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# 1

## THE TEACHING VOCATION AND THE INTERIOR LIVES OF TEACHERS

*Ken Badley and Michelle C. Hughes*

Teaching is hard work. But it is immensely rewarding work. An abundance of research on teachers' mental health, teacher burnout, and attrition in the profession has proven the truth of the first claim. And, without reading a word of academic research, teachers know the truth of the second claim: teaching is immensely rewarding work.

In this introduction, we dive into the tension between those two claims. All the chapters that follow work in this tension, and teachers work in this tension in classrooms all over the world. Teachers work and live in this tension in Alberta and California, the jurisdictions where we live. And educators in Bulgaria, Kenya, Costa Rica, and the Philippines, where we have worked with teacher colleagues, also do their day-to-day work in this tension. Our purpose and that of our contributing colleagues is to focus on one part of that tension—on what teaching gives back to teachers. While recognizing the challenges teachers face and the sacrifices teachers make, we have made it our purpose in this book to identify what we receive in return—on what we get back—from facing the challenges and making the sacrifices. In other words, in this volume, we want to focus on the reciprocities of teaching and on how joyful, resilient teachers transform challenges into opportunities.

Of course, the word “reciprocity” itself is intriguing. Its connotations range from a strictly legal and sometimes negative sense to a rather positive sense that has emerged in social psychology in recent decades. On the legal end, party A has agreed to meet one set of conditions if party B meets another set of conditions. Search “Reciprocity Treaty 1854” or 1911 online and you will find that Canada and the United States signed trade treaties long before the North American Free Trade Agreement or its successor agreements were part of the conversation. Search “Reciprocity Treaty 1875” and you will find that the United States once signed an agreement with a kingdom in the Pacific known as Hawaii. In these paradigm cases, appropriately named treaties, the two parties each took on a legal obligation to permit specified goods to cross their borders in both directions without penalty.

The recent use of “reciprocity” in the social sciences has a greater sense of moral obligation than did the 1854, 1875, and 1911 legal meanings of the word. In this case, nothing is signed, no documents are filed away or displayed in a museum. Some in the field go further than that, using it in the sense popularized in the feature film *Pay it Forward* (Leder, 2000). In this understanding, one does good to others not in expectation of an exchange or of getting something back but because one simply wants to contribute to the well-being of others, giving in the hope that others will likewise give.

With the range of connotations available to us, where do we categorize the reciprocities, rewards, and opportunities teaching gives teachers? Most teachers sign a contract with a school or school district and that contract specifies the professional duties which they are to carry out and what salary they will receive for the successful completion of those duties. We might consider that if the work that teachers do and the salary they receive stop there, we would have a perfect parallel to the kinds of legal and binding trade agreements the United States signed with Canada and Hawaii over a century ago. The legal contract between a teacher and a school or board of trustees does not address the matter of working weeknights after dinner, the necessity of doing class preparation or grading papers on the weekends, the worries about the success of a student who finds school challenging, or the deep questions about the teaching vocation itself. Interestingly, nor does that contract mention the joy teachers experience when their students graduate or when a student warmly greets them on the street months or years after leaving their classroom.

In short, while teachers engage with their boards and districts in a form of legal reciprocity, we usually do not think about teaching contracts as exchanges (except during a work-to-rule campaign, walkout, or other labor action). In this book, we want to recognize reciprocities, the moral and non-legal connotations, whether one is paying back or paying forward. For example, Chapter 4 examines our relationship with and use of printed and online resources, including textbooks. The two authors of that chapter have worked on many textbook projects (some of them together—and they have remained friends). Textbooks are essential resources for teachers to use in their classrooms, yet all teachers have had to make compromises with the textbooks they chose or the jurisdiction specified for them; they have had to come to terms with the weaknesses of their textbooks as well as with their students’ responses to the contents of the texts and the texts’ approaches to the content. Teachers might be unhappy about the treatment of a topic, about the level of *critical thought* demanded by the questions provided, or even about the layout. When teachers are unhappy in these ways, they compromise and supplement. They come to terms with the reality that they must use an imperfect—and possibly expensive—textbook. Chapter 4 recognizes the weaknesses inherent in textbooks (because they are produced by human beings), but it asks teachers to recognize what textbooks give back to us. Textbooks are just one example of many that the contributors to this volume believe give back to teachers. All the authors want readers to understand that we keep coming back to a single truth: yes, we compromise, sacrifice, work hard, face challenges and complexities, but we are resilient and teaching reciprocates. The challenging aspects of our work as

teachers are only part of the story; teaching creates opportunities for growth and gives back to us in surprising ways.

