

Critical Social Work
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**Poetically Teaching/Doing the Profession of Social Work as a Joyful
UnDisciplined Discipline-Jumper and Genre-Jumper 1**

By

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HOW FLAKY IS THIS PROFESSOR WHO BELIEVES THAT POETRY OFFERS
SOMETHING CENTRAL TO SOCIAL WORK

...We expect our students to upgrade their knowledge and skills over their careers, yet do not help them acquire effective self-directed learning skills. There is little integration of knowledge in social work education or coordination of teaching. The curriculum is broken into individual parts - policy, methods, research – with few efforts to integrate them. There is a lack of integration between class and field. There has long been an ‘add-on’ approach in social work education, in which we simply add new content, resulting in an unintegrated and (often) indigestible mix. This fragmentation gets in the way of learning (e.g. seeing the interrelationships among different areas). Obscurantism abounds... Key aims espoused often remain undefined... ...because there are different views about what social justice is, pursuing vague, related outcomes inevitably involves imposing some people’s view of social justice on others.

(Gambrill, 1997, p. 320)

Social Workers are employed in non-profit organizations, government offices, and in private practice. We engage with individuals, families, groups, communities. Social workers 2 engage with people in every phase of the life cycle; in every community; in every lie and truth told to, and by, humans. We do international work with relief or disaster care organizations. We are the people touching the troubles of the whole world; and all those worlds of troubles touch the insides of us. One of my students concisely summarized some of the problematics of our profession. We’re seen, she said, as: “Child / Baby snatchers. Bleeding hearts. Women/female. Intrusive. Controlling. Uncaring.

Unnerving. Bound by rules and regulations. Condescending. Or: we're not acknowledged at all!"

Teaching, living and working our way through all of these contradictions and expectations have the potential to damage our health and well-being by forcing us to become the living 'glue' between all these contradictions - and by forcing us to shut down to/shut out certain flows of information. Rossiter (2001) describes how she feels these conflicts as a professor of social work,

...I find that the more I teach, the more perplexed I become at the responsibility for social work education from a critical perspective. I think this is because my thoughts about social work seem to be taking me farther and farther away from what is possible to teach and still call it social work (p. 1).

All of us within this profession -- and especially those of us who are on the edges of this profession -- need to find ways to comprehend our contradictions and function creatively within them.

Workers' bodies and women's bodies are contested terrains which manifest the struggles and appetites of capitalism/ patriar Workers' bodies and women's bodies are contested terrains which manifest the struggles and appetites of capitalism/ patriarchy (Thornham, 2000, pp. 155-184; Transken, 1995, 2001). Women I've worked with in this profession have fallen along the wayside to chronic fatigue syndrome, cancer, heart troubles. Migraines and colds are almost always impacting on someone on any social work team. My sense is that Depression among our own is one of our profession's taboo topics. Much has been written about how care work (and I use the term carework in a wide thick way) can exhaust us - and that the work and the exhaustion is often made invisible (Brown, 1994; Caplan, 1993; Friedman and Penny, 1995; Hanmer and Statham, 1989; Jordan, 1997; Marx Ferree and Yancey Martin, 1995; Miller and Pierce, 1997; Neysmith, 2000) in a patriarchal capitalist world. This poem from Outlaw Social Work (Transken, 2002, p. 67) expresses our perpetual location as compromised and conflicted careworkers.

NONE AND ALL

we are
mopping vigorously
this dirt from cool mud floors;
stumbling & dancing while
doing undo-ables somewhat well;

being with those who aren't even
within themselves;

striving for what we know won't be

during our thin lives;

inquiring about & artfully
documenting the absurd;

pushing even ourselves,
boundaries & other un-evens;

trying to get comfortable
with discomfort;

wearing bold masks, vigor, humor, & more
for vital tasks & vital days;

trying to do well & be well while
doing undo-ables sort of well
we are well wishers in an unwell world.

We cannot be all things to all needy people and purposes. Nonetheless we try; and we hope to succeed. To some extent we have become trapped in colluding against ourselves. Hick (1986) 3, summarizing and building on the work of Smith, Walker and other theorists who might be defined as Feminist Standpoint Methodologists, describes how ideological categories are constructed by the ruling class and then we participate unknowingly in reproducing those categories. "Ideologies mediate by providing categories and concepts which express the relations of work practices to institutional practices" (p. 3). It might be said that our 'natural' creativity is a way of authentically experiencing the chaos and possibility of the world. To be locked into cubes or silos of categorical thinking is the opposite to creative intuitive thinking. Letting ourselves notice, experience, respond to, and share knowledge from every portion of our organic humanity and from every "Discipline" of knowledge is an act of resistance against the rules of many institutions and structures in our society. Cultural Studies (CS), as Mullaly (2002) has suggested is a way to reclaim and 'reknow' all these streams and flows of knowledge; and to mindfully use these streams and flows in our efforts to resist oppression. As social work professors and activists we become healthier, more integrated, more effective (and better role models) when we are in touch with multidisciplinary and multigenre-ing (i.e. our creativity).

