# **Pedagogy of the 21st Century: What we Can Learn from Anthropologists**

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Let me start by thanking the organizers of this workshop for the invitation. It is good to be here not only because of the current work I do but because as a trained teacher I care deeply about the goals of this project. There is no substitute for good teaching and learning for the preparation of good citizens of any nation. It is therefore my pleasure to be here and to share with you some thoughts of what I call "Pedagogy for the 21st Century." I do so today in my capacity as a trained anthropologist and would like to share that for those of you who here there is something we can all learn about teaching from how we anthropologists engage with the cultures we study.

A very well-known anthropologist named Clifford Geertz has an essay in which he shares his experience as a young ethnographer in Bali, Indonesia. He and his wife went to Indonesia in 1958 to undertake research and as usual for anthropologists in such contexts had to find a location from which to operate. They ended up living in a small village of about 100 people. This residency happened at a time when the local people were suspicious of foreigners. This was the year of some rebellion in some parts of Indonesia owing to political challenges and the covert interventions of foreign governments. The locals welcomed Geertz and his wife because they had to but never quite accepted them. Geertz's initial months of fieldwork were, therefore, met with either silence or covert resistance. As an anthropologist carrying out fieldwork one cannot get very far with ethnographic studies when the same people one is supposed to learn from go about their business as if one is completely inexistent. On this initial experience, Geertz says

> As we wandered around, uncertain, wistful, eager to please, people seemed to look right through us with a gaze focused several yards behind us on some more actual stone or

> tree. The indifference, of course, was studied; the villagers were watching every move we made and they had an enormous amount of quite accurate information about who we were and what we were going to be doing. But they acted as if we simply did not exist, which, in fact, as this behavior was designed to inform us, we did not, or anyway not yet. (pp.56)

Among many of the Balinese cultural practices include a performance that brings all villages together-- a cockfight. Cockfights are a popular activity that include betting and village rivalry. As an anthropologist and a member of the village, Clifford Geertz attended one such performance in a neighboring village. No sooner had they settled into the heat of the fight than a truck full of policemen roared into the village and police officers moved in to beat up and arrest the villagers. Cockfights were illegal but they were very popular. Here is how Geertz describes this event

> People raced down the road, disappeared headfirst over walls, scrambled under platforms, folded themselves behind wicker screens, scuttled up coconut trees. Everything was dust and panic. On the established anthropological principle, When in Rome, my wife and I decided, only slightly less instantaneously than everyone else, that the thing to do was run too. We ran down the main village street, northward, away from where we were living, for we were on that side of the ring. About halfway down another fugitive ducked suddenly into a compound—his own, it turned out—and we, seeing nothing ahead of us but rice fields, open country, and a very high volcano, followed him. As the three of us came tumbling into the courtyard, his wife, who had apparently been through this sort of thing before, whipped out a table, a tablecloth, three chairs, and three cups of tea, and we all, without any explicit communication whatsoever, sat down, commenced to sip tea, and

> sought to compose ourselves. A few moments later, one of the policemen marched importantly into the yard, looking for the village chief (The chief had not only been at the fight, he had arranged it). Seeing my wife and I, "white men" there in the yard, the policeman performed a classic double take. When he found his voice again he asked, approximately, what in the devil did we think we were doing there. Our host of five minutes leaped instantly to our defense, producing an impassioned description of who and what we were, so detailed and so accurate that it was my turn, having barely communicated with a living human save my landlord and the village chief for more than a week, to be astonished. We had a perfect right to be there. We were American professors; the government had cleared us; we were there to study culture; we were going to write a book to tell Americans about Bali. And we had been there drinking tea talking about cultural matters all afternoon and did not know anything about any cockfight. (pp. 58).

