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## Dao and Zen of Teaching: Classroom as Enlightenment Field

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### **The Sound of Three Gongs**



*Buddha and Sky*  
(Dodge, date unknown)

### **Two Educators Meet and Compare Notes**

One spring day, the two of us were sipping tea together, and comparing notes on our experience in classrooms, first as learners and now as teachers. We were well into another semester of teaching, and our minds were preoccupied with classroom experiences. The challenges and struggles we faced as classroom teachers were being played out against the backdrop of our own schooling experience of oppressiveness, coercion, fear, anxiety, and boredom. There was a tragic atmosphere surrounding the recollection of our own classroom experiences.

We thought about the countless hours we had spent in existentially meaningless and forced assimilation of content materials in competition for good grades and, presumably, future security, and happiness. So often we had wished we were not there, but we had no choice

about it and no alternative places to be. One of us (Avraham) could indulge in daydreaming in class without grave consequences, but Heesoon's school was a regime of terror, and there was no way she could relax her vigilance and daydream in class.

When humans are compelled to be somewhere they don't want to be, isn't that incarceration? And to compel another to do things against his or her wishes, isn't that oppression? Never mind the rhetoric of prudence like "they *need* education to survive in this society." How many parents and even teachers have said to children variations on the same theme: "If you don't go to school and study, you will end up pushing a shopping cart on the street." Fear circulates in the veins of both the oppressor and the oppressed. All done with good intentions and out of love, but is in the end misguided and damaging.

Now that we are educators, how shall we confront this phenomenon of students being in the classroom, not out of the sheer joy of learning in the company of each other, but out of the perceived necessity of earning grades, degrees, certificates, and so on? Is it possible to turn the classroom into a place where students of any age will come voluntarily, even eagerly, because they love the company and because what they learn enriches and enlarges who they are and their sense of life? Is it possible that the classroom can become a space of enlightenment?

*Avraham (A):* When I look back, what upsets me most about my schooling is impersonality; really we were systematically being taught to be alienated from human contact and experience. There was little personal contact, connection, and content in the conduct of classroom. My teachers did not ask me and other students how we were and what was going on in our lives. There was no real attempt to connect our personal lives with what we were learning—damaging and deadening and yet this still goes on today. And, I suppose not surprisingly, I don't see massive protests in the streets by parents, educators, or concerned citizens against these rather "inhumane" practices! I wonder why we accept it.

*Heesoon (H):* Very bizarre, isn't it? I don't mean to be dramatic, but this practice of compelling our children (and when these children become adults, they have learned to compel themselves, and of course, others) to go to school and learn things that do not nourish them personally, directly, and daily is extraordinarily strange. We seem to be in a trance and unable to see the absurdity, let alone the damage of such practice. I mean, we would not think of forcing people to eat food that is indigestible or has no nourishing effect, but when it comes to "food for the mind and heart," we lose that instinct or common sense. Education is so much driven by the rhetoric of compulsion and threat like, 'you *have to do*,' 'you *need to do*,' and 'if you don't do...' that we take all this as the way it is and the way it is supposed to be.

*A:* That's right. This is why I am determined to approach the classroom as a place of personal development and community. I start all my classes with time devoted to personal process (Cohen, 2004). Students and I have the opportunity to deal with any relevant classroom issues that come up personally for them. I frequently hear stories about being stressed, tired, upset, etc. I know that educators are often fearful that if they invite personal sharing that the class will turn into a psychotherapy group, for which they feel unprepared and unequipped. I allocate one half hour for this in each class and we have heard stories about pregnancy, death, illness, job success, job loss, marriage, love, break-ups, etc. Somehow, the atmosphere is established that we can share, we can feel, and we can be sympathetic, empathetic, and excited. The situation never goes "out of control," students are personally engaged, they feel a part of something, and at the close of this personal time

they are “emptied” of personal experiences and ready to address curriculum matters. This process time is helpful for the classroom community to connect, become present, and form personal bonds. As well, I end each class with some time for sharing of experience about both personal and learning insights during the class. I often hear that students feel more relaxed and energized at the end of the class than when they arrived.

