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The Dialectic of Identity and Integrity of the Teacher in Parker Jay Palmer's Philosophy

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Abstract

It has been retained that the teaching- learning process often gives pride of place to the subject matter and method. Parker Jay Palmer holds that this approach to education conceals the place of the teacher in the educational transaction. In this light, Palmer observes that we tend to forget the invaluable role of the teacher on who so much depends. This paper set out to argue that debates in education has to cherish and challenge the human heart that is the source of good teaching. For Palmer, good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. The main question this paper seeks to answer is, how does the identity and integrity (personality) of the teacher contribute to effective teaching and learning? How can the re-establishment of the teacher's authority restore order and discipline within the school milieu? While Palmer thinks the complementarity of identity and integrity plays a key role in learning, Nel Noddings holds that the care shown to the students is key. Our central argument here is that identity, integrity and care are limited as sole determinants of effective teaching and learning. This limitation can be complimented by educarity which should be understood as envisioning oneself as part of a ring of love in which each individual self has worth in-itself and also as he/she relates to every other self.

Key words: Care, Identity, integrity, Teaching, Love, Curriculum, method, Teaching, and learning, Caritas, educarity, Educathority.

Introduction

In his Book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of Teacher's Life*, Parker Jay Palmer authoritatively asserts that “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher”(Palmer, 1998: p.10). The place of identity and integrity in teaching is one which has been neglected in today's educational system which seems to prioritize expert knowledge gained by the teacher, the material taught and the place of the teaching method. Given this consideration, Palmer seems to suggest that a lot of emphasis is laid on the “what” and “how” questions in teaching (that is what is taught- subject matter? And how is it taught-teaching method and technique?), and little or no interest is put on the “who” question (who is the person's teaching-identity and integrity as a teacher). Identity is essentially the answer to the question “who am I, who are you?” or “who is the teacher?” It should be noted that the identity and integrity of the teacher refers to the selfhood, the personhood, the ego and the “I” of the teacher and also what the community thinks he/she is. According to the *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, the concept of identity “leads on to questions such as the nature of substance, the relationship of appearance and reality, and the conditions of personal identity” (Bunnin & Yu, 2004: p.327). Integrity is the “consistency and the continuity across the various dimension of one's life and hence amount to moral identity” (Bunnin & Yu, 2004: p.327). Palmer thinks that identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death (Palmer, 1998: p 13).

Palmer like others like Paolo Freire and John Miller is an educational philosopher who thinks that education should be holistic, That is, it should involve the whole person from his body, spirit, and soul. In addition, it should involve the intellect, the emotional and the spiritual. It is within this understanding that Palmer thinks that anyone who is charged with the responsibility of teaching has an awesome task of not only inculcating, informing and teaching but has the task of forming the whole person of the student. This explains why Palmer observes that in teaching, three important paths must be charted, namely; the intellectual, the emotional and the spiritual. Any attempt to limit teaching to any of the three aspects is inadequate and dangerous. He later contends that the reduction of teaching to the intellect is simply cold abstraction; reducing it to emotions is narcissistic and limiting it to the spirit makes it to lose its anchor in the world (Palmer, 1998: p. 4). Therefore, the intellect, the emotions and the spirit depend on one another for wholeness (Palmer, 1998: p.4). This explains the reason for seeking to consider the place of identity and integrity within Palmer’s holistic education.

Identity and Integrity in Palmer’s holistic education

The concepts of identity and integrity have a complementary role in the educational vision of Palmer. When we talk of identity, two things come into mind. Firstly, what the community thinks the teacher is. This is always the answer to the question who is a teacher? And second, what the teacher thinks of himself as a teacher. This is usually the answer to the question, who am I as a teacher? When Palmer talks of the identity of the teacher, these two meanings are very much implicated. This also brings in the second aspect which is integrity. For Craig P. Dunn (2009), integrity requires:

Coherence among a set of moral values, with this set of moral values having consistency with a set of social values, and that integrity further requires congruence between an agent’s behavior and this set of moral/social values over time and across social context(s) (pp.102-103).

