

The Ineffable in Teacher Education and Teacher Professional Development:

The Presence-Present Confusion

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(reflections on Existentialism in Dr. Antonio's class)

In the discipline of education, particularly teacher education and teacher professional development there is a long-standing divide between the outer core and inner core of instructional knowledge, effective pedagogy, and professional identity. Concerns about the outer core dominate current policy debates in education and is primarily interested in the technical-external elements of teaching, including the on-stage aspects of classroom instruction such as: lesson plans, assessments, curriculum design, pedagogy, and standards based instruction. The emphasis on the outer core is consistent with the current national and state focus on testing and accountability for judging the overall effectiveness of a teacher. Its primary organizing domains are: **what** is being taught (content knowledge) and **how** is the content being taught (pedagogy). The outer core is more visible, tangible, rational, and measureable through the tools of objectivity. It is akin to Nietzsche's notion of "the Apollonian" ways of knowing the world; plastered, sculptured, formal, and rigid.

The inner core of teaching has many defenders in the literature but is nearly absent from in the policy and practice conversations about effective teaching. The inner core is divided into two domains: **why** is the teacher teaching a particular way (philosophy-good reason giving) and **who** is the self that teaches? Aspects of the inner core (the behind the scenes inner life of teaching) include things such as: heart, passion, calling, caring, courage, grit, true behavior, and imagination. The inner core is less visible, more obscure, grounded in the emotions-heart, and ineffable; it is knowable but resists measurement because of its subjective stance. Nietzsche's

description of “Dionysian” ways of being in the world seems to animate the inner core of teaching with the music of the heart, the singing of passion when deep speaks to deep, and the joyful dance of the teacher and student in euphoric relationship with the text.

As a researcher and teacher I’m particularly interested in the ramifications of taking seriously the question of “who is the self that teaches?” I believe that a primary reason for the failed or stalled reforms that characterize contemporary forms of education is the neglect, by the educational establishment (Kierkegaard’s equivalent of “Christendom”), of the inner core of teaching. Our class has offered new ways to understand this question and for that I’m most grateful and refreshed. I’m convinced, based on a deep dive into the literature in theology, positive psychology, leadership, teaching memoirs, effective instruction, and educational reform, that the element of “who” can be divided into 5 ineffable qualities (IQs): *calling, presence, authenticity, wholeheartedness, and imagination*. In an operational sense, the 5 IQs are recursive and sequential in the daily life of a teacher. Furthermore, I believe that the IQs are applicable to the inner life all of helping professions including: education, congregational leadership, social work and healthcare.

Kierkegaard is a rich source of images and paradoxes associated with the inner-life of the teacher. For instance, I find his notion of “faith” a helpful description of the inner craft knowledge of teaching, in particularly the ineffable quality of *imagination*. A teacher who is paying attention to the ethos of the classroom must at times make instructional leaps based on a sense of intuition-faith, without fully knowing what the outcome of the pedagogical choice will be. In my experience, the need to leap is common during moments of instructional and personal uncertainty (existential doubt) as a lesson goes sideways and a teacher faces basic and deep questions about identity and existence as an educator.

Our recent reading and class discussion on Heidegger has brought into sharp outline the ineffable quality of *presence*. In the education literature, *presence* is often confused or tangled up with the attribute of “being present”. I have argued that “having presence” and “being present” are distinct and if my reading of Heidegger is correct, he will be a helpful ally in extending this argument. For me, “having presence” is associated with qualities such as, persona, charisma, instructional aura, and a sense of proper fit between the teacher and the classroom. And “being present” is focused on the characteristics of openness, vulnerability, attentiveness, and the capacity to meet students at the deepest points of their learning needs. It is a component of the ineffable quality of *wholeheartedness*.

Heidegger seems to be hinting at a similar distinction with his notions of “presence-at-hand” and “being-present-at-hand”. (I express a sense of hesitancy here in making the following claims given my tentative understanding of Heidegger’s observations.) I hear in “presence-at-hand” an invitation to lift up the inner core of the teacher that is uniquely and authentically possessed by that teacher and resounds within the classroom space as something illusive but tangible to students. Students recognize a teacher with *presence* as truly a teacher even before the teacher utters a word or makes an instructional move. The teacher’s being and the world of the classroom are intimately charged, or in the words of Heidegger, the paradox of “they-self” and “I-self” (authentic self) is fully in bloom as the student-teacher interaction pulls forward and obscures the inner essence (*presence*) of the teacher. Good teachers command the classroom with their *presence* which students respond to with their presence thus creating a classroom space unique to that teacher’s inner essence and his deep sense of “authentic self”.

In contrast, “being-present-at-hand” for Heidegger seems to draw attention to the more external and somewhat transactional elements of objects in the world. In the best sense these

items are fully themselves as defined by the world they inhabit. In a similar fashion teachers and students can “be-present-at-hand” to each other especially when acting in the role of teacher or student. In an ideal classroom environment the aspect of “being-present-at-hand” can lean toward an image of a teacher being fully present and attentive to the student in an effort to liberate or call forth the inner essence of the student. For me, a teacher with a high degree of *wholeheartedness* consciously exhibits the quality of “being-present-at-hand” as if encouraging her students to take seriously her invitation to use her as a gateway into deeper, fuller, and more complex relationships with the teacher and the text they are studying together.