

Imagination, Emotion and Inquiry: The Teachable Moment

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We explore some aspects of the elusive idea of a “teachable moment” with a special emphasis on the role of emotion, intuition, and imagination as well as intuition, paradox and possibility. The teachable moment occurs when students and teachers genuinely share an interest in better understanding something, some situation, or, in the case discussed, some text, and wish to inquire into the object of mutual concern together. Some of the aesthetic elements of John Dewey’s theory of inquiry serve as a way to gain insight into the “logic” of creating and sustaining teachable moments.

The “teachable moment” is perhaps the most sought after pedagogical prize. Every teacher knows what it feels like even if she cannot name its characteristics. It is as wonderful as it is elusive. Teachers long for the moment when their class has that special quality of intimacy, openness, and creativity that provides us with what researchers have called the “the psychic rewards” of teaching (Lortie 1975). These rewards include the almost ineffable experience of getting through to our students, of connecting, and of our students learning and not just getting ready to take a test. All too often, the moment slips away before we can seize it. The teachable moment comes so suddenly and departs so quickly that many assume it is simply a gift of good fortune. Sometimes it is, but fortune does favor the prepared. Our paper explores some of the particulars of the teachable moment, including the role of emotion, intuition, and imagination. The teachable moment is elusive. Our hope is that if we can understand it better we may find it more frequently. Ours paper is a collaborative work between a philosopher of education and a former elementary school teacher both of whom are searching for a better understanding of the illusive idea of the teachable moment.

Consider the following paradoxical passage from *The Dark is Rising*. It reads, “The snow lay thin and apologetic over the world” (Cooper 1973, 3). We ask you, without knowing anything more about this novel than this single sentence to consider how snow can lay apologetically over the world? Why would the writer of this passage choose this combination of words; what

imaginative picture do you construct with this passage? What kind of feeling does this word choice convey to you? What do you think the author is trying to say here?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines paradox as, “A statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well-founded...” (1971, 450). Poetic tropes of all kinds, metaphor, metonymy, simile, synecdoche, and such all have a paradoxical quality. **Paradoxes break the bowl of ordinary thinking.** Breaking habitual modes of interpretation confuses and entices. We feel the need to inquire into their meaning. Have you subconsciously been thinking about the title, *The Dark is Risking*? Paradoxes free us from the ordinary and every day. Imagination allows us to create possibilities and explore their consequences.

For formal logicians, metaphors are category mistakes. Defying old, familiar, and habitual ways of interpreting the world we assume they are simply false, or something to be explained away logically. Those that can live awhile with the tensions occasioned by poetic tropes can initiate creative inquiries. These inquiries explore the primeval possibilities that flood through the opening in conventional thinking created by paradoxes. Released from the mind forged-manacles of conventional categories, identities, and essences we may enter the world of possibility. Personal need, desire, and interest internally motivate the exploration. Imagination facilitates the inquiry. The paradoxical passage “the snow lay thin and apologetic over the world” provides the poetic space for exploration beyond old, familiar, and habitual categories, correct answers, or responses. Feeling, intuition, imagination, paradox and possibility, comprise the teachable moment. If they are fortunate, when students and teachers share paradoxes and inquire into them together they may experience the teachable moment.

There are three dynamic and interactive movements to any teaching event, the student, the teacher, and the subject matter. In these movements, the dance should be everywhere and the center nowhere for very long. There are, therefore, three movements within the paradoxical opening that converge to create the teachable moment. We began with the subject matter, or in this case, a text. We now turn to the teacher’s perception, although the teachable moment is no more teacher centered than it is subject matter or student centered.

Teachable moments involve shared inquiry into a subject matter of common concern. Our paper explores some of the aesthetic elements of John Dewey’s theory of inquiry as a way to gain insight into the “logic” of creating and sustaining teachable moments. Aesthetic elements, including feeling, intuition, and imagination are important to Dewey’s theory of inquiry, yet most educators ignore them entirely. In the present case, the teacher was seized by a text full of paradoxical passages that aroused in her animated feelings and

imaginings. Linda thought that the text could also arouse intense, although distinct, passions, images, and ideas in her students. For Dewey there was no sharp separation between creative thought and rational thought.

