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Abstract

This article addresses leadership within the context of a teacher's interpersonal skills. It argues that the basic responsibility of all educational professionals is to facilitate a student's personal vision, his goals, and his potential positive future outcomes. The position in this article is that learning, growth, and development are essentially emergent, constructivist endeavors and a teacher's role is to nurture this process.

*No man can reveal to you aught but that
which already lies half asleep in the
dawning of your knowledge.*

Kahlil Gibran

What teachers do is help make possible futures more real for students. They help students look for the seeds of potential referred to by Gibran. Teachers then help individuals choose and nourish those seeds into development toward their best selves.

Teachers help students dream. Here it is important to understand the dynamic of dreaming. The difference between a simple fantasy and its transformation into a dream is the addition of responsibility. "In dreams begin responsibilities" state William Butler Yeats. Fantasies are turned into dreams as individuals commit themselves to growing in a particular direction.

Teachers are challenged to design the best process for helping students realize their dreams. Do we feed them a steady diet of facts? Do we focus on exciting their thinking? Do we

encourage the construction of understanding? Do we set up learning environments conducive to the emergence of initiative? What do we value within the educational process that they value? The following vignettes illustrate a possible plan of delivery.

A former student, let's call him Larry, at a small college where I worked had trouble writing a paper on what he wanted to do with his life. When pressed, he confessed that his real ambition was to become a professional bass fisherman. If that didn't work out, then he would become a teacher. Larry expected my disapproval but didn't get it. I told him if that was really his dream, then he had to commit himself to that endeavor first, because it would always impede his future as a teacher not to have tried.

We then discussed Larry's dedication, talent, and competence as a bass fisherman. Was that endeavor aligned with his values? Is it what God what wanted him to do? How would becoming a professional bass fisherman align with his personal beliefs? He didn't know and I

didn't either. But perhaps the answer would someday unfold.

Our discussion was also an opportunity to explore the concept of intellect, the capacity for understanding the dynamic complexity of an endeavor. Professional bass fishermen have developed the intellect specific to the challenges of the profession; they must know the ecologies of lakes and rivers, as well as the ethology of bass behavior. It is also a business, so they must develop that understanding as well. Professional bass fishermen must develop a "special literacy." They must be able to read the challenges and opportunities of their situations.

I told Larry that there was a word for bass fishermen who didn't understand the necessary ecology and ethology of the endeavor: "amateurs." The professionals of any endeavor develop their intellect in response to its specific challenges and opportunities.

Larry wrote a paper on the intellect of a bass fisherman. He read several books written by professionals. If nothing else, he found out that it is not as simple as most people suppose. It is a dynamically complex task requiring a developed intellect identified as a "cultivated intelligence."

Most importantly, Larry's interest was fully engaged in the process of an academic investigation. He became personally involved. The gaining of knowledge made more sense to him. This was not an exercise in "bulimic learning" for him. He acquired content knowledge not to pass a test, but because it aligned with who he was and what he wanted to become.

I haven't heard from Larry in awhile, but I hope he musters the responsibility to make his dream become reality. He may change his dream, but regardless, he learned something about commitment, intellect, and responsibility,

as well as ecology and ethology. If he decides to instead go directly into teaching, it will be a more informed decision and he will therefore be a better teacher. If Larry makes it as a professional bass fisherman, who knows what opportunities for contribution that will provide.

In that case, I did my job.

One of my best exercises of good judgment in regard to student teaching supervision was with a woman we will call Betty. (I will, of course, omit any evidence of poor judgment in this essay.) Betty worked with third graders in a San Diego classroom.

After my first observation of Betty, I requested a private room for consultation. She was a strong teacher, well organized and clear in her communication. Only one thing bothered me; left unchecked it would weaken her as a teacher. She could tell that something bothered me; she nervously awaited my comments.

I asked Betty why she hugged the kids. Puzzled by my question, she could only respond, "because we're supposed to."

Betty was a victim of a malady in American education, the pushing of universal techniques. Both her textbooks and professors had systematically told her that she should hug the kids. Betty, however, was simply not a hugger. You never saw a more awkward tableau than Betty forcing herself to hug those little kids. And they knew the hugs were forced. They submitted to them, but they too felt awkward.