### The Context of this Book

We return to textbooks at the end of this chapter when we introduce the other chapters, noting in each case the reciprocities of the various aspects of teachers' work. Before we introduce the other chapters, however, we want to set our project in a slightly larger context: the teaching vocation. We view this volume as a contribution to the larger conversation about the calling to teach. Unlike some other issues of interest to educators—for example, the relationship between socio-economic status and school achievement—the teaching vocation conversation, while ongoing, is not robust. Most of our readers will know about Parker Palmer's distinct contributions to this conversation, especially his best-selling *The Courage to Teach* (Palmer, 1998). Some of our readers will have received as gifts various inspirational books meant to encourage teachers, such as *Chicken Soup for the Teacher's Soul: Stories to Open the Hearts and Rekindle the Spirits of Educators* (Canfield & Hansen, 2002). A few other titles focus on vocation rather than inspiration, although none of these has achieved the popularity of the two mentioned above (Fried, 1995; Friedman & Reynolds, 2011; Nieto, 2005; Spotts, 1963). We note this small body of literature because we want you to understand how we see our book fitting into and contributing to this area.

We want *Joyful Resilience in Educational Practice: Transforming Teaching Challenges into Opportunities* to encourage teachers and motivate them. We hope this book will serve as an inspirational volume that students, their parents, and teachers' friends give to teachers. Books in this genre usually include stories meant to illustrate the joys of teaching. Some include quotations meant to reinforce the importance of teachers' work. The contributors to this book regularly include stories from classrooms but these stories are not the primary focus; we want to open these stories up to discover what they mean for us and the vocation. Some of the other books mentioned above dig deeply into the meanings of the word "vocation" (from *voce*, the Latin word for "voice") and the challenges teachers face as they respond throughout their working lives to having heard a call or voice. We do some of that digging here too, although, again, this kind of analysis is not our focus.

Research into teacher burnout, disaffection, and attrition has grown in recent decades, producing a large collection of academic articles but not many books. Our volume recognizes the realities that researchers have studied but, again, the hard aspects of teaching are only our starting point; they are not our priority or our ending point. We address the challenges of teaching but we always focus on and revisit the reciprocities, the joys, the challenges and opportunities, and the professional and often personal resilience that these challenges produce. We do so with the conviction that if we can show how teaching pays us back then we can inspire teachers to keep teaching. If we achieve that, we will have met one of our goals: to inspire. We write with the conviction that if we can demonstrate how teaching fills,

challenges, transforms, and rewards us, we can also help teachers understand more deeply their calling to the profession. We can help teachers believe that they were not crazy when they heard a voice or felt a nudge pushing them toward this profession. If we achieve this, we will have met one of the purposes of the aforementioned books that explore the teaching vocation in depth.

In short, we understand that as teachers we work with our own doubts, failures, and weaknesses. We also work with our strengths, successes, and, for most of us, an abiding sense of vocation. In the significant daily tasks we complete and in our interactions with students, we receive daily confirmation that we have heard a voice and that we are, in fact, called to teach. Palmer (1999) frames this voice as listening to your true self, your values and truths, as well as your limitations and potential.

In the chapters that follow, our contributors will note such sobering objective factors as the increased, nearly obsessive concern about assessment, the tightened budgets that we hear about almost daily, the increasing numbers of students in (or missing) class who are not prepared for school, or who have not eaten that day, and the increasing degree to which schools need to support the mental health of students and their families. Teachers face uncharitable and even hateful student evaluations of our courses (and, for many educators, the most negative comments get rent-free space in our heads for years afterward). Teachers also face personal and subjective challenges. Some wake up in the middle of the night, worrying about students (and some have nightmares about coming to class unprepared, or without materials, or without clothes!). Teachers recognize that at the end of a class, or at the end of a day, or at the end of a course, they could have done things better. Some teachers become deeply weary because they're tired at the end of each workday and cannot seem to find or make time for any restoration on the weekend. Teachers feel the weight of additional responsibilities that include meetings, remote learning (and technology that keeps changing), unexpected and uncontrollable challenges such as fires and floods, and, recently, even a pandemic that demanded that teachers suddenly move their programs online for over a year. We hesitate to list even the few items above but we want you, our readers, to understand that this book's contributors know all about these challenges and complexities. We all have first-hand experience in the trenches in K-12 classrooms. We get it.

