

Cohen, A. (2015). Chapter from *Becoming fully human in educational environments: Inner life, relationship, and learning*. (2nd edition. Previously titled, (2009) *Gateway to the Dao-field: Essays for the awakening educator*. Amherst NY: Cambria). Vancouver BC: Writeroom Press.

We Teach Who We Are and That Is the Problem

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labour and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence in whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he is always doing both.

—Zen Buddhist Text (source unknown)ⁱ

Why are some teachers effective and influential and able to contribute to the development of the human dimension, while others are not? There is very often a gap between how teachers present themselves to students, their self-perception, and what they are actually experiencing within. This gap is costly to students in terms of learning curriculum and about being human. It is also costly to the educator as it precipitates “burnout” and compromises their inner world and their felt sense of integrity and wholeness. As the gap widens, effectiveness diminishes further, and conversely, as congruence and authenticity increase, effectiveness increases. By *effectiveness*, I am referring to the teacher’s capacity to engage with students personally, have students engage with each other personally, develop a sense of aliveness and community in the classroom, and have the students engage authentically and energetically with curriculum material.

In the current literature on teacher formation and development, the closest I have found to this idea is in the work of Parker Palmer (1990; 1998). However, even Palmer falls short. He does not offer detailed descriptions about how educators can practically move towards becoming more exemplary educators. Palmer shares many appealing ideas and stories but with little indication as to how the reader could develop their own abilities to create similar classroom experiences. This essay offers the view that a significant part of the success of these phenomenal educators is connected to the self-knowledge gained from *attention to and work with their inner* life that allows them to have advanced ability to be fully present in the moment. I describe inner experience and inner work—specifically the relationship between metaskill development, authenticity, and presence—and I try to make the case for its importance for educators.

The Cost of the Gap

Many educators struggle with issues such as curriculum and its delivery, class size, student diversity, demands for inclusive education, systemic indifference, professional expectations that conflict with personal needs, lack of collegial connection and support, lack of quality supervision, loss of passion for learning, subject matter in conflict with student indifference, and a focus on grades. They complain to their colleagues, partners, spouses, family, and friends. They blame themselves. They worry. They get sick. They burn out and up. They try harder. They use substances, distractions, and a form of willpower that overcomes and disenfranchises their own genuine needs. They work in isolation and feel overwhelmed. Many hours are devoted to attempting to make it all work. Sometimes they even succeed but at what cost? Many comments and criticisms could be made about the system, supervision, teacher, and education, but my purpose here is to introduce the background to the gap and focus on the educator’s experience.

Cohen, A. (2015). Chapter from *Becoming fully human in educational environments: Inner life, relationship, and learning*. (2nd edition. Previously titled, (2009) *Gateway to the Dao-field: Essays for the awakening educator*. Amherst NY: Cambria). Vancouver BC: Writeroom Press. A study (Talmor, Seiter, & Feigin, 2005) related burnout to a lack of inclusion, having numbers of students with special needs at more than 20% of the classroom population, organizational factors, psychological factors, and low levels of social support. While each of these areas is worthy of investigation on its own, I will centralize the inner world of the educator here. Her or his inner world is core to areas where the teacher could exercise more personal agency. I am not diminishing the importance of the very real issues in classrooms, nor do I dispute that changes in those areas would be helpful, but the point that I want to make is that there is always a personal and inner dimension associated with classroom experience. I believe that work on these dimensions will lead to a better classroom experience for educators. and their students, and a lack of work on these will lead inexorably back to the original difficulty. Here is an example of an imaginary classroom experience with older teenaged boys and how inner awareness and work are helpful:

A female educator is working with a class that has a number of male students whom she finds attractive. She finds herself fantasizing about relationships and sexual possibilities with some of these students. She comes to class full of guilt, shame, and worry that somehow her imagined liaisons will come to light and jeopardize her job and her professional status. She realizes that, as a result, she is actually avoiding engaging with these students, and consequently, they are getting less attention personally and academically. She engages in inner work that helps her to see that she is, indeed, relating to her own fantasies and needs, and that the young men are serving as scaffolding for her own issues. She is able to make a series of connections to her isolation as a child, her fear combined with hero-worship of her older brothers, her current social isolation which she has rationalized as a result of her too-busy work schedule, and her fears of letting anyone get close to her. The result of her inner work is that her practice changes. She is able to see the young men much more accurately, nurture a proper relationship with them, and lessen her own burnout potential by dealing with her internalized stress and being able to come to class in a more relaxed state. And, she realizes that she has a journey in front of her to resolve her personal life issues.

In this particular case, while unlikely to unfold as described here, presumably the teacher's problem would likely have been "solved" in the more usual manner by moving the young men out of the class. However, this would not have resolved her core issue, which certainly would have resurfaced at another time. A more likely example for exclusion might be where an educator has issues with aggressive males. It is not hard to imagine a request for assessment, along with many examples of behaviour deemed to be inappropriate. The males might then be referred for counselling, psychiatric assessment, or moved to a different class with a different teacher, or a combination of these measures. All this will appear to help the teacher, help the students, and alleviate the problem. However, my contention is that in many of these situations, the situation could and would be resolved within the classroom to everyone's benefit if the teacher were able to resolve his or her own inner experience.

To be clear, I am not offering inner work as a panacea for the isolation and challenges that many teachers experience. I am suggesting it can be helpful, and in fact, I am making the case that it needs to be central to any practice of education. Ideally, the ideas and practices contained here would be integrated with systemic support. However, in current educational environments, this is often not the case, and the systemic challenges are many and complex. Educators. can learn about the process of inner work by consulting with someone who is already skilled in this practice by reading widely about and becoming involved in any or many of the following: counselling, contemplative practice, journaling, reading philosophical, spiritual, and religious texts, arts-based practice, and their own unique creative inquiry.