*H:* That’s wonderful! If my students can leave the class more relaxed and energized than when they enter, I sure would read that as a sign of great success in my teaching. I approach my teaching similarly. I tell my students that I don’t see information transmission as my primary job. Not that I don’t expect such to happen. In all learning and teaching, information transmission is inevitable. But what is the goal of my teaching? What do I want to see happen in my class? I want to touch the hearts of my students. I want to create an environment where their spirit can awaken. I want to stimulate their mind. I want to see their eyes open. I want to see them come *alive*. I want to see their face light up (and I want them to see each other having this experience) when they suddenly see the bigger picture, catch an insight, and are moved by understanding. It does not matter what subject I (or anyone else) is teaching.

*A:* Yes! Aliveness should be the most prized experience in a classroom. Aliveness goes with awareness. Ideally, senses, hearts, and minds are open and ready to connect with themselves, each other classroom inhabitant, and with curriculum material. I want educators to look around their classrooms and notice what states of being students are in—not in general but in the moment. A lot of teachers, when they go into classrooms, either don’t sense—see, hear, and feel—how students are, or they ignore what they notice, and carry on (because they think they *have to*) with the usual business of downloading the prepared curriculum into students. It is precisely this approach to teaching—that is teaching as information transfer or knowledge transmission—that *kills* students. When we ignore and neglect the existential being who is the student—who he or she is, their hopes, desires, longing, pain, discomfort, anger—then their eyes become dull with a frozen expression of indifference, submission, or sullen defiance and subversion. The dead feeling teachers get when they walk into classes where students sit with flat and dull expressions is an indication that the spirit is under duress. What appears to be the opposite also occurs, is just as problematic, and is indicative of the same underlying problem. Some classes are full of boisterousness and acting up. This may look livelier, but it is really an effort on the part of students to avoid the feeling of deadness, and has the same effect: no learning that impacts the existential dimension. In my view, the *real* job of the teacher is to rekindle and fan the fire of love and life in students.

*H:* I agree. As I lecture or conduct a seminar, I am always watching their faces and noticing body positions and movements. I want to be in touch with who they are and what they are experiencing in the moment. This is how I was able to notice on the first day of a particular class that my undergrad students (there were 90 of them) seemed somewhat “dead.” I was so startled by this feeling that I felt strongly that I could not just go on, ignoring the distressed human beings in front of me, and talking about the course and what we would be learning. Somewhat impulsively (internally, I had to fight the feeling that what I wanted to do was inappropriate, invasive. . . *crazy*) I asked that we go around the room and each person say in just two words what their in-the-moment experience was. They took my suggestion, although I imagined many thought it whacky. I was stunned to hear the persistent and repetitious comments, “tired,” “sleepy,” and “hungry.” For sure, there were a few saying, “curious,” “anticipating,” and “excited,” but these amounted to no more than five or seven out of ninety!

*A:* Good grief! I think you did a courageous thing when you decided to connect, even if for a few moments, with each student in such a large class that was designed as a lecture experience. I imagine that brought them to life, at least temporarily. Yes?

*H:* Yes, it did. The energy level changed in the room. There was a sense of people having real experiences, becoming real in the moment, instead of just a bunch of impersonal “bodies.” For the moment, students seemed to “wake up,” and a bit of curiosity and interest animated the room. They were looking around and looking at each other, wonderingly and perhaps sympathetically. There were smiles and chuckles, stirring of bodies, and clearing throats.

*A:* It is so easy for teachers to fall into the curriculum delivery trance. We can easily get into the trance of *having to* “get through” and “covering” the apportioned content for the day. Once the compelling idea of “have to get through” is in mind, it is a short journey to becoming resentful of anything that gets in the way of curriculum delivery. Such a compulsion quickly becomes interpreted as an overpowering need. A while ago, I was teaching a practicum class to a small group of M.A. Counseling Psychology students. The course includes a case presentation that demonstrates their clinical work from their practicum site and a related write-up that includes client background information and treatment recommendations. A student made an unusual request to perform a live demonstration with a classmate, which meant that there could not be a write-up as outlined in the original assignment, since the classmate did not constitute a case. Her desire to work outside the curriculum created a problem in terms of my carrying out the carefully set-up curriculum. I said, “I like your idea, but I need to give you feedback on your written work, as I said I would do in the course syllabus” As I spoke these words, I felt a slight tension in my chest. I thought to myself, “Whose needs am I addressing here? What’s my need to give feedback? Do I really have this need?” I realized that what I had said to her was completely inconsistent with my views of education and with myself as a person and an educator. I turned to the class and said, “Actually, I don’t have a need to give feedback. I need to have you do what is meaningful for you. Design your own learning. I trust that none of you is here with the intent to do as little as possible, and even if you are, then it is your loss. Do what matters to you. Use me as your resource.”

