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Alchemy: The Search for Community on Campus

Abstract

Alchemy offers an opportunity for reflection and exploration for higher education faculty. The process of teaching and learning involves complexity for those in the academy. Why reflection and exploration? Join two professors as they share their experiences, knowledge and search for community on their campus using the metaphor of alchemy.

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Historical Context

Carl Jung has been noted as a leader in alchemy—a process which subtly embodied and symbolized psycho-spiritual transformation. Psychologically interpreted, alchemy is a "treasury of analogies that corporeity or embody the objective psyche and the process it undergoes in development (Edinger, 1985, p. 100). The alchemical project would almost always involve the differentiation of the prima material (or the base starting material) into one of the four elements earth, air, water, or fire (Mayes, p. 82-83).

Transformation this way come

Over the period of the past four years, two professors of color in a predominantly white institution have had conversations, meetings and work-related committees in which a transformation emerged that we plan to share in this proposed presentation. The base starting material are the two of us and the evolution that takes place over a period of time involving the four elements of earth, air, water and fire.

We learn from the alchemist that fire is the heart of the process. This operation is called *calcinatio (fire)*—the heating process. *Solutio* is the water, the dissolving stage of alchemy. While *coagulation* maybe referred to the earth—this stage is the hardening. The final stage is *sublimatio* is the air and we are aware from our science classes that a tangible gas tends to rise and has a light and a shadowy side.

The metaphor of alchemy provides a starting point for our discussion. The arrival of these two professors at a predominately white institution. They are both new faculty of color and are confronted with *calcinato (fire)*. The image of the novice trying to understand the culture, students, colleagues and politics while balancing the professorship duties and their personal lives. The heating process for both professional and private lives becomes extremely heated at various times of the year, month and days of their beginning tenure in the new position.

Solutio (water) is viewed as therapeutic and at the same time overwhelming. A quiet brook can be changed as our lives on the campus evolve around our students. We wish to be caring to our students, meet the needs of our department and the university and for those at a teaching university the overwhelming duty to "nurture". The water may at times drown the novice professor. Yet, you are unsure where the life boats are located on the ship.

The alchemists view of mortification as somewhat destructive and Carl Jung as a projection of "one's own shadow". The hardening that takes place is called *coagulation*. *It is during this time in our lives within our first year that this process begins to take place. This can be viewed as Parker Palmer notes in his works on the paradoxes of teaching as a paradox between the individual vs. the communal. This maybe a time of exploration of the inner landscape and confronting those dark hidden places within each of us during the novice year.*

For the presenters, this maybe a time to ask, "Why did I come here"? The first year was filled with change yet, prior to arriving at this institution I was successful. Prior to my arrival, I was not perceived as a number, color, language, or different. *Sublimatio* refers to the process of transforming something low into something high. The continued employment and movement through the tenure process at such an institution involves transfiguration.

Alchemy offers an opportunity for reflection and exploration. There are images that have assist both of us to find community on our campus. It has heightened our political sensitivity, spiritual acuity and continues to assist us to reflect and explore ourselves.

Presenters

Dr. Harriett Brown Arnold is presently serving as Associate Professor in the Gladys L. Benerd School of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

A veteran educator, she has served as an elementary school teacher, a middle school administrator, elementary school principal, international consultant, and director of personnel and staff development. Her higher education experience includes serving as a coordinator of the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP), Stanford University, Stanford, California. Director of Secondary Credential Programs which included collaboration with Arts and Sciences faculty and K-12 partnership schools in the Stockton area for the Benerd School of Education.

Her professional associations include Executive Board, California Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (CAS CD), Constituency Board of Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (AS CD), Issues Committee (AS CD), Association of California School Administrators (ASCA), California Council on the Education of Teachers (CCET), Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), Board of Directors, Project 30 Alliance and other educational organizations.

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Her teacher training projects have involved teacher training for the Ministry of Education in the

Bahamas, where she trained elementary teachers in the area of reading, Japan, England, Trinidad, Germany and Curacao in the area of social and emotional learning. She serves as the Co-Facilitator of the Network for Research on Affective Factors in Learning, a special interest group of educators interested in the role of emotions and learning. This Network is funded by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Her publications include professional journal articles and reviews, one historical book, *Antioch: A Place for Christians, Chronicles of an African American Church*, (1993) an outgrowth of a professional development grant, *Succeeding in the Secondary Classroom: Strategies for Teachers*, (2001) Corwin Press and the result of her research, *EQ + IQ = Best Leadership Practices for Caring and Successful Schools*, (2003) co-editor with Maurice Elias, and Cynthia Steiger Hussey (Corwin/Sage Publishing).

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