

## Becoming Who You Are

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## **Becoming Who You Are**

### **The time of education**

**Andrew Metcalfe and Ann Game**

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**ABSTRACT.** Desirous time is not conducive to learning because its fantasies are distractions from the present moment, the time when genuine creative possibilities emerge. In contrast, the time of love, of an *I–Thou* relation, is the time of potential and infinitude. This is when engaged learning occurs, and when students develop the practices that open them to a creative way of being. In contrast to the future-oriented linearity of desirous time, the time of creative learning is the time of presence. This argument is developed using interview material from well-known Australians and well-regarded Australian teachers. **KEY WORDS** • patience • potential • presence • the present • whole

### **Desirous Time and the Time of Love**

In this article we explore the time and ontology of creative or deep learning, a transformative, wonder-filled process in which we learn about the world and ourselves anew through engagement. In order to develop an understanding of the temporality of these experiences, we make a distinction between identity-based and relational pedagogies, between teaching through a desire for knowledge and teaching with a love of learning (see also Liston, 2000). This distinction reflects a tension, common in education debates and practices, as well as debates around knowledge, between a desire for certainty on the one hand, and openness to the unknown, to surprise and change, on the other.

The difference between these pedagogic approaches can be understood in terms of the difference between the Hegelian logic of desire and Martin Buber's (1958) *I-Thou* relation of love (Game and Metcalfe, 2003; Metcalfe and Game, 2004). The Hegelian scenario is that of a desire for self-certainty and identity, a desire for mastery of otherness and the unknown (Hegel, 1977). Despite their deconstructions of the desire for self-certainty and mastery, post-Hegelians retain the basic formulation of desire: the primacy of identities, self and other, that precede social relations. Cixous (1986), for example, speaks of a desire which 'would keep the *other* alive and different' (p. 79), and a movement towards the other in a proximity that avoids merger or appropriation. The alternative is between two forms of identity, separate or merged. Deconstructions of Hegel focus on the impossibility of a complete mastery or appropriation: there is always an excess that is unknown. Logically this unknown is elsewhere, eluding us in an endless deferral that produces a restless 'never settling' movement (Cixous, 1986; see also Derrida, 1992). Thus, despite the undoing of mastery, a desire for knowledge is necessarily governed by an end. Desirous time involves living in the future, taking us away from the present moment.

Buber (1958) used the term 'I-It' to describe the logic of this Hegelian world of finite subjects and objects located in linear-Euclidean time-space. He distinguished this from the infinitude of an *I-Thou* relation. The latter relation refers to a primary relationality: '*I-Thou* establishes the world of relation' (p. 11):

When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object . . . *Thou* has no bounds . . .

The relation to the *Thou* is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou* . . . No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between *I* and *Thou* . . . (pp. 3–12)

In an *I-Thou* meeting there are no identifiable subjects, objects and desires. It is not that these are transcended, but rather that no identification can be adequate, no identity can serve as a conclusion of knowing. What I know in the eternity of the meeting is not an endless amount of knowledge but a knowledge of the mystery, the no-thing-ness, of the whole: 'in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*' (p. 6). Such meetings are characterized by wonder.

The time of an *I-Thou* meeting is the present:

The present, and by that is meant not the point which indicates from time to time in our thought merely the conclusion of 'finished' time, the mere appearance of a termination which is fixed and held, but the real, filled present, exists only in so far as actual presentness, meeting and relation exist. The present arises only in virtue of the fact that the *Thou* becomes present. (Buber, 1958: 12)

In this time, the unfolding present holds within it all time, but, in contrast to chronological or linear time, the past here is not a flashback to what has been and the future is not anticipation of what is to come. Past and future exist in

the eternal as phenomena of the present. This, as Buber suggests, is the time of presence, the time of being, the time of the fullness of living (see also Heidegger, 1972; Loy, 1992).

