

The Anxious Underworld of Teacher Education

Reading and Representing the School Dream in Comics Form

DAVID LEWKOWICH

University of Alberta, Department of Secondary Education

BENEATH THE VISIBLE, LEGIBLE, QUANTIFIABLE CURRENTS of classroom life lays a seething vortex of ambient, proto-cultural form, “unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii). Between what can and cannot be expressed, there remains a constant flow of emotion and embodied, unclear gestures: stutters, bursts of nervous energy, slowly closing eyes, sighs of disinterest, flits of unformed feeling, posturing, sleepy smiles. This unseen world outside resembles an unseen inner world, and much like the dust that floats in the air, which is rarely noticed except through a slant of unbidden light, our seemingly sovereign nodes of conscious thought are incessantly interwoven by something else, a displacement away from the self-obsessed authorities of waking life. “It is what dreams teach us,” Cixous (1993) claimed, “not to be afraid of not being the driver” (p. 100), yet on waking, we hardly remember these visual poems that suddenly appear and disappear without entrance or exit.

In recognition of this inarticulable quality of psychic and social existence, I often ask students to dive into the fray of what Winnicott (2005) titled *potential space*: an “intermediate area of experiencing” (p. 3), “between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived” (p. 70), running the gamut from children’s play to various forms of cultural experience. As an example of such activity, fusing intellect and intuition, I will here share scenes from a number of comics created by students enrolled in an undergraduate course on multimodal literacies. Since these visual narratives describe dreams that are set in school, they also represent a step towards and through the subterranean zones of teacher education.

Though we all presumably possess the capacity to experience the seductive force of dreaming, it seems that most of the time we are asked to stay awake and alert in school, where “stark truth” (Winnicott, 1987, p. 236) and expectations of clarity matter most. This disavowal, however, is not without consequence, and especially because our psychic life cannot simply be willed away, I use this paper to pose the question of what it means to *think with* rather than *away from* the naughty and frightful fact of dreams. In what follows, I first conceptualize my

understanding of dreaming as a creative form of thinking, to which I relate a number of published examples of comics with characters whose dreams take place in school. I then describe the context of my class, as well as the themes, patterns, and aesthetic motifs employed by students in their artistic creations.

The Dream

While most of us likely associate dreaming with the hours of sleep, I follow such psychoanalytic thinkers as Bion (1962), Milner (2010), Meltzer (2009), and Ogden (2003, 2010), who consider dreaming as a form of thinking that persists in day as well as night. Though dreams are at their most prominent when encountered as night narratives, the act of dreaming continues throughout the day in what Bion (1962) referred to as “unconscious waking thinking” (p. 25). We usually ignore these daytime meanings, however, as they are eclipsed and censored by the convincing and forceful logics of conscious thought. Of his understanding of this dialectical relationship, Ogden (2010) wrote: “Just as the light of the stars in the sky is obscured by the glare of the sun during the day, dreaming continues while we are awake, though it is obscured by the glare of waking life” (p. 328). In the context of teacher education, I consider how preservice teachers continue to dream through the “glare of waking life,” as I also question how to best perceive this richness of meaning.

The first possibility involves attending to the insights of psychoanalysis, whose techniques are concerned precisely with the creation of synthetic circumstances (such as the drama of transference and the ritual of free association) to initiate the patient’s “discovery of what was already there in herself” (Winnicott, 1989, p. 316). In therapy, the focus of conversation is meant to eventually shift to areas of consciousness more closely resembling dream life, thus, calling into question the borders of inside and outside that we maintain, precariously, in waking life. As a psychic model for states of mind that are less mediated by the compromises of language and culture, many psychoanalytic thinkers look to childhood as an especially rich site for observing the external manifestations of internal conflicts, including what Farley (2011) called “the mind’s reel of dreams” (p. 24). For instance, Klein (1955) considered the child’s play with toys as comparable to the adult’s free associative drifts, while Milner (2010) contended that since children, “live so much of their lives ... in a state where dream and external reality are fused” (p. 108), their drawings communicate a curious lack of differentiation between the world of thoughts and things, which is also suggested as a psychic position to which we may subsequently return as adults. For Milner, this return is made particularly manifest in artistic practices that avoid the “over-linguistic bias of traditional education” (p. 142).

In Meltzer’s (2009) view, dreams are directly connected to the poetic potential of everyday life; “they are,” he wrote, “the function of the mind which deals with ... aesthetic experience” (p. 29). In this understanding, dreams are more than just an internal vision or projection of internal desires, but a mental process through which external events become internally significant and thinkable. Along with Bion (1962), Meltzer’s (2009) understanding of dream analysis asked how dreamers learn from experience to create their dreams, which involves the reciprocal work of making unconscious links between psychic and social activity. As Ogden (2003) described this mental condition of reciprocity, it is only through dreaming—a process of making experience psychically meaningful—that people may learn to imagine their world differently, and in this context, dreaming is a feature of mental health and freedom of thought. As he noted, “A person

unable to learn from (make use of) experience,” or in other words, a person unable to dream, “is imprisoned in the hell of an endless, unchanging world of what is” (p. 19).

Developing a language of dreaming, thus, invites a reconsideration of how the various boundaries that shape our lives—inside and outside, self and other, body and mind, possible and impossible, knowing and not knowing, etc.—may be denaturalized and imagined differently. Inspiring such acts of reconsideration among preservice teachers, my hope is that students may learn to “rediscover the night hidden within the day” (Cixous, 1993, p. 104) of school.