GIFTS FROM TO CULTURAL STUDIES

I am tempted to say that CS is a 'body' of knowledge. That would be too suggestive of a precise outline and a final form. More accurately, I will say that CS is a 'flow' of knowledge. CS is a flow of knowledge that I am adding to my social work knowledge because it enriches my vocabulary of concepts and possibilities. I would like more CS people to be in 'we-ness' with social workers. It seems that the circle of conversationalists/ theorists/ researchers/ activists who

would identify with CS are not yet in conversations with many social workers 4 . It is one of my missions to stretch and overlap some of the space between these flows of knowledge. CS assists me to dynamically focus my teaching/ activism/ research/ creative writing/ human being-ness. CS creates a vocabulary and cluster of concepts to help me understand and talk about all the muscular portions/ projects/ perspectives which co-exist.

The CS use of ideas such as 'liminal space' 5 are quite helpful. 'Limen' means threshold. As the cover of *Limen* suggests, 'liminal space' can be thought of as a 'space of transformation between phases of separation and reincorporation. It represents a period of ambiguity, of marginal and transitional state'. It can also be a '...passage between fixed identifications represent [ing] a possibility for a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'. It is the smeary blurry state of inbetween-ness. Social work has always been a location that takes insights from everywhere and attempts to respond to many calls for assistance. Our profession has always lived within perpetually liminal locations. All the portions of who we are as thinking/ feeling/ doing/ creating beings are vital. Collectively, they add up to more than their parts. This paper is a partial and ever-morphing description. It is offered here only as one example of 'searchingtalk 6' .

Many of the insights from CS are already being used in some social work circles. The possibilities available in interdisciplinarity have always been there at the bottom of our professional tool kit. There is debate (and some denial) about how much information and ideology social work practitioners/ academics let in from other Disciplines but we do absorb and utilize intelligence from many discourses. Social worker/ activist/ creative writers like Bridget Moran (1998, 1994, 1992, 1988), Dorothy Livesay (1998, 1991, 1977), Emma Goldman (1983, 1977, 1969), Jane Addams (1910, 1930) and Miriam Waddington (2002) have always been telling/ living the stories of multidisciplinary and multigenre-ing. They could be thought of as 'cultural studies oriented social workers'. They could also be thought of as social workers/ creative writers. As Mullaly does (2002) am advocating that our profession become even more permeable with our boundaries and inclusions when our ethical activist visions can be shared . With some of those goals we bring wisdom from many Disciplines and communities into our circles of conversation (and vice versa); let's go further than we've gone before!

When I am teaching/ doing the profession 7 of social work from an interdisciplinary perspective and from multiple grounded locations only then do all my pulsing breathing worlds matter (my worlds of academia/ grounded activism/ my survivor's flesh and blood embodied world/ my creative writer's imaginative world...). When I am 'wild' (i.e. untamed by the structures conceived of and imposed by Eurocentric patriarchal capitalist assumptions and needs) I am my healthiest. Processing what we are doing as integrated beings/ practitioners is, perhaps, self-indulgent. While remembering the feminist assumption that the

'personal is political' I prefer to define it as "consciousness raising" and solidarity building. My belief is that students who are invited to engage with all the dimensions of who they are - including their inner poet - are healthier and more effective as professionals when they graduate.. CS invites us to play with boundaries and contradictions; and the format or 'channel' of poetry is the perfect way for me to play with these complicated energies. Poetry is natural mystique and chaos. For example, Cornel West, a well recognized CS scholar, recently made a rap cd which, apparently, got him into trouble with the administration of the prestigious university he worked for. In other cultures, other historic/herstoric eras, other geo-political contexts poetry is known as a powerful force.

Poetry is a forum which ipso facto rejects the linear, rational, sequential as the only way of knowing. For a long time I have been noticing that the "ways of knowing" that First Nations writers talk about have connected closely with my own perceptions about "celebrating diversities of knowings"

...self-styled guardians of academic 'excellence' feel obligated to exclude or depreciate the possibility of Aboriginal knowledge, Aboriginal understanding and power, accountability and leadership. For these guardians, who are found in all disciplines as well as in the ranks of senior administrators and remain key to the ongoing marginalization and/or assimilation of Aboriginal students and scholars, to think otherwise would be to bring thinking itself into question. It would be tantamount to seeing academic rationality as in part a Euro-imperial, historically specific construct and therefore not a neutral, 'human' universal. (Battiste, 2002, p. xi)

Many other First Nations organic intellectuals have discussed the strengths, beauty, resilience and usefulness of recognizing multiple ways of knowing (Baylis (in Transken, 2002); Ortiz, 1998; Hesch, 1995; Smith Tuhiwai; 1999). Aboriginal creators/ voices have much to offer to opening up academia and social work to various ways of knowing (and being our poetry). And, this institutionalized resistance to redistributions of power and reassessments of the "worth" of certain styles of knoweldge is precisely one of the reasons why their progress into centers of knowledge definition in academia are so thwarted (Gunn Allen, 2000; Monture-Angus, 1999)!

