

happen. There is a greater intelligence that wishes to operate through us when we coach a client, lead a group, or hold a meeting. I have experienced the potential of this larger intelligence countless times. When I fully take on the stance of a learner to the process (no matter how much of an expert I am in a particular subject), I am open to a greater wisdom that always wants to come through.

In an earlier draft, I ended the Preface by saying that *Getting Messy* was a “work in progress.” To me, the book asks more questions than it answers; it opens more doors than it closes. Working in the realm of “imaginal space,” it likely couldn’t be any other way. The content of this book points to avenues beyond what is currently known. A friend read my words and said they sounded liked an apology. She kindly reframed it: “Kim, this is *your life’s work...in process.*” The inquiry continues.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Teaching is a Way of Growing

*Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, hump, bump, bump, on the back of his head behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.*

— A.A. MILNE, WINNIE THE POOH

## 1

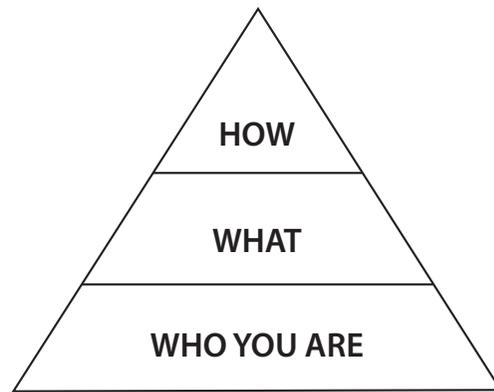
## EVERYTHING RESTS ON WHO YOU ARE

**M**Y WORKING LIFE has always been diverse. Over the past thirty years I've developed and taught seminars, worked as a coach and consultant, and facilitated many groups on an assortment of topics. My clientele have ranged from Senior citizens to troubled teenagers to creatively blocked adults and everything in between. I've developed and taught computer training courses for Fortune 500 corporations, led tours for wine connoisseurs at a local farmers market, facilitated creative writing workshops at a yoga center, organized focus groups for educational institutions, taught swimming lessons for children and grown adults, hosted community poetry readings at the public library, presented technical expertise at corporate meetings, and mentored troubled teens at a high-priced boarding school. I've also taught a range of university

courses for undergraduate and graduate students. In all cases, diverse as they may be, the same principles of teaching and learning applied.

I didn't know this ten years ago when I was hired to teach an "Instructional Strategies" course in a teacher credentialing program. I presumed, of course, that teaching was about standing in front of a group of students as an expert, delivering content information. The problem I had, however, was that the roles were switched. My students, with a couple exceptions, were experienced teachers who simply needed to acquire a course credit and I—I had never taught a class in a formal classroom before. I wasn't even sure what instructional strategies were. I was frightened.

What did I do? I went on a search for tools and techniques. I wanted to know *how* to teach. I wanted someone to tell me everything I needed to know to be a good teacher. I would then memorize this information, practice it at home, and hope the students in my classes would never know that I was inexperienced. One of my first stops was a workshop on how to facilitate groups. However, on the third day of this five-day workshop, we still had not gotten to techniques. I still did not have anything to arm myself with when I walked into the classroom to teach for the first time. I was frustrated and when the workshop resumed after lunch I spoke up. "This isn't what I came here for. I need to know how to teach." The instructor looked at me for a moment and then turned around and drew this diagram on the flip chart:



“Everything rests on who you are,” he told me, “Once you have that, the ‘how’ is easy.”

So I started teaching a classroom of experienced teachers with no techniques under my belt. The only real method I had was to be a learner, to try things out and learn along with the students whether they worked or not. After all, the title of the course was Instructional Strategies—what better way to learn than to use the course itself as our laboratory?

My class was a required course in a teacher-credentialing program at a large university, a program that provided teaching certificates to vocational and adult educators. Students came from dramatically diverse backgrounds and teaching situations, and most of them had been teaching for years. There were high school and junior high teachers, but also medical educators, corporate trainers, social workers, teachers who worked with disabled populations, in senior centers, prisons, nursing homes, and so on. It was clear that there was no way I could provide these people with a pre-packaged set of information. My task was to pursue a deeper inquiry into teaching along with my students. It would be an adventure.

