Memoir as Contemplative Practice for Peace and Justice

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Abstract:

In this paper we examine the relationship between mindfulness, memoir, and critical pedagogy. We propose that memoir links critical pedagogy and contemplative practice, furthering the goals of both. This proposal is rooted in an analysis of three years' worth of memoirs prepared by students in a Peace and Justice Studies course. Our study shows that the pedagogical strategy we have employed assists students' increased self-awareness as well as insight regarding their inter-connectedness with other living beings. Both the study and contemplative practice of memoir root this awareness in the specific places, relationships, and situations that form our students' lives. Students are thus situated for deeper reflection regarding the ways their own lives are linked with the destiny of a much larger world reality, and specifically, with questions of peace and justice.

Keywords: Memoir, Peace and Justice, Mindfulness, Place, Praxis, Vocation

I : ORIENTATION TO CONTEMPLATIVE MEMOIR AND PEACE & JUSTICE

Introduction

For the past six years, we have been involved with other faculty at Moravian College to increase peace and justice awareness and praxis on our campus.* We have developed an introductory course to serve as the entry point to a Minor in Peace and Justice Studies: "Lifewalk of Justice: Introduction to Peace and Justice Studies." We designed this course with three linked focal points: critical pedagogy, contemplative practices that promote mindfulness, and writing a memoir. We draw upon critical pedagogy in order to help students more critically evaluate their world, particularly the ways in which peace and justice shape, or are absent from, their world, and to promote civic engagement.

We have coupled critical pedagogy with contemplative practices to build mindfulness. This helps students develop the skills necessary to explore their hearts and thus explore the meaning, purpose, and values that they hold dear.** Mindfulness is at once "the seed and the fruit," according to Buddhist teacher and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh. Focused and quiet attention in the present, whether through breathing, walking, or other types of meditative/contemplative practice, assists concentration and depth of self-awareness. This is the central seed of mindfulness practice. But the practice of mindfulness equally, as "the fruit", grounds humans in their physical contexts and deepens their appreciation of and connection to their surroundings. As Hanh (2003) writes, "Meditation is to be aware, and to try to help" (p. 77). The study and practice of mindfulness enables students to better understand the depths of their own compassion, the reality of their own context, and to develop the personal strength necessary to confront challenging situations. As Hanh states, "Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion, and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live" (p. 77).

In our course, memoir is the bridge between critical pedagogy and mindfulness. Firstly, memoir is a contemplative practice that encourages deep exploration and reflection upon one's self. Unlike autobiography, which attempts to narrate the entirety of a life, memoir traces particular themes, issues, or questions as they weave through the experiences and developing self-understanding of an individual. Secondly, memoir provides the space where students can creatively address any tensions between their own purpose and values, and the values and realities of

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** Our understanding of mindfulness is shaped by the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (www.acmhe.org).

the social, cultural, and political world in which they live. Memoir highlights the shaping of consciousness and conscience in connection with particular themes, and demands that the author analyze his/her life not only in order to better understand the development and disposition of the self, but to situate the self in relationship to the particular theme that is being explored. Additionally, in our case, memoir links our pedagogical practices to the heritage of our college. This heritage, rooted in a very particular practice of memoir, becomes a starting point and a foundation for the deep and sustained exploration of self and place that will become central in our students' work. The most important assignment students complete in "Lifewalk of Justice" is the writing of their own memoir, through which students explore their life story, physical place, and personal and social development in connection with particular themes and questions having to do with peace and justice.

In what follows, we first trace the historic heritage of the Moravian use of memoir, showing how this genre is a unique practice for us to draw upon. We then show how memoir is linked to critical pedagogy. This is followed by an analysis of our student's experiences with memoir. We emphasize the challenges faced by students who are unprepared for contemplative practices, but also highlight the transformative effect of these practices on student self-understanding.

Moravian Connections to Memoir

From the start, we knew that we wanted to draw upon the rich resources of the 18th century Moravian Community that settled in this area and began a counter-cultural experiment in communal and egalitarian living.* The first Moravians in North America established the town of Bethlehem as a collective economy organized around a choir system. Choirs grouped members based upon their station in life: single men, married men, single women, married women, and widows, for example, lived in separate collective housing units. Each group took care of their own needs while contributing to the larger community. This system of social organization was a means of practicality for communal egalitarian living, rather than of stratification. For instance, the choir system made necessary the development of leadership positions for women in order to manage the women's choirs. The Moravian sense of equality ran deep; they were one of the first European communities in North America to build educational institutions and practices that included women. Though they separated themselves from the outside world, they did not shut themselves off from the larger world. They were among the earliest settlers to seriously study Native American languages and included both Native Americans and Africans in their community.

