

DEVELOPMENT OF A MUAY THAI ENTHUSIAST: AN INTERPRETATION OF A.N.
WHITEHEAD'S THEORY OF LEARNING

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education
In the Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the learning experience of Muay Thai training and competition through an interpretation of Whiteheads' theory of learning. This examination is undertaken through a reflection on training and competing in Canada and Thailand during the 2009-2011 period. I will offer an analysis of learning Muay Thai through an interpretation of Whiteheads learning theory and educational philosophy. This thesis rejects learning as a product of hoarding information and recommends education must facilitate concrete and abstract experiences of the principles of freedom and discipline to allow for the development of wisdom and courage in learners. This paper argues that expressing oneself through Muay Thai facilitates non-violent dispositions by allowing for 'rhythmic' experiences which enable the growth of active wisdom and courage through periodic tests of training and competition. By providing an autoethnographic account of learning Muay Thai and a theoretical discussion on learning the author will provide a subsequent interpretation of Whiteheads' theories applied to Muay Thai training and competition. This paper will also consider the educational merit of Muay Thai for marginalized identities as a consequence of developing active wisdom and courage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to this effort. Bob Regnier, my supervisor has provided me enormous support and incredible insight into graduate studies. Bob's guidance in navigating the complexities of thought which comprise process thought was hugely beneficial for my own outlook. Also, his incredible patience has made this experience amazing and I thank him, so very much.

I would also like to thank Mike Cottrell for being a listening ear. I would also like to thank Dianne Miller, Sheelah Mclean and many other folk in the university who helped encourage my growth as a researcher and writer. Change is not so scary around people who embrace it with grace and fortitude.

To all my Thai coaches, you have made an impact on me that will last a lifetime. I always yearn for the hazy Bangkok sunset and the bustle of morning commutes as I get ready for another day of training. Master Toddy, Kru Chacrit, Kru Chinnarach, Kru Phu, Kru Singh, and everyone else involved including my training partners, Anucha Waraput and Chase Walden who own love for the sport helped me through training and competing in Thailand.

There are many individuals I would like to mention by name but there are far too many meaningfully express my gratitude here, so I will just say thanks and hope the universe brings it back to them in some way.

I would also like to thank my mother, Gwen and everyone else in my huge messy and awesome family including Nathan, Mike, Chris, Tasha, Janelle, Carrey, Tommy, Mikel, Keanu, Richey, and George. Big thanks also go out to my Baba, Dad, and Granny. Also I express my deep gratitude to my late and Great Grandmother, Georgina and my late Grandfather Tom, you're always in my heart.

And finally I would like to thank my Canadian kickboxing instructors, Al Lovell and Troy Scheer. Al has been there from the start and is the embodiment of a good coach, and Troy's leadership has always made me aware of what's necessary for success. Thank you both.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE ADVENTURE OF MARTIAL ARTS

1. Introduction

Muay Thai fighters, known to some as Nak-Muay's and others as simply a Thai boxer, trains in the martial discipline of Muay Thai kickboxing where knees, fists, elbows, and legs are used with various grappling and sweeping techniques. A Nak-Muay or Thai boxer usually resides at a training camp where he or she adopts the teachings of the camp's leading coach, known as Kru or Ajarn. (Kru and Ajarn are designations earned by coaches to denote trainer and master trainer, paralleling how teacher and professor are used in North America.) Each Nak-Muay is expected to abide by the Muay Thai fighters oath which is meant to ensure proper conduct outside the gym and highlight the behaviour and attitudes necessary to be a successful fighter. Muay Thai training and competition incorporates rigorous discipline and highly strenuous learning experiences to develop learners. I can say I am a Nak-Muay/Muay Thai enthusiast as defined through my adherence to Muay Thai training for five years, during which the 2009-2011 period was by far the most developmental. During this period I engaged in a diligent training regimen in Canada and participated in three training camps in Thailand which allowed me to work alongside world class competitors and trainers while undergoing significant physical and mental changes.

In this thesis I offer an autobiographical examination of my experiences of learning as a Muay Thai fighter. This reflective discourse considers the experience of learning during my trips to Thailand and training here in Canada during the 2009-2011 period through a self-conscious explication of the various characteristics of my learning processes. Through this process, I draw attention to the arousal of various physical feelings, emotions,

conceptualisations, transformations of previous and ongoing feelings and ideas, and emergence of feelings of possibility that have informed my deliberations through this training. Articulating such self-awareness is needed to provide a thesis that reveals and provides an account of the embodied experiences of such strenuous training and competition experience. In making an account of Muay Thai training and competition, the complex nature of subjective experience which informs the development of learners is revealed. Accounting for various modes of learning experiences is crucial for educators as it offers expansive possibilities for educational experiences not previously considered.

This thesis utilizes a self-reflexive practice which is intended to highlight how learning experiences during training and competitions lead to forms of self-discovery and personal transformation when enduring immense physical, emotional, and mental tests. One example of overcoming limits for me was realized after hitting pads with a Thai trainer named Chacrit. Chacrit is a renowned Thai trainer, infamous for his difficult and nauseatingly fast-paced pad-sessions. I hit the pads furiously for nine rounds that was faster and harder than anything I had done before. He was ready to provide immediate and often painful feedback yet his teaching encouraged rigorous discipline and the freedom to explore technique which enabled me to respond to situations of duress with a well-developed and highly conscious mentality. This was an example of how when learners push past limits, new worlds can open up. Training and competition is a constant push to expand ones physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental capacities in order to entertain a greater scope of possibilities for oneself in everyday circumstances. In such cases learning becomes less about the other person with whom one is in conflict and more about the personal learning journey an individual takes to exceed their previous limitations. The journey of Martial Arts holds within itself the capacity to fortify

individuals through the development of wisdom and I will elucidate this process through the work of A.N. Whitehead.

1.1 How I Chose Muay Thai

Given the rise of Martial Arts in modern society since the seventies and its recent infusion into mainstream sports, Muay Thai has been provided new spaces for its inclusion across a variety of contexts. This is largely due to Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) rise in popularity and the subsequent revision of regulatory laws related to contact sports. Broadly speaking, Martial Arts inclusion into the west is predicated on but not limited to, military training, combative competition, personal development, police training, and very recently, academic dissemination. Crossley (2007), Mendenhall (2008), Lakes & Hoyt (2004), and Martin (2006) make the connection between Martial Arts and positive social and personal outcomes. The general consensus of these various studies outlines the positive outcomes of martial arts training which are becoming more accepted as a legitimate form of education. In my experience, many parents have often cited the martial arts as a vital element of their child's overall education and a crucial factor in their future development.

The role of MMA or Mixed Martial Arts in mainstream sports has begun to undergo a lot of changes over the past ten years, partially due to rules and regulations being homogenized across the globe. Certain jurisdictions that previously outlawed full contact sports such as New York, Ontario, and most recently Saskatchewan are being pressured to review and revise legislation which makes professional and full contact sports such as Mixed Martial Arts (Shymanski, 2011) illegal. The conception of martial arts as proprietor of violent behavior is slowly shifting through education and research backing up the positive outcomes many martial

artists and instructors emphasize about the benefits their disciplines carry (Crossley,2007; Mendenhall, 2008; Lakes & Hoyt, 2004; Martin, 2006)

However one would like to conceptualize modern martial arts in North America, we cannot undermine its importance in development of modern educational pedagogies and modalities that counter-act depressing statistics in our public schools and higher education including rising rates of obesity, lack of focus, and high rates of depression. Martial Arts have been targeted as a source of potential for counter-acting some of these trends (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004) and have proven helpful at fostering positive change in adults as well. Many of my friends and family begun to take up the discipline, many who would be difficult to pigeonhole into the ‘martial artist’ stereotype of a lean and sagacious weapon of lethal force.

While growing up Catholic gave me religious insight, my Metis and Indian identity rooted me in spirituality, albeit roots I had to rediscover. One year I was allowed the privilege to be a part of a special Indigenous ceremony particular to plains Cree and ever since it has deeply affected my life and become a core aspect of my ideas around spirituality. Protocol prohibits detailing this ceremony so I will best describe my personal feelings and transformation after the event. In the following days I was deeply affected by a heightened awareness of what was crucial to my life and living it meaningfully. The banality of living in a consumer culture can obstruct my attention to the importance of life’s most precious ingredients.

I became aware ceremony was a way of connecting to the things day to day life can make me take for granted; basics like clean water, a sense of community, good food in your stomach, and laughter with your friends are elemental to living regardless of one’s socioeconomic stature. Renewing a connection to the fundamentals of life underscores the function of ceremony.

Ceremony kept such knowledge alive through my active use of it. We keep our culture alive by practicing ceremony and part of our culture is retaining a sense of kinship to the basics of what makes our life possible in the first place. Ceremony keeps us grounded, humble, and ever mindful of what keeps us in communion with the natural processes unfolding around us. Modern living detaches us from the land which makes it more difficult to retain a sense of kinship with the earth and each other. Ceremony continually re-establishes this connection to draw us back into a relational awareness and makes me at least, aware of what is important for life.

The insight provided through ceremony drove the search for a ‘wisdom education’ in other areas of my life. It was this drive that nurtured my desire to pursue Graduate studies and eventually ponder the nature of martial arts learning. There are endemic issues with modern living that fosters disconnection, hence the need for manifold approaches to reconnect and acknowledge the attitudes, values, and land which are crucial to our livelihood. In graduate school, I found myself trying to express an educational outlook that emphasized connection amongst the subjects. During this time I was heavily involved in Muay Thai, and upon having conversations with my thesis supervisor I was surprised to find out Muay Thai was actually serving a similar purpose to ceremony and what I wanted my thesis to reveal. In becoming a “fighter” in the martial discipline of Muay Thai which is heavily reliant on ceremony, I became aware of how the practice and ceremonial aspects consistently drew attention back to the values, attitudes, and elements of living which are most beneficial to a fighter’s success.

If someone were to tell me when I was young that I was going to grow up to become a ‘fighter’, I would have laughed and dismissed the whole thing. How could I be a fighter? Is that not for the tough? I did not ascribe to that image, but life has a funny way of scripting out

certain plots for us despite our best intentions. After the ceremony I mentioned previously, I was given a job as a bouncer to pay for school. Taking the job subsequently motivated me to take up self-defence classes to handle the stresses and rigors that the occupation bred. Martial arts classes turned into a passion for the sport of kickboxing and eventually brought me around the world to train and compete with an astounding array of coaches and fighters. It is oddly serendipitous that a cultural ceremony coalesced in a journey towards Muay Thai and subsequently a graduate thesis which connects the nature of learning a martial art with the metaphysical notion of keeping knowledge alive.

1.2 Gender & Martial Arts

As a male, gender certainly influenced my mobility in Muay Thai training and competition. As a male in a male-oriented sport, it was easier to join new camps, travel alone, and to train among strangers. Attending and competing in promotions were more accessible to men due to restrictions female fighters often have to circumvent. For instance, to fight at Lumpinee Stadium is regarded as the pinnacle of a Nak-Muay's career. However, women today are restricted from fighting at Lumpinee or even touching the ring. Although the culture is slowly shifting and becoming more open to female Nak-Muays, they still have to battle the constant assumptions and stereotypes that make it difficult for women to enjoy the same level of training and competition men do in Thailand.

On the other hand, there is a tradeoff between the culture in Thailand and the gyms I have train here in Canada. The kickboxing schools in Saskatoon have many women training and competing, often times outnumbering their male counterparts. Even still, the sport is still mostly

hetero-oriented and dominated with normalized masculine archetypes which make it difficult for female fighters to get recognition on par with that of a male.

As a male, the world of kickboxing and North American martial arts generally is much easier to navigate because of the perceived “toughness” and “warrior-like” attributes that men are normally attributed to. Oddly enough, although Thai culture is similar in this regard to perceptions of male physical superiority, women have more social mobility in North American martial arts given the more progressive attitude towards women in sports. Even still, women progress much quicker in Thailand because of the intensity, popularity, and approach to Thai training that breeds excellence.

It seems women hit a ‘glass ceiling’ of sorts in North America, whereas in Thailand albeit many obstacles they do face, there are fewer limits from women from getting highly competitive matches. Simply put, men want to see men play sports in North America so the venues, promotions, and gatekeepers usually favor male participants over female because of their selling potential.

1.3 Being an Aboriginal Enthusiast

Being Aboriginal in Thailand was an odd experience given their experience with Aboriginal people is next to nil. Most people travelling to Thailand are usually in socioeconomic positions to do so, and unfortunately the exorbitant costs of such travels are outside the economic capacity of many Aboriginals. Thai perceptions of Aboriginal people are fed through the bias of western media; as a consequence they have an antiquated and romantic image of Aboriginals as historical figure and not a contemporary being. As a result, training in Thailand was difficult in

the sense that I had to repeatedly explain my ethnicity to many Thai people who were fascinated by my dark features and high cheekbones.

After providing often prejudicial explanation of my origins I was treated differently and almost with reverence. Being differentiated from other “falangs” made Thai’s more interested and thus I was fed more positive attention because it separated me from other westerners.

Beneath the polite Thai exterior, many Thai people have a disdain for foreigners who fail to act with respect for Thai culture and its people. Unfortunately Thailand is a cheap getaway that plays host to a dark underbelly of tourist industries that encourages foul behavior. Many foreigners have little self-restraint and respect for locals and custom, which can make tourist area’s notably different in atmosphere and attitude.

There is a deeply ingrained belief that the ancient and proud art of Thai boxing ought to be kept to its people and not shared with outsiders. Though this belief has fallen out of favor, it still holds true for many. My physical appearance has been helpful as to avoid costly taxi rides, waiting in restaurants, or constantly gazed at in public and even perhaps gaining access to certain gyms. I seemingly fit in to Thai life much easier than my white friends while my Aboriginal background and gender only buffered my status amongst Thai people. Being Aboriginal in Thailand never appeared to be an issue whereas it seemed only to enhance my relationships with Thai people – providing me an “in” where others perhaps did not. Interestingly, being Aboriginal in Thailand is what I imagine being White would be like in North America. You gain privilege by virtue of your language, culture, and gender – and thus the more similar I was to the model ‘Thai’ image, the more privilege I seemed to possess.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

My own experience as a student, teacher, fighter, and person of mixed ancestry, coupled with a general review of the history of modern education, has led me to believe learning has been almost exclusively defined in terms of narrow intellectual achievement or exclusive preference given to the ‘precision’ phase of Whitehead’s theory of growth. Overemphasizing rote memorization at the expense of learning which is complex, multifaceted, and dynamic can construe education as a process of information acquisition instead of what Whitehead (1968) says is “the acquisition of the art of the utilisation of knowledge”(p.3 Whitehead’s ideal education not only means acquiring information, but making meaning of that information so as to generate “understanding of that stream of events which pours through his/her life, which is his/her life” (p.3). Education is bereft of meaning when it fails at making the content of learning relevant to the lives and histories of learners. To be meaningful, education must be relevant and connected to the lives, histories, and present circumstances of learners.

Education in the west has been undermined by our cultures tireless pursuit of profit. The limited conceptions of learning and achievement as preparation for economic agency within the scope of modern capitalism are antithetical to the overall development of learners. The forces of neo-liberal capitalism on education reinforce limiting and narrow foci on standards, job preparation, deference to authority, and limit critical capacities and mental preparation for a life of finding a place within a given social and political order (McMurtry, 1991; O’Sullivan, 1999; Purpel, 2008). Einstein (1949) criticizes capitalism and its effect on education:

The crippling of individuals I consider the worst evil of capitalism. Our whole educational system suffers from this evil. An exaggerated competitive attitude is inculcated into the student, who is trained to worship acquisitive success as a preparation for his future career. (Einstein, 1949)

The crippling of the individual and/or certain groups refers to the inability to stand apart from this monoculture of acquisitive success. Students buckle under the weight of a culture which provides limited spaces for alternative expressions and tragically reduces their agency with a cynical outlook on the possibilities presented to them. For instance, a student who yearns to study art may feel the pressure to look for more “meaningful” work which generates maximal income, and usually in Canada’s west this translates to the oilfield work where working class mobile men get into high risk work, women get into service industry jobs, and professionals are drawn into engineering or management-type positions.. Students are pressured to be “cogs”, constrained to fit into whatever position they can get into. Students want to be seen as powerful and able to exercise a degree of change in the spaces they inhabit; and in a world which defines agency through the ability to acquire material resources misses the point of education entirely. Educators should encourage students to crave growth in what they are interested in regardless of how economically viable it is. As teachers, we should teach them to be comfortable with risk.

Finally, education generally fails at providing all people, regardless of class, gender, race, or sexuality proper avenues for developing ways to handle highly stressful situations with a proper mentality. Learners must develop themselves in ways such that when they do not have Wikipedia or Google on hand, learners can handle themselves accordingly. Marginalized persons who must navigate spaces that pose risk than can benefit from an education which teaches them how to engage such situations with a proper mentality so they do not succumb to fight, flight, or freeze. A response I have noticed often in approaching youngsters from Northern communities who experienced a lot of violence is a fear of difference, fear of authority, fear of men, fear of Caucasian people, and fear of the spaces they generally inhabit. Teaching marginalized students to navigate these spaces by providing tools to be confident and capable

poses significant advantages for it provides education to address the failure to meet the complex needs of these persons including the failure to encourage initiative and the failure to make learning relevant and connected. Education must be for all people, regardless of history or circumstance.

1.5 Significance of Thesis

The creation of his thesis resides from the rare opportunity that I have had as a Muay Thai practitioner who experienced training and competition in the birthplace of the sport amongst venerated and popular Muay Thai trainers, such as Grand Master Toddy, Ajarn Yod, Ajarn Yut, and Kru Chacrit. I am in a unique position both as a graduate student in Educational Foundations and a Muay Thai enthusiast to scrutinize the experience of learning Muay Thai apart from normative educational frameworks which western readers are familiar with. Through an inquiry into the nature of learning, I draw parallels between Muay Thai training/competition and Alfred North Whitehead's notion of learning in order to convey the value and meaning of Muay Thai to a broad audience. By discussing the value inherent within Martial Arts disciplines and by discussing how Muay Thai fighting can be appreciated within A. N. Whitehead's theory of learning, this thesis contends that Muay Thai training and competition are viable conduits of meaningful learning. As such I make the claim that where education is bereft of experiences which facilitate meaningful learning, including the experience of marginalized persons, this Whiteheadian analysis underscores how Muay Thai can be an integral piece of an overall ideal education.

I have often reflected on the merit of fighting in one's life. There are many contradictions and parallels regarding the worth of a fighter in modern society. For example, is

fighting simply the offshoot of biological tendencies for violence? Is it a regressive aspect of human biology? Is it an attempt to reinstate a form of patriarchy due to a 'crisis in masculinity' (Brent, 2013)? Is there a place for a warrior in an institution where we preach non-violence and benevolence while trying not to reinstate different forms of oppression? As I pondered the nature of fighting and how it fits into my life, martial arts became an interesting crux for analysis.

When I consider my experiences how that role has come to shape and define my experiences during and after this two year period when I consider fighting and social conception of a warrior analogue.

Over several years now, I have come to view my experiences within a fighter warrior analogue and I have aligned my political, moral, social, and educational ideals in the furnace of anti-oppressive theory, as transformational movements were at one with my heart for inducing change in a world I care deeply about. Regnier (1995) states:

If aboriginal people cannot imagine themselves as being warriors and defending a version of their culture, then are they not dominated and defeated? The hegemonic strategy of cultural and political disarmament resides partially in discrediting the notion of warrior. Pronounce the notion of warrior dead or unsavory, and the defense of aboriginal claims to sovereignty is gone. (p.74)

With the recent *Idle No More* movements, Aboriginal peoples and allies across the world have joined in solidarity to challenge the Canadian government's continued encroachment upon Indigenous sovereignty, environmental stewardship, and democracy. Discrediting the movement's objectives is achieved through denying the participants legitimacy by perpetuating stereotypes, shouting platitudes, and demeaning its leaders. The movement has endured attacks upon from various interests which seek to debase Aboriginal groups and agencies as fraudulent, greedy, selfish, and savage; essentially perpetuating an opposing image of the inherent character

of the movement and the people who comprise it. By denying legitimacy to those who seek change it results in a cultural and political disarmament that “resides in discrediting the notion of warrior” (p.74).

The notion of Warrior possesses strong resonance to my Aboriginal culture, my Metis history, and my development as a Muay Thai practitioner. Martial arts allows me to respond to highly stressful situations with a mentality of non-violence. Posing hegemonic resistance through non-violent means still poses risk as the spectre of violence often deters criticism and action. Also, resolving Indigenous issues within the inherently violent reality of colonialism can incite interactions reminiscent of Oka and other Indigenous struggles with Canadian government (Ipperwash, Restigouche, etc. etc.). Thus change is difficult when speaking out and acting in opposition to dominant forces which raises the possibility of exclusion, ridicule, loss of employment, or even imprisonment. Much like getting into the ring with a formidable foe, the threat of violence should never dissuade from engaging conflict if it is your moral duty to act. Whitehead knew education ought to convey a sense of duty, which “arises from our potential control over the course of events” (Whitehead, p.14). The form of learning which Whitehead advocates essentially translates to individuals who have the capacity to induce change within the spaces they inhabit.

