

The Transformed Teacher

The Transformed Teacher is the educator who has transcended the prejudicial and oppressive beliefs, values and expectations - as well as the resulting practices - that seem to be instilled in the very DNA of our public education system and ultimately sustained through a highly effective, reproductive cycle implicating our educators as individuals who have successfully navigated and therefore benefitted from the system they are charged with interrupting.

According to Mezirow (1991), "Experience strengthens our personal category systems by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be... That is, we construct a model of the world with our system of categories, come to expect certain relationships and behaviors to occur, and then experience our categories, making imaginative projections to construe experience." He further asserts, "to make the crucial distinction between our own psychological reactions and external events requires the development of our capacity for self-consciousness."

Transformed Teachers, on paths towards constant self-consciousness, recognizes that while our "experience strengthens our personal category systems", dependent on the experiences, our reinforced "expectations about how things are supposed to be" can often, if not always assuredly stem from our larger, hegemonic societal construct rooted in white supremacist idealism. Furthermore, Transformed Teachers recognize how they, in the skin they are in, have both profited and lost as a result of this construct. Building from some, initial, character-changing experiences (willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously), Transformed Teachers intentionally (willingly AND consciously) inquire, examine, reflect, take action, assess and improve - not despite this reality, but explicitly considering it.

The Transformed Teacher connects her personal being to her professional life specifically within our schooling system. She recognizes that she has a prescribed role, as both product of and player for this system, to perpetuate and reproduce the larger construct of oppression and power for her own students (Kennedy, 1999; Sheets, 2006). With increased consciousness of her world and her place within it, the Transformed Teacher is aware that a deep shift in her very being is necessary. This shift must take place not only her curricula and pedagogies, but also in the beliefs, values and resulting expectations behind her decisions and actions about her students. Thus the Transformed Teacher begins to internalize a stance for equity and social justice, and a commitment to an even more intentional professional transformation in order to interrupt and transcend her systemic destiny and to re-conceptualize and actuate her work as an agent and effective educator of social change and improvement.

The Transformed Teacher recognizes the importance of BOTH maintaining high expectations and belief that each student can and will succeed regardless of their social demographics AND using prescribed and well-known best practices for all students regardless of these demographics. Thus she commits BOTH to evolve her knowledge, skill and humility as a culturally competent and effective teacher, and to develop her will and courage to form and actualize a social justice stance that translates to anti-racist actions and advocacy not only with, but also on behalf of her students and all students in the face of a larger institutional and systemic design intended to impede the results of even her best teaching.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of a Transformed Teacher is measured less by the cultural competence infused through her knowledge and skills, or by the fierceness of her anti-racist stance in the name of equity and social justice, than it is evidenced by the results of her students, again, specifically the students who historically have been least served.