

## Philosophy of Education

There was a moment in time, my time as a teacher, nine years into my career, when I discovered that

teachers stand before the students as authority figures with power at their disposal; that makes it very easy for them to wrong students (Wolterstorff, 2006).

As I looked over my class of grade three students, tiny compared to the grade six and seven students I had taught for eight years, I was overcome by the ease at which I would be able to physically manoeuvre students into obedient positions should they choose not to obey. And if this was possible physically, how much more so would it be possible to do this with their minds, their hearts, their souls. And how much had I unknowingly used this same power with the older students?

And I was afraid.

It was not the first time I was afraid of my potential ability to wrong students, but it is the mental image that has since served to remind me that teaching is a sacred trust. It is the image that has pushed me to examine how the very institution of schooling itself can be involved in the promotion of violence and aggression. It is the image that has unveiled for me the absolute necessity of recognizing and honouring the worth of the other. It is the image that warns me, guides me, motivates me in my role as educator for young children, for adolescents, and for adults.

My fear at that moment in time has since been transformed into *awe* as I experience and examine the potential restorative justice holds for education. Far more than a response to behaviour, restorative justice embodies the Freirian notion of equity and social justice that can be expressed in the simple word *with*. Much more than a concept, *with* speaks of the wonder of community and relationship, and justice comes to be understood as existing in relation to a person, something done by a person, while injustice is condemned, not because the law is broken but because someone has been hurt (Bianchi, 1994; Heschel, 1962; Simon, 1992; Zehr, 2005). When I am alert to this as an educator I view my students, the curriculum, and all of living through a lens that places in the forefront of my attention the worth of the other (Wolterstorff, 2006) and I respond intent on respecting that worth and contributing to the restoration of that worth where it has been lost. This requires that I get to know my students, care about whether they learn and develop intellectually (hooks, 1998), and challenge them to think critically about themselves, the life that surrounds them, and their choice to become educators. It requires developing curriculum that draws out the gifts of the students in order that together we might engage critically with both the wonder and the brokenness of this world and join in the work of restoration. Curriculum as such is never left in the abstract but through problem-posing hands-on experiences, engaging with the broader community and reflecting, it requires action and results in change.

Ultimately education is living and I have come to know that “whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (Freire, 1998). As

an assistant professor, as a human being, committed to honouring the worth of all, I am constantly learning and learning is not easy.

This is a moment in time, a moment when I am discovering.

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