I was not an expert on the subject of classroom teaching and I certainly couldn't offer these students specialized expertise

regarding their own particular teaching situations. But I soon discovered that I had a skill that was much more important: *I was an expert learner*. I didn't need to present myself to the class as someone who had all the answers. My real job was to be a guide, to initiate with my students a conversation about the subject of teaching. I would enter into this inquiry along with the students and I would be fluid with whatever arose from that conversation. I would draw the wisdom out of the room and I would learn along the way. I have since come to discover that no matter what situation is in front of me, whether it be a group of rambunctious teens or weary adults, being a learner is the only thing that really works. Being a learner is what allows creative insight to happen.

The first time you give a presentation at a sales conference to a bunch of jaded sales reps can feel similarly. And the answer is the same. It doesn't work to try to “sell” them; what works is to be authentic. What works is to share with them what you feel genuinely enthusiastic about. They'll respond to your integrity. As Gertrude Stein once said, “No one real is boring.”

Yet how often do we give ourselves the freedom to be real when we're working with other people in some professional capacity, especially when it involves the role or title of “expert”? Being real would mean that we sometimes make mistakes. Being real would mean that we are willing to take risks and experiment. Being real would mean that we're learners too.

## TEACHING, LEARNING, AND IMAGINATION

IN THIS BOOK, I use the words *teacher* and *learner* broadly, to describe the capacities that we are engaging in when we work with other people in meaningful ways. We are involved in a teacher role when we are informally facilitating a group, coaching a youngster, or presenting information to colleagues. We take on the learner role when we work with a business coach to grow our business, attend a weight loss meeting, listen to an ad campaign, or speak with our partners. During the day we shift back and forth—sometimes teaching, sometimes learning. Healthy adults make this shift effortlessly.

No matter whether you facilitate groups, coach, mentor youngsters, or teach in a formal classroom, there are deeper principles of teaching and learning that apply across professional milieu, age groups, situations, and subject matters. These deeper principles of teaching and learning create the foundation for a transformative experience, moving the group beyond what you might have thought possible. And the principles are universal, because what we are doing in all these situations is *connecting*—with some sort of subject, with ourselves, and with one another. Often, information needs to be conveyed. And even though the *content* of that information may vary, the principles that cause a Senior who is 20 years older than me to listen to what I have to say, are the same learning principles that keep teen-agers engaged. After all, we're all human.

Unfortunately, for most of us the words *teaching* and *learning* bring up memories of painful boredom. Like many of you, I've spent too much time in "learning" situations, trying to find ways to keep myself interested. If I can't find a way to stay engaged, I start drawing and doodling in my notebook; I make

to-do lists, plan my weekend, daydream. Our standard model for teaching and learning is dry, boring, and mechanical. It's time we take teaching and learning out of the box and give them a little air. What I would like to know is this: *Why are most learning situations uninspired and unimaginative? Why are most so dull we count the minutes until we can get out of that room?* It doesn't have to be that way. Teaching and learning are two of the most important things we do in life. They make our lives exciting, interesting, and enjoyable. Teaching and learning are what make life worth living.

Most of us prepare to teach or lead groups by seeking out strategies and activities. We focus on perfecting our procedures and designing flawless presentations. We're concerned about the timing of activities and we nearly always define our responsibilities in terms of the required content to be taught. In the process, we reduce our work to the superficial level of technique. Our main concerns have become: *How do I silence the person who always asks odd questions? Or, Do I have time to review all this material at our next meeting?* For many of us, teaching, coaching, or leading a group has become a matter of problem solving, programming the event to work as efficiently as possible.

But let's look back on your experiences in school. What do you actually *remember*? I often pose this question to students. If they remember anything at all, what they remember are moments of *connection* with a teacher, a favorite subject or assignment, or fellow students. They remember teachers who were real people, who shared themselves, their lives, and their loves with them. They remember teachers who moved them, somehow managing to penetrate through their aloof and skeptical exteriors. Real teaching is somewhat mysterious. There's a depth to it that can't be explained. Clearly, it's not about techniques.

