Creating inner lives:

Theories of learning, selfing, actioning through arts education. A beginning...

JUDITH MCLEAN, QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

The paper explores the idea that psychoanalytical theory offers insights into the learning process by focusing on the importance of building relationships between teacher and student in arts education. It is argues that such relationships can only occur if the teacher is conscious of her own transferences. It explores the learning process through the work of D.W. Winnicott and Winifred Bion.

My research journey will be familiar to many academics and teachers in arts education who read this article. It began teaching drama in the classroom, directing school musicals and rock eisteddfods in an ill equipped school hall. However, there was always a desire to be better at what I did - both as a teacher and an artist. For me at that time the only means of improvement was learning from experience, (at this time read experience as a code for failure, a search for perfection, such was my positivist view of the world) (Schwandt, 2001, p. 88) and being better next time around. It was a case of trial and error. I believed if I could somehow ‘master’ (sic) the technical skills of teaching and artmaking that next time the work and students’ learning would be better…but of course learning is about much more than this.

This paper looks at alternate models of learning for teaching in the arts that critiques the notion that experience in itself as Britzman (1991) tells us “never guarantees access to particular meaning, competency truth, or a particular form of conduct” (p. 200). For her, our knowledge of experience can only be known after it is expressed and depends upon the discourses we take up. Experience does not contain an objective lesson and in her words is “not instructive in and of itself” (p.200). While not denying that experience often allows experimentation and creativity, this paper suggests other ways of improving practice. The suggestion is that by adopting and critiquing different discourses we discover other ways of knowing the world releasing potential for both teacher and learner.
PURPOSE OF ARTS EDUCATION

Before I can outline the kind of teacher and artist pedagogy I subscribe to, I will state my beliefs about the purpose of arts education. The study of art, and, in this case, drama education, is about gaining knowledge of ‘self’, (or what I have termed a ‘selfing’ process) and gaining knowledge of others. The process of ‘selfing’ requires an active verb to indicate the constant thinking involved in making and re-making of the self (in whatever state of poststructuralist fragmentation the self is represented). The importance of this ‘selfing’ process is its enabling capacity in giving learners agency over their lives, in other words to take responsibility for their lives.

This includes teacher and students having the capacity to “use” (Beck, 2002, p. 23) objects, events, people, places, both consciously and unconsciously, to be able to think for themselves. Being “mindful” (Epstein, 2001, p. 95) of how we think consciously and even, unconsciously, is central for self knowledge (Palmer, 1998). Beck tells us that “the capacity to tolerate unconscious thinking is coeval with the capacity to create meaning” (Beck, 2002, p23).

This kind of thinking required for arts education is a particular type of knowledge labeled by Suzanne Langer as “insight, understanding the essential life of feeling” (Langer, 1957, p. 92). For arts educators what is important is a need to explore one’s feeling life. Contrary to what might be believed exploring a feeling life is an irregular practice in arts education. Searching for a way to chart this exploration led me to an investigation of psychoanalytical theory.

In detailing such a position, I hold the view that arts education curricula embrace a multiplicity of theories. Plurality and diversity in the classroom are not only healthy but desirable. In this paper I propose that the most influential driver for be-ing, described by Winnicott as “the uninterrupted flow of the authentic self” (Epstein, 2001, p. 30) or put another way, staying present with who we are, is a growing consciousness of the teacher and students’ inner life. The point needs to be highlighted, that between teacher and student there is a reciprocal relationship similar to that demonstrated by mother/child relationships and like the latter these relationships can be “benevolent forces with destructive potential (Epstein, 2001, p. 32).

Undoubtedly for some the term inner life is contestable perhaps even inadmissible. However, if we can accept Freud’s claim, along with other esteemed psychoanalysts alluded to in this paper, then there is a psychic space where an inner life exists. Undeniably, inner lives are shadowy and hard to pin down alluded to as the unconscious appearing as intuition, accidents, dreams, and fantasy.

While combining the discourses of arts education and psychoanalytical theory may seem like an ambitious sweep, Delueze makes the point that it is not the number of ideologies or methodologies that create change but the putting together of different ideas. For him “curriculum theory moves when in multiplicities and lines of flight, not in dualisms or either/or” (Delueze in Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 2). What defines curriculum moves is the:
...‘and’, as something, which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND, - stammering. And even if there are only two terms, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p.34 in Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 3)

My consciousness began to grasp what it might mean to move arts curriculum to a stance that borrows/ co-opts from the following areas when I began to engage with psychoanalytical theory, encompassing emotional intelligence, AND cultural studies AND arts education.