For us, knowing about and living with such challenges is not the last word; we have no desire to write a book on teacher burnout and attrition. Instead, we recognize the challenges and we want to shift our thinking. We want to reframe teaching—toward the joys, opportunities, resilience, and successes that teaching produces professionally (and personally). For example, we hear from students—sometimes years later—that for them our class was life-changing, or that they learned “so much.” We hear that our class was the best course they ever took. We have students express surprise and even disappointment that a session has ended, that the bell has rung, or that they were absent from yesterday's class because they were sick. They even express disappointment when we ourselves are absent due to illness or needed to serve in another role at school. Sometimes our colleagues and supervisors pass along that they have heard about the quality of our classes. These are just a few of the

joys and reciprocities of teaching. We do not expect such gifts but when we recognize and receive them we feel validated for doing the work we do.

Teachers' work has negatives and positives, and teachers at all levels struggle; some throughout their entire careers come to terms with the contrast between these aspects of teaching. In *A Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer (2004) helps his readers navigate the tension between these two sides of fulfilling our vocations. We see our volume specifically as a contribution to the effort he began there. We believe that if we can not only see but actually notice—take note of and somehow grasp—the reciprocities or what teaching gives back, we will be able to fulfill our vocation with greater joy than if we default in our thinking to the challenges. We have called our book *Joyful Resilience in Educational Practice: Transforming Teaching Challenges into Opportunities* because we want our readers to begin each new academic term, or semester, or year, knowing that this term, semester, or year is another opportunity to fulfill a vocation, a calling. And we gave it that title because we believe that remembering what teaching gives back to teachers will help us all grow professionally, strengthen our practice, and teach each day with less apprehension and more joy.

### The Chapters that Follow

We now offer an overview of the aspects of teaching that we and our colleagues examine throughout the book. We know you can look at the Table of Contents, but we want to introduce the chapters to give brief snapshots about their respective authors. We want our readers to know that all the contributors are live educators. Individually and collectively, we have spent most of our professional lives in classrooms; in some cases, all our working lives.

We begin, appropriately, by asking about students (Chapter 2). Michelle C. Hughes comes from California and has been an educator for 32 years. She has served as a high school administrator, a junior high school teacher, and a college professor, so from a variety of angles she recognizes the significant need to support teachers. In her chapter on students, Michelle acknowledges the obvious requirement that teachers expect to give great amounts of energy to their students. She catalogues some of the reciprocities, the unexpected rewards that students give back to teachers, noting that these reciprocities are often long delayed—until after a teacher has finished teaching a student or a class. You may be interested to know that this chapter was the first any of the contributors completed for the book, perhaps reflecting both Michelle's long-term commitment to students and her enthusiasm for this project.

In Chapter 3, Joy A. Chadwick follows Michelle's treatment of students in general by noting some of the reciprocities of teaching students with special needs and other students who face challenges related to their gender, socioeconomic, cultural, or family factors. Joy is now a professor but as someone who has worked as a classroom teacher, a special education teacher, and a school principal, she knows firsthand that teaching students requires teachers to adjust and reframe their teaching methodology continually in ways not required in the past. She knows that those necessary adjustments can lead to feelings of futility and failure, yet she points

to the benefits and reciprocities. She believes that the requisite reframing and rethinking can also contribute to teachers' ongoing professional development. In her view, when teachers view all children, with their myriad gifts and challenges, as their own potential teachers, each day becomes an opportunity for teacher growth. She calls on teachers to focus less on what students can and cannot do and more on how their learning needs can inform our teaching practice. For her, these gifts of teacher learning foster spaces of hope, new opportunity, and moments of success for teachers and their students.

Including Chapter 4 on learning resources and textbooks may surprise some readers; when most educators think about the challenges and complexities of teaching they typically default in their thinking toward students, parents, administrators, time pressures, and budgets. But, as we noted earlier, teachers know the imperfections of printed and online resources and they know that any given textbook rarely meets every student and teacher need. In fact, at the college and university level, those imperfections are one of the reasons there are so many textbooks addressing the same material. A professor finds the available texts unsatisfactory for a course and decides to produce a new one, presumably one that another professor up the road will, in turn, deem to be imperfect. Ken Badley has worked with several publishers on junior high, secondary, and university textbooks. He has worked with Dana Antayá-Moore on student resources and teacher resource guides, and she has worked on several others. They have personal knowledge of the challenges of developing resources that will engage students well, support teachers' work, and meet the curricular requirements for the jurisdiction that has contracted with the publisher. Both authors recognize what resources demand from teachers; they focus on what such resources give back to teachers and what new teaching opportunities emerge from them. In doing so, they write both as classroom teachers and as textbook authors.

