

Transformative Pedagogy: How Intentional Reflection is transforming my Teaching

Paul Alan Marcus

Calvin College

Preamble

I recently turned to the ‘memoirs’ that I began writing in my first and second year of teaching. My life was different then. I was still a full-time classroom teacher and I had yet to discover the joys and weariness that come with having children of my own. As I reflect, I see that even then I questioned common assumptions about pedagogy and the structure of schools. There were, however, places where my naiveté shone through the silver lining I had brush stroked. Nevertheless, it is interesting, even humbling, to look back to where I was and witness the positive growth I’ve accumulated, and also to put eyes on some practices that I am not proud I had.

When I was in university, we were often forced to reflect by way of journal writing. I hated it. I’m not sure why I hated it, perhaps because we were being forced to do it, but also because we were being marked on it. I have grown to believe that reflection is critical to both learning and teaching. It is through intentional reflection that we come to a better understanding of what we’ve been learning. But, it is also true that through reflection, we learn more. It leads to new learning, new questions, new lines of consciousness. Without reflection, we simply hear.

In this short paper, I hope to explore the act of reflection. I want to touch on its importance for our learners. I also want to delve into its importance for teachers who continually try to improve their craft to become agents of transformation. Good teachers, I believe, help their students to transform socially and to aid in the transformation of their communities. In this process, they are transformed themselves.

To this end, I will be reflecting on some of my early memoir entries with the anticipation that it will help me to show how I have grown in my pedagogy, and also with the hope that it will

show that the journey of teaching is also a journey of intentional reflection and change; or learning, relearning, and unlearning as Joan Wink (2010) names it.

To be transformative teachers, we must also be reflective learners.

Note:

All memoir pieces are published in italics. They were all written between September 2004 and June 2006. I reproduced them from their original pencil-written form without changing grammatical imperfections. I hope that this helps to express their authenticity.

Philosophical Beginnings: Developing my Understanding of the World.

This is the first job in my life where when I wake in the morning, sure I'd still love to sleep in, but when I'm up I can't wait to get out that door and rush into the classroom to start teaching. That classroom is my place. I built it. There are no governing bodies that tell me what I can't put on my bulletin boards, what I'm prohibited from writing on the chalk board, what I hang on my walls. So, I put up a banner at the front that states in grand, shadow-laden, upper case letters: "LIFE IS WORSHIP!"

This sums me up. This is why I teach, it's why I live. If there is anything that I want my students to come away knowing, it's not that insects all have three body parts or that Canada is a constitutional monarchy. As important as those are, I desire my students to have an understanding that worship is not about Sunday. It's not even about days, it's about seconds, milliseconds.... The Christian "prays without ceasing" as the Bible says it, which could just as easily be said in that the Christian worships without ceasing.

I long for my students to know that subjects are not pieces of compartmentalized facts – subjects have a direction, they have legs. They can walk towards or away from God, it depends on how we approach them. Is there a worshipful way to approach mathematics? I hope so. Is

there a God-pleasing way to teach Science? I pray that there is. Is there a faithful response to all subject matter? It is my whole hearted, seldom wavering belief that there is.

And yet I fall short.

I can't say that I was ever challenged by school, but I was always driven enough to succeed. That is, I was always driven enough to complete school work well enough to get good grades. I certainly wasn't an 'A' student, although I got my fair share of them. I attended Christian schools my whole life with the exception of one year which was more than enough to concretize in my mind that Christian Education would be forever a part of me. I attended post-secondary at Redeemer University College where I finally came to understand what Christian Education really could become.

It wasn't until these four years of university that I finally heard (or was finally able to understand) that Christianity played out in a lot more than the sacred world. In retrospect, I'm fairly hard on the education I received in my elementary and high school years; for the life of me, I can't recall what was distinctively Christian about it aside from devotions in the morning, prayer before lunch, and Bible class. Perhaps I'm being too critical and I should assign some of the blame to myself. Or, perhaps I should consider the fact that I was able to develop this understanding later in my life as a testament to the groundwork that was paved by these experiences. Nevertheless, it was in university when Kuyper (Kuyper, n.d.) finally shouted at me that "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'That is mine!'" Finally, a philosophical and theological statement that would frame my teaching.

