

Story and Healing in Action: New Methods for Fostering Heart-to-Heart Dialogue about Race

By Rachel E. Saury & John Alexander

I. Introduction: Breaking New Ground

At the National Association for Multicultural Education conference held in Washington, D.C., in October, 2002, Elizabeth Thompson and Rachel Saury presented methods used in a class called "Story and Healing" that Rachel co-teaches at the University of Virginia with her colleague, John Alexander (<http://www.faculty.virginia.edu/storyandhealing/>).¹

The positive feedback we received compelled us to share more widely what we are doing as part of the ongoing process of discovery as we develop this very unusual, dynamic, and challenging course. Our methods enable us to enter a discussion of the ills of white privilege and the epidemic of racism through the "back door." First, we ask students to contemplate transpersonal experiences such as healing and suffering, second, we provide them with tools to observe and analyze self and other, third, we ask them to apply these principles and methods to the study of a culture that is neutral to them — Ukraine, once part of the former Soviet Union — and fourth, we ask them to contemplate the question of how narrative heals. Only then do we ease them into the quagmire of race.

The content and methods of this course, merging perspectives in the humanities with methods and theories from various branches of clinical psychology, are beginning to be discussed around the country in response to 9/11, and as such are breaking new ground.²

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A growing awareness of the reverberating effects of trauma both individually and socially coupled with the pressing need to avert more violence in whatever form, is forcing many to seek solutions in heretofore unusual partnerships. We believe we are creating a new, interdisciplinary approach to multicultural awareness which addresses the intergenerational trauma of ethnic genocide, racism, homophobia, sexism, and other biases which are based on a social devaluation and oppression of others work.³

We bring a discussion of white privilege out of a strictly sociological or political perspective to one that can be described as transcendental, or embracing how various disciplines — folklore, anthropology, history, religion, neuropsychology, neurophysiology, etc. — can bring us to a core dialogue about the nature of human suffering and how that suffering often manifests in subtle and overt acts of violence against self and other. We wish to specifically cultivate the ability to listen to and parse stories — our own and others' — as a non-judgmental, open-hearted witness. We feel multicultural education should, at its foundation, have as a goal healing the pain *all* Americans have around the issue of race.

Developing the skills described above are essential in overcoming the natural processes of resistance, anger, and guilt which arise in racial identity awareness and are based upon a philosophy that we need to support all voices at all stages of the process in order for social transformation to occur.⁴ To this end, we use social science fieldwork methods, journaling, various art projects, meditation, and storytelling to enable students to relate to the narratives of trauma from this often new and eye-opening perspective.

The results of our methods and materials have been galvanizing and made us feel we are onto something very important. Students report that the class

changed their lives, changed their views on interracial tensions and prejudices, and taught them a lot about themselves and the world. In our view, they have become more aware world citizens who are more likely as they go about life to question the dominant culture, if they are white, or if they are a person of color, to have a new and potentially healing perspective on the injustices they have experienced or may yet experience in their lifetimes.

II. The Self as Central: History and Background of the Course

Since our methods and theories are rooted in the vital importance of placing the self at the center of any scholarly inquiry and because the course deals with identity formation, we will begin by introducing ourselves. We are both white and of Western European ancestry. John grew up in Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee, and likes to observe that if there are degrees of sin in the arena of racism, he carries the legacies of the hottest of those degrees. His solidly middle class family gave John the security to explore these themes — a benefit of privilege. He has sustained interest in understanding contemporary culture by seeing all facets of it as having equally valid, alternative points of view. This grew naturally from his undergraduate study at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he majored in cultural and intellectual history and anthropology with a focus on popular culture. In graduate school, he studied contemporary drama, in particular Revolutionary Black Theater.

In a related development, he has sought to mature emotionally and spiritually by reflecting honestly and objectively on himself and his surroundings. Though he grew up in a conventional suburban Presbyterian Church, in his adult years,

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he has become active in Unitarian Universalism as well as studying the spiritual practices of Native Americans and alternative practitioners from animal communicators to such approaches as indigenous healers and shamanism.

