

The Role of Authentic Communication in Moral Development and Transformative Education

Reflections on a Case Study

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Introduction

In 2005, this author undertook a case study of a moral education/community development program in a public high school in North Carolina. Given a long-standing interest in transformative education,¹ and reports received of the program's remarkable success in promoting moral motivation and a profound sense of community among high school students from normally estranged racial and socioeconomic groups, I sought to understand the transformative experiences program participants reported having and how the program's curriculum and pedagogy might be promoting such transformation. The resulting case study became my dissertation, to which the reader interested in more of the study's details than are included in this article may refer (Cotten, 2009).

Data collection for this study began in the fall of 2005 when the program's founder invited this author to observe a number of workshops (i.e., the core of the educational experience the program provided). At approximately the same time, I also became acquainted with and increasingly interested in psychologist Mustakova-Possardt's (1998; 2003; 2004) research on the development of "critical moral consciousness" (CMC). I was especially interested in the unusually holistic characterization her theory provides of how moral motivation and critical consciousness develop in people who dedicate themselves to social service. My study of the program thus came to focus on two research questions: (1) Could the transformations some of the program participants reported

experiencing (in their senses of identity, responsibility and agency, and ways of relating to others) be usefully understood as instances of CMC development? and (2) If so, how might the program's curriculum and pedagogy have contributed to this development?

Analysis of data collected from field observations and interviews with selected participants revealed that a majority of those interviewed appeared to be developing CMC at the time of their interviews. Furthermore, by and large, these participants regarded their participation in the program as having either been the primary cause of, or as having significantly contributed to, the changes in moral consciousness they reported experiencing. Further consideration of these findings led to the conclusion that the participants' experiences in the program of what I term *authentic communication*, in this case regarding a moral problem directly concerning and affecting them, apparently stimulated their development of CMC.

This article's purpose is to explicate this finding and reflect on some of its implications. Before doing so, the two sections that follow introduce relevant aspects of Mustakova-Possardt's theory of CMC, describe some outstanding features of the program, and present a few noteworthy accounts of participants' experiences. Subsequent sections describe the case study's methodology and discuss its central finding, that experiencing *authentic communication* regarding an issue of moral concern amplified participants' moral motivation and stimulated their development of CMC. The remaining sections further explore the nature of *authentic communication* in light of insights from Martin Buber and Parker J. Palmer, examine features of the program's pedagogy that may have fostered such communication, and consider implications for promoting transformative education.

Mustakova-Possardt's Theory of Critical Moral Consciousness

For Mustakova-Possardt (2004), "critical moral consciousness" (CMC) refers to a kind of consciousness or mode of being characterized by "integration of moral motivation, agency and critical discernment" (p. 245) and a corresponding "deepening synergy between mind, heart and will" (p. 258). This kind of consciousness, Mustakova-Possardt (2003) argues, has likely always characterized that minority of people who stand out across diverse socio-historical contexts as unusually "independent and original thinkers" (p. xiv), individuals "spurred by a quest for truth and justice" (p. 3) who engage in "ongoing dialogue" with others and with "life" (p. xiv), who function as "creative agents in their communities, forces of attraction that seem to draw out the best in others," who

exhibit a quality of “love” and “compassion for the human condition” noticeably “more all-embracing” than normal (p. 4), possess a highly-developed capacity to critically discern and respond to social injustice, and manifest “ever-expanding...agency in service to humanity” (2004, p. 246). Mustakova-Possardt (2004) views such people as progressing along an “optimal path of human development” (p. 246).

The empirical basis of Mustakova-Possardt’s (2003) cross-cultural research on CMC development consists of interviews she conducted in 1995 in the United States and Bulgaria with 28 adults exhibiting “different levels of CC” (p. 21). Her resulting theoretical model is the outcome of a grounded theory approach she used to analyze her interview data.

For Mustakova-Possardt, the key to understanding CMC development lies in understanding the nature and origins of moral motivation. Contrary to Kohlberg’s (1969; 1981; 1984) influential view that moral motivation derives from the development of moral reasoning, Mustakova-Possardt (2003) traces such motivation back to an innate “spiritual impulse,” which, she observes, is evident in children’s “spontaneous attraction to beauty, goodness and knowledge” (p. 6), and which, she asserts, “allows us to account for the fact that moral leaders consistently recollect a sense of core moral values or instincts having been with them from a very early age,” and having, in some cases, led them to make “decisions which put them in conflict even with their early family environments.... at an age at which it is not reasonable to assume post-conventional principled reasoning” (p. 42).