Betty and I had a discussion about why she was not a hugger and whether she could, or even should, become one. She informed me that her family was not one to for physically showing affection. Nonetheless, her family was a caring one. We then discussed alternative ways of

showing affection and the benefits of behaving in ways that are natural to who you are.

By the end of her student teaching experience, Betty had the allegiance and affection of her students. She was comfortable in her role as a teacher. The students were comfortable with her. She was affectionate with them, but verbally, not physically. And the kids responded to her sincerity. Betty had learned that she had to find her own way of becoming a successful teacher.

In that case, I did my job.

One day I entered my classroom and began addressing the subject for the day. Soon, however, I noticed that one of my students, who we shall call Carolyn, a young mother of two children, was upset. To my question as to whether she was okay, she replied that she was consumed with anxiety because she was taking the Praxis exam the next day.

Carolyn had studied and studied, but she was not a good test taker. She had taken the Praxis before, and failed to pass it. Taking a test made her feel stupid (her word). I validated her point that test anxiety can erase memory and stifle intelligence and I asked the class to share a few examples of test stupidity.

I changed my agenda for the day to address test anxiety. I then introduced the issue of how we can choose to reduce stress in our lives and the importance of such freedom. (The alcoholic chooses alcohol, etc.) The methods we choose define us in powerful ways.

The class was human development, so the subjects of test anxiety and stress release were appropriate. The teacher's job is to help people make possible (and, of course, desirable)

futures more real. The situation had provided a teachable moment.

When I asked how she dealt with stress in her life, - Carolyn then gave a curious answer, "I don't have a way to relieve stress," was her reply.

"Then, Carolyn, you will soon be a dead woman. Or, actually, you would already be dead. Think about it. What is your primary method of relieving stress?" "I guess I pray a lot," she said. There you go. That works. Have you prayed about the Praxis exam?", I said. "I sure have, but I am still anxious. I had prayed before but I still flunked."

"What about a prayer circle? Have you asked for help from people in your church?" (I had prior knowledge of her religious affiliation.) "I can't do that," she replied.

"Of course you can. They will do it for you. Call some people together this evening. I've got ten dollars that says that will help you pass the test." "I can't do that," she repeated.

At this point, one of her friends in the class joined the discussion: "But Ronnie (Carolyn's husband) can do that. I'm gonna call him and ask him to pull together a prayer circle for you." And her friend did.

Carolyn reported in the next class that she had taken the test with a full night's sleep behind her and hadn't felt nearly as anxious as usual. A few months later she caught up with me in the hall to inform me that she had indeed passed the test.

Not only did that particular day of instruction help Carolyn pass the Praxis, but the rest of the class saw the importance of how we choose to relieve stress in our lives. It also

contained lessons in the dynamics of test anxiety and the development of persistence, the not allowing of oneself to become trapped by predicaments, to somehow find a way out of a situation.

In that case, I did my job.

When my Learning Theories class began in the afternoon of September 11, 2001, the shock, anger, and confusion in the faces of my students was obvious. Our country had been attacked that morning. I asked myself, "What would be the best way to conduct the class?" Sometimes, in such situations, people need to stick to a routine. Other times, they need to break routine and have a conversation that addresses the event. A key concern of mine, as a teacher, is the phenomenon of resonance:

In music, resonance means the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or synchronous vibration. In education, resonance occurs when students reinforce instruction by personal reflection or sympathetic engagement.

What are the conditions necessary for students to resonate with a particular understanding or insight? Students incorporate instruction into their developing intellect whenever they resonate with the insight or understanding. Learning, after all, is action on the part of the learner. It is self-construction, not an imposed bit of data. When students are not ready to resonate with a lesson, because of whatever conditions, then teachers need to adjust their teaching. So we talked.

We discussed how America could develop an informed decision about how to respond to the attack. How could we figure out what to do without sufficient and definite

information? Could we, as a nation, muster the wisdom to have the clear-headedness and patience to wait until we knew who was really responsible? Would we, instead, find scapegoats in order to make ourselves feel better?

