

# Introduction

This book is probably not the first book you have read about dreams. There are many fine treatments of the subject, which we identify and discuss throughout, and list in a bibliography. This is primarily for dream educators and others who want to extend and deepen their knowledge by involving themselves in dream education as teachers and/or as advanced learners. The relative newcomer to dreams also will find this book, supplemented by other resources, to be a useful guide.

We acknowledge that it might sound strange to speak of “educating” people about dreams. Isn’t dreaming something you just do, without needing anyone to teach you how? Yes, and no! Yes, dreaming is a natural process of the imagination that does not require any conscious effort or training; it simply happens, automatically, all through our lives. Indeed, the capacity to dream seems to be inherent in the evolved neural architecture of the human brain. We are truly a dreaming species, born to a lifelong cycling of waking and sleeping modes of consciousness. At the same time, we do learn how to view and use our dreams. Every culture through history has developed its own traditions of dream belief and practice and has passed them on (i.e., taught them) to the next generation. People learn about dreams from their families, their religious or spiritual leaders, their healers, and their teachers. Cumulatively, these influences have a tangible impact on the frequency and content of people’s remembered dreams. Dream education is, by any reasonable standard of cross-cultural comparison, a universal practice in human societies. So, no, it shouldn’t seem strange to engage the different ways people teach each other about dreaming. What is strange is how rarely these practices have been discussed in the contemporary Western academic context.

The purpose of this book is to examine current activities and issues in dream education, giving our sense of emerging possibilities that will shape teaching practices in the coming decades. The book is a resource guide for practitioners at all educational levels, in a wide variety of disciplines. In addition to our many years of experience teaching our own courses on dreams, we have spent the past several years gathering information—convening panels and symposia on the subject of dream education, listening to teachers from many different disciplines describe their approaches and experiences, and surveying

the curricula of colleges, universities, and graduate institutes. Thanks to the far-ranging scholarly network spawned by the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD), we have gained a broad overview of what is actually happening in contemporary Western dream education. At the most basic level, this book holds up a mirror to present-day society, reflecting back a lively but little-known collectivity of educational practices revolving around the universal human experience of dreaming.

We do not believe any one culture or tradition has a monopoly on how best to do dream education. Our major emphasis is on teaching practices in Western higher education because that is where we work and what we know best. However, we are well aware of and deeply respectful toward venerable non-Western dream perspectives, and dream education outside conventional university environments. In this era of the Internet and instantaneous worldwide communication, information of all kinds is increasingly flowing over national, cultural, and institutional divides. We see this happening in dream education, and we view this book as one contribution to that broader process of emerging cross-cultural dialogue.

We recognize that for some persons dreams are associated with superstitious beliefs and fringe activities like astrology, channeling, and alien abductions. We have noticed, too, that the reactions of many persons typically combine doubtfulness about the value of dreams in general and their fittingness as objects of study with a fascination about their *own* dreams. Experience has taught us that people possess an innate curiosity about dreaming, but they are wary of exaggerated claims and dubious theories. In this respect, we address our book and its arguments not just to people already interested in dream education, but also to the wider public. We devote considerable attention to questions of intellectual integrity in the study of dreams, with the goal of establishing a sound, reasonable basis for making valid claims about the origins and functions of dreaming and the meanings of dreams. Dreams always will be viewed by some people with skepticism, even disdain, but that should not stop dream scholars from continuing to develop theory, gather evidence, and promote dream practices that meet the highest standards of academic quality. We believe the best, most effective, and most enjoyable dream education practices are grounded in precisely that kind of knowledge.