Mustakova-Possardt (2003) contrasts a moral motivation, characterized by innate concern for “truth, beauty, and goodness” (however these might be construed or felt), with an equally innate “expediency motivation” characterized by self-concern and fear (p. 6). For her, CMC, as described earlier, begins developing in a person when his or her moral motivation comes to dominate his or her expediency motivation. She further notes that the dominance of one or the other of these two types of motivation can be detected in a person in connection with “four central themes or dimensions of existence,” which she identifies as “(i) identity; (ii) relationships with external moral authority, and the emerging sense of internal moral authority, responsibility, and agency; (iii) empathic concerns with others, with justice and caring; and (iv) concerns with the meaning of life” (2004, p. 253; see Table 1).

As for what causes one or the other motivation to dominate, Mustakova-Possardt (2004) observes that many people “negotiate” their “core yearning toward truth, beauty, and goodness.... sporadically and with many distractions, in the course of which the core yearning may become

progressively overlaid by fear and the overall motivation of the person may become predominantly instrumental and expedient (i.e., avoiding discomfort)” (p. 253). However, some people negotiate this yearning “more consciously and purposefully... in the context of morally/spiritually oriented formative environments,” which “amplify” the yearning (p. 253). Such social environments, she clarifies, are “characterized by an explicit orientation to values greater than the self” and “foster the authentic quest of individuals” to “keep aligning themselves to horizons of greater significance through the combined exercise of knowledge, love and will” (pp. 255-256). Of particular relevance for interpreting my case study’s findings, Mustakova-Possardt (2003) further observes that “a predominant expediency motivation can *at any point in life be transformed* into a predominantly moral motivation (often *as a result*

Table 1
Indicators of Expediency vs. Moral Motivation

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Expediency motivation</i>	<i>Moral motivation</i>
Identity	Identity predominantly rooted in social conventions (social identity) & lack of moral imperative	Identity predominantly rooted in moral values (moral identity) & moral imperative
Authority, responsibility & agency	Limited personal authority & responsibility; lack of agency (fear, helplessness, skepticism in the face of external authority)	Personal moral authority & critical discernment of external authority; expanding sense of moral responsibility; moral agency
Relationships	Lack of empathy, alienation, impermeability, lack of concerns with justice & not hurting	Empathy, relatedness, permeability, concerns with justice & not hurting
Meaning of life	Self-referential frames of reference & limited goals	Larger frames of reference as vantage point for critical discernment & self-reflection; life purpose greater than self

(Mustakova-Possardt, 2004, p. 254)

of peak experiences, such as losses, disease, near-death experiences, and *education*)” [emphasis added] (p. 6).

It should be noted that defining moral motivation and CMC, as Mustakova-Possardt does, in terms of “attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness” does not require giving precise philosophical definitions for these three categories. Indeed, Mustakova-Possardt (2003) does not define these terms beyond briefly mentioning that she uses them “in a Socratic, Platonic, and Aristotelian sense” (p. 28). Rather, what her theory emphasizes is that being predominantly *concerned with* and *attracted to* truth, beauty, and goodness, however one may understand these, profoundly affects one’s psychological development. Thus, the psychological development of one who is passionately committed to seeking truth can be seen to qualitatively differ in important ways from that of a person who is not as strongly motivated in this regard, irrespective of how these two individuals may define “truth” or what specific propositions they believe to be “true.” Similarly, the degree of importance one gives to moral or aesthetic concerns/values is directly linked, according to Mustakova-Possardt, to whether or not one develops the characteristics of CMC, irrespective of what specific things the person counts beautiful or moral. Having said this, it is nevertheless worth noting that the accounts Mustakova-Possardt (2003) presents in her book reveal a significant overlap in the ways the people she interviewed construed truth, goodness and beauty. Given the central importance these three dimensions of human experience have in both Mustakova-Possardt’s theory and this author’s conceptualization of *authentic communication*, I should clarify that, for my purposes here, I take “attraction to truth” to mean a strong desire to understand one’s self and world, “attraction to beauty” to mean concern with finding meaning and valuing aesthetic experience, and “attraction to goodness” to refer to commitment to value, respect and care about others for their own sakes.