The tools-and-techniques approach suggests that our work with people is end-oriented, performance-oriented, that once we have the proper tools in our arsenal, we're done. However, activities and exercises by themselves have nothing to do with good teaching. The most highly skilled presenters are often the most boring and lifeless. Why? Because they hide behind their methods. The tools—the carefully timed break-out sessions, the detailed agendas, glossy handouts, slick PowerPoint presentations—have become central, replacing real connection.

People are human beings and human beings don't operate in predictable, machine-like ways. When our carefully-crafted exercises fail to work, we wonder why. We wonder why clients fail to understand us, why they're ornery, difficult, and belligerent. Most of all, we wonder why we've lost passion for our work. I'll tell you my reason: The core of teaching isn't about presenting information and learning has little to do with swallowing it.

Both Carl Jung and Albert Einstein said in different ways that no fundamental problem can ever be solved at the level at which it was created. To come up with new solutions, we need a larger context, a larger set of possibilities, and expanded ways of thinking. In other words, we need imagination. This is true for learning, as well. We can't learn anything unless we first imagine it possible. When we learn, we step out beyond what we know, into the arena of what we don't know. We are necessarily involved in a relationship with something that is larger than ourselves.

## THE SOUL OF TEACHING

**W**HO YOU ARE is on display when you teach. Every issue you have—self-consciousness, fear, grief, boredom, hostility toward some unknown aggressor, embarrassment, likes, and dislikes—is on display for your clientele to notice. Consciously or unconsciously, they can *see* who you are, so you might as well use this as an opportunity to grow. The way many of us react to this unwanted vulnerability is to put up a wall between us and our clients. It's true that a certain level of professional distance is appropriate, but when the wall becomes too rigid and heavy, it blocks the authentic connection that can inspire learning for both teacher and learner. When we choose the path of growth, we view our work as sacred territory, being open to what occurs and working through what comes up for us—issue by issue.

When we work with others in a leadership or teaching capacity, it's interesting how frequently we remove *ourselves* from the learning process. But how can we expect to change others and remain unchanged ourselves? How can we expect to create a dynamic atmosphere of inquiry for our participants, yet be an observer to it? The more we separate ourselves from the messy business of learning, the more we lose heart for our work. We start to forget that we feel most alive when we're simply offering *ourselves*—our knowledge, passions, interests—to our students, clients, participants, colleagues. These very human qualities are what inspire others to learn from us. They're what cause people to keep coming back for more.

These are some of the things I learned when I stood, on shaky legs, and “taught” this group of experienced teachers. I assigned final papers to the students and below is one excerpt. The man who wrote it teaches auto mechanics in a

vocational education program. He was a big, burly guy and was quiet in class. Of all my students, I thought he would be someone focused on the “mechanics” of teaching, rather than the “soul.” I was wrong.

I have gained much from reflection upon what I stand for and why I do what I do. I realize that I teach with the whole of my being, both lessons that are articulated and some that are not...I have always felt to a degree that students could sound the depths of my knowledge and commitment regardless of my physical actions. It is more than just body language, but communication on a much different level. *I know that they know.* How many times have you attended a seminar, only to leave unfulfilled, knowing that the facilitator was full of BS? Was it his mannerisms, his body language or the light of his aura? No matter how you knew, the fact is that *you knew.* Critical reflection has flowered my awareness. We teach who we are, with continuity, vision and purpose to what we are doing. If nothing else, I can shine my spirit, and teach with all the illumination and clarity that is within me. This is the most treasured lesson I will carry from this class.

No matter your particular subject, mode of delivery, or client population, who you are *matters.* The content of your agenda is the least significant thing that you are teaching. As Dale Carnegie once said, “What we are speaks more loudly than what we say. Sincerity, integrity, modesty and unselfishness affect an audience deeply.” Whether you are presenting

to a large audience or mentoring a youngster, what you are offering is deeper than your words or techniques. What you are offering is your Self.

Human learning does not happen at the level of technique or strategy. Learning doesn’t require polished slides, a detailed agenda, or clear objectives. Learning involves being able to *connect*—with one another, with oneself, and with a subject. Human beings have a fundamental need to connect. How do we make and nurture these connections? How do we really learn from another person? How do we learn in a group? What are the things that inspire and provoke our learning? What are the things that motivate us to continue? And what stops us? Those are some of the questions we will be exploring in this book.