Once beyond questions about the value and meaningfulness of dreams, an even more formidable challenge presents itself to anyone who wants to learn about the subject. What is the best disciplinary perspective for studying dreams? The first answer that comes to mind (from a contemporary Western perspective) is psychology. To be sure, more courses and program units on dreams are taught in psychology departments than anywhere else. But as we show in the coming pages, there are teachers in many disciplines other than psychology who are making valuable contributions to our efforts to understand the nature and

potentiality of dreaming. This may seem to complicate matters, but in our view it is simply a reflection of the pluralism of dreaming itself. An honest appraisal of human dreams reveals them as complex, multifaceted, and nearly infinite in their diversity and possible meanings. The study of dreams therefore embraces many scholarly disciplines, bringing together the arts, humanities, and social and natural sciences. Complementary approaches from all these fields are required for a full understanding of dreams, with direct implications for all forms of dream education. In this regard, we embrace multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching, with critical, self-reflective dialogue across disciplines helping us sort out what is and is not useful and trustworthy.

Our discussions in this volume range from thoughts on the best ways to teach and learn about dreams in particular subject contexts, to epistemological arguments about why dream studies are an appropriate and important part of study in various academic fields. For example, in the chapter on psychology, a field where dream studies are relatively well established, we give greater weight to pedagogy, whereas in the chapters on humanities and writing, where dream studies are less prevalent and less well known, we emphasize the reasons for their educational importance and curricular inclusion.

Although courses on dreams are relatively scarce, a number of schools and teachers are working to develop not only single courses but also broad-based curricular enterprises. We look forward to the benefits that emerge as students are able not just to take one course on dreams but are also able to immerse themselves in programs of multiple courses involving ongoing interaction with a community of faculty and students who share their interests.

### The Authors' Perspectives: A Dreams Primer

We want readers of this book to know the beliefs and attitudes that we hold about dreams, as they informed our choices about what topics to include and what to write about them. To this end we present the following “dream primer,” summarizing our view of dreams.

This section doubles as a brief but densely packed introduction to the field for educators who want to incorporate dreams into their teaching and want to expand their existing knowledge. In Appendix A, we discuss books that we have found particularly enriching in learning and teaching about dreams. This can serve as a reading list, both for those with little or no previous background in the subject, and those more experienced in the field for whom the books may provide a helpful review, extension of their knowledge, and possibilities for student reading assignments.

We encourage you to reflect on the contents of this volume and other works on dreams and incorporate into your own understanding those ideas

that resonate most meaningfully and prove to be most useful. Which theories, perspectives, and approaches hold up best to tests of logic, experience, practice, and empirical confirmation? Teaching is more effective when teachers personally embrace the material they are using, having considered and selected it carefully.

The three of us come from varied academic disciplines (general humanities, literature, and film studies for Welt; religious studies, philosophy, and psychology for Bulkeley; and psychology, political science, and research methodology for King) and have different dream interests, yet agree broadly about their nature and use, the differences among us being largely ones of emphasis.

What about dreams intrigues us enough to devote much of our careers to their contemplation? It is their intense and meaningful quality, first encountered in our childhoods, which drew us as adults into their study. We believe that work in dreams is usually grounded in and motivated by one's own dreams, at least initially. We agree with Gordon Globus that those working with dreams need to honor their own dreams.<sup>1</sup> The experience of dreams and their personal significance is vital for the best possible dream teaching, scholarship, and clinical practice. Eventually, of course, working with dreams may range far from one's personal dreams. Researching and teaching about sleeping and dreaming patterns, dream content, and studying and creating literature or art derived from dreams all can extend well beyond the scholar's own dream experience.

Dreams are emotion-laden stories that our minds create during sleep. They may be complete or fragmentary, coherent or confusing, joyful or troubling, recalled on waking or forgotten. We found in surveying more than 1,000 of our students that on the average, they report remembering between two and three dreams per week, although some recall dreams rarely or never and some recall many dreams most mornings. Dreamers can strengthen recall with intention, focus, and practice. A remembered dream, once recorded, becomes a text that we can engage to understand and develop its meanings. A dream, or (better) a series of dreams for a person becomes a narrative of that dreamer's life concerns.

The dreaming person most often experiences being a participating character in the dream, although sometimes the dreamer is only an observer. The dreamer usually takes the events of the dream as "real," which is to say as if they were occurring as in waking life. Only on waking, does the realization dawn that "it was only a dream." An exception to this is the "lucid" dream, in which the dreamer realizes that he or she is dreaming even as the dream takes place. Lucid dreams are rare as a percentage of all dreams but are experienced at one time or another by a majority of people who remember their dreams.

