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William Van Buskirk and Michael London

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INVITING THE MUSE INTO THE CLASSROOM: POETIC LICENSE IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

William Van Buskirk
La Salle University
Michael London
Muhlenberg College

Instructors are responsible for making teaching come to life. This article seeks to energize the classroom through an exploration of the tacit synergies between the language of poetry and the language of management. In the process, the authors delve into both the opportunities and the obstacles in bringing together two disparate discourses. As an autoethnography, the article details a journey that is both personal and professional. It includes a literature search to explore the uses and potential of poetic language, the design of a workshop to enhance the experience of poetry in management professors, and the crafting of classroom activities using poetry to elicit students' felt connections to the course material. In the end, the authors envision a style of teaching rich enough to compete for the center of students' attention—their depth, their creativity, and their stillness of mind.

Keywords: *poetry; pedagogy; language; management; experiential learning; metaphor; training*

This article is an account of a shared search to think more deeply and personally about how to bring the vitality of poetic language to the act of teaching. In it we seek to elicit more wholeness and depth in our students and ourselves (Fairfield & London, 2003; Van Buskirk, 1997). Because it is

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a personal document and an academic one, we seek to convey the lived experience of a journey through which we make new connections between our lives as poets or songwriters and management professors. We seek to convey both the doubts and longings in such an enterprise and its transformational possibilities.

We are concerned not just for ourselves, but for our students. The stakes are high, yet subtle. Much can be lost with little awareness of the fact. As the corporation's scripts of action and achievement spur students to envision their lives in terms of its grand design, we worry that they participate too exclusively in its exteriorized world, that they risk becoming frozen into their corporation's prose, its received language. We have come to believe that not enough poetry in our lives can get us into trouble. The poet William Carlos Williams says "it is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die every day from lack of what is found there." We are in trouble if the words we use to craft a resume (or journal article) become too much of how we name our personal, immediate experience. Our inner worlds become pale reflections of our outer ones. As we repeat, year after year, the second-hand versions of Maslow, Hertzberg, Rogers, and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analyses found in our texts, poetry begins to cast a long shadow. We begin to feel like purveyors of cliché. In response, we explore how poetry might transform the discourse of the classroom to make the internal discussible, the personal public, and the academic immediate.

In academic terms, we conceive the article as an *autoethnography* (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 1997, 2000, 2004; Richardson, 1997), a research document that, like traditional ethnographies, tries to convey something of the lived experience around an issue. Yet, unlike them, autoethnography explicitly puts the researcher into the center of the work. Written in the first person, it attempts to combine careful description of qualitative research with the subjective experience of the writer. Hence, the data of the article is the lived experience of the writers themselves, rendered as faithfully as they can manage.

We choose this form because of the nature of our topic. We want to tell how, as artists and academics, we struggle with a gulf between the vitality of poetic composition versus the flatness we experience in the language of our academic field. This article is about a journey from a career defined by (and encapsulated in) traditional academic prose to a professional identity where professional prose and cherished poetry refresh, invigorate, and inform one another in the classroom. It is a tale of confidence, doubt, risk, and shifting professional identities. Hence, we invite into the center of the article our struggle with the contradictions between professional and poetic diction. By highlighting these conflicted voices, we hope to discover something useful about how to energize, on a daily basis, the language and pedagogy of our field.

Clearly these issues could not be addressed from an armchair. We decided to take a journey that involved many activities and much reflection. We needed to act before we saw an endpoint, or before we received any professional approval from colleagues or superiors. Each activity involved a significant investment of time over a course of several years and each one gave us confidence and insight. First, we sought guidance from thinkers simultaneously active in the arts and social sciences. Next we tested ourselves by designing and conducting an experiential workshop (the Poetry Gallery) for colleagues attending the Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference (OBTC), and finally we designed a series of exercises more closely related to our classrooms.

Finding a Place to Stand: Poetry in the Social Sciences

From the beginning, our zest for artistic composition and performance created problems for us. The energy and enthusiasm they generated could not be denied. Yet it seemed irrelevant to our professional role. Life seemed more and more to be split into two halves. Poetry seemed to get the worst of it—an irrelevance and a distraction to the pursuit of professional advancement. As we lived with this state of affairs for many years, we felt like people in the midst of a double life—a poetical side, private and intense on one hand versus a respectable but increasingly perfunctory professional existence on the other. As our double life grew more and more uncomfortable, we began to discuss how we might change it. We started out by asking ourselves, “What sorts of classroom exercises might we design to find more integration?” However, each time we tried to discuss this topic, we were overwhelmed with doubts and contradictions. Were poetic and professional lives irreconcilable in any but the most superficial ways? Could poetry be more than an ornament to professional prose and pedagogy? Were there deep links between the two dictions that we could discover and exploit? Were we skilled enough to enhance the experience of poetry? If we were successful, what difference would it make? Would our students understand the material any differently than if we had proceeded in a traditional manner? How would our colleagues and deans, themselves steeped in academic prose, greet our experiments?

Together these doubts crystallized into a crisis of legitimacy. We needed a place to stand vis-à-vis our dual lives, a stance from which we could derive a sense of possibility. We began to see the need for allies. So we looked to social thinkers who dealt with these issues. We found many scholars in the fields of sociology, psychology, education, anthropology, communication, and literary criticism (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Jipson & Paley, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Tedlock, 1993). They, too, find the language of the social

sciences “boring, and flat, dominated by the passive voice, an invisible narrator, an absence of feeling, and pretensions to absolute truth” (Richardson, 1997, p. 148). Based on a thoroughgoing critique of positivistic language, they carve out a space for poems, songs, narratives, and drama in the heart of their disciplines. Poetry and social science come together around valuing, exploration, and representation of lived experience as a form of knowledge (Banks & Banks, 1998; Richardson, 2000). We find, in their struggle for a more artful social science, a mirror to our search for a more artful way to teach it.