The Comic

Suddenly and Without Transition

If dreams convey an impression of life continuously interrupted, arranged, and rearranged by a mixture of the seen and unseen, comics appear especially well suited to address this dynamic. Indeed, as Yoe (2013) surmised, “Comics are more like dreams than any other medium” (p. 5), since the unique structure of comics, where action and story is regularly interrupted by moments of pause, “works to replicate the staccato, fragmented style of dream narratives” (p. 5). Following this structural feature of comics, numerous scholars have also argued that readers’ interactions depend on both what does and does not appear on the page. Between the panels, readers are thrust into what McCloud (1993) famously called “the limbo of the gutter,” where in the blank spaces dividing the frames, “human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (p. 66). As an example, we can look to the following panels from “The Big Seep,” a story by Moore (2006) featured in *Tomorrow Stories*.



In these panels, we find Splash Brannigan, a parodic representation of a film-noir private investigator, in the midst of a dream sequence that suddenly transports him back to school. The first panel finds Splash in an environment containing a number of obvious references to Salvador Dali’s paintings, while in the second panel, he sits at a desk in the anxiety-provoking, overfamiliar

setting of a school exam. Tellingly, the overfamiliar quality of this particular setting led Freud (1900/1999) to include such dreams among his “typical dreams,” which along with nakedness, flying, and experiencing the death of a loved one are dreams that are common enough that most of us have experienced similar versions of them. As we will see, many of the preservice teachers in my class also imagined their stories in a similar dream environment.

Separating the two scenes in the above comic is a squiggly gutter, across which the reader inserts an expectation of continuity, and though we do not actually see Splash move between these scenes, the gutter gives the reader permission to link these otherwise unrelated environments. In the following dream sequence from Morrison and Janson’s (1990) “Gothic,” we find another example of a setting change *without transition*, in which Bruce Wayne (as Batman) is suddenly transported from the water’s edge into a classroom.



This sudden change of context, however, is actually quite characteristic of dreams in general, and in this sense, the gutter is the closest narrative equivalent to what Ogden (2005) called the “frontier of dreaming”: the moment, “alive with ... desire” (p. 9), before one category of experience becomes another. The following scene from Charles Burns’ (1989) “Teen Plague” shows just how quickly and dramatically perspectives and appearances can shift within the dream, as well as across the gutter.



Since as soon as we close our eyes or cross the gutter we find ourselves moving from a world of indeterminacy to one whose story is already written, focusing on the gutter—between the before and the after—is a way of illuminating where dreamers, as well as readers, may be thinking of the possibilities of dreaming rather than the seeming inevitabilities of waking life.

As Low (2012) noted, while all texts have their “spots of indeterminacy” (p. 369), because of the conspicuously “conjunctive feature” (p. 372) of the gutter, comics help to visualize the inherently

dialogic nature of reading experience. By focusing on “what is ostensibly left *off* of each comics page” (p. 371), or what the reader *imagines* rather than what they *see*, we may be able to better understand how meaning is always an arbitrary and alterable condition. For Chute (2011), since such meaning is often activated “through incompleteness” (p. 283), it is only because the story is unfinished that we are able to give it meaning. As with classroom life, the illegible aspects of comics are just as significant as the features of text that are more immediately grasped.

Withdrawal

To relate this process of reading to my larger discussion in this paper, when encountering comics of dreams that are set in school, we should look to how the dream enacts and communicates a distortion of classroom life. We may then consider what these revisions propose about education’s “underworld” (Britzman, 2006, p. 135), where desire perpetually forms and reforms at the frontier of dreaming, at the very edge of legibility. As a description of such distortion in the context of analytic reverie, Ogden (2005) described “a withdrawal from the logic, demands, and distractions of external reality that is analogous to the ‘darkness’ of sleep” (p. 5). Generating a similar experience of withdrawal, turning deliberately away from conscious images and perceptions of classroom life may allow for the representation of less acceptable, less articulable

forms of being in school. These are forms of being, as Taussig (2011) wrote, that are “on another plane” (p. 7), and the question here is how and whether to make the passage between these planes increasingly porous, even if what is encountered remains a secret. This panel from Conrad and Bailey’s (2019) *Tremor Dose* articulates just how dreams can speak a secret—“the beating presence of it, its feeling” (Cixous, 1993, p. 85)—without actually spelling out its meaning.

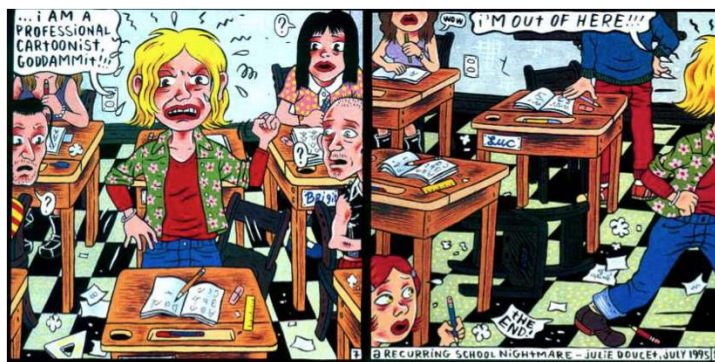


For the dreamer, who is “subject to division, but to uncertain purposes” (Phillips, 2006, p. 111), it often seems that moments of passage require, at least in fantasy, the destruction of what

was previously considered permanent. For instance, in this classic strip by Bushmiller (1951/2014), Nancy is only able to withdraw from consciousness once she has dreamed the destructive and violent image of an exploding schoolhouse.



