**The Inner Game of Teaching – Robert & Jana Marzano Workshop** at Hawker Brownlow Teaching & Learning Conference May 21, 2011

Please note: these are the notes taken during the presentation – presenter’s comments & ideas in black, my thoughts (Anne Doody), connections etc in blue.

**Background to this workshop:**

Robert’s (Bob) wife Jana is a psycho-therapist. The concept of this workshop came out of numerous conversations between the two about ‘ how much do teachers know about themselves that might help them in their profession? This session was the first time that they have presented on this topic together.

Note:

In the previous session on Assessment, it was noticeable that there were lots of males in the audience. In this session – obvious that there were many more females.

The Marzanos think that it is very important that teachers be aware of themselves – their strengths & weaknesses, and their emotional framework as otherwise – there can be two different teachers doing the same things, but getting very different results, and they don’t seem to know why.

It was put to the group that at all times, we are operating in relation to goals – to wanting to achieve or prevent a particular thing at a particular time – they termed these, **‘Situated Goals’**. This is occurring whether or not we are aware of it.

Above the ‘Situated Goal’ that we are operating to at any given time, there are **‘Higher Level Goals’** –these may be more long term, of a greater magnitude etc. At the very top of our goals sit our **‘Basic Operating Principles’**, (which may mean our ‘values’ and are tied intrinsically to our Catholic ethos.) It was interesting to think that they used the term ‘Principles’ where we might often use ‘Values’.

At this point, Jana used an example / anecdote to clarify how this could affect a teacher:

A teacher had scheduled some sessions as they were concerned that they had lost motivation for the profession, and it was affecting performance. Through a series of discussions, it was found that at this time the teacher was also struggling with an ongoing physical illness, and had an ill child who required considerable care. So what had really happened was that the person’s circumstances had changed, and rather than just having had lost motivation for teaching, circumstances had dictated that for a while the overall goal had become survival of self and family, and just keeping the job. This needed to be taken into account, and if the teacher did want to reinvigorate her teaching despite the circumstances, what was required was for her to find a way to reconnect with her original goals for her teaching.

It was put to the group that most of the time we are working to ‘scripts’. By this, they meant that we have in our mind different set of behaviours as being appropriate in different situations. Participants were given a couple of minutes to discuss the ‘script’ that they have for behaviours when attending professional learning workshops – such as we found ourselves in at present.

This was then likened to in classrooms – do we notice what we do habitually? And how do we react when the ‘habits’ don’t give us the results we want?

Question put to group:

How do you react to certain student behaviours?

If there is a particular student or colleague you don’t get on with easily – does it often become negative really quickly? Or can it?

Bob talked about the concept of a **‘Presenting Event’** – an event that occurs unexpectedly. Especially when it is a negative event. We were invited to consider **‘triggers’** for our reactions to such events. It was suggested that we may be unintentionally, or without being aware that we are, connecting a current / present event with a negative (or positive) past event or experience, which then affects the current event.

**Being aware gives us some control.**

Some questions to help us in these situations:

* What is it? (that is actually occurring?)
* Is it a positive or a negative?
* How important is it? (in relation to other possible situations – this reminded me of the ‘Catastrophe scale’ in the YOU CAN DO IT programs)
* How do I feel about it?

Example given – a teacher in class who has planned conscientiously, and is delivering, and becomes aware of a group giggling down the back.

Q – Do you interpret it as a Big Deal, medium level, or low level deal? The response influences how we react.

**Our response under strong emotion, is different to our response when not under strong emotion.**

On a scale of:

GLAD SAD MAD AFRAID

We make decisions when in this area that we would not make if in a more positive area.

Q – How long does it take us to recover from being in a time of anger? Teachers (and students) sometimes need a ‘time out’ – so there is a need for schools to have in place strategies to assist a teacher who finds themselves in a situation where they ‘lose it’. There has to be a process, whereby they can get themselves out of there and they can be substituted while they settle down.

Bob gave an example of an argument that seemed really important and was viewed differently by different people involved. His suggestion was that if you can align it to something that is not that important, you can gain some perspective, and thus re-assess how to react. In this way, we each have the power to ‘select a desired outcome’. They refer to this as the ‘Metacognitive Control of the Inner Game’. There are two elements involved – Control of Interpretation & Control of Outcome Selection. Some questions for self- help include:

**Control of Interpretation:**

* How am I interpreting this event?
* Does this interpretation help serve an important goal or important principle in my life?
* If not what is a more useful interpretation?