With the suspension of a subject's desire for an object, Buber's *I-Thou* is a relation of love: 'Love is *between I and Thou* . . . Love is responsibility of an *I* for a *Thou*' (Buber, 1958: 14–15). This love has the qualities of the 'transformative, enlarged love' that Liston (2000) says nourishes students' and teachers' souls. Drawing on Murdoch (1971), Liston argues that this is a form of love that 'takes the individual beyond his or her personal concerns to a clearer, less noise-filled focus on beauty . . . and on the world around and beyond us' (p. 81). It allows us to accept mortality and uncertainty with humility and to attend to the reality of the learning situation before us, here and now, without anticipation. This patient and attentive state is essential if teachers are to play their part in helping students engage with the larger world, finding the connections between their lives and this world that show 'that significance exists' (Liston, 2000: 95–9).

To make this argument about the time of education, we will draw on a research project on 'teachers who change lives'. We interviewed 13 well-known Australians and 22 teachers, the latter coming from all levels of formal education and a diversity of disciplines, including maths, languages, sciences, humanities, theatre, music, art and sport (Metcalf and Game, 2006). In semi-structured interviews, we invited all interviewees to talk about their experiences of life-changing teachers, and the teachers to talk about their own teaching practices and experiences. We encouraged all participants to re-enter and recount specific experiences.

The aim of this project was to develop a relational understanding of education, addressing the question: what happens *between* teachers and students in effective, engaged learning and teaching? Thus, we took the relational tradition of phenomenology as the basis of our conceptual framework and methodology. In phenomenology, participation is the principle of knowledge: we know, not as subjects observing objects, but through our being in the world. In other words, the site of knowledge is the relation: we know and learn 'with' rather than 'about' others. In our interviews, both we and our interviewees learned more than we had previously known about learning and teaching.

Avoiding abstractions, phenomenology is concerned with direct and specific descriptions of experiences, of the space and time of our relations with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Our empirical research was not designed to be representative or to provide data from which generalizations could be drawn, but, rather, to provide details of particular experiences and situations, through which we might gain a sympathetic understanding of the universality of good teaching. Our writing is also guided by a participatory principle, aiming to evoke the quality of experiences so that they might resonate with those of readers. By

inviting readers to reflect on the similarities and differences with their own experiences, this form of writing allows for a creative dialogue with the text (Bachelard, 1969).

### Changing and Educating

In our research, we found that good teachers were aware of the unhealthy nature of their pedagogic desires and strategies, however well intentioned these may be; through concentrating on potential rather than expectation, through patience rather than a desire for pre-established outcomes, they had learned to live with the unknowing that comes with presence.

Let us exemplify this mature unknowing. Mr Schubert was the life-changing teacher nominated by writer Nick Jose. Mr Schubert was a senior teacher whose students had a record of great distinction in public examinations, yet Mr Schubert did not work towards particular outcomes. In a letter to an ex-student, he explained:

A teacher's work can properly be judged only by its long-term outcome, of which, in the nature of things, he can normally expect to know little or nothing; he works, as it were, largely in the dark. Additionally, there is the question of what criterion it is appropriate to use. Recently, at a dinner at the School, I sat between [A], who was still plainly excited by being newly appointed a judge of the Supreme Court, and [B], who makes no bones about his satisfaction with his role in shaping the policies of the Reserve Bank. But, perversely perhaps, I am even more impressed by [C], who tells me he still always has his Donne on his bedside table, or [D], who claims that he reads more poetry than anything else.

Nick's own account of Mr Schubert's practice confirmed the importance of this humility, innocent of strategy:

Mr Schubert had a really deep love of literature. The texts he chose for us were fantastic texts he had a passion for, and, however strange his manner, he was able to convey that passion. He was very sensitive to literature and was always . . . challenging us to tap into quite powerful forces in our lives, and that was a way of letting us be ourselves.

He seemed blissfully unaware of the effect he was having on us. He would be there, he would rub his nose a lot and he'd read out these bits, like the quote from *Othello* – 'an old black ram . . . tugging your white ewe'. It was electrifying! Because he was blissfully unaware, we thought it was okay too. He treated us absolutely as if we were mature people intellectually.

