Because I Am A Teacher: A Dialogue For Consideration

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Abstract: I am an artist/researcher/teacher seeking to better understand and explicate the role and power of the arts in education. These identities have allowed me to explore the complex nature of what it means to teach and to learn, and has provided an ongoing conversation where I can inquire and respond through written dialogue. In reading a dialogue, we enter into conversation not as observers, but as participants in inquiry. We begin to actively involve ourselves in the vital process of asking questions. We become aware of a means of play within thought. Without this experience, our senses become impoverished of creative potential; we lose the ability and willingness to reach out beyond our own reality and engage in someone else’s. The willingness to imagine possibilities is what makes a good educator. This dialogue questions the senses, because our minds do not teach our students, our whole being and identity teaches students. Our lived experiences teach students. Our wholeness teaches students. We cannot separate out the parts and pieces of us before we enter the classroom. We need to take advantage of our whole beings and teach to the sensibilities we have as humans. It is the only caring, noble, democratic, informed thing we can do. What follows is a pedagogic creed; an exploration; a dialogue that considers what it means to teach and what roles must be considered for one to fully grasp the power and complexity of being a teacher, and the all-encompassing nature of learning.
Why me?

Because you are a part of this whole thing.

What whole thing?

It is the breath that enlivens your spirit each day. It is the twinge of familiarity when you see something repeated. It is the appreciation you feel when you squint your eyes on a sunny day. It is the pause you take when you hear a rhythm played.

So, it is nature, then. It is natural. It is implied. It is expected.

It is understood.

I fear that I don’t understand. I fear my participation is outside of this place. I wonder if I find this place and then will be unable to lead others to it.

What others?

The others: The souls I have been charged with. The family I claim to belong with. The partners I cling to in this multi-level search.

What are you searching for? Many have asked this of themselves (and of others). There is more comfort in asking others as though we already have met that challenge ourselves. It seems to be muddy and perhaps unanswerable. In this typical existential question, is there something you’re getting at?

The question I really ask is ‘for whom?’ I am finding these levels complex and fraught with more questions. I might lose my footing and find myself on a path undisturbed, taking those first steps alone. Or worse, I could end up laboring over endless repetition of thought, following with my head down and my being desensitized in the lack of creation. Unfruitful repetition is illustrated by teaching what has been taught and who has been taught as though every class is a duplicate of the last, which is never so.

This has been done since the beginning of time. We must teach anew each time, each person, and each sense. We will experience what has yet to be experienced. We live hoping others live alongside; perhaps by our model, perhaps by our guidance.

Who is to say that I am a good model? What gives me the inclination to present myself as a guide for those asking new and personal questions? Am I to assume that we all have the where-with-all to conduct so many symphonies at once? Each brings different instrumentation, hears a different rhythm, recognizes different tones, and chooses different moods for their pieces. Who, but a great, experienced leader could bring forth the audience that is inevitable? Who could show the audience that each musician is a vital member of that orchestra? Who will intricately bring out the nuance of the French horn while celebrating the brass while acknowledging the entrance of the opera soloist? Who will draw forth the participation of the audience by facilitating a one-of-a-kind experience?

It is one who sees, listens, feels, thinks, compares, reorients, reevaluates, considers, expects, waits for, and loves the music. Could that be you?

I do love the music. I do think about it every moment of every day whether I am attending to the thought or not; it is there. I think of the musicians sitting and waiting for direction. I think of stepping onto the freshly polished steps leading up to the stage. I concentrate on the hopeful expressions of my heart. This all happens in a moment.

You describe a simultaneous knowing; bringing forth of one’s own experiences to engage and enlighten the new experiences.

However, it is not something I feel I know. It is something I react to, feel with, think within, and re-evaluate. It requires an opening of the heart and of the mind. I cannot play the music in my head. I need the musicians, their instruments, the music, the chairs and stands, the lights, and the air that circles through us like ignited fire.
This is knowing; just not the way you think. It is an encircling of the body and spirit with the mind. It is bringing the moment into being; this moment that wouldn’t be possible without the touch of each participant.

I am one of those participants. I am waiting and listening just as they are. But I do bring light to the experience. I act as a focus point.

Yes. You are just as necessary as your musicians. There is inspiration in synthesis. You come together and find one another anew.

Perhaps there is synthesis of excitement, of the lifting of hearts that happens at the end of a moving piece; but not in the mind. I have great fear that my musicians will only want to play what I bring to them, that the only music they will enjoy is that which they feel I want them to enjoy. There is freedom in difference. There is value in diversity.

An orchestra would be terrible if you only had flutes, or if you simply relied on the violins to carry the melody for every piece.

I want each member to belong in their uniqueness. It is that uniqueness that allows us to come together and play beautiful music.

And do not underestimate your own uniqueness. Your presence is not merely a facilitory one, but a pedagogical one. You are leading the way, guiding a path of experiences to come, using your own identity to nourish yourself and those you take with you.

I re-see and bridge a connection between my musicians and the lyrical melodies they bring forth, but I forget to include my own harmonies at times. I celebrate the minor chords we sometimes play together. We can cringe at the obvious differences but marvel at the sounds that are then created from that. From minor modalities, harmonious understandings are brought into being. Without the dissonance, there can be no fluidity of process.

We create because we need that dissonance and that fluidity. We are lyrical beings, moving together and apart as we create new understandings of what it means to be alive.

There is a murmur that originates from that connection; a vibration that emanates through the soul, and reminds us that this is what we are here for, and this is what keeps us alive.

The attentive pedagogue reminds us of that murmur each day without giving it a name. They take us to a place of rebirth and imaginative engagement. We all want to remember that place when we leave. But it is difficult.

Perhaps these deliberations do not belong to me. I search, but it is not exhaustive. I seek, but with my own eyes. I rethink, but from my own experience. Because I am a teacher. And because of that, I will continue.