

Reciprocal Revelation: Toward a Pedagogy of Interiority

Tobin Hart, Professor of Psychology
Co-founder and President of the ChildSpirit Institute
University of West Georgia Email: thart@westga.edu

Dr. Hart based this paper on concepts he presented at the “Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Cognitive-Affective Connection” conference held March 24, 2006 at Oxford College of Emory University and sponsored in part by the Center for Cognitive-Affective Learning and by JCAL.

Knowledge by Presence

The great texts of the wisdom traditions are often described as “living words.” Rather than static they are in some mysterious way described as alive. This is why in so many of the traditions there is invitation to reconsider the words again and again in order to see what might be revealed. It is as if the words are encrypted and compressed. To gain access to the mysteries and reveal meaning that lies beneath the surface we have to break the code.

The process of deep learning in secular domains is no different. The biology text, the notes on the board, the “text” that is the person or situation in front of us, and the world as a whole are living words—awaiting expansion in order to be more fully understood. Their richness and dimensionality already exists here and now but must be decompressed to be realized.

The secret to breaking the code and decompressing the words is in the quality of our encounter with them. The instructions to return to the words is an invitation to enter into relationship with the symbols and signs and allow ourselves to both open *to* them and be further opened *by* them. This is like a two-headed key opening a series of locks that lead simultaneously into our selves and into the data. Uncoiling the wisdom comes from *knowledge by presence*, which involves looking not only at the outer data but also closely into our selves. The code is broken, the words come alive, and the world is opened only to the degree that we open to it. This is, we might say, reciprocal, interdependent revelation. What this points to is the value of developing interiority not simply as an adjunct to knowledge acquisition or as an additional domain of learning such as the worthwhile areas of emotional or social intelligence, but as essential to the process of deep learning in general.

Moving On and Moving Into

We recognize those moments in life when something really “clicks” or “pops,” when learning becomes nourishing, even transformative. Perhaps a topic or even a person we thought was just something or someone to get through suddenly opens to us unexpectedly, revealing a hidden beauty, truth, depth or pattern we had never seen before. And we also know those moments when we only skim the surface, bouncing off the atmosphere of the text when the angle of decent is not steep enough.

In contemporary education too often curricular expectations, looming standardized tests, a modernist approach to pedagogy, and general anxiety push us toward *moving on* to the next bit or byte rather than *moving into*. On the educational surface lives information and there is often a tendency to skim along at this level and accumulate what we can, assuming this to be the goal. But elevating information acquisition to the goal of education glazes the surface of learning and obscures information’s potential as a portal into depth, presence, and intensity—to the interiority of self and subject. It mistakes the wrapping for the gift. However, when we dive in a little deeper, subject and self open and both have the potential to be transformed.

A pedagogy of depth creates clearings where interiority meets information. It does not require that more information be added to the contemporary curriculum, but invites us to the inside of the subject matter, the other and the self.

If we are attending only to the surface of facts and factoids, information has little chance of resonating down to our soul. On the other hand, even the most seemingly two dimensional content, the definition of a word, for example, comes to life and in turn brings *us* to life if we can open to and encounter it deeply, perhaps through finding the beauty of its written form, the history of its origin, the resonance of its sound, the phenomenology inherent in its etymology, the relevance of the word in one’s life today. Like life itself, these subjects are living words, living subjects that are

encrypted. Again, the code is broken and the subject revealed only to the degree that we open to them.

In an education for depth, *information* is given its rightful place as currency for the educational exchange but not mistaken as the goal in and of itself. Information can then open up into *knowledge*, where direct experience often brings together the bits of information into patterned wholes involving mastery and skill. Knowledge then opens the possibility of cultivating *intelligence*, which can cut, shape, and create information. This is followed by the layer of *understanding* that takes us beyond the power of intelligence to see through the eye of the heart. Understanding contrasts and balances objectivism and offers a way of knowing that serves character and community. Education then has the possibility of cultivating *wisdom*, which sees from a greater height and blends insight into what is true with an ethic of what is right. Finally the depths lead to the possibility of creative *transformation* changing both the known and the knower and generating new information to be explored (Hart, 2001a).

