What Can Folktales Teach Us about Higher Education Teaching?

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Folktales, stories passed down orally for generations, can shed interesting insight into higher education teaching. Thirty-nine folktales about teachers and teaching from twenty-nine different countries were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to discover themes relevant to contemporary higher education. The teachers in these stories use primarily constructivist approaches to teaching (modeling and experiential learning), vary in their levels of wisdom and virtue, and struggle with the inherent power of the teacher over his or her students. Implications for modern education are discussed.

Professors in American higher education are constantly trying to find innovative ways to engage students. As educational policy and trends change, academics struggle to stay abreast of novel teaching methods and strategies in order to maximize the impact of their instruction. The practices of the twentieth century have been transformed by new approaches in educational philosophy and developmental psychology, resulting in "flipped classrooms," developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), "connected learning," increased interactivity, "blended learning," and teachers acting as the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage," implying a more constructivist approach to student learning.

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One source of inspiration about teaching and teachers' roles is examining the "literature" that has been passed down orally for generations: folktales. These stories, most originating in oral societies, have survived for a reason: they are *good* stories that address important intellectual, social, and moral issues. In an oral society, if a story is not strong, it is not told and it disappears. The surviving folktales we have accumulated in the written record must be both entertaining and useful or they would have perished. What can these tales teach us about teaching?

Literature Review

Media Depictions of Teachers

Cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to particular images over time helps shape public perceptions (Weimann). Developed in the 1970s by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, the theory was the culmination of research into the impact of television viewing on people's perceptions of reality, particularly those perceptions related to television violence. They found that increased exposure to violence and crime on television led heavy television viewers (> 4 hours/day) to perceive the real world as a more violent place than it actually was (Gerbner et al.). The prevalence of violence on television meant increased exposure for heavy viewers, which translated into negative real-world perceptions. In a similar manner, repeated exposure to particular images or stereotypes of teaching and teachers in media not only reflects social norms, but perhaps also helps to engender social perceptions of the profession and its educators.

Amy Cummins examined the depiction of teachers in contemporary, young adult, realistic fiction to explore the good/bad teacher dynamic. She found that favorably depicted teachers were those who helped "students develop their identities and resist dominant and oppressive educational paradigms, [while] the less favorably perceived teachers often represent the authority against which the adolescents and good teachers rebel" (37). She applauded that the texts she analyzed moved beyond the good/bad dichotomy to depict changing and more subtly nuanced teachers. Still, the "more effective teachers correspond with education theorist McLaren's formulation of the teacher role-ideal of the 'liminal servant,' while less effective teachers fit the mold of the 'hegemonic overlord' or 'entertainer'" (37, citing McLaren 164–65). In the role of "liminal servant," teachers create an exploratory environment that empowers students to participate

actively in their learning and to question hegemonic norms that subjugate peripheral social voices. It is a constructivist approach to learning in which "the teacher is a facilitator who demonstrates skills and respects student responses rather than a dispenser of knowledge; the student's role is active rather than passive, more like an exploratory risk taker than a person who works only for right answers to yield a grade on an assignment" (Cummins 44).

Catherine Carter examined the metaphors used to describe teachers and found that the teacher-as-saint metaphor was predominant in popular culture and media representations, leading to social expectations that teachers should work miracles, martyr themselves while shepherding their student "flocks," and inspire "students through their passion for the subject, their nontraditional pedagogy, their charismatic personalities, and their profound caring, which somehow transcend shortages of books, chalk, or training" (68).

Mari Dagaz and Brent Harger examined the depiction of professors in popular films from 1985 to 2005. They found the stereotypical portrayals of "glasses, bow ties, and tweed jackets" (274), but they also found that, compared to the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, film depictions showed younger professors and more male professors than reality indicates. They also found that African American professors were over-represented, while Asian and Hispanic professors were under-represented. Professors tended to follow stereotypically gendered character traits with females portrayed as "sensitive and nurturing" and males as linked to "dominance and intelligence" (282).

Bandar Alhamdan and colleagues examined the depiction of teachers in newspapers in five countries. They classified these depictions into four larger categories: the caring practitioner, the transparent (un)professional, the moral and social role model, and the transformative intellectual (490). The caring practitioner was "expected to be attentive to students without bias . . . [and] prioritize their needs" (497). The transparent (un)professional characterization focused on teachers' abuse of their power over students, teachers as lazy and uncaring, and teachers as involved in sexual or criminal misconduct. It emphasized unethical conduct and contrasted it with such positive characteristics as "neutral, kindhearted, friendly, knowledgeable, brave, sincere, dynamic, cordial, selfless and a motivator of children, attentive to students and unbiased, sincere, punctual and respectful" (499). The moral and social role model characterization defined teachers as upstanding moral compasses for others to idolize. These teachers

were dignified, respectful, inspirational, and honest, similar in many ways to the teacher-as-saint portrayal described by Carter. The transformative intellectual portrayal depicted teachers as societal change agents who were dedicated to growing the next generation of "worthy citizens" (Alhamdan et al. 500).