Higher educators and K-12 educators regularly need to deal with new curricula, new instructional initiatives, new forms of assessment, new educational trends, new buzzwords, new school and district policies, changing demographic trends among students, and so on (this list *is* exhausting). In our better moments as educators we know these changes help us keep our brains alive. But such changes also have the potential to wear us down, and may even produce cynicism. In Chapter 5, Sunshine R. Sullivan examines curriculum changes. As a classroom teacher and now the chair of an education program, she knows that educators swim in water where the currents are always changing. Intellectual currents shift and societies evolve. Educational stakeholders identify new concerns, forcing curricular change. Students' attitudes change along with those of society. Hence, teachers must change and adapt. Such adaptations, while they usually involve work, are not always negative. Sunshine argues that teachers who embrace change rather than avoid it stand to benefit. They are resilient. When they commit to adaptation, they grow intellectually, essentially as artists who teach, and they increase the likelihood that they will remain professionally vital throughout their careers. In short, change entails work, but adapting to change is transformative; teachers who embrace change receive more than they might ever expect.

The theme of shifting intellectual currents continues in Chapter 6, where Paige A. Ray identifies a strong link between theory and practice. Indeed, she believes that there is nothing more practical than a good theory. Think about that for a moment. Instead of theory being nonsense produced by out-of-touch people at the university or at the Department of Education, what if it is an attempt to understand and explain something that is happening in practice? Maybe the car won't start because of X. Maybe the roses won't grow because the soil lacks Y. Maybe these students have difficulty reading because of their home environment or because the reading approach I've been using doesn't take Z into account. All of these examples represent theorizing at its best. Paige has taught both secondary and college English, and she knows about the demands that are regularly placed on teachers because of new theories and new attempts to understand teaching and learning, yet she argues that embracing theory—and seeing the recursive links between theory and practice—pays back teachers.

Chapter 7 focuses on colleagues. Every teacher would love to have perfect colleagues. Except in Utopia, no teacher does. Teachers know, given enough meetings, emails, and lunch breaks, our colleagues—likely the ones with the sharpest elbows—will rub off some of our corners. However, if we keep our eyes and ears open, we can gain untold wisdom from those colleagues. The contributors to this volume—and, we suspect, all our readers—have had many colleagues who supported our work, told us to keep going, gave us ideas and teaching materials, and shared our professional and perhaps personal joys and sorrows. We have also had some colleagues we wished taught somewhere else, in a galaxy far, far away. Tiana Tucker, who has worked as a teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and a human resources director, knows many of the joys and sorrows that colleagues can bring teachers' way. She reminds us of our colleagues' gifts and calls on us to value them, support them, and allow them to support us.

In Chapter 8, which may be seen as a counterpart to Chapter 7, Jay Mathisen argues that teachers' supervisors also offer them great gifts. Only teachers who run their own single-teacher schools enjoy the luxury of not reporting to a supervisor (and even they report to parents and, in a sense, students). The rest of us in the teaching profession have to report to supervisors. (And, yes, we can all think of a supervisor who we wish would seek employment elsewhere.) Jay has taught for many years and has reported to supervisors who ranged from great to not-so-great. This long and rich experience inevitably shapes his perspective. Jay argues that teachers who come to terms with their supervisors and the institutions in which they have found themselves have much to gain; they too can find opportunities to experience resilience and to grow professionally.

Many teachers chose the profession because of their own teachers. Andrew Mullen wrote Chapter 9 as a kind of thank-you letter to teachers' teachers in recognition of the fact that our own teachers gave and continue to give to us. He notes how the models of teaching we are exposed to at every stage of our development affect us powerfully, at both conscious and subconscious levels. Our own teachers and mentors may serve as models—or, at times, as counter-models—in our

ongoing journey of professional self-definition. Andrew argues that cultivating awareness of the ways our own teachers and mentors have shaped us is essential as this liberates us from any subconscious tendency to emulate those mentors in new contexts that may call for different pedagogies. His chapter explores his life-long efforts—as both a K-12 teacher and a university professor—to capitalize on the modeling he witnessed with effective (and sometimes less effective) educators. He draws attention to specific applications of his own and others' practices and dispositions, and highlights the need for discernment in attempting to re-create—across cultural and generational boundaries—what might have been effective in our own education.

