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Book Reviews

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Editorial: Knowing as a Kind of Loving

KNOWING IS AT the heart of education. When we enter the classroom, we do so with the desire that our students will come to *know* things as a result of our teaching them. We want to help them in their struggle with new ideas, we want them to become masters of the subject-matter, we want to boost their learning power ... but, wait a minute, is this how we should think and talk about knowing? Struggle ... mastery ... power?

Parker J. Palmer, for one, doesn't think so! In his book *To know as we are known: A spirituality of education* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1983), he questions the dominance in our culture of the metaphor of knowing as power and he suggests its replacement with that of knowing as loving. Instead of seeing reality as something to be mastered, analysed, formed and shaped to our ends or learning as a matter of 'mastering' ideas, 'grasping' concepts, 'wrestling with' problems and 'cracking' them, Palmer wants us to see things differently:

'... another kind of knowledge is available to us, one that begins in a different passion and is drawn toward other ends ... This is a knowledge that originates not in curiosity or control but in compassion, or love - a source celebrated not in our intellectual tradition but in our spiritual heritage ... the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own.' (p.8)

In years gone by, when philosophers were kings in the world of teacher education and linguistic analysis was thought to be the way to deal with many of the issues we faced in thinking about education, it was commonplace to analyse words like 'know', 'teach', 'learn', 'educate' and 'indoctrinate'. It was often pointed out that 'knowing that' was different from 'knowing how' and that both were different from 'knowing' when the word was followed with a definite object, e.g. the name of a person or place. The impression came across that 'knowing that' was at the heart of education. The educated person was somebody who had knowledge and understanding in depth and breadth. This knowledge was not mere 'know-how', not a matter of developing a range of skills, but having well-grounded beliefs *that* certain things were so. The third kind of knowing - knowing with a direct object - had its place but it seemed to be valued more for what understanding of others and of ourselves contributed to our personal development than as a kind of knowing in itself.

Palmer's suggestion moves relational knowing from the wings to centre-stage. And the spiritual heritage of which he speaks goes all the way back to Old Testament times, even to the time at which it is said that Adam 'knew' Eve. While the Greek ideal of knowledge was a contemplation of reality in its static and abiding nature, the Hebrew way of knowing was primarily concerned with life in its dynamic process. Knowledge was therefore a matter of relationship with the experienced world, a relationship which is not simply a matter of intellectual understanding but one that involved the whole person. Knowing for the Greeks was spectatorial and detached while for the Hebrews it was on the playing field and committed. To know God is not merely to know that he exists but to recognize him, trust him and obey him. Job's affirmation that he knows that his Redeemer lives is not a mere statement of a belief that God exists but an expression of his whole-person commitment to him.

Relational knowing is at the heart of everything because it was, is and will be forever there among the persons of the Trinity. Small wonder that we read that the Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). He made 'persons' not 'individuals'. Like an atom, an individual is an ultimate indivisible element, an object that has no relationships and no powers of communication with others. A person is a person-in-relation, a subject in relation with other subjects. We only know

ourselves as we know one another and, as John Calvin recognized, we truly know ourselves only as we know God.

Far from coming in third behind knowing that and knowing how and being merely a means to personal development, relational knowing ought to come first in our thinking about life in the classroom. In the previous issue of this journal, Marshall Gregory reminded us of this in his article ‘Pedagogy and the Christian Law of Love’ (*JECB* Vol 6 No 1, pp.9-25). He also reminded us that this kind of loving is not something mushy and sentimental but something tough that contains standards.

This knowing is not confined to knowing other persons and relating to them. It also has to do with our relations with things for they are things in God’s world, things that he has made. The relationship is therefore one of stewardship in fulfillment of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1, of *caring* for God’s world and everything in it as those he has called to be his vice-regents over his creation. He values that which he has made for it is recorded that he saw it and it was good. No place here for an attitude in us that, on the one hand, treats everything as being for us to do with as we will or, on the other, for one that devalues the material world in the Platonic contemplation of the timeless ideas. Meta-narratives (or ‘big stories’) are embedded in our little stories, our parables and allegories. Contrast the attitude towards the material creation of Plato’s prisoner as he seeks to escape from the allegorical Cave, the material world of shadows, to contemplation of the ‘real’ world of timeless ideas with the attitude to his vineyard of the owner/planter in Jesus’ parable whose tenants used it for themselves and killed his servants and even his son (Mark 12:1-9).

This knowing kind of loving also brings the intuitive dimension of knowledge to the fore. Knowing a person cannot be reduced to knowing facts about the person for we may know a lot of facts about a person without ever having met that person. Admittedly, it would be strange if we claimed to know somebody without knowing anything whatever about him. And we do not all need to know the same facts about a person to validly claim that we know her. But over and above any amount of ‘knowing that’ about a person, what is needed for personal knowledge is some form of direct acquaintance. This is something immediate and direct that grounds our claim to know the person as a whole person and that integrates all the particulars into that whole knowledge which is more than and different from the sum of its parts. Relational knowing cannot be reduced without remainder to that which we deduce logically or know by induction from observation. It involves an essential element of intuitive awareness.