As he has matured, he has been pleased to be able to serve in a role as a mediator and facilitator in his home church, thus leading the congregation to move through issues that might otherwise have caused the community to factionalize or fragment. These skills and experiences become a vital part of his approach to the work of this course.

Rachel moved around the United States due to her father's frequent changes of employment. Her family struggled to maintain a middle class lifestyle. Rachel became interested in Russian culture as a sophomore in high school and subsequently focused on that topic for the next 15 years, eventually self-designing a B.A. in Russian Studies at Trinity College, getting an M.A. in Soviet Studies, and then a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures with a major in folklore and a minor in anthropology at the University of Virginia. Her in-depth study of Russia provided a broad, interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture.

"Story and Healing" is taught once a year during Spring Semester out of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. Rachel taught the course for one year on her own and then teamed up with John in 1998 after talking for several years about collaborating on a course which would challenge students' reliance on the rational modes of information processing and learning that are dominant in western culture. The topic of story and healing seemed to lend itself nicely to this goal.

We also wanted to open students up to the perspectives and ways of knowing of indigenous cultures around the world in which the cognitive and rational are blended seamlessly with the intuitive and experiential. Rachel's many years' practice of yoga and meditation, six years of Jungian psychoanalysis and three years studying closely with the Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo, the Chief of the Green Mountain Ani-Yunwiwa, a branch of the Cherokee, and holder of the ancestral spiritual teachings of her clan, had been an important part of her intellectual and emotional development. She wanted to bring the teaching and learning methods used by Dhyani into the academic setting.

John's experiences of a vision quest under the guidance of Donovan Thesnega of the Seven Oaks Pathworks Center as well as years of talk therapy and workshops in alternative approaches, years of mediation and other spiritual practices have similarly convinced him of the need to present these more experiential and integrated approaches in an academic setting.

Our personal experiences with psychotherapy, dream work, hypnotherapy, meditation, art, shamanic journeying, vision quests, play therapies, extended retreats, and ritual celebrations led us to a shared vision that non-rational modes of knowing are rich and untapped resources in traditional educational models in the West and are sorely needed to break the bonds of interracial, inter-ethnic, and religious conflict and discord.

We believe from our own lives that these experiences lead to a greater awareness of the relative and changing nature of identity and thus to a development of the ability to listen openly and non-judgmentally to the sometimes difficult stories of others. Inspired by the well-known video, *The Color of Fear*, and due to John's background in African-American literatures, we decided to use the sharing of stories about experiences of racism in the class as a way for students to see story and healing *in action*. In this way, we dove into this new way of teaching and learning, hoping to forge an experience which would be intellectually stimulating to and personally meaningful, if not life-changing, for our students.

III. The Back Door: Theoretical Content and Methods

We take a back door approach when moving students into the difficult territory of racism, rather than plunging headlong into confronting them with the ills of white privilege and the epidemic of racism which is alive and well today.

Only after we have given them various tools of analysis and teaching on Ukrainian and Russian folk texts do we ease them into the quagmire of racism. To extend this metaphor, we teach them that when entering the quicksand, it is best to remain calm, to objectively observe the world around them and to acknowledge our collective dependence on each other.

Most undergraduates at the University of Virginia come from upper middle

to upper class families, no matter what their racial or ethnic background. Surrounded by the material comforts of American culture, most are unaccustomed to critically analyzing it. They usually assume that their televisions, email, music, family patterns, workplaces, and other cultural forms are common or shared across cultures or, more bluntly are the "right" way of being.

They may have encountered some diversity in religion and perhaps in racial and ethnic identity in their schools and churches, if they are lucky. Nonetheless, unless they are a person of color or, an immigrant or a heritage American who has gone through the "contact" and "immersion" phase in their identity development and/or the rare student of any background who has had an experience of seeing a friend discriminated against because of race or lived or traveled extensively outside the U.S., rarely has this ethnocentric view of reality been challenged.

Nor have they been forced to apply the "objective" scrutiny to American culture that they may have applied to other cultures in other courses. While we have found this crop of students to have been given large doses of African-American history and to have been exposed through the media to various black, Latino and even Asian leaders, from politicians to athletes to music and TV stars, many — including even students of color — cling to the idea that to be color blind is to be non-racist and/or, particularly if they are white, believe that those who say they have been the brunt of racist experiences are exaggerating.