What is the Goal

At a conference I attended recently, a presenter explained that he was involved with contemplative architecture. I think most of us in the audience were trying to imagine what this work was about. Did it mean building meditation halls or religious buildings, I wondered. When asked what in the world contemplative architecture was he explained that it was designing a building with more space on the inside than on the outside. There was a pause as we took this in. This is what developing interiority is about in education, spaciousness on our inside to take into us the world that is before us. Perhaps the more information and technology there is on the outside-and certainly we are deluged these days-the more spaciousness and richness of interiority is necessary. That is, the greater the complexity and demands of the outer world, the more essential is our internal discernment, our attention to values, our ability to be present in the midst of streaming information.

Cultivating interiority is not just a means to a short-term end-awaken interest and students will learn more-but instead, especially in the backdrop of the previous century, an interior life is required for navigating the complexities of the world with wisdom, virtue, and meaning. Our most sustainable and valuable educational goals do not have much to do with test scores, instead they have something to do with a balance between preparing young people for surviving and thriving in the world while developing their authentic inner potentials. Thomas Merton (1979) said it this way:

The purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to the world-not to impose a prefabricated

definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself. (p. 3)

And inward awareness is not only important to provide a kind of centerpoint for identity as Merton invites, but also because it reveals the intersection of our individual depth with a more universal depth. The universe lies not only about us but also within us; the outside can reveal the inside and vice versa. Emerson (1968) tells us that:

In yourself is the law of all nature...in yourself slumbers the whole of reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all...Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is but a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. (pp. 47, 46)

The inside is completely bound to the outside in a dialectic of its own. As outside and inside meet in awareness we begin to recognize our relatedness and embeddedness in all the worlds (physical, social, political, spiritual, environmental, linguistic) to which we belong.

Changing Weather

In today's educational climate, attention to interiority can serve to rebalance the learning equation through this process of reciprocal revelation. I want to briefly attend to four general foundational pedagogical vehicles: contemplation, relevance, resonance, and community. The later three are explored as climates or atmospheres we might say, rather than direct frontal attempts at interiority. They all engender intellectual and emotional microclimates where affect and thought, inside and outside, self and subject are naturally joined.

Contemplation

Contemplative practices cultivate interiority directly. Contemplation here refers to an epistemic process-a way of knowing-that complements the rational and the sensory. While largely absent from contemporary education, there is a long history of contemplative practice across the wisdom traditions that includes meditation, prayer, yoga, dialogue, radical questioning and so forth. These practices are designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind in order to cultivate a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, or insight. Whereas various practices are designed to evoke different kinds of interior experience, such as creative breakthrough, heightened concentration, or compassion, they share in common a distinct non-linear consciousness that invites an opening or expansion of awareness. This opening *within us* in turn enables a corresponding opening toward the world *before us*.

Contemplative practices are currently enjoying a renaissance. There is a growing body of evidence on the utility of contemplation in areas ranging from medicine

(Benson, 2000; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) to spirituality (Finley, 2000; Hanh, 1987) to learning (Druer, Zajonc & Dana, 2003; Hart, 2004; Miller, 1994). There are several initiatives from various organizations introducing contemplative practices in education at every level (e.g., The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, ChildSpirit Institute, Fetzer Institute, Garrison Institute, Impact Foundation). Stand-alone practices such as meditation, although often derived from religious traditions, can be applied in education, including public schooling, without fear of violating church-state separation because they represent ways of knowing, not doctrines of what to know.

In a very literal sense these kinds of practices represent internal technologies of the mind. Just as we come to rely on external technologies from a pencil to a computer, these internal technologies may enable shifts in attention and physiological responses that optimize our mind for the task at hand. Demonstrable effects on physiological *state*, which in turn affects emotion and attention and ultimately learning, are most clearly and consistently documented (Murphy, Donovan & Taylor, 1997). In addition to state effects, change over time in *traits* such as empathy, perceptual acuity, and anxiety level have also been described, although demonstrating this type of outcome is typically more difficult than researching effects on physiological state and has heretofore been accomplished with varying degrees of methodological rigor.

