Transforming Educational Culture—Education Workshop 6-12

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TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL CULTURES

Education Workshop 6-12
“Education and Unity” (EdU) is the outreach of those who, by living out the Focolare Movement’s spirituality of communion, seek to generate a new culture in the field of education. As stated by the Focolare’s founder, Chiara Lubich, “Every authentic educational approach includes a utopian thrust; that is, a guiding principle which stimulates people to build together a world which is not yet a reality, but ought to be.” Lubich’s call is the inspiration behind EdU’s efforts to generate a culture marked by positive values and reciprocal relationships.

There are EdU groups across North America, including Toronto, Vancouver, New York, Baltimore, Atlanta, Columbus, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Los Angeles. These groups include students, parents, and professionals representing all strata of education, who share with one another their experiences, reflect on those experiences together, and develop practical strategies for bringing this “new culture” to life.

The book *Education’s Highest Aim: Teaching and Learning through a Spirituality of Communion* presents examples of our lived experience of living out a spirituality of unity in our personal and professional circumstances, as well as the history and theory behind our work. It also contains material for reflection, especially key texts by Chiara Lubich.
What does it mean to generate a culture of reciprocity in classrooms and schools? What are its effects? Dialog will focus on interpersonal and group process among students, as well as among faculty and staff. Additional aspects include extracurricular activities such as clubs, performance groups, and sports.
**OUR ITINERARY**

- **E**ngage: Experiences of life.
- **E**xplore: Transforming Educational Cultures
- **E**xplain: What is essential for transformation?
- **E**laborate: Review and revise our perspectives.
- **E**valuate: What is our commitment?

What does it mean to generate a culture of reciprocity in classrooms and schools? What are its effects?
ERIKA CROATTO

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Let’s say we want to “transform educational cultures.” From what are we transforming? To what would we agree to be transformed?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTUAL</th>
<th>DESIRED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power struggles in school</td>
<td>Shared community of reciprocity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of values, individualism, self-centeredness</td>
<td>Love the person in front of you</td>
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<td>Distractions such as politics, accountability</td>
<td>Focus on relationships, T&lt;-&gt;T, T&lt;-&gt;S</td>
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<td>Dismissal of teachers/staff without notice or as a technical procedure</td>
<td>Doing this with compassion and mutual understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students lack a sense of belongness to school and family</td>
<td>Community spirit.</td>
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What are the significances of relationships in education?
Through reciprocity with others, individuals realize their capacity to confront the weightiest moral questions, life’s “mountains of hatred and violence” that no one can move by himself or herself, and in doing so become most truly themselves. In the contemporary world of education, the construction of such an integrated identity in its constituents (students, parents, instructors) is complicated or thwarted by tensions such as these:
• Professionalization and specialization lead to academic success and recognition but impose a work ethic based on isolation that deters teachers and researchers from developing reciprocal relationships;

• Privileged contemporary notions such as competency and efficiency require persons to display only fragments of their talents, characteristics, knowledge, and experience so as to fulfill the technical requirements of the particular educational setting in which they must operate;

• Students and educators alike adopt sets of behaviors that maximize their reward and minimize their personal cost;

• The processes that constitute much of the day-today educational activity, such as problem-solving or decision-making, render human subjects solitary agents who apply their calculative or manipulative capacities in an instrumental fashion;

• Educational institutions seek to be good stewards of public as well as private resources but often choose to reduce themselves to a commodity with the central promise of economic success and social rewards for the individual student.
IN PRACTICE

1. Take the initiative to reach out to all co-workers and be open to those who reach out to you;
2. When something happens that causes disunity, do not take things personally, try to think positively and forgive if necessary, and take the first opportunity to reach out to the other;
3. Encourage team members with expertise relevant to the discussion at hand to express their thoughts freely, especially taking care to elicit comments from those who are least likely to express their ideas;
4. Try to listen fully before responding or speaking;
5. Resolutions and conclusions from interdisciplinary discussions should be made in the best interest of the students and families we serve and agreed upon by the team.

Review and revise our perspectives.
Explaining KIPP’s 'SLANT'

By Deborah Meier on April 11, 2013 10:08 AM

Elliott Witney blogs again with Deborah Meier today.

Dear Deb,

You’ve asked how we can reconcile our practices with the Golden Rule of “Do unto others what you would have others do unto you.” Or, in other words, how aligned are our practices with our beliefs? That’s a question I’ve been focused on since I was in college, and I deeply appreciate the chance to get into it with you.

I’ll devote this second letter to discussing the educational practice you asked about, known as SLANT. This is a perfect example of how alignment between practice and beliefs is just as crucial—if not more so—than the specific practice itself.

SLANT emerged at our school in Houston as an easy way to explain to children some key...
Creating a Positive Educational Climate

The Art of Living the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule, “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself” transcends cultures, religions, and systems of ethics.

This “Art of Living the Golden Rule” describes the creative and collegial habits of effective educators and guides daily professional practice. This “rule”, we have found, is relevant to many situations we encounter, including the joyful and the difficult.

We propose that living this way together helps us to become better, happier, and more effective as individuals, educators, and as an educational community.

This, we have found, is foundational for creating a positive educational climate.

<table>
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<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| **Courage** | ◆ Embrace difficulties and challenges as golden opportunities.  
◆ Recognize your adversaries as a gift, providing special relationships and insights.  
◆ When something goes wrong, be ready to start again, immediately, and with joy. |
| **Empathy** | ◆ Give priority to the perspective or point-of-view of the other.  
◆ “Walk in the shoes” of the other. Make their perspective your own.  
◆ Set aside your beliefs and ideas to understand the other. |
| **Solidarity** | ◆ See everyone as an ally, colleague, or partner in the education mission.  
◆ Make a conscious effort for “transparency”.  
◆ Give priority to communication. Keep all “stakeholders” in the loop. |
| **Initiative** | ◆ Take the initiative to help the other.  
◆ Be the first to say a kind word and do a kind deed.  
◆ Share constructive ideas and resources. |
| **Positivity** | ◆ See the good in the nature and abilities of yourself and the other.  
◆ Understand challenges, difficulties, and problems as opportunities for good.  
◆ Promote the good, truth, and beauty in everyone. |
| **Reciprocity** | ◆ Commit yourself to the good of your students, colleagues, and community.  
◆ Share our hopes, ideas, needs, time, and gifts.  
◆ Accept others’ difficulties and joys as if they were your own. |
Creating a Positive Educational Climate

The color spectrum as a referent for honoring and balancing priorities

- **Resources**: Budget, Materials, Supplies, Enabling Conditions
- **Relationships**: Collaboration, Collegiality, Teams, Mentoring
- **Reflection**: Purpose; Meaning; Ethics, Values and Virtues
- **Re-Creation**: Health, Natural Environment, Rest, Wellness
- **Harmony**: Beauty and Order, Organization, Surroundings
- **Wisdom & Study**: Learning and Professional Education
- **Communication**: Connecting—Speaking, Writing, Media
What is possible in our own settings? How should we act?
What is our commitment?
**What’s next?**

- Develop a workshop to offer to faculty/staff at the start of the year. Sustain engagement.
- Be the first to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes (walk the talk). Be a model first.
- Avoid cooperating in gossip.
- Take initiative in doing our part in building relationships to help the most in need. Include everyone. Involve others (colleagues, principal)
- Be conscious about how we express what one is sensing, feeling, as understanding without accusation being judged.
Facebook: *Education's Highest Aim* by Michael James, Thomas Masters, Amy Uelmen

http://www.focolare.us/