The paradoxical snow passage in *The Dark is Rising* particularly fascinates Linda because she loves the implied contrast between a traditional image of snow as being pure, fresh, soft, cushioning and protective of the dormant winter earth and Cooper's image of a miserable, worn out, thin blanket of snow unable to sufficiently do its job. Linda gets a feeling of a well-worn landscape with patches of brown earth barely covered with snow. It portrays an untidy, almost unkempt, dysfunctional world, one not aesthetically pleasing to the casual eye. These words in this quote create a forlorn and ominous feeling for her, a feeling of something being not quite right; something is missing. Additionally, and perhaps simultaneously, these words are setting up a tension, foreshadowing suspense, mystery, danger in the novel. An intuition of mystery compounded the uneasiness of Linda's feelings. Linda's inquiry into the entire book is initiated against the background of her emotional intuition of the quality of a single paradoxical passage. This passage even evoked doubt and uncertainty regarding her habitual interpretations of children's books in unforeseen ways. Dewey's theory of inquiry allows us to see the intelligence operating in Linda's emotional intuition.

For Dewey all inquiry begins "with what may be called a total seizure, an inclusive qualitative whole" (1934, 195). Like Linda, a feeling that disrupts our usual ways of thinking and acting may seize us. As Dewey indicates, "not only does the 'mood' come first, but it persists as the substratum after distinctions emerge; in fact they emerge as *its* distinctions" (196). The distinctions that emerge are discriminations of thought, ideas for instance, but these cognitive distinctions always operate against a background of aesthetic intuition. Dewey made this very clear when he indicated:

The word "intuition" has many meanings. But in its popular ... usage it is closely connected with the single qualitiveness underlying all the details of explicit reasoning. It may be relatively dumb and inarticulate and yet penetrating; unexpressed in definite ideas which form reasons and justifications and yet profoundly right.... Intuition precedes conception and goes deeper.... Intuition, in short, signifies the realization of a pervasive quality such that it regulates the determination of relevant distinctions or of whatever, whether in the way of terms or relations, becomes the accepted object of thought (1930, 249).

Inquiry for Dewey, including inquiry into the meaning of literary passages like "The snow lay thin and apologetic over the world," originates against an often unacknowledged, vague, indeterminate, and constantly changing pre-cognitive qualitative background that we may grasp only intuitively.

Dewey began his essay “Qualitative Thought” boldly: “The world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated is preeminently a qualitative world” (1930, 242). Distinctions of thought, ideas, and interpretations *emerge* out of an intuitively grasped aesthetic background. Dewey draws out the implications of this view for his theory of inquiry, “The immediate existence of quality and of dominant and pervasive quality, is the background, the point of departure, and the regulative principle of all thinking” (261). This does not mean that our intuitions are necessarily correct; it only means that intuitions are necessary for initiating any inquiry. The consequences of the inquiry determine its validity. Linda’s inquiry eventually had a host of classroom activities as its consequence. The quality of these activities allows us to evaluate the “quality” of her intuition and the intelligence of her inquiry.

A single poetic and paradoxical passage created a feeling of uncertainty and concern, Linda regarding her habitual interpretations of children’s books. This disturbing mood accompanied a new found doubt not only about the meaning of this individual text, but an awakening to the power and danger of an entire genre. This is precisely the kind of all-pervasive mood that seizes us when we intuit a unique quality. Linda’s mood set the context for her reading of the text. Her distinctions emerged as distinctions within the totality and massiveness of its unique, even if vague and undefined, quality. Subsequent selective discriminations depended upon the feelings that directed selective attention and interests. Feelings are part of the aesthetic background for Dewey. They allow us to intuit the quality of some paradoxical situation. Inquiry for Dewey began with a background precognitive intuition of a qualitative whole. Dewey declared, “If we designate this permeating qualitative unity in psychological language, we say it is felt rather than thought.... The existence of unifying qualitiveness in the subject-matter defines the meaning of ‘feeling’” (1930, 248). In other words, the feeling you have is the feeling of the quality. Others, for instance her students, may feel otherwise, so they will intuit differently.

