *the* unifying theme, throughout my life. This characterization embodies *the journey* as well as *the destination* and the current work is an exploration of both. I explore this visually in the section on *Maps, mandalas, and matrices*.

To document and better understand that trajectory, the structure of the study may appear a little unconventional from a typical education dissertation. However, it is not unusual for an autoethnography, therefore its use of quotations to thematically mark each section, as well as the extensive inclusion of photographs as an essential part of the narrative, as well as the extensive first-person perspective. In addition, as it makes use of evocative autobiographical narration, it "needs a good story; it needs to have the potential to interest, excite, draw the reader in and provoke an emotional response" which "requires emotional honesty, deep introspection and a measure of literary skill" (Dashper, pp. 214, 216). I have attempted here, often beyond natural inclination, to present such honesty and skill and believe the result worthy of examination on its own terms.

In order to facilitate the analysis of my many and diverse activities, first displaying them in an easy-to-read manner was part of the exercises my lead supervisor Allyson and I regularly engaged in. These visual displays became more than simply exercises, however. For me they touched a responsive chord akin to the absorption that followed the viewing of Tibetan thangkas. These artistic representations of deities or Pure Lands were designed to encourage meditative contemplation and provided me with the first yearnings to study Tibetan Buddhism. Allyson had not only suggested this to help her understand the often-detailed recounting of events in my life but also to assist me in thinking differently about those events and activities so that I might discern patterns to help me work with them. I found the process thoroughly enjoyable and very helpful.

Figure 56 below has the first "map" as we came to call it and it shows the main activities I had participated in at the time my doctoral work began. When I saw all these groups and names displayed in this way, I began to see patterns I had intuited for a long time, as well as those which struck me as surprising. Most importantly, that

Buddhism and psychology and activism had played crucial roles in my life was not surprising at all, but I hadn't realized the extent of education played in these fields. More will be said about this process of using artistic figures and the role they had in my discovery of how important education had been in my development in *Maps*, *Mandalas*, and *Matrices*.



Figure 56: Searching for a way to describe all the disparate aspects of my life: The original “map” made up of distinct elements from which patterns later emerged

4.4 A fourth pillar? Education and the ISE Program

Education has come to be regarded by me as the last and therefore fourth pillar, and while I discuss its importance more at length later in the paper, I introduce it here via the ISE program which was the impetus for the present work. It was during my time as a BA student in the ISE program that I was first introduced to the different dimensions of educational theory. But it took until the middle of my period as a doctoral student in the same program to feel comfortable in reading and reflecting on those different theories. It was in the middle of our research interviews (conducted with Allyson) that I noticed a common factor: the students all had strong, positive emotional reactions to their period in the program. More than the contents of courses or educational theories they were exposed to, the students used affective language, speaking warmly about the teachers and the program. This led me to begin looking at the affective dimension of education as a way to understand the experiences of the students and the fundamental bases of learning. (I am reminded of something commonly attributed to the writer Maya Angelou who had once said “I’ve learned that people will forget what

you said, people will forget what you did, but people *will never forget how you made them feel.*"³⁹

In working on the dissertation, I have come to believe that we must not only recognize this relatively ignored affective dimension of education, but we must continually return to it, for it is the wellspring from which our desires to train, to liberate, to transform, and most relevantly here, to educate students all arise. This dissertation then is also a discourse on education, conducted with myself and then shared with others. It uses the original ISE research as well as my personal journey to have a conversation about what is most important to education.

The toolboxes of theory or pedagogy are, as Parker Palmer writes (Palmer, 1998, p. 11) simply "word balloons" floating around us, if they are not revealed in the caring manifestations that characterize what is remembered and cherished by learners. Getting there involves the integration of emotions with the intellect, an occasionally arduous process, and a metaphorical bridge that too few of us construct, and even fewer cross. When these two are integrated, however, both our wisdom and compassion flourish and only then can we build an authentic community of truth. The moral arc of education, then, is one that bends towards concern and love: of the student in all their human vulnerabilities and frailties, with *their* histories and background, and of the broader community of learners engaged in a common search for knowledge and acceptance.

As I was a recipient of such concern, from my earliest years to the present, I felt it was incumbent upon me to explore and document the process as a contribution to the field of education but also to record one man's journey within that field affirming that it has its own inherent worth. As Campbell (2016) put it, "The thick description embodied in an autoethnographic approach can help make sense of our own experiences" (p. 98). In making sense of my life, I hope to set an example, and provide an interesting one at that, for others.

³⁹ <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/04/06/they-feel/>

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

5 Conceptual Frames

“Pedagogy, pragmatism, practices, and PISA scores alone are not enough” – José M. Tirado

Introduction

I grew up in an environment surrounded by people who had either started life in poverty, with little education and who moved to a generally better off (though never wealthy) condition, or those who remained in near poverty, also with little education, but who felt they would never move out of this fate. Their children often felt the same, and so I witnessed several generations of my family suffer because they saw education as a luxury, something too distant to be of much concern. Even though they generally recognized its value, most never thought they'd share in its blessings. Here, in this autoethnography, I write about my life as an education in and of itself and this causes me some concern because as I do so, I feel privileged, and ungrateful. To theorize freely on a topic so rarefied for my family seems to me to be an indulgence. I justify this now by arguing that my understanding of and exposure to the theories which inform this work originates in my *lived experience*, not in the books I amassed or courses I have taken, but I wonder, is this enough?

For example, my first encounters with Buddhism resonated with me because of its methodical and reasoned approach towards human suffering. And, as B.P., my first Supervisor in Clinical Pastoral Education said out loud at our initial interview, I was so interested in suffering because it was personal for me: I had suffered and had seen many who had as well.

I had seen the women around me suffer.

I had already seen the deleterious effects of sexism in my own family, having grown up around women whose unpaid labor at home went unappreciated and often unacknowledged. I saw their exhaustion at entertaining the kids, feeding us, maintaining spotless homes, taking us to picnics and playgrounds, helping us with our homework, and then being expected to feed us all regularly. When they began to work out of the home, I remember the initial objections of the men who worried about

their dinners but never considered the palpable rise in self-esteem (and income for the household) generated in these women, who often felt independent for the first time and competent in their own right. And these were often women who had sacrificed their own ambitions, modest enough for their times, but still important to them personally, for those of the men whose presence at home was often sketchy.

I had seen the suffering of working people.

My exposure to labor and the importance of worker solidarity was not something I'd read about but witnessed firsthand as my father addressed his fellow workers as "brothers" and remained a loyal "union man" his whole life. Thus, all these concepts were not abstractions, nor were they theoretical, they were instead confirmations of my lived experience, given names, and then studied.

In this section, I will look at my three pillars along with education and critical analysis as methodologies, or frames. Each are systems I used throughout my intellectual life as both tools to comprehend what was "out there" (Figure 57) as well as functioning as intellectual frames on which I metaphorically stood. Thus, each, along with autoethnography (examined at some length in the first section, *The Accidental Heurist*) plays a major part in the work presented here.

Laying out the frames

Education, the overarching arena in which this research takes place, is the latest addition to the intellectual collective. Nevertheless, education has always been a present and essential part of my development. Education in this sense served a dual purpose. The first focused on its being essential for my own intellectual and emotional development. I thrived by learning, and it enabled me to rise above limitations I may have felt or given myself. But it was also crucial for my social development, in terms of finding within myself a desire to help others through my own enthusiastic embrace of learning and, wanting to share that, to assist them as well. Not only did education/learning complement my three pillars, but it thus incorporated elements of all three as well.

This oxymoron, that education is the last field in which I have immersed myself and yet the one which has always been present and influential, forms the "soul" of this study. It is the fourth pillar upon which the overarching tent of my intellectual life rests. Consequently, as noted earlier, this chapter uses a rather broad definition of education. It may be the last field I have entered officially, but it is the first presented here below, as it is the focus of this work.

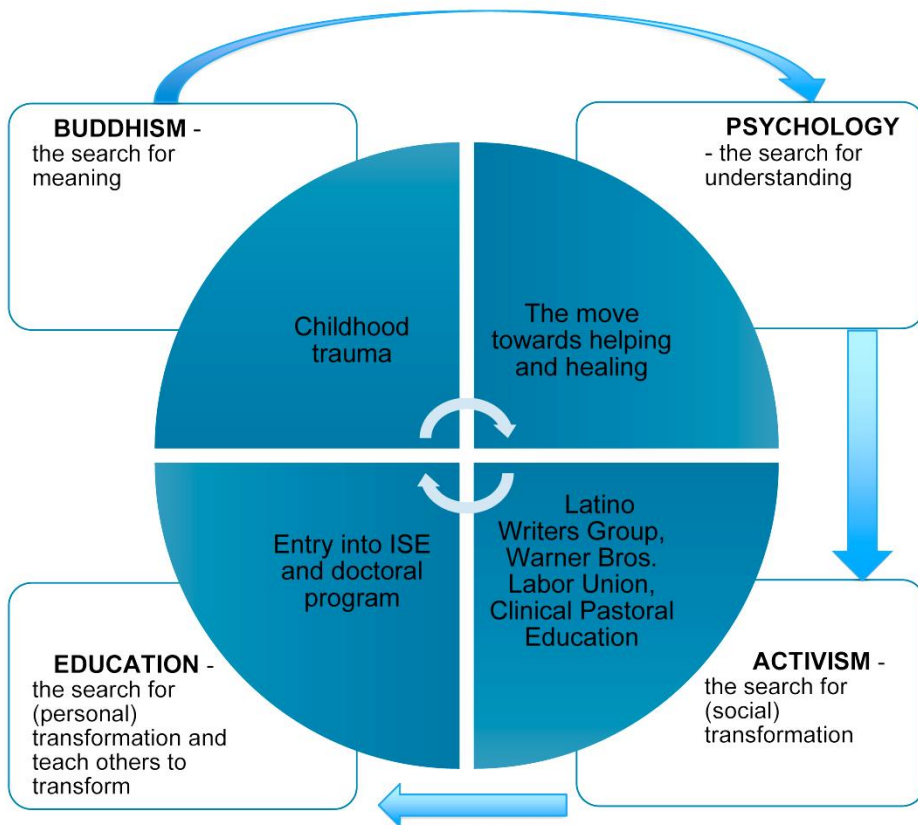


Figure 57: Looking at the connection between the three pillars and education – origins and meanings

Following education, I will discuss psychology, at first a personal interest that began with a deep-seated desire to understand some of the traumatic events of my early life and later, an academic pursuit which began with a stint as a peer counselor in high school. My interest grew all the way through to completing a master’s and then entering a doctoral program in psychology at Saybrook Graduate School and Research Institute (now Saybrook University) in San Francisco. Key figures will be introduced as each were of immense influence and they include Alfred Adler, James Hillman, Eugene Taylor, Susan Rosenthal, Thomas Szasz, and Tod Sloan. As noted previously, I had begun reading works in psychology soon after my mother’s attempted suicide and, by the age of 11 I was reading original sources, such as Sigmund Freud, among others.

A brief but rather detailed review of Buddhism follows the section on psychology. This section is further subdivided into basic Buddhist concepts, Engaged Buddhism (the strand of Buddhism I remain most affiliated with), Buddhism and education/learning,

Buddhist chaplaincy, and finally, the Buddhist sects I have practiced in. The relationship of these Buddhist manifestations to my development will also be highlighted along with their major theories.

Activism is the third pillar in the triad of key intellectual traditions, and I will speak about some of the very different key figures who have informed my attitudes concerning political and social justice work, such as Noam Chomsky, Dorothy Day, Paulo Freire, Frantz Fanon, Antonio Gramsci, and Michael Parenti. Their writings (and personalities) had great impact on many of the various activities I engaged in, such as union work within the entertainment industry in the United States, solidarity work with Guatemalan refugees, and hospital chaplaincy, all attempts for me to aid in social transformation. More than the ideas each of these individuals espoused, their very being, as complex, committed individuals affected me and helped alter the trajectory of my life. I have concluded that each of these fields are educational by nature (Table 1). This conclusion is significant as it sees the trajectory of my life as always having been enfolded in learning; education, as my own “ground of being”, the very basis for all my endeavors, whether they were spiritual, political, or psychological. For example, the work of activism requires convincing, occasionally cajoling, rallying, rousing, and inspiring people, and thus involves educative functions. This is no less true of psychology, which demands the psychologist educate their clients (to draw out from the client) as to the nature of the presenting issues and, in working together to find solutions, requires at times a teacher-like positioning. Buddhism, though a religion, is also a philosophy which has used critical analysis in its attempt to lead its adherents to *awakening*. Awakening, perhaps *the* preeminent concept in Buddhism, is said to provide the practitioner with an utterly transformed set of perspectives and, consequently, a transformed life. The Buddha’s teachings are there for us to follow and be led out of ignorance into a space from which we might awaken ourselves. This “leading” function is clearly educative in no small part because the word education itself comes from the Latin “*e + ducere*”, meaning *both* “to lead [to]” and “to lead out [of]”.

All the different professional and academic realms I have involved myself with are, by their very nature, inclusive of educational processes, and as part of what we commonly call education. Their practical purpose was to provide examples of leadership in terms of guiding others toward an awareness or concrete objective, as well as an attempt to inspire and thus, draw out of the student or client some realization. By coaxing or convincing or even simply persuasive conveyance of an idea, this would lead to a transformative experience within them.

I may have enmeshed myself in formal learning and in obtaining a higher education, perhaps in some psychologically over-compensatory way, but my commitments to

Buddhism, to peace, to people, to socialism, to feminism, and fair play, as well as to education and learning, were *not* theoretical, they were – and remain – an essential core-part of the life I have lived: I saw them in action and witnessed what happened when they were absent. I offer this now hoping that it has value for both the field and for future generations of my family.

Table 1: Characteristics of the three pillars plus education

THE THREE PILLARS + EDUCATION	Buddhism	Psychology	Activism	<i>Education</i>
METHODS OF DELIVERY	Use of critical analysis and psychospiritual tools to awaken individuals to own understanding	Present psychodynamic issues to clients and teach/guide them to possible solutions	To convince, rally, cajole, and inspire others to engage fundamental issues of deep social concern	“To lead (towards)” or “To lead (out from)” To train in knowledge, skills, and values
PURPOSE	Development of spiritual meaning and liberation from suffering.	Development of inner well-being by tapping into the growth-oriented dimension of human existence.	Development of community and socio-political visions of a better humanity living consciously aware of their intertwining needs along with those of the environment	Development of an “educated” individual who can contribute to and prosper in society

These various elements, the personal care and guidance, the melding of Western-Eastern insights with Northern-Southern cultural assumptions, provide a road map of sorts to the kind of broader education needed to survive the threats we are all collectively facing. This also demands a combination of the kind of caring plus higher calling for education Palmer (1998) and Noddings (2002) speak about coupled with a globally focused concern for our collective future: education, then, as a moral movement, an arc that “bends towards love”.

I believe the various intellectual threads of my life: Buddhism, psychology, and activism, form a personal core that has come to embody or perhaps more accurately, reflect such an amalgamation.

I mentioned in chapter one, realization of my being an educator, in teaching my family what I had learned, in teaching workers at Warner Bros. about their power to get better labor conditions and pay from the company, in teaching Latino writers that only by uniting can we effect the kinds of changes we need to be more represented in the entertainment industry, and in educating people about the inner dynamics of their lives, teaching them that they can heal, they can lead healthier, more balanced lives but that they must cultivate some deep reflective skills first - all these are forms of teaching and in teaching them, I was lighting a spark that could begin a fire within them all. I had learned to activate processes in them that I had activated within myself. The kind of educator I am, then, is an activist one, the "Activator", someone who wishes to inculcate the values of free inquiry, social justice concerns, and inner awakening which I believe will be of benefit to all they encounter should they, in fact, begin this process. Equal parts teacher and leader, it is, I have come to accept, a natural role for me and one which has implications for all the people around me, most particularly, however, are those learners who come to Iceland to receive an education they might not have received in their own countries. What they get from me is a concern, an enthusiastic embrace of them as Buddhas-to-be, and to the extent that I can deliver, I give of myself with passion and the conscious embrace of my own history which informs all that I do in the classroom.

While being a Buddhist, having trained as a psychologist, and worked as an activist and political leader for social and economic justice concerns, it is education, both the formal and informal processes of learning, which encompasses all the many interests and defines who I am and what I do best.

Nothing that we have experienced is exempt from who we become. And who we are, is only a ridge in the landscape of a constantly evolving self, thus, as Palmer so beautifully described it, ultimately, "we teach who we are". Who we are: a constantly evolving, adapting self, is connected to past traumas, histories, stories, and familial mythologies for sure, but at each step of the way, our infinite potential is available to be contacted and cultivated, changing those patterns from dysfunctional to optimal, often through the intervention of a teacher, who has seen this potential in us, long before we saw it in ourselves. With that change we become, from a Buddhist perspective, for the first time truly functioning and thus, able to truly flourish. Sensitive to those who brought us out of the darkness of our patterns, who helped us to become who we are through their patience and creative ways, we can become like them, seeking out among our charges those for whom a few cookies, a meal, or a party might be remembered as just as important to their educational experience as were the courses we taught them.

When I consider the implications of these thoughts, I wonder if something new is called for, something that blends the West's valuation of the individual, while sustaining the communal network of learners that includes the teacher. Perhaps a *neo-humanistic education* is needed, one which combines *East-West, North-South* ideas, and that sees education as essential in tackling the multiple crises facing humanity. In its pedagogical foundation it must embrace collective concerns while respecting individual autonomy, it must be sustainable, eco-socialist I believe, while embracing free association. It must care for each individually, while ensuring equality and social, economic, and political justice for all. And it must foster a sense of the commons – and humans' place within it, as a *community* – to succeed, for, as Lovat, Dally, Clement and Toomey note, "positive, value-rich relationships with students ... [are] an inherent feature of teachers achieving optimal results" (2011, p. 34).

6 Education

“Education is not a preparation for life but is life itself” – John Dewey⁴⁰

6.1 What is education?

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines education as,

1a: the action or process of educating or of being educated, also: a stage of such a process; b: the knowledge and development resulting from the process of being educated.

2: the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning *in schools* [emphasis added].

While this definition may be standard, it reveals little, I believe, except insofar as it emphasizes the formal, institutional dimension of education exclusively. The APA Dictionary of Psychology, however, presents a somewhat more useful definition in my opinion. It defines education as, “[t]he process of teaching or acquiring knowledge, skills, and values. 2. A field of advanced teacher preparation study that involves the practice of methods for teaching and learning” (2007). For the sociologist Emile Durkheim, the purpose of education was also instrumentalist, that is,

to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined (Partington, 1987, p. 143).

⁴⁰ This is a well-known paraphrase taken from Dewey’s *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897) in the public domain: “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”

Another definition speaks of education as “a collective *technique* which a society employs to instruct its youth in the values and accomplishments of the civilization within which it exists” [emphasis added] (Marrou, 1956, p. xiii). For Peters (1966/2015), education may be defined through its functions: it is concerned with the transmission of knowledge and understanding. This transmission is considered worthwhile and then to be done in a morally appropriate manner in tune with the student’s interests.

It is the second definition of education, as the acquisition of “knowledge, skills, and values” that most concerns me here. For most of us in the West, this definition generally presupposes an emphasis on formal education or schooling. Such presuppositions, however, can be problematic, seen as ethnocentric, and therefore deserve careful scrutiny for, “conflation of ‘education’ with formal schooling” excludes “traditional education in Africa [for example] which has been informal in nature and closely tied to the social life of the community” (Reagan, 2018, p. 7) and what is described as the productive aspect of education versus what can be described as a “reproductive” education (Reagan, 2018, p. 6).

Then there is the issue of *learning* versus *education*. Biesta (2009) argues against the use of the word “learning” in what he describes as the “learnification of education” because in his understanding, “‘learning’ is basically an *individualistic* concept” [emphasis in original] which “stands in stark contrast to the concept of ‘education’ which always implies a relationship” (Biesta, p. 6). Throughout this work I have spoken of a *culture of education* in such a way that I could substitute education for learning, and it would encompass my own understanding of these rich concepts. In addition, Biesta worries that

we now live in an age in which discussions about education are dominated by measurement and comparisons of educational outcomes ... [to the point where] we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value (Biesta, 2009, p. 10).

How do we assess the education we participate in and teach versus what is measured, must it be an either/or choice? Must we abandon standards and measurements, or conversely, jettison a values embracing education system that honors the learner with respect and kindness. Likewise, balancing societal needs to produce a citizenry capable of passing on its more positive values and principles with concerns for an education that provides both individual personal and professional growth does not seem inappropriate, or impossible. I mentioned at the beginning of this study, in *The Accidental Heurist*, the binary of an instrumentalist versus intrinsic value to education. However, Biesta (2009) may have provided a better way of viewing this problem.

In Figure 58 below I take Biesta's three functions of education (*qualification*, *subjectification*, and *socialization*) and created a Venn diagram where the individual (represented by the red triangle in the center) is centered within the nexus of the three functions, equidistant and equally influenced by each.

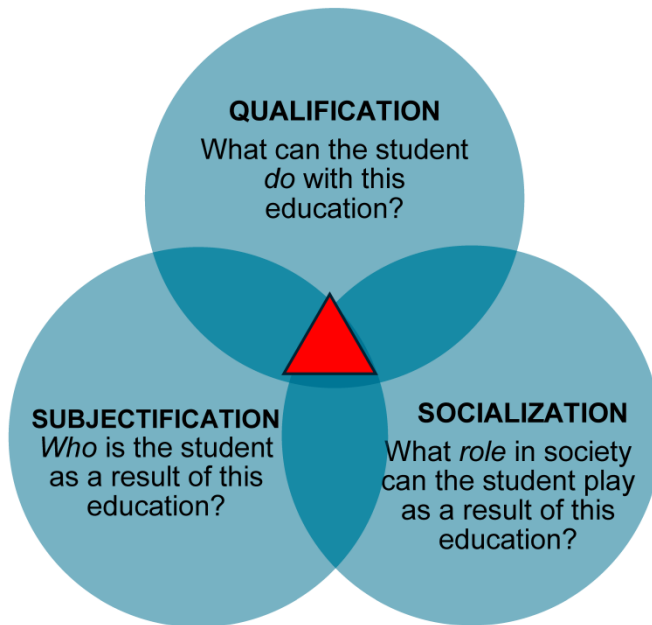


Figure 58: Identifying the nexus of Biesta's (2009) three functions of education (qualification, socialization, and subjectification)

For Biesta, education must serve all three functions if it is to be legitimate. It must have some utility value for the learner after their course of learning is over and they join society as full members; it must change the character of the individual who receives this education, and it must provide something that helps that individual find a rewarding role within that society as well. Biesta compares citizenship and mathematics education and states that what matters most is the "concern for a good education rather than a concern for effective education ..." (Biesta, 2009, p. 11). What determines a good education, he says, is a matter for those diverse and pluralistic cultures in which education is valued to decide. But we must engage in questions about education that extend beyond scores and tests.

One metaphor for education, establishing its value through the expanded benefits it grants the learner and thus, more widely, society at large, lies in the training of children to walk. Of course, as most parents know, the guidance given to babies to take their first steps can hardly be described conventionally as teaching. Sometime

between 10 and 18 months, most children begin to independently take their first steps. Assisting children in this formative stage of development is a major task with far reaching ramifications for parents and children alike, even though the assistance given is to someone with a nascent ability already 'built into' them. Once a child can walk, it can explore its spatial environment in novel ways and the better it becomes at walking, the larger the spatial field they can physically inhabit. This brings new realizations ("it is unsafe too far away", "it is beautiful here", "it is dangerous there") which further serve to expand the possibilities of living in their space in new ways, and in an expanded distance, in a growing mind. For example, once a child can walk, it can wander off and be taken by predators in the jungle or disappear in a city. But the ability to walk was inherently within the child all along. And for its own survival, it is a necessary skill to develop. In keeping with the metaphor, then, the value of an education lies beyond mere instrumentality and is, as reflective of the Dewey quote at the beginning of this section, an essential part of life itself.

That last image, of an inherent ability to grow and learn to become more of oneself or, to fully become oneself, is not only shared by educational theories but by all three of my pillars: Buddhism⁴¹ (in its doctrine of original enlightenment), psychology (humanistic psychology's growth-oriented dimension of human life), and activism (socio-political visions of a better humanity living consciously aware of their intertwining needs along with those of the environment). The notions of innate potential or holistic development ("becoming our best", "achieving awakening", "maximizing our human potential", etc.), are the sparks that education seeks both to light and to enhance. Each includes the various dimensions of human experience shared by the major fields in which I have sought out and immersed myself.

I believe our ultimate task as parents, caregivers, or, even, as educators, is to assist each child - or learner in school - the ability to move to an emotional-intellectual space whereby their own innate curiosity and refined awareness of their own personal possibilities and limitations, enables them to continue enlarging this learning on their own. This approach, one that is, for me, a very Buddhist one, places *affect* as much as *intellect* at the center of the learning experience. (The importance of this affective dimension of education (ADE) can be seen in a variety of studies including, Tschakert, et al., 2018; le Cornu and Collins, 2004; Trujillo and Tanner, 2014; Blanco, Guerrero, Caballero, Brigido and Mellado, 2009.)

⁴¹ While the overcoming of ego-subjectivity in order to achieve a more open and less self-centered version of self is a fairly universal position in Buddhism, establishment of a more healthily compassionate, wise self which acts for the benefit of others is just as emphasized in the Mahayana schools and comports well with the kind of development I suggest here.

I have come to accept that an adapted form of the Buddhist “middle way” in education is necessary. I am, of course, referencing the Buddha’s cessation of ascetic practices in his spiritual pursuits and his counsel to seek instead a “middle way” between the extremes of asceticism and hedonism. For the Buddha, a reasonable and balanced approach towards spirituality was necessary for the eradication of suffering and the concomitant transformative insight Buddhists refer to as Enlightenment. In this manner, one carefully weighs the need to understand the causes and conditions of suffering, then applies principles that take into consideration both a societally utilitarian, as well as an individually ennobling path. In his time, the path of asceticism (often extreme in its techniques) represented the norm for successful spiritual cultivation, while those without spiritual ambitions were consigned to living more materialistic and self-centered lives from which they might make offerings to the priestly elite for a better life to come. A moderate, reasonable balance between these two extremes, the Buddha believed, was the most efficacious way towards success. Likewise, a balance set between affect and intellect, as well as the needs of what Biesta calls qualification (and the measurement of such), socialization, and subjectification, seem not only within reach, but necessary.

“What ‘form’ transforms?”

Perhaps we should pause a bit and engage this question of transformation more carefully. In *Contemporary theories of learning*, Robert Kegan (2009), a psychologist and educator tackles this very issue by considering the difference between informative and transformative learning. He asks pointedly, “What ‘form’ transforms?” In his chapter, what he calls *informative* learning simply adds to the information, data, or knowledge set of the learner which can then be tapped into and measured quantitatively. But *transformative* learning alters the very structure of the learner. With transformative learning, one can then “ask more general questions *about* the facts or consider the perspectives and biases of those who wrote the historical account *creating* the facts” (Kegan, 2009, p. 42) [emphases in original]. Kegan links this process, of altering the epistemologies we enter into relationship with the material we learn, to *constructive-developmental theory* (C-D) which “invites those with an interest in transformational learning to consider that a form of knowing always consists of a relationship or temporary equilibrium between the subject and the object in one’s knowing” (p. 45).

When we learn something, it is not transformative simply because it was learned. It becomes transformative only when we are changed. And a C-D approach to transformative learning would suggest “an image of this kind of learning over a lifetime as the gradual traversing of a succession of increasingly elaborate bridges” (Kegan, 2009, p. 48). When the “I” who is learning repeatedly changes because of

what is learnt, whether in school or other environments, causing our epistemologies to be continuously affected and altered, then we can say we are engaged in transformative learning, and only then. I began to see my own journey as one which consistently sought out that kind of learning challenge which might assist me in changing, not necessarily just in acquiring new facts to dazzle others with and impress my family, but so that I could experience the excitement of the unknown transformation that would invariably come my way if I remained in such environments of learning. Transformations were the key.

It was upon entering the ISE that I began to devour texts in TE/TL which seemed so close to my way of viewing the world that I felt like I remembered what I was reading although, for the most part, I was studying them for the first time. I had some exposure to theories of adult learning in the CPE experience and then later, among the leftist groups I had belonged to. There – meaning primarily online – I read Gramsci and Freire not because of some requirement but because their work resonated with me: particularly the ways Freire spoke of education’s liberatory potential. I had worked with Guatemalan refugees of the civil war there and it was among them that I first saw how education could be a revolutionary force. By learning to read, to record their stories, and explore the possibilities the written word opened up for them, they became empowered to change their world in ways previously not possible. I saw this as well among the Zapatistas I met in Los Angeles, and it was that experience which inspired me to choose the Zapatistas as one of the groups to study for my BA thesis at ISE.

When I read Freire, I often had this image in my head of my father, a man who had left school at 13 and yet who read in his free time philosophy, religion, and world literature and for whom such was a way of fighting back a world that often-devalued men like him: an uncultured working-class minority lacking much formal education. He saw himself as a being of squandered potential, but still one with more dignity than he was granted by society at large. I thought that this ability to see himself in this manner attenuated some of the shame he lived with in having quit school so early and it left quite an impression on me. In *The Politics of Education*, Freire writes that, “[t]hrough their own efforts people can remake the natural path where consciousness emerges as the capacity for self-perception” (Freire, 1985, p. 115). Such self-knowledge is empowering. I saw my father’s pride in being able to recommend different authors and subjects to me and his pride in me pursuing learning for its own sake. I saw firsthand how inspired reading and learning made him, and it stirred within me a faith in learning and a commitment to stay engaged in learning, no matter what career I chose or life I lived.

But I was also exposed to another side to education: its affective dimension. This was partly a result of discovering how the interviewees in the original project had retained

great affection for the ISE experience over and above their regard for any of the coursework or theories they were exposed to. It was in my exploration of this concept that I turned towards my own experiences in education and realized they needed to be investigated as well. In fact, this affective dimension of education is recognized as a neglected aspect of learning that may very well be crucial in TE/TL (Taylor and Cranton, 2012, pp. 566-567). One of Mezirow's critical collaborators declares this clearly when he says that "[a]ffective knowing - developing an awareness of feelings and emotions in the reflective process - is inherent in critical reflection" (Mezirow and Taylor, 2009, p.10). But it was also intuitively clear to me that my own immersion in education was partly fostered by the enthusiastic interventions of teachers who saw my already present, natural eagerness to learn, and who in turn helped create and maintain that enthusiasm by continually feeding me new and different subjects to stimulate my curiosity and growth. They nurtured and cared for me, and it was my response to that care, and the excitement of learning in a way that changed my way of being in the world, that I continually sought out. I thrived in those places where I could be part of this electrifying project of learning and it was in education that I found both a home, and a culture I could always fit into.