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* See Atwood (2004) for a helpful narrative of this early North American community and the role of memoir in their communal life.

The traces of this experiment are evident around the older part of our campus, especially in "God's Acre," the 18th century graveyard that sits next to historic College buildings. The remarkable spirit that infused this early American community is etched into simple square headstones where immigrants from Eastern Europe are buried next to Africans and Native Americans who joined and lived in community with white native and immigrant settlers. The Moravians developed leaders such as Rebecca von Protten, who was born in Ghana, transported as a slave to St. Thomas, liberated, ordained as a pastor, and eventually married a German man.* We sought to draw upon the sense of justice and individual responsibility we see in the Moravian worldview, which stresses accountability to one's 'self, community, and world'.

Though we come from different disciplinary perspectives, we were both captivated by the formative role played by memoir within the 18th century Moravian Community. Among early Moravian spiritual practices, the writing of the *Lebenslauf* was paramount: translated as "Lifewalk," this was the individual's memoir of his/her life, with special emphasis on its spiritual dimensions. All members were required to compose their "Lifewalk" which was read aloud at the individual's funeral liturgy. We use this genre to more closely fit the goals of our Peace and Justice Studies curriculum: to provide an opportunity for students to contemplatively and consciously deliberate upon the connections between their own life story and experiences, and the large questions and practices of Peace and Justice Studies.

Memoir as Critical Pedagogy

The goals of critical pedagogy shape our Peace and Justice Studies Minor.** Moreover, we see these goals echoed in the Moravian tradition of contemplative and critical reflection upon self, community and world, especially in the tradition of *Lebenslauf*. In particular, we find memoir ideally suited to three goals of critical pedagogy. First, by focusing on students' lived experiences, memoir becomes a tool for developing the skill for "power-sensitive discourse" attuned to those whose voices have been marginalized.*** This skill is necessary for critical literacy and encourages students to recognize hegemonic forces in their own life stories. This recognition, in turn, allows students to grow as citizens, become more critically aware of the significance of the places they occupy, both physical and social, and raise questions about their family structures and systems, the communities, educational and religious institutions in which they have been raised: political and

* On the funeral liturgy of the early Moravians, see Atwood (2004). Examples of women's Lebenslaufe are found in Faull (1997).

** Critical consciousness is developed in our class through a variety of resources, including memoirs (see below, note 11); works on critical pedagogy, such as Giroux (2011); theoretic works, such as Maguire (2010); and case studies, such as Kraig (2012).

*** Schramm-Pate & Lussier use this concept in their discussion of Giroux (2010, p. 329).

corporate structures, and class and gender. They learn to more fully engage in the second goal of critical pedagogy, the ability to deconstruct privilege and reconstruct alternative forms of democracy, "negotiating diversity rather than squash it" (Schramm-Pate & Lussier, 2010, p. 329). All of this is related to the development of liberative critical consciousness, as Henry R. Giroux (2011) writes,

> educators should nourish those pedagogical practices that promote `a concern with keeping the forever unexhausted and unfulfilled human potential open, fighting back all attempts to foreclose and pre-empt the further unraveling of human possibilities, prodding human society to go on questioning itself and preventing that questioning from ever stalling or being declared finished. (p. 159)

This spirit of open-ended questioning, combined with the genre of memoir, helps students to develop consciousness to pay attention to the subtle workings of power in the concrete experiences of their own lives. Beginning frequently with personal experiences, as they reflect on their own lives, critical pedagogy assists by providing a framework to connect the personal with consciousness of larger systemic and global dynamics of power. For example, one student explored her growing awareness of discriminatory forces limiting the lives of her gay and lesbian classmates. Raised in a conservative Catholic family, she supported a gay friend through episodes of bullying at school. Yet when she attended a rally to support LBGT rights, she hid this from her family. In her memoir she explored subsequent experiences, when she and her family faced conflict regarding her growing moral awareness, and as her parents ultimately learned greater acceptance as a result of their daughter's courage and insight. Through her memoir, this student began to construct the narrative of her life that countered the family narrative. For her, the logical outcome of this was to join struggles for marriage equality.