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In the following sections, I offer a number of ideas associated with my core thesis about inner work:

1. Familiarity with and ability to access inner experience contributes to an authenticity that is compelling and appealing for students.
2. Educators can perform some form of inner work that is interactive with and responsive to their outer experiences.
3. Inner work can lead to transformation into new ways of being and a changed sense of identity that influences practice and invites new responses from learners, which can recursively precipitate further inner work.
4. Inner work is germane to the development and nurturance of fully alive metadimensions/metaskillsⁱⁱ in the human dimensions of curiosity, warmth, excitement, and compassion, to name a few.

The contact with and the capacity to use consciously an exceptional depth and range of metadimensions sets apart those educators whom students want to be with and those to whom they are less attracted. These educators are often described by students as authenticⁱⁱⁱ in their way of being.

Inner Work and Inner Life

The term *inner work* refers to reflective practices conducted under the gaze of consciousness, which depends on a developed capacity to self-observe, to witness experience. This type of awareness is not something teacher education addresses, nor is it a part of the culture that most of us inhabit, yet it is the crucial and central key to personal inner work that will facilitate the narrowing of the previously mentioned gap between outer presentation of self and inner experience. Inner work is a way of working on and with perceptions, sensations, memories, and cognitions, all of which constitute a person's experience. Inner life consists of inner awareness and inner reflections on memories, thoughts, feelings, images, dreams, reactions, ruminations, and processes that can be either internally generated or generated in response to an external event. Central to these ideas is that there are internal, private processes occurring all the time within educators. In response to experiences, both internal and external, and that these internal experiences are recognizable by that person.

Within Western culture, the separation between inner and outer life and the privileging of the outer world over the inner world seems to be an accepted and largely unconscious decision. Emphasis on grades, test scores, and intellectual achievement in educational environments with no acknowledgement of the emotional or physical life of students is a prime example. This separation has become so embedded in consciousness that few seem to notice that their lives have become an unending series of tasks. The idea of taking time for reflection, stopping and actually attending to experience as it is unfolding instant by instant and attending to life as it is now, is not even deemed worthy of the time it would take to declare the project unworthy. The education system and the mainstream culture within which I grew up quietly and perniciously insinuated a separation between inner and outer experience, and this has indeed caused me and multitudes of others difficulties.

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Not only do we separate the inner and the outer but we also privilege the outer over the inner. In our culture, we look up to those who are “movers and shakers,” who are the “winners” in the competition for status, money, possessions, and being “beautiful,” but we speak dismissively of those who are extensively involved in inner work. Predispositions to perform inner work are derided as “touchy-feely,” “soft headed,” “navel gazing,” “time wasting,” and on and on. There is little encouragement or guidance for us to engage in inner work. Here is an example from my own experience. At an early point in my career, I was the unit supervisor of a residential treatment unit for severely disturbed male and female adolescents. The unit was one of three similarly configured ones. As an outcome of my own inner work and my belief that it was important to individuals, communities, and organizations, I designed the structure of the unit to put inner work for the staff in the foreground in combination with a strong and direct focus on the interpersonal relationships and communication between the staff. This was not practiced in the other two units. There was a relentless supply of comments from staff and supervisors from the other units, including how much time we wasted on staff’s personal problems and how much navel-gazing we did. Consistently overlooked were specific quantifiable phenomena. Our unit had one third of the staff sick time, much less staff turnover, virtually no staff time lost due to injury, and a significantly lower incidence of critical incidents with our residents.

In the service of healing myself and accessing my potential, I have learned to observe my own inner experiences and to work with these experiences, and in classroom and organizational contexts I have helped others to learn this practice as well. I have had help with this, and I have also developed skills on my own.

E. F. Schumacher, author of the seminal work in ecology that became a modern day classic, *Small is beautiful: Economics as if people mattered* (1973/1999), came to the discovery of inner work and its power rather late in his life. Inner work was not likely part of his school curriculum. In his autobiographical work, *This I believe and other essays* (1997), he talks about his revelatory experience on being advised “that I could greatly improve my health and happiness by devoting fifteen minutes a day to certain relaxation and concentration exercises—which were explained to me” (p. 215). He goes on, “My way of living had never allowed me to discover those inward parts let alone to notice what had been put into them.” He then speaks about what he considers to be most important: “This inner organ with its indwelling spirit of Truth is really the most wonderful thing. It tells me whether something is Truth—the truth that shall make us free—sometimes long before my reason is able to understand how it *could* be such” (p. 216).

Who Are the Inner Workers and What Happens in Their Consciousness?

Schumacher describes succinctly the life-changing effect of this discovery of his inner life. That which was previously words now divulges its true meaning. He says that while this *truth* may be uncomfortable, it does lead us to the critical question in life, “distinguishing the True from the False with regard to the only question which we cannot sidestep, about which we cannot be agnostic—the *question of what to do with our lives*” (emphasis added, p. 217).

This question is important for any human being, and its relevance for educators. is surely apparent, both for educators and for their students. This question is in the atmosphere on a daily basis in classrooms. An educator who is addressing this question on a consistent basis through inner work surely will model for

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I identify myself as an inner worker. I have found my motivations for this process to be similar to others whom I have encountered in my personal and professional life. Inner workers are spiritual pilgrims that Jack Miller (1988) describes as:

people who have awakened to their true identities and manifest this awakening in their lives and work. They work and live their lives in a place of love and compassion as they are not trying to meet the never ending demands of the ego. At the same time they have retained their humanity; they are not hermits or unreachable saints. (p. 2)

Miller is describing people who are in a process of awakening and who demonstrate this by their way of being, and not by any particular action. He describes some characteristics of such individuals:

Firstly, they have the courage to confront many of our traditional approaches to healing and spirituality. In many cases they have been pathfinders....

The re-evaluation of traditional structures is part of the pilgrim's role....

Another characteristic of these individuals is the depth and authenticity of their work. Their realness has a powerful impact on others....

...the Pilgrims see the world as a "school" for learning and understanding who we really are rather than a place to be exploited and manipulated. When the Pilgrims have confronted suffering in their own life, they have not pushed it away, but viewed the pain as a vehicle for spiritual growth....

...they have not cultivated disciples or followers, but instead have encouraged people to do their own work (e.g., meditation) and trust their own heart as a guide....