Patrick Shannon and Patricia Crawford summarized many of the popular conceptions of teachers and teaching. They mentioned the image of teachers as "caretakers of children," as "saviors answering a calling to change the lives of children and adolescents," or as incompetent ("those who can, do; those who can't, teach") (256). They also addressed the conceptions of teachers as "jailers" who either drill their students and punish slackers or idly oversee student work without intervention, as "keepers of wisdom" who exert a civilizing effect on their charges, as "guides" to children's natural development, or as "technicians" who can efficiently package and present curriculum.

Folktales as Teaching Texts

Storytelling is inherently about teaching and learning. We tell stories to forge social bonds, to explain ourselves, to share information, and to teach through vicarious experience. Different types of stories offer us different kinds of learning. *Cautionary tales* help us avoid the dangers and pitfalls of our surroundings, *fables* help us wrestle with issues of morality and ethical behavior, *myths* explain the origins of the world and its people and give us a sense of history and purpose, *pourquoi tales* explain why things are and how they became so and help us create order out of seeming chaos, and *hero tales* encourage us to aspire to be greater than we are.

As Kendall Haven writes,

> Humans have told, used, and relied on stories for over 100,000 years. . . . Most Western cultures began, en masse, to read and write only a few hundred years ago. Before that, oral stories were the dominant form through which history, news, values, cultural heritage, and attitudes were passed from person to person and from generation to generation. . . . Evolutionary biologists confirm that 100,000 years of reliance on stories have evolutionarily hardwired a predisposition into human brains to think in story terms. We are programmed to prefer stories and to think in story structures. (3–4)

Stories have always been an important way that humans, across cultures and across history, effectively construct, encode, and share knowledge.

Tad Williams, author of the *Otherland* fantasy series, makes a similar suggestion:

> After all, is it not the way we humans shape the universe, shape time itself? Do we not take the raw stuff of chaos and impose a beginning, middle, and end on it, like the simplest and most profound of folktales, to reflect the shapes of our own tiny lives? And if the physicists are right, that the physical world changes as it is observed, and we are its only known observers, then might we not be bending the entire chaotic universe, the eternal, ever-active Now, to fit that familiar form? If so, the universe, from the finest quantum dust to the widest vacuum spaces, does indeed have a shape. It begins "Once upon a time . . ." (598)

Through the intangible folktale, humans gain subjectivity and a sense of control and meaning in the face of the immensity and mystery of the universe.

In modern society, we still use folktales and stories to help us understand and relate to our world. We see references to folktales in political cartoons (a recent one, for example, showed a politician sawing off the tree limb he was sitting on, a reference to the Hodja stories from Turkey) and advertisements (see Dégh and Vázsonyi; Dundes); we use snippets from folktales as modern aphorisms ("straighten up and fly right") and in song lyrics; and web designers help people navigate websites by providing "bread crumbs" (from the tale of Hansel and Gretel).

Methods

Qualitative content analysis was selected as the best way to mine the folktale texts for data. Barbara Wildemuth explains, "Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes, and patterns" in texts (308). Earl R. Babbie discusses two types of content analysis: manifest and latent. Manifest content analysis classifies "the visible, surface content of a communication," usually resulting in quantitative counting of word occurrences, while latent content analysis examines

"the communication's underlying meaning" and results in quotations addressing themes in the documents (328).

Data Collection

Folktales are classified in three varieties of indexes: type, motif, and subject. Type indexes classify whole stories, enabling scholars to find similar tales from different countries. We did not use type indexes in this study as we were building our data set to include as many *different* stories as possible, not variants of the same story.

Motif indexes break folktales into pieces called motifs and classify each piece. This is a level of analytical granularity that enables similar parts of folktales to be drawn together, despite the folktales themselves being very different. For example, the motif of the slipper test (H36.1 Identification by fitting of slipper) is well known from the *Cinderella* stories, but the test also occurs in less conspicuous tales from around the world, such as the Chilean story of the enchanted cow, or the Irish story of Billy Beg, whose shoe is taken by a princess he rescues and is used to identify him as her rightful husband. We examined two motif indexes of children's folktales—*The Storyteller's Sourcebook* and *The Storyteller's Sourcebook, 1983–1999*—to find folktales pertinent to this study, using the subject index and the keywords "professor," "teacher," and "instructor." We did not use the original motif index—Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*—because the sources he included are not readily available to most scholars.