*H:* Now, that’s enlightened! You see, I don’t believe I can know what is meaningful to students unless and until I make a connection with those students and find out something about who they are and their individual needs. In my own teaching experience I too have found that students appreciate the opportunity to integrate the personal and the academic. I believe strongly the notion that the personal and the academic are separate is harmful and needs to be dispelled. I believe we are existential beings who are physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually alive (or not) and that honouring aliveness ought to be the primary educational mandate.

### **Philosophical Interlude**

What and how we teach is predicated upon the portrayal of who we are and what our “business” is on this planet. Currently the prevailing portrayal of human beings is that of the propertied individual<sup>[1]</sup> whose worth or power depends on what he or she possesses in terms of material wealth, status, and knowledge. Erick Fromm (Fromm, 1976/1999) calls this orientation to life the *having* mode in contrast to the *being* mode<sup>[2]</sup>. Knowledge acquisition, which is seen to be the primary business of education, becomes an essential

means to acquisition of wealth and status. And what is knowledge in this *having* mode? The having mode is not possible unless whatever we are to possess is seen as discrete, objectifiable, and hence, quantifiable. Knowledge in the having mode, then, has to be quantifiable in terms of discrete units of knowledge whose contemporary name is 'information.' Having defined knowledge as discrete units of information and what we do with the information, then we understand schools as an organization that prepares individuals to acquire, store, process, and apply the information.

In the having mode, then, it makes sense to push students to acquire and apply information. Social survival and success depend on the acquisition of information and skills that go with applying information. The quality and quantity of acquisition determines the survival, success, and worth of human beings. In this picture, what gets lost or left out is, of course, the human being who is undertaking all this doing in the service of having. The focus is on what he or she *has*, not on who he or she *is*. The focus on the person would take us to a very different paradigm: the *being* mode of existence and schooling. The focus is on the human being—the living, breathing, feeling, perceiving human beings and their existential states of consciousness. Joys, sorrows, happiness, misery, fulfillment, and aliveness all matter intensely and centrally as educational concerns. They matter more than how much students know, what they have acquired and accomplished, what their future earning potentials will be, and so on.

Can we conceive of an alternative educational paradigm that takes the states of consciousness seriously and deems them to be the legitimate and central educational concern? Yes, we can. For that, we need to go to radically different ontological views like the Daoist *qi* philosophy and the Zen philosophy. There, we can derive an educational paradigm that honours and works with the human consciousness as its primary educational good. Of course, Daoist and Zen philosophy have no monopoly on the project we are proposing. Other being-oriented and processual philosophies may do the job. We choose to work with these Asian philosophies because they are our own practice traditions, and we find the theoretical tools—philosophy and methodology—to be both precise and versatile. Daoism and Zen offer insight about the foundation and essence of being fully human, and have cross-cultural applications to education today. The potential of classrooms as enlightenment fields for cultivation of full humanity and aliveness that indicates integration of the body-mind-heart-spirit is limited only by our imaginations. In what follows, then, we will explore Daoist and Zen philosophy and practice to show their application to teacher education.

### **Emptying the Mind: The Zen Methodology**

Contemporary schooling relentlessly pursues the development of the narrowly focused rationalistic mind and its moral consequence of instrumentalism. Our orientation in life is characterized by: “What can I get out of this situation, this person, this object, this life . . . ?” and “What knowledge and skills shall I acquire so that I can get and do this or that?” This objectifying, acquisitive, calculating, instrumentalist mindset is exploitive towards other beings and is unable to comprehend, let alone feel, the sacred in Life (Bai, 2001; Bai & Cohen, in press, 2007). A rationalistic mind wants to acquire more and more knowledge and skills. It seems our whole education system is founded, precisely, upon this mindset. Zen training is designed to puncture and drain the acquisitive mindset, which is grounded in the rationalistic mind.