The above example illustrates how memoir facilitates the development of civic engagement, the third objective of critical pedagogy. Flowing from their growing awareness of power differentials in their own lives and experiences, students are motivated to do something about 'injustices'. Because the work is based upon students' lived experience, they are intrinsically motivated to analyze the workings of social, cultural, economic, and political forces.* This emotional attachment also motivates students to directly confront these forces, leading to enhanced civic engagement. Schramm-Pate and Lussier (2010) claim that critical pedagogies "seek to contribute to the development of a more vibrant democracy by empowering students to become active creators and promoters of a better society through

* Recent research on the neuroscience of learning emphasizes the importance of emotional connections for learners. See, eg. Zull (2002).

the elimination of social inequities" (p. 323).* Critical pedagogy helps students develop the imagination to question their own lives and the complexity of historical, economic, political, socio-cultural and other contemporary dynamics that shape their world. We have seen our students dedicate themselves to this multidisciplinary analytical perspective, spurred by the power and insight that comes from deep connection to and analysis of the relationship of peace and justice to their own life stories.

II: OUR EXPERIENCES

Students Unprepared for Contemplation

From the beginning of our experiment with this course, we were struck by our students' lack of preparedness for contemplative practice; it was difficult for them to step out of their regular routines to wander about in an open-ended way, to ponder upon, and deeply consider the world and their place within it. Our students, over-scheduled and perpetually 'wired' into electronic devices, are uncomfortable with silence, stillness, inner searching and reflection. The perpetual busyness of school, work, sports, and music practice is rooted, to some extent, in deep anxiety over whether they will succeed. We intentionally observed our students during contemplative walks around our campus, during silent 'centering' time before we officially began our course agenda, and during the recitation of poems that students brought to begin our class sessions. Especially at the beginning of the semester, many students displayed a physical discomfort and restlessness during these times. However, we continued to invite students to more deeply ponder the meaning of the place where they have chosen to live, study and learn. During the first class, after introducing the course, we take students outside with the local Moravian archivist, an expert on the early Moravian community, to contemplatively experience our own historical setting and the meaning of this educational experience taking place in its midst. Some students became captivated by the historic connections between the memoirs they are working on and the 18th century practice of *lebensläufe.* Other students were guided into the rhythms of contemplative practices through regular writing associated with their memoir. We found free writing during class helped students to quiet themselves and focus their minds on their experiences and desires. We found that we could use in-class writing as a means of fostering particular kinds of mindfulness.** Our

* This article appears in an anthology of essays edited by DeVitis and Irwin-DeVitis (2010), and focuses on critical pedagogy within a high school setting; we believe these insights are also applicable to our introductory college level course in peace and justice studies.

** Some prompts that we used: What are the most pressing peace and justice issues: personally, locally, globally? Why are you interested in peace and justice? How do peace and justice intersect with your own life story?

students were not used to being asked to sit or walk quietly, nor were they used to deep thinking removed from a concrete task (such as writing an exam or paper). But since they were used to being asked to write, the memoir served as a bridge to contemplative practices for a number of our students.

This is not to say that having students write memoirs constructed around their experiences of peace(war) and justice(injustice) went smoothly or easily. Since this is an Introductory level course, a large number of our students are in their first semester of college. Many are intimidated by the prospect of a lengthy writing assignment. It is even more daunting for them to write about themselves. We tried a number of strategies the first year to help motivate students, but far too many students—even strong students—put the assignment off for too long and ended up with memoirs that lacked depth of reflection, analysis, and sometimes even substance. In later iterations of the course, we developed more structure to guide students in this exercise that seemed unfamiliar and uncertain. We designed a series of smaller writing assignments centered on the types of questions about their experiences and desires that we wanted students to contemplate.* These weekly essays during the first part of the semester allowed us to gauge student progress, provide individualized feedback and guidance, and alleviate some of the anxieties about grades and structure, and became rough drafts of chapters in student memoirs. Having students share their weekly essays with the class also helped to create the conditions for a spontaneous community of support, further establishing our class as the intentional community that we desired.

Though uncomfortable at first, over time many students learned to utilize, appreciate and even desire increased opportunities for experiences of contemplation and mindfulness. As the semester progressed, students requested additional time for contemplative walking and mediation during class. The benefits of such practice increasingly are recognized for higher education. Miller-Lane (2012), sees contemplative practices as leading to an embodied education characterized by attitudes of welcome, rather than fear, that assist learners to participate deeply in discussions that involve cognitive dissonance and discomfort. Contemplative practices have been demonstrated to help individuals respond more effectively to stressful situations, expand their capacity for concentration, maintain preparedness, process information, and develop increased insight (Miller-Lane, 2012, p. 42-47).