...the centrality of love and forgiveness. (pp. 2-4)

Miller outlines core characteristics of inner workers, that is, people who are motivated to learn about life, whose approach to others tends to selflessness, who swim at the edge or beyond the cultural stream, who have chosen to move to alternate locations and seek that which is not easily found, and who want to help others realize their human potential.

A major part of the difficulty of undertaking inner work is that, unlike what the terminology might suggest, it is not something that comes naturally and easily, like sitting down and having a cup of tea or talking to a friend. An essential ingredient of inner work is the development of witness consciousness.^{iv} Other names for this are the observer-self, intuition, Hara, or more recently, metacommunicator (Mindell, Arnold, 1990/1991). Using Arnold Mindell's vocabulary, the metacommunicator notices what is happening and comments without judgment. Things are accepted as they are in the moment and neither liking nor not liking is implied. The metacommunicator participates in the exquisite interaction between inner and outer experience. The metacommunicator is the aspect of personal consciousness that has the capacity for awareness and is a crucial aspect of an educator who facilitates exceptional pedagogical

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If you are identified with only one part of yourself, then there is no metacommunicator, no one is there to work with this part. You cannot decide to investigate it further, to amplify it, or even to amplify the suffering because you are it. One of the reasons for working on yourself is to develop a relationship to and between different aspects of yourself and to allow these inner roles and relationships to unfold. The more you work on yourself, the less you will identify with only one part, and the more you will metacommunicate. Thus even if you are submerged in some difficult piece of fate, you...can go deeper into the message and story of suffering. (pp. 84–85)

An increasing capacity to hold differing positions and perspectives in consciousness is indicative of the metacommunicator at work and is an integral dimension of any quest for authenticity. A well-developed metacommunicator is the part of consciousness that makes it possible for the educator to shift fluidly between a multiplicity of roles and perspectives and to monitor feedback that indicates the need for shifts in states of consciousness and roles. The metacommunicator mediates between inner and outer experience and both facilitates and develops as an outcome of conscious attention to experiences. This level of awareness gets the educator out of the intrinsic trap of positioning and provides opportunity to facilitate between positions. This supports processes of integration and heightened awareness. By having a metaposition from which to observe experience, the educator is freed up to take a position consciously, take on an apparently opposing position, comprehend holistically whatever values are present and embodied in those positions, and creatively facilitate dialogue between the positions. This inner work can be done with inner differences and conflicts.^v

Why Is Inner Work Especially Important to Educators.?

Educators carry an inordinate amount of power and influence in relation to students within learning contexts. If they are unaware of how they use this power, it is very likely to be misused. As well, if educators are unaware of what is happening inside of them that affects their way of being in the classroom, then they are likely to, at best, create a numbing and dull atmosphere and, at worst, increase the scope of the wounds that already exist within classroom community members. On the other side, if educators are aware and growing by way of their own inner work, they will model aliveness and offer a classroom opportunity that is full of attentiveness, excitement and curiosity.

Specifically, if an educator assumes a dominant position, which can be an inevitable outcome of insufficient acknowledgement and integration of inner experience, then the timespirit^{vi} of the leader freezes, and consequently, any leadership function or initiative that might emerge from students will be suppressed. A *timespirit* is an evolved form of the concept of role. It is a role that emerges at a particular time and place. It can be "held" by a person, disowned, or just be in the atmosphere waiting to come into play. An educator who does not have consciousness that is in a process of intentional development is unknowingly dominated by the effects of unconscious forces that are inevitably oppressive to him or her and learners. Even if the educator's unconscious is dictating what seems right by the norms of the community, something will still seem to be wrong. What is wrong is that the unconscious process will show up in an incongruity of expression because of the unrecognized internal conflict? Learners will be

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By nature of his or her position, the educator does have a sanctioned dominance. The effect of inner work is to ensure that this dominance is used judiciously and appropriately. An outcome of failure to acknowledge inner experience can manifest as the misuse of rank (Fuller, 2003), that is, the use of rank to further personal agendas, whether conscious or unconscious. I hasten to add that the sanctioned dominant position is often unwisely thrown out under the misguided view that the position itself is a problem when the issue is really improper use of the position, role, and rank. Acts of unconscious suppression of students also have the effect of suppressing the leader. Arnold Mindell states succinctly, "There are no permanent roles. Anyone can be in any role. At the same time the roles themselves are in flux" (1990/1991, p. 202). For example, it could be the case that the part of the leader that is relaxed and receptive—that is also a learner and just another member of the educational community—is suppressed because the leader is held by the notion that he or she must be "in charge" and be seen as knowledgeable about everything. Inner work is the pathway to the authentic self, the liberation of creative energies, and the protection against misuse of power and authority.

In the Presence of an Inner Worker

A further meaning of presence is *in the presence of*. Somehow the presence of the human who educates imbues the space with something ineffable. There is something about bearing, manner, style, way of being, and beingness itself that is significant. The idea might better be conveyed by reference to melody, poetry, rhythm, or metaphor. The leader conveys something that goes beyond the words—the construction of the words into sentences, the sentences into paragraphs, the paragraphs into sections, and the sections into an entire textual production. The students may have a sense of something deeper that inspires a leader. What is this thing?

Hafiz (in Ladinsky, 1999, p. 99) asks:

How Do I Listen?

How
Do I
Listen to others?
As if everyone were my Master
Speaking to me
His
Cherished
Last
Words.

Is there not a sense of being in love conveyed by these few words? Not being in love as in in love with another but literally being contained within an atmosphere, a field, that is constituted by love and that permeates all that is within it. Love is simultaneously a noun and a verb. Is not true presence synonymous with love?

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I believe that presence is equivalent to love. Giving full presence to another is, I believe, the greatest gift a person can offer. Another way of saying this is to equate presence with full attention. For example, without such presence, there is no empathy, only sympathy or pity. This latter, at times, indicates an objectification of the other and is not the same as full recognition. I believe the concepts of empathy and identification are often confused. Empathy is the ability to feel another's experience. It is not pity or sympathy. Demonstrations of empathy indicate that a person has proceeded in their developmental process past the level of only knowing self-as-central. To feel empathy does not mean to be totally identified with the other's experience and become lost in the feelings. It means being sufficiently present for the experience to know it while maintaining a consciousness and a presence that is able to observe the experience and comment on it while not being completely consumed by emotions.

