

Dreaming as the Pursuit of Emotional Truth in Teaching and Teacher Education

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IN THIS ESSAY, I EXPLORE DREAMING as a process in the lives of two new teachers, each case reflecting the work of dreaming as a pursuit of emotional truth present in waking life. The two accounts emerge from my work as a teacher educator. The first characterizes the emotional situation of a new teacher traversing the boundary between teacher education and the first year of teaching. The teacher, Laura, recalls engaging with the rich complexity of curriculum in a teacher education course, but she dismisses the experience as a dream, an unreachable ideal. I consider the emotional significance of her ambivalent dream in the context of her teaching in, what she calls, a “scripted school.” The second account focuses on dreaming as a narrative quality of an autobiography written by a preservice teacher, Matt, in a teacher education course. This autobiography of “learning from experience” discloses how the drive toward emotional truth, manifest in the reverie of waking life, necessarily confronts unknowable elements of subjectivity. Reflecting on the lives of these new teachers in the context of psychoanalytic thought, I characterize and call for attention to dreamwork as a dimension of teacher education that exceeds and challenges the standardization of teacher professional knowledge and expertise.

Dreaming as Emotional Truth Drive

James Grotstein (2004) posits the pursuit of emotional truth as a fundamental drive of the psyche, a drive toward unknowable and ineffable reality that registers a sense of truth—and its disruption—in emotional experience and that compels curiosity about one’s existence and one’s relationship with objects and others. Grotstein derives the concept of an “emotional truth drive” from the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion’s theory of mind (p. 1081). Truth as an absolute, Grotstein explains, cannot be attained but is felt intuitively, generating emotional turbulence that is mediated through “unconscious thinking processes,” namely dreaming and the dreamlike dimensions of waking life (pp. 1081–1083). As we develop knowledge, always incomplete, about internal and external reality, the emotional valence of thought bears a sense of truth, “affirming our sense of being *real* and impelling us to search for the *real* in others,” while sustaining a quest for truth in unknowable “ultimate reality” (p. 1094).

What lies wholly beyond our grasp but detectable as “sense impressions” in immanent experience, Bion refers to as “O”—the “term for an ineffable and inscrutable domain that lies beyond imagistic and symbolic reality” (Grotstein, 2004, p. 1096). *O*—“infinite, ever-evolving, ever-transient, all too chaotically meaningful mystery and uncertainty” (p. 1096)—stirs in the sphere of our internal and external object relations as “sense impressions of emotional experience,” the painfulness of which provokes evasion of the experience or the emergence of a mental state capable of “suffering the *truth* of the emotional pain” and thus evolving subjectivity (p. 1087). *O*, then, is registered psychically in unconscious phantasy as a “personal, subjective truth about reality,” a provisional *emotional truth* that constitutes and necessitates ongoing “learning from experience” (Grotstein, 2007, pp. 139–143).

The drive for emotional truth establishes and sustains dreamlife as a realm of emergent unconscious personal significance.¹ As “*imaginative fictions that preserve emotional truths*,” dreams flourish, Grotstein (2009, p. 736, emphasis in original) explains, as the psyche symbolizes, flexibly contains, and integrates the emotional complexity of experience. The process of dreaming, therefore, is “a form of mentalization” and “emotional cognition and perception” that partially obscures truth, abating and deferring its disruptions, while making truth, infinite and ineffable, available for subjective encounter and for reflective and associative thought (p. 736).

The work of dreaming appears, although it is not wholly disclosed, in dreams recalled from sleep and in diurnal reveries, symbolizing emotional experience continuously with varying qualities of psychical containment, the truth capaciously and flexibly held in unconscious thought or anxiously rendered and constricted, approaching the troubled condition of “undreamt dreams” (Ogden, 2005). Through the work of dreaming, the sensations, feelings, and affects that constitute “emotional experience,” serving as “truth’s envoys,” find passage, however circuitous, into conscious thought (Grotstein, 2004, p. 1094). Expanding Freud’s conception of dreams, Bion (as cited in Grotstein, 2009) theorizes dreaming as an unconscious thinking process that protects wakeful perception and enables conscious thought, “disencumbering consciousness of an excess of sense-impressions of emotional experience” and translating the excess—via the vividness, specificity, and feeling of conscious, lived experience—into dream narratives (pp. 742–744).² Grotstein thus reveals dreaming as the preservation and pursuit of emotional truth about the self, the other, and their constitutive alterity.

