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Teaching as a Reflective Practice: Orgasmial Theory and its Refutation

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Teaching as a Reflective Practice
Orgasmial Theory and its Refutation

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in TESOL degree at
SIT Graduate Institute,
Brattleboro, Vermont.

October 16, 2012

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Abstract

An interdisciplinary study examining teaching as a reflective practice with special emphasis on expanding the underlying factors of constructing and maintaining an empowering learning environment, as well as the need for and development of “transformative integrity” as part of a proactive teaching praxis.

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Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Teacher Attitudes. Teacher Characteristics. Teacher Effectiveness. Teacher Responsibility. Instructional Improvement. Teaching Methods. Cultural Inter-relationships. Intercultural Communication.

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Equilibrium is a key characteristic to the orientation and effective functioning of engaging, transformative activities. Equipose and entropy, euphony and concinnity are all dynamic states tending toward ‘completeness’ and ‘cooperative actualization,’ whether that be in the form of the miraculous operation of living organisms, the effectiveness—or not—of “complex” (Ottino, 2003) adaptive systems (i.e., physical, economic, socio-political), the interconnectedness and interdependence of our communities, and most certainly learning in the classroom. The search for “wholeness” (Merton, 1989) and application of its dynamic functionality naturally embraces the process of self-knowledge: an understanding of our individual socio-cultural makeup that precedes awareness and cognitive manifestation. Equally, the “foundation” of good teaching lies in helping educators “develop a sense of self-awareness” (Baum & King, 2006, p. 217). For how can a teacher stimulate discovery and inspire learning when he himself has failed to embrace the excellence and personal striving he so eagerly hopes for from his students? How can his students be encouraged to construct ‘meaning’ when he has failed to do so out of his own lived experience? How as educators can teachers promote authenticity, respect individuality, and inform cultural identity when they have neglected that very process? Opening the doors of learning cannot predictably occur simply by command or delivery of facts, but as a deliberate journey teacher and student engage in together prompted by ‘facilitation’—not by edict (Stevick, 1980). This active, adaptive, non-linear development, i.e., the “intrapyschological” (Vygotsky, 1978) process of cognition that leads to collaboration and the eventual “transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes” (Palincsar, 2005, p. 288) of mutual learning, is a key aspect of what

will be referred to in this paper as “transformative integrity.” As John Dewey pointed out, “Education is growth. Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

The need for awareness and understanding of a reflective teaching practice by educators has never been more important. Today, education faces a foray of problems that are formidable and manifold. First and foremost are the social challenges directly affecting youth and their families nurtured by the tribulations and ‘wellness factors’ of society. There is also a divergent set of conflicts and inconsistencies including the “business of education,” advances and social integration of technology, as well as the continuing debate on curricula and teaching approaches. Often, teachers become distracted by the responsibilities of their lives and pulled ‘off course.’ Over time, these short missteps can lead the educator to become environmentally consumed and ultimately fail to fulfill his purpose and vocation. Most acute is the matter of “dividedness” (Palmer, 2004)—an antipodal quality to performance that prevents the creation of a safe and supportive classroom culture of learning and discovery.

This paper seeks to understand and investigate the process of transformative integrity as it is applied in the classroom. Not from a macro-institutional perspective involving policy and philosophy, but at an individual level where the fertile soil that serves as the classroom together with the expertise and compassion of the teacher as gardener-guide bear the greatest affect on nurturing the seedlings of his vocation. In other words, to look at a key component that contributes to that process specifically as it is formed, facilitated and fostered by the educator in his/her daily work.

The paper is broken down into three parts: the teacher as an inspiring and compassionate force; the classroom as a sacred and defensible temple of learning; the activity of teaching as a reflective practice—its application and framework for development.

Inspiration as a basis for learning is a subject that is widely acknowledged and investigated by a number of writers including Angela C. Baum, Samuel Horsley, Margaret A. King, Parker J. Palmer, Plato and John Jacques Rousseau among others.

Strategies for creating a living, motivational, humanistic laboratory of learning have been developed and explored by many teachers and scholars comprising in part John Dewey, Caleb Gattegno, John Holt, Jean Piaget, Earl Stevick, Marcia Taylor and Lev S. Vygotsky.

Teaching as a reflective practice is a relatively new subject in the field of modern educational research. Leading investigators who have provided insightful developmental work with strong application potentialities include Ann Brown, Michael Cole, Nick Gould, Deanna Kuhn, Sharon Nelson-LeGall, Lauren B. Resnick, Barbara Rogoff, Donald A. Schon and Imogen Taylor.

It is hoped that this research will not only bring additional light to an important and growing field of study, but will also allow those of us who teach to revisit and reinvest ourselves—regularly and vigilantly—in one of the most important activities of professional development. For it is not only the technical skills and knowledge of our subject which most empowers us as educators but the visceral capacity to journey inward and penetrate our “own inner darkness” and lead our students to a place of “‘hidden wholeness’... because we have been there and know the way” (Palmer, 2000, pp. 79–81).

Chapter 1: Teacher as Catalyst

"I am not a teacher but an awakener."—Robert Frost

The word “teacher” is a universal semantic form. While meaning can shift between contexts, its modern-day definition denotes a person who engages in “the activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skill” (Miller, 2009).