CONTRADICTIONS/ LIMITS/ PUSHING

Social work rhetoric advocates that people find holism/ integration/ and balances ; eat well; exercise regularly; have a rich social life; know how to have pleasure in our lives; give to our communities; have a spiritual life; find quiet contemplative time, etc. And in academia many of these goals (which promote holistic health) are almost not possible given the demands of tenure and the organization's implicit and explicit expectations 9 . These goals are especially tough to achieve for professors who have emerged from marginalized/ subaltern populations

(Acker, 1999; Bannerji, 1993; Caplan, 1993; Clark, Garner, Higonnet, Katrak, 1996; Dag, 1988; Gere Lewis, 1993; Giroux, Shumway, Smith, Sosnoski, 2001; hooks, 1994; Luke, 1996; Ng, Staton, Scane, 1995; Ortiz, 1998; Stalker and Prentice, 1998). Social work professors usually also have multiple communities we must respond to (our clients; our students; our peers; the agencies we intern our students in; etc...). This poem expresses how I have felt these impossibly contradictory messages.

DEMON STRATIONS

his eye contact: admiring; comradely; effective.
his voice: giving up something about friendship
as he mentors about status.

he says that if

in addition to the

doctorate completed 24 months ago,
eight scholarly chapters & essays,
poetry & prose publications,
twenty years of activism,
administrative committees,
volunteer committees,
\$40,000 in grants,
dozens of conference presentations,
research student supervisions,
new courses designed,
overloads of teaching duties
& positive student evaluations -

if

in addition to those accomplishments
i could now demonstrate my contributions to the field by
publishing a book in America
& four more articles in peer reviewed journals,
sitting on one provincial committee,
& one more organizational committee,
supervising a few more thesis projects,
writing a 100 page report on a topic
of his recommendation -

then, this sincere good man says,
in another two years
i could apply for tenure
& maybe even a promotion.

as i watched his back
& remembered to watch my own

i realized the magnitude
of both my own insignificance
& the morbid melodrama
that is academia. 10

Creative writing is one of the few spaces in which I feel all the wholeness of my being and my intentions attempting to come together. This is a space, process, and mode for integration and holism. I feel my “healthiest” when I’ve written or read a few poems in the last week (and been able to achieve the other dozens of goals placed before me).

My inclinations toward creative writing (and creative holistic living) have met with resistance and this paper (among others) is attempting to understand and push back against those resistances. Social work as a profession and the teaching of social work at a university level might be imagined as a double whammy of resistance to holism. My academic/professional training is in Social Work, Women’s Studies, Sociology, Psychology (especially Jungian/Feminist/Psychodrama/Bodywork) and Creative Writing. For over twenty years I have felt these bodies of knowledge attempting to pull me (or ‘manage’ me) in different directions. Professors, Supervisors, and peers along the way have suggested I ‘chose my focus’ and ‘become more serious about my work’.

Recently (and gratefully), I’ve discovered how CS (Giroux, 2001; Hall, 1996, 1993; hooks, 1997, 1996, 1995, 1994, 1994; Trinh Minh-ha, 1991, 1992; Morely and Chen, 1996; Nelson, 2001, etc.) can assist me to dynamically focus my teaching/ activism/ research/creative writing/human being-ness. CS creates space for all the liminal and muscular portions/ projects/ perspectives to co-exist. CS expands my ability to engage with Social Work concerns in anti-oppressive ways and with a special emphasis on the meaning and role of poetry and creative writing.

COMPREHENDING ACADEMIA’S DIS/ORDERING

it is not the
buildings, administration, demands
of unsimple hard work,
minimal requirement of twenty years
of preparation to be defined
as being
prepared to begin repreparing everything forever –

it is the
competitive ethics, epistemology, eurocentric
whitewashings & psychic dirtiness;
the impossible shuffling of
duplicities, alliances, denials,

obfuscations, heirarchies;
the testosterone
dripping on my soft skull
(like honey on toast);
the worshiping
of infinite lines of dead palefathers;
the whisperings
at unfun egobloated parties;
the mingling
among those with sweetly brutalizing
cheque books
in smoothly sewn pockets
bartering & buying
our words & wisdoms;

the pressurepressurepressure
to publish
while people patiently push
polite tongues down throats,
diplomatically kick hearts
but supply bus passes
& food for my needy scared belly.

