Using poetry to reach and teach future educational leaders for social justice

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of teaching concepts of social justice in educational leadership preparation programs, share teaching strategies from the literature, and provide new examples of graduate student activities and products with the intention to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue. We describe how we have used poetry in our classrooms to better understand: the potency of self-reflection; the importance of understanding heritage; the value of unpacking privilege and power, and; the responsibility of recognizing and deactivating stereotypes in the process of reaching and teaching future leaders for social justice.

Article:

TEACHING LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: ENACTING WHAT WE ESPOUSE

While the concept of social justice is not new to society at large, incorporating concepts of social justice into teaching educational leadership is relatively new. The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of teaching concepts of social justice in educational leadership preparation programs, share teaching strategies from the literature, and provide new examples of graduate student activities and products with the intention to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue. We describe how we have used poetry in our classrooms to better understand: the potency of self-reflection; the importance of understanding heritage; the value of unpacking privilege and power, and; the responsibility of recognizing and deactivating stereotypes in the process of reaching and teaching future leaders for social justice.

First, we explore the importance of teaching for social justice in leadership preparation programs. Thereafter, we share programmatic and pedagogical considerations as well as specific teaching strategies. Next, we describe a pedagogical process for bridging theory to practice and show how this approach complements our goal of teaching educational leaders important social

justice concepts. Finally, we conclude with a discussion to push the field forward and invite others to join the dialogue.

JUSTIFYING AND STRATEGIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP TEACHING

We agree with Bogotch (2005) that dialogue around social justice is not separate from actual school leadership practice. For example, Theoharis (2007) found that principals who lead with a commitment to equity: (a) raise student achievement; (b) improve school structures; (c) recenter and enhance staff capacity; and (d) strengthen school culture and capacity. Furthermore, Mansfield (in press) found that principals who lead from a social justice perspective have a commitment to active resistance against deficit thinking and a drive to create a safe space in school that is relationally similar to an extended family structure. Relationships and empowered thinking undergirded the actual changes to school structures, which included opening up gifted and advanced placement courses to all students.

According to Brown (2004), educators need to "retool teaching and courses to address issues of power and privilege - to weave social justice into the fabric of educational leadership curriculum, pedagogy, programs, and policies" (p. 78). Departments of educational leadership must develop a critical mass of faculty willing to engage in the dialogue and infuse it into their individual courses and the overall leadership program (Bruner, 2008). To do so is not an easy task. First, we believe embracing social justice teaching requires a paradigm shift or personal value audit for some. Second, we have observed that discussions of social justice and equity often push faculty and students outside of their comfort zones. Singleton and Linton (2006) argued that courageous conversations rarely take shape overnight. They are the result of intentional and purposeful dialogue and scaffolding that takes time to develop. Third, it is easier to read about social justice teaching strategies than it is to actually implement them in classrooms. According to Shapiro (2010),

> The work of educational leadership for social justice requires hard work, imagination, and courage. It is work that engages the heart, mind, and body in ways that are exhilarating, yet highly stressful and physically exhausting. So much needs to be accomplished to transform schools into compassionate and just learning communities. If educational leaders repress their emotions or explode with frustration and work until they are exhausted, they will suffer and in the process be less effective leaders. Those preparing educational leaders can benefit from learning more about the power of emotion and about strategies for tapping into emotion in service of social justice. (p. 242)

Unfortunately, negative views of emotion (as a demonstration of weakness) have deemed the expression of feelings in school leadership as unprofessional (Shapiro, 2010). However, it is our belief that emotions, while highly political, are important ways of knowing, as they stem from our values and beliefs. We maintain that leading without emotion is virtually impossible and that emotion cannot be separated from intellectual practice. We believe that leading with emotion is more authentic and actually respects the human experience.