This was to become the pivotal moment for Geertz and his wife in that village. It was clear that even though no one was speaking to them, the villagers were quite informed about their work. Silence did not mean ignorance. It was indifference. They did not belong and the villagers said to them as much but without uttering a word. It is the flight from the police that turned things around. Geertz explains

> The next morning the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement. Everyone in the village knew we had fled like everyone else. They asked us about it again and again. "Why didn't you just stand there and tell the police who you

> were? Why didn't you just say you were only watching and not betting? Were you really afraid of those little guns?" …everyone was extremely pleased and even more surprised that we had not simply "pulled out our papers and asserted our distinguished Visitor status, but had instead demonstrated our solidarity with what were now covillagers. (pp 59)

I share this story because I believe there is something that we as teachers and experts in pedagogy can learn about teaching and learning by assuming an anthropological posture especially in our 21st century world. Scholars tell us that 21st century pedagogy has a number of qualities and the most critical among them include:

- Student centered learning;
- Collaborative learning;
- Project based learning;
- Problem based learning; and
- Teaching and learning that takes place in an e-environment.

Further, scholars tell us that the skills that our 21st century students need include:

- Collaborative skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Critical thinking skills; and
- Communication skills.

These are the skills that all students require no matter their specific subject area specialization. We want graduates who are able to work with people different from them, graduates who are able to go underneath surface statements and presentations to critically review them and ask important questions, graduates who can think outside the box, graduates who can see

connections between what they learned and new things that were never imagined in their curriculum, and graduates who have empathy and care deeply about others and the world they inhabit. As I looked at the graduates that we expect to possess the 21st century skills, I realized they are students we expect to be coming out of our competence based curriculum and education. These are students who will not be coming out of pedagogical experiences characterized by rote memory or ones lacking practical experience in their fields of study. These will be students who have been participants in the learning enterprise.

How then are we in the universities going to prepare for these students? First, we need to prepare student teachers who will be training these students in both primary and secondary schools. Then we need to simultaneously prepare their teachers in the university so that they can prepare them well for those levels and finally train our university teachers to teach in our mid-level colleges and universities. There are a number of ways to prepare for these tasks but I will only share one that approaches the classroom and teaching the way an anthropologist approaches a new culture.

The classroom is a space that can enhance or hinder learning depending on the ability of the teacher and students to meet each other's learning goals. Whether in a traditional classroom or out in the field, learning occurs best when both students' and teachers' cultural identities are acknowledged and mobilized. What does a classroom look like when students become co-villagers? As cultural beings we bring to our learning environments specific worldviews and experiences that greatly affect our learning outcomes and teaching strategies. Sometimes our pedagogical styles as educators may differ with the learning styles and expectations of our students. As anthropologists we are trained to “go native” when we enter into a community because it is by doing so that we are able to participate and observe the cultures we study. Those

of you who go to open air markets know that the minute a foreigner starts speaking Kiwashili to the local vendor the interaction changes in favor of the foreigner. How do we transfer this same practice into understanding our teaching and learning interactions? How do we allow our students to switch to the "local" language of the classroom so that they feel connected?

My main argument is that students learn best when we as teachers approach the classroom just as we anthropologists approach a new or different culture. This seems simple but in our context in this part of the world where the teacher has always been regarded with reverence (I hope that is the case anyway) and where a person in authority commands respect, being vulnerable and engaging students as co-villagers is not the norm. Clifford Geertz came from a different culture and by virtue of that difference, along with many other factors, including economic, racial, and political ones, he did not connect with the villagers for a while. He was only able to connect when the villagers realized he was not going to pull his rank or status to deal with something that happens to them all the time. He demonstrated his vulnerability as well as his camaraderie with the villagers. He became one of them.

