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From Being Known in the Classroom to “Moments of Meeting”: What Intersubjectivity offers Contemplative Pedagogy

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Despite recent advances in psychological theory and research, often empirical knowledge of intersubjectivity is not incorporated into teaching. In this paper we suggest that using the intersubjective space of the classroom can provide students with experiences of being known and “moments of meeting” which can result in transformative learning. Using a conceptual framework, we explore why being known is a relevant concept in education and contemplative pedagogy, and highlight student perspectives and an example from our own teaching. We suggest that contemplative pedagogical activities are inherently intersubjective, thereby providing opportunities for being known and educational moments of meeting.

Keywords: intersubjectivity, contemplative pedagogy, presence, relational connection, attention, student engagement, learning communities

In the “quiet revolution” (Zajonc, 2013) of contemplative pedagogy, which offers “a wide range of education methods that support the development of student attention, emotional balance, empathetic connection, compassion, and altruistic behavior” (p. 83), one of our most powerful teaching tools is our presence. For it is through our presence that we first begin to know our students, and are known to them, and it is this relational connection that fuels and produces attention, balance, compassion, and altruism. Our ability to fully see and hear our students invites them into a space in which they feel known and valued. In our work with our students, we have come to appreciate the “intersubjective relational field” (Rasmussen & Mishna, 2003, p.40) of the classroom and the ways in which working in this “space” provides opportunities for being known and encountering moments of meeting with our students.

As Palmer and Zajonc (2010) write,

We have all had the experience of a conversation shifting and becoming a deep, free exchange of thoughts and feelings that seems to reach into and beyond the individual participants. Something new emerges, a transcendent communal whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In such conversations we are caught up for a time in what some call “the social field” generated by the quality of “presence” necessary for true dialogue or community. (p. 12)

Although we may have had these experiences, and may have also intentionally tried to cultivate an environment/classroom culture in which these experiences can occur, and may have also, perhaps, grounded these efforts within discipline-specific pedagogical strategies, there continues to be a gap between our knowledge and experience of these moments in teaching, and research findings in intersubjectivity, neuroplasticity, and developmental psychology that could help elucidate these moments (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 101).

Recent advances in intersubjective psychological theory and research are starting to provide the theoretical grounding for the relational dynamics that foster presence, knowing, and transformation. We suggest that contemplative pedagogical activities may be particularly effective due to the intersubjective field in which these activities often occur, and in which our students experience being seen and known.

Contemplative pedagogy highlights the ways that instructors and students are enlivened and transformed by encounters with each other. It is in the mutuality and reciprocity of the exchange that we experience an intersubjective encounter, or “the shared experience created in the joining of two or more minds, revealing how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Siegel, 2012, AI-43). Instructors need to be willing to cultivate awareness and consideration of the assumptions and conceptualizations of human experience and interaction that underpin our pedagogical decisions. Instructors may construe intersubjective moments as appearing *out of something* or as *emerging from* two subjectivities. In contrast, many continental philosophers, starting with Husserl, suggest that the very ontology of humanity is intersubjective. According to Heidegger (1962/1927) we are always already “being-with” others. This philosophical perspective argues that there is no such thing as an isolated independent subject and no gap to bridge with others. Heidegger is not suggesting that we always experience or enact this intersubjective “reality.” Rather, from this ground of being that is always already there, we experience and enact varying manifestations of engagement and distance within ourselves and with others (Dallmyr, 1980; O’Brien, 2014).

deQuincey (2000) offers additional dimensions of intersubjectivity that can be viewed as manifestations of Heidegger’s “being-with”: psychological mutual en-

agement and participation and mutual co-arising that creates participants' experience of themselves (p. 138). The psychological dimension involves experiences of attunement, shared emotions and ideas, affective engagement, and feeling understood by others. The mutual co-arising dimension involves interactions that form and inform participants' knowing and experiences of themselves in an emergent, generative manner. Participants describe such moments as transformative, as bringing them into being in a way they had not experienced themselves prior.