Programmatic Considerations

According to McKenzie et al. (2006), little literature exists on what a leadership program focused entirely on social justice would include. However, there is a growing understanding that educational leaders must become activist leaders with a focus on creating equitable school environments (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Kose, 2009; Lugg & Shoho, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2006) while forefronting and balancing preparation strategies that both address the complexity of schooling and focus on day-to-day practices (McKenzie et al., 2006). Following this line of thought, scholars have forwarded social justice definitions that are linked with academic achievement, critical consciousness, and inclusive practices (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2006). Therefore, the goal of leaders should be to: raise achievement for all students; prepare students to live as critical citizens in society, and; structure schools to ensure that students learn in heterogeneous environments (Capper, et al., 2006; Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2006).

In order to facilitate school leaders' understanding toward creating heterogeneous environments, there must be a theoretical grounding that raises students' critical awareness of multiple perspectives and realities (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, language status and any other categories are often labels that largely contribute to the commodification (see Alexander, 2005) of students, parents, and communities and were largely created to serve state interests, such as high-stakes testing. Therefore, when educators examine issues of race, they should interrogate the social, institutional, and historical implications as well as the organizational and structural barriers for the communities they serve (Milner, 2007). In teacher education, Asher (2007) challenges classroom teachers to unpack the tensions of race, culture, and gender by actively engaging in critical dialogue and self-reflection that interrogates the intersections of these aforementioned identity labels and binaries. Educators should also encourage space for new, hybrid identities (Asher, 2002) as well as classroom dialogue on the subject of identity that is nuanced and supports difference (Asher, 2005).

Another programmatic consideration is the student admissions process. Research has shown there is still a need to train educational leadership professors on the importance of student diversity by considering who is admitted to educational leadership programs in the first place (Kezar & Carducci, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2006). Reflecting their concern that schools engage in a more collaborative and multicultural conceptions for leadership, Kezar and Carducci (2007) call for preparation programs to focus less on admitting candidates who are already in positions of leadership (or aspire to be principals) and reach out to other educators such as teachers and counselors (who do not necessarily aspire to be principals) as legitimate players in the leadership process. Regardless of their formal or informal leadership labels, McKenzie et al. (2006) recommend that educators admit students who *already have an orientation toward social justice* because not doing so requires considerable ground to be covered in the short two to three years of a leadership program.

Pedagogical Strategies

In addition to developing a programmatic orientation to social justice, preparation programs are experimenting with a variety of concrete ideas for what Furman (2012) described as moving beyond the abstract to developing a practical "toolbox."

Developing critical consciousness. Theoharis (2007) maintained students must develop a reflective consciousness that deepens their knowledge of self and remains open to new ways of thinking and knowing. Learning social justice means active engagement with emotional and value-laden issues (Rusch, 2004). Rusch (2004) grounded her thinking in Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning that argued students must modify personal paradigms, reject habits of mind, and reorder previously held assumptions as evidence of perspective transformation. One way to prompt this type of thinking is to require students to engage in "the plunge," an activity that requires them to place themselves in a situation in which they are the only minority and then reflect on their feelings and perceptions of others related to their presence.

Some educational leadership professors utilize elements of popular culture to develop critical consciousness in higher education classrooms. For example, Bruner (2008) wrote about using the movie *Crash* as a critical reflection instruction tool to focus on diversity issues. After viewing the movie, students wrote papers on themes including self-reflection, privilege and power, and stereotypes. This assignment required students to grapple with their beliefs and make sense of how their values impact their leadership. According to Bruner, "The movie challenges the viewer to confront personal attitudes and ask ourselves how our preconceptions influence our everyday interactions with those who are ethnically different than ourselves…" (p. 484).

Reflective and autobiographical writing. Along similar lines, Rusch and Horsford (2008) described a writing assignment based on Theoharis' (2007) work that required students to read his article and use it as a framework for reflection on social justice theory and action. Schmidt (2009) utilized the social justice autobiography to help students highlight ways in which they have acted for the good of others. Brett, Behling, and Brake (1998) also suggested autobiography and autovideography to help students confront beliefs and behaviors - their own prejudices and stereotypical behaviors - to develop more egalitarian attitudes and practices. Students read the life stories of others, write their own autobiographical stories, and then convert these into videos.