Historically as well as cross-culturally, teaching recurrently distinguishes itself from rudimentary forms of purely informational dissemination by its development of learners’ congenital faculties of discernment, reason and intellection (separately from the familiarity with common scientific and practical truths) culminating with the insightful application of cognitive learning—i.e., *sapience*—in concert with both its quality of action and guidance on gaining the capacity to facilitate such use.

This didactic position was observed as far back as the founding of the first institution of higher learning in the Western world: “As in education, a change of state has to be effected” (Plato, trans. 2006, p. 83). Hence, learning implies more than basic erudition: It stipulates “the selection of the right ends as well as of the right means” (Webster, 1913, p. 1478). The task of a teacher, therefore, must include the union of both mental and moral excellence as well as thought coupled with deed—where learning is more than the apprehension of facts and relationships: where learning purports action and action is directed by it. Therein lies the focal point—or more precisely *stationary point*—to this dynamic, quasi differential equation of applying and manifesting higher knowledge and/or acquired “experience.” The functioning of this deterministic model emphasizes *qualitative values* whose set of functions include “teaching and learning as transformation.” From here, teachers can lead

students “to form conceptual lenses through which they can examine their work, their lives, and their world in a new way, empowered by relevant facts, critical thinking, and scholarly exploration” (Kelley, 2009, para. 1).

Toward this end, the teacher serves as a ‘catalyst’ to initiate, accelerate and precipitate an event (or sequence thereof) to unite the learner with deeper levels of understanding. Naturally, this presumes both interest and intention together with the translation and a transferability of ideas, personal conceptions and preconceptions, values and other life-changing approaches leading to critical, transformative, and perhaps even contradictory change. Unsurprisingly this process occurs more manageably in an environment that is most compatible with a student’s individual learning style, temperament and worldview. Here, it is not the duty of learners to convince themselves of any particular advantage or promise of improvement, but rather the teacher’s task to openly make the opportunity for change a possibility while clarifying the ways this change can occur—if needed. Appropriately, this process begins with the “subordination of teaching to learning” (Gattegno, 1970, p. 9) where a teacher must act as a facilitator and not a barrier to transformation.

Removing the barriers to learning is a dynamic and environmentally sensitive process. Its approaches are well researched and bring a plethora of substantiated classroom methodologies including socio-cultural approaches. The ‘intrapersonal’ aspect, however, is explored less extensively, but its results are potentially richer and more effective to the unlocking and entering of a reactive, responsive and ultimately receptive garden of learning. Uniting, merging, complementing, and synergizing are all concordant shifts describing this process of eliminating the ‘barriers of dividedness’ in both the intrapersonal

and professional lives of the teacher. Accordingly, learning and growth begin with an awareness of these equilibric shifts.

This process of “awakening” described by Gattegno consists of four defined tasks (Gattegno, 1970, pp. 84–97): “The first is *to become a person* who knows himself and others as persons”—who possesses a will, uniqueness, and the ability to change; the second task is an acceptance and inner awareness of truth as well as one’s ability to perceive, experience and trust in it; the third task of a teacher is finding out “*how knowing becomes knowledge*”—first in himself, then in others; the fourth and final task is the “economy of learning,” of placing a value on people’s time and using this time to precipitate an experience “which when accumulated, becomes growth” that prepares both teacher and student for future undertakings and challenges.

It would be natural to assume that a person who becomes and works as a teacher does so because he or she enjoys the occupation and is good at it, and thereupon would first direct himself *in the way he should go* before he would instruct others (Buddha, trans. 1921). As a professional vocation grounded in (and at times gripped by) standards, policies, qualifications and credentials, one would also believe that institutions as well as communities would invariably engage the most capable teachers that they can afford—to nurture, inform and illuminate the young, impressionable minds of their children, future citizens and leaders. But this is clearly not the case everywhere or at all times. The agenda varies, as do the ‘outward’ and ‘inner’ missions of institutions and their guiding bodies.

In the ESL¹ world, as an example, programs, principles and teachers are diverse and even distinctly dissimilar in their critical practices and orientations. As a result, the specialized

capabilities and ongoing professional development of teachers together with their individual approaches to teaching collectively occupy an even more crucial and central place in constructing meaningful, humanistic and productive learning environments:

“Teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal—or keep them from learning much at all. Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions, and good teaching requires that we understand the inner sources of both the intent and the act.” (Palmer, 1998, p. 6)

Unfortunately, there are cases within these settings where the affinities of an instructor are more closely aligned with covering the major recreational ‘sites’ of the host country and its neighboring environs during the contract period in lieu of providing quality education. Also, such underpinnings allow little time for deep, thoughtful, reflective practice—a preparation and procedure for bringing spiritual equanimity and vitality to a teacher’s pedagogical activities.