Diving below the level of technique, we investigate the elements that spark learning, including the rich arena of human interaction and communication. The metaphor that comes to mind is the image of a fertile field, full of expansive possibility. The fertile field supports *life*—plants can’t grow or live without its rich soil. Human learning comes from fertile soil, as well. When we focus on our innovative techniques, we overlook this deeper dimension which is rich, messy, and hard to put into words. Something shifts inside us and all of a sudden we’re moved, inspired, enthralled. The fertile field may look empty, but it’s not.

Yes, of course we sign up for seminars and workshops to gain specialized information—to learn how to invest in the stock market, how to market our product on the Internet, or to receive a professional credential. Of course, there are numerous things we need to learn in order to be productive citizens and have successful lives. However, in the process of striving for these goals, we’ve forgotten how to be human with one another. We miss the expansive possibilities that

happen when groups come together in meaningful ways. We focus on techniques and expertise, and miss the life. We focus on end results and miss the adventure.

No matter what sort of teaching you do, you have expertise. However, being an expert and being able to teach others are two different things. Your human qualities are what make you a teacher, because the base of teaching is who you are. In this book, we go back to that base. If you are an inexperienced teacher, you will begin to develop your teaching voice; if you are seasoned, you will discover a new connection to self that may have been submerged. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: That which you are, you will teach.

## LEARNING IS MESSY

**W**HEN I WAS WORKING on this book, a friend of mine told me that he *hated* my title. He didn't want anything to do with *messy*. His life was spent keeping disorder at bay. But if recent books such as *A Perfect Mess: The Hidden Benefits of Disorder* are any indication, I believe that messiness is becoming more in vogue. People are starting to notice that perfectly ordered systems are both uncreative and inflexible.

Messiness presents us with the opportunity to create something new and experience something we wouldn't normally experience. When the blue pastel is left out on the table by mistake, for example, it invites us to create something with it. Or remember the days when journals weren't computerized? If we wanted to find a piece of information about something, we had to sort through stacks of books and magazines until we found

what we were looking for. In the process, however, we encountered all sorts of odd, but surprisingly useful, information. Such synchronicities often produced amazing creative work, solved difficult problems, and generally provided delight.

For me, messy means exploring unknown territory and asking questions that take us outside of our current ways of knowing. It means that we don't have prepared answers; it may mean moments of awkward silence. When we appreciate and honor the deep mystery of the unknown, we develop patience, learning to wait until the right thing to do next emerges. All in all, human learning is messy...and that's the invitation. It's only when we step out of the mold and allow a little disarray, that learning and growth begin to happen.

It's true that there are models of learning that look quite neat and simple. Take memorizing, for example. Information is presented to us, we memorize it, and we spit it back out at the appropriate time. That is an orderly and perhaps favorable method of learning in our achievement-oriented society. Learning that is more transformational and lasting requires that we connect with deeper levels of wisdom and understanding—a process that could be called “discernment.” Discernment requires a deeper connection to ourselves and it requires that we be able to *see* on a deeper level. We have to be able to look under the surface of things.

The groundbreaking research in “emotional intelligence” has clearly demonstrated the importance of wholeness in learning. We know now that learning is deeper than mere cognition. Learning involves accessing our own unique insights and our own emotions. Feelings are a fundamental aspect of learning; they are a signal that learning is happening. We are not learning anything of much significance if we don't feel *something*—excitement, wonder, anger, awe, fear—as part of the process.

I often use the word “sacred” in this book to describe the quality of the environment that best supports learning. Although one might sneer at the idea of sacredness in a professional setting, ignoring a sense of sacredness has been a gross disservice to teaching and learning. Parker Palmer, author of several books including *The Courage to Teach*, says that sacredness is that which is worthy of respect. Sacredness acknowledges that when we learn, we enter mystery. The learning will be larger than we are—we cannot know beforehand how we (or our clients) will grow through this process. Sacredness means that this process is bigger than our current state of knowledge.