Highlighting the above, integrity requires that there is coherence between the teacher’s behaviour and his moral values. That is, what he/she says should flow from his/her being. This means that the teacher’s identity is who he/she is in the eyes of the community and in himself/herself and his/her behavior has a lot to do in the teaching and learning process. For this reason, Palmer avers that teaching like any “truly human activity emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the conditions of my soul onto my students, my subject and our way of being together” (Palmer, 1998: p.2). In this way, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. It is with this understanding that he argues that good teaching requires self-knowledge. This is because when the teacher does not know himself/herself, he/she cannot know the students and consequently cannot teach them well (Palmer 1998: p.14).

Again, self-knowledge is important as to know thyself is to communicate the self. This is pivotal because the students do not only listen to the voice of the teacher, they also look at the person in front of them and observe if there is an adequation between his/her words and actions and whether all these say something about his being. This is because to educate is to guide the students on an inner journey towards more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world. It is in this light that Palmer wonders how schools could perform their mission without encouraging the guides to scout that inner terrain (Palmer, 1998: p. 12).

Further, Palmer acknowledges that the moment the teacher faces the students, the only resource he/she has, is his/her identity, his/her selfhood and his/her sense of the “I” who teaches. This sense of the “I” is what makes meaning of the “thou” who learns. This pushes him to maintain very early in his book that “*good teaching cannot be reduced to techniques; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*” (Palmer. 1998: p.10). This assertion has great implication in teaching. That is to say, good teaching cannot depend only on the best teaching practices that have been developed. It also extends to a strong sense of personal identity which characterizes the work of the teacher. The teacher’s self-knowledge permits him to be able to connect with the subject and the students. This connection is not held in the methods but in the heart. Palmer uses the word “heart” in its ancient meaning to refer to the place where “the intellect, the emotions and the spirit converge in the self” (Palmer, 1998: p.11). Is the claim that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher not altruism? To this, Palmer thinks that it is not because good teaching comes from good people (Palmer, 1998: p. 11). As the philosophical medieval dictum goes sicut

tens, sic agit (as a being is, so it acts). This means action follows being. In effect, if a teacher is bad or has a bad heart, he can only teach badly *Nemo dat quod non habet* (One cannot give what one does not have). Is Palmer also suggesting that identity only has to do with the good and noble features of the teacher? Is it possible to have a teacher who is flawless, whose heart is all full of good things? To this, Palmer is quick to retort:

(...) by identity and integrity, I do not mean only our noble features, or the good deeds we do, or the brave faces we wear to conceal our confusions and complexities. Identity and integrity have much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potentials (Palmer 1998: p.13).

When Palmer uses the term identity and integrity, identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death (Palmer, 1998: p. 13). Now is it possible to fully know who we are and can we continuously be consistent? To this we must insist that it is always a work in progress. This is because they can never be fully known by anyone including the person who bears them (Palmer 1998: p. 14). No, after having seen that effective teaching and learning cannot take place without the identity and the knowledge of the teacher, we turn our attention to the relationship between the teacher's identity and integrity in the holistic vision of education.

Integrity as part of identity and vice versa

To Palmer, integrity is seen as the foundation or the essence of identity. They are two different words but complementary. The teacher's identity and integrity make him or her to create a good connection with his students, the subject he or she teaches and himself or herself. Palmer talks of the I-thou relationship of Martin Buber. He agrees with Martin Buber in the fact that all real living is a meeting "*Alles wirkliche Leben ist Begegnung*" (Buber 1929: p.7). For Palmer one should not be tempted to protect his or her selfhood beyond walls; doing so will kill or diminish his or her identity. He says: "I am often tempted to protect my sense of self behind barricades of status or role, to withhold myself from colleagues or students or ideas and from the collisions we will surely have" (Palmer, 1998: p. 16). He continues: "when I succumb to that temptation, my identity and integrity are diminished and I lose the heart to teach" (Palmer, 1998: p.16). The teacher should always make sure that he is aware of who he or she is, that he or she teaches from their heart. If he does so, he will always have that love for teaching.

