Teaching
Community

A Pedagogy
of Hope

bell hooks

within ourselves, that we can become deeper." Openly and honestly talking about the ways we work for change and are changed in these essays, I hope to illuminate the space of the possible where we can work to sustain our hope and create community with justice as the core foundation.

Parker Palmer believes that enlightened teaching evokes and invites community. Many of us know this is so because we teach and live within the life-enhancing vibrancy of diverse communities of resistance. They are the source of our hope, the place where our passion to connect and to learn is constantly fulfilled. Palmer states: "This community goes far beyond our face-to-face relationship with each other as human beings. In education especially, this community connects us with the . . . 'great things' of the world, and with 'the grace of great things.'. . . We are in community with all of these great things, and great teaching is about knowing that community, feeling that community, sensing that community, and then drawing your students into it." Hopefully, *Teaching Community* will draw you in and renew your spirit.

The Will to Learn

The World as Classroom

When contemporary progressive educators all around the nation challenged the way institutionalized systems of domination (race, sex, nationalist imperialism) have, since the origin of public education, used schooling to reinforce dominator values, a pedagogical revolution began in college classrooms. Exposing the covert conservative political underpinnings shaping the content of material in the classroom, as well as the way in which ideologies of domination informed the ways thinkers teach and act in the classroom, opened a space where educators could begin to take seriously what it would look like to teach from a standpoint aimed at liberating the minds of our students rather than indoctrinating them. Imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal values were taught in the all-black schools of my Southern childhood even as those values were at times critiqued. In those days black teachers who were themselves usually light-skinned (since those were the individ-

uals the color caste hierarchy allowed to be upwardly mobile and receive higher education) definitely showed favoritism, giving respect and regard to fairer students thus reinscribing white-supremacist thought, even though they might also teach that white enslavement of black people was cruel and unjust, praising anti-racist rebellion and resistance.

In this space where they offered alternative ways of thinking, a student could engage in the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. Hence it was possible to learn liberating ideas in a context that was established to socialize us to accept domination, to accept one's place within race, sex, hierarchy. Of course, this same practice has been true in all forms of schooling. As women, mostly white, entered schools and colleges for the first time, learning from the patriarchy, their very presence was itself a moment of insurrection, a challenge. Within in the patriarchal academy, women have consistently learned how to choose between the sexist biases in knowledge that reinscribe domination based on gender or the forms of knowledge that intensify awareness of gender equality and female self-determination.

Certainly for African-Americans the institutionalization of Black Studies provided a space where the hegemony of imperialist white-supremacist thought could be challenged. In the late sixties and early seventies, students, myself included, were radicalized in classrooms by coming to critical consciousness about the way dominator thinking had shaped what we knew. As a girl I had initially believed white teachers who told me we did not read black authors because they had not written any books or any good books. As a critically thinking college student I learned to interrogate the source of information. In 1969 June Jordan published the essay "Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person." She argued that Black Studies was a counter-hegemonic location for decolonized black people, writing: ". . . Black students, looking for the truth, demand teachers least likely to lie, least likely to perpetuate the traditions of lying; lies that deface the father from the memory of the child. We request Black teachers of Black

studies. It is not that we believe only Black people can understand the black experience . . . For us there is nothing optional about 'Black Experience' and/or 'Black Studies:' we must know ourselves . . . We look for community. We have already suffered the alternative to community, to human commitment. We have borne the whiplash of 'white studies' . . . therefore, we cannot, in sanity, pass by the potentiality of 'Black Studies'—studies of the person consecrated to the preservation of that person." This was a powerful message about the decolonization of ways of knowing, liberating knowledge from the chokehold of white-supremacist interpretation and thought. In this essay Jordan raised the vital question: "Is the university prepared to teach us something new?" From the onset the presence of Black Studies created a context for a counter-narrative, one in which learning could take place that did not reinforce white supremacy.

In the wake of the success of militant black anti-racist work, feminist movement emerged. Since well-educated white women with class privilege were uniquely situated to enter the academy via affirmative action policies in far greater numbers than black people, they were in turn able to make affirmative action boost their numbers. As the most immediate beneficiaries of affirmative action, their inclusion served to enhance "white power and privilege" whether they were anti-racist or not. When jobs in the academy, created via the civil rights-inspired affirmative action policies went to white female candidates, white males in power could present themselves as addressing discrimination without really making way for ethnic diversity, or for the inclusion of larger groups of people of color. Feminist women, largely white, who came into the academic workforce in large numbers from the late sixties and on into the eighties, who were radicalized by feminist consciousness raising, challenged patriarchy and really begin to demand changes in curriculum so that it would no longer reflect gender biases. White male academics were far more willing to address gender equality than they were racial equality.