Mr Schubert's teaching drew, it seems, on an undefined range of hopes for his students. He might have hoped that they would be successful in their careers; he hoped that they would serve others; he hoped that they would be sustained by their relationships with books. These hopes, however, never settled into finite

desires that would allow him to appraise his success with each student. Eschewing a desirous, purposive hope that would take him away from the present, Mr Schubert taught with what Hillman (1978) says is an altogether different, religious sense of hope. He quotes St Paul: 'For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' This is an infinite hope, a patient and courageous hope, based on interest and curiosity and not, like desire and expectation, on a finite object or outcome. This is a hope open to the surprise of time, and therefore able to be realistic about our place in the world. Not projecting abstract fantasies onto the future, it is a hope that accepts tomorrow as the unfolding of today. It finds in tomorrow what it knows it is not in a position to expect today, and yet it finds it as the fulfilment of the as yet unknown significance of the present.<sup>1</sup> There is genuine creativity and yet it leads us to become what we (don't yet quite know we) are.

As Nick Jose insisted, Mr Schubert's teaching doubtless had 'successful' outcomes, but to achieve them he had to set expectations aside in his daily classroom work, concentrating simply on the students as they were, then and there. His task as teacher was to establish a classroom in which students could be changed through their encounter with John Donne. Mr Schubert didn't try to control the outcome of this relation. He loved what he did, and shared what he loved, and had faith in his students and his beloved poets. As Nick put it, 'what the teacher does is in the here and now, that's where it happens, and then there is this distant harvest, which they have to just trust in. Teachers can't predict exactly what will happen. Their work is an act of faith.'

Mr Schubert's bemusement about his effect on students recalls Socrates' claim that teaching is an impossible project (see Felman, 1982). It was a bemusement shared by all the teachers we interviewed. They were uneasy about our idea of life-changing teachers, insisting that it is *teaching* that is powerful, not *teachers*; the miracle comes from what teachers and students do together, how they change in ways that no one could have expected. They told us that teachers who *try* to change students are imposing themselves on students, trying to control the future by limiting students to what the teachers can themselves imagine. Ethical teaching, they insisted, is fundamentally a process of educating – drawing out. Teachers can help by keeping students open to aspects of their potential that the unfolding of lived time has not yet revealed, but they cannot do the learning or the living on their behalf.

### Potential and Wholeness

In their account of the face-to-face encounter, Levinas and Nemo (1985) give a classic account of the infinitude of relational logic. This is the logic of love

rather than desire, of potential rather than expectation, and through it we enter the eternal and universal that underlies the profane temporality of subjectivity, objectivity and desire:

Access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other . . . There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute . . . [T]he Other, in the rectitude of his face, is not a character within a context. Ordinarily one is a 'character': a professor at the Sorbonne, a Supreme Court justice, son of so-and-so . . . Here, to the contrary, the face is meaning all by itself. You are you. In this sense one can say that the face is not 'seen'. It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond. (pp. 85–6)

When Levinas says 'you are you', he is not associating you-ness with a self-contained identity, but rather with an essence that is being-ness. The word *you* is like the words *now* and *here*: it indicates a presence that can be experienced as a whole but never known as a totality, never defined, contained. Levinas is referring to an *I–Thou* relation.

When we asked Sharon Cheers, a primary school teacher, what she saw in her students, she spoke of their blooming, and described it in a way that reminded us of Levinas's account. Her teaching relied on her ability to see in each student their particularity:

You can definitely see talent in people, but you can also see them as a person. That constantly amazes me. You can go down to that pre-school and their personalities are there. They are true little people. So in saying you can see their talent, you can certainly see aspects of their personality that are strong, but whether or not that's a talent or just them, I don't know. In terms of something that you measure, in terms of competition, I wonder: *Competition in what? Competition in being a good person? Competition in being able to answer closed questions correctly? How do you measure a good thinker against a better thinker?* You can always set something you can measure and then compare students against that, but that's leaving out a whole lot. I suppose that's the whole other thing, how do you measure education?

To see the effect on students of the teacher's holistic vision, let us cite Jenny Oliver's account of her maths teacher, Mr Simpson. In her senior high school years, Jenny had become burdened by people's expectations, pigeon-holed as a future lawyer or doctor on the basis of high marks. Rather than conform, she was on the point of dropping out entirely. Mr Simpson not only allowed her to find her way back, he helped her find her own vocation as a primary school teacher:

He was so *there* for me, so gentle and so kind and he listened to what I said when other teachers had lost their patience or didn't know what to do with me. Absolutely encouraging. When I think about teachers like him, that's the classic thing in my head: *they made me feel like me!* Mr Simpson got the picture, he got the whole personality. And I guess I became even more me because I was totally devoid of anxiety. When people have expectations of you they see one slice only, whereas Mr Simpson saw the whole and I could flourish.