Here is a well-known story in the Zen tradition:

### 空 *A cup of Tea*

NAN-IN a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?" (Senzaki & Reys, 1957, 19)

The Chinese character 空 means empty, hollow. What does this have to do with classrooms, teachers, learning, teaching, or wisdom? Let's look more deeply into this little story. Who comes to inquire? A professor, a learned man full of knowledge! What could be better? A professor comes to learn, *but*—and it's a very big but—the master sees that the professor is so filled with pre-conceived and pre-digested ideas that there is no room for fresh seeing of *what is*. Now, if Nan-in didactically told the professor how stuffed and clogged up he is with "inert ideas," (Whitehead, 1929) chances are high that this teaching would only go to the professor's head once again, and would have little potential to precipitate an awakening experience. We can only marvel at Nan-in's *crazy wisdom*.<sup>[3]</sup> How do we as educators learn to be like Nan-in?

*Crazy wisdom*, well known to Zen masters, does not and cannot spring from accumulated information and knowledge that is so fondly pressed on and into students within contemporary educational contexts. Crazy wisdom, that is, the ability to wake up to vivid and transformative insight travels only through empty gaps and spaces in consciousness uncluttered by discursive information and knowledge. The discursive mind is an impediment to cultivation of crazy wisdom. What we need, therefore, is a way to clear out or empty (but not destroy) the discursive mind. That is what Zen does. Martine Batchelor (2001) succinctly explains Zen (禪): "Zen actually means meditation. It comes from the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, which means meditative state in the Buddhist tradition" (2). More explicitly, *dhyana* means non-ordinary states of consciousness (Rahula 1959, 48).<sup>[4]</sup> What is meant by 'trance' here is a non-ordinary state of consciousness in which the discursive intellectual activity slows down or ceases temporarily. Cleared of discursivity, the mind or consciousness rests in "pure" (meaning, empty of discursivity) states of Being.

In the Zen story above, the emptying of the cup illustrates the practice of Zen. Once cleared, the mind becomes capable of seeing past habituated patterns of thought and sees with fresh eyes, known in the Zen literature as a *beginner's mind*. We are not suggesting that discursive materials are *never* offered for our students' mind. Teacups are there to be filled and drunk from; human minds are there to be filled and used for discursive thinking. But filling up must be occasionally followed by emptying. The mind that is filled up more and more with ideas, notions, concepts, views, like the professor's overflowing cup, does not conduce to fresh, creative, and surprising insights that spring from an encounter with *what is*: the awesome, complex, and evolving reality in front of our eyes. Meditation that facilitates "clearing the discursive mind" is not currently a component of teacher education. Today, in the midst of an overwhelming information explosion, it makes eminent sense to incorporate meditation in our practices of education. Thus we propose an inclusion of meditation or some such practice<sup>[5]</sup> in teacher education.

## Emptying the Mind: The Daoist Methodology

The Zen insight above is further corroborated by Daoist thought. The Dao De Jing (Ames & Hall 2003), which is attributed to a mysterious and legendary old man “Laozi,” or “The Old Master,” speaks of emptiness:

### Chapter 11

The thirty spokes converge at one hub,  
But the utility of the cart is a function of the nothingness (*wu*) inside the  
hub.

We throw clay to shape a pot,  
But the utility of the clay pot is a function of the nothingness inside it.  
We bore out doors and windows to make a dwelling,  
But the utility of the dwelling is a function of the nothingness inside it.  
Thus, it might be something (*you*) that provides the value,  
But it is nothing that provides the utility. (91)

Conventionally, *nothingness* conveys a negative meaning, namely that something that is positive and desired is lacking. The Zen and Daoist understanding of *nothingness* is different. It signifies the positive state of a de-cluttered mind, a mind that is available, open, and receptive. The empty mind is a vast field of potential creativity where creative insights and conceptualizations can arise abundantly. If teachers are seriously interested in creativity and encouraging the potential in their students, they are well advised to cultivate this vast field of emptiness within themselves, which will have the effect of opening the way in their students.

“*Dao* (道)” is an ontological notion: reality as a field of infinite possibilities of perception and action. Anywhere humans reside, including our classroom, there is a *dao-field*. But in order to work in this field of possibilities, the human consciousness has to be receptive to the *dao*, or, to be more precise, it has to become part of the *dao*. The mind has to become, through embodied participation, a microcosm of the *dao-field*. To use the well-worn but still most expressive expression, we need to “*become one with*” the field. Two questions arise in this context: How do we get in touch with the *dao-field* in the first place? And, how do we work with it? While it may be true that the *dao-field* is something that is there whether we perceive it or not, what we are interested in is the question of how to get in touch with it and become one with it.