Seen as mindset and motivation, a deeper, more concrete set of questions surfaces: Can a teacher without his heart in his profession be a good teacher? Can a person with little or no sense of identity be a transformative catalyst that leads to learning and growth? Can an educator lacking in skill and knowledge of the subject he teaches fulfill his required role? What of the instructor who derisively shows up unprepared and spiritually absent—can he be an effective force? The answer is, in truth, ‘No!’ because “we teach who we are,” and teaching, “like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2). We cannot know our students if we do not know ourselves. In such circumstances learning will not be inspired, or knowledge perpetuated because the powers and distractions from the outside will exclude the teacher from developing his own

“authority” and voice of identity, and preclude the utility of his inner resources and the integrity of the “teacher within” rising from his own “experiments with truth” (Gandhi, 1993). Only when students—and not *diversionary* “sites”—are at the center of the process can a good teacher be conceived and created. Teaching with “human heart” and a focus on student needs and learning must be central to the present and future of the professional educator. Its vocation must be compassionately lived for, continually developed, and committed to fully in order to overcome situational impediments and achieve better than cursory results that meet arbitrarily set minimum standards. Wislawa Szymborska, winner of the 1996 Nobel Prize in literature, expressed it this way:

“There is, has been, and will always be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits. It’s made up of all those who’ve consciously chosen their calling and do their job with love and imagination...Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it.” (Szymborska, 1996)

Life giving transformation follows such integrity. Ignoring, or worse denying, the deep yearnings of our identities inflicts violence on ourselves and on those we come into contact with.

Engagement and growth occur in time, often through processes that are non-linear, creative and mysterious. *Changing time into transformative, meaningful experience becomes the primary role of a teacher.* Developing this competency is a vital and necessary activity to be undertaken along with the challenging task of un-severing and expanding one’s consciousness of self and world. If not made part of a regular teaching practice, ‘dividedness’ occurs and classroom learning suffers.

This scenario, of course, presumes that the educator is directed and motivated to create a life-laboratory of learning. That he or she possesses the professional skills and knowledge as well as discipline to follow and “respond to the voice of his inward teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 33). As we will see in the chapter that follows, that both process and concordance of classroom environment prevail.

Chapter 2: Defending the Learning Environment

“...we must become conscientious objectors to the forces that put us at war with ourselves, assaulting our identity and integrity, violating the sanctity of our souls.”—Parker J. Palmer

Had Archimedes been a teacher rather than a mathematician, his assertion, “Give me a place to stand on, and I can move the earth” (Archimedes, trans. 1953, p. xix) would likely be repeated and effusively put to use. His fulcrum would imply a classroom, and his lever—the frontier of his stewardship. As an accomplished engineer, he would conceivably demand a firm and immovable pivot point from where he might successfully transport any weight or worldly measure.

Teaching, like physics, is a study and general analysis of nature. A discipline covering the phenomena of mind, emotion and spirit across space-time. This journey of consciousness represents both the realization and transcendental nature of our being. Like scientists, an important component of our work as teachers involves framing our ‘universe.’ Not simply imposing conditions, but protections to insure that our purposes can be carried out and the visions of our students realized. “It would therefore seem reasonable to suppose that there are also laws governing the boundary conditions” (Hawking, 1993, p. 327).

Describing and delineating learning environments, schools, and educational institutions may lead to interpreting the teaching profession in physical terms when in reality a “classroom” may consist of nothing more than an open field and sunny firmament overhead where imagination and creativity are the principal tools for bringing about meaningful, transformative learning. Even a blackboard and chalk are optional. (Anderson, J. B., personal communication, spring 2009)

Notwithstanding, determining with precision the bounds, limits and demarcation lines of behavior inside the class space and, as equally significant, the level of influence and degree of involvement of outside actions, agendas and agencies is a foundation stone to invincible teaching. Consequently, defining and defending the learning environment is of major importance to all educators.

A classroom in many ways is not unlike a ‘cell’ in a living organism. Both microcosms represent fundamental elements of activity and organization within a larger structured body. Cells, ordinarily, are similar to each other, but not identical (Barrett, Brooks, Boitano, & Barman, 2010); (correspondingly, classrooms may appear alike on the exterior—but inside their functioning and practices can vary greatly. In addition, cells as well as classrooms are fairly self-contained and self-maintaining. They each carry out specialized functions and, perhaps most consequential of all, *they perform metabolic activities, i.e., operations that involve change, transformation, metamorphosis*. It follows that by studying the functioning of healthy cells, “the smallest structural and functional units exhibiting all fundamental properties and manifestations of life” (Sitte, 1992, p. S1), it may be possible to gain greater insight into some of the distinguishing characteristics that foster an effective, life-giving classroom.

As “building blocks of life” (Weeks & Alcamo, 2008), cells can tell us much about the natural processes of growth and development. For example, an examination of cellular architecture reveals, in part, an extraordinarily secure environment where vital functions, i.e., biochemical processes key to cellular activity, can be assiduously carried out. These conditions are assisted to a large extent by a miraculous and critical structure that surrounds the cell: an ordering of layers referred to as the *cell envelope*. The attributes of this casing are many: the membrane/wall separates the interior of the cell from its outer environment and acts as a barrier against exterior forces; it allows for the passing of some substances and the exclusion of others thereby serving as a custodial filter; its permeability is self-regulated and can be varied; it permits communication between cells; it gives rigidity to the cell; it prevents the cell from expanding and finally bursting (cytolysis) from osmotic pressure against a hypotonic environment—essentially, an imbalance between the cell and its outer world (Maton, 1997).

It is also worth noting that many diseases can be investigated and interpreted on the basis of cellular disorders (Sitte, 1992). Thus, a disruption in cellular function such as loss of ‘wholeness,’ equilibrium, and general inviolability sparks violence and inflicts harm on the cell and its constituents as well as on the integrity of the larger organism. The same can be said of the classroom. For example, when respect for instruction, the teacher or fellow classmates becomes lost or ‘misplaced,’ learning suffers.

