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# Connected Teaching: An Exploration of the Classroom Enterprise

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A series of events and insights over the past few years has helped me to understand better my goals as a college teacher. The university where I teach is, according to our mission statement, dedicated to the "education of the whole person" in preparation for "creative and intelligent engagement" in the larger culture. Yet, like most university faculty members, my colleagues and I often talk about teaching as if it were simply the passing on of knowledge and critical thinking skills, disengaged from the larger human experience. In recent years, I have begun to take more seriously the commitment to form students as "knowers," capable of creative and intelligent engagement throughout their fives. How can we equip our students with habits of mind and heart that will prepare them for ongoing growth in this capacity, that is, for intellectual and psychological growth not just during the college years but in the decades beyond? In this article, I would like to share my struggle with this question and to describe the classroom practices that have grown out of the struggle.

Last year I taught rhetoric, a writing class for advanced freshmen and sophomores. For one of the assignments, I asked my students to read two essays: Rodriguez's "The Achievement of Desire" (1990) and Steinem's "Ruth's Song (Because She Could Not Sing It)' (1990). Both essays are moving accounts of the authors' coming of age. Together, they prompted several thoughtful discussions about parent-child relationships and the function of education.

Born to impoverished Mexican immigrants, Rodriguez became a scholarship boy' who ultimately earned a PhD in English Renaissance literature in London. His essay is an account of the way his education

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alienated him from his boisterous, affectionate family. About his schooling, Rodriguez comments,

> With his family the scholarship boy has the intense pleasure of intimacy, the family's consolation in feeling public alienation. Lavish emotions texture home life. *Then,* at school, the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily .... From his mother and father the boy learns to trust spontaneity and nonrational ways of knowing. *Then,* at school, there is mental calm. Teachers emphasize the value of a reflectiveness that opens a space between thinking and immediate action. (1990, p. 502)

Speaking of his doctoral research, he says, "I seemed unable to dare a passionate statement. I felt drawn by professionalism to the edge of sterility, capable of no more than pedantic, lifeless, unassailable prose" (1990, p. 518).

Like Rodriguez, Steinem spent her early years feeling marginalized. During most of her childhood, she lived alone with a mentally unstable mother who was dependent on her. Departure for college marked the beginning of a wrenching separation from her mother and was a first step toward Steinem's eventual emergence as a spokesperson for the American women's movement. Following a poignant account of a childhood filled with shame, her essay describes the evolution of their adult relationship, through her mother's recovery over several decades until her death in her 80s. As the title suggests, "Ruth's Song (Because She Could Not Sing It)" is primarily an extended reflection on the ways Steinem's mother's life was constricted. But it is also the story of a daughter's adult relationship with her mother, a relationship shaped by Steinem's deepening understanding of her mother.

What my students and I found most interesting about the two essays was the theme of separation. Both Rodriguez and Steinem needed to break away from their families in order to make their ways in the world. This breaking away may be, as Erikson (1950) suggests, a universal experience for young people who are trying to establish an adult identity apart from their parents. For both Rodriguez and Steinem, the emotional experience of separating was intensified by the fact that the parents were marginalized and impoverished and that the two offspring became influential and relatively affluent public figures. A change in social status widened the chasm between parent and child. For both Rodriguez and Steinem, the avenue for this break was attending college.

My students' preoccupation with the theme of separation did not surprise me. Most of my rhetoric students were traditional college freshmen and sophomores, living away from home for the first time. Many of them, like Rodriguez and Steinem, were struggling with conflicting desires-the drive to become their own person versus loyalty

to their parents and the comfort of being part of a family. Practical concerns such as financial dependence, the question of where to spend semester breaks, or disagreements with parents over appearance made MY students acutely aware of the struggle. Many of them, for example, were battling with parents over curfews and multiple ear-piercings.