Muay Thai enables practitioners to remain calm and collected when the possibility of considerable harm is real. Although I cannot attribute martial arts as the sole factor in compelling myself to activism; it has tempered me through training and competition to better handle the rigors of “standing apart” and the personal difficulties activism brings. Even an innocuous exchange over dinner, in class, or on the bus can result in stressful moments which

may stifle critical dialogue when you face the possibility of being ostracised, challenged, insulted, and in some cases physically threatened. Yet despite facing overwhelming odds as did Thai legend Nai Khanom Tom when up against nine of Burma's finest fighters, the spectre of violence in whatever form it takes, does not dissuade the individual from taking up the nobility of warrior activism. Muay Thai paradoxically implies an ethic of non-violence in the face of violence, which is developed through years of training and competition. When people would ask me why do something dangerous and sure to cause pain. I can reply that this form of learning gradually trained me to handle the complex difficulties of facing the continuous possibility of multiple forms of violence which may manifest in the occupation of marginalized spaces. In essence, Muay Thai enabled me to be strong and calm amidst spaces which are inherently harmful.

By connecting Whitehead to Muay Thai in light of my experience of marginalization and violence; I can express the value and meaning of a Whiteheadian education *and* Muay Thai which seeks to fortify individuals through the active mastery of knowledge, or *wisdom*.

1.6 What is Muay Thai?

Modern Muay Thai traces its roots back to an ancient form of combat born on the battlefields of Southeast Asia, known as Mae Mai Muay Thai. The practice of Mae Mai Muay Thai by its practitioners focused on using and conditioning the body into a veritable weapon. They also amalgamated weapons training, such as the Krabi (sword) and Krabong (staff), - which is another sub-discipline of Thailand's combat training – referred to as Krabi-Krabong. Through the combination of Krabi-Krabong with Mae Mai Muay Thai, ancient warriors were well equipped to deal with incoming marauders in order to defend their territory.

Since its initial development, Muay Thai has changed in many ways. Now a modern sport, rather than a battlefield skill, it carries at its heart old traditions and an ancient fighting spirit. Muay Thai is both an art and science, which was developed for warfare, but Mae Mai Muay Thai was unsuitable for sport competition. About 100 years ago, the use of boxing gloves, the implementation of weight classes, and standard rounds and time limits have since been utilized for ensuring that risk of injury towards the fighters were minimized.

Muay Thai is popularly known as the ‘Science’ or ‘Art’ of 8 Limbs. This loose translation mirrors the complexity and ambiguity that has often plagued conceptualizing Muay Thai in English. However, Muay Thai is typically regarded as a complete striking form. It combines elements of grappling, striking, rigorous physical conditioning, and traditional pre-fight rituals which underlie the spiritual foundations of the sport and many of its practitioners. The practice of ceremonies such as the *Wai-Kru* and *Ram Muay* are undertaken mainly by genuine promoters and faithful advocates of the sport. It is also required by many gyms to abide by a fighter’s oath, which outlines ethical conduct of fighters.

The statement “From powerful punches, furious kicks, piercing knee strikes to crushing elbows and skillful grappling, Muay Thai has it all” is sprawled across a banner at Sityodtong Muay Thai gym. The combination of effective technique with incredibly developed power, along with conditioning the body to handle harsh impacts upholds the common saying in Thailand regarding training ‘Farangs’, (a common phrase used by Thai people to indicate foreigner) “To fight like a Thai, you must train like a Thai.” Muay Thai training is sometimes regarded as the most difficult physical conditioning one can endure, as the time it takes for the shins to ossify and harden enough to absorb impact can take many years of painful preparation.

Muay Thai incorporates methods and approaches to training and fitness that have been utilized by fitness instructors, Military, Police, and other sport enthusiasts for years. Cross training in this sport has demonstrated great effects on the overall performance of athletes. Over the years I have noticed greater interest in martial arts, as my local gym has largely expanded to accommodate the growing demand for training programs in the city of Saskatoon. On any given day you can observe students, fathers, mothers, children, tradespeople, and academics training alongside one another. Large cross sections of various people converge on the gym to train, and it is no longer type-casted for only young men as everyone can benefit from what Muay Thai can offer.

Muay Thai training is generally formatted as beginning with a conditioning/cardio phase, usually done by skipping ropes (Thai ropes are 30x heavier than normal skipping ropes used in North America), jumping on tires, and a lot of bodyweight exercises and stretching to get the body ready for Pads, and Heavy Bag work, Sparring, and partnered drills, such as clinching. The Pad work and Clinching typically separates Muay Thai from all other Martial Arts training. Elongated focus mitts which cover both the hands and forearms are used to punch, kick, elbow, and knee; and are known simply as Thai Pads. The pad holder uses the Thai pads to familiarize the student with various techniques while providing immediate verbal and physical feedback. This is a very effective form of training as the pad hitter learns to move around the pad holder with proper footwork while being challenged with feedback and various cues. It can simulate having another person in the ring while developing technique and stamina.

Clinching refers to the grappling aspect of Muay Thai; where in close quarters, throws, elbows, and knees are utilized while grappling for a dominant position using your hands and

arms to control the neck and body of the other opponent. It is worthy of note, that the Clinch usually separates Thai fighters from “Farang” fighters because of the fact Thai’s train so consistently from a young age that many fighters who end up fighting a Thai, will usually do much to avoid getting caught in a clinch. To illustrate this point, I trained with four young Lumpinee fighters, the heaviest of which was approximately 125lbs. One of these teenagers, no more than fourteen, threw me around at 160lbs, so much so that I was tossed off balance more than I care to recall. This was indicative of the supremacy of technique and training “like a Thai.” I remember looking up from the mat at a couple Olympic boxing teams the coach had trained in the past...which underscored the depth of talent I was drowning in.

Even across disciplines, such as western boxing, Khaosai Wanghompou, also known as Galaxy Khaosai, was the longest reigning World Boxing Association bantamweight champion in history. He was elected to the boxing hall of fame in 1999, and his brother also went on to win the bantamweight title (Harris, 2001, p.354). Somrak Sor Kamsing is a national hero as he won the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games gold medal in boxing amidst a stellar Muay Thai career. The noted accomplishments of Thai fighters who went on to successfully compete in other disciplines or under different rules and regulations speak to the effectiveness and discipline which Muay Thai fighters exemplify.

1.6.1 National significance of Muay Thai.

Muay Thai is often regarded as the most devastating striking art on the planet because it incorporates eight points of contact with the greatest scope of applicability. Most martial arts typically in sporting circumstances use only two to four points of contact, such as Boxing, or Karate. Muay Thai is a sport that is fiercely tied with Thailand’s national identity as the

historical development of the sport has roots in the battlefields of south-east Asia, and is closely linked with nobility with endorsements by the King (Vail, 1998). Since the people of Thailand are proud of the fact that they are the citizens of the “country that was never colonized”, Muay Thai is known and revered in near mythological status and is often conveyed in their historical narratives as a weapon used to battle the onslaught of other encroaching nations. This lengthy quote from Vail (1998) provides a general account of a well-known story about a Thai Boxer named Nai Kanon Tom:

By far the most famous (and most embellished) boxing story is that of Nai Khanom Tom, a legendary hero allegedly taken prisoner and removed to Rangoon after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. Sometime after being taken captive, on an occasion when the king of Ava decided to include boxing as part of a religious festival, Nai Khanom Tom entered the competition and succeeded in beating nine or ten of the top Burmese boxers. Seeing this, the king is reported to have said that "he [Nai Khanom Tom] fights as though he had venom on his hands; had the nobles [of Siam] fought like him, Ayutthaya would never have fallen." The story is immensely popular. Virtually every school child in modern Thailand knows it even though few may know precisely where it originate. (Vail, 1998, p. 80)

Nai Kanon Tom won Thailand its independence and thus accorded its people the freedom from Burmese control and enshrined a vision of Muay Thai as a form of authentic sovereignty because it demonstrated the Thai spirit and lands as unconquerable. Nai Kanom Tom is commemorated to this day by a statue in Ayutthaya, and is celebrated nationally on March Seventeenth as the official National ‘Muay Thai day’.

Fighters in Thailand often begin training at a very young age. A trainer at the Fairtex camp in Bangkok had a child of nineteen months who could hit the pads with alarming accuracy. Most Thai fighters often peak at fifteen and are retired by the time they reach twenty-twenty-five. Many opinions differ on the morality and ethics of teaching children Muay Thai, especially given the onus and burden placed on these children by their parents. A comparable analogy

would be overzealous hockey parents overwhelming their children with the pressure of winning at all costs.

Many young Nak-Muays nonetheless do not seem over-critical of the incredible pressure exerted on them by the community, coaches, or worst of all, family. Muay Thai has been regarded as something to lift oneself out of poverty because of the lack of viable alternatives. The popular ideal of ascension out of lower classes towards nobility further enhances its appeal, as many accomplished fighters go on to become royal guards (Vail, 1998). Nak-Muays that do train and compete are often humble and outwardly innocuous. The humility and poise demonstrated by many fighters conveys a gentle disposition that is far removed from the martial artist typecast that perpetuates an image of violent thugs. This perception differs from western sports, where machismo and bravado, characteristic of the National Hockey League or National Football League etc., is emphatically encouraged. The screaming vascular athletes and chest thumping which comprise North American sports is removed from the Muay Thai image of a compassionate and humble warrior.

Through the teaching of Muay Thai in Buddhist monasteries an osmosis of Buddhism occurred; teaching, learning, meditation are reflected in the various rituals and ceremonies associated with Muay Thai. Rituals such as Ram Muay, or the Wai Kru, along with sacred symbols and artifacts worn by Muay Thai fighters (such as the Mongkol (headbands), or Praiijoud (armbands)) reflect Buddhist narratives and cosmological orientations that are cherished amongst practitioners and teachers. Muay Thai has been a positive influence on my life as certain elements of Muay Thai culture paralleled my own experience of ceremony while reinforcing ethics of non-violence.

1.6.2 Globalization and Martial Arts

Globalization is a difficult term to define and according to Paul Bowman (2010) this is problematic in trying to reach a consensus on what globalization actually is, but nevertheless:

Some of the salient preconditions for and coordinates of globalization include: 1) the expansion of increasingly instantaneous telecommunications networks; 2) the opening of ever more contexts to market mechanisms owing to the internationalization of finance systems; and 3) the deregulation of those finance systems, the effect of which has been to undermine the traditional power of nation states to control their own economies and societies” (Bowman, p.1).

Globalization has affected human life, the planet, and how people interact through instant communication, ease of travel, and flow of capital. In relation to Martial Arts, Muay Thai has not been inoculated to the effects of a globalized world. Bowman (2010) states the traditional spread of martial arts is strongly linked with military, migration, or margins; whereas more recently the “effects of global media have exponentially increased martial arts’ dissemination” (p.2). Nowadays people train for personal reasons more so than militaristic necessity. Many gyms in North America have begun to adopt Muay Thai into their curriculum as a response to increased demand arising from immense interest in the sport, owing to increased access to media and communication. At one time learning Muay Thai was not a free choice, much less a decision people willingly made and paid enormous amounts of money for. Modern kickboxing sports are geared towards an economic model meant to drive profits and increase membership. .

Since Bruce Lee helped popularize martial arts in the 1970’, ease of access to media has “taken control of the ability of martial arts styles to spread and transform” (Bowman, 2010, p.2). The spread of martial arts takes with it regional cultural richness and ethnic associations from their original context. As a result martial arts “have become increasingly deracinated and commodified” (p.2). Uprooting martial arts from its original context can coincide with a shift from its original role in society and to the individual. Bowman provides a great example with

Billy Blanks' 'Tae Bo' system. By combining amateur boxing, Muay Thai, and Taekwondo with music for the function of aerobic fitness and profit; the blending of styles, severing its cultural roots and packing it for mass consumption meant the "demarcation between aerobic exercise and combat training are utterly blurred" (p.2, 2010).

Training Muay Thai in both Canada and its birthplace in Thailand served as an opportunity to notice the effects of globalization on Muay Thai. 1) There is a disassociation from Muay Thai's cultural and historical lineage, amputating it from many current interpretations. 2) Authenticity is granted to those who have the ability to pay for training and attain certification. The actual learning, development, and hard fought growth are secondary. 3) Rejecting personal development in favor of popular demands for weight loss, fitness, self-defense, or curious encounters arising from osmosis through Mixed Martial Arts popularity. 4) Belief in the myth of commercialization, where anything is capable of being packaged for profit. I will expound on these criticisms below.

One of globalizations most notable effects on Muay Thai was the disassociation from its cultural and spiritual roots. For a long time I did not learn about the Ram Muay or Wai Kru, two ceremonial dances Nak-Muays diligently perform before every match. Western schools tend to strip-mine Muay Thai for its effective form and training methodology yet leave behind cultural, linguistic, and spiritual underpinnings. Many of the modern techniques derive from ancient forms of *Muay Thai Chaiya* and *Muay Boran* that are explained through Buddhist narratives. Unfortunately, the push to have more gyms to meet the demand of a popularizing sport leads to the second point made above that Muay Thai's historical and cultural nuances are abandoned in a rush to satisfy customer demands which are not likely commensurate with the spiritual origins of

Muay Thai. Personal development is not as highly commercial product, so many Thai trainers and western teachers opt to leave out the spiritual and cultural elements conducive to personal development or introspection out of their curriculum.

It is important to note that training can and does occur by highly trained and well respected enthusiasts across the globe. Many advocates successfully bring the sport into different countries faithfully through diligent study and good teaching. But there is something intangible about the daily grind of waking up to train noting the pungent smell of Thai boxing liniment and the warmth of the morning sun on your face while practicing the daily Wai. There were also the shoddy attempts to learn Thai while seizing the physical, emotional, and mental stamina to endure harsh workouts. As well as the social interactions with different people of different backgrounds all qualify for what I attribute to authentic Muay Thai training. It was not so much about the physical rote elements of training but the attitudes, assumptions, language, culture, and spirituality that made it a deeply gratifying experience and an excellent candidate for a skillset which encourages personal growth.

To learn a sport or craft, the most optimal place to do it would be in a country and culture which lives and breathes it. While Canada is arguably the best at Hockey, it is far from the best at Muay Thai. Thus, if you want to get what many Canadians would describe as “the real thing” for hockey education, you have to train at the sports birthplace. And this is why Training in Thailand is the best place to train because Muay Thai is infused into the cultural and historical lineage of the country and people. Muay Thai everywhere in Thailand its culture endorses it while the people venerate their practitioners. The context of Thailand endowed in its culture,

climate, history, language, people, and other influences both large and small render Thai training unique and difficult to replicate in other areas of the world.

1.7 A.N. Whitehead and Muay Thai

Upon returning from Thailand I knew I possessed a core idea that required clarification, and discussions with my thesis supervisor helped me realize Muay Thai training and competition's relevance for graduate studies. I was already somewhat read in the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, as his theories were standard reading in a couple classes I had taken. Whitehead's powerful ideas of education and learning were cornerstones in forming my own educational philosophy. I began to frame ideas related to learning Muay Thai with questions posed by my thesis supervisor. Eventually it became apparent that Whitehead's theories had a depth and breadth which were applicable outside of the western liberal curriculum which Whitehead theorized from. The experience of learning Muay Thai and ideas developed through graduate studies informed my own educational themes, values, and aims expressed here.

I intend to explore the scope of Whitehead's educational concepts outside the normative contexts of western classrooms. I invite the reader to explore an alternate expression of learning through discussion of the training and competition of Muay Thai. This thesis will explore learning and growth in Muay Thai through the philosophy and theories of Alfred North Whitehead's *The Aims of Education*, most notably the first three chapters. Whitehead's theories of education and learning known as 'the rhythms of freedom and discipline' and 'the cycles of growth' (reflected in the three phase's romance, precision, and generalization) along with personal experiences of a Muay Thai practitioner are juxtaposed to understand and contextualize Muay Thai learning *and* the relevance of Whiteheads' theories. My efforts here to locate Muay

Thai alongside a well-established educational philosopher serves to invite people to expand on their notions of what constitutes learning experiences generally and to consider the possibilities of the Martial Arts.

In *The Aims of Education*, Whitehead put forth the following these: education is a process of dynamic and organic growth which capitalizes upon the natural rhythms of mental development of learners. His vital contribution to learning theory was that of identifying the notion of “rhythmic growth” where learners naturally exhibit rhythms of general interest, intense focus, and applied general interest. Education is thus a process of acquiring understanding through a gradual process of applying knowledge in various ways which capitalize on “rhythmic growth” to safeguard against knowledge becoming a series of ‘inert ideas’ which are ideas “that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations” (p.2).

The process of acquiring understanding requires active use of ideas through intellectual and technical experiences in order to know and do something well. Thus an ideal education patterns itself after the natural sway of mental development of learners who fortify their ideas through the active utilization of abstract and technical experiences. Technical experiences are embodied engagements Whitehead believed are critical to learning because he noted that utilising an idea mean “relating it to that stream, compounded of sense perceptions, feelings, hopes, desires, and of mental activities adjusting thought to thought, which forms our life” (Whitehead, 1968, p.3). Learning is not only mental as physicality or bodily feelings are integral to the experience of learning and growth. Stinson (2005) emphasises the importance of embodied

learning and kinesthetic perception because it is through our bodies that we live in and engage the world.

In Whitehead's education both technical and abstract/intellectual experiences are seamlessly woven in the general experience of learning and necessary for growth. Whitehead knew technical experience is necessary for learning because individuals require a mode of technical/physical agency in order to be "effective individuals" (p.37) where they can not only *know*, but *do* something well.

1.8 On Interpretation: Coding Muay Thai Learning Experiences with the Stages of Mental Growth

In order to interpret my own experiences, I am coding personal reflections suitable for this thesis with Whiteheads' theory of rhythmic growth. The mode of inquiry is termed reflective narrative which Hendry (2010) states: "is not a method, but rather a process of meaning making that encompasses what I suggest are three major spheres of inquiry: the scientific (physical), the symbolic (human experience), and the sacred (metaphysical)" (p.73). By posing reflective narratives, the thesis can best express the various physical, symbolic, and sacred elements of learning Muay Thai. In reflective narratives, I am the nexus on which this thesis derives its fullness and meaning and the analysis is centered on my own experiences of Whitehead's three phases of growth.

Sacks (2001) states in Hendry (2010) regarding the three spheres of inquiry that:

These modes of narrative inquiry are not distinct and incommensurable. In fact, quite to the contrary, they are interconnected and interdependent. The sense of awe and wonder

that scholars often experience at the mystery of some phenomenon or event may often lead to more questions about the actual physical nature of an event. (p.74)

Scrutinizing the learning experience of Muay Thai requires expressing this inquiry through the various phases of growth in Whitehead's theory of learning. Incorporating personal narratives unearths the complexity of learning Muay Thai and provides space for the physical, symbolic, and sacred aspects of learning.

Instead of imposing an unfamiliar coding on a wide diaspora of personal experience, I have selected particular experiences reflective of Whitehead's three phases of Romance, Precision, and Generalization. Although I am not modifying my experience to correlate with Whitehead, reflections are framed to make more explicit the power and scope of Whitehead's theory in order to bring about the physical, symbolic, and sacred aspects of learning within the complex diaspora of personal experience. By categorizing the experience of learning Muay Thai within Whitehead's three phases of growth I can emphasize which elements of learning are relevant to the course of inquiry.

In order to navigate the myriad experiences of learning Muay Thai, Whitehead's theories of education and learning become the frame of reference to gauge which experiences are relevant for this course of inquiry. By coding my experience through Whitehead's theories, I generate meaning and understanding from a complex web of experience and thus offer alternatives for facilitating various alternative experiences in learning.

1.8.1 Interpreting Whitehead

By interpreting Whitehead, I bring my own unique historically affected understandings to Whitehead's text in order to validate its appropriation for my own use. Interpretation in this

sense is not a one-way vertical dialectic, where I simply take what is said in a text without context. I interpret Whitehead's ideas alongside other Whiteheadian scholars regarding education and learning for a purposeful enquiry into my background experience.. The meeting place is where the examination becomes understanding or realization amidst the body of relevant literature.

An example of this interpretation occurs when I read into Whitehead's theory of inert ideas. Whitehead articulates 'inert ideas' as: "In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call "inert ideas"- that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (1967, p.1). Whitehead was an educator from a white middle class background who advocated reading classical literature, his critique of 'inert ideas' is certainly influenced by his historical background. I interpret his model of 'inert ideas' to convey elements of a learners education which are not beneficial to overall growth. Growth is a consequence of learning and educators must make useful the 'stuff' of learning. To make an analogy in Muay Thai would be learning to adopt certain boxing techniques, such as bobbing and weaving, which do not incorporate easily into Muay Thai. The traditional bob and weave (moving under left or right hooks, or dodging straight punches) in boxing is done in greater frequency and uses more upper body movement to bow/bend below punches. Muay Thai does not use the bob and weave to such an extent, and the technique itself is different for more vertical movement is used to keep the upper body straight versus arcing the upper body to bow below the other's strikes. Hence, where the bob and weave is perfect in Boxing, its practice poses the risk of a dangerous strike from either knees or legs in Muay Thai. The act of interpretation correlates 'inert ideas' to the myriad experiences of

learning Muay Thai which are subsequently expressed as a newly codified exemplification of Whitehead's theory.

Whitehead's thoughts on the process of learning expressed in *The Aims of Education* provide insight into how I have progressed as a Nak-Muay. Even though Whitehead speaks of the process of learning within the scope of the liberal model of education, we can interpret the theory beyond the scope of the historically affected background from which Whitehead theorized. Because we arrive at a 'fusion', I can extract from the texts history what the "rhythms of education" mean in my own particular embedded culture, history, education, etc. I will reflect upon my own unique circumstance to abstract the learning experiences of Muay Thai training and competition that best capture the complex and dynamic process it is within Whitehead's theories.