We start the semester with the heuristic queries: What is healing? What is suffering? These questions are easily graspable by undergraduates and transcend the boundaries of academic disciplines and religious affiliation. All humans, no matter what their ancestral origins, religion, nation, or gender must grapple on one level or another with them either directly or indirectly. No matter what type of intra- or interpersonal conflict we are talking about — whether a conflict with our inner self-manifesting in a neurotic pattern, an ongoing fight with a roommate, or the collective sickness of racism — at the root of all of it is suffering. When we talk about suffering and healing, therefore, we allow students to tap into a shared experience of life.

Anyone who has suffered *can* be

moved by the suffering of another if they have grasped the transpersonal nature of experience. Through the very open-ended and inclusive nature of these questions, students dive headlong beneath the cognitive where they might otherwise get mired in intellectual or theoretical questions engaging their minds but not their hearts. We want them to begin first to *feel*, then to think. Stuck only in the mind, we can easily lose sight of our natural capacity for empathy. Empathy, in our view, is one key to interracial healing.

We know from our own life experiences that the fires of compassion are stoked through the skills of observation of self and other. Therefore, we incorporate several methods aimed at developing what is called in psychoanalytical theory the “observing ego” and in social science fieldwork methods, the “participant observer”. From the beginning of the course, students are given a weekly journal topic in which they are asked to explore an issue of personal relevance connected to the course material.

For instance, when studying folktales, they are asked to think of a recent dream and note if it has similar elements or qualities. We also introduce various activities honing their skills of observation. For example, a chair is put on a table in the middle of the group, and they are asked to simply describe it. Students invariably start with the blunt, “It’s a chair!” looking at us as if we are crazy. We then lead them into close observation: what is the texture, shape, size, color? What materials is it made out of? How do you think it was made? What do you think the person who made it was like? What kind of culture do you think would produce such an object? Eventually, they discover that a chair is *not* just a chair, but is an extraordinarily complex synergy of elements, physical and non-physical.

At the same time, students are learning to observe the arising phenomenon of body, breath and mind through meditation by means of a very simple meditation practice common to several Buddhist traditions in Asia. The meditator focuses on the breath flowing in and out of the nose or on the rising and falling of the chest. Then, as thoughts arise, the moderator silently labels them in her mind, “thinking, thinking” and returns her attention to the breath. As this skill of entrainment to the breath grows, other labels are added: “hearing” for sound, “feeling” for sensations in the

body, “sensing” for vague intuitive impulses, and various labels for emotions: “judging,” “anger”, “giddy”, “joy”, etc.

Students quickly realize that the mind literally has a “mind of its own”! More importantly, they begin to realize that thoughts, emotions, sensations, and other inner and outer stimuli constantly flow through but are not *who* they are. This awareness enables them to step more squarely into a transpersonal view of reality from which they are not as likely to act reactively from out of the mind’s insistent noise. One student observed in a paper last spring:

Is it possible for one to have total control over his/her own mind? If this question were asked to the members of Slavic Folklore 204 before we even set foot into the classroom, I can guarantee that myself, and many of my peers would answer foolishly and claim that we all have the ultimate power over our own minds. But on the first day of class we put our minds to a little test that would inevitably answer that question. We were asked to meditate by closing our eyes and focus on our breath and eventually we were guided though the path of consciousness. It sounds easy, but many of us discovered quite quickly into the process, that clearing the mind is a very challenging thing to do if not nearly impossible.

This is a critical first step towards the development of the dispassionate observing ego.

At this point, we step into the process of learning about one of the most powerful tools part of human beings’ ancestral legacy: story. Lawrence E. Sullivan states in an interview by *Parabola Magazine* [vol. 18, no. 1] which we use as one of the seminal texts of the course:

So much of the creativity of a culture is a response to the reality of sickness, whether this be in the realm of oral tradition, written literature, music, dance, visual art, or the festival mobilization of communities. Healing always points toward a renewal of creative powers, toward a condition that is vital, strong and whole, as befits a creative beginning. Art embodies and expresses these creative virtues, which link art inextricably to healing.