The feeling of tension is the emotional side of the cognitive state of doubt. We are in a state of doubt when our habitual ways of interpreting things fail us and we do not know how to continue. A typical state of doubt arises when we are in the state of need. Consider Dewey’s description of need: “by need is meant a condition of tensional equilibrium” (1925, 194). Feelings and emotions express an uneasy state of needful disequilibrium. Doubt and emotion initiate and sustain inquiry. Linda’s passionate need to understand the text sustained her inquiry and eventually led her to translate her feeling into explicit intellectual questions. What did it mean? Was it good, for her? Was it a good book for fourth graders? Linda’s initial feelings and intuitions created many tensions that required more than one course of inquiry to dissolve.

The reason teachable moments and how to study them have remained

hidden from research on teaching is that researchers do not acknowledge the existence of the precognitive qualitative background, teachers' intuitions, or the importance of mood and feeling to good teaching. For them, if they cannot measure it, then it does not exist. There is also a tendency for conventional research, including qualitative research, to ignore the role of selective interest and imagination. Research that investigated the role of teachers' intuitions, interest, and imagination would help us create more teachable moments in schools with the joy and delight such moments bring to all.

Linda imagines this snow personified as regretful because it cannot fulfill a perhaps universal wish to have an abundant white and pure covering of the earth in winter to soften and beautify any frozen ugliness in the landscape. Linda imagines that the author chose these words, snow lying thin and apologetic, because of the paradoxical contrast this image presents to the reader; it plays on our desire for a cozy, blanketing picture of snow. It is imagination, of course, that creates possibilities for us to explore. Imagination suggests alternatives to our habitual ways of interpreting things. Ultimately, creative imagination is the only way out of the state of doubt and the feelings it incurs. Linda imagined the possibilities in *The Dark is Rising*.

How do you consider a novel that includes the following: a story of primeval powers carried forth into the present with ancient wise ones mysteriously guiding a young initiate; a quest to fulfill moral visions in a battle of good versus evil in order to decide the fate of the world; evil powers that are aroused; abundant symbolism that illustrates and reveals the depth and complexity of the see-saw motion of this battle in the text; ominous foreshadowing: "This night will be bad. And tomorrow will be beyond imagining" (Cooper 1973, 19); a novel that plays back and forth between present and past; time as a fluid, nonlinear entity: "You see Will," he said, "we of the Circle are planted only loosely with Time. The doors are a way through it, in any direction we may choose. For all times coexist, and the future can sometimes affect the past, even though the past is a road that leads to the future.... But men cannot understand this. Nor will you for a while yet" (Cooper 1973, 54). Do you read, enjoy yet dismiss, or then place the novel as science fiction fantasy? Alternatively, do you allow yourself to enter into this world and let the story feed your own imagination and stir your emotions? Linda is very aware of her love for literary genres that explore and bring to life quests, moral journeys, soul deepening experiences: *Merlin and King Arthur*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Star Wars* saga, *Wrinkle in Time*, even *The Wizard of Oz*; fairy tales, Native American stories. Linda knows she likes these stories because she loves possibilities. She does not accept the status quo, some given actual state of affairs, as the only possibility for many things. Linda loves to consider the unthinkable and to imagine beyond our culturally determined notions of reality. She loves to challenge herself and her students' self-limiting beliefs, their habits of thought. She believes there are

realities beyond and besides our every day pressure and worries, and believes that breaking from ordinary everyday experience is essential and happens by looking, feeling, experiencing the “misty gap between memory and imagining” (Cooper 1973, 33). This novel spoke to her in the language of poetic possibility.

