

Seeking Socrates' Similes
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For the past 15 years, my academic appointment has been with the Arizona State University at the West Campus (ASUW) Department of Integrative Studies. A Noah's Ark principle guided our faculty recruitment: Our department has two astronomers, two mathematicians, two philosopher-ethicists, and two social scientists, with me as token psychologist. The curriculum includes interdisciplinary core requirements and a concentration that students construct in consultation with their faculty advisors. Annually, we assess the writing portfolios of our graduates and then spend the next semester crafting more coherent linkages for course subject matter. Our alumni now number over 300, and include law school and master's and doctoral program graduates across a variety of (inter)disciplines.

Our core requirements emphasize critical reading and writing skills, critical thinking dispositions, information competencies, amiable problem solving, and an understanding of diversity and ethical citizenship across many dimensions. In an American Association of Colleges and Universities monograph, Julie Thompson Klein (1999), a scholar of interdisciplinary studies, affirmed our program as one of four national exemplars for educating students with a new epistemology for the 21st century. We articulate this epistemology in courses such as "Multicultural Autobiographies" (see McGovern, 2001) and "Psychology, Multicultural Narratives, and Religion," which is in a new core category requested by students called "Secular and Sacred Worldviews."

As someone whose scholarly interests are on the history, program development, and evaluation of innovative psychology undergraduate education (McGovern, 1993, 2004; McGovern & Brewer, 2003, 2005; McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991), the opportunity to construct an interdisciplinary program has been a rare privilege. At many institutions, teaching interdisciplinary courses is relegated to summer school offerings, or they become add-ons to regular assignments. For the first 7 years of our new department's life, we co-taught every new core course with one or more colleagues. For instance, I played "second chair" to a philosopher in a course called "Moral Dilemmas" and "first chair" to an astronomer in "Human Experience," in which we built an historical reading list of 19th century women scientists' narratives as precursors of 20th century memoirs. A reflective practitioner ethos served us well over the years, as we contrasted each others' pedagogies and continually tried to integrate divergent subject matter.

My department believes in the continuing integration of faculty scholarship and teaching assignments. It is an ideal environment in which faculty members can expand the boundaries of their original scholarly expertise by weaving into their courses the content

and pedagogy of writing across the curriculum, feminist studies, or ethnic studies, for example. Other faculty have developed expertise in entirely different disciplinary areas and constructed creative interdisciplinary syntheses. Moreover, our personnel policies reward publishing innovative scholarship in nontraditional places. For example, the astronomer in our department now teaches and writes on science, religion, and art. My path led back to studies in literature and religion, as in my undergraduate days, but now merged with narrative psychology. With that contextual introduction, I turn to the specific topic of this essay and offer a narrative about one academic career.

Whenever I teach Introductory Psychology, Erikson and Erikson's (1997) life cycle theory generates intuitive and optimistic appeal with students because of its focus on identity issues. In fact, this focus on identity issues led Lawrence Friedman (1999) to title his biography of Erik Erikson "Identity's Architect." Identity issues always seem salient to most students, whatever their respective ages. Talking with colleagues in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, I suspect that many, if asked to describe the facets of their adult identities, would list the term "teacher" more than any other. The more I re-read Erikson's original texts, the more I appreciate his interdisciplinary perspectives on human development.

Dan McAdams, the personality psychologist who directs the Foley Center for the Study of Adult Lives at Northwestern University, extended Erikson's epigenetic theory, empirically demonstrating that we first create the themes or ideologies of our personal stories during adolescence. Findings in cognitive science on autobiographical memory, as well as my own study of the literary criticism of life narratives, suggest that we remember, revise, and add to these stories constantly. McAdams (2001) proposed that adult identity can be understood as an anthology of stories that we constantly edit and from which we extract ever-new meanings. His most recent research (e.g., McAdams & Logan, 2004) focuses on the generativity stage. My interdisciplinary work in teaching and writing about multicultural autobiographies confirms that, during the generativity period, crafting and editing our anthologies are very important.

When I consider my own anthology of teaching stories, I find it helpful to use Socrates' similes to map the developmental sequence of an academic career with its crises and turning points. I borrowed this organizing metaphor from Hannah Arendt's (1971) essay, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in which she recalled the similes used by Plato to describe Socrates—midwife, gadfly, and electric eel.