Jenny was debilitated and constrained by the pressure of expectations. Mr Simpson made a difference because he saw that she would always be more than dux of her class, a doctor or a teacher, even if she were any of these things. Any defined identity would be only a slice of Jenny. Being there for her, Mr Simpson helped Jenny to relax and be herself, to find joyful ways of realizing her potential. The world was again full of open promise. When Mr Simpson *saw* his students, he saw the potential that made each unique and incomparable. This insight underlay his ability to draw out the students' potential by drawing out the best work they could do.

It is important to be conceptually precise here, for potential is a word with different understandings that have different implications for teaching. As Sharon implied, potential is often confused with talent, seen as a measure of innate ability. To see the student's potential in this sense is to assay them as raw material and, on the basis of this, set educational expectations. The temporality here is future-oriented linearity, involving prediction and projection of a pre-established identity. Jenny, for example, was generally expected to become a doctor, and expected herself to maintain her brilliant academic record. Although often presented as a form of praise, such expectations actually constrain the student's potential, establishing an identity that becomes a measure of their life. In the face of these expectations Jenny experienced such anxiety that she lost a sense of the inherent value of education.

A richer sense of potential, one based in an *I-Thou* rather than an *I-It* relation, arises when teachers like Mr Simpson see students in their uniqueness, as whole people whose capacities exceed any definition or prediction. Instead of setting up external standards that distract students from their current situation, these teachers only ask for what the students can do at any given moment – their best. All they require is that students commit themselves, refusing to hold back because they think they've done enough or reached their limit. They're asking not that students be the best but that they do their best.

Whereas talent is an objective thing that can be tested and measured from the outside, no words can describe potential. It comes as epiphany, Jenny Oliver told us, through the wonder of direct encounter with the infinite. Potential is not a thing that is seen but a sense of wonder that is experienced through a love of learning. The teacher can see the students' potential because students reopen the teacher's horizons:



What I see in the children in my class is their potential. It is an epiphany. For me as a teacher, it's an absolute privilege. When I look at them, when I look at their writing, and I see what they have the ability to be, oh my gosh, like leaps and bounds beyond me. When I think about what I want them to learn, I want them to see what their potential is, and to realize it as best they can for themselves.

It is interesting to look at Jenny's story alongside the account we were given by Kym Lawry, a high school teacher, of the responsibility of the teacher. Because Kym knows what students and others offer him, because he knows that potential unfolds through playing a part of a whole, he knows that it will only be the students' relations that give them lives that will fulfil their potential:

I'm passionate about teaching physics, but a physicist's view of the world is just one part of the story. It's a nice coherent story, but you have to say, '*Look, physics offers one way of looking at the world, find some others. Find something that excites or engages you. You have to do more than just survive, get a house and a car. You have to find meaning.*' That's why my involvement in the school is wider than physics. I've run trips to Samoa where we've got involved with primary schools and Australian Volunteers Abroad.

In a holistic sense, my role as a teacher is to play a small part in equipping students to become successful humans. What you're hoping to do is help them become happy, positive, enthusiastic, committed, just, engaged members of their society. I want to show them that there are lots of different ways in which they can be involved in life and make a contribution. This is not old-fashioned charity, but a sense of responsibility: *what's your response to the world?*

Teachers like Mr Simpson and Kym Lawry have faith that if the students go about their lives with an open heart, they will find their unique paths and fulfil their potential. Students whose lives are most whole and most fulfilled will be those who become most engaged with their work, with other people, with the world and with themselves. Whether in school or outside it, engagement is the way to learning and learning is the development of engagement. By engaging with *other people's realities*, we learn to draw out our own potential and become most fluently and creatively ourselves.

What teachers ask is that students maintain openness, an honest relation with their lives. The teacher's responsibility is to help them develop awareness of issues that might alienate them from their work, and they do this, with love's honesty, by calling the students' attention to work that is anything less than whole-hearted.