The paradoxical snow passage drew Linda into the imaginative world of the novel with her senses awakened, alert, and sensitized to the suspenseful, mysterious, and puzzling unexpected; as amazed by rich details and nuances as if she were hiking through the woods on a fresh, bright, sunny spring morning. The novel draws upon the mystical legends, ancient quests and ambiance of Britain’s history, and weaves all this into a present day setting, plot, and characterization. She was compelled to read further, experiencing through text, a juxtaposition of ancient history interwoven with a modern setting, a tension of time and place, old and new. As Linda expressed it to Jim, “For me the attraction of using *The Dark is Rising* after our other language arts activities is the juxtaposition of ancient history that is interwoven into a modern setting. My interest is in appreciating, feeling, picturing, wandering around in the ancientness of the United Kingdom; the layers of history time has deposited on this relatively small island. The novel draws upon the mystical legends and ambiance of Britain’s history and weaves this into a modern day setting, plot, and characterization. The tensions between the richness and aesthetics of old and new motivated me to see what my students would do with their own exploration.” Such tensions, be they between the old and new, the familiar and unfamiliar, or the habitual and original behavior, are characteristic of the poetic openness and creativity that help constitute the poetic moment. Having worked with these tensions in her own imagination, thought, and feeling, Linda is prepared to facilitate and guide her students to do the same. Dewey observed, “What might be or might have been stands always in contrast with what is and has been in a way only words are capable of conveying.... Words as media are not exhausted in their power to convey possibility. Nouns, verbs, adjectives express generalized conditions — that is to say *character*” (1934, 247, emphasis in original). Reading a text that we feel we need to understand reaches the core of our character, it converts mere emotion into desire and interest; it induces reflection and so we embark on an adventure of ideas. When inquiry into the meaning of the text becomes passionate, there is no question of motivation.

As a reader, Linda is captured by the novel emotionally in the way it stimulates and enhances relationships she creates with herself and her world. The novel stimulates her imagination; it draws on her emotions and nurtures the relationship she has with herself as a reader, a learner, a creative person able to make choices and explore possibilities. Linda’s imagination and emotion create the relationship she has with the novel and all the possibilities there could be in exploring life and history through this novel. Linda also

experienced anticipation through her emotional and imaginative connection to the novel. As a teacher, Linda lets herself submerge into emotional and imaginative spaces through this novel. For Linda, the relationship with this complicated “children’s” novel transformed her personally and professionally as she began to articulate her felt needs, desires, and interests into the kinds of questions noted earlier.

Allowing oneself to be submerged into emotionally charged spaces was part of reasoning for Dewey who wrote:

No “reasoning” as reasoning, that is, as excluding imagination and sense, can reach truth. [The inquirer] ... selects and puts aside as his imaginative sentiments move. “Reason” at its height cannot attain complete grasp and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination — upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense (1934, 40).

Ideas emerge from an emotional and intuitive background. The above passage clearly indicates that Dewey understood imagination as having an intrinsic role in the emergence of more structured phases of the developing experience. Imagination is the point of transition between the vague qualitative background of inquiry and the cognitive foreground of ideas. The artistic artifacts of creative imagination are original ideas and novel hypotheses the consequences of which are testable by further inquiry. Inquiry on such an account is an artistically creative endeavor. As Dewey expresses it, “The idea is, in short, art and a work of art” (1925, 278). Ideas and hypotheses are possible interpretations, that is, attempts to understand doubtful situations, contexts, or texts whose consequences may be explored in imagination. Dewey says:

Deliberation is a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action. It starts from the blocking of efficient overt action, due to that conflict of prior [interpretive] habit ... [Rational] deliberation is an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like (1922, 132).

For Dewey, rational thinking required a vivid imagination. So too does rational teaching.

