

Change -- A Necessary Challenge

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Janus for whom the month of January was named, was the Roman god of doors and gateways, of beginnings and endings. His principal temple in the Forum had doors facing east and west for the beginning and ending of the day, and between them stood his statue with two faces, gazing in opposite directions (Microsoft Encarta). At the beginning of this New Year, we are wise to also look in both directions, determining our position, looking backward to ascertain change and assess growth; looking forward to visualize new horizons and set new goals.



In what way has change affected you in the last five years? Has your role in the classroom changed? Have you in any way let go of those principles which are *changeless*? How do you anticipate you and your students will have changed by the 21st century? What mind set will facilitate these changes?

Whatever or however varied the answers to these questions may be, change is a scary, stretching experience. Webster states that "change implies making either an essential difference often amounting to a loss of original identity, or a substitution of one thing for another". This definition suggests discomfort or even pain.

Robert Kegan, a Lecturer on Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, sets change in a psychological framework which he calls constructive-development (Kegan, 1994). He uses a helix to represent his five stages of constructive development: starting with the incorporative stage; spiralling up through the impulsive, imperial, interpersonal, and institutional stages; and finally, reaching to the zenith of development, the inter-individual stage.

He further sees these changes as occurring on a continuum, shifting back and forth, as "objects" are alternately "lost" and "found" allowing for "a universal ongoing process (Kegan, p. 264). Thus, these "lost objects" are, according to Kegan, the various stages in the on-going process of personality development which shifts back and forth between embeddedness and emergence; between "periods of stability and periods of transitions"

Sometimes change can be so distressing that according to Kegan, we even seem "to have lost our sense of self and our ability to function" (Kegan, p. 231); pain would threaten to paralyse us.

However, as physical, emotional, and social losses (or gains) are forced upon us, the once-stable personality must test his/her own framework and grow to meet the challenge of his/her new, evolving self -- a process of raising questions, exploring new possibilities, of rethinking old position, of letting go, of staying put for reintegration, and bridging (Kegan, p. 227).

The question is: *How do we make sense out of experiences that are thrust upon us?* How do we truly look **forward** -- visualizing new horizons and setting new goals?

First of all, I think we have to realize and accept the fact that there are certain external, societal forces that impact our professional and personal development; forces which are beyond our control. Once we accept this fact, we are better prepared to face and deal with the impact these issues thrust upon us.

Second, we must be willing to integrate theory with experience -- networks, telling "our story" as a means of understanding events and gaining perspective, discovering that happiness can be as simple as a cup of hot tea on a cold day. These are all ways of making meaning.

Third, deciding to trust the Lord through all circumstances. At certain points in our lives God speaks so loudly that we cannot help but hear His voice. Have we decided to listen? Are we willing to let go of ourselves and "let God"?

"Trials and obstacles are the Lord's chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. . .In His providence He brings persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. . .The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious which He desires to develop (White, 1942, p. 471).

The Chinese draw "crisis" with two characters: one means "danger," the other "opportunity". As we face 1999 may we focus on opportunity -- opportunities for growth, emergence, breakthrough, meaning-making, and integration -- opportunities which cause us to accept change as a necessary challenge.

References:

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Microsoft Encarta. (1994). "Janus".

White, E.G. (1942). *Mountain View*: Pacific Press.