We have in effect already alluded to the answer for the first question when we introduced Zen. Zen as the practice of clearing the discursive mind by the use of awareness is the very practice we need to come in contact with and to attune the human mind to the *dao*. In other words, through Zen we contact and connect with the *dao-field*. As for the question of how to work with and within the *dao-field*, we have to first know what is in the field. Is not the *dao-field* simply empty, a place where there is nothing? Not at all! For the *Daoist* practitioners, the empty *dao-field* is full of *qi* (氣), vital energy.<sup>[6]</sup> *Qi* is dynamic: it flows, moves, increases, decreases, and so on. All these movements are the activities of *qi* in the *dao-field*, giving rise to human perceptions and actions. A classroom is a perfect example of a *dao-field*.

A teacher whose attention is refined through a training of awareness like Zen continually

perceives the micro (individual students) and macro states (the collective) of moving *qi* manifest in the classroom and skillfully works with it. This is an energetic work. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the nature of this energetic work.

### Working with *qi*: The Dao-Zen Approach

Let us probe more deeply into the Zen practice of “emptying” the mind and the daoist practice of working with the individual *dao-field*—our consciousness. What is involved in this? The best known Zen practice is sitting meditation, *zazen*. In just sitting, you learn to pay intense attention to whatever occurs in your field of consciousness. But Zen meditation can be practiced anywhere and anytime, not just when sitting. In fact, we recommend this practice to you. Lying down, walking, running, it does not matter. What matters is that is simply being aware—just seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching—without adding editorial comments on the process, or if they creep in, then noticing the speaker of those comments. Ordinary states of consciousness are filled with editorial comments that make it difficult to get in touch with the vast and empty but energy-filled background consciousness. Zen teaches us the technique of simply witnessing what happens moment-to-moment. Just ask this deceptively simply question, “What is happening now, and now, and now?” No further comments, elaboration, explanation, or justification are required. Just watch and see, like this:

*I am sitting here at the keyboard. I am aware that I feel tired. This tiredness manifests itself as heaviness around my eyes. I look out the window. I see the lights of the city. I see darkness. I pause. I am in my own world. I feel the tightness in the chest around the heart area. I feel alone. Suddenly, I am aware of the “reader” who would be reading these words. I feel a rush of energy and sensation moving up my spine.*

This example of awareness and noticing the flow of feelings and associated energy demonstrates the fluidity of consciousness that follows the process. Energy follows awareness.

It is important to emphasize that *qi* is not something abstract and mysterious. *Qi* is the felt quality of energy. When Heesoon walked into her undergraduate classroom of 90 students and sensed *deadness*, she would describe what she felt as “stagnant *qi*.” When the opportunity was offered for each student in the class to express what they felt in the moment, it had the effect of stirring up and moving the stagnant *qi*. In other words, a flow began to happen. By the time everyone said two words, Heesoon and her students felt a slightly different configuration of *qi* circulating in the classroom. Students’ faces and postures showed that they were filled with a bit more brightness, liveliness, and engagement. This is the *qi*-work, i.e., energy work. Teachers are energy workers. As well, from the Zen discourse, we can say that teachers are awareness-workers and modellers. Awareness and energy work go together. With awareness, energy is detected and sensed in the experiential field—the *dao-field*. Once you sense the energy, you can begin to follow it, work with it, and nurture it. There is a whole intricate and profound practice dimension of the *qi* work that can be implemented in teacher education. Presently, there does not seem to be anything close to this kind of work in teacher education.

### Dao-Zen Teachers and Classrooms

Teachers as awareness and energy workers can see classrooms as fields of *dao* suffused with *qi*. The full existential spectrum of humanity is evoked and educed in the field of *dao*: emotions, perceptions, desires, mental constructions, communications, beliefs, values, actions, being bodies, being, doing, and spiritual experience—all that existentially constitutes being human. Education must aim at cultivating the whole person. Anything less leads to inner and outer oppression in a classroom no matter how well intended the teacher and the school may be. How so?

