

Responding to Peggy Sax's (2008) *Re-authoring Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory*.

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with responses from,

“Wendy”

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Abstract

In this article we present a unique exploration of the effects of Peggy Sax's (2008) *Re-authoring Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory*. In her book, Peggy describes how she has taught courses in narrative practices in a university setting, integrating web-based learning, and always striving to be influenced by those principles of narrative practice that are important to her. She has also included the voices of her students and those people who have consulted her in therapeutic conversations. We wished, therefore, to also be informed by our commitment to narrative practices in our method of writing about our reactions to her book. Rather than writing a traditional book review, which we thought could inadvertently set up the tone of an expert driven academic critique, we decided to be guided by the structure of an outsider witnessing conversation. This has involved reflections, in a conversational format, from a university professor, a former student of Peggy's and a practitioner. Using an outsider witnessing conversation format has resulted in a certain level of transparency about our positions and experiences in order to situate the effects of Peggy's book in our local contexts. We then, as is also usual in an outsider witnessing conversation, asked the "insiders", "Wendy" who had consulted with Peggy and whose voice is in the book, and Peggy, as the author, to respond to our reflections. This article will be of interest to people who teach and practice narrative therapy.

Introduction

We wanted to write about our reactions to Peggy Sax's recent book about teaching narrative practices in a way that is in keeping with the sensibilities of narrative work. We did not want to write a traditional review, that has the potential for setting up hierarchies and judgements. So, we decided to engage in an outsider witnessing conversation in print. This has come about through the process of a virtual conversation as we e-mailed our responses to one another. Consistent with outsider witnessing maps and conversations, we began by commenting on those aspects of the book that particularly jumped out at us, moved on to describe what images came to mind, what resonated for us from our own lives, and then described where these reflections had taken us or might take us (White, 2007). Laura is a university professor who teaches a graduate level elective in narrative practices. Luke is a former student of Peggy's and his voice is included in Peggy's book. Piper is a practitioner who has been informed by narrative ways of working for over ten year and was also a student visitor to one of Peggy's classes. We each describe the effects of Peggy's book in our local lives and contexts, which may appear unusual for a traditional book review, but is in keeping with the conversational map that was providing us with ideas for structuring this conversation. Also in keeping with this format Peggy then invited "Wendy," someone with insider knowledge to comment on our reflections; Peggy was then given the opportunity to have the last word. We hope that you enjoy bearing witness to our conversations and that you might be inspired to have a look at Peggy's book if you have not done so already (Sax, 2009).

Laura: Peggy Sax's (2008) *Re-authoring Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory* provides descriptions of how she has developed a method of teaching narrative practices in a university

setting that is congruent with the philosophical and political stance of narrative therapy. Since I also attempt to maintain congruence between and across the various aspects of my life as an academic, researcher and narrative therapist (as well as mother, spouse and friend), I have found her book interesting and helpful. I have decided to start the conversation by limiting myself to only commenting on a couple of issues that have particularly stuck with me.

Peggy's book title includes the subtitle "*creating a collaboratory*" which signals her creative use of a web-based laboratory as a learning aid for students in her course on narrative approaches to social work or psychology. She describes how this website becomes an important part of her course. She generates on-line discussions by posing questions or reflections based on classroom activities and discussions. One of the course expectations is that students each contribute at least three postings to the website each week between classroom meetings. Peggy keeps a de-centred position, as she initially generates most of the discussions on the website, but encourages students to communicate with one another rather than to her. This provides many positive opportunities for students to carry on conversations and bridge their learning and critical thinking from one week to the next.

I was grateful that Peggy admitted that many of her academic colleagues have argued that they could not possibly consider adding this online component to their teaching due to the extra work that would require. This was exactly my worry, and so it made me smile to read it. Of course, Peggy had a response to these worries: although she spent more time on the website, she spent less time marking papers, and her students' feedback was that they were integrating their learning more effectively than they would have with more traditional course requirements.

I would like to comment on one other issue. Peggy has included, with the permission of former students, many excerpts from website discussions. The majority of these show thoughtful

exchanges as students grapple with the challenges of integrating narrative ideas into their practice or prior learning. The students all sound “brilliant” and Peggy always seems to ask “perfect” questions. I realize that in describing them this way I am not using very narrative or postmodern language, but this is how I was reacting. After a while, it was beginning to sound too perfect, and since I’ve often found the most profound learning comes from difficult situations, I was interested in an example Peggy included where she realized, from feedback a student gave her, that her first response to the student had not been carefully thought out and she had been a bit too quick to jump to conclusions. She wrote to the student again, asking if she could try again, and in her second posting provided some thoughtful questions which the student responded helped her feel understood and also provided the chance for further learning. That particular exchange will stay with me and encourage me as I integrate web-based learning into the narrative therapy course I teach.