Feminist intervention was amazingly successful when it came to changing academic curriculum. For example, it was not Black Studies which led to the recovery of previously unrecognized black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston. Feminist scholars, and this includes black women, were the ones who resurrected "herstory," calling attention to patriarchal exclusion of women and thus creating the awareness that led to greater inclusion. Even though I began my teaching in Black Studies, the courses I taught that were always packed with students (I had to turn students away) were those focused on women writers. The feminist challenge to patriarchal curriculum and patriarchal teaching practices completely altered the classroom. Since colleges and universities rely on students "buying" the commodity "courses" to survive, as more students flocked to courses where teaching practices as well as curriculum were not biased, where education as the practice of freedom was more the norm, the authority of the traditional white male power structure was being successfully undermined. By joining the campaign to change the curriculum, white males were able to maintain their positions of power. For example, if a racist patriarchal English professor teaching a course on William Faulkner that was a required course with many students attending, had to compete with a similar course being taught by a feminist anti-racist professor, his class could end up with no students. Hence it was in the interest of his survival for him to revise his perspective, at least to include a discussion of gender or a feminist analysis.

As an insurrection of subjugated knowledges, feminist interventions within the academic world had greater impact than Black Studies because white women could appeal to the larger, white female student population. From the onset Black Studies mainly addressed a student constituency made up of black students; feminist studies from the onset addressed white students. Even though Women's Studies courses initially attracted mostly white female students, usually those with some degree of radical consciousness, as gender equality became

more an accepted norm the feminist classroom has grown larger and has attracted a diverse body of white students and students of color. Significantly, feminist professors, unlike most non-feminist Black Studies professors, were much more innovative and progressive in their teaching styles. Students often flocked in droves to feminist classrooms because the schooling there was simply more academically compelling. If this had not been the case it would not have become necessary for mainstream conservative white academics, female and male, to launch a backlash that maligned the Women's Studies classroom, falsely presenting it as teaching students that they did not need to study anything by white males and insisting that students really had to do no work in these classes. By devaluing the feminist classroom they made students feel that they would appear academically suspect if they majored in these alternative disciplines. Of course, the feminist classroom was a rigorous place of learning, and as a bonus the teaching style in such classrooms was often less conventional.

No matter the intensity of anti-feminist backlash or conservative efforts to dismantle Black Studies and Women's Studies programs, the interventions had taken place and had created enormous changes. As individual black women/women of color, along with individual white women allies in anti-racist struggle, brought a critique of race and racism into feminist thinking that transformed feminist scholarship, many of the concerns of Black Studies were addressed through a partnership with Women's Studies and through feminist scholarship. Over time, as the academy shifted, making the reforms needed to embrace inclusion—gender equality and diversity—feminist and/or black scholars were not necessarily situated only in alternative programs. The mainstreaming of progressive feminist professors and/or black professors/professors of color— that is, taking them out of the "ghetto" of Women's Studies or Ethnic Studies (which happened because white men wanted to regain their control over these disciplines)—gave them back

control, but it also meant that it brought dissident voices into the conventional disciplines. Those voices changed the nature of academic discourse.

Very little praise is given Women's Studies, Black Studies/Ethnic Studies, for the amazing changes these disciplines spearheaded in higher education. When progressive white men created the alternative discipline of cultural studies, teaching from progressive standpoints, the success of their programs tended to overshadow the powerful interventions made by women and men of color simply because of the way white-supremacist thinking and practice rewards white male interventions while making it appear that the progressive interventions made by women and men of color are not as important. Since cultural studies often included recognition of race and gender, even as it allowed for the maintenance of the hegemony of white male presence, it unwittingly became one of the forces that led colleges and universities to dismantle Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies programs with the argument that they were simply no longer needed. The overall mainstreaming of alternative disciplines and alternative perspectives was a tactic deployed to take away the concrete locations of power where different policy and educational strategy could be enacted because folks did not have to rely on the conservative mainstream for promotion and tenure. Well, all that has changed. Successful backlash undermining progressive changes has changed things back to the way they were. White male rule is intact. All over our nation, Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies' programs have been ruthlessly dismantled.

