

## Brandon P. Thompson, M.A. Philosophy of Education

My personal philosophy of education is unconditionally grounded in the belief that each student, and indeed, each human being, possesses a certain quality of Knowing which is *immanent*, omnipresent, and readily accessible at any moment. However, over the course of our lifepaths and throughout our dealings with habitual mind and cultural conditioning, our awareness of this Truth becomes obstructed. This is a natural condition of human living. Within this model of education, then, the educational process might be understood to be less about the transmission of knowledge – knowledge which, presumably, the “teacher” possesses and the “student” does not – and more about the organic, gentle, tender unfolding, unpacking, or *unobstructing* of the student’s own awareness, bit by bit, throughout the duration of a student’s tutelage. To say this in another way, the educational process – while honoring and recognizing that a measure of skillful guidance, facilitation, and instruction is certainly conducted by the individual who has found him or herself in the role of the “teacher” – is viewed as more of a *process of awakening to what is already there*. The educational/transformational process is a dance between teacher and student; it is a co-created, co-emergent *propagation*, a continual and partnered practice of “wiping away the dust” of conditioned mind and habitual pattern which obstructs the radiant Knowing which dwells immanently within each Being. But by what means, *utilizing what tools*, can this gentle process of “wiping way the dust” be facilitated?

As a Buddhist practitioner and also as an Associate Core Faculty Member at Sofia University, I find myself continually returning to the Buddhist idea of *prajna*, or discriminating awareness, as key to my relationships with students. The idea of *prajna* or *prajnic* practice feels so broad to me that it might in fact be understood to encompass the Whole of my experience as a teacher. *Prajna* contains a sense of responsibility to each student: a deep, transpersonal commitment to contributing in some way to their own awakening, but without the need to always be “overly kind” or to “give them exactly what they want or are expecting.” In its purest form, *prajna* is the *antithesis of enabling*. It is an expression of balance, of walking the razor’s edge between what a student wishes to hear, and what the student *needs* to hear to wake up. The *prajnic* practitioner foremost practices to attain his or her own awakening, and from that place, concerns him or herself with the awakening of others. (Implied in this idea is that the teacher recognizes that awakening itself is Path.) The idea of *prajna* is often symbolized by a flaming sword that intends to cut through ignorance, attachment, and self-deception. Each of these is among the many mechanisms used by ego to keep us asleep. From my vantage as a Buddhist who is also a teacher, *prajna* is a profound and powerful teaching tool, but also challenges me to remain “on the dot” with my own process as I interact with and guide students. And so, the dance continues.

As a teacher, I feel an abiding appreciation for the courage, craft, and care that goes in to each student’s transpersonal and transformative educational process. Undoubtedly and so clearly, the journey is a unique and very personal one for each student as we endeavor together to navigate the waters of Awakening, to find meaning within our experiences, and to hone our aspirations to *serve*: to be of benefit to others and to the World. I have found that the tools of good humor, courageous honesty, true compassion, gentle mindfulness, and *maitri* (unconditional friendliness with both oneself and others) are among the most powerfully-transformative instruments utilized by both teacher and student along the Way. I meet the Whole of the transformational/educational journey with an open heart filled with loving admiration, receptivity, presence, and with my own aspirations to serve, as well.

I would finally offer a quote by Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche which I feel beautifully expresses my notions of both personal transformation and also of the transpersonal educational process, which I have detailed in my philosophy above. He says:

“If you want to solve the world’s problems, you must put your own household, your own individual life, in order first. This is somewhat of a paradox. People have a genuine desire to go beyond their individual, cramped lives to benefit the world.

But if you do not start at home, then you have no hope of helping the world. So the first step in learning how to rule is learning to rule your household, your immediate world. There is no doubt that, if you do so, then the next step will come naturally. If you fail to do so, then your contribution to this world will be further chaos.”

Who is the student and who is the teacher? Indeed, we each of us are *both* on this journey. May all Beings grow to understand how to lessen and eventually cease contributing to chaos, and instead offer healing, compassion, and joy to themselves and to the World. And may I, as a humble facilitator of the educational/transformational process, be ever vigilant of my own household, that I may always offer my fullest Self in service to All.