A significant moment also came when I read the words of Al Wolters (2005) who claimed that all of creation has *structure* and *direction*: "*structure* denotes the 'essence' of a

creaturely thing, the kind of creature it is by God's creational law. *Direction*, by contrast, refers to a sinful deviation from the structural ordinance and renewed conformity to it in Christ." (p.

88) The slogan 'Life is Worship' maintains for my teaching that the world is God's, and although affected by sin, is being redeemed by Christ. All subject matter should have a two-fold focus: an acknowledgement of the Creator and the according praise due, and a recognition that in spite of sin, they can and should be directed back towards the Creator. In this basic (profound!) belief, teaching and learning is inherently transformative.

The Basis of Knowledge and Truth

Throughout the past number of months, I've been led into a reflection about knowledge and my assumptions about how it is attained and transmitted. Out of this process, I've been left with yet another question; can knowledge be attained and transmitted in ways that we've traditionally thought they could be?

Perhaps a good starting question to ponder could be 'what is knowledge, and where does knowledge come from?' This question has been pondered throughout history and there are many different suppositions. It is outside of the scope of this paper to outline them all. In my years of pondering these questions it is my belief that knowledge (truth, facts, etc.) comes from God and are revealed by God over time. Peter C. Hodgson (1999) claims that God's Wisdom, or truth, has been incarnated throughout history in different figures including Jesus of Nazareth. Others, most notably Thomas Aquinas, posit that God created truth within us that can be drawn forth with the skills of reason. (Hodgson, p. 27-28) To this, Hodgson would respond that "Education is not so much the drawing-forth of what the human subject already knows inwardly, but the drawing-out of the human subject from self-centredness to God-centredness or reality centredness. Christ and the Spirit play central roles in this process." (Hodgson, p. 48)

I prefer Hodgson's view as I think God (through the Holy Spirit) works (has worked) through history and through people to reveal truth. It is also integral to position our hearts towards our creator to 'hear' the truth. Reason is but one tool to discover truth and has been relied on too heavily which has led to a reliance on objectivity as the determining factor of truth.

As objectivity seems to require, we cannot separate ourselves from creation in search for truth. Our understanding of our place in creation and our experience in relationship to it will and should always affect our learning. Parker Palmer (1993) claims that "The modern divorce of the knower and the known has led to the collapse of community and accountability between the knowing self and the known world." (p. 26) To maintain a distinction between subjective and objective knowledge is to create an unnecessary distinction that serves only to dichotomize knowledge leading to the fragmentation of subject matter into opposing forces such as, for example, science vs. religion. Hodgson summarizes this well when he outlines his premise that the teaching and learning process must be transformative: "Knowing can no longer be abstract and detached but becomes connected and caring; domination is replaced by reciprocity and cooperation, readiness to doubt by readiness to believe, solitary scholarship by a desire for relationships." (p. 68)

We all know from experience that we are unable to take ourselves out of what we are learning; if we are able to accomplish this we will have created truly artificial intelligence – robots incapable of deciphering anything outside of the 5 senses.

The Image of God

Central to my educational philosophy is the understanding of humans (students) as Image-bearers of God. I take this to mean that we are called to reflect God's likeness on Earth as we 'go about our business'. Wolters assigns us the task of being God's viceroys in creation

during God's temporary physical stead. (p. 16) We have an important task, and any education that does not hold us accountable to this task is missing a required piece. Unfortunately, this belief has led me down some individualistic paths over the years. I have been guilty of talking too much about individual student needs and gifts, and too little time talking about how community reflects God's image.

God created community for his image-bearers in the beginning, and we must admit that humans are not meant to be autonomous beings. We are called into community, we feel fully alive in community, and we learn best in community. Palmer asserts "Only in community does the person appear in the first place, and only in community can the person continue to become." (p. 57) We are not meant to be, not created to be, individuals forced into isolation to learn. I don't think this is limited to *physical* isolation. It can also be extended to spiritual and emotional isolation. Is this what we force our students into when they sit in rows, when we test their individual knowledge of a set of facts, when we assign 'independent work'?