A cultural anthropologist, therefore, approaches another culture as a learner, not assuming to know much but eager to learn about the place and the people. To do so we anthropologists use three key approaches: first, a **holistic approach** where we seek to understand culture from all possible angles including the political, economic, environmental, historical, and geographical; second, a **comparative approach** that allows us to make conclusions after comparing cultures, times, and places; and third, a **contextual analysis** that allows us to understand a culture, activity or phenomenon within the time, place, and values that produce it. Through these three approaches we are able to establish the complexity of a culture or community. While a classroom is not really a distinct community, there are certain habits,

values, and practices in the learning/teaching enterprise that produce a kind of culture that allow for or hinder learning. There is value, therefore, in us as teachers to assume a learning posture in that classroom space much as we may be the most knowledgeable individual in there. Assuming a learning posture allows us to deemphasize the power differential that tends to play out in the classroom; it allows students to see themselves as important and active partners in the learning process; and allows the classroom to be more of a community of individuals who value each other and ready to work together. This kind of classroom is what promotes a culture of inquiry, of critical thinking, of collaboration, and of creativity.

Approaching teaching as an anthropologist would approach a new culture, allows us to state that the classroom is a space that engenders specific forms of interaction that are shaped by the participants' that are present as well as by their received norms and values. The worldview and personality of the teacher, for instance, will influence the work he/she undertakes in the classroom, how students will view him/her, and how the teacher might come to understand his/her work in the classroom. The teacher's role in the classroom is also going to be seen through the lens of experiences that students have had in other classrooms and in courses taken with other teachers as well as in their home environments. In that way, whether one wants it or not, students will be comparing one's classroom behavior with others they have observed and experienced. There is also another dimension to this reality. If the teacher shares a cultural world with students, he/she may be able to "read" the students better than someone who does not have such knowledge or what we may call cultural literacy. Such teachers can differentiate situations in which, for instance, a student is worried, anxious, embarrassed, or when the material is incomprehensible to them. If the teacher does not share the same cultural world with his/her students then the teacher is unlikely to make such cultural interpretations, which at times are

critical in making learning a successful enterprise. However, we now know there are many ways of dealing with this kind of cultural deficit. What we do not have through our experiences we can accomplish through training. As teachers we need to have cultural literacy that allows us to understand the worlds our students inhabit. Quite often this means being aware of self and the assumptions and practices we bring into the classroom. Without such self-knowledge there is tendency to present one's experiences and preferences as applicable to all the students. I am sure many of you here know of a growing phenomenon in African Christian services today I wish to highlight.

I attend a church that is trying hard to engage its congregants and build community during the service. This community-building practice involves having an active audience which at times entails the service host or preacher telling the congregants "turn to your neighbor and ….." for some of these exercises there is an expectation that you will have a full conversation and exchange personal experiences with the person seated next to you. Imagine that you have just come to such a space and you do not know anyone and happen to take a seat that is empty and you are asked to turn to a stranger and tell them the story of your life. A little knowledge of the types of individuals in that congregation would be useful for the pastor or service leader in order to make this community-building exercise useful for all. In that congregation are new people who don't know anyone, there are regulars who are seated with friends or spouses, there are others who are having a bad day and do not really want to talk to someone, and then there are introverts who find such a request impossible to engage with. How do you think these people will respond to the "turn to your neighbor" request? Clearly there is need for cultural literacy even in church. Your classroom has similar individuals whom you cannot assume will respond the same way to your invitations or actions.

I believe it is in the cases where the teacher needs to be culturally literate that the work of PEDAL becomes critical. PEDAL is providing the kind of training that will allow our university teachers to understand the enterprise we call teaching, reflect on their own teaching, understand how people learn, and create learning practices and outcomes that are aligned to the teaching and learning of the 21st century world we now inhabit. When we understand who we are as teachers, how we teach and why we teach that which we teach, what our philosophy of teaching is, how we seek to establish what our students have learned and how they demonstrate that learning, as well as how we prepare them to succeed in the next course and/or in the world they inhabit post-graduation, then we become 21st century teachers. This expectation of teaching is to be embedded in the overall culture of the university so that not just a few teachers adopt it. In my experiences as a teacher I found my most enjoyable times in the classroom to be when I was in a university where there was a shared culture of teaching and expectations of us as teachers. When I taught at Calvin University in the US, for instance, we understood that teaching was taken as seriously as research and community service were. Indeed, the faculty handbook states in part that:

> Effective teachers know their students. They understand student development and acknowledge the diversity of students' needs and abilities. Effective teachers foster a classroom atmosphere in which students can appropriate knowledge for themselves. Effective teachers know, however, that teaching sometimes causes discomfort, and respect for students remains within the context of respect for truth.[1]

[1] http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/fac_hb/chap_3/3_6.htm accessed October 10, 2006.

