

Vulnerability in the classroom : Reflections on Palmer's The Courage to Teach

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*(This is the eighth in a series of articles featuring excerpts from past numbers of the Journal of Christian Education (JCE).*

***Vulnerability in the classroom:Reflections on Palmer's The Courage to Teach***, Stephen Nighswanderer-Rempel JCE Vol 45 No 1 May 2002

Teachers' understanding of themselves plays as important a part in classroom dynamics as the relationship between teachers and their students: teachers must be comfortable with themselves in order to effectively teach their students.

The fundamental role of relationship in the classroom reflects the importance of relationship in his faith....to maintain relationship with God and with our neighbours.

In opening himself up to other people, he (Jesus) allowed them to enter into a relationship with him, and as a result added meaning to their lives. This model of vulnerability may be applied by teachers. Teachers are usually advised to assert and maintain their authority in the classroom from the first day....breaking this hierarchy barrier is fundamental to teachers making themselves vulnerable.

The balance of authority and approachability requires a great deal of self-assurance and security. Understanding one's own identity and integrity may be enhanced by moments of vulnerability...(and) teachers may be better able to help their students similarly identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

To maintain authority while allowing the expression of alternative viewpoints requires vulnerability, which arises from an inner sense of security.

Vulnerability in understanding their identity and integrity and in being able to step aside from their assumed position of authority and allow the students to unlock new avenues of learning

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