The affective dimension of education

I have mentioned several times in this thesis the importance of the affective dimension of education. My awareness of its crucial role in learning began as we first reviewed the interviews with ISE students. We noted how the memories of their experiences in ISE were always more cemented to their emotional reactions to being in the program over and above academic aspects of the program. In studies conducted over the years, for example, with the learning of math and science, one group of researchers concluded that "the role of affect in the process of knowing, thinking, acting, and interacting is essential in the teaching-learning process" (Blanco, et al., 2009, p. 2). Among the ISE students we interviewed, for example, comments that described the benefits of the program either using overtly affective language or describing affective elements which remained with them included:

"The program showed me I could do academic work and succeed. The teachers were so giving", "The experiences of my classmates helped me to see the broad picture; that all immigrants have similar problems and I didn't realize how fortunate I was before", "I was looking for something to develop myself and the program gave me the confidence to pursue teaching because they taught me I already have some capital which is good that I can use. The teachers were so supportive...", "The program was so different than what I was used to back home. I use the

pedagogical styles and lessons from ISEP at my work site to teach others", "she [teacher X] was like a mother to me..."

In another study, researchers concluded that the emotionally weighty "sense of belonging" was found to be an important element in the success of students (Trujillo, and Tanner, 2014, p. 10). In *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain*, Immordino-Yang (2016) wrote that:

when learning and knowledge are relatively devoid of emotion, when people learn things by 'rote' without internally driven motivation and without a sense of interest or real-world relevance, then it is likely that they won't be able to use what they learn efficiently in the real world (p. 240).

Emotions and our ability to regulate them have evolutionary functions, partly in terms of modulating behaviors that might become anti-social or increasing the incentive to behave pro-socially through reward systems that are either external (via social approval) or internal (the rewarding feeling of satisfaction in achieving something). Any activity or trauma that inhibits emotional sensitivity may therefore cause subsequent emotional and physiological responses that may also inhibit learning or the desire or ability to learn. As noted in *UNESCO Policy Paper 38 (2019)*, "Traumatic experiences can cause long-lasting physical, emotional and cognitive effects [which] can be particularly damaging when experienced during the sensitive periods of brain development" (p. 1). Most teachers are aware of the role school lunches have had on children's focus and alertness in the classroom and this was a major factor in the creation of school lunch programs in the United States. As well, teachers were always exposed to children from abusive or dysfunctional homes and noticed the effects such social conditions placed on the students coming to them. Trauma needn't be extreme to have deleterious effects on children's motivation, their capacity to learn, and their ability to maintain concentration and focus. While refugee displacement from war or families of abuse may rightly be seen as easily identifiable precursors to trauma-induced difficulties with learning, the link between less extreme forms such as those events in my own life and difficulties in school are mentioned in the section *Trauma, learning, and a call for something new*. The impact of "parental suicide attempt" as a concept is noted there as generally having a significant negative impact in the lives of children in school.

I suspected quite early on that I was the recipient of more than just teacher goodwill. Only later did I conclude that early on teachers had known not only about my early seizures but of my mother's suicide attempt and I am fairly certain they responded with some extra care and support. That support, I am convinced, countered the stressors of trauma and the emotional tenderness which dominated my earliest life in

school and was the catalyst for me staying engaged and in fact, thriving in a learning environment. As Tschakert, et al., (2018) write, “affective pedagogy prepares students for future endeavors by placing front-and-center their personal entanglements and the role of their emotions in how they position themselves, and vis-à-vis others” (p. 198). Whether my former teachers were motivated by theoretical designations such as “affective pedagogy” or not, they certainly set a model for me to follow later as I became an educator, one who pays attention. In addition, they serve as an *assistant* to learning as much as being a teacher, and who genuinely confronts the multidimensional factors that live and breathe in each individual they meet.

I became exposed to this notion of education as a process of assistance while studying Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and working as a hospital chaplain (1996-2002). In that program, one of our readings included *Hospital Ministry* (Holst, 1985). There, author John Katonah spoke of the process of hospitalization as akin to an initiation in that it is a period which often involves a “personal crisis of meaning ... resulting in personal change and new visions and directions for the future” (Katonah, 1985, p. 55). He described the hospitalization experience as paralleling an initiatory process and its “three stages”: first, “separation” where “a quickened sense of life’s fragility is experienced” requiring “submission and complete trust”, in this case, between the patient and the hospital staff. In the second stage, “betwixt and between,” the patient undergoes a loss of identity and, through a set of meaningful and often challenging encounters, often with mythic deities or spiritual elements within their psyche, they find themselves creating a new identity, one impacted by this frequently traumatic experience. Lastly, in the third stage, “transformation”, the patient has developed new ties to both their inner lives and their community via a confrontation with death and sickness and a commitment to sharing their insights with others (Katonah, 1985, pp. 56-59). But crucially, during this period, the chaplain acts as a “maieutic helper”, tenderly assisting with the range of emotional disruptions which are common during such periods, and who, like a midwife (from where the phrase in Greek, *μαιευτική*, originates) assists in the birthing of a newfound understanding of their experiences and are affirmed, and encouraged along the way (Katonah, 1985, pp. 61-62).

The process of learning, first, informally at home, and then formally through whatever community schooling (or analogous process) occurs, goes through similar stages. There is the leaving stage where the child enters a new space where some transformation is said to occur. It can be frightening and disorienting. Then there is an adjustment period whereby each learner is confronted by a new community and a new environment different from the one they came from. Excitement replaces fear. Their identity is now as “student” or “apprentice”. And lastly, there is the transformation which occurs as they bring their new learning home and share the new and often exciting changes to their intellectual and social life. Alone they must wrestle with these new tools; frames of reference which further challenge and expand their knowledge. They are also learning how to live with others, meeting the expectations society

demands of schooled people and they are beginning to understand the implications of this for their future. They are no longer “preschoolers”; they have been changed by entry into a new world of learning. A wider future awaits them; both good and bad await them, but they are different now and have new skills to navigate the seas before them.

Guiding this process are the intermediaries we know as teachers who, like the midwives mentioned above, seek to assist the birth of novel ways of approaching problems, of this new societal member, the student, who must learn how to acquire enough skills to continue their way through life on their own. The teacher may spark new attention towards one or another direction (subject, field, topic), but the learner must cultivate this muscle of grasping abstract material and transforming it into viable knowledge. The process is interrelated, with the teacher activating latent tendencies or curiosities within the learner, and the learner cultivating through repetition, the approaches to learning latent within. This sequence is somewhat analogous to the Buddhist teacher-student relationship and this similarity will be expanded upon later as *activating* those latent tendencies so that what is hidden deep within is brought to the surface to be used and shared with others.

In revisiting this notion of education as being *non-instrumentalist* in nature, Osberg and Biesta (2021) argue that rather than view education as for its usefulness, we should instead see that, “education has its own unique aesthetic qualities, like art or music, which have the power to elicit emotion and are thus affective” (p. 58). Likewise recent research has affirmed that “emotion and feelings cannot viably be seen as neurologically separable but rather as inherent to all rational processes” (p. 39), confirming again the importance of the affective dimension to learning and education. The heart and the head go together and uniting them in service to awakening within the learner their own innate capacity to continue learning, is the task for educators as I have come to see it.

It was at the *Spirituality in Education Conference* in 1997 that I first encountered the author Parker Palmer. One of a number of speakers that included the Dalai Lama, I was so engaged by his presentation that it remained with me for years afterwards. I can honestly say that his way of talking about educators jolted me with an inner realization that I wanted to be an educator of the kind that he spoke of. I had not thought of teaching at a university - I was still in my first unit of CPE and finishing up my Engaged Buddhism MA - but he made me want to teach. Of his talk that day, *The Grace of Great Things*, I don't remember much except that it included a set of remarkable ideas that opened me up to looking at education as more than just being a teacher. And I took it as hugely significant that the following year, after I had moved to Madison, Wisconsin to begin my CPE year-long residency, that Parker Palmer was one of the keynote speakers at the CPE conference I attended.

International education

Previous experiences with international education

While I had never given much thought of international education until I came to Iceland, a good part of my educational experiences before then were, at least in part, internationally related. For example, learning about Buddhism in the 1960s was exposure to a then novel part of the cultural landscape in the United States. Buddhism was a foreign religion, by and large, and I had been introduced to Buddhism through my father, a man who had done Occupation Duty in Japan and who spent more than 30 years at sea, traveling the world. His life and journeys were part of our dinner table conversations and thus I could share stories with my friends about his trips that lent me a cosmopolitan cache that brought me some respect. In addition, I was bilingual and while having a deeply conflicted attitude towards that aspect of my heritage until my late 20's, it too made me stand out in my early years.

Later, when I went to Eckerd College, my senior year in 1983 was spent at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan where I ended up continuing a second year, until 1985. It can be said that my first formal experience with international education was in Japan at Nanzan University. Some of the classes were in Japanese (Japanese language, Ikebana, and Calligraphy, for example) and life in Japan (I ended up staying in Japan about 5 years) was itself a remarkably rich educational experience full of culturally challenging elements which fostered the three elements Dewey (1938) regarded as constituting a forward moving force, e.g., it “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future...” (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). The school atmosphere was serious but welcoming and foreign students were regarded with curiosity. We were often seen as aggressive because we spoke loudly and in turn, we thought Japanese student manners indecipherable, with so much communication being done with pregnant pauses, bows, hems and haws and other non-verbal mannerisms. In addition, I could never have imagined such a blend of old and new so close together with small Shinto shrines sometimes built in between railroad tracks, and stone lanterns hundreds of years old next to KFC or Shakey's Pizza. I went to temples and spoke about meditation and enlightenment with Buddhist monks as well as in the school I taught in, I learned how the Japanese live and learn. I traveled to fishing villages and rode subways and trains daily, meeting people of all walks of life in a language completely different from any of the Romance languages I had some familiarity with. I grew so much in those five years that when I came back to the United States it felt as if a lifetime had gone by.

At The Naropa Institute, yet another culture permeated the environment, this time a Tibetan one (Figures 59 and 60). To see a displaced people so generous and so willing to share their extensive body of educational materials with us, was wonderful, for Buddhism was the vehicle for literacy in Tibet and it was reflected in the language in which from the very first lessons, Buddhist ideals are expressed, and Buddhist

concepts made reference to. The school itself, run mainly by USAmerican students of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the school's founder, was decorated everywhere with Tibetan prayer flags and thangkas, the richly elaborate cloth tapestries depicting Buddhist figures or deities.



Figure 59: The wheel of Buddhism within flames: Naropa University coat of arms with the text “The Womb of Wisdom” written in Tibetan script.



Figure 60: The allure of Tibetan Buddhism was partly in its detailed art: Tibetan Buddhist thangka of Sangje Menla, “Medicine Buddha”

The ethos of the school reflected a distinctly Tibetan approach to learning⁴² and our final exams were often conducted in the traditional Tibetan style with one person sitting on the ground and an “examiner” standing in front, ritually slapping the palm of the hand and asking a question such as “According to Madhyamika⁴³ philosophy, what is the ultimate nature of mind?” We would also have some famous Tibetan Lama witnessing this and snapping his fingers at us demanding clarification on some point or process we had missed. Classes began and ended with a bow, and one week each semester courses were canceled for “Sitting Week” where we were expected to use the same class hours in sitting meditation in the Meditation Hall. We were all assigned a “meditation instructor” at the beginning who would continue with us if needed (I didn’t as I had many prior years of Zen training already) and part of our “homework” involved reflection journals of our meditation practice. I can say that the international and predominantly Buddhist faculty at Naropa were quite influential in forming many of my views on education culminating in my period at ISE.

International education at the University of Iceland

My entry into the University of Iceland marked another international education period which also was encased in a different linguistic, cultural, and ethnic environment which is an immersive education in and of itself. Very different from the Japanese culture I had spent time in some 20 years before, Icelanders, I quickly came to view, are quite reserved and not very easy to make friends with. This time, however, I was surrounded by a foreign student body which exposed me to Ghanaians, Filipinos, and many other groups I had not met before. My age was also a factor in this journey, but now I was in my early 50s, and still my curiosity was just as easily tapped into as in all the previous institutions I had studied in. In fact, I was surprised at how easy it was to get back into the groove of studying, writing papers, and living in a foreign environment. Part of what was different this time, was I was now a family man in school and for the first time I literally felt I could walk streets at night without looking over my

⁴² “In the Buddhist path, we accumulate knowledge in three ways: through *study*, *contemplation*, and *meditation*. First, we gain intellectual knowledge, then we personalize it through reflecting on it, and then we go beyond that to a whole new state of knowing—one that’s free from reliance on reference points. That’s the nature of our journey. First, we’re handed a map and learn to read it; next, we’re on the road but still relying on our map for directions; finally, we realize we don’t need to look at the map anymore—we know it by heart. Our confidence doesn’t waver, whether we’re looking at the map or the road ahead; the map has dissolved into the landscape. That’s higher knowledge, or one way of looking at it”. (Pönlop, 2011, p. 81.)]

⁴³ Murti, (1980). *The central philosophy of Buddhism: A study of the Madhyamika system*. Unwin Paperbacks.

shoulder or worry about my children and violence. The school itself was sleek and modern but there was a formality in the ethos I enjoyed and had not felt in the United States or in Japan. Perhaps it was a northern European approach, but it was different, not exactly welcoming, but open enough for someone like me who enjoyed navigating yet again a new academic setting. I could not help but notice that here I was again, standing at a unique intersection of being an older Puertorican man in a foreign country, from a different culture surrounded by a new language and customs that, while Western, were a far cry from anything I had been immersed in before.

The ethos of learning, though, they all shared, albeit in differing cultural forms. It was, for me, the immersion in questions, in thinking critically, in debating ideas with people in a safe atmosphere and an environment conducive to rational exploration.

6.2 My practice of teaching

The various teaching positions or activities I have been involved with share a common approach – they were each an attempt at reconciling the differing epistemological approaches of my pillars. Teaching meditation at the University of Iceland (and my work in formulating a teaching style that blended the Kagyu system I was authorized to teach from as well as my psychological insights) was perhaps the first significant attempt at such a reconciliation. When I taught *The Path of My Experience* programs here in Iceland after shortly arriving here, that was my attempt to integrate Buddhism, psychology, and activism in one program. Teaching the *Development and Self* course to undergrads in ISE was me trying to bring in Asian philosophical ideas into a course that declared its internationalist perspective but offered only Western theories of self. When I was at Warner Bros., I found myself first learning, and then teaching elements of United States labor history to a union unused to an active union president. Teaching CPE in San Francisco was a start to me teaching transdisciplinarily. And teaching at Hitt Husið was teaching psychology (group counseling) with meditation from an existential-humanistic and transpersonal psychological grounding.

The two traditional ‘wings’ of Buddhism – Compassion and Wisdom – also figure into my teaching ideals. I mentioned them above as *head* and *heart* and their union as being what the educator should focus upon. Certainly, using the compassionate regard for everyone as a potential Buddha plays into how I treat each student and approach them. But wisdom, too, figures into the equation and here I take it to mean understanding the student’s and my own limitations while taking a “long view”: that co-creation of a learning environment in which education can take place is the objective I must strive for. Compassion then, is taking the vow to benefit all sentient beings; Wisdom, is knowing I can’t save all sentient beings. I can do my best, but it may not suffice for all the students I come across and I must then settle for the good faith efforts

I have made, while holding such students in the same compassionate regard as those more responsive to my teaching style or skills.

Two important educators

In a conversation with one of my committee members some months ago, he mentioned that the excitement I described when I spoke of a “culture of learning” reminded him of a similar excitement described by bell hooks. In *Teaching to transgress* she writes,

Attending school then was sheer joy. I loved being a student. I loved learning. School was the place of ecstasy-pleasure and danger. To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone (hooks, 1994, p. 3).

I understood hooks. I heard her enthusiasm and knew that my own love of learning was transgressive to the mindsets of generations of undereducated people who didn't receive the same encouragement I did, nor perhaps did they possess the yearning that burned in me to understand everything. They had fewer opportunities, fewer role models, fewer resources, and for some yes, even fewer ambitions. But I wanted “out”. And I knew education was the path I needed to follow.

But following one's path is not easy without guides and as I entered the field of education, aside from the role models of teacher-mentors who, to this day continue to inspire me, two theorists stand out: Parker Palmer and Nel Noddings.

Palmer, an American Quaker educator and author was the first of the two I was exposed to, and it was during an early course in the Engaged Buddhism program. His book, *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey* (1993), which we had to read in a course on spirituality and education was a shock to me. Its Christo-centric language (more Quaker-oriented than, say typically Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox) was foreign to me and not congruent with the Buddhist material I was otherwise immersed in. Nevertheless, it resonated with me in its attempt to describe the process of learning as a sacred one. In fact, my own enthusiastic embrace of learning always felt to me to be a sacred endeavor, and his earthy way of speaking touched me. We met at the Spirituality in Education Conference in 1997 (along with many other luminaries including my own teacher, Pönlop Rinpoche) and I believe it was then I began to see what I was doing as a chaplain as analogically an educational process. When I left Naropa to do my CPE residency, I realized that to engage in learning with others, even if it was to work with illness and suffering, was educational. To lead people through serious illness with compassion and grace, to listen to the anxiety of the dying, to embrace frightened seniors whose loved ones were fading, or to work

with the unbearable tragedy of young people in hospice – all these were in ways I hadn't considered before reading Palmer as learning arenas, educational episodes filled with Spirit. And within the context of chaplaincy, this was learning that most certainly was sacred, I thought. Palmer later wrote a book called, *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (1998) which I used during my CPE Supervisorial training. In that work, he wrote "we know reality only by being in community with it ourselves" (Palmer, 1998, p. 97) and this pithy yet wonderfully profound statement triggered in me a sense that an integration I had always sought for, combining Engaged Buddhism, psychology, and activism, was nearing. I will speak more about this turning point in Chapter Five, but Parker Palmer's writings were seminal to my reconsidering who I was and admitting that I probably always was an educator at heart.

Nel Noddings' work I had not heard of until I entered the doctoral program in Iceland. I had read articles that mentioned her before but both Allyson and one of my doctoral student colleagues thought her work should be something I might want to investigate. The notion of "paying attention" and the notion of care and caring in education reinforced my natural own views on these elements, the first in recognizing its importance from a Buddhist perspective, the second resonating as a major element in my own growth. Her approach and thinking resonates with other theorists and the Buddhist ideals I have been studying since I was a child. I found *Educating Moral People* (2002) inspiring, yet it was early in her book, when she describes the form of caring that makes a difference in the life of a child, that I discovered an accurate description of what I had been exposed to throughout my youth. She writes,

the consciousness of "carers," ... is characterized by two features. First, there is a special form of attentiveness, which I have called engrossment; this form of attention is acutely receptive and is directed at the cared-for ... Second, there is a motivational shift; the motivational energy of the carer begins to flow toward the needs of the cared-for. Children who are genuinely cared for learn early to detect these signs in adults around them (p. 28).

I remember saying a loud "yes!" when I read that last part – I clearly knew that I had always been on the receiving end of warmth and encouragement from my teachers, but it was especially that "motivational energy" phrase that struck me. It was as if all my worries and insecurities would vanish and be replaced by this wonderful infusion of energy that would linger sometimes for days afterwards. No matter how sad I was or how confused I felt, going to school meant that some teacher in some class would take a particular liking to me and would transfer this amazing jolt of confidence that would sweep away my pain. It was no wonder I loved school. The possibility that someone

could burst through all manner of my internal obstacles and leave me instead with such a feeling is what carried me far away from my suffering and inspired me to seek out such environments with the greatest enthusiasm for the rest of my life. It also showed me what I was capable of creating with others.

An early attempt at a philosophy of education

It was during my years working as a chaplain, when assignments for the Clinical Pastoral Education program were designed to tease out our “theologies” and required of all chaplain trainees, that I first delineated my ways of thinking and acting in terms of all the forces which inspired me. Three papers were required, a *personality paper* which delineated my psychological stance regarding hospital ministry, a *theological theory* paper which outlined my religious position on the same, (although I called mine a *Buddhological Theory Paper*); and an *educational theory* paper, using my understanding of educational theory in the training of chaplains. Together, these formed the beginnings of a philosophy of education. That was the first time I had considered education as part of my intellectual life. I was unsure how to approach the topic as I viewed myself more as being a psychologist by training, but the exercise was helpful. I had reviewed my life with an eye towards those occasions I taught – and they were many.

Later, when I was searching for teaching jobs in an effort to leave Iceland, one school actually requested an essay specifically on my philosophy of education. This was the first time I had assembled a coherent perspective on my religious, activist, and psychologist training in one place. I combined the CPE educational theory paper with some newer observations.

Looking at it now, it is clear that education played a far more dominant role in the entirety of my life and my identity than I had previously understood, although I was still unprepared to recognize it. While some points have changed and much could be added to it because of the last ten immersive years in the field of education, it still stands as a basic testament of my philosophy of education albeit with some modifications I shall explore later in this document. I present it here below as it was originally written.

“My Teaching Philosophy” (original text)

“An outline of my teaching philosophy must take into consideration my personal background. As a child of parents for whom education meant the possibility of escaping poverty, I have taken my cue from them, and achieved a level of academic achievement they could only marvel at and be proud of. My father quit school at 13 and later served in the US Navy during the Second World War. My mother had to

leave school at 17, and both grew up in poverty, he in New York City, and she in rural Puerto Rico. I bring to my educational commitments a desire to assist others reach their own full potential and an identification with those who have not benefitted from the guarantees of regular, formal, and sustained education. The human component of education, that is, the recognition from the very beginning that the educational experience is part of the realization of an individual's full human potential informs my approach.

Because my interests span across the fields of spirituality and politics, finding their nexus in applied spirituality, whether Eastern, in the form of my own personal commitment to an Engaged Buddhism, or Western, in the form of groups such as the Quakers and the *Catholic Worker*, has been a focus of my research and life. Their examples continue to inspire my way of working with students of all ages and backgrounds.

As an educator, I have used my background to offer innovative perspectives on such diverse as contemporary politics, or meditation for pain relief. I have constructed a relaxed, open style which combines a modest Freirean identification with students as independent agents in a liberatory experience, with a deep-seated desire to help bring out the attitudes of excellence and authentic pride.

As a Shin Buddhist priest, I offer in addition, a deeply humble approach to learning, distrusting sharply hierarchical models of relating to students and trying to embody what Shinran called *ondobyō-ondogyō* "fellow seekers" or "equal companions" in a common search for human fulfillment of which education forms an integral part. I have utilized this sense of equality in my interactions with working class patients in cancer wards in Wisconsin, to the privileged patients at the Institute for Health and Healing in Pacific Heights in San Francisco. While Buddhism and its faith in the inherent wisdom capabilities of all persons has illuminated my perspectives in educating others, I have also been open enough to criticize its shortcomings, in writings such as *Buddhism and CPE: Concerns and Contributions* (Tirado, 2006). This is an area where my approach as a Buddhist dovetails with my approaches as an educator. I feel Buddhists needed to bring out their ideas of suffering from the heady intellectual to the more relaxed personal and give to others, particularly in the arena of chaplaincy, of their whole selves instead, sharing their vulnerabilities and failings as much as their grand perspectives on enlightened living. I have been collecting this theoretical approach in a paper entitled *Towards a Buddhist Language of Pastoral Care* which I am expanding into book length form.

I began teaching formally in Japan where I was the Head Instructor at ACC English Language School in Hekinan City in the late 1980s. There I taught children as young as four years old, this in a school where the course offerings were at the end of the

day, and I saw how the driven demands of children's parents often interfered in the learning abilities and creative joy otherwise seen in Japanese children. I sought to compassionately engage them in play and, while balancing the needs of parents, allowed the children I taught the space to cultivate their natural curiosity about English.

This pattern of adapting to the circumstances at hand and tailoring the academic needs of the institution to the human needs of the students has continued. In Iceland, I reevaluated teaching materials typically used by the continuing education school I was involved in and offered instead material I created out of my own professional background. I created a course in cinema called "Movie Madness!" where I used film excerpts to teach advanced English in a course that became not only quite popular but also enjoyable. I also taught an advanced vocabulary course using Latin and Greek roots and incorporating material from entertaining and unique websites to promise 900 words could be learned in nine weeks, an accomplishment the Icelanders relished and achieved.

These are just a few examples of my teaching philosophy which arose from the need to affirm the precious individuality within each person, with their own desires for academic achievement and excellence. I am informed by my Buddhist understanding of the innate potential for enlightened understanding and approach all students as deserving such recognition." [End original text]

Transformative education/ Transformative learning (TE/TL)

The field of education which has most influenced my research interests has been that of Transformative Education or Transformative learning (TE/TL). First explicitly described by Jack Mezirow (and with different emphases by Paulo Freire, among others) TE/TL refers to the "social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, pp. 222-223). For some (such as Freire), this includes seeking to understand and foster the overtly transformative nature of learning into not only an individual but collective force for societal betterment (Freire, 1970/1993). To that end, it culminates for Freire in "conscientization," (Freire's Portuguese word, *conscientização*, Anglicized) or the 'shock' or "disorienting dilemma" as Mezirow would describe it, that causes us to rethink, reformulate, and then relate to our lives and/or learn new learnings, in new ways, and to work towards assisting others in obtaining the same opportunity (Freire, 1985, pp. 67-96). For Mezirow this primary effect of education, the disorienting dilemma and its reassessment of our life and behavior, was an *individual* experience, more located in mind and associated with reason than any emotional aspect. For Freire, it was more a *collective* experience leading to wider social awareness for the purpose of communal liberation.

These two poles, one more oriented toward an individual's cognitive shift, and the other towards a more socially embedded awakening of one's kinship to others, represent the most dominant trends in TE/TL. (I later confirmed this impression in a letter to Henry Giroux who affirmed that these distinctions were quite characteristic of the two theorists.)

A neo-humanistic education platform?

In light of this early attempt to extract a "teaching philosophy" informed by Buddhism, below is a generalizable set of principles that could serve as a guide for those willing to incorporate or at least articulate what such a Buddhist pedagogical system might look like. At one point I considered that Buddhist-influenced principles constituted a kind of "neo-humanistic" system but abandoned that direction for its too broadly constructed and not as well articulated layout as I would like.

Nevertheless, the initial outlines of my attempt may serve as a rough example of what I am beginning to envision:

Humans are inherently possessed of *buddhanature* and are thus, all potential Buddhas, beings of inherently unlimited compassion and wisdom.

Human's access to this *buddhanature* is blocked by habitual patterning caused by individual karmic residue as well as from societal reinforcement.

Humans naturally gravitate towards compassionate and cooperative regard for others, but this is occluded by social and institutional emphases on selfish individuality.

Humans yearn to learn, to break free of suffering, and to live lives encased in love, or the compassionate-cooperative regard for others and Nature.

A neo-humanistic education begins with the above principles and is inclusive of standard definitions of "humanistic education" as derived by the Rogerian presentation of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, the need for acceptance and creation of a classroom environment of trust, the empathetic regard for the learner through a mutual relationship of respect, as well as other criteria commonly used today and regarded as "humanistic".

6.3 Maps, Mandalas, and Matrices

Early on in this project Allyson and I attempted to map out the many influences and activities of my life. It began first with a list and then, as I toyed around with more

visually appealing figures (something I had learned from Allyson and which we continued to use throughout this process) into Figure 61 we called, “the map”. It was quite linear in terms of simply arranging the words into quadrants and then later adding colors which roughly matched with the themes of activities: red for social justice work, for example, green for environmental concerns, blue to purple for the more inner, psycho-spiritual activities such as chaplaincy or my ordination. At the very bottom, in the center, I inserted in yellow a new category, *educator*. ISE, the University of Iceland (HÍ), and PhD/EdD were the only other elements added as this was a relatively new designation, but I was stuck by the vertical poles, *activist-advocate* at the top, and this new idea of *educator* at the bottom. I was so taken by this exercise that I made a color copy and affixed it to my bookshelf in my office. I thought the exercise was more than just that: it was the first time I had considered all the different fields and activities I had engaged in and attempted to present them in one clear visual way. I felt tired looking at it – I hadn’t realized how much each of these fields and activities had taken out of me over the years and it made me feel old. It was also a novel thing for me to showcase my life activities and, while causing me some embarrassment, this artistic display got me thinking how I might expand upon it and possibly include it for this work. This proceeded in four stages.



Figure 61: Stage 1: My first attempt at “mapping” who I am

This map shows four quadrants: “caring for others” (impersonal), “caring for others” (personal), “caring for nature”, and “caring for self”. A center, vertical axis with “activist-advocate” at the top, and “educator” at the bottom, bisects the diagram. Within the map are a number of activities I have engaged in (“Guatemala support”, “2002 *Tokudo* [ordination]”, “M.A. in Psych.”, etc.) as well as interests (“sustainability”, “Bhutan”, “Native-American struggles”). While the term *educator*

does appear at the bottom, on the horizontal split, I noted that the tasks of activists and labor union leaders both *educate* their members (see 2.5). It was good but limiting.

The second iteration of the map developed late in the process of this dissertation. In this stage 2 (Figure 62), I had shifted gears from trying to document each activity to grouping the activities into the broader arenas of my pillars. How to show the relationship of each to education, which I have later called my fourth pillar, was the task. Education I had come to see as permeating everything I had done, and this figure captured that aspect nicely.

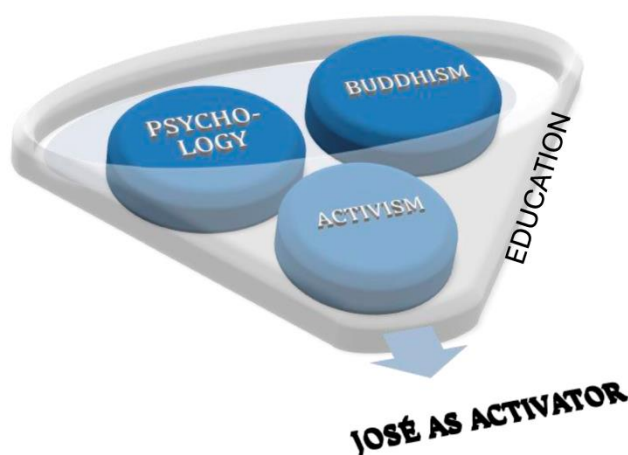


Figure 62: Stage 2: *The Pita: Me as Activator*: The pillars enfolded into education

In this representation, I called it, “The Pita” for here I showed Buddhism, psychology, and activism as being encased within a triangular flattened cone that bore a resemblance to a pita bread which represented the field of Education. Education, then enfolded these three pillars and this inclusion “squeezed” out The Activator.

But there still seemed to be a problem. Even viewed in this manner, the simple amalgamation of the three pillars suggests a far more linear and, in fact, staid representation of these durable but always shifting influences. I wrestled with several ideas at once: how to show the evolution of my views of these pillars while still demonstrating that education, the last adopted intellectual field I studied, had been there from the beginning albeit in an oddly, and only up until recently, ignorable way.

This was good, but I remained dissatisfied. Then something shifted (Figure 63).