Learners are inspired by the modeling of a teacher who personifies change and growth—someone who emanates aliveness, a curiosity about life, a willingness to take risks, interconnectedness, and someone who demonstrates self-awareness. A teacher who is not able to be present in a substantial and meaningful way will not be able to demonstrate these qualities, which are integrally related. It is incongruous if an educator teaches for change of thinking while simultaneously demonstrating little interest in him or herself, others, and personal change. In educational environments the damage accrues to learners, who tend to shut down in the presence of unconsciously conflicted role models, who are already damaged and numbed to the effects on themselves and others.

The work of addressing the inner experience for an educator is in the service of recognizing the "inter-awareness" of the educator and the educational community that includes the environment, the atmosphere, the educational leader, and the learners. The educator's task is to recognize interbeing. How does this happen in the educator? How are the educator and the milieu parts of one whole? The educator's presence is core to these ways of being.

Inner Work Primer

What constitutes the activity called inner work? What kinds of "things" do inner workers do? What is their essential method, if there is any? For example, how do inner workers develop the aforementioned metacommunicator?

Inner workers require ongoing development of personal awareness, including:

1. Observing experience while being engaged.
2. Reflecting through memory after the initial experience is past.
3. Imagining possibilities.
4. Staying focused on inner experience.
5. Employing a variety of methods and perceptual frameworks that allow and facilitate inner work.

All of these abilities are associated with the capacity to manifest, live in, and work with nonordinary states of consciousness. The states themselves are not the goal. They are evidence that usual consensus

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reality has, at least, temporarily moved into the background. These nonordinary states are the ground from which inner experience and the doors of perception open. The ordinary states have their uses. They are the states within which I look after everyday things. I remember my appointments, brush my teeth, call my friend, buy groceries, and so on. The nonordinary states allow seeing life, self, relationship, other(s), and the nonhuman world as part of a collective whole. Consciousness shifts. Conflicts and differences are seen as part of a whole. Roles are seen as separate from the person. Social reality becomes a construction rather than a fixed reality. My identity is experienced as not fixed. This nonordinary consciousness is a living and lived experience. It is felt emotionally and physically and leads to a deeper understanding of self and life. Possibilities for unique creative expression are freed up, aspects of which for long-forgotten reasons have been blocked from awareness and expression.

Certain inner experiences attract the attention of the inner worker and send a signal for attention. This signal can take the form of excesses or cessations, emotional responses, symptoms, dreams, relationship problems, and behavioural shifts. These experiences are frequently connected to personal history. Often central to this unfolding is identifying the inner opposition (IO) that prevents this emergence. The IO is embedded within a person and is working against what a deeper part of that person wants and that is trying to emerge. This IO very often has a good intent, but this good intent is no longer attached to anything that is actually present. It is a perpetuation of the response that made sense in the original pattern of experience. For example, a child withdraws in the face of a persistent parental criticism. This withdrawal is in the service of protecting the existential core of the child. Withdrawal becomes seamlessly integrated into the child's way of being whenever the child perceives adverse experience directed towards him or her. As an adult, this pattern persists in the face of any encounter that is perceived as threatening. This person is now unable to take in feedback that is felt to be critical, even if there is a possibility such feedback would be beneficial. As well, the person diminishes contact and connection with most people as every person represents a possible threat. Finding out what message is being expressed by both the deeper self and the IO, and establishing a relationship between them, facilitates what is trying to happen and is an important aspect of inner work. These internal difficulties are reflective of outer difficulties. Identifying inner experiences implies the possibility of working with them in ways that involve some form of self-reflection. The forms can include counselling or psychotherapy, meditation, journal writing, peer support, mentoring, supervision, and any personally meaningful relationships. The methods used can involve relating experiences to any, all, or some of personal history, day and night dreams, personality structures, behaviour, symptoms, relationship issues, group issues, the world, and states of consciousness.

Here is an example of what inner workers do that might be deemed unusual. They take the stance that the ominous outer world and dream events, objects, and figures hold the key to deeper understandings about themselves and life and that not dealing with these is a guarantee of repetition. Alfried Längle (ECPS Colloquium, University of British Columbia, February 3, 2005) attributed the following to Viktor Frankl: "I take everything as a question to myself." Inner workers have this approach and use these questions to investigate the deepest meanings of difficult pieces of fate. Inner workers are in the process of exploring all aspects of their lives by entering intentionally into those areas that call for inquiry and by dealing with fears, feelings, and experiences of not-knowing. Developing an openness of heart and mind is both experience and process for inner workers.

Through inner work, people can learn to value difficult experiences as much as pleasant ones and are learning endlessly about the potential contained in both kinds of experiences. Further, there is an awareness of the continuum between the extremes of dark and light and that the depth and breadth of

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Inner Work Sampler: My Own and Others'

The following narrative is a description of an experience that I had. I have written in the present tense to make the experience as alive as possible within this textual form:

I am sitting in a meeting with a group of fellow graduate students. An educational leader with a role that legitimates a dominant position is taking up most of the time allocated for discussion. This is a recurrent experience. I along with my colleagues in our lesser roles are sitting submissively and allowing the monologue to go on and on. I feel very frustrated and am doodling and thinking about other things. Suddenly I remember that this is a familiar situation not only here but also in other circumstances in my life. I remember my father and his tendency to dominate conversations and the very similar feelings that I had while with him. I reflect on this and then slowly bring my awareness back to the meeting. I begin to observe the leader who is dominant and my colleagues who are submissive. I become keenly curious about what is actually happening with each person, at least what is observable and what is going on between people. I observe various clues that my colleagues are drifting in and out of attention. I begin to see signs of anxiety in the leader and imagine that there is a positive intent to get things deemed to be important across to us. My curiosity increases. I wonder to myself, "What is going on? What can I do?" My feeling changes from dullness and frustration to a feeling of enhanced curiosity, compassion, care, and empowerment. I keep looking for openings. I keep coming up against my own fears. I do not have much of a personal relationship with this person. I can not find a way in. This person is drowning and taking the group down with her. There is nothing in the culture of this little community that allowed any intervention that I could imagine. I feel my body relaxing. I am beginning to come to terms with my own helplessness and my sense of self-preservation that suggests that I should take the least worst option, namely, be relaxed, alert for opportunity, and otherwise mostly quiet. What I can offer the situation is my compassionate and quiet attention.

