

Thoughts on Inquiry: Bonita Evans Gondo

If we are to become teachers of inquiry, which leads to students becoming process oriented writers then we must step outside of the box and create a circle where learning to write, and teaching how to write becomes a reciprocal process. Within this process a symbiotic relationship develops. The process is similar to that of a traditional Native American vision quest. A ceremony takes place towards the student-seeker's search into understanding their internal defining of self, as a writer. The teacher as medicine man/woman or shaman guides the seeker into another realm, and dimension of the writing process. The shaman makes no judgement on the seeker's journey, only acting as a guide providing support. At the beginning of the journey the seeker has very little or no insight into what it is they are seeking or journeying toward. It is as if they are only in a dream imagining themselves as an accomplished writer. The shaman is aware that the dream can only become a reality when the seeker is able to write aloud their silent internal voice. They know that once the conduit for inquiry is open the channels into the writing process will be vividly illuminated on the surface of the blank page, conceived as the written word.

If we are to become teachers in the inquiry process we must unlock the iron gate of being all knowing and seeing in the classroom. We must unmask ourselves and step out into the pure light of day, on a limb, open faced, expecting nothing and being excited about everything that we receive. Within the circle, the seeker and shaman as guide become one. In the outer circle of the quest the community is not passive, but lends support to both the seeker and the guide through chanting while a drummer plays a hypnotic rhythm upon the sacred drum. This support is what the seeker holds onto when they enter through the invisible door of knowledge. The teacher-shaman in that classroom who has made inquiry their quest, must be both the underlying constant rhythm and guide who has some grounding and experience about the student's journey. The shaman has already taken the journey and is on the path to a kind of enlightened investigation into their practice of teaching that allows inquiry to happen. This helps the seeker to find their own answers on an invisible but recognizable path along the cutting edge of the circle towards becoming independent writers, readers and thinkers of substance.

If we are to become teachers for unlocking the inquiry process in our students we must become receptors, standing at the apex of the hurricane of information received from the students. The teacher then becomes the giver-listener who does not twist and turn their critique of the work like a sharp knife, or strangle the motion and meaning of the words the student uses to express their progress on the journey. The teacher becomes a shamanistic wave, creating ripples of thought, through provoking gestures (strategies), probing questions, or a sharing of their knowledge. The teacher absorbs the student's writings, understanding that the student's voices must be allowed to speak and be heard over the roar of many antagonistic voices, as they unlock the writing process for themselves.

A conversation must ensue that articulates the inquiry process. The end product translates into some form of written self-expression on verbal and non-verbal levels: a dance, a poem, a play, a book, a song or some kind of artistic work. In a flicker the ceremonial flame dies down, there is a whisper; a moment of oneness, between the teacher and the seeker as the student becomes the guide, leading the work into inquiry based writing. In this breadth of time both the shaman and the seeker come full circle.