Folktales, epics, film, novels, memoir, comic strips, urban legends, and the myriad other narrative forms produced by human beings are creative products pointing towards images of wholeness, which, according to Sullivan, “are primarily images of time which is [sic] no longer available, which can only be described in mythic terms.”

In order to understand how stories function as images of wholeness in the individual and collective psyche, we must understand the psychology of identity formation. At this point, we introduce Beverly Tatum’s first seven chapters in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* while we also offer the students various means to explore their own identity formation. They do so through journal explorations on how their family’s religious, ethnic, racial, economic, or other markers have formed their idea of who they are.

We also have them at certain key points throughout the semester decorate a white gift bag asking them to express several themes in non-rational ways. First, what face they present to the outer world, then who they are “inside,” then what their strengths are in the face of trauma and lastly, how they have changed in their self-identity in the course and what they will carry with them out into the world. With this experience, they peer behind the façade of surface appearances and delve into the level of the unconscious whose language is inherently symbolic. Art projects engage the students’ imaginations — a capacity central to storytelling and an integral partner to the rational skills of intellectual analysis. Without imagination, Galileo would never have “discovered” that the earth revolves around the sun; Einstein would never have developed his theory of relativity.

While these experiential and self-exploratory activities are going on, we are moving through the intellectual material in the course. First, we ask students to look at the oral narratives of the Ukrainians and Russians — folktales and heroic epic — as they start to analyze the question “How do stories heal?” They learn how to make genre distinctions through an analysis of form and content as a folklorist would. Folktales are prose. Their storyline generally follows a certain set of patterns which a well-known literary scholar named Vladimir Propp outlined in the 1950s.⁵

The famous Harvard scholar, Albert

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Lord, showed that oral epics and Homeric epics also have common elements and structure. Folktales deal with unconscious material — archetypes, unexpressed neuroses and complexes, the dream world, magic, and ritual forms, while epic deals with social and historical reality, particularly in the wake of war or death. The book *And the Blind Shall Sing*, by Natalie Kononenko,⁷ an in-depth ethnography of the minstrel tradition in Ukraine from its inception to the 20th century, provides the cultural context in which epics and folktales arose and flourished. With the ability to analyze and make generalizations about culture out of readings of texts, students build cognitive skills.

We then ask them to go a little deeper so they have both intellectual and personal connections to these texts. They compare Russian folktales to the very popular movie, *The Matrix* which lends itself easily to Proppian and psychoanalytical analyses. As a point of cross-cultural comparison to heroic epic, we have them watch *Saving Private Ryan*. While having students elucidate the structure and themes of these films to epic and folktales, we also ask them why these films would be important to American cultural identity.

In this way, they make an empathic and intellectual leap to understanding how seemingly archaic texts — folktale and epic — would have been important to the 19th century peasant in Russia or Ukraine. This opens the container to transcendental awareness and leads us directly into the heuristic query, “What is the nature and impact of war and violence on the psyche? What conscious or unconscious forces would seek expression in the face of defeat in war, slavery, or ethnic genocide?”

At this point, about halfway through the course, they have all the tools needed to enter the difficult territory of racism and to begin to understand the inherent power in story making.

IV. Story and Healing in Action: Theories and Methods

Violence is a terrible thing. Very few of us these days would disagree with that statement even though some might add that, in some cases, violence is a “necessary evil.” At this point in the course, students are exposed to the theories of Judith Lewis Herman and others

on the history of the study, causes, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁸

PTSD is a cluster of symptoms resulting from trauma. Herman defines trauma as occurring when action is to no avail — neither resistance nor escape is possible. As a result, profound and lasting changes often are made in physiological arousal, emotion, and memory, resulting in the common complex of symptoms called PTSD identified now in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* of the American Psychological Association.