1.9 Thesis Outline

The following chapters will provide a theoretical framework of learning and education according to the first three chapters of Whitehead's "The Aims of Education"; a correlation of Whitehead's learning theory and the experience of learning Muay Thai and; a discussion of the ethical and social dimensions of Muay Thai training and competition in order to express the educational value of Muay Thai.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter explores the idea of learning in Whitehead's theory of organic development as presented in *The Aims of Education* by reviewing his general perspective on education and his theory of rhythmic growth. The first task of this chapter is to interpret Whitehead's general outlook on education from primary sources and through Whiteheadian theorists. To achieve a general understanding of Whitehead's views on education, a cursory analysis of his process philosophy as it relates to learning and education is warranted. The second task here is to analyze and interpret Whitehead and Whiteheadian theorists in order to clarify the meaning of an ideal Whiteheadian education by explaining how the principles of freedom and discipline give effect to the rhythms of mental development, understood as the three phases of rhythmic growth called romance, precision, and generalization.

The chapter is organized into three main sections. The first section explores process philosophy as it informs Whitehead's outlook on education. The second section explains the nature of growth and the purpose of education. Finally, the third section provides the reader with a general outline of the salient features of each phase of growth in order to provide a coherent framework that best describes the experience of learning martial arts. The final section will form the groundwork for chapter three where Whitehead's theory of learning is interpreted in light of the experience of learning Muay Thai.

2.1 Introduction

Process philosopher and educator Alfred North Whitehead coined the popular phrase “Education is the art of the utilization of knowledge” (1967, p.8), a phrase he elucidated in *The Aims of Education*, a collection of essays and papers. The idea of “art of utilization” for Whitehead depicts education as a process of creative growth through adventures which combine inquiry and discipline. He believed that the function of education is to foster “active wisdom”. Active wisdom refers to a process that allows learners to act according to a set of value principles within each moment of experience. Whitehead believed a meaningful education is a balanced education that encourages interest and a well-trained intellect. Wisdom is therefore developed through the fluctuating influence of freedom and discipline in the learner’s adventure of education. This education must be modelled according to structure and dynamics of mental development, which he described as rhythmic, cyclical, and always in a process of “becoming.”

Whitehead asserted that learning, as a phenomenon itself, resembles an ongoing cyclical procession through three distinct, yet interrelated, temporal phases of experience. The first stage of learning is known as romance, described as the phase of joy, desire, curiosity, anxiety, or fear which demands intense interest consequent upon discovering novelty. The phase of romance is for the learner an arousal for the subject which entails the learner’s further engagement.

The second stage of learning known as precision is the phase of applied focus and disciplined detail. This phase naturally diminishes interest and motivation of the learner as the banality of repetitive tasks familiarizes the learner with all the contours of a subject. The joy of discovery is not so profound once a learner sheds a light upon all areas of the topic; and it is the job of the teacher to adjust the learner’s environment such that the subject matter retains interest.

The final phase in Whitehead's theory of rhythmic growth is known as generalization. The last stage of growth is for the learner the most significant and necessary element in a student's learning process. The final phase is necessary if the student is to return to romance in order to renew interest and motivate further discipline to acquire knowledge. The learner gains the capacity to "drag thought outwards" and see how facts are instances of certain principles and vice versa. The learner understands a subject's relation amongst other subjects, and returns to the stage of romance with the "added advantage of classified ideas and relevant technique" (Whitehead, 1967, p.19). The purpose of the phase of generalization is to return the learner to their natural experience of learning which is the joy of a subject, in itself, for itself. The stage of generalization actualizes the student's growth towards active wisdom in Whitehead's ideal education. If the learner does not progress through these stages, the result is what Whitehead calls the "mental dry-rot" of education. Simply put, if students do not keep their knowledge alive by keeping it relevant, connected, and active, their interest wilts and creates "minds-in-a-rut."

2.2 Autoethnography as Method

For determining a particular method of narrative inquiry and autobiography that examined learning processes and the external influences in a learner's environment, an autoethnographical approach was appropriate. Chang (2011) notes that "autoethnography is ethnographical and autobiographical at the same time" (p.1) because "as you play a multi-faceted role as researcher, informant, and author, you should be reminded that your story is never in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants in your story" (2008, p.69). Autoethnography can also be "associated with narrative inquiry and autobiography" (Maréchal, 2010, p. 43). This thesis is largely framed by embodied experiences that fit better within an

autobiography and my experience did not occur in a vacuum and thus an ethnographic examination is also warranted. Thus it is important to note that although this thesis employs the term ‘autoethnography’, it is important to clarify its use to readers in order to avoid confusion over the terms many meanings.

In this thesis I make the claim that the experience of learning Muay Thai is paralleled by Whitehead’s view of learning and human development. Thus it will inevitably rely on personal narratives that explicate and utilize stories that describe bodily feelings, corporeality, and self-awareness. In this regard, the usage of the term ‘autoethnography’ may not be adequate enough to account for the ‘feeling and thinking self’ with an emphasis on describing the individual in relation to their surroundings. This thesis utilizes personal narratives as a way to explicate the processes inherent in learning Muay Thai and as such, while cultural examination is a critical part of this thesis, autoethnographic methods does not provide an adequate framework for describing the ‘bodily’ nature of learning Muay Thai due to its inherently corporeal nature.

Thus the method I will use to account for and describe my experiences in a cultural, reflective, and embodied context would best be described as an *embodied autoethnography*. This approach is an attempt to locate the experience of learning Muay Thai in relation to the culture of martial arts in North America and Thailand while acknowledging the dynamics of learning processes. In this sense I am an autoethnographer using my corporeality and environment as way to describe and account for the development of learners in the complex experience of learning Muay Thai.

2.2.1 Weaknesses:

According to Chang (2011, p.15) there are five shortcomings to using autoethnography as an approach to research:

(1) excessive focus on self in isolation of others; (2) overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; (3) exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source; (4) negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and (5) inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography.”

Employing a method which is essentially hinged entirely on the author creates problems which must be addressed. While using oneself for the subject’s own study is a source of strength, it is also a dangerous pitfall due to “excessive focus on self in isolation of others” that can downplay the role culture and society has on individual accounts of experience of learning and growth. Utilizing autoethnography incorporates necessary external influences through which “should reflect the interconnectivity of self and others” (Chang, 2011, p.15). Therefore this approach can be risky if an undue emphasis is placed too much on the self without reference to the influences outside oneself which make up the web of experience. This runs the risk of not adequately accounting for “analysis and cultural interpretation” (p.15) which is essentially what differentiates this thesis as an academic work versus a personal autobiography which can be rife with narrative flourishes and subjective flaws.

2.2.2 Strengths:

The strength of using the autoethnographic approach is best expressed by Chamberlayne et al. (2000) stating that:

‘To understand oneself and others, we need to understand our own histories and how we have come to be what we are. We make our own history but not under conditions of our own choosing, and we need to understand these conditions of action more, if our future

making of our own history is to produce outcomes closer to our intentions and projects'.
(p. 7)

In order to make sense of my own development as a Muay Thai kickboxer and to describe the salient features of this development, I employ autobiographical narratives in order to understand and interpret the personal/embodied context associated with this development while nestling it in an ethnographic approach. By utilizing this approach I can account for influences which have shaped my identity as an Aboriginal man and as a Muay Thai Kickboxer while also describing the inherent learning processes which form the basis of my personal development.

Chang (2011) states there are three benefits of autoethnography:

“(1) it offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and (3) it has a potential to transform self and others toward the cross-cultural coalition building” (p.11)

In regards to the first point, although fairly self-evident, the reason I chose this method/approach was because the primary data which I use is my own experience which is also a “holistic and intimate perspective on [my] ‘familiar data’” (p.11). The unique opportunity to reflect on this period of development given my particular background as an aboriginal man, academic, and martial artist posed a desirable “data set” to employ.

The second point highlights the culture of martial arts in North America and contrasts it with that of Thailand's. Thus describing and destabilizing myths and ‘fighter’ stereotypes serves to benefit people unfamiliar or uncertain of Muay Thai's possible merits. And furthermore, point three makes the case that it can promote cross cultural coalitions because not only does the practice of Muay Thai encourage people of different socio-political and cultural contexts share space while training, but this paper highlights these positive attributes thus familiarizing western readers with Muay Thai. By describing the general features of growth which Muay Thai training

has provided and how the merits of such growth serves to benefit the individual and society, this paper can hopefully generate positive interest among readers and incline individuals to consider the benefits of learning processes which facilitate wisdom, growth, and personal development.

2.2 Philosophy and Education

Whitehead was an educator, mathematician, and philosopher. Despite a wide scholarly field of work, Whitehead never outlined a comprehensive philosophy of education. Most of Whitehead's educational discourse is contained in *The Aims of Education*, and sporadically throughout various other writings such as *Modes of Thought* and *Process and Reality*. This section explains the philosophy of Whiteheads' ideal model of education in *The Aims of Education*. The purpose here is to offer a general understanding of Whitehead's educational philosophy, as opposed to the more specific theories regarding the process of learning itself (which comes later).

2.2.1 Process philosophy as critique of scientific materialism/reductionism.

For Whitehead, education is rooted in his process philosophy which regards the world and all beings in the world as in the novelty of continuous becoming (novelty is an expression used by Whitehead to convey fresh experiences which have not been previously encountered). In other words, the individual already possesses the intrinsic capabilities for growth and meaning and thrives with the proper guidance and support in order to actualize their potential.

Whitehead's famous axiom is "education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge" (1967, p.4). The philosophy of Whitehead reorients learners as the source of

creative potential and rejects a commonplace notion in education which is that the mind is a dead instrument, meant to be sharpened, or stuffed with “inert” ideas.

Brumbaugh (1982) believes that process philosophy, such as in the form of Whitehead’s metaphysics, provides the required alternative framework to address current educational concerns and to provide a basis to reconceive the learner as an organism in a process of constant becoming which is removed from the biases of scientific materialism. Evans (2010) explains that metaphysics is an attempt to offer a “coherent and consistent account of reality as a whole” (Evans, 2010, p.97). While we need not have an exhaustive understanding of “reality as a whole” in order to ascertain Whitehead’s educational outlook, an examination of his metaphysics is still fruitful. By understanding Whitehead’s goal of making the character of education reflective of the essential qualities of what constitutes reality, the link between his process philosophy and his educational theory becomes more apparent. Brumbaugh (1982) generalizes Whitehead’s work into two metaphysical principles. In his first principle about *aesthetic education* Brumbaugh states that “education should pay more attention to the appreciation of concrete things...make concrete appreciation as important an aim of education as we now make intellectual discipline” (p.4) and in his second principle he sees learning as occurring through *temporally-oriented sequences* in which “All actualization, from particles through persons to civilizations and evolutionary epochs, must be achieved in an irreversible sequence of phases” (p. 5).

In process metaphysics, time is “dynamic, directed, irreversible, and taking place in successive phases” (Brumbaugh,1982, p.4). For Whitehead, a process-oriented approach to education directs the learner in a temporal succession of patterned stages of growth known as

romance, precision, and generalization where learning is as much about the journey as the destination. The adventure of learning must occur in time-appropriate stages, with a recognition that the kind of education which will give best effect to the learners overall growth and existence will yield both concrete and abstract modes of engagement. Whitehead (1967) offers a quote in this regard:

The antithesis between a technical and a liberal education is fallacious. There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical: that is, no education which does not impart both technique and intellectual vision. In simpler language, education should turn out the pupil with something he knows well and something he can do well. (p.48)

Brumbaugh (1982) summarizes Whitehead's concerns regarding modern education where in his view common sense and social science have overemphasized the abstractions of seventeenth century physics. Those abstractions served to highlight properties of inanimate particles, moving and colliding with Newtonian precision, which in turn transformed into principles of metaphysics and thereby characterized the whole of reality as such, including educational thought. From this over-generalization, a new criterion for judging what is "real" in education arose (Brumbaugh, 1982, p.3). Brumbaugh (1982) believes that the sole aim of education as a result of this new criterion is to solely train the intellect, thus a fixation on abstractions such as names, numbers, and mental discipline. Brumbaugh (1982) suggests carefully considering the content so educators do not indoctrinate their students with a savage individualism that implies individuals are minds imprisoned within an unfeeling body.

Instead of acknowledging students for the holistic and interrelated entities they are, the mind and body were segregated into divisible elements. The influence of seventeenth century science on western society extended to the notion that science and technology can solve all the world's major problems and that modern education which is based upon this belief and thus

provides students with knowledge and skills to find jobs and solve these problems while neglecting to cultivate the entire student. Brumbaugh (1982) states that the aim of education must make concrete appreciation as vital as intellectual discipline.

Cultivating learners entirely stems from Whitehead's metaphysical notion that "nothing is in isolation" (Whitehead, 1967, p. 122). According to Evans (1998) "to fully appreciate [Whiteheads] philosophy, we must eventually see the whole as well as the parts" (Evans, 1998, p.65). Nothing exists independently of one another contrary to seventeenth century reductionist tendencies to analyze systems in terms of their constituent parts. While reductionism is not a useful or fruitful conception of understanding learners in education, Whitehead's relationality conveys that a human being is a totality in which the whole is greater than any of its distinct parts. Learners are defined from a perspective that views the student holistically. Students do not present a body divisible from the mind. Instead, the student presents an interrelated whole which bears the indelible stamp of relationships they are constituted from.

When scientific materialism manifests as metaphysical over-generalization in certain systems, such as education or philosophy, Whitehead coins it the "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead, 1932, p.64). Scientific materialism in education has associated learning and teaching "with models that identify students with stupid particles and classroom space with an insulating vacuum" (Brumbaugh, 1982, p.3). Whitehead was critical of viewing the learner as a void to be filled. He recognized that the learner was alive, and a balanced amount of technical and abstract engagements throughout a whole continuum of content and action is required in order to be considered "good and wholesome food" for their development.

It is common knowledge that a full spectrum of healthy food is required for a balanced and healthy diet in any human; Whitehead (1967) simply connects the dots in regards to the learner:

The pupil's mind is a *growing organism*. On the one hand, it is not a box to be ruthlessly packed with alien ideas: and, on the other hand, the ordered acquirement of knowledge is the natural food for a developing intelligence. (p.30)

The importance of a balanced approach to education stresses the temporal character of learning and growth which creates a foundation for overturning some misguided elements in modern education. The learner's mind is not a box meant to be stuffed with alien ideas to be regurgitated on an exam – exams also created within the misguided frameworks of what constitutes “real” criteria for evaluation. A fitting example is evaluating student understanding of physics via rote memory vs. practical examples. (i.e. solve for x , when $n=1.65, \theta=32^\circ$ vs. Using the material provided, refract the light ray so its index angle is parallel to the exit ray using two distinct substances with differing indices of refraction, provide explanation and proof) The student is more than a mind in a vat excreting data to be rechecked by an external fact-checker. The student presents a body indissoluble from the mind, and learning requires the active integration of both. Whitehead noted that concrete experiences were the necessary balance point for intellectual discipline because it better conforms to the appearance of reality which acknowledges the indivisibility of the whole learner.

2.2.2 Metaphysics and speculative philosophy.

An important feature of Whitehead's educational theory is a coherent and consistent explanation of how 'life' exemplifies itself. This feature stems from his metaphysics and speculative philosophy. Basing educational theory on sound and cogent metaphysical assumptions, Whitehead's view of education reflects physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional realities that are not superfluously rejected as non-important or non-existent entities of

the human experience. All elements of experience are accounted for in order to frame a “coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted” (Whitehead, 1933, p. 223). Even “experience drunk and experience sober”, experience sleeping, waking, drowsy, physical, religious, emotional, self-restraining, normal, and abnormal are all valued as “real” and therefore meaningful experiences for the venture of learning (p.227).

Process philosophy emphasizes change as fundamental ontological feature of reality. The notion of flux stands in contrast to static endurance, which has endured since Aristotle (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). Whitehead’s philosophy explains change within the cosmos’ as occurring with the features of an organism and is best understood as a living entity whose aggregates organize and coordinate to form large societies; like that of a molecule, orange, human body, or solar system. Instead of seeing matter as “self-sustaining, externally related, valueless, passive, and without an intrinsic principle of motion; organisms are interdependent, internally and externally related, value-laden, active, and intrinsically active” (Chee, Loke & Tan, 2007, p.131). Whitehead’s metaphysics seeks to get at what is really “real” and in this regard, tend to reflect Buddhist, and Indigenous thought. Seeing the world as interrelated, characterized by flux, and always becoming something “more” is not a novel idea. The insights of science over the past 100 years have completely reshaped how many scholars have come to see how humans fit into the universe. We now know we are composed of the busted guts of exploding stars, and the capacity to appreciate that understanding is owed to science. Whitehead’s ability to synthesize all the various domains of science into a unified and broad understanding made him link the whole experience of reality to that of an organism. By

expressing the universe as an organic entity Whitehead is able to situate change, as opposed to static endurance, as a fundamental feature of humans and human learning.

By understanding how realities are temporally directed, interrelated, and characterized in a processes of “becoming” his metaphysical thinking has influenced and reconceptualized the venture of education. Instead of viewing students as passive vehicles of ideas led to action though the teachers influence; students are viewed as receptive, self-directing, and intrinsically valuable. Students are defined by processes that lead to what they can become, instead of what they “are”. Students are not “this” or “that”. They are instead “becoming this” and “becoming that”.

Students are not ignorant, wise, disciplined, or lazy; but rather they become ignorant, just as they become wise. The process of “becoming” has a structure and a temporal unity which emphasizes it was once this, and now it is that. Whitehead’s reconceptualization of education as a process versus a product thereby challenges some ideas about how education can be conceptualized including how the human mind has been viewed as a “dead instrument” (Whitehead, 1967, p.6).

2.3 The Aims of Education: Summary of Relevant Theory

To revisit the quote mentioned above from Whitehead, (1967), “Education is acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge” (p.8), two thematic elements of Whitehead’s outlook on education are conveyed. The first theme has connotations of development, growth, and relationship; while the second theme conveys creative and novel ways of going about utilizing knowledge. Having an “artistic” way of going about one’s knowledge is indicative of

Whitehead's understanding regarding the purpose of education. Whitehead believed the point of education is to keep knowledge alive, or in other words, to exemplify learner's knowledge within relevant contexts through its active use. Instead of being confined by the content through a "passive reception of disconnected ideas not illumined with any spark of vitality" (p.2), he believed the learner can exhibit creative and imaginative, thus proactive and beneficial, capacities to facilitate greater understanding and growth by tossing an idea into every novel combination as is possible. Thus, a central feature to the problem of education for Whitehead was its focus on the transmission of inert ideas, which are ideas not relevant or related to human experiences. He believed them "not only useless: it is above all things, harmful – *Corruptio optimi, pessim*" (1967, p. 2).

Learners keep knowledge alive by utilizing ideas in ways which provide understanding of the various circumstances that pervade their lives. Knowledge must be kept fresh, and Whitehead realized this importance as it applies to the learner. Keeping knowledge alive provides learners with the joy consequent upon the discovery that "general ideas give an understanding of that stream of events which pours through his life, which is his life" (Whitehead, 1967, p. 2). Whitehead realized that joy, interest, and the vitality of curiosity is intrinsic to learning itself. Keeping knowledge alive through the creative application of ideas in order to provide understanding and meaning in the lives of learners can generate learning experiences which ensure interest, vitality, and meaning.

2.3.1 Wisdom.

Information becomes knowledge when it is placed in context. Knowledge becomes wisdom when its context is widened and connections are made that go beyond the immediate insistent facts. Wisdom requires the kind of synthesis or integration that is

urged explicitly and implicitly throughout Whitehead's writings about education. (Evans, 1998, p.76)

Marcus Ford (2009) states education culminates in *active wisdom*, a "preparation by which to qualify each immediate moment with relevant ideas and appropriate actions" (Whitehead, 1967, p. 37) and education foster habits of thought which allow learners to penetrate their reality and create possibilities to act wisely within it. Instead of being subjected to forces outside their control or understanding, wisdom allows students to understand the various "stream of events" and "sense perceptions, feelings, hopes, desires, and of mental activities adjusting thought to thought" which comprise their life, thus providing students a form of agency. While wisdom is the general overarching aim in Whitehead's ideal education, Evans (2010) states that "balanced education, as Whitehead advocated it, is one of necessary specialization and equally important generalization" (Evans, 2010, p. 90).

Wisdom comes from balanced education whether that education comes from self-education, through acute sensitivity to the meaning of experience, or through formal education. Wisdom is achieved from consideration of knowledge, experience, emotions, and bodily feelings in a broad context. The presence of both broadness and depth of feelings, experience, and knowledge is necessary if wisdom is to be achieved. (Evans, 2010, p. 90)

Whitehead believed education is stuck in a groove such as where and when experiences are highly specialized and facts are isolated from experience. As such, modern education tends to lack a grounding which provides individuals with a "sense of history, connectedness, and the concrete and mystical aspects of experience that are the beginnings of wisdom" (Evans, 2010, p.90).

Instead, Whiteheadian education values "the way in which knowledge is held...[it is] mastery of knowledge, which is wisdom, and is the most intimate freedom obtainable" (Whitehead, 1967, p.30). In this regard, Whitehead recognized that specialism coupled with

general education, presents a unique contribution to culture and education; and he stated that “the only avenue towards wisdom is by freedom in the presence of knowledge. But the only avenue towards knowledge is by discipline in the acquirement of ordered fact” (Whitehead, 1967, p 30). His suggestion to impart individuals with the proficiency of a specialization conjoined with a generalized understanding of their world provided for attaining wisdom through technical as well as abstract engagements.