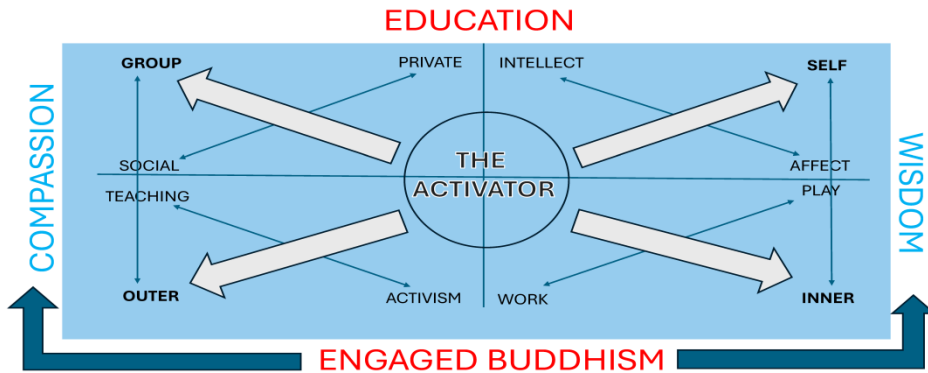


Figure 63: Stage 3: The New Map

For stage 3, I decided to return to a more linear representation that perhaps might combine the relative importance of education but might also return toward inclusion of each polar dimension (*inner-outer, self-group,*) and add in new elements that conveyed the importance of the Engaged Buddhist concepts which were coming to the fore as crucial towards any evaluation of pedagogical practice, such as compassion-wisdom. Here the activator moved out into the various directions which were separated from each other and held in different quadrants. The inclusion of new elements was satisfying but by returning to the older model of neatly separated units of activity I still felt this was insufficiently conveying the interconnectedness of each piece of the puzzle.

I then considered using a mandala, the generally circular patterns which are used in Buddhism, primarily its Himalayan forms, to display teachings about various deities or to be used as concentrative aids in ritual practice (Figures 65-69). I also considered the mandala form used by Kraft (1999) (Figure 64), updated to reflect Engaged Buddhism modes of action and fields of practice. Such a model fit my preference for well-rounded forms which could reveal an inner core from which disparate but related elements radiated outward in a hierarchical manner with the closer-to-center objects being more important than those further from the core.

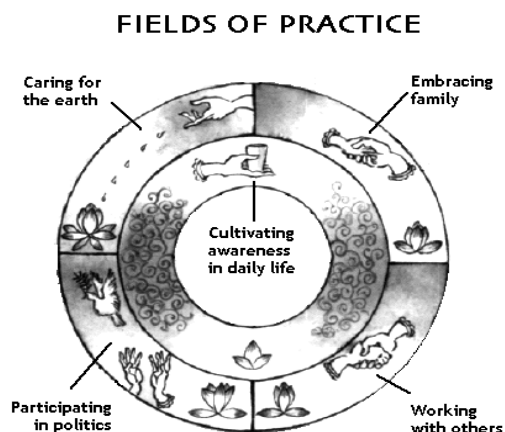


Figure 64: Kraft's Model of Engaged Buddhism: Fields of Practice designed as a Mandala, specifically, the Bhavachakra Mandala (The Wheel of Becoming)

From: <https://carlos.emory.edu/thangka-paintings-0>

Two circular mandalas from Tibet



Figure 65: Kalachakra Mandala

From: <https://traditionalartofnepal.com/shop/kalachakra/kalachakra-mandala-01/>



Figure 66: Bhavachakra Mandala (The Wheel of Becoming)

From: <https://carlos.emory.edu/thangka-paintings-0>

Three square mandalas from Japan



Figure 7: Sacred Buddhist Mandalas of the Pure World: Womb World Mandala 13th

Figure 67: Mandala 1

From : <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Sanskrit-Beyond-Text%3A-The-Use-of-Bonji-%28Siddham%29-in-Dine/fb2ab9763d6523b25b9e026e877f7dc85c0e243d/figure/5>



Figure 68: Mandala 2

From: <https://www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk/mandala/>



Figure 69: Mandala 3

From: <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/1420/mandala-of-the-diamond-world/>

But what if I was seeing this wrong? What if different sized movable blocks were arranged in a rectangular way with a “rough center” being related by contact and proximity in different angles? Were there any Buddhist related images of that sort?

Yes, there are many.

In Japanese Buddhism square or rectangular mandalas are often used. Three are shown on page 158.

It was around the same time that I was looking at this, that Allyson had reconfigured the map to just a formation in blocks. I had resisted this, thinking it didn't, and couldn't, convey the intricate ways all these dimensions, arenas, pillars, and activities related to each other. But when I considered the square mandalas, I realized that here was a way that combined the centrality of a main figure in the center but combined with a way to show the connections to different dimensions included through the proximity and shared borders to others. I thought it was a novel way that might work.

In Figure 70 below, the final representation is given. Now Education and Activism are given reversed polar positions with Buddhist ideas of Compassion and Wisdom occupying the left-right center poles. Each corner quadrant diagonally works with the other so Society and culture contrast with more Individual activity functions (such as Engaged Buddhism in the former, Teaching in the latter). As well, Self (upper right quadrant, the example poetry given) contrasts with Group Activity in the bottom left which includes psychology as representative of its main sphere of activity. In the center now, The Activator takes the most prominent place but is linked closely to all four corners as well as the horizontal and vertical poles. In this way, The Activator makes use of each aspect and realm of their life but is able to move and emphasize one or the other as different activities require. At the same time, these are not disconnected and abstract qualities, all are related to each other.



Figure 69: Stage 4: My final map. The Activator makes use of each realm, able to move anywhere as needed

In the next two sections, Psychology and Activism, I will present the seminal influences on my intellectual life in psychology as a living collection, not only a theoretical foundation. The people named here are exemplars of both theory and conviction and it was not only through their works that I came to include them as influences, but more often by who they were, and are, *as people*. Their commitments to their respective fields were embodied in very practical aspects of their lives and writings so that mere theoretical depth was not enough. They each possessed a very personal approach or focused on a practical, applicable, and relevant aspect of their ideas which often translated into literally changing the way one might assume a famous scholar or professor should act (Noam Chomsky, and Michael Parenti are emblematic of this).

7 Psychology

Six individuals and their writings have been enormously influential and have formed the core of my understanding of psychology. In addition, their particular specialties and the ways in which they are able to blend scholarship with an approach that may be considered “activistic” or “practical” has also informed my attempt to synthesize the various strands of my intellectual interests into a coherent whole. This attempt at synthesis I regard as a defining characteristic of my approach to education, a new system to my intellectual universe which I came to bring my own different “streams”, my “pillars”, and which I have spent much time trying to meld into a single cohesive unit. I yearned for such a synthesis, believing that I had for too long kept artificial divisions between them and never felt comfortable with such tightly demarcated lines between the things that mattered most to me. I wanted them to fit, that I too might feel whole and united. But there was safety in this imagined unity, and I believe that was what I wanted most, the safety of a consistent explanation for things, not a set of contradictory but equally meaningful theories which I held together through sheer will.

The Saybrook Institute was founded by humanistic psychologists whose work extended the Carl Otto Rank, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow tradition of searching for a less positivistic, more optimistic and growth-oriented dimension of human life version of psychology than the prior emphases on behavioral and experimental models of psychology more dominant in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, the school was named after the Saybrook Conference of 1964 where the leading proponents of a new humanistic psychology met to establish a new branch, a third force (between Freud and Skinner) committed to this vision.

7.1 Alfred Adler – The Psychologist of Belonging

First among those whose works I found relevant was Alfred Adler who broke away from Sigmund Freud and instead “stressed the power of personal choice; the universal fellowship of human beings; the importance of a positive encouraging life focus; the eradication of social inequality; and the primacy of social relationships” (Carlson and Englar-Carlson, 2017, p. 3). For Adler, his particular emphasis on humanity’s social make-up, our sense of belonging, so to speak, was a departure from many of the psychologists I had studied who emphasized individual pathologies and strivings over our social embeddedness. In contrast, Adler states that “there is not a single form of life which was not conducted as social” (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1964, p. 128). In

fact, this notion of social embeddedness has led subsequent psychologists to assert that “the social aspect is indeed the most important factor in Adler’s Individual Psychology” (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, p. 127). Adler said that “all the questions of life can be subordinated to three major problems – the problems of communal life, of work, and of love” (p. 131). He stressed the importance of meaningful work as “the only possible means of mitigating the universal human feeling of inferiority” (p. 132) and thought of this discovery as “the chief security for the welfare of mankind” (p. 132). That is, without meaningful employment that grants one the means to participate fully in society, creating a class of dissatisfied, lower-class individuals, society could never properly function. This stress on the importance of community and meaningful work to an individual’s well-being felt very relevant to me as someone who had seen the effects of insufficient or unmeaningful work on both men and women throughout my life and particularly during my years as a labor leader. Adler’s words struck a deep chord in me as I tried to inspire others to join together to create enough power to influence their own livelihoods and thus, their broader lives in society. This short description of a profoundly influential psychoanalyst was a perfect constellation of psychological topics (social, politically relevant, positive, etc.) that fit my interests and life to a “T”. When I shared this enthusiasm with Adler to the late Eugene Taylor, my doctoral chair at Saybrook he told me that he thought that, in the future, Freud’s name would be essentially forgotten but that modern psychology’s “real founders and most important figures” would be Carl Jung and Alfred Adler.

But Adler’s work on other topics was just as relevant to me as well, particularly his work on birth order. According to Henry Stein (n.d.), an Adlerian psychoanalyst and trainer, a second child is “more competitive, wants to overtake an older child. May become a rebel or try to outdo everyone” and a middle child “may have trouble finding a place or become a fighter of injustice” (<http://www.adlerian.us/birthord.htm>) all traits I exhibited throughout my life. I felt that my striving to grow up fast, to heal others, to explain things and to dominate in areas different from my brother (academics versus sports, for example) were all “stamped” on me and while I tried to understand these dynamics and turn them so that they might manifest more healthily, I frequently understood their manifestations as over-compensatory.

7.2 Thomas Szasz – Protector of Autonomy

Thomas Szasz, the psychiatrist author of *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961) was a visitor to Saybrook whose lectures I attended both astounded and infuriated many in the audience. I spent several days with him during one of our week-long residential conferences shortly before his death in 2012. His main work focused on the quality of mental health care that I did not see enough of, and this worried me. That is, how do

we as a society protect the autonomy of individuals society deems as problematic? Not necessarily criminal but nonconforming to typical norms in such a way as to cause disturbance, shame, anger, or fear among those around them. This reflection has huge ramifications at almost all levels of society, whether hospital patients, the differently abled, etc. For example, minorities, whether racial, ethnic, or otherwise were frequently deemed to be affected by mental illnesses and treated as second class citizens in the United States, imprisoned or even executed due to such labelling. In addition, sterilization, something that happened to one third of Puertrican women (many in my own family) has often been a tool of repression in different societies and the United States was no exception. As I learned about these events and listened to Szasz, I became frustrated with the psychological profession, realizing that oppression need not come from state actors opposing political dissidence but can come from a new class of medico-industrial priests called “psychologists” and “psychiatrists” whose power to incarcerate or determine one’s worth in society was dangerously and disproportionally large. Meeting Szasz came at a crucial juncture of my time in APA (the American Psychological Association), when some state assemblies were taking up the allowance of psychologists to prescribe medications, much in the same way their psychiatrist colleagues (who are also medical doctors) do. Many of us opposed this on a number of grounds, not least of which included resistance to what has been called, “the medicalization of human misery.” But we also knew that the pressure to prescribe would nail us to insurance companies’ interests in faster “treatments,” and that mentality went against our commitment to a more humane practice of psychology. Szasz was a little man but a giant in urging us to resist such cooptation and to instead keep the patient’s inherent human worth always at the front of our minds. This was a very important lesson for me.

7.3 Eugene Taylor – The Psychologist-Scholar

Eugene Taylor, a big, burly man with a white beard and a clipped Texas accent, was one of my favorite professors at Saybrook and an inspiration for the confidence he placed in me to become a scholar and research psychologist. He was my former doctoral chair and was also a considerable influence and his books opened up new ways of conceiving of psychology. His book *Mysteries of Personality: A History of Psychodynamic Theories* (2009) was a unique reconfiguration of psychology’s history, described in three “streams”: the Experimental, which worked from *positivistic* assumptions about the nature of mind and behavior; The Clinical, which relies upon *psychodynamic* assumptions; and the Experiential, inclusive of transcendent assumptions about consciousness. It was Taylor who developed the hybrid, “Existential-Humanistic and Transpersonal psychology” (EHT) neologism, folding in Rogers (person-centered), Maslow (growth oriented), James (“exceptional states”) and the later

transpersonalists who studied “altered states of consciousness” along with shamanism, entheogens (like LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, etc.) and coupled with post WW2 existentialist psychologists such as Viktor Frankl and Rollo May. Taylor’s clinically precise way of documenting historical data regarding the history of psychology while retaining a deep interest in non-normative states of consciousness represented a manner of dealing with two strands of psychological research competently and yet in novel ways. He possessed a sharp intellect, a round face and with his long white beard, and wide girth, he was reminiscent of an intellectual Santa Claus, but he was an avid drummer and aikido black belt as well. He taught me much about being a scholar and, as he had specialized in Sanskrit and was quite learned in Eastern religions, our discussions were always rich. He wanted me to be his peer and demanded nothing less than my best and when I proposed to him a doctoral project that would take what I knew (the psychophysiology of meditation) and link it to a field I didn’t (astronautics and the mission to Mars) he enthusiastically supported me. Having to leave the psychology program when I did was a shattering disappointment to me, but my loss was attenuated by the fact that I always had his support and approval, thus knowing that I was a good research psychologist. Again, the role of a supportive mentor was crucial to my development in a school environment and provided me with a model to repeat with others.

7.4 Susan Rosenthal – Dr. Socialism

While a physician and not a psychologist, Susan Rosenthal, a Canadian doctor who maintains a personal website called, *Socialism is the best medicine* has added to my intellectual social justice armory. Her examinations of the deleterious effects of capitalism bristle with passion and directness. She states, “[t]here are ‘no social determinants of health’ under capitalism. Nothing about this society generates health for people or their environments. Inequality, sexism, war – these social sources of sickness are essential for capital accumulation.” (Rosenthal, n. d.). I first came upon her work while at Saybrook and thought about how society at large played a role in the psychological health of its people. They didn’t just suffer physically from poverty or homelessness, psychological health too suffered which spiraled into a process I saw firsthand when I lived in San Francisco and spoke to homeless people there. I thought that Maslow was onto something when we considered that basic needs were primary before “higher” needs could be met, or even considered. But I later rejected that assumption when I considered the Mayan Guatemala and the Zapatistas in Mexico, two groups with members I knew personally and both very poor materially, but often quite balanced otherwise. What was that due to? How can this be, I wondered. Such lines of thought I credit to Rosenthal’s unsparing focus on the systemic causes of certain psychological conditions within a capitalist system.

7.5 Tod Sloan – The Critical Psychologist

The last figure on this list is Tod Sloan, a psychologist whose role in my life was very short but quite meaningful. He was a visitor to the ISE when I met him and after only a few hours of talking with him convinced me he would make a fine addition to my doctoral committee during my earliest days in the doctoral program. He was Professor of Counseling Psychology at Lewis and Clark Graduate School from 2004-2018. His work mirrored Rosenthal's but went in much more deeply into the subject of the psychological effects of modernization. In *Poverty and Psychology: A Call to Arms*, Sloan (2003) wrote of the need for a critical psychology which argues that "the individualism inherent in most psychological interventions seriously restricts their effectiveness as solutions to social problems ... [because] the dominant cognitivist paradigm of the last two decades reinforces individualist ideology and therefore maintains social inequality in Western society (Sloan, p. 303). Here I found a "school" of psychology which directly challenged Western psychology's individualist orientation, something I had wondered about yet could not articulate until I met him and read his work.

Such were the figures and theorists whose personalities and work contributed to my own conceptual frame in psychology. Each possessed a dimension of academic weight which I found influential but more importantly, the implications of what they wrote, combined with their personal presentation as committed fighters or tellers of Truth I have taken with me and regard as transformative in my own life.

7.6 Trauma and a call for something new

I had initially desired to include a separate discussion of trauma and its effects on learning as an Appendix but I chose to include it here instead. I felt reticent to examine the various crucial experiences in my development as anything but ordinary ones for both the time and region I grew up in. However, closer examination revealed they were not ordinary at all. As so many of our students have life experiences which we often know little of, it might be of some use to open up my own experiences in the hope this may serve as a cautionary presentation for assuming that gifted, outwardly lively or upbeat students have no difficult issues.

First, let us look at pairs of opposing dynamics. Table 2 lists fifteen pairs of my earliest dynamics taken from Chapter One and, as I composed the list, I was struck by their easy divisibility into those associated with my mother and those more associated with my father. There were a few exceptions, however. For example, both my parents had darker, quieter sides, while being outwardly convivial, full of laughter and stories. Both parents were of above average intelligence and lacked only advanced, formal education; my mother, having almost finished high school, went farther than my father,

but he seemed to be a more avid, wide-ranging reader than she. And while I associate the heart, that is, my emotional life, as more connected to my mother, and intellectuality with my father, this may be simply a result of my father's years away from home and thus the more coolly rational, distant side of my character I link to him, and the warmer, more emotionally available parts of my personality with the more accessible maternal warmth I received from a stay-at-home mother. In addition, the Buddha I feel as an emotional figure and the samurai figure given to me by my aunt as something more rational and calculating, yet it was my father who first spoke of the Buddha's life and it was his interest in Buddhism which inspired him to create the chain I now wear.

Table 2: Contrasting personal dynamics

Role	Father	Mother
Location	New York City	Puerto Rico
Site	Urban	Rural
Language	English	Spanish
Persona	Samurai	Buddha
Disposition	(Hyper)vigilance	Naturalness, Spontaneity
Expressions	Action	Emotions
Display	Activism	Spirituality
Participation	Monasticism (retreat from the world)	Engagement (mix with world)
Stance	Education/Learning/Head	Heart /Intuition
Function	Protect	Embrace
Manner	Guard	Share
Spiritual Role	Monk	Priest
Demeanor	Intensity	Brightness
Bearing	Sharpness	Warmth

Barring those exceptions, there is an interesting consistency in these pairs. They are relatively easily divided into those more related to one or the other parent:

While I associate activism with intellect, it is a love for those who struggle and are marginalized that keeps me involved in activism and politics.

While being vigilant guarded me from being hurt, openness (not hiding), spontaneity (not acting), and naturalness (not rehearsing) are the ways of being for which I yearned.

While action, in general I feel a calculated activity to assist others, the motivations must come from the heart, not the head, which is how I have historically most acted from, to be most effective.

Next, let us look at some of the events I have written about, also from Chapter One but this time, with an eye towards their intensity, impact, and seriousness. As I created this list, Table 3 below, it soon became clear that these were not only *not* normal events but that, as the majority occurred before I was 11, they must have possessed a greater or different effect than I had previously admitted. I discovered that these experiences are clearly identifiable as traumas⁴⁴ and, as such, I have come to recognize that much of my life has been informed by deeply disturbing experiences and that the reactions to them were most likely maladaptive adjustments which are, in fact, forms of what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, trauma refers to “an event in which a person witnesses or experiences a threat to his or her own life or physical safety or that of others and experiences fear, terror, or helplessness. The event may also cause dissociation, confusion, and a loss of a sense of safety. Traumatic events challenge an individual’s view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place. Traumas that are caused by human behavior (e.g., rape, assault, toxic accidents) commonly have more psychological impact than those caused by nature (e. g., earthquakes).”

⁴⁵ Posttraumatic stress disorder

Table 3: List of significant traumatic events mentioned in Telling the Story

Age	Event	Scale of intensity (1-10, 10 = most severe/ disturbing/ frightening)
c. 5 years old	Witness man shot by police, watched him die with my father and brother.	10
7 years old	Suicide attempt of mother.	10
c. 8 years old	Death of cousin, Valerie	10
8 years old	Concussion from accident near Baltimore with family.	8
9 years old	Slammed car door on Virgi's finger.	10
c. 9 years old	Witnessed corpse dragged from canal with mother.	8
Between 8-11	Seven car accidents with mother (Miami intersection, my door, several rear 'bumpers', etc.).	8
15	Ran father's car into concrete lamp post.	8
20 years old	Father's accident	10
40 years old	Death of father	10

In examining the significance of many of these experiences from my early life, two distinct strategies for managing or processing trauma should be noted: *positive reappraisal* of traumatic experiences, and *acceptance* of trauma, both leading to healthier adaptations to traumatic events leading to post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Quan, Lü, Sun, Zhao, and Sang, 2022). I have benefitted from involvement in Buddhism which has elements of both strategies within its worldview and practice recommendations. Buddhism, then, ameliorated and lessened the negative impact the cumulative power of these events had over me. Psychological training and study have assisted their eventual integration as well.

Having mentioned earlier my natural reluctance to engage in autobiography, I admit to an even greater reticence to indulge in what we used to refer to as a “sidewalk psychoanalysis” of myself. It was not in our family to discuss one’s personal dynamics much and certainly I retained such a disinclination while at the same time wanting to examine myself, albeit from a safe, somewhat disconnected distance.

Nevertheless, deep reflection on certain life events, coupled with several periods of therapy have led me to conclude that my innate “guardedness” is the result of events I now see as more troubling, more traumatic, than I had earlier considered. As a result of this, the latent intellectual abilities somewhat hidden under the anti-seizure medicalized state I was in until the car accident which ended my seizures, did not, as is often described in the literature, inhibit learning (as in the “fear destroys the capacity to learn” (Perry, 2006, p. 23)). Instead, this inhibited emotional stability, paradoxically increasing a focused flight into abstract learning and education. School became the one calm place in my life I could control, receive plaudits for and success in, and thus learning was heightened, accelerated out of a sense of desperation: “I am safe here and this works so I must succeed and stretch it out as long as I can”. This is a dynamic I have learned to see in others, students, for example. And one we as educators should be on the lookout for among learners.

During my earliest, most formative years, up until my first year in high school, there were nine significantly traumatic events, eight of which occurred before I was 10 (Table 3). They average 9 on a self-constructed scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most “severe, disturbing, or frightening”. Use of two other available scales (*Impact of Events Scale – Revised*, and *Trauma History Questionnaire THQ*) both retrieved online revealed that events I had internalized as simply significant ones that occurred in my life, were, in fact, remarkably stressful and, in fact, seriously traumatic in most cases. And that over the years, I have neither mentioned these events in such a context, nor I had approached the therapy sessions I had been in with any questions about what the cumulative effect of my growth might have been as a result of such intense and consistent trauma events in such a short period of time might have done to me.

A search of the literature on trauma revealed a number of significant correlations between just one of those events (“parental suicide attempt”) and significant behavioral difficulties for children. It is not only potentially traumatic to experience a parental suicide attempt, but it could also entail living on with the uncertainty and a fear of re-experiencing that the primary caregiver can ‘choose’ to die and leave you (Lunde, Reigstad, Moe, and Grimholt, 2018, p. 1). Such emotional vigilance can be exhausting and cause stress in academic performance or in one’s personal relationships, or both.

In adults, such events can lead to “constant worrying, being on guard day and night, taking responsibility for activities of daily living and trying to create a nurturing environment for the suicidal relative” (p. 1). The authors speculate that for children, the same dynamics would apply and certainly, in my case, they did. O’Brien, Salas-Wright, Vaughn and LeCloux (2015) cite psychological literature that speaks to the “impact of parental suicidal behavior on outcomes such as mood and anxiety disorders, physical health, social and academic difficulties, and suicidal behavior” (p. 7). In another study, behavioral problems in both childhood and adolescence were also noted in families where a suicide attempt (SA) by a parent was made. If the SA took place when the child was between 8-16 years of age, this “had the strongest association with offspring mental health problems during adolescence ... [with children] more likely to develop externalizing and attention/hyperactivity problems over time” (Ortin-Peralta, Kerkela, Veijolä, Gissler, et al., 2023, p. 892). My own nightmares and sleep problems and my brother’s acting out aggressively as noted earlier all indicate the probable psychological effects of this traumatic event.

These observations have become, however, a hopeful sign that, despite trauma and giftedness, despite performance and over-preparedness, I also internalized a healthier dynamic of caring, of recognizing the dynamics of others and actively seeking to pull from them the means towards their own wholeness and that I now give out as an educator.

The ability to healthily integrate the inner, personal dynamics which characterized such a large part of my education can be used in the process of educating others not only from skill sets acquired through teacher training or pedagogical expertise but via a dynamism borne from a commitment to human growth. A skilled pedagogue may be able to teach and at times, teach well, but the qualities of the most remembered teachers are often recalled through use of affective descriptions, revealing the heart-reactions to the teacher’s presence more than from the teacher’s expertise or performance. As has been noted, “positive, value-rich relationships with students to be an inherent feature of teachers achieving optimal results” (Lovat, Dally, Clement, and Toomey, 2011, p. 34). The three pillars of Buddhism, activism, and psychology each have contributed, in their own way, to me becoming “myself”. In carrying out this autoethnographic research I have discovered that the dynamics of each of these have contributed to my professional whole, to me as educator and learner.

Becoming a Buddhist, and integrating the process of becoming a chaplain with my experience of serving others; testing myself in a leadership role as a union activist; using my untrained self to teach English in Japan; committing that same self to developing the capacity to meet the qualities inherent in leading a complex and demanding spiritual life; all of these were in reach and were possible when building

on the challenge of my childhood which prepared me for the ongoing responsibility of becoming an Activator.

Entering the ISE BA program based in the School of Education in 2014 pushed me into the position of working towards a personal goal in order to leave Iceland, but then to deal with students from foreign backgrounds whose situations mirrored back to me some of my own motivations (and life experiences). These include the motivation to help others, to lead and to mentor, and so, while I was ostensibly working for a personal goal, I was also challenged to deal with the conditions and people around me who I felt obligated to help. Moving into the ISE doctoral program and then teaching there further tested my abilities and skills and I gradually came to see the relevance of my journey to the work I was doing in the classroom.

We must then ask, how might these thoughts impact and inform the interactions with our students? And in what ways are the pillars of my life connected to such consideration?

Buddhism, with its emphasis on suffering, also possesses several other useful facets of relevance here. It's focus on the spiritual equivalent of acceptance strategies to overcome suffering, and cognitive-behavioral practices (congruent with CBT, which has theoretical similarities with Buddhism) (See Greene, P., (n. d.) <https://drpaulgreene.com/buddhism-and-cognitive-behavior-therapy/>) which, when applied can foster rapid growth in acceptance and thus, PTS growth, all have featured prominently in my life and should therefore be considered as ameliorative of the otherwise negative effects of traumatic events. The interventions of my teachers (at least in the grade school years when most of the traumatic events occurred) should also be noted as reinforcing positive coping strategies and fostering acceptance to those experiences and thus, positive growth. I consider myself most fortunate in this regard. Lastly, ongoing psychological work can also play a major role in bringing attention to the unhealthy dynamics and encouraging new behaviors to overcome them.

It is not so different from educators. When our students come to us, they come bringing their own personal traumas, experiences, and lives which are not separated from the often-curious learners we see in our courses. As complete persons, some with mixed ambitions, some with high expectations, and some with unfocused goals, each of them must be acknowledged as the equivalent of potential Buddhas, beings capable of remarkable wisdom and compassion. As such, our task as educators should not be to attempt psychoanalytic therapies but to accept that differences in temperament and learning styles are not only cognitive and behavioral manifestations but are also psychospiritual ones as well, and we should be keenly aware of how our own dynamics impact them when in the classroom as well as what they may bring into each

classroom engagement. These complicated dynamics underscore the need for a consistent approach coupled to a broad vision of what education and learning is, and perhaps most importantly, how it should be conducted. Fostering engagement cannot be merely the hopeful cheerleading that is sometimes mistaken for support. Opening class with chants of “I am somebody”, for example, is not enough. At the same time, pedagogy, pragmatism, practices, and PISA scores alone are not enough as well. A deeper reassessment of why we are in the classroom in the first place, coupled with a wider vision of human potential is needed combined with a secular version of Buddhist wisdom and compassion. A reinvigorated humanistic education. A neo-humanist education, perhaps?

7.7 The “Trinity of Affinity”

In *The Mystery of Personality*, Eugene Taylor (2009) outlines what he calls the “hypothesis of the three streams”, resetting the traditionally historical divisions of psychology into the experimental, clinical, and experiential “streams”⁴⁶. The experimental stream is “based on an epistemology of scientific reductionism” and ... “attempted to confine a definition of psychology primarily to what can be measured.” The clinical stream is “more person-centered but still partly under the sway of the experimentalists’ epistemology” and expands both the “conceptions of the unconscious” and definitions of personality. Lastly, the experiential stream represents “a lineage of psychospiritual anthropologies indigenous to popular culture, developed by individuals for purposes of understanding their own lifetime journey toward self-realization” (p. 5).

Later in this text (p. 14) he broadens this theory by explaining that each stream contains certain epistemic assumptions. First, there is the positivistic assumption undergirding the experimental stream where consciousness is exclusively with the “everyday waking state” and there exists no unconscious, “The thinker is the thought” and changes in personality contingent only upon “manipulation of the person’s articulated thoughts and behavior”.

Within the clinical stream, a psychodynamic set of assumptions dominate where a “vast interior and more primitive” unconscious is postulated which has an underlying causal effect on waking consciousness. It is the bringing to light the contents of this unconsciousness that leads to changes in personality.

⁴⁶ Taylor is not the first researcher to use a “three streams model” in his theoretical work. Flay & Petraitis, (1994) speak of a “theory of triadic influence” related to human behavior and use the phrase “streams of influence”, and Kingdon’s “multiple streams framework” (Hoeffler, 2022) describes how public policy changes are made. There may be others.

For the experiential stream there exists a “transcendent epistemology” which expands on the notion of an unconsciousness “but defines its scope as wider and deeper and higher than the psychodynamic”. This “transcendent dimension exists in addition to a primitive dimension in the unconscious” and can be accessed via altered states of consciousness achieved through meditation or entheogenic substances in addition to certain physical activities such as yoga, tai chi chuan, etc.

As shown in Figure 71 in the current document, I immediately recognized in Taylor’s division a rather interesting set of parallels between the epistemologies of each of these streams of psychology and my own three pillars. This can be seen clearly first in the positivist assumption of the experimental stream. It aligns quite nicely with the generally materialist and reductionistically positivist assumptions in the underlying roots of most Western theories of society. According to Acton, this is because in part,

Marx rejected the claims of Speculative Philosophers (to use his expression) or of metaphysicians (to use the term current today) to obtain knowledge of the world other than the knowledge obtained by the use of the scientific methods. This view, that the only knowledge of the world is obtained by the special sciences such as physics, chemistry or biology, is called *Positivism* [emphasis in original]. Marx was undoubtedly a positivist, although he would not have called himself by that name, as he disliked many of the social views of Comte, the leading positivist of the nineteenth century (Acton, 1967, p. 30).

