Overview and Pedagogical Foundations

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Masters Plan B Project

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I believe in the power of the classroom space to change lives for the better for both teacher and student. My plan B project is developing a training for teachers who want to teach in a more self-aware and authentic way. It is meant for teachers who want to develop the skill to teach in a way that increases the opportunities for transformation for themselves and their students. The training will span multiple weeks and will be affiliated with the Center for Collaborative Conflict. The Center for Collaborative Conflict (CCC) is an organization designed to help teach and train people to be able to approach conflict in a way that recognizes it as an opportunity for growth and connection. The CCC will have many trainings, workshops, retreats, etc. My plan B project is an iteration of a possible training that will be provided for those that have undergone other training from the CCC and want to learn how to improve their ability to teach the concepts they have learned at the Center. I believe this training applies well to teachers who might want to teach other things than just the conflict concepts taught by the CCC, but the target audience for this training is those who want to teach others more about topics focused on by the CCC.

The workshop is divided into three main sections: Inner Landscape, Wayfinders, and In Practice. The Inner Landscape section focuses on the participants getting to know themselves as teachers. During that segment, we will explore our strengths and weaknesses as teachers, our teaching philosophies, values and more. The Wayfinder section includes concepts that are helpful as check-in points for teachers. If they feel they are lost or struggling in the teaching process, these concepts can help them recenter and realign. The In Practice section is focused on skills needed before teachers enter the classroom, in the middle of teaching, and afterward. Some of

these concepts include what kind of questions they ask, creating a safe space for students, and self-reflection after they teach.

My project has three components; one, the Guide to Transformative Teaching that the students attending the training will be given as a companion workbook to the training. This component will have resources that will be useful as they prepare to teach these concepts on their own. Two, the lesson plans for someone leading the training on transformative teaching. This document has more instruction for how to lead the different activities and discussions in the Guide that the students will receive. It includes examples of personal stories that should be replaced with the personal teaching experiences of the one leading the training. It is not a formulaic lesson plan, it can and should be adapted to the needs of the particular group of students and should be adjusted as the facilitator sees fit. The third part of my project is this document, my rationale for the pedagogical decisions I made in developing this training. In this document I outline four different main concepts that provide a theoretical foundation for the teaching strategies I employ in designing the workshop: First is the Coordinated Management of Meaning theory, second, research on the role of narrative in teaching, third, matters of power in the classroom, and fourth, the Transformative Learning Theory.

Coordinated Management of Meaning:

Pearce and Cronen are the creators of a theory called Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). At its heart this theory recognizes that meaning is jointly created and always occurs in multiple contexts (Pearce, 2005). A main tenant of this theory is that "communication is a form of action by which persons collectively create and manage social reality" (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 119). Pearce describes this further when he says humans are not like a bag of rocks or sand that do not coordinate with each other but more like a pack of wolves who adapt

and connect to each other during the hunt in order to take down prey (Pearce, 2007). He further points out that unlike wolves, humans belong to multiple packs at the same time e.g. religious groups, family, nationality, race, etc (Pearce, 2007). Pearce states that the different packs or social worlds we belong to come with a structure of "oughtness" that tells us things we should/must and should not/must not do (2007). Communication, through the lens of this theory, is complicated with many moving parts and we can communicate in ways that can shape our social worlds. Pearce mentions that CMM allows us to ask questions like "What are we making together? How are we making it? What are we becoming as we make this? And How can we make better social worlds?" (2007, p. 53). One way we can make better social worlds is to intervene in people's communication habits and offer different communication choices that can give them something that was not available in their old way of communicating (Pearce, 2005). In the workshop, we discuss what kind of social world we are trying to make in the classroom. We learn that as we ask questions that are open and honest, we can shape the environment of the classroom to be more hospitable for students to explore their own answers rather than dictating what they should learn. Open and honest questions are ones that do not lead someone to a certain conclusion or have a right answer. They are questions to help a person explore what they know and feel without outside constraint. I am also modeling this practice of asking open and honest questions as I am teaching about using them in the classroom. This allows for a better social world in the classroom where teachers respect the student's autonomy and ability to know what is best for them rather than the teacher telling the student what they should or must do.

Another aspect of CMM is the coordination or "meshing of stories lived" (Griffin, 2009). CMM theorists refer to coordination as the process of people working together to bring more of what they want in the world and to discourage things they do not want more of (Griffin, 2009).