In comparing cells to educational settings, the following parallels and conclusions can be made:

1. A classroom, like a cell, is likely to benefit by maintaining a surrounding fold that separates the intracellular components from the extracellular environment. The *outer*

layer will not only serve as a protective skin but exoskeletal body that will shape the cell giving it form and adding utilitarian function. Classroom application and advantages can include safeguarding learning from defeatist policies, harmful gossip, institutional conflicts and controversy, dissention among faculty as well as general negativity and indifference. Any type of 'distraction' that curtails learning, takes away from student expectations, creates fear, lessens confidence, disrespects cultural norms, disfavors identity and individuality, leads to aggression or destructive and depletive tendencies *needs* to be identified, carefully evaluated and, if necessary, barred from the learning space.

2. Building—and defending—this kind of educational complex using values and norms that let teaching speak and learning be heard plays a mechanical-supportive role the same way the cell wall does (i.a., more than just a selective boundary). Not only does this allow the two ecosystem-like entities to fulfill a set of functional roles, such as sensing and regulating to equipoise with their outside worlds, but also provide a working structure to erect a cytoskeleton, a system “that not only maintains the structure of the cell but also permits it to change, shape and move” (Barrett et al, 2010, p. 35). The anchored cytoskeleton, or dynamic *inner scaffolding skeleton* that provides, maintains and protects cell shape and functionality from an intracellular perspective, operates and interacts extensively and intimately with cellular membranes much the same way a teacher’s class culture facilitates its intra-class responsibilities and extra-class roles (Doherty & McMahon, 2008). This can include humanistic, constructivist and student-centered practices as well as socio-cultural elements that encourage and advance learning.

3. The existence of a differentially permeable ‘margin’ or ‘perimeter’ able *externally* to regulate what enters a cell or classroom, and *internally* support the cultural delimitations of the classroom is needed for the survival of both entities.

There exist a number of other processes that parallel cellular and classroom functions such as cellular morphogenesis and expression, intercellular competition and differentiation theory, as well as the transmission of hereditary information (DNA) to the next generation of cells necessary for regulating cell functions and survival (Manton, 1997). The implication and consequences of these analogous orientations far exceed just inherent biological values and include characteristic tendencies towards self-regulation, stimulus, self-choice, growth, non-intrusion and autonomy. This intrinsic biological wisdom emphasizes ‘humanistic’ elements and the need for non-interference and passive cooperation in lieu of forceful control and manipulation. For example, in prescribing what is best for a learner, is it not better to get him to tell us what is best for him? Having the belief that the subjective state of a learner (or an organism) is a good guide for what is needed for itself has, at the very least, to be a notion that should be receptively considered (Maslow, 1971). Thus, cellular functionality as an operational metaphor could evolve as a practical model that can be studied and used to develop effective classroom methodologies as well as a compelling argument for the natural defense—internally as well as externally—of the classroom. It may also serve as a first-rate indicator of the quality, direction and path learning can take in a heuristic setting.

Lastly, a claim may be made regarding the creation of a ‘prerequisite envelope,’ much the same as certain educators, administrators as well as students have criticized the merits of a student-centered learning environment where unless teachers drive students to learn they

will not do so: “ ‘students will simply not engage themselves.’ So many people have said to me, ‘If we didn’t make children do things, they wouldn’t do anything.’ Even worse, they say, ‘If I weren’t made to do things, I wouldn’t do anything.’ ” (Holt, 1982, p. 113). But simply ‘filling a pail’ by a one-way ‘forced’ teaching of information is neither a definitive approach nor all-embracing solution.

In a case involving teacher-delimited classrooms, disapproval, even censure, is likely to be harsher than in the scenario concerning student-centered learning, as the teacher can be viewed as placing himself in a position ‘superior’ to the local ‘regulating’ authority. This point cannot be argued. But neither can it be amended: Dominative influence involving teaching is less about hierarchy of operation and self-worth, and more about duty and transformation. Teachers exist to serve students and their learning. And institutions—for the primary purpose of infrastructure and support to teachers as well as students.

Unfortunately, ignorance, egocentrism and, at times, appropriation and fraud attempt to polarize and systemically invert this state of affairs. “Orgasmial theory”² or the like may be used as justification and a basis for such action. Ultimately, however, the teacher on the frontlines knows the situation and his students best. Nevertheless, what can result from hierarchical predominance is a violation of teachers’ identities and the integrity of their classrooms.

In the end, teachers have a job to do. And if they are unable or prevented from carrying out their role as an educator in an effective and responsible way, it becomes necessary to find a venue that more closely supports their practices and shares their values as teachers and as human beings—where the ‘chemistry’ of the teacher animates with the collegiate environment of the instructional institution. There is no substitute for an empowering

collegiate setting. And its existence is vital to its faculty, student body, and most assuredly to its resident community.

Classrooms, like institutions, are meant to be sacred places of learning: temples of knowledge, growth and social development; and centers for mankind's creative, intellectual and spiritual activities. Having committed and compassionate teachers who teach with heart, and classrooms with thriving, independent cultures focused on learning and the human spirit are key components of the educational process and to *transformative integrity*—a process of facilitating learning, personal growth and vocational wholeness by honoring the call and integrity of the inner life.