Finally, we examined the eight indexes of Mary Eastman, Norma Ireland, and Joseph Sprug. First published in 1915 with many subsequent editions, their *Index to Fairy Tales, Myths, and Legends* is a thorough, subject/title/author classification of these three genres of stories. The first four editions by Eastman (1915, 1926, 1937, 1952) contained no stories pertinent to this study, since the listed stories were all authored fairy tales (literary tales) not folklore. Care was taken in the remaining editions to winnow out the fairy tales with known authors.

Once known-author stories, duplicate stories, and tales that included teachers who were only nominal characters in the story (such as a tale of the birth of the teacher Confucius) were discarded, the resulting data set comprised thirty-nine tales from twenty-three different countries: China, Czechoslovakia, England, Ethiopia, Gambia, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon,

Myanmar, Netherlands, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Tibet, Turkey, the United States, and Vietnam.

Data Analysis

The folktales were read and coded for themes relating to the depiction of the process of teaching or the role of the teacher. Coding was conducted following Strauss and Corbin's three-tiered coding process to develop grounded theory. First, we used *open coding*, "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (61). We followed this with *axial coding*, "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories" (96). Finally, we used *selective coding*, "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (116).

Results

Based on the coding scheme enumerated above, three primary, interrelated themes regarding teachers and teaching emerged from the data. Each of these is addressed below.

Methods of Teaching

The folktales in this study showcased many methods of instruction, from the more historical, objectivist approaches (lecture and repetition) to more recent, constructivist methods (problem solving, modeling, and experiential learning).

LECTURE

Whereas none of these folktales was set in a traditional educational environment such as a school, several of the "students" in the tales learned by listening to the words of the teacher. In the Greek story of "The Laborer and the Nightingale" (Paxton), a man is so entranced by the nightingale's singing that he captures it; it promises three pieces of wisdom in return for its freedom, and, when the laborer

complies, it says: "never believe a captive's promise," "keep what you have," and "sorrow not over what is lost forever." The man realizes the value of the teaching in retrospect, as he watches the bird fly away.

In the Indian story of "The Five Wise Words" (Sideman), a young man decides to seek his fortune but asks his teacher's blessing before departing. The teacher gives him five counsels: obey whomever you serve, never speak unkindly to anyone, never lie, never try to appear equal in station to those above you, and if you meet someone reading from a holy book, stay and listen. The young man wanders the world and follows his teacher's advice at moments of crisis in his life, leading to his success at every turn. Contrary to the story above, in this one, the teaching is given (and heeded) before important decisions are made. In both, however, the words are, indeed, wise.

The Swedish tale of "The Strong Voice" (Sperry) tells the story of young Per, who has such a tiny voice that no one listens to him. His schoolmaster searches his Book of Wisdom and explains to Per that if he wants a voice that all will hear, he must find such important news that people forget their troubles. Per cannot get anyone to listen, so the schoolmaster again consults the Book of Wisdom and explains that Per must first learn to listen if he wants others to do so. He begins to hear the wonderful stories of the animals and plants, but still no one will listen. Again, the schoolmaster consults his book and explains that Per must learn to do things that others cannot do. When Per hears the birds talking of the dam about to break, he rushes to the miller to get him to close the iron gates that reinforce the dam. The villagers follow, but the miller is out, so Per picks up stones and begins to strengthen the dam himself. The villagers quickly understand their danger and work together to save the village. Per is elected mayor, but the story ends with Per still unsure of what he has learned (how to have a voice without speaking by motivating others with his own actions; in short, how to be a leader).

In the Greek story of "The Prince and the Vizier's Son" (Manning-Sanders) the vizier's son's tutor offers very confusing advice, such as when the son asks whether he should take a feather he found on the ground, and the tutor replies, "Take it, and you will repent it; take it not, and you will repent it" (55). He takes the feather and the prince demands it *and* the bird from which it comes. The vizier's son and the tutor acquire the bird, causing the sea nymph who owns it to throw off her jeweled girdle, and when the vizier's son finds it and takes it back to the palace, the prince demands it *and* the queen of the sea nymphs to whom

it belongs. Again, the tutor helps his student complete the task. Eventually the queen destroys the evil prince and marries the vizier's son. The verbal lecture, in this example, is ineffectual; offering a truism to a student's question is not helpful, no matter how accurate. However, it does challenge the student to rely on his own wits and intelligence and to make his own choices and face the consequences; in this way, the student grows and matures. The tutor also never abandons his student, regardless of his choices, and so he serves as a constant companion and guide in life's challenges.