The aspects of Mustakova-Possardt’s theory described are particularly well-suited for analyzing the experiences of program participants because her conceptualization of “critical moral consciousness” seems to offer a more comprehensive account than most prominent theories of “moral development” of the kind of consciousness several students I interviewed appeared to possess. For analyzing participants’ accounts for indications of “attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness” made it possible to notice that many of these participants were psychologically characterized not only by a “moral motivation” to promote justice and care about others, but also by an inclination to critically question conventions and passionately seek truth, and by the motivation to seek a beautiful meaning and purpose for living. Furthermore, Mustakova-Possardt’s

theory seems to offer a more complete and reasonable depiction of how sudden transformations in degrees of moral motivation, like those some program participants described, occur. For such transformations, it would seem, cannot be adequately explained solely as instances of a sudden, rapid development in reasoning ability, as Kohlberg's (1969; 1981; 1984) understanding that morality derives from cognitive development in reasoning ability would seem to require. Nor does describing such transformation as being associated with a strong sense of empathy, as moral sentimentalists emphasize (Nichols, 2010), seem sufficient. For such a description, while not incorrect, begs the questions of what the origins and nature of this empathy might be, and why it seems to develop more in some than others. Similarly, the urge for "self-consistency" (Blasi, 1983, p. 178) moral identity theorists posit, by itself, also seems inadequate to explain the passionate caring program participants felt about others. In contrast, Mustakova-Possardt's (2003) characterization of such passions as stemming from an innate concern with and attraction to "truth, beauty, and goodness," and her characterization of CMC development as being characterized by sometimes sudden *shifts* from a dominant "expediency motivation" to a dominant "moral motivation," more closely corresponds to the phenomenological descriptions program participants themselves provided me of their experiences in the program, as the following accounts attest.

The Case

Like many U.S. public schools, the high school in which I conducted my research suffered from an academic achievement gap between advantaged (primarily White, upper-middle class) and disadvantaged (from a lower class and mostly racial/ethnic minority) students. To address this problem, in 2002 a guidance counselor at the school initiated a program consisting of workshops he created and facilitated, designed to bring together racially and socio-economically diverse students to promote understanding, care and a sense of community between them and provide the foundation for an associated peer tutoring program.

While "anti-bias" or "diversity" training programs are not new in U.S. public schools, this program's workshops had a number of distinctive features. Notably, the workshops aimed to help participants recognize their "oneness" through experiencing what the program terms a "Head-to-Heart Shift," i.e., a shift from a way of perceiving/being dominated by one's "head" to one which also incorporates the awareness of one's "heart." The workshops also explicitly propose a "spiritual" view of human nature and place a high value on "authenticity" in human relationships.

Furthermore, the often powerful and poignant “sharing” that occurred in the workshops of students’ personal experiences and their reflections on these experiences fostered a degree of caring and community between students that many considered extraordinary in the context of a public high school. While more details of the program’s pedagogy can be found in a later section of this article (i.e., “How the Program Fosters Authentic Communication”), the following accounts of a few participants (referred to by pseudonyms) attest to the powerful, even transformative, effect the program workshops had.

A female, White high school junior I will call Ruth, described her “Head-to-Heart Shift” by recalling how, during one workshop,

... in the midst of crying, people were sharing what they felt, and I was certainly listening to their words, but, to me they were kind of washing over me, and I think that’s what made me cry harder. I hadn’t realized there was more under the words! I felt like I was ... swimming under the words and that I was headed to a place that I couldn’t even imagine. I just felt like I was really hearing that person, not the words, but hearing the person. (Interviewee 1, Personal Interview, May 3, 2006)

She went on to describe how the workshop fosters,

... a state of mind or state of heart...with other people where you feel like there is no me or you, there is us. It’s just this higher state of being.... it’s not connecting and it’s not coming together, but it’s like letting your outer shell go so you can see the connection that was already there.... It’s like when I used to meet people, I’d know their favorite colors or you know what food they liked, but I didn’t really know them. And [the program] just opened up a doorway for me to reach in and know someone better.... People’s favorite colors and what kind of grades they get, foolish things like that...., that’s kind of like the ‘head’ position [referring to the “Head-to-Heart Shift”]. So, when you’re knowing somebody, you are knowing the facts of them... But when you really know someone with the “heart,” what you know is not facts; it’s... their spirit. *You know them*, instead of knowing *about them*. (Interviewee 1, Personal Interview, May 3, 2006)