Though a less violent manifestation, Doucet (2006) also expressed a withdrawal from school in a short comic that describes a recurring nightmare in the form of a wish: to suddenly recognize the unnecessary nature of school and to simply walk out. While she is not really being tested, this comic contains a similar “carnival of affects” (guilt, fear,



shame, loathing, etc.) to the aforementioned examination dreams, which in their intensity, “signal things far more archaic than the affective tie that schooling both obscured and animates” (Britzman, 2006, p. 135). Such dreams about school are thus very often not about school at all, or rather, not necessarily *only* about school. Finding oneself in the wrong place at the wrong time, being unprepared for an oral report – as in the panel below from Veitch’s (1996) *Rare Bit Fiends*—forgetting important facts, not being listened to, being treated as a child in the body of an adult—as in the 1952 example from *The Strange World of Your Dreams* (Yoe, 2013)—these dreams appear to use the familiar environment of school to stage and communicate a variety of childhood experiences and wishes: of wanting to leave the family but not being able to, “of learning to live with beloved and hated others” (Britzman, 2006, p. 135), and of circumstances where desire exceeds the practical capacity for satisfaction.



In this example of a dream from Batiuk’s (2019) *Funky Winkerbean*, we encounter the titular character returning to the scene of frustrated adolescent desire, in a state of panic and distress.



Startled awake, this dream indicates the timeless nature of unconscious life, and that even though we may consider ourselves as adults who have long outgrown our childhood wishes, the dream dismantles such delusions of maturity. Since the dream’s undifferentiated nature allows for child, adolescent, and adult to coexist, dreaming demonstrates the ultimate sign that psychic borders (of memory, consciousness, maturity, etc.) will always remain porous, insecure, and movable. Given the childhood origins of school dreams and the fact that a school experience may represent so much more than the student’s harried life, we unfortunately cannot offer our startled dreamer any consolation. When it comes to the aftereffects of childhood, if we follow the evidence of our dreams, there is nothing resembling a “statute of limitations.”

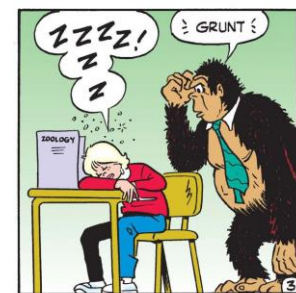
The Class

Dreams about school are, therefore, “less [about] analogy than ... recovery” (Rose, 2003, p. 119) and a reencounter with the timeless, enfolded, reciprocal relations of psychic life. For students engaged in the process of learning to teach, talking about dreams encourages a shift in thinking—even if momentary—from the conscious and cognitive to the emotional, embodied, and desiring. Following Lawrence et al. (2017), who explored comics creation as “a mode of inquiry into teachers’ stories” (p. 1), this section of the paper will focus on the comics of preservice teachers who used their narratives to think about the psychic life of teaching from the vantage point of dreams.

As I was first preparing for this spring 2020 course in the initial weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was challenged by the sudden move to online learning to create activities that built community and invited vulnerability, while also asking students to experiment with multimodal strategies of representation. While I had taught online classes before, doing so in a pandemic was certainly a new experience, and just as the dream involves a withdrawal away from conscious concern, I wondered to what extent the novelty of social isolation might encourage a turn inward. In our opening class, I asked my students, who came from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, to consider how their dream lives may be affected by the pandemic and by their new arrangements of living.

As a class, we read an online news article (Lynall, 2020), whose title asked the question, “Is coronavirus stress to blame for the rise in bizarre ‘lockdown dreams’?” Complementing the ways that dreams can affect our expectations of surface and depth, the author of this article noted, “It’s a strange irony that as our waking hours become more monotonous, our nighttime lives seem more varied” (n.p.). Preparing these students for their assignment, I described how dreams set in school may communicate our hidden desires and anxieties regarding teaching, while also making us “spectators of ... unintelligible” (Phillips, 2006, p. 108) and forgotten educational histories. Indeed, I wondered out loud if by positioning ourselves as dreamers *of* and *in* school, we may be able to communicate something about educational life that cannot be otherwise put into words.

Along with the aforementioned comics, I shared a couple school scenes from Winsor McCay’s comics, and a few panels from *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (Gollhofer & DeCarlo, 1998) where Sabrina falls asleep and dreams her teacher in the image of a gorilla, which since she possesses magical powers, transforms her *actual* teacher into an *actual* gorilla.



After guiding my students through these comics, I shared the following thoughts regarding the relationship between dreaming and visual literacy:

- Since dreams are inherently visual structures, their meaning potentials are like those of multimodal ensembles, and regardless of what the dream communicates, it always communicates something visual about *education's underworld*.
- Dreams are *timeless*, which means that in the dream, we can be simultaneously child and adult, student and teacher, interacting with people we have not seen for years.
- Dreams distort reality; “In our dreams we can do things and things are done that we can’t do and can’t be done” (Phillips, 2006, p. 108).
- Dreams work metaphorically, where through a process of condensation, multiple ideas and experiences may be expressed through a single symbol, person, or event.
- Dreams also work by displacement, where the meaning of something important may be shifted to something decidedly less so, as the dreamer’s emotions may be expressed differently than in waking life.
- If most of the time, we rely on the difference between thoughts and things as a way to safely position ourselves in an unpredictable world, dreaming admits that *there are always other ways of ordering human experience*.
- I then asked these students to consider the following: *How can you use the dream to give voice to that which is disturbing and preposterous about school? How can your dream represent your innermost fears, anxieties, wishes and desires about school—the otherwise unrepresentable and impossible psychic life of education?*