While Whitehead was critical of intellectual cultivation solely through generalized or abstract ideas as he states “[t]here is no royal road to learning through an airy path of brilliant generalizations” (Whitehead, 1967, p.); he also saw that it is vital to develop learners that possess a plethora of ideas in which they have a genuine interest over how they relate to one another. The goal of education is not to produce well-read individuals as “you cannot be wise without some basis of knowledge, but you may easily acquire knowledge and remain bare of wisdom” (Whitehead, 1967, p.30).

2.3.2 Style and Specialism

Whitehead believed education is meant to impart students that can know and do something well; thus he praised both abstract and technical learning. Since Whitehead believed that main avenue towards wisdom was through balanced abstract and technical learning; an undue emphasis on narrow intellectual cultivation rooted in abstractions is damaging and regressive. In order to develop a program of best possible potential for growth towards wisdom, Whitehead recognized that in an era of education mostly focused on a disciplined study of abstractions; abstraction must be counteracted with technical, concrete, or aesthetic modes of engagement. The overall character of this two-fold approach to education is sought through

mastery/specialism, typified by the generalization phase of learning. As Whitehead states, “the general culture is designed to foster an activity of mind; the specialist course utilizes this activity” (Whitehead, 1967, p.11).

Whitehead’s notion of specialism emphasizes a love for a subject, in itself and for itself. Whitehead (1967) believed a special devotion towards a subject that is specially studied results in “the most austere of mental qualities,” known as *style*. Style is “the last acquirement of an educated mind” (Whitehead, p.13), which pervades the whole student. Style, for Whitehead, is a quality of intellectual habit which encourages the principles of attainment and restraint. Attainment and restraint, for Whitehead, are two fundamental principles of aesthetic appreciation. When sculpting, writing, or building, one must always know when to quit, and when to add. In sculpting wood, how much material is whittled away before it becomes perfect? In writing, how much do we need to elaborate a topic before it is meaningful? In teaching, how much work do we assign versus time to explore? Whitehead’s metaphysics accentuate the virtues of attainment and restraint in his conception of positive and negative prehensions. (Prehensions are characterized as moments of experience where the subject “prehends” its environment and selects positive or negative influences suitable for its own evolution)

Style may be also conceived as utilizing principles of access and limitation and as a moral ethic because of the implied consequence of action from commitment to value. Whitehead believed that style is the “ultimate morality of mind” because “the administrator with a sense of style hates waste, the engineer with a sense of style economizes his material, and the artisan with a sense of style prefers good work” (Whitehead, 1967, p.12). In essence, style is a moral context

for Whitehead's theory of education, as the principles of attainment and restraint are the fundamental qualities of work.

To provide an example of style as a principle in practice; let me offer how an experienced canoe builder teaching a student can serve as an illuminating case. The process of a student learning to build canoes will yield a demonstrable amount of knowledge in many subject areas. The student could attain knowledge related to chemistry, physics, biology, art, and practical skill. Nothing can be done if the student cannot swing a hammer, push a saw, or sand for hours on end. All the theory in the world will not help if technical acuties are not developed. In building a canoe, the student must select appropriate wood, which is of course reflective of the biology of certain trees. Particular physical and chemical properties are desired hence why cedar is preferred to pine. Students have to select the right tools, materials, and environment to build, and therefore need an understanding of their purpose and applicability.

Now the difference between the canoe master and novice here is that the master can attain their canoe with greater ease and efficiency than could the novice. The beginner stumbles over the next course of action, and must repeat certain tasks thus making the process more lengthy and full of corrections. The obvious result here is a disparity in the quality of a canoe being built between the student and master. While the student is still learning from the teacher, the level of quality between the two is apparent. The master's canoe was selected from the highest quality grain of wood, and used only demonstrably effective materials garnered from many years' worth of trial and error. The student may still make the novice mistake of trying to cut corners by using a cheaper material, or using an easier technique of bending wood, or having to predrill a hole four times before it's the right angle; but the student's inexperience comes at a

cost to the canoes overall quality and integrity. The student does not yet have a sense of artistic creativity in the canoe's overall character because the canoe's design is too restricted by the particulars of its construction. Students also lack comprehensive and embodied understanding that come from years of experience and specialization. The artisan canoe builder can examine a piece of wood and envision their creation whereas the student merely views a pile of lumber.

It should be pointed out at this point that specialization in Whitehead's view does not convey the popular notion of specialization akin to professionalization. While it does convey a special devotion to a special topic, e.g., canoe building, it does not translate to a myopic treatment of canoe building as a discipline in itself, like a worker on an assembly line putting together pre-fabricated components. The canoe builder is versed in physics, biology, mathematics, geometry, and art; while also emphasizing the aesthetic and technical acuties of a carpenter, a conservationist, an engineer, and a naturalist. The point of specialization is to remain comprehensive and open to the variety of disciplines and domains of knowledge to creatively express a distinctive contribution in preparation of a totality which bears the stamp of one's own unique relation to the world and its various domains of experience and knowledge. In other words, depth of quality requires breadth of understanding.

Purposeful activity infused with a generalized understanding is the point of Whitehead's discussion on style and its moral context. The love of a subject in itself, for itself, can be undertaken with the conviction of attaining some foreseen end because of the familiarity and foresight bred by specialism. The study will yield a sense of style because the pupil will know who, what, when, why, and how to achieve their goals with a particular aesthetic quality unique to them. Specialism yields style because the student can foresee a purpose and end without

being restricted by divisions in thought that come from disciplined detail. Learners can act with a shade of moral agency that comes from the power gained with foresight. Thus specialism is not professionalization in Whitehead's view of education.

Whitehead (1967) believed that style is the product of specialist studies. Power bestows the student with foresight because the "effect of your activity is calculable, and foresight is the last gift of gods to men" (p.13). With an increase in style, comes an increase in power. A specialist after years of devotion to a particular area of study now has the power to attain their ends and not be distracted by irrelevancies. A scientist can make valid appropriations about the world because they study empirical elements of the world which are eventually delivered as scientific truth, even if those appropriations are not what is thought edifying in a society (i.e. Copernicus and sun-centered heliocentric model of the solar system challenging prevalent dogma). For example, science explains empirically why the tides come in and do not concern themselves with mystical notions that it is due to some super sensory being controlling the oceans. Scientists are specialists because they can achieve what they set out to do with a set of well understood principles and are able to accomplish astounding feats of theoretical and technological innovation when coupled with the love of wisdom. The intrinsic spirit of curiosity endowed in the learner is what Whitehead believes is necessary for education. When curiosity is coupled with a special devotion, the results are creative impressions of innovative thought and action.

Whitehead (1967) aptly calls style and by extension, specialism, the exclusive privilege of the expert, because "whoever heard of the style of an amateur painter, or the style of an amateur poet?" (p.13). Style, for Whitehead, grounds the pupil's use and restraint of their

various intellectual and physical capacities. Style is a fashioning and restraint of the use of power, and education for Whitehead meant that students are able to reflect this ethic in their daily lives for it “pervades the whole being” (p.13). A person with a sense of style knows how to reach a desired goal due to well-trodden habits of thought and action which can best yield a favorable result. But more importantly, the individual possess characteristics which pervade their work that allows them to creatively go about their knowledge. The pupil’s canvas is colored by this pervasive quality because of the love of their subject and the need to express that conviction in fascinatingly diverse ways. A great cook loves to explore new sensations of taste, perhaps creating a delicious combination previously unknown.

Whitehead says that “you may not divide the seamless coat of learning” (Whitehead, 1967, p.11). In order to attain a “seamless” education, there is no one course of study which endows general thought and another that develops a special body of knowledge. For Whitehead, the seamless quality of learning imparts an “intimate sense for the power of ideas together with a particular body of knowledge which has peculiar reference to the life of the being possessing it” (p. 12). Specialism yields a particular body of knowledge while general education imparts a reverence for the power of ideas and both demonstrate conformity to the experience of human learners. The process of learning echoes a continuum of growth that requires general and specialized education if wisdom is to be attainable. Learning is indivisible between the application and appreciation of general idea’s and the body of knowledge which supports it. Since general ideas are grounded in concrete fact, a learner cannot divide their education between generality and specialism. Wisdom for Whitehead is when the learner possesses an “eye for the whole chess board” (p.12) where concrete and abstract thoughts and skills merge. The following quote conveys the importance of special knowledge:

A special study can give any appreciation for the exact formulation of general ideas, for their relations when formulated, for their service in the comprehension of life. A mind so disciplined should be both more abstract and more concrete. It has been trained in the comprehension of abstract thought and in the analysis of facts. (Whitehead, 1967, p.12)

In general, Whitehead believed education is about process rather than product. The philosophy of organism provides the grounding upon which deeply rooted notions about mind and matter are upended. Whitehead believes “inert ideas” and a lack of aesthetic avenues are hindrances to an ideal education. He offers a balanced approach to education through concrete and abstract learning in a temporally oriented sequence of development. He emphasizes this idea by explaining the dynamics of learning as three stages of pervasive quality that occur as temporal phases of growth known as romance, precision, and generalization.

2.4 The Rhythm of Education and the Character of Mental Growth

Although Whitehead’s views on education can be seen as apprehensions of his more general ideas regarding process philosophy, this section examines Whitehead’s ideas about freedom and discipline in learning by explaining the “rhythms” of education as constituted in the three stages of mental growth.

2.4.1 The cycles of freedom and discipline.

Whitehead claims that most education in the west is based upon an incorrect assumption regarding how students learn. He states “the pupil’s progress is often conceived as a uniform steady advance undifferentiated by change or type or alteration in pace...education is based upon a false psychology of the process of mental development” (Whitehead, 1967, p.17). The student is essentially treated, consciously or unconsciously as an empty vat where teachers “dump” knowledge to be reiterated when it is convenient for evaluation by an external referent.

Whitehead states: “Learning is often spoken of as if we were watching the open pages of all the

books which we have ever read, and then, when occasion arises, we select the right page to read aloud to the universe” (p.27). All too often students equate learning with the ability to regurgitate rote information. The source of much frustration in western education has roots in the idea of the human mind as an empty container and a lack of concern for the essential rhythm of life processes. Eminent anti-oppressive educator, Paulo Freire coins the concept of *banking education* in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* where “education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, 1994, p. 58).

Equating a human being to an instrument, or tool, rejects the intrinsic agency of that learner in place of a utilitarian view of humans fitted for economic agency. The student is not a static and hollow entity meant to be slurped for profit. Therefore, the influence of the banking model results in what Whitehead calls “soul murder” and what Freire believes results in a loss of creativity and consciousness. Similar to Whitehead, Freire states that the “capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative powers” (Freire, 1994, p. 60) is the result of a passive review of disconnected ideas. For Whitehead and Freire, the banking model of inert ideas inflicts a diminished capacity for students to exercise their full potential. In my experience, the cynicism surrounding education is warranted due to the failed expectations of many students and teachers who expected a meaningful and rich learning experience but were instead met with the stresses and realities of modern culture and competing in a neoliberal form of education which emphasize grades and competition. The debilitating effect of imbibing too many disconnected ideas results in disillusionment about the real potential of what education offers society and the individual. The individual and society ought to be allowed the creative and critical capacities necessary to adjust factors which are detrimental to its own growth.

Whitehead believes education to create more than well-read individuals. Ideal learning, for both Whitehead and Freire, reflects a desire to increase a learners understanding of their existence, to provide meaning, and emphasize control over their life. Especially in an increasingly complex world where social, cultural, political, and scientific realities require lucid scrutiny and understanding. Whitehead states:

Education is the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by the art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment. (1967, p. 39)

Freire expresses a similar sentiment in regards to self-agency:

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for men to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. (Freire, 1994, p. 118)

Whitehead maintains that education is a process, whereby the main goal is the fruition of wisdom and for Freire's "concientization" (Freire, 1994). The importance of students developing self-control over their existence is reflective within both men's ideal of education. While their political motivations are divergent, the endpoint of their pedagogy and philosophy are similar; moulding students capable of agency (Roemer, 2006, p. 321).

Whitehead believes "the antithesis in education between freedom and discipline is not so sharp as a logical analysis of the meanings of the terms might lead us to imagine" (Whitehead, 1967, p. 30). The two principles of freedom and discipline are not antagonists, but should be adjusted in a learner's education as to correspond to the natural "sway" of their emerging existence. Whitehead calls this natural sway the *Rhythmic Character of Growth*. He believes the term "rhythmic" conveys "difference within a framework of repetition" (Whitehead, 1967,

p.9), and a lack of attention to this dynamic of learning, or mental growth, is a “main source of wooden futility in education” (Whitehead, 1967, p.9). He believed life to be firmly grounded in cyclic or rhythmic processes as “our bodily life is essentially periodic. It is dominated by the beatings of the heart, and the recurrence of breathing. The presupposition of periodicity is indeed fundamental to our very concept of life” (Whitehead, 1911, p. 122). Once again Whitehead connects his metaphysical generalizations with educational philosophy. Whitehead correlates rhythmic processes inherent in the life of organisms, with the character of mental development of learners.

When Whitehead discusses freedom and discipline he speaks of the nature of education and external factors which should so be adjusted to provide the best possible course of development for the student. Part of this delicate adjustment is providing a consistent focus to the student’s current mental stage of growth. To discern which stage of mentality the student exhibits at any particular moment, Whitehead outlines three stages of mental growth he derives from Hegel’s analysis of progress (noted as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis), which he renames as romance, precision, and generalization. The rhythmic claims of freedom and discipline are principles when rightfully applied by the adaptive genius of the teacher, give way to meaningful growth in the context of the rhythmic nature of learning in learners. Learning is inherently rhythmic; if education is to be meaningful then it must characterize and reflect the rhythmic nature of growth.

Whitehead believes mental development should be composed of cycles of freedom, discipline, and freedom once again. Freedom is the essential feature of Whitehead’s philosophy of education. It is the teachers task to “discover in practice the exact balance between freedom

and discipline” (Whitehead, 1967, p.34-35) as to provide the best possible circumstances for the students development. The genius of the teacher is to provide the proper course of development to reflect the rhythmic character of mental growth. A good teacher knows how adjust the amount of freedom and discipline so as to reflect their current stage of development. Since the mind is not a vault to be filled and opened when the time is right, the “ordered acquirement of knowledge is the natural food for a developing intelligence” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 30). Or to borrow the fish analogy; a student must keep their knowledge fresh by exhibiting relation and application, but it must be ingested in due course when their craving for disciplined detail, or freedom to explore, requires the teacher to provide the pedagogical context for such learning to occur.

Whitehead recognizes that “freedom and discipline are two essentials of education” (Whitehead, 1967, p.30). The learner is a growing organism, not to be stuffed with inert ideas; but requires an ordered acquirement of knowledge. Hence a balance is required between the accordance of freedom and discipline in the learners life as to “correspond to a natural sway, to and fro, of the developing personality” (1967, p.30-31), which he elsewhere calls the rhythmic character of growth. Whitehead believes most failure comes from neglecting to align the application of freedom and discipline with the natural sway of the learner’s development. His main position is that education should be dominated by freedom, but at times, freedom must give way to discipline with freedom subordinated to the rigor of discipline. Whitehead believes that all development occurs in cycles, between a rhythmic interplay of freedom and discipline, and freedom once again. The cycle begins with the first stage dominated by freedom, which Whitehead coins the stage of romance. The second stage, dominated by discipline, is named the

stage of precision. And finally, the third stage, once again dominated by a return to freedom, is called the stage of generalization (1967, p.31). The trick of a well formed educational program is balancing and coordinating the influence of freedom and discipline alongside the student's temporal mental development.

Whitehead maintains "that the aim of an ideally constructed education that the discipline should be the voluntary issue of free choice, and that freedom should gain an enrichment of possibility as the issue of discipline" (Whitehead, 1967, p.). He suggested framing an educative pattern which reflects the rhythmic character of mental growth. He states:

We shall endeavor to weave in the learner's mind a harmony of patterns, by co-ordinating the various elements of instruction into subordinate cycles each of intrinsic worth for the immediate apprehension of the pupil. We must garner our crops each in its due season. (Whitehead, 1967, p.16)

The job of the educator is to actualize the principles of freedom and discipline to coincide with the current rhythmic character of learning potential of the student. In other words, before the student can subject themselves to the rigor of disciplined detailed analysis, they must first be captured by the phase of romance and thereby possess the motivation "to explore a field or collection seen as extending to the horizon, but not yet surveyed and articulated into disciplined detail nor enclosed by a general architectonic frame" (Brumbaugh, p.5). The student thus possesses a certain degree of freedom to explore new ideas and to further plumb a domain of knowledge. Then, afterwards when the novelty of discovery has worn off, the principle of discipline is emphasized for there are definite facts to be known and procedures to learn. Once again, not only must the proper "food" be eaten, but at the proper "time" as well.

Whitehead's focus on the individual's freedom in this case seems to indicate a learner-centered approach like that of Montessori's method or Dewey's experiential learning. The focus

is placed on the students unique emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical acuties, and the teacher is seen as both facilitating and directing learning, rather than its sole proprietor. In Whitehead's philosophy, he believes wisdom to be the goal of education. Since wisdom is related to how knowledge is handled and employed, the goal of education is to not only impart knowledge, but to demonstrate the importance of dominating knowledge with wisdom.

Whitehead reminds us that wisdom is only attainable if the student has a suitable degree of freedom in the presence of knowledge, and knowledge is only procured through a disciplined "acquirement of ordered fact" (1967, p.30). There can be no meaningful growth without interest. Thus freedom sustains interest, while overt discipline will likely diminish it.

Whitehead realized in order for students to grow, education must begin in freedom, and end in freedom. Education is always dominated by interest.

2.4.2 The Rhythmic Character of Mental Growth

Prior to explaining each phase, it is important to emphasize Whitehead's caution regarding interpreting the progress of mental growth (romance, precision, and generalization) as clearly uniform and neatly progressive divisions. Whitehead (1967) states "The interior spiritual life of man is a web of many strands. They do not all grow together by uniform extension" (p.27). The complex nature of growth, despite being explained by formal divisions, is "a rhythm involving an interweaving of cycles, the whole process being dominated by a greater cycle of the same general character as its minor eddies" (Whitehead, 1967, p.27).

Whitehead warns that while he chooses to characterize the three phases of human learning as distinct from one another, they are not a mutually exclusive – such that an organism in the phase of romance has no capacity for precision. Whitehead states that the distinction

between each phase is one of “pervasive quality” (Whitehead, 1967, p.28) and that it merely reflects the notion that each stage is present throughout the continuum of learning. Distinction between each is necessary to emphasize which phase predominates at a particular moment during the process of learning. The distinctive quality of each phase is present throughout the whole process. Thus, while a single phase may permeate the current cycle of growth, it is the alternation and reverberation between all three that constitutes the rhythms of learning.

Howard Woodhouse (1995) reiterates the notion of non-linear progression through the stages of growth when he discusses how the three cycles are not entirely divisible from one another. The cycles are non-linear and therefore different from Piaget’s notion of development, which are distinct, sequential, and age-related (Piaget, 1969, 1976). The process of learning for Whitehead conveys a “dawn of mentality [that] exhibits itself as a rhythm involving an interweaving of cycles” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 27). When discussing a particular phase during a learner’s process of growth and its enduring characteristics or qualities, it is important to emphasize the presence of other pervasive qualities which exist in the background of the other enduring qualities of other phases. For example, a learner observing the night sky can be said to be in the stage of romance, but it does not mean they are closed off from exhibiting and benefitting from some precise details and skills. These details and skills would further enhance romance, such as proper telescope alignment, zenith, azimuth, and basic stellar formations. They would greatly assist in the student’s capacity for wonder and joy by plumbing the depths of the night sky with greater ease and awareness by understanding some basic skills and ideas.

2.4.3 Romance

The subject-matter has the vividness of novelty: it holds within itself unexplored connexions with possibilities half-disclosed by glimpses and half-concealed by the wealth

of material. In this stage knowledge is not dominated by systematic procedure. Such system as there must be is created piecemeal ad hoc. (Whitehead, 1967, p. 17-18)

The stage of romance is one of invigorating discovery and passionate interest. In this stage, the pupil yearns to ask questions, to find answers and to explore the experiences that foster and enhance this new wealth of information. The stage of romance is unorganized, chaotic, and it is necessarily so. The learner suddenly stumbles upon a wide open vista, full of strange noises, smells, and sights. It captures the student and they feel the presence of an intense aesthetic moment that signifies the beginning of something new. This requires the freedom to explore knowledge as the first stage on the path of meaningful learning must be immersed in interest. The first stage, dominated by freedom, is full of wonder, intrigue, and excitement that a journey is about to take place. The student encounters a phenomenon and is allowed to explore it freely until they desire to satiate their curiosity by engaging the subject matter in a definite and ordered manner. In a sense learners are given free rein to frolic about in the vista of their imagination or new experience, to taste new things, and be immersed in the immediate feeling of a newly discovered object of interest. Like swimming in the ocean for the first time, or gazing upon the craters of the lunar surface; the students are given the freedom to let the experience's full aesthetic impress upon them such that they become enamoured by it.