I was further able to corroborate Ruth’s depiction of the life-changing effect the program had on her with her mother’s observation that participating in the program was a “real awakening” for Ruth and a “water-shed” in her life. (Interviewee 4, Personal Interview, May 20, 2006)

Another participant, an African-American male junior high school student, Daryl, described his Head-to-Heart Shift and what it taught him in these words.

When you think with your head, it’s more robotic than thinking or acting on how you feel... So, making that Head-to-Heart Shift is just

saying that, “OK, I’m going to... express my opinions on how I feel, and not on how others want me to think.”... It shows how we’re individuals by acting by our hearts... You can program your brain to act like somebody. But if you act from your heart, think from your heart, you’re completely different from everybody else... You go from a student or teenager, and you basically become a person. (Interviewee 2, Personal Interview, May 5, 2006)

Another young White woman, Nancy, attested that her experiences in the workshops “changed my life.” For her, the “Head-to-Heart Shift” was a shift from thinking/perceiving “very literally” and “selfishly” to “really being able to feel other people’s stories” (Interviewee 5, Personal Interview, June 8, 2006).

When I made that Head-to-Heart Shift, I knew what I want to do is to benefit others, and not just benefit myself... It’s not that I felt sorry for anybody... It’s not being judgmental. It’s being interested in hearing their stories... So now, I just want to hear as many stories as I can... I hate stereotypes now... Who wants to live their life in their own little circle?! (Interviewee 5, Personal Interview, June 8, 2006)

Finally, an Iranian-American student described the rarified quality of the “sharing” that occurred between workshop participants as follows.

Everybody, for some reason, in the room was able to understand where everybody was coming from... Everybody was able to realize how everybody felt... [Normally at school] it’s all about conforming, and finding your clique. [The program] isn’t that way at all. If you go to the workshops, it’s the most diverse thing in every way... you know as far as race and socio-economics... [but the workshop] tends to eliminate the groups... we’re showing people what it is to be friends with all people of other cultures, races... that it can actually happen. (Interviewee 3, Personal Interview, May 12, 2006)

Methodology

For this case study, I use Stake’s (1995) approach to studying a “unique case” in depth (pp. 1-13). In the first instance, the “case” I was interested in was the program itself. After further investigation, however, it became clear that the case this author wished to focus on should more precisely be defined as the morally transformative experiences of certain participants in the program. Thus, it is important to note that this case study does not purport to provide an evaluation of the program’s overall effectiveness. Furthermore, while the author certainly acknowledges the significance of the question of why some program participants were not as profoundly affected by participating in the program as others, the

question of why this was the case (i.e., what the reasons are that some participants did not appear to develop CMC while others did) is beyond the scope of this study.

Qualitative data for the case study was collected from field observations of the program's workshops (and a few other activities connected with the program) and in-depth interviews with 14 current and former program participants as well as four parents/guardians. Included in the sample of program participants were equal numbers of females and males ranging in age from 15 to 19 years. Eight could be categorized as White Americans of Western European descent, two as African-Americans, two as Asian immigrants to the U.S., one as an American of Middle-Eastern descent, and one as a Hispanic American. My sampling strategies were consistent with what Patton (2002) terms "intensity" (p. 234) and "criterion" (p. 238) strategies in that students selected for interviewing were among those the program's founder/facilitator identified as having been particularly affected by and committed to the program. This seemed appropriate for the purposes of my study since my aim was to understand the nature of the transformative experiences certain students seemed to be having in the program (as opposed to understanding why other students were not so affected). My sampling strategy was also "opportunistic or emerging" (Patton, 2002, p. 240) in that, out of the larger group of students the program founder/facilitator suggested I interview, those interviewed were students I had less difficulty contacting and arranging meetings with. I also took advantage of opportunities that spontaneously arose to interview a few parents/guardians and three former program participants.