Many interviewees turned to organic metaphors to discuss these responsibilities to students. Jenny Oliver said that Mr Simpson let her 'flourish'; English teacher Judith Moreland-Mitchell spoke of students 'blossoming'. The philosopher Raimond Gaita told us that teaching was a planting of seeds:

Years after I first met [Martin Winkler], when I despaired of teaching, he told me that there are two ways to think about teaching. One is to dream of pulling a switch

that will make a thousand lights come on. Another is nourished by the image of passing a candle from one person to another, or of planting seeds, not knowing when or where they will grow. It was the wisest advice about teaching that I have ever received. The seeds he planted in me were then still germinating. They grew only many years later, when I wrote *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, which I dedicated to him.

Whereas the logic of prediction presupposes an already determined world, a finite world without creative possibilities, potential is experienced in a living organic world. To anyone with eyes to see, the seed already has within it the history of life; it holds an evolutionary potential that is never finalized. Each seed is unique, yet each is the whole miracle of life. Good teaching relies on the ability to see this universal essence in the uniqueness of each student.

It is this logic of potential that accounts for the remarkable fact that teachers find qualities in a world governed by quantities. However many students they have in a year, however many years they have taught, good teachers find the unlimited capacity to be amazed by the uniqueness of each student. Competition is used in schools to help students extend themselves, but teachers' relations to students are not based on competitive rankings. There is no competition for the teacher's respect.

A consequence of the teacher's vision is their need to accept the uncertainty of lived time. Martin Winkler's tone has hope but no triumphalism. He knows that any attempt to guarantee the outcomes of teaching removes the life of the process. We can plant seeds, and nurture the vulnerable seedlings in our care, but their fate is as open to delight and disappointment as the rest of life. We cannot control life but if we can learn from its ups and downs, we can grow, and it is growth that gives life a sense of wholeness.

### **Passion and Patience**

Passion is one of the words most used about good teachers, and it is commonly assumed that it signifies the energy inputs made by teachers to students. The foregoing discussion has implied, however, that this assumption relies on a faulty understanding of the temporality of creative learning and teaching. The quality of energy in the lively classroom is not restless or adrenalin-based. It is a liveliness that has within it a stillness, because it is working with a potential that is already present.

Sharon Cheers alluded to this slowed-down and opened-out sense of time when describing the dynamic characteristic of the classrooms of her mentor, Alison Pegus:

As soon as you walked into Alison's classroom, you could tell it was working. There was lots of movement, lots of different things happening, but there was still

a sense of calm. It's a feeling more than anything. You could tell she was not just listening for the sake of listening, but really listening to understand what's going on for that child. I suppose her passion came through everything she did.

Passion is a word commonly confused with desire, but Sharon's insistence on the significance of classroom atmospherics indicates its basis in a relation that is open rather than driven. Passion, enthusiasm and inspiration are all concepts from religious tradition, pointing to a spiritual and soulful vitality that emerges when people come together. The hum of the classroom involves everyone, yet is beyond the control of even the teacher: something *happens*, without anyone making it happen. This is an understanding of spirituality that places it within the ordinary world, for the classroom spirit comes from these children and this teacher at this moment.

While Sharon links Alison's passion to calmness, broadcaster Julie McCrossin links passion and patience when describing her life-changing teacher, Mrs Miller:

Passion, patience and boundless personal relationship with each girl, they're the three qualities of a great teacher like Mrs Miller. The most passionate, erudite, curious hunger for learning: that was the spirit I got from Enid Miller and it's alive and well.

Mrs Miller's *passion* was her genuine love of reading, literature and performance: 'she wasn't bunting it on, she was absolutely authentic: she really loved Donne and Shakespeare'. Mrs Miller's *patience* was evident in the faith she had in the girls' ability to learn through performance: she allowed them time to find their own ways into the roles and hence the plays. Her *boundless respect for each girl* manifested her compassion: 'she had the ability to make everyone feel special. She really cared; that's the human connection.' These three qualities came together in the curiosity that characterized Mrs Miller's classroom. Julie said,

What I mean by really teaching is the ability to arouse, to stimulate to learn, so that the student is made curious and wants to take independent additional action. They're enthusiastic, electrified. Good teachers have a gift, a vocation, and the core of it for me is that they want you to learn as much as they want to learn themselves. In fact it goes deeper than that. Mrs Miller thought she could learn from students. She felt how Julie and the others responded to the trauma of Lady Macbeth and in this way she could experience the trauma of Lady Macbeth afresh.

