

The Meeting

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We all look at life over the bridge of our own noses. Students and teachers alike live in this isolated experience. We receive 'messages' from the outside world and interpret them. We create hopes and dreams as well as limitations and depressions within our own minds. These personal experiences find their spark for development in the meeting with another isolated soul.

The philosopher Martin Buber wrote 'All real living is meeting'. What I have written here is not intended to be a thorough analysis of this concept, but rather merely a point along the way.

A meeting is an encounter with another person. When a meeting occurs, we forget our isolation and enjoy the ideas and views of another. Hopes come alive, a sense of meaning grows in one's being, life takes on an added dimension.

The most important moment in teaching is when teacher and student meet mind to mind. It may be when a mathematical idea such as adding unlike denominators finally makes sense. It may be when a student admits that he was the one who broke the window after hitting that homerun. The meeting also takes place when the teacher admits he struggled with Math when he was in Grade 3. This meeting is a moment when mind meets mind, soul meets soul.

It takes place in silence when a spectacular sunrise is shared; On a campout when night sounds and campfire draw a group together. Meetings between peers, meetings between those of different ages all take place around the campfire.

A student finds long division too difficult and the teacher, at his side, offers a thought or two to ease the pain and encourage, the meeting has occurred.

A student, relegated to the hallway because of a noisy, 'fake' cough is met by the principal who offers him a cough drop. The meeting has occurred.

As teachers, we should share moments in time, moments that allow us to meet, to share, to live.

Whether in a small one room school of six students, or a large inner-city school of hundreds, the encounter of mind to mind, usually in dialogue, is where education takes place.

We may be prone to think of a good morning 'hello' as too small an encounter as to be part of education but often the goodwill communicated in a simple 'hello' sets the foundation for deeper and more profound encounters.

Teachers and students live their day in a set of meetings. Students meet with students, sharing, competing, putting down, encouraging, all of these meetings occur over and over.

A teacher can sit on the porch watching his students play and can enter their lives simply by caring for what he sees. When the next encounter occurs between teacher and student the teacher may venture to comment on what he observed earlier, or may seek for ways to offset the negative messages conveyed.

Imagine an altercation on the playground, the teacher must intervene. The 'bully' denies any wrongdoing. The teacher offers irrefutable facts showing that denials won't work. Now the 'bully' is in an encounter, as is the teacher. The teacher recognizes in this young person, someone with strengths and capabilities. As they encounter the moment together, the teacher realizes that here is a person who could easily protect rather than hurt. Arrangements are made for this student to join the student playground helpers. A change occurs, the student catches a vision, a positive vision of himself and what he can accomplish.

Each encounter is different. All encounters yield results. Teachers must come to school rested and able to encounter the student with faith and goodwill, otherwise days of former encounters could lose their value in one moment of angry speech.

Jesus, Our Example

The story of Jesus is one of meeting after meeting, encounter after encounter, with individuals. We would do well to study these encounters of our Lord.

He met his disciples, often one to one. He met the poor, the needy; rich and powerful and affected them all. His compassion radiated in all encounters. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the woman of Samaria, Mary at the time of Lazarus' death, all humanity as he hung on the cross.

Jesus calls out to all of us to meet with Him, to encounter Him. As we sense the power from that encounter, we will want our students to enjoy it as well.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30