A simple and straightforward practice of mindfulness, for example, helps to develop interiority and metacognition through a process of witnessing the contents of consciousness. William James (1950) understood the distinction between the “I”-the part of us that witness or watches, and the “me”-the content of our consciousness. A practice of simple mindfulness in which we regularly or even steadily watch the stream of consciousness-thoughts, feelings, sensations-without either pushing them away or clinging to them, develops a capacity for detachment. This detachment is most often described not as a distant objectivism but instead as an open witnessing presence (Eckhart, 1958). For example, rather than just feeling angry, such witnessing allows us to step back and notice-“I see that this is really upsetting me” and inquiring about it while in the midst of it: “I wonder what this anger is about?” This not only develops the potential for emotional regulation and impulse control, but also develops interior “muscles” of reflection leading to metacognition. Emerson hints at this developmental arc: “Our thoughts first possess us. Later, if we have good heads, we come to possess them” (Sealts, 1992, p. 257). In this witnessing or watching what occurs is “a mindful reflection that includes in the reflection on a question the asker of the question and the process of asking itself” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 30). This process “begin[s] to sense and interrupt automatic patterns

of conditioned thinking, sensation and behavior” (p. 122). Such technology opens one to see in fresh ways, a fundamental component of deep learning. In addition, as we simply and honestly observe and tolerate our own reactions, we may also gain a tolerance for others, so essential for entertaining multiple points of view.

Not doing. At the most foundational level what we know of effective learning is that time-on-task is entirely subordinate to the quality of attention brought to that task. If our attention is somewhere else, scattered or racing perhaps, we may have little capacity to be present and learn. Paradoxically, we may need to *not do* for a few moments in order to be more available for *doing* the task at hand.

At the beginning of a class, at a transition time, or when we might be struggling with a problem, I might turn the lights down and ask students to: “Take a few deep, slow, clearing breaths. Let your body release and relax; let any parts of you that need to wiggle or stretch do so. Now feel the gentle pull of gravity and allow the chair you’re sitting on, and the floor beneath you to support you without any effort on your part. As best as you can and are willing, just let go and allow yourself to be silent and *not do* for a few minutes. You may want to focus only on your breathing, allowing it to flow in and out without effort. If you find yourself thinking, distracted, working on a problem, don’t fight it, don’t get stuck in it. Just allow it and you to be and redirect your awareness back to your breath, and to *not doing*. Perhaps you can imagine those thoughts or concerns to float up like bubbles from underwater. When they reach the surface they simply burst and disappear.” We might add a ring of a bell in order to add to the power of ceremony that helps students to recognize this as time to shift.

The moment of transition from the depth of contemplation to the action of the classroom is significant. “As you gently come back to the room you may notice the sensations of peacefulness, a clearer mind, or perhaps a feeling of centeredness. As you move through your day, even and maybe especially when things get difficult, perhaps you can take a breath and find that center again.”

Following this exercise, we might ask them to notice any difference before and after “not doing.” They might share their experiences with one another; students are often surprised by the stream of their own thoughts. They may experiment with longer periods of contemplation and often report explorations on their own in various situations outside of class. This is a very simple and safe way to develop the internal skills to shift awareness and impact concentration and attention (Hart, 2004).

Where are you now? A slightly different focus can also nourish the capacity for witnessing and presence. “Where are you now?” we might ask our class. “Take a few moments and just relax. Take a few deep breaths. Close your eyes if

you are comfortable doing so, and tune into where you are right in this moment. Are you thinking about the day ahead? Rehashing some past experience? Caught in an emotional hangover about a situation with a friend or family member? How much of you is in your body? In your head? Floating outside you? Do you feel out in front of you? Stuck in a painful nook? Just watch for a few moments; just noticing where you are and how that feels.” After a few moments we might ask, “Now take two minutes and share your awareness with the person next to you (or in your notebook, or out loud to the class).”

In a larger or shyer group I might ask how many were thinking about the past or the future, how many were worried about the day ahead, how many were in their head or in some other part of their body, or outside themselves. As a way of explaining James’ notion of “I” and “me” or the idea of witnessing we might ask them if they noticed that some part was watching and some part was being watched. This part that is watching, the “I” or the witness, may be a useful point of reference. This could be extended into a daily activity outside of class. “Where am I now?” might become internalized as a kind of personal check-in, inviting self-awareness.

Such simple and brief practices (and there are many more) are starting points toward inviting interiority directly in the classroom. These may be thought of as experiments with developing life-long interior technologies of knowing (Hart, 2004).

In what follows, I will not emphasize independent practices so much as focus on very recognizable dimensions of pedagogy that can be applied in an integrated fashion to enhance interiority. I am addressing very familiar and common practices and orientations; ones that teachers at every level are already capable of. However, in the current emphasis on information download, these approaches often get pushed to the background or neglected altogether. I want to highlight that a very slight turn in pedagogical emphasis can open interiority, which in turn catalyzes deep learning.

