

Stories that Mattered

Introduction

Peter London

Each of our authors are prepared and dedicated teachers, each knows their discipline, each loves their career as teacher. Their professional affiliations follow their articles. The settings of these stories all take place in the classrooms of formal educational institutions, their students prepared, as anyone can be, to learn. Yet, something happened at the moment of meeting that disrupted the plan and everyone's sincere intentions and something different and more and better, eventually, evolved. These several stories are eyewitness accounts of what happened. Each account is quite different in circumstances and consequences and the voice of the story teller. There is however a significant common theme throughout, perhaps such is the case with every story when the human condition resides at its center. One such central theme is that every plan intended to enhance the quality of life for others' must consist of a grave abstraction of the maddeningly complex phenomena humans necessarily are. And, the more detailed the plan is formed the more it must leave out. Once such deletion is the signifying right of humans to say, no matter the request, "I'd rather not." And that pesky response, so disheartening to the plan and its planner, turns out, more often than not to be somehow better for both the subject of the pain and its author! Each of these stories tell how.

The initial story is the simplest in telling, yet the pivot between fore and aft in its way is the greatest; a whole new dimension of what a teacher is for, what teaching is for, and when is a student more than a student. And the teacher, in this telling of **Peter London's** article, "Melvin Gets a Passing Grade", recounts an early incident in his career as a high school art teacher in which he is forced to decide, despite his past experiences as a student and as a newly minted teacher, which world he would rather be in, the one he knew, or a possible world perhaps much larger, perhaps better, but certainly much different. The next story "Amelia's Gift," by **Danny Mydlack**, tells of a student, not all that unusual at first meeting, who turns out to be much more (isn't that true of everyone) and forces open the doors of perception. The next story, by **Rochelle St. Martin Pettenati**, "I Hate you, I love you..." is the not uncommon one of a new teacher wanting the very best for each of her students, only to be rejected by them, and how she had to reframe her views of teaching, enlarging it sufficiently to not only include her plans for her students but now must also include her students. **Jane Bates**, an experienced teacher, a well-known author in the field of art education who wrote a National Art Education publication, *The Teaching of Art*, tells in her article, "Keep on Going," of having a similar recent experience teaching trying a new holistic perspective in curriculum and pedagogy that Rochelle, the brand new teacher experienced. Well versed in the history and philosophy and practice of holistic art education, but never practicing

such, Dr. Bates was as confounded and brought to a juncture between her best of intentions and preparations, and the general dynamics of her class who said, most emphatically, we'd rather not. **Bonnie Berkowitz's** article, "The Bridge," tells of confrontations between the fields and their students, of fine arts and art therapy. Both of which she was adept at, but each taught in different settings and purpose. The curriculum and the pedagogy of each being - as now practiced, quite different, how to teach the rewards of each with one body of students. And, how she resolved the dilemma.

Liora Bresler, a major researcher, author, editor in the field of art education relates in her article, "Aesthetic and Pedagogical Compasses: The Self in Motion," how she confronted many converging - and disparate fields, cultures and missions and pedagogies as well as differently prepared and motivated students to - somehow, bring them and herself into consonance, an emergent harmony doing, again somehow- justice for all.

David Pike, recounts in his article, "Do Teachers Know this?" a dilemma that many members of our species encounter whose intellect allows them to perceive patterns and possible meanings in the world heretofore unavailable to many, in this case, to many of his students. How to explain what is in the world to those whose area of acquaintance with the world is smaller than their own? Not unlike the story Plato describes in his essay, "The Allegory of the Cave." Freed from the shadow reality he and the other captives of the cave share, he ascends to daylight, sees what the manifest world is as it appears in the light, then faces the daunting task of returning to his colleagues in the dark, and to explain to them, what they see and know is not all there is, we have been mistaken, there is more and better beyond. How to convey for the cloistered mind, difficult to perceive features and patterns of the world in an accessible vocabulary and pedagogy? How to recover from a student's evaluation of your teaching, and realize, "You know, she has something there." When the student's response to the question, "How might the teacher improve this course?" answers: "Speak English."

Holly Edwards, a professor of art history, in her article, "A Story Without End..." faced the perennial and now extremely pressing question in the design of what to teach and how to teach it; *How is this relevant?* Right now. How to make your personal experiences in another time and place relevant to this time and this place. What teacher (parent, preacher, mate, friend) alive to this world can avoid such engagement? **Shireen Soliman**, in her article, "Fashion, Identity and the Muslim-American Narrative," writes of straddling two cultures, each composed of different histories and values and practices, views of themselves and views of all others, and viewed by all others as different, thus to varying degrees, enigmatic. How to position oneself in such a manner as to bring one's full self into the teaching arena, welcome all others to do so as well, and while in this arena of mutual becoming bring all parties to experience the occasion to more deeply know and respect the other, and in so doing, more fully to come to know and respect ones' own self. **Alexandra Fidyk**, in her article that closes this issue, "The Art of Storying a Life" fittingly invites the teller and the listener of the story to unite in witness, in *copoiesis* and thus beget the power of *communitas*.