What does all of this have to do with being a fourth grade teacher, imagination, emotion, and the teachable moment? We began this article by describing how Linda’s imagination and emotion brought the novel alive for her; she let this happen for herself, even as a busy, over-structured teacher. In this way, Linda had an intuitive sense of how her students could discover for themselves a connection between themselves and the world of the novel.

Linda's fourth grade language arts class does not just read a novel, answer questions, and take a test. They both, students and teacher, "do" a novel in as many ways as possible that allow for a direct experience with and around the novel. Linda's initial relationship with the novel served as a springboard for her to imagine possibilities for her students. The teacher's imagination, emotion, and intuition are indispensable to the process of using this novel with the students.

As teachers we move through the time-segmented, scheduled school day, sometimes notice and take advantage of "teachable moments" and sometimes ignore them because we are too busy managing the school day. We understand "teachable moments" to be times when spaces open for the student and teacher to interact in a synchronistic dynamic. During these moments there is a special or enhanced quality of intimacy, openness, and creativity coupled with an experience of students or teachers having an "ah-ha" experience, of a connecting where there was none before; students realizing breakthroughs in learning or experiencing an effortless flow in learning. Every teacher knows intuitively what the "teachable moments" feel like and how often these moments come so suddenly and then so easily slip away; how sometimes these moments are very subtle, barely perceptible to even an experienced eye, and how at other times these moments are obvious to all involved.

We believe that teachers develop relationship with themselves as literate persons by taking time to know themselves with and inquire into a novel (or any other classroom activity). Relying on their intuition, emotion, and imagination with the topic, or issue or content area, is a key ingredient for teachers creating teachable moments. Linda took the time to initially know herself, her own needs, intuitions and interests regarding this novel before asking her students to do the same. She struggled through some of the tensions and resistances that bring self-recognition and understanding before she asked her students to struggle through a similar inquiry. The novel therefore becomes an authentic experience for her that she hopes to share with her students. Linda's "doing" of the novel, as she likes to describe it, came from an important, personal place within her. She has built a relationship with her own imagination, emotion, and intuition: Linda knows how aesthetic experience through written and spoken text can enrich her life. She has experienced the possibilities of literacy for herself and she wants to explore the possibilities for her students. The tensions Linda felt and observed in *The Dark is Rising* between the richness and aesthetics of old and new motivated her to see what her students would do with their own exploration. The snow quote was an opportunity because it presented possibilities free of our normal ways of knowing; it works as a paradox.

Linda seeks to share her own literary inquiry with her students. It is a logical thing for a teacher to do. Dewey remarked:

Logic is a social discipline.... Man is *naturally* a being that lives in association with others in communities possessing language, and therefore enjoying a transmitted culture. Inquiry is a mode of activity that is socially conditioned and that has cultural consequences.... Every inquiry grows out of a background of culture and takes effect in greater or less modification of the conditions out of which it arises. (1938, 27).

Cultural tradition and personal history are a part of the context of every inquiry. The culture of Linda's class is our primary concern, but that cannot be separated from the larger culture.

If there is a significant social component to inquiry, then it is not surprising that there is also one in artistic creation and aesthetic appreciation. Dewey noted, "The material of esthetic experience in being human — human in connection with the nature of which it is a part — is social.... If social customs are more than uniform external modes of action, it is because they are saturated with story and transmitted meaning" (1934, 329). The paradoxical tension between old and new, even concerns about the power and danger of a whole genre of literature, led Linda to explore far beyond the limits of story as merely transmitted meaning. The tensions and resistances of paradox and poetic tropes open up possibility of editing and emending the culturally prescribed texts assigned us at birth about what it is to be good boys and girls, good Americans, or good workers. If we reflect on the resistances, and perhaps begin to resist them ourselves, we may become the creative authors of our own lives.