In addition, when we look at the clinical stream, we can draw parallels to a more humanistic and broader understanding of psychology in general. Last, Buddhism fits quite well with the experiential stream’s transcendent epistemologies and has actually served to influence many of the modalities used throughout this stream such as meditation, mindfulness, etc.

I introduce this discussion here because, depending upon the differing activities I engaged in, a mix of epistemological positioning dominated my immersion in any arena I involved myself in. As well, I would move from one to the other, from Buddhist retreat to leading a union struggle, from being a chaplain and nursing dying patients, to advocating for greater Latino representation in the entertainment industry, from publishing poetry to studying Japanese - seeking ultimately some integrated ontological and epistemological stance from which I could definitively call my own. This may not be possible, I admit, but acknowledgement of their differing orientations, and admitting that each have served a purpose (and continue to serve depending upon the task) makes using them better and the ultimate integration I seek may simply be their accommodation within a sometimes-competing set of tools in my life.

8 Activism

8.1 Background: Thoreau and the turmoil of the times

Recently I came upon a quotation from some unknown source about the prevalence of anxiety in our modern society. It said in effect, that “while not all who suffer anxiety are poor, *all* poor people suffer anxiety.” I immediately understood that one source of my later involvement in activism originated in my family’s social and economic status in the United States, with our history: urban poverty from my father’s side, rural poverty from my mother’s side. And within that context, the constant refrain of “we can’t afford that” or “there’s no money for X” revealed a deep anxiety both parents navigated as they tried to support their children and create for us a better life than they had. They lived with anxiety their whole lives and, while a modicum of financial stability was had by the time we were teens, it still was below many of my circle of friends and those in our Miami neighborhood. But I saw it with most of our wider family and felt, even at a young age, an affinity for those who had less than others. The times I grew up in were marked by rising resentment to not only the Vietnam War, but to the poverty and disenfranchisement of Blacks and other minorities and was captured best by the most memorable sentence of President Johnson’s Kerner Commission Report which said that “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal” (United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). It was an unnerving time to grow up in.

	Experimental	Clinical	Experiential
1860s	Era of Religion and Moral Philosophy	Era of the Physician and Minister	Literary Psychology of the Transcendentalists
1880s	Physiological Psychology, German psychophysics, and English Mental Testing	The French Experimental Psychology of the Subconscious and Psychical Research	Era of Spiritualism and Mental Healing
1890s	The Functionalism of William James	The Era of Experimental Psychopathology	Christian Science, New Thought and the World Parliament of Religions
1900s	The Era of the "Schools" including Gestalt Psychology	The Era of Psychotherapeutics and the Emmanuel Movement Jung precedes Freud	The Depth psychologies of Freud and Jung flourish among the artists and psychics
1910s	Behaviorism takes Control of the academic laboratories	Era of Military psychology and mass Testing	Jung, Freud, and Bergson define popular psychospiritual consciousness; Buchmanites organize into the Oxford Group
1920s	Era of Tests and Measurements and advances in inferential analysis	Tests and Measurements	Era of Psychics, Swamis, Marx, and Radical Sexual Politics
1930s	Age of Theory Begins: Era of Learning Theory versus The Macro-Personality Theorists	Era of Psychoanalytic Ego Psychology Psychosomatic Medicine, and Pastoral Counseling	Radicalization of Social psychology Era of the Surrealists and existentialists; AA is founded
1940s	Era of Military Psychology	Emergence of Scientist-Practitioner Model	Era of Huxley, Merton and Watts begins
1950s	Neo-Behavioristic Era of Modeling begins: Humanistic Psychology emerges as an Academic Endeavor	Humanistic, Existential, and Phenomenological Therapies Dominate Clinical Psychology	Era of Suzuki, Zen and the Beat Generation
1960s	Cognitive Psychology takes over the academic laboratories	Psychedelics, the Community Health Movement, and Client-Centered Therapy challenge psychoanalysis	Human Potential Mvt. Arises, Era of psychedelics begins, Radicalization of depth psychology accelerates. Bodywork and group encounter become the rage
1970s	Cognitive Science expands	Medicalization and over-regulation dominates clinical psychology; Clinicians take control of the American Psychological Assn.	Maslow and Sutich launch Transpersonal Psychology, Absorbs Existential and Humanistic psychology; Gender politics and meditation emerge as new forms of psychotherapy.
1980s	Era of Artificial intelligence, information processing Models; Scientists bolt From APA and form the Amer. Psychological Society	Licensing requirements tighten Psychologist win class action suit Against the MD psychoanalysts; Homosexuality depathologized	Shamanism, spirituality and health become linked. Multiculturalism emerges
1990s	Neuroimaging introduced	Behavioral Medicine develops Evidenced based practice and psychopharmacology introduced Cognitive therapy colonizes spirituality	Mind/body medicine develops Noetic Sciences, Holistic Medicine, Ecopsychology, and entheogens emerge in psychotherapy
2000	Positive Psychology launched and Brain neuroscience expands	Race, Class and Gender become a new focus; Only cognitive and behavioral and psychoanalytic therapies permitted for licensure	Complementary and Alternative therapies, Mind/body medicine, and Socially engaged spirituality emerge

Fig. 1.1 A history of American psychology in three streams

Figure 70: Eugene Taylor’s (2009) Three Streams from “The Mystery of Personality”

Growing up in Miami, I encountered many factors which added to this identity with the poor and the yearning to do something about it. I have said that I devoured Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* at a very young age, but that volume was paired with another famous essay of his, *Civil Disobedience* (Thoreau, 1966) which introduced me to the idea that what the individual considers an immoral or unfair law can be rejected

outright if one is prepared to pay the consequences. Unfortunately, I believe, such a notion has led to a regressive interpretation insofar as anti-abortion activists and anti-gay business owners too have cited Thoreau as an inspiration to them for denying others what they morally reject. I cannot argue that issue here. Only for me, this notion of morally righteous civil disobedience applied itself, in theory, at least, most when refusing to pay taxes that supported war efforts, and which caused death and destruction. In the context of the Vietnam War, which only ended when I was 16, this notion felt quite real as even my father, a WW2 veteran who opposed the war, suggested that, if the draft continued when my brother and I became of draft age, he would send us to Canada. He supported my opposition to the draft for, as we all knew, “[of] the 2.5 million enlisted men who served during Vietnam, 80 percent came from poor or working-class families...”⁴⁷. He also had a working-class sensibility tied to unions and their work and thus felt transformation in a society required solidarity with all kinds of people, united in their class interests over any ethnic, cultural, or linguistic affinities. I agreed and have retained such motivation.

During high school, I became exposed to other issues aside from the Vietnam War as well. Influenced by *The Whole Earth Catalog*, I saw advertisements and articles in its pages about environmentally clean living, off-the grid cabins and shelters, grow your own food supplies, and more, and, exposed to the countercultural older friends and relatives who purchased it, I began to form ideas about what kind of life I wanted to lead, long before “sustainability” was part of my vocabulary. I focused my attention on nuclear power since the Florida Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant had begun to get national exposure in that period when the environmental movement was still in its early, formative stages. I attended protests against it (Fig. 9) and nuclear weapons proliferation (the t-shirt I was wearing in Figure 9, read “No Nukes, No Secrets” and featured the design of a nuclear bomb whose very display was legally prohibited until The Progressive magazine won a case taken all the way to the United States Supreme Court allowing its public exposure (Morland, 1979).

8.2 Noam Chomsky - Scholar as Humane Anarchist

One of the earliest inspirations for my understanding of activism and the need to oppose oppressive structures in whatever form they arose from is Noam Chomsky, dissident, father of modern linguistics, and peripatetic author. I encountered his work first in 1980 at Eckerd College and have been an ardent reader of his works since then. With him I found an analytical, critical theory-oriented, dispassionate, anarcho-socialist who was not only a towering intellect but an approachable human being. I

⁴⁷ From: <https://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/>

corresponded with him off and on over the years and he never failed to promptly reply to my queries, signing his name “Noam” and when we finally met, he interrupted me each time I called him “Professor Chomsky” to gently chide me, “It’s Noam, José, just Noam”. That accessibility impressed me far more than his being touted as the 8th most cited intellectual figure of all time⁴⁸. I discovered in his presence an unswerving commitment to careful analysis while remaining absolutely true to a commitment to justice and radical equality. I wondered how does one maintain such an attitude despite being hailed by revolutionaries and radicals around the world, disdained by almost all mainstream media, and yet so influential that his works stand behind only Marx, Lenin, Shakespeare, the Bible, Aristotle, Plato, and Freud in scholarly citations? How does one maintain such an authentic sense of humility and connection with average people while still looming over most of them intellectually? I never understood this, but I sensed it was the way I should aim for as it also reminded me that our humanity conveys most clearly who we are and that despite any achievement, we should face the world directly, without filters, and honestly embody one’s principles.

8.3 Michael Parenti – Scholar as Street-Fighter

Michael Parenti was for me a working-class version of Chomsky. His thick New York accent and passionate manner of speaking was more in line with my personal style over the more intellectually precise Chomskyan manner. I saw Parenti several times, met him once, speaking at events related to United States imperialism, the JFK assassination, and at various anti-intervention events. He was a brilliant conveyor of Marxist analysis, a professor, a social commentator, and activist and his book *The Sword and The Dollar: Imperialism, Revolution and the Arms Race* (1989) was my introduction to his written work. From Parenti I learned that my own commitment to public commentary (I have written for a number of left publications including *CounterPunch*, *Dissident Voice* and others) should never be hidden behind a façade of urbane conventional intellectuality but should instead be an expression of who I am authentically. Also, I could never imitate the weightier Chomsky way of retrieving amazing amounts of facts and figures and puncturing an argument with precision. I had a more passionate and street-level expressiveness which I need not hide nor use crudely. Parenti, in that sense, represented a healthy balance between an Ivy League-type intellectual presentation versus the intellectual giant’s mastery of language.

⁴⁸ From: <https://softskull.com/bookauthor/noam-chomsky/>

8.4 Paolo Freire – Teacher as Activist

I have mentioned Paulo Freire before and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* may be the most non-Buddhist re-read book (next to *Walden*) in my library. On my bookshelf in the faculty offices in Skipholt, I have four other works by or about him: (*The Politics of Education*, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, and *The Meaning of Conscientização: The Goal of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy*) and what I have been most affected by was not just passion, clarity, and articulateness, which all the literary influences on my development share. It was the overtly ardent defense of the poor and illiterate that affected me most and to this day continues to inspire. This obviously comes from a deep personal connection to the poor and illiterate and I am convinced that Freire has contributed to my ambition to teach these groups despite not having encountered his books until the past 15 years or so. Freire captures the spirit of finding literacy, the excitement and pride that emerges when one realizes one can read. Some of my relatives barely finished grade school, at least two who were close to me never got past the fifth grade. I saw their eyes light up when I read something to them that I had discovered, no matter how banal, such as something on cloud formation, and it still made them sparkle with joy and pride in my accomplishment. Freire spoke of people such as these, and he knew the enormous power literacy had to open up their eyes to oppression and unfairness in their own society.

8.5 Frantz Fanon – The Colonial Critic

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist trained in France's colonial system and an ardent fighter against the colonial projects everywhere but particularly in the Francophone world (Martinique, his birthplace, France, and Algeria in particular). I read *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1967) when I lived in Los Angeles; David Dantes had encouraged me to read it as he said it was essential for understanding why the oppressed so infrequently rise up. I read it and it disturbed me deeply. Fanon's withering critique of the way the colonizer cripples the minds of the colonized, forcing them to use his language and then judging their behavior through the lens of how well they assimilate in thought, word, and deed, shocked me. It took years for me to admit that the ways we put ourselves down as Puertoricans, accepting that we needed the United States or else we would "become like Cuba" infuriated me. Otherwise, intelligent people seemed to bow down to the *de facto* colonial status we Puertoricans live under, and I saw how Frantz's descriptions of Africans in the Francophone-world were reflections of my own family. Frantz taught me to see how the oppressed internalize their oppression against each other and often take the side of the colonial masters over their own people. This kind of incendiary analysis was a catalyst for my move into the *independentista* camp and I am happy to say that since then (some 15 to 20 years back to now) almost 30% of Puertoricans on the island want some form of

independence (historically that number has rarely been more than 5% since the movement was essentially crushed in the 1950s.) When I have exposed students from Africa to Fanon, they all come back to me shaken, saying how truly he spoke and how he changed their lives. Several ISE students have shared with me their gratitude for having been introduced to his work.

8.6 Antonio Gramsci – The Organic Intellectual

The last figure to feature in my development and whose literature left an indelible mark on my character and analysis is Antonio Gramsci, the physically challenged writer and activist (he suffered from a spinal deformity that left him under five feet tall) who defined *hegemony* in terms of dominant ideas of bourgeoisie. These ideas then are adopted into the background of political debates so that one doesn't see their permeation and remains locked into seeing the world on their terms. Gramsci also introduced the term "organic intellectual" as someone who "emerged from a specific social class and functioned to elaborate that class's productive activity as a set of general principles..." (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2023). With such a definition he opened the idea of the intellectual as not a functionary of the dominant ruling class but someone "in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (Forgacs, 2000, p. 321). Gramsci himself was such a figure. This model served as an example of what I came to regard as The *Activator*, which combined educator and activist, and which has emerged as a key component of my pedagogical practice.

8.7 Discussion

Education is not so much the state of having been educated, nor is it that which is taught, that which is given to the students, but it is a process that is lifelong as one treads Life, learning along the way, how to adjust and to grow with whatever is put in front of one. It refers most relevantly to learning. This accords with the Dewey quote at the beginning of the education section.

Buddhist Enlightenment too, is, I believe, not an amber-encased condition of static purity attained by a select few adepts but should be seen instead as a vibrant and constantly readjusting response to circumstances that are always different with what are commonly taken as remarkable degrees of wisdom and compassion. Perhaps these events are the *karma-phala*, resultant displays of karmic patterns which have come to fruition later, or perhaps they are simply random expressions of unlinked causes and conditions which arise spontaneously. Either way, the response to them, though itself conditioned to a degree by culture and training, remains a response by a relatively autonomous agent who, being human, ebb and flow in their moral life, thus, mixing

metaphors here, like a compass, they may wobble though it remains roughly pointed in the proper direction.

The so-called enlightened person then moves in their world like this. It is, as I understand it, a life characterized by three approaches: openness, naturalness, and spontaneity. That is, lacking the need to hide or protect oneself, without pretense or the need to perform, and without rehearsing one's responses to differing circumstances. Such persons have definitely received some kind of training: moral, ethical, spiritual, for example, and many have benefitted by years of academic teaching at the feet of great masters, but their awakening, their enlightenment, is an ongoing ability to fill every event with luminous presence and behave through the three qualities named above.

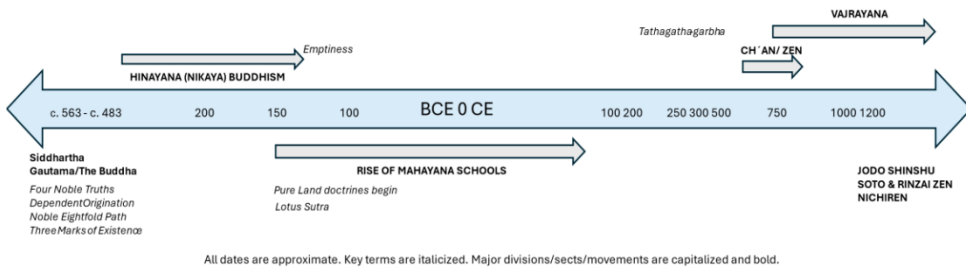
The integration of education with Buddhism, psychology, political and social activism may sound like an abstract and impossible goal, and, in truth, it has often felt that way. A commitment to compassion, a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, a desire to then act upon such in all arenas, such as the political, economic, and social, would then lead to an engaged life of action beholden to moral principles. The insight into that which benefits beings is also supported by psychological teachings that a humane sense of worth and belongingness, as Adler noted, are essential ingredients for well-being (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1964, pp. 127-162) and this in turn calls for an educated populace who work assiduously in taking care of each other through what I understand are progressive, eco-socialist ideals.

Nevertheless, a passionate commitment to the dispossessed, a "preferential" tendency towards the marginalized must be the practical standpoint, the manner in which this commitment should be displayed and offered, and this I assert based upon those psychologists and activists whose works I have mentioned above. But then again, it was not only their written material, but it was also their human disposition that inspired me just as well. This combination then is a part of the total vision I believe that marks the integration of what these disparate intellectual fields look like.

In the remaining chapters, I piece the whole research together and in so doing, piece together my life's journey with some sense of coherence. I will also give some final words about the process and the insights I have derived from discussing the opposing forces that pulled me into different directions at each stage. With one difference, I now had *The Activator* as a designation for my role as an educator, but more was still to come.

9 Buddhism

Table 4: Timeline of Key Buddhist Developments Mentioned



9.1 Basic concepts and traditions

As one of the world’s largest and most widespread religions, with over 500 million adherents,⁴⁹ Buddhism’s basic teachings are somewhat well-known among Western academics but certainly not as familiar nor well-understood by non-academics as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. I will present here therefore, a selective summary of its major teachings and divisions and contextualize how these ideas have played in my academic development as well as their personal contribution to me as an individual. This relationship between the two: my personal history and development on the one side, with the trajectory I have taken intellectually and academically (leading me directly to this autoethnography) on the other, represents a major part of what this work has attempted to accomplish. That is, the connection between the research and the journey leading to that research are intimately related and are themselves legitimate objects of scholarly study.

For over 50 years, I have seriously studied and practiced in most of the major Buddhist traditions still extant today. Beginning with *Zen* (in both its major Japanese forms, Soto, and Rinzai, and its Chinese precursor, Chan), and then moving to *Vajrayana*⁵⁰, then *Jodo Shinshu* (the Pure land sect I took formal ordination in 2003).

⁴⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-buddhist/>

⁵⁰ *Vajrayana* refers to the Indo-Himalayan tantric Buddhism known primarily in its Tibetan form and having Nepalese, Bhutanese, Sikkhimese, Mongolian, Chinese, and later Japanese (known in Japan as *Shingon*) analogs.

This journey through Buddhism comes from a deep yearning for a sense of belonging as I moved through very different life circumstances and different cultures. And, as I reflect in a recent submission to an international Buddhist magazine this search for a “bigger umbrella” has relevance to this work as will also be shown.

84,000 Doors

One of the most remarkable aspects of Buddhism that I have studied is its relatively harmonious historical development, lacking the sometimes genocidal internecine conflicts because of doctrinal differences sadly prevalent in other religions. This may be due to a very early Buddhist teaching. In the *Theragatha* (*The Songs of the Elders*), dating as early as the sixth century BCE⁵¹, there is mention of “84,000 doors to Enlightenment”⁵² taught by the Buddha, each suitable for a different sensibility. This unusually large number suggests that the various differences in understanding and capability of people he came across led the Buddha to adjust or modify his teaching accordingly. This conscious adjustment is known as *upaya*, or “skillful means,” referring to the different stories and lessons given to monastic renunciants, farmers, businessmen, women, children, and members of all castes and backgrounds the Buddha encountered in his 40+ years of teaching. This idea of 84,000 doors asserts that, while the search for an end to suffering might be universal, those receiving the teachings might require different examples or methods for them to gain the wisdom necessary to *awaken* and achieve Enlightenment. Thus, acknowledgement, acceptance, and tolerance of varying doctrinal positions may have softened any tendencies to rigidly set the definitions of and methods to awakening and consequently to potential conflict over doctrinal differences. The Mahayana text, the *Lotus Sutra*⁵³ (c. 100 BCE-200 CE), one of the earliest Mahayana sutras, also affirms in many of its stories and parables the need to adjust the Buddha’s teachings to different audiences with a key assertion that all beings can Awaken and thus are possessed of an innate Buddha-potential, e.g., *buddhanature*.

The historical background of the Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama as he was known before his spiritual transformation called “Enlightenment,” is somewhat well-known. He was born a prince in a small kingdom in what is now Nepal to a local King who sheltered the boy so that he would be exposed to only positive experiences, lest he fall prey to notions of spiritual renunciation which were common at the time. Coming across living examples of old age, sickness, and death shatters his ostensibly happy

⁵¹ <https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Theragatha>

⁵² Khuddaka Nikaya, Theragatha 1024

⁵³ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/buddhism/book/the-lotus-sutra>

mind until he sees a *sannyasin*,⁵⁴ one of the spiritual renunciants his father dreaded him encountering, with shaven head and remarkably peaceful mien whereupon the young prince decides to abandon his luxurious life, including wife and newborn child, to pursue spiritual truth. For six years he studies under a number of spiritual teachers and undergoes extreme ascetic practices that eventually bring him near starvation. One day, apparently near death, he decides to accept food from a village girl who sees his sad state and offers him nourishment and he concludes that a middle way between asceticism and extreme sensual indulgence would be a better spiritual path and, returning to his search, he meditates under a pipal tree until he finally achieves Enlightenment and henceforth is referred to as the Buddha, the Awakened One.

This notion of awakening, then, is crucial to Buddhism in all its forms. And, as the name Buddha means the “enlightened” or “awakened one”, clearly, awakening as a concept is essential.

But awaken to what?

“To see things as they really are.”

The expression, “*yatha bhutam*”⁵⁵, or, to see things as-they-really-are, may be the most succinct explanation of Buddhism’s most immediate goal for practitioners. This kind of experiential knowledge is described as a truly accurate way of perceiving and relating to oneself and all phenomena which leads to working with this newfound understanding throughout one’s life. As one writer put it simply, “In Buddhism, all suffering is a form of resistance to reality, a form of attachment to desires and ideas about how the world should be”⁵⁶. Thus, learning to understand, to “see” reality as it truly is, is to achieve liberation from suffering. “[T]o see things as they are (*yathabhutam*) without illusion or ignorance... is the extinction of craving ‘thirst’ ... and the cessation... of dukkha [emphasis in original] which is Nirvana” (Rahula, 1974, p. 40).

For a Buddhist, “things as they really are” encompasses a tripartite realization:

all things are impermanent (*anicca*);

⁵⁴ Lit. “beggar” or “mendicant” referring to someone who has “renounced the world and who lives totally without possessions solely for the realization of liberation” (Schuhmacher & Woerner, 1989).

⁵⁵ Lit. “sees it as it is” (Rahula, 1974, p. 9).

⁵⁶ <https://www.themarginalian.org/2023/03/11/pema-chodron-loneliness>

all things are laden with *dukkha*, ie., dis-ease, or “suffering”; and,

all things have no intrinsic soul or eternal, inherently existent substratum (*anatta*)⁵⁷. (In other words, all things are provisionally existent, without a monistic, underlying identity).

When one fully comprehends these “marks”, one can better adjust to the vicissitudes of life and react in a most understanding manner, neither neurotically clinging to what one holds dear, nor nihilistically avoiding, or rejecting that which is unpleasant. Equanimous wisdom coupled with compassionate activity for those still locked in *samsara*⁵⁸ is described as the manifestation of this transformative vision. And there is a delineated path to attain this kind of understanding, known as the Noble Eightfold Path. This path has three traditional divisions: *morality*, *meditation*, and *wisdom*:

- right⁵⁹ understanding (or view), right thoughts (or resolve), representing *wisdom*;
- right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort (or enthusiasm), representing *morality*; and
- right mindfulness (or meditation), and right concentration (or absorption), representing *meditation*.

All of these are placed contextually within the framework of the Four Noble Truths which delineate the existential basis for these teachings. They are that 1., life is permeated by *dukkha*⁶⁰, 2., the cause of *dukkha* is *tanha* (craving, desire), 3., there exists a path available to all to end *dukkha*, and 4., the way to its end lies in the Noble Eightfold Path.

These, in sum, represent the most basic axioms held by all Buddhist schools.

⁵⁷ Collectively referred to as the *Three Marks of Existence*.

⁵⁸ *Samsara*, lit., “constant flow” (Takakusu, 1978, p. 29) is the endless cycle of birth, old age, disease, death, and rebirth, *ad infinitum*, which all compounded things, literally or metaphorically, are subject to, animate or inanimate.

⁵⁹ The word preceding each step is “*samma*” which can be read as “right, or proper”, “highest”, “most complete”, or “perfect”. These designations were established by the Buddha to differentiate between behaviors conducive toward awakening and those which are not. Thus, *samma* also suggests “most likely to benefit self and others”.

⁶⁰ Though mostly translated as “suffering,” this word more properly suggests a latent discomfort or “dis-ease”, referring not only to physical suffering but the discomfort of both anticipated and/or realized loss of what one loves or desires, and being faced with that which one dislikes (Schuhmacher & Woerner, *dukkha*, 1989).

Paths to Awakening: Two vehicles, two ideals, two doctrines

Nevertheless, as Buddhism developed and spread, its ideal changed from the more ostensibly individualistic pursuit of Awakening led by monks and nuns who focus primarily on the individual cleansing of unhealthy emotions, to a broader focus, one allowing for the full spiritual development of those who weren't monastics. That is, the earliest Buddhists were traditionally divided into two main groups: first, were the renunciant monks (and later, nuns) who represented the core of the faith (allowing them to devote their lives exclusively to cultivation of the Buddhist path), and who aspire to arhatship, the *arhat* being one who has extinguished the fetters which had bound one to samsara; and second, the laity, providing food and shelter and other means of support for ordained monastics as a way to earn merit, aspiring for better, future lives. This path came to be known as *Hinayana*.

However, those who promoted this new ideal called themselves *Mahayana*, or "Greater Vehicle", to distinguish their collective movement from the pejoratively designated "Lesser Vehicle" (*Hinayana*) (the use of vehicle suggests a vehicle or cart which carries people across a river, in this case to awakening. The earliest Mahayana texts appeared around the first century CE and were thus compiled perhaps one or two centuries before).

The human ideal of these respective traditions, that is, how we should strive to behave and look like as we practice this path, aside from the example of the Buddha himself, changed over the course of Buddhism's development. It went from the *arhat*, someone who strove for their liberation individually and achieved a recognizable peace in their demeanor, to the *bodhisattva*, someone who strove assiduously to benefit others, delaying their own "entry" in Nirvana⁶¹. This change may have reflected, in part, the historical Buddha's own journey as one who originally spent years in various ascetic undertakings in order to Awaken but who then spent the next 40 years teaching others. It also introduced the possibility that the activities of compassionate concern for others - over the pursuit of enlightenment for oneself - would enable anyone, even theoretically non-monastics, to achieve final Awakening.

The philosophical foci of these two ideals, in addition to their development from the solitary arhat to the publicly beneficent bodhisattva, included two related doctrines: the doctrine of interdependence (*pratitya-samutpada*) for the *Hinayana* and of the doctrine

⁶¹ Sanskrit for *nibbana*, lit. "extinction" or "blowing out," refers to the unchanging, passionless peace that is the summum bonum of Buddhist practice. It is referred to as "[t]he cessation of continuity and becoming" (Rahula, 1974, p. 37).

of emptiness (*sunyata*) which explicitly came later in Buddhism's development, officially ushering in the Mahayana.

The first doctrine, also known as "dependent origination", or "conditioned genesis" (Rahula, 1974, pp. 53 ff) "is the principle that all things arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions—nothing exists as a singular, independent entity."⁶² This obviates any notion of singular, individual identity, instead assuming that all things are each inextricably woven into the fabric of the other, from their arising through to their eventual dissolution. Thus, no "first cause" is posited nor accepted.

The second doctrine, *emptiness*, is a concept whose development marked the beginning of Mahayana around the first century CE and is defined as "the total absence of inherent existence and self-identity with respect to all phenomena" (Hirakawa, 1990). The development of these two related ideas, while cementing the separation of the Hinayana (which is sometimes also known as either *Nikaya* Buddhism for its exclusive reliance on the Nikayas, the earliest written texts of Buddhism, or the *Theravada*, The Way of the Elders, despite this latter term being more correctly applied to just one of the 18 earliest schools), might be best understood as being natural philosophical outgrowths from one to the other.

To posit the interpenetration of all phenomena via an interlocking system of causes and conditions with no first cause nor substantive unit outside of this contingently intertwined relationship, could eventually give way to an understanding that therefore, the primary characteristic of phenomena is one that is *empty of an inherently separate substance* but nevertheless, full of potential. In this way, emptiness is not viewed as negative, that is, as solely something lacking, but instead, something that is pregnant with possibilities and a soteriologically relevant concept whose contemplation (Gyatso, 1986) and direct realization positively transforms the practitioner completely, psychologically as well as spiritually (Tirado, 2008). This more optimistic perspective, in contrast to the depiction of the sterner arhat monk who must labor strenuously to achieve their goals, comports nicely with the softer image of the bodhisattva who operates in the world with a higher wisdom that enables him/her to pursue their benevolent activities with both dispassion and enthusiastic energy.

A third vehicle?

The movement from arhat to bodhisattva, from the early Hinayana to the later Mahayana, gave birth to a third branch which began around the 6th century CE, depicting itself as a yet subsequent and distinct "vehicle", the *Vajrayana*, or Diamond,

⁶² <https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Pratityasamutpada>

or Thunderbolt Vehicle. This movement refers to the Himalayan (Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan), Chinese, and Japanese esoteric, or tantric schools which usually relied upon elaborate rituals, mantras, mudras⁶³ visualizations and other spiritual practices for development of an immediately accessible, transformative experience that was not necessarily focused on and/or exclusively available to monastics. In the Himalayan versions, the new ideal, the *ngakpa*, (literally “mantrin”, or, one who has spiritual abilities because they have power derived from mantras), represented an *ordained but non-celibate* community of Vajrayana practitioners who often wore red and white cloaks, kept their hair long, and wore distinctive jewelry but who remained within their communities taking life-long, non-monastic Vajrayana vows. These practitioners were originally connected to the early *mahasiddhas*, (Ray, 1995) the wandering yogis of northern India who engaged in tantric practices seeking supernatural powers, or *siddhis*, from which their name derived (a *Siddha* is one possessed of these powers or abilities, and a *mahasiddha*, is a “great siddha,” one who has gained the highest power, that of final enlightenment.) It should be noted that while later doctrines were not necessarily accepted by the earlier schools, the converse was true, later developments in Buddhism still retained the earlier doctrines but held the newer ideas such as emptiness as higher.

These three developments, two vehicles, two ideals, and two doctrines in Buddhism are relevant to this project for giving the key ideas which have informed my practice and study and for their emblematic approaches and doctrines which are reflected in my own life as well. I will say more on this later. For now, however, two final Buddhist concepts require introduction. These are *hongaku* (本覺, ‘original enlightenment’) (Stone, 1995; 2003) and the somewhat related and similar *buddhanature*, briefly mentioned earlier.