Relevance

Relevance implies that an idea or topic relates to us or to something or to someone we are close to. If we find interest or meaning (relevance) in something, we pay attention and tend to learn it. Few things are more straightforward in education. Interest enables the three year old to know the names of dinosaurs, including which ones eat meat. It allows the child who struggles with simple mathematics to be able to interpret and memorize baseball statistics; children who have trouble with basic written language skills have little difficulty memorizing and writing the words to popular songs. Interest means that emotions have been engaged and we know that cognition and

emotion are interdependent. Emotion activates attention, which drives learning and memory.

Sometimes relevance is apparent. For example, my daughter will devour books that she likes (often ones about adventurous girls close to her age) and push aside the ones with which she cannot connect. Asking students to follow their own lead through independent, self-selected research projects is a fairly reliable way to activate interest. At its steamiest, relevance may evoke passion, even a sense of calling that emerges from some mysterious origin.

While relevance and passion can emerge spontaneously, at other times we may have to work at exposing relevance. We do so when we shape the curriculum with the concerns of students’ lives, from their neighborhoods, or from a point of view that might be close to theirs. For example, a history lesson for junior high school students might be offered from the point of view of a twelve-year-old who lived at that time. When we work toward relevance we partner with the student to build a bridge between them and the curriculum and we, as teachers, meet them on that bridge. When any information passes before us, some part of us asks: “What’s in this for me?” “What does this have to do with my life?” “What meaning does this have?” Making these questions explicit helps students discover how the material relates to some present concern or future goal and thereby nourishes meaning and interest. On her first day of class, one middle school teacher asked students to write down two questions that they have about themselves and two questions that they have about the world. After collaborating in small groups, they organized and ranked the questions and arrived at some degree of consensus. These questions (e.g., “Will I live to be a hundred?”) serve as a point of relevance for the entire curriculum and lessons are regularly organized around them (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999). Relevance means keeping students’ abilities, interests, and passions in view.

Whereas relevance means that something may be useful to us, this is not just a self-serving awareness. When students use information to make an impact on others as when they give a presentation outside of class or tutor other students, their motivation often increases dramatically (McCombs, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). University students returning from helping serve food or clean up houses after Hurricane Katrina or tutoring a local first grader in reading twice a week, regularly describe an internal deepening that they understand as having something to do with opening their heart.

Learning through service can be so powerful precisely because it makes us more vulnerable to direct encounters with the world and in so doing engages interiority in the form of empathy, understanding, struggle, and so forth. Service is important not just to fill the needs of the culture, or because it is the moral or good thing to do, but because it

actually opens our consciousness; service becomes a way of knowing (Deikman, 2000).

The nature of questioning can either open or truncate relevance and depth. The ancient Greek philosophers were bold in asking questions like “Who are you?” “What are we here for?” Surprisingly even young children ask these big or radical questions as a way of trying to understand the world (Hart, 2003; Matthews, 1980). But schooling at every level, with looming curricular demands and an emphasis on one right answer, often works against depth of exploration. The result is that “neither teachers nor students are willing to undertake risks for understanding; instead they content themselves with correct answer compromises” (Gardner, 1991, p. 150). But pondering big and radical questions has the capacity of opening to unexpected insight. In the classroom at any level we might pose and invite questions on:

- Big things. “What is life about?”
- Both local and distant influences. “What would make your school, the world, your parents, the universe better?” “What do you wonder about and worry about?”
- Ethics. “How do you know what’s the right thing to do?” “What would you do if you were the President?”
- Identity. “What is the most important thing about being you? What’s the most fun?” “What will your life be like in ten years?” “What would you like as your epitaph?” “Who are your heros?”
- New perspectives. “I wonder what the world looks like through an ant’s eyes, a Martian’s, a terrorist’s?” “I wonder what your parents think about when you’re not around?” “What if you had a week to live?”

In a large university class, posing questions in journals may provide a source of developing interiority. Sharing an answer with a neighbor, even in the middle of a large lecture hall can, in the right atmosphere, engender reflection and connection. In an exam or in a class discussion, simply asking for the questions that the student would ask about the topic, what they are curious about, what they really want to know but have been afraid to ask, serves as another means to loosen the lock of pre-determined answers on the process of knowing.