The deadening of professional language has a lineage dating from the late 17th century, when philosophers of knowledge rejected artistic language (Berman, 1981; Richardson, 1997). The new science would strive for objectivity and certainty, to be a mirror to nature, independent of linguistic devices. The voice of objective scientific thought would be dominant. To achieve this position, positivist thinkers had to exclude any kind of language that threatened its clarity. The languages of art, narrative, and poetry—multivocal to their core—were prime candidates for exclusion.

From the 17th century onward, Western science has rejected rhetoric (in the name of “plain” transparent signification), fiction (in the name of fact), and subjectivity (in the name of objectivity). Rhetoric, fiction, and subjectivity were located in “literature,” a new historical construction, aesthetically pleasing but scientifically ridiculed. Literature was denied truth value because it “invented” reality rather than observed it. Dependent on the evocative devices of metaphor and imagery, literature could be interpreted in different ways by different readers. Worse, “the narrating is always multivocal—it says one thing to illuminate something else.” . . . Literature violates a major pretension of science: the single unambiguous voice. . . . Science was to be written in “plain style,” in words that did not, in John Locke’s estimation, “move the Passions and thereby mislead the Judgment,” unambiguous words unlike the “perfect cheat” of poetic utterances. The assault on poetic language intensified throughout the 18th century. Locke urged parents to stifle poetic tendencies in their children. David Hume depicted poets as professional liars. Jeremy Bentham proposed that the ideal language would be one without words, only unambiguous symbols. Samuel Johnson’s dictionary sought to fix “univocal meanings in perpetuity, much like the univocal meanings of standard arithmetic terms.” . . . The search for the unambiguous was the triumph of the quest for certainty over the quest for wisdom. (Richardson, 1997, p. 15)

Over time, the need for polemics subsided as the superiority of such scientific language evolved into a given. Voice, rhetoric, and metaphor, as shapers of the writer’s message, receded into the background. The massive suppression of the individual voice and the linguistic modes that best convey it, gave rise to a root metaphor of separation (Richardson, 1997). To achieve the pristine clarity it sought, social science would have to posit an observer split off from (and unaffected by) the observed. Anything that

threatened this observer would be excised. Lived human experience would eventually become “error variance” (Gergen, 1982).

However, modern thinkers point out that this unitary, dominant voice can result in a research article devoid of passion, subjectivity, and the lived experience of both researcher and subject. Its root metaphor—knower split off from the known, researcher from subject, and interviewer from interviewee, uncovers a voice that is absent and invisible, yet claims omniscience:

Who is telling the story? The researcher? The researched? Both? Postmodernist critique challenges the grounds for authority in the writings of positivists and phenomenologists, measurers, and ethnographers, because it rejects dichotomizing the “knower” and the “known.” In scientific writing, authority has been accomplished through the “effacement of the speaking and experiencing scientists. . . . Neither “I” nor “we” are used. With no apparent narrator, an illusion of objectivity is created. The implied narrator is godlike, an all-knowing voice from afar and above, stripped of all human subjectivity and fallibility. But, in fact, science does have a human narrator, the camouflaged first person, hiding in the bramble of the passive voice. The scientist is not all knowing. Omniscience is imaginary, possible only in fiction. (Richardson, 1997, p. 18)

Moreover, the research text contains, as postmodernists have shown, a range of devices that abet the metaphor of separation and the effacement of voice. They have shown that the structure of the research report itself reinforces the omniscient, univocal fiction, lending it a seeming inevitability and an aura of common sense:

The ubiquity of this format (introduction including the research question, literature review, methodology, data presentation, data discussion, conclusions, and future prospects) lends the report an aura of common sense and a certain status of validity. The format becomes a marker of the competence of the researcher, provides comfort through a sense of agreed upon norms The standard format may be considered a rhetorical device which not only lends credibility to the researcher but supports the truth-value of the report. Moreover, each segment of the report serves as a building block and the blocks are stacked so that the “conclusions” segment depends for its warrant on previous sections. The form in its linearity drives the reader toward the stated “conclusions.” (Blumenfeld-Jones & Barone, 1997, p. 84)

Thus, the hard-won clarity of modernist science is purchased at a steep price. Univocal, invisible, authoritative voice buttressed by a host of rhetorical and linguistic arrangements rules out voices deemed incompatible with its project. The voice of lived experience (best rendered in the language of narrative, song, and poetry) is a notable casualty. Many social scientists complain about the result: disengaged literary style, boredom, absence of both the author’s voice and the voices of research subjects, and finally, the loss of the potential contribution of lived experience to knowledge.