According to Brett and colleagues, students tended to bond together as they explored similarities and differences in their experiences and perceptions of their experiences..."the method seemed to enable students to apply to themselves the notion that contemporary -isms are often behaviors engaged in by persons who consider themselves unprejudiced and who are unaware of their discriminatory actions." Students understood how they have been targets of discrimination and how they have contributed to discrimination themselves.

Guided reflection and journaling is also a prime example of how professors can facilitate the development of their students' critical consciousness (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Kezar & Carducci, 2007).

Artistic expression. Similar to Brett, et al. (1998), Boske (2009) advocated for the use of numerous artistic formats of expression to capture students' ideas about current curriculum trends and issues in education across culturally diverse communities. Students utilized artmaking (photography, short films, music) via Microsoft MovieMaker to bring social justice issues and their understandings of them to the forefront of their educational practice. According to Boske,

students experienced a kind of personal transformation as they struggled to artistically address injustice and experienced emotions that included sorrow, fear, disappointment, and, sometimes, joy.

Case studies. Since it is important for educational leaders (practicing or preservice) to focus on problems of practice and means for resolving them, problem-based learning via case studies is essential in preparation programs (cite). Many students need explicit examples of social justice action because they lack frames of understanding in regard to what this looks like in a school or for a school leader (Schmidt, 2009). When instructors present students with case studies, they are required to confront problems in a safe, simulated way, challenged to consider whether similar problems exist in their environments and then to decide how they might resolve them (Schmidt, 2009). Other scholars (please see: Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Kezar & Carducci, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2006) also advocate the use of case studies as an important tool in teaching future leaders how to translate social justice theories into the day-to-day practice in schools.

Equity audits. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) advocated for the use of equity audits to promote discussion and awareness of patterns of inequity in schools. The press for incorporating equity audits in leadership preparation programs has been reaffirmed by a variety of scholars (please see: Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; McKenzie, et al., 2006; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). Equity audits rely on a set of 12 indicators divided into the categories of: teacher quality equity; programmatic equity; and achievement equity to provide students with a set of variables for which to gain data and critically analyze. Students learn lessons centered on equity as they try to gain access to data that, while public knowledge, is often difficult or impossible to obtain, while they also learn to analyze variables that are related to student achievement a critical lens. When multiple weaknesses are identified, students must prioritize and make decisions (based on personal ethics, school/district goals, available resources, etc.) about which areas to target for improvement plans.

USING POETRY AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE TEACHING STRATEGY: *I AM FROM* POEMS

Although faculty have utilized reflective writing, videography, and other tools as a social justice instructional strategy in all of our programs in the Department of Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University the experience we write about here was with our first cohort of Ed.D. students. The Ed.D. program is highly focused on connecting leadership learning to practice. Coursework in this program is seamless (meaning, content is not provided in separate/individual courses; bur, rather, is provided as an ongoing two-yearlong curriculum integrated with the daily practice current school leaders to make it as authentic as possible) as students learn all content in context. When students begin this doctoral program, they spend an entire semester engaged in the work of understanding who they are as people and how this impacts who they are as leaders and, in turn, how their personal and leadership identities impact their relationships with students, teachers, parents, and school communities. To facilitate this understanding and "knowing of self," we ask them to write *I am From* poems.

The Theoretical Foundations of the Activity

According to Shapiro (2010), artmaking is a tool for leaders to gain insight into their emotions and how these emotions impact the social justice work they do in schools. Shapiro noted, "Artmaking can facilitate a personal, authentic engagement with social justice issues" and "provide expression of subjective experiences that are important in our lives as leaders" (p. 245). Furthermore, Barone (as cited in Shapiro) called for the creation of communities of "strong poets" who

> ...refuse to accept as useful the description of [their] lives written by others. Instead, the strong poet is a strong storyteller, continuously revising her life story in the light of her own experience and imagination...She is necessarily a social being and a moral agent, a responsible citizen in a shared community. (p. 246)

Thus, the *I am From* poem exercise, which was developed and adapted by the actor Rebecca Rice, is a way for students to examine how they can be culturally responsive to their communities and build trust with diverse stakeholders.