Within this framework, I attend to the work of dreaming in the lives of new teachers—to the reveries, associative thoughts, and ventures in capacious subjectivity that enable them to wander and wonder in teaching, to register the troubling and enigmatic affect that emerges there, and to symbolize the provisional knowledge and insight that reflects and sustains their call to teaching as an existential vocation. I offer interpretations of these narratives to expand our understanding of the affective landscape of teacher education and to consider how the field might open further to the complex, continuous, and biographically particular emotional work of teaching.

The Teacher’s Dream as “Isolated Little Capsule”

In a conversation about tensions in the experience of teaching, Laura, a new high school social studies teacher, elaborates her struggle to recover a mindset of openness and creativity in her daily work.³ Laura feels lost in the landscape of standardized schooling, and she symbolizes the emotional difficulty of sustaining a sense of her teaching vocation in an institution largely antagonistic to her creativity and intellectual life. Facing this difficulty, Laura reflects on her

teacher education, associating creative freedom in teaching with “Curriculum Development in the Humanities,” a course that I co-taught and that Laura took at the end of her teacher education program. Laura works through the tension of becoming a teacher in a conversation with my co-instructor and me, conveying a sense that the creative potential of teaching collapses in the confines of the school. Her reflections evoke the ambivalence of dreaming when the external world—the institution of education, in particular—cannot sustain thought about the emotional experience the dream bears.

Our teacher education course focused on teaching literature in secondary schools and developing interdisciplinary curricula in the humanities. For the course, Laura selected a work of literature she wanted to share with other teachers; explored its significance in the context of various works of art, literature, history, and theory; and created a conversation about this literary curriculum with visiting high school students. A social studies teacher with a vital interest in fiction, Laura selected a collection of short stories for her project depicting the lives of young women engaged in emotionally complex situations—stories, she explains, that reveal the “inner workings of their protagonists.” Laura brought focus to one short story that illuminates the social demands and personal expectations that shape teacher identity, challenging students to consider how “our personal biography” shapes “our view of teachers.” For Laura, it seems, the curriculum development work in our class provoked fundamental questions about the conditions and purposes of teaching.

In our conversation, Laura elaborates the enormous pressure she faces as a new teacher in a school, remarking on her frustration with unworkable technologies, standardized lessons in social-emotional learning, and responsibilities that alienate her from professional and intellectual community. When prompted to speak about our course, Laura’s tone shifts, her mild distress from the teaching day giving way, it seems, to the lightness of a pleasant reminiscence. She then becomes more animated, characterizing the valuable experience the course afforded her—the freedom to select her own curriculum resources, the time for focused study of curriculum scholarship, and the opportunity to build intellectual community with her peers. In the moment, Laura’s recollection of our class feels, in part, to be an offer of reassurance to my co-instructor and me that the course was meaningful to her. However, Laura also portrays her deeply engaged experience of study, her words evoking a sense of flexible and capacious “psychic dimensionality” (Grotstein, 2000, pp. 83-99)—room for thought and experience—that threads through the objects, ideas, and interlocutors of curriculum. In a burst of expressiveness, she conjures up a scene of study that the three of us shared: “I had material that I love,” she explains,

and I had complete freedom to do whatever with it and interpret these ideas in whatever way I wanted. ... I was personally challenging myself, and I had so much time and so much reflection and so much collaboration. ... I had people who I trusted but who were also not judgmental. ... It was just like, let’s discuss this problem and kind of figure it out together.

Laura characterizes her creative and interpretive freedom, her subjective investment in aesthetic and intellectual resources, and her singular path of study, one incited, it seems, by her experience of “subjective non-coincidence” (Pinar, 2017, pp. 99-100). “I was personally challenging myself,” she explains, suggesting that, in the realm of an emergent curriculum—of which she was a part and in which she had creative authority—she encountered herself as one to be challenged in the pursuit of meaning and one capable of challenging herself in that regard. In

the language of everyday self-consciousness, Laura thus conveys the givenness of subjective incompleteness—of otherness—that, as Pinar argues, makes study possible.

As Laura's teacher, I have a strong wish that her teacher education experience sustains her in the profession. Under the sway of this hopefulness, during our conversation, I grasp her description of curriculum development as the authentic pursuit of study in the life of a teacher.⁴ Conveyed with an ebullience, it suggests to me a sense of boundlessness in her work, calling to mind Pinar's (2017) comment on the subjective space of study: "Having room to move—as we once said in the vernacular—follows from an expansive subjectivity structured by enabling relationships with others, texts, and experience" (p. 106).