Their struggle between attachment and separation is one with which most adults can identify. Gilligan, studying psychological and moral development, suggests that this is a lifelong tension:

> Attachment and separation anchor the cycle of human life, describing the biology of human reproduction and the psychology of human development. The concepts of attachment and separation that depict the nature and sequence of infant development appear in adolescence as identity and intimacy and then in adulthood as love and work . . . . [T]he apogee of separation in adolescence is presumed to be followed in adulthood by the return of attachment and care. (1982, p. 151)

The interplay of attachment and separation was one I was accustomed to seeing students wrestle with; indeed, I wrestled with it myself.

But what *did* surprise me was the fact that my students overwhelmingly favored Steinem's portrayal of the child-parent relationship. Their response to the essay by Rodriguez was anger and impatience. "The Achievement of Desire" portrays the emotional separation of child from family roots as complete and irreversible. As Rodriguez moves toward intellectual and psychological independence, he loses the affectionate closeness he once felt with his parents, he loses his lively Mexican culture, he loses touch with his own spontaneous feelings. In "The Achievement of Desire," Rodriguez sees as inevitable and final the loss of interdependence and intimacy between the adult child and his parents. This sacrifice is a necessary prerequisite for intellectual achievement.

Although Rodriguez celebrates the intellectual benefits of this separation, my students thought that the losses outweighed them. Moreover, in their eyes, Rodriguez's alienation from his parents undermined his authority as a writer. They believed that his academic training, leading as it did to alienation from his family, had caused his understanding not to increase but to diminish. Instead of growing in his ability to perceive and make sense of the world around him, he lost ground, at least in some essential realms. It was as if he had donned blinders that limited his knowledge of his own family, his culture, his emotions, his own self. Instinctively, my students distrusted him.

In contrast, these same students expressed an admiring appreciation for Steinem. Several of them groaned when they first recognized the name of a controversial feminist on the syllabus. And only a few could

identify personally with the particulars of her childhood home life. Yet almost all the students were impressed by Steinem's combination of tenderness with a clear-headed critique of the social forces that thwarted her mother. A child traumatized by the burden of a mentally troubled and dependent mother might well have become an adult ridden with anger and guilt. Instead, in "Ruth's Song," Steinem balances an intimate bond with her mother and an intelligent understanding of her victimization.

At first we agreed that Steinem understood her mother's plight *in spite of* her emotional involvement with her, but then we wondered if it would be more accurate to say that she understood *because of* her emotional involvement. Judging by "Ruth's Song," Steinem separated from her mother both intellectually and psychologically as she herself gained higher education and broader experience. Over many years, she educated herself regarding the nature of mental illness, the social and economic forces that shaped the women of her mother's generation, and the events of Ruth's own life. Eventually, such knowledge led to a deeper understanding of her mother and thus to a deeper bond with her.

Describing a moment of epiphany, Steinem writes, "It was a strange experience to look into those brown eyes I had seen so often and realize suddenly how much they were like my own. For the first time, I realized that she might really be my mother" (1990, p. 549). Through the interplay of separation and attachment, Steinem had come to a sense of understanding and compassion that my students wanted to emulate. In contrast to Rodriguez's alienation, Steinem's relationship with her mother felt somehow complete to us, as if mother and daughter had reached a state of resolution and balance. And the understanding that grew out of that relationship seemed likewise complete.

**Relationship of Ways of Knowing to Human Development**

The discussion in my rhetoric class raised for me larger questions regarding the individual's growth as a knower, or, to borrow Perry's terminology, a student's ability to perceive "knowledge, truth, and value" (1970, p. 43). How had their formal education helped Rodriguez and Steinem to become more adept and versatile at "ways of knowing"? It seemed clear to me that the two writers" intellectual growth influenced their psychological separation from their families, and vice versa, that their shifting relationships with their families helped to shape their ways of perceiving and understanding the world. It followed that my students' relationships with their families influenced their ways of knowing-their epistemological stances-which in turn influenced their family relationships. Furthermore, I suspected that students' relationships with their

families shaped their relationships with peers and larger social communities that also influenced their ways of knowing. In light of these factors, I asked the question: How could the university (I in particular) promote my students' intellectual growth?