With most topics, there is an opportunity to create the dynamic tension of ambiguity that can lead to unexpected knowing. We do this when we lead off the lesson with an honest question that has no simple preset answer. We might ask, “What are the causes of violence in our culture and in our society?” instead of truncating knowledge with “What are the five causes of violence that our text discusses?” Of

course we want the student to know the text, but if our questions merely dead-end there, we have missed an opportunity for insight through exploring the gaps in our knowledge. In this sense ambiguity, gaps, and uncertainty potentiates curiosity and learning.

Holding paradoxical or contradictory perspectives long enough may frustrate and transform normal thinking. For example, we might invite students to ponder the idea that light operates both as waves and as particles, or the conflicting issues of fairness involved in a contemporary issue such as affirmative action. Could we take both the position of the disadvantaged youth as well as the privileged child who was denied admission to college in spite of his or her higher performance? The point is not to win an argument as in a debate; it is to see beyond the various sides in order to take in the whole of the issue and to synthesize a larger perspective. Traditions ranging from Chinese and Indian philosophy to Heraclitus, from Hegel’s dialectics to quantum physics to Zen Buddhism have used paradox to open knowing.

Another simple practice invites students to generate questions instead of answers about a particular event or idea (e.g., a Civil War battle, a science demonstration, a story). These remarks can include students’ own reactions and associations such as, “What does this have to do with my life?” Or statements such as, “What about this really excites (or bothers) me?” In one variation of this exercise, students can anonymously write the questions on an index card to be shared out loud with the class by a designated reader. These are not immediately to be answered but just listened to. We could place a “question chair” in the middle of the classroom. Questions are addressed to the chair rather than to the teacher or another student. No one is allowed to answer the question directly; it is simply allowed to sit and simmer. Other questions may follow. Initially this is awkward and students fall back into habits of looking to the teacher, forgetting to talk to the chair, or providing a quick response to the question. But with just a few reminders, space opens up. The process is less like an assembly line and more like an artist’s studio, the atmosphere gradually shifts, and I imagine that the space inside the student shifts and opens as well (Hart, 2001b).

So much of education is about pouring in to students, but the balance to this is to help students find their voice, their unique creative expression in the world. When we speak a true word or write from our hearts or express our imagination, we expose our insides to the potential for feedback. This is not only through their products-term papers and projects-but also by their authentic being, we might say. Making room in a course for dialogue, creative projects, presentations, independent writing helps them to find their voice. Attending to personal interests, finding opportunities for service, inviting questions, leaving gaps

and ambiguity in knowledge, and encouraging students to practice using their “voice” helps foster interiority through connecting what we think is important to what they think is valuable.

Resonance

Resonance literally implies that something vibrates in us. Challenge, curiosity, rich sensory experience, and juicy information wakes us up by producing an echo or resonance within us. As with art, it is not just the superficial outline, contours, or the shape of the information; “there is something additional, a breath that draws your breath into its breathing, a heartbeat that pounds on yours” (Davis, 1992, p. 16).

When material is presented with enough depth and richness, we often feel its pulse within us. When it is not, we leave numbed; as one student remarked, “most of my teachers taught in a way that their subject resembled a dead corpse or a petrified dummy. They taught directly from the text and to the test. As a result, I lost all passion and interest.”

The source for resonant exchange is the information and its particular form of presentation (e.g., through a lecture, a book, a game). Superficially presented information or information out of context is less likely to resonate within us. As Emerson writes, “Nothing interests us which is stark or bounded, but only what streams with life” (Sealts, 1992, p. 246). Great teachers know their subject deeply enough to bring forth its presence and vitality, its streaming life. They serve as artists and explorers who create a picture for the student to see and meet. Great teachers give a glimpse of the soul of a thing or idea, each in his or her own unique way. It is not just that they know content but that they also understand the particular epistemics and aesthetics of their discipline.

Great teachers also remain open to learning from and exploring the material in new ways; information remains unbounded, without preset limits, and available to flow into new forms. If material is only superficially understood or is too tightly bound, it will be insufficient to resonate within the student or the teacher. Material offered with depth is like a wonderful meal, sensuous and embodied; it makes us want to lick the plate and look forward to the next offering. This is what great art does, what a powerful song does, and what juicy information offers. Students are hungry and looking for something that they can sink their teeth into. If we are simply asking for the memorization of a factoid for a test, they will learn that school is not a place to find real sustenance.