When studying the solar system, it would be best to allow the students to give them the basic skills and understanding on telescope operation and penetrate the Cosmos in a free and open environment in order to be captivated further into a precise analysis of gravitation, stellar evolution, and planetary development. There is a definite and innate beauty of viewing the majesty of the universe outside the lights of cities. The night sky captures the imagination of nearly anyone with a pulse.. The student can with little effort, view nebula's, asteroids, the

storms of Jupiter, conjunctions, eclipses, and a whole wide range of cosmic events which are so astounding it often leaves even the most well-read individual breathless. This is the sense of wonder Whitehead alludes to as the required starting point on the adventure of learning. The affective engagement of a learner in response to, and anticipation of, its environment is critical to its future learning processes.

The wonder and awe accorded to those on the vista of new experiences is reflective of the innate capacity for curiosity and joy that comes from discovery. It is the initial inclination of interest, curiosity, and motivation in the freedom of knowledge that characterizes the phase of romance. Henning (2009) states that “the aim of Romance is freedom, which fosters a joy for discovery” (p.7). Whitehead explains that “from the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery. The discovery, which he has to make, is that general ideas give an understanding of that stream of events which pours through his life, which is his life” (Whitehead, 1967, p.2). Romance inclines the student to know their world because it allows them to comprehend it, and the joy of discovery which fuels this wondrous curiosity was for Whitehead, a critical aspect of their learning experiences, and a fundamental element of education. Interest must rule the entire process, only at times to be given way to discipline through intense focus, rigor, and precise analysis. Discipline naturally diminishes interest, but the attention to the rhythmic process of learning potential ensures students eventually re-emerge from the banality of repetition and intense focus towards a renewed sense of curiosity and wonder.

Romance occurs within a continuous flow of cycles “which culminate in fully expressed feelings and inclusive forms of understandings” (Whitehead, 1920/1957b, pp. 17-19).

Woodhouse (1995) states the phase of romance represents the initiation into a process of growth and is typified by an “interest of the learner [which] must be evoked so that she or he can gain the necessary skill and constant delight of success” (p.348) which reflects the “joy of discovery and love of learning that distinguishes the young child.”(p.348). Although romance is typically conceptualized in Whiteheadian scholarship with youthful archetypes, the metaphors offered merely reflect the pure and genuine interest that children so readily display when introduced to a new discovery that piques their interest.

A student learning music will by necessity, study scales, notes, measures, as an intense amount of discipline is needed in order to demonstrate a level of skill to match their performance. People love music, and some are compelled to understand music further by an intense study of it. Those learners become musicians that are capable of rendering their love for music with performances that flow from wells of creative impulse and imagination. A pianist playing Beethoven or Chopin needs discipline to perform, and they need interest to subject themselves to discipline. The pianist renews interest by performing new works, or writing new pieces. A musician never ‘does’ music, they ‘play’ music.

2.4.4 Precision.

The first stage of development in learning is romance, or interest. The student requires freedom to explore the breadth of relationships of a new subject, or feel the immediacy of emotional apprehensions that the new subject can bring about. In a physics lesson on the introduction to refraction, the teacher would facilitate and accommodate a certain level of freedom for the students to explore and demonstrate various examples of refraction. The student utilizes various instruments and observations to constitute how the principle of refraction relates

to a wide range of observed phenomena. The first moment in a student's learning experience is interest, and eventually the spirit of inquiry compels the student and the teacher must facilitate the transition from breadth of relations and immediate feeling to an "exactness of formulation" (Whitehead, 1929, p.18) where structures of the subject matter are defined and understood. This is the stage where definite knowledge is acquired and right and wrong ways of procedure are understood.

After the initial stage of Romance, the student progresses into and through the next stage, known as the phase of Precision. According to Penaskovic (2009), during precision, appeal is made to the intellect. It is the stage where students perfect their writing, spelling, arithmetic, and lists of simple facts. In this stage of precision "width of relationship remains subordinate to exactness of expression or formulation" (Penaskovic, 2009, p.49). The student pushes past the excitement of discovery into the familiarity of routine and by subordinating the qualities of freedom, joy, and novelty; to discipline, repetition, and focused interest.

Whitehead warns of the dangers of imposing too much discipline upon the student before the stage of romance has run its course. Discipline is the natural successor to freedom needed in romance because the mind "craves order, system, clarity, and exactness so that it will not wander aimlessly amidst the wealth of materials it has encountered in the stage of romance" (Brumbaugh, 1987, p. 37). Whitehead believes the mind craves order as much as it craves new experiences. Students undertake careful analysis and learn techniques to penetrate the wealth of material encountered in the stage of romance. Part of this task requires that the student subject themselves to the rigor and repetitive nature of "getting it right". It is at the stage of precision that memorizing, repeating, and drills find their due place because there are certainly "right ways

and wrong way [of proceeding], and definite facts to be known” (Whitehead, 1967, p.34).

Whitehead did not promote lazy learning. He realized the importance and necessity of subjecting the learner to a certain amount of discipline in order to facilitate meaningful growth. Undertaking tasks regardless of a student’s desire to do them is a necessary habit according to Whitehead, and Riffert (2005) states that “learning things for which you have presently have little value for can be valuable in character development” (p. 32). Even Whitehead states that “it is necessary in life to have acquired the habit of cheerfully undertaking imposed tasks” (Whitehead, 1967, 35).

An example of precision in the case of learning refraction is a fitting case. A student must learn to use tools, measure angles, and calculate indices of refraction. A host of skills and facts are required as the necessary aptitudes to understand refraction. It is one thing to show a student how to use a protractor and solve for x , but it is entirely another for the student to be given the freedom to demonstrate their knowledge and skill by showing how they apply to a wide variety of circumstances. From rainbows to black ice, and light bending in water, to calculating the speed of light in a cube of diamond immersed in water; the student knows the phenomena in question and how to categorize it in their mind. Their expressions are limited to the narrowness of formulation as they possess only detached examples isolated from reality (i.e. textbook examples) which are needed in order to patiently master the process of method, observation, and discussion.

Once students possess the ability to competently wield their newly acquired acuties, they are now ready to demonstrate its power by utilizing it outside the context of textbook examples and neatly packaged experiments. Students need a reason to continue learning, and giving them

the power to demonstrate how that knowledge and skill relates to their experience of reality infuses the learner with powerful tools of perception and therefore opens the world up in exciting ways. They need to show how what they learned matters, and carries with it a relation to the world in which they live.

Whitehead suggests that teachers keep their students' knowledge alive by preserving interest as they need a reason to subject themselves to discipline. The student requires interest because "the organism will not absorb the fruits of the task unless its powers of apprehension are kept fresh by romance" (Whitehead, 1967, p.34). Thus the need for moving beyond precision and renewing romance is imperative if growth is to continue. Renewing interest belongs to the phase of generalization and freedom is required again, but utilized in a different capacity than freedom in romance.

2.4.5 Generalization.

Before the student attains understanding or wisdom, they must "patiently master detail, day by day, minute by minute" (Whitehead, p.). There is no "airy road to learning", but rather a slow and patient focus on detail, reflected by an intense engagement in the subject matter. The stage of romance sustains a pre-conscious immediacy of feeling and intense enjoyment in the freedom of knowledge; whereas the phase of precision appears as a conscious and immediate focus of intellect and intense attention in a particular domain of knowledge. The next movement on the educational cycle is a Hegelian synthesis of romance and precision, where students regain interest by returning to reality with newly acquired tools and ideas that have come from precise training, fuelled by the students motivating interest. The Hegelian fusion is coined the phase of generalization. It is the final phase on the cycle of rhythmic growth before the student returns to

a state of freedom and renewed interest which is required as a safeguard against the discipline of training since “training is apt to kill initiative” (Whitehead, 1967, p.35).

According to Whitehead, romance is associated with “the excitement consequent on the transition from the bare facts to the first realizations of the import of their unexplored relationships” (Whitehead, 1967, p18). The phase of generalization is “a return to romanticism with added advantage of classified ideas and relevant technique. It is the fruition which has been the goal of precise training” (Whitehead, 1967, p.19). Power and style emerge as a result of mastering a subject. Since power is gained from possessing the “relevant habits and techniques for increasing our knowledge rapidly and without much conscious effort” (Riffert, 2005, p. 37), we can act with style because the student can achieve their ends without wasted effort or imagination. Whitehead believed style was a moral restraint upon the exercise of power because the student directs their energies towards valuable goals.

Henning states that “the aim of education is not to simply develop curious persons who can categorize their experiences and apprehended facts” (2009, p.8). The journey of education must develop learners who can also infer broad generalizations, principles, ideas about their experiences of world and “these generalizations belong to cultured persons who are now free to act” (Henning, 2009, p.8). The third phase of learning is about more than simply returning to the stage of romance and reiterating the entire process. George Allen (2009) mentions that Whitehead’s notion of cycles is better understood as a helical process rather than a cyclical process. With a helical conception of growth, the completion of each phase results in more than a return to romance, but rather it signifies an overall arc of growth; thereby implying the student

is 'more' than what they were in the previous cycle. The development of wisdom relates the overall arc of growth through a continuous repetition of cycles built upon other cycles.

Whitehead claims that freedom and interest should dominate the journey of education, when it is not in subordination to discipline in the phase of precision. Since students need continual renewal of interest to subject themselves to further discipline, Whitehead believed that the student needs a chance to demonstrate that they are an "effective individual, and it is effects that he wants to produce" (Whitehead, 1929, p.37), where effective individuals possess intellectual/abstract and technical agency. The student's mind is prepared through discipline such that their knowledge is ready to employ by "battling with the immediate experiences of life, a preparation by which to qualify each immediate moment with relevant ideas and appropriate actions" (Whitehead, 1929, p.37). Riffert (2005) posits it would be more accurate to say that generalization "involves a synthesis of freedom and discipline" where the discipline actualized in precision "enables students to act with style and efficiency, and the freedom gained from the rekindling of wonder and adventure gives them reason to do so" (Riffert, 2005, p. 40). The oscillating influence of freedom and discipline in a student's education involves a synthesis of precision and romance as to produce moments of transient awareness.

The adventure and love of learning "is the necessary counterpoint to the acquisition of knowledge that belongs to the stage of precision" (Scarfe, 2010, p.15). From a deeply burning desire to understand, the necessity to organize and codify experience brings about the stage of precision and a more systemic, disciplined, and rigorous examination of experience and knowledge takes place after romance has taken course. The student realizes there are things to be understood. They wish to figure out, what are those nebulous orbs in the sky? How do they

move? Why do some move differently than others? How did the earth create life? Answering these questions is fraught with intense precision of detailed fact and observation. It requires a discipline that will surely kill the interest of the student sitting under the night sky being captured by the sheer immensity of it. Once they realize that they are “star stuff”, constituted of the same cosmic utterances of a supernova; they view themselves differently and wonder emerges once again. As different domains of thought connect to one another, along with incorporating an aesthetic dimension, learning approaches a confluence which is the moment of expansive awareness over the generality and specificity of reality. The student see’s themselves as well as every macro and micro moment of reality as constituted by a relatively simple set of principles. Once that awareness takes hold, they return to their everyday experience armed with a mentality that is aesthetically open and thoroughly disciplined in acquired fact.

The stage of generalization is where “active wisdom” is possible. The student has a firm grasp on a few well understood principles, and possesses a wealth of related fact to support those claims. Those principles allow the student to grasp how their environment and the events which constantly unfold in their reality as giving effect to those principles. Riffert (2005) states that “the ‘active’ part of wisdom lies in the molding of our future actions in accordance with the insight these general principles provide” (p. 40). Style and power are related to wisdom because style relates to the use of power by attaining a desired end without wasted effort or imagination. If wisdom concerns the way knowledge is held and handled, then style and power are hallmarks of the wise. The wise knows when and where to use their knowledge, and generalization is the stage where this power is realized since “the pupil is now ready to use his new weapons” (Whitehead, 1967, p.36-37). The individual becomes effective through active wisdom, and “it is effects that he wants to produce” (p. 37). Generalization is the phase where the student becomes

both effective and affected by the training incurred through discipline by the natural mode of interest which fuels the entire adventure of learning.

An example of practical wisdom in everyday life is the conscious choice to reflect non-oppressive attitudes and actions. Oppression and racism in particular are manifestations of ideology and are thus learned. People learn to see race just as they learn to identify a shape with a name. Race is a construction created as a conscious and unconscious element of structural influences to oppress a group of people for the benefit of another dominant class. Learners may feel the need to learn about oppression which may have originated from their own or a friend's mistreatment. Learners then immerse themselves in dialectic with text, teacher, and classmate to ingest and understand fact and history. They learn where instances of racism historically manifested and carry over into modern consciousness through various political, social, economic, and cultural structures. Learners perceive the disparities of society and gain awareness over the treatments that are procured to a certain group at the cost of another. Whether students are dominant or marginalized, or both, they can move beyond the castigating gaze of racial subjugation because its boldest claims are bogus once a student imbibes a bit of history and connects it to concrete examples. The most powerful classes in anti-racism have incurred deep wells of emotional conflict, and have sometimes resulted in a student breaking down admitting to being the perpetrator or subject of racial bias. Wisdom and understanding is a strong weapon against ignorance and drives the individual and society further from the vicissitudes of hate.

2.5 Whitehead and Martial Arts

Garland (2009) makes the connection between Whitehead's themes concerning learning and education with the work of contemporary psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997),

and his ideas of 'flow' psychology or 'optimal experiences'. Garland (2009) states that "an intimate connection exists between Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow experiences and Whitehead's view of the rhythmic nature of learning. From the theoretical standpoint, flow is most closely related to Whitehead's generalization or mastery stage of learning" (p.92). The theoretical perspectives of Csikszentmihalyi and Whitehead can better account for the complex and dynamic nature of learning martial arts.

While Garland acknowledges the limitations of promoting flow experiences as a worthy goal for education, he notes that the culture of schools and universities do not allow the kind of optimal settings that are conducive to the type of mastery, or generalizing abilities of a 'flow experiencing subject'. Garland (2009) states that "What we need for flow experiences is the synthesis of the features of romance and precision, and the stage of mastery can be achieved" (p. 92). In the phase of generalization, flow experiences, are representative of specialism in a student's education. As previously mentioned, style and power are developed during the phase of generalization and according to Whitehead: "we gain power from the mastery of a subject matter because we now have the techniques we need to increase our precise knowledge exponentially; we can categorize each new fact we encounter without pause or hesitation" (Garland, 2009, p.91*). The stage of generalization is where specialism or mastery allows the student to penetrate a subject with enough depth, upon which, they can spontaneously approach a situation with a readiness necessary to handle it accordingly. For example, when a master canoe builder begins to select wood for a new project they are aware of the necessary procedures needed to progress because the canoe builder is exactly fitted to the task for which he/she has trained by mastering the necessary knowledge, procedures, and skills.

Martial artists are endowed with a consistent awareness over one's actions and thoughts. By encouraging non-violent dispositions through self-awareness and discipline, the approach to Muay Thai training and fighting is similar to that of Whitehead. The development of a Muay Thai fighter is a continuous process of change marked by sustained interest in committing to the rigorous discipline of training. The power gained from specialism in Muay Thai allows the learner to act according to a set of principles in order to handle each moment of experience with the necessary action. In other words, Muay Thai develops wisdom by the same pathways Whitehead describes: freedom in the presence of knowledge, and discipline in the acquirement of ordered fact. In martial-arts rhetoric, that would be the same as learning how to throw a kick the right way through repetition, then trying to execute that same kick given the freedom to do so in the chaotic realm of sparring and fighting. The fluctuating influence of freedom and discipline is accorded such that they follow the natural sway of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development of the martial artist. The three phases manifest in training and fighting as periods of intense discipline, separated by periods of renewed interest. Renewal of interest typically follows from sparring and fighting, which is most identifiable with the third phase, generalization.

The features of flow psychology in promoting and enhancing generalization assist in determining what elements of experience fall under each phase of rhythmic growth. Categorizing and framing the experience of learning martial arts will be achieved using the theory of rhythmic growth. This will provide the necessary link between the embodied and intrinsic process of learning Muay Thai with the theory of learning and education of Whitehead.

Whitehead's theories are anchored on imparting students who not only have a grasp of certain abstract ideas, but can also possess a certain degree of technical skill. The strength of Whitehead's theories resides in his encouragement of wisdom and interest through a balanced education of freedom and discipline expressed in both technical and abstract engagements. The strength of martial arts resides in a similar position, the development of wisdom through the balance of discipline (training) and freedom (allowance to fight and spar). Whitehead's theories regarding learning and education are valuable conduits by which to access the mysterious and highly idiosyncratic world of martial arts. Martial arts, particularly Muay Thai, are conversely a way of understanding and giving effect to Whitehead's theories as well.

The following chapter correlates the features of learning and education offered in this chapter with training and competing in Muay Thai. The autobiographical narratives highlight the experience of training and competition, while the theories of Whitehead highlight the ideal experience of learning and education. Thus, the third chapter will synthesize the features of learning and education from Whitehead's perspective with the narratives in the previous chapter. This synthesis will highlight how Muay Thai training reflects Whiteheadian ideals of rhythmic growth, promotes wisdom, utilizes specialism, and encourages aesthetic and abstract modes of knowing. While this chapter expressed the theoretical features of learning and education from Whitehead, the next chapter will demonstrate how Muay Thai training embodies characteristics of a rhythmic education and results in similar outcomes which include the promotion of wisdom, keeping knowledge alive, and utilizing a balanced approach to a holistic education (technical and abstract).

CHAPTER THREE

INTERPRETING MUAY THAI THROUGH WHITEHEAD

3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to align Whitehead's philosophical exposition of education with learning a martial discipline by reflecting upon my training and competing in Thailand and Canada. This task is achieved by synthesizing Whitehead's ideas of Active Wisdom, the Three Phases of Growth, and Freedom and Discipline with the process of growth experienced by myself as a Muay Thai practitioner.

3.1 Whitehead's Cadence and Muay Thai

Whitehead believed the traditional concept of learning was falsely based upon the belief that learning was linear where bits of information are accumulated through repetitive tasks and learners became better "regurgitators" of information. Like tossing dirt into a pile, the act of learning was associated with accumulating piles of random knowledge into the heap of one's intellect while believing one's shovel was getting sharper. Whitehead (1967) rejected the assumption that the mind was a "dead instrument" meant to be honed (p.3). He also rejected the notion that learning was akin to accumulating mounds of data for the sake of having the biggest hill. Novelist and Robotocist, Daniel Wilson, aptly stated in his book *Robopocalypse* "true knowledge is not in the things, which are few, but in finding the connections between the things" (Wilson, 2011, p.32). Emphasizing the meaning and power of ideas through their relationship to one another is a crucial aspect of learning and education.

Whitehead believed learning and life is fundamentally anchored in a cadence that is metaphysically grounded in the very fabric of reality; from quantum occurrences to macroscopic phenomena. “Our life is essentially periodic. It is dominated by beatings of the heart, and the recurrence of breathing. The presupposition of periodicity is indeed fundamental to our very concept of life” (Whitehead, 1982, p.11). In Whitehead’s metaphysics view, life is constituted of rhythmic pulsations out of something vague into something definite, again to dissolve into other emerging occasions *ad infinitum*. This process becomes obvious in humans on a large enough scale and Whitehead connected this fundamental rhythm of reality to the phenomena of human learning. (The notion rhythmic learning is not peculiar to education, as the Medicine Wheel is another modality which reflects the dynamic of rhythms.)

Martial Arts have traditionally been understood by its practitioners as a modality which reifies the basic tenet of ‘rhythms’. When practicing a kick, one must repetitively execute it until gradually it becomes technically sound. If repetition is the father of perfection in Martial Arts, then surely the fruition which yields from connecting techniques developed through repetitive discipline is its Mother. We often speak of “finding your rhythm” in martial arts, as a way to express the need to find balance. Thus to express ‘rhythms’ in relation to martial arts and in terms familiar with western readers and people unfamiliar with martial arts, I will express the notion of rhythms and cycles through Whitehead’s theory of freedom and discipline, the three phases of mental development and active wisdom.

3.2 Freedom and Discipline

Coupled with ethics and modified habitus, the pupil/learner gains greater freedom and by extension a greater degree of discipline is attainable. Because the pupil/learner has an enhanced

capacity to respond effectively to certain situations without resorting to blind instinct, the learner can engage in higher levels of discipline than previously possible. An example is sparring as a beginner versus as a seasoned fighter. In the beginning, body movements are highly erratic as the pupil learns to control responses in highly stressful situations. The newbies ability to utilize complex patterns, combinations, and footwork is sacrificed for the necessity of learning the basics of first ridding oneself of the ‘fight or flight’ trigger. In addition, a huge element of training is controlling one’s breathing. The beginner does not yet know how to stay calm and focused while breathing in a very precise manner to the point of finding a *cadence*. The experienced fighter can engage in highly stressful and strenuous situations and utilize highly complex movements while staying in a rhythm, yet not be dictated by it. Therefore, the more experienced martial artist possesses a greater degree of ‘freedom’ due to well-trained physical and emotional responses coupled with an ethical approach to living.