The Importance of Narrative

One of our more striking realizations is the importance of stories both for education, and for self-awareness and growth in consciousness. Reading and writ-

* For example, one essay focused on what they learned by reading a memoir of someone engaged in issues of peace and justice. Another explored the idea of vocation. We discuss these further later in this essay.

ing stories engages students emotionally. Before the semester begins, we send enrolled students a letter outlining the requirement that they select a memoir to read before the semester begins. We select works written by well-known activists, but also memoirs by less prominent figures whose life stories highlight the workings of peace and justice.* These memoirs, in diverse ways, bring together a personal life story with much larger questions, dilemmas and activities pertaining to peace and justice. Frequently, students choose a memoir that helps them to better understand their own life story. For example, one student of Iranian descent chose *Persepolis*, the graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi, partially to better understand his parents' experiences. In our letter, we also introduce the central question of our course: 'how do I live my life without making a mockery of my values?'** Our goal is to encourage students to begin the process of thinking about how issues of peace and justice play a role in individual lives, including their own.

Many scholars have recognized the power of reading memoir as a pedagogical tool in higher education. For instance, anthropologists draw upon memoir because "only in such works do students see a society depicted in real depth" (Keeler, 2008, p. 16). According to Peter Gilmour (1998), studying memoir not only assists students to "vicariously enter into the world of the memoirist," memoir additionally moves them to think more deliberately about their own lives and become writers of memoir themselves (p. 310-311). In addition, by reading memoir students may become more alert and practiced in analyzing the complexities and ambiguities, moral and practical, that are an inevitable aspect of human life. Many memoirs include "counterstories" through which authors deconstruct stereotypical narrative structures, such as seeing drug addiction as either a disease or a moral failure (Gosselin, 2008). Counterstories "subvert the culturally dominant narrative structure . . . by rejecting neatly contained, orderly and sanitized depiction of experience" (Gosselin, 2008, p. 144). Being encouraged to read, think and write deeply about such narratives gives students the tools and courage to more carefully and profoundly explore the ambiguities and complexities in their own lives. In fact, studying memoir helps students to complicate their understandings of human selves in general, and their own selves in particular. As opposed to "the fully unified concept of the self," memoir is fraught with the complexities of understanding the constantly shifting self, situated in changing contexts (Ng, 2011, p. 34). "The autobiographical self is not single and unified" (Ng, 2011, p. 34). Thus, reading and understanding memoir requires a sophisticated strategy that can take account of "the ruptures and gaps in the subject's lived experience" (Ng, 2011, p. 44). Moreover, studying memoir may provide a

* A recent "welcome letter" informing students about the requirement to read a memoir before the semester began included the following choices: Lewis (1999), Ayers (2001), Chin (2009), Satrapi (2003), and Boudreau (2008).

** In his memoir, Ayers (2001) recounts hearing Paul Potter, while president of Students for a Democratic Society, asking: "How will you live your life so that it doesn't make a mockery of your values?" (p. 62)

bridge to reflection on vocation. One academic tells the story of drawing upon Randy Pausch's *The Last Lecture*, detailing Pausch's reflections on the meaning of his life as he faced terminal pancreatic cancer. Students were invited not only to create a reader's response to Pausch's work, but to extend his ideas in order to think about their own futures. "Through Pausch's memoir, these college students begin to recognize their own social consciousness and become motivated academics, starting to make the connection between the value of a college education and the attainment of lifelong dreams" (Smyth, 2011, p. 48). We discuss below the important connections between the use of memoir and a focus on vocation as part of the course we teach.

We have found that students develop a deeper appreciation of narrative through both reading other memoirs and writing their own. In feedback, students expressed their gratitude for being able to tell the stories of their lives. One graduating senior commentated that it was the first time ever in his education that he had been asked to write about himself. Though he was nervous, perhaps even fearful at the start, he came to embrace the process, and like many of our students, expressed a sense of being empowered through the creation of their own memoir. The struggle to articulate the meaning of their own life experiences provided many students with a sense of ownership and control over difficult, ambiguous and deeply important elements in their lives.