In the workshop, when we talk about feedback, we are enacting the part of CMM called coordination. When we talk about feedback, I ask the participants to think of times when they have received feedback and it went well and did not go well. This is part of the gathering of stories lived so we can hopefully mesh them together in a way that can bring us to a more useful understanding of the word and the way we would like it to be. For example, the way we currently talk about feedback and offer it has elements that are not useful and sometimes harmful. We often criticize and try to control the other person through our feedback, when feedback should just be offered as how we experienced another person without trying to tell them what they have to do differently or what we know they did wrong. In the workshop, I bring in stories and opinions from lived experiences and invite the participants to do the same hoping that we can negotiate a new meaning for the word feedback; one that is more useful to the participants as they learn to become better teachers.

Other questions that Pearce states are at the heart of what CMM represents are "How can I/we act in ways that prevent the occurrence of undesirable events? And How can I/we act in ways that call into being preferred events?" (2007, p. 54). These questions are at the heart of my philosophy behind the teaching decisions that I made in the workshop. I view the teacher/facilitator as an agent that has great power to influence the classroom environment and the likelihood of transformation to be able to take place for the student. That is why I am so interested in leading teachers through a process of learning different mindsets and skills that they can develop in the classroom in order to bring about more desirable events and avoid undesirable events. In this case, the desired event being positive transformation in regards to conflict for the student and teacher.

Narrative:

One theme that runs through my training is that of narrative. Fisher states that humans should be called *homo narrans* because storytelling is so integral to the way we exist in the world (1984). He also states that humans put symbols together to create stories to organize the human experience and to tell others how to live in community with each other (Fisher, 1984). Koenig Kellas (2015) states that narrative helps people take events that can be "messy, complicated, and confusing" and turn them into more "manageable packages" of information that can then be made sense of. In line with these assertions, I chose to incorporate several narratives in the pedagogy training in order to help students make sense of some of the abstract and complicated concepts about teaching that we discuss in the training. According to dual-process theory, people tend to process information in two different ways; experiential/heuristic or rational/analytic (St. B.T. Evans & Stanovich, 2013). According to Epstein (2014), the rational system tends to deal in the abstract and a slower process of reasoning through concepts, whereas the experiential system tends to be processed more quickly and lends itself well to narratives, metaphors, and concrete, real-life examples. For these reasons, I decided to add in some narratives about experiences I've had in the classroom in order to help students connect more quickly and easily to the abstract concepts about pedagogy we explore in the training such as openness, and process.

Bolkan, Goodboy & Kromka found that not just any stories are useful in helping students to learn concepts more effectively, but that the stories need to be concrete, memorable, and related to course material (2019). Stories can be made more memorable by connecting them to a larger abstract concept, so that when the student encounters a situation where that concept might be useful, they can recall the story to aid them in deciding how to handle the problem (Bolkan, Goodboy & Kromka, 2019). My stories are all course oriented and memorable according to these

standards as they are organized under a specific abstract principle and serve to demonstrate more clearly what that concept is. The stories are concrete as well in that they zoom into a very specific instance in a classroom that demonstrates the larger principle. Kromka & Goodboy found that when teachers shared a narrative to summarize important concepts after a lecture, students were more able to recall the information, had an easier time paying attention, and felt an increased connection to the teacher (2019). They stated that when the teacher is employing self-disclosure when they tell a story to demonstrate a course concept, the students like the teacher more and were more likely to take a class from them again (Kromka & Goodboy, 2019). While my goal in teaching is not necessarily to get students to like me or take a class from me again, I do want them to trust me as a teacher and want to keep learning from me. So I chose in most of my narratives to share a personal story of me being a student in the classroom or teaching myself. Hopefully this will allow for greater connection and intimacy in the workshop. It has also been stated that using narrative in teaching allows for students to insert themselves into the learning environment rather than it being a cold and removed subject from themselves (Hazel, 2008). Further, Cayanus and Martin found that when teachers self-disclose things that are related to the course content, students report that the course is more meaningful to them, they have a greater belief they can succeed in the course, and they understand the material better (2008). For these reasons, including personal narratives in my teaching will help students feel more connected to me as the teacher and the material and be able to understand and recall it better.

