

Welcome to this first part of the Presentation on Transformation and Reflection in Augustine of Hippo.

Before you is an infographic of transformation and reflection in Augustine. The outer trapezoid identifies 3 core characteristics of Augustine that are transformed by his conversion, by his learning. His conversion is more than spiritual. It is a transformation of his whole person. Within the trapezoid is a reflection circle involved in his transformation. We will come back to that circle in a while.

We might say that Augustine exemplifies learner-centered transformation through the 3 core characteristics of Augustine in his pre- and post-conversion life that are transformed through learning. The characteristics are:

A Passionate Curiosity

An Ear for Eloquence

A Genius for Friendship

Augustine's "Passionate Curiosity" was transformed (redeemed) by redirecting his restless love, that is, his will. As he tells, "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." (Confessions, I, 1,1.) He tamed his curiosity by directing his will, his love of learning, by remembering that he always needed to learn more. As he notes, "The more they think they are learned, the more unteachable they have become. They have become ashamed to learn, because that would mean admitting ignorance." ( Sermon 198, 13.)

Key to Augustine's transformation is his discovery of the importance of humility. His core characteristic of "An Ear for Eloquence" was transformed (redeemed) into searching for truth with humility. For Augustine, "The first step in the search for truth is humility. The second, humility. The third, humility. And the last one, humility. Naturally, that doesn't mean that humility is the only virtue necessary for the discovery and enjoyment of truth. But if the other virtues aren't preceded, accompanied and followed by humility, pride will find an opening and infiltrate them and, sooner or later, finish up destroying good intentions. All other vices are recognized when we are doing wrong; but pride is to be feared even when we do right." (Letter 118, 3, 22). Rather than someone with a special "ear for eloquence," he told his followers, "My attitude, as I teach you, is to remember and keep in mind my duties as a servant. As a result, I speak not as a master but as a minister, not to pupils but to fellow pupils, not to servants but to fellow servants." (Sermon 242, 1.) This equality with his followers led him to understand that, "As long as I am a good teacher, I will continue being a student." (Sermon 244, 2).

Augustine is renowned for his friendships. This leads easily to seeing his "Genius for Friendship" as a 3rd core characteristic. He remarked that "Without a friend, nothing in the world seems friendly." (Letter 130.2.4). In his learning transformation he comes to understand friendship blossoming into solidarity in community as he recalls his experience of learning with friends in his youth in these words, "My soul found all manner of joy when I was in their company — to talk and to laugh and to be kind to each other — to read engaging books together, to go from the lightest joking to talk of the deepest things and back again — to differ without discord, as I might differ with myself, and when on the rarest occasion disagreement arose, to find it highlights the sweetness of our normal agreement — to teach or to learn from each other — to be impatient for those absent and welcome them with joy when they return — these and similar things, emanating from our hearts as we gave and received affection, shown in

our faces, our voices, our eyes, and a thousand other gratifying ways, ignited a flame which fused our very souls together and made the many of us one.” (Confessions, IV, 8, 13)

In the transformation of his friendships, Community becomes the core of the Core Values of his pedagogy. It transforms his approach to leadership by seeing community with his people as fundamental to good teaching and leading. He notes, “My place as your head frightens me, but what I share with you comforts me. I am a bishop set over you, but together with you I am a Christian. The first is the title of the office I have assumed, the second is a grace; the first is a danger, the second is salvation. The office seems like a storm tossing us about in a raging sea. But when we remember who redeemed us by His blood, it seems we enter the safety of a harbor in the stillness of that thought. Even though this office is personally hard work, the common benefit gives me rest.” (Sermon 340, 1) Most important in these words is the distinction Augustine makes between “with” and “for.” This distinction emphasizes the importance of “with. Thus, we can say that the most distinctive characteristic of Augustinian learning is being a Learner WITH Others. In this light, even truth is something we share “with” others, or as Augustine observes, “If the truth is the object of the aspirations of all human beings, it cannot be the exclusive personal property of any person. The truth cannot be exclusively mine or yours precisely because it has to be both yours and mine.” (Commentary on the Psalms, 103, 2, 11).

In community Augustine demonstrated “with”-based learner-centered teaching dispositions:

He taught in DIALOGUE with others, because “There is no better way to truth.” (Soliloquies, II, 7, 14)

Augustine’s RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS AUDIENCE/HIS DIALOGUE PARTNERS can be seen in the use of different styles of Latin to tailor his presentations to the different learning preparation of his listeners,

Augustine demonstrated OPEN-MINDEDNESS/ACTIVE LISTENING, when he gave his mother, Monica, who had no philosophical training, a teaching role in his philosophical dialogues, because of her possession of wisdom.

He emphasized EMPOWERMENT/ENCOURAGEMENT in advising Deogratius on how to preach/teach. (De Catechizandis Rudibus)

Even though he was cautious about rhetorical manipulation, Augustine described the importance of PERSUASION in teaching and learning. (De Doctrina Christiana)

All of this culminates for Augustine in REFLECTIVE THINKING. As he notes, “It is of no use ‘to know’ the truth unless you also embrace it with your life. It is necessary to build on a sure foundation of ‘hearing’ and ‘doing.’ Those who hear, and do not do, build on sand. Those who neither hear nor do, build nothing. Those who hear and do, build on stone. (Commentary on the Psalms, 58, 17).

In his transformed learning and teaching, who was Augustine listening to? For him it was the Inner Teacher/Teacher Within who he listened to in the solitude of his reflective thinking.

As Augustine describes it, “Consider this great puzzle. The sounds of my words strike the ears but the Teacher is within. Do not think that any human teaches another. The sound of our voice can admonish, but the one Who teaches is on the inside. The sound we make is useless.” (Tractate on I John III, 12) When Augustine asks, “What foolish oddity could ever lead

someone to send a child to school so that he can learn what the teacher thinks?" (The Teacher, 45), he is telling us that the external is only important when we process it through reflection. He cautions that, "the inspirational light of the teacher is confused with the activated light of the student." (The Teacher. 14, 46)

In the next presentation on Transformation and Reflection in Augustine we will explore how Augustine's reflective thinking lead him to the light of learning.