According to Boske (2012), John Dewey "...reminds us to consider the need to recognize the impact of prior lived experiences, to make meaning from current experiences, and to draw connections. These connections provide spaces for the way in which gained knowledge depends understanding and responses to situations that follow" (p. 118). The use of the *I am From* poem as a teaching strategy is rooted in critical theory and constructivist practice in the classroom to facilitate a power shift and sharing between students and instructors. The purpose is to create a forum for discussion of issues and diverse perspectives related to ethics and social justice in education that ultimately improves learning for all students. Art making in general, and poetry specifically, encourages learners to exercise agency and to assume responsibility for their own learning, fosters a community of learners, promotes a critical awareness of self and of others, makes the learning process personally relevant for students, and dispels traditional hierarchical teacher/student relationships. The use of the *I am From* poem is consistent with a feminist approach to teaching and learning that recognizes power in the teaching role, recognizes the diversity of all students, ensures equity for all, and includes students in engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994).

Phase I of the Teaching/Learning Process: Faculty Modeling and Oral Sensemaking

During the first few weeks of the Ed.D. program, students were asked to repeat the phrase, "I Am From," and create verbal depictions of their lives from the perspective of both pride and oppression. As an instructor for the Ed.D. program this first semester, one of the coauthors, who had utilized multiple art making teaching strategies at a previous university, provided her own *I Am From* poem to students as an example and to establish trust. She took students line by line through her poem and described and gave meaning to the metaphors she had utilized in her phrases. In essence, she led students through the "think aloud" method of teaching where she spoke aloud the thought process she went through while creating her poem and the events that shaped her prose. Students were encouraged to go home and work for a week on constructing poems that represented their pasts, cultures, and identities - without focusing or being stymied by the worry of creating perfect poems with rhyme and rhythm. They were told to come to class the

following week with poems in hand, but that they would not be forced to share their poems with everyone if it made them uncomfortable.

Students are, typically, anxious about writing "poetry" and uncomfortable with exposing themselves. The following comment from a student captures this Ed.D. cohort's overall anxiety: "Well, I went home last week after being given our assignments and told my wife that my tasks were to write a one page poem and to write a 20 page paper...and that I couldn't wait to write the 20 page paper!" While students do not revel in the thought of writing papers, writing assignments are within the scope of activities that they are "used to." They are less comfortable reflecting on themselves, particularly in creative formats. Nevertheless, students most often undertake the poetry assignment and write amazingly rich poems that help them understand who they are and where they come from as well as help them get to know others in their classes better. Almost always, students indicate that while this activity is uncomfortable for them, it is a powerful tool for reflection that they come to deeply appreciate and respect.

Phase II of the Teaching/Learning Process: Students Share Processes and Products

Students returned to class either emotionally charged or drained after writing their poems. The instructor asked for students to share their poems to one another in groups of three or four and to describe their thought processes and the experiences that brought them to what they had recorded on paper. Students were given the option not to share their poems or to share only parts of their poems with one another. Sometimes, students are uncomfortable at first, but gain courage to share their poems once they establish trust in their small groups. Students shared their *I Am From* poems with one another for approximately an hour before coming back together as a whole class (see Appendices A and B for examples). At that point, the instructor asked for volunteers who were willing to share their poems out loud to the entire class. Sharing as a large forum lasted another hour and allowed for whole group sharing and a widened establishment of trust and "knowing" of one another. As students shared and got to know one another, the instructor encouraged them to discuss how the content of the poems is relevant to their leadership practice. According to Boske (2012), as students engage in critical thinking by examining their lived experiences and those of others, they create space for alternative thinking and, as a result, reexamination of their selves to question and counter what they know as true. This learning process is transformational as students grapple with alternative points of view that force them to consolidate or question their beliefs and values.

Phase III of the Teaching/Learning Process: Exploring Emergent Themes

Though this paper is not based on an empirical study, the coauthors thought it would be helpful to provide readers with a brief glimpse of the themes that developed from the *I Am From* poems constructed by our first Ed.D. cohort. The content analysis of the poems uncovered consistent themes including: an understanding of heritage, a sense of overwhelming professional duty, an awareness of hardship (self or others), a recall of strong emotions such as fear or sadness, and recollection of childhood memories.

