Drake Lecture
2009
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Dear Dr. Drake: Do I Read You Correctly?

Thank you so much for this opportunity. It's an honor to stand before you – an honor which I sincerely appreciate. And . . . as I am about to deliver the Drake Lecture for 2009, I have a confession to make. In spite of my on-going involvement with this scholarly society - I must admit that I am surprisingly unfamiliar with William Earle Drake, the professor and educational foundations scholar for whom this lecture series is dedicated.

As I began to organize my thoughts for today, some questions intruded into my thinking: Who, really, was William Earle Drake? What kind of a man was he? What qualities defined him as a teacher, and as a man? And . . . why a lecture series honoring his name? What ideas flow from this man? Did he leave an intellectual legacy of ideas that can stimulate and motivate - and challenge - those of us who have gathered in this room today? Ideas are building blocks for the personal educational philosophies that help define who we are as educators. Each one of us made the journey here today because we intellectually wrestle with ideas – the old, the new, the revised, and even those still waiting for a creative birth.

We agree - at least in principle - with Theodore Roszak, that a major "task of education is to teach people how to deal with ideas; how to evaluate them, extend them, adapt them to new uses." And, we build upon an interpretive understanding of a thought expressed by George Bernard Shaw; a thought that can be transferred from the performance stage to the classroom: "The quality of the play, is the quality of its ideas." This epigram may be restated to say that the quality of the educational process - the daily, ongoing process which you and I engage in - is the quality of the ideas; ideas with which we intellectually wrestle, and interpret, and restate, and, perhaps, create.

So, as I thought about Dr. Drake, I wondered about ideas – his ideas, and his intellectual struggles. And, I felt - well, I guess the best word is, embarrassed. I have shelves of books relating to the foundation of education: historical, philosophical, sociological, political, cultural, theological, biographical ideas; all encased in hard and soft covers. I have CDs of lectures from outstanding university professors who represent a variety of academic disciplines and educational philosophies. And yet, nothing by - or about - William Drake.

So . . . I decided I needed to grow a little – to invest some quality time in a bit of research. *Amazon.com* allowed me to find, and purchase, some of the books Dr. Drake has written. Included was his fictionalized, autobiographical educational novel, intriguingly titled, *Betrayal on Mount Parnassus.* Sounded pretty heavy, and definitely philosophical. Maybe even somewhat mythological? So, I began a new learning journey; one of those open-ended quests that lead to new intellectual adventures.

Through the newly procured books, and other sources, I began to learn something about Dr. Drake, the person. Here was a unique individual; a university professor who did not just dispense knowledge, but who actually *connected* with his students and colleagues - who changed lives. Here was a risk-taker, one who challenged various forms of entrenched orthodoxy and dogma, whether it be political, economic, religious,

or educational dogma. I was looking into the mind of an educational prophet; a prophet who, as defined by the Jewish Theologian, Abraham Heschel is "one who asks the challenging questions." That is what William Drake did. His challenges opened-up new worlds of student thought. And, he was also one of those prophets who, in the words of James Garrison, "imagine possibilities beyond actualities, and who issue provocations to action." In the foundations classroom, Dr. Drake was an intellectual provocateur.

Now . . . before continuing, I should offer-up another confession. Well, perhaps it's not a confession, but just a notification - perhaps a caveat. Many of the ideas I will attribute today to Dr. Drake - although not all - are from the words of Ron Jervis, his literary alter ego in the novel, *Betrayal on Mount Parnassus*. Be aware, however, that after also reading many of Dr. Drake's scholarly, nonfictional educational writings, I can attest to the fact, that the fictionalized Dr. Jervis realistically replicates the educational philosophy, historical understandings, humanistic inclinations, political concerns, pedagogical expectations, and prophetic intuitiveness of the REAL, the authentic, Dr. William Drake. I envisioned Dr. Drake incarnated in the fictional Ron Jervis – or is it vice versa? -- Oh well, you know what I mean.

