

## The Burden of Contentment

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I know the burden of contentment: the lack of energy to do something dramatic or difficult, the quiet glow of joy and calm in the face of choices of action, the sweet realization that the safety of the world does not depend on my personal effort. For a 1931 baby, born in the wake of the Great Depression, the very concept of leisure or holiday is foreign. I have never been good at vacation! Although a self-professed beach-bum, I usually spend beach days frolicking in the waves or walking the shore. I will sit still anywhere only as long as there is a good book in my hands.

Dan Berrigan was preaching a sound theology when he urged: “Don’t just do something, stand there!” My deep attraction to Buddhism comes from the fact that it presents the sharpest opposite to my nature. Opposites do attract!

I recall the shock I felt when I realized that dialogue education, as I was teaching it, demanded a calm, quiet waiting on the part of a skilled educator. Once adult learners were engaged with specific and demanding learning tasks, my job was to *be there*. “Don’t just do something, stand there.” Always a resource, always waiting for the invitation to add value, never responsible for the learning, always responsible to the learners. A fine balance. I was asked to take a contented role: glad for the design that was working well, glad for the learners who were working hard.

At first, I struggled against this role of contentment – it was so strange! Only when I saw the results of my “work” was I convinced that contentment is fruitful. Learners stood tall, proud of the products they had created that proved their grasp of elusive and complex concepts, skills and behaviors. I celebrated their learning and the design that made it happen. My part in the session was hard to grasp, never mind celebrate! Paulo Freire said once: “Only the student can name the ‘death’ of the professor.” In the case of dialogue education as we do it, the design (prepared by the educator, informed by the learners) demands that death and celebrates it as necessary to the learning.

I face a continual struggle in my own life over this role of contentment... and need to remind myself that this role is indeed fruitful – in miracles and manners that bring joy and meaning. The burden of contentment is the burden of being human and watching and waiting for the seeds you have sown to grow. “God gives the increase!”