I love and need my job as an assistant professor of social work. The challenge every day is to set limits and weigh one splintered array of truths against another and another and another. Some aspects of these ways to find balance and heal include trying to push the boundaries about what it means to be an academic; how might we do what we do and be integrated and healthy women ?

CS authors and ecofeminist authors such as Battiste, Shiva, Mies, Eichler (and many others) have demonstrated that a mono-culture or 'mono' knowledge weakens our 'response ability' to complex ever-shifting and evolving issues. Like many academics, I have felt forces (promotion or tenure review committee members, publishing opportunities, conference organizers, etc.) attempt to block, disconnect, disrupt, and alienate the portions of who I am (a professor, an activist, a therapist, a healing/healed woman, a researcher, a poet, etc.). The portions of our selves (our passions, intellect, physicality, intuition, etc.) can become divided and conquered.

We can become divided and conquered - and enfeebled and ghettoized – within one body of knowledge (i.e. the Disciplines of Social Work, Sociology, Psychology, Literature, etc.) - 'locked' away from necessary and vibrant engagement with other relevant bodies of knowledge. Sometimes we are divided and conquered by becoming separated from different communities/ conversational circles in which vital organic information is generated (i.e. the

feminist community from the anti-poverty community; the intellectual community from the pragmatic street-level activist community, First Nations people can become divided from respectful white Anglo Canadian-born peoples, etc). Striving to remain connected to our slightly chaotic creativity, our multiplicity, our unresolvability, our unsettled alliances, our incomplete visions for the future - and fiercely encouraging our students and clients to claim all the portions of themselves - these are the ordinary and extraordinary concerns that I ponder.

It is possible that it is only the elitist Western way of thinking about thinking and being (i.e. blocking of knowledge that comes to us from the body; from our spirit; from intuition; valuing multiple locations, etc...) that is so dismissive and rejecting of poetry as "real knowledge". Some First Nations (Ortiz, 1998), Hispanic (Espada, 1994; Glazner, 2000), Black (Espada, 1994; Glazner, 2000), Working class White Anglo Canadian-born (Acorn, 1972; Belford, 2001; Purdy, 2000), Chinese (Quan and Wong-chu, 1999), Feminist (Montefiore, 1987; Nemiroff, 1989; Putnam, Kidd, Dornan, Morre, 1995) and other voices from/with subaltern populations feel/think/are with the mode and possibility of poetry/prose/ creative writing differently. The therapeutic use of creative writing is old news in some circles (Brown, 1975; Campell, 1988) .

WHO/ WHAT IS A SOCIAL WORKER ?
WHAT DOES THE WORLD LOOK LIKE AND FEEL LIKE FROM HERE?

My sense of our profession has been that we are always drenched in contradictions. Every day when we show up for work we are forced to make tough choices; even moment by moment. Our own values, perceptions, limitations, mood, energy level and access to resources influences which choices are possible. Also, during times of budget cutbacks, downsizing, global restructuring the grime and despair of the world/ vulnerable populations gets splashed onto us. This is a poem I wrote (Transken, 2002, p. v) that attempts to describe some of these contradictions and problematics.

TO NEW SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS:

well come to this con
tradictory profession of alleged
nice-white-women trying to be even nicer,
slashed bleeding hearts,
change & spy agents,
configurations of com/passionate
administrators, silly surrealists,
writers of micro history/herstory,
& hate propagandists
(oh yes we were there
for the Residential Schools,
the making of educated

immigrants into cleaning ladies,
lesbians into shock-therapy victims,
oh yes we were...)
& like Dobermans for the Gestapo sniffing
out the oppressed for The State
we're sent to control & redo the them.

welcome to this con
gregated cluster of lost souls.
we begin saying Justice & Rise Rise.
amazon-warriors fiercing, widening,
strengthening but soon some of us
are just whimpering the word obey
welcome to our con
fusing profession. some of us do
infiltrate, break rules, defy
masters & monsters
if only for moments
between lean pay cheques
-- notice that attempting to
redo this strange status quo us
takes precise premeditated
incremental courage. well come
to our profession but please remain alert
to the pros and cons.

As individuals/ groups/ organizations, when we have not figured out how to manage some of these contradictions and problematics we often worsen or disadvantage the situations and people around us. Our bodies wear the damage of being forced to use only some portions (our rational linear eurocentric portions of our frontal lobe) of who we are. Some helping professionals end up using drugs and alcohol to cope with our strange and estranged chaotic feelings. Some leave. Some become numb. Some organizations and groups continually banter and splinter. Sometimes I think of the stories of the Chinese women who had their feet bound and the Muslim women who have had their clitoris removed - women in this mainstream Anglo Canadian Eurocentric American-ish culture have had their integrative creativity removed . We have had our imaginations bound. Some of our ways of bringing in and processing knowledge (and living in healthy ways) have been stolen from us.