The discussion evolved into thinking about the "making of judgment". How does a person or country determine education decisions in the midst of the confusion caused by anger, shock, and lack of dependable information? Dynamically complex situations such as the 9/11 attack require the exercise of a developed judgment, because clear knowledge about causes and conditions is rare, if not impossible.

Thinking about issues such as dynamic complexity and judgment transfers readily to the kind of predicaments inherent to the teaching endeavor. This was not made clear in the class. It was unnecessary, and inappropriate to do so at that time.

Several students told me, on that day and on following days, how much they appreciated the opportunity to have a conversation about the attack. Such an event should not be ignored for the sake of curriculum. The class helped them deal with their anger, shock, and confusion.

In that case, I did my job.

Conversation is an integral component of a constructivist learning process. Teachers should "lead the conversation." Learning is perceived by constructivist teachers as primarily a social endeavor, one in which individual learners work in a collaborative effort to construct knowledge. Linda Lambert (1995), in *The Constructivist Leader*, writes:

In a constructivist conversation, each individual comes to understand the purpose of the talk, since the relationship is one of reciprocity. Each person is growing in understanding; each person is seeking some interpretation of truth as he or she perceives it.

Learning requires the application of the learner's initiative. Therefore, conversation must occur (People can, of course, have a conversation within themselves.) because therein initiative is encouraged and informed. The opposite of initiative is inertia. Without conversation, any knowledge transferred between teachers and students is inert. It will not contribute to the life of the mind. Some weeks ago, a student in one of my classes commented, "This is my favorite class because everyone in here talks."

I had managed to "lead the conversation," to set up the conditions in the classroom that encouraged contribution from everyone. The students felt safe. They trusted the learning environment. They felt free, and challenged, to develop their understanding of the subject, not just memorize stuff for the tests.

Learning was understood as a continuous construction process, and as a personal but also a communal endeavor. The students therefore applied the energy and creativity of their initiative. They "owned" the process and the class.

In that case, I was doing my job.

I have a collection of stories I tell, entitled "Portraits of Educated and Uneducated People." The collection is centered around the relationship between the educational process and the gaining of experience. The stories serve as

useful images to help us discuss various concepts in learning theory and human development. The stories illustrate several key questions:

- What does it mean to be a successful human being?
- What are the essential characteristics of an educated, or, for that matter, experienced person?
- How does the education process fit in with the responsibility we owe our dreams?
- Why are some people better at gaining experience than others?
- How do we move toward our best potentials and avoid situations that diminish us?

An essential concern of the collection of stories is that we all have the task of determining what we all meant do do. Living a responsible life means determining who you are and choosing a vocation in alignment with that truth. I frequently ask my students for a reflection paper on the subject.

Whenever I do that, I am doing my job.

The Teacher's Intellect

The ability to make possible futures more real for others depends upon the development of characteristics such as informed compassion and educated initiative. It goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge. It requires understanding of the student/teacher relationship and the joys and predicaments of its idiosyncratic and interactive nature. Teachers need to constantly learn how to read their situations, to develop their literacy as teachers.

The ability to teach requires the development of a teacher's intellect, which is the structure of heart and mind that guides compassion and initiative. Bearing in mind Howard Gardner's (understanding) of intelligence as the capacity to solve problems and fashion products, teachers have the responsibility of cultivating their intelligence as teachers.

Intellect is the capacity for understanding the dynamic complexity of an endeavor. The nature and substance of intellect is determined by the kinds of intelligence individuals choose to cultivate within themselves. Intellect, as it evolves, becomes what informs and directs the future activities of intelligence. Intellect is meta-intelligence or metacognition.

Intelligence without intellect can only be reactive; intellect is what makes action possible. Intelligence may be the capacity to solve problems and fashion products, but intellect is what identifies the problems to be solved and the products to be fashioned.

The endeavor of teaching generates specific kinds of problems that have to be solved. The products of teaching, such as competent and informed practitioners, life-long learners, successful human beings, and facilitative learning environments, are also specific to the endeavor. Teachers, like doctors, lawyers, detectives, politicians, or plumbers have a kind of intellect specific to the endeavor.

Practitioners who are not genuinely and actively engaged in the process of cultivating their intellect as teachers are stagnating. (Clear evidence that they were meant to do something else.) Teachers have not only the professional but the spiritual responsibility to develop their intellects as teachers. They owe it to their

students, to the future, and to themselves to do so.