In the next chapter, the subject of *collegiate community* and its role as part of a reflective teaching practice will be explored in greater detail.

Chapter 3: The Meaning of a Reflective Practice

"You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself."

—Galileo Galilei

What is reflection and why is its engagement so critical a factor to good teaching?

One answer:

"As important as methods may be, the most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it. The more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching—and living—becomes." (Palmer, 1998, p. 5)

If accurate, this response gives rise to a further set of questions:

"How can schools educate students if they fail to support the teacher's inner life? To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of

seeing and being in the world. How can schools perform their mission without encouraging the guides to scout out that inner terrain?" (Palmer, 1998, p. 6)

As light allows the eye to discover things before it that are hidden, reflection enlightens the mind. It can cast light, create perspective, provide a sense of proportion, give depth and yield insight. A critical function of this 'process' is not only the addition of clarity, but also the resulting connections and relationships that become perceptible by the 'throwing back' of deeper cognitive content comprising 'intelligible intuitions' and *a posteriori* orientations:

"[While] all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows, that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself." (Kant, trans. 1855, p. 1)

Thus, a reflective practice that provides intuitive distinctions as well as an understanding of the deeper processes of our work and inner life via personal perception (viz. transcendental elements) and social experience creates an awareness into the origins, interdependencies, paradoxes, consequences and sequences of best serving students' learning needs.

Viewed in this way, a successful approach to teaching involves more than instructional methodologies and the communicating of 'facts'—it also includes professional inquiry, self-study, synthesis, the search for hidden truths, encounters with personal fears and failures, motivation and invocation together with an emerging and enlarging sense of identity. As sentient and rational beings, people come to know by connecting, not disconnecting. Like classroom learning, reflection is a conjunctive contemplative phenomenon that, as will later be shown, also finds efflorescence in a collaborative collegiate setting.

Fundamentally, reflection is an exercise in *being* what we are (by being *what* we are, we acknowledge *who* we are). It is a way of looking at the divided lives we lead as individuals through an imperfect, clouded, and sometimes-cracked lens. It does not profess perfection, but “it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life” (Palmer, 2004, p. 5).

In his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, Parker Palmer (2004, p. 6) describes a personal pathology that leads to a divided life:

- We refuse to invest ourselves in our work, diminishing its quality and distancing ourselves from those it is meant to serve
- We make our living at jobs that violate our basic values, even when survival does not absolutely demand it
- We remain in settings or relationships that steadily kill off our spirits
- We harbor secrets to achieve personal gain at the expense of other people
- We hide our beliefs from those who disagree with us to avoid conflict, challenge, and change
- We conceal our true identities from fear of being criticized, shunned, or attacked

This pathology of failing to answer the call of our soul leads to a single conclusion: when we “are here unfaithfully,” we are “causing terrible damage,” (Rumi, trans. 1998, p. 161) not only to ourselves, but to everyone and everything we touch.

By reclaiming our selfhood (disabling illusions and negative projections), a type of “best response” (Myerson, 1996) emerges that allows the fulfillment of our potential concurrently with an ability to meet the temporal demands placed on us in a wholly, unimpaired and faithful way—in the world we live in, and to the students we serve. By penetrating the darkness and stepping out from the shadows, we are able to *illuminate* and fulfill our role of authentic service and stewardship. Therefore, in reply to the question prorogated earlier, “How can schools educate students if they fail to support the teacher’s inner life?” is reparteed: How can schools *not* support what is perhaps the most essential

issue educators face today in facilitating learning, and a key instrument that the institutions themselves can utilize in developing their academic workforce?

Reflection Defined

Reflection as a study of consciousness dates to Plato and Aristotle (Boring, 1953). “Introspection” originates as observation and reporting where the mind studies its own processes and progresses to advanced forms of *metacognition* including the development of “strategies for learning and problem solving” (Shamrock, 2007, p. 262). Metacognition as a construct can be conceptualized as the dawning awareness of young children at one end of the developmental progression that “eventuates in complex metaknowing capabilities that many adults do not master. During its extended developmental course, metacognition becomes more explicit, powerful and effective” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 178). As higher-order thinking emerges, existing understandings are coordinated with new conceptions and insights; broadened cognitive knowledge (declarative, procedural) is readily acquired (Kuhn & Pearsall, 2000). Meta level awareness (an individual’s awareness about his level of awareness) and “metastrategic knowing” (Kuhn, 1999) serve as enhanced feedback and evaluation mechanisms that contribute (through a repertory of multiple approaches of varying adequacy) to the revising and reselection of strategic predispositions as well as to the eventual modification and overall enhancement of performance models.

Coexercising, i.e., integrating group work into a reflective practice, also has demonstrated the capability to increase awareness, promote learning and build certainty. Brown is among a number of researchers who has followed this approach. Her “community of learners” curriculum specifies “the development of a discourse genre in which constructive

discussion, questioning, querying, and criticism are the mode rather than the exception. In time, these reflective activities become internalized as self-reflective practices” (Brown, 1997, pp. 399–413). Over the past thirty years, other researchers like Cole (2003), Resnick/Nelson-Legal (1997), and Rogoff (1998) have investigated and applied their own repertoires of knowledge predominantly within the domain of “metacognition” targeted toward the development of student-applied frameworks. What these investigators offer is a community-based perspective focusing on critical thinking and intellectual skills as they are practiced and shared within a social setting. And while not specifically centered on a reflective practice as it is applied here, the developmental subject matter is readily identifiable, rich in content and legitimately capable of being used as reference and/or embarkation points for future investigative efforts. The development of a personal reflective teaching practice incorporating these cognitive competencies and social practices, therefore, is a grounded approach that can powerfully assist in furthering knowledge in this area.