Piper and Luke, may I ask you what you were particularly drawn to in Peggy’s book?

Luke: In pondering this project, “reviewing” Peggy’s book, I’ve found it hard to separate a review of the book built around her narrative practice courses from a review of my experience as a student in one of those classrooms. As I write that sentence, I am thinking, “Why do I have to *separate* the two?” Perhaps “separate” is the wrong term, but I do feel a need to treat the two experiences differently, as I engaged in and was engaged by each differently—though similarly at times, certainly. Tied up in my confusion and uncertainty as we approach this project is a discomfort with the idea of “review.” “What is a ‘narrative review?’” I wonder.

Peggy’s book got me thinking - just as her course did - and I’ll begin by exploring the aspect of the classroom experience she helped create that most struck me, something I’m not sure

I could have put words to until reading this book. Laura, you touched on what I am speaking of when you wrote, “I also attempt to maintain *congruence* between and across the various aspects of my life as an academic, researcher and narrative therapist (as well as mother, spouse and friend).”

The two chapters that spoke most directly to my experience as a student of Peggy’s were *Teaching Congruently* (chapter 3) and *Reckoning with Power* (chapter 4). I was particularly struck by the term isomorphism, a new word—for me—to describe the parallels in the principles guiding various aspects of this work, namely consultation, therapy and teaching. Laura, your addition of “mother, spouse and friend” to this list struck me because I have also wondered about this congruence or isomorphism extending beyond the “profession.” I like that isomorphism is a mathematical term; it brings to mind invisible lines connecting all the different constructions of my-self. At the intersection of these lines I can see a preferred identity emerging, one that I intentionally carry with me. In practice contexts I have aching feelings of discomfort when I hear and see myself acting out of line with my preferred way of being with people. This may explain why I have played with bringing in ideas of friendship, and later love, to my thoughts on social work practice at all levels. Reading Peggy’s “behind-the-scenes” thoughts on congruence and power will help me construct my own preferred stance moving forward.

Would you think I was channelling Peggy’s enthusiasm if I wrote that I am on the edge of my seat in anticipation of where this conversation will take us?

Piper: I feel incredibly privileged to be a part of this conversation and am excited about the outsider witnessing format. Starting with your question, Laura, “What were you particularly drawn to in Peggy’s book?” I think what first strikes me is in the dedication, in which Peggy

shares that she was struggling with an earlier draft of the book and how Michael White advised her to write it in her own voice. The way Peggy used her voice—and the students, mentors, and “experience consultants” who have over time informed this voice—is what most captured my heart and mind.

A few years ago, David Epston facilitated a workshop on narrative ideas and practices in Seattle. During this workshop we played around with the particularities of asking questions so as to co-construct a more intimate description of a person’s narrative. I learned the importance of asking questions to bring out unknown and unfamiliar territories...the smells...the sounds...the sights...the textures...the many different layers and variant characters that could make up any moment in time. I became fascinated with the nuances of this practice, as the details are what most often can be lost, and yet they hold the richest possibilities for persons to experience life as having multiple meanings and thus, freedoms. I realized that the more intimately I could become involved with another’s telling, the more I could be transformed and changed permanently.

I speak about this, because inside Peggy’s book is the intimate landscape of a hundred lives connected to thousands more. I was able to experience and connect to a beginner’s mind, a student’s quest for knowledge, a parent’s wisdom, a client’s transformation, and a scholar’s craft. *Re-authoring Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory* is the beginning of a living archive of precious narrative details; details that tantalize my imagination and expand my knowledge. One example is when Peggy compared Pilates to narrative approaches. She said that engaging in narrative practice is like “finding a different kind of powerhouse—learning to listen from an embodied place of curiosity, holding the complexities to the best of your ability, often working with opposing forces such as being simultaneously transparent and de-centered” (p. 232). These complexities and contradictions are an integral part of this work, yet how many times are we able

to stop and play with them, roll them around in our minds, and question them from different angles before the thoughts are lost as we are forced to move into more immediate issues? And how lovely it is that next time I am consulting with a person, I can imagine my yoga practice like Peggy's Pilates and think attentively to how I want to move lightly and powerfully from opposing sides, almost as if they become one movement of de-centered transparency.

Another example is when Pamela, a parent Peggy worked with, gave recommendations for professionals. She wrote that it's okay to say, "I don't know the answer" (216). This detail will distinctly change my practice. Each moment a thought creeps up telling me I must know what I am talking about as a professional, I will remember Pamela.

