
Democracy & Education

Expanding the Landscape of Wholeness: The Spirituality of Teacher Preparation.

A Response to *Reconstituting Teacher Education: Toward Wholeness in an Era of Monumental Challenges*

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Abstract

This article is a response to a paper arguing for a shift from “oneness” to “wholeness” as a democratic principle when reconceptualizing teacher education in a time of large-scale social change. While the paper provides compelling arguments for wholeness as a tool to address social injustice, the discussion is framed primarily through a humanist lens. This response is an invitation to expand the definition of wholeness to include spirituality as core to what it means to be human and whole. It addresses the importance of spirituality in teacher education when considering culturally responsive pedagogy, the religion-spirit distinction, the source of the call to teach, and the outer-technical and inner-heart paradox of teaching. Examples from educators combining spirituality and social justice are explored.

This article is in response to

Masterson, J. E., Gatti, L. (2022). Reconstituting Teacher Education: Toward Wholeness in an Era of Monumental Challenges. *Democracy & Education*, 30(2), Article 1

Available at: <http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol30/iss2/1>

Why, when God's world is so big,
did you fall asleep in a prison
of all places?

—Rumi

dimensions of humanness. A truly complete understanding of human wholeness for teacher education should include the social, cultural, and political as well as the spiritual dimensions of personhood for teachers and students.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR inclusion, justice, and equity in “Reconstituting Teacher Education: Toward Wholeness in an Era of Monumental Challenges”

(2022) are timely and well-reasoned. As such, this response is an invitation toward expansion of the social justice and equity arguments articulated in the article. Why are teacher educators falling asleep in the prison of neoliberalism, power, and whiteness when the world is so big? In the style of “Reconstituting Teacher Education,” I want to propose both a conceptual and practical expansion on Rumi’s bigness of the world to include the spiritual

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Spiritual as a Metaphor for Wholeness

The central argument of “Reconstituting Teacher Education” hinges on the observation that the physical monuments in society perpetuating inequity are being challenged and, when necessary, pulled down in favor of more complex and diverse understandings of democracy. The time is ripe for schooling and teacher education as a social practice to consider the metaphorical and structural monuments of dehumanization and to challenge, remake, or relegate them to permanent storage. These are the same types of structures and practices that form the bars of Rumi’s prison, limiting and constraining human potential in schools and teacher preparation.

The authors pointed to the ideology of “oneness,” which perpetuates white supremacy, power, and individualism as problematic in the structuring of teacher education. Oneness is dehumanizing because of its roots in whiteness, power, and privilege. Instead, the authors argued for the more inclusive notion of wholeness in teacher education, “These challenges are ones that naturalize and uphold whiteness, exalt a narrow definition of ‘teacher educator,’ reward white, middle-class privileges and sensibilities with unfettered entry into the profession, and preserve the ‘oneness’ of teacher education at the expense of an inclusive, multifaceted ‘wholeness’” (Masterson & Gatti, 2022, p. 2).

Like the authors, I hope that teacher educators resist the siren call of normality when normal means a return to policies and protocols that perpetuate whiteness, monolithic thinking, white supremacy, and diminishment of culture and linguistic differences. In this response, I advance three arguments for the inclusion of the spiritual when refashioning the conceptual understandings and practices in teacher education. I begin with an expanded description of humanness that includes the spiritual, move to a discussion of the distinction between spiritual and religious goals in education, and conclude with conceptual and concrete examples of spiritually informed teaching and practices. If teacher educators strive for a more inclusive and holistic understanding of education that is just and empowering, they need to include both the socio-political and the spiritual dimensions of humanness.

An Expanded Landscape of Humanness

In “Reconstituting Teacher Education,” the authors drew from the writings of Danielle Allen to frame their articulation of the challenges and opportunities society faces in these times of social, economic, and political disruption. The concept of “reconstruction” is central to Allen’s work and the new directions for teacher education promoted by the authors, “although reconstitution implies a loss of what once was, Allen has reminded us that it is fundamentally ‘an opportunity for weaving a new social fabric in which to clothe ourselves’” (Masterson & Gatti, 2022, p. 3). And the authors asked, “If we view teacher education itself as being in a moment of reconstitution, what sort of fabric shall we use to remake ourselves?” (Masterson & Gatti, 2022, p. 3). To this “new social fabric” I propose weaving the spiritual into the cloth of teacher education and teacher preparation. We risk, in leaving that thread absent, a bareness in the cloth that ultimately weakens its capacity to cover the wholeness of what it means to be a human

alive in the world who is concerned about social justice, equity, and inclusion.

