Reflection: I won’t learn from you

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In *I won’t learn from you* not learning is a conscious choice, a way to maintain self respect and self definition. Not-learning and unlearning are strategic techniques used in protest, in opposition to dominant forms of oppression, not due to lack of intelligence. It is important to find out what the motivation is behind unmotivated students. Is it the teacher’s lack of understanding who they are? Is it personal bias, acknowledged or unacknowledged by those in power? We have to make sure not to simply look at a student through the lens of our own life environment and economic status. Instead we must work to see through their eyes. Racism can impact the content of what we teach but we must think critically to discern it. We must respect the students’ differences in culture, gender, and class. Sometimes we as teachers may have to choose between conforming to the system or meeting the needs of the students.

There are changes in our teacher preparation programs that I believe would be beneficial. All teachers need to be well rounded in the history of race relations in the United States. We also need programs in place to diversify the future teaching force. Educators from diverse backgrounds are valuable role models and may bring a variety of valuable perspectives to the classrooms. Fortunately, “culturally relevant” teachers, need not come from the same ethnic minority group as the students they teach. Educating the future teacher is key to understanding the challenges that face our students.

Class Presentation: Student/Teacher dialogue

Student: Why do you call me a failure for not learning? I am more than you see.  

(Poem: Perception)

You think you know me.  
Arrogant, angry, at-risk,  
Limited….  

I am more than you see, 
Why do you always choose to judge me?  
How I look.  
My nappy hair, baggy clothes,
And tattoos.
Girl me or boy me,
I am not the news
To be discussed by all….
Teachers, school and family.
Because I don’t fit
What you like to see
Failure is what you expect,
Because I won’t learn,
How to assimilate, change, and earn
Your respect.

Change from who I am and not be true.
Why should I learn …..especially from you?

I am more than you see,
Creative and open
To possibilities,

Accept me for who I am.

---Olivia Forbes

**Teacher: A teacher’s pledge**

This year I stop being a teacher and instead will become a co-learner with you.

This year I stop making you jump through the hoops of content consumption, rote learning, and memorization of facts and instead will begin constructing learning environments that are conducive to fostering the development of skills you will use as a life long learner.

This year, the walls of my classroom will become thin and we will connect with others around the world.

This year, in our classroom, school will become real-life.

This year my classroom will cease being a classroom and instead became a workshop of thinking, reading and writing.

This year, I will let go of the reins, and place your education and learning squarely where it belongs: in your hands.

This year I will create my own personal learning environment, and begin teaching you how to do the
same.

This year we will change the world — at least a little bit.

…. Shelley Wright (modified by O. Forbes)