Later in our conversation, however, I come to understand more fully that Laura experiences herself as having very little room to move in her school, compelling her to refer ambivalently to this remembered, seemingly lost, scene of curriculum development as "the dream of lesson planning." With regard to dreaming, Laura's recollection of our class does indeed elicit a state of reverie in me; our subsequent conversation, however, does not sustain the state of mind, which provokes the thought that Laura is symbolizing dreamwork at risk of collapse.

"Reverie," in Bion's (1962/2004) theory, refers to a calm reception of emotional turbulence that surfaces from and fosters the wakeful dreaming of emotional life (pp. 34–36); and psychoanalytic research discloses how reveries emerge as co-constructions—as relationally generated and experienced states of emotional exploration (Ferro, 2009). Laura's account of creative freedom calls forth reverie in me, therefore, that (in one interpretation) represents a shared state of reverie, enabling me to encounter the emotional situation of her teaching life. Her reminiscent, increasingly animated vocal tone in the conversation bolsters her words—"so much time and so much reflection and so much collaboration"—and imbues the conversation with a sense of capacious "mental space" (Young, 1994). If, in the moment, the reverie compels me to idealize her creative agency and subjective freedom, it also expands my grasp of her emotional situation, enabling me to register Laura's experience of creativity and freedom as a promise of teacher education diminishing in her daily work.

Laura wonders if such a mindset can actually be regained in the milieu of the school, where her professional life is deeply structured by scripted curricula, a strict testing regime, and a lockstep temporality. As a new teacher, she wishes for the opportunity to create curriculum without having to be "on the same page as other people" and for time to collaborate not limited by the purposes of standardization and testing. "You know, everything is too busy," she says,

Two mornings a week I have meetings for [professional development on standards and assessments] and then one morning a week I have a team meeting where we discuss ... a standardized test they instituted for Social Studies. ... I would like to think that if there was more time, there would be more natural collaboration, and I think I'm a little worried that there won't be.

Laura describes a continual deferral of meaningful engagement with curriculum. Repeatedly, she explains, "autonomy" is postponed, and the opportunity for "original content creation" is delayed by the culture of teacher accountability.

Laura acknowledges that outside the fluid intellectual space of her curriculum studies course, in the difficulty of her current professional life, she might recuperate an orientation to curriculum as an emergent sphere of meaning and begin again her own creative curriculum practice. "Even if I don't feel like I'm where I want to be," she explains, "I have this sense I can

do it.” Such statements demonstrate Laura’s ambivalence about pursuing creative opportunities, revealing both an anxious self-subjection and a hopefulness that resonates with her passion for study, teaching, and social critique.

Laura describes the promise of a teaching life called forth as she witnessed her father’s teaching career unfold, discovered her profound interest in history, and came to understand education as a practice of democracy. Laura’s narrative about her call to teaching, threaded with ambivalence, therefore, expands the sense of her teaching labor as a pursuit of emotional truth. “I loved school, and so I always thought I would be a teacher,” she explains, a vision demanding that she immerse herself in the work and ask: “Can I teach? Can this be something that is viable?” These existential questions, Laura explains, encouraged her to explore teaching in various disciplines and locations, leading her ultimately to a university-based teacher education program and a position as a secondary social studies teacher. The questions about her vocation continue to sustain her as she negotiates a place of teaching in a school.

“The school,” however, as Huebner (1999) reminds us, “is not designed to support the living that teaching is” (p. 379); and for Laura, this means feeling stuck in a situation where knowledge and meaning succumb to the instrumentalization of teaching. The emotional truth she approaches, therefore, resides in the conflict between a calling to teach—a vocation to be lived “intentionally and openly” among others called to educate—and the fact of “teachers and teaching being shaped and pummeled by forms of schooling” (Huebner, 1999, p. 380). The dreamlife of teaching must confront the undreamable character of the school, “where the capacity for dreaming is overwhelmed by the disturbing nature of what is being dreamt” (Ogden, 2005, pp. 23–24).

As Laura labors under “policy’s excess,” her pedagogy largely “mapped and prescribed by mandated curricula, standards, assessments and audits” (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, p. 8), her psychic space wanes: “I’m hating myself for doing this,” she says,

you know, for just falling into this thing—to this idea of what I should be teaching and how I should be teaching it. ... I am not doing it the way I want to do it. I don’t know enough to change it right now. I’m too busy to change it, and then ... I am making excuses for myself. That’s the thought that goes through my head every day ... It’s this feeling of being forced into a place I don’t want to be in.