By “spiritual,” I mean the formation of a relationship with something greater than self and self-knowing. This is broadly consistent with the definition of wholeness posited in “Reconstituting Teacher Education.” The primary difference is the expansion of wholeness beyond the human sphere to include the landscape of the mystical and ineffable. In a temporal or secular sense, spirituality in education is a relationship with something greater than self when learners commit to the disciplined study of a content area culminating in a degree program. Ideally their individual interests and love of knowledge is incorporated into the more inclusive frameworks of the knowledge community. In a transcendent or eternal frame, spirituality in education can embody a sense of transcendence and transformation when learners fully commit to a deep change in identity and sense of selfhood through a relationship with other-knowing, “a personal commitment to the process of inner development that engages us in our totality” (Teasdale, 2001, p. 17).

In the field of adult learning theory, the stimulus for deep personal engagement is often a “disorienting dilemma” that invites a reorganization of previously held beliefs and assumptions about the nature of humanness for self and others (Cranton, 2016; Schwartz, 2019). “Reconstituting Teacher Education” points to the many ways that teacher education limits the kinds of disorienting dilemmas that would bring to light the importance of socially justice educational practices. These structural and conceptual responses to inequity are necessary but insufficient when considering what it means to bring wholeness to the task of social justice.

Educator and activist Parker Palmer (2017) has noted that when assessing educational challenges, the ineffable as well as the technical must be considered: “Good teachers, lawyers, physicians, and leaders bring at least as much art as science to their work—and art is rooted partly in the affective knowledge that eludes our instruments and our intellect” (p. 209). Wang (2021), drawing from educator William Doll, has warned teachers that too much attention to the technical “drains out the aesthetic and spiritual meanings of education” (p. 186).

If fully practiced in teacher education, attending to the social, emotional, and intellectual is not an easy endeavor. It takes commitment and willingness to risk the social pressures of normality, whiteness, and standardization. Noted educator and social justice advocate bell hooks (2013) made a compelling argument for inclusion of the spiritual as a source of renewal when engaging in social activism: “Weariness often emerges as spiritual crisis. It is essential that we build into our teaching vision a place where spirit matters, a place where our spirits can be renewed and our souls restored” (p. 183). Teacher candidates who include social justice and equity in their teaching increasingly encounter hostile politicians, district administrators, colleagues, and parents who seek to constrain and control their efforts at student liberation.

If, as Masterson and Gatti (2022) noted, Allen’s understanding of wholeness “is synonymous with ‘full,’ ‘total,’ and ‘complete’” (p. 4), then why is the spiritual, an important part of what it means to be human, left out of many teacher education reform

conversations? When the transcendent qualities of humanness are not explicitly included, what are the implicit forms of marginalization and exclusion experienced by teacher candidates? When the temporal and technical dimensions of teacher education falter around the deep longing of the teacher's heart, where might they turn for sustenance and strength? The attention to the spiritual is not a diminishment of effective teaching or humanizing pedagogy but rather an addition to these important conversations.

Humanizing Pedagogy and the Spiritual

"Reconstituting Teacher Education" seeks to answer the question, what does it mean to be human as defined through the principles of democracy? In response, I propose another question, what does it mean to include understandings of the spiritual, or the call to teach, when considering humanizing pedagogy? hooks (2003) focuses the question by noting, "We can't begin to talk about spirituality in education until we talk about what it means to have a life in the spirit" (p. 158).