Brian Davis (1997), in an article on truth-seeking by questioning, points to enactivist psychology's rejection of individualism when he says: "individual agents are no longer regarded as fully autonomous and insulated from one another but as subsystems of more complex systems (e.g., families, classrooms, societies), each with an integrity..." (p. 370) We cannot take humans out of their environment and expect them to be able contextualize their learning. Every learner has prior knowledge and previous experiences which serve to contextualize further learning. This echoes what Paley (2007) means when she exclaims "I have discovered that I can't seem to teach the children that which they don't already know." (p. 156)

An Evolving Pedagogy

I've always thought of teaching as an unnatural arrangement. I should say, I've always thought our way of education in the West to be a tad unnatural. Teaching is an evolving matter. In the past century we have seen corporal punishment and one-room school houses, and the opposite end of the spectrum in open-classrooms and restricted class sizes. It is my opinion that none of these approaches have hit the nail on the head exactly. It is also my opinion that none of them can. It takes a brilliant mind, some luck, and a lot of experience to teach children. The trick seems an enigma to the beginning teacher, but as I write this in my second year of teaching, I can tell you that this stuff sinks in. The tricks, the quirks, the rationalities and irrationalities all start to make a little more sense each day. It is my hope that one day I can say that I've figured it out completely. Although I guess I also believe that's not possible.

I can remember sitting in a massive gymnasium with hundreds of other students writing an exam for an education course and thinking 'this is not the way that it's supposed to be'. I can't remember what the question was, but my answer reflected my situational mood and I went on a bit of a rant questioning what I would soon learn that Smith (1998) calls the 'official theory of learning'. I also can't remember what my mark was on this exam, but I doubt that it was good.

I had never before had my assumptions validated as clearly as I did when I read Smith's "The Book of Learning and Forgetting". Finally an official voice would echo my own questions and discontent with the modern structure of education (the 'official theory'). For example, why do we cluster students into sets of similarly-aged children? Are tests, quizzes, and worksheets the best method to help students learn a body of knowledge? When we test students, are we actually measuring what they have learned, or we measuring how well they are able to recite that

which we've told them is important? Is the human learner someone into which knowledge is deposited for use at a later time like a bank (Wink, p. 55), or is the human learner someone who interacts with the world around him/her and constantly and naturally learns that which he/she is impassioned about?

I've come to understand that the learner is a fragile creature and in our current structure of education is constantly in danger of becoming jaded, cynical, passive, and disinterested. Mike Rose (1989) in his semi-autobiographical account of his life's work with disenfranchised learners said:

“The churches these children attended told them they were made in the image of God. But I began to wonder what images they were creating for themselves as they came to know that their physical being was so vulnerable, that whatever beauty they bore could be dismissed by the culture or destroyed on the street.” (p. 101)

I would add to that last sentence: ‘or stifled by the education that is supposed to set them free.’ He continues “Our approaches...as often as not keep us from deep understanding of differences and problems – and possibilities.” (p. 128) I think that the danger in our traditional approaches to learning can lend more towards missed possibilities as we continue to engage in activities and structures that oppress, discourage, and limit.

I quickly learned and am continuing to learn that we need to find ways to involve learners and to engage them in what they are learning. Perhaps we need to look at some metaphors for teaching that will help us to allow student learning to become more directed by their passions. Could the teacher be a mentor instead of a banker, a facilitator instead of a professor, a fellow learner instead of simply a teacher? What model will help our students to be transformed by, and

transformers of their learning instead of simply becoming regurgitators of prescribed curriculum?

Teaching and Power

I never envisioned myself to be a strict teacher. I can remember doing a teaching placement at a Catholic school with this teacher named Mr. Chernets. He had an interesting style. He would show up at the last minute, all the kids would already be inside. He rarely made an entrance. He was a short man, not much taller than his students with a huge partly red moustache. He always looked unkempt, untied with his shirt untucked and hair amuck. When he got there, he would simply go to the front chalkboard and write a few assignments on the board that the students were expected to complete with rarely any help from him. I remember thinking that this was absurd, yet at the same time I loved the freedom and the responsibility it forced the students into. I discussed his practices with him on occasion. I once mentioned that I might prefer to have a more structured atmosphere to which he replied “Oh...you’re one of those guys. You need the power, you need the control at all times.”