Everyone dreams every night, although biological depressants or brain injury can reduce dreaming activity. In a typical night's sleep, some mentation may be occurring all along, from forms of thinking to storylike dreams with a plot and visual contents. Dreams have much in common with films: Both primarily are visual experiences with other sensory and emotional content. Dreaming can occur in any of the cyclic stages of sleep.

Dreams range from the mundane to the sublime and powerful. All dreams can inform the dreamer's life in some way. Each dream is unique in the variety and subtlety of its emotions and meanings. Remembered dreams overall tend to be slightly more negative than positive in their emotional tone. However, even so-called "bad" dreams (nightmares) can be "good" in their deepening of experience and insight, and we believe it is important to experience and understand "bad" dreams, and not flee from them. Repeated or recurrent dreams indicate ongoing concerns or issues that have yet to be resolved.

Dreams can bypass defense mechanisms that inhibit deep experience in waking. Therefore, dreams often are more sensorially vivid, emotional, and meaning-laden than is much of waking life. Therein lie much of their appeal and fascination. Dreams remove blinders and we can experience our lives and ourselves in fresh and revealing ways, particularly if later we consciously consider what meanings our dreams hold. What we do in waking with dream experiences, if anything, is up to us.

Dreams may even be a conduit to paranormal experience. Thousands of persons claim to have had telepathic, clairvoyant, and precognitive (predictive) dreams. Although the cumulative weight of these reports is impressive, it has been difficult to prove their existence to scientific standards. We believe in staying open to the possibility of such anomalous dream experiences and respectful of dreamers' claims, without becoming unduly credulous. We advocate carefully assessing the evidence and considering alternative explanations.

Dreams are lodged in sleep processes, grounded in the neurology of the brain. As is true with all experience, dreaming events are produced by and filtered through neural mechanisms. We know this because injury to these mechanisms results in corresponding deficiency of dream imagery or affect. This does not mean, however, that dreams are "nothing but" neurological products. Brain could be viewed as the vehicle through which mind manifests itself—we do not believe that mind necessarily can be reduced to brain. Many qualities of dreams cannot be linked empirically to specific neural structures or events. Mental processes (including dreams) have functional autonomy. We leave open the *possibility* that there is consciousness independent of brain activity, and thus prior to it and transcending the individual human being. This means that dreams may have spiritual dimensions in terms of personal meanings and perhaps as conduits for exogenous spiritual influences.

Dreams as recalled and written down as narratives can be analyzed using methods of the natural and human sciences, philosophy and the humanities, and can serve as material and inspiration for new creations and modes of expression and engagement. We can analyze dream content statistically to extract meaningful patterns and regularities. We can interpret dream stories in terms of the psychology of the dreamer or larger social, philosophical, spiritual, literary, historical, and political categories. Dreams can reveal the meanings and concerns of the person or the community. We believe that the more vivid and

striking the dream, the more it speaks to the dreamer's deepest existential concerns. Dreams and dream processes can be a window into phenomena of sleep and brain functioning in waking and sleeping. Therefore, the study of dreams is inherently multidisciplinary, and the constituent disciplines of the sciences and humanities, separately and in concert, may lay claim to the subject. Dream studies are primed for new, *interdisciplinary* approaches that combine the analytical rigor of the sciences with the imaginative creativity of the humanities.

What do dreams mean? How should we interpret them? Is there an automatic function, or more than one function, that they serve? Additionally, what purposes or uses can we place on dreams as a matter of choice? We do not hold any one stance about these questions, and we caution the reader not to adhere to any particular perspective for adherence or theory's sake. Theories and methods are lodged in particular cultural contexts, their use contingent on the users' purposes, which tend to reflect and support extant worldviews. We see theories as devices that are helpful in clarifying aspects of reality, dream reality in this instance. They are tools in our analytical toolbox. In practice, we view theories as useful or not useful, rather than true or false. (Although we admit that some theories illuminate some aspects of dreams so brilliantly at times that they do seem true as well as useful.) We have found all approaches to dreams valuable in clarifying some aspects of the phenomenon, but none sufficient by itself.

