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Restoration: Emerging with Courage

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Restoration: Emerging with Courage

Abstract

This essay, first presented at the conference (name has been changed) as a talk at anonymous university, examines one pre-service faculty's scholarly journey. Written during the Covid-19 pandemic, the author highlights research about professional teaching dispositions specifically exploring the disposition of courage. The essay reveals how the author's research and scholarship became life-giving during a challenging season. The author encourages colleagues to cultivate space to reflect, summon courage and consider where they can seek and find restoration in their work and scholarship. The author concludes that seeking restoration is a life-giving practice that reminds educators of our faith and calling--and why we chose to teach.

Keywords

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Introduction

Two winters ago, I received a lovely invitation to present the “Emerging Scholars Address” at the upcoming 2022 ICCTE conference. This address is traditionally given at the conclusion of the conference by a newer scholar. The purpose of the talk is for a speaker to share their research and to encourage fellow educators in their scholarship endeavors. After presenting at the conference, I decided to write up the talk and submit it as an essay to the ICCTE Journal in hopes of encouraging readers to consider my personal scholarship journey, reflect on their own journey, and contemplate how our work and scholarship can invigorate us, renew us, and even restore us.

Am I an Emerging Scholar?

I was truly honored with the invitation to speak, yet I felt the weight and responsibility of giving a plenary talk. Soon after accepting the invitation, I drove onto my college’s campus and saw a sign posted for an Emerging Leaders Conference. I wondered, who are the emerging leaders? Who is attending this conference? I realized after 33 years in education that I equated the concept of emerging with youth—someone just finishing college or someone switching jobs or just beginning a career in higher education. In actuality, I felt a bit seasoned, even tired, and decided to look up “emerging” in the dictionary. According to Merriam-Webster (2022), emerging means becoming apparent or prominent. This definition reminded me that in my course and assignment rubrics, I often list emerging as a category—a student is working toward an expected benchmark, standard, or outcome—but

they are not quite there yet. As I pondered the meaning of emerging, I thought about when I started my doctoral studies in 2011. I reminisced about when I arrived at my dorm apartment for the first summer residency—I was in my early 40’s—my roommate was in her 20’s. She took one look at me and exclaimed, “I am so glad you are not young!” She later clarified that she was happy to have a roommate who wasn’t “super young;” in other words, she wanted a roommate who would focus and study. Although I appreciated the clarification, the damage was already done—I certainly did not feel like I was emerging that day.

I view the mindset of a scholar as one who typically invites growth, embraces growth, and leans into it.

Regardless of my age or my years of experience, I believe we are emerging in distinct ways. As pre-service faculty, we are certainly emerging from a pandemic, from pivots and pilots with new technology, Zoom calls, and masks—yet, as I was preparing my address, I wondered if we actually see ourselves as emerging professionals and as scholars in Christian community. I speculated whether emerging was even a category to which I should belong. A quick search of emerging on Google Images revealed images of light bulbs and ideas, seedlings, rose buds and blooms, cracking eggs, and butterflies. Seeing these images helped me gain additional clarity about needing to grow,

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to learn, and to emerge with purpose as a scholar. With this perspective, I recognized that I AM emerging and my journey is “not yet finished.”

I view the mindset of a scholar as one who typically invites growth, embraces growth, and leans into it. Yet, educators like you and me need to find time to give ourselves permission and space to think and reflect. Aguilar (2021) claimed, “Reflection is a practice. The more you do it. The deeper you go” (p. 77). Hence, Aguilar assumed if we create space for reflection, then self-awareness and new knowledge emerge so that we can grow.

My Journey into Scholarship

I started my career in 1989 as a junior-high English teacher, then served as a high-school administrator. In 2009, I transitioned into higher education, feeling like a fish out of water. Learning about research, needing to attend graduate school to earn initials after my name, wearing regalia, and participating in the pomp and circumstance felt like learning a new language; I quickly realized that I was out of my comfort zone. In all honesty, I felt a bit of imposter syndrome as a new scholar and wondered if I belonged, or if my ideas were worth sharing beyond the walls of my own classroom. I wondered if I had anything worthwhile to share that would be appreciated by my faculty colleagues. I tried to not let the self-doubt sneak in and take over. I also reminded myself that being me had served me well for a long time. As scholars, we typically do not admit it, but we can feel insecure about our work, our progress, and our professional development. Although it is easier said than done, I truly believe it is important for us to be ourselves, to believe in ourselves and what we have to offer our institutions, departments, and larger communities. Nieuwhof (2021) proposed that we embrace more of what we are supposed to be, suggesting that we be loving, genuine, curious, and gracious. Similarly, Spencer (2018), in *Reframing the Soul*, suggested, “Feeling at home does not mean all is well within our soul. . . it means we know who we are. We know our strengths and our weaknesses and we understand that spiritual and moral progress takes time” (p. 162). The author

continued: “It is in our nature to change, we recognize that we are not yet who we are going to become” (p. 163). These words encourage me to remain true to myself as I learn, adapt, and grow.

