

# ENCOUNTER

EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4      DECEMBER 1998

## Executive Editor

Jeffrey Kane

## Associate Editor

Dale Snauwaert

## Book Review Editor

Judith Kaufman

## Editorial Board

Sue Books  
William Crain  
Riane Eisler  
David Elkind  
Diana M. Feige  
Maxine Greene  
Kathleen Kesson  
Rob Koegel  
Jonathan Kozol  
Jack Miller  
Ron Miller  
Nel Noddings  
Jack Petrash  
Madhu Suri Prakash  
David Purpel  
Molly Quinn  
Douglas Sloan  
Huston Smith  
David Sobel  
Shirley Steinberg  
Jesse A. Stoff  
Paul Theobald  
Dilafruz R. Williams  
Atsuhiko Yoshida  
  
**Graphic Design**  
Anything Graphic  
  
**Managing Editor**  
Charles S. Jakiela

©1998 by  
Holistic Education Press

## Table of Contents

Editorial. Toward a Socially Engaged Holistic Education. Jeffrey Kane and Dale Snauwaert . . . . .	2
Rallying "The Whole Village." James P. Comer . . . . .	4
Rooting Children in Place. Gregory A. Smith . . . . .	13
"Pedagogy of Place" in a Southern Black Rural School. Lauren A. Fregeau and Robert D. Leier . . . . .	25
Integrating Humanistic and Social Justice Education: A Sequenced Approach for Teaching About Diversity. Ellen Davidson and Nancy Schriedewind . . . . .	31
"My Dream Catcher is Tired:" The Importance of Visualization as a Meditative Practice for Young Children. Marni Binder. . . . .	40
Book Reviews: <i>Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures</i> by Esteva and Prakash (Reviewed by Robyn Opels and Bernhart Voetterl) . . . . .	46
<i>Looking Back and Thinking Forward: Reexaminations of Teaching and Schooling</i> by Lillian Weber (Reviewed by Diane Mullins) . . . . .	48
<i>Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development</i> by Lee, Menkart, and Okazawa-Rey, eds. (Reviewed by Janet R. Price) . . . . .	51
Book Supplement. Questions Worth Arguing About. From Ed Clark's <i>Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A Student-Centered Approach.</i> . . . .	54

Cover photo © Joel Brown, Tucson, Arizona

ENCOUNTER is an independent journal that views education from a holistic perspective and focuses on its role in helping a student develop a sense of personal meaning and social justice. Manuscripts (an original and three copies) should be submitted to the Editor, Jeffrey Kane, School of Education, LIU, C.W. Post Campus, 720 Northern Blvd., Brookville, NY 11548, typed double spaced throughout with ample margins. Since a double blind review process is used, no indications of the author's identity should be included within the text after the title page. All manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the author-date format as described in chapter 16 of the 14th edition (1993) of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

ENCOUNTER (ISSN 1094-3838) is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by Holistic Education Press, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328. 1-800-639-4122. E-mail: <encounter@great-ideas.org> Website: <<http://www.great-ideas.org>> Annual subscription rates are \$35 for individuals and \$75 for libraries and other multi-user environments. (Foreign subscribers, please add \$9 to above rates.) Back issues are available at \$10 per copy. Periodicals postage is paid at Brandon, VT, and at additional offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ENCOUNTER, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328.

## Editorial

# Toward a Socially Engaged Holistic Education

Jeffrey Kane and Dale Snauwaert

**Holistic education must not be concerned *only* with the internal processes of a child's development; it must also concern itself with the critical evaluation of society's influence in shaping that development.**

Scholars and practitioners of holistic education both propose and practice an approach to education that aims at the complete and full development of the child. From this perspective, the child is a multidimensional being, with intellectual, emotional, social, physical, aesthetic, and spiritual facets. But, at the core of the child's multi-dimensionality is *spirit* — the authentic essence of the child that exists prior to, but is influenced by, the socially constructive influences of the environment into which he or she is born. While addressing the intellectual, social, emotional, and aesthetic development of the child, holistic conceptions of education place particular emphasis on the transpersonal spirit of the child and attempt to provide an educational experience conducive to the unfoldment and embodiment of the child's soul. This is a "coming home" to one's "true nature."