These discourses took me to theories of the unconscious. It was from this place that I begin to investigate the proposition that knowledge of our inner life is important for arts educators because inner life

- is part of the educational project of transcendence (Grumet, 1988)
- and human agency are linked (Shepherd & Davis, 1986), Bion (Symington, 1996), (Stern, 1985), (Winnicott, 1965)
- has a “reality of its own- but once tapped forms the ontological step” (Bruner, 1986)
- is today threatened by destruction (psychic space) (Kristeva) in (Zournazi, 2002)
- is part of linguistic and cultural narratives (Lacan, 1977) (Maturana & Varela, 1992)
- is lived and dreamed concurrently & communally - consciously/unconsciously (Craib, 2001) repressed/generative (Newirth, 2003), (Beck, 2002)
- is constructed and reconstructed - dialectic involves understanding backwards - living forwards - memory and desire (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995)
- is shared and part of the language of communities - res publica (Phillips, 2002)
- is ‘noumenal’ (beyond the reach of our most ambitious theories) (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995).

In this paper I only focus on the first three statements concerning understanding the construction of inner life. I argue that raised consciousness of our inner life and its impact on the external world is a means of moving or transcending life. This has significance if we believe that schools can be places of transcendence and not just instrumental skilling factories.

A CAVEAT

It is important to state that in this study psychoanalytical theory does not claim a place in a classroom as it is experienced in a clinical context. Its use is that by understanding the underlying structures of psychoanalysis they will assist in building quality human
relationships. Britzman’s clever play on Freud’s now famous aphorism, “where id was, there ego shall be” becomes “where interpretation was there education shall become” hints at the possibilities (2003, p. 3).

Most teachers are not given psychoanalytical training in teacher pre-service preparation. A web audit of teaching programs finds most psychology courses offered as developmental learning models adopting behaviorist models focusing on the learner rather than the psychological attitudes adopted by the teacher. Palmer makes the point in his excellent book, The Courage to Teach that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10).

I began to research my own teaching by focusing on feelings of joy and anxiety and became curious about the genesis for these states. I began to work in a way described in psychoanalysis as the analytical attitude. The term is a reference to a purposeful and learned frame of mind adopted by a therapist to a patient to facilitate growth and transformation.

It is part of the learner’s earliest memories experienced in the libidinal mother/child relationship. Here it is used in relation to teacher and students and refers to a state of being where the teacher is,

attentive in a way that is unusual in daily life; we respect the patients [students’] need for room to think; we try to minimise irrelevancies; and we look for meanings and responses beyond the obvious. We do not rush in with the first thing that comes into our head (Lomas, 1994, p. 23).

In the analytical attitude the teacher attempts to create conditions outlined by Lomas to encourage engagement in the learning process. It is the teacher’s communication that is at the heart of learning, as Jean White explains,

My assumption – derived from Bion’s arguments concerning unconscious communication and the relational nature of learning – is that the state of mind of the teacher...will have the most profound impact on the students’ capacity to learn (White, 2002, p.94).

Britzman sees a direct relationship between “the early work of learning to love to the belated work of loving to learn” (Britzman, 1999b, p. 2). Here we see the direct connection in the three relational areas, mother/child, teacher/student, analyst/analysand. The starting place for learning is in the natal area, caregiver-infant relationship later transferring to the teacher and learner’s libidinal history. What the teacher concerns herself with is the transference of learning in relationship.

This approach has application for teachers who find themselves confronted with the overcrowded curriculum in contemporary education. At a policy level the quandary for educators seems to focus on content, what is to be taught, or privileged. A richer conversation might centre on how to engage meaningfully with students’ inner learning.
In order to understand how an inner life develops and how it manifests itself in a student’s life I explore the writings of British object relations theorists, Donald Winnicott (Shepherd & Davis, 1986) and Wilfred Bion (in Symington, 1996, White, 2002).

**BROADENING LEARNING THEORIES**

Bion saw knowing as a process model, and believed that personal meaning is the goal of learning with emotion at the centre of the development of thought. Bion’s theories are particularly relevant to the research of arts educators as he focuses on the attitude of the teacher, particularly the unconscious communications and the relational aspects of learning.