As I formed a mental picture of Dr. Drake, I began to visualize him through the words of the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard: "Though the system were politely to assign me to a guest room in the loft, that I might be included, I still prefer to be a thinker who is like a bird on a twig." I see Dr. Drake on that metaphorical twig, thinking – and, unfettered by conformity to a power structure; ready to spread his wings in search of another idea. (Dr. Drake. Do I read you correctly?)

Those of us who involve ourselves in educational foundations would do well to take lessons from this foundations scholar; from the Dr. Drake who stimulated a memory in one of his former student. This student wrote: "What I remember most about him is his infectious enthusiasm for intellectual give and take. He loved nothing better than a rousing discussion about the ideas underlying the problems facing society in general and public schools in particular . . . He never let political winds diminish his voice as he spoke out for what he believed. At the same time he . . . was always willing to allow his students to follow their hearts." Dr. Drake spoke out, and - perhaps more importantly - he allowed, and encouraged, his students to give voice to who they were. Another former student remembered: "He taught me to ask 'why' . . . and to search for my own answers. My life changed because of him." I can see that Dr. Drake agreed with John Dewey that "teachers should start with question marks, rather than fixed rules." The thoughtful "why?" was an important motivator for William Drake, as it should be for each one of us in this room.

We who are committed to the importance of educational foundations as an intellectual and ethical force in the education of teachers understand the importance of asking "why?" – of challenging the authoritatively transmitted. We - like Dr. Drake -favor "infectious enthusiasm." We court it. We try to model it. We tell our students: "Express yourself. Be who you are – be authentic. Make room for a challenging 'why?'" We - again, like Dr. Drake - are committed to "rousing discussion," and the dialectical power of "intellectual give and take." Or . . . we should be!!

I have a feeling - perhaps it's a hope - that most of us in this room agree with Dr. Drake that: "The Socratic, as contrasted with the catechetical method stands out with striking superiority." There was no rigid, pedagogical catechism for William Drake.

And we concur - I think - when he writes: “Dialogue does not demand ideological agreement; only the will to engage in and promote a deeper understanding of issues pertaining to problems of meaning and value.” Deeper understandings trump both ideological certainty and the mere acquisition of testable knowledge.

At this point, I hazard a guess. I may be wrong; but it is a guess that most of us in this room favor the dialectical over the didactic in our teaching. I’m reminded of a thought I heard from the Princeton scholar and public intellectual, Cornell West, in a lecture at Wichita State University: “In dialogue we allow our differences to percolate.” Isn’t that what we do in the foundations classroom? We strive to intellectually percolate ideas, including opposing ideas.

We understand that an idea-generating power - even a life-changing power - may be sparked in a foundations classroom. That is IF, only if - like Dr. Drake - we *connect* with students as unique, independent, self-forming individuals. We understand that providing information, and developing skills, and concocting pedagogical recipes are insufficient teacher-education goals. There are big “why” questions to be asked - often, questions that have no definitive, concrete answers. Some of us here today seem to have an intuitive understanding of the Taoist reminder: “There may be no answers; search for them lovingly.” We may even ponder on a thought from W.E.B. Du Bois, as voiced in one of his seldom read educational novels: “There are questions so fundamental that not to talk about them is to die.” A pretty strong statement, but . . . .

So we search, and engage in intellectual explorations; even those risky ventures that may be called “thinking outside of the box”. And, I suspect that most of us understand the Taoist-like wisdom of the recently retired Columbia University foundations scholar, Maxine Greene: “Teachers, like their students, have to learn to love the questions, as they come to realize there can be no final agreements or answers, no final commensurability.” Dr. Drake agreed with this sentiment, and his philosophical inclinations also were in-tune with a statement made by the labor leader and poet, Saul Alinsky: “The question mark is an inverted plow, breaking up the hard soil of old beliefs and preparing for new growth.”