After the data collection, field notes and videotapes of the workshops and interview transcripts were analyzed for recurring themes using categories suggested by Mustakova-Possardt's theory, the program's own special terminology (e.g., the Head-to-Heart Shift), and ideas taken from literature focusing on moral psychology, moral philosophy, and educational approaches resembling the program's. To answer the first research question, the indications listed in Table 1 of whether an expediency or a moral motivation is dominant in a person were sought, primarily in the interview transcripts. When an interviewee's moral motivation appeared dominant in relation to all or most of Mustakova-Possardt's four motivational dimensions, he/she was determined to be developing CMC. Further, to determine whether the program's pedagogy appeared to have significantly contributed to this development (i.e., to answer my second research question), I relied on the students' own impressions regarding which aspects of the program's curriculum and pedagogy they felt had most profoundly affected them.

Case Study Findings

Following the method described above, it was determined that nine of the 14 students interviewed appeared to be developing CMC at the times of their interviews. Furthermore, when asked to explain what, in their experiences in the program, and especially in its workshops, affected them most, these participants overwhelmingly alluded to two features of the workshops: (1) the way participants communicated with each other about personal experiences and feelings regarding a social/moral problem directly involving and affecting them, and (2) the inspiration and encouragement the program's facilitator provided through the positive, non-judgmental and caring regard he showed participants and through his sharing of illustrative stories from his own life.

The second feature alludes to Mustakova-Possardt's (2003) observation regarding the importance to CMC development of being exposed to *authentic moral authority* (p. 158), and suggests that many of those I interviewed regarded the program's founder/facilitator as exemplifying such authority. Since this factor's connection to CMC development is well-described and theorized in Mustakova-Possardt's work, I chose not to focus on it. Rather, what especially captured my interest was the connection my interviews strongly suggest exists between engaging in a certain rare and rarified type of communication with others and developing moral motivation and CMC.

Describing and Defining Authentic Communication

According to my own observations and the accounts of those I interviewed, perhaps the most salient characteristic of the program's workshops was the quality of communication they engendered and the impact engaging in such communication had on participants. In the context of the workshops, the content of this communication consisted mainly of the participants' "sharing" of personal experiences and feelings related to hardships caused by lack of authentic understanding and appreciation between the different social groups they identified with, as well as expressions of the new-found appreciation participants developed for each other and new possibilities they saw for relating to one another. Significantly, as some participants observed (both while "sharing" in workshops and in their subsequent interviews), this kind of communication involved sharing aspects of themselves they had rarely if ever shared with, or witnessed being shared by, their peers. In this connection, several participants alluded to the rarity of this kind of communication in today's world, and, at the same time, to how essential experiencing it is for happiness and well-being. In Ruth's words,

“people want it so bad, but rarely get it. So in that sense it’s kind of like a miracle, but what it really should be is a [normal] human experience.” (Interviewee 1, Personal Interview, May 3, 2006)

The intensity and quality of the emotions evoked by experiencing such communications also stand out. Indeed, powerful, often tearful, expressions of sympathetic distress and relief were outstanding features of the “sharing” I witnessed in workshops. Similarly, expressions of affirmation and care for one another, communicated not only verbally but also non-verbally through eye contact, smiling, and/or the simple gesture of passing a tissue box to someone in tears, became increasingly normal as workshops progressed.

To better understand the nature of this type of communication, beyond simply noting its specific contents and the emotional responses it evoked, it proved most useful to characterize such communication in terms of the psychological motives apparently underlying it. Unlike many normal forms of conversation, this kind of communication does not appear to be motivated by self-serving or expedient agendas, e.g., it does not aim for self-defense or self-advancement. It is not deceptive nor manipulative nor does it seek to find fault or cast blame. Neither is it “instrumental,” in the sense of being undertaken solely for “practical” purposes or purely to conform to social conventions. It is not judgmental, but involves a willingness to suspend judgment and prejudices. Perhaps most significantly, this way of communicating is profoundly truthful, inasmuch as those engaging in it appear primarily motivated to share with others what is “true” for themselves (as they honestly see/experience it), and to understand the experiences and perspectives of the other, appreciate their uniqueness, and affirm and care for them for their own sakes. In sum, the principle aim of such communication seems to be to authentically know and be known by, to appreciate and care about, and in turn to be known, appreciated and cared for by others. Thus, this type of communication appears to be essentially “morally motivated” in Mustakova-Possardt’s (2004) sense. i.e., motivated by concern with and attraction to “truth, beauty, and goodness” (pp. 250-255). A concern with and commitment to truth could be seen in program participants in the priority they placed on truthfulness when sharing with each other. As previously noted, they became willing in the workshops to honestly share experiences and feelings they normally would have kept hidden (even at times from themselves). This willingness seemed to stem from a deeply-felt motivation to authentically know and be known by others they had come to trust. Thus, stereotypes and superficial assessments and categorizations of others, and normal defensiveness regarding their own worldviews

