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Cultivating Reflective Practitioners through the Study of Human Development: a Transformative Graduate Program in Elementary Education at West Chester University

Abstract

The article expands on a presentation given by the author at an international symposium held at the University of Silesia from May 10-13, 2005, entitled *Innovation in Higher Education: A Global Perspective.* Perspectives on transformational processes in Higher Education vary widely even after forty years of exploration by psychologists, educators, sociologists, and neuroscientists. West Chester University of Pennsylvania's Plan of Excellence includes five essential transformations in which is embedded the new Elementary Education Masters Degree Program in Applied Studies in Teaching and Learning. An essential catalyst for transformation is the experience of personal authenticity. As a goal of teacher development, authenticity paradoxically leads to heightened individuation as well as social connectedness and integration. Highlighted in this area of study are components of a six-area framework of Human Development as a formative study for personal, social, cultural, and global transformation. Future implications for questioning and enriching teacher development are explored.

Key Words: *transformative learning; adult development; relational-cultural theory; self-awareness; mindfulness; integral learning; transpersonal psychology; authenticity; flow*

Background

Two key questions with which educators have perennially wrestled involve the search for a concept of optimal human growth and well-being and the resolution of the fundamental paradox of teaching for human growth while also teaching

human beings to meet the needs of a *social system* (Jourard, 1971). Erich Fromm (1963) stated that, "Education is identical with helping the child realize his [sic] potentialities" (p. 104). As Boy and Pine (1971) summed up, "…there is a wide gap between what we want to do and what we are doing to enhance the human development of young people….it is our contention that the teacher who can be the most whole person will make the most significant contribution to the development of students as self-actualizing persons." (p. 2)

Goldhammer (1969) maintained that, "It is the relationship [between teacher and learner] that teaches, not the text" (p. 365).

The ideal of perfecting the teacher-learner relationship as a catalyst to mutual growth has proceeded over four decades with the goal still tantalizingly elusive. Cranton and Carusetta (2005) wrote, "If we are to maintain our self in our teaching, becoming authentic human beings who teach rather than mindlessly following social expectations, we need to work to become conscious" (p. 290). The quest for conscious authenticity is proceeding on many fronts and is demonstrated by research in prenatal and perinatal psychology (PPN) in which the infant within the womb senses qualities of its parents' minds and responds to thoughts directed by other people toward the mother (McCarty 2005). The search for connection and transformation appears to be intertwined and an essential aspect of human nature and learning. As educators, we, too, are inextricably intertwined with our students, who are often our greatest teachers.

1. Transformation as an individual and social process

Transformation as a concept in personal development and learning has been explored over several years from a variety of vantage points. However, fundamental agreement exists on essential components or results of engaging in the transformative process such as deepened self-awareness, a *paradigm shift* that may involve deepened empathy for oneself and one's environment, behavioral change, and social interactions reflecting one's changed awareness.

At the level of self, Tennant (2005) identified four levels of personal identification that are changed by transformational learning. They include the authentic, repressed, autonomous, storied, and entangled selves. As teachers identify their *anchoring points* in their various selves, they can make more genuine choices to create their future reality. In the same article, Tennant conceptualizes the interplay between self and society and claims that transformational learning designs that include this perspective facilitate the personal and social change process. As learners identify the impact of *ideological language* on their self-talk, they become freer

to identify their inner freedom and autonomy. As their sense of self-efficacy expands, learners become empowered to *re-create* and *re-story* their experiences and to define their relationships more authentically. As neurological patterns of thinking change, the process of reflection becomes a mental habit that leads to continuously developing new strategies for relating, thinking, and behaving.

Cranton and Carusetta (October 2004) examined the development of authenticity in teachers over a three-year period which, in itself, became a transformative experience. Using five interrelated categories of self, other, relationship, context, and critical reflection, the researchers discovered a developmental progression in each category of authenticity. For example, in *self-awareness*, beginning teachers often accepted a socially constructed view of the *teacher as authority* model, whereas, in mature authenticity, teachers integrated their teaching selves and personal selves more fluidly. Likewise, in *awareness of others*, teachers progressed from unquestioned generalizations about students to a multifaceted perception of diversity in students. Beginning authenticity in *relationships* was characterized by rule-centered relationships with students, whereas mature authenticity in this area involved awareness of the interplay between the teacher's and student's development of authenticity. Teachers in the *awareness of context* category progressed from inflexible perceptions to a personal struggle with contextual factors that impacted both students and teachers. The last category, *critical reflection on self, other, relationship, and context*, indicated growth from focus on specific teaching skills to in-depth questions of premises underlying conceptualization of the teaching-learning process as an interpersonal relationship. Development in the preceding categories can result in transformative learning in which teachers' beliefs and perspectives become more open and permeable as well as better validated through personal experience (Mezirow, 2000).