Two Buddhist doctrines relevant to education

The doctrine of original enlightenment, or *hongaku*, (“original state of enlightenment” (Inagaki, 1984)) is the proposition that “no distinction exists between the phenomenal and the absolute, that is, between samsara and nirvana ... delusive passions and enlightenment ... and ordinary beings and Buddha” (Habito, 1995, p. 83). This nondual perspective on key Buddhist doctrines was an outgrowth of emptiness teachings and was first mentioned in the “second and third centuries C.E., ... and

⁶³ “a bodily posture or symbolic gesture” (Schuhmacher & Woerner, 1989) used to convey spiritual truths or to activate spiritual forces during spiritual practices. Buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, and other figures in Buddhist art often display distinctive hand and finger positions, each signifying a specific quality or practice associated with the figure depicted.

written sometime in the early fifth century. Its main dissertation is that: *all sentient beings have the original capacity of becoming Buddha...*" (Habito, 1996, p. 3) (emphasis added). This innate capacity serves as an equalizer in the trajectory of Buddhist ideas about enlightenment and who can attain it. That is, not only all persons, but *all sentient beings*, in fact, have this capacity within them and it is only through development of insight, whether by gradual cultivation via spiritual practices, or sudden transformative experiences which jolt the practitioner into an awakened state, that it is revealed.

The last concept to be given some attention is related to this and is called *buddhanature* (佛性). While not recognizable within the earliest Buddhist doctrines it can be argued that implicitly the seeds for this concept were there already. The Buddha himself in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (Numerical Discourses), among the earliest of Buddhist teachings, referred to the "luminous mind" which is only temporarily covered over by "adventitious defilements" (Bodhi, 2010). This led to the supposition that when uncovered, such defilements are cleansed and the true nature of mind is revealed, leading directly to awakening, or exposing the inherent, awakened nature of the individual. In addition, some of the earliest Mahayana texts from the 2nd to 3rd centuries CE suggested that Buddha potential is an innate, embryonic quality in all sentient beings. In Chinese Buddhism, this doctrine was referred to as the *tathagata-garbha*, or "Buddha embryo". By the middle part of the 5th century CE, major texts were affirming this doctrine as essential. The gradual recognition of women as equally capable of reaching, through their own efforts, enlightenment gave way over the years to allowance of lower caste members and then, in the Mahayana period, to the recognition that even non-monastics are capable of the highest realization. This movement was a remarkable development in the universalization of Buddhist ideas: that ultimate Awakening, or Enlightenment, was the provenance of all beings, no matter how high or low, no matter the class, race, monastic status, gender, or even, eventually, species.⁶⁴

These ideas above then, are among the most influential doctrines of Buddhism, from its earliest teachings up to its tantric developments in the first millennium CE which are characteristic of some of the newer schools. Each of these teachings, affirming not only the *availability* of enlightenment to all but including the *innate enlightened nature* of all beings, had implications far beyond just the soteriological for me personally. *It has relevance to education as well.* It gave doctrinal support for an involvement in

⁶⁴ With the doctrine of rebirth central in Buddhism, particularly at the time, the idea is that elements of consciousness take rebirth according to karmic propensities and accumulated merit but can move through the various realms of which the human realm is only one.

teaching to assist others to awaken to their own nature, outside of a Buddhist context. In addition, it gave validation to a spiritual path immersed in this life, not in a later incarnation, or within a strictly monastic setting, but in all settings, by all people.

Buddhism represents for me a rational, kind, and optimistically realistic overarching system of beliefs and world views which teaches that suffering can be overcome by anyone, Awakening can be realized by everyone, and that a life of compassion and wisdom may be found now, in this existence.

I believed that Buddhism, in its analysis of the human condition and its optimistic evaluation of human potential, should be part of the dialogue around issues of national and international importance such as those I had been involved with for several decades. But how? Uniting these observations into an integrated whole which would inform all my actions had always been a struggle and I never felt convinced that an adequate melding was possible. So, I kept them separate, leading one activist life, and one Buddhist life. Nearing 40, however, a different possibility opened for me.

Zen

I began in Zen, its Japanese variants first, (both Soto and Rinzai, the most dominant schools) and lasted more than 20 years in it. Its directness, simplicity, regard for nature, its remarkably spare art, and Quaker-like ethos, Zen set the stage for almost every other school of Buddhism I studied or practiced in. I loved the discipline and the achievement of being able to remain motionless for long hours and I appreciated the straightness of its approach. Nothing so exemplified this for me than the *enso*, 円相, 'circular form,' the circle spontaneously drawn by innumerable Zen masters to convey the ineffability of Awakening (Figure 72). I was determined to Awaken and honestly felt I could. Nevertheless, I noticed, when I went to Naropa, that there was a tightness to this approach and it manifested in a self-righteousness that made my intensity insufferable at times, even to me. I knew that approaching a goal like awakening, a supreme value, the great end of spiritual practice, was a great challenge but no matter which Zen temple or community I entered, I simply encountered people, struggling like me to navigate suffering and holding on to spiritual practice as if nothing else mattered. But many things did, deaths occurred with the same frequency, finances were always an issue, relationships began and ended, and I never encountered the kind of enlightened being I was expecting, one inured to suffering and able to remain some metaphorical distance above it all.



Figure 71: The Zen enso, the circle symbolizing emptiness and the profound, ineffable Truth of Awakening

Vajrayana

My entry into Vajrayana, or, as it is more commonly known, Tibetan Buddhism, was not deliberate; I had begun Naropa as an identified Zen Buddhist, believing in its promise of awakening for only the most determined practitioner. And I saw displays of Buddhist practice among people considered serious practitioners that left me aghast: moving or changing positions during periods of meditation, an informal approach to form, and what appeared to be a slavish devotion to teachers. The latter I came to understand, was itself a practice in Vajrayana: to see one's teacher as the Buddha himself was said to grant the devotee the blessings of a Buddha (and, conversely, as said by Naropa founder Trungpa Rinpoche, if one sees one's teacher as simply a drunk, one accrues the blessings from a drunk!). Aside from this however, the rich, colorful displays, magico-ritualistic practices with music and elaborate hand gestures all with understanding mind as the primary practice, sucked me into a world of an Orthodox-like ethos of sometimes gaudy but always rich colors and images. It was all quite foreign to me and yet it called to me in its overt religiousness. Vajrayana's very dynamic differences from Zen seemed outside my sense of what Buddhism was and yet immediately after I had met Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche I understood that here was a far different vision of the enlightened teacher than I was accustomed to: not distant, serious and stiff but instead expressive, vibrant, and with an incredible kindness. But the Tibetan teachings were always imbued with a more down-to-earth ethos of understanding the foibles of commonfolk, and while I had distanced myself from such

a self-assessment, I still felt like one – someone who struggled and took his struggles too seriously. Vajrayana had humor and lightness and the Tibetans, I discovered, smiled a lot more than the martial-like Zen teachers I spent years practicing with.

The image that most represented this tradition for me though, was the Wheel of Life, the *Bhavachakra*, (Figure 73) a mandala-like image which contained the beings in the six different realms of samsara, with the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion in the center, all encased in the 12 links of dependent origination and the whole held in the jaws of Yama, the god of Death. A huge story was contained in one image and expertly drawn, one could get lost in its intricacies and spend numerous hours contemplating its teachings.



Figure 72: The Bhavachakra, Wheel of Life

The different Buddhist sects in my life

Inside of my earliest explorations of Buddhism, beginning as a child, really, as I'd heard my father's stories of Japan and his readings about Buddhism for as long as I can remember, lived a nascent but distinctly twinned set of impulses: to learn what I could about Buddhism, and to tell others about it. To teach, in other words. Of all the memories I retain, that impulse lived clearly and served as a motivation to learn more, so that I could teach more. As mentioned earlier, being referred to as "el doctorcito" from a young age no doubt helped in that, gaining recognition for being a precocious

reader attenuated the loneliness of an insecure, chubby boy who felt out of place everywhere, all the time.

For years, I felt that to study Buddhism is one thing, but to practice it, another. No matter how many times I had read that they should be united, my life followed the intellectual study of Buddhism from a pan-Buddhist perspective, attempting to understand each tradition in order to discern its universal wholeness. However, each school I studied with by practicing, seemed to have something unique to offer me, and something I felt lacking.

Pure Land (Jōdo Shinshū)

When my father died in 1999, the combination of grief and separation from my sangha, as well as the lack of comfort derived from my practice all led to a crisis of faith I have spoken of before and which led me back to a Japanese form of Buddhism that was a far cry from the two I'd practiced in and spoken about above. *Jōdo Shinshū* (lit., "True Pure Land school") is often derided as a Buddhism for the weak – and that's how it was both created and touted. Its basic doctrines are the same, accepting suffering, the pitfalls of samsara, and the need for awakening to escape the clutches of this cycle. But a novel interpretation of a scripture and figure in Buddhism given by its founder changed everything.

While Pure Land practices existed in both Zen and Esoteric Buddhism, they were considered as adjuncts to awakening. In Jodo Shinshu, though, the primary practice became the simple recitation of the name of Amida Buddha (the *nembutsu*, or, *Namo Amida Butsu*) (Figure 74) a mythical figure whose appearance coincided with the earliest Mahayana scriptures whose purpose was to give those who were unable to carry out intensive practices like meditation or rituals a prospect for enlightenment. It did this by promising rebirth in his realm from where enlightenment was guaranteed and all obstacles to it removed if they recited his Name with single-minded devotion. Jōdo Shinshū's founder, Shinran's innovation was in part, to say that as Amida, as the monk Dharmakara, had already made his vows *and achieved them* by becoming Amida, then the vow that declares single minded focus on his name for deliverance was *an act already accomplished*. Thus, we were all destined for Awakening and should instead simply recite the Name in gratitude. No matter how bad our circumstances are, no matter our inability to practice, we are already guaranteed full Awakening in his land. This was the Land of Bliss, a Nirvanic waystation of sorts, where anyone could go and eventually achieve complete awakening. It was a Buddhism of faith, yet, still fully encased within the Mahayana tradition. Its language was both personal and pastoral (a key element in me finding my way to a more humane Buddhism) and the value of the individual prized vs an emphasis on universal

suffering. In keeping with the Christian comparisons, it was for me Protestant/Quaker-analog: warm, friendly, and the place from which I chose formal ordination. I have, since then, found a way to marry all these traditions together, but Shin Buddhism (as Jodo Shinshu is popularly known) was the last great religious expression I pursued, and it affected the course of my life profoundly in its profound down to earthiness and humble acceptance of human limitations (Sakakibara, 1983 and Manshi, 1984, are both excellent introductions to this perspective).

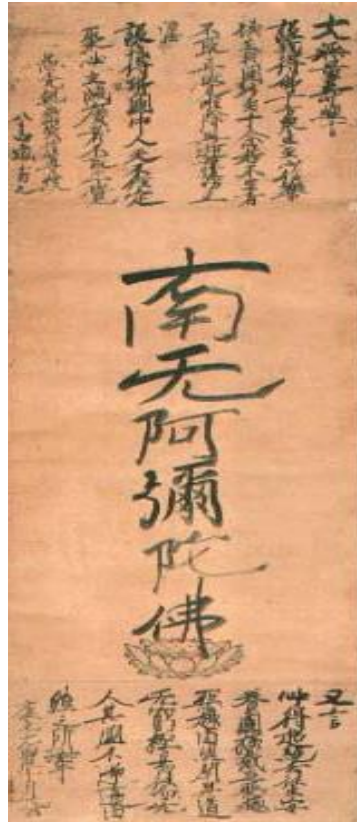


Figure 73: The “Nembutsu” as drawn by the founder of Jodo Shinshu, Shinran

9.2 Engaged Buddhism

The beginnings

I do not remember when I first held a book, but I clearly remember when a book first held me. It was an illustrated edition of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*. I was in the fifth grade and this edition had drawings of the lake he lived on and the woods

surrounding him and the text, while often very difficult, seemed magical to me. It was easy enough to become beguiled by the natural descriptions in his book. But it wasn't that. It was his living a life of contemplation about the things that were most important – and he defined that which was most important as the deep contemplation of life itself. I was so captured by this sentiment, perhaps primed by my father's many talks of his own deep musings at sea and my mother's stories of mystical experiences she'd had as a little girl legally blind and communing with nature in Puerto Rico. I also yearned for the kind of quiet Thoreau had: the quiet of nature in which no airplanes, police sirens, and loud crowds were anywhere nearby. I fantasized about being able to walk in some woods somewhere and reflect on things, alone, to work things out so I could understand them and in so doing, have more power over them than they had over me. But here was a kind of quiet in the presence of an atmosphere conducive to penetrating rumination. I wanted to get away from things, thinking I could easily live alone when I grew up, and yearned for an uncomplicated existence where I was safe and could appreciate the natural world.

This was odd, however. For I had never lived all that close to nature having been raised in New York City and Miami, and I had never been camping nor did I even like the prospect of tenting somewhere or a cabin with spiders and other insects. Still, there was an irresistible appeal deep inside me. It wasn't until I was 35 and living in Boulder, Colorado that I ever spent any real time in the mountains above the bustling little college town that it is. Once there I realized how much I loved the long hikes and the dramatic views down across the valley on one side all the way to Denver and, on the other side, more forests, rising landscapes, and just beyond, the majestic Rocky Mountains. And when I thought back when I was even younger, two (Figures 75 and 76) other images popped up:



Figure 74: The Buddha's "Earth-touching gesture"

This image of the Buddha's enlightenment scene I first encountered around the time I was in high school. It depicts a crucial moment in the Buddha's story; beset by temptation (the three women in the viewer's lower right), by fear (the threatening monsters in skies surrounding him) and violence (the weapons being hurled at him) are all taken in an obvious powerful peace in which his right hand touches the earth (Figure 75) and all that befalls him descends as flowers upon him. The gesture was his response to the demon Mara's challenge to the Buddha to find a suitable witness to this presumptuous struggle of his. Here, the Buddha points (or touches) the Earth to bear witness to not only his struggle to achieve enlightenment, but implicitly, his right to even attempt such a feat is attested to by his very existence on this Earth.

The other image takes place years prior to this great scene (Figure 76). It might even be said to be the moment the Buddha-to-be understood that the way *out* of suffering, was to search *within*.

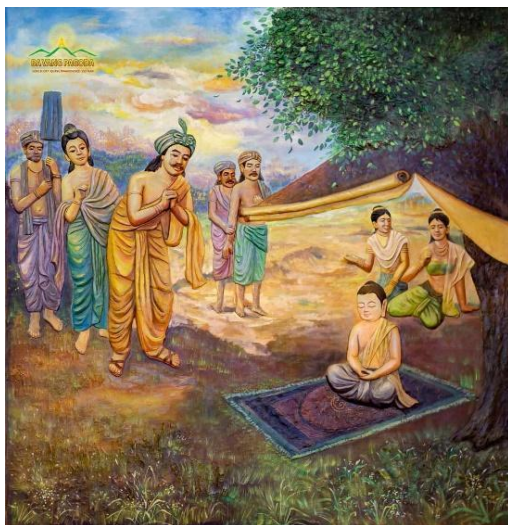


Figure 75: The Buddha as a young prince under the rose-apple tree experiencing the bliss of meditation for the first time

From: <https://en.thaythichtructhaiminh.com/early-life-of-prince-siddhartha-gautama-life-of-budda-part-1-d170.html>

In that story, as a very young Prince, Siddhartha saw the shade of a rose-apple tree and sitting there, entered into a kind of trance, losing all sense of time and feeling an extraordinary peace which he recalled years later while undergoing ascetic practices. From the *Mahjima Nikaya 100*:

‘I recall sitting in the cool shade of the rose-apple tree while my father the Sakyan was off working ... Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered and remained in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected ... Could that be the path to awakening?’ ... Stemming from that memory came the realization: ... ‘That is the path to awakening!’ Mahjima Nikaya, 100, Chs 1-5

Later, as he recalled the memory, he realized that the attempt to gain understanding via painful asceticism was misguided at best, adding pain unto pain. The path of indulgence too was rejected out of hand as leading only to ignorance. Instead, he concluded that quiet, determined contemplation would be a better path and one he intuitively understood as leading to the final Awakening he had long sought for. Once he had experienced this Awakening, he was then known as the Buddha, the “Awakened” or “Enlightened One” and he then spent the next 40 years teaching this path in order to help them.

I was struck by many parts of these images, but certain elements remained more influential than others. For example, the phrase “bliss born of seclusion”, triggered within me a desire to remain alone so that I too might attain some state of perfected quiet, a calmness born from deep inner stability. It also unfortunately solidified a notion very early in my life that only away from people, in seclusion, could I ever attain a measure of quiet and secure safety. That notion changed over the years, I later found more comfort within community than I had in my earlier life, but the deep inclination towards solitude remains.

The other piece was simpler and less amenable to distortion: if I wanted to understand why my suffering (or that of all sentient beings) occurred, then I must inquire within myself, for that is where the ultimate answer to such questions was to be found.

Also, being disturbed by all the suffering around me led me to want to understand it – not in a heady, intellectual way, but in a visceral, complete way that would enable me to overcome it and benefit others in the process.

Thus, two of my pillars, so to speak, Buddhism and activism, were born from the same concerns, to conquer suffering and assist others to do the same, and it led me to a field I hadn’t heard of yet but which was to form a huge part of the rest of my life: Engaged Buddhism, a fusion of the two. Here I began a process of integrating elements that had formed separate pieces of my life into one coherent but dynamic whole: touching the Earth (concern for the planet), inner investigation (via a path of contemplation of suffering and the path of meditation), and then teaching what one has come to understand, to benefit others.

A Buddhism engaged with the world

In 1994, I was still working at Warner Bros. Pictures and preparing to leave a job I had been at for about five years for a complete turn in my life. I had just fought a successful union battle against the company and against my own union and I had won both. I felt at the top of my game and hoped a wider, more successful world awaited me.

But inside, I was not satisfied with that trajectory, ashamed that I had not completed my BA and feeling that my place was elsewhere. In short, I was looking for something more meaningful to do with my life and, most importantly, I didn’t know how to connect my Buddhist identity with that of being an activist. I had long felt a tension between the vociferous advocacy of causes I felt passionate about with the maintenance of a deep inner peace associated with Buddhist practice and which I felt during meditation or visits to Buddhist temples. I had joined the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and received their newsletter, *Turning Wheel*, and occasionally I visited

different local temples. Overall, though, I was extraordinarily busy while at Warner Bros., constantly on the go afterwards at meetings and planning sessions for Latino Writers Group, and I realized that my connection to Buddhism had weakened and needed strengthening.

One afternoon, while having lunch in my office at WB, quite serendipitously I came across an advertisement for a newly created combined BA/MA program in Engaged Buddhism (EB) at The Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) in Boulder, Colorado. I had known about the school since it was founded in 1975. In fact, in another of those events that seem strangely coincidental in my journey, just before leaving Japan in 1988, I had casually recorded in a journal that I might seek out Naropa as it felt like I belonged there and that my life naturally pointed in that direction. I was ecstatic at this possibility facing me just as I was at a major life crossroad, looking for a way across. In 1994, I applied and became the first person accepted into the program, called “the most natural candidate for an engaged Buddhist program we had received” by the program’s chair. Since much of this process was overlapping with the affiliation vote, I had to keep it secret from my union colleagues and when we had finally won, I informed them of my plans and, much to their disappointment, I soon excitedly left Los Angeles in the summer of 1994. I was just shy of 35.

But what is “engaged Buddhism”? The term appears to have originated with the late Vietnamese Zen monk and activist, Thich Nhat Hanh who “coined the term ‘engaged Buddhism’ to describe social and political activism based in Buddhist principles in the 1960s” (Gleig, 2021). Hanh was nominated in 1967 for the Nobel Peace Prize by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who said of him, “I do not know of anyone more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle monk from Vietnam” (Eppsteiner, 1988, p. 78) Thich Nhat Hanh was born in 1926 and died 2022. Bhikkhu Bodhi, a Western monk in the Theravada tradition, referred to Engaged Buddhism as representing “a decisive shift in emphasis...away from the attainment of transcendent liberation or a heavenly rebirth...to the task of transforming the oppressive systemic structures that cause grave suffering for people in this present world of concrete experience” (Bodhi, 2009, p. 15).

My readings in Engaged Buddhism stretched from Western to non-Western writers and several were crucial to my understanding of the concept. A major exemplar of Engaged Buddhism who I was influenced by is Sulak Sivaraksa, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee who was one of my teachers during a course at Naropa. (I was invited to dinner at Dr. Harding’s house where we met with author Sudarshan Kapoor and Sulak Sivaraksa, see Figure 44). Sivaraksa’s book, *Seeds of Peace* (1992) called for blending “two kinds of peace”, the external kind, which “is the freedom from quarreling, violence, and, on the broadest scale, war ... the freedom from fear and

anxiety". And the internal kind characterized by "peace of mind or spiritual peace". Yet at the same time, he says that "it is easy to hate our enemies – the industrialists who exploit us and pollute our atmosphere" while at the same time asking us to still regard humanity as "one human family" (Sivaraksa, 1992, p. 116). I saw the contradictions embedded in his writing, as did he. It made for several long and spirited conversations.

During our time together he struck me as a wonderfully stubborn man, a committed Buddhist whose efforts to reform Thai society frequently put him in danger but who always remained clear-headed and calm. He helped mobilize Thai society according to its own indigenous values, away from Western materialism but also fully committed to traditionally Western democratic principles which landed him in jail but of which he remains staunchly a defender. In his actions and demeanor, I saw someone who could stand tall as a Buddhist in a modern context, not as a monastic, but as a lay leader who could still (Figure 76) translate Buddhist ideals into a vision that was relevant for our time. Key for Sulak, however, was an uncompromising stance against violence, which we argued over as my exposure to the Guatemalans and Zapatistas demonstrated to me, at least, that among some peoples, non-violent responses to their oppression would guarantee their complete elimination as a people. To this day I struggle with such concerns. But he would not budge.



Figure 76: The indomitable Sulak Sivaraksa now

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, author of *Dhammic socialism* (1986) too was an influence and his writings found a way to make "socialism" *dhammic*, i.e. congruent with Buddha teachings, or dhamma/dharma. He said,

If one believes in Buddhism, the spirit of socialism will be one's flesh and blood. One sees fellow human beings as *comrades in dukkha* [emphasis in original], friends in birth, aging, illness, and death. We are comrades in suffering such that we can't sit and watch (p. 170).

One didn't see many Buddhists who used the word "socialism" so often, much less so positively, but it struck a sympathetic chord with me and when HH the Dalai Lama said the following in 2011, I felt that maybe there was a way to reconcile some of the disparate orientations that made my version of Engaged Buddhism such as it was:

Of all the modern economic theories, the economic system of Marxism is founded on moral principles, while capitalism is concerned only with gain and profitability. Marxism is concerned with the distribution of wealth on an equal basis and the equitable utilization of the means of production. It is also concerned with the fate of the working classes—that is, the majority—as well as with the fate of those who are underprivileged and in need, and Marxism cares about the victims of minority-imposed exploitation. For those reasons the system appeals to me, and it seems fair (cited by Halliwell, 2011).

When I first arrived at Naropa in 1994, I was often held as an exemplar of an Engaged Buddhist due to my work as labor leader, advocate for Latino rights, and defender of indigenous opposition to colonial domination and patterns of ethnic cleansing. I briefly thought I should continue my previous leadership skills by becoming the head of the Denver Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) but that only lasted one semester as my *raison d'être* for going to Naropa was not to capitalize on past ideas of activism (that only got me into the program) but to learn new ways to marry these two important pillars which held up my life and which I felt needing melding, activism and Buddhism.

Yet, even while at Naropa, thriving in the new intellectual tradition of EB which I was exploring, I was often questioning its practical efficacy. Perhaps more clearly, I was questioning the premises of EB. Was it really possible to become so beneficent that our enemies are viewed with the same equanimous kindness as friends and still believe one was rectifying rather than reifying the ills that sustain oppressive relations in our world? I questioned the higher moral position of non-violence as occasionally impractical. For example, I had worked with Guatemalan veterans of the UNRG, the guerilla movement that had fought so bravely against forces supported by the United States government and coffee producers eager to displace them off their rich, arable lands. Had they not fought back, they would have sustained even greater losses than the estimated 200,000+ predominantly Mayan peasants who perished in that struggle (Harbury, 1994). To help attorney and activist Jennifer Harbury, locate her husband,

Everardo, (a guerilla leader and subject of *Bridge of Courage: Life stories of the Guatemalan compañeros and compañeras* and later, *Searching for Everardo* (1997) I assembled a team of activists and interested people to get her story publicized. I saw firsthand the terror and despair in the eyes of the survivors she had brought to the studio. (Sadly, her husband was not one of them. Unbeknown to her, he had already been brutally tortured and disfigured, before being executed, without having given any names of his compatriots to the security forces—informants paid by the CIA it was later revealed—demanded from him.) I had also worked with the related groups of Zapatistas in southern Mexico who, had they not resisted, would have been consigned to history books, completely wiped off the face of the earth from their traditional homelands in the Lacandon forest regions of southern Mexico. I saw that self-defensive violence stopped genocide and was only ever undertaken by desperate, poorer, and marginalized peoples as a last resort. I struggled within over my commitment to a Buddhism whose moral vision I believed in, and an equally passionate commitment to the oppressed anywhere. And I regularly saw that sometimes, the choice to fight back with violence was the wiser one.

Years later I continued to wrestle with this movement I belonged to but whose parameters were so severely divided down through my own heart – one part knowing the Buddhist call for nonviolence as sensible and believing it morally superior, the other part knowing the depravity and violence of resource hungry governments would never accede to polite demands nor back down from embarrassment and who instead chose death and genocidal policies against whoever got in their way. I was torn because my heart understood both sides of this dilemma and I had no tidy way to resolve the conflict. But it was not just violence and the Buddhist position on it that disturbed me. In *Buddhism's non-preferential problem* (Tirado, 2018) I asked about Western Buddhism's lack of an analogous "preferential option for the poor" by saying,

From the Salvation Army to Liberation Theology. From the Catholic Worker to the Red Cross, the notion that Christians must reach out to those who are hungry, poor, in distress, and homeless, the marginalized or those wounded on the battlefield has been a major part of Christianity's history... its successes in relief work and in outreach to the marginalized is historically well known and properly lauded.

When it comes to this notion of preferences, in Buddhism, by contrast, *upekkha* or equanimity, as one of Buddhism's Four Immeasurables⁶⁵, is emphasized, which not only encompasses the individual non-preference for good or bad, fame or shame, rich or poor, but the Dharma's profound vastness which explains the nature of things-as-they-are holding all phenomenal existence to be a compounded formulation akin to a dream, and the objects within that sort of dream, to be taken as ephemeral and thus, of little ultimate consequence.

Though perhaps a bit harsh, I felt that the parts of the Western Buddhist community I had seen or belonged to all lacked a consistent vision around helping others in more worldly arenas and this I blamed its by and large wealthy patrons for whom "mindfulness" and merchandise seemed to me to matter more. I asked,

Why is it that we think feeding the homeless, ending racism, or poverty in our local communities' somehow too difficult, but we say we are committed to saving all sentient beings daily without irony? ... I actually think we know the answers to these questions. Because simply put, Buddhism appeals more to the wealthier classes in the West from whom it gives a pass on issues of social justice.

I was also inspired by noble attempts to present Buddhism as relevant to our time in such works as Robert Thurman's *Inner Revolution* (1998) where he spoke of the Buddha as someone who "taught the need for freedom from belief systems in order to develop the power of critical wisdom...". In possibly its most relevant to this work excerpt, Thurman adds,

He [the Buddha] taught the relativity of social structures and the supremacy of the individual's right to freedom. And he taught that the scientific understanding of reality leads to effective ethical behavior. His was *an educational movement* [emphasis added] affecting not only individuals but whole cultures, entire systems of thinking and living (p. 59).

I read Thurman and became excited at this kind of talk. I had never been exposed to such an assessment of Buddhist teachings and I was ready to hear how it might play

⁶⁵ The *Four Brahmaviharas* or, Immeasurables (literally, "Abodes of Brahma", or "Divine Abodes") are: 1., *Metta* (Love); 2., *Karuna* (Compassion); 3., *Mudita* (Sympathetic Joy); and 4., *Upekkha* (Equanimity) and are called "divine abodes" "because they are the mindstates in which all the enlightened ones reside" (<https://www.lionsroar.com/what-are-the-four-brahmaviharas/>)

out in our modern world facing some distinctly modern crises such as alienation, technological advances that serve more to distract us than educate us, and a growing unease about our collective future due to climate change.

It was Joanna Macy's *World As Lover, World As Self* (1991) that crystallized my thinking on these matters as being part of a larger system and that Buddhist ideas about interdependence, the teachings of *pratīca-samutpada* or Dependent Origination, could be applied to the entire range of my questions. Politics and the environment, poverty, and social action, working quietly on myself and being involved with family and the day-to-day needs of someone working, all these *were* connected and somehow needed to be seen as working together. I didn't know how, but she was providing me with some guidelines. She spoke eloquently of the ways the natural environment was a living totality, responsive to the needs of its parts but living within an equilibrium which sustained the whole. I could not seek an imbalanced response to the world's ills but should take into account all the dimensions in which I lived and acted, the personal as well as the political. The way she approached this task using the language of deep ecology lit up for me the possibility that some kind of integration might be possible for me.

Once while at Naropa, I attended a lecture by a visiting teacher who had herself been recently made a Rōshi, or Zen Master: Joan Halifax. Joan was starting the Living and Dying Project, a Zen training program for working with dying people. We had a wonderful set of conversations and when she heard I was studying to become a chaplain she asked me all about the CPE program I was in and what I planned on doing afterwards, obliquely suggesting I go work with her project in New Mexico. I was tempted then and there to go to New Mexico where, years before, I had done retreats with Sasaki Rōshi but unfortunately, that was not to be.

However, I was searching for a template that would assist me in taking my own life and work and contextualize it within a framework I thought already existed. It did not. There were many debates on this topic going on, for example, whether EB should reflect a more secular vision though tied to one of the larger Buddhist traditions such as Trungpa Rinpoche's view of *Shambhala* and an "enlightened society", or a new form created for specific purposes such as the *Zen Peacemaker Order*, founded by Zen teacher Bernard Glassman, Rōshi. But where the relevance of Buddhism to activism took a clearer focus for me was when I read Kenneth Kraft's *The Wheel of Engaged Buddhism: A New Map of the Path* (1999) (Figure 78). There he used the form of the wheel which is a traditional Buddhist pedagogical tool. Kraft created two wheels which highlighted the *fields* of Engaged Buddhist practice, and the *modes* of practice. The first, *fields of practice*, begins with cultivation of awareness in one's daily life and extends outward to caring for or relating to the earth, family, politics, and others; and the second, *modes of practice*, begins with our moving into the world feeling at ease

amid activity, extending compassionate action, exploring new terrain, and finally, spreading joy in all directions. I found this map of synthesizing the different ways we use Buddhist wisdom in the various domains we live in our world to be of immense value. In rediscovering Kraft's maps for this project I did, however, wonder about one key arena missing which was relevant to my work. Education.