These limitations of traditional social science tend to create an identity crisis similar to our own in postmodern researchers. One common solution is to embrace a different root metaphor to guide the research enterprise. Many writers echo Richardson in valuing connection over separation and intimacy over distance:

In the writings of poets and social scientists, the position of the author is linked aesthetically, politically, emotionally with those about whom they write. Knowledge is not appropriated and controlled but shared; authors recognize a multiplicity of selves within themselves as well as interdependence with others, shadows and doubles. . . . It is this potential for relating, merging, being a primary presence to ourselves and each other that makes possible the validation of (our) writing, not for the sake of only and just writing poetry . . . but for the sake of knowing about lived experiences that are unspeakable in the “father’s voice,” the voice of objectivity; flattened worlds. (Richardson, 1997, p. 166)

As subject and object come together, as the distinction between researcher and subject erodes, the authorial, invisible voice of modernist social science cannot maintain itself. Researchers open to a wider range of feelings, selves, and voices, produce a different kind of work (Denzin, 2003). In many fields of social science, poetry, narrative, song, and drama receive consideration for publication. Subjects gain influence in structuring the work and in saying what it means. In some cases, the boundary between subject and object breaks down altogether, as ethnography and autobiography merge into a new form called autoethnography (Banks & Banks, 1998; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 1997, 2000, 2004; Richardson, 1997). The common enterprise in this work is to reclaim lived experience as a phenomenon energized by a renewed fidelity to the language that best conveys it—narrative, drama, song, and poetry (Denzin, 2003; Jipson & Paley, 1997; Richardson, 1997).

For us as teachers, this body of scholarship amounts to liberation. If the language of our field is built on a root metaphor of separation that brings about a massive suppression of voice, then our intuitions about its deficiencies get some much-needed support. We need no longer imagine our role as purveyors of a dead language, but as artists and/or social scientists joined with our students in the cocreation of a performance called education. The conflict between our artist selves and our professor selves eases a bit as we envision a role where, in Richardson’s words, we “link ourselves aesthetically, politically, and emotionally” to those we teach.

Poetry in the Classroom

What remains is to learn how to act on these insights. Although we are excited by the potential in rich tapestries of experiential learning, we seek to go

beyond the mere devising of classroom exercises. We seek a thoroughgoing connection among the acts of artistic composition, our identities as artists and/or professors, and creative innovation in the classroom. We begin with the act of artistic composition itself. In it, significant changes occur in the tacit balance of commitments, obligations, and possibilities. As these become more explicit, we change. The new images we evoke in our work provoke new possibilities. Next, as we turn our attention outward, we try our hand at designing a workshop (the Poetry Gallery) where the tacit poetry of participants is enhanced. Next we follow the advice of Richardson (1997) and others to connect to our students' aesthetic and political experience, and we find the concept of root metaphor to be a useful pathway. We also find poetic possibilities in the language of the course itself. By viewing the SWOT analysis as a metaphor and a concept, student interest and connection to the course can be increased. Finally, we have found that specific poems with thematic connections to the course can invite voices and points of view into the discussion that are normally suppressed.

COMPOSING A (TEACHING) LIFE

Modern social science has freed us to envision the classroom as a venue for deeper and deeper voicing of lived experience in the context of (and through) the subject matter. However, if this deepening is to occur, professors cannot take themselves out of the picture. If the lived experience of our students is to be enhanced and connected to the knowledge of our field, we must more fully engage the artistic, political, and spiritual worlds of our students. As we do this, we change as teachers and as human beings.

Poetry aims . . . at the reformation of the poet, as prayer does. In the grand cases—as in our century, Yeats and Eliot—it enables the poet gradually, again and again, to become almost another man; but something of the sort happens on a small scale, a freeing with the creation of every real poem. (Berryman, 1949, p. 386)

Indeed, the act of teaching, like anything else we do, is bounded by a host of tacit values, constraints, images, regrets, hopes, contracts, understandings, and so on. In the act of writing a poem, some of these vague intuitions are given form. At this point we can be, in Berryman's words "almost another man," if only in a small way. In a new poem, the balance between spoken and unspoken has shifted somewhat, and artistic creation becomes self-creation. In the process, we may find deeper insights and more energy in our work. The poem and gloss below demonstrate how this happened to one of the authors.

Final Exam

*In two hours time this will all be done.
 Soon I'll be nothing more
 than an image in a lineage
 of judges receding into memory . . .
 but today I am The-One-Who-Matters.
 They come to me skittish,
 hoping for wisdom or kindness—
 aware of their falling short
 but not their why. Do they suspect
 that what they want is way beyond
 the deals I've made with a world
 that doesn't know me? That I stop short
 of what our time could be?
 Look, I have my own lineage—
 fierce priests with winter in their eyes
 darkening into history as I age,
 holding me to promises
 I half-remember making.
 I look out at the class, backs
 humped over blue books.
 Maybe we're not so different—
 unable to name our stopping-short,
 we linger in the dramas that we're stuck with
 until another, better poet comes along
 and takes an interest, or until
 we ourselves crack
 the genetic code of spirit
 signaling in the pause and pulse
 of our bodies—
 off—on
 dark—light
 Nothing—Father.*