Identity and integrity are very important in one's life as a teacher. In fact, they are primordial. We have developed a succinct exposition of Palmer's understanding of Identity and integrity. In summary, Palmer understands the notion of identity as the interaction of forces within and without oneself which lead to a perfect knowledge of self and enables the teacher to make that connection between the students, the subject he/she teaches and himself/herself. He sees integrity as the fact of being consistent in one's identity. As regard the teacher, Palmer does not see integrity as perfection but rather as being conscious of his or her wholeness as a teacher. At the end, he sees identity and integrity as closely related in a way that one cannot be without the other.

Identity and integrity as foundations of the teacher's authority

In education, the teacher performs a dual role. The teacher is an authority and he/she is an authority in the classroom. How does identity and integrity found the authority of the teacher in Palmer's holistic education? According to Buzzelli C. & Johnston B., the former refers to the teacher's ability to direct actions within the classroom, the latter to her status as the possessor and transmitter of sanctioned forms of knowledge. (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001: p. 873-874.). The teacher therefore uses his authority both for purposes of regulating power relations and for moral ends; she is both a political and a moral agent in the classroom (Buzzelli & Johnston 2001: p. 873-874). This indicates that the role of the teacher in class as an authority supersedes the transmission of knowledge. The teacher does not only remain a transmitter of well sanctioned hard facts, not only a depositor of education or banker but he becomes a mentor and spiritual guide helping students to build an I - Thou relationship as espoused by Martin Buber.

The question of the authority of the teacher within education is also an important issue in the success of teaching and learning. This problem is so worrisome and preoccupying that every fabric of the school community has to be checked to proffer an effective and sufficient solution. To these problems, many solutions have been offered. These include amongst others restructuring the syllabuses, changing the curriculum, the content, improving and updating the various teaching methods, and ultimately rendering education child-centered. Even recently, we have the Competency Based Approach (CBS). Given all these ills within the educational settings, the basic preoccupation is how can the identity and integrity of the teacher help to restore and ground the seemingly eroded authority of the teacher? Can refocusing on the moral role of teachers help to bring back discipline, eliminate and ultimately restore moral probity amongst the students and the school in Cameroonian schools? Can any meaningful results be achieved in all the restructuring without reconstituting the basic authority of the teacher who acts *in loco parentis*?

When the curriculum, the subject matter and the teaching method are well understood by the teacher, we can say that the authority of the teacher comes from his ability to master these. When identity and the integrity of the teacher are given pride of place, the question becomes where does he take his own authority? How can he develop the authority to teach and the capacity to stand his grounds in the midst of an avalanche of complex forces of the classroom and those of his own life? To meet this challenge, Palmer thinks that within the culture where the teaching method and the technique are given pride of place, there is always a confusion between authority and power. He holds that power works from the outside in, and authority works from the inside out (Palmer, 1998: p. 32-33). He underscores that it is erroneous to seek authority outside the self, in sources ranging from the subtle skills of group process to that less than subtle method of social control called grading (Palmer 1998: p. 33). Good as this may look, it succeeds to turn the teacher into the cop on the corner trying to keep order by having recourse to the coercive power of the law (Palmer, 1998: 33). Can we say that external tools of power are useless? To this Palmer thinks that they cannot substitute authority which comes from the teacher's inner life. As a result, he maintains the use of the word author to buttress the point. In his understanding, authority is given to those who are perceived as authoring their own words, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts (Palmer 1998: p.33). He concludes by saying that when teachers depend on the power of the law, they have no authority at all. Thus, concluding his thought on this. Palmer avers “authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from depths of my own truth and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind” (Palmer 1998: p.33). The point he makes is that authentic authority wells from within and should not be conflated with power which is basically something external. After this consideration, one thing we need to find out is, are identity and integrity adequate in the teaching and learning process? Does the teacher only need these to teach effectively?