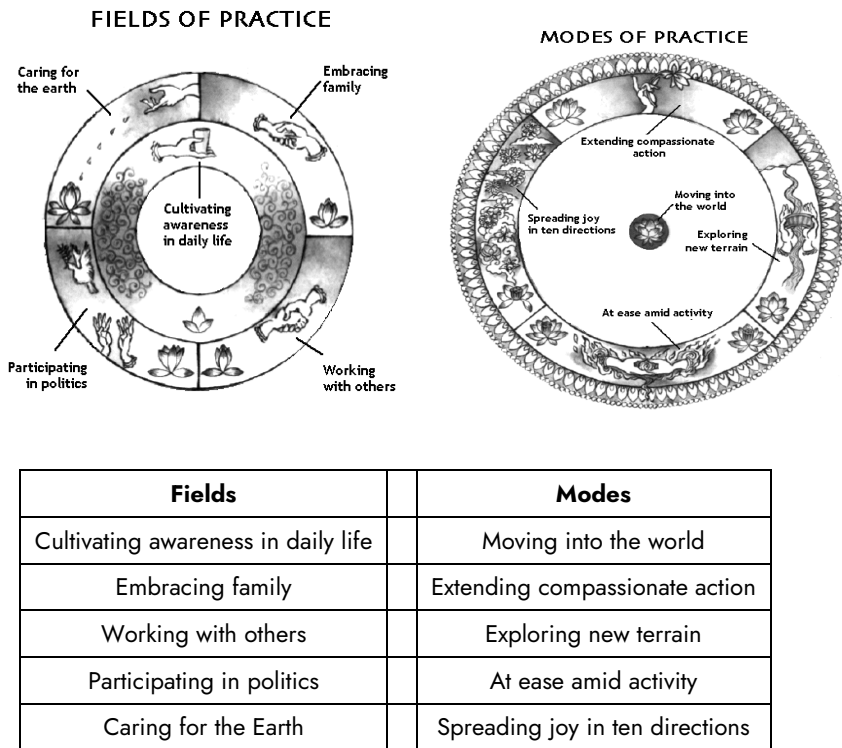


Figure 77: The wheel of engaged Buddhism⁶⁶: *Fields of practice* and *modes of practice*

9.3 Buddhism, education, and learning

Is there a particular Buddhist understanding of education, or a Buddhist way of learning? If so, how does it work traditionally and how would it be relevant and applicable to us now in the West? A distinctly specific-to-Buddhist education is a topic far too large for this work as the various culturally specific education systems

⁶⁶ From: <https://dharma.net.org/coursesM/32/wheelmod1.htm>

This model is taken from Kraft, (1999), *The wheel of engaged Buddhism: A new map of the path*, Weatherhill.

throughout the Buddhist world have differed from each other in so many ways as to render a brief summation almost impossible. Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan, etc., school systems are all influenced by Buddhist values, but they have been likewise influenced by historical circumstances unique to each nation as well as advances in technology and imported Western notions of formal education so that each are reflections of a composite of complex influences.

Here I would like to briefly examine a few concepts from several different Buddhist orientations to point out that the Buddhist approach to education/learning is primarily seen as a *process towards awakening* so that individual transformation occurs, and *wisdom* and *compassion* then manifest outwardly. This conception of education/learning has analogs across the spectrum of Buddhist cultures and, as its purpose is to create conditions for which the individual comes to “sees-things-as-they-really-are” (*yatha bhutam*), it is clearly *educational*. I will also give some examples of teaching episodes from several different Buddhist traditions.

A Buddhist pedagogy?

While Merriam-Websters Dictionary defines pedagogy as “the art, science, or profession of teaching”⁶⁷, Britannica goes a little further in describing it as “the study of teaching methods, including the ways in which such goals may be achieved”⁶⁸. A more detailed definition is offered by the Oxford University’s *A Dictionary of Education* (2008) which defines pedagogy as

Teaching, as a professional practice and as a field of academic study. It encompasses not only the practical application of teaching, or pedagogic skills, but also curriculum issues and the body of theory relating to how and why learning takes place (p. 219).

I would suggest there are two issues to consider here regarding the notion of Buddhist pedagogy. These are firstly, how Buddhism has been imparted over the course of its 2000+ year history as a spiritual tradition of liberation from suffering, and secondly, how Buddhism is or has been used within educational systems or institutions and how their distinctive pedagogies are similar to or differ from non-Buddhist influenced pedagogies. My focus here is on several short but instructive examples from a few different Buddhist cultural traditions and then a look at several modern examples in the West, including my alma mater, Naropa University.

⁶⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pedagogy>

⁶⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/science/pedagogy>

Some traditional models of Buddhist pedagogy

In Japanese, “to learn” is reflected in the Sino-Japanese ideograph *narau*: 習う. This character is composed of two distinct spheres, or “radicals”, an upper and a lower one, with the topmost radical a flattened form of the character for (bird) “feathers” and the bottom one, a slightly truncated version of the character for “100”. In this etymological interpretation, the concept suggests “a bird learns to fly by flapping its wings 100 times”, that is, learning is an active process in which the application of effort itself represents the learning dynamic. To *try* to learn *is* learning and repeatedly performing that action actualizes what the specific effort is directed towards. Here a bird can only “learn to fly” by actually attempting to fly – no amount of theorizing can make this action possible. I always felt this comported quite nicely with several elements of Buddhist teachings: the faith in the *individual's self-effort* towards awakening, as well as the recognition of the *collectively* inherent potential for everyone to achieve such awakening.

In Tibetan Buddhism there is a general use of what is called “three trainings in wisdom” that detail the optimal process of learning: “*srutamayiprajna* wisdom generated through learning (listening and studying); *cintamayiprajna*, wisdom generated through reflection (or contemplation); *bhavanamayiprajna*, wisdom generated through meditation (and application), or study, contemplation, and meditation” (Buswell and Lopez, 2014). While “*prajna*” refers to wisdom or knowledge, it is the prefixes that are most relevant here. For the first, *sruta-* means *to hear*, thus it is a passive process of making oneself receptive to that which is being taught or given. The second is *cintamayi-* and refers to the wisdom gained *by thinking* about something. But the last one, *bhavana-* is a bit more complex as the word means “*cultivation*” and like in the Japanese example given above, this is an active process of doing something with some regularity in order to foster a thing or quality, such as in growing a plant we *cultivate* the garden. Thus cultivation, the highest form of learning, is here linked with an active dynamic of doing.

For Hsuan Hua, a Chinese Ch’an master, Buddhist education

seeks for the liberation of human potential through the study and understanding of the mind and all its states ... [whose aim] is to animate the intrinsic wisdom and nurture the seeds of compassion in each individual ... providing them the tools with which they gain self-knowledge and activate their own inherent potential... Such education properly conducted does not indoctrinate, but simply disentangles; it enables one to see through and remove the ignorance obscuring wholesome inborn qualities (Verhoeven, 2022 ¶
<https://www.drbu.edu/news/what-is-a-buddhist-education/>).

Again, we see this metaphor of growing as well as the sense that *inherent within the individual is an innate capacity to develop*. But this is not solely in service to one's own understanding for "[t]he Buddhist-educated person...demonstrates an unflagging commitment to work for the betterment of humanity" (Verhoeven, 2022, ¶3). Learning is thus connected to helping others learn, to teaching, in short.

For Johnson (2002), Buddhist education provides a link to qualities necessary for lifelong learning, e.g., "the continuation of conscious learning throughout the lifespan" because practices such as Buddhist meditation and contemplation allow us to experience life "more fully and consciously experienced" (p. 110).

Lastly, a story from the Buddhist tradition of Kisa Gotami may encapsulate this last perspective best. Kisa Gotami was a woman who had suffered much in life and who, finally managing to find some happiness, suddenly lost her husband and baby in a flood. Despondent, she carried the corpse of her baby everywhere muttering how sick it was. This tragic scene prompted villagers to suggest she approach the Buddha who was nearby whereupon, at the prospect of finding someone who could restore her happiness she livened up and approaching him asked if he could help. He said he could - but only if she brought back one mustard seed from a household that had not experienced death. From house to house she went desperately begging for a single mustard seed which was always available but, when she heard that someone, a husband, father, relative, etc., had died, she left until after repeatedly receiving the same response she awakened to the inevitability of death and gave her baby for cremation. In this story, the Buddha compassionately gave her a task to perform but her discovery, her awakening was her own, activated by the Buddha's skillfully crafted task.

The way the Buddha taught included explications on consciousness, the giving out of ethical and moral prescriptions, practical mental exercises such as meditation to foster inner growth, and in answering the questions set to him by his fellow monastics as well as the people who came to him for advice. But, as in the Kisa Gotami story above, the use of parables was an extremely useful and oft-used technique for trusting the listener to inductively come to a conclusion on their own. This comports well with the Buddha's exhortation to "be like a lamp unto yourselves" and the emphasis on trusting one's inner understanding rather than accepting something on the basis of authority, for example. In fact, in the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha told his questioners to not rely upon the authority of teachings by tradition, dogma, personal opinion, trusted authorities (experts), etc. but instead to carefully weigh whether, "[t]hese things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; [and that if] undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," [and only then]

enter on and abide in them.'" (*Kalama Sutta* 1994 <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>).

In Mahayana Buddhism, the parables contained within the Lotus Sutra are among the most widely known including the "burning cart" and the "hidden jewel" (the latter will be spoken of more later on in this document). In Zen, episodes or stories of teachers with their students, known as *kōans*, (公案), literally, "public case", took on the form of pedagogical techniques designed to create a state of confusion, requiring a suspension of typical ratiocinative calculation and instead, a transformative inner event which could then be offered as an answer or explanation that would erupt from a place of deeper understanding than that available through logic or deductive analysis.

The Buddhist pedagogical approach then includes this use of stories which are to be considered differently than a typical tall tale or problem to be solved, and which must instead appeal to an inner knowing, an inherent wisdom which can be appealed to and then arises within the learner. The teacher, then, is a mere interlocutor, an inspiration for the release of wisdom which is contained within each individual as part of their own buddhanature.

Buddhist pedagogical practices in action

As mentioned above in *A Buddhist pedagogy?* I believe there are two important dimensions to the question of whether there is a Buddhist pedagogy and, if so, what must it entail? First, there are the pedagogical aspects of Buddhism embodied in its overtly religious presentation such as what we might commonly call "preaching". This refers to how the Buddha became an exemplar of a particular way of teaching his spiritual discoveries and how generations after him took from that and expanded it to accommodate differing social, cultural, and temporal audiences. For example, an audience from northern India/Nepal 2600 years ago would probably respond differently to a presentation of suffering and its causes than someone from more modern times in the West. Thus, the ways *Buddhism* was taught have differed through the years as well as receive different emphases according to place.

Secondly, there are aspects of Buddhism which have, through the years been seen as the equivalent to what we might consider "character education", designed to foster good citizens or regarded as proper tools for maintaining a common society and these differences have influenced the school curricula throughout large swathes of Asia which differ widely from each other such as Nepal, Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam, to name but a few of the places where Buddhism took root and influenced local societies.

I have provided some examples of the first meaning of Buddhist pedagogy throughout this dissertation. The story of Kisa Gotami, for example, reflects a compassionate concern for a grieving mother mourning the loss of her child but still respectful of her ability to come to a comprehension of her plight on her own. This was informed by a Buddhist perspective that each individual possesses within them the capability of realizing even the highest Truth, including discerning the ubiquity of suffering and necessity of acknowledging its universality. Another story I feel emblematic of this approach lies in an early story from the Mahavagga, called *The monk with dysentery*. The Buddha came across a monk who had severe dysentery and yet was receiving no care. Chastising the community for treating a member of the community as if they had no worth simply because of that person's woeful condition, that is, they were no longer of use to the community as they were rendered unproductive members of their society, the Buddha himself cared for the monk and taught that "Monks, you have no mother, you have no father, who might tend to you. If you don't tend to one another, who then will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me, should tend to the sick." (Kucchivikara-vatthu, 1997). Lastly, when the Buddha was questioned as to who or what he was given that he appeared so different from other teachers and regular people he simply said, "I am Awake". These three examples represent what I once called the "Three Pillars of Buddhist Pastoral Care", the title of a paper I wrote during my chaplaincy residency in Wisconsin. These three pillars consisted of 1, "to compassionately look after others", 2., "to give the Dharma/Truth", and 3., "to practice, or embody Dharma/Truth in our lives" (Tirado, 1998).

But how does such a philosophy, such a teaching translate into normative academic settings? Storch (2015) has provided an interesting examination of four institutions of higher education founded upon and inclusive of Buddhist practices and using Buddhist pedagogical practices. Four schools were looked at: *University of the West* in Rosemead, California was founded in 1991 by Xingyun, a Taiwanese monk and member of the Chinese Humanistic Buddhism tradition (p. 4); *Dharma Realm Buddhist University* in Ukiah, California was founded by Xuan Hua in 1976. He was a Chinese monk who "believed in a multi-faith approach to the problems which humanity was facing" (p. 31). *Naropa University* (formerly The Naropa Institute) in Boulder, Colorado was founded in 1974 by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher and lineage holder in both the Nyingma and Kagyu schools of Tibetan Buddhism; and finally, *Soka University of America*, associated with the lay Nichiren Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai International (SGI-USA) and inspired by Daisaku Ikeda, was founded in 1995 in Orange County California. It "emphasizes the importance of liberal arts and humanities" (Storch, p. 72) and yet does not offer courses in Buddhism after a professor alleged religious discrimination "against faculty not associated with SGI" (Storch, p. 70).

In an interview with Richard Payne, Dean of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Storch quotes Payne as listing four principles upon which are part of his school's philosophy and which "can be applied to Buddhist-based education elsewhere" (Storch, p. 82). These principles are

Education is a process of mutual growth so that ultimately, there is neither student nor teacher [and] education is a mutual growth in wisdom and compassion...

Education is the exercise of mutual growth grounded in the teachings of the absence of any permanent self, or ego; and interconnectedness of all life as the main guiding principle...

Education, essentially, is a reformation of one's character, which advances only when change comes about in one's behavior and attitudes...

Education is a long process. It brings people from a state of suffering and frustration to an awakening from greed, hatred, and ignorance [the three poisons] ... (Storch, p. 82).

Storch then reclassifies these as "1. mindfulness, 2., interconnectedness of all life, and 3. Right motivation for giving and receiving education" (p. 83). At Naropa, each student was required to either practice Buddhist meditation or engage in some other recognized contemplative practice. Most chose Buddhist meditation as that was one of the main draws to the school. Each student then is assigned a Meditation Instructor whose purpose was to guide the student through the formal stages of shamatha-vipashyana, the twinned and most elemental of meditation practices in the Tibetan Buddhist meditation system. All buildings had a small meditation room where students could go to or they could sit in the main Meditation Hall in the main building. During "Sitting Weeks" classes were canceled, and we were to sit in meditation for the same number of hours that we would have had class. Journals were then kept and submitted to the meditation instructors. It was believed that ongoing contemplative practice would ground the more theoretical teachings and grant us exposure to the inner dynamics that a monastic might undergo. The principles of interconnectedness were spoken of often quite eloquently in most courses but on a practical level this included the relationship of courses to each other. Each track, language, Engaged Buddhism, etc., had connecting courses in the other tracks as well as a relationship to general courses that interlocked with each other. This was not always easy (nor, admittedly, always clear) but it was a regular part of Naropa life to be told how we were practicing interconnectedness throughout our academic journey. This also included trash collection, recycling, and our behavior to the school environment. Lastly, Storch speaks of "students, administration, staff, and faculty at Buddhist-based universities understand that helping other people requires compassion" (p. 100). I found that the

Naropa environment cultivated a sensitive regard to all our community members at all levels. Not only classes, but departmental, and student club or association meetings all began and ended with a bow and there always seemed to me to be a warm attempt to address conflict reasonably and with respect for all parties.

These may not be considered dramatic examples of Buddhist-influenced pedagogical practices but they are fairly emblematic of the different ethos which permeates these institutions.

10 Review & reflection

“Let’s all walk each other home” – Ram Dass

In this closing chapter, now that I have first identified the three pillars supporting my life stories and how they influenced me, and secondly, come to an understanding of my theory of myself as an educator, I will return to the story of my life. This close-up look at these formative periods and the mentoring from which I benefitted then moves into the identification of important issues that emerged and were resolved, or which emerged and have yet to be resolved.

Having dissected the development of my life chronologically, I will now link that narrative with the forces that pulled me in different directions, and which required integration. Key themes emerged which I look at as they moved closer together, coalescing into a stable yet fluid unity.

I will close with a call for a more holistic education, incorporating the impact of the three pillars of Buddhism, psychology, and activism on my understanding of education for myself and as an invitation to others.

10.1 Reflecting on the study’s origins and themes

The theme of “love”

The movement from documenting personal transformation and the recognition of the vital role the affective dimension plays in education, to revealing the process that has led me to the field of education, is the foundational narrative of the study. This process revealed a thread throughout the stories: that my most fundamental drive within education is not one of liberation, or even learning, but *of love*. What I mean by “love” is perhaps closer to Noddings’ “care” (2013) – a double dynamic of deep attentiveness to the other, accompanied by an absorbed involvement and desire to assist in the other’s needs. This two-pronged process permeated all the relationships between my mentors and me, first by granting me an unusually comprehensive focus, and then cultivating a regard for me that lasted through whatever crisis I experienced. They stayed until I could move on. In Buddhism, love and compassion are often

separated: love (*metta*) refers to our desire for others to be happy; compassion (*karuna*) is our desire (and actions) to remove the other's suffering. Taken together, this is what I feel Noddings means by "care".

The humanistic drive to assist others in becoming whole, in becoming more human, is reflected both in those mentors who nurtured me at crucial points in my life, and in the many choices I took to reach this place. Motivated by the same concerns for others, I found that the transformations I had been documenting were my own transformative experiences and that therefore, the block at integrating all the theoretical material with the ISE study was caused partly by not looking at that directly.

The theme of the affective dimension of education

I changed my gaze - and discovered that part of what causes authentic transformation is this *affective dimension of education* (ADOE). And it was the rediscovery of the work of educator and author, Parker Palmer (as well as philosopher of education Nel Noddings, and others) which, in part, led me to this position. I needed a way to record and analyze my own story and experiences. Humanistic theories about the importance of recognizing this dimension and their implicit importance in the education process were mentioned.

In "The map" (*Maps, Mandalas, and Matrices*), I united the two main descriptors of *educator* and *activist* into "*activator*." This is who I am, an activator of others, one who combines education and activism and embodies them in a strategy designed to positively affect individuals and the larger world and who views this work as spiritually inspired.

The theme of life as theory-making

Grasping for an overarching theory that could unify the three separate intellectual strands of my life dominated the initial stage of research. I floundered in this ambitious attempt until the realization came that their unification (or synthesis) was not to be found in some theory that I had developed over the years, but *in the very life I had lived*.

It was an epistemological revelation that initiated the complete rethinking of the doctoral work. Given my record of seizing opportunities to teach and learn it seemed appropriate to triple the challenge: 1. To take on education as a new area of *intellectual study*, 2. To use the chance to research myself as the "subject" of the planned study, and 3. To develop and become skilled in a new methodology: autoethnography, which features me as the subject.

The use and importance of visual representations

One noticeable part of this work is the frequent insertion of visual representations. In order to count just how many, I created a list:

- 83 figures (60 photos, 23 models or graphs taken from books or made by me)
- 4 tables
- 7 textboxes

Plus, a frontispiece photo collage ... all in just over 300 pages and over 100,000 words.

I think to myself, "This isn't a normal dissertation".

It should be clear from those numbers that visual representations are an important part of this story. But why? Why were so many images included – photos of family, friends, events, famous people, Tibetan thangkas, religious artworks from several Buddhist traditions, diagrams of childhood dynamics, psychological "maps" attempting to describe who I am, all showcased in over 300 pages of biographical material and its interpretations from several theoretical angles?

This isn't a normal dissertation.

Ironically, despite their large number, I initially did not consult research materials on the use of photos or other visual representations for this dissertation. I never considered that they might have any more significance than simply being additions to the written text. The work on the dissertation began by assembling stories from the different periods of my life and then carefully extracting the themes or events that were of greatest significance in order to document them properly. Gradually the first pictures were included to simply show, rather than tell, the reader what I was doing at a particular time or what the context was for a particular anecdote (my father on the tugboat, for example). The tables and textboxes too were similarly added to give something extra to the narrative text.

As I progressed, however, I began to see that the story I was telling seemed to demand more from me that I needed to show who this or that person was to enrich the tale. I remembered something I had learned at Warner Bros.: if one goes to a movie theater and closes one's eyes during the showing of the movie, the experience is little different than listening to a radio play. Yet if one opens the eyes but turns the sound down, something else happens – one is still watching the movie. This metaphor was used to emphasize the importance of the director and how a movie was predominantly a visual medium.

A dissertation, by contrast, is, in general, is a word medium, usually filled with carefully laid out attempts to demonstrate this or that assertion and offer value of those assertions as deserving examination and academic recognition.

Autoethnography is somewhat different, using the stories people tell about particular cultures to demonstrate the inherent worth and academic significance of those cultures in ways that are often differently presented and even differently assessed. Something about words drives me: great poetry, beautiful speeches, the words of great playwrights, even screenplays, for example. My ease with words began early and the voluminous amounts I read over the years reinforced that capability. But underneath that is, I believe, an often-unacknowledged yearning to “see” meaning differently conveyed. The Map (Figure 61) was my first attempt to share who I was in a visual form, and it triggered this evolving desire to find newer and perhaps better ways to do that (the entire Maps, Mandalas, and Matrices section speaks to this).

Autoethnography emerged out of the “cultural turn” that happened in the 1970s when “many social scientists understood social processes, social identities, and social change and conflict” as coming out of the culture they were embodied and encased within (Rose, 2007, p. 1). The study of cultural artifacts in such autoethnographies, and visual representations such as photographs, began to take greater importance. This was partly because “the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies” (p. 2).

In the case of this dissertation, the photographs included represent what Rose (2007) calls a “supplemental” method because “the specific qualities of photos are allowed to display themselves rather more on their own terms, thus acting as a visual supplement of the researcher” (Rose, p. 239). The photos are used, in part, to “affirm the veracity” of the text (p. 247), by being “specified generalizations” which make my stories more “believable” (pp. 246-247). Understanding visual representations involves three modalities according to Rose: “technical modality, compositional modality, and social modality” (Owby, 2013, p. 7). The first refers to the various tools or technologies which stretch from paint brushes to “photo-blogs on the Internet”. Compositional modalities refer to “image design, such as color, positive-negative space” etc. But the social modality refers to the “plane where connotation resides” (Owby, p. 7) which Rose describes as “the social, economic, political and instructional practices and relations that produce, saturate and interpret an image” (Rose, 2007, p. 258).

While my use of visual representations might have begun as an almost parenthetical afterthought, it became clear as I continued that their supplemental utility was something more deeply embedded in my memory than I had understood. Here I will offer a few reflexive examples that highlight their importance.

While I have never taken many photos nor created much visual art, I have made only two collages in my life, and this is significant for the present work. And one story related to the very first collage may be the key here.

As a Chaplain Supervisor in San Francisco, I was required to undergo at least one short period of psychotherapy. I worked with the late Dr. Elizabeth Fischer Targ, niece of chess champion Bobby Fischer and daughter of Russell Targ, a pioneer in the US-Soviet era ESP experiments and remote viewing. Elisabeth and I both worked at the Institute for Health and Healing (IHH) at California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) in San Francisco. CPMC had a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program at the hospital and IHH was trying to integrate spiritual care into an innovative organization that brought healers of different traditions and modalities under one roof for research and practical application. These different modalities included massage therapy, acupuncture, and CPE's chaplaincy program as spiritual care.

Elisabeth was a tall, lovely, caring and incisive person but still a nuts-and-bolts psychiatrist with a fascination with how people's intentions affected health, in a word, prayer. That was her research focus at the time, but she also had therapy sessions for the public and IHH staff. During one session Elisabeth asked me to bring a number of photographs which I would use to create a spontaneous collage. I remember the day clearly and the configuration I created which had my step-daughter and partner at the center, next were my family, then my chaplaincy students, pictures of political figures representing my commitments to different causes, various friends, and then some abstract photos of the planets or stars or Buddhist figures representing my cosmological beliefs. In one far corner I put my seven-year-old picture of me (Figure 20). When Elisabeth asked about this, I said I thought it meant I was looking down at everything. She then took the seven-year old me and moved it to the center of the collage asking me how this felt? "No ", I said, "it doesn't work ... It feels weird". She looked at me deeply, carefully assessing my words and I got the distinct impression she felt it was me hiding myself away, diminishing myself for some unexplained reason.

Cut to today and the dissertation presented here, and again, I thought I might open the document with a collage. I hurriedly grabbed a number of pictures I'd included already in the document and, without giving it much thought, created the image now seen below (Frontispiece, p. ii).

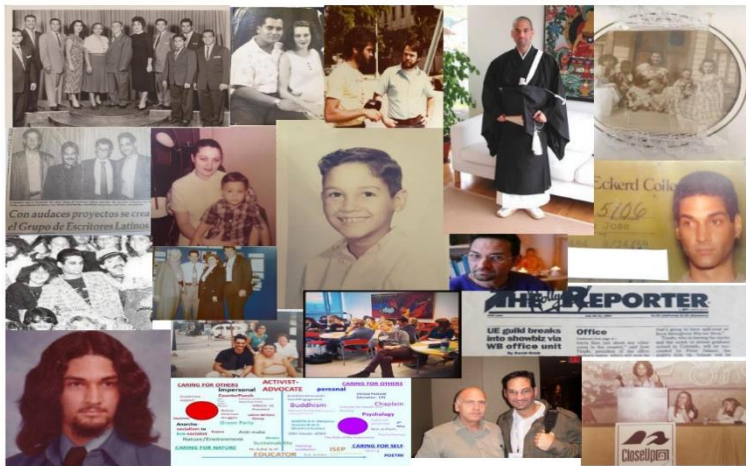


Figure 78: In the middle of my own life: Frontispiece

When I was finished, I noticed something odd. I had placed that very same photo of me at age seven squarely in the middle. What did that mean? Was I saying that all these people and events now surrounded and encased me? Was I saying that I was now the most important area of study? I don't know. But the differences in the collages (again, the only two I have ever done) remain striking.

But there was more going on with the pictures. Much more.

Over this 20+ year gap the only two collages I have ever created, which were so ostensibly different, contained a very enlightening, common component: the placement of me: in the first one on the outskirts of my life, and in the second, in the center of my life. Similar to the main figure in a Buddhist thangka painting (Figure 60). This seemed significant. But then I began to look at the other photos I had used here, along with some I'd gotten from my sister, attempting to look at them differently, to see if there was some other element within them that I had not noticed before and if their choice of inclusion reflected some lesser dynamics I had not considered during the composition of the work.

I noticed that the pictures of my mother's family (Figures 9 and 10) were casual in nature, depicting "country people" who seemed simple and humble while those of my father's family (Figures 13, 18, and 19) were posed and formal, with the latter two photos describing their subjects as "glamorous".

In Figure 30, I am seen speaking while a bearded man, a famous activist whom I had gone to see who was leading the anti-nuke protest I attended, appears to be intently listening to me, not the other way around as might be expected.

At the Close-Up trip I took in high school, I am seen (Figure 24) behind a microphone, as if I am giving a political speech with the others gathered on the stage looking at me. In similar fashion, in my high school yearbook photo of the club I was “Ambassador” of (Figure 27) I am the recipient of some affectionate and supportive looks from two of the club members.

My use of Maps as a way to visually demonstrate who I am as well mirrored how Buddhism over the years used art as stories. In Buddhist art, particularly its earliest stages, the images convey the stories, often with incredibly detailed teachings embedded.

It was only after completion of the dissertation, that I realized how I had used all these images and models to convey a sense of competence, demonstrating the same capability and nascent leadership qualities I had written about.

If we all matter as I believe and say in this work several times, as students as well as teachers, then perhaps my inclusion of the photos and “maps” is a way of reinforcing this to the reader, that I matter, that my stories are worth recording for posterity and that engaging the reader with these particular visual representations strengthens the implicit argument that this is a life worth noting.

10.2 The Great Pivot

The theme of Chaplaincy as the door to holistic integration

One could say that my life has been a series of cases worthy of examination. My life stories combine the pillars in different ways, and each have had their own unique impact. In this section, I have selected CPE because it was there in my chaplaincy education that I discovered an alternative way for me to live as a Buddhist; it was in chaplaincy that my humanistic psychology training unofficially began.

Chaplaincy was the connector to fields I had devoted my life to, the bridge which brought together theoretical Buddhism with real engagement, a doorway linking psychology and activism to Buddhism as well. As part of the graduation requirements for the MA in Engaged Buddhism at Naropa, each student had to complete an internship at some local social service agency or other facility that worked with an underprivileged or underserved population. I had chosen to do mine at a Native American reservation. Unfortunately, this arrangement was canceled shortly before I was to begin. Instead, talks were underway to enroll EB students in a Clinical Pastoral Program at Fort Logan which lay eight miles southwest of Denver and have our practice hours done more locally at Boulder Community Hospital. When told of this

option, I was disappointed and disgruntled about it, recording in my journal my initial response as “no hand-holding chaplain here”.

Nevertheless, I remained open to the possibility that I could learn something useful, in particular, on working with the dying which I felt was a “specialty” of Buddhism. Works on the topic of Buddhist notions of death and dying were popular around this time (Sogyal, 1994, Longaker, 1998, Kapleau, 1998) and I thought that Buddhist ideas about death could offer the West valuable tools for assisting in the process of dying. What I hadn’t anticipated was discovering that intellectualizing one’s spiritual ideas was not only a decidedly unhelpful strategy in the chaplaincy field, but it was also the quality most criticized and singled out as detrimental to professional chaplaincy development. The CPE process, combining group therapy with theological formation and close examination of the motives of chaplains in training, was designed to weed out proselytizers and those who were personally distant, evasive, and unable to bridge their theoretical understandings with the sensitive work that goes into chaplaincy. I was to learn during my years of work in the field that, surprisingly, I was a prime example of such.

When I began Clinical Pastoral Education, my outsider status as a Buddhist in a predominantly Christian field often protected me from a deeper examination of the “cognitively top-heavy” way I had created and held onto my religious identity (as I later characterized my then-dominantly way of relating to the world). This was noticed at my earliest interview for entry into CPE after I gave a lengthy and what I only realized later was a non-personal, intellectually evasive answer to a query about why I had chosen Buddhism. My questioner, Bob P., a former Catholic priest who was to be my CPE supervisor for the next 10 weeks heard my response, then he leaned forward and, looking directly at me, quietly but pointedly asked, “Do you think you’re so interested in suffering because you yourself have suffered?” This kind of response to my presentation I appreciated, but it jolted me into a realization that while I might have considered myself intellectually prepared to work with people, I was still very much a guarded person who held his pain close to his chest, and rarely shared personally my natural human sufferings. And this manifested with the unflattering way I came off: distant, pedantic, and untouched.