For Bion thinking is “a steady development of connections” (Craib, 2001, p. 105) and knowledge is a human process, as opposed to the knowledge being there to be had. The process of knowing entails looking at relationships between elements, rather then the elements themselves, with knowledge moving through-increasing levels of abstractions. For Bion, “bearing pain is an essential prerequisite to the development of a capacity for thought” (White, 2002 p. 91). There are echoes of Kristeva’s idea that tolerating solitude is a pre-requisite to being able to be creative (in Zournazi, 2002, p. 67).

Beginning in the first relationship, Winnicott uses the term “good-enough mother” (Gomez, 1997, p. 88) to describe the caregiver who protects her infant; letting the baby enjoy that illusion of omnipotence which later becomes a source of creativity and agency, but she also provides for disillusion (reality-sense) without despair (Winnicott, 1971, pp. 75-82). My paper postulates that teachers and artists play this role, alternating between protector and antagonist.

Britzman describes Bruno Bettelheim’s notion of the good enough teacher as one who “transfers, in exchange for her own or his love, not a learning but a demand that the students learn to make their own demands in learning” (Britzman, 1999a, p. 8) Like the infant’s caregiver, it is an arts educator’s role to develop a learning space, variously described in psychoanalytical theory as “the holding space”, the “transitional space” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 81) or “the container” Bion (in White, 2002, p. 101). Bion states, “learning depends on the capacity for the growing container/contained to remain integral and yet lose rigidity” (p. 101).

Winnicott’s theory is that in this space the infant is allowed to play with and enjoy a “transitional object” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 81) (soft toy, piece of blanket, thumb), for arts educator substitute creating art. The transitional object represents the mother’s ability to present the world in such a way that the infant does not at first have to know that the object is not created by the infant (Winnicott, 1971, p. 81). The transitional object assists in filling the gap between created and found, internal and external, and is a preparation for the later use of symbols; the infant’s ‘true self’ is not impinged upon and ‘false self’ defences do not have to be assumed and the infant learns to be able to “go[ing] on being”...
(Epstein, 2001, p. 30) by behaving spontaneously. However there are many impediments to behaving spontaneously and one of these is the concept of transference.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHER**

Perhaps the most startling awareness that I have encountered in my research is the ubiquitous nature of the concept of transference and its impact upon learning. The term, transference is defined as “passing-on or displacing an emotion or affective attitude from one person or another object” (Reber & Reber, 2001, p. 23). Freud’s notion is that the student must pass through the teacher on the way to knowledge and that these relationships involve transference of love from parents to teacher. Freud describes transference as:

On the one hand an instrument of irreplaceable value and on the other hand a source of serious dangers...the love transferred is caught in its own dramatic acts, and sustaining its fragile ties is just the beginning of learning (in Britzman, 1999b, p. 7).

Educator Anna Freud wrote that teachers must learn to control their own aggressiveness; otherwise students serve as unsuspecting analysands.

I hold we are right in demanding that the teacher or educator should have learnt to know or control his own conflicts before he begins his educational work. if this is not so, the pupils merely serve as more or less suitable material on which top abreac his own unconscious and unsolved difficulties (in Hall, 2002, p. 23).

More recently Grumet challenges us to become conscious of our transferences to be able teach as an art, she claims,

- to teach as an art would require us to study the transferences we bring to the world we know, to build our pedagogies not only around our feeling for what we know but also around our knowledge of why and how we have come to feel the way we do about what we teach this may lead us to new forms for knowing that will not compel our students to recite the history and future of our desire (Grumet, 1988.p, 128).

According to Grumet everyone brings the transference “from our infantile introduction to the symbolic order to our teachers. We expect them to know, and in that knowing confer that knowledge on us” (Grumet, 1988, p. 122). The question is, how do we become conscious of our own transferences so as to become a good enough teacher The first step in unravelling its scope is to become conscious of the relationship between inner and external worlds.
CONSCIOUSNESS & OBJECT RELATIONS

Antonio Damasio (2000) a leading researcher, in neurology, emotion, memory and language describes in *The Feeling of What Happens*, how when we learn about consciousness, it is like “stepping into the light” or “the birth of the knowing mind” (2000, p.4) and states,

...what could be more difficult to know than how we know? What could be more dizzying than to realize that it is our having consciousness which makes possible and even inevitable our questions about consciousness. (Damasio, 2000, p. 4).