Power in the classroom:

In my workshop and in my teaching, I seek to disrupt the common power structure in the classroom. It is traditional to have the teacher's responsibility to dispense knowledge and for the

learner to stay quiet and receive the knowledge being given. Looking at the classroom from a critical perspective, the idea of power in the classroom becomes salient and important. Uryu offers these three questions that are useful to uncover power at play in a society, organization, or a classroom; "Who gets to talk? Who needs to listen? And What do they need to learn?" (2017, p. 6). In my workshop, I seek to disrupt some of the traditional power structure of the classroom and strongly encourage all student's active participation in the learning process. I focus on asking the students many questions and orchestrating spaces for them to share their thoughts and listening in a way that values their contributions as necessary and essential parts of the learning process. Paulo Freire criticizes the "banking concept" of education in his book The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2014, p. 72). The banking concept of education is when teachers deposit information from their brains directly into the student's brains. They treat the student as a container that needs to be filled. This perspective invokes a model focused on memorization of facts that are given to them by the teacher without consideration of its significance to their lives and they do not have a role in the learning process other than to receive. Freire states that in the banking frame of mind, teachers consider that "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry." (2014, p. 72). Freire instead proposes the idea of emancipatory learning, also known as libertarian education or education as a process of inquiry.

One of the main ideas of this paradigm of education that Freire proposes is dialogue. He mentions that some of our greatest power as humans comes from our ability to make meaning through communication and that educators should encourage students to be able to speak in a

place where they are not dominated or oppressed. Dialogue is a theme in my workshop and the students are encouraged to participate through questions. Students are also encouraged to use their own creativity and original thought which Freire mentions can be stifled by the banking model. I have organized activities like the value sort in which the participants will get to look through lots of different things they could value in the classroom and sort them in order of importance to them as teachers. This is a good example of not oppressing the students by telling them what they should value in the classroom, but giving them a chance to choose for themselves and explore why those values are important to them.

Student autonomy is a very important element in moving toward emancipatory education and away from oppression. Creators of the Self-determination Theory (SDT) state that people are naturally prone to want to learn and grow, but that these outcomes need to have a certain environment in order to take place (Ryan & Deci, 2020). They argue that in order for this healthy development to take place, there are three needs that are particularly important to be filled; autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). They further explain that the need for autonomy is supported when students feel like the material is valuable and interesting and the need for autonomy is thwarted by being controlled by someone else whether that is through reward or punishment. They emphasize the importance of students being intrinsically motivated and how this contributes to greater learning and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). They further mention that it is important to have structure to offer students, but to allow for some flexibility within that structure for students to function best and to serve the need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). One study found that when instructors gave students a choice between different assignments and told them how the things they were learning were relevant and useful, the students felt more intrinsically motivated to complete the assignments that they chose (Baker

& Goodboy, 2019). Open questions are used in the workshop so that students have more autonomy to reply with their own thoughts and engage in dialogue in a way that is not oppressive. Students also get to choose what to teach their fellow students in one portion of the workshop. The workshop section called Inner Landscape, allows a lot of room for student choice and autonomy because they are exploring themselves as teachers and what is important to them and what their strengths are.

Overall, I strive to disrupt traditional power structures in the classroom by prioritizing student autonomy and student dialogue so that we can be engaged in a more emancipatory type of learning.

Transformative Learning Theory:

Jack Mezirow is a scholar who authored the Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow's theory is catered toward adult learning and he states that adults have a collection of experience they have gathered that informs the ways in which they view the world (Mezirow, 1997). He further explains that adults are resistant to new information that may challenge or disprove their current way of viewing the world, but that an important part of adult learning is to reflect on our paradigms of the world and see if they can be changed for the better (1997). Mezirow states that "transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (2003, p. 58). Mezirow posits that we all have "meaning structures" or beliefs we hold about the world around us and a necessary part of transformative learning is to critically self-reflect on our current meaning structures and make changes to those for the better (2009). He further explains that there are two major elements to critical self-reflection; first, considering where our current

meaning structures come from and what effects they are having on us, and second, engaging in dialogue in order to come to an understanding of how we might want to change these current beliefs we hold (2009). Fisher-Yoshida mentions that the goal of critical self-reflection is to allow us to assess how well our current belief systems are working for us in our lives and whether there are ways we can change that would help make our lives and the world better (2005). My workshop has a theme of encouraging this type of critical self-reflection in order to help the students engage in their teaching practice in a way that works better for them and their students. One example of this is when I encourage the participants to think about the concept of process. Process is a radical new meaning structure and frame of mind to adopt which is difficult to do. A lot of us have a mindset focused on outcomes and scarcity, whereas process is more of a mindset focused on the journey and abundance. Introducing this new mindset requires students to look at their current way of viewing things and ask whether those beliefs are serving them and their students in the best way. An example of this is that if a student or a teacher tries a new skill and it "fails" or does not have the desired outcome, instead of feeling down about it, we can view it as a natural part of the learning journey. Learning a new communication skill naturally involves a certain amount of struggle. Another example of when critical self-reflection is encouraged in the workshop is when students are asked to reflect with several questions in the grounding section and the self-reflection section. Both of these sections contain questions that prompt the student to consider the why behind some of their behaviors in the classroom and consider if there is a way of engaging in the classroom that might work better for them. One of the themes in some of these questions is identifying tendencies toward perfectionism in the teachers and prompting them to replace that with more self-compassion behaviors.