Perhaps the most universal way of moving information into the patterned wholes of knowledge is through offering material in the ways that we live and understand our lives: through stories and metaphors. Stories and metaphors offer

patterns of meaning that may be interpreted at many different levels. They weave bits and pieces into patterns located in time, space, with history and direction—just like our lives. Stories, whether the story of a biological cell, a metaphysical idea, or an historic event, connect ideas and events into the stream of life, to the “pattern that connects” as Gregory Bateson named it. Inevitably we act according to our stories (e.g., “I am a good student.” “The world is round.”)

Stories help open and activate imagination, a capacity of interior knowing. Einstein’s thought experiments (“Imagine I am on the head of a rocket traveling at the speed of light”), Picasso’s unusual way of bringing his unique perception and play to art, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s imagining a world of justice and equality (“I have a dream”) are forces of interiority which take us beyond the information given and beyond the status quo. Imagination has been mistaken as a colorful accent to schooling, and largely dismissed in an educational age anxious about meeting standards and status. However, it is this rich interior way of knowing and playing with knowledge that is central to discovery, invention, synthesis, and application. Thankfully there is some fresh attention to the value of imagination in education (Imagination in Education Research Group, 2006).

In scholastic work we mainly emphasize intellect and language. There is a long tradition in the west from Plato to Augustine to Descartes of separating the intellect from the body. The body has been perceived as a source of suffering—the prison house of the soul for Plato, the vehicle for moral failure as Augustine understood, and merely a machine on which the head rides around for Descartes. As a result, feelings, felt sense or bodily sensations, and non-linguistic perceptions have been made largely irrelevant in contemporary education. In addition, a modernist emphasis on objectivity has likewise pushed subjective perception far to the background in favor of a belief in the ultimate possibility of objectivity. Now, we know that both the rise of mind-body medicine and the post-modern turn have helped to rehabilitate the status of the body and of subjectivity. We can join that turn and take it inward by engaging the body in teaching. For example, in literature great description engages the body via the senses (“It was a dark and stormy night”) to evoke a visceral experience of the event. Great poetry often mixes and joins senses and levels in a synesthetic event. Social scientists engage in thick phenomenological description to capture the body of experience of the scene they are viewing or the person they are interviewing. Discernment between true and false, fact and opinion, good and not so, is part of what education endeavors to teach. We know from experience that a felt sense or immediate “intuitive” response is sometimes at least as good a barometer as a logically reasoned decision

(Gladwell, 2005). We also know that endorphins and their receptor sites previously thought to exist only in the brain are distributed in large proportion in the gut, suggesting that the “gut feeling” as a valid source of discernment, has a neurophysiologic substrate (Pert, 1986). To learn to understand and deconstruct the messages from the body as well as the mind serves our capacity for judgment. We might ask “what does reasoning tell you about this; what does your gut or hunch tell you. Now let’s sort these out and, hopefully, test them out.” This process of awareness, reflection, and testing helps to refine capacities for discernment, which is an aspect of our interiority.

In order to activate more of the body-mind, we might ask students in any discipline to draw a response to a particular problem rather than use language exclusively. In a small section of a university psychology class, my students are asked to use Play-Doh™ to depict (and then later explain) an aspect of their personality during that section in our text. I am always amazed after some playfulness, by the silence and intensity of concentration that comes over the room as they fall into this kindergarten-like assignment. There is something about the tactile nature of it that takes them deeply internal as the richness of their responses betray. Many ask if they can keep the Play-Doh™ as if it were some alchemical catalyst or touchstone.

The word “understanding” means literally “standing under or among.” This implies crossing boundaries inherent in “standing apart from or against”-the meaning of objective-and moves toward intimacy and empathy. Understanding requires a fundamental shift in the way we know. Buber (1958) describes this shift as a movement from an “I-It” relationship” toward one of “I and Thou.” Understanding comes when we empathize with the other, lean into the other, and suspend our distant self-separateness for a moment. As we do so, recognition of interconnection may emerge. This way of knowing is as useful in science as it is in human relationships. Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock described a less detached empiricism, one in which she gained “a feeling for the organism,” (she explored genetics through working with corn plants) that required “the openness to let it come to you” (Keller, 1983, p. 198). The other is no longer separate but becomes part of our world and our selves in a profoundly intimate way.