For the purposes of this paper, we use Heidegger's ontology of intersubjectivity with the understanding that de Quincey's intersubjective dimensions articulate the varying ways that human beings experience and enact “being-with” in the world as we show up, distance, co-create, disagree, reveal, cover, and transform ourselves as instructors and students engaged in learning¹.

This paper will present relational concepts from contemporary psychodynamic theory and relevant research from interpersonal neurobiology, along with student responses from a recent research project and vignettes from our own teaching. We posit that the above “emergent moments” occur within an ever-present intersubjective space, shaped by psychological dimensions and mutual co-arising experiences, in which students feel recognition and a sense of being known.

Having a theoretical grounding that informs instructor understandings and efforts to create intersubjective experiences is even more vital for those educational spaces where students have previously felt dismissed, misunderstood, devalued, or ignored. In our experience in an urban university setting, many of our students enter the classroom expecting to receive and not *be received*. Nearly half of our students, some of whom are first-generation college students, transfer into our system from community colleges. Many of our students face multiple stressors as they embark on their academic careers: managing the high cost of education, commuting, working full-time, and tending to family responsibilities. Dishearteningly, we encounter students who do not necessarily anticipate a deep engagement with material, or to be personally stimulated by learning. Moreover, the instructor is often, or at least initially, perceived one-dimensionally as an authoritative presence.

However, instructors also come with schemas and preconceptions that color instructor/student interactions. Palmer and Zajonc (2010) argue that as faculty we

¹ There are two caveats to note: 1) Some may argue that this alignment of Heidegger and de Quincey is not entirely compatible. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the differing perspectives on this claim (e.g., is one definition or form of intersubjectivity ontological? Is one dimension a pre-condition for another dimension?). Rather, we wanted to clearly articulate our philosophical grounding. 2) As educators we make claims that certain intersubjective dimensions may be “better than” others because of the ways that they support and promote student learning. It is important to note, however, that ontologically there is no sense of “better than” or “worse than” since this is a phenomenological description of how human beings are in the world.

often do not see the whole of the student in front of us and nor do we reveal our own aspects that make us whole. In essence we are neither seeing, nor being seen. The consequences are dramatic; “disengaged forms of learning are likely to lead learners toward disengaged lives” (p. 31). Our experience, and anecdotal reports from our students, also reveals that many students do not expect to be known, or even seen, in their own right. Paradoxically, as social work educators we require that our students learn first-hand through internships how to engage clients and form meaningful relationships in which change can occur. These dilemmas have challenged us on multiple levels, generating the questions: how can we expect students to respond to the relational needs of clients and the helping relationships, if they are not experiencing for themselves what it is like to be seen, known, and understood? How do we expect students to be compassionate, courageous individuals capable of developing deep and meaningful relationships, if we are not modeling this for them?

In the context of a larger study (Rodriguez-Keyes, Schneider & Keenan, 2013), we asked our students if they felt known by their instructors and the ways in which being known, or not being known, impacted their participation. We found that being known positively impacted student engagement and motivation. This is supported by research in communication (Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Zhang, 2009) identifying the direct relationships between instructor immediacy, caring, and competence with student motivation and affective learning, and indirect influences on cognitive learning. However, we were curious about another question: what is it about being known that has the power to deepen a student’s learning experience? Knowledge of the dynamics that generate educational experiences of being known help inform the decisions we make in the classroom and how we integrate our unique ways of being in order to invite students to do the same. Within this intersubjective space, we believe moments of meeting are not only possible, but have the potential to powerfully transform the learning experience. The remaining sections of this paper will identify and discuss these dynamics of being known and moments of meeting within the intersubjective space of the classroom, while highlighting de Quincey’s (2000) psychological and mutual co-arising dimensions of intersubjectivity.