My question was illuminated by *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), a book that examines students' experiences as knowers, particularly during the college years. Using open-ended interviews, Belenky and her colleagues studied the experiences of 135 students in a research sample that included traditional college students at a variety of institutions, nontraditional students (who were returning to school at a more mature age), and others involved in less formal education through social service agencies, many of them from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Their research yielded a paradigm of five "epistemological positions" (Figure 1).

In this paradigm, I could readily recognize many of my undergraduate students; they clustered in the middle three positions of *received, subjective, and procedural* knowing. I was interested especially in the position of procedural knowing, because so much of university education involves the transmission of various procedures for arriving at truth. Belenky et al. describe procedural knowers as "practical, pragmatic problem-solvers" (1986, p. 99), who are involved actively in trying to master the procedures and paradigms-to "see through the lenses"-that others have found effective. Unlike the spontaneous, intuitive knowing of the subjectivist position, procedural knowing is conscious and deliberate; the procedures are governed by rules that ensure fair and systematic learning-learning that can be communicated and verified. Procedural knowing requires the knower to set aside the personal point of view for a time in order to look through the lens of another.

## Connection and Separation as Ways of Knowing

Within the position of procedural knowing, I was fascinated by the distinction made between *separate knowing and connected knowing.* As a scholar of rhetoric, I recognized the procedures of separate knowing: learning through argument, detachment, impersonal analysis, and doubt. Critical thinking, the scientific method, and textual analysis, for example, all fit into the category of *separate procedural knowing.* Separate knowing often takes the form of an adversarial proceeding. *Ripping an argument apart, sharpening one's thinking, and intellectual sparring* are all metaphors that describe it. Discussion in this mode grows out of disagreement and the desire to discover flaws in the other's position. In separate knowing, the self and emotion are weeded out in favor of a truth that transcends them. Such intellectual sparring may carry over into

Figure 1

**Epistemological Positions**

## Silence

An abnormal stage characterized by little awareness of intellectual capabilities and by the belief that only external authorities know (or deserve to know) the truth. Words are seen more as weapons than as a means for sharing.

## Received Knowing

Knowledge comes only from external sources, from perceived "experts" and authority figures. Little value is placed upon the individual's personal authority as a knower with legitimate insights and understanding. Truth is single, absolute, concrete, and factual so that a thing is either right or wrong, true or false, good or evil. (This stance is comparable to Perry's description [1970] of the dualist, who sees truth in terms of black and white, right or wrong.)

## Subjective Knowing (or Subjectivism)

One rejects external authority in preference to one's own ostensibly unique vision of the world. Subjective knowers look inside themselves for knowledge; truth arises from firsthand personal experience, from intuition, "from the gut." Subjectivists believe passionately that everyone has the right to an opinion and that all opinions are equally valid, even when they contradict one another. In this mode, personal truth need not, or cannot, be communicated or generalized.

## Procedural Knowing

Knowers begin to adopt external procedures to arrive at truth. The knower begins to appreciate the methodologies of particular disciplines as a means of acquiring knowledge, as well as to embrace *talk* as a way of gaining knowledge—discussion with peers as well as with authorities.

### *Forms of Procedural Knowing*

*Separate mode* focuses on evaluating and judging different points of view or arguments. It is abstract and analytic. Objectivity is achieved by adhering to impersonal standards and keeping the self separate from the process. Feelings are believed to cloud thought. The goal of separate knowing is to construct truth—to prove, disprove, and convince.

*Connected mode* focuses on trying to understand and experience another's perspective, another's reality, and to be understood. It is narrative and holistic rather than analytic. Objectivity is achieved through adopting the other's perspective. Feelings are believed to illuminate thought. The goal of connected knowing is to construct meaning—to understand and to be understood.

## Constructed Knowing

One seeks to integrate knowledge gained from external sources and procedures with knowledge that is acquired more subjectively. Personal experience and the individual's private vision are woven together with procedural knowledge in such a way that knowers see their passions and intellectual life as part of one unified whole. One person in this stage described it by saying, "You let the inside out and the outside in" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 135). The goal of constructed knowing is to *care about thinking* and to *think about caring*.