Conservative manipulation of mass media has successfully encouraged parents and students to fear alternative ways of thinking, to believe that simply taking a Women's Studies course or an Ethnic Studies course will lead to failure, to not getting a job. These tactics have harmed the movement for progressive education as the practice of freedom, but they have not changed the reality that incredible progress was

made. In *Teaching Values* Ron Scapp reminds us: "The antagonism toward and fear of those who 'question' had a long (and violent) history. That those asking questions today and rejecting the 'givens' of our cultural history are seen as pariahs and are under attack should also not be 'surprising.' " Scapp calls attention to the fact that the folks who resist progressive educational reform "are quick to dismiss or discredit (and sometimes destroy)," but this does not alter the fact that there has been a powerful meaningful insurrection of subjugated knowledges that is liberating and life-sustaining.

Struggles for gender equality and ethnic diversity linked issues of ending domination, of social justice with pedagogy. The classroom was transformed. The critique of canons allowed the voices of visionary intellectuals to be heard. Gayatri Spivak brilliantly challenged the notions that only citizens of this nation can know and understand the importance of the traditional canon. Daringly she states: "The matter of the literary canon is in fact a political matter: securing authority." In *Outside in the Teaching Machine* she explains the importance of "transnational literacy," starting with a discussion of the high school classroom. Writing about the canon, Spivak contends that she "must speak from within the debate over the teaching of canon," from a perspective informed by postcolonial awareness of the need to create justice in education: "There can be no general theory of canons. Canons are the condition of institutions and the effect of institutions. Canons secure institutions as institutions secure canons . . . Since it is indubitably the case that there is no expansion without contraction . . . [W]e must make room for the coordinated teaching of the new entries into the canon. When I bring this up, I hear stories of how undergraduates have told their teachers that a whole semester of Shakespeare, or Milton, or Chaucer, changed their lives. I do not doubt these stories, but we have to do a quality/quantity shift if we are going to canonize the new entries . . . The undergraduates will have their lives changed perhaps by a sense of the diversity of the new canon and the unac-

knowledged power play involved in securing the old." Spivak's work, emerging from a transnational, feminist, anti-racist, left critique, embodies the extraordinary genius and power of the intellectual interventions transforming the old academy.

Obviously, despite interventions, much about the academy did not change. However, that does not render the changes any less relevant or awesome. Whereas the conventional dominator classroom remained a place where students were simply given material to learn by rote and regurgitate, students in the progressive classroom were learning how to think critically. They were learning to open their minds. And the more they expanded their critical consciousness the less likely they were to support ideologies of domination. Progressive professors did not need to indoctrinate students and teach them that they should oppose domination. Students came to these positions via their own capacity to think critically and assess the world they live in. Progressive educators discussing issues of imperialism, race, gender, class, and sexuality heightened everyone's awareness of the importance of these concerns (even those individuals who did not agree with our perspective). That awareness has created the conditions for concrete change, even if those conditions are not yet known to everyone. Certainly, in the last twenty years progressive educators, teachers, and students have positively worked on behalf of social justice, realizing the goals of democracy in ways that are awesome. Hence the backlash has been equally awesome.

Significantly the assault on progressive educators, and on new ways of knowing, was most viciously launched not by educators but by policy makers and their conservative cohorts who control mass media. The competing pedagogy, the voice of dominator hegemony, was heard around the world via the lessons taught by imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal mass media. While the academic world became a place where humanitarian dreams could be realized through education as the practice of freedom via a pedagogy of hope, the world outside was busily

teaching people the need to maintain injustice, teaching fear and violence, teaching terrorism. The critique of "otherness" spearheaded by progressive educators was not as powerful as conservative mass media's insistence that otherness must be acknowledged, hunted down, destroyed. In *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the Twenty-First Century*, Zillah Eisenstein explains in the chapter "Writing Hatred on the Body": "On the eve of the twenty-first century, hatreds explode in such places as Sarajevo, Argentina, Chechnya, Rwanda, Los Angeles, and Oklahoma City. The hatred embodies a complex set of fears about difference and otherness. It reveals what some people fear in themselves, their own 'differences.' Hatred forms around the unknown, the difference of 'others.' And we have learned the difference that we fear through racialized and sexualized markings. Because people grow othered by their racialized sexualized and engendered bodies, bodies are important to the writing of hatred on history." Academic challenges to this hatred, though meaningful, do not reach enough of our nation's citizens.