The helical conception of growth mentioned in chapter two, although used to convey an overall arc of development as each learner progresses through the three phases of growth, is quite fitting for describing the student’s sway between freedom and discipline. The more developed a student becomes, the greater degree of freedom they can be accorded to learn highly specialized and difficult movements, which of course requires a greater degree of discipline. The student gains greater skill and dispositions as they sway between the freedom to express and the necessity to discipline themselves in the skills and dispositions required of them. Learning is a rhythm between both freedom and discipline in a student’s training and fighting career. These rhythms become a fundamental feature of learning, whether the object of one’s learning is martial arts, logic, or music. The student spirals towards greater growth through the experience of freedom and discipline. Greater freedom compels greater discipline; which translates to more

skills requiring a greater need for expanding the boundary conditions of allowable risk. Students need the space to exhibit their skills to see how they stand up in a space where risk is real. This space is often small in the beginning, like a big padded bouncy air castle. As students grow, the boundaries of freedom become more and more akin to a real life situation where consequences are readily felt and where the degree of danger is inherently higher. In the beginning of a student's learning Muay Thai, the learning process is carefully controlled. When you spar, you wear full gear and often spar with people with similar aptitude, while higher level partners are often teaching more than performing. In time, sparring is dangerous, intense, and as close as one can come to the 'Real' when two partners are closely matched in skill and physical ability. This growth resembles a sway between the need to discipline and the need to utilize discipline in ever expanding environments of freedom.

Learning martial arts appears generally similar to learning many other disciplines. The difference in subject matter does not mean learning suddenly changes appearance. Learning math is the same as learning logic vis-à-vis martial arts. We must master basic algebra before we can work on single variable calculus. Freedom to express the world through mathematics is enhanced with greater discipline just as the freedom to express oneself through martial arts is hinged on greater discipline, albeit differently applied. The obvious difference is that most martial arts are steeped in ethical dispositions on how to live with minimal right to conflict. A student's modified 'habitus' (Bordeiu, 1980) conditioned through physical and emotional training reifies a moral outlook which fosters disdain for pointless violence.

A student's education in Muay Thai must be shaped as such to provide the greatest rate of progress while acknowledging their current learning potential. How much freedom and

discipline a student receives in training is heavily influenced by the coach, Kru, or Master. The prescription of what a student will learn, when, and how is dependent on the student's current stage of learning potential. A student cannot learn complicated combinations without first being versed in something as simple as the jab-cross. Once a student learns basic movements, he or she can be given more freedom to express new weapons in sparring or a free-following drill. When a student requires more time and or comprehension to master a technique, the teacher accords more discipline to assure the student can achieve their result. In Thailand, one coach noticed my knee techniques required adjustments, so he had me work through various drills and sparring exercises meant to hone timing and minimize telegraphing (Telegraphing alerts an individual of their opponent's intentions through the reflexive movements that accompany physical actions. For instance, the 'telegraph' of a person throwing a straight jab may drop their shoulder, look at a certain point on the other's body, shift their feet slightly, and/or drop their hands; all of which indicate the intention of the opponent. Advanced athletes minimize telegraphing and possess a high degree of awareness to anticipate and react to opponents telegraphs). Learners will know when they are not executing a move correctly through bodily awareness, and if not, a teacher or fellow fighters can be quick to point out flaws. The teacher provides clear instruction and outlines the necessary roadmap needed to facilitate growth in an area of need.

Freedom and discipline can exist as a periodic flux between student learning and teacher wisdom. Education is the relationship between a teacher's genius as a master, and a student's oscillating need for freedom and discipline. The teacher's knowledge to capitalize on student abilities and potential in order to effectively train them comes from years of specialized experience; and the sway between freedom and discipline is adjusted by the teacher's mastery

and the student's development. After a while, a rhythm can develop as very regimented, task-oriented, and somatic experiences. The student grows and the teacher finds a way to honor that growth through ways that give effect to their learning. During a student's initial training, he or she is encouraged to enter light-kickboxing tournaments to provide valuable experience associated with the rigors of competition as well as provide avenues for students to use their skills against opponents outside their gym. Eventually, I felt ready to demonstrate the effect of months spent in the gym by entering these tournaments, and eventually, tournament competition was not adequate to match my skills or dispositions. Eventually I craved a full-fledged Muay Thai match where essentially I needed a greater scope of freedom to apply myself without the imposition of rules.

Teachers constantly require a close connection to their students and an awareness of their needs and desires. While training in Thailand, Master Toddy my teacher noticed I had become somewhat melancholic due to my intense training without much social interaction. I had become engrossed in the gym to the point of failing to seek out living beyond it. One weekend, he forced me to take a holiday where no fighting or training was to occur. The gym banded together and we met fighters, dignitaries, and various fascinating people involved in the sport. People were kind and eager to meet me, given my Master is a person of interest in Thailand. I was venerated in some sense, for training for a fight in Thailand with Thai rules against a Thai opponent. I relaxed and took some time away from the rigors of training in order to experience some of the freedom it was according me in other areas of my life. I noticed I carried myself with a sense of assurance, but not arrogance. I can often be reclusive due to my inherently introverted nature, but Muay Thai compelled me to engage the world with confidence. Even a good friend commented that I was 'still', upon my return.

At times it can be difficult to ascertain a student's needs and wants when approaching the teacher-student relationship within the context educators are familiar in most public and university classrooms. Teachers tend to remain distant from their students albeit sometimes against their best efforts; they can be alienated from the student's day to day needs and circumstances. The teacher must be patient, observant, and diligent to provide feedback and guidance when required. They also know when to step back and let the student direct their own learning. In any case, the teacher understands what is needed due to their professional experience. Muay Thai coaches deal with a relatively small set of people and with most camps consisting of usually 5-6 fighters to one coach, the student-teacher relationship is not fraught with problems associated with a higher student-teacher ratio western teachers are familiar with. Most gyms also house dormitories for their fighters so they live together while training; thus consistent proximity is another critical element in the teacher's relationship to the student.

Students who do not receive opportunities for finding relevance for their learning can become disenchanted with Martial Arts. Students can only get so much from punching pads and hitting heavy bags; eventually students want to test themselves in a way that they utilize the repetitive tasks ordered by the teacher in some creative and engaging exercise. Like above, sometimes students need to experience the collective bonds of a family dynamic within a gym. We speak of our brothers and sisters when talking about our training partners. When we train together, we also need time to interact together aside from trying to bludgeon each other. Students need a space to exemplify their social needs in ways that are understood by their fellow training partners. "Birds of a feather" stick together because their needs aside from those immediately apprehensible in the gym can surface outside of it. Relationships are always

emphasized to maintain the close connection required by coaches to evaluate a student's training in order to provide challenges required for continued growth.

If training is only geared towards physical development, students can become disillusioned. Students have to feel like they belong and keeping that bond strong is vital to a teachers awareness of their student's needs and desires. Within the scope of training, we sometimes need more sparring, or more clinch work, or more endurance conditioning. Eventually, the teacher will recognize when their students are ready for an engaging and creative experience that challenges their skills in order to meet the demands of the activity. And more often than not, that creative and engaging exercise is a student's actual fight. However, the main reason for maintaining the proximity to students is to comprehend their realities outside the gym walls. They represent a totality which is more than what they experience in the gym, thus a teacher's curriculum and decisions upon which to base their pedagogy is partially informed by the unique impression of each student.

3.3 Specialism and Style

At this point I have not given much treatment to the topic of specialism, for Muay Thai is essentially a specialized discipline. "You may not divide the seamless coat of learning" (p.11) as Whitehead states. Learning may occur whether it is solely dealing with airy abstractions, technical forums, or dry definite facts. But as Whitehead reminds us, education must convey the value, power, structure and beauty of ideas through "a particular body of knowledge which has peculiar reference to the life of the being possessing it" (p.12).

Muay Thai is a specialized activity which fosters a mental quality which Whitehead coins *Style*. The study and practice of Muay Thai represents dedication for this sport in as much as specialization in its activity represents an individual's interest magnified through intense devotion. Specialism according to Whitehead is akin to mastery learning. It represents 'special subjects specially studied' (p.23). He believed that mankind is naturally specialist but acknowledges the unique nature of each student as "One man sees a whole subject where another can only see detached examples" (p.10). It is Whitehead's aim to produce learners that know and do something well, thus specialism is firmly rooted in the confluence between technical ability and generalized knowledge. He believed specialism is required for the development of wisdom by utilizing the activity of thought which a general curriculum provides.

The specialized study of Muay Thai, like any specialization according to Whitehead, fosters style, which is "the peculiar contribution of specialism to culture" (p.13). According to Whitehead, "style is the ultimate morality of mind" (p.12) because a specialist is well aware of how to utilize their small share of knowledge to attain their goals without distraction. *Power* is how Whitehead elucidates being useful with one's portion of specialized knowledge, and it is power that allows people to modify their environments. Power in Muay Thai, in this sense, is not a Machiavellian struggle, but a gradual rhythmic journey through intense discipline to gain proper form applied within lapses of freedom to express oneself in creative ways that pertain to the "particular body of knowledge" (p.12) of Muay Thai. With the help of a well-trained instructor, specialism is how students become powerful. Powerful students are effective, and "it is effects they wish to produce" (p.37). They not only know Muay Thai, but can perform in other avenues of life as well. Muay Thai is simply not rote performance, but its inherent value is realized in training, competition, and day to day life.

Possessing the power to go beyond one's inherent predilection for 'fight, flight, or freeze', especially coupled in a culture steeped in machismo and violence, is vital for navigating oneself through circumstances where the threat of physical violence is very real. Violence is something many people must deal with on a day-to-day basis. While certain people may be more prone to a version of it in one form or another, it still resonates in many spaces people of difference occupy or must navigate. Muay Thai offers chances for people to feel safe in their own skin; and it offers security in ways that are not provided by our society. Disenfranchised communities and individuals can be consistently enmeshed in violence. Often people from privilege take their environments for granted so it can be difficult to convey how people can feel and be threatened simply by walking in a grocery store. For many Aboriginal people, sometimes walking by a police officer, speaking in front of a classroom full of white students, or even walking through a crowd can create intense feelings of fear and anxiety. The environments of certain spaces inherently compel fear, which can disrupt meaningful engagement due to the effects fear has on an individual's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual agency. Learning to exist beyond physiological triggers induced by forces beyond one's control is inherently valuable for occupying unsafe spaces, especially for people who are marginalized.

3.4 Threefold Processes of Growth

The processes of learning were elucidated by Whitehead and subsequently reinterpreted through various interesting corollaries by various scholars. Whitehead himself discusses Hegel's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; Garland (2009) connects Whitehead's notion of generalization to that of Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi); and Bruce Lee, eminent martial artist and originator of the Jeet Kun Do style of martial arts said there are three stages to cultivation, the primitive, the mechanical, and the spontaneous or stage of alertness. His quote (as cited in

Little, 1996) while lengthy, is fascinating and curiously similar to Whitehead's three phases of learning:

The first is the primitive stage. It is a stage of original ignorance in which a person knows nothing about the art of combat. In a fight, he simply blocks and strikes instinctively without a concern for what is right and wrong. Of course, he may not be so-called scientific, but, nevertheless, being himself, his attacks or defenses are fluid. The second stage — the stage of sophistication, or mechanical stage — begins when a person starts his training. He is taught the different ways of blocking, striking, kicking, standing, breathing, and thinking — unquestionably, he has gained the scientific knowledge of combat, but unfortunately his original self and sense of freedom are lost, and his action no longer flows by itself. His mind tends to freeze at different movements for calculations and analysis, and even worse, he might be called “intellectually bound” and maintain himself outside of the actual reality. The third stage — the stage of artlessness, or spontaneous stage — occurs when, after years of serious and hard practice, the student realizes that after all, gung fu is nothing special. And instead of trying to impose on his mind, he adjusts himself to his opponent like water pressing on an earthen wall. It flows through the slightest crack. There is nothing to try to do but try to be purposeless and formless, like water. All of his classical techniques and standard styles are minimized, if not wiped out, and nothingness prevails. He is no longer confined. (Little, 1996, pp. 108-9)

It is informative to utilize a theory of learning that accounts for the nature of growth according to Whitehead who enjoys comparable analogues with the work of Hegel, Czinkimihaly, and an eminent martial artist like Bruce Lee. By noting the shared essential characteristics of general learning and growth across a variety of intellectual and physical disciplines, the analytical power of Whitehead's learning theory can provide cogent descriptions of each stage and useful insights into the nature of learning, regardless of subject. It is enriching to find a striking parallel in Bruce Lee's theory of cultivation that is grounded in martial arts, with Whitehead's three stages of mental development, which is grounded in a classical liberal education. Both men come from different contexts, yet came up with similar ideas regarding growth which underscores the common experiences of learning most subjects. Thus it is a fitting case to interpret learning

Muay Thai with Whitehead's theories which retains stark parallels with Bruce Lee's views on learning martial arts.

3.4.1 Romance.

The act of learning according to Whitehead is constituted by three moments or phases: romance, precision, and generalization. Romance appeals to immediate emotions whether it is fear, love, anxiety, or wonder. Whitehead thought that learning always began with an interest which precedes the eventual need to fully grasp the object of their desire. Without romance to instill a sense of desire in a learner's education prior to working through rote examples and rigorous analysis "the previous analysis [precision] is an analysis of nothing. It is simply a series of meaningless statements about bare facts, produced artificially and without any further relevance" (1967a, 18). If the learner trains without first possessing the determination to unify their various techniques *ad hoc* to meet the challenges of sparring and competition then the learner simply possesses a good jab, or a good kick and nothing more.

The utility of ideas leads to Whitehead's main axiom that ideas must be used. Ideas viewed in the scope of other ideas, allows students to "see the whole chessboard" (Whitehead, 1967, p.12). Muay Thai is no different in expressing Whitehead's ideal that knowledge cannot be dissected from practice. Whitehead's model of education and my experience of learning Muay Thai possess very similar characteristics because interest always precedes discipline, and discipline when properly administered, is usually self-discipline. While training I have been subjected to many challenges in order to utilize what I have learned as a way to avoid techniques becoming "inert". According to Whitehead, ideas must be used for they keep no better than fish.

In the stage of romance, a Muay Thai learner is enamoured with half-disclosed possibilities realized while training with the freshness of inexperience. They yearn to be effective and play about through adventures of thought and action. I remember when I first started training; I was constantly attempting to demonstrate what I had learned to others. Emphatically saying “You have got to see what I learned this week!” prior to demonstrating a new technique reminds me of a child proudly showing their parents a new painting or essay.

I used to hit the bags as hard as I could, letting out wild grunts while learning to control my breathing with short controlled bursts that sound like “Aish!” I tried my best to be like the Thai fighters and Dutch kick boxers I was watching on television and the internet. After my first class I was scouring the internet for highlight videos and suddenly found myself enmeshed in hours of studying techniques, strategies, and the styles of interesting fighters. Romance precludes effective self-discipline, and after I started Muay Thai I found myself trying to teach others what I was learning and to seek out understanding on my own.

In the beginning learners often ‘flail’ imposing vigor upon technique and exaggerating or wildly executing form. Because of the emotionally gratifying force of hitting the pads really hard, emotions translates to overemphasized and/or incorrect form. A beginner must have room to play around, and just have fun. The endorphin rush coupled with the vigorous exercise of striking a target is exhilarating at the start of a learners training. The coach does correct technique as much as possible, but a novice learner simply needs to enjoy the moment without being over corrected every two seconds. Sometimes people have natural abilities and are able to enjoy a higher level of progression than others, but nonetheless, the learner still needs to advance through the initial stage of romance in order to submit to the call of precision.

The phase of romance is always present throughout the learning continuum. Unless the learner finds a reason to drive them towards the hardship of discipline in precision, the whole venture is pointless. If I lacked heart, what would training resemble? Pad work would be lack lustre. I would not want that extra round of sparring, or sit patiently soaking up every word of my coach. I would not care to run every morning, or improve myself after a hard loss. Interest should always dominate a learner's journey through education because the desire to improve precedes effective self-discipline.

Without romance, the pupil simply learns disconnected bits of physical movements and fails to see how they comprise a coherent whole. The movements are inert in the sense that they are ineffectively isolated from the 'flowing-together' of various techniques which originates from the learners desire to develop coherence. Any fighter who lacks heart is passive, sluggish, and very frustrating to attempt to train. The question is not one pertaining to ability, but one of willingness to endure to achieve greater effect. No one is outside the scope of learning Muay Thai and retaining interest is the key to enduring years of training and fighting. Typically people find themselves in the gym for weight loss or self-defence. However the compulsion to lose weight or feel strong gradually recedes once a learner has trained long enough such that self-defence and weight loss are natural by-products of training. Eventually, such a student needs a greater reason to submit to precision.

Martial artists often speak of a fighter's "heart", akin to a well-spring of drive and ambition. To find a student's "heart" for fighting and training means locating a source of motivation that drives the student towards an even more challenging discipline. When you have pushed your body and mind beyond all conceivable limits, the importance of "plumbing"

yourself to find the drive to keep on task is vital. A Nak-Muay must have belief in themselves and their abilities. They wake up at 5:30 am every morning to run ten kilometers. They push past bruised limbs, sore muscles, and blood that feels like battery acid to see their goals accomplished. But above and beyond one's reason for training is the romance for martial arts. Training and competing has an allurements which drives people to devote their lives entirely to Martial Arts. They do it because they love it. The same goes for a musician or a scientist, where their thirst for knowledge and understanding drives their need to submit to the discipline required by precision. Without drive, the whole venture of learning is a pointless venture of accumulating isolated bits of movements without understanding how they flow together. Any person can learn how to throw a kick, a punch, and/or an elbow. But a martial artist will learn how to use all their weapons with force and creativity because they have the motivation to animate technique with the rousing force of romance in a performance of spontaneity.

In the very beginning the romantic learner like myself, was “potentially hanging on tenterhooks, often painfully so” (Scarfe, 2010, p.13). I yearned to understand and whet my appetite, to work and climb over the horizon. Aching with possibility and “pervading the phase of romance is the question, what is this subject matter all about?” (Scarfe, 2010, p.13). The next step after the start of training and subsequently throughout every cyclic return to romance is to persistently perform an “exactness of formulation” with the “power of definiteness” (Whitehead, p.18, 37). After a poor performance in sparring or noting a flaw in competition, I felt compelled to focus on what I required to develop. Gaps in development required further discipline; however, self-discipline and precision is not possible if the “active taking up of the trials and of the concrete steps along the way to any discovery” (Scarfe, 2010, p.14) is not animated by the motivating power of romance.

While in Thailand there was one particular training session I will never forget. I felt the spirit of romance was best expressed in this scenario and how it provides the motivation to carry a learner through rigorous precision. I was asked to repetitively execute a combination drill which, when performed correctly is very rhythmic yet physically demanding. Cross-left hook-right roundhouse-left hook-cross-left roundhouse (Roundhouse is a kick from either left or right leg which torques the hips and upper shoulders while generating force from pushing off the ground and transferring all the momentum into the shin and then onto the object of impact) and repeat for three minutes and then again for another nineteen rounds. I was working next to a friend, which made it easier to know another person was present doing something I thought was rather inhuman. After the first five rounds I was sure I could not continue. My legs were agonizing tombs of pain and I had already accumulated a pool of sweat beneath my feet that splashed underfoot with every strike. My lungs were laboring to draw in enough breath between each controlled exhale that sounded more like a pubescent cackle than the normally strong Thai “AISH!”

So I went another five rounds. As each one passed I gradually had to become more and more focused upon trying to stay upright and rigid without looking tired. The person next to me was still going, albeit at a much more labored pace than I. He provided me with some added motivation, but my mind started to play tricks. I could hear my inner voice telling myself to take a break, to conserve energy, to find some way out of this very real pain. It seemed like my strained body was convincing my mind to come up with any rationalization to justify quitting and slump to the floor for a rest.

Then another five rounds passed. At this point it becomes difficult to convey the level of exhaustion I was feeling. I had already gone ten rounds beyond what I had believed I could and at this point my whole body was a vehicle without fuel, somehow forging on with sheer will. And then something happened. I began dredging up experiences, both positive and negative. I plumbed my mind and heart for experiences that would provide me the energy to lift my arm or leg just once more. I recalled mistreatments, achievements, mistakes, failures, triumphs, and agonizing experiences. I called to the fore anything affective which could be traded for another minute of work. I labored as much emotionally as I did physically and the result was being able to push through another five rounds of one of the hardest challenges I had ever endured.

I finished the day with commendations from my trainer. I tried walking up to my room a full two flights of stairs above the training area, which may as well been fifty. I reached the second level and broke down weeping in the stair well. Unsure of why or how, I stopped trying to rationalize the sensation I was going through and simply just felt what I had to. I collected myself and went to my room where my training partner looked at me and we both knew what each of us had just experienced was deeply affective, and dare I say, spiritual. The feeling I had was reminiscent of participating in ceremony, where a deeply situated reservoir of feeling was tapped through difficult physical trials.

I met a highly improbable challenge despite my reservations about realistically accomplishing it. I did not start the drill with the conviction that I was going to finish it. I was not assured that it could be done, much less by someone like me without years of conditioning. I had felt strong and calm in the end. I sat quietly afterwards for some time watching the sunset on the hazy Bangkok horizon and I realized that this moment paralleled my experience after a

ceremony or doing something which terrified me, like getting in front of a crowd to do a speech or having to spar a really tough opponent. In a sense, training provided me a conduit into what I can possibly become by periodically engaging scenarios which poses tangible risk for disclosing my emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual limits.