For the learner finding a relationship between consciously knowing something and affect, are often uncorrelated and “the disjoint or particular affective reactions can be established without participation of conscious appraisal.” (Redding,1999, p.14). Damasio speaks of the importance of understanding the act of consciousness, which allows us to, “develop a concern for other selves and improve the art of life” (Damasio, 2000, p. 5). He and his colleague Joseph Le Doux (LeDoux, 1998) work from a biological and evolutionary approach to emotion. Common to both is a belief that “the felt centre of emotion consists of informational feedback from states of the body” (Redding, 1999 p,17) suggesting that emotion as primarily a body state is often unconscious thus giving credence to Freud. Knowing oneself is not as simple as it might appear and contemporary life appears to suggests that most people are not always concerned with understanding their “internal symbolic experience” (Newirth, 2003, p. 2).

However whereas Freud’s later work does move beyond biological “basically physiological” (Gomez, 1997, p. 2) it is to the object relations theorists, Klein (Gomez, 1997), Winnicott (Shepherd & Davis, 1986), Balint (Balint, 1968), Bowlby (Craib, 2001) and Chodorow (Chodorow, 1978) that lead us to a “subject relations theory” (Gomez, 1997 p,4). As a theory for learning and development it redefines and extends Freud’s work proposing the purpose of life as “relationship[s] rather than the gratification of instincts”(Gomez, 1997, p. 3).

It is this preoccupation with relationships and intersubjectivity (Diamond & Marrone, 2003) that it at the heart of learning of object relations theory. Winnicott calls this process “personalisation” in (Davis & Wallbridge, 1981, p. 37) of the self, by which he meant “the acquisition of a personal body scheme with “the psyche indwelling in the soma” (p.37). Winnicott explains this concept of personalisation in the following,

The basis of this indwelling is a linking of the motor and sensory functional experience with the infant’s new state of being as a person. As a further development what comes into being is a limiting membrane, which to some extent (in health) is equated with the surface of the skin, and has a position between the infant’s “me” and his “not me”. So the infant comes to have an inside and an outside, and a body scheme. In this way meaning comes to the function of intake and output; moreover it gradually becomes meaningful to postulate a personal, an inner psyche reality for the infant (Davis & Wallbridge, 1981, p. 37).
It is the idea of the “me” and “not me”, the potential to recognise one’s own life, or Damasio’s “autobiographical self” (p.19) that is so crucial for what can be known. It is in the space between inner and outer world, which is also the space between people which Winnicott calls the transitional space. It is here he claims that intimate relationships and creativity occur.

Winnicott’s concepts of personalisation, transitional objects and transitional space are responsible for physical and psychic development, physically in such areas as muscle tone and co-ordination, and, mentally for the ability to be in relationships of shared reality. As Damasio states, “having a sense of self is not only required for knowing... but may influence the process of whatever gets to be known” (Damasio, 2000, p. 19). Knowing who we are, directly affects what we can know.

To return to the importance of this discourse for arts education. If “art is the expression of knowledge about feeling, not just raw expression of that feeling itself” (Langer, 1957, p. 92), then it is vitally important for educators to be erudite about what consciousness leads to educating emotions and feelings to build learning relationships. Wilfred Bion’s question “what is it that triggers emotional experience” and his answer, “an emotional experience cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship” urges us to consider the quality and nature of relationships in learning (Symington, 1996, p. 113).

RELATIONSHIPS AND LEARNING

It is the dynamic of the relationship that is of central importance here, and can assist in being developmental or anti-developmental. For example, the child whose mind prematurely, knows, because he cannot tolerate the “not knowing position”, which might allow new insight, takes a posture viewed by Bion as “anti-development” (Symington, 1996, p. 113)

Bion’s ideas have applicability in drama education, indeed all education. The first idea is the posture he advocates, to promote the evolution of the mind. He suggests that the psychoanalyst, here substitute teacher, should “inhibit both conscious memory, and desire for improvement, understanding or cure” (p.95). In this sense it produces what Bion calls,

an “act of faith” or a state of mind labeled a reverie, in which a deep and new insight or understanding can develop in such a way as to change or advance and enlarge the mind and itsapperceptions (White, 2002 p, 97).