I also made sure that students knew the value of their work had nothing to do with questions of aesthetic beauty or artistic skill. As I wrote in the course outline: *Rest assured, the point of this activity is not about your drawing skills, but simply to make an attempt at comics creation. Though the comic itself can be a straightforward, sequential narrative, since dreams themselves are never straightforward, you may also want to think about how to evoke the mood of your dream, while simultaneously telling its story.*

Reading these Comics

In the following discussion, I recognize that while *constructed as dreams*, these comics are actually closer in character to Winnicott’s (1989) *potential space*: “the intermediate area ... which is neither dream nor object-relating” (p. 204), but an unresolvable combination of both. As a waking dream that uses metaphor—which we may also call art—to join the gap between inner and outer experience, these comics involve a journey to Cixous’ (1993) “School of Dreams,” in which “something must be displaced ... [w]alking through the self toward the dark” (p. 65). By displacing the primacy of language, they are also evidence of what can happen when teacher education encounters the knowledge of literature at the “frontier of dreaming” (Ogden, 2004), where “symbolically mediated self-consciousness ... is powerfully shaped and colored by what lies outside of conscious awareness” (p. 10). Since literary knowledge, like that of dreams, “is not authoritative” (Felman, 1982, p. 41), these comics tell stories that “are not made [explicitly] for the purpose of being understood” (Britzman, 2009, p. x). In recognition of what remains unthinkable in dreams and literature, I, therefore, approach these comics with something other than

simply understanding in mind. In brief, I am not here to provide conclusions, but instead to read the traces. As an interpretive principle, I follow Lear's (2005) advice that "the essence of a dream is not its hidden content, but the activity of dreaming" (p. 115), and as such, I will not be looking for hidden meanings about the authors' psychic lives, but describing how these students have used dreaming as a form of thinking about teacher education. I should also mention that most of these students had already spent considerable time in the classroom as student teachers, enduring the challenge of entering schools "in contexts that they themselves did not set up" (Britzman, 2003, p. 216). Looking forward to their post-university lives, these comics reflect anxieties and desires about teaching, as well as histories formed and forgotten while being a student in school. In what follows, I share examples from these students' comics, in relation to the general themes of time, space, and embodied performance.

Passing Time

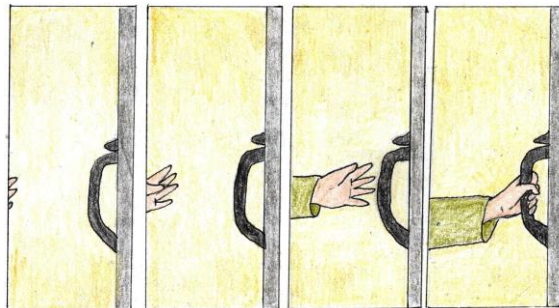
Despite the timeless nature of the unconscious, symbols of time appear in many of these comics, and in the form of the ever-ubiquitous clock, as an emotional recognition of the inevitably of time passing and time lacking. In two of these comics, the story opens with the protagonist's realization that they are late for an exam, as they spend the rest of the story frantically trying to catch up, inevitably failing to do so. In the example below, Leshya's character wakes up and immediately recognizes that she has forgotten about an important exam. Once she gets to school, however, she doesn't know any of the answers, and time flies by, seemingly out of her control.



In Shilo’s comic, an alarm once again appears in the opening panel, and as the protagonist struggles to get to her exam, every step she takes only seems to further upset her ability to make it on time. Crossing between the third and fourth panel, the mental image of a clock physically impresses upon our hero’s head, as does a similarly structured image of the word “FAIL” in the sixth panel.



Since the effects of these images echo each other, a fear of failure is closely associated with a fear of being late, as their mounting rhythm suggests a continuous and inescapable tension. Though Shilo’s character is able to slow down later in the story, captured in the use of a motion-to-motion transition between four panels, when she finally opens the door she is in a random hallway, which is absolutely not where her exam is being held. As the comic ends, she leaves the reader with her final thoughts, “I’m going to fail,” as she walks toward a distant, unknown source of darkness.