Compassion which is not informed and guided by a developed intellect can, in its blindness, diminish and cripple students. Compassion is essential to a healthy student/teacher relationship. Students know when teachers care for them. They resent and resist those practitioners who have agendas other than helping them forge a desirable future from their potential. But compassion without intellect is reactive; it lacks the perspective necessary for the true initiative, for action that best helps students image a dream and develop the necessary responsibilities.

Education for Initiative

I frequently ask my students this question: "The heart of our being cares about only one thing to important enough to measure it; what is that?"

They can investigate this question in any way they choose. They can talk to anyone: teachers, friends, family. A key ingredient of many of my assignments is conversation with people outside of the class. I take a special joy in involving people peripheral to the classroom experience with the puzzles I give my students. This expands the learning community.

The answers gathered from such conversations are always interesting. The resulting discussions are always enlightening.

In the heart of our being, we care only about growth. That growth can be intellectual, emotional, or spiritual. When we grow toward our potential, when we grow in our capacity to understand or love, or when we grow closer to our personal definition of God, then we take note and reward ourselves with the feeling that we are onto something. We measure only those

times when we are forging the substance of ourselves, when we are developing our integrity.

No other form of achievement, whether it consists of money, position, or fame, has an appreciable impact on us as individuals. Nothing other than growth matters. It is the only real success. Therefore, education for initiative is what should guide instruction. This is because:

**Initiative is movement
toward growth.**

Initiative is never a reaction. It is a movement along a path of development. Initiative is what enables people to construct the responsibilities necessary for the actualization of their dreams. Without initiative, we do not think for ourselves, we don't expand our awareness and understanding, we don't develop ourselves emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Ultimately, the development of initiative is the aim of all teaching. Education for initiative is, in essence, the best evidence of success.

Simplistically filling student with facts is short-sighted because it systemically results in either resistance or resentment, or worse, bulimic learning. Initiative is intimately bound up with interest and ownership. The concept of relevance, a bugaboo to those who push for programmed instruction, is especially important to education for initiative.

Development of Intellect

A key insight to understanding the teaching endeavor is embedded in the statement,

“God sends threads to webs begun.”

That image of threads moving toward evolving webs, illustrates intellectual

development. My job is to help students design and construct their webs of understanding, their intellects. The necessary threads will then, with the help of student interest and initiative, accumulate to elaborate and nourish the evolving intellects.

I am philosophically a constructionist. My job as a teacher is to establish the conditions conducive to the emergence of learning in my classrooms. Therefore, my primary concern and activity as a teacher is to develop the interactive conditions in the student/teacher relationship that are conducive to the development of initiative. Initiative is a cardinal virtue. It is at the core of all worthwhile learning. Initiative is therefore at the core of all worthwhile action. Two definitions need to be made clear at this point:

1. A condition is “something that must exist before something else can occur.”

Certain characteristics of learning environments must be in place before learners are encouraged to bring forth initiative, to resonate with the instruction. Mutual trust and respect are integral to a healthy classroom. A spirit of inquiry is essential. A sense of freedom to fail is also necessary. Students must find the instruction relevant to their interests and potentials. Students need to also feel connected to the instructor; they must believe that the instructor is primarily concerned with helping them actualize their potentials. Without the presence of such conditions in classrooms, the development of initiative is suppressed rather than encouraged.

2. An emergence is an “unpredictable development” that arises from the interaction of underlying conditions.”

Programmed instruction assumes that developments, such as the capacity to read, can be assembled in a linear fashion. The state of

New York once isolated over 1200 separate reading skills that were, of course, research based. The result was a curriculum consisting of a blizzard of worksheets dedicated to mastering those disparate reading skills. The state eventually discovered that students could sometimes master all the skills and still be unable to read.

Reading is a holistic capability that emerges. That is, develops unpredictably, from within the minds of learners. Conditions can be developed which encourage the emergence of reading capability. But, for the most part in American education, we forget that without initiative on the part of learners, true literacy will not emerge. Readers cannot be trained into existence; they must be encouraged to develop.