Cultivating the tools of a reflective practice that allow educators to fully actualize their teaching competencies in the classroom is less a lofty goal than fundamental one:

“There would seem few more important accomplishments than people becoming aware of and reflective about their own thinking and able to monitor and manage the ways in which it is influenced by external sources, in both academic, work, and personal life settings.” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 181)

Thus, if we are to see students become rigorous, independent critical thinkers as a result of their education, teaching that incorporates a reflective practice component must become an essential personal as well as institutional goal. Interestingly, while there exists a

“burgeoning” critical thinking movement, little has been developed with regard to a reflective teaching practice.³

Given this import, why would an activity of such significance—its practice and the nature of its development—not be deliberated upon through extensive and systematic inquiry? A possible explanation is that relevant research is either nonexistent or untranslatable into practice. Even if accurate, this rationalization is not universally inclusive as other areas of academic study such as psychology (metacognition) and philosophy (introspection, epistemology) have copiously explored and empirically investigated this field with researchers in recent years paying increasing attention to the relevance of putting their findings into practice.

One possible explanation for this difference in study is that unlike applications in psychology and philosophy, introspection does not fall within the traditional purview of a developmental teaching approach because it is not—at least in modern times—a traditional developmental phenomenon. In other words, it does not evidence the robust age-related sequence of competencies that researchers have identified in psychology and philosophy. Nevertheless, thinking in any age within any discipline should be sound and rigorous, and free from fallacies and impediments.

For these reasons, the inclusion of a reflective teaching practice (as a tool applied within the framework of understanding and fostering classroom learning) is seen as a significant and relevant addition to curriculum design at all levels and within all specialties of education. Furthermore, it is proposed that the heuristic teaching movement with its emphasis on experiential learning and problem-based techniques has much to gain from a developmental conceptualization of this field of study—a perspective that has been largely

absent (though there is a growing knowledgebase of reflective practice research to draw upon). Moreover, an evolving conceptualization has implications for what is perhaps the most pressing practical issue in current efforts to practice a reflective practice—the fact that gains most often do not generalize beyond the immediate instructional context.

So what makes up a reflective teaching practice? What are its components? What could entail an elementary framework that an educator can build upon?

Perhaps, an outline of the author's personal method can serve as a representative illustration. First of all, the practice carries meaning and utility. It is structured, yet supportive of spontaneity. It has consistency and regularity. It is written down, and it evolves. It is approached with openness and daily discipline. It is both a consequence and a dynamic cause of classroom interchange and student involvement as well as metered 'Wow!'—responsiveness and influence. Reflection also acts as a retrospective reconsideration of the 'weather conditions' of the day's *vibe* including the larger overriding trends that are brewing and certain to impact (directly or indirectly) future learning.

The "experiential learning cycle" (Kolb, 1984) (> concrete experience > reflective observation > abstract conceptualization > active experimentation >) serves as a reliable model of how a reflective practice can be approached and undertaken. In my case, morning *rumination* initiates as "reflective observation" that serves to focus my cognitive state, and act as an anchor that centers me for the day's duties and responsibilities. This stage is followed up by a more formal process of "abstract conceptualization" that reliably exists as one of the most creative and intuitive periods of the day that actualizes as a stream of expressionistic rendering of ideas, frameworks, directions and solutions to daily activities as well as longer-term undertakings and challenges. As sensitivities and thinking move

from the habitats of a larger unified cognitive configuration to patterns of individual elements, acuity moves from awareness to intention.

“Active experimentation” as applied here is as an inner process of mentally and emotionally preparing for teaching. It includes conceptualization, objectification, rehearsal, realization, visualization and extrication—all elements that assist in absolving my interior of any distractive thoughts or noxious feelings. “Concrete experience” is now ready to begin.

After each class, dedicated time is spent in personal reflection in the form of journal writing. This often consists of a description of activities and personal feelings as well as the compiling of written observations on individual students including concerns with larger existent issues pressing in on classroom learning. This return to the stage of “reflective observation” serves as a balanced examination of what transpired and what didn’t, and acts as an important springboard in preparing for the next class. In tandem with a “community” element, these activities collectively represent the essential components and sequence of my personal reflective practice.