Student poems demonstrated an understanding of heritage in the following ways:

- *I am from European and Native American heritage - a mutt and proud of it.*
- *I am from the end of a trail of tears and immigrants working the land for years.*
- *I am from Ghanian mountains, "da bush," waterfalls. Sponsor, share, save them all. Dominican sun and sister faces. I am from world, places.*
- *I am from the African slave, the Cherokee nation, and the slave master's loins.*
- *I am from the knowledge that hundreds of millions of my African family have been enslaved both physically and mentally since the 17th century. This condition happens in a world dominated by greed, ignorance, and hate. The first opinions of my people are based solely on skin color.*

Students demonstrated a sense of the overwhelming duty of being a school leader in the following ways:

- *I am from biting off more than I can chew. My plate is overflowing with life and academia stew.*
- *I am from Krypton, take flight, giant "S." I'm invincible, ain't no Kryptonite...I come to the rescue all day and night.*

Students demonstrated an awareness of hardship in the following ways:

- *I am from a family who loves. A mother who worked 3 jobs to raise 4 boys. A dad who walked out when I was 4...3 stepfathers.*
- *I am from the long way 'round. Made my way, stood my ground.*
- *I am from the love that produces a peace, with courage to say, "through your rapes, murders, lynching, beatings and lies, I am still your sister. I sill breathe the same oxygen that you do, and trillions of cells make-up my body. I cry when I am happy and when I am filled with grief, do you really see me?"*
- *I am from the Biafran war, Took my grandmother, stole and stifled childhood dreams. Our education deferred. Yes, almost denied.*

Students demonstrated a remembrance of fear and sadness in the following ways:

- *I am from bottles of liquor. Where the skeletons in the closet just keep getting sicker.*
- *I am from lost innocence, angry voices, strong words, stinging words...fear as only a child could know it.*
- *I am from poor eating habits and lots of gain, Morbidly obese nearing four hundred. Bypass surgery to save my life. Missing some food, but not the two hundred pounds.*

And students acknowledged childhood memories in the following ways:

- *I am from jump rope and Cracker Jacks. Red rover, Red rover, send me right over. The Jetsons and "Baby Boo" ... Mommy will they ever make Black baby dolls for us?*
- *I am from Beastie Boys and Twisted Sister; Skating parties and parachute pants. Cotillion and Flash Dance.*

- *I am from musicians, educators, and entrepreneurs. From Bach and Beethoven, to the Negro spiritual sounds of "Ezekiel Saw a Wheel" and "Hold On." From the calm of a symphony orchestra to the bounce of hip-hop beats. From teachers to professors, from authors to editors.*

Phase IV of the Teaching/Learning Process: Revisiting Insights and Effects

After we engaged students in dialogue about how their past experiences influence their leadership practice as school leaders, some came to the realization that their experiences have helped them be more empathetic toward specific students while others came to the realization that "baggage" from the past has negatively impacted their leadership practice and they made commitments to transform their practice. Once this activity was completed, the instruction for the remainder of the semester focused on utilizing the knowledge learned about selves to guide their efforts to get to know students, teachers, and parents in their school communities. During the remainder of the program, students were regularly invited to return to the knowledge they gained via the *I Am From* poems and further reflect upon their insights and efforts to change practice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In our experience as instructors teaching for social justice, it is clear that our students actively engaged with the sometimes difficult and complex emotions and attitudes that surfaced during the multiple phases of writing *I Am From* poems described above. Finding ways to promote an understanding of individual heritage awakened an awareness of hardship as well as memories of sadness and sometimes fear. Sharing childhood memories often resulted in cathartic experiences, which enabled the transformative learning experience to take place. Our experiences echo those of Brown (2004) who emphasized the potency of self-reflection. We found that incorporating the activities and projects associated with the *I Am From* poems is one way to promote social justice understandings in our students that can be translated to the communities in which they lead. Leading for social justice involves both justice and care toward those who comprise the school community when making decisions. Knowing yourself and understanding what impacts your leadership as well as understanding those that surround your school community and for which you make life altering decisions, creates a "...care orientation that focuses on identifying needs and creating a solution responsive to the needs of all involved..." (First, 2012, p. 337).