Instilling sacredness is not about props, prayer, or religious ceremony. It’s simply an intention that we are entering, and open to, mystery. How wonderful it is that teaching and learning involve sacred mystery. We can create rich, deep, meaningful educational settings or we cannot create them. Which would you prefer?

## LEARNING AS A WAY OF TEACHING

**W**HEN I EMBARK on something new that involves teaching, facilitating, coaching, or presenting material, I always view it as a learning experiment. It takes the pressure off. An experiment means that it’s uncertain. I’m testing things, trying things out, and using feedback to modify my procedures. Since it’s an experiment, I don’t have all the answers stored up inside me. It’s helpful for me to tell people that it’s an experiment—this gets them engaged in a more playful, experimental mode, as well. In *Getting Messy*, I use the word *learning* to emphasize

what I believe our true role is when we teach, instruct, coach, or facilitate others. You can substitute the words *explore* or *experiment* for “learn,” if you like. I admit these words are a little sexier. I’m just partial to the word learning. I believe it hasn’t been given its due.

A great teacher is a revolutionary of sorts. Learning, by its very nature, moves us beyond established systems of knowledge and ways of doing things. Learning takes us outside of the box and beyond our comfort zones. A great teacher, whether operating in a formal capacity or an informal one, invites us to inquire and explore beyond what we currently know. As Palmer wrote, “The true work of the mind is to reconnect us with that which would otherwise be out of reach.” And that’s exactly what teachers do—they connect us with those things that would otherwise be out of reach.

Strong learners have a well-developed capacity to think “critically,” which means the ability to question assumptions, embrace ambiguity, and hold multiple perspectives. Yet in many professional environments we don’t often exercise these skills, as we usually assume that there is only one right way. For example, “active learning” has been a hot topic in educational circles. Its proponents argue that learning is, or should be, an *active* experience. That sounds good, but when active learning becomes a decree for all teaching situations it stifles the creativity and fluidity that is necessary for learning.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer presents a humorous example of an angry chemistry professor at a large university who proclaims that he will *not* use role-playing in his classroom. Our fancy methods can be a wonderful thing, but they do not necessarily work in *all* situations. Despite good intentions, it’s not helpful to latch onto methods without critically thinking about what we are doing. The belief that there is only one

right way has led us to unimaginative and boring presentations, seminars, meetings, and so on.

If we're working in a teaching capacity as presenter or group leader, we need strong, well-developed capacities for critical thought, including the capacity to question, explore options, and be open to what works best given the situation at hand. If we believe we must follow some sort of system composed of rules, strategies, and techniques, we have no freedom to create something new. We have positioned ourselves with something fixed, not something fluid and flexible that supports growth. Life is fluid. Learning is fluid. Our methods need to be fluid as well.

Our techniques are often superfluous anyway. It's the *particulars* that matter—*this client, this topic, and this situation*. In management literature, this is called “contingency theory”—methods are contingent upon the unique situation in front of you. Many of our learned procedures are useless when we are face to face with a particular situation. If we work with other people in a professional capacity, we must be learners. We must be willing to not know.

Being a learner helps immensely when we're confronted with situations we're not prepared for. A corporate trainer walked into the room where he was supposed to lead a seminar and discovered that he didn't have any of his requested supplies. He eventually acquired the needed materials, but during that first session he had to quickly improvise a solution for entertaining 20 bored executives. Many years ago I led a large discussion group for older adults. It was all very pleasant, and then all of a sudden a woman stood up and shockingly started screaming at a man on the other side of the room. I'm sure you all have your own stories to relay, but the point is that you can't prepare for every situation that

will come up. The group is bigger than you are. You don't have absolute control.

What can we do in the face of the unknown? We can be learners. We can investigate what is before us: *What is this situation asking of me? What, or who, do I need to pay attention to right now? What do I need to learn here? What lesson may be here for the entire group?* By diving underneath our systems and strategies to the level that actually holds growth and learning, we find renewed inspiration.

Some very basic learning principles are what I took with me when I walked into my first formal teaching situation. These principles and others are described throughout this book:

- paying attention
- being curious
- connecting to what feels true for me
- staying open to new possibilities
- allowing what wants to emerge
- using feedback to alter course

I have also discovered that I need to reach under the day's written agenda to the level that inspires and supports *my* learning, because my own growth and creativity are the only things that will ultimately renew me.