An important element of hooks's observation is tied to the philosophical distinction between the twin elements of humanness (temporal and transcendent) and the tendency of Western ideologies to focus almost exclusively on the temporal and concrete. Noted author Robin Wall Kimmerer, who writes about her experience with the spaces between science, Indigenous wisdom, and emerging notions of self, like hooks, seeks to bring the temporal and transcendent aspects of humanness into alignment. She has noted that Indigenous communities know and live into an epistemology of interdependence and interrelationship that requires "the choice between the deadly road of materialism that threatens the land and the people, and the soft path of wisdom, respect, and reciprocity that is held in the teachings of the first fire" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 361).

The destructive potential of continued submission to the monuments of materialism, individualism, and commodification of the self are well understood "in a commons-based society where sharing was essential to survival and greed made any individual a danger to the whole" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 299). Kimmerer's language and intention for humanness strikes a similar tone to "Reconstituting Teacher Education" when the text notes that the historical monuments of teacher education diminish humanness for historically marginalized individuals.

Deformation in Teacher Education

What I wonder about and see as an area of growth in humanizing pedagogy is the space between the conceptual-philosophical understandings of teacher education candidates and their humanizing practices. As a teacher educator, I assign readings that articulate the importance of humanizing pedagogy in support of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. And many students in their assignments, class discussions, or reflective writing can accurately state the parameters and importance of humanizing pedagogy. They demonstrate a strong intuitive sense of humanness that resonates with a universal notion of what it means to be human, a holistic sense of human ontology, that is often missing in school practices and principles.

At the same time, when asked to articulate the philosophical and spiritual roots of their understandings of what it means to be human, they often struggle. Their difficulties seem a consequence of several factors, including: rarely has anyone in their program asked this question; they lack the words to describe what fuels their calling to serve; and given that humanizing pedagogy is prevalent in the field of teacher education, there is little need to stake a personal claim of knowing and being.

A case in point: In the courses I teach, the final project includes an artistic representation of learning, which addresses social justice content, practice, and changes in self and self-knowing. The first elements of the assignment are typically easier for students to complete; the last element, which is essentially a question of spiritual formation linked to practice, is a challenge. In a recent class, after the presentation of final projects, I engaged students in a conversation around this apparent disconnect between their temporal understanding of educator as a person who practices social justice and their transcendent understandings of self as a person whose calling, purpose, is informed by the transcendent and spiritual.

When presented with this dichotomy, students spoke about this painful reality. They found it easier to intellectualize ideas than live into and investigate the philosophical and spiritual roots of their teaching. They noted that participation in the normalizing system of education made it difficult to see themselves as a human with transcendent qualities in the role of teacher. The fullness of their humanness was deformed by many current practices in teacher education that often value the head and technique over the heart and spiritual wisdom. An experienced teacher in class, who actively creates spaces of refuge for students of color, noted that in over 20 years of teaching, rarely were they asked to connect their heart to the work of teaching for social justice.

Who Is the Self That Teaches?

What might it look like to create the conditions in teacher education where formation of the full human is the goal, inclusive of the technical elements of culturally responsive pedagogy and the energizing and sustaining elements of spiritual identity? The authors of "Reconstituting Teacher Education," when applying Allen's theories to teacher education, noted, "Applied to teacher education, Allen's (2004) concepts of reconstitution and wholeness beg critical questions related to belonging, inclusion, and participation: Who gets to participate in the work of teacher education? Who is included? Do all voices get a vote? Who sets the agenda?" (Masterson & Gatti, 2022, p. 5).

For Masterson & Gatti (2022), "who" speaks to the essence of full inclusion of individuals typically excluded by the sources of power and privilege from conversations and decision making in teacher education. Who in this sense is an outward concern for people who are not present. In a similar way, the concept of who is central to the question of what it means to bring the fullness of one's spiritual self to teaching and learning. However, the direction of intent is different; the spiritual questions of who are inwardly focused on the liberation of the self and others.

In his critique of teacher preparation and professional development, Palmer (1998/2017) posited four questions framing conversations about teaching: (1) What is being taught? (2) How should it be taught? (3) Why should it be taught? (4) Who is the self that teaches? The first two questions dominate discussions and research on teaching practices. The third question is rarely asked, often only while writing a short philosophy of education. The fourth question, who is the self that teaches, is almost never asked, nor is there space in teacher education curriculum to burrow into its deep meaning and implications for self as a social justice educator. The previous example from my class is consistent with Palmer's observation that the development of the spiritual essence at the heart of good teaching is vacant in the experiences of most educators.

