

Education, Psychoanalysis, and Social Transformation

Series Editors:

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The purpose of this series is to develop and disseminate psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic knowledge—including knowledge derived from cognitive science, neuroscience, new emotion studies, and other emerging fields—that can help educators in their pursuit of three core functions of education:

1. facilitating student learning,
2. fostering students' personal development, and
3. promoting prosocial attitudes, habits, and behaviors in students (i.e., those opposed to poverty, inequality, ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, violence, substance abuse, etc.).

Psychoanalytic knowledge can help educators realize these aims of education by providing crucial understanding of:

1. the emotional and cognitive capabilities that are necessary for students to be able to learn, to develop, and to engage in prosocial behavior,
2. the motivations that drive such learning, development, and behaviors,
3. the motivations that produce antisocial behaviors as well as resistance to learning and development, and
4. the principles, techniques, and practices of intervention that promote the development of optimal emotional and cognitive capabilities.

Such understanding can enable educators to develop pedagogical strategies, techniques, and practices to help students overcome psychological impediments to learning and development as well as to the adequate and fair assessment of other individuals and groups. By offering an understanding of the motivations and the emotional and cognitive deficiencies that cause some of our most severe social problems—including poverty, inequality, crime, violence, substance abuse, and prejudice—together with knowledge of the types of interventions through which these psychological impediments can be corrected, books in this series will contribute to the reduction and prevention of such problems, a task that education is increasingly being called upon to assume.

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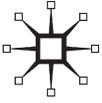
Resistance to Learning: Overcoming the Desire Not to Know in Classroom Teaching

By Marshall Wise Alcorn Jr.

RESISTANCE TO LEARNING
OVERCOMING THE DESIRE NOT TO KNOW
IN CLASSROOM TEACHING

MARSHALL WISE ALCORN JR.

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RESISTANCE TO LEARNING

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To the next generation: Jewell and Jasmine Alcorn,
Austin and Tyler Alcorn, Skye and Sean Alcorn

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PREFACE: ON GAPS, PAUSES, AND SILENCES IN COMING TO KNOW

“There are poetic reversals like this in life, is my point. There are pauses between knowing and understanding. Pauses in which we wait for delayed news about ourselves to spark along the sagging wires.”

—Amity Gaige, *Schroder*

Amity Gaige’s novel features a character, Schroder, who is interested in the various words that demarcate gaps between ongoing links of thought. Periods, for example, mark the end of a sentence where a reader digests what has been said and prepares for a new sentence. In particular instances of speech, one can notice a longer gap between sentences. Here, in this longer gap, we may describe our recognition of a pause. Pauses reveal a certain slowness in the digestive process of thought. Pauses are not gaps marked by periods but by temporal delays in the mind’s assimilation of thought. Pauses, though they are empty spaces, may in fact be meaningful in and of themselves. Pauses introduce the idea that something additional is going on between two linked sentences. Something more is present to a thinking mind than the verbal representation of the sentences might suggest. In addition to pauses, there are gaps still longer and more potent. A long pause becomes at some point registered as a “silence.” When we notice silence, it often speaks volumes. Silence can be “telling,” but it can also be invisible.

This book is an attempt to make visible what is often invisible in those “pauses in which we wait for delayed news about ourselves to spark along the sagging wires” (Gaige, 125). Between “knowing and understanding” are complex and usually invisible processes of mind that allow “knowing” to become marked as “understanding.” This book is about something I have termed “the emotional assimilation of thought,” and its opposite “the desire not to know.” I am not

happy with the terms I have chosen, but I am seeking a language to slow down and observe what may not be seen.

Some sentences and their busy ideas connect quickly and easily. It can be a joy to read lively prose, with its rich implication of more enjoyment to come. Some words, however, make us pause. They require “emotional work.” Some sentences stop us in our tracks. The emotional work of these thoughts may seem unbearable. This book is an attempt to honor and give respect to these last two categories.

The pause between knowing and understanding may be small, almost imperceptible in recognition. And yet often everything depends on this link—a link that may well fail rather than succeed. Michelle Masse has recently argued that teachers must learn to work “within the suspended liminal time of knowing/not knowing” (Masse, 2011) This book offers approximately 200 pages of commentary that seeks to understand and more carefully attend to this suspended liminal time, a time of pauses, silences, and reverie.

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Washington, DC
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