The idea and experience of looking and wondering is a huge shift and a felt experience of having my feelings that have been closed off become available. I have found a better way to be in this situation. I am now more likely to be helpful if opportunity arose, and at the least, I was less likely to be a contributor to worsening the situation.

What my experience demonstrates is a move out of one level of reality into another. Initially, I was able to move into what Arnold Mindell (2001) calls level one, Dreamland, which is the land of roles, theories, and concepts. I began at level zero, which is the level of consensus reality and includes feelings and everyday observations. When I perform my inner work, or perhaps it is more realistic to say "when it occurs," I move from level one to level two, which is the level of conscious awareness. It is the level at which I see the interrelated systemic wholeness of the situation. The part of me that observes is awake. I am suddenly in a state of lucidity, an altered state. The world becomes different. I see the world through different eyes.

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A participant in a presentation that I gave on the inner experience of the educator provided a good example of inner work. As part of his teacher certification, his supervisor came to watch him teach a grade-seven class. The next day, the students were all giggling when he came in. He asked what was so funny. After a little hesitation, the students told him that that class had been the best class he had ever taught, saying that he was funny and made the lesson fun and how different it was from the usual classes. This teacher went away and reflected on this statement. He recalled his family experience, which told him how important it was to be strict, calm, and controlled with children. This made sense to him in terms of his large family where the atmosphere was authoritarian, controlled, and contained, and where his parents' needs for order and decorum were paramount. He recognized that on the day his supervisor was present, his anxiety had moved him to be more excitable and emotive than he would usually be. He recognized how his family background had influenced him to become dull as a teacher, teaching as if he was heading his family of origin. Out of this experience he resolved to change his approach to teaching and to students, to be true to his feelings, to trust more in his students' desire to learn, and to optimize his and their potential to have a good experience in class. Crucial to his insight was the realization about the influence his family background had played in his approach to teaching and how his way of being in the classroom previously was inconsistent with his nature, which was fun loving and good humoured. His inner work and its translation into practice combined to create a life changing experience.

Master Teachers and Inner Work

In this essay I set out to investigate what makes for an effective teacher; a teacher who students find compelling. I have given my analysis in terms of inner work. The kind of effective teacher or master teachers about which I have written are those who have little or no gap between how they present themselves to be and who they are. The closing of the gap is the fruit of the inner work. In the remainder of the essay, my analysis of the master teacher is placed into a somewhat historical and cross-cultural (or, to be more precise, Eastern) perspective in order to further enrich and inform my view and perspective.

Durkheim (1975), the German philosopher and psychologist, spent his life interpreting Eastern thought for Westerners. He wrote about the need for the *master* teacher to assist the student in becoming aware of the master within themselves. In psychological terms this would be a reference to the student's projection on to the master of his or her own capacities to be a master or masterful. In referring to the inner master Durkheim says:

There are always two levels on which master and student cooperate in bringing Being into existence in human shape: one is the external, contingent world, where master and student meet as real human beings—and the other is within the seeker himself. The

Cohen, A. (2015). Chapter from *Becoming fully human in educational environments: Inner life, relationship, and learning*. (2nd edition. Previously titled, (2009) *Gateway to the Dao-field: Essays for the awakening educator*. Amherst NY: Cambria). Vancouver BC: Writeroom Press. master here is not an outside figure but an authority directing the student from within. Deep inside ourselves, we are all masters and students in this sense, and this is due to the anguish and strength of true nature, forcing its way within us toward self-realization in worldly form. But we must bring this fact to consciousness. Seeking and finding the external master depends, like everything that master does, on the inner master. (pp. 34-35)

A major part of the task of the educator is to facilitate this contact with the inner master in each student and to nurture the growth process of mastery. Through this process, learners can be empowered to understand that they have undiscovered inner resources and capacities for learning and knowing. This undertaking is supported by the educator's inner work, modeling, facilitation of learning, and modeling and facilitation of learning about learning; learning that is about both self and curriculum content, encouragement, and education.

One of the most difficult things for many teachers to do is to sit patiently and even silently in wait for students to present themselves—to “show up.” Too frequently, teachers talk too much and too loudly making pronouncements of what students should know and need to know. In this vein, teachers often talk over students and, if students do not resist, which is the most common response, the teachers end up, more often than not, not talking to anyone, as the students have departed in terms of their capacity to attend to either their inner life or the outer world; to use common vernacular, they are “zoned out.” Their self-awareness is gone. Their metacommunicator is shut down. They aren't going to discover their inner master in this condition. Master teachers are able to be quiet, but their quietness is not destructive to students' desire to participate and listen. In fact, it is reassuring and encouraging to students. Master teachers' whose silence represents inner stillness and awareness manifest “presence:” a warm and spacious glow that extends to others and encourages their full presence. In the presence of such stillness, students come to a heightened awareness of their own inner life and their own metacommunicator, or witness consciousness. Full presence by the educator is in and of itself a

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Presence involves listening not only with ears and mind but also listening with heart, which means hearing the emotions and the essence of the persons who speak, *hearing* what is not said, and hearing those who do not speak overtly, and listening for what is in the quietness. For example, if there is emotion in the room and it is not given a voice, the task of the educational leader is to notice and acknowledge this voice that is silent and to create opportunity for the silence itself to have a voice. This allows for understanding of the implications, reason, and meaning of the particular silence, and acknowledges and reinforces the value of inviting in the silenced parts of experience. This level of acknowledgement has its own value and is also a model of sensitivity to what might otherwise be marginalized for learners. An educational leader who exemplifies this type of heart awareness facilitates by example the potential of students to also serve a leadership function.