This "coming home" is not a withdrawal from social action and responsibility. Rather, it is a process of becoming who we are *through* responding to what is asked of us with what is highest in us. Our development as persons is not, in our view, a solitary exercise. Ultimately, none of us is, or should be, a means, but neither are we ends unto ourselves.

In America we have a tradition of viewing the self as something distinct and completely autonomous. The rugged individualistic images of earlier times still hold sway culturally. The open ranges have been replaced by fenceless intellectual territories where there are no absolutes or standards of measure. In one way or another, we often see our "true selves" as unencumbered by notions of right or wrong, except as we choose to define them.

Holism embraces a spiritual view of human existence — a sense that there is a sanctity and dignity to

each of us and the natural world that is inviolable irrespective of particular social interests or objectives. This conviction lies at the heart of much of the resistance to the national standards and testing movements and the embrace of alternative forms of education. Simply put, the mainstream educational initiatives have virtually nothing to do with the needs and interests of growing human beings. Their aim is the cultivation of intellectual capital.

Our conception of the *true nature* of the human Self is that it is relational and enmeshed in Being. Each of us — all of us — exists in a dynamic, fluid set of relations that shape the very foundations of our existence. Just as we see human evolution within the context of varied and constantly changing environments, we hold the same to be true in the larger domain of Being, some of which is physical and some of which is not. While the nature and extent of the relations within which we exist are far beyond the scope of this editorial, our intention here is to suggest that we need to adjust the way we think about an education that is responsive to who we really are as human beings. A purely transcendent view of human nature that separates the spiritual from the social is a product less of a perceptive imagination than of an abstract intellect taking the concept of the divine as its object.

Does a holistic perspective require that social educational issues yield to the personal? Quite simply, "No." On the contrary, social issues are important precisely because they are perceived in the context of our core humanity rather than any particular social allegiance or identification.

We are born into families, cultures, societies, economies, polities. A basis purpose of education, common in fact to all cultures is the assimilation of the next generation into the ways and beliefs of society. Human society must not only reproduce itself biologically; it must also reproduce itself culturally through formal and informal socialization processes, including schooling. The sociocultural environment, including the intentional socialization implicit in formal education, exerts a profound influence on the child's psyche, constructing the child's identity. This influence is so powerful that John Dewey, for example, argues that the moral legitimacy of our social institutions, including schools, should be evaluated

in terms of their influence on our all-around growth as human beings.

From a holistic perspective, the legitimacy of any social environment hinges on whether it fosters personal development that is in alignment with the child's authentic Self, or whether it impedes the realization of his essence. A theory and practice of holistic education must not be concerned *only* with the internal processes of the child's development but must be equally concerned with the critical evaluation of society's influence in shaping that development. Furthermore, it must be concerned with fundamental social considerations from poverty to environmental sustainability.

In other words, holistic education must be "socially engaged." Holistic educators must be concerned with the debilitating effect of social injustice in all of its various dimensions: political, economic, ecological, cultural, social. As Martin Buber deeply understood, dialogical encounter — and a pedagogy so based — is both intrapersonal and social.

**ENCOUNTER**, as a forum for the exploration of holistic, spiritual, transformative, progressive concept of education, asserts the importance of critical social engagement as a central dimension of a holistic education. The task we have chosen is difficult. It requires that we speak of practical issues with a primary sense of moral obligation. It requires that we speak not only to the head but also to the heart. Only when the writer and the reader are inwardly active do concepts and ideas come alive and become real as a source of volition. Abstract discussion of social issues invariably frame themselves in terms of power and control. For us, analyses of power and control are not enough. The key lies in ideas living in us and we in them. Our task is to provide a framework of intellectually rich dialogue — a dialogue that keeps us awake to who we are and to our responsibility as human beings.

**VISIT ENCOUNTER ONLINE  
AT  
WWW.GREAT-IDEAS.ORG**

# Rallying "The Whole Village"

James P. Comer

**An important function of schools is the support and (re)creation of a sense of community that nurtures the growth and development of children.**

We are at the height of the controversy today on how to improve education. There are groups focused on vouchers, privatization, and charter schools. Others are focused on children, how children learn, how the school can help, how preservice education can prepare people to help schools help children learn and develop. They are concerned with helping children learn to meet the standards required in our time and preparing them to meet life's tasks. To me, that is what education is really all about. The outcome of the struggle that is taking place right now will determine the face of education over the next 30 to 50 years because once we put money in, we're going to be locked into those positions. The poor and the marginalized, already vulnerable, will be more vulnerable if the nation focuses on organizational changes that are meaningless rather than changes that provide opportunities in school, at home, and in the community that help young people grow and develop.

