3. NOURISHING THE AUTHENTIC SELF: TEACHING WITH HEART AND SOUL

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality encompasses all that we are. It is an internal force that helps to guide our lives. It incorporates our upbringing, values, traditions, beliefs and unique experiences. It gives meaning and fullness to our lives when we are able to embody the spirit and be our authentic self. Our existence on earth is based on our ability to breathe the air around us. This breath that we all share is a powerful force. It represents our shared existence as one people. It helps us to see that in our difference, we all share a common thread. Our spiritual journey allows us to achieve wholeness. According to Zulu Latifa, our spirituality is a gift where each one of us has the power to develop our inner force throughout life’s journey (Wane, 2007). However, our current approach to schooling suppresses this gift which lives inside each one of us. It silences an important part of who we are, preventing us from truly becoming our authentic self. Therefore, we must transform. This chapter will examine why it is essential for educators to nurture the soul and it will provide strategies in order to promote wholeness and authenticity in the lives of students. It will offer innovative teaching approaches in order to create spaces of mutual trust and respect within the classroom. It will examine the issues of spirituality and wholeness in a student’s live through a transformative and anti-oppressive framework. Through the process of deconstructing our traditional ways of knowing and teaching, this chapter offers practical strategies that educators can implement in their classroom in order to offer their students hope for a brighter tomorrow, by nurturing the souls and becoming their authentic self.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Transformative education empowers each student to find his or her inner voice and power (Gardner & Kelly, 2008). It provides students with the tools and strategies to critically deconstruct the information that is being taught and to offer alternative ways of knowing. The primary goal is to empower students to affect social change through self empowerment and actualization (Gardner & Kelly, 2008). This notion of empowerment and actualization suggests that when a learner truly knows themselves and their history, they will not blindly accept information that is being
presented. Learners will feel empowered to want to understand the why, rather than simply reproducing knowledge they will desire to be part of the knowledge production. Interdependent learning allows both the teacher and the student to engage in a mutual exchange of knowledge (Freire, 1994). Consequently, the teacher can inhabit the role of the student and the student can act as an educator (Freire, 1994). It provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their ideas, assumptions and beliefs which raise their consciousness while increasing their awareness of biases, prejudices and stereotypes which in turn inform their actions (Gardner & Kelly, 2008). This leads to a shift in consciousness that permanently alters their way of being. Yet, in order for transformative education to make a difference, it is essential that educators challenge their existing patterns of thought because one cannot facilitate transformative learning unless they are conscious of their own perspective. Based on the work of bell hooks (1994), she discusses the importance of educators recognizing their social location and how that impacts the dynamics of a classroom. Transformative education provides an integrated approach to learning through shared experiences between both teacher and students through reflective writing, listening and sharing which enriches the learning experience of all participants. Transformative education allows us to teach students to become critical thinkers in order to help them form their own opinions and beliefs (Mezirow, 2003). It helps us to nurture the whole student. It gives students the opportunity to speak from a place of authenticity. This authentic space comes from their heart where they feel empowered to raise ideas that are relevant and important in their own lives where they are not be afraid to offer an alternative way of thinking and knowing. Therefore, when we connect with the heart and spirit, change is truly possible in the lives of our students.

Currently in our educational system, every day children arrive at school afraid to be themselves, to share their beliefs, to challenge the existing norms because school has silenced an important part of who they are and want to be. Students’ voices have been silenced through the teaching and practices that are deemed valid by the educational system and policy makers. The curriculum is a prescriptive document based on Eurocentric knowledge that we expect all students to embrace as truth, while devaluing their own truths and lived experiences. Therefore, how do we begin to place our students at the center in a quest for holistic education? This can be achieved through a shift in spiritual capital in order to socially transform the educational system we encounter on a day to day basis where spirituality fuses the gap for students between schooling and their individual ways of knowing.

ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION

In contemporary society, our classrooms dynamics have changed to meet the diverse needs of students but many educators are still entering classrooms unprepared to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners. Accordingly, anti-racist education allows us to provide explicit training to educators in the true meaning of equality and justice through a critical teaching lens (Dei, 1993). It allows us to address issues of social inequality, racial oppression and sex discrimination. A