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Adapted from a handout given by M. B. Belenky at the "On Gaining a Voice" workshop at Grailville Conference Center, Loveland, Ohio, November 16-18, 1990. See also Belenky et al. (1986), p. 134, for an overview of the positions.

one's personal life, causing the kind of alienation and sterility experienced by Rodriguez.

Although many of the students Belenky et al. interviewed learned through such procedures, many others seemed to discover truth in a very different way. Unlike the subjective knowers, these students were seeking to get beyond their own perspective, to try out the lens of another in order to discover truth that could be communicated and generalized. Yet a great percentage-not just the weak students, but some of the highest achievers-felt alienated from the educational institution they attended. They felt instinctively at odds in universities where only the procedures of separate knowing were endorsed.

To describe such students, Belenky et al. formulated the concept of *connected knowing,* in which learning occurs through involvement, active engagement, imagination, belief, and empathy. The connected knower discovers truth by aligning with another's point of view, even when in disagreement. By imaginatively taking on the other's point of view, such a knower broadens understanding. Belenky et al. say of the connected knower, "Through empathy she expands her experiential base" (1986, p. *115). Entering the other person's world, receiving his vision, and sharing in exploration* are metaphors that describe connected knowing. Discussion in this mode grows out of trying to identify with and take on the other's position. The self (or personal experience) and emotion are seen as instruments that help the knower to discover truth. This description made me think of Steinem's efforts to understand mental illness and women's oppression by imaginatively taking on her mother's point of view. 1

Belenky et al. are rather general in their descriptions of connected knowing; to flesh out this concept, I have been collecting examples from a range of sources. The systematic theologian John Dunne describes his method of "passing over," that is, of imaginatively entering the life of another person:

> [Passing over] is a method of entering sympathetically into another person's autobiographical standpoint, seeing the whole world anew as that person sees it, and then coming back enriched to one's own standpoint and to a new understanding of one's own life. The technique of passing over is based on the process of eliciting images from one's feelings, attaining insight into the images, and turning insight into a guide of life .... The sympathetic understanding into which [a person] must enter in order to pass over into another [person's] life is itself compassion, for it involves a sharing of feelings and images as well as insight into the images and feelings. (1972, pp. 53-54)

One of my students, Susan Imwalle, offers this explanation as to how she became a biology major because of a high school biology class in which her teacher encouraged students to connect personally with the subject:

We read personal essays written by people who were affected by health problems or other biological phenomena. We read the journals of Darwin, and saw the evidence of evolution grow through the study of finches on the islands by taking on his perspective temporarily .... [My teacher] would tell us stories about the personal quirks and struggles of great scientists of the past and made us realize that these great authorities were also engaged in a constant state of learning and relearning similar to our own studies. Thus she encouraged us to believe in our own scientific abilities and our potential. (1991, pp. 3-4)

The scientist Loren Eisley practiced passing over not simply to humans but to the perspective of an entire ecosystem:

a natural scientist who spent hours and days and weeks immersing himself, imaginatively and sometimes literally, in the life of his subjects. [Eisley] tried to see the world from the perspective of animals in evolution, of forests in transition, of streams and oceans changing shape and flow over long periods of time; his essay on floating down the Platte River allows us to feel the life of the water itself. Eisley's legacy is a body of writing that brings us into community with the nature around us and in us . . . . (Palmer, 1983, p. 117, referring to Eisley's *The Immense Journey)*

Belenky et al. offer another example of a researcher connecting with the object of study. They cite Barbara McClintock, whose work on the genetics of corn won her a Nobel prize. McClintock describes the state of mind accompanying the crucial shift in orientation that enabled her to identify chromosomes that earlier she had not been able to distinguish:

I found that the more I worked with them, the bigger and bigger [the chromosomes] got, and when I was really working with them I wasn't outside, I was inside, I was down there. I was part of the system . . . . I even was able to see the internal parts of the chromosomes-actually everything was there .... I actually felt as if I was right down there and these were my friends . . . . As you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself. (quoted by Fox-Keller, 1990, p. 669)