I didn’t agree with his assessment, but to a certain extent, I had a lot of respect for the way that he could let go of the control. As teachers, I feel that we all crave a bit of control – some more than others. In our defense though, we’ve all had a day in the classroom where we were unable to take control of the class and felt awful, miserable, and exhausted at the end of the day.

The kind of control we want is not the kind that students accuse us of possessing at times. We don’t want to be that teacher that is so strict and rigid that there’s no room for fun, no room for heading out doors for a walk, going in the gym to play games. We try to create a room where we are in control of the learning that takes place. I don’t feel that Mr. Chernets had control of

the learning in his classroom. Yet, his words still haunt me to this day. Am I this guy that craves the control, desires the power? In a positive way, I'd say that it's true. Do I need the control for my own egotistical, selfish ambitions? I don't believe that I do. But, I'm sure that there are others who do.

I often hear principals remark with regret that their teachers teach the way they were taught. Likewise, I had a professor in university make the comment that “you are here (in teacher education) because you enjoyed your elementary school experience”. I disagreed with that statement then, and still disagree with it now. But, after a number of years both in the classroom, and now in the office, I can understand what he was saying. The statement was not true for me, and in many ways I chose this vocation because of what I didn't like about my elementary school experience. Academically I did fine; in fact I found it easy. Socially I was well-liked and would even characterize myself as popular. But, I wouldn't say that I loved school. I chose this vocation because I wanted to see if I could do better, better than what I had learned.

When principals make the aforementioned comment, they are often lamenting the fact that their teachers are stuck doing what they do in a way that they experienced it as young students. This makes sense; if it worked for them, it must work for everyone. It's hard to get out of that mindset. I must admit that I ended up teaching in much the same way that I was taught as well, unfortunately.

In the memoir above, Mr. Chernets questioned my desire to control the teaching environment. The more I reflect on that situation, the more I believe that I indeed do often try to control the classroom situation, to exact my power over it. The following quote, also from my memoirs, sticks out to me:

“Occasionally in the education system of ours we have days that seem nearly and quite possibly pointless. I say this in a purely pedagogical or perhaps traditional academic sense. Today was one of those days”.

There is so much pressure on teachers to use classroom time efficiently. ‘Time on Task’ is a term that I learned early in my career. Although Chickering and Gamson (1987) were discussing undergraduate level learning, they claimed that “Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task”. Apparently research proves that the quantity of time spent on learning or teaching is correlated to the quantity of learning that is accomplished. How they measure that is beyond the scope of this paper, but the point is that there is significant pressure on teachers to spend their time teaching as much as they can, as efficiently as they can, in the classroom. This raises a few important questions. Can learning be measured? If it can be measured, what exactly is being measured? Are there certain types of learning that cannot be measured?

Many of these questions are addressed by Smith when he illustrates that our modern conception of education has arisen out of industrialization and military theory. (p. 46-48, 62-63, 66-68) In this view, students are treated as products that are tested for their ability to meet certain criteria, they are organized into efficient ‘batches’, as Sir Ken Robinson calls them (theRSAorg, , 2010), and teaching is structured into what resembles an assembly line. It seems to me that this is a perfect illustration of how we have endeavoured to exert power over learning – to direct, manage, supervise, and evaluate it.

I’ve always felt uneasy about this structure. And yet, I knowingly employ its methods. Palmer spends a great deal of time dealing with the idea of creating what he calls “space to learn” (p. 69-87). The following quote paraphrases nicely Palmer’s profound insight:

“To sit in a class where the teacher stuffs our minds with information, organizes it with finality, insists on having the answers while being utterly uninterested in our views, and forces us into a grim competition for grades – to sit in such a class is to experience a lack of space for learning. But to study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn – to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space.” (p. 70-71)

Creating a space to learn is not only referring to the physical space of the classroom, although this is certainly important, it is also referring to the classroom atmosphere, the teacher’s attitude, method of instruction, variation in instructing methods, demeanour, and the relationships that are fostered and nurtured among the learners. This is a tall order, but it is integral to the future of our schools. I have known instinctively for some time that students don’t respond well to competition, individualism, monotonous techniques, seat work, etc. The time has come for me to seriously ponder how I am going to change and instil change.