Care of Persons, Care of World

In *The Future of an Illusion*, Sigmund Freud said, “I should like to hand it [the practice of psychoanalysis] over to a profession which does not yet exist, a profession of lay curers of souls who need not be doctors and should not be priests” (quoted in Stokes, *Ministry after Freud*, 1985, p. 5). Chaplains are members of a different kind of profession, something like those “lay curers of souls” Freud was suggesting. They operate in a realm in between that of a parish priest and a mental health practitioner.

Often trusted more than a family's minister or priest, rabbi or imam, the chaplain is usually a person in ministry either participating in a chaplaincy program to fulfill requirements to conclude their priestly/ministerial training, or who have decided to provide pastoral care as their primary focus and are usually employed in hospitals, hospices, assisted care homes or other places where the population are sickly or permanently or temporarily confined for mental or physical health reasons. They are, as I came to see it, in an in-between realm of ministry serving often transient populations but often leaving a lasting impression for their heartfelt interventions by the families they care for.

CPE had its start in the 1920s to 1930s and grew out of the nexus of medical social work and internship training for theological students. Perhaps its most influential founder, the Rev. Anton Boisen, a Congregational/Presbyterian minister was hired as chaplain at Worcester State Hospital Boston despite having suffered psychotic breaks between 1920 to 1922. Boisen believed there was a connection between such episodes and problems of "the soul". "He associated crisis with religious 'quickenings' ... moments bringing forth change either for better or worse" (ACPE, 2020). We may compare this prescient insight to the now recognized "spiritual emergency" identified by psychiatrist Stanislav Grof and written about in Grof and Grof, 1989. Boisen played a key role, along with Dr. Richard C. Cabot in forming an organization that would, akin to the requirements of medical students, offer internships at hospitals and mental institutions for theological students in the Boston area. Gradually this coalesced into several institutions, the Institute for Pastoral Care, the Council for Clinical Training of Theological Students and several others which finally merged in 1967 into the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE, 2020). Today there are over 3,000 members worldwide and while for most of its history its accredited chaplains and CPE Supervisors (now called ACPE Educators) were overwhelmingly white, Protestant males, now most religions in the United States are represented, there are international centers around the world, and great numbers of minority students and women. At the time I began, I was among the first Buddhist chaplains in the United States and later became the first Buddhist to seek out advanced level CPE Supervisorial training but left the field when I left for Iceland.

On their website ACPE describes itself as "more than just an association: we are a movement committed to the transformation of the human suffering⁶⁹". This concern transcends the more commonly understood notion of chaplaincy as simply being about a visit from some kindly clergy person to a grieving family during an accident or the

⁶⁹ <https://acpe.edu/about-acpe>

death of someone close in a hospital. It involves a perspective on suffering, on community, on human growth, on psychological health, and on spiritual resources. Author Larry Graham (1992) calls this practice "a ministry of care" (p. 20) which is involved not only in effecting change in individuals but for society at large. He writes,

The ministry of care is a particular context in which the suffering connected with symptomatic crises may be contained, their causes and meanings explored, and new patterns of relatedness fashioned.

The ministry of care seeks to promote change. In general terms, change is understood as an effective increase of love, justice, and ecological partnership throughout the psychosystemic matrix. More particularly, the ministry of care seeks to promote a creative modification of the power arrangements in the existing structure of things. It attempts to reorder the values that are contributing to symptomatic behaviors. It identifies destructive outcomes. Thus, *for the pastoral caretaker, symptomatic crises are an invitation to be a participant in changing the fundamental fabric of personal and social reality, and to reconstruct the environment* [emphasis added] (p. 96).

While the practice of chaplaincy involved meeting with patients and families and asking them if they wished to speak with a chaplain from the hospital we worked in or with some clergy person we would contact for them, reading theoretical material such as this was an enormous eye opener for me. I had never known about this dimension of Christianity (while Jewish and other religious groups have a solid presence in CPE programs around the United States and elsewhere, it remains a predominantly Christian organization probably accurately representing the same proportions of Christian to other religious affiliations in the general population at large). Graham speaks about chaplaincy's -

"attempts strategically to relate specific acts of pastoral care taking to selected aspects of the religious heritage in which caretaking occurs and to relevant secular theories about the nature and care of persons ... [along with] ... the creation of new interpretations of the religious heritage, new understandings of human persons, and a clearer grasp of what is required for effective ministry to care seekers." (1992, p. 20)

This was a challenge for me as I had never conceived of Buddhism in such a light. I thought Buddhism had great ideas about suffering and awakening, and that one only needed guidance to practice enough to wake up and then, by some miraculous transformation, we would be able to go out and benefit others. Here in CPE was instead a program, and an actual institution turning theoretically spiritual ideas into a practical training ground for individual and societal transformation. My unrealistic

notions about Buddhist care as well as Christian pastoral ministry were all shattered in a beautiful way during this period, giving me a much better look into how Christianity operates on a “ground level” and ideas about how Buddhist could – and should - do the same.

Chaplains are called to not only provide compassionate care but to also spiritually “diagnose” their charges as well. Pruyser (1976) provided me with an excellent and immediately understandable image of the “minister as diagnostician” (which is also the title of his book). It was yet another concept that I hadn’t ever considered before entering CPE. The clerical models I had been most exposed to in Buddhism as it is in the West in general functioned very differently than the models I worked with as a chaplain. One notable exception worthy of greater study is the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) ministers whose relationship to their communities reflects a similarly pastoral relationship to dominant Christian, Jewish, and Muslim clergy in CPE. A Rōshi, for example, was a Zen master, historically (and even to this day, in fact) very often aloof and wise, someone generally far above those of us who were meditating regularly in our search for awakening. A Lama or Rinpoche in Tibetan Buddhism too was not someone easily accessed and whose interactions with followers was geared more towards inspiring through their learned background and presence. Both were people whose spiritual attainments were seen as greater than ours and who could assist us, if we applied ourselves assiduously, in reaching such heights. In a field dominated by Rōshis and monks and nuns who live generally far away from “regular” people, the average interaction was mostly circumscribed by a respectful distance.

In contrast, ministers in the Protestant denominations which dominated CPE (and this includes Catholic, Orthodox, and Rabbinical chaplains as well) were much more informal and “pastoral” by definition, feeling the need to lead their “flock” through not only their spiritual knowledge of religious doctrines and their ritual services, but by friendly leadership, often demonstrated by their active involvement in the day to day lives of their parishioners. I was greatly impressed with this model and felt that the Buddhist schools I had been involved with should find some way to bring such relationships to the forefront of their duties. By contrast, one Rinpoche, when the friendly and informal joking with students was apparently too much for him, said, “I’m not your Rinpoche-hangout-buddy”. Not only did I want to see more informality and approachability with those Rōshis and Rinpoches, but I wanted to embody greater accessibility in my own relations with the people I taught meditation to or dealt with as a hospital chaplain, but also as an educator with students. I appreciated the respect given to one with perhaps more expertise, but I retained an anarcho-socialist disdain for titles and hierarchies. This was embodied for me in my meetings and correspondence with Noam Chomsky who refused to be called “Prof.” Chomsky and who always insisted we call him by his first name.

The theme of integrating activism and Buddhism through discussions of violence and care

Looking back now, I realize that it was also during this period of training in CPE that I began to see the enterprise as a testing ground for uniting the pillars of *activism* and *Buddhism* (my MA thesis at Naropa reflected my more personal transformation and was titled, *From Applause to Affect*), as well as learning from non-Buddhist teachers. I met in this period the author and apostate Catholic priest Rev. Matthew Fox and one of our teachers in the EB program was the Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding. I also struggled with reconciling Buddhism with violence to end oppression (such as my work with URNG and Guatemala). Harding was an associate of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and one of his speechwriters (he penned the 1967 Riverside Church speech in which Dr. King condemned the Vietnam War and called for a restructuring along socialist lines of the United States economy).

Rev. Harding seemed to take a particular interest in my past work but an even greater interest in the personal struggles I had over issues of non-violence and Buddhism. He wanted to know about me and then to use that knowledge to challenge me, to help open me up to a greater moral perspective on issues such as non-violent resistance and the ultimate goals of our activist struggles. He believed no less firmly than Sulak in nonviolent resistance to oppression but, because of our shared USAmerican backgrounds, he thought it incumbent upon me to reach into a past that informed my life to come to such a conclusion. That is, he affirmed in me my struggles, regarding them as part of the struggle we all undertake to become fully human and to then use our transformation to transform the society which encases us. He believed the African American Civil Rights movement could help me understand why it is that we should choose a different way of resistance. The fact that he was so intimately connected to one of the giants in our history and someone who continues to inspire activists around the world gave his advice a gravitas and I was in awe of his personal regard for me. And yet he was so gentle, so soft-spoken one would never assume an indomitable spirit that refused to participate in violence but that resisted it with ardent passion was within him. He cared for me, and his support and his friendship I regard as major influences of my life and my commitment to nurturing the same regard in others. When he signed his biography of Dr. King for me, (Figure 79) I wept as I read those last three words. He believed in me.

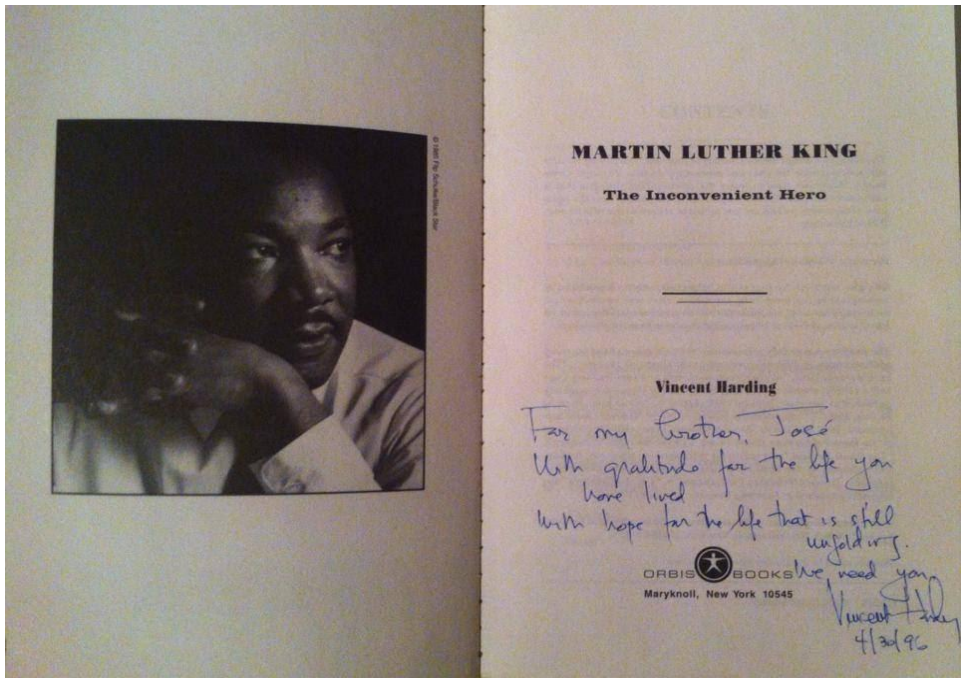


Figure 79: One of my most prized possessions, Vincent Hardings' dedication of his book to me

It reads:

"For my brother, José. With gratitude for the life you have lived. With hope for the life that is still unfolding. We need you. Vincent Harding 4/30/96"

As a result of my CPE training, I began collecting material to document what I felt could be a uniquely Buddhist approach to chaplaincy calling it, *Towards A Buddhist Language of Pastoral Care*. In it I first began to use a *three-pillar model*, writing that there were three pillars of Buddhist pastoral care: 1. to speak the Truth, 2. to compassionately care for others, and 3., to embody the same compassionate concern the Buddha was instructing his followers to live by. I explained it this way: first, we must not shy away from suffering or death and thus should always speak compassionately but truthfully about the condition or prognoses of our patients. Second, we must compassionately look after the needs of others. The spirit that this is done in is one of alleviating the immediate suffering but doing it in a way that respects the individual's autonomy. Last, there is a tendency in Buddhism towards emphasizing individuals realizing some given truth on their own. Pönlop Rinpoche, my former teacher, spoke about this during his presentation at the *Spirituality in Education Conference* (Figure 80). Each person therefore must embody this understanding, actualizing their own awakening. The creation of this document served to teach me how to bring the Buddhism of my head down into my heart, to create a system that retained its authentically Buddhist nature, but which made use of the insights gained in my encounter with non-Buddhist teachers and ministers who worked in similar fields (activism, chaplaincy) as I was working in.

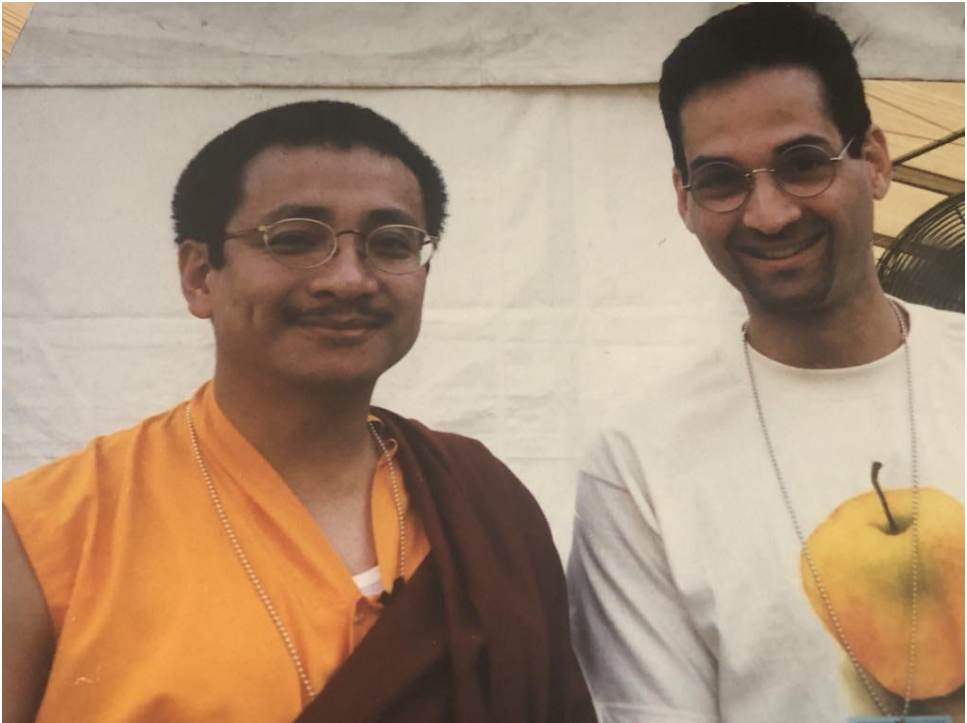


Figure 80: With the Seventh Dzogchen Pönlop Rinpoche, my teacher, at the Spirituality in Education Conference, at the Naropa Institute, 1997.

A new, more integrated Buddhism emerges

I began to see “Buddhism” as actually divided into two very different forms that, in the West at least, seemed to not have reconciled themselves very well: the *psychological*, versus the *pastoral*. There was, on the one hand, a very distinct “science of mind” approach, wherein Buddhism’s more intellectual methodology to what are usually considered religious questions was emphasized. In this approach, questions of existential suffering of the day-to-day variety are elided in favor of rational discussions of how development of a watcher consciousness can assist us in creating better lives.

While there are many modern descriptions of Buddhism available, I have come to like Vyner’s (2022) recent presentation in a short article as a good example of this approach that speaks of the scientific utility of Buddhism as a science of mind. In it he states, “Modern science has virtually ignored the Buddhist science of the stream of consciousness, and it has done so despite the fact that it is the source of Buddhism’s wisdom and meditative technologies” (p. 2). One could legitimately wonder how this would mesh with Buddhism’s having once been the dominant religion of almost all of Asia simply because it addressed “stream of consciousness questions” using

“meditative technologies”. He justifies this approach because, he feels, it is developing “1) a modern science of the phenomena that appear in the stream of consciousness and 2) a body of data that establishes that the natural mind — the mind with an egoless ego — is a far healthier mind than the egocentric mind” (p. 3). Cultivation of this “egoless mind”, then, becomes the primary task for Buddhists, via a meditative discipline. This methodological approach appeals to many in the West who, I believe, have made psychology a replacement for spirituality which in the past considered questions of meaning as separate or, at least different from working on one’s mind.

The second, more traditionally understood as “religious” approach, sees Buddhism as a system of ancient moral and ethical teachings, filled with majestic stories and symbols rich in cosmological vastness and often enacted in elaborate rituals, and speaking constantly of compassion and wisdom. Like Christianity, which forms the bulk of the chaplains’ affiliation with whom I worked when I was in CPE, this second form deals with all people, not just the sick and the depressed in ways we would describe as “pastoral”. For more than 2,500 years it has played a role in Asian societies akin to Christianity in providing counseling to the bereaved, comfort for the suffering, and compassion for the dispossessed. These two different forms of Buddhism seemed so separate, their reconciliation so improbable, that reconciliation appeared nearly impossible. But it was my introduction to CPE while in the MA program in Engaged Buddhism which gave me a template in which I could begin to see how Buddhism and activism could cohere in one profession and thus aid in their integration in my life, much as Dharmapa’s instruction to “melt [all the teachings he received] together”⁷⁰.

As I said above on page 174, “education is not so much the state of having been educated, nor is it that which is taught, that which is given to the students, but it is a process that is lifelong as one treads Life, learning along the way, how to adjust and to grow with whatever is put in front of one. It refers most relevantly to learning”.

I began to see that Buddhist Enlightenment too, is, I believe, not an amber-encased condition of static purity attained by a select few adepts but should be seen instead as a vibrant and constantly readjusting response to circumstances that are always different

⁷⁰ In the story, Dharmapa, a scholar of Buddhism who had accumulated vast knowledge but without integration, received instructions from a mysterious dakini who told him, *“Just as the particles of precious metal become well-fused by the smith, so the various things you have studied must melt together in your mind.”* (Robinson, 1979, p. 134)

with what are commonly taken as remarkable degrees of wisdom and compassion. Perhaps these circumstances are the *karma-phala*⁷¹, resultant displays of karmic patterns which have come to fruition later, or perhaps they are simply random expressions of unlinked causes and conditions which arise spontaneously. Either way, the response to them, though itself conditioned to a degree by culture and training, remains a response by a relatively autonomous agent who, like a compass, the arrow may wobble a bit, but it remains roughly pointed in the proper direction. In this case, this means the awakened individual responds to life's circumstances rooted in compassion and wisdom.

In addition, the so-called enlightened person then moves in their world like this. It is, as I understand it, a life characterized by three approaches: openness, naturalness, and spontaneity. That is, lacking the need to hide or protect oneself, without pretense or the need to perform, and without rehearsing one's responses to differing circumstances. Such persons have definitely received some kind of training: moral, ethical, spiritual, for example, and many have benefitted by years of academic teaching at the feet of great masters, but their awakening, their enlightenment, is an ongoing, creative ability to fill every event with luminous presence and behave through the three qualities named above.

The integration of education with Buddhism, psychology, political and social activism may sound like an abstract and impossible goal, and, in truth, it has often felt that way. A commitment to compassion, a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, a desire to then act upon such in all arenas, political, economic, social, for example, would then lead to an engaged life of action beholden to moral principles. The insight into that which benefits beings is also supported by psychological teachings that a humane sense of worth and belongingness, as Adler noted (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1964), are essential ingredients for well-being and this in turn calls for an educated populace who work assiduously in taking care of each other through what I understand are more progressive, eco-socialist ideals.

Nevertheless, a passionate commitment to the dispossessed, i.e., a "preferential" tendency towards the marginalized must be the practical standpoint, the manner in which this commitment should be displayed and offered, and this I assert based upon those psychologists and activists whose works I have mentioned above. But then again, it was not only their written material, but it was also their human disposition that inspired me just as well. This then is a part of the total vision I believe that marks what integration of what these disparate intellectual fields looks like.

⁷¹ The word karma means simply, "action". When speaking about the results of our actions it should more properly be rendered "*karma-phala*". *Phala* means "fruit of" or "result" (Rahula, 1974, p. 32).

11 Final Themes

11.1 The Culture of Education

Not only was I a teacher, but my culture was education itself.

Education itself is a culture. I have also referred to it as a “learning culture of care”. It is like a field where many different plants and flowers, fruits and vegetables may grow. With only the proper amount of care given, with the proper quantities of precision and gentleness all may flourish. This culture, the one in which every element, in this case, every person is cared for and guided, to be regarded as equal and treated with the same amount of tenderness, is my culture. The place where I finally belong, and where I have always belonged, though possibly I was not ready for that realization until now.

My cultural home as it were, was both in informal learning and sought for in formal educational institutions. I was aware of the visceral importance of my background in my journey as an educator from my early experience as a psychologist and, also, as mentioned earlier, during my years as a chaplain. At that time in chaplaincy, I had been confronted with personal dynamics which arose from exposure to traumatic events in childhood. I had several periods of therapy as required in CPE and felt secure enough to continue work on myself. Thus psychologically, too, I knew the significance of personal history on one’s behavior and, as Hillman calls it, one’s “calling” (1996). (Ch. 2, Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) – *Engaged Buddhism in Practice*).

I have spoken about a set of sometimes contradictory, diverging, and opposing influences of my life many times during the course of this work. I have considered how each played significant roles in not only my personal development but also in how I became an educator. I have been influenced by the experiences and the changes they created within me, and when accounting for my interest in student transformations, I reiterate that, as noted earlier, “I see how the driving force behind this search for transformation are those formative experiences”. The tensions between them have not been completely resolved. Can one’s personal dynamics ever be anything but a work-in-progress? I believe not. Nevertheless, they have quieted down, becoming more

integrated. I am also aware that, in becoming an educator, many of the early experiences I had were traumatic and have affected my worldview and behaviors. Both early trauma and these ongoing tensions have played significant roles in my identity formation, and we saw this in *Trauma, learning, and a call for something new*.

Autoethnography offered me the expression for a newly discovered sense that everything that had occurred for the 50 years before entering education *as a field* was all about learning. Everything I was looking for was already contained and pointed towards this final, culminating work. Autoethnography felt familiar as it offered me a way to reflect on my life stories in a systematic way.

I became a teacher long before I studied education, and I entered education last because it has taken me all this time to realize that this is where I belong.

I was led to Buddhism to comprehend suffering I believe, led to psychology to work with it, and led to activism to redress it. But within each of these different strands exists a deeper call to inform, to share, and to educate others so that they may traverse their own similar journeys with greater ease. I helped, explained, taught, guided, and counseled others early, too early some might say, because the particular combination of me and the circumstances I endured were uniquely combined to be of benefit to others. Instructing them, then, became my educational daimon, who directs me towards my ultimate destiny with an invisible model of what form I will take already in ethereal blueprint form. This is what Hillman (1996) calls “annunciation,” the calling embedded within us from the beginning working in us like a detailed DNA of the soul (thus the title of the book).

Hillman describes the story of R. G. Collingwood, the English philosopher, who, at a very young age, removed one of his father’s books, *Kant’s Theory of Ethics*. He was at first excited, realizing that what was being discussed was of ultimate importance. Then came a second wave of emotions, this one of great shame that he could not understand any of it; that despite his recognition of the language, it was far beyond him. Lastly, a third realization more powerful than the other two hit him: he knew from deep within that here was his destiny, to fathom philosophy and plumb intellectual depths for meaning. He was eight years old (pp. 14-15). Very early on I, too, recognized my task: to guide, to help others to access that which might assist them, to help or inform, in short.

11.2 The Jewel in the Lotus: Transformative education as the integration of inclusive spirituality into education

Transformative Education/Transformative learning theorists treat the learning that takes place as a phenomenon that occurs in reaction to circumstances and a readjustment

process that leads to change. Hillman offers instead a vision more tied to mythology, one that says within each of us lies the blueprint of our character and if read properly, can be developed on our own but can also be teased out healthily by teachers to help the person (in this case our students) to grow. They will then use this innate character to make their own adjustments in ways that honor who they truly are and were meant to be. In Buddhism, the image of the jewel in the lotus comes to mind. As the lotus grows from the muck of a lake or stream, likewise all of us are embedded within the messiness of life. But rising from this material, a beautiful flower emerges: the lotus. And the most well-known Buddhist mantra, *Om manipadme hum*, celebrates this phenomenon, giving us the image of a jewel within the heart of this lotus, symbolizing compassion. Within each of us, it is taught, lies this jewel of inestimable power and beauty.

This comports well with Buddhism's concept of original enlightenment, psychology's growth schools, from the humanists to transpersonalists, and activists who dream of a social system which supports the growth of all individually so that as a collective group of individuals we create the conditions for the future collective growth of humanity itself. Discovering that jewel within each of us becomes our task.

Seeking transformation, then, is vanity, because I am already wedded to transformation; I am primed for my task and each event, though perhaps not fated to be as they were, nevertheless would all be eventually gathered to assist in this formation, this calling for a teacher, one who can guide, teach, and mentor others for their own journeys. In looking back, I see the life I have always lived and in projecting from the individual events forward, I see the future that is now my present, as near inevitable. I am here because this is where I have been heading my whole life. Only now, I can truly see this as the case.

How, one may now ask, does all this look in practice?

In addition to the theoretical background I bring to the classroom, what is the effect I have on the students and what do I bring to the table other than this theoretical foundation? How does my background and that which I believe important to the educational experience foster the kinds of conditions and outcomes I regard as truly beneficial? In what ways do I co-create the conditions I see? These are some of the questions I have pondered in the course of this examination and will give some attention to in this section.

As a Buddhist I believe in everyone's inherent ability to overcome any and all obstacles given guidance, support, and perspective, and to rise to become. I initially saw the most basic division as that between "head" and "heart", symbolized by the Samurai and Buddha statues, respectively, on my teenage bookshelf (Ch. One

Questions of Identity). One was action and head oriented, calculating and ever-crafty, and the other, contemplative and affective, more inner-oriented and intuitive. Later attempts to understand this dual-natured analysis led to the third pillar of *psychology*. Together these three ended up serving my needs well, placing the varied experiences and understandings into a comprehensible total. This totality then became the frame of my intellectual life and looking at each cluster now, I realized each also contained an overall *education* component, the fourth pillar, so to speak.

For example, one of my teachers at The Naropa Institute, a high-ranking Lama of the Nyingma sect (the oldest of the Buddhist schools in Tibet), Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, said "By examining our thoughts and beliefs, we uncover our deeper attachments. When they are brought to light, these concepts no longer have power over us." This phrase, taken from his book, *It's Up to You: The Practice of Self-Reflection on the Buddhist Path* (Kongtrul, 2005) reveals the shared understandings of Buddhism and psychology and one way to deal with memories of traumatic experiences. In Ch. 2, *CPE Engaged Buddhism in Practice*, I noted the experience as a novice chaplain failing in my first attempt to provide pastoral care and realizing how much more I had to do to actually become pastoral.

It should be noted that, echoing a psychological perspective, Miller (1981) would concur, writing that "every childhood's conflictual experiences remain hidden and locked in darkness, and the key to understanding of the life that follows is hidden away with them" (p. 5). By refusing to acknowledge our past experiences or negative patterns, by treating them as too strong to work with, or too painful to even recall, we give them a strength over us that may actually be neutralized if we only bring the proper perspective to them. This is where Buddhist "emptiness-theory" and psychology have a meeting place (Tirado, 2008).

In my case, my perspective on students, and my ideas around what teachers could do for students, have a direct connection to the psychological analysis of my history, and are also reflective of Buddhist and social views on individuals, education, politics, and injustice (much of that also under the rubric of "political activism"). Thus, the three pillars are both reflective of an already existent base of, and, at the same time, create, the educational philosophy which guides me to and my behavior in the classroom.

One issue that was missing in this discussion which appeared late, is the role of spirituality and community. Parker Palmer, the author of *The Courage to Teach* (1998) and *To Know As We Are Known* (1983/1993), has been a remarkable influence on me regarding questions about how to live more authentically in an age of conspicuous consumption and narcissistic distractions.

As an educator he is a very popular speaker around the United States. I saw him first at Naropa's Spirituality in Education Conference (SIEC) 1997 and later at several CPE conferences, where our paths crossed. It was his expansive vision of "community" which struck me most. I can honestly say that his way of talking about educators jolted me with an inner realization that I too wanted to be an educator of the kind he had spoken of. I had not thought of teaching at a university; I was still in my first unit of CPE and finishing up my Engaged Buddhism MA, when I met him at Naropa, but he made me want to teach. I saw in him the kind of teacher I had always loved and the kind I believed I could become. His talk that day at the SIEC, *The Grace of Great Things*, I don't remember much of except that it included a set of remarkable ideas that opened me up to looking at education as more than just being a teacher. While a deeply committed Quaker, his use of the word community, and of "spirituality", enabled me to frame my own views on the educational experience and of the transformations which can take place in that environment differently. This is not to say that spirituality, or that which encompasses spirituality should become part of the curriculum in schools, or that a teacher's religious views should become an overt part of the teacher's tools. I do not believe that.

Nevertheless, a more inclusive definition of spirituality is, in my opinion, rightly to be considered as part of what educators should not be afraid to address. The conceptual bridge linking spirituality and education lies, for Palmer, in the transformations which take place in the classroom; and this connects me to him and to this notion of transformation.

While we admirably adhere to policies of strict separation between our individual faith and what we teach in schools, Palmer (1999) laments the resultant alienation from the deepest questions of our lives, about meaning, death, loss, etc., all of which are present in our students' lives, whether we acknowledge them or not. Thus, the bonds which hold us together are held only by the unfeeling engagement of curricula designed for sterile regurgitation on tests or essays and with little to no engagement with the person for whom education, and education with us in particular, might be among the most transformative periods in their life. He adds, "by teaching us how to live our questions with one another rather than answer them, the gift of community emerges among us—a gift of transformation" (p. 6). Thus, being open to questions of meaning and of how the learning process affects us is what is key here (not any particular desire to speak about religion). Linking community to transformation is not unique to Palmer's vision, of course, but in the arena of education, such language stands out.

Several stories might be helpful here. In one high school class I attended, the teacher of several advanced Senior-level courses, "College Prep Vocabulary" and

"Introduction to Philosophy", was a single-earring-wearing, British man, Mr. Lightfoot, who lived on a sailboat and was known for talking disturbed or disgruntled students down from suicidal thoughts or of dropping out. Successfully, it should be added, and repeatedly. He cared about us and after we graduated, he would invite us to hang out with him on his boat with a bottle of wine and would regale us with his stories of sailing around the world, while listening to our plans for work or college.

Similarly, at ISE, when Allyson offered food in the middle of break in a three-hour session that went over time, some of the students later expressed their astonishment that a teacher would not only allow students to eat, but that the teacher would be the one providing the food and who seemed more interested in creating a shared experience and a warm, human atmosphere at the time, than maintaining the scheduled class plan. Both these examples exemplify the union of community to learning and, in fact, demonstrate how creation of community fosters learning. This certainly is a boon for education. And as Allyson once noted to me, the role of the teacher is "to *provide a setting* that is educational, *not only providing knowledge*". The setting must be a safe space, a place where growth is allowed to flourish and thrive. This is a form of hospitality, fostering the creation of a community of interested learners and creating that setting is as much, if not more, than our task is to instruct and assess. *That* is the culture I have thrived in all my life.