I would like to make the case for a child-centered approach and to begin by reflecting just a little bit on my own background. My own background is the source of my insight, understanding, and motivation to focus, and get others focused, on child development. I would then like to address the kind of change that has taken place in society, that has changed the nature of our economy, that has been driven by science and technology, and that has challenged us to educate more young people at a higher level than ever before. I'll then describe our school development program as a response to the change that has taken place in society over the last 50 years and then talk a little bit about what schools of education can, and I think must, do to prepare more teachers to help young people grow and develop.

## Growing Up

My mother was born into rural poverty in 1904. She was a child of a sharecropper who was a good

Adapted from a presentation July 6, 1998, at the Long Island University—C. W. Post School of Education.

Dr. James P. Comer is the Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center. He is also the founder of the Yale Child Study Center School Development Program.

man and cared about his family. But, when she was about 6 years of age he was killed by lightning. Soon a cruel stepfather came into their lives because there were no support programs of any kind at that time. He was abusive in every way. He felt the children should not go to school and would not allow them to go. But my mother, as a small 8-year-old child in the cotton fields, decided that the way to a better life was through education. She set out to try to get an education, and eventually, at 16, ran away to a sister in East Chicago, hoping to go to school. When she had to drop out, she declared that if she ever had children she was going to make certain that every one of them would get a good education.

Then, she set out to very, very carefully find my father. Now, as it worked out, my father had been married once before so she wasn't sure he was the right one. She insisted that he bring a letter of recommendation from his ex-mother-in-law. It worked out and my mother with no education at all, working as a domestic, and my father with a rural sixth grade education or so, working as a steel mill laborer, eventually sent the five children to school for a total of 13 college degrees. While that was happening in my family, I had three friends who were just as bright, just as able as anybody in my family and anybody in the predominantly white middle, upper-middle income school to which we went. Yet, all three of my friends went on a downhill course: one died early from alcoholism, one spent a good part of his life in jail, and the other was in and out of mental institutions until he died recently. What was the difference between me, my friends, and our family? The only difference was the quality of the developmental experience at home and the ability of my parents to interact with the school and the mainstream system in a way that that system embraced and supported our development as well. It was the community of the 1940s and 1950s that really supported our development in a way not available in the vast majority of communities today.

First of all, I grew up in a family where we were wanted. Children were very important and rearing children was very important. Second, my parents had goals for all of us from the very beginning. It was important for us to determine what we wanted for ourselves, but we had to accomplish something first.

Third, they actively promoted our development and exposed us to educational opportunities from the very beginning. Life at home and in the family was about growing up and being educated and developing. The aim was to expose us to things that were educational. On Sundays in the evenings, we, the four young children, all gathered around my mother. While she could just barely read, she read the funny paper. She would then read over this one's favorite column and that one's favorite column until she'd read the paper the second time. What was important was not what was in the paper or how well she read but the closeness, and the interaction, between the children and my mother.

When I was four or five years of age, I said I wanted to be a doctor like my family doctor, and my parents bought me a doctor's kit. People would come around and say you know he's not going to be a doctor. Why would you support that? Why would you tell him he's going to be a doctor and disappoint him? If you said that around my mother twice, you had to leave the house. There was support for high aspirations. In the evenings we would sit on the front porch and have malted milk and popcorn and my parents would take us to the lake front on Lake Michigan. There, we did all kinds of things together. When I wrote a book about my family, *Maggie's American Dream*, I asked my mother about those times and she said, "We decided that the good times that we had together as a family made it possible for us to chastise you during the bad times, and you could see that it was for your own good."