When the wholeness is not validated, when certain parts of a person are privileged and validated and other parts are marginalized, as in our present day education system, this leads to various manifestations of internal oppression and external oppression (exploitation and domination). Whoever is not existentially whole and in touch with their existential matrix of being suffers from and manifests forms of oppression, notwithstanding avowed good intentions. Of course, whole persons are not easy to find. The next best thing is a persistent and pervasive commitment to becoming whole. A teacher who is intent on covering his or her lesson for the day, and pays little attention to the students' in-the-moment existential states of being is, albeit inadvertently, oppressing the students and diminishing their spirit.

Let us call teachers who practice Zen awareness in the *dao-field* of classroom “Dao-Zen teachers. They approach the classroom as a Daoist alchemical cooking pot, within which the raw materials (*prima materia*) of the existential totality of each student along with himself or herself “cook” for optimal potential for transformation towards full humanity capability for wisdom, compassion, and love. In the process, students do learn academic content and skills, but these do not constitute the overarching or ultimate aim of education. The ultimate aim is to cook the raw materials, that is, whatever is existentially present, at the right temperature, for the right amount of time, and with the right attitude within the *alchemist-chef* and his *alchemical cauldron* (the classroom) until the gold emerges from the *prima materia*.

The above way of describing the teacher's role could give you the wrong impression, namely that students are passive recipients of alchemical transformation treatment conducted by the teacher, the master alchemist. The role of *alchemist-chef* (leader or educator) is just that, a role, and as such can rest within any person, including students, in the classroom. The teacher is designated as such and does carry specific responsibilities but the role can and does shift amongst the human beings in the classroom. The Dao-Zen teacher has the capacity to allow the role to be assumed by the right person at each moment, using his or her awareness to notice this happening and to step aside and allow the teaching contribution of that person to the classroom community. In such a classroom, the spirit of “deep democracy” (Mindell 1995, 2002) prevails.

This chapter from the Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu 1991) conveys the spirit of “deep democracy” in Daoist philosophy:

When the Master governs, the people  
are hardly aware that he exists.

....

When his work is done,  
the people say, “Amazing;

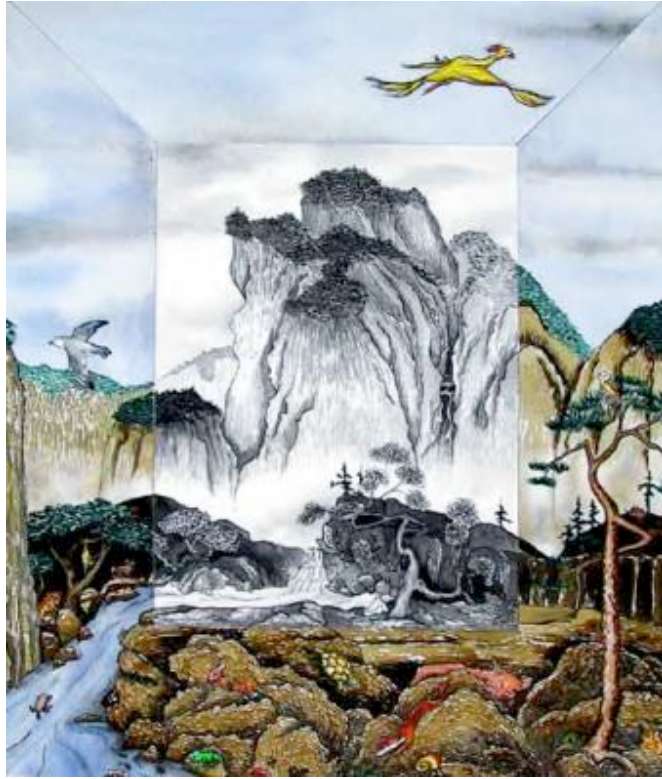
we did it, all by ourselves!” (Ch. 17)

### Begin Here

As alluded before, it is not likely that we will find Dao-Zen teacher educators working in teacher education programs around the country. How then can we educate future educators to be like Dao-Zen teachers? Who can and will educate them? At the risk of appearing to give out a tool, a recipe, or a formula, we shall offer a method-less method, also known as heuristics. This is how Moustakas (1990) defines “heuristic research methodology,” which we find useful for our purpose:

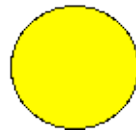
The root meaning of *heuristic* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries. (9)