—Bill Van Buskirk

This poem got started as I was proctoring a final exam at the end of a semester. Looking out over a sea of “backs humped over blue books,” I felt a definite sadness, not that the semester was ending, but at the relative lack of impact that my teaching would have on the students who seemed to me more and more like strangers with values different from mine, around which there could be little dialogue (the class was strategy/policy, the students were graduating seniors). Then I remembered the Poetry Gallery exercise. Could these students have an embodied, implicit poetry? I had a working assumption that everyone had an interior dialogue that was the “raw material” for poetic meditation, but it was hard to imagine this when I looked at my students that day. If they were poets, they kept their poetry well hidden. I began to feel rather unreal, like a ghost or, in the language of

the poem, “an image in a lineage”— just one more judge in a long line of judges. But that is not how the students see me. I *am* powerful in their eyes, but it is a power I would rather not have. I am one of the many temporary gatekeepers to their futures—I *am the one who matters* for a few more hours at least. As a judge I seem to merge with the “judges” they carry around in their heads. I would like to have made more of a contribution so that they would be more empowered by the course. Instead they come *hoping for wisdom or kindness, aware of their falling short but not their why*. As I sit here in this quandary, I began to fall under the spell of my own inner critic who is fond of pointing out all the *deals I have made with a world that doesn't know me*. Are they aware of my own *stopping short of what our time could be*? So the class seems like the result of a collusion between myself and the students—you don't demand so much of me and I won't demand too much of you. I start to protest—*Look, I have got my own lineage* of judges; but in that moment I discover a connection to the students—I have got my own inner judge, my own inhibitions about investing myself in the moment. Like them I fall short. Like them I *linger in the dramas* that I am stuck with.

The poem up to this point is about the dark side of my connection to them. But it turns as I look out at the humped backs of the students. In an earlier version of the poem, I thought of Bob Cratchet—Scrooge's abused apprentice. In another I thought of humped-back whales freely swimming in their sea. In this image the students seem to be both of these at once—oppressed and free, ignorant and knowing, yet insistent on growing at their own rate, making their own decisions. Suddenly they remind me of myself, and we all seem to be in the same boat—imperfect humans severely limited by the paradigms and ideologies that support them. We are all stuck *until a better poet comes along* to show us a way out of our self-induced “boxes.” Yet there is hope. Who is this poet? He or she could be any one of us (maybe at a later date after much more life experience). For aren't we at least potentially capable of cracking *the genetic code of spirit*?

As I began to jot down the first notes of this poem (during the exam itself), I began to feel myself as a taker of my own *final* exam. How will my teaching life be judged at the end of the day? Their weariness, their bent backs, became a metaphor for my own life test. The connection between my life and my students' lives seemed to point the way out—to behave more and more in my teaching like a poet, sensitive not only to the stereotyped chatter in my head (career complaints, etc.) but to the teaching moment itself. For that I would need a kind of silence in which there was nothing but the unexplained moment *pulsing in the pause and pulse of our bodies*. Teaching could be a meditation.

Writing the poem, “Final Exam” dramatizes the insights of scholars such as Laurel Richardson (1992) and Norman Denzin (2003) about how

poetic composition can help discover voices, possibilities, and selves previously suppressed. Richardson writes, “As we write our social worlds into being, we write ourselves into being” (Richardson, 1997, p. 137). In “Final Exam,” the poet goes from a state of alienation to a shared humanity with his students, to a sense of the possibilities inherent in greater involvement in his teaching—an involvement expressed as spiritual. Artistic composition can reframe the teaching career. In poeticizing the teaching life, we find new sources of energy in it.

THE POETRY GALLERY

As we turn our attention outward, one of our earliest questions becomes activated. Could we actually design a workshop that would enhance the experience of poetry? Could we leverage our background in experiential workshop design to produce an experience that would stir the poetic energies in our colleagues and our students? Could we design a setting in which we could reproduce in others some of the joy, energy, and mystery we feel in composing and performing?

We called our workshop the Poetry Gallery. We chose the OBTC as a setting because it was a friendly venue, an organization full of people who, like us, intuit a great deal more excitement and mystery lurking in language than they can name. We saw the conference itself as a kind of microcosm of the academic world in which we all ply our trade. At the OBTC, like all academic conferences, busyness is the norm. People rush about from one presentation (class?) to another, while putting finishing touches on their own presentations. We wanted to design a workshop that would undercut these distractions. We hoped to design a setting and a process to help participants quiet external and internal chatter and connect with their own innate poetry. We hoped to learn from them how to connect our own poetic inclinations more fully to our classes.

The setting of the gallery consists of 75 to 100 poems taped to the walls of a room. The poems are in oversized type and the colored pages are arranged in a variety of lively colors. It takes 15 to 20 minutes to read them all. Each year we select a new batch. From our reading we note poems that move us and circulate them to each other. In a recent workshop, the poems ranged from a 14th-century samurai poem to works written in the previous year. The poets range from icons such as Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson to anonymous and unpublished work. We delete the authors’ names to lessen the impact of the star quality (or lack of it). We provide a list of poems and authors at the end of the workshop.

As participants enter the room, workshop leaders simply instruct them to “walk around and read the poems as if you are at an art gallery.” We do not provide an introduction about what to expect. We do not provide an

orientation as to how this exercise might be useful in the classroom. We want people to have an experience of poetry before they talk about it. We envision entry into the physical space of the workshop as an entry into another relationship to language where words evoke experience rather than explain it. Many participants describe a kind of hush in the room that immediately quiets them. Others have spoken of entering the force field of poetry. They report an environment that is somehow different—physically, artistically, and psychologically.

As participants go through the activities of the workshop, they browse the gallery, select the poem that most speaks to them, share that poem with the group, engage in a free writing exercise, and share their own compositions with the group. They begin to have what Naomi Shihab Nye (1995) calls “the slow experience of words”:

Poems allow us to savor a single image, a single phrase. Just think how many people have savored a haiku poem over hundreds of years. It slows you down to read a poem. You read it more than one time. You read it more slowly than you would speak to someone in a store. And we need the slow experience of words. (p. 322)

As participants slow down, the gallery, like good poetry itself, short-circuits explicit communication, and directly evokes emotionally charged meaning and memory.