Mitchell's (Lao-tzu, 1988) translation of a chapter from the ancient text, the *Tao-Te Ching*, captures something about a particular way of being present. It seems to be the way of near invisibility. In my own experience as a college instructor, if I wait and am attentive, students will often contribute what I might have said myself. Active presence on my part along with facilitation seems to be a crucial factor in the emergence of knowledge from students. My alertness ensures that I actively intervene at moments of transition, moments when I can add something that furthers learning, and moments of rupture or disjunction. The second meaning of presence is the capacity to be fully present in the moment. The consistent factor is that I am fully

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my ability to attend and be present. The Tao Te Ching tells us:

When the Master governs, the people
are hardly aware that he exists....
When his work is done,
the people say, "Amazing;
we did it, all by ourselves!" (Ch. 17)

In the introduction to his translation Mitchell says,

Lao-tzu's central figure is a man or woman whose life is in perfect harmony with the way things are. This is not an idea; it is a reality; I have seen it. The Master has mastered Nature; not in the sense of conquering it, but of becoming it. In surrendering to the Dao, in giving up all concepts, judgments, and desires, her mind has grown naturally compassionate. She finds deep in her own experience the central truths of the art of living, which are paradoxical only on the surface; that the more truly solitary we are, the more compassionate we can be; the more we let go of what we love, the more present our love becomes; the clearer our insight into what is beyond good and evil, the more we can embody the good. Until finally she is able to say, in all humility, "I am the Tao, the Truth, the Life." (pp. viii-ix)

This idea for guidance suggests that the educational leader will be deeply immersed in a process of inner work and trust; trust that what is natural will emerge if he or she does the work to remove the obstructions that block what is alive and natural, so that the Dao can make itself known, and so the educator can be more fully present. Further, this esoteric little chapter suggests that there is a relationship between the Master and the people that is intrinsically related and relational, and that involves a subtlety that both agree to in some way.

The master teacher has not forgotten concepts, judgments, and desires. In fact, he or she is very aware of them. However, the master teacher lives in a state of consciousness that is non-ordinary. He or she sees these very commonplace experiences as components of a larger field. Because the master teacher's presence is authentic (there is no gap between their presentation of self and their inner feeling), he or she is able to see what is before them without any interruption

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of vision, feeling, or thought that would create a distortion between the outer reality and the inner perception. He or she sees and knows the background within which these experiences exist and is not pushed, pulled, and unduly influenced by them. She or he, as an outcome of inner work, is simultaneously of, with, and in the world while maintaining a vantage point that knows and sees all the components in a feeling way and their interblending. This is achievable through an ongoing process of inner work practice and is a necessary undertaking for the emergence of the true teacher. I would add that it is in and through this unending pursuit that the true teacher emerges. This emergence and the capacity for presence are profoundly connected. There is no final moment of achievement. It is a life-long process.

The master teacher has a highly evolved capacity to recognize and live in the space and place of “inter-being” (Hahn, 2001), a non-ordinary state of being, between self and all things. Lao-tzu suggests that the Master governs and that she or he does it while exercising the subtle art of *transparency*, which at times seems to approach *invisibility*. When the master teacher is transparent he or she is actively and clearly involved but in a way that is in the service of bringing forth the emerging knowledge that seems to have a life of its own within the group. As the master’s visibility decreases, the learner-community moves into the foreground. The master teacher is quiet and may even be forgotten, at least in the moment, by the students as they discover their own knowledge and resources. There is no sense of causality. The master may be in the role of facilitator and at times the learner-community has this role. According to Arnold Mindell (2002), “One of the distinguishing characteristics of process-oriented organizational work, and its application to group meetings... is the special combination of inner and outer “awareness work.” Process-oriented facilitation works with our inner lives and dreams, as well as with group life, and its dreams and stories.” (p. ix) The implication is that the students have

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the requisite knowledge and skills within, and that the master teacher role facilitates emergence of what is available and wanting to emerge. The students have an increasing awareness that they are the agents of creation. The *timespirit* of the facilitator is significant and contains the possibility of being with and moving amongst the members of the community in a variety of ways. Specifically, the timespirit is seen as something separate from the person who may be enacting it at a given moment. The role of a teacher is a timespirit that he or she takes on and enacts and then drops when done with it. The master is in a continuous process of development and learning and may have a very fluid ability to pick up the timespirit of facilitator, let it go for another, and pick it up again. The creative emptiness of the master that results from inner work allows him or her to pick up a timespirit and then let it go, while remaining completely open to the needs, requirements, and responses that present themselves at any given moment. Mastery and being a master teacher is really a commitment to a process. This process arises out of increased experience of *emptiness*, which is an outcome of inner work.

Emptiness and Inner Experience

The idea of emptiness comes from Eastern religious traditions and practices. Nakagawa (2000) refers to “wu” (nothingness or non-being) as the deepest ground, out of which all other dimensions emerge” (p.141). In the context of education, the educational leader’s capacity for *wu* constitutes the ground for the emergence of the knowledge, both human and curricular, that exists within the learning community. This emptiness is not a sign of something necessary lacking nor is it a static state. The emptiness within the educator is the opening of space, a generative opening that invites a creative flow and outpouring from the community of learners. An observer might see a teacher who is quieter than most teachers, who does not rush in to fill silences, who judiciously allows students to struggle to come to understanding, who offers

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questions and statements that are intended to bring forth what is in the student(s), and who does at times come forth with ideas and direction. An astute observer would notice that even when the master is more prominent, his or her presence is very often framed in a way that also evokes and provokes more opportunity for students to discover knowledge that they may not have been aware they had. He or she is also interested in having individual students spontaneously provide the information that other students do not have, which is simultaneously in the service of students discovering their own power. All this can arise out of the master teacher's development of *wu-wei* that contributes to the development of mastery and develops through the process of attending to his or her inner experience.