I am reminded of one of the loveliest parables in Buddhism, contained in the Lotus Sutra, the story of a Bodhisattva named "Never Disparaging" whose sole practice was to bow to all beings he encountered, assuring each of their eventual Buddhahood, saying,

I have reverence for you, I would never treat you with disparagement or arrogance,' ... It is representative of his attitude toward them, his respect for the Buddha nature inherent within them. He goes about "simply bowing to people," as the sutra states, in this way paying honor to their inherent worth and integrity. He typifies the spirit of peaceful dialogue and renunciation of all violence and offense with which the bodhisattva ideology sets about seeking to create a peaceful world, and one which is a model for those of us today who cherish the same ambition (Shinozaki, Ziporyn, and Earhart, 2019, p. 231).

Despite his being reviled and dismissed for what is perceived to be a presumptuous sentiment, he held firm to his conviction that, recognizing and honoring the potential in each was the proper practice and that in this way, he was creating an atmosphere of complete trust in all who heard his assurance that they would realize truth and become Buddhas themselves. Educators often hear that, by affirming the positive potential

within students, we encourage their growth, that they can live up to our expectations of them. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging would agree.

11.3 The theme of community

And with the deep reflection that has defined this autoethnographer's task, to search for those subjective patterns and behaviors which are relevant to the research task, comes the realization that, only in those moments when a community was most deeply felt, when a caring community appeared to me, guiding me, encouraging me, and assuring me of its supportive constancy in my process, assuring me in the process that I could succeed, that only then did I flourish (Postscript: A Moral Dimension, Ch. 1). When such an atmosphere was removed, or was lacking from the beginning, I was less engaged, less interested, and certainly eventually less fluent in the content. Was becoming a teacher built in me all along, as I asked at the beginning? I don't know. Certainly, all the conditions were right for inspiring me to pursue education and thrive in its culture of learning. I was held up, supported, and encouraged every step of the way.

And this notion is supported by the interviewee's responses as well, in their affectively recalled memories of moments less connected to learning per se, and much more connected to the relationship of teacher-student during those occasions when a community was created, and most keenly felt. When Parker Palmer quotes Abba Felix he gets something that resonates with this notion of community creation in teaching. The line, "to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced" (Palmer, 1983/1993, p. 69) speaks to a commitment of honoring the path of the experiences of all who are part of the education process, the teacher and student both. It describes a place, a culture of learning, in which for a brief time our separation by race, class, religion, or background is superseded by our agreement to be members of a new community, a community of learners.

Rainer Maria Rilke, in his *Letters To A Young Poet* (1934/1954) wrote, "Love consists of this: two solitudes that meet, protect and greet each other" (p. 59). I think such a sentiment has parallels with the teacher's most vivid moments; the times when the student and teacher truly connect, when something clicks and the air in the room is vivified by those nearly palpable electric occasions when everyone present realizes that something new has just taken place and it is a precious contribution to the human experience of not only being in school, but of their life.

Only when learning and education are seen as "reflexive coproductions" (Tschakert et al., 2018, p. 198) where the relationship between educator and learner is cultivated not through "the hegemony of neo-liberal paradigms" which focus on "content-matter dissemination and accountability ... that demands standardization, managerialism, and

bureaucratization” (Tschakert et al., 2018, p. 187) and instead, through the human dimension of which affect and care are nurtured, can we educators become the “inspiring role models” (Tschakert et al., 2018, p. 198) who effect real transformation. This is the union of head and heart, of Compassion and Wisdom that Buddhism also seeks to cultivate.

Another beautiful example taken from Buddhism might illustrate this nicely. In explaining how there could be rebirth without a soul the Buddha asked if one lit candle was used to light another and the first blown out, are we left with the same flame or a different one? There is obvious continuity, the causes and conditions of one ignited the other, but they are clearly different flames. Thus, what we as educators do is similar. We ignite within others a flame that can only burn because the proper fuel was already present within the learner and our actions created the spark which then continued as a flame.

What moments such as these elicit is not only a renewed enthusiasm for their presence in the program, but a more engaged student, open to being part of something bigger than just a classroom. This is what I believe Palmer refers to as a “community of truth” (1993, p. xi).

My commitment to students is via this amalgamated, integrated collection of linking philosophies concerning social justice, learning, and human potential as contained in activism, psychology, and Buddhism, respectively. It is informed by my story, by the traumas of my youth, the practices of my faith, and a deep trust in human potential arising from a heartfelt belief in fairness, and justice.

Integrating separate and such distinct pillars was not a goal at the beginning of this process but as I came to write about my life, I began to see a little more clearly how from my experiences and background evolved the seeds which grew into these separate pillars and from each pillar new ideas poured back onto the ground which then continued for years. I originally saw my life as being held up by these pillars but was beginning to see a different perspective emerge. This was related to a newfound and until now, elusive integration.

11.4 A heuristic postscript

The work is done. I sent it in for editing a week ago, but it is essentially finished. It’s a happy moment for me, maybe even momentous, and I am tired. Still, it was worth it.

But there’s more to say.

First, this process enabled me to write out my story – something I have yearned to do my whole life and something my father yearned to do, too. In his memory, and to

honor both my mother's unfailing commitment to us and those teacher-mentors who supported me, I put together a story of my life in education, discovering that *my life in education* is the actual *culture* I feel the greatest affinity for, above and beyond my ethnicity or citizenship. It is an accomplishment and yet...

First, I still remain restless.

Second, education still feels new.

All this time, I was surrounded by experts. I see my committee and colleagues as a sports team of sorts. I regard them as people far more fluid in education than I and I'm the new player on the field. In Skipholt, (where the faculty offices are of the University of Iceland's School of Education) I was working according to their rules, and their received manner and traditions about education and research. It has been exhausting and frustrating while being as well a deeply enriching journey that has highlighted my love of learning and of educational experiences throughout my life.

But there is still more.

In mid-March I thought I had completed the work. I got feedback from my committee and addressed it in all the places they thought I needed to bring something out: clarify this, expand upon that. No problem. I managed that and felt positive about what I had done.

But at the end of this process, my editor, someone completely unconnected to me or education in Iceland, reads this and comes to a different conclusion than the one you have in your hands, written by me.

I stop.

Here I am, about to hand in my life's work and my thesis, that *education is my core, the golden thread* that runs through everything I am and have done, binding it all together, and yet it is seen as missing the point! Instead, my reviewer sees that my life's central pillar is Buddhism and, therefore, rather than education being the dominant thread connecting the different pillars of my life, she sees that *it was Buddhism all along*.

I am puzzled, and ask, is she right?

My starting point had been a belief in transformative learning and that this could be found in many scenarios. I seem to have advanced and accepted the notion that "education" has common characteristics that can be found across several fields. In addition, it was clear each field has some distinctive characteristics or categories of learning not found in the other fields.

From a core of values emerging from my childhood I constructed a unique self with support from the pillars (fields) for my own identity, another double loop of learning has been encountered.

So, I go backwards through my dissertation and find that maybe I had already identified the answer:

"The moral arc of the education universe may be long or short, but it is bent by love."
JMT (inspired by MLK, Jr.)

The narrative I was looking for might have been wrong all along.

So, is she right? Was it Buddhism all along? And can I say that what that means is that "love," this desire for others' happiness, to be relieved of their suffering and to be free from oppression, and the burdens of despair, that this is the dominant lesson here?

For all the received wisdom handed down to me through those experts, she, my editor, a person who knows nothing about me save for what I had written, saw not education, but Buddhism as most embedded in me, and everything else is painted with that patina. Thus, *while I thought I was bringing this project to an end, it may be that it is, in fact, a new beginning.*

What this means, I cannot yet say with any certainty.

But what if she's right (Figure 81)?

What if Buddhism was the foundation all along and these other elements, my pillars, were added atop and each given a distinctly Buddhist flavor, including education? What if this version below is more representative?

Engaged Buddhism/ Activism	Compassion/ Psychology	Education/ Wisdom
Buddhism		

Figure 81: Was it Buddhism all along?

Does it invalidate all my insights, so documented in this text that I labored on daily, weekly, for many, many months, feeling as if I had discovered some new continent with the realization that education has been the through line all along?

No, maybe I am not wrong – maybe I just have neglected my own perspectives and issues chronicled in the life-stories in part one. As I moved into part two, my own stories were becoming less important as I began to rub shoulders with old friends, some dead, some still alive. After some persuasive discussion with Allyson, I went ahead with reviewing my relationship with influential people from my past. Interestingly I found this as rewarding as telling my story chronologically.

And in the end, was my version, (Fig. 82, below), simply too complex, too convoluted, and missing the point?



Figure 82: My final version of the map (see also Figure 70)

With all my efforts to find some artistic representation of who I am, some personal mandala, I was constantly attempting to reconcile Buddhism with education but maybe the views from each can stand alone. Maybe they all need not be so integrated that one diagram can hold them together like some topographical map, I could use to drive from anywhere and find my way home again.

So, what if she was right?

What if it's all a bit more complicated than some unidirectional evolution? What if there is instead a multidimensionally expanding, multidirectional movement among a shifting set of components that make up a rich, variegated life that might rely on learning but approaches it in its different main pillars through a Buddhist lens? And this Buddhist lens itself originates in "love", love for others who suffer, love that wants to understand, love that wants to help and heal, love that wants to teach...

Something like Fig. 83 below.

What if?

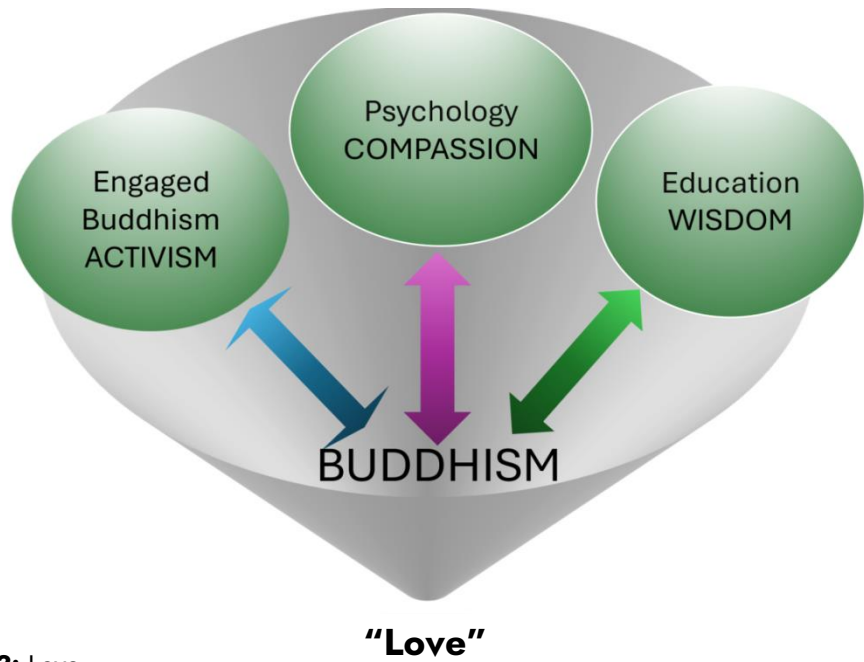


Figure 83: Love

EPILOGUE:

THE PATH OF MY EXPERIENCE

So, what is *the path of my experience*? Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) wrote: "A path is formed by walking on it" (Chuang Tsu, 1974, p. 30). Is it simply the collection of all those different paths I walked? I have walked in pain and joy, in streets and on mountains, in classrooms and every realm that gave me the excitement of learning, as well as among the unlettered for whom bars, the streets, and the seedy life brought a different learning and different excitement. I face my 65th year finally close to a goal I have long dreamed of – a doctorate – and I wonder, what is this path I have walked on?

I began this study with the following phrase

*"The moral arc of the education universe
may be long or short, but it is bent by
love." JMT (inspired by MLK, Jr.)*

If education or more accurately, *learning* was a deep call, it arose as a response to a question. That question was how to get out of the pain we suffer. I may have sought it out through adventures and learning (they were really one and the same for me) but I did it not only to run away from pain and fear and a desperate desire to find some safety for myself, but because of another, more Buddhist-oriented desire. I traveled the path of my experience because I knew this:

recognizing and honoring the potential in each was the proper practice -

All I ever wanted was to give back what was given to me: the recognition that I was worth something, that, no matter how small I felt or how scared I was, someone saw that I had within me some great potential. And so long as they faced me with that conviction, I believed it and lived up to it, knowing firsthand the thrill of finding some miraculous deep power within me. I knew I had another great power: I could help pull out from within others an equally miraculous set of gifts that would result in someone else's shining. As mentioned earlier on page 36, "In each enterprise I undertook, I wanted to learn, and then teach others". My practice was, is, and should always be, to recognize that within others we all share that same potential which was recognized in me. And, for the benefit of all sentient beings, to honor that potential by helping to

activate within them that same power to become who they are, to walk on the path of their own experience with their heads held high and their hearts ready to join the great ranks of the those who will, in turn, light up the spark within others.

I do this because I heard a call as a child, the Buddha's life-story: a resonant mytho-poetic story of one little boy with doubts, great questions about what he'd seen around him and who found a quiet space within himself to explore those questions. When he grew up, he left the relative comfort of his culture to pursue an understanding and he discovered that not only were the answers within him all along, but that within each and every one around him as well, there was the same capacity, the same seeds of Awakening. What he became, all can become, He knew this with such conviction that he was regarded as more than human, a deep and puzzling figure. Asked if, in fact, he was a god, he said simply, "no." Asked if he was then a demon, he answered the same way, "no". Finally, when he was asked, "then what are you" he gently said, "I am Awake". No other story gave me as much hope as that one. If we only awakened, we could live in peace, among the deepest safety imaginable, the safety of wakefulness, that enables us to see things as they are, and to not fear its ever-shifting, grandly mysterious nature. With such Wisdom in place, we could then continue walking and help others to awaken as well.

From this very Buddhist understanding, *this* path, I began and all the subsequent fields I entered, psychology, activism, education, all of them I entered with this conviction in my heart. I wanted to know so that I can help others know the same.

Maybe my editor was right after all.

As I close this chapter of my life and conclude this dissertation, two remaining thematic discoveries deserve attention. During the writing, I wondered about what this process has done for me, what I have accomplished by it, and what I discovered. It is clear to me that a deep catharsis has occurred. It was a major relief to, for the first time, document my life and in so doing, leave something of my family's history for my children and grandchildren. I know my father always wrote and he spoke often of wanting to someday write his own life's story, documenting some of his life and adventures while also telling his children about his family history. I feel I have done this now, and it pleases me no end.

In addition, while I retain some hesitancy to claim any great academic accomplishment in this writing, I have discovered that its value is worthwhile as an addition to the intellectual universe of education. It is because *all* our stories are valuable, as are *all of us*, the teachers and students both. Making education work, making it relevant for our collective future, is given greater legitimacy when it acknowledges the worth of each of all our stories, mine included. So, I feel satisfied in that regard as well.

Finally, I discovered arenas of my life I had not often considered, areas where the nexus of these pillars of mine moved in often mysterious and rather serendipitous ways to give me the feeling that yes, there has been a direction all along, a seedling within me this whole time, taking root from Buddhism and growing to bloom as a gift to others, manifesting in diverse but related ways. This is a result of two recently discovered insights from readings I only began towards the end of this project.

The first concept concerns John Bowlby, a British psychologist, psychotherapist, and psychiatrist who is credited with saying, "All of life is a series of daring explorations from a secure base". It is an intriguing if truncated quote, but it still masterfully conveys a truth extremely relevant to the work here. (The original source, *A Secure Base* (Bowlby, 1988) is less artistic but essentially contains the same concept: "all of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s)" (p. 61).

Throughout my life I sought out *learning*, internally, on my own, because I felt that by acquiring more information, I could make some sense of my life and the events that seemed to frequently upset the stability of that life. At the same time, I also sought out *education* – formal, immersive external spaces where I could thrive in an intellectually challenging environment with others (and be encouraged by mentors as a bonus) feeling safe from the intrusions of a chaotic and often threatening life outside its walls. I know that I have not always made that distinction, between learning and education, clear within this dissertation but it has become apparent to me that they are inextricably tied to each other. The internal space and external environment together made up my own "secure base" from which I could successfully navigate as a confident person who can then work to assist others.

At home my own base was secure in that I received regular and consistent love, ate well regularly, and while never living a rich life I still enjoyed the rewards of living decently in a lower middle-class lifestyle in a wealthy first world nation. But while my base may have been ostensibly secure, I still felt it was somewhat untrustworthy, that some event – a suicide attempt of the most important person in my life, a sudden death, violence, for example, might take that away from me. Thus, I fervently sought out knowledge for understanding, explored Buddhism for wisdom about suffering in a wider context, and made a commitment to others as an unspoken need to help ensure that others felt more secure in their lives.

The second concept comes not only from the Buddhist tradition but specifically from Shin Buddhism, the sect I was ordained in and is contained in the writings of Kiyozawa Manshi (Blum and Rhodes, 2011) a major voice in the revitalization of Buddhism in Japan in the 20th century and a key figure in Shin Buddhism. The concept in question

is *naikan-shugi*, (内観主義) “which describes the process of finding the source of truth for oneself through introspection and using it as the basis for external action” and “implies a system of philosophical thought and personality development based on the valorization of inner experience” (Blum and Rhodes, p. 38). I was actually thrilled when I read this description for it embodied in succinct ways the manner I had taken and integrated Buddhism into all the facets of my life and interests, primarily psychology, activism, and throughout it all, education. My inner experience determined the intellectual direction I subsequently faced and each external action I took both reflected what I had determined inwardly as appropriate but then influenced later actions which may have deviated from the original inspiration into unknown directions later pursued. Engaged Buddhism may have come late to my intellectual life, but it was the only form of Buddhism which could have carried me through my sensitive reactions to the pain within and around me. Thus, it was present from the beginning. Psychology and activism, too, were products of inner contemplation about what I saw and participated in as well as avenues to understand and translate such into meaningful actions and they began early, driven by the deep inner contemplation inspired by Buddhism.

In reading these two descriptions, I felt a magnificently lucid realization that all these perspectives and pursuits are fundamentally clear and transparent, they seem to match seamlessly. That I should have seen it all along. And when I came to this point, after all the work I put into this dissertation, such an innately integrated pattern brought to mind what remains perhaps the most inspirational quote I have ever encountered. It was written by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche but apparently inspired by the teachings of one of his teachers, the great Tibetan Dzogchen master, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and it is as follows:

“All aspects of every phenomena are completely clear and lucid, the whole universe if open and unobstructed, everything mutually interpenetrating. The everyday practice is simply to maintain a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people, experiencing everything totally, so that one never withdraws or centralizes unto oneself.” (Trungpa, 2003, p. 461).

Wow. That is it, indeed, I thought.

*“The moral arc of the education universe
may be long or short, but it is bent by
love.” JMT (inspired by MLK, Jr.)*

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Appendix A

The ISE Project

The Four Phases of Research

The research presented here has a context and proceeded along four stages. A summary is presented here below with expanded descriptions of the process given for detail below that.

Phase 1

In 2016, I successfully applied to the doctoral studies program. I began an initial “reading and conference” of research ideas with teachers and other students from the ISE. Preparation of a plan for doctoral research started but I was a part-time student, so my first objective was to complete course requirements. On the advice of my provisional supervisor, I reviewed a series of possible objectives and emerging issues in the field of comparative education which was my first area of focus.

I then examined methodologies and theories around education including Transformative Education/Transformative learning (TE/TL) (Taylor, E., 2011, Dirkx, 2000, etc.), phenomenology (van Manen, 1997) and phenomenology-related methodologies (phenomenography and Interpretative phenomenological analysis, IPA) which became

the preferred constructs for developing a study of learning in higher /international contexts among the cohort of students I had begun the program in as a BA student. These were chosen to better understand the lived experience of students and their education-related transformations, if any were found. Courses were also completed. It was apparent that an interdisciplinary approach would be necessary and fruitful. Benefits of researching the value of international educational settings were to be discussed with the ISE program in University of Iceland (UI) being given a special place. A schedule was then drawn up.

Phase 2

For almost two years, I floundered, struggling with an ambitious set of goals while working with my first supervisor. Our personalities clashed and I knew I had to try working with someone else. During that time, my initial Interim Evaluation was rejected as too broadly conceived, and in addition, I was told to essentially start from scratch. I sought out advice from Allyson who was informally co-supervising me and who had been one of the professors in the program I trusted the most. She was unable to work with me before then but had agreed to be listed as a co-supervisor and make herself available for consultation as needed. By 2018 I had asked her to be my only supervisor and shortly after she agreed to work with me. We assembled a set of names, and we began creating a pilot study examining the ISE program in a search for transformation using the TE/TL literature I had begun to concentrate upon. I started to see the beginnings of a project that, theoretically at least, considered both student transformation and my background in Buddhism, psychology, and activism. By June of 2018 we began seeking out former colleagues from my cohort to interview and soon thereafter began interviewing people who had been with me in ISE. I finally felt as if this would go somewhere though I still wondered in the back of my mind how I could fit into this picture. But that would come later.

In June 2021 I submitted a complete research proposal to the doctoral committee. Four members of the committee were selected from several departments at the university – supervisor and co-supervisor, and two specialists. Amendments were proposed by the specialists. We had a fruitful mid-term meeting, and I wrote a response to their comments and was soon given a green light to proceed.

Interviews with former students began and initial results regarding the affective dimension of education were presented in Scotland at a SERA (Scottish Educational Research Association) conference with Allyson. Then, Covid-19 struck, and the interviews, as well as normal academic activities were interrupted. However, as the participants had indicated that the transformations they underwent had a strong affective dimension and that this may be just as strong a factor in their learning as the cognitive dimension, the direction of research became clearer.

Further reading and consultation with supervisors led to the inclusion of Buddhism in my research, in particular, the field of Engaged Buddhism in which I had previously taken an MA, and which combines social justice and ecological concerns with Buddhist-informed practices and understandings. After Covid-19 had passed, the interviews continued. Findings were discussed, and more reading and further meetings with my supervisors followed.

Phase 3

With Engaged Buddhism in the picture, I realized that now more than ever I must use trustworthy methods to produce a credible set of findings that were both feasible and viable. Several methodological options existed to meet my objectives. Deciding to use life-stories added to the need for reliability and validity of my findings in investigations into learning in higher/international education and identifying issues in education that emerged from:

- a) an application of autoethnographical methods to construct my own life stories from the last 60 years,
- b) my recent path as a *de facto* participant observer in the BA program in the ISE in the years 2013- 2016,
- c) as a researcher and teacher in the Department of Education and Diversity.

Last Summer (2023) all these pieces came together.

Phase 4

In this final stage of the research, I reevaluated autoethnography in light of the research so far. An autoethnography using evocative, narrative, and analytical methods was selected with the intention of documenting my life as part one and presentation of the theoretical and methodological aspects as part two of the dissertation. Autoethnography proponents often encourage using evocative, narrative, and analytical methods, all of which form parts of my research. During this phase new insights arose regarding the cultural component of the work (the *ethno*) revealing that the culture I was truly involved with my whole life, and thus what is to be studied, is education, that is, *learning as culture*. Unbeknownst to me, I was engaging in a *double loop learning process* (Argyris, 1977) As this kind of process of discovery characterizes the work, I determined it to be a *heuristic autoethnography*.

I continue to use qualitative and analytical methods to open up and reevaluate the continuing research, uncovering new insights. Integration and application of methodological and theoretical frames have been created and focused upon throughout the Spring. The findings from the life stories have been more thought-provoking than I ever imagined as I found forgotten or ignored slivers of my life. A full draft of the dissertation was completed, and I enjoyed engaging with my committee and with emerging issues as they arose. A rich and diverse bibliographic list has been assembled and continues to grow in accordance with the varied and continually expanding nature of this interdisciplinary project.

The ISE Project, the collective name for the two-phased interviews and the material that was part of it all represents the original core of the present research. It was from this project that I moved to a different, though related direction of autoethnography. In fact, as referred to earlier, the deepening search for transformation among the students in the program is what led me to consideration of my own transformations in education and the unfolding realization that the “culture of education” was the most important facet of my own educational experience.

On Nov. 20th, 2019, I presented *Transformation in University Learning: A Phenomenography of Students in International Studies in Education*, the initial results of our ISE study in Edinburgh, Scotland at the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) conference. It was the first public presentation of my research outside the University of Iceland setting. Allyson and I had undertaken eight interviews by then and the material we reported on was based in part upon an earlier presentation I had made to the ISE doctoral students for one of our doctoral seminars earlier that fall. We viewed this as a pilot project intended to be presented for later approval at the midterm Interim Evaluation from whence I would then continue the research and expand upon it for the dissertation.

In this initial project I aimed to examine both immigrant and international students’ experiences in light of being in an international program that was especially designed for these two groups who were increasing in numbers in Icelandic society as well within the University of Iceland system. For many of the students, this was the first time that overt consideration of human rights, social justice, sustainability, and gender issues were a regular part of their school experience. This was especially true of incoming BA students but was noted by MA students as well. Such topics were folded into the course descriptions and the curricula contained excerpts from writings on each of these topics. Aside from site visits to different educational settings, in class discussions, role playing, diverse reading assignments and written case studies were the main components of their course work. Students were expected to lead and take part in discussions as well as to present individual and group assignments and class presentations. Each of these components alone were substantial enough to ensure students were challenged but taken together the immersion in a foreign country and the required use of English made the experience a very taxing one for many of our students, even amongst the most committed members.

Because the experiences among my peers seemed so different from each other, I wondered if there were any commonalities and if so, what might they be? I had begun readings in Transformative Education/Transformative learning and then considered if,

in fact, students would identify their experiences as transformative. If they did describe their experience at ISE as transformative, then how was this experienced and would they consider the transformation as positive or negative? A phenomenological approach seemed most appropriate. Phenomenography became the methodology used with phenomenological interviews structured to elicit responses that focused on the experience of transformation as they lived it (them). We felt that the value of phenomenography lies in its unvarnished presentation of the lived experiences of the subjects. We hoped the study would highlight the varied nature of the transformations, i.e., significant events/insights which led to long lasting change, that could provide information about the internal processes of learners. Taking a subjectivist view, the research would then provide insight into how courses and academic programs could create transformative experiences in higher education and support creative development of individual teacher's classroom interactions with diverse student groups.

The key question we used to guide us was "How is transformation experienced?" and an open-ended 20 question questionnaire was made and used for each interviewee. Interviews were held mainly in a meeting room on the third floor of the faculty and graduate student office building in Reykjavík, a short walking distance from the School of Education campus. Several interviews had to be done at Allyson's house only a few kilometers away because of scheduling difficulties. Allyson was present for each interview which lasted from 25 to 90 minutes. Participants were composed of my cohort plus several members from subsequent years. Interviewees were selected by snowball sampling and evenly divided between four men and four women, from their 20s to late 30s, of European and African origin, with mixed class and cultural backgrounds.

In examining the interview transcripts, at this phase of the research several notable categories were noted: "structural warmth", "confounded expectations", "social access: class, race, culture", and "utility value" (of program). The language the interviewees used to describe the events they recounted that led to us placing their narrative into either of these categories was notable for the emotional words they regularly included when speaking of the experience in being at ISE. Some of the most representative quotations we used at the presentation in Edinburgh were the following:

- "I was looking for something to develop myself and the program gave me the confidence to pursue teaching because they taught me I already have some capital which is good that I can use. The teachers were so supportive... ."

- “The experiences of my classmates helped me to see the broad picture; that all immigrants have similar problems, and I didn’t realize how fortunate I was before.”
- “I was able to analyze issues of racism, equality, and capitalism through the learning I got from the program that I can use today at my job.”
- “My ideas about education were already more radical than most and the program gave me new views of pedagogy and sustainability and how important that is.”

Additional excerpts seemed to confirm the positive views held by interviewees about the program and the often subtly affective way the responses were given.

- “There were things I didn’t need but I took all the ones I did, and I wanted a multicultural experience and got it.”
- “The program showed me I could do academic work and succeed. The teachers were so giving.”
- “The program was so different than what I was used to back home. I use the pedagogical styles and lessons from ISEP at my work site to teach others.”
- “The exposure to all these different cultures made me realize I was privileged and can’t just bulldoze myself into situations.”

With this material in hand, we conceived of expanding the interview set to 15-20 total and we desired to explore not only the commonalities but also the variations between responses, selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for commonalities and retaining use of phenomenography to continue describing the variations in responses. Inclusion of focus groups for a follow-up was also planned for.

Then Covid-19 struck.

Like many parts of the world at the time, Iceland was not exempt from more than a year of cancelled or truncated school periods, social distancing, lengthy absences from work or use of public transport, etc. It was a trying time for us as we navigated distance learning requirements with feeling bad for those students who had journeyed from around the globe to Iceland only to find themselves isolated in their dorms, often unable to live normally when many of them desperately needed some security and a sense of safety rather than the often near-hysterical anxiety that permeated much of the atmosphere at the time.

By the Fall of 2022 things had settled enough that we were able to present yet again at the SERA conference, this time in Ayr, Scotland. By then we had expanded our interviewees to a total of 15 and continued with both phenomenography and IPA. And, as we presented, “[t]ranscript analysis revealed the unifying thread between these two approaches as being the importance of the affective dimension to learning and its fundamental role in the individuals’ experience of transformation in education”. The title of our presentation reflected this clearly. “*They Will Never Forget How You Made Them Feel’: Transformation, the Affective Dimension of Learning, & the Researcher’s Role*”. At this point it was clear that the deepest impression made on learners who had been a part of the program was an affective one. “She [AM] was like a mother to me” and “Through the program I felt more integrated into [Icelandic] society” were two additional quotations taken from the transcripts that pointed in this direction.

But a newer development was taking place and that concerned my role. Four main issues were now identified:

- “Transformation is a continuing process, not a static place reached after (a) transformative event(s)”
- The affective dimension of education is far more important than otherwise normally acknowledged
- The relationship between the researcher and the researched matters. In fact,
- “How to include myself and my evolution into the research?” had become the focus of a [to be considered] “layered account” which uses autoethnography to examine the me who examines this program.

I had gone through a process of planning a project in which I first wanted to examine the ISE and its educational value by the initial interviews and their expansion, to thoughts of writing a publication thesis where the first paper would be on ISE and transformation, the second on Engaged Buddhism and activism, and the third on the psychology of transformation, to then examining my place in this project autoethnographically. But it became clearer as time went on that I couldn’t resolve how I fit into the ISE project and that instead, examination of my own transformative experiences and a deeper look at the role of education in my life would be a more rewarding, if in many ways more difficult, project to consider.

Appendix B

Supplemental Reading

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