These descriptions of connected knowing struck a chord with me. Looking back over years of academic training, I could recall many occasions of connected knowing that enriched my more traditional, #separated" study. My doctoral dissertation, for example, was an analysis of the archival writings of a 19th-century religious community. The worldview and way of life of French-American cloistered nuns in the 1840s seemed enigmatic to a secular, American graduate student in the 1980s; I sought to pass over into their "autobiographical standpoint" (Dunne, 1972, p. 53). By day, I pored over books and manuscripts, but during the evenings I walked the convent grounds (especially the cemetery) and imagined myself conversing with the now-deceased sisters in the hope of better understanding their history. In my journal, I wrote imaginary dialogues with the founder of the convent, and I tape recorded interviews with several of the elderly sisters, who passed on the lore of the early days.

At the time, I regarded somewhat guiltily such pleasurable but #unprofessional" research methods, methods that I would never mention to my thesis advisors. Now I can see that I was engaging in a kind of connected knowing that added insight and compassion to my textual studies.

## Fostering Connected Knowing

The authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* affirm the value of both separate and connected forms of knowing. Employed together in a sort of yin-yang balance, these two types of procedural knowing will, the authors maintain, lead to *constructed knowledge,* which constitutes a more complete and holistic understanding of truth. Yet separate knowing alone is taught widely in schools and colleges; indeed, its procedures he at the very heart of most academic disciplines. Connected knowing, on the other hand, is not only seldom taught in educational institutions, it is often viewed with skepticism, if not hostility. Rodriguez, for example, received little help from educational institutions in bridging the gap between his home life and his schooling.

On campus, connected knowing is relegated to counseling. Elsewhere, it is found in the realms of family life and religion, particularly the mystical tradition. Good parents understand the importance of entering the world of the child in order to understand that reality. Similarly, many religious traditions emphasize passing over from the individual's perspective to identify with another's suffering or with a religious figure. Dunne (1972), for example, talks about passing over to the perspective of the Buddha or Jesus or Ghandi.

When I described connected knowing to a colleague, he commented, “It's nothing new-it's something good teachers have always known intuitively. It's just that it's never taught. If a teacher doesn't learn to /connect” with a subject on his own, it just doesn't happen.” When I led a discussion on this topic among a group of colleagues from various departments at my own university, many reported that they had experienced connected knowing in their own research, whether passing over into a mathematical equation or a novel or a pig embryo. Yet all were at a loss as to how to teach or even talk about such experiences in the classroom. We all agreed that the majority of our students did not connect in such a way in most of their courses.

In fairness to those of our students who are connected knowers, I maintain that we as teachers need to be able to validate and foster connected knowing. Clinchy, one of the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing,* describes what happens when we fail to do so:

> When a woman (or anybody) with a proclivity toward connected knowing enters an environment that fails to recognize connected knowing as a legitimate way of knowing, she feels disconfirmed as a thinker. Such women may become highly adept in separate knowing, but, as they say, “it doesn't feel right.” It feels lonely, ungenerous, fraudulent, and futile. Thus it never becomes a “me-voice.” It remains a separate voice, separate from the self. The me-voice, being ignored, may fail to develop further or may even wither away. (1990, p. 65)

Moreover, I believe we need to be able to instruct all our students in how to engage in connected knowing, not just those for whom it comes naturally. We need to teach the practice of connected knowing with just as much dedication as we pass on the procedures of separate knowing.

About the damaging effects of an exclusive emphasis on separate knowing, Clinchy comments,

> [T]he really insidious effect of an education that emphasizes separate knowing to the virtual exclusion of connected knowing [is that] ... many of the students we interviewed had removed themselves from their work and dissociated thinking and feeling. They had learned . . . to think only about things they didn't care about and to care only about things they didn't think about. (1990, p. 65)

The overemphasis on separate knowing has implications for students' psychological development as well. Erikson's term "generativity” (1950, p. 267) is used widely to describe the state of maturity and creativity that psychologically healthy adults reach in mid- or late life. By definition, generativity includes a balance between attachment to and separation

from others, a balance that enables the individual to help establish and guide the rising generation, whether through the creating and rearing of children or through the caretaking required by other relationships.