There are numerous ways that the question of who is the self that teaches can be woven into the curriculum of teacher education. My course syllabus includes a statement that learning in class is both an intellectual task of understanding content and an invitation to deep internal change which can be philosophical or spiritual. I bring readings to class that point to the ways that the spiritual enlivens and sustain the social justice impulse of educators, for instance Fernández (2019), Camangian & Cariaga (2021), Purpel (2002), Frogel (2010), LeFever (2016), Michalec and Wilson, (2021) and Waggoner (2016). During class conversations, office hours, and teacher observations, I look for examples of both technical and spiritual elements of a teacher's practice. Where is one element lacking or too developed? Is a teacher's commitment and effectiveness to humanizing pedagogy faltering for technical and conceptual reasons, or because their heart, the center of their authenticity, is silent?

I also ask students to engage in a particular form of reflection that is specific to spiritual formation. A practice that leads to greater levels of integrity and wholeness. In my teaching, I encourage critical reflection on one's practice, a focus on a teacher's examination of the external ramifications of their practice that constrains or liberates students. This is a good and necessary practice for high-quality social justice education. But when it comes to the kind of reflection that energizes hooks's (2003) claim that the spiritual must be included in educational practices, a different kind of reflection is required. In many spiritual practices, this form of internal reflection on outer action is known as discernment. Discernment is best practiced in the context of community where a teacher can articulate the "who-ness" behind their practice and colleagues can listen for inconsistencies or point to truths that the person has yet to realize. Discernment in teacher education is the continual practice of answering the question, who is the self that teaches toward the goal of social justice and equity?

Spirituality and Religion

A perennial challenge when notions of spirituality are included in conversations about schooling and school curriculum is the First Amendment separation of church and state. Lingley (2016) in her articulation of "Spiritually Responsive Pedagogy" posited that the First Amendment concerns are a red herring, "a refusal on the part of members of the dominator class to relinquish

epistemological and ontological control when it comes to certifying what counts as legitimate knowledge and learning in schools" (p. 7). Kessler (2000) in *Soul of Education* offered three responses to the prohibition against religion in schools: (1) Given the diverse religious perspectives in America, it is appropriate and just to resist the linkage between religion and public policy. (2) Spirituality and religion are distinct values guiding human decision-making and practice. (3) Since spirituality is central to humanness, it is present in schools regardless of what the law or school policy endorses or limits; humanness and spirit are inseparable.

Hansen (2021), advocating a philosophical and moral foundation to the call to teach, has noted that "the terms religious and religion typically walk together, for any number of time-honored reasons. However, it is possible, for heuristic purposes, to single out religious as not necessarily implying roots in an actual, established religion" (p. 5). The spirit is often a path to religion, and faith practices are enlivened by the spirit, but the two are not synonymous. There is ample evidence that it is possible to speak about and include the spiritual when considering human development and liberation in education without defaulting to the dogmatism and rituals of religion: "I emphasize the mystical dimensions of the Christian faith because it was that aspect of the religious experience that I found to be truly liberatory" (hooks, 2003, pp. 160–161).

Spiritual Truths Are Pedagogically Inclusive

Unlike rational truths that hold to the logic of right and wrong, spiritual truths are paradoxical. They include "both/and thinking" (Dewey, 1938) that strives to encompass all the complexities of differing points of view into a shared description of humanness. This understanding of truth as broader and more inclusive than true or false, is held by fields of knowing as diverse as physics and poetry. The physicist Niels Bohr captured the distinction between truth that seeks collaboration and facts that drive toward division: Two sorts of truth: profound truths recognized by the fact that the opposite is also a profound truth, in contrast to trivialities where opposites are obviously absurd (Bohr, 1967, p. 328). The poet Emily Dickinson advised, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant" (Franklin, 2005) which as an educator I take to mean that paradox, mystery, and story are as essential to teaching as the more highly publicized "best practices."