When the tragic events of 9/11 occurred it was as though, in just a few moments in time, all our work to end domination in all its forms, all our pedagogies of hope, were rendered meaningless as much of the American public, reacting to the news coverage of the tragedy, responded with an outpouring of imperialist white-supremacist nationalist capitalist patriarchal rage against terrorists defined as dark-skinned others even when there were no images, no concrete proof. That rage spilled over into everyday hatred of people of color from all races in this nation, as Muslims from all walks of life found themselves rebuked and scorned—the objects of a random and reckless violence. No matter the overwhelming majority of people of color whose lives were tragically lost on 9/11, the more than sixty countries represented, every religion in the world represented, innocents of all shapes, sizes, colors, the newborn and the old—cruel Western cultural imperialism reduced this brutal massacre to the simply binary of "us/them," of United States citizens as

"the chosen people" against a world full of "unchosen" people. Thankfully, among colleagues and comrades who know better, individual people of color hoped first to grieve, then to talk of justice. Whenever we love justice and stand on the side of justice we refuse simplistic binaries. We refuse to allow either/or thinking to cloud our judgment. We embrace the logic of both/and. We acknowledge the limits of what we know.

Even though I could walk to the sites of the 9/11 tragedy, I was not able to speak about these events for some time because I had come face-to-face with the limits of what I know. I could not be a critic of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal mass media, then rely on it to teach me about what had taken place. What I knew, the limits of my knowing, was defined by information in alternative mass media and by the boundaries of what I experienced, of all that I witnessed. That's all I could account for. Anything more would have been interpretations of interpretations offered me by a media whose agenda I hold suspect.

From the moment of the attacks and then in the days and weeks afterwards, our neighborhoods were fenced off. Only the sounds of planes could be heard. Only the state enforcers, the police walked freely. Men, mainly white men, with guns were everywhere. Everywhere people of color were randomly targeted. As soon as they could, the privileged folks in our neighborhoods (mostly white) left for their country homes. Neighbors called me from their houses hours away to give me the news. Friends and comrades from all over the world called to grieve and to lament. I felt surrounded by caring communities. Yet racial hatred, coming from folks who had always presented themselves as critically conscious, was as intense as that coming from groups who have had no concern for justice, who are not even able to acknowledge that our nation is an imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. It was a moment of utter chaos where the seeds of fascist ideology were bearing fruit everywhere. In our nations, schools, and colleges, free speech

gave way to censorship. Individuals lost their jobs or lost promotions because they dared to express the right to dissent that is a core civil right in a democratic society. All over our nation, citizens were stating that they were willing to give up civil rights to ensure that this nation would win the war against terrorism.

In a matter of months many citizens ceased to believe in the value of living in diverse communities, of anti-racist work, of seeking peace. They surrendered their belief in the healing power of justice. Hardcore white-supremacist nationalism reared its ugly voice and spoke openly, anywhere. Individuals who dared to dissent, to critique, to challenge misinformation were and are labeled traitors. As time passed, we witnessed a mounting backlash against any individual or group who dared to work for justice, who opposed domination in all its forms.

A profound cynicism is at the core of dominator culture wherever it prevails in the world. At this time in our lives, citizens all around the world feel touched by death-dealing cynicism that normalizes violence, that makes war and tells us that peace is not possible, that it can especially not be realized among those who are different, who do not look or sound alike, who do not eat the same food, worship the same gods, or speak the same language. Since much of the pedagogy of domination is brought to us in the United States by mass media, particularly via television, I rarely watch TV. No one, no matter how intelligent and skillful at critical thinking, is protected against the subliminal suggestions that imprint themselves on our unconscious brain if we are watching hours and hours of television. In the United States television has become primarily a series of spectacles that perpetuate and maintain the ideology of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. There have been times in the history of the United States when the media have been a location where diverse voices are heard despite the hegemony of more conservative forces.