Being a strong learner is necessary for success in any occupation. I once heard an interview of a man who runs a program for at-risk youth. It became clear during the course of the interview what an impressive role model he was for these kids. He was an impressive role model not because of his expertise or charm, but because of his humility. He admitted that he was simply *learning* how to be a mentor to these youth; he didn't have all the answers; and furthermore, he didn't

have all the answers in his new role of father either. With both pride and humility in his voice he said, “I’m a father. I’m not a great father, but I’m *learning* how to be a great father.”

His words were echoed recently by President Barack Obama, who had this to say about fatherhood: “I’ve been far from perfect. But in the end it’s not about being perfect. It’s not always about succeeding. It’s about always trying. And that’s something everybody can do.”

## WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

**G**ETTING MESSY addresses teaching and learning in a broad array of settings. As should be evident by now, teaching and learning cut across a wide number of domains—from high-level corporate seminars to local community events. This book may be most helpful for those of you who work with adults in retreat centers, corporations, hospitals, senior centers, government, non-profit agencies, community colleges, universities, professional schools, and continuing education programs. The term *teacher* is meant to be broadly defined—trainers, consultants, mentors, coaches, parents, managers, workshop leaders, and group facilitators all work with people in a teaching capacity. Anyone who is responsible in some way for another person’s experience is a teacher.

The term *learning* is also meant to be broadly defined, since we learn in a variety of ways and environments throughout our daily life. I’ve tried to present a broad range of examples from professional environments. Whatever example is being provided, please apply it to your own situation.

Finally, the words *student* and *client* will be used interchangeably in this book to refer to the participants in your workshops, your colleagues, your patients, the people you direct or manage, or whomever you work with in a teaching capacity. The terms students, clients, colleagues, and participants are meant to be used reciprocally. I often use the term “group” in this book to refer to the participants in your teaching situation. If you are a coach or mentor, you can assume that “group” in this case refers to you and your client.

There are very few situations in today’s world in which we’re not required to learn or teach information to others. And more and more, modern-day jobs require creativity and flexibility. This book will help you find inspiration when you need it, learn how to “flow” better in chaotic environments, and tap the incredible resources contained within a group.

*Getting Messy* is intended to be an inspiration and a friend, a place you can turn to for wisdom when problems occur and for renewed energy when you find yourself drained of ideas. It is offered with deep appreciation to those of you who spend your lives helping people learn.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**T**HIS BOOK presents a framework and some principles that will assist you in developing a learning perspective when you teach or work with other people. It is my hope that you will use this book to instigate a deeper inquiry into the heart of your work: *Who are you when you teach? What are you offering*

*your students (clients, participants)? How can your work be renewing to you? How can this work help you grow?*

As a framework for this learning process, I would like to tell you about a method of research in the social sciences called *Organic Inquiry*. Initially developed in the 1990s, it is a feminist approach to scholastic research that is exploratory and discovery-oriented. It arose because of frustration with traditional research methods that view the scientist as totally removed from what he or she is studying. Organic Inquiry is especially well suited for investigating elusive topics and for fostering insights about topics that have had a profound personal effect on the inquirer. For example, a scholar may be studying rape as a topic of research, yet also have a deeply personal connection with this topic. These personal associations necessarily influence the research study, yet are viewed as unimportant by traditional methods. Organic Inquiry acknowledges and allows personal associations and incorporates them into the research data.

What I realized upon encountering it, however, is that Organic Inquiry is not limited to collecting research data; it also gives us a model for how humans learn in everyday life. After all, research is really a process of structured learning. When scholars decide to study something, they are beginning an investigative process, one where they wish to understand something new and unfamiliar.

The aim in Organic Inquiry is not to present data that is objective and generalized, as all other research methods aim to do. Rather, the aim is to present the data and analysis in such a way that the individual reader may interact with it and be transformed by it. In other words, the research process itself is viewed as transformational. In order for this transformation to occur, you first create a “container” for learning—something

the authors call *sacred space*. (See Clements & colleagues’ *Organic Inquiry: If Research Were Sacred*.)

Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One’s Own*, reminded us of the need for our own sanctuary in order to write or create. The same is true for learning. While Woolf was speaking of a physical room, we can view her suggestion metaphorically as well. When we create *room* for ourselves, we allow stillness and silence so that we can hear our own thoughts and observations. One of the first things we need to do as learners is intentionally create room for learning. This space for learning is not unbounded. It has edges, creating a container for our pursuit. When you read this book, you will have your own organic inquiry. Whatever thoughts, ideas, and feelings arise for you are important; they are part of your individual journey with this material.

In the *Reflection* section that follows this chapter I offer some suggestions for how to create learning space. One important way to create space is to dedicate a journal or notebook to the learning process. My journal in this case was titled, *An Organic Inquiry about Organic Inquiry*. During the course of reading about Organic Inquiry, I noted what came up for me with regard to the topic—any emotions or reactions I had to reading the material, dreams, synchronistic events and chance phone calls, in addition to all of my thoughts, research, and reflections. What came up for me was my own personal “research data” into Organic Inquiry.

I like the use of the term *sacred*, because defining this process as *sacred* makes us notice and value what does come up, rather than dismissing it as unimportant. We can meet each moment with the expectation that our environment may yield messages that are addressed to us personally. Dreams, intuitions, synchronistic meetings, random thoughts, feelings—this

everyday material is our source of learning and may be directly speaking to our current questions. If we view the occurrences of our everyday life as sacred, we are more likely to pay attention to them.

Organic Inquiry presents us with a very different way of reading a book. Typically, our learning model has been one of information-processing. We read. We digest. We spit out. There is very little “chewing,” i.e., letting the material seep in and “work” us. The kind of learning that we will be doing here is holistic, not purely cognitive. If it were solely cognitive, I would present my material and you would swallow it. However, in our Organic Inquiry we’re required to go deeper into the learning process. We’re going to chew a little—not only tasting our “food,” but differentiating the flavors, allowing our own insights to surface. The point here is not to give answers, but rather to help you connect with your own voice.

Learning, especially in adulthood, is driven by our passions, interests, and questions. It’s an internal process—we *choose* what we wish to learn. Our inner voice is the central directing element, shifting us in certain directions and away from others. In Chapter Two we investigate learning as a process of discovering what we love, discernment, critical thinking, and trusting ourselves.

In Chapter Three we create *internal* space for learning, exploring the arena of imagination. Imaginal space presents us with new possibilities. We are beginning to move beyond what we currently know, into what we don’t know; we are making new connections.

In Chapter Four we create *external* space for learning, developing a proper appreciation of structure. Structure is what allows space for our possibilities to sprout. It is partly *physical*, created by four walls and the arrangement of chairs. It’s partly

created by having adequate *time* to allow learning to occur and freedom from distractions. It’s partly *conceptual*, created by how we frame the topic for learning. And it’s partly created by our *intentions* and *ground rules*, having guidelines that create opportunities for real dialogue.

In Chapter Five we are learners, immersing ourselves in a relationship with something that’s bigger than we are. What does it mean to be *learners* when we facilitate a group or coach a client? We investigate the necessity of stepping out of the role, becoming empty, meeting clients as equals, paying attention, speaking our truth, cultivating connections, learning from diversity, and allowing what wants to emerge.

And in Chapter Six we dive into the most difficult situations that many of us experience at one point or another. We learn about third space and what it means to teach from that place. We are true learners, critically reflecting on our challenges and growing from them.

And because we don’t just learn by taking in information, at the end of each chapter are a series of suggested reflective questions and activities, grouped into five sections: *Creating Space*, *Renewing Inspiration*, *Planting Seeds*, *Tending the Field*, and *Digging Deeper*. Just as it sounds, *Creating Space* is meant to help you create space for learning in your teaching work. Learning space has both internal and external components. Your commitment and openness create internal learning space. External learning space is created by the arrangements you make to foster learning in your life. *Renewing Inspiration* and *Planting Seeds* will help you develop new possibilities for your work. The questions and exercises in *Tending the Field* will help you process the information you will be receiving.