Laura speaks from the space of, what she calls, the “scripted school,” where school leaders “pay lip service to the idea that [testing] is not everything,” while urging compliance with the culture of standardization and the ideology of the achievement gap, where educational technologies evoke the fantasy that “everything [is] streamlined,” but remind her continuously that “teaching is limited by things that are beyond [her] control,” and where the system of professional development—at first, it seems, “not a punitive thing”—emerges as an extension of a harsh teacher evaluation system. Laura speaks from the space of “the new professionalism” in teaching, where, as Brass and Holloway (2019) argue,

teachers are not de-professionalized, but re-professionalized ... to think and talk about teaching in terms of measurable outcomes, align their professional judgment with standards and rubrics, implement commercial curricula and professional development packages, render their work auditable to organizational managers and accreditation bodies and organize themselves in response to performance targets and pay-for-performance incentives. (p. 8)

The degree to which this reality is an enactment of fantasies of control, teachers who endure it are “dreamt into existence by others,” Pinar (1992) suggests, a confinement in others’ projections he discerned as the teacher was reconceived “from factory supervisor to corporate manager” (p. 234). Clarke and Phelan (2017) also characterize the life of the teacher in these conditions, describing teachers’ voices “relegated to the realm of ... the political unconscious of education policy as the terrors and technologies of bureaucratic performativity make increasing inroads into the teacher’s soul” (p. 29). In the dispiriting movement of teachers into a sphere of education desiccated of human significance, what remains of the work of dreaming—the enigmatic drive toward emotional truth?

Laura reveals the flickering presence of her dreamwork where others’ fantasies of control hold sway. At one point, reflecting on the tension between our curriculum studies class and her present teaching situation, she suggests that, in the scope of her teaching life, the course was too minimal to be of significance. “I think it’s almost unfair,” she explains, “because it was such an isolated little capsule.” The course—in retrospect, a seemingly diminutive educational offering—once animated her, Laura clarifies, as “the dream of lesson planning,” evoking a sense of dreaming, if only to mark its dissipation. In Laura’s memory, dreaming imbues the creation of the lesson plan, that most rigid institutional form of curriculum, reminding us, as does Rocha (2021), of “the secret of objects, a secret that endures in the bleakest of places and times”—that objects, curricular objects in this context, comprise and express the subjectivity of the persons who create them (p. 29). Although Laura can recall the reverie of curriculum making, the dreamlife of curriculum, she suggests, cannot be reanimated in the scripted school. Referring to the class, Laura says: “That is the dream of lesson planning, but I don’t know. I don’t know. I think it makes [teaching in school now] seem so much harsher because of the disparity.”

In this moment, Laura marks a split between a vibrant educational experience and conditions of schooling that obstruct subjective investment in curriculum: a split, as well, between teaching as an existential project—being “in the process of becoming a teacher with others” (Britzman, 2007, p. 3)—and teaching as an alienating endeavor, rendered so by institutional “forces of conformity” (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, pp. 25–26). To distinguish these opposed realities, Laura uses a conventional notion of a “dream” as an ideal to designate the school as a place where a particular dream of the teacher—curriculum as a sphere of creativity and conversation—cannot be borne in mind. She ushers in the dream to signify the circumstances of its disavowal, drawing attention to the “undreamt and undreamable experience” (Ogden, 2005, p. 5) of teaching and teacher education.

“A call to be a teacher often wears thin,” Huebner (1999) suggests. “But disillusionment ... does not mean that the call—the vocation of teaching—is over” (p. 379). As Laura explores the rift in her teaching life that severs the curriculum *as a complex and eventful experience* from the curriculum *as an institutional plan*, her call to the teaching life resonates in the emotional wrangle with a dream made irrelevant by the order of the school. Daring to negotiate this tension, she invites us to hear the call of the dream enveloped in the “isolated little capsule” of our educational past, muffled by the clanging mechanisms of curricular control, and reverberating in the disappointment of new teachers confronting the troubled landscape of contemporary schooling. To foster and sustain the dreamwork of the new teacher, teacher education will have to consider its own troubled reveries, where the field’s fantasies of creative, connected, and agentic teachers give way to the teacher’s pursuit of emotional significance. In the next section of the paper, the complexity of that pursuit is revealed in the dreamscape of teacher autobiography.