Yet, in our culture, most adults fail to reach this state of generativity. In his landmark study of the adult (made) life cycle, Levinson (1978) assessed generativity among adults in terms of their ability to form intimate mutual friendships and to mentor younger colleagues in the workplace. Although most of the men in his sample were satisfied with their degree of success in their occupation, their fulfillment in the other areas was uneven. Most reported *never* having a successful experience of mentorship and seldom having a close friendship beyond their marriages.

These gaps in psychological and social development led Levinson to question why our institutions and social structures are so unsupportive of full adult development. He ends with a challenge to reform work and family structures so that a healthier balance becomes possible. Levinson seems, in fact, to be challenging us to find avenues by which adults can better develop what I call their "connecting muscles" both intellectually and socially, and thus become more generative. If a person has developed capacities for empathy and personal engagement in the intellectual realm, it seems likely that these will be useful in personal relationships as well.

## Practical Guidance for the Classroom

How, then, can we promote connected learning in our college classrooms? Having taken to heart the exhortation from Belenky et al. that we all become "midwife-teachers" (1986, p. 217), for the past several years I have experimented with methods that effectively promote connected knowing in my literature and writing courses. I offer them here in the hope that they can be adapted to other disciplines and that they win stimulate other teachers to discover still more effective practices.

*1. Class discussions.* It would be easy to assume that simply by *having* class discussion we are promoting connected knowing, but often such discussions are adversarial proceedings in which students and teachers, as one of my students described it, "tear one another's ideas apart.,, Instead, we can lead class discussions in which a student can put forth an idea even while *thinking it through*. By asking questions, encouraging, and inviting elaboration, a teacher models connected knowing and helps students to develop ideas.

Comments such as the following invite connection: "That's an interesting idea. Can you spin it out a little more?"; "I don't quite follow your logic there. Can you help me understand it?"; "What you're saying seems

important. Let me see if I'm following you," (then restate the student's comment); and "Who can build on what Erin is saying?" I am not suggesting that ideas never should be challenged, only that our first effort should be to build upon students' insights rather than to tear them apart.

Palmer asks students to speak no more than two or three times during an hour's conversation, a practice that gives the quieter students the " space to speak" (1983, p. 80) and causes the more loquacious ones to contribute more thoughtfully. Tompkins urges teachers to "talk about the class to the class" (1990, p. 659), a practice she calls, for mnemonic purposes, the "good sex directive" (p. 659). She recommends that, at the beginning of each class, the teacher check in with students about how they think the class is going so that problems can be addressed before they become too big to deal with. An approach I use is to meet regularly with a committee of three or four class members who report on how the course is going for the students. Many teachers find that periodically asking students to offer written comments on the course also is helpful.

The goal of such efforts is to promote the kind of connected class discussion that Clinchy describes:

> If we cultivate and nourish our students' skills in connected knowing, students can begin to engage in fully mutual connected knowing, in which each person serves as midwife to each other person's thoughts, and each builds on the other's ideas. Some of the women we interviewed cherished memories of class discussions that took this form, with students and teachers drawing out and entering into one another's ideas, elaborating upon them, and building together a truth none could have constructed alone. (1990, p. 64)

*2. Reading lists.* Include first-person narratives, works written in a personal voice, and photographs in reading assignments. Books (or excerpts from books) that draw from autobiographies, biographies, oral histories, diaries, or memoirs can be used as primary or supplementary texts that serve as counterpoints to more detached treatments of an academic subject. My own understanding of the history of American settlement, for example, was transformed by course readings from Schlissel's *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982), which includes photographs of settlers as well as diary accounts of the journey west. Similarly, many people found that the Civil War came alive for them when they viewed the PBS series, *The Civil War,* broadcast in 1990. Drawing upon letters, diaries, and still photographs, the series let viewers pass over into a first-person experience of the war.