REPETITION

Rote learning by repetition is evident in only one of these stories. In "Donkey and Scholars" from the Netherlands (Jagendorf), a trickster is paid to teach an ass to speak. He repeatedly puts grain between the book pages, and the ass learns to turn the pages in search of the grain while braying, "eeh, aah." The trickster claims he has learned his vowels already. In this tale, repetition and reward are employed, much like Pavlov's classical conditioning with dogs, in which animals were subjected to repetitive stimuli to produce specific responses. This story is the only one to involve teaching animals, which might suggest this method is inappropriate for teaching humans, calling the rote memorization of the "skill-and-drill" approach into question.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Four of the tales include some form of learning through testing or trial. In the Chinese story of "The Sage in the Cave" (Alexander), teacher Wang Shen challenges his students to get him out of a cave. None can! Then one student tricks the sage by claiming he can get his teacher *into* a cave, and Wang Shen comes out voluntarily to see whether he can do so.

The English story of "The Schoolmaster and the Devil" (Spicer), depicts a contest between a teacher and the Devil. In this tale, the Devil needs souls, so he terrorizes a town so people will sacrifice themselves to regain peace. The local schoolmaster challenges the Devil to pass three tests (count dewdrops, count wheat grains, wash a rope of sand in a river). The Devil accomplishes the first two but fails the third as water dissolves his sand rope, and the Devil returns to hell empty-handed.

"The Teacher's Tricky Test" (Amore and Shinn), an Indian folktale, portrays a teacher willing to offer his daughter to the "most virtuous" student who brings him the most secretly stolen property as dowry. The Bodhisattva refuses to take anything in secret as nothing is truly secret. The teacher gives his daughter to the Bodhisattva and makes others return their stolen goods.

In "The Test" (Jaffe and Zeitlin), two students give their professor the excuse that they missed an exam due to a flat tire on their return from vacation. The professor offers them a make-up exam the following day. Elated that their ruse worked, the students study all night and return the next day. The professor separates them, and they find that their exam consists of only one question: which tire was flat?

It is interesting that in each of these examples, the teacher's "test" is actually a clever trick, not an actual assessment of prior knowledge, as is most often the case in higher education. Passing these tests is: impossible, leading to failure (washing a sand rope); difficult and reliant on chance (flat tire); impossible, leading to enlightenment (stealing secretly); challenging, leading to a new way of thinking (getting the teacher out of the cave). The tests are used as a gatekeeper, defeating those who are not worthy and celebrating those who are, and they reward only those who move creatively beyond the confines of the testing situation: the student in the cave changes the rules of the test, and the Bodhisattva declines to follow the given rules. The learning depicted by the successful students shows they have moved from the basic levels of Bloom's taxonomy of educational goals (remembering, recognition, and recall) to much higher levels of complexity and abstraction (analyzing, evaluating, and creating) (Anderson).

MODELING/EXAMPLE

Teaching through the vicarious experience of others or by modeling the desired learning was present in five of the folktales.

In "The Twin Parrots" tale from India (Gaer), a mother parrot raises twins to know all that parrots need to know. The babies are stolen by a hunter who sells one to a brigand and the other to a holy man. The king of the region gets lost in the forest and hears one parrot mimic his owner, saying, "bind him and kill him." He races off and hears the holy man's parrot say, "feed him and pay him honor." The holy man's parrot teaches the king that the difference is due to the model each has had.

The untitled Turkish story from the Downing collection (65) depicts the famous teacher, Nasreddin Hodja, as he struggles with a teaching moment: how to lead his students through the village without being disrespectful? If they precede him it is disrespectful to his status as teacher, but if he precedes them and turns his back to them, it is disrespectful to them. He eventually mounts his donkey backward while riding in front of his students to solve this dilemma.

The Chinese story of "The King of the Mountain" (Hume) describes the exploits of the famous teacher Lao Tzu. When a terrible tiger threatens the village, the people try to kill it, but fail. When they ask the help of Lao Tzu, he arrives in his cloud chariot and, accompanied by one villager, takes a baby goat to the tiger's cave. The tiger loves it like a kitten, and the two play together. Slowly the tiger is transformed by the kitten's love into a human, and, learning from this example, the village lives in peace and tranquility.

In the Ethiopian story of "The King's Black Curtain" (Davis and Ashabrenner), it is the king, not the teacher, who provides the "instruction" for his nobles. The story explains that because of their nearly divine status, kings always eat, hidden behind a curtain. When a wise teacher attends the king's feast, the nobles mock him, but the king invites the teacher to eat with him behind the curtain, an incredible honor. When the nobles complain, the king explains that a king can make people nobles and give titles, but God made the teacher wise, hence the privilege.

"The Scholar and the Thieves" from Vietnam (Sun) describes a poor, ragged teacher sleeping in a miserable hut. When robbers enter his home, they take pity on him and offer him some of their stolen food, but he refuses as it is better to die of hunger than to eat stolen food.