Nicole, a client of Peggy's, eloquently stated something that sums up the effects that the voices in this book might have. "It became about honesty and truth. When speaking truth, we are not trying to construct, analyze, or manipulate. It just comes out. We react to each other as a human being, which allows everyone to join in. No one is excluded" (p. 193). I was not a student in Peggy's course, but the intimate style of the text gives me the opportunity to be a student by proxy; every time I see the front cover and imagine myself walking down the Vermont path, I will know I am not alone in these values and ideas; many are walking with me while I make room for them to expand and trickle out.

Laura: I think I'll try and link what I first said to my own life to explain why certain things resonated for me (which is in keeping with outsider witnessing practices, moving us away from expert positions, and rather having us speak as individuals within contexts). A few years back I was involved as a research associate with a year-long brief and narrative therapy training program. The term "isomorphism" came up, as some of the people teaching the course had more

of a background in systems theory. We had all kinds of discussions about using the word “congruence” instead of “isomorphism” to avoid the mechanical kind of thinking that systems metaphors could bring up. But, Luke, I appreciate what you say you like about the mathematical image of invisible lines linking things together. Privileging how things are interconnected is lovely and does not need to conjure up images of “controlling by steering” that cybernetic and systems approaches potentially can bring about.

I’m also very interested in mindfulness and reflexive practice. I want the peacefulness that comes from not having to make jarring movements from one way of being to another. If I am committed to the philosophical and political underpinnings of narrative practices, then that can’t help but influence all my activities and interactions with people. When I write or teach now I try and privilege these philosophical and political stances first and foremost because I think the narrative conversations and practices then flow naturally from them. I can’t de-center myself as a social worker, and then take on a position of power as a teacher without reflecting on how to take on that position most ethically and respectfully. I have made an effort to think in these ways with my friends and relatives too.

I think I especially liked Peggy’s example of trying again with a conversation/posting to a student, because we can commit to be and interact a certain way with people, but we don’t always live up to those preferences. Sometimes we make mistakes and I have found that people who have consulted me, and students, have found it a new respectful experience for a therapist or professor to apologize. It’s useful to keep in mind that we can say, “I’m sorry. Can I try again?”

Luke, could you say more about your preferences and how your preferences link to your comments about friendship and love?

Luke: I was struck by the clear impact that the stories Peggy shared had on Piper's life, especially her thinking as a practitioner. I am now imagining a "review" of Peggy's book as a snapshot of the lasting influence that her words (and the words of others that she included) have on our lives, possibly even our hearts.

And with that convenient little transition, I want to move onto Laura's inquiry into my preferences, specifically how those preferences link to my commitment to love. I was struck that Laura had noticed my mention of love because I felt that it might appear to be a throwaway comment in a sentence focused on a greater point. However, it was not a throwaway; it was a nod to an emerging line of thought that is guiding my practice and general interactions with people and nature. This story begins long before Peggy's class and book, but through her class I began to find the words to express my journey, a journey to which her book has added.

Just now, I opened up the "micro-map" I created for Peggy's class last summer and noticed the title I gave my preferred story, "Living in Love." I had forgotten that I was already playing around with love and its possibilities at that point. Looking it over, I am reminded that my micro-map struggled to move love into the social work realm, something I spent much of the next year exploring through my final project, "What would love do?: Thoughts on a loving social work practice." Furthermore, I notice that my micro-map only ventured six or seven years into my past, to the beginning of my college experience. I recall struggling to trace this story of love through the wall that loneliness had erected during that period in my history.

Peggy's experiential lessons on Michael White's concept of "the absent but implicit" eventually allowed me a way to explore how I knew that I wanted love even when I was experiencing such intense loneliness. Our group interviews on "re-membering" practices brought my Maga back into my life, re-imagined my Pop-pop's influence, and brought me closer

to my mother. This is an incredibly truncated version of events, but in this space I merely want to give a glimpse into how learning narrative practices in the setting Peggy has developed can impact someone's life and work, as well as the relationships that weave throughout.

As far as my work—and the preferences of which Laura asked—I found inspiration in the ethical postures of Karl Tomm, who in turn called upon the thinking of Humberto Maturana. In his writings on “therapeutic loving,” Tomm defines love as “opening space for the existence of the other” as opposed to violence, “any imposition of one's will upon the other,” which closes space (cited in Smith, 1991, p. 23). This led me to ask what practices “open space” (for new or marginalized stories, for example) in the lives of those traditionally referred to as clients. My findings focused primarily on narrative and other postmodern approaches, but it was not my intention to answer the question for everyone. My intention was to pose the question for consideration amongst the helping professions. What would love do?