Foundations scholars - following the example of William Drake - push that metaphorical plow, and nurture new intellectual growth in students. And we understand that even the answers that our plow uncovers must be challenged and questioned in an intellectual give-and-take in which Dr. Drake’s idea of a “rousing discussion” excites and inspires <u>both</u> student and teacher. Each person in such a dialectical arena must utilize an open-minded give-and-take in a search for answers that keep alive possibilities for continuing intellectual and emotional growth.

Heraclitus – you know, that old Greek philosopher – . . . well, his voice still echoes down the corridors of time, to remind teachers: “Teaching is not to fill a pail, it is to light a flame.” This “flame lighted” classroom is the one that William Earle Drake encourages us to create. It is in such a classroom, alight with thought, that we would find the Dr. Drake who was described by one friend as “a gentleman, master teacher, patient listener, and superb discussant.” I wonder if a No Child Left Behind, or an NCATE, definition of a “highly qualified” teacher would include these non-quantifiable characteristics. Just a thought. Something for another day.

Master Teacher? How is one defined? Paraphrasing Dr. Drake from various writings (and here I’m pulling from both his fiction and non- fiction writings, and putting them together) we would say: “it’s not so much teaching a subject as it is the kind of mind

from which the teacher operates in the classroom; a mind that has an artistic sensibility, a sense of professional autonomy, a sociological imagination, a broad humanistic understanding, an ethical commitment, an intellectual sense of responsibility, and a commitment to the general welfare." Now here really is a definition of a "highly qualified teacher." Well, at least it's a rather significant beginning to what may be an ever unfolding definition.

Let's add that William Drake quality, "patient listener." Now here's a teacher quality that is often overlooked. How can you be a master teacher if you don't listen – listen with an open mind, and open heart? Someone, I forget who, has said: "You must have an ear, if you want to develop a voice." And, what about being a superb discussant? To achieve this teacher disposition you must practice the pedagogical skill of a Socratic midwife. You must give birth – birth to other voices, to divergent ways of thinking, to creative potential, to insightful understandings – even to unanswerable questions. We are reminded by Michael Foucault that even if we "never get the answer, that does not mean we don't have to ask the question." And so, those of us in this room - those who are educational foundations rebels - like Dr. Drake, rebels with a cause - ask questions, and probe, and challenge, and break up the soil of old beliefs; and challenge educational orthodoxies, and disturb the status quo.

Dr. Drake - by way of his alter ego in the novel, *Betrayal on Mount Parnassus* – reminds us that "the purpose of education is to create, and, in so doing, help the student develop the quality of his mind, along with any other talents that he or she may possess." "Quality of mind" is a recurring, much emphasized theme for Dr. Drake. He especially sees it as a goal for educational foundations classes. In reading William Drake I am reminded of an aphorism in a John Dewey speech to the Teacher's League of New York in 1913: "Teaching is either an intellectual enterprise, or it is a routine mechanical exercise." Those of us who prepare future teachers for America's classrooms would do well to listen to Dr. Drake: "What is needed is more emphasis on the quality of mind in our teachers . . . Those who teach in our public schools should be teacher-educated, not teacher-trained."

Think about your personal experiences. Ask a question. In today's schools of education, are teachers trained, or are they educated? There is a difference. Is what Dr. Drake observed so many years ago alive and well today? Do we - to quote Dr. Drake - see too much "skill training and not enough creative thought" in teacher education programs? Could Dr. Drake have been prophetic in his statement that "the concept of trade training dominates our teacher certification, not creative thought or social intelligence." Well . . . it's something to think about in this historical era in which foundations courses are being minimized in many schools of education across the country. More emphasis is being placed on courses which can more readily produce measurable outcomes for accreditation purposes.