This is not just an expectation for the teachers, the university puts in resources to support that kind of teaching and every year at the beginning of the academic year there is what is called a "fall conference" where many matters on teaching, research, and community service are highlighted and celebrated. Indeed, as one joins the university as a faculty member one of the expectations is that one will take a new faculty seminar through which the culture of the university is taught. You cannot be a full member of the community if you are not inculcated into it.

Parker Palmer in his book *Courage to Teach* talks about teaching as practicing in community, saying that

> To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced. The hallmark of the community of truth is not psychological intimacy or political civility or pragmatic accountability, though it does not exclude these virtues. This model of community reaches deeper, into ontology and epistemology--into assumptions about the nature of reality and how we know it--on which all education is built. The hallmark of the community of truth is in its claim that reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality only by being in community with it (1997:95)[2]

This community that Parker Palmer talks about can be formed in the classroom and/or in the university. To be part of a community is to belong, to feel part of it. Psychologists tell us that for people to belong, to feel part of a community or group, they need to have a sense of membership in the group or community, they desire to have influence in the group, want a certain level of integration within the group as well as the fulfillment of their needs, and finally need a shared

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[2] Palmer, Parker (1997) *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. 1st edition, Jossey-Bass.

emotional connection with other members of the group. So belonging entails Membership, Influence, Integration, Fulfillment, and Connection. As teachers we can lay the foundation for this sense of belonging and fulfillment by the way we teach and relate with our students. We also have to aspire for the kind of learning in which we engage a classroom culture that is liberating, where the student and teacher feel free and comfortable in the classroom; a context where participants feel that they can be themselves. The teacher ought to be seen not only as a facilitator but also as part of the learning process. To achieve this, traditional conventional methods of the classroom have to be challenged. Each student must feel welcome in the classroom, the teacher must try as much as it is possible to know students and engage with them as individuals with a special identity not just a number. The teacher must evaluate, validate, and respect each student's point of view without fostering parochialism or losing control of the important role he/she has as a leader in the learning process. Our institutions have also to be committed to the teaching enterprise and provide the necessary ecosystem and support for us to thrive. Further, each student must know from the onset that for classroom learning to be a success he/she has a key part to play. In this way we as teachers must make students accountable for their own learning so that when we make that extra effort to teach them as individuals, they also make that extra effort to learn.

So what do we do with all this information and examples? I think we all are people who care about teaching and thus by extension care about our students' success. We are all going to receive or have already received some form of training in pedagogy to be successful in the 21st century world. We also will continue to receive more opportunities for growth in that area. We must, however, guard against stopping at the level of competence (as many training programs

tend to provide us with the “tools of trade”) and try to get to the level of transformation because as Parker Palmer says

> Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. (ibid.)

Such identity is formed before you step foot in a pedagogical training workshop. The training only brings out the best in you and provides strategic direction and best practices. But you probably can best identify your teaching identity through self-reflection and by working with others to tell you who you are and how you practice your teaching. To get such access to your identity as a teacher, you have to be part of the community mentioned above. I hope this workshop is one such community. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that your time together this week will allow you to know yourself as a teacher; that you will have an opportunity to question certain assumptions you may have brought with you about teaching; that you will pick up some things that will revitalize and even revolutionize your teaching practices and affirm your passion for teaching. I also hope that in teaching we are all learners because we never quite become, we are always becoming.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I end let me now ask you to turn to your neighbor and introduce yourself.

Thank you!