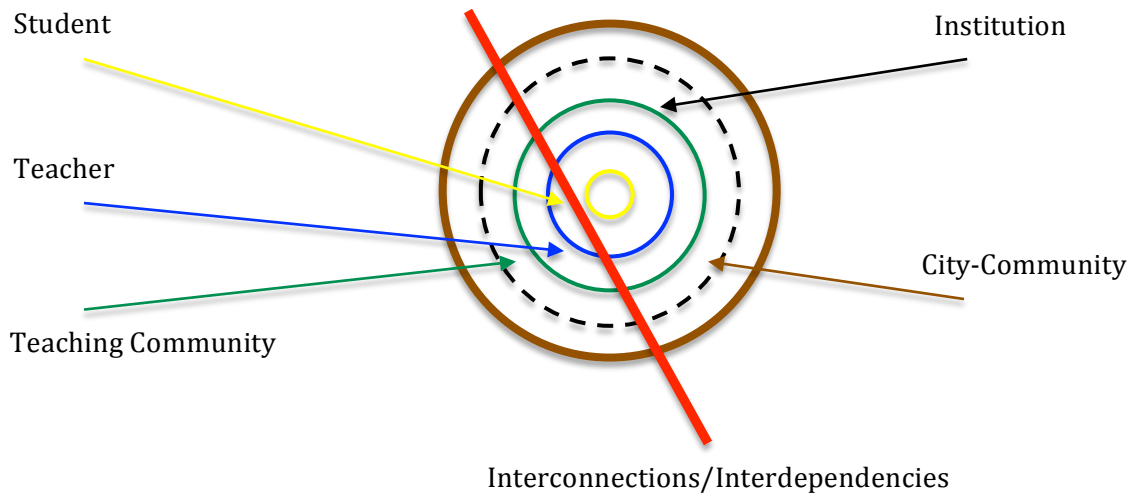
The addition of a community or ‘collegiate’ aspect is not only a critical factor in my teaching, but sensibly a fundamental feature part of any reflective practice—without it, I would be far less effective and capable a teacher. In my present circumstances, *collegiality* includes regular (i.e., daily) one-on-one talks with a trusted and similarly directed colleague. Through the forum of “spiritual friendship,” a variety of issues and themes such as classroom strategies, insights into students, solutions to learning problems, new initiatives, working through general dysfunction and overcoming cultural challenges can circulate and be openly addressed in non-abstract and non-denigratory ways. What

predictably results in clarity and receptivity to deeper processes and levels of understanding to hurdles which were only partially escalated earlier. Such awareness can be ascribed to an environment that is safe, supportive and sacred.

Ideally, collegiality comprises the larger community and draws on its interconnectedness and interdependence of people and culture using a prescribed set of non-evasive modalities and interactive conventions. On the subject of these experiential encounters, research has shown that more effective cooperation between teachers in an instructional body leads to superior teaching and ultimately better learning (see Blase (1987), Johnson/Johnson (1995) and Deutsch (2006)).

Practical Applications of Vygotskian Theory

In educational settings supporting a student-centered approach, a non-traditional hierarchical model of shared antecedence can be conventionalized as follows:



The diagram depicts the student as the center and primary focus of the construction encircled by the teacher who in turn is supported by his or her collegiate community. The

administrative support of the institution can be found as an outer ring with the larger “City-Community” context as the furthestmost band. Priority and sequence are important and symbolic functions. But the immediacy of each ring as well as their matrix of interconnections also play a key role in the dynamic functioning of this educational organizational model.

Similarly, when describing the nature and activities of a collegiate community engaged in a reflective practice, the following factors should be considered:⁴

1. Members of the community gather together out of their own volition, not through outside pressures or by official mandate.
2. Trust and confidentiality are respected as cornerstones of all group activities.
3. Mission is defined as helping individuals find their own answers through the support of the community. To get clarification—not instructive counsel.
4. A facilitator should be appointed. Participants are expected to stay ‘on topic’ and be wholly intent on *why* they are there.
5. Differences (i.e., cultural) are to be embraced and respected.
6. Creating an inviting physical setting is encouraged.

It is important to note that the development of a community as well as an individual reflective practice is flexibly prescribed. Their activities and outcomes must be personal and immediate to one’s lived experience. Only then can they help to ground the educator in reality, and open new inroads into teaching.

To reaffirm, the interactive process of generating and framing experience brings greater meaning to the teacher’s personal and professional life. Most notably, it has a profound affect on teacher approach and in teacher-student interaction. As an instrument to

'constructive' learning and effective change, it stimulates perception and develops awareness through a cycle of discovery, growth and "intelligent action" (Dewey, 2005). Metastrategic and critical thinking skills eventually play key supporting roles.

In closing, it is worth mentioning that the processes outlined in this chapter could conceivably aid teachers in culturally diverse and culturally challenged situations. Not only can their practice assist in understanding more complex and less familiar aspects of the target environment, but also potentially be utilized in navigating through the difficulties of overcoming issues of cultural marginality (Bennett, 1993). Additionally, through constructive use, an understanding of one's individual socio-cultural makeup that precedes awareness and cognitive manifestation (as suggested by social-cultural theory) may demonstrate viability in the interchange between teachers and their collegiate communities as successfully as it does in classroom settings. The same applies to the assimilative "ends-means" methodologies part of the Participatory Approach of literacy acquisition, where group environments allow participants to address concerns and derive meaningful content (i.e., metacognitive awareness) through a "collective dialogue" of exploration and evaluation of life-based concerns that in the end lead to change and the reshaping of reality through informed and motivated action (Auerbach, 1992).

Conclusion

It has been said that self-knowledge is only possible by doing, not through reflection (Goethe, 1879). Perhaps, in some cases, this is true. But *doing* for the educator is often not possible, practical, or productive until he is cognizant of what will best facilitate learning at a particular place and point in time. In short, excellence in teaching cannot occur until the

teacher is one with the classroom: in a state of cooperative actualization with his students, and of equipoise with himself.