No-Thing
I was no-thing
I will be no-thing
I am no-thing.
Who writes?
—a. cohen

Human Development, Growth, and Presence

The issue of personality bears mentioning at this point. Kirk Schneider (2004) says that much of personality is developed and preserved as a mask that serves as a shield to protect what he calls the *fluid center of life*, “any sphere of human consciousness which has as its concern the widest possible relationships to existence” (p. 10). What is masked is the person's authentic way of being. Their vulnerability and soft core of being, that was wounded a long time ago, is being shielded and protected. This soft core or fluid center of life is finely tuned to notice, unconsciously, that which confirms the need for a protective personality structure. Classrooms and counsellors' offices are filled with people who have developed personalities that serve as protection rather than as a vehicle for authentic expression. Not surprisingly many of these

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is to facilitate an unmasking process that facilitates access to the soft core of being in him or herself and in students, and that optimizes the possibility of emergence of the person's most authentic way of being. This access is gained through moving ever deeper into the inner life.

I am not suggesting that it is necessary for an educator to be an enlightened master. The term master is better understood as a process of mastery development and suggests to me a person who intends to be present in each moment, to be more of who he or she is, and who is moving towards a perpetually receding horizon. Life continues until it doesn't. The suggestion is that within each person, there are potentials that are predisposed to emerge under the right conditions. The crucial action is one of *stepping aside*, becoming empty of any false sense of identity, to allow for the emergences of potential and knowledge that the learner has, and has not yet realized. Such knowledge may exist only in seed form. Inner work is a process of personal reflection with the intention of growth of consciousness and associated self-expression and is crucial to what an optimal and continually developing educational environment requires. Some signs of consciousness growth include an enlarged capacity to see what is both visible and invisible, realization of a broader perspective than was previously apparent, an increased sense of space and ease within oneself, a felt sense of connection, and a sense of consciousness that is present in and at the same time transcends the moment. This listing of signs is incomplete and should not be understood as goals but only as markers along the way. The educator can be who the situation requires and still be in integrity with deeply held values.

Mastery indicates an ability to manifest a sense of presence. Presence is a concept with many meanings. Presence arises authentically out of *wu-wei*. In the same way that an empty bowl represents a potential to be filled, the true experience of emptiness is an experience of

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The “job” of the master educator is to address and encourage the human spirit, and to evoke or provoke the unconscious to bring the spiritual to consciousness and consequently to bring the idea of the spiritual and the associated choice to exist into consciousness. I believe that the atmosphere that is created by such an undertaking by the educator when it is done with passion, compassion, care, and skill creates an atmosphere where curriculum learning becomes practically inevitable.

Deeper into the Inner Life

What follows is a fictionalized compilation of experiences from my classes. One of my students tended, from my perspective, to be very dominating in classroom discussions. During a particular class I was demonstrating facilitation of a group process with a sub-set of the class while the rest of the class observed with particular assigned tasks that would be used as discussion points after the demonstration. The exercise was designed to last fifteen minutes. The student referred to above was a member of the demonstration group and almost immediately began to ask one of the other participants a series of questions. It seemed likely that this *interviewing* process could take up the whole time allotted for the demonstration, would exclude other students from active participation, was at odds with the guidelines that had been given, and would certainly impair the pedagogical intent. I was aware that he was very sensitive and tended to perceive anything that was not floridly positive as a personal criticism. I had to decide whether to let the process unfold as it was or to intervene. I chose the latter. The student stopped talking and was quiet for the remainder of the exercise and the rest of that class. Two days before the

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I had come away from this previous class filled with feelings of heaviness and anxiety. I felt that the demonstration and my intervention with this student had gone poorly. I was concerned about the effect on the rest of the class. Up to this point the classes had been very lively, filled with personal sharing, connection, dialogue about the course material, all of which had taken place in a supportive and encouraging atmosphere. Before returning the call I sat in meditation (Cohen, 2002) and reflected upon what had occurred and particularly my experiences with this student. I will describe for you my experience in the present tense to give you as much as possible a sense of immediacy about my inner work.

I need to get inside the experience of this person. I notice that I have reluctance. I find within me a strong feeling of dislike. I feel a tendency within me to move away. I *listen* to this tendency. I *back up* inwardly and am looking at him *from a distance*. I see a large person who takes up a lot of psychological space, and simultaneously conveys a message that seems to say, "Excuse me, I don't want to cause a problem." As I imagine him speaking my body tenses and I feel fear arising in me. My body is becoming cold and my heart feels like it has a clamp on it that is being tightened. Suddenly, I have concerns about the class being taken over. I imagine extreme unhappiness emerging from the other students. Awareness of my fears leads quickly to my next concern that the class will be unsuccessful and that my view of myself as a good teacher will be altered. I also have an awareness of a fear-fantasy that the program director will be notified. I feel my common sense mind being overwhelmed by my fears for my professional and personal survival. I want to obliterate this student and appear blameless in the process.

This fantasy resided in my consciousness, constraining my capacity to respond and was the repetition of a habitual, somewhat unconscious, personal pattern. This experience of dread was preprogrammed from my personal history to occur under the *right* circumstances and this

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this was brief, but I knew that I had to do something in order to be able to communicate with this student and the class in a different and better way.

As I sit in the inner relationship with this student I feel another ripple of fear. A childhood memory emerges. I am small. I am going to school. I have to cross the street with the assistance of the schoolboy patrol. The boy who is on duty is big and I know that he has threatened and struck some children with his sign. I feel fear in my body. I feel its rush through me. I do not like the feeling and feel the beginnings of fear about having the fear. I recognize that I have been responding to this student with vestiges of this old feeling and particularly out of my unconscious effort to avoid feeling this fear. As a small child I need reassurance. My early mentor, Dr. Peter Lavelle, appears. I hear his voice. He says, "You are sitting on your own power. You are afraid of what you might do and the effects of your power." Somehow, I know that this ties in with my fears of being alone. My child mind *knows* that if I am strong and forceful, others will move away. Another childhood memory surfaces. I am about eight and I am playing a game with other children. I make a quick move that changes the whole direction of the game in my favour. I notice that the children draw back. Nothing is said, but viscerally I know that I am being *rejected* because of my power in this situation.