Modeling works when students mirror the positive traits of their teachers, so long as their teachers are wise and are not too strict in their desire for imitation. In "The Way of the Master" from Japan (Edmonds), however, the teacher demands his villagers do *exactly* as he does, with disastrous results, as they mirror his mistakes as well as his good manners.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Sometimes learning is acquired, not by direct instruction, but by immediate experience "in the field." Teachers may use the current situation to encourage

their students' growth and insight, and sometimes it is the teachers themselves who must learn this way. Seven stories addressed this kind of learning.

In "Never Know When It Might Come in Useful" from Iran (Shah), the famous teacher Nasrudin takes a fussy scholar across a river in his ferry boat. When the scholar asks if the crossing will be rough, Nasrudin answers, "Don't ask me nothing about it." "If you have never studied grammar, then half your life is wasted," sneers the scholar. When the boat begins to sink, Nasrudin finds that the scholar has never learned to swim and replies, "Then ALL of your life is wasted."

The "Talking Talisman" from Israel (Barash) tells the story of a magician who makes a huge tower (Talisman) that identifies Jews, so the villagers can beat them to death. A Jewish teacher comes in disguise to the local university and trains the sons of the local nobles and ministers. After three years, he takes his students to the marketplace, and the Talisman roars out that one of them is a Jew. The teacher asks the students to confess to being Jewish, but none will. He beats them for lying. The local nobles and ministers decide to get rid of the Talisman as it is obviously malfunctioning. As soon as the Talisman is destroyed, the teacher leaves and his students forget all his teachings, but the Jews in the area are now safe.

In "The Way of the Master" from Japan (Edmonds), a teacher is sent to a backward village; he pridefully instructs them to do exactly as he does. A smart warrior is sent to get the teacher to quit his position. The warrior holds a banquet, where the teacher makes a series of gaffes, which the whole population mimics. The teacher runs away in embarrassment; so do the villagers. The warrior explains that the best teachers "teach them [students] to do what is right and let them do it their own way" (137). The teacher takes this lesson to heart and becomes a great teacher.

"Saving the Pennies" from Poland (Geras) portrays how a teacher and his wife agree to save pennies in a trunk until they have enough to make apple strudels in the spring. Neither adds money, and they argue and fall into the trunk, which rolls down a hill. When the people of Chelm hear of this, rather than internalizing the lesson about saving, they make a silly, but precautionary, rule that trunks may not have wheels.

The tale of "Padmasumbhava and the Felicity Scarf" from Tibet (Hyde-Chambers and Hyde-Chambers) describes how a king is jealous of a local teacher's wisdom and hopes to humiliate him before the court. The teacher arrives and sets the king's scarf ablaze; humbled, the king prostrates himself before the teacher

and offers him the scarf as a sign of respect, which starts the tradition of giving felicity scarves to honor the recipient.

"The Wisdom of the Lord" from Turkey (Jagendorf) is a very short tale about how the Hodja finds folly in big watermelons growing on small vines and small nuts supported by a huge tree, until a nut falls on his nose. He quickly realizes the Lord's wisdom in not making the watermelons grow high in the tree.

In "Feet for All" from Turkey (Kelsey), several boys are standing in a river as the Hodja comes by on his donkey. Wanting to trick the wise teacher, they claim they can't figure out whose feet belong to whom, and they are afraid they will be stuck in the river forever. The Hodja grabs a stick and pretends to poke their feet, and the boys run out of the water, thereby cleverly resolving the issue.

In all of these stories, experience provides the instruction, whether or not a human teacher is present. This lack of an intermediary is congruent with modern, constructivist approaches to learning, where the teacher is a guide rather than a formal instructor. However, just as we often need more learned compatriots to help us to the next level of understanding (see the concept of the "zone of proximal development" in Vygotskiĭ), many of these story characters also rely on a teacher to help them interpret what the experience is supposed to teach them.

Wisdom and Ethics

Wisdom and virtue have a difficult coexistence in folktales about teaching. The word *wisdom* derives from the Proto-Germanic *weid*, meaning "to see" or "to know." The word *virtue* derives from the Latin *virtutem*, meaning "goodness" or "high character." Some of the teachers in these tales are depicted as both wise and virtuous (having both knowledge and moral integrity). One example, in which virtue and religion are conflated, is the schoolmaster in "The Schoolmaster and the Devil" (Spicer). The schoolmaster relies on his virtue for protection, saying, "heaven will help me" (68), and he uses his knowledge of science to force the devil to leave the town. Other teachers who share these two traits are described as gentle, kind, patient, brave, and honest.