After the workshop, there is often a rush to take down poems that were not initially selected. Members are curious about the identities of the poets. We encourage everyone to take poems home, and we pass out a list of the poems and the poets who wrote them. Many participants want to know how to get more of a particular poet’s work. Where possible, we provide references.

From the participant’s point of view, many echo the sentiment that “I found a hunger larger than myself,” a capacity to respond to and be nourished by poetry to an unexpected extent. This experience takes many forms. Some workshops are quite emotional with much tears and laughter. Others are characterized by quiet communion. Many are surprised and delighted at the poetry they wrote. One participant said that the workshop “gave my life the gift of poetry.” Another, who had not written since he was a child, wrote a powerful piece that stunned the whole group. Others report that they wrote more poems after the workshop, sometimes for the first time in their lives. Several spoke of the elation of bringing poetry into their professorial selves. For some, the effect was more personal as the range of activities re-enchanted a dormant mourning process, or heightened the unspoken beauty of their lives with spouses and children. Several participants adapted the workshop to their own settings. For us, the gallery made poetry come alive. As we repeated it in a variety of settings, we began to experience poetry as an underutilized and undeveloped intelligence available to all (Gardner, 1983). We began to

inspect our teaching lives more closely for opportunities to enrich them through poetic means.

STUDENT CULTURE AS INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY: WORKING WITH ROOT METAPHORS

As we turn our attention toward the classroom itself, we encounter new difficulties. Unlike the OBTC, many of our students do not share our enthusiasm for poetry. For many of them, the classroom is an instrument for professional advancement, and poetry might as well be a foreign language. Yet as we turn attention to events in our classes, we discover poetry-like phenomena that might be advantageous.

As traditional social science becomes institutionalized in syllabi, textbooks, and classroom practices, important facets of student experience (i.e., distinctions in class, gender, geography, and culture) are ignored or trivialized (Gardner, 1983). To the extent that local student cultures appear homogenized, we miss an important potential advantage—the root metaphors (a device that is both cultural and poetic) that shape how students experience the class.

Root metaphors constitute student groups as interpretive communities. Following literary critics (Emig, 1977; Fish, 1980; Iser, 1978), we see the interpretive community as a group of individuals who bring to a text the same background and interpretations of events. To the extent that teachers and students interpret the class through different metaphors, and to the extent that these interpretations are tacit, we may be flying blind about whom we are teaching and how the material is being interpreted. The class may fall short of what it can be. In the following example, one of the authors discovers such a community of interpretation among his students, along with the root metaphor that guides their interpretation of organizational behavior:

Years of OD, qualitative scholarship, t-groups and experiential learning hadn't prepared me for this! First, it was disconcerting that these students seemed to be so smart, yet so quick to follow the herd. They also carried expectations for course grades equal to their IQ and SAT scores! And, the Wharton culture demanded a grade distribution that assured that many would be disappointed. This all provided opportunities for great dialogue, a sense of unlimited potential and students who would pull out all the stops to succeed. However, it also brought with it the challenges of defense systems that were as sophisticated as high tech-weapons—a sense of entitlement and a tendency to retreat into the safe confines of the mathematical and certain.

Upon arriving at the school, it felt like I was a purveyor of all things soft in the very hard world of Wharton. In the finance-driven world of the school, professors of organizational behavior, management, leadership and group dynamics had to deal with the tendency to see their discipline as soft, fuzzy and vague by colleagues and students alike. And if one chose not to follow the norm of tough grading distributions, there was a distinct possibility of being regarded as teaching a dreaded “gut course.” This was more than holding

onto legitimacy, as gut courses got the very least from students, while those that demanded performance for grades were rewarded with full commitment. Overall, there appeared to be a tendency to devalue the field, rooted in the culture of the school.

I tried to counter this prejudice in my classes. I lined up all the arguments I could think of to convince students that OB concepts were as essential to success as I thought. Research studies, experiential exercises, cases, group projects, service learning, peer feedback, etc. These interventions made good things happen in the classroom. Course evaluations were fine, but I couldn't shake the feeling that the moment students left my class, they would see it as an isolated experience divorced from what they viewed as their "real education."

My experience with the Poetry Gallery sensitized me to the language of the situation. At Wharton, soft was considered weak; hard was real and bottom line. Numbers were hard; people skills were soft. Debate was considered hard, listening was soft. Grades were hard and growing was soft. This was the irreducible symbolism of the place. I began to see limitation in my teaching as long as it was played on those terms. This in itself was evidence that I was starting to adopt the hard frame to view what I was doing. No matter how much I tried to bring in exciting pedagogy, and no matter how excited people got, there was this inaccessible interpretive ground that I could not overcome.

Gradually I began to shift my frame. The soft/hard dichotomy was the institutional poem of the place. It was how students and faculty alike aligned themselves with each other and with the institution. As long as I proposed the humanistic worldview of OB to the business ideology of the Wharton School, I would be swimming against the stream. What I needed was a different kind of poem, one that would present the field in a different way. I came to the formulation—hard language for soft realities. I began to add strength to my soft concepts and to present them with undertones of hard language. For example, rather than talk about the importance of developing relationships in which people feel valued, I suggested that many of my students would fail to reach their potential because their bosses would see them as "not team players" or worse, threatening. It helped that I had actual quotes from employers to this effect! I challenged the students to consider the dynamics present in their project teams, because the alternative was that others would have a competitive advantage that they lacked. I urged them to build their self-awareness, while taking issue with their cowardice in running from the truth. And so, what had been soft was now hard, and the hard language was now paradoxically creating softness in their manner and practice. As students brought their competitive selves to the values of OB, they were softened even as they kept score. In this process, the poetry of human experience was revealed in the conflict between the linear quest for performance and the love that fuels much of human existence but is often relegated to the back stage (Goffman). Paradoxically, love was now brought forward in a new container lined with steel and put up as another bottom line challenge, part of the tournament system the students had bought into from an economic paradigm.