Our sense of the importance of narrative for critical consciousness has deepened as we have guided students through the process of reading and writing memoirs. As Peace and Justice Scholar Robert Nash (2002) argues, "narrative construal of meaning" is central for teaching, since, as he says, "teaching is really storytelling" (p. 200). Story would seem to be endemic to the human creature. We live, not in reality, but in the stories we tell about reality. We are constructed by stories as well as construct them ourselves, and live in tension with the way our stories may distort reality as well as illuminate it. For this reason Nash states, "I believe that teachers everywhere, at every level of schooling, have an ethical obligation to acknowledge, and to understand, their colleagues and students as narrative-bearing, narrative-telling and narrative-interpreting persons" (p. 210). We whole-heartedly agree, especially when students are given the opportunity to contemplate, analyze and write the narratives of their own lives.

Disengagement or Powerlessness?

This course has illuminated for us the disconnect between our students' perceptions of themselves, their communities, and the world. They see injustice at the structural level, and they know that it affects people close to them, oftentimes themselves. Students recognized, and wanted to better understand, inequalities based upon economics, race, gender and sexuality. However, even when they recognized the structures that led to injustice, they were unable to confront these

injustices. Our students felt powerless in the face of anonymous structures. Instead, they wanted to focus on their own 'inner peace'. Concerned at first that this represented procrastination, we came to realize that our students did not feel capable or qualified to address issues beyond themselves. Frequently they articulated feelings of being overwhelmed and unsure of where to start; they questioned whether they could make any difference with respect to regional, national and global injustices. Since we believe that a Peace and Justice program rooted in a critical pedagogy should be focused on student engagement with issues of injustice, this presented a serious challenge for us*.

We began to assign readings and recruit visitors that could help students think strategically about issues of importance to them. For example, we worked with the staff members responsible for overseeing student volunteer opportunities to question whether charity promotes social justice if it does not attempt to change the underlying structure. We created assignments related to *The Global Peace Index* to enlarge students' thinking about global structures related to peace and justice. We assigned them Gene Sharp's *There Are Realistic Alternatives* and reviewed the 198 different methods for engaging in nonviolent direct action for greater social justice. The discussions in these class sessions were wonderful—passionate, engaged, inspiring. Students were thinking more strategically and were excited about change, but the majority of them were still not excited about engaging these issues in ways designed to make change. Through a process of dialog with our students it became clear that we needed not to teach them how to make change, but rather to teach them that they could. In order to help our students build up their confidence and thus their willingness to even propose working for change, we needed to help them focus on more immediate and local understandings of community. In other words, we invited students to think more concretely about the peace and justice issues that intersect with their location in the real world. We learned this by observing the students who were excelling in our class. These students naturally focused on the smaller scale. For example, one student focused on one classroom in the elementary school where she was student teaching. Another focused on how young women in her religious community dealt with the cultural norms mandating women's silence.

By focusing on the smaller scale we were able to meet our students where they were, focused on the challenges of their own lives and places. Doing so allowed us to push students beyond themselves while acknowledging the importance of their formative experiences. In the process, a fair number of students developed the composure and confidence to begin confronting the structures of injustice that shaped their own lives. For example, one student, a former football player

* Later in this article we discuss our pedagogy regarding the introduction of the course requirement regarding "interventions for peace and justice."

who felt uncomfortable with the ways in which masculinity was equated with aggression, violence and emotional detachment, interviewed his father and other male relatives about how they understood their roles as men in their families and their communities.*

We introduced students to the importance of "little interactions" for peace and justice, not only as building blocks for learning to enact large-scale peace and justice praxis, but for their own intrinsic value (Kraig, 2012). "Small interactions" that in seemingly insignificant ways reduce prejudice and promote greater social justice, take place without the participants generally thinking about themselves as social activists. Exploring the "small interactions" of one small white community in Washington State, Kraig showed how everyday small acts made a difference when a black family moved into a white neighborhood. Offering a ride to the black family, inviting their children to birthday parties, and disagreeing with white neighbors who voiced prejudicial stereotypes, all were essential to enflesh the goals of integration. Over time, these "small interactions" led to larger ones. Eventually leaders in the white community led a neighborhood survey in order to track discriminatory attitudes toward integration, and organized town hall gatherings to discuss their findings.

We have found that most students needed to begin with "small interactions" regarding their own interventions for peace and justice. They interviewed or had honest conversations with family members, wrote letters to the editor, set up a table with peace and justice materials at a college carnival, and attended a political rally. Overall, we desired to create a space where students would feel comfortable wondering, pondering and thinking about the world in which they lived. Yet at the same time we wanted students to develop concrete interventions in peace and justice that would demonstrate their understanding of how issues of peace and justice intersected their lives.