I hope I have not gone too far afield from Peggy's book just now because I can surely say that without Peggy's course I would have never stumbled so far down this path of love, especially in my social work practice. Her book has reinvigorated me after being away from the stimulation of an academic setting for a few months. Beginning with David Epston's declaration in the first paragraph of the foreword, “I found myself falling in love with the people in this book,” I was hooked (p. xix).

So basically, love is an important guide in my life. But why does Peggy's book make me think of such ideas? I probably would not have said it then, but one major thing that was different about Peggy's teaching style is that she taught with love. Acts of love that I experienced from Peggy include her transparency, congruency and ability to admit mistakes—each of which we've mentioned in this conversation previously. Peggy opened space for me. As

I think more deeply about this experience, I am beginning to realize that I have a similar experience when reading Peggy's book. I feel loved as a reader. Loved by Peggy's use of a conversational voice and transparency as an author, teacher, practitioner and human being. Like David Epston, I found myself falling in love with the people in this book, and I'd like to add that I found myself being loved as well. Peggy's book is like a big warm hug for me, it reaches out beyond the page.

Writing about the connections between Peggy's class/book and my final project has reminded me of something Piper said recently to me in private conversation. Piper, you looked up from the pages at one point and said, "I wish I had Peggy's book when I was writing my final project." I am hoping you could say more about this. What difference can you imagine it would have made to have Peggy's book with you during that process? How will you carry Peggy's words/story forward with you?

Laura, Piper's previous post reminded me of something about which I was curious to hear about from you. Piper spoke to the "intimacy" of Peggy's book, its depth and richness. She spoke of how a training of David Epston's initially got her intrigued to explore "the smells...the sounds...the sights...the textures...the many different layers and variant characters that could make up any moment in time." I experienced Piper's comments as speaking to the "experience-near" picture of Peggy's teaching style and class functioning that the book embodied. I wonder, Laura, how you experienced the book as someone who never sat in on a class of Peggy's. I am curious if the picture was "rich" for you or how it was different, if at all.

Piper: Laura and Luke, thank you for your thoughtful responses. I would like to extend the conversation around the theme of love, opening space for students in the classroom, and

particularly answering your questions, Luke, about what difference it would have made for me having Peggy's book to read during my final project and how I might carry her words forward with me.

Ginger, a fellow student, and I wrote a final paper during graduate school titled, *"Reflections on patriarchy in the classroom: A co-vision for transformative social work education."* We wrote this paper in order to make visible for students and educators some of the effects certain practices that support patriarchy in the classroom had on our personal and professional lives. Ginger and I experienced great suffering during various moments of graduate school, as many do, but about which we are not encouraged to speak. It seemed that with each passing day our dreams, hopes, and preferences of being were dwindling out of reach. It appeared that I was being groomed—not by any person's intention, but as a result of discourses operating underground—to honor hierarchical divides within organizations and to devalue our political power and ways of knowing as women, which in turn would teach us to do the same with "clients."

Luke, you so beautifully stated, "I found myself being loved. Peggy's book is like a big warm hug for me, it reaches out beyond the page." I find your words resonate deeply for me. At many points I was brought to tears while reading Peggy's book, as I felt her arms around me, supporting me. Reading Peggy's ideas has delivered me to several realizations. As Luke wrote about love being the "absent but implicit" storyline in his experiences of loneliness, I realized maybe my suffering within a patriarchal institution was not my own failure, but a testament to how strongly I believed in relational and collaborative ethics and the valuing of marginalized voices. I feel I have come back into communion with myself. Peggy seems to have taken this caged voice in my throat and freed it into the winds of a peaceful chatter. Peggy's commitment

to helping students engage in a collaborative and relational way of learning appears to not only be making change on a small “p” political level, as it has impacted many students’ and practitioners’ lives alike, but also on a capital “P” political level. I believe it is part of both a widespread and never-yet-done-before effort that is shifting teaching and social service traditions.

What I most appreciate is Peggy’s commitment to examining power relations within the classroom. When speaking about using her power ethically with a student, Peggy states, “I also use my facilitative and relational skills to deepen their connectedness with their classmates, rather than their individual relationships with me” (p. 75). This encouragement would not have only lessened the impact of isolation and competition between peers that pervaded my academic experience, but it would have helped teach me that building solidarity and turning to colleagues for support and strength is of greater value than attaining individual success and receiving a professor’s approval. Peggy’s desire to encourage emotional intensity and connectedness among students counters a tradition of individualism. Her words could have helped us come together as a community of care while also giving us the opportunity as a group to acknowledge the abuses of power we experienced, resisting them together. If I had been a student in Peggy’s course, she would have helped me carry on this legacy with individuals, groups, and communities in the professional environment and positively influence organizational change.