2. Human Development as a formative study in the transformative process

Human Development is a multidisciplinary, integrative study of six main developmental categories of the human life span which includes physical, emotional, social, cognitive, moral, and self developmental areas. Students of Human Development learn to reflect upon and synthesize their own feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors in each of the six developmental areas in order to gain insight into their own personality formation within their own unique social context. As one examines the University of Maryland Graduate Catalog in Human Development (2004), the broad scope of this field becomes apparent. The focus on historical and contemporary

factors influencing one's life trajectory generally induces a transformational experience built-in to the very nature of the curriculum. (www.wmd.edu).

According to McWhinney and Markos (2003), "Every design [for transformative learning] implies a theory of human and social development, and every design has a political effect on the participants, whether by implication or by following an explicit ideology" (p. 27). The key factor in the study of Human Development is the multiple and layered contexts in which students are invited to reflect and act upon themselves within a social context. The main aspects of personal human awareness can be categorized into knowledge of oneself, increased self-efficacy [self-control], self observation and care, and self re-creation. Students are encouraged to take an active role [personal agency] in discarding inauthentic parts of their selves while discovering their genuine sources of energy and purpose.

Both students and teachers of Human Development encounter their own personal assumptions about the purpose of the educational process in which they are engaged. Many questions arise during this spiraled layering of learning. What is the ideal goal of human life? How does one balance self-interest and collective well-being? Is self-interest a primary motive? What is one's *real* story? How much freedom do we really have? Is freedom a reality and to what extent? How does the teacher negotiate students' freedom and social appropriateness? Can a teacher be authentic while working for the state? Such questions can ignite both passion and purpose in students and teachers as they discover their personal ideals and personal space while reframing their social responsibilities.

3. West Chester University's Plan of Excellence and Five Transformations

West Chester University, a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, is a public, regional, comprehensive institution committed to providing access and offering high-quality undergraduate education, post baccalaureate and graduate programs, and a variety of educational and cultural resources for its students and alumni and the citizens of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Vision Statement of West Chester University states that WCU will be a national model for excellence for public regional comprehensive universities and especially noted for:

- Undergraduate programs that actively engage students in connecting the life of the mind to the world in which they live and work;
- The responsiveness of its graduate and post baccalaureate programs to regional need;

- Its focus on providing lifelong-learning, technical, and applied skills essential to graduates' success now and in the future;
- A commitment by faculty, staff, and administrators to provide access and to serve effectively the educational needs of a diverse student body; and,
- Its role as a leading educational and cultural resource and partner in fostering the economic, social, and cultural vitality of southeaster Pennsylvania.

Five essential transformations have become priorities in order to concretize West Chester University's Vision Statement.

- Responsiveness Transformation: WCU will increase its responsiveness to the educational and cultural needs of its region.
- Student Success Transformation: WCU will make student success its defining characteristic.
- Diversity Transformation: WCU will strengthen its commitment to pluralism, access, equity, and a supportive campus climate for a diverse community of students, staff, faculty, and administrators.
- Human Capital Transformation: WCU will increase its investment in the continued development of the skills and knowledge of its faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Resourcefulness Transformation: WCU will diversity the base of its physical and fiscal resources and increase the effectiveness with which they are managed.