Understanding of this sort is engendered by an attitude of curiosity and appreciation for the object of our gaze. Curriculum generally emphasizes how we measure, calculate, memorize, and utilize objects and ideas, but it is appreciation for the other-person, particle or planet-that helps us to really meet the other and be changed by it. Heschel (1972) suggests that this capacity is a matter of our very survival.

Mankind will not perish from want of information; but only want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder. (p. 46)

A simple goal of understanding and appreciating the other rather than calculating or manipulating it in some way invites the possibility of wonder. While we might want the student to understand the moon phases in our astronomy class, we might additionally invite them to simply take the time to behold a night sky, imagine a trip to the moon, notice what spending some time under the moon stirs in them. This simple and subtle turn curves away from objectification of the other to a more intimate meeting. Of course, it requires that we, as teachers, know something about this process ourselves, moving from efficiency into moments of open intensity and quality. What have we beheld, appreciated, and genuinely met today?

Richness, openness, stories, the body, goals of understanding, and attitudes of appreciation help to bring a resonance to material that awakens a connection between ourselves and the material, engendering a genuine meeting. As Buber (1958) wrote, “All real living [and we might add learning] is meeting” (p. 11).

Community

Finally, I want to mention the paradoxical role of community in fostering interiority. Interiority may be commonly thought of as separate: mine is not yours. However, in the context of genuine community, interiority finds a space to explore and develop.

At the intersection of subject, teacher, and student is a space that may be thought of as a “clearing” (Heidegger, 1966), as the “between” (Buber, 1958), or as the overlap of play areas (Winnicott, 1996) that engenders a community of learners. Although a student can open a book or click on a CD ROM and access information, it is in a community that those ideas have a chance of being challenged, tested, played out, and discussed; these are precisely the activities that help grow knowledge and self. Community is so central because it enables dialogue and creates a dynamic and spontaneous tension; we never know quite where the conversation will lead. Our own thought can be more easily examined when externalized in a conversation or heard in the comments of another person; ideas leap off the page and out of our minds as they take life in a classmate.

Community not only serves the learning process but also is its own lesson. That is, it reminds us that the world exists in relationships and that knowing is always about a relationship. We may begin to recognize that the housing development becomes a neighborhood only if we know our neighbors; the workplace becomes a place we look forward to or dread, not only because of the work but especially

because of the quality of relationships. The classroom becomes a community when understanding both the material and one another becomes our mutual responsibility. Unfortunately, community is not always valued as essential for learning; “teacher and students gather in the same room at the same time not to experience community but simply to keep the teacher from having to say things more than once” (Palmer, 1998, p. 116). And it seems that institutionalization often occludes the essentiality of community. Institutions offer the trappings of community and sometimes leave us confused and longing for a kind of relationship and care that the institutional structure does not provide by itself.

The earliest years of formal schooling (e.g., kindergarten) probably attend to community best because we recognize the tenderness of our youngest charges and our need to create a kind of “school-home” (Martin, 1992). However, especially against a backdrop of anxiety, materialism, hyper-competition, hyper-individualism, and objectivism, the need for the essence of school-home-community extends throughout every level of education. When an individual does not feel the basic sense of belonging that a community engenders, alienation and anxiety rule (Horney, 1950). This may leave both students and teachers wary, causing us to expend our energies on self-protection, on closing down rather than opening up. We may keep our distance from one another and the material, positions that are the opposite of those that invite depth. Wariness can also take the form of a lack of civility, and even aggression, which is a violent expression of self-protection. Do our classrooms and our courses engender wariness or a general sense of trust?

In community we take risks and get feedback, get provoked, test out ideas, and develop intimacy. We are always a self-in-relation. If we feel a sense of belonging, we lower our defenses, we allow ourselves to be seen; we allow our interiority to rise to the surface and meet the world. The literature on group dynamics and community development is large and well developed and so I will not address particular means here only noting that genuine community involves tolerance for disagreement, play, celebration, vulnerability, care, and dialogue.

Conclusion

Learning more and more deeply is tied to the way and to the degree that we meet information. Contemplation as a way of knowing, relevance of material, the resonance of rich and real presentation, all in the context of a community of learners invites an education that does not mistake information as the goal of education. Instead it uses information as the rightful currency of learning-as living words-toward an education of depth and understanding.