In a similar vein, students learning about human reproduction could be enriched by reading assignments in a book such as the classic, Our

*Bodies Ourselves* (1984), written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, in which biological and medical explanations are interspersed with first-person narratives describing events such as childbirth or sexual maturation. A class in gerontology or nursing could require readings from a book such as *The Thirty-Six-Hour Day* (Mace & Rabins, 1981), which incorporates first-person accounts of Alzheimer's disease, or an ethics class could include personal narratives such as those in *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience* (Andolsen, Gudorf, & Pellauer, 1985). Examples of connected knowing, such as those drawn from McClintock or Eisley, could be included in lectures as well. Furthermore, as college teachers, we can take up the task of searching out texts or, in subject areas for which no such texts exist, compiling and publishing collections of first-person narratives.

Finally, I have found that many students connect much more readily when I provide photographs related to a subject we are studying. When I teach *Master Harold and the boys . . .*, Fugard's play about South Africa, I bring in *Why Are They Weeping? South Africans Under Apartheid (1988),* Turnley's very moving collection of photographs of contem orary South Africa. When we study a series of short stories on the theme of aging., my students are enriched by looking at collections of photographs that challenge their ageist stereotypes, such as Cunningham's *After Ninety* (1979).

3. *Journals.* Informal writing assignments can help students pass over into the experience of a literary character, a historical figure, or a subject under study. For example, recently I had my students write “empathy entries” in their journals when we studied Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide ...* (1977). My largely White, upper-class students had difficulty appreciating the lives of the inner-city Black women featured in the play, so I asked them to put themselves “in the shoes” of one of the characters and then, from her perspective, write a journal entry recounting key events (I use Progoff's term "steppingstones" [1975, P. 119]) in her life. They must search their own experience and emotions to find common ground that will allow them to identify with a character.

Empathy entries often break down students' resistance to the unfamiliar. I also have had students use their journals to write letters to characters or imaginary dialogues among authors, characters" and themselves. journals are, in addition, a forum in which students can vent (and communicate to me) feelings elicited by the course material, as they respond to prompts such as “How do you feel as you read this story? How do your feelings change as it progresses?- It was through journals, for example, that I became aware of the hostility students felt toward Shange's characters. Such journal entries also, of course, can be a springboard for class discussions.

*4.* *Cooperative learning.* Much work has been published in various disciplines in the last decade exploring the value of cooperative or collaborative assignments and of a less authoritarian teacher-student relationship. Such innovation often promotes connected knowing of the kind Clinchy describes. I have had good results asking students to work in groups on research projects or for class presentations. In a graduate writing class, for example, I have pairs of students research the history of important issues in composition theory. This requires that they work closely together, first to search out sources, and then to integrate them. The research leads to a class presentation by the team, and then to a collaboratively written research paper.

*5.* *Questioning and listening skills. I* also have found it worthwhile to give assignments that require students to hone their interviewing skills, that is, to grow in their abilities to ask thoughtful, provocative questions and to listen attentively to another person's response in a manner that invites elaboration. Oral history research is the linchpin of my students' research projects. My writing students have, for example, interviewed relatives friends, and other members of the community about their firsthand experiences with combat in World War II, the Civil Rights movement, the Peace Corps, communes of the 1960s and 1970s, and so forth. My graduate students in a methods of teaching writing course recently interviewed seasoned teachers, professional writers, and participants in the National Writing Project in preparation for their class presentations and final projects. Freshmen who are planning to pursue a particular career interview people working in that field in preparation for writing an essay about their future plans, a project which sometimes leads them to reconsider their career choice. Such interviews are a #connected" complement to their library research. On a more modest scale, I have students interview and introduce one another to the class at the beginning of the semester.

To conduct oral history interviews well, students need much guidance and instruction. We spend class time developing questions that will elicit interesting and thoughtful responses. We conduct role plays in class as a springboard for talking about the importance of open-ended questions, tone of voice, body language, and other communication skills that are essential to a good oral history interview. On a few occasions, I have invited interview experts as guest lecturers, including a colleague from communication arts and a professional journalist who frequently interviews people for feature stories. The many available handbooks on oral history offer more specific guidance on how to train students to conduct such interviews. I find that these projects teach empathy and active listening skills that students carry over to class discussions and conversations. They sometimes become more questioning readers as well.