Dinnertime was a very special time around the kitchen table. There were discussions in which everything imaginable could be discussed, but you had to play by the rules. You had to listen. You had to know when to talk. You had to know what was appropriate and what was not appropriate. All of the rules of social interaction were learned around that dinner table, and in those discussions the values of the family came out. All the things we were going to do or try to do came out in those family discussions and would spill over in the evening into debates. We would debate everything and anything. My mother at the end of the day would lie on the bed in an adjoining room. She did not participate, but if she heard something that wasn't appropriate, she would

raise a question. One time I was arguing against public welfare because public welfare forces dependency and the like. Well, that wasn't my usual position, but my brother caught me in it and was really blasting me for being not caring. My mother finally said, "Jim, what would you do for the poor people?" I said, "Well, there would be a government of last resort, a job of last resort from the government." She said OK, and we kept going. She intervened to make certain that we were compassionate, caring, and responsible even though it was our discussion and our way of thinking. Learning to think was important. It was important to make your argument well because it was not good to lose in our family. The rule was no matter how badly you lost the argument, you could not fight. I found myself coming home from school thinking and thinking about how to present my argument so I would not lose. The important thing was learning and thinking and learning to present an argument — all things needed for achievement in school.

They took every opportunity to educate us. When President Roosevelt's caravan came through our hometown, my mother bundled us all up and had us there to see. My mother worked on the polls during the election. She worked at a voting booth and she called me over (which was probably against the rules), took me inside the voting place (which was probably against the rules), and I actually pulled the lever (which *was* against the rules). That experience was so powerful and so important that I always vote. Even when I'm out of town, I make certain that I vote. There is great power in exposing young children very early to things educational and things responsible.

Our family was enmeshed during my childhood in a church community, and that church community also was a very important source of support for our development. My father was superintendent of the Sunday School. He believed very much in being on time. As he got close to the church, everybody would start running to make certain that they got there on time. We picked up values right there. He also was head of the Baptist Young People's Bible Drill and my sister was in it. The way the drill worked is that you looked for Bible verses. The first one who found it won. My sister had found the verse and was about

to give it when somebody else whispered. My father disallowed her answer. My sister thought as a child that her father should have given her a break. But not my father. My father believed what is fair, is fair, is fair.

We weren't taught values, we caught values in an environment in which desirable values were acted out all the time. I remember on one occasion at church, I punched a kid. It was a defensive punch, of course; he had punched me first. But, I remember Mrs. Johnson saying, "I'm gonna tell your father when he comes." My father never spanked me, ever, and yet the fact that she was going to tell my father and that he was going to be disappointed by my behavior had me fearful the entire time until he arrived. I realized that she really didn't tell him. It was that kind of experience in which everybody at church and everybody in the neighborhood could "tell your mother" or "tell your father" that influenced the way you behaved and lived. Also, the neighborhood was such that you interacted with all kinds of people. Parents, teachers, administrators, choir members all shopped at the same A&P store. On any Friday you might meet your minister or teacher in the grocery store. There was always a discussion about how you were doing and what to do if you didn't act as you were supposed to. Under those circumstances it was difficult to act up and act out.

Nonetheless, I was like most 11-year-olds. I was curious about my environment and my curiosity could get me into trouble. Once, when I was exploring my environment in a troublesome situation, or potentially troublesome situation, a sister from our church called my father, and before I got home he knew what I was up to. Now, I was fortunate and didn't have one of those punitive fathers. He talked to me and he said, "You know if you want to be respected by the people in your church and the people in your neighborhood, there are some things you can do and there are some things you just cannot do." And so, I didn't do those things ... at least where anybody could see me! The point is that we were caught in a seamless web of caring people from birth through early childhood through full development. We were locked in a conspiracy to support our development and they (the larger community) were un-

aware and weren't even trying to do so. It was just very natural. Some communities of the past were structured in that way. They were natural communities of support. The teachers lived in the neighborhood, and you would see them in a variety of places. Some you would see at church. I used to walk to school hand in hand with my third grade teacher.

I remember a racial incident with that teacher, but I was prepared to manage it because my parents had taught me how. The three friends I mentioned earlier, who went on a downhill course, were in my class when the teacher had a library exercise trying to teach us how to use the library. We had a contest in which we had to read books, and I had read the most. My three friends, who were the only other black youngsters, had not read a single book. My teacher said, "If you three little colored boys don't want to be like the rest of us, you should not come to our school." My teacher was not a die-hard racist. The problem was that she didn't understand that these were the kids of sharecroppers and tenant farmers, who were frightened by mainstream institutions, and did not interact well with them. If she had known that, she would have taken them by the hand to the library, helped them get the card and helped them learn to manage that entire system. But nobody had helped her understand the setting that she was in and how to respond to that situation. I must hasten to add that most of my teachers, Mrs. McCallum, Murphy, Walsh, and the like, were very supportive of me, my family, and all the youngsters.