Mention of intuition in discussion of knowing can be met with a knee-jerk reaction that kicks it out of court immediately. It is too mystical, they say, or it is dangerous because it can be used to justify any belief, however far-fetched. Let’s stick to the facts, they say, the facts that can be proven deductively or inductively. But intuition cannot be ruled out that easily. Even seeing that a logical or mathematical proof is valid is not something that can itself be proved logically or mathematically – we simply ‘see’ that the proof is valid.

Intuition is not limited to mathematics and logic. The great philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, said that all our knowing is ‘personal knowledge’ because ‘into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known’ and this is ‘no imperfection but a vital component’ of all our knowing (*Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958/1962, p.viii). And in this process of coming to know reality above us, around us and within us, he said that intuition is a mysterious but necessary faculty that enables us to move spontaneously from the multiplicity of particulars in our experience of reality to a discernment of the whole, of overall patterns and coherences. Polanyi went on to distinguish between the ‘anticipatory intuition’ of a problem through which scientists feel their way towards a solution and the ‘final intuition’ of the discovery of the solution and the seeing that it makes sense, seeing things in a new light (*Knowing and Being*, ed. Marjorie Grene, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, p.202).

In art and music, the discernment of beauty and harmony in the whole is at a level beyond that of seeing particular details and yet it does not happen apart from awareness of the details. In ethics, too, knowing what is good is a matter of a particular kind of awareness and not simply the conscious

logical application of rules or criteria. Beauty and goodness, like truth, are there to be seen rather than to be defined. And do not all three - truth, beauty and goodness of the person - come together in our spiritual awareness, our knowing God?

So we have relational knowing in the classroom, relational knowing across the curriculum in both the sciences and the arts, relational knowing with its central element of intuitive awareness. This puts teaching into a different light. D. Z. Phillips, the Welsh philosopher of religion writes of education in matters of faith as being like 'elucidation of a thing of beauty' (*Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, New York: Schocken Books, 1970, p.163). This suggests that our teaching may be, at least in part, more like drawing attention to features of a work of art so that our students may come to see the 'Big Picture' for themselves than one of leading them through a process of rational argumentation.

Embracing a more Hebrew view of knowing in this way in place of a Greek one also places us in an interesting position in relation to the contemporary 'paradigm shift' from modernity into postmodernity. What exactly is happening, whether indeed it is even a paradigm shift or just more of the same as we had before, is not easy to discern. But one thing that does seem to be clear is that exclusive focus on the powers of deductive and inductive reason and on the objectivity of knowledge is becoming rapidly outmoded. The emperors of rationalism and scientism are being dethroned as people come to see that indeed, in spite of their claims to be the best-dressed rulers in all of history, they simply have no clothes. We should welcome the fall of the huge statues of these emperors, these idols for that is what they really were as they now lie like those of Lenin and Stalin in some city park in a post-communist land, no longer occupying the place of dominance they once had. At such a time, when the temptation is to conclude that there is no knowing and that all is meaningless, a rediscovery of a more relational, personal and intuitive way of knowing may be very timely. It may give us a way to think more Christianly and more relevantly about knowing, teaching and learning and thereby serve better not only our students but also our world and our God.

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The articles in this issue of the journal are all adapted from papers presented at the 2002 Stapleford Education Conference at St John's College, Nottingham. The speakers at the plenary sessions (Signe Sandsmark, Steve Vryhof, Terence McLaughlin and Ken Badley) each had the task of preparing a paper on a different Christian perspective on education.

Signe Sandsmark tells us of a Lutheran perspective with its note of paradox, particularly that of God's two governments or two 'hands'. This provides for an education which is both in the service of God and is for all children, whether or not they happen to be Christians.

Steven Vryhof gives an account of Reformed Christian schooling which provides education for the children of the Christian community so that, in time, they may be agents of transformation of the wider culture. Reformed Christians have a positive attitude to culture because all of it rightly belongs to the Lord God.

Terence McLaughlin points to the need of balanced judgement on the part of the Catholic teacher in the classroom in interpreting and living out the complex and rich tradition of the Catholic faith and avoiding the temptation of conforming to the norms of society. He reminds us of the importance of laughter and enjoyment of good things.

Ken Badley has the difficult task of presenting accounts of not one but two perspectives, fundamentalist and evangelical, two that grew out of one, two that have much in common but also each their own distinctives. He finds these distinctives in all four of the areas of posture toward state education, creation and support of independent schools, production of theory, and production of instructional materials.

It is our hope that these papers will stimulate a discussion between these perspectives to work further on commonalities and distinctives. Contributions from other readers of this journal will be welcome on these or any other issue at the interface between Christian faith and education.

John Shortt & David I. Smith