The Dreamscape of Teacher Autobiography

In an essay about “learning from experience,” Matt, a former student of mine, narrates an encounter with his father, asleep on a living room chair, that brings an awareness of his father’s suffering, the loss of a dreamworld the two of them shared, and a demand that he learn to sleep on his own. The significance of sleep in the narrative and the poetic, dreamlike character of the scene of memory invite me to consider how dreamwork is at play in this autobiography—written within the domain of teacher education, yet disrupting the conventions of teacher knowledge presumed to afford “simple induction” into the profession (Taubman, 2012, p. 22). As Matt reflects on the toil of memory and describes enigmatic speech and images in terms of their life-saving capacity, he reveals elemental functions of symbolization stirring in conscious experience, confirming the contemporary psychoanalytic understanding of dreamwork as “a continuous process that belongs to waking life” (Ferro, 2002, p. 598). Matt’s autobiography thus discloses what teacher education disavows: the teacher’s subjectivity is, as Taubman (2012) writes, “an unruly dream-like interplay between an unconscious and an ego” that “plays havoc” with the field’s prescriptions for teacher reflection and disposition (p. 23).

Matt wrote his essay in my course “Development and Diversity,” which engages preservice teachers in the study of human development and social diversity through a framework of social psychoanalysis. Students compose two autobiographies in the course, one focused on the emotional experience of learning and the other on social identity, each assignment requiring students to write an autobiographical narrative and then to elaborate their experience using theory from the course. The assignments enable preservice teachers to reflect on experiences of otherness that constitute the self and infuse their engagements with the social world. Matt submitted his dreamlike autobiography for the assignment about the emotional experience of learning, specifically as theorized by Bion.

In his essay, Matt describes how, as a child, he discovered his father’s drug addiction, a “stumbl[ing] on something horrible” beyond his capacity to know, and, thereby, how he lost “a comfort, a warmth that only [his father] could provide.” Narrating the experience is difficult, Matt explains, “not so much because of the emotions it conjures, but because of the many fractions, particles, grains, and strands that [he has] lost in the sweep of time.” He chooses the story, nonetheless, to convey his understanding of “learning from experience.” Through this writing, Matt realizes that the event of disillusionment in his youth, the rupture in meaning and sense of wellbeing, provoked questions about his existence and his relationship with others that necessitated new forms of learning, knowing, and communicating. The “weight” and the “gift,” he explains, remain with him today. Matt writes: “The man I am, the man I was, the man I hope to be—all are contained in this rendering of a discovery I made as a young boy.”

Matt wanders in the realm of the discovery, collecting the elements of a narrative that might attenuate its force. Through a line of associations both obscuring and revealing, Matt works his way back to the containing milieu forged in the relationship with his father. The regressive journey involves recollecting “alien” and “evocative” objects that call forth a sphere of emotional experience for working through those very objects and their internal implications.⁵ Matt first recalls the “family business” that his mother and father shielded from his view. “All she ever yelled about was the needles,” Matt begins his narrative, then conjuring his mother’s voice: “*The needles, [Richard]. I thought you kicked it.*” Hearing of needles, but never seeing them, envisioning them, but at a loss for their purpose, Matt seeks understanding of the place of needles in his family. His desire to know, however, is diverted and frustrated by his mother and father. “I wanted to see [the

needles],” he writes, “but she said they were too sharp. *They’ll prick your foot, son.* Dad agreed. *This is family business, boy.* They shut the door in my face.”

For Matt, the closed door in his memory evokes the sense of concealment in his father’s visage. Matt associates to his father’s face, his beard, his grooming—a look created with “the basic tools a man needs to maintain his appearance . . . clippers, shaving cream, comb and brush,” all packed into “a faded blue Bell Atlantic shaving kit.” Matt writes further:

Dad was an exceptionally well-groomed man. His salt-and-pepper goatee recalled Burt Reynolds, c. 1997, the shape perfectly aligned, the hairs perfectly trimmed. . . . Even later, when his skin turned yellow, you could count on dad’s beard looking fresh as all hell.

If Matt’s memory of his father’s look hovers around his father’s illness, it also affords Matt passage into the space of reverie the two of them shared, an immersive dreamscape shaped and enlivened by cartoons, secrets, late-night snacks, and a father’s storied, colloquial wisdom. Matt writes:

When I think of that beard, I think of Toonami and *Dragonball Z*, of toasted PB&J and the smell of fresh cigarettes. I think of *Batman & Robin*, my dad cradling a bowl of Cocoa Puffs in his lap, a cigarette hanging loosely from two calloused fingers. He used to sit by the chimney and exhale through the vent. *Don’t tell your mother, bud.* This was our secret, and our story. After hours, when mom and baby [Tim] went to bed, dad and I would set up camp around the chimney and watch cartoons. He’d tell me about what it meant to be a man. He was full of truisms and country adages, picked up from his youth in the mountains. *It’s all in the knowin’ of the livin’ of a life*, he used to say. *Don’t you forget it.*