Marking, Judging, Reporting....Limiting

It’s three days from the last day of school. It’s the 2nd year...already. People always say to me that I must be glad that we’re winding down for the summer. I am glad, but never for the reasons that the person I’m talking to thinks I should be glad. See, I’m not happy for the fact that I don’t have to “work” for 2 months. Rather, I’m happy that this relatively meaningless part of the school year is over. It seems that starting even two weeks ago, everybody is kind of into shut down mode. Teachers are teaching taking things down from the wall and hardly doing day plans any more. On the other side, students have caught wind that we’re done writing

report cards, so they've quit doing their best on things. Sure, they humour us and pretend to work on things, but we know, we see this impatience in their eyes which says "yah, I'll let you talk, but I sure as heck am not going to remember any of this."

Perhaps a remedy to this would be to hand out report cards in the summer; write them after school is finished. I know for a fact this idea would meet with much resistance. As much as the teachers complain that the students have shut down, the teachers have too. When school ends, most teachers don't even want to stay for year-end meetings let alone write report cards. And so, even with it being a direct repercussion of our tiredness, we will continue to lose the last two weeks of school to the impatience of students and the hecticness of the year-end stuff.

In the above reflection, I seem to have been unable to wrap my head around what the answer might be to avoiding the end-of-year staleness. I must admit, that the answer seems to be right there; change our method of assessing, evaluating, judging, and reporting. It seems so simple, and yet is so entrenched in the structures of our educational system that it seems impossible to banish.

Smith summarizes my frustration when he asks "Why do we focus so much on what students fail to learn, rather than on what they are learning in its place, which may have much more significance in the students' lives?" (p. 1). This statement has flipped my assumption about evaluation on its head. I've been so focussed on what my students have *failed* to learn that I've ignored what they *have* learned. It's no wonder that there was exasperation in my writing above – I'm sure that the students were even more exasperated. Instead of continually witnessing their successes and encouraging them accordingly, I outlined their shortcomings in the form of a summative evaluation on a report card. Would this motivate me to strive to continue learning? No. So why would I expect this of my students?

Only in recent months have I also identified my unwillingness to let students question. Instead, I've always expected them to reiterate the content that I have explicated to them in the form of traditional tests, quizzes, projects, etc. If reflection is an integral aspect of the honing of my craft, then why do I avoid it entirely with students in the classroom? The following discussion board post portrays my attempt to try and foster an environment of questioning and reflection instead of answering.

I teach a little bit still and I've chosen to teach Science to a couple of grades because it's something I really enjoy teaching. I've been trying hard to get students passionate and excited about these subjects. In grade 5/6 I haven't done any traditional testing, we've only done assignments and projects. I've been wondering how the students would respond to this. Since it's a unit on body systems, I had a doctor come in a talk to the class about some of the topics. I was really impressed that when he asked the students questions, they were always able to answer them. Even something obscure that we talked about like semipermeable membranes, a student (who I didn't even think was listening!) put up her hand and answered the question. Success!

In grade 7/8, however, I decided to do an end-of-unit test for a unit on Chemistry. When we were having a review session, the students kept asking questions like: "can you say that again so I can write it down exactly as you say it?", and "is that what we should write on the test?"

I want to teach in a way that will have students asking questions that will lead them to further learning. I don't want to have them simply regurgitate what I'm telling them. And yet, I want them to know the material that we've covered so that we can go into other topics. Why do the students want to simply give answers that I've provided? Is the end-of-unit test to blame? Can I give an end-of-unit test that will foster questioning instead of regurgitating? What can I do that will help them to question more and answer less? I know that I have to give up on end-

of-unit tests as I've been doing them because all I'm really measuring them on is their ability to say what I've asked them to say.