Are identity and integrity adequate for effective teaching and learning?

For teaching to be effective, Palmer appeals to the identity and integrity of the teacher. He advances: “Identity and integrity are not the granite from which fictional heroes are hewn. They are subtle dimensions of the complex, demanding, and lifelong process of self-discovery” (Palmer, 1998: p.13). To explain it better, he continues: “identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death” (Palmer, 1998: p.13). The combination of identity and integrity in the teacher's life renders him or her fully aware of themselves. Why does identity and integrity make teaching effective? To Palmer, this is because the teacher joins who he/she is, his/her identity and his/her integrity to his/her subject matter and to his/her students. They are able to connect with students in ways that a teacher without the knowledge of his/her identity and integrity does. In his words, these are able to weave as it were a web of connections. This goes a long way to open the students to the world. This eventually enables them to learn to weave a world for themselves.

For Palmer, teaching and learning will be effective if the teacher has knowledge of his/her identity and integrity. One problem which he does not seem to answer is the question of the method used in transmitting knowledge. He seems to give the impression that once the teacher knows himself/herself then everything goes on smoothly. This explains why in our work we are suggesting that the identity and the

integrity of the teacher remain largely inadequate if the question of how this knowledge is transmitted is not addressed. This is why we argue that the element of sacrificial love, the desire to make the students another part of oneself or an extended self is missing.

The place of love within education is one which has been taken for granted. This is because the teacher in most systems of education considers themselves as experts of their subject matter who are using their skills, teaching methods and techniques to download the content in their heads to the students. We are pushed to ascertain that love is at the base of the teacher's authority because it seems to handle some of the shortcomings of identity and integrity. From the perspective of identity and integrity, the teacher is seen as a professional who knows who he/she is and can be consistent to his/her word and deed. The unanswered question is how does this directly touch the lives of the students? This is not relational enough. From the way, he or she relates to the students, the students easily get influenced by his/her thought patterns and integrity. This explains why for us, we think that identity alone is inadequate. As a result, we propose another salient ingredient in the teacher's toolbox as it were that which can greatly make or mar his/her identity. It is in this context that we come out with a neologism *educarity* and *educathority*. This love is called *educarity* and the authority is called *educathority*. To explain this love in education. This is because teaching is a public thing and it opens doors for the teacher to connect with the students. This "public life is... our life among strangers with whom our lot is cast, with whom we are interdependent whether we like it or not"(Palmer, 1983a: p. 18). and the ways in which some forms of dynamic education can serve to "bring us out of ourselves into an awareness of our connectedness"(Palmer, 1983a: p.20).

Towards A New Vision of Teaching and Learning: Educarity

What is *educarity* and *educathority*? What is the characteristic of this kind of love? How effective will this be in the teaching and learning process? *Educathority* is a neologism which is coined from four Latin words, *educere*, *educare*, *caritas*, *auctoris*. *Educare*, means "to train or to mold" *Educere*, means "to lead out," "to bring up," "to develop" (Craft, 1984: pp. 5-26). The word *caritas* means "love for another person." It means envisioning oneself as part of a ring of love in which each individual self has worth in itself but also as it relates to every other self. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is a weak expression of *caritas* (Zimbardo, 2007: p.4). This is love that is not based on any fulfillment of another condition. It is similar to the Greek word *agape*. *Auctor* means "augment," "add" and "increase." So once these two words are brought together, we have the word *educarity* meaning "teaching with *caritas*" or "teaching with love which takes the responsibility of the other's desire. From *educarity*, we have *educathority* which is the authority found in *educarity*. This neologism would mean having authority which comes from selfless or sacrificial love for the students. *Educarity* would mean education in love or education with love. After an etymological understanding of the word, it would be good to ask the question anew what is *educarity*?