Theology, as a study of the spiritual, can offer the gift of description to the field of education when considering the mysterious and eternal nature of humanness. What might the language of theology and spirituality offer as a deeper understanding of what it means to be human? What might this epistemology of knowing add to the aim of advancing the goals of equity, justice, and inclusion in teacher education? In answering these questions, I offer several examples from educators in theology, medicine, and education who are exploring the interface between humanness and the spiritual formation. Across this wide framing is a complex range of descriptors from theologians, First Nations people, educators, activists, philosophers, and educational reformers, including: oneness and eternal presence (Wang, 2021); the circle (Jacobs, 2016); prophetic spirituality (Purpel, 2002); transcendence

(Huebner, 2012); inner-life (Palmer, 1998/2017); charisma (Flood, 2020); totality (Teasdale, 2001); singularity (Hansen, 2021); spring box in the center of the chest (Banks, 1995); The Beloved (hooks, 1999); and ultimacy (Forbes, 2002).

Models of the Spiritual in Education

The language of spirituality from multiple faith traditions is present and accessible, but what might it look like in the concrete world of spiritually informed social justice education? There are many authors I could point to to explore this, including Parker Palmer, David Hansen, and Hongyu Wang, but I want to highlight three educators, Audrey Lingley, bell hooks, and Laura Rendón, because their work focuses on social justice and the spiritual formation of educators.

In her article “Democratic Foundations for Spiritually Responsive Teaching,” Lingley (2016) offered a template for integrating spirituality into pedagogical reforms that advance the goals of democracy and culturally responsive teaching. In her argument, she drew from educators committed to humanizing learning, including bell hooks, John Dewey, Nel Noddings, and Paulo Freire. She noted that these social justice reformers in education lean toward the “positioning of spirituality as an inner resource of strength, purpose, and connection to the sacred as well as a tool for disrupting hegemonic epistemological assumptions buried in mainstream pedagogy” (p. 7).

Lingley (2016) organized her reform efforts into four principles that act as a counter-narrative to traditional notions of teacher preparation, which, devoid of spirit, will perpetuate whiteness and the diminishment of culturally diverse learners:

1. *The learner’s spiritual development is situated within a holistic framework of human development (p. 8);*
2. *Curriculum, instruction, and assessment must respond to spiritual ways of knowing and support the learner’s spiritual development (p. 8);*
3. *A holistic ontology, including aspects of divinity, sacred connections, and a larger purpose, should inform all aspects of teaching and learning (p. 9); and*
4. *The integration of spirituality by democratic educators into social justice goals (p. 9).*

Lingley argued that the incorporation of these principles will “increase the application of democratic principles in educational experiences through recognition of the central role of spirituality in the lives of students who have been epistemologically and ontologically marginalized by a Western binary” (p. 10). Her approach to spiritually informed pedagogy shows that democratic practices in schools, a central concern in “Reconstituting Teacher Education,” can and should be compatible with a holistic landscape of humanness that includes spirituality.

bell hooks (2003) was concerned with the tendency of Western ways of knowing to deform notions of humanness and perpetuate a sense of divided self for students of color:

Conventional education teaches us that disconnection is organic to our being. No wonder then that black students of color, and

working-class kids of all races often enter schools, especially college, with a learned experience of interconnectedness that places them at odds with the world they entered. They are deeply threatened at the core of their being by the invitation to enter a mind-set where there is no sense of the sacred, where connection is devalued. (p. 180)

“Reconstituting Teacher Education” invited teacher educators to incorporate wholeness as an organizing principle in reform agendas dedicated to holism, healing, empowerment, and culturally responsive pedagogies. Central to hooks’s project of wholeness is the spiritually informed, spiritually embodied practice of love that recognizes the pivotal role of the spirit in fostering change, building a community of difference, and sustaining the commitment to reform education: “Many of the individuals who worked to create communities of diversity are weary. That weariness often emerges as a spiritual crisis. It is essential that we build into our teaching vision a place where spirit matters, a place where our spirits can be renewed and our souls restored” (p. 183).

