

Touching eternity: The enduring outcomes of teaching

by Tom Barone

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Reviewed by
Matthew Thibeault

Touching Eternity is a welcome volume for researchers and teachers with a generous conception of teaching and learning. Barone, a professor at Arizona

State University and a founder/editor of the free, online International Journal of Education and the Arts, has written a book that explores the thorny question, "What are the enduring outcomes of teaching?"

Barone focuses on Donald Forrester, a visual arts teacher in the Appalachian highlands of North Carolina. Twenty years ago, when Forrester was awarded an Outstanding Teacher prize by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Barone was commissioned to write an essay about Forrester's teaching. The essay is reprinted as Part I of *Touching Eternity*.

The first section details a program reflective of the region's craft heritage and offers a vocational orientation (producing crafts is a common regional job). Although vocational, Barone quickly uncovers the truth: It is also a rich art program. Whether weaving, painting, quilting, or working with torn paper collages, students are creating genuine works of art.

Picking up the story 12 years later, Barone tracks down both teacher and students described in Part I to explore the resonance of the art program in their lives today.

Not surprisingly, the students often remember lessons that were particularly meaningful. One chiropractor recalls a lesson where a pin representing the earth was placed in the ground, surrounded by particles of flour fallen from a handful thrown into the air.

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Forrester had told the students:

"Think of these two fields and the area within them as the universe. Each particle of flour is a star in our galaxy, and there are untold numbers of galaxies besides our own. The head of the pin is the earth. And where are we in Bryson City?"

As the student recalls, Forrester would never tell exactly what he meant when we did things like this. But it challenged them to contemplate a whole world outside of their tiny little town.

Part III explores the impact that the students had on the life of their teacher, a vastly under-researched area. This segment focuses on Forrester becoming who he is, and how he has changed as a result of aspiring to instill in his students a love of nature and urging them to create works of art in the local traditions.

The book concludes with two sections discussing the tension between aesthetics and utility, and among other issues, an exploration of the transfer of learning.

For those interested in conducting research, Barone provides a good introduction to the basics of his approach. Primarily aimed at

researchers and the scholarly community, teachers can find both hope for their own work and a reminder of the depth of their contributions to their students' lives. It embraces a view of teaching as a human and artistic endeavor with resonances that go on for decades and that touch students in ways we often will never know.

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