Described as a receptive state of mind, where the mind is ready to receive barely formed thoughts, a selected fact, is taken up, offered by teacher or student. This selected fact, presents an opportunity for students to suspend their temporary givens and knowns, in favour of entering the risky activity of allowing new thoughts into consciousness.
The second strategy useful for the teacher is apparent from Bion’s work in the container/contained. In this manifestation the teacher assists students in living with half formed ideas, providing time and space for ideas to be tested by using multiple vertices. In Bion’s terms “truth is a process” (in White, 2002, p.97) and tolerating doubt and uncertainty is the only way through to knowing.

Bion’s next concept relates to the notion of ‘multiple vertices, i.e. the capacity to hold in mind differing perspectives on the same issue or possibility, which he states gives the learner “a powerful form of reality testing” (in White, 2002, p.97) further attesting to the notion that thought “precedes through internal and external relationships”. The above concepts work together to create what Bion calls transformation. Transformation occurs through emotion and experience “irrevocable transform[ing] the thinker and his or her perceptions of internal and external reality” (in White, 2002, p. 90).

Work in the area of educational drama, promotes such techniques and strategies e.g., role-reversal, metaxis, mantle of the expert, hot seat, (O’Neill, 1995) etc, occur when students are encouraged to hold provisional ‘truths’ and test these out as the drama unfolds, at the same time being aware of elements of fiction and their relationship to the students own life.

THE TEACHER-ARTIST

As outlined in the introduction the motivation for this research stemmed in part from a need to delve further into my own practice after a long period as a teacher and artist. There is a belief held by Gardner that all understanding is self understanding, (in Orange, 1995p.18) a sentiment I agree with. I was confident about my processes and the contexts within which I worked, however, I was fascinated with questions relating to the nature of the exchange that occurred in these situations, i.e. theories of learning. This study takes me beyond my initial reactive (Winnicott, 1971) phase of teaching, where I responded instinctively to the relationship between content, context and form, to viewing learning as a complex process which was structured by my own values, and behaviours accordingly.

I accepted that my socially defined role (for which I was being paid) was to help my students into their emerging places in society. I also knew that I was in a system that constrained a hidden curriculum that was involved in maintaining social order and fostering compliance (Fornas & Bolin, 1995). I saw an additional part of my role as that of a subversive who wanted to use every opportunity that could be found to empower students so that they, rather than some kind of social hegemony could direct their lives. The question of how to promote agency within each student is vexed in curriculum based arts learning.

I agree with Grumet’s statement, that although schools as places where industry and bureaucratic interests are paramount, because of the complicity of men and women in paternal authority, they also have potential and power inherent in the classroom context as she states,
Curriculum is a project of transcendence, our attempt while immersed in biology and ideology to transcend biology and ideology. Even in the most conventional scene of classroom practice we can find traces of transformative consciousness, no matter how masked in apparent compliance and convention (Grumet, 1988, p. 20).

In thinking about curriculum as a ‘project of transcendence’ Grumet describes her fundamental belief that “knowledge evolves in human relationships”, and as Maturana states so eloquently, all cognitive experience involves the knower in a personal way, rooted in his biological structure. There, his experience of cer-tainty is, an individual phenomenon blind, to the cognitive acts of others, in a solitude which, as we shall see, is transcended only in a world created with those others (Maturana & Varela, 1992, p. 18)

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have learnt heavily on psychoanalytical AND arts education theories. Britzman alludes to the difficulty in settling on what it is to know particularly in education when she outlines the breadth of knowledge teachers need to confront,

...the romance of cognitive styles, the rumblings, of brain research, the idealisation of information and standards, the parade of new diagnoses of learning failure: attention deficit disorders, overstimulation, understimulation and not enough Mozart.
(Britzman, 2000, p. 200)

This paper posits that for teachers faced with such conflicting discourses that experience in itself will not suffice, rather it is by understanding the importance of building quality relationships that the teacher will find other possibilities of engaging with learners. Once understood the paper traces the ways in which building such relationships can occur. It expounds the importance of natal theory through the writings of object relations theorists Winnicott and Bion. These theories provide an interpretation of the importance of relationships in learning including the role of the caregiver, here substitute teacher, and their own psychoanalytical awareness. The paper posits that unless the caregiver/teacher is able to consciously create a learning space where the student feels held/ contained and can just be spontaneous, then little real engagement can take place. Winnicott sums up the importance of this state when he writes, “the alternative to being is reacting, and reacting interrupts being and annihilates” (Epstein, 2001, p. 1).
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