The classrooms of Alison Pegus and Mrs Miller combined passion with patience, movement with stillness, exuberance with respectful attention. Such combinations remind us that passion, as its etymology implies, is an energy that involves passivity. It is something you receive, something that moves you; it is the compassion of patient devotion. By suspending the trajectory of the desirous self, passion returns students' attention to the task at hand, to the present. Patient and receptive, it provides the time students need if they are to mature.

Think of Mrs Miller's students performing Shakespeare in class. They are not rushing to interpret Shakespeare, and they are not distracted by the prospect of exams. They simply devote themselves to the particular lines of speech before them, playing with them until they ring true. When the lines resound with the vitality of a full body, who is providing the energy? Is it Shakespeare? Julie? Lady Macbeth? Western civilization? Mrs Miller? What time are the students in? Who is active here and who is passive? It is the unanswerability of these questions that gives passion its cognitive power. When it is passionate, the work of Mrs Miller's students will be true to both Shakespeare and the students. This authenticity will be the proof that lessons have been well learned.

In her account of Mrs Miller, Julie several times linked enthusiasm and passion with curiosity. Open to receive what lessons have to offer, interested to see what they will learn about Lady Macbeth and what she will teach them about themselves, students face their day with faith and hope. This is not a curiosity that seeks satisfaction but one that enjoys being part of Shakespeare's universality. It is not faith in any *thing*, or hope for any identifiable outcome; it is acceptance that the only life available is the one that unfolds from here and now. This class matters. It is not a lesson about life: it is life, it is the world.

What happens if, by contrast, passion and love settle on an object? When lovers define themselves through the beloved person or thing, the other loses their infinitude and becomes an object, desired as an idealized reflection of the lover. This is an ethic that blocks learning because it disrespectfully denies difference. Without difference, the desirous self is closed off from the whole, and potential is reduced to the narrowness of a subject's aims.

### **Ritual and Presence**

If education is a relational process, and teachers cannot unilaterally generate a creative learning experience, they nevertheless have a crucial role in establishing the conditions within which relationships can flourish. For example, kindergarten teacher Vicky Yannikouros told us that she devotes the whole of Term 1 to establishing the routines that make her students feel physically and emotionally safe. Without this safety, she told us emphatically, no child can learn:

Once you've established this feeling of safety, you can vary your teaching mode. The class hums along. So, I'm not advocating running a militant classroom where children can't breathe without putting their hand up. On the contrary, I think those routines in a sense free them.

Vicky believes that the generation of this order is the most difficult task facing teachers. Yet, once it is established, classroom management becomes inconspicuous, able to rely on patterns of conduct integrated into the learning envi-

ronment. Without this reliable authority, students feel abandoned, too anxious to learn.

Once a classroom has come to life, the teacher's authority is embedded in the formality of everyday rituals and routines. Whereas imposed routines seem boring and repetitive, the formal routines of a trustworthy environment support the presence that is creatively open. The formality of ritualized time actually produces a fluent attunement to the unfolding of time. Let's examine this by returning to Jenny Oliver's account of Mr Simpson:

High school was a troublesome time for me. I took the weight of the Higher School Certificate on my shoulders – the whole angst thing. One of the things that helped was that Mr Simpson's maths teaching was so regular. He was so constant. I can remember we'd walk in and there were mental. Then he would go into checking homework – we'd do that. Then we'd have a little talk about a new concept. Then we'd do examples – I can remember it so clearly. Then we'd start the homework and also – rain, hail, whatever – if we wanted to see him at lunch time for help, he was there without fail. In the morning, at recess, at lunch time, without fail. I come back to that word, reassurance. It felt supportive, rather than boring. If you create that calm, supportive, anxious-free zone, the doors are open. It encourages that risk taking.