The message for teacher educators is that love is more than a practical form of pedagogy that attends to the needs and interest of the other. Love combines the heart and the hand in the shared work of wholeness. For hooks (2003), love is a discipline, a spiritual practice, that “can bridge the sense of otherness. It takes practice to be vigilant, to beam that love out. It takes work” (p. 162). Love, as practiced by hooks, is akin to Indigenous and quantum physics claims that reality is the integration of all that is known, “to be guided by love is to live in community with all life” (p. 163).

In a radical turn to unconditional hospitality, hooks (1999) suggests that true love occurs in relationship with “intimate otherness” (p. 117), the person or people who we are least drawn to as conversation partners or members of a shared community. For teacher educators, this means that a curriculum of love, anchored in spiritual practices like compassion, discipline, and discernment, is essential to flourishing for all learners. In affirmation of this claim, Kimmerer (2013) provided a concrete example of how an expansive love of otherness extends the boundaries of community: “Being with salamanders gives honor to otherness, offers an antidote to the poison of xenophobia. Each time we rescue slippery, spotted beings we attest to their right to be, to live in the sovereign territory of their own lives” (p. 348). If teacher education candidates studying biology could love the much maligned and misunderstood salamander in this way, imagine the transformative ways they could love and care for the otherness of their students.

Laura Rendón (2012) is another educator leaning into the ways that spirituality can inform teaching practices in ways that create space for the fullness of the teacher and learner in the classroom. Much like the authors of “Reconstituting Teacher Education,” Rendón argued that current forms of education are detrimental to the health, wellness, and integrity of students of color. She noted that Western Enlightenment thinking is, by design, a collection of “negative elements of an educational system that effectively slaughters our sense of wonder” (p. 4). Rationality and mystery are held apart from each other in the curriculum and in the lived experience of learners resulting in a sense of the divided self (Palmer, 1998/2017).

In her articulation of ways to move education and professional development toward wholeness and connection, Rendón (2012) employed the metaphor of an educational dreamfield, a socially constructed space of shared beliefs (p. 23). The contemporary dreamfield of division and separation is anchored in a series of agreements that privilege rationality, competition, perfection, monoculturalism, and outer work (p. 26). Quoting the Uruguayan journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano, Rendón noted that “from the moment we enter school or church, education chops us into pieces: it teaches us to divorce soul from body and mind from heart” (p. 131). Because dreamfields are a human construct, it is possible to remake the educational dreamfield to foster the spiritual disciplines of integration, wholeness, connection, paradox, contemplative practice, and discernment.

When describing a workshop on integrating spirituality into the practice of educators, Rendón (2012) posited four questions drawn from the work of activist, theologian, and educator Wayne Muller: (1) Who am I? (2) What do I love? (3) How shall I live, knowing I will die? (4) What is my gift to the family of this earth? (p. 83). Adding these questions to the curriculum of teacher education would advance both the democratic goals central to “Reconstituting Teacher Education” and to the goal of including spirituality in any conversation about what it means to be a person engaged in the very human endeavor of teaching and learning. Instead of the classic Cartesian framing of humanness as “I think therefore I am,” Rendón proposed an embodied epistemology that affords space for the spiritual and ineffable in social justice education: “I feel therefore I am” (p. 131).

Conclusion

In “Reconstituting Teacher Education,” the authors argued that “among our teacher candidates, wholeness insists that we move beyond ‘teaching to the middle,’ which, given demographic trends, leaves us to attend to the needs of cisgender white women to the exclusion of everyone else” (Masterson & Gatti, 2022, p. 8). Another middle ground that is worth moving beyond, because it excludes important information about the heart of teaching practices dedicated to liberation and humanness, is the myth of spiritual neutrality. Kessler (2000) in her book *Soul of Education* argued that because spirituality is intimately bound up with humanness, it is always present in teacher education classrooms, whether the spirit is acknowledged or not. Curricularist Dwayne Huebner agrees with Kessler’s views about the inherent spiritual aspects of teaching and learning. Huebner (2012) has noted that a spirituality of education should be considered the normal state of being in classrooms, “to speak of the ‘spirit’ and the ‘spiritual’ is not to speak of something ‘other’ than humankind, merely ‘more’ than humankind as it is lived and known” (p. 343).