BEING KNOWN

Although it has universal applicability, the concept of being known has begun to make its way into several areas of research in just over a decade, including health-care (Thorne, Kuo, Armstrong, McPherson, Harris & Hislop, 2005) psychotherapy group work (Menzies & Davidson, 2002) and, most recently, education (Rodriguez-Keyes, Schneider & Keenan, 2013; Wallace, Ye, McHugh & Chhuon, 2012). Being known is an experience that crosses over disciplinary, and we would argue, educational divides. Whether in private settings, or public universities, “What-

ever their philosophies, good teachers, tutors and coaches have always sought to know their students well” (Gardner, 1999, p. 151 as cited by Saltzman, 2006, p. 69). In order for one to be known they first must be truly seen.

The idea of “being seen” is well rooted in contemplative traditions. Fundamental to any type of love, Thich Nhat Hanh (1997) teaches that one must first understand the other. In order to understand, we first must see. “When you are really there, you have the ability to recognize the presence of the other. To be there is the first step, and recognizing the presence of the other is the second step. To love is to recognize; to be loved is to be recognized by the other” (p. 13-14). Jon Kabat-Zinn compels us to consider our own memories of being seen, observing, that these moments “have been here with us our whole life, never forgot, for we are not likely to forget, even as children, moments of feeling completely seen and accepted” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 198). It is in this space of recognition that two subjectivities take shape. These moments “often unfold in silence, in a parallel play of doing together and being together, wordlessly” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 199).

Psychodynamic theories have sought to elucidate the psychological impact of this type of recognition. In her seminal work, Jessica Benjamin (1995) notes that it is through being truly recognized by another that we can begin to feel our impact, become familiar with our own intentions and recognize our own part in creating meaning (p. 33). In other words, we become familiar with our own subjectivity through being recognized and experiencing ourselves in the presence of another (p. 30). Complexly, we experience both joy in the attunement of another person sharing our feelings and a tension of asserting ourselves while recognizing the other. We learn to self-regulate through regulating the other and our awareness that there are others who share similar states as we do expands. However, “to be known or recognized is immediately to experience the other’s power” (p. 149). As instructors we have a power that often goes unexamined. We have the power to see, or not see, recognize or not recognize, the other. Given Benjamin’s theory of recognition, the shadow side of this power is the possibility that our presence and lack of recognition of a student may convey to a student her lack of impact, deadening her sense of intention and meaning making in the context of our classroom. As one student told us, “I kind of didn’t feel involved in the class because it wasn’t interactive. I don’t think I got a lot out of the lecture because I wasn’t involved.”

In their responses to our survey, students intuitively connected being known with a sense of being seen. On a very literal level, many students noted the importance of eye contact with the instructor and being known by name. “He calls us by name in class and gives us eye contact. He also took the time to learn all our names in the beginning of class.” Illustrating how being seen is beyond “eye-deep” (R. Gallo, personal communication, September 13, 2010), another student shared, “Our instructor treated each of us with respect and gave us each the spotlight during class time to express our feelings and opinions on the subject matter.”

In the context of being seen, students begin to feel the valuable role they have within the classroom, and potentially the importance of their own contribution. As one student in our program shared, “[The instructor] spent time getting to know each and every one of us.” These experiences led another student to surmise, “I feel like my presence is vital in this course.” The research of Rodgers & Raider-Roth (2006) reveals that something unfolds in these very critical moments of being seen and valued:

From the learner’s point of view the moment is one of recognition, of feeling seen and understood, not just emotionally but cognitively, physically and even spiritually. It is a feeling of being safe, where one is drawn to risk because of the discoveries it might reveal; it is the excitement of discovering one’s self in the context of the larger world, rather than the worry of losing one’s self, in the process. (p. 267)

A student alluded to this risk and the important role of the instructor in this process. She wrote, “The experience of feeling ‘known’ definitely increased my participation...I am usually very quiet, but she made me feel comfortable and encouraged everyone to participate in class.” As research has indicated, these experiences of caring engage students affectively in the learning process and heighten motivation for both affective and cognitive learning (Zhang, 2009). Intersubjective space helps articulate the field that is created between a group of students and an instructor when students feel known.