Many of Peggy’s tips for creating a collaborative learning community would have also greatly impacted me as a student. She recommends, “assume students are knowledgeable and skillful—continually ask them to reflect on learnings from their own life experiences and how we might incorporate their learnings into the class” (p. 28). What I appreciate about this is that Peggy is not asking her students to separate their personal and professional lives or to dis-

member themselves from past experiences and relationships; she is not supporting an institution of academic colonization. Academia would have felt less like a foreign land where I was meant to assimilate if I had been celebrated for sharing local knowledge. Peggy would have supported me to believe that as a female, in a female dominated profession, it is crucial to bring our bodies, minds, and spirits into our care work and not sacrifice them to entrenched standards of behavior.

Laura, what about Peggy's book, or prior experience in your life, has helped you see the importance of a "personal" or "communal" care ethic? What difference do you think it makes to your students if you imagined them noticing how you practice this ethic?

Peggy speaks about how it is important to her to center narrative practices and feminist pedagogy in the classroom. As a young woman in the profession of social work, having her stand as a collaborative female leader and challenge the status quo is something that will affect my life over and over again. What would I do without women professionals like Peggy and Laura who are dedicated to relational ethics and taking stands for preferred values and beliefs? Peggy has taught me a "third way" of becoming a female social worker, as opposed to the available dominant roles such as the sacrificing caregiver or the hardened professional. A third way is to stand proud in my own beliefs while simultaneously privileging practices that are culturally devalued such as curiosity, mutual interdependence, and taking a de-centered position. I can stand a little taller, speak a little louder and spread my wings a little wider because reading Peggy's book helped me experience the liberatory education for which I was searching.

Laura: In answering your questions, Piper and Luke, I think I should share a little of my background. I completed my Ph.D. in a critical pedagogy and cultural studies specialization that generated some of my beginning interests in teaching in ways that would make visible the issues

Piper has raised with more traditional classroom practices. In the early 1990s I first heard Michael White present his ideas about narrative conversations when he was in Toronto. For many years I attempted to integrate some of the inspiration I took from him into my practice, as I pursued my growing interest in narrative practice in my doctoral work and in research projects. Then, after having received my Ph.D., I participated in the seven-month training programme at the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, when Michael was still part of that Centre. I was very much committed to learning narrative practices more, developing a small private narrative practice and teaching narrative approaches within the university setting. I had noticed that in postgraduate narrative training programmes, many students seemed to almost have to unlearn other ways of approaching conversations and people in order to take on new ways of interacting. It was important to me to begin to raise these issues in the B.S.W. and M.S.W. programmes, so that students would not experience this disconnect from one set of knowledges as they began to try and develop new knowledges and skills. I guess I didn't want the "known and familiar" and the "possible to know" to be quite so distant for them after graduation.

Once I returned from Adelaide I began to teach a narrative therapy, theory and practice elective within our graduate programme. My manner of teaching has been directly influenced by the training styles of Maggie Carey, Shona Russell and Jane Speedy, all whom I met while in Adelaide. Again in December 2007, I spent a week with a small number of people in conversation with Michael White in Adelaide, developing our advanced practice skills and indirectly our teaching skills. So, I had already begun teaching narrative practices and reflecting on my position as "professor" prior to reading Peggy's book. However, after reading Peggy's book. I reformatted my course outline and have now completed 13 weeks of classroom learning incorporating online discussions that are evidence of Peggy's effect. Peggy says that "the

interactive website provides a forum to keep conversation active between classroom meetings” (p. 26). Just as Peggy explained she does, I also began this online component by posing questions or providing comments that would encourage students to reflect further about our classroom practice and ask questions of one another and myself. I found that after the first week of posting comments, several students raised how intimidating this could feel and they worried about being judged about the quality of their comments. I reiterated my hope that they each post at least twice weekly but that these postings were not intended to be well-thought out papers but rather questions and queries and reflections.