These symptoms include, among others, a state of hyper arousal in which there is no baseline state of calm or comfort. A person might have difficulty falling asleep or may be easily roused. They may have chronic nightmares or an overdeveloped startle reflex. They may be chronically irritable, exhibit explosive anger, and/or have chronic anxiety. They may be hyper-sensitized to any pain stimulus.

Often sufferers of PTSD have problems with depression, alcoholism, or other addictions. Their memories of the event may be so deeply suppressed that the person may have no actual memory of the trauma even though they might have all the symptoms. Or they might begin to have intrusive, fragmented memories which lack a verbal narrative or images without a context. The event or events may be relived in dreams and in actions in the world, in which certain situations are projected outward. Or they may live for years with no memories and then suddenly have overpowering and intrusive flashbacks that are easily triggered by comparatively benign, unrelated events.

During these lectures, students see various photographic images and scenes from movies which exemplify conditions which might cause PTSD, for example, the famous image of the little Vietnamese girl running naked and screaming out of the smoke and flames behind her. At this point, we introduce Patricia Neuman-Thoth's theories of what she calls “Post-traumatic slavery disorder.” Starting with a scene from Stephen Spielberg's movie *Amistad* showing the brutality of the slave ships, we ask students to contemplate what would have happened to the bodies, minds and spirits of the men, women and children on those ships.

It would be highly likely that many would have developed PTSD. Through-

out the rest of their lives from that moment on, they and their progeny would have been subjected to various brutalities and indignities without the possibility of escape. Presuming that the neurological, physiological and psychological functioning of the bodies and minds of the Africans transported from Africa would have been inexorably altered and left untreated, according to Neuman-Thoth, those distortions in functioning both physiologically and psychologically would then have been passed down generation after generation.⁹

She provided an example of a historically African-American community where she and a group of colleagues in a community-based clinical practice were called in to treat a rampant community-wide incest epidemic. Almost every family had a long history of incest. Finally, upon looking into the history of the community, the clinicians and researchers learned that it was geographically located where in the 18th and 19th centuries there had been several plantations where enslaved Africans and their children were bred for sale after it became illegal to bring slaves over by ship. The families in this community were their direct descendants.

She described the abuses perpetrated on the prisoners — of mothers forced to copulate with sons, sisters with brothers, cousins with cousins. She described how a bag would be put over the heads of close kin to desensitize them to their “partner” and downplay affinal connections. Newman Thoth then challenged the young black people in the audience to stop using the word, “motherfucker” — a common descriptive expletive with both positive and negative connotations. She noted how the very use of the word psychically links them to the abuses perpetrated on the African and African-American people over two centuries ago and called upon them to commit to becoming more aware of the intergenerational influences passed down in their communities and families from the practices of slavery.

In the meantime, students have been required to finish Tatum and have also watched *The Color of Fear* in which nine men — 3 Asians, 2 blacks, 2 Hispanics, and 2 whites — engage in an intensive 4-day conversation about their personal experiences with race. Students are also continuing to meditate and are beginning to work on a fieldwork collection project in which they are asked to collect stories from a selected group

about their experiences in potentially traumatic situations (Holocaust survivors, Vietnam Vets, etc.).

In addition, at this point in the semester we have the class view and discuss the gripping underground film, *Slam*, about a young black poet and rap artist who is entrapped in a marijuana bust and is facing time in prison. Students also listen to and analyze underground hip hop lyrics from a variety of artists from the point of view of how the art form would be an expression of intergenerational and current trauma. Due to their collective openness to the topics at this point in the semester, the ensuing analysis is generally rich and revealing.

Journal topics are also now asking them to engage in questions about their experiences with racism and their reactions to the concept of white privilege. Due to the feeling of community and trust which has been developed throughout the semester through the journals, experiential activities and large and small group discussions, students are then encouraged to not only react to the reading and film, but if they feel comfortable, to share their own stories. An often initially cautious, but no less heart-felt discussion ensues. We have entered the difficult territory of racism and have opened the doors to self-exploration. At this point, we hope the magic will take hold and they will start to see story and healing *in action*.