What is true of reading is also the case of many other desirable characteristics. Critical thinking, life-long learning, and the development of individuals with character and integrity emerge from the interactive conditions of their educational situations. Such capabilities cannot be forced into existence. Conditions must be developed that encourage the emergence of holistic characteristics such as reading, thinking, and initiative.

Narrative Based Education

The products most critical to the educational process are holistic in nature. They are also emergent; they arise from interacting conditions such as interest, trust, creativity, curiosity, resonance, initiative, intelligence, and intellect. If we want students who can and do think critically, who have initiative, who own their own learning, who have a life-long spirit of inquiry, who wish to contribute, who have character and integrity, then we must comprehend and understand the holistic nature of such characteristics and design our instruction accordingly.

Teaching is an idiosyncratic endeavor dependent upon the developed intellect of its practitioners. Too many judgment calls have to be forged in the midst of confusing situations, without adequate information, for dependence upon a formulaic knowledge base. The teaching endeavor is too complex and dynamic for the simplistic application of prediction and control formulas.

As teaching is engaged with dynamically complex realities that make development unpredictable, it cannot be totally a science, (at least by Newtonian definitions of science). Quantum based fields of science, such as complexity science and chaos theory, do strive to comprehend and explain dynamically complex realities. Their holistic approaches can be helpful to comprehending and explaining the educational process. Teaching, however, remains primarily an art. Although the endeavor can be informed by scientific investigation, it should not be governed by it.

Two questions follow from the preceding understandings:

1. What are the conditions in my classroom that are necessary to excite and inform growth?
2. How can I help generate desirable but nonetheless unpredictable developments?

The answer to both of these questions involves the combination of three approaches:

Storytelling. Through stories we best convey the dynamic complexity of human predicaments. Stories are the best way to excite and educate initiative. Storytelling is brain-based teaching; the human brain has evolved over eons to prefer narrative learning.

Dialogue. Through genuine conversation meanings are shared and judgments are developed. Contextual awareness can be developed only through internal and external dialogue. Contextual awareness is what gives us understanding of dynamic complexity which, in turn, educates initiative.

Questions. Human knowledge is not advanced through the simple process of knowing; it is advanced only by questions that foster the construction of answers. Similarly, intellect is not developed by the simple acquisition of knowledge bits, but by the asking of contextual questions that engage the interest and ownership of the learner.

The synergistic combining of these three approaches constitute Narrative Based Education. The dynamic complexity of situations is best illustrated through story. Dialogue then helps us develop our contextual awareness of the situations under investigation. Questions carry us beyond the limitations of what we already know to a more comprehensive perspective and more elaborate understanding of the interactive realities. Narrative Based Education is the inquiry method of learning in action. Inquiry is always centered around the issue of “What’s the story?”

Some Final Thoughts

I am a teacher, not a trainer. The difference between a teacher and a trainer can be readily imaged in the etymology underlying the words education and training. *Educo* means “to bring forth.” What is brought forth? Growth is brought forth, whether it be intellectual, emotional, or spiritual. Training, on the other hand, comes from the Latin *trahere*, which means “to drag forth.”

Human development cannot be dragged forth. Teachers can only set up the conditions conducive to its emergence. Much of what is called “teaching” in education is actually training. Students generally prefer to be taught rather than trained.

It is important to provide information. It is even acceptable to occasionally entertain. But the most caring and productive thing a teacher can do for students is inspire them. Inspiration, as one might suspect, has a poetic root:

The word “inspire” is the opposite of “expire;” it means to “breathe life into.”

Teachers should endeavor to breathe life into the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual words of students. There is no better way to help make possible futures more real for students than through inspiring them to think, question, and believe in their potential. Teachers should strive to help students dream and develop the necessary responsibilities to make real the promise of those dreams.

Making possible futures more real for others is a dynamic and complicated endeavor. There is no more interesting or challenging task. Understanding the ecology of the educational process is a never-ending challenge.

Teaching is a sacred calling. All Teachers understand that we have a need to learn; but we also have a need to teach. Teaching is the highest form of productivity. Our spirit compels us to treasure the endeavor. Teachers are intimately involved with striving to bring about the only thing our being really cares about, growth. Nothing is more important than helping make possible futures more real for others. Only then are we really doing our job.

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