It is no news that we live at a time when the world seems to be spinning faster. Information abounds and is available like never before. Both the imminent threats and the constructive possibilities at the horizon are almost unfathomable. If we are to prepare students for this accelerated and challenging world, and aspire to more than merely trying to keep up or catch up, something more than a stockpile of information and skills sets is required. The greater the complexity and demands of the outer world, the more essential are those capacities and qualities of interiority that allow us to be spacious and skilled enough to open the code of information: discernment, values, detachment, presence, imagination, reflection, and heart.

When education embodies the vision and practice that internal and external are bound to and also transformed by one another in a kind of reciprocal revelation then education moves toward becoming a wisdom tradition itself.◆

Tobin Hart is a father, author, teacher, psychologist, and speaker. He serves as Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia. He is co-founder and President of the ChildSpirit Institute, a nonprofit educational and research hub exploring and nurturing the spirituality of children and adults (www.childspirit.org). His work explores the integration of consciousness, spirituality, psychotherapy, and education. His most recent books include: From Information to Transformation: Education for the Evolution of Consciousness (Peter Lang, 2001) and The Secret Spiritual World of Children (Inner Ocean, 2003).

References

- Benson, H. (2000). *The relaxation response*. New York: HarperTorch. (originally published 1975).
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.). (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou* (R. G. Smith, Trans.). New York: Charles Scribner & Sons. (Original work published 1923)
- Davis, A. (1992). *The logic of ecstasy: Canadian mystical painting 1920-1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Deikman, A. (2000). Service as knowing. In T. Hart, P. Nelson & K. Puhakka (Eds.), *Transpersonal knowing: Exploring the horizon of consciousness* (pp. 303-318). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Druer, M., Zajonc, A. & Dana, D. (2003). Survey of transformative and spiritual dimensions of higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1(3), 177-211.
- Eckhart, M. (1958). *Meister Eckhart: Selected treatises and sermons* (J. M. Clark & J. V. Skinner, Trans.). London: Faber & Faber.
- Emerson, R. W. (1968). The American scholar. In L. Mumford (Ed.), *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and journals*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (Original address delivered 1837)
- Finley, J. (2000). *The contemplative heart*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books.
- Gardner, H. (1991). *The unschooled mind: How children think and how schools should teach*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. N.Y.: Little, Brown and Company.
- Hanh, T. N. (1987). *The miracle of mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon Preress.
- Hart, T. (2001a). From information to transformation: Education for the evolution of consciousness. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hart, T. (2001b). Teaching for wisdom. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 14(2), 3-16; 253-270.
- Hart, T. (2003). *The secret spiritual world of children*. Makawao, HI: Inner Ocean.
- Hart, T. (2004). Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2(1), 28-46.
- Heidegger, M. (1966). *Discourse on thinking* (J. M. Anderson & E. H. Freund, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1959)
- Heschel, A. J. (1972). *God in search of man*. New York: Octagon Books. (Original work published 1955)
- Horney, K. (1950). *Neurosis and human growth: The struggle toward self-realization*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Imagination in Education Research Group (2006). *ierg*. Retrieved October 1, 2006 from <http://www.ierg.net>
- James, W. (1950). *Principles of psychology*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1890).
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York: Random House.
- Keller, E. (1983). *A feeling for the organism: The life and work of Barbara McClintock*. New York: Freeman.
- Martin, J. R. (1992). *The schoolhome: Rethinking schools for changing families*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Matthews, G. B. (1980). *Philosophy and the young child*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McCombs, B. L. (1996). Alternative perspectives for motivation. In L. Baker, P. Afflerback, & D. Reinking (Eds.), *Developing engaged readers in school and home communities* (pp. 67-87). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Merton, T. (1979). *Love and living*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Miller, J. (1994). *The contemplative practitioner: Meditation in education and the professions*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.
- Murphy, M., Donovan, S., & Taylor, E. (1997). The physical and psychological effects of meditation: A review of contemporary research 1991-1996. Petaluma, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences (2nd edition).
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pert, C. B. (1986). The wisdom of the receptors: Neuropeptides, the emotions, and bodymind. *Advances*, 3(3), 8-16.
- Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. (1996). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and application*. Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice-Hall.

Sealts, M. M. (1992). *Emerson on the scholar*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Varela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1993). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.

Winnicott, D. W. (1996). *Playing and reality*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1971)