V. Group Mind: Results

As we have taught this course over a period of five years, we have grown slowly into these methods and perspectives, pushing our own learning edge and issues with race, class and other “isms.” The connections between the intellectual and experiential content have been a work in progress as we have expanded the boundaries of the course beyond traditional disciplinary perspectives in the humanities to embrace the personal. We have struggled with how to strike the balance between both. For instance, the last time the course was taught in Spring 2002, was the first time we incorporated meditation. We decided to do fewer straight lectures and hoped that various processes and activities, including meditation, would lead students to make the right connections. We found we need to bring back the lectures — to make the intellectual connections more

overt and then allow students to experiment within the container of the experiential and scholarly activities.

We have struggled with how to foreground the content of the course focused on internal, symbolic, and unconscious processes as we simultaneously move into the external manifestations of race. We have also noticed how the personality of each class determines how the methods will play out. The last time the course was taught, the class as a whole was introverted. As a result, discussion was dominated by several very extroverted, vocal white members whose views were very much against the concepts of white privilege posed by Tatum. We often left class shaking our heads and felt frustrated with the seemingly slow progress and our inability to draw others out, but then discovered in the evaluations that students’ experience of the discussion and their own breakthroughs were quite the opposite of what appeared on the surface.

They felt the conversations had been lively, eye opening and comfortable, and their ideas about race had changed dramatically. In the iteration of the course previous to the last one, we had a very strong-minded and vocal group of African-American women who told their own stories. We also had several whites who were willing to take personal risks and talk about their own fears and frustrations about race. At the end of that class, both whites and people of color expressed that it was the first time in their entire education they had felt it was safe to speak about race “heart to heart,” beneath the level of politics and polemics. All along the way, our students have given us encouragement, hope and courage. They have written in their evaluations much that is positive about all components. On meditation, they wrote:

“Meditation gave me a clearer perspective than normal.”

“Meditation was really hard for me and showed me that I need to spend more time reflecting on myself.”

“Meditation made me be able to keep things in perspective easier.”

“Meditation forced me to become more aware of my thoughts and feelings.”

On the atmosphere of trust in the class:

“I think the conversations were very open for anyone to speak their mind.”

“There was an unspoken code of trust between us.”

“I developed trust and respect for everyone.”

“Yes, I felt comfortable because others were doing it, so it was easy.”

On racism, they wrote:

“I learned that racism is a serious problem and it’s my problem just as much as everyone else’s. That people are unique and suffer in different ways — stories are a process of healing.”

“I think it [worked well to blend Slavic, African-American and Native American materials] because you are not attacking one group — you are just exploring how different all people are, and then you start examining. I never realized how much race makes you who you are. I learned how history is passed down through generations. I was one of those people that got all mad that an African American would bring up slavery today as if it affected their life and now I know it does and a little bit about how.”

“I learned from class discussions how much I really don’t know what it is like to be black, also how much being African-American plays in someone’s everyday life, that as a white person living in America I have been given privileges without being conscious of receiving them. I am more aware now of white privilege. I realize I need to make a conscious effort to not be a passive racist.”

“This class has lessened my prejudices.”

“For as open as I thought my family was and as knowledgeable about our background and others, I found there is still so much I don’t know.”

From these and other comments, it appears that our methods are hitting home — to that place between the mind and heart where true empathy lies.

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VI. *The Next Steps:* *Looking towards the Future*

This course is always very oriented towards the future, and many of the questions and challenges after our NAME presentation pointed in possible and important new directions. One question was how this course specifically supports students of color as they grapple with the impact of racism on their lives.

Acknowledging that our own racial and ethnic backgrounds do not provide us with an intimate personal experience of racism, we invited Mildred Best, Associate Director of Chaplaincy Services and Chaplaincy Education at the University of Virginia Hospital who is African American and Yitna Firdiyewek, a Lecturer in the Curry School of Education, who is Ethiopian to join our teaching team.

The idea of expanding the team to more than the two instructors also grew out of a clinical method called Therapeutic Spiral Method which emphasizes the importance of ample support for team members and participants in the group treatment of trauma.¹⁰ Roles can then be shared and swapped. With two white and two black team members, students can also see modeled many different perspectives within a culturally diverse collaboration.