**Control of Outcome Selection:**

* What will this look like if it turns out well?
* What actions can I take to accomplish a more positive outcome?

These are good strategies that reflect the types of questions / self talk that are recommended in programs like: You Can Do It/ Program Achieve; Habits of Mind; Restorative Practices; Mindmatters / Kidsmatter ; Teaching All Kinds of Minds, Social Cognition etc. They are the skills that sit behind the learning to be achieved by students in the non-disciplinary areas of Personal Learning / Working in Teams/ Thinking / Communication in the VELS, and the General capabilities of Critical and creative thinking; Self-management, teamwork and social competence & Ethical behaviour in the new Australian Curriculum. For this reason, it is very important that teachers themselves are thinking about these strategies, using a common language around them that is accessible to students. We can’t explicitly teach what we are not consciously aware of.

Examples were given to get us to think about times when all of us can find ourselves in such situations:

* Bob himself admitted to a ‘quick temper’ and when put on the spot when coming through customs to enter the country, because he had mistakenly used pencil rather than pen to complete the arrival forms, he had to himself quickly assess the situation and make sure that he chose a ‘desirable outcome’ and act accordingly. (Even though this was a bit of a strain after a long flight)
* Another example given was of an experienced teacher having problems with a team of less experienced teachers, and having to make choices as to how to react, and consider how different possible responses would play out. The teacher had interpreted that they were ‘being used’ – but when the question was put “What might you learn from this, from their behavior?’ it led to different questions, and ultimately different behavior.

Do we know enough about our students / colleagues backgrounds / experiences to reliably make judgments about their behavior?

**99% of the time, misbehavior is nothing to do with the teacher.**

Quote from Jane Goodall:

‘ human beings cannot go through a day without positively or negatively affecting someone else’. What does this mean for teachers?

**Everything that teachers do – or don’t do- is interpreted by students as whether you like them or not?**

What you think is not important – what you do is. It is all that students can respond to.

Bob’s saying – ‘Fake it until you make it’. **Even if you don’t feel it – you must ACT as if you are on the students’ side all the time.**

Q – What about students who develop a ‘reputation’?

* Believe it or not, some schools successfully DO NOT allow negative talk about students. (Wow, what would it be like to work in one of those schools?)
* How do we develop a culture where ‘we don’t do that here’? ie No-one makes negative comments about students at our school.

Q’s posed –

* If you decide HOW you can an event to turn out – can you get it there?
* How do you play out an event to get a positive result?

Bob recommends the work of Carolyn Dweck (**Growth Mindset**), her work suggests that at a very young age, we develop ONE of TWO theories:

FIXED – I am what I am; OR

GROWTH – if you try hard, you can!

They emphasized the **importance of the type of language that teachers find them selves using**; Eg. NOT – well done, look how smart you are…. BUT instead – wow, you worked really hard on that; were really organized; persisted and you got there etc.

Again, all of the programs that deal with emotional intelligence, social cognition and optimism came to mind. A lot of what was being said was not really new – what a pity that we frequently forget to focus on this stuff.

Q – Will you ever change your basic personality type? Probably not, but you may change the way that you are likely to react.

**Some final hints:**

* Awareness goes a long way
* Just because you had a problem in the past, doesn’t mean that it has to stay that way
* Workshops, reading etc can help
* Practice
* If necessary – therapy? (What would you recommend for someone else? A student?)
* Have to find a way to drill down to where the problem is coming from – or we can’t move on
* Be aware of what types of students/ colleagues / events trigger us

IT IS A VERY POWERFUL THING TO GET TEACHERS TO REVISIT WHY THEY BECAME A TEACHER.

**Positive futures** – the more you can picture a positive future, the more you can realize it.

We have to keep reminding ourselves why we are in this occupation.

Human Satisfaction Research (HAPPINESS) – at this point Jana popped in a comment to remind us that ‘ Addiction is when people do the same thing again and again, expecting better and better results.

The research shows – **3 things that make people happy:**

* **Do something really difficult and become good at it**
* **Do something that affects people in a positive way**
* **Have some autonomy over it, or the opportunity to be creative within it.**

Bob closed this session by pointing out that the **teaching profession has all of these elements!**

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