Jenny's trust in the classroom routines was based on her acceptance of her teacher's authority. Because Mr Simpson's greater experience gave him a better sense of what the curriculum required, and of what Jenny could do, the steadiness of his schedules soothed her *angst*. Instead of being distracted by the future, she could focus on the task before her: when they were doing maths mental, *that* was all they were doing. Because of its stillness, the classroom became a sanctuary in Jenny's troubled life.

The logic of this *calm, supportive, anxiety-free zone* is often misunderstood. People assume that creative work involves personal expression and confessional intimacy. Such an environment, however, makes people too self-conscious to get out of themselves. On the contrary, it is an interested impersonality that allows students to explore the aspects of their lives that elude their self-images. The ritual element of schoolwork held Jenny, opening time and allowing her to fully engage with the problems. Ritual is a form of flow: it allows work to develop grace and fluency by keeping us in the present moment.

With the quiet presence of a shepherd or guardian, Mr Simpson transformed Jenny's experience. We could call the joyful patience of his classroom a 'potential time', comparable to the potential or holding space discussed by Winnicott (1991). Within this time, Jenny could easily uncover possibilities hidden from her controlling mind. An error on one day would dissolve when it revealed a better way to approach the problem, or revealed the potential of another question.

Jenny's light awareness of Mr Simpson is like that of a young child playing in the presence of an unintrusive mother. According to Winnicott (1990), this is the

situation in which a capacity to be alone develops. When we are alone, we are in the presence of someone else, someone who guards us but who does not need to interfere. Mr Simpson could provide this support because of his own maturity, his own patience and trust, his own ability to hold his fears and desires without projecting them onto a world that is thereby made an external environment requiring control.

When Jenny left Mr Simpson's classes, he remained with her, continuing to support her, in the working rituals she had come to love in his class. In this potential time, she could witness herself with mercy rather than observing herself with judgement; she could have a creative relation with her failings, fears and wounds.

### **Practice and Maturity**

Maturity arises when we learn to live in time. It is the skilful ability to be present and empty, the patience that allows time to unfold. David Ritchie, an actor and teacher of performance studies, told us that it is this maturity that allows us to recognize newness in every repetition:

I have found the more experience you get as a performer, the more you realize the value and mystery of time. We tend to think spatially and visually; language is just full of visual metaphors and it's very poor in temporal metaphors. So when you have the practice and skill to go into something that works in the dimension of time, you are constantly discovering something mysterious and wonderful and terrific. It is a fascinating dimension – stillness and time are very powerful.

Through practice, David can lose his self-consciousness. Entering the life of a play, he brings the play to life, speaking and moving with a rhythm that is just right. Good timing and grace are gifts that practice brings when it makes us humble enough to receive.

To explain how teachers help students develop this mature and skilful relation to time, we will tell a final story, that of oboe player Diana Doherty. When trying to live up to expectations, Diana sought out a famous overseas teacher, initially expecting him to perfect her technique, by eliminating mistakes. At this stage, she was, she told us, her 'own worst enemy', often paralysed by a sense of inadequacy. The turning point came when a dramatic failure forced her to stop and reflect on her relation with her work.

Through talking with a friend, Diana found a holding capacity that allowed her to become aware of the psychodynamics of perfectionism. She could see the harmful effects of self-condemnation, but she could also sympathetically understand the neediness that underlay perfectionism. With awareness, she learned to be alone with her instrument, and enjoy the surprises that arose; things that

she once would have regarded as mistakes became moments of interest: *What happened there? Does that tell me something about my breathing? What would happen if I changed my posture?* This curiosity also changed Diana's relation to perfectionism itself. She learned to treat symptoms of intolerance as useful warning signs; by holding perfectionism she could wait until it redirected her to the love of music. Maturity came, she told us, when tolerance and curiosity transformed perfectionism from saboteur to guide.

Compassionate awareness not only teaches Diana how to play, it teaches her how to teach:

I've done a lot of work on myself, addressing my perfectionism, and building a healthy confidence rather than being so critical of myself. This has helped me understand other people. Because being alone in a room with your instrument makes you confront all your imperfections, understanding how you relate to the world is the most important thing. So what I'm doing in teaching is helping a student to develop a way to deal with themselves. Some of these people will not go on to be professional musicians but hopefully these skills will be useful for them, not only in the musical context, but helping them analyse themselves without putting themselves down.