INTERSUBJECTIVE SPACE

Neurobiology research helps us understand how our attentive presence and openness can result in a deep attunement with the other in such intersubjective interactions. In affective neuroscience, Panskepp (2010) found that social/cultural environments shape development of the social brain more than evolutionary factors. Attachment relationships are one key aspect of social/cultural environments. Developmental research has found that early attachment relationships can, and do, change over time when individuals have new social experiences with family, teachers, friends, and other influential people (see, for example, Sroufe, et al., 2005). This research underscores the potential influence that significant adult figures (e.g., instructors) can have not just on a student’s learning, but on a student’s overall well-being. On a more fine-grained level, the polyvagal theory of Porges (2009a) provides the conceptual frame of a “social engagement system” to describe the communication between face and heart, linking subjective and physiological experience in attachment and other types of relationships. As we gaze at each other, the vagal nerve sends signals to the heart. Face-to-face interactions signal not just safety/danger, but also activate other mutually influenced affective processes (Porges, 2009b).

In recent years, interpersonal neurobiology has emerged as a nascent discipline that bridges neuroscience and the social sciences. Building on the research of Porges, Panskepp, and others, Cozolino (2013) articulates the ways that neural systems receive and process social and emotion information. He posits that the space between humans functions as a “social synapse” as energy and information (conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal) is sent and received back and forth (Cozolino, 2014). Connecting these signals with mirror neurons allows one to feel a bit of what another person feels, but not *be* them as internal representations of the internal states of others are formed. This embodied sense of attunement enhances the sense of connection between oneself and another. In these moments, “When others sense our attunement with them, they experience ‘feeling felt’ by us” (Siegel, 2010, p. 34). In our interactions with others multiple subjectivities weave together in an elegant dance of mutuality, reciprocity and, as Siegel (2010) suggests, “resonance.”

Siegel (2010) notes that “in many ways we feel ‘close’ or ‘heard’ or ‘seen’ by another person when we detect that he has attuned to us and has taken us inside of his own mind” (p. 54). When we feel this attunement our own state can change, as “the observed takes in the observer having taken her in” (p. 54). From this interaction a state of resonance emerges. Students note the impact that this resonance can have on their own desire to engage in their learning. As one student observed, “When a professor gets to ‘know’ their students I feel that they care more and therefore I want to participate more because I know they are paying attention and actually listening to what we have to say.” Stated another student, “I felt more engaged in the class and material because if I was falling behind, not paying attention, or doing well she took notice.” These comments underscore the possibility that the experience of being known has a transformative impact on engagement, and requires a degree of reciprocity between the instructor and student.

Students who participated in our study noted that beyond being seen, there was a process of being invited into intersubjective space of the classroom with a heightened motivation for affective and cognitive learning. As one student shared, “[Being known] helped me to feel welcome to contribute to the class.” Another student noted the importance of comfort. “Since I felt known by the instructor, I can definitely say that I wanted to participate more within this course because I felt more comfortable opening up, whether it was an answer to a question, open discussions, or even further clarification on a topic.” Consistent with the research and psychological theories, when students felt invited into fully engaging and participating in the course material, many responded to this invitation through increased participation and involvement. Mirroring many students’ sentiments, one student informed us, “With the constant feedback and urge to participate, feeling known by my instructor was a very positive feeling and in a way, pushed me to do better.” As another student remarked, “I feel like she recognizes when I participate. And

therefore I try to participate as much as I can.” Relating to the student, through recognition and invitation, has the power to shift a student’s own perception of their education. Stated one student, “I think that it was very good to know that you weren’t just a number but a person with a face and a life.” As faces and lives are seen within the intersubjective space, emotionally charged and emergent moments become possible within the flow of “the way we usually learn together.” These moments that jump out of our memories are called “moments of meeting.”