Perhaps it's an auspicious time to listen to Dr. Drake, who reminds us that "teaching is an artistic and intellectual performance." I feel sure that he would agree with Bertrand Russell that "the teacher, like the artist and philosopher, can only perform his work adequately if he feels himself to be an individual, directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority." It was the inner creative impulse that Dr. Drake had in mind when he cautioned that: "Methodology will in no way solve the problem of quality teaching," and that "this mechanistic view tends to ignore the

affective creative art role, and the facts of impulse and motivation." To be a true teacher is to be an artist, continually reimagining new paths leading toward creative engagement.

It's not that Dr. Drake did not see a significant place for methodology; in fact he thought university professors should have much more exposure to "how to teach" learning-experiences in preparation for the university classroom. But, his understanding of a specific educational concept, the art and science of teaching, led him to express a thought: "We think of the scientific method in the teaching/learning process as a supplement to the art of teaching, and not as a substitute for it."

You and I know that quality teaching is not something that can be formalized into a set of follow-the-recipe expectations. We can take a lesson from the culinary arts. I remember something Dalton Curtis reflected upon as the 2004 Drake Lecturer: "You can follow the recipes and become a cook, but that won't make you a chef." Dr. Drake reminds us of the dangers of recipe-thinking. He refers to the "hidden rigidities of thought;" and further cautions that, "this mechanistic view tends to ignore the affective, creative role . . . Mechanism in education is never desirable." In another of his writings he asks a question: "How can we maintain a sense of freedom of individuality and of personal worth when confronted with a world where everything is standardized?"

I remember that, historically, our first teacher training institutions in the United States were called Normal Schools. And I recognize a certain irony in the fact that the word "normal" comes from the Latin, and its derivation means "to follow a rule or pattern." Now, there is a hint in this derivation of the word "normal" – a hint of "conformity," of adherence to rigid expectations and inflexible guidelines that limit the expansiveness of a creative mind. As Dr Drake saw it: "Our problem is to promote a quality of teacher education consistent with the development of a free mind . . . What is missing in our teacher education program is the growth of the free mind of the teacher. We are not educating teachers, only training them to fit into some kind of traditional pattern of conformity," What did Dr. Drake mean by "free mind?"

Let me play with some ideas. A free mind is a counterpoint to the conformity that bows to systems and unchallenged orthodoxy. A free mind is an open mind, a questioning mind, a challenging mind; a mind that - to paraphrase Paulo Freire - "is never too certain of its certainties." A free mind finds discomfort with easy answers and half-truths, and dogmatic ideologies. A free mind - an open mind - is one that facilitates philosophical thinking rather than ideological thinking. It is as Robert Gurdin has written: "Philosophy is an open system. Ideology, on the other hand is a closed system. Ideology causes us to judge and to act uninquisitively We do not question our own judgments."

This uninquisitive thinking bothered William Drake. He was very concerned about a condition which he described as "indoctrinated minds." As I interpret Dr. Drake, indoctrinated minds are no longer free or open, they are chained to dogmas and orthodoxies, including educational dogmas and orthodoxies. He wrote that "dogma tends to destroy, to cramp individual initiative and creative thought." And he expressed a fear of "those dogmatic groups (that) seek to dominate the thinking of others." (Wow! Does that remind you some current happenings in the social/political arena?) In thinking of education, Dr. Drake expressed a personal concern: "It is almost impossible for the mind that has been molded into a rigid pattern to appreciate the joys of freedom, to learn to create." I am reminded of a statement by one of my students: "I do not want to *mold* my

students, but help them give meaning and reason to their own learning experiences." She understood the molding metaphor to represent a counterpoint to student self-creation, facilitated by the educational experience.

As I read the writings of Dr. William Earle Drake I realized that he was a dedicated champion of those classroom experiences that we describe as educational foundation courses. And why? Here again, let me play at being Hermes. Do you remember Hermes? He was an interpreter. Think Hermes, and you think "hermeneutical." I am engaging in an interpretation of Dr. Drake. He saw educational foundations courses as those intellectual stimulants that encourage students to explore a wide and diverse spectrum of educational thought; the historical, political, philosophical, sociological, cultural – even theological. Within such courses are academic endeavors that open minds to diverse and divergent - even conflicting, ambiguous, and paradoxical ideas. There are ideas that may cause students to question the educational and social conditioning they have personally experienced; ideas, that when reflected upon, may even create cracks in certain students' personal worldviews.