Dream pioneers Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung emphasize, respectively, dreams as reflecting the past and giving guidance for the future. We like this complementary focus, and believe that much, even most of *psychological* theory about dreams consists of extensions and modifications of Jung and Freud. We find Freud's view that dreams are primarily disguised sexual wishes and Jung's belief that dreams can manifest inherited tendencies to express archetypical ideas interesting and heuristically valuable but of questionable general validity.

We share the perspective of Harry Hunt that there may be multiple types of dreams with different sources, functions, uses, and meanings.<sup>2</sup> Dreams may be primarily about the dreamer's psyche or body, or the dreamer's immediate community or society. They may reflect the past or present, preview the future, give voice and form to unconscious conflicts, spur and express creativity, solve problems, reveal the divine, or even cull unneeded cognitive material. Dreams, including religious dreams, may speak directly and clearly to personal concerns, or be metaphors that sidle up to issues and their meanings in cleverly disguised ways. Although dream content varies in terms of demographic factors such as the age, gender, and culture of the dreamer, these aggregate differences become less salient the deeper one delves into particular dreams of specific persons.

Dream theories tend to be self-fulfilling as dreams themselves reflect waking perceptions and attitudes. People who believe in Freudian, or Jungian, or paranormal explanations of dreams will tend to have dreams that corroborate their

beliefs. Although dreams always retain the ability to tap one on the shoulder, so to speak, and impart a new perspective, they sometimes will simply confirm one's extant positions. Homicidal terrorists perhaps are more likely to have dreams justifying their worldview than they are to have dreams that challenge it. Dreams are not necessarily more moral than the waking consciousness of the dreamer. They *can* express existing but latent, repressed or incompletely developed positive qualities and views.

There is no consensus about the functions of dreaming. We believe that dreaming even without recall may serve to regulate emotions by completing experience and expression of feeling and, as Ernest Hartmann argues, by absorbing traumas and lesser emotional events into existing contexts of meaning.<sup>3</sup> Remembering dreams and evaluating their significance, however, go an important step beyond any automatic regulatory function of dreaming. A conscious assessment of one's dreams, including discussing them with other people, can be a kind of self-therapy, a spur to personal psychological and spiritual growth. A consideration of dreams offers the potential of discovering previously unexplored aspects of self and of the world.

We urge the reader of this book to learn about dreams and dream education with an open mind and open heart, while retaining a critical eye regarding evidence adduced in support of any claim or theory. Anecdotes, historical accounts, and case studies are fascinating and great springboards for reflection and theorizing, but do not constitute proof of assertions. Where the point is empirical, scientific criteria of verification, reliability and validity apply. Where the point is philosophical, logical criteria apply. Where the point is aesthetic, subjective and consensual criteria apply. Where the point is about one's own life, the "a-ha" of recognition and the ongoing consequences of the insight are major criteria for meaningfulness. It helps us to remind ourselves that at the core of learning about dreams for the dreams teacher is an exploration and sharing of one's own dreams. This grounds all other endeavors.

We are truly and perpetually fascinated with dreams, and continue to study them, teach about them, and use them as material for self-understanding and creativity. We enjoy being part of a widespread community of dreamers and dream scholars who share ideas, friendship, and support. Still we caution against giving dreams more than their due. This is an occupational hazard, as dreams are beguiling and awe inspiring, and communicating one's dreams can be grounding and nurturing. Dreams celebrate our triumphs and our ongoing expansions of self; they will not hesitate to show us our contractions of self and failures at seizing the moments of possibility that come to us. An attention to dreams can enrich life. However, there is little redemptive quality per se to dreams; they "only" illuminate experience and possibility. The redemption is in the waking act and thought—the role of the dream is to chronicle, goad, inspire and celebrate.