As the work of hooks, Palmer, Rendón, Lingley, and others demonstrate, the deep motivations of teachers are inherently spiritual. It matters little if teacher education acknowledges this truth—preservice teachers will always bring spiritual aspects of self into the classroom. The only questions worth attending to, through a spiritual lens, are the what, why, and how of spiritual formation

and the deforming consequences of not fully addressing spirituality as an element of human wholeness.

Now is the time to reexamine, not retool, the normal that perpetuates the old ways that are empowering some (whites and Cartesian’s views of human) and disempowering others (people of color and spiritual ways of knowing and being). Now is the time to liberate the inner-spark, a person’s sacred fire (Kimmerer, 2013), from what we can visualize with Rumi’s metaphor of a prison designed to limit and confine human potential.

In her poem “Burlap Sack,” Jane Hirshfield (2006) compared the human condition in modern society to the work of a pack animal overloaded with technical accoutrements. In the ways of poets, her comparison is metaphorical—humans are never mules—but revealing of the human experience of work that is less than life-giving: “A person is full of sorrow / the way a burlap sack is full of stones or sand. / We say, ‘Hand me the sack,’ / but we get the weight. / Heavier if left out in the rain. / To think that the stones or sand are the self is an error.” When I read Hirshfield, I think of my teacher education students who are weighed down by programmatic and institutional imperatives that are more attuned to procedure and performance than fidelity to their humanness. I think of my students who have never been asked, who is the self that teaches? They take the weight as part of the training process with the presumption that at some point, their calling, their spirit, their spark will enliven their pedagogy.

Hirshfield continued: “The mule is not the load of ropes and nails and axes. / The self is not the miner nore builder nore driver.” If the tools and external evaluators are not the source of identity and meaning, what is? The poet, as is their nature, leaves the answer in mystery in the form of a question, “What would it be to take the bride / and leave behind the heavy dowry?” As a teacher educator interested in expanding the landscape of human flourishing and spiritual formation, I reframe the question: What would it be to attune to the spiritual, the calling to create healing spaces in classrooms and attend less to the antidemocratic pillars articulated in “Reconstituting Teacher Education”?

Striving for spiritual wholeness is a universal quality of humanness and should take a more central role in teacher preparation. In solidarity with Indigenous communities and cultures that value interconnectivity, Newell (2008) noted a growing human consciousness “that life is interwoven, that reality is a web of interrelated influences, and that what we do to a part we do the whole” (p. ix). In critique of his religious tradition, Newell stated that “we have neglected the truth that we and all life come from the same Source and that all things therefore carry within them the sound of the Beginning” (p. xiii). The educator and philosopher David Hansen (2021) used the word “singularity” (p. 62) to describe Newell’s “sound of the Beginning,” which he claimed is the singular human quality every teacher brings to the craft of teaching.

Integrating the inner spiritual and the outer technical is a dance with variable steps, not a preprogrammed set of policies and protocols: “We are meant to live in two infinities at once—one leading us outward toward action in the world around us; the other calling us to open ourselves to the world within us” (Needleman,

1999). Rachel Naomi Remen, MD (1999), has been committed to the task of bringing wholeness to physicians who often experience a deep sense of spiritual and professional dividedness. She argued that physicians are educators, and as such, “there is a place where ‘to educate’ and ‘to heal’ mean the same thing. *Educators are healers*” (p. 35).

During her training of physicians, (Remen, 1999) often asked the question, “Is there a part of you that you are afraid you may forget in this process of becoming a doctor?” (p. 40). Based on her personal experience of dividedness (the separation of her head, hands, and heart) she asked this question to remind her students of their inherent wholeness and that healing for self and others depends on the wholeness of the physician connecting with the wholeness of the patient.

I imagine and practice a time when Remen’s question is a central element of teacher preparation: Is there a part of you that you are afraid you may forget in this process of becoming a teacher? To fully answer this question will require the inclusion of the spirit and spiritual formation alongside the technical and procedural demands of teacher preparation. The authors of “Reconstituting Teacher Education” are right: Why are we as teacher educators falling asleep in a prison (borrowing Rumi’s imagery) when the world of human potential is more expansive than our current parameters allow?

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