One semester, our course focused on working collectively to organize the campus as a specific intervention for greater peace and justice. We were preparing for a visit from noted scholar and activist Vandana Shiva as a Peace and Justice Scholar in Residence. Inspired by reading her work on food sustainability and the Commons, we challenged our students to organize themselves and their student colleagues to attend a public lecture by Shiva. Excited to share what they had learned about Shiva with their peers, our students far surpassed our expectations with their ability to use social media along with more traditional forms of organizing, creating a lightening "buzz" on the campus. Due to their interactions, not only was the main auditorium filled, but a number of additional overfill spaces for the lecture. Following this great success, students reflected on their surprise to

* As well as analyzing his interview in his memoir, the student included a transcription of the interview as part of his portfolio.

discover that they were able to move and impact so many people in such a positive way. These kinds of experiences also helped students to see that 'being involved' did not mean giving up other aspects of their lives. Instead, they could find a way to dedicate an hour or two each week to being engaged in their community. This "small interaction" contributed energy, awareness and imagination to other interventions for peace and justice on our campus, such as student actions to address labor inequities experienced by food service employees, and the student eco-club's push for heightened practices of food sustainability on our campus.

Memoir, Spirituality, Vocation

Nash (2002) points to the spiritual dimension of the stories we tell about ourselves. He writes, "Passionate teaching leads to spiritual learning, both for the teacher and the taught. However, the opposite is also true – spiritual teaching leads to passionate learning, both for the teacher and the taught" (p 198). Nash recounts his own story of "100 breakfasts," when, during a sabbatical, he let his students know that he was relaxed and interested in meeting them over breakfast to listen to whatever they wished to talk about. He came to see this experience as a kind of "holy ground," as he was invited "to participate directly in the soul-stories that were altering my students' lives" (p. 225). Later, a number of his breakfast partners relayed to him that these opportunities "provided the best education they ever had" (p. 227).

Towards the end of our course, we introduce the concept of vocation, drawing from the spiritual writer Frederick Buechner, who defines vocation as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (Buechner 1993, p. 95). This broad approach to 'vocation', linked neither to religious calling nor to technical vocational training, is finding a place within higher education, and is akin to the experience of "holy ground" described above. Gregg (2005), for example, outlines the ways in which the concept of vocation has been used at Alma College to stimulate reflection on "meaning, purpose, and calling in life". We ask students to include a concluding chapter in their memoirs in which they reflect upon their experiences and how these shape their understanding of their future vocation. This meta-cognitive activity is designed to help students connect the different aspects of the course. They connect their growing awareness of self and community with theoretic work in peace and justice studies and their expectations of what will prove fulfilling and meaningful in their future professional lives.

We have discovered that students are hungry for this opportunity to reflect on and imagine their futures in connection with their *Lebenslauf*, and their initial forays into peace and justice interventions. For many students this opportunity represented a first time that they imaginatively began to conceive of their future beyond the need to provide for themselves and their families materially. For in-

stance, one student whose life path had been largely predetermined by family predilections, decided that the career in business and finance her family had pushed her toward was not really "the deep desire of her heart." In writing her *Lebenslauf* and through her peace and justice initiatives she developed the courage to admit to herself that her real passion was to design women's clothing in resistance to dominant oppressive gender patterns, and to promote women's full sense of self. She began to draw, somewhat hesitantly at first, then more confidently. By the end of the semester she was full of creative ideas and initiative regarding the ways she might link her studies in math, accounting and finance to a future career increasing women's sense of self purpose and humanity through design.

III: MEMOIR, CONTEMPLATION, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

We have discussed some of the challenges of using memoir as a contemplative practice. There are other challenges as well. But overall, we have found that using memoir as a vehicle for contemplation has been tremendously successful. By breaking the memoir into a series of smaller writing assignments, we have been able to introduce students to the regular rhythms of contemplation. Having them focus on manageable tasks on a weekly basis has helped students develop the discipline that allows them to reflect deeply upon their past experiences and future desires. Encouraging them to seek out and analyze the connections between the themes and questions of peace and justice, and their own life stories, dilemmas and perplexities has created rich and deep terrain for growth in critical thinking, writing, community development, problem solving, and the courage to intervene; in short, the genre of memoir is ideally suited to forward the goals of critical pedagogy.