In this paper, *transformative integrity*, a process for achieving this corollary of cognizant experience, was presented and compendiously explained as a process of self- and social-transformation. Its realization—evidenced by letting our lives speak honestly through our vocation and an *inner wholeness* arrived at by engaging in a reflective teaching practice—yielded an integral theorem where identity plus integrity equals learning. Likewise, students were also shown to benefit under this paradigm as inner work and its operation become the meeting point of core classroom-related activities—teacher facilitation, student application, teacher-student collaboration.

Over the course of writing this paper, it became clear that the initial notion of investigating a reflective teaching practice represented scarcely one facet of a larger study: what came to light was a set of obstacles and delinquencies the author began solving existent in his current teaching environment as well as a curt, yet deeply intensive personal look into the major currents guiding and feeding the author's professional life.

In some ways, this zetetic undertaking represents just one leg of a longer journey. And this makes sense not only from a personal perspective, but also from an investigative one as more extensive and concentrated study is required to better understand and effectuate the aims and processes explicated herein. Inquiry, therefore, is undeniably far from complete. Nevertheless, this paper has attempted to bring greater awareness to what a reflective practice is and means; and to advance a developmental framework that can be applied and later modified by practicing teachers in their classrooms where further

exploration of these perceptions can prepare a way for earlier attainments to assist later ones.

So what does it mean to be proficient in reflection, and how does this competence manifest itself? What are the component skills or fractional states of its application that a teacher might review, analyze and progress in? How can this process be measured? These are some of the questions best answered in a future work where a broader base of empirical knowledge can be generated and used to address these queries apart from the current investigative strategies that are largely and imperfectly driven by belief and shared experience. Notwithstanding, a more extensive cross-discipline inquiry can and should be undertaken—especially as a means to invest literature that until now has remained unconnected but nevertheless shares a common concern with reflective practices and indicates a consistency in terms of predictable working models and frameworks (i.e., metacognitive understanding, critical thinking, introspection practices, counseling and therapeutic modalities, coaching and mentoring, problem solving intersections). Preliminary findings by a number of investigators discussed earlier confirm this supposition.

Research, however, is but one part of the process: the development of facilitating skills that support and embody these first order cognitive competencies is a crucial joint step. And with the evolution of knowledge and its practiced application are likely to result more detailed and defined educational objectives irrepressibly accompanied by wider use.

In addition to popular support and the increased participation from capable teachers, collaboration with the educational organization is of no less importance. In the former case, fear, stagnation, closed-mindedness/objectivity, rebellion, cynicism, and motivation can all

play an affecting role in utilization. Other pressures include entrusting the time, love and joy of carrying out this difficult work. In the latter case, introspective journeys of discovery may be seen as 'libelous,' or in less extreme cases neither scientific nor reflective of the practices the overriding institutional body wishes to be recognized for.

In an age where forces work to segment and polarize society while disassociate and distract the individual, there clearly is no better time than the present to regain our wholeness, reestablish a salubrious equilibrium and reinstate an authentic selfhood.

Caring and compassion are the primordial workings of a teacher. From here arise all possibilities. Today, there is a call to journey back to these sacred origins where integrity to self and a predisposed orientation towards *wholeness* are manifested as a quality of readiness to return, rediscover and restore—where we are being asked to foster an environment that seeks to widen our cultural and spiritual experience in much the same way that we as teachers broaden the capabilities of our students as multicultural beings.

In the end, "we are always in interaction with our culture, our times, our realities..." (Minnich, 2005, p. 254). Change is a process that we can, and often do, struggle to come to terms with. But as we evolve, we begin to appreciate the plurality of our lives and explore the differences without loss or confusion of identity. Of course, certain institutions are biased and unbalanced: this is part of the challenge we face in the *kalpa* that is upon us. Certain modals of social indoctrination and reactionary forms of fundamentalism are mutually exclusive to peace and coexistence, even human development. But this predicament can be overcome. 'Competition for ascendancy' is already being seen as an approach that no longer is productive in the globalized world we are interdependent with. Forms of "solution equilibrium" and "conflict management" are beginning to prevail.

Disjunction and alienation are being replaced by constructive boundaries, “committed relativism” (Perry, 1970), tolerance and social responsibility. And with these new landscapes come new revelations.

As teachers, we stimulate the discovery of this panorama while respecting individuality and promoting authenticity. We strive to create a secure environment that brings the best out of people, makes use of their gifts and fosters trust. We focus on learning as a process leading to constructive meaning and effective thinking. In the end, each of us is but an observer and expert guide, here to encourage and to open the doors of ‘Possibility.’ In doing so, self-actualization and self-realization become the apex of education.

Footnotes

¹ English as a Second Language.

² A theory formulated by the German botanist Heinrich Anton de Bary that suggests, “It is the plant that forms cells, and not the cell that forms plants.” See Baluska, F., Volkmann, D., Barlow, P. W. (2004). Eukaryotic cells and their cell bodies: cell theory revised. *Annals of Botany*, 94.1, 10.

³ For a recent review, see: Gould, N. & Taylor, I. (1996). *Reflecting Learning for Social Work: Research, Theory, and Practice*. Brookfield, WI: Ashgate.

⁴ For a more detailed description on forming and operating reflective communities, see Palmer (2004).

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