The inclusive scope of the five transformations reflects the view that the total institutional culture and environment needs to reflect a consistent, assessable, commitment to healthy growth and diversity as well as an environment continually open to change and self-evaluation. The West Chester University Values Statement elaborates on the behaviors it seeks to engage in to encourage transformation:

- Attracting, enrolling, and graduating quality students from a wide variety of educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds;
- Attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty and staff and to provide each member of the University community with learning and leadership development opportunities;
- Supporting and encouraging programs which benefit all people and which seek to eradicate discrimination and injustice;
- Treasuring the worth and uniqueness of each individual within the belief that success is to be earned by individual effort put forth in an environment founded on equality of opportunity, and the appreciation of the ideal of an inclusive society;
- Emphasizing civility while affirming the worth and dignity of each member and the shared responsibility of all to treat each other as individuals, with respect and courtesy;

- Addressing the concerns of a global society by teaching students to think clearly and critically, to make logical and ethical judgments, and to communicate effectively with others;
- Supporting the principles of academic integrity and academic responsibility; and,
- Viewing the WCU Values Statement as a living document that will change as the university community evolves (www.wcupa.edu, 2005).

The above description of one university seeking to provide an affirming environment for its whole community illustrates a clear plan to implement research findings on transformation. The focus on individual, social, systemic, and international change provides *a space to grow* for a diversity of individuals and programs.

4. An Innovative M.Ed. Program of Applied Studies in Teaching and Learning

An Innovative Master of Education Degree for the Reflective Practitioner was developed by the Department of Elementary Education faculty with input from graduate students in order to advance the knowledge and skills needed to be reflective practitioners and educational leaders. The program recognizes the value of students' experiences and emphasizes reflection, collaboration, and classroom-based inquiry and prepares teachers to serve the needs of diverse populations of children through the development of active, constructive, and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning.

The Master of Education Degree in Elementary Education is a 36-credit program which includes an 18-credit core requirement, a 12-credit *Area of Focused Inquiry*, the development of a professional portfolio, and a 6-credit, classroom-based inquiry project. *Areas of Focused Inquiry* include, but are not limited to, the following: Inclusion/Special Education, Technology, Culturally Responsive Education, Teaching English as a Second Language, Literacy, and Human Development.

Two *initial* courses are to be taken during the first 15 credits. A brief description is included below.

EDE 554   The Reflective Teacher: Examining Cultural Paradigms in the Contemporary Classroom (3)

An investigation of the origins of popular, personal, and theoretical constructions of teaching and learning processes and how these constructions influence contemporary practice.

EDE 532   Teaching and Learning: Linking Theory and Practice (3)
           This course is intended to help teachers connect knowledge of cur-
           riculum design and learning theory with the development of cultur-
           ally responsive curriculum and effective classroom practice.

Intermediate courses build on the *initial* knowledge and experience base.
EDE 556   Human Development (3)
           Study of cross-culturally evolving perspectives on healthy develop-
           mental processes in children and adults. Application of findings to
           interaction between teachers and learners within the contexts of
           family, school, and community.
EDF 583   The American School as Social Narrative (3)
           An integrated exploration of the philosophical, cultural, social, and
           physical foundations of schooling and education in the United States.
EDR 535   Language, Learning, and Literacy (3)
           The developmental nature of language and the critical links between
           language, learning, and literacy. Major theories of language and lit-
           eracy and links to practice. Individual variation, class, gender, dialect,
           and ethnicity related to language and literacy.

The *Area of Focused Inquiry* is composed of twelve (12) credits in which students
are encouraged to propose their own focus areas based on personal interests and
needs as well as graduate course offerings. These areas are developed between each
student and faculty advisor in accord with student interest and appropriateness.

Culminating courses are designed to help the student integrate and synthesize
earlier learning experiences in both a personal and professional context.
EDE 571   Educational Change: A Systemic View (3)
           Exploration of theories and models of educational change, with
           emphases on systems thinking and the central role of the teacher in
           educational change.
EDE 611   Teacher as Classroom Researcher (6 credits)
           This course explores the role of classroom research in the profes-
           sional life of the teacher. With the goal of informing personal practice
           and collegial discourse, participants review existing literature, design
           and carry out an investigation in their own setting, and report results
           to professional colleagues.

Many threads of Human Development are woven among the above course offer-
ings. Continuous *themes* of self-reflection, professional discourse, language aware-

ness, social systems, cross-cultural perspectives, personal choice, and contemporary life are approached from multiple human learning vantage points. The program is designed to be an evolving life experience for both university faculty and their teacher-students. As teachers are encouraged to probe more deeply into their authentic relationships with self, others and the learning context, they gain greater self-mastery as they seek to create optimal learning environments for their students.