Above all, we have been struck by the surprising amount of contemplative growth in a very short period of time. Many of our students begin the course with a skeptical or even hostile attitude, towards contemplation. Yet, over the course of a single semester, many of these same students come to embrace the regular practice of contemplation and self-reflection. Last year, for example, a group of three students started going on regular contemplative walks together around campus. Moreover, student memoirs indicate that this self-reflection has led to a deeper understanding of how the individual self is connected with other living creatures and with a sense of place. Student evaluations indicate that students gravitate toward, even long for these kinds of educational experiences that assist them to "make the connections" between their individual life experiences, conflicts, pressures and hopes, and their desire to be a part of a larger project, initiative or movement toward making the world a better place.

We conclude our course with a celebratory communal meal during which students share something of their memoirs and course portfolios with their peers.* These sessions have been characterized by deep emotional and intellectual engagement and self-awareness. Students take time to thoughtfully and generously comment on one another's work and growth. This becomes a genuine moment of transition as students share their imaginings with one another about where this work may take them in their future endeavors. Each year, a few students create objects to hold their memoirs, and these are passed around the room. One student brought her portfolio in a suitcase filled with artifacts from the semester and from previous important educational moments, such as the work that she had done with children in South Africa. The suitcase represented her desire to continue to learn about the world and make a difference for the increase of peace and justice through travel, living in different cultures, and learning from diverse people in community. Another student included in her portfolio photos and presentation materials she used in a workshop she developed to raise disability awareness among college students.

In preparing a contemplative memoir, students make strides in self-awareness that is rooted in the specific places, relationships, and situations that form their lives. We have been encouraged by this to think about ways of including deep analysis of the local spaces and relationships that have shaped the lives of our students as individuals and as members of communities. This further takes us back to the initial Moravian use of *Lebenslauf* that inspired our adoption of contemplative memoir. Moravian *Lebensläufe* are explored by scholars from around the world for the fascinating and revealing insight they provide regarding 18th century people in Bethlehem and the role of the social and physical landscape in their lives. We see parallels between these early narratives of the "lifewalk" and current examples from our students. For example, one student, a second generation Syrian American, used her memoir to focus on issues of gender inequality she faced as a female member of a U.S. Syrian enclave, and in the Syrian communities she visited each summer, when she traveled with her grandfather to visit extended family. Another student used his memoir to analyze and reflect on peace and justice issues with regard to the changing global economy, and its impact on the working class community of masons in a rural Pennsylvania town where he

* Student portfolios may include any materials, in addition to the student memoirs, that demonstrate students' successful completion of course goals. In particular, we ask students to include evidence that bears witness to their increased awareness of their own life's relationship to peace and justice issues and evidence regarding the concrete interventions they have enacted over the semester. Students have included ppts, brief films, works of art, essays, created brochures/flyers, etc. as elements of their portfolios.

worked as a teenager and young adult.* The increased mindfulness we see in our students over time is manifested in a deeper self-awareness that is both internal and external; it helps them plow the territory of their inner worlds even as it also opens the door to more thorough investigation and deliberation regarding the meaning of their lives in very concrete and specific times and places. That is, students inquire more deeply into how their own lives are linked with the destiny of a much larger world. In the 'vocation' sections of their memoirs many students begin to articulate the places where the deep desires of their heart intersect with the needs of the world. Anecdotally, we know also that students carry this with them. A fair number of students from this course keep in touch with one or both of us; perhaps more than any other piece of evidence, this demonstrates to us the lasting impact of the course on students' lives.

In conclusion, contemplative practices have deepened our critical pedagogy. First, contemplative practices help to prepare and support students for the challenging and courageous work of analysis of self and world that we will ask them to undertake. Second, the memoir in particular serves as an important bridge between the personal and the political. Students begin to analyze their personal experiences in light of the larger social, political, cultural, and economic structures that shape their lives. They take steps to risk promoting change toward a more just and compassionate world. Finally, the memoir assists students in making important links between their current lives and vocational aspirations and futures. What we hope for, and place before us all as a goal, is to complete the course with a better sense than we began with, regarding concrete answers to the central question for our work together: "How do I live my life without making a mockery of my values?

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* The Syrian student developed workshop resources that could be used in a church setting to address issues of gender discrimination in among Syrian immigrants, and included these resources in her portfolio. Both students made use of photography to illustrate their peace and justice interventions for inclusion in their portfolios.

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