MOMENTS OF MEETING

Psychoanalytically informed infant research, as well as biological systems theories, demonstrate that being known is a complex organizing principle in development, as well as an essential part of the change processes (Sander, 2002). Researchers have identified a process in infant-caregiver interactions where an implicit knowledge (not conscious) of what to do, feel and think provides a sense of mutual regulation. The togetherness experienced in these intersubjective moments of recognition, comprised of matching, mismatching and repair, precipitates the capacity for each individual’s coherence and a greater ability to integrate complexity. This intersubjective relating has the potential to transform recognition into “moments of meeting,” where feeling states are heightened, the other’s subjectivity is recognized, and a change process begins to ensue (Lyons-Ruth et al., 1998). Change processes can strengthen or alter qualities of the relationship and/or individual understandings and abilities.

Stern and members of the Change Process Study Group (1998) used what they learned about early infant-caregiver relating to articulate these change processes in psychodynamically oriented treatment. They identified four relevant concepts for understanding the process of change: “moving along,” “now moments,” a “moment of meeting,” and “open space.” In the “moving along phase” both parties are moving toward a goal and improvisational modes illuminate the present moment; that is, there are occasional fits and starts as students or instructor seek to develop understanding together about some aspect of the course. These “present moments become represented as ‘schemes of ways of being-with-another’” (Stern, 1995), creating a bit of predictability regarding how these students with this instructor will learn over the semester. In the process of “moving along” there are emergent moments where “all of a sudden a qualitatively different and unpredicted moment arises” (p. 304). As described by Stern et al. (1998),

This kind of emergent property can only arise if the moving along occurs within a context (system) that is rule governed by an established technique that is (implicitly) well understood by the interactants. The “now moment,” as an emergent property, disequil-

ibrates the normal, canonical way of doing business together. It offers a new intersubjective context. (p. 304)

Surprise, anxiety, and a sense of unpredictability can emerge in these moments. There is also an opportunity for these “now moments” to become a “moment of meeting” when it recognized by both individuals. Spontaneous, genuine responses by instructor and students to the emotionally charged, potent “now moments” characterize moments of meeting as two or more minds collectively join to produce new understandings, deeper appreciations, and fuller recognition of each other. Affective sounds, head nods, eye contact, and other nonverbal communication are often observed in such moments, followed by brief pauses of “open space” where each sits with and takes in what just occurred.

CLASSROOM EXAMPLE ONE

Translating this into the classroom setting, the “moving along” moments are the patterns of how students and instructors interact that get created at the beginning of each course. These serve as the scripts, the expectations for how learning takes place. Within that context moments of surprise, tension, or uncertainty can surface unexpectedly. These moments often have an affective tone to them and can feel emotionally charged, such as when a student challenges or disagrees with another student, when a student is being more honest or forthcoming than the norm, or when students provide new information about why they haven’t been engaging in learning.

For example, early on in a social work group practice course, one of the co-authors was talking about the parallels between group practice and learning this material in class: group leaders and instructors cultivate an environment where clients/students can talk openly about their ideas and reactions to what others are voicing. The instructor asked students to discuss the degree to which they had been able to do that in previous social work classes. One student said that there were many times in the previous semester when he did not feel able to be honest about what he was thinking because he knew that his opinions were not shared by others in the class. When he said this, the room shifted into an alive, emotionally charged space. Several students’ eyes bulged as they looked at each other while other students were nodding their heads. We were in a “now moment” that holds the potential for a moment of “mutual co-arising” (de Quincey, 2000). I felt the affective intensity and responded with some spontaneous sounds of surprise and asked if others had had similar experiences. More head nods and feedback about these times being related to social issues that often result in polarized conversations within families and in the larger political discourse within the United States. Others mentioned how they felt excluded, marginalized, stuck, and at times, silenced in the past because they didn’t know how to bring their

views forward. They felt the risk was too great and did not want to be shamed, judged, or targeted. The energy remained high, and I wanted to use this affective engagement to expand the capacity of this group of students to continue to be forthcoming yet also knowing that many had not had a successful experience thus far. Thinking on my feet, I asked if they would be willing to write down some of these experiences anonymously, and then we could collectively listen and receive them today. Students reached for paper and shared experiences from social work and other college courses. I collected them and read through each one, pausing to create space for reactions and comments. While we interacted with what was on the pages, the emotional intensity decreased, students attentively listened and looked at each other and myself. The head nods and eye contact now were from a place of recognition and validation—we had moved into that “moment of meeting” where everyone could be seen and heard in a way they were able to emotionally regulate—a moment of “mutual co-arising” (de Quincy, 2000). This moment created a bit of a shift in future classes as students became a bit more willing and able to talk about aspects of themselves with greater vulnerability. Stern et al. (1998) notes that this “moving along” which occurs after a “moment of meeting” has a slightly different feel because it incorporates the expanded intersubjective relational knowing from the “moment of meeting” (Stern, et al., 1998).