Hence, there is a need to fill a teacher’s toolbox with dispositions to foster strengths of the heart and help new teachers shepherd and care for their students (Hughes, 2020). Finding time to cultivate opportunities for educators to engage in professional development, book groups, and intentional discussions about dispositions and the heart part of teaching can fuel a teacher’s work.

When I started graduate school, a student in a cohort ahead of me gave me some great advice—“pick your passion, research it, and stick with it.” I took this advice to heart, and enthusiastically made professional teaching dispositions my scholarly focus. In the breadth of literature, the professional teaching dispositions are teacher actions, beliefs, and attitudes (Murrell et al., 2010). The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (2016) defined dispositions broadly as the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator’s performance. As I dove into my graduate studies, I collaborated with my department colleagues to develop a dispositions statement for our liberal studies majors and credential students. From my first research presentation to my dissertation years later, I embraced my studies, taking advantage of opportunities to dive deeper into dispositions and postures of the heart. My colleagues and I quickly recognized that we valued and infused four distinct dispositions into our program —lifelong learner, reflective practitioner, compassionate professional, and grateful servant. Each of these four dispositions links to our college’s mission and scripture; they are implicitly and explicitly introduced early in our program and are sustained across the arc of our program

through assignments, classroom and clinical experiences, collegial exchanges, reflections, and self-assessments (Hughes, 2014; Westmont College Department of Education, 2020, p. 5). Through several studies, my research affirmed that educators need to create space for dispositions--the intangible attitudes of the heart--dispositions can help us grow [and emerge] as educators and scholars (Hughes, 2014; 2020).

Our work in and of itself can be life-giving. Restoration means we can repair, renovate, and rebuild. Restoration can be the reinstatement of a previous practice, right, or custom; restoration can be the action of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition.

In my faculty position, I am required to write and publish, yet at the same time, I truly want to enjoy the writing and research journey. During my first sabbatical in 2017, I threw my energy into a follow-up study to my dissertation. It brought me life to reinterview the participants from my dissertation. Reconnecting with participants and past program graduates when they were knee-deep in teaching was an unexpected gift. They identified links between dispositions and self, dispositions and students, and dispositions and colleagues. Of particular significance, the follow-up study revealed that dispositions build self-awareness in new teachers; this finding validated that teacher participants had a deep understanding of the attitudes and emotional needs of the job. Additionally, participants noted that a new teacher's decision to develop and practice dispositions is most often by their own initiation. Schools and districts do not typically provide space and time for teachers to reflect or even consider dispositions. Hence, there is a need to fill a teacher's toolbox with dispositions to foster strengths of the heart and help new teachers shepherd and care for their students (Hughes, 2020). Finding time to cultivate

opportunities for educators to engage in professional development, book groups, and intentional discussions about dispositions and the heart part of teaching can fuel a teacher's work.

Can My Scholarship Restore Me?

As I prayed and prepared to give the "Emerging Scholars Talk" for the conference, I was prompted to examine whether or not there was a link between my work with dispositions and restoration. The conference highlighted the theme of leaning into the firm foundation of Christ with a spirit of curiosity and creativity so as to be transformative. The conference theme opened the door to consider how the dispositions I hold dear can offer me refreshment and renewal.

Last summer, at the end of a long and challenging academic year, pre-service faculty moved from a pandemic to an endemic, some were prepping for new courses, and some were looking for the nearest beach to disconnect. Although the work of faculty at Christian institutions can naturally lend itself to restoration, faculty often do not feel or identify that the work feels renewing or restorative. With life and work demands, most faculty members like you and me do not take time to revisit our calling, our vocation, and why we chose to teach. My department colleagues and I find that it is extremely challenging to bounce between teaching, scholarship, meetings, syllabi, and faculty disagreements; however, our work and vocation can bring restoration. Our work in and of itself can be life-giving. Restoration means we can repair, renovate, and rebuild. Restoration can be the reinstatement of a previous practice, right, or custom; restoration can be the action of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition. Contemplating this, I recognized that focusing on and sharing about the scholarship – the dispositions I value as a professional and a child of God – is a restorative practice for me. Focusing on dispositions breathes new life into me, my calling and purpose, and also fosters space for me to grow. Simple acts such as taking time to write, reflect, read, or even engage in conversation with colleagues about dispositions bring me back to the heart of why I chose to teach. Thus,

intentionally pursuing my research fuels renewal and invigorates me.