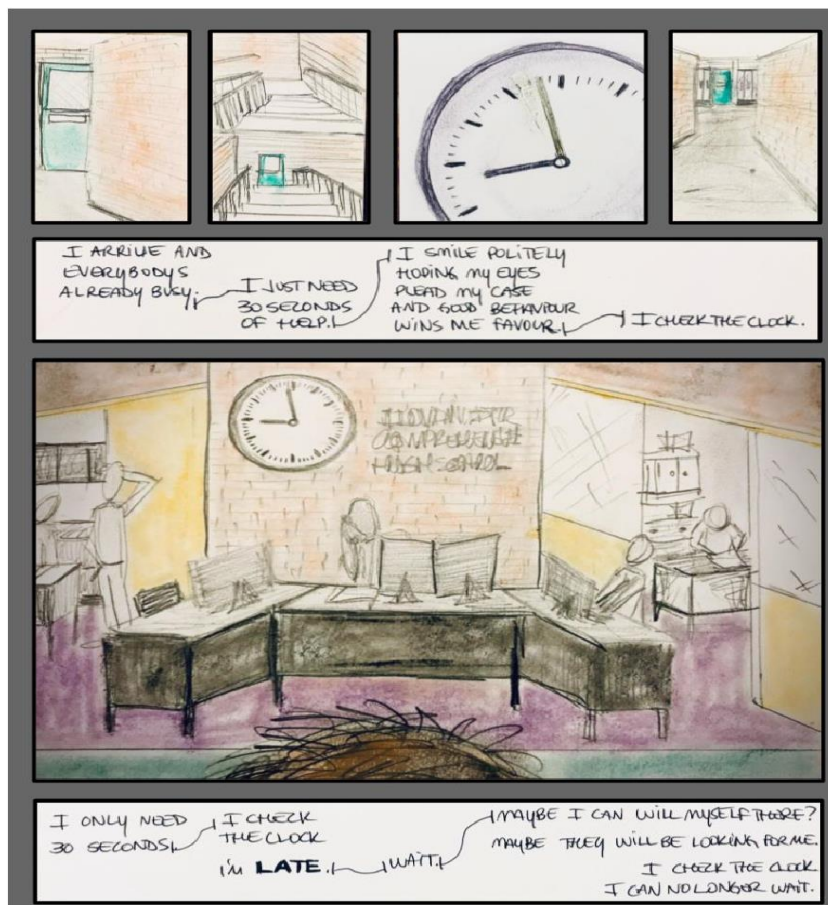


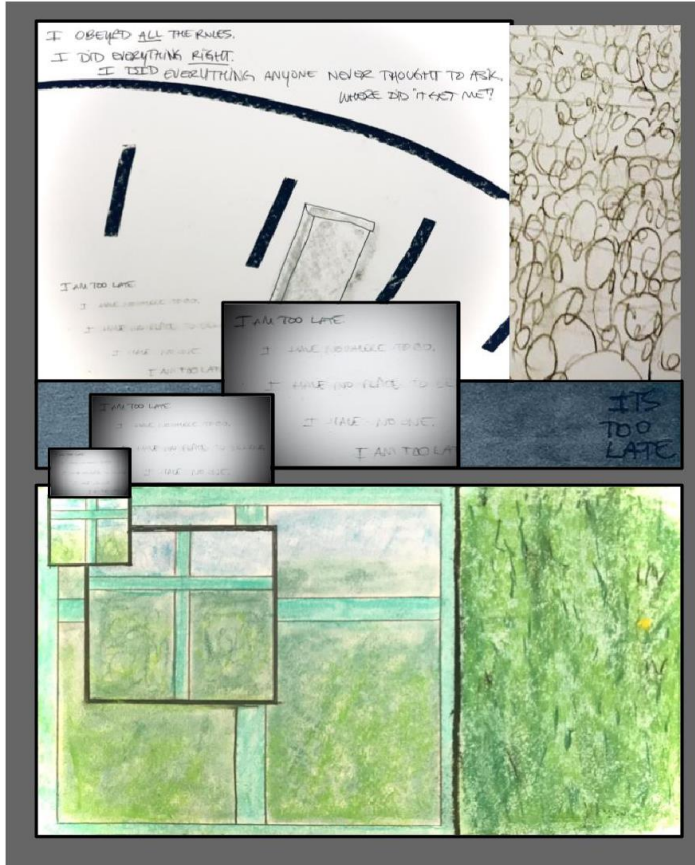


Though this move to darkness happens literally *in the blink of an eye*, the fact that it takes three separate panels to show this blink indicates the prospect of slowing time, and that—despite its likelihood—there may be ways to delay the arrival of failure. Since death is often associated with *walking towards the light*, this character’s walk to darkness may also represent a journey to life, though one that is filled with no small degree of uncertainty. As she continues to walk and overcome while also experiencing impossibility, a quote from Samuel Beckett’s (1994) *The Unnameable* comes

to mind: “I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (p. 418).

Camila’s comic, which reads like a poem, with repetitive words that signal an ever-mounting sense of anxiety, also uses the inescapable presence of the school clock to evoke the daily experience of rushing to class. In the opening stanza, the character is late to school, and her words focus on the visceral act of pushing: “I push through the doors. I push through the bodies. I push past the chatter. I push in between their energy. My stomach feels tight.” As the comic progresses, the character moves from pushing, to shoving, to running, to sliding, to creeping, to tiptoeing.



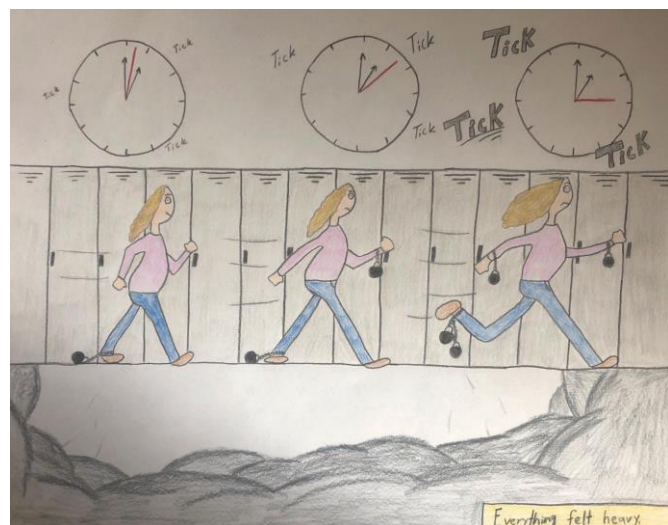


In the end, however, these movements amount to nothing: “I obeyed all the rules. I did everything right. I did everything anybody never thought to ask. Where did it get me? I am too late.” Once again, the notion of time is that of an inexorable, unreasonable force. Throughout this text, the author also repeats the phrase “I check the clock” six times, as the clock’s image appears at a similar frequency.