Some of the teachers from these stories are neither wise nor virtuous. Their vices are pride and deception, both of which may stem from the position of power they hold or are trying to hold on to. The teacher in "The Way of the Master" (Edmonds) instructs his students to do exactly as he does, which has embarrassing consequences when he makes mistakes. "The False Schoolmaster" (Skurzynski)

does not teach at all, but has older students teaching younger students. When a woman asks him to read a letter from her husband, it is discovered he cannot read, and he is driven from the town. Whereas peer teaching is certainly valuable as an instructional technique, it is less so when the teacher uses it to avoid displaying his own ignorance. All of these stories involve some humiliation of the teachers; this combination of traits makes the teachers especially deserving of such ridicule.

None of the stories features teachers with virtue and no wisdom. Although the sample of stories in this study is too small for definitive conclusions, this suggests that, at least for teachers, wisdom is what enables teachers to do good works in their communities. Wisdom does not guarantee, however, that teachers will be good. The real tension between wisdom and virtue is most clearly seen in the stories in which the teachers are wise but not virtuous, and those in which the teachers are wise but enter a morally gray area.

Some of the wise but unvirtuous teachers are merely harmless tricksters. Two different versions of the same story appear in which a teacher tricks the Hodja into believing he can see the future when he predicts the Hodja will fall with the branch he is cutting (Juda; Walker). Others of these teachers are violent and deadly. In "The Woman in the Chest" (Rank), the teacher kills the priest's wife, makes the priest think he did it, and is paid by the priest to take the body away. Then he continues planting the body places, making people think they killed the woman, and gets hired repeatedly to take it away. Padmasumbhava lights the king's scarf on fire, a display of power inappropriate for most teaching classrooms (Hyde-Chambers and Hyde-Chambers). The combination of wise and unvirtuous is often much more dangerous than foolish and unvirtuous.

Finally, several of the wise teachers are operating in a morally gray area. They exhibit both virtuous and unvirtuous traits. Some of the teachers in this category are deceitful. In "The Teacher's Tricky Test" (Amore and Shinn), the teacher challenges his students to bring back the most stolen property as dowry, planning to marry his daughter to the most virtuous student. When the teacher asked the Bodhisattva "why he had not yet brought anything taken in secret," he answered that "there was no such thing as secrecy" (78). This teacher has deceived his students to teach a moral lesson. Some of these teachers are in a position of relatively less power than those they are teaching. They do not exactly serve their students' best interests, but perhaps a higher good is achieved. For example, Cat fails to teach Tiger all his hunting skills, and Tiger's swishing tail ends up giving

him away when he is hunting prey (Htin Aung and Trager). Cat has not met Tiger's needs as a student but has probably saved the lives of other animals.

The most effective teachers in these stories are both wise and virtuous, so that their actions and words align for a positive effect on their students.

Power

A well-known aphorism proclaims, "knowledge is power." Power is a subject that comes up repeatedly in folktales about teachers and teaching. Often the teacher is the one with the power, but not always.

Many stories convey the point that teachers have power. Some extreme examples go so far as to indicate that the teacher is more powerful than the king, or even has power over life and death. Padmasumbhava, mentioned above, is not punished for lighting the king's scarf on fire (Hyde-Chambers and Hyde-Chambers). Instead, the king offers his scarf to Padmasumbhava as a sign of respect. In the story of the "White Buffalo Woman" (Erdoes), the Lakota nations are starving, as they have no horses to hunt buffalo. Two men search for a buffalo herd and see a beautiful woman. One tries to touch her and dies. The other returns to the village to prepare for her arrival. She brings the sacred pipe to the people and teaches them how to use it. When she leaves, the buffalo give themselves to the people as food. She literally brings both death and life (through food).

Perhaps because knowledge is so powerful, the teacher is often depicted as being abstruse, unable or unwilling to communicate clearly, or involved in inconsequential minutiae. This arcane knowledge separates the teacher from the common person. In "Twigmuntus, Cowbelliantus, Perchnosius" (Booss), a wise king hires seven professors to translate his wisdom for the common people and to twist and turn common language so it is complicated enough for the king to understand. He proclaims that whoever can silence the king and the professors will marry his daughter or lose his head trying. A farmer's son wants to try, so he works for a parson in return for access to his library; he tires of reading books, so he heads to the castle. On the way, a twig hits him in the mouth (Twigmuntus), cows bellow at his passing (Cowbelliantus), and a perch bites his nose while swimming (Perchnosius). The professors give a long harangue and ask him to explain it; he replies with his three nonsense words, and the king and the professors are silenced trying to figure out the nonsense.

In the Dutch story of "The Professor" (Pellowski), seven professors waste

seven days trying to figure out what people would drink if all the water were salted herring, and in "The Prince and the Vizier's Son" (Manning-Sanders), the tutor gives the son cryptic advice about whether to take a feather he has found, "Take it, and you will repent it. Take it not, and you will repent it" (55).