Particularly given how much we ourselves have learned from the Native peoples which we have brought directly into this course, we also want to build in more of the experiences and traumas of the indigenous peoples of this nation and around the world, as we understand they are the still very invisible victims of ancestral and ongoing policies of ethnic genocide. In addition, we plan to dissolve even further the disciplinary boundaries that we each began with. As an example, in our first offering of the course, we shared a lecture where we each outlined our disciplinary departure points — in John's case, literary studies, and in Rachel's case, folklore.

In that lecture, we each, literally occupied a board where we pointed to and answered the definition or approach the other articulated. In the next iteration we share the board and speak not from the point of view of a given disciplinary boundary, but more holistically and, more grandly, more synergistically from the point of view of the entire overarching themes of the course: trauma, reality construction, healing, and identity. We plan to explore the use of art therapy methods

further, particularly those used in Therapeutic Spiral work.

At the NAME conference, we were also challenged as to what motivation students are given to put their new awareness to work in service of the cause of social justice. Rachel's response at the time was that the course very much reflected her own process — the need to draw inward and build internal resources before going back out into the world to do good works. We do see the value of encouraging students to continue their self-reflection, cultural critique, and engagement with all the tools and ideas they are given.

We also understand that there is inherent value in planting seeds which will later develop in ways now invisible, but no less powerful. Therefore, our immediate goal is simply to stoke the fires of awareness and insight, knowing that knowledge is power and that out of knowledge grows a conviction to change the world.

In the end, the students' experiences speak clearly that what we are doing has inherent value. Students report that the class changed their lives, changed their views on interracial tensions and prejudices, and taught them a lot about themselves and the world. In our view, they have become more aware world citizens who are more likely as they go about life to question the dominant culture, if they are white, or if they are a person of color, to have a new and potentially healing perspective on the injustices they have experienced or may yet experience in their lifetimes.

We believe that our course will continue to cultivate students who will become social activists in the area of racial and other justice movements, as has Rachel's co-presenter, Elizabeth, who now teaches in the middle school level and is seeking to find ways to bring our methods into her own classroom in hopes of enlightening her own young charges. She, and others, have been our inspiration to forge ahead.

Notes

¹ Elizabeth served as a TA for the course in Spring, 2002.

² Rachel recently attended an 8-day workshop called Action Against Trauma sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Therapeutic Spiral International, an organization consisting of professionals in clinical psychology who use unique

experiential methods to treat post-traumatic stress disorder. The goal of the workshop was to merge academic and clinical perspectives and practices which participants could then bring to their workplaces and community organization to "inoculate" against and treat trauma. During that same week, there was an announcement circulated by email of a conference to be hosted in December in Los Angeles called Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Approaches to Trauma's Effects, which described its purpose as "offer[ing] a novel way to examine trauma and its effects on society. The three-day symposium features leading scholars and researchers who will explore, discuss, debate, and analyze the concept of trauma from different disciplinary perspectives."

³ Given that the western world has historically labeled races other than white as it is socially defined as "no better than animals," we want to note here that we should also be concerned with the oppression of animals as part of the category of those abused based upon biological and/or genetic markers. How a culture treats animals often reflects how humans labeled as "different" or "other" will also be treated.

⁴See Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* New York: Basic Books, 1997, for a discussion about the stages of awareness. Rachel recently talked to an old friend from college whom she had not seen over 20 years. They reminisced about a forum sponsored at their *alma mater* called "Awareness Day," which was put together to address issues of diversity, especially sexism and racism. Her male friend told her that he left that forum feeling battered and horrible about himself, "Here I was, white and male and my ancestors had done these horrible things."

⁵ V. Propp, *Morphology of a Folktale*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968.

⁶ Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

⁷Natalie Kononenko, *Ukrainian Minstrels: And the Blind Shall Sing*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.

⁸ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: BasicBooks, 1997.

⁹ From a lecture by Patricia Neumann-Thoth at the University of Virginia, sponsored by the Office of African-American Affairs, Spring, 2002.

¹⁰ See M. Katherine Hudgins, *Experiential Treatment for PTSD: The Therapeutic Spiral Model*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2002.