Peggy says that “as teacher, I strive to create a hospitable atmosphere in which no one is the expert and we are all learning together” (p. 26), and this was definitely my wish. It was interesting to see the students come to terms within the first few weeks that this class could be a different kind of place. They didn’t need to prove their critical analysis and synthesis, but rather could take chances with sitting with the unknown and unfamiliar for a while. Peggy goes on to say, “I create space for students to actively participate in steering a course oriented to their preferred ways of learning, with activities structured to enhance their learning . . . an interactive website makes it possible for students to participate more actively in decision-making that shapes learning activities” (p.27). This has certainly been my experience. After the fourth class, students began open discussion on the website about how each one of them would like to structure the class most weeks. They have been saying again what a unique opportunity it is to be able to attempt learning and practicing these specific practice skills in a university setting.

I want, at this point, to respond to some of your comments about love. They sound beautiful and yet, at the same time, I feel a little uncomfortable with them. Luke, you said “She taught with love. I felt loved in the class. . . . I feel loved as a reader. . . . Peggy’s book is like a

big warm hug for me.” I also value a conversational voice and transparency across various roles, but the sense of love (or acceptance and respect) that I believe is so important with people who come to consult us, I think can have potentially negative side effects in the classroom. I agree with what both of you, Luke and Piper, have said about needing classroom spaces and experiences that challenge the rigid hierarchies of academia.

I “love” your language, Piper, as you say “I can stand a little taller, speak a little louder and spread my wings a little wider because reading Peggy’s book helped me experience the libratory education I was searching for.” I will hope that my students have that experience also. However, I’ve had conversations with students who have raised the need to have the sort of climate that allows for various contradictory views and critical analysis. There is the risk that students will not want to rock the boat and challenge one another because the classroom norm is one of love and support and comfort. The unsettling work of critical analysis and reflection can be uncomfortable; I try not to make a classroom so comfortable that students don’t want to move into that difficult work. I would hate it if anyone felt silenced or unable to raise their differing opinions because they felt any pressure to keep the classroom a “warm and fuzzy” place.

I realize as I write all this that having been raised in England and now working in Canada, I am positioned in a cultural and local context that may be subtly different from the United States setting in which Peggy, Luke and Piper are each positioned. I think that Peggy and I probably have very similar intentions and hopes for our classroom practices and I may just be responding to different uses of language. I think Peggy is suggesting we try to create classroom and online environments where we can challenge traditional mainstream power relations, and I guess I am conscious of the dangers of inadvertently creating another norm. We may think it is a

better norm or a more loving one, but I would hope that we could try to hold on to these ideas and approaches tentatively, so these new ways of being do not also become reified.

Luke: I believe that I composed my last entry just as I was beginning my first post-graduate school job, and since then I have been wrapped up in all that goes along with that experience. Now, certainly some of my hesitation in writing this section of our reflections came from a place of pure exhaustion brought on by a work schedule to which I am not accustomed. However, the greatest hesitation came from this place of loss. Having moved—literally and figuratively—away from my place of academic study, I have been losing a grasp on some aspects of this work that gave me passion and drive. I love the doing side of the work when it comes to meeting and learning about families, but I miss the thinking side in addition. Of course, my co-workers and I still think, but not nearly as much time is dedicated to wonder and possibility as it was during graduate school or in our internships. My work environment is also much more steeped in “traditional” social work than was our schooling, and I am worried I am losing the edge or radicalism I had coursing through my veins only a few months ago. Succumbing to the “real world” haunts me.

In order to break from this nightmare and get back to this review, I picked up *Re-authoring Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory*. While rereading a couple of chapters, I came across an idea Peggy put forward to a woman with whom she was working. At a time when the problem was less strong in her life, Peggy suggested that the woman might want to write a letter to herself in the future, when the problem might be growing louder. When I first read this suggestion it seemed like a nice concrete example of a possible activity to pursue in a therapeutic relationship as well as a reminder that the strength of problems in our lives is not always in a

steady decline/incline; instead, it shifts, circulates and rolls like a wave. This was enough to catch my attention, but as I continued to reread Peggy's book, the metaphor of a "letter to the future" began to grow.

No matter how much of a struggle graduate school became, I was always able to find grounding in the knowledge that I was struggling in the pursuit of my ideals and intentions. I do not find it as easy to establish that grounding in my current employment. Rereading Peggy's book over the past few weeks, however, began to bring some of my passion back. All of a sudden I thought to myself "this book is like a letter from the past," a letter about the wonder and possibility of this profession, a letter to remind me of where I get my passion from and to remind me of the strength of my intentions. I cannot thank Peggy enough for this document. I certainly have other "letters from the past" to remind me of who I intend to be, but it is particularly special to have one on my bookshelf.

This metaphor, a "letter" to myself, is personally apt because some of my words—in the form of online postings—are in the book. I hope the metaphor of a "letter" reminding us of certain lost, misplaced, forgotten or not-yet-known intentions might work for others as well. I feel that Peggy's book is the kind of book that touches people and sticks with them. I want to acknowledge how her words and the inclusion of a diverse array of other voices has re-opened space for me in my life by reminding me of my values and intentions.