Many years later, Ms. Walsh confirmed my understanding of the importance of the interaction between home and school. She was a volunteer when my mother was in the hospital. Ms. Walsh at that point was eighty-plus spry years when I came to visit my mother and she threw her arms around me and said, "My little James!" I was probably fifty-six, but you're always "my little James" with your first grade teacher. Then she stood, stepped back and looked. She said, "Look at you. We all loved the Comer children. They were bright-eyed and eager to learn." It was critically important that we had been prepared for school in a way that we were able to elicit a positive response and support for our development from school people. But, it didn't stop there.

In college, my sense of belonging was really challenged for the first time. There were many situations the first year, as I made the adjustment from high school, where I had been involved in everything and had a good sense of self. I wasn't doing as well as I could, but I had an English composition class in

---

*We weren't taught values,  
we caught values in an  
environment in which  
desirable values were acted  
out all the time.*

---

which I was beginning to come out of it. I had been warned not to take the professor of that class, but I couldn't imagine the professor being prejudiced, at least to the point that it would effect your grade. He graded the papers anonymously and read the best paper at the beginning of the class. He was reading mine, and he got halfway through and he said he had question. When he asked who had written the paper, and I raised my hand, the only black kid in the class, and from that point on he ripped it apart, line by line. What should have been a good experience turned out to be devastating. I went home that summer after a mediocre first year and tapped all of those sources of support — all of the sisters in our church, all of the people in the neighborhood who made me feel good as a child. They made me feel good again, and I went back and I was able to be on the honor roll from that point on.

But, we lost many young people at every stage because many of the kids dropped out. Many dropped out in high school, but many in college played cards the entire time rather than study, rather than engage with the school setting. The point I'm making is the importance of belonging and the power of community. The family, the church, the school have to support the development of the whole child; they have to help all children feel that they belong and have a right to be there. I'm also saying that you can be poor and privileged and you can be wealthy and not privileged. I was poor and privileged because I had a family, a neighborhood, and a community that provided the support that was im-

portant. Now, that kind of a community existed in many places across this country right up until a few years ago. In some cases such communities still exist. However change, dramatic change, took place forty or fifty years ago.

### Changes

Science and technology have changed the nature of the economy, changed the nature of the community, and created the challenge to development that we now have. Human beings have been on this earth for five maybe six million years, and during all that time lived almost the same from one generation to the next. Change was slow. Dramatic change, generation to generation, began only about 150 years ago. One hundred years ago, we were at the horse and buggy level of technology and we've raced to automobiles, to jets, to rockets, to interplanetary rockets. Most of that change occurred in the last 50 years, and there is the promise of much more rapid change in the future.

Despite the rapid, massive change that has taken place, the needs of children have changed very little. They still need protection, guidance, support for development and preparation for adult life, and, in fact, they need a higher level of development than ever before. In the past, we only needed to educate about 20% of the children to a high level and the rest go to the farm, the factory, the waterfront, a variety of places. They could take care of themselves, earn a living, take care of their families and carry out all of their adult tasks and responsibilities. But today, to get a job, we must educate 90% of the population to a high level so that they can carry out their adult tasks. The problem we are faced with is that we have not adjusted our institutions, any of them — family, schools, schools of education — fast enough or well enough to prepare people for the demands of the present age. I first began to realize the level and the nature of the problem when my daughter was four years of age. My wife and I were both working, and we had a housekeeper who liked to watch the "soaps" with my daughter. As I was preparing to go away on a trip my daughter very solemnly shook her finger at me and she said, "Now don't you have an affair!" I was sixteen before I knew what an affair was.

The problem is that this is the first time in the history of the world that information goes directly to children. Before, it went through the important adults in their lives who could censor that information, who could censure them for acting inappropriately on it, or give them training and guidance about how to manage what they were observing. No more. It goes directly to children. A higher level of development is needed in order to handle today's information, and children need more support for that higher level of development.