Right now, free speech and the right to dissent are being undermined by conservative, mass media-pushing dominator

culture. The message of dominator culture would have little impact if it were not for the power of mass media to seductively magnify that message. For example, much of the television coverage of 9/11 focused on firefighters who are predominantly white males. New York firefighters have had notoriously racist hiring practices. Many Americans saw the victims of the 9/11 tragedy as white. Had the focus been on the victims of the tragedy, not just the portraits of privileged rich, white individuals who lost their lives, whose deaths are still tragic, but on the masses of poor working people who were slaughtered, a huge majority of them non-American people of color, the conservative "us/them" agendas would not have so easily become the popular response. If mass media had chosen to focus on the incredible national and religious diversity of the victims of 9/11 (including the many Muslims who were killed), it would have been impossible to create the sentimental narrative of us against them, of Americans against the world. In fact, the world's diversity was embodied in the people killed on 9/11. It was never a uniquely American tragedy, but television distorted truths to make it appear that this was so. And lots of viewers who would ordinarily know better were seduced because of the way in which grief created a context of vulnerability and rage where folks were eager to simplify everything to make a common enemy.

Our senses are assaulted by the stench of domination every day, here in the places where we live. No wonder, then, that so many people feel terribly confused, uncertain, and without hope. More than anywhere else a dominator-controlled mass media, with its constant manipulation of representations in the service of the status quo, assaults us in that place where we would know hope. Despair is the greatest threat. When despair prevails we cannot create life-sustaining communities of resistance. Paulo Friere reminds us that "without a vision for tomorrow hope is impossible." Our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now.

Teach 2

Time Out

Classrooms without Boundaries

Although for most of my teaching career the university classroom has been an exhilarating place, in recent years I have begun to feel a need for significant time away from my job. I was burning out. Entering the classroom at the big city university where I taught, I began to feel as though I was entering a prison, a closed-down space where, no matter how hard I tried, it was difficult to create a positive context for learning. At first I blamed my sense of gloom on the size of the classroom, the gap in skill and aptitude of my students, the intensified spying on the part of administration and faculty (usually taking the form of grilling students about what happened in my classrooms, and on the basis of their comments, giving me unwanted critical feedback). In actuality, these obstacles had always been a part of my teaching experience. My capacity to cope with them in a constructive ways was diminishing. I needed time away from teaching.

All teachers—in every teaching situation from kindergarten to university settings—need time away from teaching at some point in their career. The amount of time is relative. Certainly, the many unemployed teachers, especially at the college level, could all work some of the time if teachers everywhere, in every educational system, were allowed to take unpaid leaves whenever they desired. At the city university where I was a tenured distinguished professor when my contract was first negotiated, it was agreed that I could take unpaid leaves to do writing and research. The salary I was paid could have covered the hiring of two or three faculty members new to teaching. Even though I negotiated this agreement, when I wanted to take a leave it was difficult to attain permission from deans, faculty, and administration. Some folks were worried that agreeing to unpaid leaves when requested would mean that all the stellar faculty would be constantly away. This seemed like a bogus argument. If we all had had incomes that allowed us to be away constantly, we would never have needed teaching jobs in the first place. Even if all college teachers had the opportunity to take unpaid leave whenever they desired, the vast majority do not have the economic means to negatively exploit this opportunity. Consulting with teachers on every educational level, I find that most of us want time out when we desperately need it, when we are just feeling burnt out and are unable to make the classroom a constructive setting for learning.

The classroom is one of the most dynamic work settings precisely because we are given such a short amount of time to do so much. To perform with excellence and grace teachers must be totally present in the moment, totally concentrated and focused. When we are not fully present, when our minds are elsewhere, our teaching is diminished. I knew it was time for me to take a break from the classroom when my mind was always someplace else. And in the last stages of burnout, I knew I needed to be someplace else because I just simply did not want to get up, get dressed, and go to work. I dreaded the class-

room. The most negative consequence of this type of burnout is manifest when teachers begin to abhor and hate students. This happens. When I met recently with grade-school teachers, one woman boldly testified that she felt the classroom situation had become insane, that size and disciplinary issues were just making it impossible for her to teach. She hated her job and her students.

I suggested that she take time to examine her circumstances and identify any aspect of the teaching experience that she still finds compelling joyful. Yet she crudely and cynically let the group know that she was no longer open to finding anything positive about her job. To her it is, was, and will be the job she will continue to do to maintain the material lifestyle she finds desirable. Surprised when I suggested that maybe it was time for her to imagine, and then look for, work that she would find more meaningful, she let the group know she has accepted that there is no way out. She feels doomed, condemned to stay in the prison of work she no longer wants to do. And of course the students she teaches are also condemned, compelled to remain in a setting where the only hope of learning is the gaining of information from formulaic lesson plans.