It is important to keep in mind that “now moments” and “moments of meeting” themselves carry the potential for fear and risk—it is precisely the surprise and uncertainty that disrupts what is familiar (even if what is familiar is not desired or pleasurable). That is, these moments are paradoxical: “in the same moment that I feel that I express my (free and independent) will, I am dependent on how the Other actually sees me. I am consequently, while free, simultaneously exposed to how the Other reacts to my expression...” (Ramberg, 2006, p. 29). These moments require instructor awareness and skillfulness and an ability to respond with comments and activities that match where the students are. Stern, et al. (1998) underscores this by noting that if a “now moment” is not noticed or responded to well, there are several outcomes, including ongoing charged moments, and ruptures with or without repairs.

Ultimately, intentional knowing, attunement, and attention to the intersubjective space of the class can shift our engagement in the classroom. Contemplative practices, by their nature, invite students to engage in first-person knowing, thereby becoming known to themselves and others. Our next two examples illustrate how one of the authors intentionally invited students to become experientially aware of the intersubjective space within the classroom.

CLASSROOM EXAMPLE TWO

Early in the spring semester, before going to my 8:00 am class, I noticed the helle-

bore blooming. Unexpectedly, I felt the need to share this green and tender representation of spring with my students. I cut off a stem from my garden and placed it in an antique smoke-green bottle. Once the students were gathered in class, I spontaneously invited them to sit in a circle on the floor around the bottle. I asked them to take some deep breaths and focus their attention on the item placed in front of them. I reassured them that they had nowhere else to be and nothing else to do than to sit on the floor simply observing what I placed before them. After some laughter and shifting, we sat in silence for approximately five minutes with an occasional reassurance from me that if their minds were wandering to gently bring their attention back to the item placed before them.

After the five minutes, we stayed where we were seated and I prompted a discussion, asking questions such as “What was this like?”, “What were you observing?”, “What did you notice?”, and “How did you feel?” Students shared with great detail what they had seen in the flower. Some thought the flower was just beginning to bloom, while others thought that the flower was dying. One student noted, “I was thinking of the life cycle of the flower, which one was closer to dying and which was dead.” Poignantly, one student commented, “It is making me think about the other people who are looking at that same flower somewhere right now, only they do not have the privilege of being in a classroom.” Another student observed the stem under the water and commented, “I see someone who is struggling and is managing to push his way up.” The students provided multiple connections relating this activity to their course material on social work practice. They shared how interesting it was that each student could look at the same thing, yet see something quite different. They shared how they saw beyond the label of “just a flower” to actually study and take in its qualities. This activity invited students to be together and learn in a different kind of way. As one student shared, “I came to class with a whole list of things I had to do and this [activity] gave me permission to focus on just this one thing. It felt good!”

In this example, beholding enhanced students’ ability to explore and observe while inviting them to engage with themselves and one another in an intersubjective play space. The act of beholding transformed a simple flower into an object that was greater than the sum of its parts because of the multiple meanings students articulated about the flower. As the students’ contributions indicate, the flower became much more than its label and uniquely took on the characteristics projected by each student. Thus, one flower held many representations, each as valid as the next. Students, by virtue of their participation, co-created multiple perspectives and learned how their contributions added to the overall experience. Students also demonstrated a curiosity about and willingness to engage in a spontaneous activity that required them to step out of the more traditional student role of receiver of knowledge, to co-creators of a mutual and shared experience.