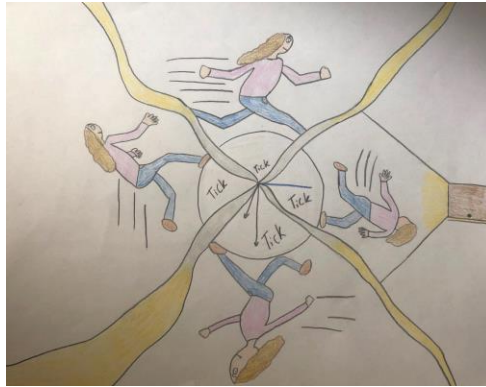
On Camila’s last page, the tone of her art changes, as the author folds the story into itself (“I am too late. I have nowhere to go. I have no place to be. I have no one. I am too late”), as if retreating and stopping time. The story then unfolds into a different landscape: one that is green, lush, pastel, organic, and wordless, all the things that Camila’s story of school is definitively not. Given this radical difference, it is worth considering what this turn away from school may represent, and while on the one hand, it may be read as an

emancipatory gesture directed toward a stifling world, it could also be read as instance of magical thinking, “an attack both on the recognition of reality and on thinking itself” (Ogden, 2010, p. 322). In this comic, these two options, thus, appear as a choice; that school may drive us to disavowal bordering psychosis (magical thinking), just as it also may kindle a search for beauty and alternate futures (dreaming).

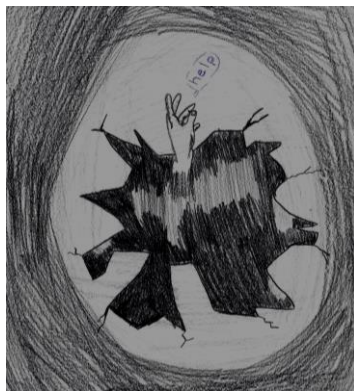
In Betty’s comic, the experience of being lost in school is once again partnered with passing time, here described as a sensation of physical encumbrance and restraint. “Everything felt heavy,” the character narrates, as her limbs are saddled with multiple shackles, resembling the iconic image of a ball and chain. Even though these shackles appear to vanish, a couple panels later this character is trapped in a futile, endless movement around the clock, which suggests that the clock has taken on the role of shackle and *is* the thing that weighs her down in school. Given this recurrent association between the



experience of being lost and the inevitability of passing time, I have to wonder what the dream of being lost in school would look like without these pressing demands, and whether it is even possible—as subjects in school—to dream outside of time’s flow.



Over a two-page spread, Christy offers a creative solution to the dilemma of pressing and passing time. In the first page, which follows a series of panels that represent school as strictly a terrible place (replete with bullies, uncaring teachers, social isolation, etc.), we are shown the desperate image of a hand emerging from cracked ice, as if the person below is drowning beneath the frigid waters of pain and alienation, and as they drown, a speech bubble captures a single word: *help*. On the next page, however, Christy includes a rewind symbol, indicating the possibility of recreating the past, before a time of damage and hurt. Given this wish, it is surely no surprise that the final page illustrates the main character as a superhero with apples at her feet. In the context of teacher education, this dream illustrates the ways in which teachers’ desires to help others are often intertwined with less explicit, but certainly no less powerful, desires to rescue a part of the self that was injured in school and indeed may still be hurting.



Spatial Distortion

While the trope of time appears in these comics as a way to express a loss or lack of control, some of these authors also communicated such concerns through the use of spatial distortion. In Jocelyn’s comic, for instance, the main character is thrown into a variety of peculiar circumstances, including one in which she is gifted an “elven rope” by a character from *Lord of the Rings*. While

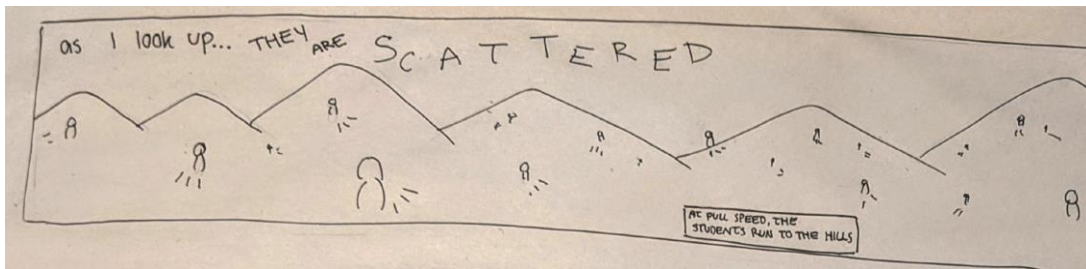


this rope initially seems to provide protection, as the dream progresses, it inhibits the teacher's ability to form meaningful relationships with her students. As the teacher stands in front of her blackboard, facing her students with the rope around her waist, the floor in front of her suddenly slopes away: "I can't see my students," the character narrates, "but I know they are there ... beyond the curve." Though the rope protects the teacher from tumbling over the cliff, her students are curiously calm, indicating that—despite their teacher's worry—they are probably not in danger. The problem here, then, is not the students' safety, or that they need to be rescued, but that the distance between teacher and student becomes so great as to be virtually impassable. Despite the teacher's passion for her subject, this dream represents a teacher's fear

that, regardless of her efforts, her teaching might actually fail to reach her students, who remain "beyond the curve," a spatial concept linked to the "learning curve," a traditional measurement of student progress. Far from a symbol of protection, then, the rope is actually an impediment, which prevents the teacher from taking the plunge into a space of pedagogical uncertainty. As the dream ends, the teacher is alone staring into an empty landscape, unpopulated by ideas, students, and meaning alike.



Mandy's comic also employs the use of spatial distortion to illustrate the anxiety of pedagogical distance. As the comic opens, a teacher worries about the responsibility involved in taking a busload of students to a mountainous park; "I can't believe they left me to watch all these students," she thinks to herself. Then, as soon as they arrive, her fears are realized: a student falls off the bus, forcing the teacher's attention away from the class as a whole.