If we substitute the word educator for researcher, we have a very good and succinct rendering of how a teacher can simultaneously teach and learn the Dao-Zen pedagogy. We are used to the idea of being taught first and then going out to teach. Learning and teaching are two separate processes. Let us try the heuristic method of self-discovery here. Undertake the experiment of being a Dao-Zen teacher in your classroom and see what happens. You might have to get a little “crazy” (become, at least in a small way, a crazy wisdom master) in your classroom, not crazy as in losing yourself, but crazy as in coming to your senses, literally coming into your senses. You can learn to trust that you and your students are in the midst of the infinitely creative and complex *dao-field*, and there, practice being in a Zen state, at any moment. Focus now, not just now, but every now that you are able to notice. You can notice your physical self, your breath, your heart’s beat, your thoughts, sounds, movements, activity, and so on. Just notice whatever you notice. Follow your own awareness. Invite your students do the same. Meta-communicate with them about all these experiences as you and your students go about teaching and learning your subject matter. Be curious about who or what in you observes. Lose the sense of observer and observed. Find the connection between observer and observed and realize that there is no separation, only points along the way that are inter-connected. You can live in the *dao* and breathe in *qi*. Dao-Zen is truly Us.



*Untitled from Collection, Designs of Faith*  
(McGinnis, 1992-1998)

*Dao and Zen*  
*In this very moment,*  
*This one*  
*This one,*  
*There is only one thing,*  
*And that one thing*  
*Is*



(A. Cohen)



1 Gong

## Notes

[\[1\]](#) It needs to be noted that Socrates was fighting this very portrayal of the propertied individual 2,500 years ago in ancient Greece. His fight with the Sophists, the first

professional paid teachers in the West, was precisely for this cause. The Sophists went around giving lessons to students on how to become wealthy and powerful individuals.

[2] These two contrasting modes are not to be understood dualistically and, hence, exclusively. The having mode does not exclude human beings partaking in the being mode: and vice versa. These two modes are orientations, meaning that people are *primarily* oriented in one way or another, with the other mode being subordinate and underprivileged. Thus, in our having-oriented society, the being mode is not taken seriously and is given only a marginal status.

[3] “Crazy wisdom” belongs to the vocabulary of Zen. In searching for an equivalent notion in contemporary educational literature, we find that Max van Manen’s (1995) “pedagogical tact” comes closest, but, of course, Zen pedagogical tact tends to go off the edge of the rational mind.

[4] Rahula explains *dhyana* in technical details as presented in Buddhist psychology: In the first stage of *Dhyāna*, passionate desires and certain unwholesome thoughts like sensuous lust, ill-will, languor, worry, restlessness, and skeptical doubt are discarded, and feelings of joy and happiness are maintained, along with certain mental activities. In the second stage, all intellectual activities are suppressed; tranquility and *one-pointedness* of mind developed and the feelings of joy and happiness are still retained. In the third stage, the feeling of joy, which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity. In the fourth stage of *Dhyāna*, all sensations, even of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and sorrow disappear, only pure equanimity and awareness remain. (48-49)

[5] Different cultural and spiritual traditions have come up with varied methods of meditative practices, such as many forms of sitting meditations, contemplative arts involving crafts or writing, ecstatic movement arts, martial arts, and prayers. All these practices enable us to get in touch with the non-discursive dimensions of our being and to work with them.

[6] “In common usage, *qi* means both ‘air’ or ‘breath’ and ‘energy’. As a philosophical understanding, *qi* is the basic “substance” of the entire cosmos, including human beings. The mental/spiritual and the material, or the animate and the inanimate, are all *manifestations* of *q*.” (Bai & Cohen, 2007, in press) More: “The first significance of *qi* for us is that it is psychophysical, meaning that it encompasses both the psychical (Mind) and the physical (matter). This integration is etymologically reflected in the Chinese character for *qi*, 氣, as it is composed of two parts: steam (气) rising from rice (米) as it cooks. Perhaps there are alchemical allusions of transformation and creation in this etymology. Through cooking hard-to-digest rice grains, they become nourishing food that vitalizes the rice eater. This line of interpretation shows a connection, made in human *experience*, between matter and vital energy. (Ibid.) Here is Clark’s explanation of *qi*: “[*Qi*], impelled by the tension between the opposing yet complementary forces of *yin* and *yang*, and structured through a complex system of correlations whereby five basic elements or processes—water, fire, wood, metal, and earth—provide a matrix in which human and natural phenomena cohere in meaningful patterns. (Clarke 2000, 31)

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