Matt’s narrative memory emerges from his teacher education coursework, specifically from his study of Bion’s psychoanalytic theory of learning, as elaborated in Margot Waddell’s (2002) book *Inside Lives: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of the Personality*. The concepts resonate with his experience, compelling him to tell this story; and yet, he explains, he cannot make “coherent meaning out of the experience the way that Waddell’s psychoanalysts do.” Tempted to emulate the narrative fluidity of the course text, while composing his essay, Matt runs the story by his mother and brother, only to find they “bristle at some of the details (Did it really happen that way? But wasn’t it—? and What about—?).” Facing these questions, Matt retreats from the goals of clarity and coherence. “This is *my* story,” he writes, “and it is not finished yet.”

For Bion (1962/2004) “learning from experience” is learning that affords emotional connection to one’s inner reality such that the telos of learning is not to accumulate knowledge, but rather to sustain a relation to the thing, the object, the other available for knowing—learning of an emotional quality and significance that it sustains the process of coming to know. Reading this theory, Matt lingers with the idea of an early developmental shift from egoism to altruism, “struck,” he explains, by the psychic resonance of the infant’s coming to awareness of the other as having a separate existence and complex inner world. Matt describes this shift in awareness as “so developmentally fundamental that [it] echoes throughout the rest of a person’s life,” as Matt attempts to recover his first recognition of “the other in [his] dad,” his first, in his words, “embracing the subject in him, weak and tortured.”

As he charts the line of autobiography, Matt describes further his seeking a narrative form that will hold the difficult memory. “As I look back on the past,” he writes, “I have a choice: open

the aperture and see it in its totality, a narrative with bookends, rising action, climax, resolution; or narrow my lens, focus on singular images, integral moments, little balls of fire.” Eschewing, ultimately, the clear and complete narrative arc, Matt pursues the fire. He writes:

One night I couldn't sleep. I crept out into the hallway, where I was greeted by a familiar darkness. When dad set up shop, he turned off all the lights. He said he felt safer in the dark, where nobody could see him. At the end of the hallway, down the stairs and across the room, there was a single, floating dot of fire, the ember of dad's cigarette cutting through the black. This was a beacon and a comfort to me, a promise I wouldn't be alone against the night. As I approached, the cigarette took shape, and so did dad. Only something was off. His breathing too regular, his shape too still. He had fallen asleep. *Nodding off*, mom used to call it.

This enigmatic particular, the “floating dot of fire,” cast against the dark, serves as a threshold of meaning, however nebulous and emergent, and as a means of reading the dreamscape of memory anew. This image from Matt's memory bears an uncanny resemblance to an already uncanny image of psychoanalysis offered by Bion: “When conducting an analysis,” Bion (as cited in Grostein, 2007) says, “one must cast a *beam of intense darkness* so that something which has hitherto been obscured by the glare of illumination can glitter all the more in the darkness” (emphasis in original, p. 1).

Matt recovers the obscure detail, casting his refusal of narrative coherence, it seems, as a *beam of intense darkness*. He does so, he writes, because as “details slip in and out of focus ... dad oscillates from fossil to vivid form.” In the oscillation, knowledge remains uncertain, but in its incompleteness, it sustains the relationship with his father, whose loss he now mourns. This is Matt's “learning from experience,” a learning that recovers the vividness of a relation from fossilized memory; through images animating, enigmatic, and slipping from perception; oriented to moments of being that are integral to experience and yet that trouble his capacity to signify them. In this narrative mode, I want to suggest, Matt engages in writing tilted toward wakeful sleep, dreaming his autobiography and his intellectual engagement with theory in a way that invites reflection on the emergence of reverie in the labor of study and the work of becoming a teacher.⁶

At “the foundation of dreams,” and the reveries of waking life, Bezoari (2014) argues, “is a pressure to make visible—and hence thinkable and communicable—the part of an emotional experience that has not yet found a symbolization appropriate to the demands of an individual's psychic life” (pp. 14–15). Matt returns this dreaming of emotional life to the teacher education that elicits it, compelling me to ask: Can teacher education make room for the symbolization of emotional experience inherent to learning and the demands of the teacher's psychic life? Matt's narrative continues where he found his father sleeping:

As I turned to leave, something caught my eye: dad's shaving kit, wedged beneath his body. Something stirred in me. ... When I pulled the kit out, dad snorted, rolled over, and I swear I almost fainted out of fear. A beat passed, and I exhaled. He was asleep. I crept back up the stairs and into the bathroom. Scared of disrupting the uniform blackness outside, I opened the kit in the darkness. Reaching around inside, my fingers ran over familiar objects: a Barbasol can, the prickly teeth of a comb. And then, something different. Mom was right—the needle pricked me right in my index finger. I suppressed a yelp and

stuck the finger in my mouth. Blood. Without really knowing, I was aware I'd stumbled on something horrible. It was as if dread shot up through the needle and filled my body, seeped out through the pores and coated my skin.