In Chapter 10, Michelle C. Hughes and Ken Badley address the issue of families and how we connect with our students' home environments. A school is traditionally a venue that hosts students, yet what happens when families tell teachers and principals they know a better way to run a school or classroom? What happens when members of students' families call teachers idiots for choosing the path we did in this or that situation? Michelle and Ken recognize the hard moments and conversations (and even the rants) but move quickly and steadily toward the reciprocities, to the families that ask, "How can we help?" or "How can my family serve your school community?" or "What do you need, what can we do, what can we give?" They explore several stories where families and schools became partners, fostering community and helping pay it forward. The relationships between teachers, schools, and families will often be challenging, yet they can produce rich benefits—and strengthen a teacher's backbone.

At the start of this chapter, we acknowledged that teaching is hard work. We also noted that teachers face myriad challenges, complexities, and disappointments on their vocational journeys. In Chapter 11, Carrie R. Giboney Wall addresses these difficult—and sometimes intimidating—aspects of teaching. In her view, teaching is a multifaceted, dilemma-ridden journey that forces educators to ask questions with complicated answers. Clashes between expectations and reality seep into all aspects of the teaching process, fueling emotional dissonance, cognitive dissonance, contextual dissonance, and identity dissonance. Though educators' first responses may be to avoid dissonance, Carrie suggests cognitive disequilibrium can be a catalyst for healthy educator development by challenging assumptions, promoting deep learning, and igniting transformational change. From the perspective of someone with many years in both K-12 and university classrooms, she argues that reciprocities may be found in these harsher aspects of the amazing—and sometimes amazingly difficult—vocation called teaching.

In his 1762 book *Émile*, Rousseau pictured a "school" with one teacher (really a tutor) and one wealthy, engaged, rather self-directed student. Check the catalogue in your local library to see if *Émile* is shelved in Philosophy of Education or Fiction. We think of it as a work of fiction. In the real world of education, schools invariably operate in political and financial contexts. And most educators exercise their vocations in institutional settings. To be rather blunt, departments of education, school boards, and schools tell teachers what to do. In Chapter 12, Dana

Antayá-Moore and Joanne Neal, both experienced public servants from the Department of Education in Alberta, Canada, address these contextual realities. They begin by noting that government departments of education and school board offices are not usually populated by evil bureaucrats who devise new regulations simply to make life difficult for teachers and students. Almost always, these individuals have teachers' and students' best interests at heart, and they go to work each day wanting to support teaching and learning. Nevertheless, budget constraints are real, and the concern for accountability is legitimate. Teachers must come to terms with the reality that, at this point in history, accountability has become an obsession, expressed largely through expanded programs of standardized assessment. Dana and Joanne conclude that constant assessment and new levels of accountability have the potential to give back to teachers (as unlikely as that conclusion may seem to some contemporary educators). They survey strategies that several creative educators have used to meet institutional expectations while remaining true to their own educational missions.

Many teachers serve throughout their careers without even changing buildings; many others teach in several schools, perhaps in different jurisdictions, or even in different countries. In Chapter 13, April E. Jarvis and Daniel H. Jarvis draw on their experience teaching in several settings to explore teacher–student reciprocities in a number of educational contexts. Both Daniel and April have taught in an international K-12 school setting, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and they have supervised a home-schooling program for their five daughters. Daniel has also taught in a public secondary school for five years, and in a university context as a teacher-educator for 18 years. Based on research and personal observations, this chapter specifically focuses on comparing public school, home school, and international school contexts, all in relation to the overall teacher–student experience. April and Daniel identify some of the perceptions of and misconceptions about the challenges and rewards of teaching in multiple settings and conclude that the challenges bring their own joyful opportunities.

In Chapter 14, Michelle C. Hughes and Ken Badley conclude that teaching pays teachers (and, yes, we know about the website with a similar name). We revisit the concession we made at the start of this chapter—that teaching is hard, challenging work—but then argue that its reciprocities make it worthwhile and keep us and countless other teachers in the profession. Yes, it is one of the most demanding professions on earth. Notwithstanding those demands, we believe—and know many of our readers also believe—that it is one of the most rewarding professions. Our goal is to remind our teaching colleagues of the reciprocities, the rewards, the unexpected paybacks. In essence, we offer this book as a love letter—a “hang in there, you’ve got this” message—to our teaching colleagues everywhere. We offer Chapter 14 as our signature to that love letter.

Because we want you to enjoy teaching with full confidence that it is your calling, we invite you to read, wrestle with, and find joyful resilience in the professional challenges outlined in this book. Thank you for reading this far. We hope you will enjoy and take courage from all that follows.

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