For all its promise, the “Information Age” has done precious little for real education. Instead of cyber-scholars, we seem to get wiki-wizards and text-masters, and that’s not the worst of it. For Thomas Rosebrough and Ralph Leverett, the Information Age has created serious problems for education—not the least of which is a kind of “programmed ‘sameness’” (4), the methodological consequence of defining education nearly exclusively in terms of content. Lost in this lock-step approach is the student as a person, and among many critical issues in education today, none is more critical than that.

While acknowledging that the “achievement [content] paradigm certainly has merit and validity” (7), Rosebrough and Leverett contend that “What really matters in education is not what but who” (8), i.e., not bodies of information for regurgitation on standardized tests, but transformed lives. “The values of life, of citizenship, and of being a moral person,” they argue, “are social goals that must be placed beside the 3 R’s and in lieu of the 4 T’s (teaching to the test).”

The authors develop their thesis in two phases. Part 1 addresses philosophical questions, while in Part 2 the authors address methodology. Each Part consists of four chapters—a chapter for each of four “principles.” Chapter 1 introduces what Rosebrough and Leverett call the “Transformational Pedagogy Model.” “Transformational Pedagogy” is “an act of teaching designed to change the learner academically, socially, and spiritually” (16). The Transformational Pedagogy Model therefore calls for three distinct sets of goals, the most novel (or most threatening!) of which for contemporary educators is the “Spiritual” goal. But “people are spiritual beings in their essence,” a fact that educators ignore to the detriment of their students. The Transformational Pedagogy Model also calls for teachers who are simultaneously “scholars” (they know their subject), “practitioners” (they know how their students learn), and “relaters” (they relate sensitively and lovingly to their students as persons). Rosebrough and Leverett acknowledge that transformational teaching can be hard work. It “requires significantly more planning and a level of complexity that compels students to ask not just “What have I learned?” but also “Who am I becoming?” (52).

Methodologically, the authors stress that teaching has not occurred until learning takes place (exposing several commonly-accepted myths of teaching along the way). A recurring theme in this section, and throughout the book, is that informational teaching is doomed to obsolescence because “We simply cannot keep up with the flow of information” (111). The authors advocate instead “Guided Inquiry Teaching”— “the scientific method employed in pedagogy” (124)—as a way to engage and motivate students in and for lifelong learning.

The authors bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to this project. Both serve at Union University—Rosebrough as Professor of Education and Executive Dean of the College of Education and Human Studies; Leverett as Professor of Special Education and Director of the Masters of Education program—and both have taught at almost every level. That said, the book seems “geared” to primary and secondary teaching rather than higher education. But the principles here are largely transferable, so the book has much to offer anyone who teaches, no matter who or where.

The book is not without flaws. The writing seems a little disjointed on occasion, and overly repetitive, as the authors return time and time again to their distinction between “Informational” and “Transformational” teaching. (On the plus side, no one can miss the point of the book!)
In the end, however, these are minor criticisms, for in truth Rosebrough and Leverett have written a manifesto for education in modern times. The work is accessible, even for beginning teachers and those unfamiliar with the professional jargon. The authors are careful to define their terms, and they include a helpful glossary (though perhaps unhelpfully divided into categories). The book is rich with real-life teaching stories (the Oxford, Mississippi story alone is worth the price of the book (59-63) and in-text summaries help clarify some of the technical material. Above all, Transformational Teaching is itself transformational. It is a serious critique of pedagogy, a serious call to do better, and a guide for a new generation of teachers. The elephant-in-the-room question, of course, is how (or whether) the contemporary educational paradigm can shift from “informational” to “transformational.” Rosebrough and Leverett do not say—perhaps that will be another volume. But for those who are called to teach—especially the forty percent or more who are disheartened (5, 43) — Transformational Teaching can put wind back in the sails.

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