The motivating force of romance carried me through persistent exhaustion and physical pain. It is grounded in affective experiences, which provide people with the drive to push past physical and mental limitations. I utilized my past coupled with the reality of the present, infused with the half realized possibilities lying just beyond the immediate moment. After the drill I knew I could win. My world opened up to me in ways I had never known. Romance is an affective state that can cause fear as much as hope – and it was the raw animating power which compelled me to continue after my own mind and body were apt to fail. Romance is more than random collection of feelings while experiencing a new facet of life, it is a “high degree of intensity [which] characterizes this absorbing and rewarding activity” (Evans, p.1). This drill obviously requires a level of discipline that cannot be first acquired without some level of precision which speaks to Whitehead’s notion that each stage is not neatly progressive or uniform. Once I was taught this drill and found my body in a cadence fuelled by more than the necessity to “stay on task” or look foolish among my peers, I realized that meaningful growth means tearing down people till they are animating their movements with the rousing force of affective experiences. People have to crave their learning in order to endure the trials that precision offers as motivation cannot be rationalized when it has to be unearthed.

The loss of a loved one, the pain of bullying, the shame of sexual intolerance, and the fear of difference have deeply affective influences on individuals and often become a large element

of their identity. People utilize these experiences as springboards of positive change, often to try make the lives of others who have experienced similar traumas better as well. Deeply entrenched experiences, nominally those of marginalized people, are a reservoir of affective force that can carry many learners through the trials of precision. The discourse of accomplishment in fighting sports are often entrenched in a rags to riches narrative, using fighting as a way to carry individuals through immense obstacles to gain authenticity and power in a world which has robbed it of them. Romance, regardless of affective experiences they utilize, is necessary for learning because learners must have the internal motivation to remain self-disciplined.

3.4.2 Precision.

After the preceding phase of romance has taken course, the next progression through a learner's development is through the phase of precision. This phase often invokes repetitive tasks in order to properly develop and hone various techniques. The phase of precision also has the greatest immediate effect upon the student's mental and physical faculties. Whitehead (1968) states "the stage [of precision] is dominated by the inescapable fact that there are right ways and wrong ways, and definite truths to be known" (p.34). In training students the proper execution of a roundhouse kick, there are well-defined movements they must execute without fail. Physics, human anatomy, and rules of engagement limit the range of movements a Muay Thai practitioner can execute. To maximize the amount of force a kick can generate, there are particular patterned movements that the human body must execute in a successive order to generate an overall successful roundhouse kick. To develop the roundhouse in training, the teacher will work with the learner through pads, heavy bags, and scaffolding their skills

alongside other partners in various drills while continually expressing the technique through speech and rote example.

Muay Thai is popularly regarded as a very effective stand up martial art because it has generated techniques without rules associated with more sport-oriented disciplines which mitigate how practitioners engage with each other.

In its original form, Muay Thai consisted of an arsenal of nine weapons – the head, fists, elbows, knees and feet -- known collectively as na-wa arwud. Although in modern Muay Thai, both amateur and professional, using the head to butt an opponent is no longer permissible, you still have at your disposal within your own body a formidable fighting force capable of devastating an opponent. Whereas other martial arts which use no other weaponry, like judo, karate and taekwondo, make extensive use of the hands and feet -- and karate and taekwondo both permit the use of elbows and knees in training -- Muay Thai is unique in the way it uses all parts of the body, including the elbows and knees for both training and competitions. (Muay Thai weapons, p.141)

Muay Thai utilizes a series of techniques that capitalize on the capabilities and limits of human anatomy. As an obvious example, a tennis swing does not look vastly different from person to person as the mechanics are the same from body to body. Movements are based upon biology and physics of max force output that the human body can generate. However, form is also more than mere physical movement. Form requires the proper knowledge of how the technique is executed mentally as well as physically. To be an effective kicker, the learner must concentrate on repetitive and precise tasks in order to mentally and physically grasp the entire technique. Learners thus acquire the ability to execute particular tasks without pause or hesitation. The precise knowledge of how to execute a kick is not only understood physically, but requires a mental preparation as well. Through a process of becoming consciously aware of how the muscles of the body feel when executing proper or improper technique, the learner gradually accrues the embodied knowledge necessary when form is correct. How a learner **conceptualizes** the feelings of the body in one's mind can create a more effective pattern of

muscle feelings. Conceptually tracing physical movements within my mind allowed me to grasp the function and feel of various techniques. I know a kick is generated by a range of movements which collectively work together in unison. Each movement is vital to the overall form of the kick, and the learner must conceptually grasp each distinct movement before successfully executing the entire form. From pivoting on the toes, to raising your chest, swinging the hip, locking the leg, counter-swinging the arm, and turning over the body all require a separate conceptualization in order to effectively transmit the conceptual execution to the learner. I could kick a bag a hundred times showing another student how to do it, but until we conceptualize the kick into its individual pieces; a learner will fail to grasp the fundamental character and feeling of form.

While training in Thailand, the beginning of a lesson usually started with various warm up and stretching exercises, most notably shadow boxing. Shadow boxing is vital to a striker's training as it mentally prepares the person to imagine an opponent, visualize the technique, and bring it into action. Shadow boxing allows a person to move around, slip punches, do combinations, and improve timing. It honed my technique and the emphasis on slow exaggeration of form allowed me to conceptualize how each technique should feel when properly executed. Shadow boxing thus lets you to mentally grasp the proper form and consequently, the feel of each technique as it is executed. The goal of shadow boxing is not to look for speed but for perfect execution, although in time speed gradually increases. It is akin to choreography for dancers. Shadow boxing allows flaws to surface, while visualizing an imagined opponent improves mental and physical awareness. It is a mentally rigorous exercise to focus on proper form while imagining an opponent who is utilizing a range of techniques which the learner must react to. Shadow boxing is a creative process when the learner

spontaneously constructs novel situations to react to. The more a learner shadow boxes and better develops their imagination, they can utilize a wider range of techniques in a greater variety of circumstances. It is a preparation for the spontaneity of sparring and competition by mentally cultivating every possible scenario which a learner will encounter.

After a while in training, I went through countless hours of hitting heavy bags; working pads with partners and coaches; and numerous rounds of shadow boxing developing physical and mental endurance. Physical endurance relates to the fortitude required by the learner to meet the demand of challenges required by training and competition. For example, in order to successfully spar at a high level of intensity for an hour with a variety of opponents, the learner requires a certain physical aptitude to meet that demand. Without first accruing the strength and durability to handle the rigors of training, the learner can never develop the fortitude to handle the extremes of competition. The same principle applies for mental endurance as well; accrued mental stamina is needed to handle the extreme duress of training and competition. A mental toughness is needed to endure rounds of harsh training is pivotal for overcoming the self-sabotaging nature of the minds need to preserve itself and the body. Anyone can relate to this by running a marathon, reading through hours of text, or working on a paper for hours on end. A particular mental stamina is necessary in addition to the physical capacity to meet the demands of Muay Thai. Thus mental and physical endurance is pivotal for staying focused through long hours of training and grueling competitive matches.

Following the work of discipline in the phase of precision, “something definite is now known; aptitudes have been acquired; and general rules and laws are clearly apprehended in their formulation and detailed exemplification” (Whitehead, 1967, p.36). The precise knowledge of,

and ability to execute proper form is wrought in physical and mental discipline through repetitive tasks. The fruition of discipline in the phase of precision is a person who knows “there are right ways and wrong ways, and definite truths to be known” (p.34), but eventually I could not endure much more precision without an eventual “dulling of interest” (p.35). I could only take so many tasks related to rote performance before an eventual stirring of feeling that was the “anticipation of making a discovery that is just over the next horizon, if [I] could only journey there” (Scarfe, 2010, p.13). I desperately yearned to harvest the growth through learning Muay Thai, and I felt that the journey over the horizon was only to be achieved through a competitive Muay Thai match. By removing the constraints and rules associated with sparring and light kickboxing tournaments, I could challenge an opponent where the possibility of failure and injury is very real. However, through the challenge of a competitive fight I could also evaluate myself and see “what I am made of.”

Eventually, I became an “effective individual, and it is effects that he wants to produce” (Whitehead, p.37, 1967). After all, the goal of education for Whitehead was to “turn out the pupil with something he knows well and something he can do well” (p.48). Therefore, I could only go along the road of precision, ceaselessly performing vigorous tasks over and over before the “craving for freshness” surfaces. Training in precision through the gradual development of fighting strategies and techniques eventually fostered a desire to explore my new “weapons”. Those weapons were the accumulated physical, mental, and emotional acuties that I had to slowly forge through training. Having the capacity to throw a deft combination of feet and fists is a physical weapon; but having the serenity to be calm amidst chaotic circumstances is also a weapon because it accords you focus and the ability to stay on task. And being clever enough to strategize *ad hoc* to generate the best possible outcome is a mental weapon, which in

combination with a practitioners emotional and physical acuties are the collective arsenal of a Muay Thai fighter. Whitehead's goal of education was to produce learners that exhibit the relevance of their learning, since the "whole affair is merely a preparation for battling with the immediate experiences of life" (p.37). The next logical step, therefore, was to wield my weapons and engage the "Real", for Muay Thai in this Whiteheadian formulation is a "preparation by which to qualify each immediate moment with relevant ideas and appropriate actions" (p.37). Mental, physical, and emotional growth demands avenues for exemplification.

I remember one particular moment in my training. Precision training eventually fostered a desire to use what I learned outside of simply hitting bags, pads, or imaginary opponents. I looked on to the higher level classes with agonizing patience. I sat quietly watching them, studying their movements, and soaking up all I could. I worked hard to get my instructors to notice my desire to move to the next level. At times it was frustrating, even maddening. Sometimes, a fighter with less time spent training was advancing through the stages rather quickly and at times, I felt cheated. Anger, frustration, and resentment clouded my mind. I often went home angry that I was not picked to advance that day; I was frustrated that my teachers could not see my readiness for the next stage.

"JUST PICK ME ALREADY!" I was vibrating with anticipation for the possibilities of using what I had learned.

I realized after some time these feelings were the ego needing to feel validated. I wanted to be recognized externally through being allowed to the next level. I wanted others to acknowledge my development through a simple title, which does not equate to being a more developed fighter. I learned to let go of those feelings of anxiety and frustration and resided in

the notion that hard work has eventual payoffs. Learning requires usage of what you come to know in order keep it alive, it is not like an empty vessel such that “when you have your boots in a trunk, they will stay there till you take them out again” (Whitehead, 1967, p.33). Principles like patience, humility, and reverence require the revitalizing exercise of utilization to keep one from possessing “knowledge without initiative” (p.33). Whitehead’s notion of keeping knowledge alive is a vital concept that is evident within Muay Thai as well. Training means more than becoming efficient technicians in combat, as it also means becoming a more complete human being. Part of that is dealing with the day to day emotions associated with growing beyond oneself. The Muay Thai fighter’s code is a practical guide to handling and facilitating this growth, such as clean living, honesty, and respect. After all, being patient is only a concept till it is practiced.

Precision imposes defined ways of doing things without exception. However, boredom eventually creeps up, which underscores the value of Whiteheads statement “it is necessary in life to cheerfully undertake imposed tasks” (p.35). Muay Thai training is a predominantly precise discipline; however, in order to meet challenges in training or in life one must have the mental and physical preparation to battle the immediacy of present circumstance. No matter how much a person can hit a punching bag or Thai pads, the discipline experienced within the phase of precision fails at providing avenues for the type of growth necessary to meet the demands of *ad hoc* circumstance. After all, what good is learning if we cannot use it here and now?

3.4.3 Generalization.

Eventually, I was invited to the highest level of training our gym offered to non-competitive athletes and I would soon have time to test myself and to test my new found skillset

in a highly strenuous situation, like sparring and eventually, competitive kickboxing. The next phase of growth known as generalization is where precision is utilized with the animating force of romance. My mind and body was now “a disciplined regiment instead of a rabble” (p.37) and I intended to explore this new mental and physical contingent in order to battle with the immediate and spontaneous demands of sparring and competition.

Through the challenge of sparring and competition the learner must summon the proper mentality to provide the relevant course of action. The learner does not have the time to analyze, pose plausible scenarios, and deduce courses of action akin to chess as one would already be losing the battle before it was waged. This is the phase where ‘active wisdom’ is developed and where learning is most substantial because details fade into the backdrop of subconscious habit. The goal of generalization is to utilize the details learned through precision *ad hoc* in sparring and competition. Essentially, the goal is to use wisdom to actively utilize “well understood principles” (p.37). The wise fighter economizes their strikes. They are fluid, dynamic, and strong. Bruce lee’s quote in this regard to fighting is apt:

...instead of trying to impose on his mind, he adjusts himself to his opponent like water pressing on an earthen wall. It flows through the slightest crack. There is nothing to try to do but try to be purposeless and formless, like water. All of his classical techniques and standard styles are minimized, if not wiped out, and nothingness prevails. He is no longer confined. (Lee, 1996, p. 108-7)

There is a sense of flow and spontaneity in Lee’s ideal of martial arts, Whitehead’s notion of generalization, and Csikszentmihalyi notion of flow. Learning to evoke relevant ideas with appropriate actions in *ad hoc* circumstances is what Whitehead calls active wisdom, which belongs to the stage of generalization. This is the “stage of shedding details in favour of the active application of principles, the details retreating into subconscious habits” (Whitehead,

1967, p.37). Whitehead (1968) states: “we don’t go about explicitly retaining in our own minds that two and two make four, though once we had to learn it by heart” (p.37). For example, in sparring and competition, fighters do not consciously execute a series of mental and physical steps every time the situation calls for it. To attempt a fifteen step combination with explicit retention of the mental and physical processes while also being attacked can often lead to confusion and moments of hesitation where even a minor pause can have disastrous consequences. Whitehead talks about engaging the “Real” when in highly strenuous circumstances and the benefit of having a good mentality. Generalization is where that mentality is developed in order to reflexively summon the proper course of action when preconditioned responses want to run their course.

Executing proper technique eventually becomes habitual through the spontaneity of combat where the pupil emerges from “passivity of being trained into the active freedom of application” (p.37). Rote performance is no longer the goal in the phase of generalization, and is counterproductive in sparring and competing although of course, perfection is always an aim to aspire to. The goal is to unite the elements learned in precision into an active *ad hoc* harmony of application. Overemphasis on rigorous discipline results in a mental and physical *rigor mortis*. In a TED conference at Caltech, Sanjoy Mahajan makes the case that rote learning fragments the world, and coherence is far more valuable than isolated fact (Mahajan, 2011). In order to develop coherence in fighting, I am reminded of Master Toddy’s lesson in regards to learning technique that often leads to feelings of confusion and disconnect. Learners begin to ask themselves, ‘Why do I learn this? What use is it?’ Thus it is vital when practicing a certain technique or combination, to apply it creatively in sparring in order for everything to “line up” in order for the learner to grasp the function of that technique in unison with everything else.

To frame the discussion of generalization, Garland (2009) provides an excellent corollary with psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi notion of “flow” psychology and its significance for describing scenarios which are best suited for the generalization phase of learning.

3.4.4 Flow psychology.

To express the value of sparring, competition, and the dynamic phase of generalization for Muay Thai and learning, I have employed the use of Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of ‘flow psychology’ in Garland’s (2009) *Finding Flow Through Discipline and Imagination*, where Garland outlines six major characteristics that constitute flow experiences and its conceptual value for education. To summarize Csikszentmihalyi’s six major components of flow experiences in Garland (2009), flow experiences are characterized as the following:

1. Flow experiences usually result from engaging in a challenging activity which demands the exercise of certain skills, which are usually highly attuned.
2. Second, the activity must have clear goals and provide immediate feedback so that we can determine whether we are progressing toward our goal. Feedback may be ambiguous however, but still retain value.
3. A third feature of flow experiences is that they require immense focus on the present moment. Movements seem effortless and seem to perpetuate on their own. Learners must develop the skills and be motivated to perform the activity with excellence.
4. The fourth feature is that flow activities involve the growth of skills which can affect the outcome of the activity. Learners must give up the safety of familiar routines in order to discover whether their skills are equal to the challenges of a demanding and spontaneous activity.
5. The fifth feature is that learners often lose self-consciousness engaged in flow activities and can possess a rare sense of unity with others in their environment. Mental preoccupations of everyday life fade as priorities become clear. This connection is the clearest connection between flow experiences and learning.
6. A final feature of flow experiences is the transformation of time. Learners get caught up in the rhythms inherent in the flow activity and lose track of the passage of time.

(p. 90-91)

Garland (2009) believes that there is a strong connection between Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow experiences' and Whitehead's notion of learning being inherently gratifying. Whitehead believes learning is an essentially self-motivating endeavor for "an education which does not begin by evoking initiative and end by encouraging it must be wrong" (p.37).

Csikszentmihalyi's characterizations of flow experiences are most closely associated with the generalization phase of Whitehead's theory of learning (Garland, 2009). Whitehead (1968) stated that generalization is where "the growth of knowledge becomes progressively unconscious, as being an incident derived from some adventure of thought" (p.37). Given that both Whitehead and Csikszentmihalyi state that the nature of experience in this regard is "effortless movement which seeks to perpetuate itself" (Garland, p.90) and is "progressively unconscious" (p.37), Muay Thai sparring and competition provides the perfect comparative lens to give effect to the conception of 'flow experiences' and the third phase of learning known as generalization.

While sparring, I notice that time often slows to a snail's pace. The intense focus required by sparring creates a diluted effect on the passage of time. To describe the mental state of focus, the concept of "bushido" or "No-Mind" is apt. When sparring I am not minding the crowd, nor to how I appear to them, nor how much longer is the round going to last, nor the worries which accompany putting myself at physical risk. I lose self-consciousness because as soon as my mind is distracted by irrelevancies, I will have lost my rhythm and focus.

Of course as a beginner in sparring, I was concerned about how I looked to others. I did not want to look amateur and that 'mind' wasted on the ego detracts from performance. I needed

to remember to focus on footwork, head movement, and moving in and out of the ‘pocket’ (range of motion where opponent can strike and hit). However, I did not simply say to myself “ok, footwork, one step in, back out. Keep back foot raised both in, both out.” Like Whitehead mentioned earlier that you do not perform two plus two with an exactness of formulation each and every time. Rote performance gradually recedes into subconscious habit as “details are swallowed up in principles” (Whitehead, p.37, 1968).

Sparring and competition correlates with the generalization phase of learning and Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow experiences. Over time, learners slowly ingest the various elements of Muay Thai into a totality which is best performed and retained in the intensity of sparring and competition. The ‘totality’ is developed in sparring and competition, whereas the particulars of technique are developed through rote drills. In order to attain the details, I first needed to satisfy the conditions of precision necessary for learning, namely that there are right and wrong ways of procedure, and precise things to be known. I needed to acquire the proper formulation of technique before I could attempt to execute it competently with the freedom allowable in sparring and competition. I learned the techniques of Muay Thai through drills and rote performance, but I needed to evaluate myself in a way that forced me to utilize my knowledge in creative and unplanned contexts.

I could throw a perfect round kick at the bag a thousand times over, but as soon as someone is kicking back; the pressure of uncertainty and potential harm changes the ability to execute effective technique, much less string together effective techniques in combinations. The fourth feature of flow experiences emphasizes possessing skills necessary to affect the outcome of the activity. If I lacked the necessary skills, the outcome would most likely be a painful litany

of injuries every time I sparred or competed. Thus sparring removes “the safety of familiar routines in order to discover whether our skills are equal to the challenges of a demanding activity” (p.90). Sparring is thus the “habit of active utilization of well understood principles” (p.37) through a challenging activity which provides immediate feedback (point#2). Eventually sparring became enjoyable and a greater challenge for my opponents as my skills grew to change the outcome of a usually one-sided sparring match.

Sparring and competing fosters a sense of unity or connection by a loss of self-conscious thought through intense focus by ‘letting go’. You understand what matters when other mental preoccupations slide into the background. It is amazing how much of a distraction daily life can be for having the proper mindset in sparring. Rent, relationships, stress from work, and worries about how you appear to others all busy the mind with distractions that are not relevant to the present moment and your performance. In these moments while I spar, my mind “floats” free from the humdrum of life in order to keep the body in tune to react and act accordingly. When you recognize that the factors which contribute to your success are not monetary items or social status, the value of sparring and competition becomes clear. It enables you to grasp the necessities for growth and success as a martial artist, such as good health, humility, respect, generosity, and compassion. A person in poor physical condition, or a lot of hubris, or is disrespectful will make a poor martial artist. Their trainers will want nothing to do with them because their mind is already full. But they can change with discipline, courage, and humility to listen to their trainers and partners. They must be generous to offer help to those who gave help to them, and they must have compassion for those weaker than them because Muay Thai makes people dangerously strong.

Thus, the practice of Muay Thai demonstrates the value inherent to education, which is “love for the subject, in itself and for itself” (p.12) because it revitalizes the desire to come back to the gym and once again push through more discipline. I remember learning new techniques, and then eagerly waiting to test my new skills. Sparring and competition is dangerous and it causes anxiety, nervousness, and fear. But there is something to be said about chomping down on your mouth guard and saying “who cares, let’s just do this.”

The purpose of education for Whitehead is using what you know, because if it is not, ideas may become inert and cause people to become bored of learning. Ideas, like food, require constant upkeep lest they fester. He said that education must pattern itself after the natural sway of the learner’s own learning potential. Muay Thai does exactly this by providing the proper scope of freedom when the learner requires avenues for demonstrating effects of their learning. Of course that is hinged on the genius of the teacher, which is pivotal in Muay Thai training. A student can only be helped to excel as far as your teacher is capable and cognizant of the necessity of freedom and discipline. Many schools fail because instructors lack grasp of these fundamentals. These schools overtly focus on either rote performance, or sparring and competition. The truly developed school knows when to drill and when to provide the student the scope of freedom necessary to assess the viability of those drills in sparring and competition in order to provide the greatest rate of progress.