I spoke to Peggy shortly before the book was to be published, and I believe she expressed a feeling of distance from the work, having moved on to new projects. Now, I am wondering if Peggy has had a chance to re-read her book and what that experience might have been like. Was she reminded of anything? I would also like to ask Peggy if she imagined what people's experience of the book would be and how readers will interact with/be impacted by *Re-authoring*

Teaching: Creating a Collaboratory. Lastly, I would like to thank Peggy for reminding me of why I became a social worker. I will always know where to find that reminder on the bookshelf when I need it.

I believe that Peggy has invited “Wendy” to now comment on our reflections. I believe she will introduce and position herself.

Dear Laura, Luke, Piper and Peggy,

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this exchange. It’s exciting to read your thoughts and to now be able to reflect in the tradition of outsider witnessing practices.

I have the privilege of coming to this conversation with perspective gained from wearing several different hats. I am a trained therapist who is no longer practicing, a former masters and doctoral student, a client of Peggy’s and quoted in her book, have taught graduate courses, and am a trainer and public speaker. From all of these perspectives I am drawn to respond, but for the sake of brevity will choose to speak primarily from the hats of former therapist and client, all the while knowing it’s impossible to completely compartmentalize myself.

One of the topics that struck me most in reading your correspondence is the consistent thread of how Peggy’s book and teachings have contributed to each of your development and maintenance of preferred ways of being as professionals and human beings. Laura, you spoke of “congruence” and wanting “the peacefulness that comes from not having to make jarring movements from one way of being to another.” Luke, your comment that “succumbing to the real world haunts me” as you navigate your new professional role outside academia touched me. And, Piper, your words “I can stand a little taller, speak a little louder and spread my wings a little wider because reading Peggy’s book helped me experience the libratory education I was

searching for” fills me with joy for you. Reading the profound ways Peggy’s book and teachings continue to affect each of you left me feeling happy for you and wondering “what if” for myself. The primary reason I stopped being a psychotherapist is that I never felt safe to engage my own preferred professional way of being within the confines of traditional paradigms. Luke, I experienced the haunting of “succumbing to the real world” of which you speak and it led me to leave a profession that was once one of my greatest passions. I am certain that if I’d had the privilege of being a student of Peggy’s or reading her book years ago, I’d be a service provider to this day.

Thankfully, with the help of Peggy’s example, I found the freedom I was seeking in my current role as a professional speaker. I’ve come to understand that there are countless people yearning to be congruent across all their roles, but for a myriad of reasons censor their authentic selves. Practitioners who show the way by example will help all their clients. This makes me think of a quote from Marianne Williams: “We ask ourselves, ‘who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous’? Actually who are you not to be?”

Now I’d like to switch gears to include the voice of being one of Peggy’s clients while maintaining insider knowledge of the profession she practices. Peggy states “narrative practice calls on us to be transparent about all sorts of things – power relations, the ideas informing our practices, and the stories that inform our lives” (p.232). She goes on to say, “When students hear that they don’t need to leave themselves behind, they often experience a great sense of relief” (p.232). It’s a relief to clients too, or at least to this client, to know that the person sitting across from me is fully present and a partner with me in addressing concerns.

Some of the most healing and life altering exchanges I’ve had with Peggy occurred when I witnessed her reactions to my stories and re-remembering. Seeing authenticity in her tears,

laughter, anger, compassion, and pride has allowed me to make new meaning where needed. Because Peggy brings her whole self to each session as well as all her skills, knowledge and ethics, I am a happier person today.

I am thrilled to know that through Peggy's book and teaching, "Reckoning with Power" is being introduced in refreshingly meaningful ways to current practitioners and those in training. I was excited to read about students' inquiries into how to position themselves in relation to service seekers. From my experience as a client of Peggy's, I believe power relations and intimacy issues are not something to be afraid of, but rather to be embraced. For example, there is something inherently wonderful as a client to know that while I care about and love Peggy, I don't need to take care of her. Even when she is most transparent she is still decentered. I am the focus. That's a gift to me and a skill that she has learned, honed and crafted. I'm thankful she's teaching others to do the same.

Knowing this book review must come to a close, I'm wondering how Peggy will respond to having read these reflections on how her book has generated thought and conversation.