This person's cynicism about teaching is a commonly held attitude. She was daring enough to give voice to sentiments that many teachers feel. And sadly, it is often the public school setting where the sense of hopelessness about teaching is the most intense and widespread. Understanding that there are times when we "must work for money rather than meaning," educator Parker Palmer describes in *The Courage to Teach* the way continuing to work at any vocation, but particularly teaching, when we are no longer positively engaged does violence to the self "in the precise sense that it violates my integrity and identity . . . When I violate myself, I invariably end up violating the people I work with. How many teachers inflict their own pain on their students, the pain that comes from doing what never was, or no longer is, their true work."

Public school teachers feel extremely confined by classroom size and set lesson plans where they have little choice about the content of the material they are required to teach. And if required standardized testing is institutionalized anew, it will be even harder for public school teachers to bring creative ideas to the work of teaching. They will be required simply to relay information as though the work they do is akin to that of any worker on an assembly line.

When I left my teaching job to take two years off with unpaid leave, I did not leave teaching settings. In order to survive economically, I worked the lecture circuit. It was a refreshing change, because usually the folks who attended my lectures came because they were open to hearing what I had to say and open to learning. This was different from teaching in a classroom setting where a substantial number of students inform you on the first day of class that they are there not because they are interested in the subject but because they needed to take all their classes on a Tuesday and your class time was a perfect fit. And of course the big difference in giving lectures is the absence of grading. Like many teachers I found grading to be one of the most stressful aspects of teaching. Grading has become even more stressful in a world where students determine that they need to make a specific grade to be successful and want to be awarded that grade irrespective of their performance.

Understanding grading to be an evaluation of a student's learning capacity and output, I worked through my tensions around grading by teaching students to apply the criteria that would be used to grade them and then to grade themselves so that they could remain aware of their ability to do needed work at the level of achievement they desired. At different intervals, in one-on-one settings, their self-evaluations would be placed alongside my evaluation. The difficult part of this process was teaching students to be rigorous and critical in their self-evaluations. But more often than not our grading would be the same.

Just as I evaluated my students in each class I taught, I evaluated myself. Continual self-evaluation was the experience that made my burnout more apparent and intense. Just as students whose grade shifts from an A to a C feel bad, I felt bad when I felt that my teaching was not consistently A+. When I first began to feel the need for a time-out I shared my concerns with beloved students who persuaded me for a time that my teaching on a "bad" day was still far more productive than most of their classes. They knew that many of the job-related issues causing me stress were not classroom related. Working within an educational system wherein the faculty was 90 percent white and the student body 90 percent non-white, a system wherein both the banking system of education and racially biased notions of brilliance and genius prevailed, I felt alienated from colleagues. Many of my colleagues were well-meaning liberals who worked overtime at their teaching tasks and who were simply unenlightened when it came to issue of race. Although well-meaning, they unknowingly often perpetuated racist stereotypes, claiming that the presence of so many non-white students, a great many of them foreigners, had lowered standards. Concurrently, they believed they had to lower their standards to teach these "backward students."

I came to teach at a big city university located in a diverse non-white community after years of teaching at predominantly white elite schools. Since I had always planned to retire from teaching early I wanted to spend what I believed would be my last years of teaching at a school that would enable me to teach students coming from poor and working-class backgrounds similar to my own. My first full time assistant professor teaching position was at Yale University. It was a wonderful teaching experience because the students who came to my classrooms, who chose to were unique and different. They were deeply committed to learning, to excelling academically, to doing rigorous work. They were a joy to teach.

When I chose to teach at a big state school, many of my colleagues warned me that I would be disappointed by the students, that I would find myself "teaching down." These warnings came from colleagues who taught at elite schools, and they were echoed by my new colleagues. I found that my students at this public institution were just as brilliant and open to learning as my beloved Yalies, but that the difference was often in levels of self-esteem. Low self-esteem led many a brilliant student in Harlem to self-sabotage. It was difficult for me to "lose" students who were excellent. For example: A really hardworking gifted student doing excellent work might simply stop attending class in the last few weeks. When I taught at elite private schools, where most students lived on campus or nearby, if I faced such a problem it was easy to locate a student (even if it meant knocking on their door at home) to seek an explanation and a solution to problems. This process could not happen at a commuter school where students often lived two or three hours away. Locating a student often took hours of time. And by the time a connection was made it was too late for grades reflecting excellence.