Equipping teachers with dispositions--both head and heart skills--for professional success means we are giving them the tools and the strength to grapple with the tensions found in schools and classrooms.

Costa and Kallick (2008) named 16 habits of mind or thinking dispositions. Their recent research extended this work and suggested that nurturing habits of mind “creates capacity to recognize and apply dispositional thinking to curriculum and the unpredictable challenges and opportunities educators a school faces” (Costa et al., 2021, p. 58). The authors noted that the more teachers and students “focus on and grapple with the habits of mind, the more these dispositions become internalized in their hearts, minds and behaviors” (p. 62). As educators highlight and recognize dispositions, they build greater self-awareness and put them into practice in the classroom with students.

Cultivating Time and Space

Christian higher education provides a unique structure and context that by its nature can create space for educators to integrate faith with scholarship and teaching--permission to seek and choose connection with God, ourselves, students, and each other. Fostering this space means we choose Christ and choose to model and live out our faith. As previously mentioned, this is easier said than done. It goes without saying that scripture, and our Lord and Savior restore us; 2 Corinthians 13:11 reads, “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” Talley (2020) noted, “Faith informs my practice; faith also sustains my practice ... [f]aith is

what sustains, protects, guards, instructs and heals the condition of my soul” (pp. 161-162). Talley recommended, “Teacher education programs begin to equip their students to ameliorate their stress through spiritual practices” (p. 166). Linking this thinking can inform our mindsets and actions. This outcome is not assured, yet for me personally, I find that when I intentionally focus on specific dispositions, they become more than just a concrete list of behaviors. They become a means, a channel, and an aim that stimulate my heart and mind--and

energize me--and this often produces a feeling of restoration internally, within myself and my work. The process itself brings renewal. In my pre-service program, my faculty team strives to prepare teachers for meaningful and lengthy careers. Integrating and intentionally paying attention to professional dispositions reaps benefits; highlighting and demonstrating dispositions can fuel, sustain, and energize teachers for the long haul (Hughes, 2020).

As noted earlier, our faith can sustain us in our daily work. Equipping teachers with dispositions--both head and heart skills--for professional success means we are giving them the tools and the strength to grapple with the tensions found in schools and classrooms. Recognizing that the last few years have been unprecedented, frustrating, and challenging, educators need opportunities to recognize restorative moments and practices in their work.

The Disposition of Courage

As I continue to write and research, I have discovered that there are a few dispositions that stand out, that rise to the top of my list and restore me. Courage is one disposition that I have explored with intention over the last few years (I am sure Parker Palmer would be proud). Seeking, naming, and recognizing courage grounds me. It gives me hope. Subsequently, I have intentionally framed teaching as courageous work--for my student teachers, for my colleagues, and for myself. As educators wrestle with how to teach and frame topics such as race, bias, school safety,

recent school shootings, mental health, and politics, we collectively feel the weight and significance of this time in history. There is an urgent need for educators in K-12 and in higher education to cultivate strength and courage to withstand the challenges before us. Courage requires grit and mental and moral strength to persevere and withstand danger, fear, and difficulty. Courage is synonymous with bravery and valor or having and possessing “guts.” All teachers need a healthy dose of courage--of guts and resolve--to embrace the daily work. I recall days in my career as a high-school administrator when I had to summon the courage to respond to a disgruntled colleague, search trash cans after a campus bomb threat, and comfort grieving parents after a child had died unexpectedly. Teaching is emotionally challenging and rigorous work that requires a deep commitment. Making the decision to teach necessitates courage (Palmer, 2017).

When educators choose to act with courage--when we choose to share a story, decision, or moment of courage with students and colleagues--we exercise and strengthen our muscles of courage. Being courageous can create a pattern that cultivates a habit in ourselves that informs our behavior and choices--and we feel energized!