Matt, again, casts a beam of intense darkness into his experience, but here it draws out no illuminated thing. In the utter dark, he stumbles through the “unthought known” (Bollas, 1987) to a place where reverie fails, where the other in his father pierces him, filling him with “nameless dread” (Bion, 1962/2004, p. 96). The story ruptures, and I struggle to locate myself as a reader, a teacher. Did I invite a story, an autobiographical study, that is more than my student, than I, can bear? What landscape of loss, illness, and dread must I traverse to respond? Is this teaching? Royle (2003) writes: “Who or what is a teacher? Who or what has taught the teacher? How did this teaching come about? Am I thinking my own thoughts? Where does a thought, an idea, a teaching begin?” (p. 53).

Matt pursues an educational purpose I have assigned him, yet the circuits of emotion he discovers exceed what I can hold in mind as a teacher educator, disrupting the fantasy that I am a teacher preparing students for arrival in a known and knowable, imaginable, and even livable profession. Matt's narrative initiates a crisis in my teaching, transforming it, demanding that I forgo an imagined goal—the “teaching self” as “totally coherent, self-sufficient and fully agentic” (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, p. 34). In the wake of the crisis, I begin again my reading of Matt's autobiography, considering its affective intensities as sources of Matt's still emerging insight and as reverberations in my own experience. I take up teaching in a mode of what Mishra Tarc (2015) calls “fictive reading,” more open to the symbolic complexity of the student's experience: a readerly teaching by which I must “feel or follow the fragile lines of [the student's] mental efforts to communicate a sense of [self] to others” (p. 36).

Through a halting poetics of darkness and feeling, negated and hesitantly claimed, Matt recovers his thought about “that fateful night when [he] discovered [his] father was only a man.” Matt writes,

Of course, with the acknowledgment of my father's subjectivity came a newfound awareness of my own. The feeling of independence brought about by this transformation was at once startling and deeply lonely. ... It meant learning to sleep on my own.

It meant, as well, Matt explains, learning to live with the “weight of an identity” freighted with “promises of a life derailed.”

Undreamt dreams demand new relations of reverie, new relationships with oneself and others. Matt demonstrates this as he relocates the dreamwork he shared with his father into his relationship with his mother. He captures, therefore, the relational flux of dreaming, the variation in relational milieu, necessary for dreamwork to survive. For his survival, Matt writes, “I have only my mother to thank.” “When I reflect on the day she told me about my father's sickness,” he continues,

I am struck by her composure. ... My mother embraced me with a gaze that ensured I was the most important person in her world that day. When she explained the particulars of addiction to me, using new and strange vocabulary, she provided my experience with form.

She reduced the complexity of my trauma to simple words, ones I didn't even understand yet, but that nonetheless provided a comfort to me, promising me that even this disturbing mystery could be managed.

Matt follows his dreamlife as it shifts between scenes of self-formation and intersubjective experience; and he pursues it fully into the sphere of teacher education, where his capacity for learning from experience, distilled from parental relationships, calls for a teacher equally attuned to the intricate fabric of affect that constitutes his becoming.

Matt explores the emotional experience of learning untethered from images of formal education but fully infusing his subjectivity as a teacher. Moving his teacher education to “the frontier of dreaming” (Ogdens, 2001), he calls me to our shared labor of teacher becoming. As he negotiates the alterity that constitutes subjectivity, reading and writing its oneiric specificity and enigma, Matt draws me into an interpretive pedagogy that demands I trust my own capacity to dream. He also adumbrates the complex inner world of teachers more generally. The way Matt orients to his inner world, therefore, I want to suggest as an approach to the pursuit of emotional truth in teacher education. If the dreamlife of teaching is inherently “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998), we might, as does Matt, embrace rather than attempt to solve the narrative dilemma it presents: opening the aperture, attempting to view life in its fullness, its order, and its coherence; *and* narrowing the lens to the particulars, the floating images, the associations that provoke thought but exceed conscious order and reflective grasp. To conduct autobiographical inquiry and teacher education in this tension is to pursue emotional truth in the ineffable dimensions of experience, where all that is undergone cannot be known, but where life is made by symbolizing the radiant trace of the other.