In my opinion successful strong social workers and successful strong organizations or groups find ways to use their creativity, activism, eccentric behaviors, and intense comradeship to maintain our vibrancy and clarity. Our creativity (and I focus here on creative writing but there are many formats through which creativity can be found and manifested) and especially creative writing can be a form of medication and meditation.

ARTISTICALLY MESSY AND MORPHING IN MULTIPLE EMOTIONAL/ INTELLECTUAL/ GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

Teaching is about exchanges and accomplishments; it is about the making, refining, celebrating, and distributing of knowledge. Academia has processes and practices which accidentally and/or intentionally exclude vulnerable/ subaltern populations (Acker, 1999; Bannerji, 1993, 1991; Caplan, 1993; Clark, et al, 1996; Dagg and Thompson, 1988; Gere, 1993; Hesch, 1995; hooks, 1994, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997; Horsman, 1999; Luke, 1996; Marino, 1997; Monture-Angus, 1999; Nelson, 2001; Ng, Staton, Scane, 1995; Ortiz, 1998; Overall, 1998; Parameswaran, 1996; Scales-Trent, 2000; Smith, 1999; Stalker and Prentice, 1998; Vickers, 1996). The vulnerable communities that social work exists to include and centralize -- are often also the communities excluded by academia.

Social work is a diversely engaged/employed profession; it's difficulties are historical/herstorical and sedimented (Baines, 1991, 1999; Dominelli, 1997; Hanmer and Statham, 1989; Moffat, 2001; Morgolin, 1997; Moran, 1992; Neysmith, 2000; Transken, 2002a; Turner and Rose, 1999; Valverde, 1991; Van Den Bergh, 1995; Zoppi, 2001). The edges of (and priorities of) the profession are ever-shifting and contested. Social work mixes us up individually and internally (i.e. on any given day I find myself pondering contradictions about my own values, beliefs, intentions...). Social work is a profession which involves itself in the mapping and traveling of complicated and contradictory terrains. This has always been true of our profession. As we do that traveling, mapping, exploring, teaching and practicing - how are we located (and shaped and reshaped and reshaped again...) as producers/ distributors/ affirmers of knowledge?

CREATIVITY AND HEALTH

Another crucial worldview difference of which the Western therapist must be cognizant is that of noncompartmentalization of experience. In Western experience, it is common to separate the mind from the body and the spirit and the spirit from the mind and the body. Most Native American people experience their being in the world as a totality of personality and not as separate systems within the person. Thus, the Native American worldview is one in which the individual is a part of all creation, living life as one system and not in separate units that are objectively relating with each other. The idea of the world or creation existing for the purposes of human domination and exploitation - the core of most Western ideology - is absent in Native American thinking.

Bonnie Duran and Eduardo Duran,

"Applied Postcolonial Clinical and Research Strategies."

In a text book for social work titled *Social Work in the 21st Century* (1997) they discuss "health care" in a variety of ways/ angles/ locations (especially to how we are going to do our billings in the future to insurance companies). They make no mention of OUR health as social workers. What are the minimal standards of

'care' for us caring for ourselves? Women (the majority of those in social work classes) encounter unbelievable stresses and they wear this on their bodies and souls. Social Workers confront all kinds of stress. This has implications for our physical and mental health. Almost half of the adult Canadian population struggles with obesity and other lifestyle health problems such as smoking, drinking, substance abuse. One in 10 people in this nation suffer from Depression at some period in their lives (Ali and Chua, CBC News Online, May 16, 2002). I happen to live in a city where 34% of the population is overweight (Brown, 2002, p. A9).

Elsewhere I have used the image of a pinwheel to describe how I conceptualize what I am doing/ who I am in the process Elsewhere I have used the image of a pinwheel to describe how I conceptualize what I am doing/ who I am in the process 11 . A pinwheel has delicate 'wings' that can be moved by minimal force if all the wings are in balance and curved in the best ways. Once the pinwheel is moving it generates energy. I imagine the wings to consist of: my commitment to ongoing personal growth; thoughtful and heartfelt teaching; research/writing; community activism/volunteer work; private practice; and organizational administration. The stem at the center of the pinwheel is creativity. Creativity and imagination hold everything together. Given my specific areas of interest (understanding the dynamics of incest, sexual abuse, criminal harassment; non-profit organizations) I have been privileged to be able to supervise interns in agencies which respond to these issues; teach about these issues; do research about this topics; and sit on committees where these themes are considered. Creativity comes into play in regards to knowing how to bring all of these portions of my life together gracefully, usefully, appropriately, effectively, and (hopefully) in a balanced way. Frequently, the spinning of all this can invoke a sense of playfulness, fun, and adventure (Transken, 2002b). If all is well and I am well no one wing of the pinwheel is larger than the others but at different moments one may be at the top or the bottom of the pinwheel's cycle.