Yet, stresses that exist in our society today have caused the family to break down. Too many children are not receiving the kind of development they need to go to school, and too many go to school underdeveloped, alienated, and psychologically hurt. On the other side, too many schools are unprepared to support the development of these children or how to bring them to a level of necessary development. It is not the fault of any one institution, but I want to stress here that teacher preparatory institutions can help. They need to change focus and begin to understand that we have to prepare people to support the development of all children. It's not only low income, marginalized children; all children today need much more support because the world is much more complicated than the one in which we grew up.

### The School Development Program

Let me turn to our School Development Program and describe it very briefly because it was really a response to the changes that we observed. The Yale Child Study Center, School Development Program which I directed, was also a response to my watching my own friends go on a downhill course. As I thought about them, I changed my plan of becoming a general practitioner to becoming a psychiatrist, to becoming a child psychiatrist, and a professional in public health in schools.

In 1968, in a joint effort with the New Haven School System, we went into the two most difficult schools. They were 99% black and almost all of the children were poor. The schools were ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 33 schools in achievement, attendance, and behavior. Interaction between the parents and the children and the teachers was difficult, and they were all defensive. Parents, teachers, adminis-



trators, and students all acted up or acted out in one way or another, and they all were on a downhill course. Those schools were terrible. The children were under economic and social stress and were underdeveloped. The schools were underprepared to help them grow.

What we did, very simply, was to recreate community. We didn't go in understanding that off the bat but that's what we eventually figured the children were missing: the kind of community that I grew up in. I think that's where we're going to go in education after this phase of structural changes, high accountability, and the like. We're going to come back to creating the kinds of communities that we need. When we recreated a community, those schools that we went into went from 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> in achievement to tie for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> highest levels of achievement in the city with the best attendance and few serious behavior problems.

We did it by creating a collaborative community rather than an adversarial community. The governance and management team was made up of all the stakeholders in the schools. The school planning and management teams developed a comprehensive school plan that focused both on the academic and the social program of the schools with staff development, assessment, and modification on an on-going basis.

We had to create a culture to be able to make those changes. We couldn't just go in and say, work in this way. The culture was made possible by having an agreement that we would have no-fault, consensus decision making and no paralysis. We could not paralyze the principal and the principal could not ignore the people serving on the school planning and management team and the input from all involved. The parents supported the comprehensive school plan and the work of the staff. The mental health team really helped staff think about children and think about how to create a good climate.

We did it by responding to every incident that occurred in the school. We had a child who was in rural North Carolina, a tight knit supportive community, on a Friday. Over the weekend, a visiting aunt brought him up to New Haven and dropped him off on a Monday on her way to work. The child went to the classroom. The teacher who had had three trans-

fers the week before, nodded her head in frustration and the child read rejection. The child looked at all those strange people and had no support. This eight-year-old panicked, kicked the teacher in the leg, and ran out. We thought that was a fairly healthy response for an eight-year-old. But it's the kind of response that gets a child sent to the principal, punished, and sent back to the classroom. Somebody laughs; he punches them in the mouth and gets sent back to the principal. It goes around and around and

---

***D**espite the rapid, massive change that has taken place in our society, the real needs of children have changed very little.*

---

around, until he's labeled "disturbed." Then he's sent off to somebody like me to get his head fixed. Instead of doing that, we talked with the staff. We talked about what it must be like to be eight years old and to have your entire support system removed, to find yourself in a strange place with a relative you just barely know. Teachers began to think about that, and more generally about what children need to be able to function in the classroom and in the school.

Now, when children come, teachers have welcome signs and give them opportunities to tell where he's from. Children are assigned to some youngster who is successful and his job is to help the kid make it in the classroom. No longer can you bring your child in and dump him in the classroom. We think about what children need to be able to make it in the classroom and schools. We had to create, and what we eventually *did* create, was a community in which children over and over can experience support and belonging. In such a community, teachers can teach and children can learn. We have children and families who are disconnected from the economic and social mainstream or who had never been connected to the social and economic mainstream in the first place. The question was what can we do to help them, and the answer was to connect them.

Recently, I was on Martha's Vineyard at a restaurant where they had a buffet. A well-educated

mother was helping her child get his plate. She explained to her son that he couldn't get in front of me, that he had to wait until I got my plate, that he couldn't put his hands in the food, and that he had to use the utensils. As she went on and on, that child was learning many of the skills necessary to make it in the mainstream of society. He was being educated and he was learning.