Mezirow emphasizes discourse as an essential element of transformative learning (1997). He states that learning is a social process and that in discourse, adult students can better arrive at a new frame of reference that makes the most sense as they engage in dialogue with each other. He states that educators need to create an environment in which effective discourse can take place. Elements of effective discourse that he outlines are where adults have access to all the information needed, are free from coercion, are willing to be open to and listen to other's perspectives and have equal opportunity to engage in all the elements of discourse (1997). These elements are incorporated into the discourse in the workshop by dedicating specific time talking about how to make the classroom space feel safe for students to participate (and I model this behavior in the workshop). I also offer lots of chances for participants to write their thoughts out, share with smaller groups, and share with the larger group. In keeping with this focus, I use open-ended questions that lead students to critically self-reflect and so they are not coerced to answer in a specific way.

In following the tenants of the Transformative Learning Theory in my workshop, students will be able to consider their current frames of reference and evaluate which ones are problematic or not serving them well as teachers and be able to identify new paradigms or ways of thinking about teaching through the discourse that we engage in together in the workshop.

Conclusion:

It has been a valuable growing experience for me to work on this training for the last year. I have never worked so consistently on one project for this long and that has felt both challenging and rewarding in about equal measure throughout the whole journey. Throughout the process of developing this training, I have learned more things than I have space to write here. I

want to highlight three main lessons I've come away with: intellectual humility, learning the value of things as we teach them, and the importance of community as a teacher.

One of the most important things I feel I have learned is intellectual humility. I consider myself a very creative person and at the beginning of this project, I thought that meant I needed to come up with all the ideas for the training myself. After gaining inspiration from different authors, theorists, fellow teachers, and students, I realize that creativity in a vacuum of the self does not produce as good of work as collaboration. I have come to feel a lot of intellectual humility as I've read about other scholars' work about ways to be more effective and transformative in the classroom. I realize that a lot of people have explored the best way to teach students and I can learn a lot from their thoughts and theories. Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel or be the first one to think of an idea, I have found it is better to stand on the shoulders of great teachers and theorists who have gone before me and try to see what I can improve from there.

Another key thing I have learned during this process is that as I have developed and taught some of these ideas, the value of them has been reiterated to me. Throughout my time working on this training, I had doubts about whether these topics would actually be useful and valuable to teachers, but as I led parts of it, it became clear to me that it is useful and valuable. An example of this is when I was able to practice leading the section of the workshop about grounding before teaching (being settled, confident, and ready to walk into the classroom) with my graduate cohort. My cohort members expressed they valued the time we had together talking about the grounding section of the training and they all mentioned that it was relevant and useful for their current difficulties they experience as teachers. As they told stories about how it is difficult to feel grounded before teaching and obstacles that get in their way of doing so, I

realized how important it is to talk about some of these aspects of teaching that may be usually overlooked. Another example is when one of my cohort members was talking about how she had a classroom moment she felt bad about and I asked if she would be willing to go through the part of my workshop with me about self-reflection after a painful teaching experience. It was a great conversation and chance to practice a section of my training. She mentioned how useful the conversation was in helping her process what had happened in her teaching experience and how she wanted to move forward after it. As I was able to lead fellow teachers through parts of the training, I realized how valuable and relevant the topics are in my workshop and was motivated to continue developing the ideas so they can benefit other teachers in the future.

A third thing I want to highlight here is the importance of a community of teachers. It can be lonely in some ways as a teacher because you are the only one experiencing the class experience from your perspective. The students all have each other, but the teacher has a unique burden of leadership to bear. I have found it is crucial for teachers to have spaces where they can talk through the difficulties and intricacies of the teaching craft and find that they are not alone in the difficulties it presents. My cohort members mentioned they wanted to have more conversations like the ones we had when I led them through parts of my training. This is one of the reasons I want to offer this training to aspiring teachers, so they can have community and support around them as they develop their skills.

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