—Michael London

This episode suggests to us a beguiling possibility. By taking our students seriously as the artists of their lives—actively engaged in imagining and structuring the symbolic space that confronts them—we might enter that

space. We might gain access to root metaphors and more effectively reframe our disciplines. In this way we might continue to be relevant to students facing a world radically different from the one we faced at their age.

THE POETRY OF SWOT ANALYSIS

As we read more closely the prose of our texts, we find that certain concepts can function as metaphors to help students simultaneously make sense of their own lives and succeed in the course. By interpreting the course's language as metaphor *and* concept, we might better connect student and material. One good way to do this in the strategy course is around the concept of the SWOT analysis.

Why do we study strategy when we are not going to run a company any time soon? This question is routinely asked by graduating seniors taking strategy as a capstone experience. The students are largely from working-class and middle-class families. At 22 years of age, they have no realistic notion of corporate success. The corporate world is a great unknown for them and getting an entry-level job is about as far as most of them can think. The conceptual material of the course—mission, goals and objectives, industry, and competitive analysis—seems a bit remote. The Poetry Gallery has taught me to understand the problem as a language gap between students' spontaneous language and that of the course. One of the authors was prompted to find a concept or two that might double as a metaphor that would help students make simultaneous sense of their situation (facing the job market for the first time) and conceptual material of the course.

The conceptual framework that made the most sense was the SWOT analysis. SWOT is used as a broad net to understand the strategic position of a company. A thorough analysis comprises elements from all aspects of the company—marketing, production, finance, and technology. What struck us about the SWOT analysis, however, was not its conceptual utility, but the connotation in the words. Each term carries emotional and conceptual overtones. The company trying to discern its future parallels, in some important ways, the concerns of a college senior trying to market himself or herself for the first time. However, SWOT as a *concept* is understood at the organizational level. Nowhere in the textbook does it talk about the usefulness of the concept for individuals, and my students do not make the connection.

I set up a conversation in which students could find a common container for all the angst and excitement of job hunting as they discussed the SWOT concept. We proceed through small-group discussions of personal strength vis-à-vis the job market to generate an extended metaphor that would at once give shape to student aspirations and shadow the course material on a personal level.

First, the class discusses what constitutes a marketable strength. Building on the work of John Crystal (1975), I make the point that we all have many

more strengths than we give ourselves credit for. I cite Crystal's (personal communication, 1977) quote that every individual has "800 marketable skills." This statement generates some disbelief and some interest. We ask students to suspend their skepticism and enter into the discussion in a spirit of exploration. Most do so. We tell them that such an exercise has been used by thousands of people changing jobs and careers and that it might prove useful to students seeking their first job.

After these issues are thoroughly talked out, members are asked to reflect on their connection to the materials of the course. We ask them *how are you like a corporation?* Specifically, I want to know about how the experience has triggered other ideas such as vision, mission, goal, and opportunity. The objective here is to demonstrate how their own experience is like that of the organizations we study. Through this exercise, *strength* becomes a metaphor powerful enough to generate many associations between their own situations and the material of the course.

The metaphors generated in the exercise tie students to the course in many ways, some subtle, some obvious. A powerful discussion of strengths triggers a connection to the cases we study and to the rest of the SWOT framework. Although we do not explicitly talk about weaknesses and threats at the personal level, students often make the connection on their own in case discussions. During lectures we often refer back to the exercise. We can talk about how weakness, opportunities, and threats can be identified and managed.

As we move through subsequent course material, the exercise connects students to other ideas—core competencies, competitive advantage, capacity building, sustainable advantage, and so on. As we work through these topics, we have a classroom primed to find parallels between themselves and the course material (Bill Van Buskirk).

Even within the strategy course, it seems that implicit poetry, understood as internal monologue or dialogue, can be evoked, amplified, made public, and activated. Here, generative metaphors work in two directions at once—creating containers for personal or emotional experience and connecting students to the intellectual material of the course. By creating a metaphor out of one concept, we amplify a center of liveliness in the students that has been there all along.

Using Specific Poems in the Management Class

In the previous sections we sketched areas where the professor might intervene to make the classroom more poetic and alive: professorial identity, the Poetry Gallery, the root metaphor of student groups, and unexplored evocative potentials in academic prose. In addition, we have experimented with using specific poems for specific classes. By stimulating a student's

connection to a given topic, a poem might elicit responses that would be kept under the vest in many classrooms. Many topics such as organizational change, ethics, diversity, stress, power and authority, gender, and personal values of all sorts stimulate considerable feeling in our students. At times these feelings prove too hot to handle. Groups may explode or shut down in response to them.

We have found that carefully selected poems create a middle ground where strong feelings can be contained and discussed openly. This accomplishes the goal of increasing the diversity and depth of voices included in the class while insulating the class against the polarizing effect of many issues.

Poems typically achieve this effect by embodying a voice that transcends stereotyped oppositions found in ideological debates. As people respond to the poem and not the issue, they find themselves in a gentler discourse. They are able to entertain and even to own a number of different points of view. The following poems and their glosses exemplify how this sometimes works.