During my thirties, in my first academic appointment at Virginia Commonwealth University, I saw my role in a counseling psychology doctoral program as that of an empathic midwife. I worked to bring forth in my students affective and cognitive insights in courses on personality theory, group counseling and psychotherapy, and vocational development. Having been trained as a psychotherapist, my classroom work drew on these skills, and I gave much more attention to teaching processes than to actual content or subject matter. The chair of my department, a statistician, had evaluated my graduate transcripts and commented that my scientific training merited the receipt of a "PhD light." However, he did predict that, with a baccalaureate from a Jesuit university, I probably could think and write and hold my own in discussions at faculty meetings.

In my forties, I mixed teaching with increasing administrative responsibilities as a department chair and director of undergraduate studies. I eventually moved to the provost's office to construct a university assessment program and help reform general education across campus. In the 1990s, the new interdisciplinary undergraduate program at ASUW captured my time and energies. All of these tasks prompted a turn towards the role of gadfly. Teaching large introductory psychology classes, I stressed primarily cognitive outcomes. In seminars on psychology and religious experiences, I probed and jostled with students' certainties. Tussling with faculty about labor-intensive strategies for the assessment of student learning outcomes and then with a state regents board about post-tenure personnel policies complemented the gadfly persona.

To mark that wonderful life cycle event of turning 50, a rare neurological illness, Guillain Barre Syndrome, paralyzed me. Forty-eight hours after doing a National Science Foundation workshop for psychology faculty, I was enrolled (passive voice is apt here!) as a new student in a postdoctoral, highly experiential curriculum that included courses such as "intensive care," "in-patient physical and occupational therapy," and "out-patient rehabilitation for activities of daily living skills." I was exiled from campus for an entire year and left permanently disabled with residual damage to the peripheral nervous system. Socrates' electric eel became a poignant metaphor. However, there were immeasurable benefits from being stopped dead in my tracks in the autumn stages of an academic career.

When I was paralyzed and in the hospital for the equivalent of two semesters, I had no control or sense of agency about even the most basic motor skills. I was dependent on others for every facet of my physical well-being. The condition directly affected my thoughts and feelings about who I was, what to do from moment-to-moment and then week-to-week, and who I could hope to become when this unanticipated trauma abated. I was forced to suspend my business as usual, listen to everyone more carefully, and appreciate elegantly new sensations and perceptions. Mundane phenomenology became fascinating, not only as I did my intellectual gymnastics, but also for the aesthetics of heretofore unseen, unheard, untouched, unfelt beauty. The Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Jonathan Larson, posed a good question in his play about the experiences of AIDS patients: How do you measure a year? 525,600 minutes!

As I prepared to return to teaching 400 days after feeling the first sensations of paralysis, I tried to weave my illness and rehabilitation experiences into the anthology of stories that included vocational identity. My reflections about losing my independence echoed the stories I heard from new students every academic year. I now understood profoundly why adult and first-generation college students felt de-skilled and dependent when they ventured into the new territories of our intellectual preserves. As scholar-teachers, we state intellectual goals in multiple discourses without translating their common denominators or the reasons why they are different. We prescribe reading and writing treatment plans based on idiosyncratic preferences without offering contexts or alternative pathways. We establish authority as our students' sole guide as they navigate through a maze of conflicting choices. We demand regularity according to our schedules and expect our students' consistent performance according to our life's regimen.

Socrates' electric eel is a rich metaphor. Arendt's (1971) analysis taught me that teachers and learners can be stopped dead in their tracks by the power of an idea, not just an event. We are stunned, rendered motionless, and must grapple directly with what hit us. We can do nothing, but we still can think and feel and savor all that is past, present, and yet to come. When our capacity to move returns, we will renew our sense of agency. Happily, we are never the same because that teaching and learning moment lingers as we once more move hands and legs and mouth in deliberate and purposeful directions. After crises in academic life, we often have the wherewithal and the blessings of a collegial community to return to teach again. Similarly, when students' semesters are over, they eventually return to learn again, and, hopefully, this pattern will repeat itself at other times and in other places.

It's been 8 years since my encounter with the electric eel. The chronic pain and fatigue from residual neurological damage are permanent reminders. The account became a good case study for the section on disabling conditions that I now include in my "Multicultural Autobiographies" course. Like McAdams' (2001) life story model of identity, the episode is remembered and its meanings revised as part of my anthology. One of its most powerful narrative themes remains—Seeking Socrates' Similes.

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