The teacher may also signal his power by performing astonishing feats. Lao Tzu darkens the sky and appears in a blaze of light from his cloud chariot in "The King of the Mountain" (Hume), and Padmasumbhava ignites the king's scarf without any perceptible source of fire (Hyde-Chambers and Hyde-Chambers).

Sometimes this goes a step further and the teacher withholds important information or gives false information. In "Why the Tiger Is So Angry at the Cat" (Htin Aung and Trager) mentioned above, Cat purposely does not teach Tiger all his hunting skills so that Tiger will not become greater than he and an eventual threat. When the Hodja is convinced that the teacher can tell the future in "And Upon the Fourth Bray" (Juda), he says, "You are a prophet. You told me when I was going to fall. Tell me now when I am going to die" (89). Rather than giving an honest response, the teacher decides to play a trick on the Hodja.

He shut his eyes tight. His hands hovered over his head, floating, turning, twisting in slow deliberation. Very slowly, very deeply, he intoned:

> When the donkey gives the fourfold cry,
> It is Allah's will that you shall die. (90)

The balance of power stays with the teachers in these situations, either because the teacher withholds vital information, or because the teacher is a sham and has no knowledge to impart.

As in "And Upon the Fourth Bray" the teacher sometimes acts as a trickster and actively uses his or her knowledge to make a fool of others. In "Donkey and Scholars" (Jagendorf), the teacher puts grain between the pages of a book so that the donkey will turn them, appearing to read. In "Two Cows" (Kelsey), Mullah Nasr-ed-Din gives his students a hypothetical question. If one cow pierces the behind of another cow with its horns, "Which cow can say, 'I have tail and horns at the same end of my body?'" (110). The students wrongly guess the first cow, the second cow, and both cows before the Mullah tells them: "You boys have forgotten that cows cannot talk!" (112). In acting as a trickster, the teacher is exerting power over his or her students, reminding them that he or she is cleverer than they are.

Students occasionally try to get the better of the teacher, and the teacher reinforces his or her power by outwitting them, such as when the Hodja uses a switch to help boys find their own feet ("Feet for All"), or when the teacher makes an exam question about the flat tire ("The Test"). In both stories, the teacher reasserts power over the students who are trying to get away with something.

There are times, however, when the teacher is not the one with the power. Students succeed in outwitting the teacher in stories like "The Sage in the Cave" (Alexander), in which the teacher comes out of a cave to see if a student can get him back in. In "The Brothers of the Donkey" (Kelsey), the teacher's donkey dies and the students hide in the barn making braying sounds. The teacher believes it is the donkey's brother. In "Twigmuntus, Cowbelliantus, Perchnosius" (Booss), the farmer's son outwits the haughty professors with nonsense. The teacher may start out with assumed power but loses power when outsmarted by the students.

Other tales also include power shifts. In "The Koranic Teacher" (Magel), a boy wants to study with a famous Muslim teacher. His father warns him, "Oh, son, have you not made a mistake. That man, whomever he teaches, he destroys him" (1). The boy studies with the teacher anyway, and the teacher does plot to kill him. However, the boy kills the teacher instead by causing him to fall into a hole. The power over life and death now belongs to the student.

The power can also shift in the other direction. Although teachers often begin with the power in these stories, sometimes they do not. Instead they earn respect or use their knowledge to better their circumstances. "The Silly Slave" (Edmonds) is underestimated because of his silly appearance but proves himself to be quite wise. The nightingale in "The Laborer and the Nightingale" (Paxton) begins as a captive, but, through teaching, gains his freedom and outsmarts his captor.

Teachers generally occupy a position of power in these tales because of their arcane knowledge or their social standing.

Conclusions

Folktale depictions of teachers and teaching sometimes mirror those found in other media. Cummins's findings suggest that good teachers are more cooperative than domineering and act as facilitators of student-driven learning rather than dispensers of knowledge. Whereas all four of these kinds of teaching are evident in

the folktales, the predominant, effective teaching style in these tales is interactive, engaging, and constructive.

Of the thirty-nine stories, only two depict a female teacher: "White Buffalo Woman," (Erdoes) and "Teeny, Tiny Teacher" (Calmenson), in stark contrast to the feminization of pre-primary education in America (94 percent of teachers are female) and primary education (87 percent are female). It is more indicative of American higher education, where 49 percent of faculty members are female, but at 5 percent female, these stories present a very male-centric view of teachers. Whereas one might try to explain this discrepancy as the difference between *American* education and the *world* of folktales, analysis of teachers from countries around the world shows that 93 percent of pre-primary educators are female, 64 percent of primary educators are women, and 42 percent of tertiary education professors are women (UNESCO). This mirrors the findings of Dagaz and Harger, who found that male teachers were more represented in popular films than reality would suggest.