MULTIPLICITIES, DIVERSITIES, CHANGES, INTEGRATIONS...

A dominant Eurocentric myth has been that we (as a species) are rational, linear, sequential in how we live, think, write, and need. Freedman (1992) describes something different:

I hadn't yet recognized that as a woman I was alienated by both tradition and temperament from conventional argumentative discourse; I only vaguely sensed why it was an emotional struggle for me to read and write in what I later found out has been called the 'male' or logocentric' or even 'phallogocentric' mode. (p. 3)

As Freedman suggests a more realistic version of our experience is that humans always have multiple intersecting and mobile identities if we admit to them. We are always adapting. We evolve in response to our natures, our environments, and the choices we make on our journey. While imagining worlds (inner and

outer) of diversity and abundance (versus the hegemonic scarcity model of life - where we're only allowed to belong to one professional body/ one ethnocultural group/ one class location/ one sexuality, etc.) we can not only admit our multiple identities but situate them within multiple bodies of knowledge and within multiple contexts. We are untidy 'texts' being read by each other and reading the 'texts' around us. 'Texts' are the complex codes and signals of the cultures we're located in; the conjunctures of our time and place. Necessarily then we are amalgamations and unique imprints - and the issues we confront are also contested intersections of the perceptions and wants of many. We are verbs. We live in a 'verby' world.

A practical concern in all this: our profession is moving more in the direction of legislated entry and practice. There are obvious advantages to this. There are also possible disadvantages and one is that the profession may become too rigid (too arrogant?) in its exclusionary practices. Some university professors (and students, etc.) want to protect the boundaries of this discipline from the 'encroachment' of First Nations, Women's Studies, etc. Garber (2001) talks about Academic Instincts and the nervousness that can exist in the contested space between Disciplines. She says, "...the disciplines' have become gated communities or combat zones. They are invitations to nostalgia, a longing for a lost unitary knowledge and a lost unitary self. And they have often turned that nostalgia inward, seeking a pure and wholer version of themselves." (p. 89). Lifting some ideas from Freud she says that we often are most nervous to push against that / those who seem closest to us but who are NOT us. "What appears to be a family resemblance needs to be disavowed as the project of constituting the self". Some social workers need to prove who they are by proving who they are not.

These are times of change and distress. As we move more toward an American model of 'licensing' for our practitioners we are becoming less permeable in our boundaries. For example, a person who has been teaching in a Social Work program and who has an MA in First Nations Studies and an MA in Women's Studies is not going to become a certified social worker in British Columbia or Ontario unless they return to school and complete a four year BSW. This kind of structural exclusion can mean that our profession becomes more embedded within a racist and classist cluster of assumptions.

CREATIVE WRITER/S

'Communication' is the core technology of social work. Most social workers spend most of their day trying to communicate (doing clinical interventions/ therapy, writing memos, doing grant proposals, composing media releases, etc.). Creative writing contributes vibrancy and solidity to the profession of social work. Writing can be about changing the world. The inner private world can be changed by writing and the outer public world can also be changed by writing. One writer can produce something that changes the minds and behaviors of millions of

people! A person can write something that will reach into the soul of total strangers - even thousands of miles away; even after the writer's death the touching of souls (and the movement of politicians!) can continue (think of Orwell, Brecht, Lourde, Livesay). Freedman (1992) pp. 4-5) describes something about important about a way of writing:

I have discovered more and more personal, mixed-genre, metadiscursive writers published by more journals or presses. They challenge the critical canon with their 'common' language and hybrid, alchemical forms as much as they do any other canon. I praise them for refusing to deny their personal histories or the process by which they come to know what they know or to believe what they believe. Combining poet with critic, they join private and public, writer and teacher, and past and present as they experiment with and announce a blending of traditional genres, (poetry, autobiography, drama, fiction, among them), subgenres (free-verse lyrics, fables, epigrams, diaries, exhortations), and disciplinary discourses. Mixed, crossed, or blurred genres is my shorthand way of referring to such anomalous, self-conscious blendings (pp. 4-5).

Freedman and her comrades are my community. They always have been. And I propose that this is also a wholesome and necessary way of communication for social workers to dis-cover what needs to be dis-covered and to try to bring about change on many levels and in many places (with our clients in their process of learning about journaling, for example, or in our own processes as helping professionals doing self-care - and in many other forums/ formats/ formulas).