Momentarily distracted, the teacher then sees her students disappearing into the mountains, and similar to Jocelyn's character, she finds herself stuck and unable to move. Not only are her students far away, she is also powerless to move herself closer. As Mandy's comic ends, we once again see the teacher alone, stuck in the mud reflecting on her failure, though her students do not actually appear in danger. Given the mud and the waning sun, however, the teacher's fate is a little less

certain. The central issue in this comic, then, is not the students' need for their teacher, but a deep unease regarding the teacher's fragile, dependent state. Given the almost identical endings in these two comics, the uses of space and distance suggest an unconscious recognition of the teacher's dependency on her students, and a fear that they alone might have the power to decide her worth and meaning.



Embodied Performance

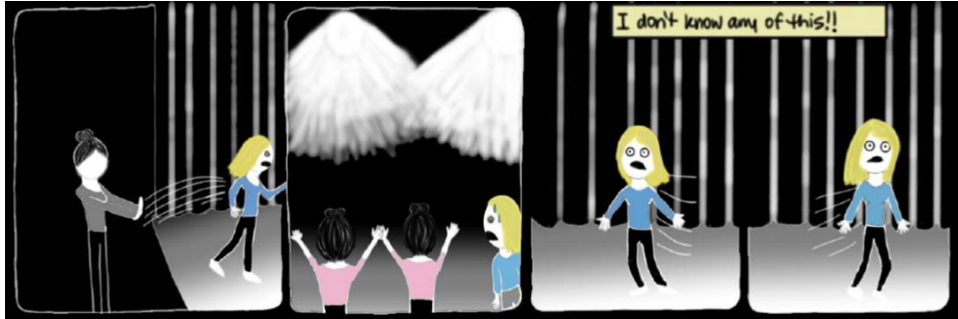
Throughout these comics, the body is a site that authors use to dream their fears and anxieties about teaching. For instance, many involve the body as an object that is easily manipulated: squeezed between other bodies; inside a tornado induced by classroom confusion; and as a source of recognition and alienation.

As the locus of the teacher's classroom identity, the body is also repeatedly proposed as a



place where knowledge is, or fails to be, enacted. Similar to the pressures of the examination dream, many of these comics have characters that find themselves in the midst of a performance that has already begun, suggesting that the pressure to perform feels like a test that is daily implemented on the teacher's body.

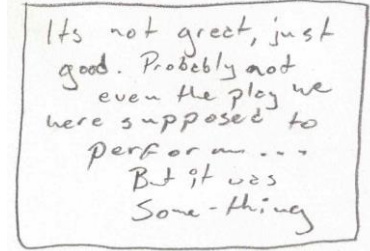
In her comic, Melissa’s character is forcefully thrown under the spotlight, completely unaware of her lines or stage directions. Though the demands of this stressful scenario evoke the idea of teaching as performance, Melissa’s comic ends with her character waking up, remarking, “Whew, just a dream.”



Though her character is safe, this ending ignores the fact that psychic life is not something from which we can actually wake.

In his comic, Michael describes a similar scenario, though rather than wake his character, he allows him to work within the improvisational nature of dreaming itself. In the opening panels, Michael’s character finds himself back in school, dressed conspicuously like a teacher, and with the opportunity to play in a starring theatrical role, for which he unfortunately cannot remember his lines. As with the preservice teacher’s pressure to feign confidence, Michael’s character tries to find a script, though as he is ultimately unsuccessful, he hides his face in shame: “They must never know,” he tells himself. Though this character is desperate, instead of waking up, he decides to enter the stage on his own terms, creating something that, while it may not be the play as originally intended, nonetheless “resemble[s] theatre.”

On the last page, Michael's character gives the following description of his efforts: "It's not great, just good. Probably not even the play we were supposed to perform ... But it was something." In the context of his position as preservice teacher, Michael's comic represents a wish that teaching might resemble something other than following a script of outcomes and methods and, in this departure from the prescriptive, allow for the uncertain ends of improvisation.



Conclusion

As Taussig (2011) described the atmospheric story of everyday life, there is "a world beyond" (p. 13) within our world, where reality as describable recedes in the face of something more imperceptible, always ongoing, beyond the reaches of language and straightforward representation. Vague and uncertain, this is a dreamy world composed of frightening, naughty affects that are hard to think about and that break us down to our most constituent parts: impulsive, unnamable reveries of rage, anger, disgust, sex, anxiety, boredom, distraction, revenge, jealousy, shame, envy, bodily attraction, and bodily distress. In their thrall, we cannot remain focused, our attention is elsewhere, colors blur, and sounds are experienced as confusingly simultaneous. More often than not, this is also a world for which education *as intellect* simply has no words. As Bibby (2015) explicitly described this split in the context of classroom life: "Enlightenment valorisations of the wakeful, rational and conscious" are typically mobilized "to the detriment of the dreamy, associative, affective and unconscious" (p. 52).

In this paper, I have explored the uses that preservice teachers make of the school dream in comics form, paying particular attention to the themes of time, space, and embodied performance. While time is experienced as an inescapable pressure and spatial distortion suggests an anxiety about pedagogical distance, the coercive nature of embodied performance indicates the preservice teacher's uncertain dance between knowing and not knowing. Importantly, though, just as dreams are metaphors for subterranean experiences and feelings that cannot be named, the affective disturbances in these comics run much deeper than words, and as such, these thematic interpretations are merely suggestions. Though dreams may be interpreted, it is also the case that no interpretation is ever sufficient. After all, as Pontalis (1993) noted, "the dream itself is already an interpretation" (p. 120) of an infinitely fragmentary experience.