5. Future Trends in Transformational Approaches to Teacher Development

Current trends in transformational education are left with an unanswered question. Is transformation an inherently valuable human goal or is transformation a means to other, more highly valued ends? Scott (1998) maintained that freedom, democracy, and authenticity were the goals of transformative education. Within democratic systems, it is generally assumed that education will lead to *progress*, both technologically and character-wise, and that progre*s*s is *good*. Oord (2005) believes that *progress* is neither impossible nor inevitable; rather, it is *possible* but not inevitable regardless of the transformational context. The key ingredient in progress, in Oord's view, is *love in action*. *Love* has often been deemed an inappropriate area for study due to its personal and intimate nature and, therefore, this important aspect of human development has been largely neglected by researchers in psychology, biology, neurology, sociology, cosmology, and anthropology.

Erich Fromm's description of *love* (1956) as having four key ingredients may be a useful framework for researchers and educators who believe that humanity can make progress in love and, therefore, in human well-being. The four components of Fromm's concept of love include: care, knowledge, responsibility, and respect. Many of these notions are embedded in the quest of transformational education to encourage maximum freedom and social responsibility for teachers and learners alike. As psychological and sociological research findings indicate, empathic and caring as well as prosocial and assertive behaviors can be taught and learned. Learning communities have often created environments in which civility as well as intellectual and ethical behaviors are valued while social scientists have also demonstrated cultural aspects that thwart human growth and well-being.

Johnston (2005) believes that, "The creative challenge in front of us… reveals the critical need to rethink our whole notion of human progress" (p.12). The necessity of healthy relationships extends beyond our personal microsystems to the global level. As we learn that even our culture is a human creation for which we

have some degree of responsibility, we are called upon to rewrite the human story. We are participating in simultaneous processes of personal, cultural, and species-wide maturation. As we become more personally conscious, Johnston believes that "creation, through us, is becoming for the first time conscious not just of its various manifest forms, but of itself specifically as creation" (p. 15).

Yet Jarvis' (1992) question about teaching as an ethical dilemma remains. "Education seeks to control learning in some way, to direct it and to ensure that it is harnessed in the interests of the state or the organization; it reflects the institutionalization of learning" (p.236). Teaching may be designed to strike a delicate balance between the best interests of learners and the needs of society. Teachers are the intermediaries between the learner and their social milieu. How teachers perceive their responsibility and power over what and how students learn becomes an ethical or moral question. When teachers perceive their role as assisting students in acquiring required certificates, Jarvis says they are in the *having* mode. At the same time, genuine learning occurs in the *being mode.* This fundamental dynamic between teaching and learning, between having and being, merits increased scrutiny in programs of teacher development.

Helping learners become more fully human can be viewed as a moral responsibility which involves all aspects of human relationships, teaching style, and classroom experiences. Reflective teachers need to be able to answer such questions as: What does it mean to be a wise human being? Do I have the right to influence a student's development so directly? What are my qualifications for being entrusted with this influential responsibility? Am I aware that the implications of my actions as a teacher extend far beyond dispensing knowledge and skills? If the student prefers non-reflective to reflective learning, should I *impose* my value of transformational education upon him/her?

One concept that has garnered general agreement as a worthwhile goal is the state of *flow* written about by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). This state is experienced as "the subjective perception of a positive, complex, and intrinsically rewarding state of consciousness" (Massimini & Fave, 2000, p. 41). It is characterized by deep concentration, high involvement, intrinsic motivation, and high challenges matched by one's personal skill level. "Human beings should be encouraged to invest their limited, and thus precious, psychic resources in opportunities for action that represent real sources of development, not only for the individual but for the natural and cultural environment" (Massimini, 2000, p. 32).

The inherent complexity of both teaching and learning illustrate the formative nature of Human Development as a *ground of study* from which to construct and evaluate one's role as an educator and potential agent of transformation. There is growing awareness that out of the subjectivity of the *human dilemma*, i.e., the

ability to view ourselves as both subject and object, a term coined in the 1960s by Rollo May, two *intrinsic values* are emerging. These are the values of *diversity* and *cooperation* at the individual and the social level. In today's world, Maslow (1968) might have included diversity and cooperation in his list of beta or growth needs in that we *need* to value these in order to continue our transformative growth process on this planet. Human beings will be the ultimate creators of their global culture and transformative educational experiences on a global scale have the potential to help the world become a peaceful community in a manner unprecedented in human history.

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