and senses of identity gave way to humble and open postures of listening and learning.

Similarly, attraction to beauty becomes apparent when authentic communication is viewed as an aesthetic experience. For the experience of authentically communicating with another is an experience of being fully “present” with that other (rather than perceiving them through the filters of one’s preconceptions, prejudices and ego-centric concerns). Ruth, for example, stated that the communication she experienced brought her to a “higher state of being” in which “there is no me or you, there is us.” (Interviewee 1, Personal Interview, May 3, 2006) Thus, the experience of authentically communicating appears closely akin to, and arguably synonymous with, the state of “mindfulness” some practitioners of meditation refer to (e.g., Hanh, 1999). Another important sense in which authentic communication reflects attraction to beauty is the way such communication reflects an implicit acknowledgment and affirmation of the inherent value and beauty of the other’s unique strengths of character.

Finally, a predominant moral concern, or attraction to “goodness,” is clearly evident in authentic communication. For such communication, as interviewees testified and as I witnessed firsthand, engenders commitment to not harm, and further to respect, affirm and care for, the other (Cotten, 2009, pp. 251-366). This commitment to care is also connected with a commitment to justice, as evident in the strong imperatives those authentically communicating feel to acknowledge and bear witness to injustice, regardless of whether it was experienced by one’s self or the other, and to take action to help right the wrong.

Thus, I define what I term *authentic communication* as communication motivated by concern with and attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness. But why, it may be asked, characterize such communication as “authentic”? Why, for example, is it any more “authentic” than say gossiping, arguing, deceiving, criticizing or simply asking for and giving information for pragmatic purposes? One reason is etymological. The word *communication* itself can be seen to include and derive from the verb *commune*. In view of this root meaning, to say that true communication has occurred implies that a state of communion has been achieved through the act of communicating. The degree of intimacy and honesty this suggests can clearly be seen in the instances of communication I am calling authentic. By the same token, communication that does not stem from and/or result in such communion may be considered pragmatic or strategic but not “authentic” in this profound sense.

Another reason that the kind of communication that facilitates such communion may well be called “authentic” relates to philosophical and psychological understandings of authenticity. To clarify, the modern no-

tion of “authenticity,” as Charles Taylor (1991) explains, reflects the idea that every person possesses an “inner voice” or “inner depths” to which they must be true in order “to be...full human beings” (p. 26). In this perspective, “being true” to oneself (p. 29) and “self-wholeness” (p. 64) are seen as essential to an authentically human life. While the modern form of this idea took shape in the context of Eighteenth Century European romanticism and developed further in Twentieth Century existentialism and certain approaches to psychotherapy, precursors can also be seen in the supreme importance classical Greek philosophy as well as western and eastern religious traditions give to knowing oneself. Likewise, Mustakova-Possardt’s (2004) depiction of how amplifying innate attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness leads to synergistic integration of mind, heart and will implies high degrees of self-knowledge and self-honesty/integrity, i.e. authenticity (pp. 248-255). Conversely, tension and conflict between mind, heart, and will can be seen to indicate some degree of self-deception and inauthenticity. Thus, inasmuch as the kind of communication in question can arguably be seen to stem from and further promote psychological authenticity, in the sense of self-honesty and internal unity, it seems appropriate to characterize it as *authentic*.

Shifting from Expedient to Authentic Modes of Relating and Communicating

In keeping with the program’s concept of the “Head-to-Heart Shift,” many of the participants interviewed understood their experiences of authentic communication as having been made possible by a “shift” in their perceptions of and attitudes toward others (Cotten, 2009, pp. 251-366). This shift can be described as one from normal, expedient/conventional ways of relating/communicating to a way of relating/communicating in which seeking truth, beauty, and goodness becomes the primary motive. Deeper insight into the distinction between normal and authentic communication, and the shift between them, may be gained by considering the thought of Martin Buber and Parker J. Palmer.