However, as a narrative style whose form directly depends on gaps in meaning, comics—as "texts that escape" (Cixous, 1993, p. 98)—appear to allow for authors to trace the dreamy qualities of teaching and learning. In this sense, the value of using comics to explore the teacher's dream life is that they are inevitably imprecise and incomplete, and since their meanings are never foretold or finally settled, their approximations and imperfections bring us to a place where the limits of knowledge are constantly reinvented, including the limits of what can and cannot be thought in teacher education. To recognize the presence of gaps in our thinking without necessarily needing to fill them in, this is a lesson that comics teach, identical to that initially devised by dreams. To put it plainly, the uses of dreams and comics in this paper suggest that there are always other ways to think about the lives we lead, and in my work with preservice teachers, I truly believe that no lesson is more important than this.

References

- Batiuk, T. (2019, December 9). *Funky Winkerbean* [Cartoon]. <https://skyfutonsockfun.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/191209.gif>
- Beckett, S. (1994). *Molloy, Malone dies, The unnamable*. Calder Publications.
- Bibby, T. (2015). Thinking and learning? On (not) dreaming in the classroom. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 20(1), 49–66.
- Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from experience*. William Heinemann.
- Britzman, D. P. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach* (revised ed.). SUNY.
- Britzman, D. P. (2006). *Novel education: Psychoanalytic studies of learning and not learning*. Peter Lang.
- Britzman, D. P. (2009). Preface. In M. O’Loughlin, *The subject of childhood* (pp. ix–xii). Peter Lang.
- Burns, C. (1989). Teen plague. *Raw*, 2(1), 5–25.
- Bushmiller, E. (2014). Nancy loves Sluggo: Dailies 1949-1951. Fantagraphics. (Original work published 1951)
- Chute, H. (2011). Materializing memory: Lynda Barry’s *One hundred demons*. In M. A. Chaney (Ed.), *Graphic subjects: Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels* (pp. 282–309). University of Wisconsin.
- Cixous, H. (1993). *Three steps on the ladder of writing*. Columbia University Press.
- Conrad, M., & Bailey, N. (2019). *Tremor dose* [Cartoon]. <https://www.comixology.com/Tremor-Dose-comiXology-Originals/digital-comic/813651>
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Randall, Trans.). University of California Press.
- Doucet, J. (2006). *My most secret desire*. Drawn & Quarterly.
- Farley, L. (2011). Squiggle evidence: The child, the canvas, and the “negative labor” of history. *History & Memory*, 23(2), 5–39.
- Felman, S. (1982). Psychoanalysis and education: Teaching terminable and interminable. *Yale French Studies*, 63, 21–44.
- Freud, S. (1999). *The interpretation of dreams* (J. Crick, Trans.). Oxford. (Original work published 1900)
- Golliher, B., & DeCarlo, D. (1998, March). Gorilla my dreams [Cartoon]. In *Sabrina the teenage witch #11* (n.p.). Archie.
- Klein, M. (1955). The psycho-analytic play technique: Its history and significance. In M. Klein, P. Heimann, & R. E. Money-Kyrle (Eds.), *New directions in psycho-analysis: The significance of infant conflict in the pattern of adult behavior* (pp. 3–22). Karnac.
- Lawrence, J., Lin, C.-C., & Irwin, R. (2017). Images, speech balloons, and artful representation: Comics as visual narratives of early career teachers. *SANE Journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, 2(2), 1–31.
- Lear, J. (2005). *Freud*. Routledge.
- Low, D. (2012). “Spaces invested with content”: Crossing the ‘gaps’ in comics with readers in schools. *Children’s Literature in Education*, 43(4), 368–385.

- Lynall, M.-E. (2020, April). “Is coronavirus stress to blame for the rise in bizarre ‘lockdown dreams’?” *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/12/coronavirus-stress-lockdown-dreams-vivid-scientists>
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. Paradox.
- Meltzer, D. (2009). *Dream life: A re-examination of the psychoanalytic theory and technique*. Karnac.
- Milner, M. (2010). *On not being able to paint*. Routledge.
- Moore, A. (2006). The big seep [Cartoon]. In *Tomorrow Stories Special #1* (n.p.). America’s Best Comics.
- Morrison, G., & Janson. (1990) Gothic: Part two of five [Cartoon]. In *Batman: Legends of the dark knight, #7* (n.p.). DC Comics.
- Ogden, T. (2003). On not being able to dream. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 84(1), 17–30.
- Ogden, T. (2004). This art of psychoanalysis: Dreaming undreamt dreams and interrupted cries. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85(4), 857–877.
- Ogden, T. H. (2005). *Conversations at the frontier of dreaming*. Karnac.
- Ogden, T. (2010). On three forms of thinking: Magical thinking, dream thinking, and transformative thinking. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 79(2), 317–347.
- Phillips, A. (2006). *Side effects*. Harper.
- Pontalis, J-B. (1993). Dream as an object. In S. Flanders (Ed.), *The dream discourse today* (pp. 108–121). Routledge.
- Rose, J. (2003). *On not being able to sleep: Psychoanalysis and the modern world*. Princeton University Press.
- Taussig, M. (2011). *I swear I saw this: Drawings in fieldwork notebooks, namely my own*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Veitch, R. (1996). *Rare Bit Fiends #18* [Cartoon]. King Hell.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1987). *The child, the family, and the outside world*. Merloyd Lawrence.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1989). *Psycho-Analytic explorations*. Harvard University Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (2005). *Playing and reality*. Routledge.
- Yoe, C. (Ed.) (2013). *The strange world of your dreams*. IDW.