I've been thinking about this for a few days. I think that I want to start each class with a session on questioning. Perhaps each day can have as its topic of questioning a field of science - biology, physics, etc. Or maybe such topics as oceanography, cells, etc. We'll just spend a short time asking questions, nothing more. I want to develop their ability to question instead of answer. We're working on Science Fair projects right now and they really lack the ability to come up with questions. I really think this is because all we've ever expected of them is to answer questions. (Marcus, November 14 2010)

My field trials with this have met with a variance of success. I could sense that some students were liberated by simply asking questions without fear of ridicule because of a 'strange utterance' as Palmer calls it (p. 74). As with my difficulty in asking questions instead of answering them, there were some students who had a really hard time simply questioning and not blurting answers to the questions of their peers. This also relates heavily to the section above on creating space – it is up to the teacher to create an environment where questions can be asked, a variety of answers can be sought, and where the journey of learning becomes more important than the measurable end product.

I want to include the following reflection from the discussion boards for this course. This was a response to a question about the inherent fallibility of using worksheets in one's pedagogy. The questions at the end of the post are ones that I would like to use as I guide my teachers in reflecting on their pedagogical practices, and also as I reflect on my practice as well.

In many ways I don't think that it's those particular activities themselves that are the problem. It's when they are used exclusively in tandem with other bad practices that I believe

they become problematic. If they are used exclusively it shows that the teacher thinks students learn best by having knowledge dumped into their heads - the students in this view are receptacles for information. I think it would be important, if a teacher were to decide to use worksheets, that he/she has decided consciously that this is the best way to relate this particular subject - the most efficient, not the most handy in the short term, not the easiest for the teacher to prepare for, not the one that keeps the kids quietest the longest - the best. I would think that additional questions to ask yourself before using these methods would be: does it build the sort of classroom atmosphere that I want? does it treat the students like the learners that I think they truly are? is this method the best first step, or is it a second or third step? does this activity promote engaging further in the subject or is it an end point? (Marcus, November 20 2010)

Good Teachers

I'm not sure what it would take to guarantee to myself that I'm doing a good job. There are moments when I feel successful, never full days or weeks, and definitely not full years. Should I take this course that will help me deal with and cater to and understand the learning disabled child? Will this make me a good teacher? Should I pursue my Master's? Will this increase my effectiveness in my vocation? I don't know what the answer is. Although, I suspect that the answer isn't as much in acquiring knowledge as it is in practicing. I learned more in my first year of teaching than I learned in my teacher education years. And yet, I feel so far off from being a master teacher. In some ways I don't feel like I could be that teacher. The picture in my head of the master teacher is a cold one; distant from the pupil, knowing exactly what to do in the classroom, remaining emotionally unattached to the successes, and more often, the failures of the learning day. I don't know if I want to be that teacher. I'm not that teacher.

I currently wear two hats in the school I serve. Effectively my title is Chief Operating Officer which means that I hold the responsibility of maintaining, managing, and directing the day-to-day operations of the school. Sixty percent of my week is spent performing this role (not a literal 60%!), and during the other forty percent I'm in the classroom. This is an interesting position because one of my jobs is teacher supervision and the evaluation that comes along with this. This has forced me to examine myself more closely as a teacher. It has also forced me to expand my view of what a good teacher is. It's not easy to make a judgment on a teacher's performance when I know that I don't exemplify all the characteristics of the teacher to whom I desire my teachers to aspire. I know that I'm using a lot of traditional teacher supervision terminology here, much of which I've disposed of, but it is not the scope of this paper to delve into that. In the end, this experience has encouraged me to take risks, reflect on my practice, and constantly revise bits of my pedagogy so that I can work alongside my staff in becoming consistently better teachers. Let me delve into some of the specifics of what I've come to know about good teaching.

I have developed an understanding that good teaching must be transformational in nature. The literature that I've studied has approached this word in a number of different manners, but I think that teachers bring about transformation with their students in two identifiable ways; socially and in their communities. First, they must be people who build a space in their classrooms and in their schools where students are given room to be themselves, have others shape who they are, and shape others around them. Second, good teachers need to provide opportunities for students to make their communities better.