Hall (1993, pp. 507-517), a well known contributor to CS, discusses the meaning of language and how we send/ receive and code and decode the texts of the world around us. Each group/ ethnocultural configuration/ community uses and engages with codes and decoding differently. For example, First Nations people are more inclined traditionally to use story telling as a way of imparting knowledge. When we insist that our students in degree programs use the formal Western MLA style of essay writing we are building in a way of excluding (and advantaging) some people in regards to becoming organic intellectuals within the social work profession. Poetry and creative writing (i.e. not necessarily the Queen's/ Colonizer's forums and formats for expression) may be a more 'natural' way for some communities to explicate their consciousness of their own centered perspectives and express their authenticity, analysis, solidarity, and resistance (Arrien, 1992; Ballenger and Lane, 1996; Bender, 1998; Cameron, 1992, 1996; Ealy, 1995; Fox, 1995; Holly, 1989; Maisel, 1999; Marino, 1997; McNiff, 1992; Metzger, 1992; Nelson, 2001; Ortiz, 1998; Osho, 1999; Parameswaran, 1996; Richards, 1995; Tator, Henry, Mattis, 1998; Trinh, 1991, 1992; Turner and Rose, 1999; Warner, 1991; Wischild, 1991).

LISTENING TO THE POETS/ CREATIVE WRITERS ON THE PATH

A case can be made that poetry/creative writing is a natural manifestation of social work and vice versa. And it might be the discursive field in which the insights from all the other disciplines can find ways to express themselves. A quote from Earle Birney (1953) about 'good' poetry could have been written about 'good' social work.

Good poetry asks, and gives, still more... A poem is a poet speaking to you out of the depth of himself [herself], out of his [her] own unique experience of life and in a tone of voice and habit of phrasing which is particularly his [her] own. That is why a poem can be profoundly 'true' even when it is making nonsense out of sober reasoning and respected truisms; a good poem is the most genuine expression of the whole personality of the man or woman who made it, and for that reason alone it can bring extraordinary insights into a human mind and heart. Also, since the poet is generally speaking about those things most difficult to talk about, the complex emotions and feelings that well out of our subconsciousness, he [she] is speaking not only about himself [herself] but about the essential human things in all of us. p. xv

Social workers (as activists, clinicians, researchers, and/or professors) should be trying to express ourselves with that much precision, clarity and emotional resonance.

In his most recent book, *Revolutionary Poetry*, Nelson (2000), another major contributor to CS, makes many points that relate to this discussion. He talks about the fortifying powerfulness found in belonging within a group of writers who were also activists. He continues by describing how that powerfulness was disrupted during the McCarthy era. Poets, and others who tried to tell a subversive truth were erased by cowardly intellectuals in the universities. Ivory Tower authorities actively erased our voice and disappeared cranky streety leftist muddy-fisted poets. Nelson reclaims these poets who fought in the Spanish war as volunteers against facism; who were union organizers/ farmers/ factory workers in the States; who were comrades with people like Emma Goldman. These people saw their poetry as being their activism. It wasn't something that was a fancy hobby on the side - it was how they manifested a dimension of their political vision for a different future. They were proud propagandists! They saw themselves as poet-documentary-journalists in a way.

.. each of these poems offers us something transferable to our own time while retaining something historically bounded that needs to be honored in its difference from us... ..As that interpretive work takes place, the history the poems recount, the history the poems are embedded in, the history these poets struggled within, that history is rewritten into the texts of our own lives. We position ourselves in relation to these poets and the historicity of their lives; and we weave their speech into our own. When these poems and others like them were excluded from the canon we lost some of what we needed as individuals – and as a culture – if we were to situate ourselves in an historically informed

present. To recover them now is to remake who we are.” p. 85 *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left*, by Cary Nelson.,

Nelson makes a case that we are/were punished/exiled, in part, because of academia’s fear of our success on many fronts.

Consider such denials of meaningful relations between poetry and politics, if you will, as a long tradition whose recent flowering presented a considerable threat to the livelihoods of literature professors...The effort to separate poetry and politics was not simply part of a discourse internal to academic literary studies but part of the public positioning and defense of literariness. Part of what is remarkable about this consensus is how long it lasted... (p. 66)

I believe it is time to take on the most despised, even reviled, features of proletarian poetry, its commonality and shared cultural mission. I am therefore trying to reformulate a perceived weakness as a genuine strength. The unifying historical and rhetorical elements of progressive poetry give it special power and meaning. (p. 6)

Nelson continues by saying,

We are accustomed to grouping poets within literary movements, but thereafter we tend to read and understand their work individually. Yet on the Left the historical conditions of both production and reception are sometimes fundamentally interactive, reactive, and responsive. A poet who seeks in part to be an instrument in a larger musical composition [i.e. an instrument in the women’s movements, the environmental movements, the anti-racism movements, etc.] is not pursuing the same aesthetic as one who thinks only of a solo performance. That does not disallow a distinctive voice but rather turns it toward collective aims and effects. (p. 7)

These poets imagined and spoke elegantly about an incomplete and disharmonious world and about a potentially revolutionary future world. In the tradition of Addams, Goldman, Livesay, Waddington, Moran - and many others from many ethnocultural communities social workers should be sharing in that same conversation. And that effort and activity would be, to me, as ‘Real’ as any other social work. CS suggests that all of these genres and disciplines interconnect and offer something lively and necessary to our profession.