*6. "Listening teaching."* Underlying these suggestions is the assumption that we as teachers will renew continually our efforts to listen well, in a spirit of receptivity and empathy. As we prepare our classes, pursue our own research, and encounter our students, we can bring to these pursuits an attitude of openness and freshness, approaching the "other' as if coming upon a friend who wanted to speak to us. It is easy to impose our interpretations upon a person or a subject, and far more challenging to hold back and let the other speak to us. Palmer suggests that in preparing for a class discussion of, say, a poem, the teacher should let the poem speak and set aside any previous interpretation. In his book, *To Know as We Are Known,* Palmer offers guidance for this sort of "letting the subject speak" (1983, p. 117) in greater depth than I can here, including wise counsel regarding the role of silence and meditation in the vocation of teaching.

One way that Palmer suggests we deepen such receptivity is to study (or even teach) regularly in subjects beyond our own field. In taking on the student role, we experience afresh what it is to come to a subject without prior interpretations and the "delusion of mastery" (1983, p. 114):

To know a subject too well and not to venture into others, is to risk becoming closed to fresh insight in favor of familiar facts .... [By becoming a student again] the teacher is forced to see

the world from the student's point of view, to deepen the capacity for empathetic identification The result is more

than new knowledge. It is the enlargement of our capacity for community, of our ability to receive the personhood of our students. (1983, pp. 114-115)

Becoming students again on a regular basis helps us to identify better with our own students, with the mixed feelings of excitement, boredom, and powerlessness they sometimes feel. When I grow exasperated with my undergraduates' limitations, sometimes I pull out the journal I kept during my first few years in college. Encountering in those pages my own self-absorbed and alienated 19-year-old self, I renew my patience with my students, as well as my belief in their potential.

## Conclusion

Becoming connected teachers promises to lead us to deeper and more encompassing ways of knowing that yield a fuller understanding of the world. Personally speaking, as I have come to understand better the concepts of connected knowing and connected teaching, I believe I am becoming a better scholar and teacher. Like Rodriguez, my academic

training caused me to experience, at times, a great sense of alienation and fragmentation. Often during graduate school when studying literary criticism or composition theory, or sitting in my apartment late at night illumined by the somber glow of my computer screen, I wondered what had become of the young girl from the outspoken, working-class family, the girl who had a passion for reading and majored in English because poetry stirred such deep feelings in her. Later, as an assistant professor working on scholarly articles, holding forth at a lecture podium, or jousting at faculty meetings, that younger self seemed more and more remote. My intellectual and professional life was becoming increasingly at odds with that deeply feeling young woman.

I see now that my graduate education constituted a gradual weaning away from the connected way of knowing that came naturally to me-that is, away from ready entrance into the imaginative world and the world of feeling-and replaced it with dependence on the separate mode. The result was a gradual loss of the delight and personal absorption that motivated me to become a scholar of literature in the first place. Like Rodriguez, "I seemed unable to dare a passionate statement. I felt drawn by professionalism to the edge of sterility" (1990, p. 518).

Understanding this socialization process gives me the hope to change it-in myself, in my classroom, perhaps even in my profession. Gradually, I am reclaiming and building up the connecting muscles of which Belenky and her colleagues write. I see now that true understanding is possible only when intellectual rigor encompasses personal experience, when critical thinking works in tandem with feeling and empathy. As with Steinem's efforts to understand her mother's life, I find that knowledge, analysis, and empathy are all necessary in the pursuit of understanding.

One result of such a way of knowing is the possibility of a more authentic encounter with our students, individually and collectively. Thus, to paraphrase Steinem describing her last encounters with her mother, we may pass over to that strange experience of looking into their eyes and realizing suddenly how much they are like our own.

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## Footnotes

[1]The most thoughtful explorations of the subject of connected knowing I have found are the essay on “The Doubting Game and the Believing Game” in Elbow (1973), and Elbow (1986).