Social Transformation

Above I spoke about my conviction that all students are learners not completely unto themselves, but in community. I also touched on the fact that all students have a context which cannot be ignored. Another way of talking about this is the idea that all students have a story that must be written and told. Kuyvenhoven (2009) devotes an entire volume to the topic of storytelling within classrooms. In it she reminds us that students must be given the space to share their stories and to hear the stories of others in order for community to be built. She says that in her experience "...classroom learning community depended on our being with each other, recognizing who each of us was, together. That happened when we told each other a story." (p. 16) In addition to the importance of understanding that community is essential to learning, the teacher must be someone who is willing to draw students into eachothers' stories so that "All children [participate] in developing the story of a particular individual and in the creation of their shared identity as a class." (Kuyvenhoven, p. 89)

The process of education must not only seek to bring students into a growing relationship with whatever subject body is being explored, but must also seek to draw students into a growing relationship with other learners. In this process of relationship-building, truth will be uncovered more clearly (or perhaps it will be muddied which will lead to even greater learning!), and learners will uncover injustices and wrongs that have been obfuscated by a variety of external factors. This is what Wink confirms when she summarizes dialogue as "change agent chatter". (p. 65) She believes that the most transformative type of dialogue is when learners take "...new knowledge and/or insights and use them for self - and social transformation." (p. 65) In my own teaching, I have been guilty of ignoring the socially transformative nature of teaching in my quest to bring a body of knowledge to the students. For this I repent and I hope that moving

ahead I can embody the meaning of growth as Hodgson states it: “Growth is not a movement toward a fixed goal; it does not have an end but is an end.” (p. 57)

Community Transformation

Just as good teachers will help students come to know themselves, shape others, and have others shape them, I have found that community is integral to this process as I have written above. In community there is brokenness, in our schools there is brokenness, and in the broader scope of our global village there is brokenness. I have wondered if it is possible to address this brokenness in our classrooms in order to extend it into the greater community and communities, and have found that it is necessary both in helping students to understand their place in God’s world, but also in helping them to be meaningful parts of a communal whole. Wink points to this in the context of critical pedagogy when she says: “The purpose of transformative education is to create processes whereby students can see that their actions do count. Students are encouraged to take the learning from the classroom and to engage locally and socially.” (p. 168)

I think that there is a plethora of ways that this could play out in the classroom. It will be a lifelong process for me to explore these ways and I will struggle with how to engage my teachers in these ideas as well. What I do know is that transformative teaching and learning of both types does not fit well within a classroom where the teacher deposits information into the heads of the learners. There won’t always be answers, but hopefully there will be many questions. Teachers will need to find ways to let go of the myth that learning can be a controlled process in a controlled environment. In the words of Wink, “Students need to have classrooms in which they are safe to take risks. In this pedagogical model, teachers shift from control of knowledge to creation of processes whereby student take ownership of their learning and take risks to understand and apply their knowledge.” (p. 147)

Transformative pedagogy is a learning process that cannot be looked at as passive. It is a process in which teachers are learners too. Hodgson wisely says: “If teachers are not themselves engaged in and transformed by the teaching process, they cannot hope to transform their students.” (p. 74) Students can quickly smell a rat, and consequently good teachers cannot be vermin.

Conclusion

There are two ways that people see teaching. There are those that see it as an excellent career choice; pretty good pay, good hours, paid holidays...and the summers! And, there are those that remember the children.

The latter realize that in any mob with children there is crying, frustration, anger, and impatience. But those of us in the profession get an everyday, first hand glimpse into one of the most intriguing, innocent, genuine phases of the human existence. We are exposed to blind faith. We are introduced to true, unhindered kindness. We are allowed to explore the psychosis of the child – why do children react the way they do to the things we do? But, the most miraculous part of our job is this: that we are given the right to, expected to, even paid to, guide, mentor, befriend, challenge, and of course teach these children through a short period of their lives, and a long part of ours.

In his chapter on transformative pedagogy, Hodgson summarizes Alfred North Whitehead when he conveys a cycle of learning that he entitles “the rhythm of education” (p. 61). In this cycle, the learner progresses through three cyclical phases in an ideal learning situation: romance, precision, and generalization. Romance is the stage where “knowledge is not dominated by systematic procedure” (Whitehead, 10, 1922), precision is the stage where we “acquire other facts in a systematic order...” (Whitehead, 12), and finally generalization “is a

return to romanticism with added advantage of classified ideas and relevant technique.”