In our foregoing interventions in this paper, we introduced the etymological meaning of the word *educarity*. Despite the rudimentary understanding of the term it is important to get the real significance of the term. By *educarity* we mean,

(...) a teacher's strong desire of love to sacrifice his or her intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, and social knowledge to develop the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, and social lives of the students. It is a desire to take responsibility of the students under one's charge which goes beyond just teaching a lesson or delivering the content or fulfilling the curricula requirements. It is a desire to sacrifice something of him to transform the lives of the students.

When teachers teach, they share knowledge, their experience and unconsciously the way they teach insinuates whether they love the students or not. In this way, teaching becomes an encounter, a sharing a participation in the teacher's love and his/her desire to create the love of the subject in them. In this way, the teacher becomes the formator, informant and transformer. This encounter is one where the teacher is drawn by the same powers that lure and attract is to ask others to be drawn in by the same powers that lure and attract us. This encounter creates connections amongst teachers, students and the subject matter. In this way,

we want the students to love what we find so alluring. This means that to love teaching is to be enamored of the attempt to share the attraction and hold the world has on us.

Educarity is a strong desire not just a casual need to teach students because of money, to show off our intellectual giftedness. It calls him to consider the students as persons and human beings with the same longing and yearning for education like him/her. In this regard, teaching becomes a sacrifice to make the other better. It is a desire, a sacrifice of the intellectual, emotional, social and virtuous enrichment of the student. It is a desire to take responsibility of the student's existential condition to make him or her a better version of himself/herself. Levinas distinguishes between "desire" and "need." He describes need as "the return itself, the anxiety of me for myself, the original form of identification which we have called egoism" (Levinas, 1966: pp. 38-39). This means that if the teacher were to teach out of need and not the strong desire of love, it will be to satisfy his/her egoistic tendencies. When he/she teaches out of the desire of love, he or she subsumes as it were his/her identity to the other, however, when he/she teaches out of need the object of need who is the student loses its otherness. It becomes part and parcel of the Subject. For Levinas, desire, on the other hand, "proceeds from a being already full and independent" (Levinas, 1969: pp. 254-255). It does not want for itself. This means that the desire for the Other is not an appetite but a generosity (Levinas, 1966: pp. 38-39). In this way, the Subject reaches to the Other for the sake of the good of the Other. In desire, the Subject is "like a being who opens a window which has been mirroring him" (Levinas, 1966: p. 40). Jobling concurs with Levinas when he argues that "desire goes to the Other not in order for the self to fulfil itself, to find its own identity, or to facilitate its self-totalization" (Jobling, 1991: p.419). In desire, the Subject is never at rest or at peace with itself. The Subject is perpetually striving towards the Other in a movement that never comes to rest because the desired does not satisfy the hunger. Furthermore, Levinas' concept of responsibility is concrete. He refers to it as "the duty to give to the Other even the bread out of one's own mouth and the coat from one's shoulders" (Levinas, 1981: p. 55).

Educarity as a love

To teach with love will mean to raise the curiosity of the student to stay alert and eager to learn what is taught. It could also mean to teach from the heart. In this connection, Daniel P. Liston (2000) says teaching occurs on affective and cognitive terrain; it is emotional and intellectual work. To love teaching is to give of yourself in a way that can be so tenderly vulnerable. Talking about the love of teaching Daniel P. Liston (2000) brings out two kinds of love;

