

Acts of “Great Generosity of Spirit”: The Classroom as a Pathway Toward Abundance and Dignity

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What does “generosity” mean? I decided to look up the definition in Merriam Webster. Here it is: 1. The quality of being kind and generous. 2. The quality or fact of being plentiful or large.

And then I read that abundance is “great *generosity* of spirit” (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abundance). And so this is how I decided to frame this presentation: it represents a classroom story about great generosity of spirit: abundance in the midst of great poverty of spirit. Based on my auto-ethnographical research work, I offer this presentation as a meditation on the possibility of “great generosity of spirit” or “abundance” for all of us who wish to make a real difference in the lives of students in classrooms and schools, especially vulnerable students who have no lived experience of “dignity”, i.e. the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed.

I invite you all to accompany me back to my first year of school teaching and to hear what happened in those first few fragile months of my life’s work. Using both my personal lived experience as a child of survivors of World War II who was offered a sense of hope and dignity by the nurturing and caring of several teachers in school, and through the telling of my first year of elementary school teaching many years ago in an inner-city neighborhood in Toronto where personal humiliation and despair was a commonplace, I explore the classroom experience as an act of abundance, the fruits of which uplift the human spirit both for the teacher and learner, and create dreams of a better future for all of us.