3.5 Rhythms Revisited

The progression through the three phases of learning in my experience of training and fighting Muay Thai have resembled a rhythmic process through freedom and discipline in the form of intense training and sparring/competing. In my initial phase of growth upon first

coming to the gym, I was nervous but anxiously anticipated what was coming. I then found myself attending every class I could, eager to sweat and soak up as much knowledge as I could draw from my coaches and peers. This attendance represented my progression through precision. Subsequently, I was eager to test myself by advancing to sparring and competition which represents the movement into generalization. Sparring and competition is a crucial assessment I found out with painful recognition what I have really learned. The insight gleaned from sparring and competition drives the motivating force which signifies a return to romance, and once again the journey is renewed with interest. The rhythmic interplay of freedom and discipline is accorded by the teacher such that it correlates to the learner's innate craving for romance, precision, and generalization.

I love Muay Thai, and after studying Whitehead's theory of learning I realized that it had powerful conceptual value for disseminating Muay Thai for academic scrutiny. My constant polarization between interest, focused discipline, and the need to combine both through sparring and competition is largely reflective of Whitehead's ideal of rhythmic learning. Furthermore, Muay Thai training and competition reflects Whitehead's notion of a balanced education and the goal of gaining active wisdom, which can have immense personal and social value for its practitioners.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF MUAY THAI LEARNING

4. A Plea for Wisdom

David Purpel explains in *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education* that our cultural weaknesses in part derived from a spiritual crisis and is “exacerbated by an unaccustomed lack of Wisdom” (Purpel, 2004, p.209). He goes on to express how modern education lacks a fundamental grasp on the importance of wisdom (2004) characterized not so much as a problem of coming to moral consensus as a crisis of the courage needed to abide by that consensus. Most people would at least be willing to concede that education is a vital enterprise towards “creating a more just and loving community” (p.210). Purpel believes that changing education and culture to meet that vision is met with resistance not because of “the immensity of the task” or “difficult but surmountable engineering problems”, but the resistance is the result of a lack of “willingness to act in accordance with that vision” (p.210-11). He believes that this is a result of a primordial fear of unknown change, losing cherished possessions, challenges to the dynamics of power, and personal doubts regarding the cost of such a venture (Purpel, 2004). In order to compel the learner towards wisdom in an ideal Whiteheadian education, educators must “find ways in which we can overcome despair with hope, trump fear with courage, replace paralysis with agency, and overcome cynicism with idealism” (p.211).

Educators can help create a just and caring community by teaching students to “overcome our capacity and impulse to create and sustain a destructive society” (Purpel, 2004, p.211). However, Purpel makes the claim that the “fight or flight” trigger still colors the vast majority of human interactions as “in the absence of training in the appropriate disciplines, we are not

properly prepared to be able to interrupt the hard-wired anger or fear that accompany our threat response” (p.214). As a consequence, Educators may attempt to create a vision of a just and equitable world but if their students lack the courage to act according to that vision and overcome the physiology of hard wired biology then education still lacks a necessary ingredient for an education directed towards wisdom.

4.1 Evoking Courage

Framing a speculative philosophical scheme that accounts for all elements of learning is central to the core idea of this thesis which holds that the experience of learning Muay Thai is congruent with the nature of learning according to Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead’s force of explanation when coupled with his many years as an educator placed him in a vantage point for developing keen insights into the process of learning and the nature of education. He was a rigorous and well respected mathematician and a brilliant philosopher whose own works are highly relevant today. He systematically tried to unify a whole range of scientific insights into a general view of the cosmos. It was an early attempt, and subsequent discoveries have led to even greater understandings of how life fits within the development of the universe.

Educators can facilitate change towards a vision of education that is just and grounded in a rich variety of experiences which encourages the use of numerous aptitudes , namely courage and wisdom. Courage does not derive from factual knowledge, but typically arises from a deep emotional need to act in response to our changing environments; and like anything else in Whitehead’s view of learning, courage is only an abstraction till practiced.

When I hear people speak of apathy in education, I see it as a result of deferring to rational thought instead of encouraging moral and behavioural development, which are all collectively required in order to be considered ‘wise’. When people act with courage, they do so because they are courageous every day. They regularly challenge norms and dominant structures and are resilient by virtue of the utility of their courage. This is why I find anti-racist educators a great example of courage exemplified. Their hides can be tough, but they are guided by the tender vision of humility and love necessary for creating a world directed by wisdom. Wisdom for Whitehead means qualifying every moment with appropriate ideas and relevant actions which can be understood both as possessing a proper mentality in a persistent present. Courage, and thus Wisdom can be partially developed by training out our biological responses for fight, flight, or freeze through Muay Thai training. It can become a valuable tool for developing learners to be disciplined and responsive in highly strenuous situations regardless of their socioeconomic background, and for developing courageous initiatives when they are expected to be submissive or silent. .

4.2 Muay Thai’s Relationship to Wisdom and Courage

Muay Thai training, constituted through a sway between the motivating force of freedom and the submission to discipline, is difficult work and hard to manage if one does not have their heart vested in it. Whitehead believed the act of learning must always begin with romance to ensure the pupil retains interest while submitting to the task of precision. However, when training gets tough we need a reason to submit to the hardship required by the task at hand. Whether it is throwing five hundred kicks or sparring for an hour, a learner needs a reason to do so and that is fundamentally anchored in sense of purpose and love for what they do. The

student needs freedom from the teacher to explore new movements, to view fights alongside their instructor, to appreciate competition through the full expression of technique in sparring, and to practice movements in an open environment where failure is accepted. The significance of rhythms in training manifests through the sway between freedom and discipline in a highly disciplined mentality not subject to biological preprogramming:

The ability to not respond emotionally to predatory forms of aggression from others and most-importantly, understanding why and when combat should end once the goal of self-defence has been achieved is vital for minimizing conflict and harm; none of these can be achieved if the martial artists actions are emotionally centered. Indeed, self-defence arts are deeply critical of unreflective attitudes toward competition, aggression, and violence. (Brown & Johnson, p.255, 2000)

The learner can begin to control his or her own emotional responses without much cognitive intervention because of well-trained physical and affective conditioning. The pupil learns to respond to a situation without resorting to blind habit of “fight or flight”, which can be dangerous and ineffective. People who use Muay Thai for self-defence are able to respond in a tightly controlled, precise, and fluid manner; and encounters can be over quickly and with minimal impact to the martial artist. Working as a bouncer for many years allowed me to see the consequences of erratic and unconditioned human behaviour. The necessity of responding non-violently to violent situations is imperative for many people who deal with the threat of violence on a day to day level. Unmitigated violence is an unfortunate reality for many Aboriginal women, for example, who are three times more likely to be victim of a violent crime than non-Aboriginal women (Brennan, 2009).

Muay Thai can increase freedom because the student is not limited by one’s biological conditioning and is able to respond in a way that is reflective of the degree of training and ethical

conduct of the practitioner. Brown & Johnson (2000) state of “self-development through practicing the martial Way is intended to modify habitus in a manner that combines self-defense abilities with an ethical approach to living life” (p.251, 2000). The student’s “habitus” refers to their conditioned ways of acting and thinking in the world. When the student can act beyond the typical habitus of primordial flight or fight, he or she are in a sense more ‘free’ than non-martial artists. Whitehead explained to friend William Hocking (as cited in Hendley, 1986) his love for playing rugby in the following quote which identifies the necessity of reacting to “the Real” with a mental awareness that is beyond biological necessity:

Being tackled at Rugby, there is the Real. Nobody who hasn’t been knocked down has the slightest notion of what the Real is...I used to play in the middle of the scrum. They used to hack at your shins to make you surrender the ball, a compulsory element – but the question was How you took it – your own self-creation. Freedom lies in the summoning up a mentality which transforms the situation, as against letting organic reactions take their course. (p.75)

It is necessary to submit oneself to the task of discipline in order to modify one’s habitus to “summon up a mentality” which is not defined by blind animal response. A martial artist may respond to the “real” in either training, fighting, or in day to day life with an awareness and “preparation to qualify each immediate moment with relevant ideas and appropriate actions” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 37). To act with appropriate actions in regard to the ‘Real’ is what Whitehead calls ‘active wisdom’ and is given effect by the ethical adherence to and practice of Muay Thai.

4.3 Implications: Building resilience Among Marginalized Learners

Globalizing martial arts can mean adopting the culture of the nation it moves to. The culture of fighting in North America is very different than that of Thailand’s. Often the same hyper-masculine chest thumping that accompanies mainstream sports and martial arts events in

North America is not prevalent in Thailand. As a common saying goes in Thailand “Thank your trainer, and thank your opponent. Finally we are friends.” In Thailand people often fight to win, not to defeat. Although it appears brutal to people on the outside looking in, the tenacity of fighters is directed towards getting points; not necessarily inflicting pain for pain’s sake. Always being in control is an important element of Muay Thai that many fighters in North America do not always seem to embody. The winning at all costs mentality can negatively influence all sporting events, not just Muay Thai. But this mentality which I believe is a western mindset rooted in the ultra-competitive nature of capitalism and sporting of North America, has infected many martial arts with the ‘kill or be killed’ attitude.

An unfortunate element of ‘results driven’ training is the disassociation from the spiritual, emotional, and mental cultivation necessary for overall martial development as a fighter. The mind/body division of western thinking and the division of a person’s spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical attributes can contribute to a sports program that can be seen less as an “art” and more as a “training regimen” meant to cultivate rote performance, but not creative potential or holistic development. The full experience of training Muay Thai caters to all elements of a person’s growth. Training should be mentally nourishing, physically demanding, spiritually enriching, and emotionally evolving. Learning how to be calm is just as vital to learning the rote elements of throwing a punch, and it is this serenity which holds immense value for marginalized learners because it encourages resilience by responding to challenging circumstances that would normally evoke negative responses.

Resilience according to Williamson, Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, and Phillips (2011) can be viewed as a “dynamic process of adjustment, adaptation, and transformation in response

to challenges and demands” (p.85) and while resilience may be conferred to learners who can adapt to change in indigenous contexts through the safeguards of traditional knowledge and interpersonal relationships, there are many Aboriginal people who cannot protect themselves against processes of marginalization. Marginalized learners can benefit through resilience by adapting to various contexts through Muay Thai training because it encourages proper conduct in strenuous situations.

As an Aboriginal male, I certainly faced and continue to face my share of marginalization. It is a hollow word to describe the enormity of being a Cree, Metis, and Ukrainian man on the Prairies and how that has identity has influenced my life. Being able to respond to situations where people demand the worst with wise recoil is necessary not only for my personal safety but because my actions, whether I like it or not, reflect others through no choice of my own. It is imperative that marginalized individuals develop resilience to react to stressful situations, like police stops or innocuous exchanges over family dinner with wise decision making. As this thesis outlined earlier, the path to arriving at the proper understanding and the consequent action is not something a learner gets through purely technical or abstract engagements, but both. Possessing the resilience to respond non-violently to the inherently violent nature of Aboriginal reality is a crucial step forward to becoming unchained from the belittling influence of privilege. As Willie Ermine (1995) points out, the skillset that encourages such personal development, whether it be through reclaiming culture or martial arts, is desperately needed to change our current reality. Thus, the practice of Muay Thai is a viable and effective coupling of technical and abstract skills that are required to develop resilience in marginalized learners.

4.3.1 Why is learning important for reality?

Learning is vital to our realities as teachers, learners, consumers, individuals, and as people connected to everything around us. Learning enables people to see beyond themselves. By attaining knowledge and developing understanding a person can determine how forces beyond them influence and shape their surroundings and how they themselves are a part of that environment. Learning enables people to influence their reality because learning allows people to transcend instinct, defy social convention, and influence those around them.

Willie Ermine states “individuals and society can be transformed by identifying and reaffirming learning processes based on subjective experiences and introspection” (p.102). Ermine believes that part of the dynamic of shifting social and individual realities are “skills that promote personal and social transformation; a vision of social change that leads to harmony with rather than control over the environment; and the attribution of a spiritual dimension to the environment (Miller, Cassie, and Drake 1990, 4)” (as Cited in Battiste, 1995, p.102). He criticizes the western worlds “dogmatic fixation on power and control” (p.102) at the cost of alienating forms of knowledge that were not deemed legitimate ways of knowing, namely introspective and relational forms of understanding.

Engaging the skills that promote personal and social change as Ermine describes above can be significant for changing modern western thinking’s predilection for habitually fragmenting the world into divisible parts. When training Muay Thai, emphasis is placed upon personal change as a necessary ingredient for becoming an effective practitioner. In order to transform one’s reality, a learner must themselves transform in order to change their environments. This transformation is negotiated through intense physical training, emotional

development, spiritual cultivation, and mental growth. When learners can begin to change their patterns of thinking and consequent actions they begin to change how they interact with their environments. For example, when engaging in conflict the person trained in martial arts is typically controlled in their aggression. When they possess the emotional control over their biological inclination for fight, flight, or freeze; more opportunities present themselves thus enabling the practitioner to exhibit a greater degree of control and agency in stressful situations. By responding to violence in sensible and rational means instead of an emotional knee-jerk reaction, the learner is able to transform their reality by ascribing to a higher mode of consciousness thereby setting a better example for themselves and those around them.

A commercial for a popular boxing brand that stuck with me provides a good example. There are two children in the slums of an African city, one is training hard while the other supports and cheers him on. The one child fights, and through a hard fought victory he wins and also gets a nice cash prize. Soon after walking home together, still high on the euphoria of victory, the children are held up by another demanding their money. Both children know that the one can handle the situation; but instead of raising his fists, he hands over the money. The ending tag line of the commercial, “Boxing makes you bigger.”

Muay Thai ethics and spirituality encourages self-control while acknowledging the interconnection people have with one another. By its very nature, Muay Thai enables people to recognize the significance of connection and the importance of Muay Thai values. Daily ceremonies of chanting, Wai Kru, Ram Muay, Wai, the adoption ceremony, and other commonplace rituals reinforce the connection we have to others and the commitments we must make to give full effect to that understanding.

4.4 Considerations & Conclusion

The value of Muay Thai is difficult to express with discourse familiar to western academics. Scholarship which has largely influenced educational philosophy is the province of a few select philosophers and scientists who have advocated for the beauty and power of rational thought. The intellect however, is not the sole provision of human learning. As a reminder, the goal of Whitehead's ideal education is to produce students who know and can *do* something well. He also believes the eventual culmination of such education is active wisdom. Thus abstract as well as technical/embodied learning is vital to the development of learners.

Muay Thai training and competition can be viewed through Whitehead's vision of education as learners motivate themselves to endure intense discipline in order to creatively exercise their knowledge and skills in sparring and competition. The development of Muay Thai learners can be interpreted in correspondence to Whitehead's three phases of growth known as romance, precision, and generalization. Romance is a stage where learners are ignorant and lack a basic grasp of what is right and wrong in combat arts. Beginners fight with blind instinct, but nonetheless fight with fluidity because they are motivated with emotional engagement. The precision stage sees learners develop the proper mechanics of technique as they discern right and wrong ways of doing things. The phase of precision limits freedom and creativity as the learner is taught the methods of analysis and proper responses to various situations which stifle the ability to reflexively act creatively. given the learner often will freeze to calculate situations by being intellectually constrained, meaning rote performance and emphasis on the so called "proper" form can become practically irrelevant in the scope of sparring and competition.

Generalization allows for separate rote elements of training to be creatively exercised in sparring and competition in order to reflexively execute technique without too much “mind” so the learner can be best prepared to handle spontaneous situations. Generalization exemplifies learning by meeting highly demanding and unpredictable circumstances with a relevant mentality and appropriate actions; it is where active wisdom is most developed because “details retreat into subconscious habit”(Whitehead, 1967, p.37). Schools and individuals often incredulously claim that their “system” of Muay Thai, Kung Fu, Tae-Kwon-Do, or Jiu-jitsu is superior to most others; and the martial arts communities can become rife with issues and can assume a tribal mentality when they uncritically venerate their teachers to the point of religious awe or claim their knowledge is the “true” version at the expense of other valuable knowledge. This is essentially comparable to a cult. For example I often hear Muay Thai is the best *Martial Art* in the world (as opposed to a *striking art* given the rules of Muay Thai competition). If a Muay Thai fighter was to compete against Mixed Martial Artist, however, he or she may likely be defeated because of different rules which accompany a different sport in addition to the fact that mixed martial arts encompasses a wider variety of disciplines, thus more advantages. In a street scenario, I have often heard that Krav-Maga or Jiu-jitsu are best suited because each is functional for ending conflicts quickly. . It is depressing to hear a Muay Thai fighter excuse themselves from the beauty and depth which other martial arts offer because they defer to the notion that their knowledge is the only knowledge they require. Whitehead stated that “the importance of knowledge lies in its use, in our active mastery of it – that is to say, it lies in wisdom” (Whitehead, p.32, 1967). Wisdom concerns both how knowledge is handled and how it is expressed. Whitehead knew the only avenue towards wisdom is through an educator’s careful exercise of the principles of freedom and discipline in accordance with the learner’s own natural

cravings for romance, precision, and generalization. To make a fruitful metaphor, having knowledge means knowing a tomato is a fruit whereas having wisdom means not putting it in a fruit salad. Grounding knowledge in reality gives it the power of exemplification, instead of simply being an airy abstraction.

Muay Thai learning provides individuals with the capacity to act beyond preconditioned behaviours like flight, fight, or freeze. It teaches learners to control their natural compulsions through a gradual and rhythmic progression of self-emergence beyond their previous limitations. People who are aggressive learn to be calm, and calm people can surprise themselves by the aggression they can evoke. It makes people powerful, and for people who are powerless in other areas of their life, this can be a crucial tool for developing self-efficacy. Muay Thai may be perceived as violent but violent training begets non-violence through the slow (acquiescence of physiological triggers.) Muay Thai offers those who choose to live the life of a *Nak-Muay* a rewarding journey that can be difficult and fraught with conflict but discloses a life few get to lead. The sense of possibility one can feel after a strenuous day of sparring is analogous to spiritual awe. Personal limitations dissolve in martial arts to reveal a universe where anything is possible.

The west exalts a maxim of self-maximization through scripts endorsed by corporate media-culture and narrow social values. It tells us to get a good job, get married, have kids, buy a house, and accumulate more possessions in hopes of reaching some far off goal which is never any closer the more we try to attain it. Muay Thai was deeply personal choice and commitment for me given the extent I have devoted myself to it. It has resulted in many sacrifices of cultural possessions which are socially gratifying, but spiritually draining. I lost many professional

opportunities, relationships, and friendships but gained many in turn as a result. The adventure of Muay Thai provides learners with constant opportunities for growth through the rhythmic interplay of freedom and discipline which is given effect through the day to day precision required by training as well through the challenging and creative possibilities offered in sparring and competition.

While training in Thailand, I was working with a partner from England who had 100% burns across his body. It was off-putting at first as I had never seen anyone with scars as extensive or deep. Classes full of students would make snide comments like “biscuit” or “the matchstick”, and most tried to never partner up with him due to the close contact that training requires. There is a social and inter-personal as well as inter-cultural element to training where people of difference are constantly engaging one another. I worked with him doing clinch work, which is entirely body on body and largely without most clothing because of the tropical climate. We worked diligently on technique and drilling punch-kick combinations, often throwing each other to the ground when one of us made the proper technique work. He worked me to the point of exhaustion and in the end I did not see his scars so much as the man beneath them . Perceptions are largely based upon what is ingrained through cultural osmosis. Perceptions of people with aesthetic, racial, sexual, or gender characteristics which differ from the dominant ‘norms’ are often overturned in Muay Thai because of the high level of interpersonal interaction which Muay Thai fosters through the boundaries it discloses and the patterns it deconstructs.

I trained with every flavour of person gay, straight, disabled, or obese. I remember a man from France at the Fairtex camp in Thailand who after a while, I found out had one leg. In fact, the only reason I found out was because he cracked his prosthetic in half, apparently a regular

occurrence during sparring, and casually tossed it by pool before jumping in for a dip. People may perceive that their degree of ability is tied to what others believe about them. I could imagine people telling him he could never train Muay Thai, yet he was very talented, very powerful, and utterly motivated.

If there were to be only one recommendation for policy, programming, or initiatives in our modern education systems, it would be to encourage the proficiency that only a specialization can offer. Whitehead states, “the general culture is designed to foster an activity of mind; the specialist course utilises this activity” (p.11) thus only specialism provides learners with opportunities to master their knowledge that fosters deep appreciation for the structure and power of ideas as “nothing but a special study can give any appreciation for the exact formulation of general ideas, for the relations when formulated, for their service in the comprehension of life” (p.12). By specializing in Muay Thai, I have come to learn many invaluable lessons which are often lost in the humdrum of everyday modern education. Lessons such as humility, non-violence, patience, and discipline have been enormously beneficial to my overall growth.

The journey of learning is always one of interest, dominated by interest, and propagated by interest. Interest drives our commitment to the task at hand and it must be unearthed, not imposed or rationalized. Through Muay Thai I have come to believe the wonder and adventure of education is not reducible to rote tasks of teaching to the test or deference to job preparation, which can diminish the thirst and quest for understanding we all desire. Rather, the aims of education ought to develop learners who crave the risks that adventures in education pose. Learners must develop specialized interests which naturally spur on a motivation to submit to the

difficulties of discipline. Educators should teach their students to be comfortable with the risks associated with learning because the rewards, no matter how distant or inconceivable at the outset, are worth the effort. We can teach students to appreciate the power and beauty of learning is a deep passion for ideas and love of wisdom.

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – *The Little Prince*

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