From “On Firing a Salesman”

*It is like a little murder:
taking his life,
his reason for getting on the train,
his lunches at Christ Cella,
and his meetings in warm and sunny places
where they all gather
these smiling men,
in sherbet slacks and blue blazers,
and talk about business
but never about prices,
never breaking that law
about the prices they charge.*

—James Autry

The topic for the day was stress. The scene was an evening management course with students who had been working all day and were now unwinding in anticipation of class. How to bring the topic to life? I could do a relaxation exercise, but then we would all be so relaxed, the mood would be all wrong to explore stress. I could do a pop quiz, but then the students might be so stressed and concerned with evaluation that that content would overwhelm process to the point of making it irrelevant. So how to induce stress with enough distance to thoughtfully consider it?

I began class with Autry’s “On Firing a Salesman.” I asked the students to consider all of the underlying stressors in the poem that were alive in their own working environment. The students responded to the tension and emotion of the poem. Some related to being the one who has to deliver bad news to good people. Others related to the harshness of corporate life, and ripples

of reaction to it, its effects on both the main players and those on the sidelines. This led to a heartfelt exploration of the challenges of maintaining our humanity while being regarded as *human resources* and about the kind of work relationships we preferred. We got into both the subtle stressors that we live with everyday and those of a more catastrophic nature. We talked about ways we cope, what happens when we cannot, and the buffers that get us through.

The power of the experience is that it was generated from the students' own lives. And the personal nature of the discussion was tempered by the distance the poem allowed. It began with someone else's story, but it soon struck close to home. Even those who had never fired someone or been fired could at least imagine what it was like and had a stake in exploration (Michael London).

In Response to Executive Order 9066:

*All Americans of Japanese Descent
Must Report to Relocation Centers*

Dear Sirs:

*Of course I'll come. I've packed my galoshes
and three packets of tomato seeds. Denise calls them
love apples. My father says where we're going
they won't grow.*

*I am a fourteen-year-old girl with bad spelling
and a messy room. If it helps any, I will tell you
I have always felt funny using chopsticks
and my favorite food is hot dogs.
My best friend is a white girl named Denise—
we look at boys together. She sat in front of me
all through grade school because of our names:
O'Connor, Ozawa. I know the back of Denise's head very well.*

*I tell her she's going bald. She tells me I copy on tests.
We're best friends.*

*I saw Denise today in Geography class.
She was sitting on the other side of the room.
"You're trying to start a war," she said "giving secrets
away to the Enemy. Why can't you keep your big
mouth shut?"*

*I didn't know what to say.
I gave her a packet of tomato seeds
and asked her to plant them for me, told her
when the first tomato ripened
she'd miss me.*

—Dwight Okita

The topic for the day was diversity in a class of undergraduates. In an era in which there is great pressure to appear open and enlightened, political correctness norms have our students in a straight jacket of equal parts civility and numbness. Playing the race card is considered political suicide, so how will we bring depth to the discussion without overwhelming people? How can we have a successful discussion about race—one that seems to matter, that allows us to really consider the human condition?

This exploration into diversity was helped by a reading of Okita's poem, "In Response to Executive Order 9066." Many feelings were aroused in class. Some related to the harshness of prejudice toward the 14-year-old girl and that which caused it. Others responded to the historical context and the lack of progress made since it was written. Still others had compassion for Denise who might eventually realize what she had lost. We talked of how we respond to prejudice and stereotyping in our own lives and the emotional maturity that the victim in the poem displayed toward her accuser. How circumstances place great stress on our relationships and how much work it is to maintain them. We talked about the meaning of friendship and how we respond when our friends let us down. And, we were able to raise the question, "How far have we really come?" This led to a thoughtful exploration of the way diversity plays out in the student body, on campus, in project teams, in the lunch room, and so on. We talked about the hopes, fears, successes, and failures of diversity in modern society. The poem was the catalyst, the way in, the open door. Again, it triggered emotion, but with enough distance that people could step in at their own speed. As more joined in, the discussion developed its own flow and it became strangely safer and more risky by the moment. Here the poem set the mood and created the context for risk, exploration, and connection (Michael London).

Summary and Testament

*I dwell in possibility—
A fairer house than prose*

—Emily Dickinson

This journey has taken us over a great deal of ground. We began by pretty much accepting the inevitability of the split between our poetic and our professorial selves. However, as we continued our conversations about this dual life, we began to feel less and less sanguine about our ability to continue. It seemed that we were sapping our energy and shortchanging our students by blindly following a path that had been charted for us by others. Before we realized it, we were on a kind of quest. We found inspiration in colleagues who, like us, longed to find a place in their profession for their more artistic selves. We found intellectual orientation to the problem through a literature review, and we gradually learned some lessons in how to invite

the muse into the classroom. The lessons of our quest have occurred on two levels. We have learned a lot about how to integrate poetry and poetic insights into the class, and we have changed considerably at the level of professional identity. In this final section we sketch the major lessons and new orientations we have taken from our journey.