Following this introduction, *Dreaming in the Classroom* is organized into 11 chapters. The first, "Practical Guidelines for Dream Education," outlines the major considerations involved in virtually any kind of enterprise in dream education. These themes include the institutional setting of the course, the backgrounds of the students, the range and depth of course content, logistical issues of class size and course schedule, and practices of dream sharing in the classroom. In this chapter, we lay out the broad pedagogical terrain of dream education.

In the following six chapters we treat six distinct subject areas in higher education, beginning with fundamental preparation in academic skills. Writing is foundational to academic work, to literacy, the life of the mind, and success in all academic pursuits. In Chapter 2 we discuss how creative writing courses can incorporate dreaming as a topic and a resource. We also argue that dream study has exciting potential for development in visual studies and electronic media in contemporary technologies of education and communication.

Chapter 3 looks at psychology, traditionally the preeminent source of Western academic knowledge about dreaming. Certainly, since the early 20th century, dreams have been regarded first and foremost as psychological phenomena. Naturally, this has led to a history of dream courses in college and university psychology departments, and we examine some of the most creative and successful of these courses and their teachers. Included in this chapter is a discussion of psychology offerings that combine the study of dreams with the study of sleeping and dreaming processes. Psychology courses bring scientific methods into the discussion, a fundamental dimension in dream pedagogy.

Chapter 4 focuses on the discipline of anthropology, which also has a colorful history of interest in dreaming reaching back to its founding researchers and theorists. Although long influenced by developments in psychology, anthropologists have developed their own distinctive way of exploring the cultural dynamics of dreaming, and their educational practices reflect this more-than-psychological perspective on the origin, function, and meaning of dreams.

Chapter 5 examines dream education practices in the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies. These fields have a historically important influence on ideas about dreaming, and remain the locus for some of the most radical questions that should be posed in dream education. Virtually every known religious tradition in the world looks to dreaming as a means of communicating with sacred powers and realities, and most major philosophers in Western and Eastern traditions have devoted at least some attention to the epistemological and metaphysical dimensions of human dream experience. We discuss courses that have been inspired in these disciplines.

The sixth chapter surveys the practices of dream educators in general humanities courses, including literature and the arts. These teachers have developed a host of robust, theoretically sophisticated understandings of human dreaming.

Indeed, courses taught by teachers in these fields feature some of the most creative interdisciplinary practices we have found in dream education.

Films are perhaps the human creation closest to dreams in both process and content, and the reciprocal relevance of dream studies and film studies is the subject of Chapter 7. It has been widely noted that many basic film techniques seem to derive from the subjective experience of dreaming, with its highly variable focus, sudden shifts of scene, slowing of action, alternation of clarity and obscurity, and so on. The cinematic dream sequence often is scrutinized in courses on dreams and dreaming. Here, however, we suggest that beyond the immediate relevance of the dream–film analogy, the most fundamental questions addressed by contemporary dream theory are deeply meaningful for understanding cinema, and that film theory’s accounts of narrative and of the hallucinatory experience of watching movies may offer provocative new ideas to students of dreaming.

Chapter 8 draws on our previous discussions of psychology as well as other disciplines in a consideration of dreams as a topic in the training of clinicians, including psychiatrists, psychotherapists, counseling psychologists, nurses, and pastoral counselors. It is perplexing that despite the *prima facie* value of dreams as a therapeutic tool and source of clinical data, dream education is largely absent from graduate clinical training. We examine some reasons for this state of affairs, while highlighting notable exceptions of clinical educators doing sophisticated and important work.

In Chapter 9 we venture outside the ivory tower and its traditional departmental structures and programs to review dream education in the community, where there is a creative burgeoning of innovative and flexible dream teaching. We look at alternative dream institutes and training programs, the work of several individual practitioner-educators, and lay dream discussion groups. We consider the evident advantages and possible disadvantages of dream education freed from the institutional constraints of conventional universities. Learning about dreams needn’t (and doesn’t) begin and end with college studies.