In his landmark book, *I and Thou*, Buber (1996) famously identifies two opposing “modes of existence,” namely the “I-It” and “I-You” modes of relating to others and the world (p. 53). According to Buber, when one sees the other as “It,” that other is viewed as an object evaluated in terms of how well it serves the purposes/interests of “I,” whereas when viewed as a “You” (or Thou), the other is an end in him/herself. In an “I-It” mode, “I” regards “It” as an object of knowledge he/she can presume to understand, “assign...to a species” and “observe...as an instance” of that species (p. 57), thus discounting the other’s uniqueness. When con-

fronting “a human being as my You...he is no thing among things,” but rather is uniquely other (p. 59). Furthermore, when “I” views the other as “It,” he/she experiences the other as an object with which he/she has no intrinsic connection, whereas when he/she encounters a You, he/she inherently “stands in relation” to his/her “You” (p. 55). This “encounter” (p. 62) “demands the soul’s creative power,” and requires “a deed that involves a sacrifice and a risk,” because “whoever commits himself may not hold back part of himself” (p. 60). Thus, Buber notes, the “word I-You can only be spoken with one’s whole being,” whereas “I-It can never be spoken with one’s whole being” (p. 54). Thus, “the I in the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It” (p. 53).

In light of these insights, the “Head-to-Heart Shift” program participants experience can likewise be viewed as a shift from an “I-It” to an “I-You” orientation towards the other. Indeed, the colloquial terms “head” and “heart” can be seen to correspond well to these two modes of relating, since living in one’s “head” (i.e., taking an emotionally detached, purely cognitive approach to life) precludes standing “in relation” to the other, while integrating one’s thinking with moral and aesthetic feelings (i.e. intuitions of the “heart”) allows one to regard the other as “You.” This correspondence between the program’s and Buber’s views is further underscored by Buber’s observation that, in I-You relationships, “nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge” (p. 62). Instead, when one relates to the other as You, one is fully “present” with the other (p. 63).

Another valuable source of insight into the distinction between these two modes of seeing/being can be found in Parker Palmer’s (1993) *To Know As We Are Known*. In this book, Palmer identifies two distinct approaches to knowledge or ways of knowing. One of these, which Palmer argues is dominant in modern society, and which he traces back to the European Enlightenment, he labels “objectivist.” This approach “begins by assuming a sharp distinction between the knower and the objects to be known.” Objects of knowledge appear to “exist ‘out there’ apart from and independent of the knower. They wait passive and inert for us to know them. We, the knowers, are the active agents” (p. 27). This way of knowing, Palmer argues, originates from a particular psychological motivation or “passion,” namely a desire to control what we seek to know, and further produces methods of research and forms of knowledge that distance us “from each other and the world, allowing us to use what we know as a plaything and to play the game by our own self-serving rules” (p. 9).

In contrast to “objectivism,” the other way of knowing Palmer identifies is motivated not by an imperative to control, but rather by an implicit sense of inherent connection with the phenomena/beings one

seeks to know. This approach to knowledge implies and fosters a sense of “awesome responsibility,” of “involvement, mutuality, accountability,” of “compassion” and “love” (p. 9). Palmer notes how this approach is more in keeping with the original meaning of “truth,” which he observes,

... comes from a Germanic root that also gives rise to the word “troth,” as in the ancient vow “I pledge thee my troth.” With this word one person enters a covenant with another, a pledge to engage in a mutually accountable and transformative relationship... To know in truth is... to engage the known with one’s whole self, an engagement one enters with attentiveness, care and good will. To know in truth is to allow one’s self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the challenges and changes any true relationship brings... [T]ruth involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound. Truth contains... the image of community... of relatedness between knower and known that certain philosophies of science now affirm. (p. 31)

How the Program Fosters Authentic Communication

When considering how the program fostered authentic communication, certain features of its pedagogy and curriculum stand out. Firstly, the workshop facilitator was able to create a “safe” and encouraging learning environment essentially by himself relating to and communicating with the participants authentically. By applauding and honoring each participant’s sharing, by expressing sympathetic and passionate concern about specific injustices that came to light in that sharing, by showing appreciation for the unique gifts and virtues participants possessed, the participants came to trust and respect him, and increasingly, to trust and respect each other. In this way, the facilitator’s ability to exhibit in some ways what Mustakova-Possardt terms *authentic moral authority* appears to have been a key to creating a safe environment encouraging authentic communication.