I taught predominantly non-white students from poor and working-class backgrounds, most of them parents, and many of them doing the work of full-time single parenting, working a job, and attending school. This required of me constant vigilance when it came to maintaining standards of excellence in the classroom. From my own position of class privilege (being single and childless) the opportunity to feel sorry for students whose circumstances were difficult was constant. It was often hard to face their pain and hardship and remind them that they had made the choice to be a student and were therefore accountable to the demands and responsibilities required of them. Their task, I told them, was to learn how to do excellent work while coping with myriad responsibilities. And if they could not excel then their task was to give their very best and make peace with the outcome. I too had to make peace with

the outcome. Just as it was often emotionally difficult for students, it was emotionally difficult for their beloved teacher.

I use the word beloved here, not to be immodest, but to describe the truth of my experience. I felt beloved by most of my students. They were grateful to me for believing in them, for educating them for the practice of freedom, for urging them to become critical thinkers able to make responsible choices. Their appreciation of my teaching was a force that kept me wedded to the classroom long past the moment when I felt I needed to separate, to leave. Teaching with excellence and being rewarded for this work by excellent student work is a truly ecstatic experience. Leaving the classroom, I was leaving behind the emotional and academic intensity of that experience. Parker Palmer's words resonated for me: "As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tried, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require." It takes courage for any teacher who teaches with gladness to accept and respond to periods of burnout, to embrace the heartache of loss and separation.

To use another of my sports metaphors, I often felt like that player who threatens retirement but never leaves. Or who leaves but comes back. Observing myself become dispirited and tired of teaching, I knew that it was time for me to take a break or even leave the classroom forever. And yet it was difficult to come to terms with being a great teacher, loving students, yet feeling a desperate need to leave the world of academe in all its ramifications. Working within the conventional

corporate academic world where the primary goals of institutions is to sell education and produce a professional managerial class schooled in the art of obedience to authority and accepting of dominator-based hierarchy, I often felt as though I was in the dysfunctional family of my childhood where I was often in the outsider position and scapegoated, viewed as both mad and yet a threat. To regain my sense of full integrity as a self, I needed to leave the academy, to remove from my life the constant pressure to conform or to endure punishment for non-conformity.

I used my leave time to see if I could survive despite the huge drop in income that would take place if I left my job. During the first six months of absenting myself from academe, from the classroom, I felt a profound sense of loss. For more than twenty years the rhythms of my life had been set by the cycles of semesters ending and beginning, by school holidays, and summers off. Suddenly I was in a world where every day was a day off. And it did not feel empowering. I had to face being without the magic of the classroom and the caring community of learners I had dwelled in for most of my adult life, being always either student or teacher. Like many retirees I suddenly felt as though I was cut off from a system that had been a form of life support. Without it, life felt less interesting, less compelling. I was the teacher alone with myself, the teacher facing myself as the pupil, needing to chart a new journey for myself. Teaching filled huge spaces in my life, and my engagement with students was a space of emotional intensity and intimacy that was fundamentally altered by my leaving the classroom.

Initially, I spent my months away from the classroom contemplating where I needed to be. I lingered in that contemplative space which Palmer defines as "an inner emptiness in which new truth, often alien and unsettling truth, can emerge." In *The Active Life* Palmer writes about the empowerment that can emerge when we shift a set position, when we dislocate,

explaining: "If disillusionment is one of life's natural forms of contemplation, the experience of dislocation is another. This happens when we are forced by circumstance to occupy a very different standpoint from our normal one, and our angle of vision suddenly changes to reveal a strange and threatening landscape. . . . The value of dislocation, like the value of disillusionment, is in the way that it moves us beyond illusion, so we can see reality in the round—since what we are able to see depends entirely on where we stand." Away from the corporate university classroom, from teaching in a degree-centered context, I was able to focus more on the practice of teaching and learning. I especially began to contemplate those forms of teaching and learning that take place outside the structured classroom.

Despite my criticism of the banking system of education, I had unwittingly been seduced by the notion of the set classroom time as the most useful vehicle to teach and learn. Dislocated, with time on my hands to contemplate being outside the structured classroom, I began to think of new ways to be immersed in teaching. Dislocation is the perfect context for free-flowing thought that lets us move beyond the restricted confines of a familiar social order.