I suggest that there are at least two kinds of love in these scenarios: scorned, romantic love and a transformative, enlarged love. Good teaching entails a kind of romantic love of the learning enterprise; it is motivated by and infuses others with a love of inquiry. Teaching in and with this love is a vulnerable undertaking, one that leaves the teacher open to pain and rejection. When a teacher's love of learning has been scorned, she may find herself in despair. This despair afflicts the teacher's soul. An enlarged, transformative love is one way to come to terms with this despair; to live with and perhaps transform the night in our days; to inform the quiet heroism that teaching must become. An enlarged love entails a diminished sense of self (or more accurately ego) in the teaching enterprise, an attentive gaze outward toward the other, and an accompanying search for the "good." If guided by an enlarged love teaching can become an ongoing struggle that nourishes our students' and our own souls. Through exploring and understanding these teachers' despair, along with their love of learning in teaching and its loss, we may come to see more clearly the possibilities entailed in a larger love.(p. 81)

The love involved in the teaching and learning process is both scorns, romantic and transformative or enlarged love. By scorned, Daniel means that the teacher feels despair when he is out to teach. In his endeavor, transformative love nourishes both the heart of the student and the teacher enlarges. To love teaching is to give of yourself in a way that can be so tenderly vulnerable(Liston: 2000 p.81). One of the things we must already bring to mind is that love in education does not have anything to do with teachers entertaining sexual relations or developing affective and romantic feelings with students. This is quite far and further removed from the idea we have about teacher as love in this work. Love here is disinterested. It

has nothing to do with sexual feelings. A close synonym of this love here would be care, though care is does not fully capture what that love is.

At this juncture, it is we turn our attention to Helm’s understanding of the difference between caring and love. For him, love builds on the specifics of caring. According to Helm, caring in general about something means that the object is “the focus of a projectible, rational pattern of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments, such that one is motivated not only to feel and judge, but also to act accordingly” (Helm, 2009a: p.75). This explains this better, we use an example that he uses. In this regard, he says, if I care about my plant, then I will tend to feel joyous when it thrives, upset when it does poorly, fearful when its survival is threatened by dangerous parasites, and so on. And not only that, but I will also be motivated to promote and protect its well-being, for example, by watering it regularly and ridding my garden of the parasites that would harm it. On Helm’s view, to care about an object is always to care about it under a particular description or to care about it “as something” (Helm, 2009a: pp. 39–59; 75.44; Helm, B. W. 2009b. 80–82). For example, if I care about a plant merely as a decorative object, then I might be unconcerned, and even pleased, if it develops a defect that stunts its growth and shortens it life but enhances its aesthetic appeal. When it comes to objects of care that are agents, caring about an agent as an agent involves recognizing an expanded conception of the object’s well-being. Agents have cares of their own—cares on which their well-being partly depends so in caring about an agent as such, we must, to some extent, share that agent’s cares. Returning to our teacher, then, if she cares about Steve as an agent, and Steve cares greatly about his basketball team winning the state championship, the teacher should, *ceteris paribus*, care about Steve’s team’s performance in the local play-off tournament. Of course, the teacher may care about Steve merely as a student and not as an agent as such in which case, she might be wholly unconcerned with his basketball endeavors, assuming that they do not impact his academic performance.

Conclusion

Despite the insistence on the place of the teaching methods and the subject matter and technique, Palmer thinks that education has to be approached from a new and better perspective. It should seek to implicate the personhood of the teacher within the processes of teaching and learning. This is because the teacher cannot teach in spite of himself/herself. He/she teaches who he or she is. The driving force of this paper was the question of the identity and the integrity of the teacher which we asserted has a dual dimension. Firstly, it has to do with the way the community understands who the teacher is and secondly it has to do with who the teacher takes himself to be. In this light, we asserted that the personhood of the teacher and his ability to be consistent in word and action impacts in a greater way in the education industry. However, we later argued that left on their own, identity and integrity do not impact the students’ lives better. This is because it concentrates more on the person of the teacher. If the teacher has to make this contagious and meaningful in the lives of the students, then a lot has to be done with regard to how he teaches. We therefore maintain that this could be done through the method of teaching which we used the term *educarity* to describe. It is a method which has love which we call *caritas* at its core.

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