Finally, in *Digging Deeper* I present ways for you to develop a deeper understanding of a particular issue or situation. These

exercises will also help you begin to open up your imagination to a wider range of possibilities for your work. We explore guided visualizations, sentence completion exercises, collage, intuitive insight, art and poetry, and dialoguing through fairy tales and other writing methods. Since problems can't be solved at the level at which they were created, we have to go beyond the level of the problem to a place of higher vision, in order to see the solution. The exercises in *Digging Deeper* are intended to help you enter that greater place of understanding.

This book is meant to be a place where you can have a provocative conversation—with the material, with new ideas, and with yourself. I hope this book refreshes and renews you, giving you a sense of expanded possibility and the means to make those possibilities a reality. I encourage you to see where you can move outside the lines. I invite you to get messy.



## Creating Space . . .

**Buy a journal specifically dedicated to learning about your teaching work.**

Title it anything you wish. This journal forms a container where your ideas, insights, inspirations, and thoughts can emerge. It's a place where you can process what comes up for you and keep track of your plans and visions. This journal is a place you have set aside for listening to your Self.

**Make an intention to find your own voice in your work.**

An internal commitment to learn helps to create a strong learning space. Your commitment will guide you as you step out into new experiences. Commitment is necessary because we don't live in a world where interior space is seen or acknowledged.

**Write your intention in your journal.**

*"I, Carla Smith, commit to learning what I need to learn in order to be a great presenter." Or "I, Bill Jones, commit to opening up and exploring my own creativity in my work and in my life." Write down any other thoughts and intentions that seem relevant.*

## Renewing Inspiration . . .

Quick... think "school." Say the word "school" to yourself and write down what immediately comes to mind.

Write down the standard, accepted definition of the word "teacher."

Next, write down the opposite of the above definition.

Finally, write down your own unique definition for "teacher."

**Here are some of my definitions:**

*A teacher is someone who brings fresh possibility and ideas, so people are inspired to learn.*

*A teacher is someone who nourishes a person's roots so they can grow. A teacher has rich soil.*

*A teacher creates space for learning.*

Your definition of a teacher may be very different from what is considered normal.

Does your own definition serve you and your work? How so?

Given your definition of a teacher, does your current environment allow you to “be” this teacher?

Given your definition, what is your ideal type of work? What is your ideal working environment?

## Planting Seeds . . .

**Write down thoughts, reflections, dreams, and synchronistic events as they occur.**

Now that you have formed your intention and created a container, whatever comes up in your everyday life that seems to be related to your inquiry is all part of the process. In addition to your thoughts and reflections, note any synchronistic meetings or phone calls, unusual dreams, and the reactions and emotions that occur for you as you read this book. Keep lists of things that strike you as funny or silly, and the things that make you angry are also important messages. Write down notes from pertinent books you come across, ideas from interesting lectures and workshops, and so on. The things that speak to you are part of your unique learning journey.

## Tending The field . . .

### Schedule time with yourself.

Our everyday lives are usually comprised of activities that offer no refuge for the self at all. Devote 20 minutes each week to reflect on what has meaning for you in your work and to contemplate your next areas of growth. You can view the process as one of creating a protected container to honor your learning.

Make a list of five things you can do to give yourself some quiet, reflective time. For example, going to the beach or listening to music are things that may give you time to process and allow your subconscious mind to provide you with new insights. . .

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Digging Deeper . . .

### Develop an initial vision for your work.

Seat yourself in a comfortable position and close your eyes. For a few moments, simply get comfortable and pay attention to your breathing. Then ask yourself for a metaphorical image that portrays a vision for your work. Spend some time with your image; let it tell you whatever it has to share. After you're finished, list whatever insights are suggested from the image. Don't try to make sense of them given your current work situation, just list as many qualities from the image as you can.

*The image that I often get is that of a farmer. In one hand, he has a pail full of seeds, and in the other, a pail full of water. Here are possibilities that I get from this image: nourishment (the pail of water), being a good steward (the farmer), potential (the pail of seeds), patience (the seeds need to be planted and don't grow all at once), care (the farmer cares about his work), and humility (the farmer is wearing old coveralls.)*