Like many individuals seeking a new path, I pondered what I would do in the world of teaching and learning if I were free to design and choose. My first awareness was that I did not want to teach in settings where students were not fully committed to our shared learning experience. I did not want to teach in settings where individuals needed to be graded. To me the best context for teaching was, of course, one where students chose to come because they wanted to learn, from me, from one another. Rather than teaching for semesters I wanted to be immersed in short intense learning workshops where attention is concentrated and focused. I wanted to teach about teaching, about the ways classrooms settings can be a place where we all learn the practice of freedom. Teaching and learning in the

direction of justice, peace, and love, of creating and maintaining academic and or intellectual community, became the vocational goals I wanted to pursue. And as I began to speak these longings, individuals responded with job requests.

When my two-year leave ended, I resigned. Reluctantly, I let go of the safety net of tenure and organized interactions with educational colleagues. Leaving my academic job raised the fear that as an intellectual in an anti-intellectual society I would be all the more isolated.

Being an intellectual is not the same as being an academic. There is tremendous support in our society for the academic life for those who are insiders inside. Indeed, as those of us who have been privy to countless discussions about the differences between the academy and the so called "real" world know, many professors see themselves as members of a chosen group, a large secret society, elitist and hierarchical, that sets them apart. Even though colleges and universities have a corporate infrastructure, that power is usually masked. Most faculty choose denial over conscious awareness of the way crude economic policies shape academic environments.

As an intellectual working as an academic I often felt that my commitment to radical openness and devotion to critical thinking, to seeking after truth, was at odds with the demands that I uphold the status quo if I wanted to be rewarded. My integrity was as much at risk in the academic world as it had been in the non-academic work world, where workers are expected to obey authority and follow set rules. While much lip service is given to the notion of free speech in academic settings, in actuality constant censorship—often self-imposed— takes place. Teachers fear they will not receive promotions or that in worst-case scenarios they will lose their jobs. Even so, in our society the academic world remains the primary place where teaching and learning are valued, where reading and thinking are deemed meaningful and necessary work. This validation, however limited in scope, provides affirmation and

sustenance for academics and/or intellectuals in an anti-intellectual culture.

Cutting my secure ties to academic institutions, I faced the challenge of finding and creating spaces where teaching and learning could be practiced outside the norm. Like many professors I naively believed that the more I moved up the academic ladder the more freedom I would gain, only to find that greater academic success carried with it even more pressure to conform, to ally oneself with institutional goals and values rather than with intellectual work. I felt enormously lucky that I was able to succeed in the academic world as a radical, dissident thinker. My success, like that of other lucky individuals whose thinking goes against the norm, was a constant reminder of the reality that there are no closed systems, that every system has a gap and that in that space is a place of possibility. All over our nation, conservative repressive institutions are vocational homes for those rare individuals who do not conform, who are committed to education as the practice of freedom.

Seeking places outside formal educational settings to teach and learn, I found it possible to make critical interventions in a number of ways. I began doing visits to public schools, mostly pushed into service in this manner by family and friends. My sister G., a grade school teacher in the Flint, Michigan school system, has always urged me to come and talk with her students. Like many folks accustomed solely to teaching in university settings, I was comfortable talking with and teaching adults, but I was afraid I lacked the skills to engage in meaningful dialogue with children. Persuading me that this was nonsense, that I could do it, G. let me loose in her classrooms and in auditoriums filled with third- and fourth-graders. This work was challenging. It was not paid labor. This experience, and the many more that followed it let me know that if one is willing to work without pay there are many formal educational settings that will welcome informal teaching interventions.

In the last few years I have been doing work for pay within a number of formal educational settings. Teaching intensive courses for a week or a month to professors and students enabled, and enables, me to engage in education as the practice of freedom without restrictions or fear of punishing reprisals. This is an utterly rewarding experience. I understand fully Palmer's assertion: "I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy." My leaving a high-ranking tenured position opened up new spaces for teaching and learning that renewed and restored my spirit and enabled me to hold onto the joy in teaching that makes my heart glad.

Teach 3

Talking Race and Racism

Teachers are often among that group most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught. Much of the consciousness-raising around the issue of white supremacy and racism has focused attention on teaching what racism is and how it manifests itself in the daily workings of our lives. In anti-racist workshops and seminars, much of the time is often spent simply breaking through the denial that leads many unenlightened white people, as well as people of color, to pretend that racist and white-supremacist thought and action are no longer pervasive in our culture.

In classroom settings I have often listened to groups of students tell me that racism really no longer shapes the contours of our lives, that there is just no such thing as racial difference, that "we are all just people." Then a few minutes later I give them an