Another significant feature of the program’s pedagogy was the manner in which the workshop facilitator skillfully “problematized” (to borrow Freire’s (2005b) term) a moral issue directly involving and affecting participants, while simultaneously attracting them to the “possibility” that they could overcome this problem (p. 79). In other words, while their particular moral problem (i.e., the ubiquitous sense of estrangement students experienced between, and within, their social groups at school, and the unequally distributed advantages or disadvantages associated with belonging to different groups) may previously have been unrecognized or taken-for-granted, the facilitator was able to bring the problem into focus and help learners recognize

how it was directly impacting the quality of their lives and the health of their society. Recognizing, understanding, and creating a solution to this problem thus became the focus of participants' collective learning and efforts in the program.

Simultaneously, the facilitator attracted learners to a beautiful "possibility" that this situation need not be, and that it was within their power to change it. He did this firstly by himself exemplifying a different way of relating to the participants. He also accomplished it by inviting them to consider certain key concepts and how these might be connected with their life experiences. These concepts, which he presented in the form of quotations from great thinkers and change agents, illustrations from science, and observations he offered about his own and the students' personal experiences, together essentially constituted an argument for the propositions that human beings possess two modes of seeing/being, one limiting, the other liberating, and that, by shifting from one way of perceiving/being to the other (i.e. by making a "Head-to-Heart Shift"), they could experience their "oneness" and become empowered to change their own lives and their community.

Concluding Thoughts: Implications for Transformative Learning

In conclusion, my study's findings suggest that, for education to effectively promote the transformation of learners and ultimately of society, it should provide learners with approaches to learning that stimulate and integrate their concerns with and pursuits of truth, beauty, and goodness. This implies that the arguably innate needs human beings possess to understand their world, appreciate and create meaning/beauty, and relate to others in caring, just and synergistic ways should be amplified (rather than suppressed) in our educational systems.

A key to accomplishing this is to ensure that all learning, at its heart, involves a process of authentic dialogue, i.e., a process of authentically communicating about a subject of inquiry that *explicitly* and *systematically* aims to (a) discover/construct a more complete and useful (i.e. "truer") understanding of the subject, (b) explore and express the beauty/meaning that knowledge arrived at has for participants, and (c) promote justice, caring and unity both in the process of dialogue itself and by applying understandings gained in social action (consistent with Freire's notion that true dialogue involves a *praxis* of reflection and action) (Freire, 2005b). In this regard, it should be noted that any subject can be taught/learned in a manner that gives due attention not only to acquiring information and developing conceptual understanding and

critical reasoning ability, but also to the moral and aesthetic dimensions of both the subject itself and the process of learning.

This further implies that *authentic communication* and *authentic relationships* should be salient features of the community in which transformative learning occurs. As Palmer (1993) observes, “we cannot learn deeply and well until a community of learning is created” (p. xvi). And developing such communities depends on teachers who “possess a capacity for connectedness” that enables them to “weave...connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students” (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). This capacity, Palmer (1998) further observes, “cannot be reduced to technique,” but rather “comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Furthermore, an explicit ethos of service should be part of this community’s culture, i.e., an ethos emphasizing the understanding that to develop knowledge and abilities for the purpose of bettering the world is a key to living a happy, authentically human life.

As for curriculum content, interdisciplinary curricula can be designed to focus on understanding and solving real problems affecting students and their world, consistent with Freire’s (2005b) “problem-posing” education, as well as on developing specific “capabilities” for promoting personal and social transformation (FUNDAEC, 2003).

By integrating the pursuits of truth, beauty, and goodness in these and other ways, educators and schools may be able to foster the kinds of persons and communities our world desperately needs.

Note

¹ Defined as education that helps learners develop capabilities (i.e., combined knowledge, conceptual understanding, skills, attitudes and moral/spiritual qualities) that can empower them to effectively promote their own and their society’s transformation.

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