Diana can help students develop a creative relation with time because she is, as she says, holding her own demons. She teaches students by teaching herself in their presence. This is not a modelling of excellence; she is not perfect, she is real. It is awareness of vulnerabilities that allows Diana to be open to her students' potential:

As you become more mature, and learn who you are and what you can do, you become more able to focus on other people rather than seeing everything through the veil of your own insecurity. I think too that aside from teaching, what's really important for me is that I always want to learn, I always want to know more, I always want to get better as a person. I want to be a good example to students of how to be and how to live and so I think, the most important thing, if I'm teaching, is that that doesn't stop me learning.

When Diana talked to us, she used the word 'practice' in two different ways. Early in her career it was a means to an end, a perfection of technique; now it is a musician's way of life, a discipline that has no end. If learning is a way of life, practice is a devotional ritual, an everyday service to your vocation. It is a word, like passion, enthusiasm and inspiration, that carries deep religious resonances.

Practice is the continuation through life of the temporal order provided by classroom routines and rituals. The patience that allows things to happen at the right time is learned through the rhythms of the school day, the slow and precise reading of a literary text, the steps by which you gradually unfold a maths problem.

By holding the desires of the ego, the discipline of practice alleviates anxiety and opens people to what they do not know they need to know. As Diana

Doherty insisted, discipline is not a way of being hard on but kind to yourself:

One of my early teachers said it was better to practise as if you did not expect to get to a destination. That changed the picture in your mind and changed what you produced. Before that I would have practised for an hour and thought, *I've practised for a whole hour, how come I can't play better yet?* I'd be really down on myself and frustrated and I'd just want to go and watch TV.

Students are often told that there's good practice and there's bad practice but I tell my students that any contact with the instrument is better than watching TV. The frequency of the contact is at least as important as the quality of the contact. By encouraging regular practice, I help students develop a healthy relationship with their instrument and themselves. If they expect perfection every time, they won't practise.

I'm happy even with postgraduate students to sit down and look at their timetable and work out a practice programme, because I think that routine and structure in one's day really helps. It keeps the mood healthy and positive; it keeps you focused on what's important, and it removes anxiety and guilt about when to practise. If I don't have a routine I get into an anxious state: I've got e-mails to answer, faxes, letters to answer, phone calls to make, and so I'm anxious because I want to practise but if I practise and I haven't done those things then I can't concentrate on my practice, but if I do those things and I don't start practising until 11.00 then my mood starts to go down because I'm already feeling guilty suddenly, so it just never gets done. But if you always do the same thing more or less everyday you know where you are. I have breakfast at 8.00 and then I practise from 8.30 until 10.00 and then I'll go out and see what I'll do with my day. I feel more comfortable if I've got that practice under my belt first. I can say, *'look, those things can wait, I've just got to practise'*. And then I'll feel much more confident talking with these people.

This practice regime uses clock time to bring Diana into the stillness and fluency of the present. Like the bells in a monastery, her timetable calls attention to the part of life that matters now, promising that there will be time later for the different aspects of her life. There is a time for dealing with emails and phone calls; there is a time for students, and a time for the family.

Diana's practice is a way of life, the connection between different parts of life. Because the parts are not competing, they can enliven, refresh and augment each other. Rather than feeling fragmented, Diana feels the whole of her life in each of its parts. She feels held by this temporal order because she is becoming who she is.

It is only within the time of presence, the eternal, that the strange logic of this ontology, becoming who you are, can be appreciated. It is this time that makes sense of the simultaneous experience of surprise and recognition in moments of creative learning.



## Notes

We thank the students and teachers whom we interviewed for this research. They all enhanced our understanding of the learning and teaching process, but they are not responsible for our interpretations of what they said. Because of a technical problem recording Raimond Gaita's interview, we have relied here on a conference paper (Gaita, 2001) that deals with the main story he told us.

1. While Bloch's (1986) account of the openness of possibilities in the present and the 'Not-Yet-Conscious' resonates with this sense of hope, it is nevertheless based in a linear rather than eternal temporality. From the perspective of presence, similar questions could be raised about the volitional intentionality of Bloch's hope that Loy (1992) raises about the future-orientation of Heidegger's anticipatory resoluteness.

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