While we do not advocate for a one-size-fits-all curriculum, we hope sharing what some have done in the classroom spurs others to share their insights and specific teaching tools that can strengthen our efforts as a community of scholar-teachers. In our experiences, literary and artistic activities facilitated important student dialogue concerning the relationship between individual past experiences and current leadership practices. Moreover, these activities produced important "aha" moments when students realized their past and present can indeed inform future practice in more positive, productive ways. Thus, we believe that these activities, and the resultant dialogue, have the potential to transform leadership practice by helping educational leaders "...operate from a reflected-on and articulated concept of social justice to guide their leadership and decision making" (First, 2012, p. 335).

However, for a truly impactful transformation to take place, we believe that faculty involved with educating leaders must have lengthy and purposeful discussions about the missions of their programs and conduct audits of all of their coursework to determine how to address the concept and practice of social justice through entire programs rather than individual courses here and there. Faculty must discuss how to introduce concepts and, most importantly, how to keep the conversation going as students move through their programs. Faculty might consider how teaching strategies such as *I Am From* poems and equity audits can be utilized across content areas and incorporated into school law and curriculum courses rather than remaining in courses titled *Leadership for Social Justice*. Finally, faculty willing to move the orientations of their programs to social justice and equity would position themselves well by providing instructors with professional development opportunities that might facilitate strong teaching for social justice as well as the use of alternative teaching strategies for adult development.

Additionally, if we are to enact our espoused beliefs, then we need to clarify what we mean by social justice and align this understanding with our classroom practice. This might mean redefining and reinventing our entire conceptualization of leadership. According to Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005), "From a social justice perspective, the greatest challenge for the educational administration field may be to shift its mental model of what it means to be a school leader rather than a school administrator" (p. 209). Prospective leaders will, in turn, need new skills and knowledge. No time is better than the present due to administrator turnover to raise questions, embrace change, repopulate the school leader population (Marshall, 2004). Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy challenged educators with the following question: "Who will lead is one of the most critical challenges and one of the most important opportunities to influence social justice" (p. 208).

In order to promote revolutionary changes in schools that challenge oppressive structures, leadership preparation programs should help educators develop the skills necessary to counter oppression and "transform silence into language and action" (Lorde, 1984, p. 43) in schools. If we are to take a critical social justice stance on leadership education, we must help students name and examine injustice...and take action for change. This requires new teaching strategies such as those embedded in this article that encourage learning beyond an understanding of self to that of the community and globe: equity audits; movie reflections; racial autobiographies; *I Am From* poems; short films; photography; and music. Through teaching strategies oriented toward social justice understanding and transformation, students learn to analyze the impact of race, gender, sex, disability, and socio-economic status on students and schools - for the purpose of creating an informed theory of practice for social justice and equity. Educational leadership faculty must raise concerns about social justice issues and make advocacy for transformation a priority. They must weave social justice learning throughout entire programs to create authentic change.

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Appendix A - Example of *I Am From* Poem

Mary Born in Bethlehem

Mary born in Bethlehem.
But there weren't any stables
Or fluffy farm animals
Or angels singing too far off stars.
Hallelujah.

Instead, there were empty gray factories
And people who drank too much
To cover up lost dreams and
Feelings of nothingness.
Cursing.

ACDC blasting on 70s stereos
While life giving steel
once prevalent,
Now gone from the hands that
Wished to mold it.
Damn.

Archeologist? Fraid not.
There ain't no work in that.
Have a secretary packet
and go on your way.
Child,
you didn't just aim high
did you?
We'll beat that out of you
in no time.
Literally.

Mary born in Bethlehem.
escaped
To the mountains
Where language was drawn out
And sneaky eyes looked behind
Wide smiles.

