

Personal Reflection – April 30, 2016

In memory of Dan Berrigan

Learning: It's Biology, Baby

In Matthew's gospel (chapter 13) the disciples ask Jesus why he always uses parables in his teaching. I know! Today we can see how the brain works and we are aware that unless the brain is challenged, is deciding, is imagining...no synapses take place, no new dendrites grow.

Jesus knew this without benefit of fMRI scanning. He made the brain!

So, each listener on the sandy shore of the lake, heard the story of *seeds* (they all had a garden of some kind) and had to decide what kind of seed they would be. They had to make a decision! They had to *learn*.

Free will? Sure, but basically: *it's all biology, baby*. We are partners with God in this ongoing creation by virtue of the structure of the brain: we've got to *do* in order to learn. If I had another book in me, I would call it: *Learning is Doing: Inviting Learners to Action*. I would start with the basic biology of the brain: and call Chapter One: *How to Build a Healthy Dendrite*.

That's why we have *learning tasks* – open questions inviting learners to action, to decisions, to questions of their own as they struggle with new content. That's why we show the uses of *respect, safety, engagement*, and *generative themes: relevance, immediacy* and *accountability*. Our invitation to learn can be destroyed by our *telling*. Let's not do that: let's not tell the content, tell the answer to the question, tell men and women what to do, what to decide, what's right and what's wrong.

Invite folks to tell the stories of their lives, and stand by quietly as the learning takes place, as the new dendrites grow. What a great job we have!

by Jane Vella