When Dr. Drake wrote that "the key to human endeavor is the open mind," he expressed a motivation for those of us who teach educational foundation courses. Our goal IS to open minds and to free the creative spirit; even if such a goal cannot be quantified and measured, or encased in a standardized, one-size-fits-all format. It is obvious that Dr. Drake understood the deeper implications of a thought by Oliver Wendell Holmes: "A mind changed by an idea never returns to its original shape."

"We must have more creative minds," wrote Dr Drake. He was concerned by an observed reality he termed a "pattern of conformity" that all too often infiltrates teacher education programs, and, thereby, negates the creative process. He was worried about the academic preparation of teachers, and wrote: "We have an intellectual vacuum in which the traditional focus on orthodoxy has gained ascendency." He was concerned about the dogmatic rigidity in various orthodoxies – political, religious, economic, and educational. He saw the dangers in what he described as the "standardization" of thought, which "limits the development of the human mind."

Dr. Drake understood the educational importance of - in his words - "moving out of a narrow provincialism" in thinking, and he urged his students to seek "alternative possibilities" to life's many challenges and opportunities. He wisely wrote: "It is always important to raise questions, but intelligent questions will not be raised without some sense of challenge, and without a degree of understanding as to alternative possibilities." As I read, and interpret, Dr. Drake, I sense that he would say a rousing "Amen" to a statement made by social critic, Christopher Lash: "We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy."

And so we, who find an academic home and an intellectual passion in educational foundations, find no problem in exposing our ideas and ideals to the test of public controversy. We are also challenged by the memory of Dr. William Drake to keep questioning absolutes, and challenging handed down dogmas. We are challenged to be models in the classroom; models for wrestling with the plurality of truth(s), rather than being autocratic dispensers of a single truth. We are challenged to find intellectual sustenance in the Quaker martyr, Mary Dyer's, words, when preparing herself for the Puritan hangman in Boston Common in 1620: "Truth is my authority, not some authority

my truth." We may even, on occasion, refer our students to Kahlil Gibran's poetic advice: "Say not I have found *the* truth, rather *a* truth."

I'm sure my time is rapidly coming to an end. So, I'll conclude with a few final thoughts. Those of us who have gathered here today have reason to reflect upon those ideas which are integral to *why* this lecture series is called "The William E. Drake Lecture." This lecture series honors not just a man, but also his concept of a "quality mind" and a "free mind"- an open-mind that dialogues with ideas and alternative possibilities, and challenges dogmatic structures. Here is someone who possessed outstanding educational credentials and authority; but who did not flaunt that authority. Rather - as noted by one of his colleagues - he expressed gratitude to "those students who stimulated his thinking by challenging him to experience new ideas, and asking trying questions." Do you remember what Ralph Waldo Emerson said to do in such situations – when challenged by a student's probing question? It was: "Give that student a hug."

Dr. Drake hugged metaphorically. He encouraged his students to question, and to challenge; even to be somewhat educationally heretical. His challenge was to think - think with a critical awareness of alternative possibilities and opportunities. This is why our varied, personal journeys in the academic arena of educational foundations so often present opportune moments to challenge the "what is" as we search for the "what should be." Can we do otherwise?

I recently watched a Wichita Music Theater performance of the musical, *Camelot*, and heard Merlin, the magician, in his last piece of advice before disappearing, encourage King Author to "remember to think." That's why we have a William E. Drake lecture series. It's to encourage the "quality mind" - the free mind – the mind that "remembers to think."

Thank you, and keep thinking. It's what gives educational foundations its *pizzazz*.