Mary from Bethlehem
in a trailer park.
Raisin breasts and crooked teeth
Praying for a miracle.
Right?

God this doesn't make sense.

So pick up the straw
Clean it up.
Nest for something great
That is brewing deep inside.
And run.
Run with it
Mary from Bethlehem

Take this great, God-given gift
And direct your own path
To salvation
Open mind, eyes, soul
And take heed
Due diligence
And speed
To move from where you are from
To that which you want to get done.
Amen.

Appendix B - Example of *I Am From* Poem

I Am Public/I Am Private

I am a child of finger-painted skies, soaring kites, snow angels and lofty ideals.

I am of private dreams and public expectations.

I play both roles well. Duplicity is survival.

I was born an old soul, whose name means a nobleman, a hero who guides with sage advice. Imagination was my best friend. My secret, it's private.

A peacekeeper on the playground, a caretaker at home, I picked up the pieces for parents who couldn't.

Not anesthetized, just not equipped. Why don't children come from manuals? Public smiles, private smiles, private tears, how will we get through the troubled years?

I retreated to movies and magic, a perfect world more like television than truth. A world where cars flew, animals talked, and people tucked you in at night.

Under the watchful eye of double-Libra parents, too busy with the straining of supernova needs of an all-American star child, I was always second. S'alright? S'alright!

I have my private word, where I happily escaped into my world of books and records, laughter, stories and songs, colored pencils and scissors and make-believe.

The "cats and the cradle" not "father knows best," raised in the 1970's disco dysfunctional decade of PMA, know-down-dragged-out, built-up self-esteem, counseling and concealing. I did survive. Private matters, not for the public.

"I'm ok. You're ok." You ok?

I was bullied but never bullied. Was beaten, but never fought back. Not ok, just expected. From a family in the public eye, we don't do that.

I stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Superman had strength, DeBergerac the wit, J. Alfred Prufrock taught me not to conform.

I can wear a tie, and still sleep at night.

My heroes taught me self-defense from small-minds and fighting fools. Bruises heel, but irony cuts to the bone.

I am funny and clever and witty and silly. I am earnest and honest and obedient. Public and private.

Possessor of a neon-halo that shines bright, when needed, I danced as hard as I could to turn tears to laughter, sadness to sensational. In private, and in public.

I am an army brat. The military brought my family together. The military ripped my family apart. Death was swift, snuffing and smothering, the survivors became "Ordinary People," who hibernated for many years to follow, and some never truly woke up.

A "Hero's Death" in the papers, we grieved in public. My family died with him, in private. They did use the hurt for good, even though what was left was hollow.

Creativity and talent, taught me how to compose the perfect life - illuminated and elevated for all to see - I am public and private. Sharing the outside, rarely the inside.

I am passionate and principled, pragmatic and personable. A teacher who learns, a leader who follows, I let fate guide me.

True love, new love, real love, my love, life is perfect in mine eyes. I gave too much already in public, leave me this in private.

I am led by a benefactor who never showed me nothing less than kindness and love, inspiration and awe. Defender of all, because she could, standing in my corner, I am invincible. A light,

where there was twilight, we learn to love those despite limitations. In public we smile, in private we laugh.

I am tested and persevere. Completing the competing demands of the great Blue and Orange, I lost my mother, my "Irish fight to win" rival. Now that she's gone, I understand her more than ever. "The Great Santorini" in pearls and pumps, no one has, or ever will push me as hard. In public, I'm ok. In private, I'm in Hell.

I am guarded. I may be a public servant, but I am not your maid. I will help you but be kind, for everyone is fighting some kind of battle. In my world, "gimme" never gets, but "please" or "may I" gets you what you need.

I dance to my own tune, and teach others to dance with me, if they so choose. Wearing my tie in public, you can hear me tap my shoes. Shh! Let's dance!

I am a noble hero, a sage and old soul: I draw out, I look in. I am here, I was there, I will help you get from here to there, or bring you from there to here.

I am fair, I am authentic, the scars, the smiles, in public and private, I am me.