SOCIAL WORK AS THE ULTIMATELY FITTED PLACE FOR UNDISCIPLINED DISCIPLINE-JUMPING AND GENRE-JUMPING

In this paper I have tried to summarize how our profession is strengthened by welcoming the breakdown of boundaries (or Genre-Jumping) between all the “ism” bodies of knowledge (Queer Studies, Women’s Studies, First Nations Studies, Creative Writing, Sociology, etc.). I have tried to connect some

examples of the consequences of bringing that hybridity, multigenre-ing, and 'searchingtalk' into the classroom. My experiences of bringing creativity into the classroom (and into my activism) have been met with positivity from students/vulnerable populations. By becoming this open and creative we are opening to a healthier response to the world -- and thus, as practitioners and professors we too will be healthier and more integrated.

Garber (2001) suggests that everyone wants a seat at the table (and in her discussion she's imagining that each seat is a Discipline) but that the question becomes, "Who's table is it?" (p 59). What if our clients/ vulnerable populations own the table? Our profession is an exotic mélange of information from everywhere anyway. Evidence could be presented that we are a profession brilliantly designed for the future. We could claim and honor our 'hybrid-mutant' mothers who have been there all along wanting us to use every thing possible in our work. Jane Addams, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger were women who didn't define themselves as belonging within a patriarchal capitalist confine. They just did what they needed to do.

They invited vulnerable populations to teach them about what was useful and necessary. And they listened to the people they engaged with to find out about what was beautiful, what was admirable, what was strengthening. They jumped Disciplines and they jumped Genres. They kept diaries, designed pamphlets, wrote to the newspapers, gave speeches, produced 'scholarly' research - they kept finding new ways to say old pain and to say things about solutions. They believed that human troubles are complex in their contexts and their configurations. They believed that responding wholistically to human discomfort and disharmony requires interdisciplinarity. They did not willingly limit themselves into any kind of a 'divide and conquer' practice, process, or praxis. Poems for them, and for me, help make the whole world come together and make it matter differently. We can decide to be with/ communicate our knowledges and to find the moments where we can live/ be all our potentials.

Here is a poem that I'd like to close this paper with. It is a wish for a different way for the world to be. This poem is exploring the kind of world I try to bring to my classroom; to my profession; to my many spheres of being/ doing/ living/ creating... It describes what I would like the whole world to be shaped like. It describes how I want the world to be more whole; less shrunk and distorted; more poetic. With this poem I invite us to alertly, creatively, actively wait for, and work for, balance and holism.

I TOO AM WAITING 12

i am waiting for
the best of Canadian creativity to leak
into the whole world's wonderfulness;
for veganism to reach epidemic proportions;

for universal medi-care;
for truth in conversations
to become kinda trendy.

i am waiting for
my landlord to fulfill his ordinary promises;
for my son to reject patriarchal paradigms;
for my inner child to get young & play daily;
for everyone on the planet to unmeanly mean what they say
& say what they mean;
for my bills to be paid two months in advance by a benevolent stranger;
i am waiting for pan-global kindness.

i am waiting
to find free menstrual care products in all public places;
for income tax to be redistributive of wealth;
for university & college tuition
to be given to any who want knowing;
i am waiting for a rebirth of kindness.

i am waiting for
95% of men to finally get what we've been talking about
& to hear what we haven't yet said;
for food banks to disappear cuz abundance has been implemented
as a National minimum;
for governments to stop downloading
& disappearing from their care-duty;
for every politician to remember
integrity's owed to seven generations;
i am waiting for kindness to explode inexplicably.

i am waiting for
executives to become environmentally friendly;
for everyone to recognize family
has been an 'f' word formed by Eurocentric men's laws;
for Hollywood to embrace
diverse diversities & multiple multiplicities;
i am waiting for a sweet plague
of kindness.

i am waiting for
the daily reading
& writing of poetry
everywhere by anyone & everyone;
for built-in exercise equipment in every home
& all public places;

i am waiting for
holism, balance, wisdom;
i am waiting for
kindness to flow overwhelmingly & unstoppably.

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