Conclusion

In this essay, I explore dreams in the lives of new teachers that reveal the subjective depth and complexity of the teacher education curriculum, conditions negated when the reflective work in preparing teachers remains moored in the promise of solving practical problems and instrumentally transforming teachers' perspectives and social commitments (Bierzynski, 2018). My teaching begins in this frame of teacher education, burdened by the discourses and practices of teacher accountability that structure my school's teacher preparation program, and saturated with my idealization of the vocation of teaching, the creative agency of the teacher, and the transformative potential of autobiography. As I attend to Laura's and Matt's dreamwork, however, my teaching becomes unmoored from the “conventions, culture, and social ideals” (Taubman, 2012, p. 22) of the field, veering from the field's imagined “teaching continuum,” bound as it is to the goals of measurable “competence” and “excellence” (Clarke & Phelan, 2017, p. 95). Laura's ambivalent search for the dream encapsulated in the orders of schooling and Matt's wakeful entry into the troubled dreamscape of his youth evoke in me an “imaginative mode of affectively reading” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 36) these experiences of teacher becoming. Their dreamwork—however diminished by or removed from formal schooling—demands my subjective distance from the procedures and protocols of teacher education, disrupting my own striving for pedagogical certitude, calling me into an emergent and speculative reading of their pursuit of emotional truth.

Attending to the dreamlife of new teachers can help us recover the *currere* of teacher education, the curriculum that emerges, as Pinar (2011) explains, from the “space and time of

subjectivity,” unfolding where the person experiences but does not conflate with the world and oneself (p. 8). At its foundation, psychoanalysis enables us to grasp the significance of life lived in this way: always at a distance, if an intimate distance, from self and other. In the distance that is subjectivity lie our dreams, “personal archival *fictions*” (Grotstein, 2007, emphasis in original, p. 281) of our emotional lives, threaded from infancy and early relationships through the skeins of experience and memory to the dreamlife of the present. To engage our dreams, then, is to venture into the elusive yet ever-present archive of emotional truth that makes the study of *currere*, the lived curriculum, an interminable labor of self-discovery.

If, as teachers, our mental lives are impoverished by institutional realities to which, we imagine, we should adapt, then the dream might unbind us from those structures. The dream might restore our capacity for thinking in the most difficult conditions that shape our teaching lives, enabling us to engage emotional and institutional difficulty with the abundant and complex resources of our inner worlds. To foster and sustain the dreamwork of the new teacher, teacher educators will have to take seriously the presence of their own dreamwork—to study the way their own “archival fictions” of anxiety, fear, joy, desire, loss, and longing imbue their calling to the work of teacher education.

Notes

1. Grotstein (2007) further describes dreaming as unconscious phantasy discernable “within the loop of experience” (p. 80).
2. In Bion’s account of dreaming, Grotstein identifies a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of the origin of dreams. Freud (1900/2001) understood the dream to be a disguised expression of an unconscious wish, specifically a “fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish” (p. 160). Bion, and Grotstein (2004) following him, however, characterize “emotional experience,” understood as a drive toward truth and knowledge, as the “first cause for the dreaming process” (p. 739). Although they function, to some degree, as a “curtain of illusion” (Bion, 1965/2018, p. 147), Grotstein (2004) argues, dreams do not emerge to oppose truth through a defensive wish-fulfillment, but rather to animate the pursuit of emotional truth.
3. I am grateful to my co-researcher Rachel Talbert for her insight into this conversation with Laura. The conversation emerges from Rachel’s and my larger research study on humanities-oriented teacher education.
4. Study, in Pinar’s (2017) elaboration, discerns and sustains a sense of interior otherness and complexity—which emanates from subjective non-coincidence with the world—as necessary for thought and the reconstruction of lived experience, necessary, as well, for “ethical engagement with alterity” within intersubjective experience (p. 99). The potential of the latter, in my hopeful reading of Laura’s memory of our class, is suggested in her account of trusted, non-impinging others sharing authority in the creation of curriculum.
5. See Bollas’ (2009) extensive discussion of “evocative objects” in the titular essay of his book *The Evocative Object World*; See Grotstein’s (2000) brief discussion of “alien objects” in his “lexicon” of “objects and their implications” (pp. 163–166).
6. See Grotstein (2007) for an account of the way “Bion dreamed his utterances and writings,” speaking and writing “in a transformational state of reverie (wakeful sleep)” (p. 15).

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