The characteristics of teachers in newspapers Alhamdan and colleagues discussed were also evident in these folktales. Their "caring practitioner" was manifest by Lao Tzu, who was kind and patient, and by the teachers in "The Strong Voice" and "The Prince and the Vizier's Son," whose compassion for, and careful attention to, their pupils helped them succeed. The "transparent (un)professional" category included indolent, incompetent power abusers manifest in "The Koranic Teacher" (Magel), "The Woman in the Chest" (Rank), and "The False Schoolmaster" (Skurzynski). The "moral and social role model" category was manifest in all of the stories summarized under modeling as a teaching method, and the "transformative intellectual" category might best be represented by the teachers in "The Silly Slave" (Edmonds) and "The Test" (Jaffe and Zeitlin).

Shannon and Crawford's classifications are like those of Alhamdan and colleagues and were consistently evident in these folktales. Unique to their study was the category of "technicians," who focus on meeting curriculum requirements. None of these stories included this kind of teacher, as the concept of a curriculum of study was never broached.

Implications for Higher Education Today

The Paradox of Teacher as Fool

Perhaps the most fascinating discovery of this research is the integral nature of wisdom and foolishness. So common are these two themes in folk literature, and so related, that they appear together in the most commonly used folktale indexing scheme (Stith Thompson's motif classification) with the designation, *J. The Wise and the Foolish*.

Superficially, this may seem to pose a paradox, as the wise man and the fool should be at opposite ends of an intelligence spectrum, and, indeed, there are many stories with only wise characters or only foolish characters. What is so intriguing is that *teachers* are often depicted as both, and their wisdom as teachers often relies on their ability to act foolish. The famous Turkish scholar Nasreddin Hodja exemplifies this kind of approach. Although it may seem that a man riding backward on a donkey is behaving foolishly, this action is really a very clever response to a paradox: how can a teacher ride in front of his students (the proper place for a teacher) and behind them (so as not to turn his back on them)? The professor in the American story of the final exam also seems to be a fool (easily duped), but he uses this to confront his students and help them learn that lying has consequences.

Silliness, humor, and play have a place in modern education (Banas et al.; Bergen). Used effectively and not aggressively, they can be an integral part of the educational experience. They facilitate laughter that defuses the emotional and intellectual tension of the learning environment, they can reframe problems and help push students to new insights, they help create a nonjudgmental atmosphere that improves brainstorming and risk taking, and they build social cohesion as people emote together and develop a common understanding of what constitutes "funny." As Albritton explains, good teachers must have a "willingness to experience levels of honesty and vulnerability" (59), and silliness is one form of vulnerability that can be effective in the teaching repertoire.

The paradoxical status of the wise fool also promotes "bisociation," a term Arthur Koestler coined to mean seeing an object or concept simultaneously in two disparate frames of reference or matrices (Koestler). Metaphors, for example, work by bisociation. When a reader encounters the Alfred Noyes poetic line "The moon was a ghostly galleon, tossed upon cloudy seas" (*Highwayman*), she must

merge the image of the moon in the clouds with the image of a ship on the stormy ocean to understand the full meaning. Forging these unusual connections is, for Koestler, fundamental to creativity. The teacher as wise-fool functions similarly by encouraging students to merge these two frames of reference and explore the synergies between them. By doing so, students can see that their initial perception of foolishness is often mistaken; the teacher uses the juxtaposition to accomplish deep learning.

Social Influence

Higher education faculty have power granted to them by their status as university employees (admissions, grading, curriculum decisions, and such), by their training (knowledge, pedigree, social network, and such), by society (social prestige, job references, and such), by the physical classroom (students all face the teacher in front, teacher is often standing while students sit, classroom technology is under teacher's control, and so on), and by students (attention, admiration, and such). Students also have some power (see Golish and Olson) in that they often provide course evaluations, they may negotiate with the teacher over assignments and course scheduling, and they may request changes to the classroom environment that they feel are not working effectively.

Whereas classical approaches to teaching kept most of the power with the teacher, constructivist and connected learning approaches are beginning to shift the dynamics in the classroom to empower students. Teachers must remain attuned to the power balance to find optimal levels of influence for all involved in the educational experience, and those levels may shift across the semester, and even during a particular class period. Discussions may require more student power, while lectures may require teacher power. In flipped classrooms, both teachers and students share in the power and responsibility, as the reading and lectures are encountered outside of class so that the shared class period can focus on more immersive and interactive learning experiences.

These folktales suggest that power should be used carefully and with "virtuous intent" (avoiding aggressive or destructive displays of power) for successful learning to take place. Students in these stories often rebel against overbearing power, and use wit, cleverness, and outright violence to redress the imbalance. Power used specifically for personal gain tends to result in failure and embarrassment,

both for students and teachers; however, power used virtuously tends to result in personal gain and success. The *intent* behind the use of power seems to be the key to success.

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