My power in this situation and in classrooms is attributed power and is not power that I intrinsically have or that actually gives me authority over anyone. It is attributed to the position of instructor by me, students, institutions, personal history, and society. In psychoanalytic terms it is a complex combination of transference, countertransference, and projective identification. Briefly, transference refers to projection from personal history by the patient on to the analyst. Here I am borrowing the term and applying it to the projections of learners onto the educator. Countertransference, similarly, is the projection onto learners individually and collectively by the educator. Projective identification is the unconscious assignment of a role that is then taken up unconsciously by the educator. An example would be as follows: a student who has issues about being dominated by authority figures sees the educator as an authority figure. The student

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As a child, I *know viscerally* that how and who I am has consequences that are frightening. Surprisingly, calmness starts to sweep over me. I realize that I am doing to myself what I have experienced as a child and reactively blaming this student who is troubling for me. I know what I have to do; nothing. Wu-wei is emerging. My inner tension and fear has been replaced with a feeling of warmth and curiosity and is, I believe, what will make the difference for me and this student.

I phone the student and am able to be quiet and listen receptively to his concerns and fears. He relaxes as the conversation proceeds. He thanks me for listening and allowing him to express himself without interruption and “for not making me wrong.”

This is a detailed articulation of my work with my inner life as a human being who assumes the timespirit of educator. To *catch* and identify these moments of importance requires awareness and cat-like quickness. Creating time and space for this type of reflection has been personally meaningful and has transformed professional practice possibilities. Experiences can be taken into this stronghold of inner reflection and the inner work outcomes can be brought back into the classroom in an ongoing interactive practice. In this way the self-care needs, the growth of the educator and learners, the human needs, and desires to absorb the curriculum can be optimally attended to.

In the End/the Beginning

I think the case for inner work is actually easily made. Philosophically determinism states that an individual's actions are pre-determined by existing conditions. I suggest that most human behaviour is determined by the imposition of personal history that has formed a person's personality and ways of being into hardened forms, and that the wellspring from which these

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forms have sprung and the awareness that they even came from this source has long been buried in a person's unconscious. Most of human behaviour is to a great extent determined, or, to use current technological language, programmed. The way out of this deterministic trap and towards free will requires that a person free themselves from the influence of these unconscious forces. The way to foster this freeing is through contemplation on and work with the inner world; work that involves shining the light of consciousness into the shadow of that which is out of awareness and bringing these processes into awareness. This inner work liberates energy, potential, and capacities and talents that have been buried under the rubble of pressure to conform in the service of survival. I need to add that all freedom is limited in terms of actions as the world has a limiting effect. The only limits on inner freedom in terms of consciousness are the limits that are buried in the unconscious of the person.

Involvement in the process of exploring and understanding my own inner life and finding ways to translate this into practice that includes increasing my capacity to be fully present is an ongoing and essential part of my life as an educator^{vii} and a counsellor^{viii}. The inner life of the educator and the ability to work with this aspect of consciousness is a vital feature of education. I believe this dimension is not attended to sufficiently either by educators or policy makers in the educational system and this is costly to learners, educators, and society. This statement derives from my knowledge that methods for attending to the inner life are not part of the curriculum for educating educators and hearing from educators who are struggling with the effects of not having these skills. The educator's attention or lack of attention along with his or her ability to work with these inner experiences will either enhance or detract from the educational community, individual learners, and learning.

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Inner experience is the internal representation and experience of phenomena. Attention to, identification of, and expression of inner experience increases the possibility that an educator will connect with individual students and the community of students in ways that optimize the development of community and learning. Such attention can identify moments of rupture or rapture, the associated phenomena, and the inner work that allows the authentic self out of its prison and into its truest path. A crucial step in the process is noticing internal experiences. An educator who has access, curiosity, a commitment to inner experience, and insight into the deepest meanings of their experience, offers inspiration to learners that is essential to igniting their desire to learn. Is that not crucial to the education and development of learners who are the future?

Later

I am out for a run. I am thinking about this essay. A fantasy about my own death emerges. The following poetic response to the whole process emerges:

Academic/Death Comes Running

*The news arrives,
I will be dying.*

*I must finish my work.
The academy becomes very human,
Special arrangements are made.*

*Even the President of the University
All there...
Death creates human flesh out of the institutional skeleton.
I die before I die.*

*Join me here
In the heart of the matter ...*

*I run
The sweat pours off me.*

I feel my body move.

Feeling deep emotion.

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Learning to hear the sound of my beating Heart,
Engaging senses,
Smelling the Blood of my Heart,
Tasting the Blood,
Becoming Blood...

In the midst of the silence of the Way.....

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ⁱ I have put substantial effort into finding the original source for this story, including <http://flowidealism.blogspot.com/2004/06/mastering-art-of-living.html>, from where I retrieved it on March 16, 2005, but it has eluded me.

ⁱⁱ Metadimensions/Metaskills (Cohen, 2002; Mindell, Amy, 1994/2001) are superordinate skills that reflect deeply held beliefs and values and are demonstrated by the in-the-moment feelings and attitudes that accompany the practice skills of the educator.

ⁱⁱⁱ By *authentic*, I mean the following: that the expression of the person is very likely to be perceived as interconnected in terms of language, tone, pace, facial expression, and body movement/stillness. Further, it will be the case that this expression is consistent with deeply held beliefs, values, and sense of the person.

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^{iv} This witness consciousness is intrinsic to many wisdom traditions, including Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, and Christian contemplative traditions.

^v An extended demonstration of inner work is given in, “Dreaming Life: Working with a Personal Dream—On My Own,” on page 122.

^{vi} I am indebted to Dr. Arnold Mindell (1995) for this term, which advances the idea of a role as something that exists at a particular time and place and that may or may not be embodied. By *embodied*, I mean someone actually taking ownership of the timespirit rather than it being talked about and being a ghost role—a role that is attributed to someone who is not present. The *boss* would be an example of this.

^{vii} By *educator* I mean the individual around whom learning is meant to take place *and* for learners around whom it does take place.

^{viii} By *counsellor* I mean one who is performing the kinds of activities in the presence of another or others that evokes, provokes, and educes learning in the inter and intra personal realms.