Wendy

Peggy: As author, I am gratified to read how this book – with its multiple voices – is contributing to others' lives, in questioning our practices as therapists and teachers. The conversation between you, Laura, Piper and Luke puts into action the New Zealand Maori word "TeWhakaakona" (Lewis & Cheshire, 2007), which blends into one word the concepts of teaching and learning to acknowledge how the teacher and students learn side-by-side. I want to join Piper and the new generation of colleagues in the pursuit of "a third way" for training practitioners in counselling and community work – a collaborative approach to rigorous study

that extends beyond the prevalent roles of “sacrificing caregiver or hardened professional” and that partners professional and experience knowledge. In my experience, this kind of positioning as teacher is akin to the “decentered yet influential” posture that orients narrative practice (White, 2003), offering plenty of opportunities for teaching practices that foster learning through discovery for both students and teacher and feedback on practice.

I attempted to show in the book how the addition of an interactive website has the potential to turn a course into a vital collaborative learning community. For good reasons, many academic colleagues are reluctant to add another labor-intensive component to their teaching. Yet – as Laura aptly notes – the investment of time to construct and participate in an interactive website is well worth the effort. By keeping the conversation active between classroom meetings, learning is extended, enriched, and energized for both students and teacher.

Like many others, I continue to reckon with power in teaching – in the classroom and online. By sharing my own “behind-the-scenes” thoughts on congruence and power, I seek to open space for others to think, question and articulate the nuances that inform their own practices. How can teachers use power ethically – drawing on facilitative and relational skills to deepen classmates’ connectedness with each other, rather than their individual relationships with me? Can teachers act like narrative therapists who continually work to decenter themselves to invite others to take up agency in their own lives?

Thank you for planning this non-traditional book review so that it would be more a definitional ceremony than an academic critique. I also feel embraced by the reviewers’ thoughtful words “like a big warm hug for me, it reaches out beyond the page.” Having my intentions so aptly witnessed makes me more (not less) open to questioning of my positions, and linked to what I cherish about critical pedagogy and cultural studies. This leads me to ponder the

severity of many academic practices, and to wonder: Can love become a subtext in teaching and reviewing – “opening space for the *enlivened* existence of the other” (Hoyt, 2001, p. 257) without losing the capacity for critical inquiry? Is it possible to bring transparency, congruency and ability to admit mistakes into teaching practices, yet still create a classroom norm where students can challenge one another and group members feel free to promote viewpoints outside the established norm of narrative practice? How can we create learning environments – in the classroom and online – based on acceptance, respect and hospitality, where teachers and students can share stories that convey the richness of their lives, their hopes and dreams, the things they cherish and hold dear, the expressions of what they value? Is it not possible for this collaborative teaching style to also make room for contradictory views and critical analysis?

Reading these reflections reminds me again to attend to the dangers of groupthink when group members avoid promoting viewpoints, and to stay alert to unintended silencing effects in my teaching style. I provide a list of questions at the end of the chapter on “Reckoning with Power” (p. 82) in an attempt to keep this in mind.

I *want* this book to get people thinking and talking about our teaching practices. Laura, Luke and Piper express curiosity about each other’s responses, and ask each other questions. This climate of inquiry is so engaging and reminds me of what draws me to narrative practice.

I had the good fortune to witness President Obama’s inauguration in Washington, D.C.; this exhilarating experience helped heighten my awareness of unforeseen potential when bridging the gap between the familiar and what is possible. And of the enormous work that lies ahead. I can also hear Michael White’s voice, “a unique outcome provides a *starting point* for a subordinate storyline with events linked in sequence across time according to a plot.” Is this a point of entry for subordinate stories that can emerge from the shadows of dominant stories

about teaching practices, with a subtext of love that extend the collaborative process beyond the classroom?

Wendy's knowledged voice contributes significantly to this conversation. As someone who wears several different hats, she shares reflections from her position as former therapist and as client. Reaffirming Luke's experience of the haunting sense of his succumbing to the real world, Wendy offers her own evocative words: "The primary reason I stopped being a psychotherapist is that I never felt safe to engage my own preferred professional way of being within the confines of traditional paradigms." Switching gears, Wendy speaks in her client voice about her appreciation for knowing that while she cares about and loves her therapist, she doesn't need to take care of her. "Even when she is most transparent, she is still decentered. I am the focus."

I abide strictly by the codes of ethics of my profession, yet Wendy confirms what I also believe to be true: we need to revisit our definition of "professionalism" (Madsen, 2006) that draws sharp distinctions between therapists' lives and the lives of people who seek help. As therapists and teachers we can ask ourselves, why do we so often leave out the voices of the people who are most impacted by our practices, and how can we more consistently position ourselves as earnestly learning about the experiences of those who seek our services?

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