We take a developmental turn in Chapter 10, in which we discuss dream education in primary, intermediate and secondary schools, and the implicit learning that occurs when dreams are discussed in the family. Children and teenagers have a natural curiosity about their dreams, and some teachers have responded to this by bringing dreams into their classrooms in a variety of contexts. However, for a variety of reasons, very few primary or secondary schools will have anything to do with dreams! We examine this general situation with the aim of highlighting the best current practices, responding to common objections, and pointing in the most promising directions for future progress.

Chapter 11 concludes with reflections on dream education’s current status and future prospects. The teachers, courses, and activities we describe are part of a broader trend in Western educational practice in which old boundaries

are crumbling and new interdisciplinary alliances are being forged, all in the midst of cultural ferment and rapid social and technological change. The current state of dream education for lay students and professionals alike offers promising opportunities to bridge the gaps between disciplines, theories, and schools of thought. Significant movement in this direction has already begun. Freudians, Jungians, neurobiologists, psychologists, practitioners of meditation, religious mystics, artists, doctors and others have finally started talking to each other about dreams, seeking to transcend the limitations of existing models in understanding consciousness, mind, and imagination. There has never been a better time to focus attention on dream education from kindergarten to graduate school, as well as in adult and senior education, across a variety of disciplines and fields. We believe the accumulated experiences of contemporary dream teachers can serve as a model for educational practices that incorporate critical thought, creative imagination, and authentic human interaction in the classroom.

Also in our concluding chapter we speculate about future trends and possibilities. We discuss the promise and the possible perils of the Internet and related electronic technologies as vehicles for dream teaching. We take a fresh look at the perplexing question of teaching dream interpretation: What are the proper bases for interpretation? How can we know if an interpretation is valid? We ponder the forms that interdisciplinary dream education might take, and offer a template for an evolved hybrid course on dreams.

Although we attempt in the book to give examples of and discuss all types of contemporary dream education, our coverage is not exhaustive, but rather representative. There are many worthy dream teachers doing excellent work that we do not get to or mention only in passing; this does not diminish their importance. Also, because this is a book about teaching, we discuss only in a pedagogical context the work of the many brilliant and dedicated scholars who supply educators with new material in their theories, scientific findings, approaches to working with dreams, and creative products. In places we are prescriptive, as well as descriptive. Although we try for detachment, we are passionate about dreams—in both their substance and teaching—and have strong points of view grounded in our experience. These opinions will come through; we invite you to consider them and agree or take issue, as you will.

*Dreaming in the Classroom* includes a number of appendices to enhance its practical usefulness for educators. Appendix A contains a brief discussion of books and other resources that have influenced us and that we recommend as useful in developing a strong background in dream, theory, scholarship, and educational practice.

Appendix B provides sample syllabi and assignments, including those that have proven their usefulness in actual teaching experience. Appendix C treats community dream discussion groups—their establishment and operation. Appendix D gives guidance for one-shot presentations on dreams to various groups.

Appendix E discusses the DreamBank—a repository of dream reports and tools for systematic analyses of dream content. In Appendix F we describe a college class project that melded quantitative content analysis with an exploration of dream themes. Appendix G presents a template for interdisciplinary dreams teaching. In Appendix H we give tips for proposing a course on dreaming. In Appendix I we consider assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of dream teaching: How can we know what students learned, and if they learned what we intended? Finally, Appendix J presents an essay by Barbara Bishop, “Why I Teach Dreams in Freshman Composition.” The appendices *in toto* will give readers access to abundant resources for creating new dream education models and/or augmenting existing courses and programs.

The book is enriched throughout by the views, opinions, and insights of many dream educators whom we interviewed for this project or have otherwise spoken with over the years. Where no endnote is present, the information is from the interview or exchange with the person mentioned. Written and other sources are noted in the usual manner.

Let us start our exploration in the following chapter with a look at some fundamental questions and issues in dreams courses in general, across disciplines. Then we consider discipline-specific course contents and teaching approaches, target groups, and learning environments.