(Whitehead, 12)

While I don't want to spend time arguing about the accuracy of Whitehead's cyclical learning process, I do want to agree with him (and others in our discussion board dialogue) that “In our conception of education we tend to confine it to the second stage of the cycle...”

(Whitehead, 11) It seems as if we're so busy trying to cover the prescribed content of our curriculum handbooks that we neglect to lead students into the romance of learning. Romance bookends both ends of Whitehead's cycle, and we generally stick to the middle. Why? Do we not know instinctively that students learn best when they are passionate, when they have been drawn fully into that which they are learning? Do we lose a significant aspect of the educational experience and indeed neglect a vast portion of the learner's soul when we start first with the content? I agree with Hodgson that the danger is that “...education will go stale if the leaven of romance and the excitement of discovery are lost.” (p. 61)

Let me conclude with the words of Mike Rose who, through reflection, found that teaching needed to be transformative and was in itself full of romance:

“Teaching, I was coming to understand, was a kind of romance. You didn't just work with words or a chronicle of dates or facts about the suspension of protein in milk. You wooed kids with these things, invited a relationship of sorts, the terms of connection being the narrative, the historical event, the balance of casein and water. Maybe nothing was ‘intrinsically interesting.’ Knowledge gained its meaning, at least initially, through a touch on the shoulder, through a conversation....” (p. 102)

One Final note on Reflection

I have discovered through my short career that reflection is integral to the betterment of my practice. Through reflection I am able to question my methods, decipher the outcome of planned activities, explore the effectiveness of my habits, etc. It has never been authentic if it has been forced on me. It needs to be an individual process. It needs to work for me. Hodgson noted that “...disciplined reflection... is also necessary if education is to reach its goal, and such reflection is only caricatured if it is represented as sitting “all day enraptured, contemplating the eternal verities.” (p. 56) Honest reflection can happen in many ways and this paper is but one of my attempts at intentionally doing so. Rarely does it take the form of meditation, or take place in solitude. Often it happens with my colleagues, or when I read a good (or bad!) book. The method is inconsequential. The truth is that for my pedagogy to continue to become increasingly transformative, I need to continue to find intentional ways to reflect on and transform my practice to revise the areas that deny students the opportunity to transform their communities and themselves socially.

References

- Chickering, A.W., Gamson, Z.F. (1987, March). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *American Association for Higher Education Bulletin*. Retrieved from <http://www.aahea.org/bulletins/articles/sevenprinciples1987.htm>
- Davis, B. (1997). Listening for differences: An evolving conception of mathematics teaching. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 28 (3) 335-376.
- Hodgson, P. C. (1999). *God's wisdom: Toward a theology of education*. Louisville, KY: New Westminster John Knox Press.
- Abraham Kuyper. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved December 14, 2010, Retrieved from <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/abrahamkuy395720.html>
- Kuyvenhoven, J. (2009) *In the presence of each other: A pedagogy of storytelling*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Marcus, P.A. (2010, November 14). RE: Wink Intro- Ch 1 Discussion. Message posted to http://knightvision.calvin.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_2_1&url=/webapps/blackboard/execute/launcher%3ftype%3dCourse%26id%3d_59499_1%26url%3d&
- Marcus, P.A. (2010, November 20). RE: Wink Ch 2. Message posted to http://knightvision.calvin.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_2_1&url=/webapps/blackboard/execute/launcher%3ftype%3dCourse%26id%3d_59499_1%26url%3d&
- Paley, V.G. (2007). On listening to what the children say. *Harvard Educational Review*, 77 (2) 152-163.
- Palmer, P. (1993) *To know as we are known*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.
- Rose, M. (1999). *Lives on the boundary*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Smith, F. (2010). *The book of learning and forgetting*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

theRSAorg. (2010, October 14). RSA Animate - Changing Education Paradigms. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>

Whitehead, Alfred North. (1922). *The rhythm of education: an address delivered to the training college association*. Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org>

Wink, J. (2010). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wolters, A. M., & Goheen, M. (2005). *Creation regained: Biblical basics for a reformational worldview*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.