The recent pandemic placed a laser focus on teachers, students, and our educational system. The extreme circumstances necessitated a hasty shift from face-to-face learning to teaching online. Teachers needed to buy in quickly and rally inner courage. There was hardly time for grieving or for teacher consideration to choose to not show up. This unexpected shift was extremely overwhelming for new and even seasoned educators (Pressley et al., 2021). As a result, teaching and expectations of and for teachers will never be the same. The pandemic brought

stressors and tensions in the profession to the surface--disparities, learning gaps, issues of inequity and access--that truly required more than the “pick yourself up by the bootstraps” kind of courage (Hughes & Badley, 2022). Research acknowledges that teachers typically choose to leave the profession because of stress. Research also shows that many teachers stay because they have a deep love for students and teaching (Loewus, 2021). Furthermore, on a personal note, pre-service faculty like me are often nervous, ill-equipped, and unsure how to respond to or even process the real-time events or grim news stories we see on Twitter, Instagram, and during our morning news feeds. These tensions test educators and necessitate that we summon inner courage. Teaching necessitates courage to get up each morning, show up, and teach every day. Of particular significance, dispositions like courage edify and inform our actions. When intentionally practiced, dispositions create a unique desire for additional space and focused practice opportunities with dispositions that can result in habitual change (Hughes, 2020). When teachers choose to harness courage, the intentional choice can lead to action and remind teachers of the bigger picture – the why – behind their decision to teach. When educators make the most of the teachable moments before us, when educators dive in courageously each and every day, we demonstrate not only effective teaching but we take steps to elevate the profession and foster confidence in ourselves. As Radmacher (2022) observed, “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying ‘I will try again tomorrow’” (p. 19).

Courage and You

Moving from self-awareness to action can uncover professional growth--shall we say emergence? When educators choose to act with courage--when we choose to share a story, decision, or moment of courage with students and colleagues--we exercise and strengthen our muscles of courage. Being courageous can create a pattern that cultivates a habit in ourselves that informs our behavior and choices--and we feel energized! For me, focusing on the disposition of courage, reading scripture about courage, talking about courage, researching and reflecting on courage

became simple acts or practices that became restorative for me; they brought me renewal. As a result, my faith, my research, and my commitment to my work have become more greatly intertwined and the experience continues to revitalize me. Niequist (2022) urged her readers to “[p]ractice your vocation or calling, whatever you understand that to be, because the practice of it will keep you connected to your own deepest self and to the God who planted those gifts inside you” (p. 61). For me, the practice of researching, noticing, discussing, learning about, and writing about dispositions—like courage—connects me on a deeper level to our Lord and Savior, to my students, to the profession, and to my colleagues. When I intentionally make a choice to take time to consider dispositions that I hold dear, my heart and soul fill up. This practice is restorative! I am reminded of who I am as a scholar, an educator, a practitioner, and a colleague. Making the choice helps sustain and strengthen me.

So, what does this mean for you? I encourage you to consider how you can emerge stronger, and how you can reflect on the work, the research, and the practices that are restorative for you. Whether you need a week in a lounge chair on a beach or you need to sit down and start reading, writing, and creating, I urge you to cultivate space to slow down and reflect. Summon up some courage and consider where you might need to emerge, grow and find restoration in your work and scholarship. Stice (2021) suggested that we look for strengths and abilities in ourselves that we are unaware of; she noted that Covid forced us to notice people in a caring way. The only way for us to function is with loving care for each other. Stice (2021) noted, “We are suddenly caring about caring, not as a peripheral subject but as central to the mission” (p. 2). Colleagues, I urge you to invest, and in some cases, reinvest in the space and practice of restoration. As educators, we have so much to offer others, yet we need to intentionally create practices that bring restoration (Brown, 2022). As a community of scholars, let us seek spaces to grow and emerge. Let us be intentional with our work, our lives, and our scholarship. I suggest that we might even consider taking courageous and creative risks that might stimulate restoration.

Colleagues, each and every day, we choose to teach, equip, and pour into students that are motivated to teach. I recommend shifting our thinking from I have to do this to I “get” to do this as a way to create space for growth, understanding, and wisdom (Allen, 2019). Hogan (2022) suggested we create space to “get rooted in our ideals in order to do the inner work” (p. 72). Thus, I enthusiastically recommend that we 1) tap into the disposition of courage, 2) examine what grounds us, and 3) consider what restores us. As we choose this courageous work every day, let us stay rooted in Christ so as to emerge stronger and be reminded of why we decided to teach.

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