CLASSROOM EXAMPLE THREE

Intersubjective moments can also be intentionally fostered in the classroom through activities that encourage students to be together in a manner that deepens their understanding of self and other. In a class on motivation, meaning and presence, I decided to forgo the typical role plays, as students complained that they felt “too pretend.” I asked students instead to interview each other about what gives them a sense of meaning, how they find comfort during times of pain and fear, from what sources they draw strength, to whom or what they freely express love, and why it is important that they are alive (questions derived from Griffith & Griffith, 2002, p. 46). The initial aim of this activity was simply to encourage students to practice asking questions that they could ultimately use in their future practices to help clients identify internal sources of strength, and access a range of supports. Just as instructors need to be able to delve into material in the ways we ask our students to engage, so, too, do social work students need to be able to engage in personal reflection on what holds meaning and importance in their lives. However, in retrospect I realized I was encouraging students to practice seeing and being seen by one another and providing an opportunity to foster the psychological and mutual co-arising dimensions of intersubjectivity (de Quincey, 2000).

The depth and personal nature of these questions provided students with an opportunity to experience asking meaning-based questions and receiving authentic responses from another individual. A shift took place in class, as they were no longer “actors” engaged in a learning activity, but became “subjects” in their own right. Upon debriefing the activity, the students shared that they were not used to talking to others “about these things” and that they collectively found themselves interested in what their classmates had to say. Some students also noted that they were having a “different level of conversation.” From my observations, they learned about themselves in the experience of asking meaning-based questions and hearing their partners’ responses as they enacted a “mutual co-arising” in dyad conversations and group debriefing.

CONCLUSION

It is an exciting time where the influx of research underscores the significance of both the processes of attunement and resonance, and essential qualities of relationships and intersubjective moments of meeting. Engaging students in a way in which they “feel felt” by the instructor and one another has the great potential to open up the learning spaces through creating community, fostering meaning making, and modeling a way of relating that requires time, attention and care. More fundamentally, intersubjectivity allows for “a sharing of a focus of attention on something other than the individuals in the relationship. Often there may be

a sharing of attention on a third object, a process called joint attention. As attention is the regulation of information flow, the sharing of attention in this way is truly the joining of minds” (Siegel, 2012, p. 18-2). When the instructor moves into the intersubjective space of the classroom, inviting and welcoming the student’s subjectivity, this is not only felt by the student, but has the power to transform the student’s experience to their own learning and their relationships with fellow peers. As one student shared with us about being known, “I am normally more shy and keep to myself and I didn’t feel that way...I was comfortable sharing my life experiences and feelings with everyone.” When subjectivities are valued, the student’s experience is transformed. We were told, “I usually don’t like to participate but being known it’s like you are in a comfortable setting and she can make anything you say turn into the right thing even if it’s wrong. She sees the potential in all of us.” This sense of welcome, comfort, and invitation illustrates the impact that a “hospitable space” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 138) and intersubjective space has on the classroom.

As recent research findings in the fields of social psychology and neuroscience indicate, “the science makes a strong case for placing the humanity of teachers and students and the quality of attachment relationships at the center of the wheel of education” (Cozolino, 2013, p. xxvii). Envisioning how education could shift with the appreciation and knowledge of the central role of relationships, Siegel (2012) presents the following:

In schools we emphasize words and logical processes, rewarding the syllogistic reasoning that searches for concrete cause-effect relationships in the world. But emotional and social skills are often more subtle and intricate than that, built upon a nonlinguistic, nonlogical way of knowing about the interior of our own and others’ subjective lives. Applying these notions of attunement requires that we embrace the importance of these other forms of knowing about reality...education has the potential to go much farther than important reading, writing, and arithmetic of present programs and into the R’s of reflection, relationships, and the cultivation of resilience...When students can be taught this way of integrating their lives, resilience can be created as they learn the skills of healthy reflection and relationships that can set up the foundation for a lifetime. (p. 23-4)

In sum, we suggest that theories and research on intersubjectivity may not only help elucidate the centrality of relationships in education, but may also serve as an emergent and empirically grounded rationale for contemplative practices in education.

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