Teachable moments occur when the students and teachers share feelings of doubt, intuit qualities simultaneously, and initiate inquiries concurrently regarding some subject matter of mutual interest. What sustains the teachable moment is when they creatively explore imaginary possibilities together. Exploring possibilities is a further function of inquiry. Initiating the foreground cognitive phase of inquiry and then sustaining it requires even further use of imagination. The paradoxical passage "the snow lay thin and apologetic over the world" provides the poetic space for exploration beyond old, familiar, and habitual categories, correct answers, or responses.

We use paradoxes such as the snow quote as occasions to reflect carefully and to perhaps create new meanings. Some teachers may consider the quote as a contradiction, an interesting choice of words, and nothing more. As a vehicle for generating teachable moments, the paradox in the passage created a poetic context where the teacher and students can suspend judgment, embrace paradoxical tensions, inquire into them together, and seek to create new dimensions of understanding. This requires that the teacher, through knowing herself, be completely present as she moves through the moment with the students. Having worked with these tensions in imagination, thought, and feeling, Linda is prepared to facilitate and guide her students to do the same.

Linda confided to Jim that *The Dark is Rising* "is full of possibilities for myself and I wanted to find out the possibilities for my students." Having herself accepted the invitation to engage in paradoxical inquiry into possibilities propelled by her own interest, desires, and imaginings she is well positioned to help her students initiate their own inquiries.

For Linda the paradoxical passage in *The Dark is Rising*, "The snow lay thin and apologetic over the world," feels forlorn and ominous. It also feels full of exciting, creative tensions, and possibilities. Others, for instance her students, may feel otherwise. We may intuit this passage many different ways. As Dewey saw it, "The same existential events are capable of an infinite number of meanings" (1921, 241). Different people of different ages, personal and cultural history, and interests, are likely to experience the same event, for instance, a sentence in the context of a larger narrative, differently. Teachers must be very careful when they decide to share their interests and inquiries with their students.

Having spent much attention elaborating on Linda's experiences with a paradoxical passage from the text and describing how she was able to develop her thinking and imagination in creative directions for herself, the next question to ask is: What about her students' experience with the doing of this novel? How do we know that teachable moments are happening for the students? Are the students developing a relationship through their own sense of self with the novel in stimulating, creative ways? This is the third movement that converges in the dance creating teachable moments. Linda knows the power of "kidwatching" (Goodman, 1982) and uses this knowledge to "read" her students and their learning: through years of watching, observing children she has developed an intuition on reading her students' emotional and physical comfort levels, engagement with learning, boredom, excitement, turning off or turning on to the learning at hand. Therefore, Linda notes her student's sense of excitement, degree of engagement and involvement with the activities in the framework she set up to do this novel.

Linda's class had already developed a context for the setting of the *The Dark is Rising* with a prior "doing" of Lynne Reid Banks' novel, *Indian in the Cupboard*. This is a novel set also in England. As a way to motivate a living interest in the text, a lived involvement with the text, to have a direct, first hand experience Linda had a British visitor come to the class. She took the class on an imaginary trip through a day in the life of a British school child, related the story in the *Indian in the Cupboard* to everyday English life, and compared aspects of that culture to the students' everyday American life. The class role-played a school day, after school life, tea time, and so on, with the visitor. Every day for months after this visit, Linda was requested to play-act the role of a British schoolteacher and to have daily afternoon tea. The level of excitement, anticipation and involvement with the students for the world they created around and with this novel provided a rich context for continuing the

“doing” of *The Dark is Rising*. These activities are the consequence of Linda’s initial intuition and inquiry and the subsequent intuitions and inquiries of her students, individually and shared, within the larger social setting of the classroom culture. They are the proper “measures” of the quality of their shared intuitions and the intelligence of their inquiry.