At the level of pedagogy, we have come to respect the innate poetry that students and professors carry throughout their daily lives. We have come to see it as our most powerful ally. Our first inkling of this came in the Poetry Gallery as our professional colleagues entered into the spirit of the workshop with great depth and elan. Feared resistance did not materialize. We began to understand the weakness of poetry less in terms of an ingrained reticence, and more a function of local cultural setting. By changing the setting, we could change the experience. Second, as we reflect on the uses of this implicit poetic intelligence, we begin to see how it is used in the classroom. Poetic devices such as root metaphor organize perceptions and valuations of our courses before we step into the room. By taking direction from a class's root metaphor, we can design an experience to include its tacit poetry. Third, with a little imagination, we see that the language of our field is not always as prosaic as it seems. Simple words such as strength, weakness, vision, and culture can serve as doorways for student metaphors to enter the room in vigorous ways. We have found this to be true in strategy courses and organizational behavior. Fourth, by focusing the experience of the Poetry Gallery, we can often use specific poems to elicit perceptions and feelings that students would otherwise hold close to the vest. The quality of teaching goes up exponentially when we are aware of our students' real orientation to what they are studying. Fifth, an involvement in poetic composition can be a cauldron in which the changes taking place in the professor's life can find form and influence his or her practice. New poems shift the unspoken balance of emotions, compromises, goals, and visions that we all carry with us. Social scientists such as Laurel Richardson and poets such as John Berryman have said that poets write themselves into the world and in the process become new men and women. Thus, not all the action in this arena occurs in public. The private transformation of vision and possibility is part and parcel of our quest.

Finally, as a result of this inquiry, we have been changed in many ways. Change has occurred not only at the level of classroom strategy, but at the level of professional identity. We have changed in terms of what we are willing to try and the risks we are willing to run. We see the stakes differently than we did at the beginning of our conversation. As a result, we end with a kind of testament or manifesto—our orientation to poetry and pedagogy as it exists today.

We find, in these explorations of poetry and pedagogy, a possibility that we might reach our students with more of ourselves—more vigor, more artistry, more spirit. Certainly, as instructors we face many obstacles in making

our classroom come to life; and these challenges are easy to shrink from. Indeed, there are few extrinsic rewards for all the extra effort. Our inspiration must be intrinsic, based on our own love of our academic field, our joy in connecting with students, and our emerging belief in what truly has value in our work. Otherwise, it is all too easy to take the ball out of our own hands and to view the status quo as inevitable, the material as given, the students as grade obsessed, ourselves as unchanging and constrained.

For us, the shift to a more poetry-centered pedagogy represents a transformation of professional identity. We ask ourselves, What parts of us are truly engaged in our teaching? Are we just covering material or are we helping students to take the next important step in their lives? Do we want them to adopt our point of view or to have an experience of their own minds? Are students and professors on a common journey? Or are we merely dispensing pearls from on high? For all the scientific trappings of our field, we have been uninformed by data on how our students interpret the course against the poetic backdrop of their dreams, aspirations, and longings. Thus, our connection to them is more obfuscated than it needs to be. Moreover, we are often just as confused about our lives as they are about theirs. As poets we wonder: Can we use this confusion to join them? And if so, what is the bridge? For us, poetry is the equalizer, an emotional bridge across which compassion, vulnerability, and power can flow.

Poetry in its grandest sense challenges us to expand our notions of what the classroom is all about. It challenges us to acknowledge and take seriously the hidden world inside all of us, a repository of great vitality. The stakes are high. Even on days when students sit in silence, there is energy to be tapped beyond the pitch and catch of presenting material, if only we can get beyond the hidden protections of our role. Students, too, have an orientation to class material that often stays private. There are many reasons for this: institutional pressures, the pervasive face work of the classroom, the fear of what might happen if we let go of traditional pedagogy. As a result, there is often a dullness to management language that obscures the great dramas of organizational life. Both students and teachers lose the counterintuitive richness that we all bring to everything we study. In the end, we risk losing touch with the deep reality of the teaching moment.

These explorations have convinced us that a deeper attention to language, especially to its poetic dimensions, can support a pedagogy that elicits an unsuspected richness of thought, feeling, orientation, and challenge. Because these energies are held in language, they can, if the conditions are right, become available to the public discourse. If we are artful in how we choose settings and how we structure experiences, our classes might themselves become a kind of poem that invites students into a more lyrical experience on a more intimate and personal level. Such a poem might be a bridge that allows that which is tacit and embedded to cross over and provide a fresh

outlook. In this way students themselves might bring their out-of-the-box experience to the box itself, enlivening both themselves and the course.

As we pursue this emerging vision, we have become emboldened to claim the poetic license to bring the intimate, the sacred, and the personal into the classroom. We learn from our best poets who speak of the power of poetry to “stop a tank,” to “refresh the language” (cf. Stevens, 1997), and to make the world whole.¹ We summon our resolve to compete for the center of our students’ attention—their depth, their creativity, and stillness of mind. In this pursuit we make use of whatever comes to hand—poems, songs, metaphors, images, rhetorical strategies, jokes, drama, and stories of all kinds. These novel pedagogical tools inform our role as social architects of a classroom that we now conceive as a kind of container for holding new possibilities for both professor and student. We seek to turn down the volume on the habitual mind chatter that makes our students seem incapable of vigorous connections to our field. We seek to strike a spark that lies just beneath the surface, a spark that can suddenly and unexpectedly explode when students find a voice amidst the content of the course. In these moments, it is all clearly worthwhile; and we, as professors, become catalysts for knowledge, spirit, intimacy, and creativity. We seek to learn from these moments, evanescent as they are. We are challenged to think more deeply and personally about what we do and to work toward a more elegant integration of theory, voice, and lived experience.

Note

1. See “Can a Poem Stop a Tank? Bei Ling and Seamus Heaney in the Conversation Beijing Tried to Suppress” in *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, December 31, 2000.

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