Linda’s teaching and learning framework created for this novel five years ago was part of her transition from a direct, whole class instruction, text-book based, transmission model to a learning-centered, process-oriented, inquiry-based system. Linda was just beginning the transition to what we now call literature circles, reading response logs, dialogue journals, and student inquiry as curriculum and knowledge construction. Besides reflecting on open-ended questions through writing in a reader’s response log and in dialogue journals, and using the written responses to prepare the students for small group and then large group discussions, it is the emotion, the feeling in the room that Linda remembers most as powerful teachable moments. The looks of awe and astonishment (and sometimes confusion and anxiety) as her students read and discussed and worked with the novel’s language; the inquiry that occurred as each student made sense of the rich symbolism, abundant, mysterious meta-phors and fluid time movement in the novel. These were daily occurrences, sometimes fleeting small moments. There were numerous small moments. The teachable moment is really a series of moments modulated by the rhythm of larger events that make up a lesson plan, the evolving school day and year, and the developing relationships between student and teacher among many other things.

Students then self-initiated several projects and activities that indicated to Linda a high level of interest and engagement. For one final project, the class imagined themselves moving back and forth between the present and the past just as in the novel. They put themselves in the main character’s shoes and at times, the spine-tingling mystery in the novel could be felt in the class as each student or groups of students shared their creative writing. This writing was extended into the students producing a “sitcom.” In this script, a knight has landed in New York City in the present. Ideas from *The Dark is Rising* fueled the language and ideas written in the sitcom. The class videotaped three sitcom sessions. With this project, the teacher needed no prodding or convincing. Linda just guided and facilitated using teachable moments in all the activities for more writing, reading, and inquiry. A variety of affiliated learning came out of this project; characterization, short concise plots with punch lines, writing a script, costume design, set design, using a camcorder, writing for an audience, timing of sessions and so on.

Linda and her students created a lived experience with the novel that served to bring out the literacy interests of each student. Linda’s imagination and emotion served as a sympathetic bridge to the students’ imagination and emotion. In conjunction with the novel, the personal worlds of the students

found a literate voice appropriate for each of them. Linda did not dictate what they had to learn from the novel. She provided structure and presented possibilities from her experience. The novel supported this effort by providing material to create a poetic moment for creative inquiry.

We typically call the foreground of inquiry “problem solving” or “answering questions” and spend a great deal of class time engaged in such activity without ever asking: Where do the questions come from? Dewey answered:

To say I have a feeling or impression that so and so is the case is to note the quality in question is not yet resolved into determinate terms and relations.... All thought in every subject begins with just such an unanalyzed [qualitative] whole.... It is a commonplace that a problem stated is well on its way to solution, for statement of the nature of a problem signifies that the underlying quality is being transformed into determinate distinctions (1930, 248).

Stateable problems to be solved, or questions to be answered, emerge out of a qualitative whole that can only be grasped by emotional intuition and imagination. In teaching, we often do not acknowledge the precognitive background to problem posing and inquiry. Teachers will often talk about such things as mood, feeling, intuition, imagination, and creativity, but educational researchers and theoreticians, concerned only with the cognitive foreground of inquiry ignore them. That is why the teachable moment seems a mystical rather than a rational experience to them.

Return now to the questions we asked you the reader near the beginning of our paper. Questions are problems expressed as linguistic statements. They create doubt and feelings of discomfort and uncertainty. Can you recall what you felt when you heard them in the context of the paradox with which we began this paper? Did you intuit a quality; did you feel the need to inquire? Or, did you as we all do most of the time, teachers, and students alike, dismiss them as just more academic exercises. These questions and others Linda asked her students about *The Dark is Rising* are expressions of the effort to stimulate authentic experiences for each student with the text just as Linda had experienced it. If the questions take possession of students they too will experience feelings of doubt, intuit qualities, and explore competing possible lines of action opened up by their imaginations. Questioning the openings created by paradoxical expressions is part of the piety of thought and a persuasive way to sustain teachable moments. We have seen how Linda plowed and made fertile the ground for teachable moments to occur, yet there is no one best way to teach. Each teacher has her or his own unique artistic style. Given your own personal experience and style, how do you think you would approach teaching *The Dark is Rising*? Answering this question also

requires piety toward the precognitive background from which it, like all others, emerges.

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