Where there is training and learning the child gains confidence. The child begins to see himself or herself as an able person. Understanding this, we created what we call a Social Skills curriculum for inner city children. I won't go into the details but in politics and government, business and economics, health and nutrition, spiritual life and leisure time, all of the areas where children are expected to have skills and function as adults, we developed many units in which we integrated the teaching of basic academic skills, social skills, and appreciation of the arts in those schools. That was when we got the first dramatic jump in academic performance. We got a seven-month jump that first year and it continued to go up every year until the children were a year above grade level in one school and seven months in the other.

Yet, we lose many children who are bright enough at about the third or fourth grade. It's more complicated than just social development, as important as it is. We believe that by giving the children the experiences they need in pre-K and in the early childhood years (the socialization experiences) academic achievement will follow. That is what happens. I am not saying that we should not have rigorous, challenging, academic learning experiences. We must. But it is the socialization that makes that challenging experience possible and makes it possible for the children to learn from experience.

### **Educating Educators**

Let me begin to conclude by describing what staff preparation needs to be if teachers and administrators are to work differently and to make learning possible for all — not just the children who are already prepared for school, but those children who are underdeveloped, or differently developed. In some schools of education across the country, child development isn't discussed at all. In many where it

is discussed, it is theoretical and abstract. It's in a college classroom somewhere far removed from the real world. I asked my three sisters-in-law and sister, who are teachers who went to good schools of education, if anyone ever talked to them about what might be involved in a fight in first grade on the playground. They all looked at each other and said, "No." Yet, what do we often see in kindergarten or the first grade or second grade on the playground? Kids fighting. Sometimes they fight because of impulse-control problems, and sometimes they fight because they haven't learned to negotiate. There are a whole variety of things involved in fighting — managing your aggression and the like. All of those things ought to be discussed with teachers and administrators so that we just don't punish kids but see those activities as opportunities for helping them grow.

Also, in many schools of education, it is possible to become a reading teacher with one reading course. What is it that we do 70% of the time in first grade? We teach children to read, and we socialize them. We don't prepare teachers well enough to be able to do that. Furthermore, in order to make schools work, teachers and administrators have to understand organization and management and their impact on the climate of the school as well as academic interaction and social interaction. In pre-service courses, we have to prepare teachers to engage in school organization and management. In the first schools where we worked, the teachers told us that was not their job. They said, "What happens in the rest of the school is not important to me. It's my classroom that's important." That's not true. What happens in the rest of the school impacts what happens in your classroom. We need to help them understand that and how to work with parents, mental health resources, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and others. Many places do not prepare teachers and administrators to work with those professionals until they're all thrown together on the front line. They don't know how to work with one another and they don't know what each other is talking about. It's like the Tower of Babel. Very often they are talking a different language with different ideas and different values. Training that prepares people to work together is important. All of this collaboration is im-

portant in order to create a climate of adult relationships that will allow the children to imitate, identify, and internalize the attitudes, values, and ways of the adults around them. That's the way children learn.

A transfer student came into one of our schools and somebody stepped on his foot. He had been transferred three times before that year. He understood that if you're a transfer student you had to fight or get "picked on." He was ready to fight. But, in our school, one of the youngsters said "Hey Man, we don't do that in this school." The kid looked around because he had never been in a school like that before and sure enough, the expression on everyone's face said, "We don't do that in this school." He dropped his dukes and he didn't have to fight his way in.

My point is that the climate of the school sets the tone that then goes to the children. They internalize it. The children themselves then become the carriers of the new values, new attitudes, and ways of working and behaving. Children will live up to a demanding academic program if they are guided by caring people. If we create a climate in which there is caring, kids can develop all of the social skills necessary to function well and meet the academic requirements.

There are a lot of non-believers. I remember an incident in Benton Harbor, Michigan, when I gave a talk when we first started working there. The teacher didn't believe me. They had this nice project of Adopt-a-School, and a junior college was going to adopt their school. The kids were from housing projects and this junior college was on a bucolic campus with streams flowing down and ducks and swans and so on. The people were looking forward to helping these children. One teacher did not prepare the children for the trip to the campus because he did not believe it necessary. The kids jumped off the bus, and the boys grabbed rocks and threw them at the swans and the ducks. The ducks were squawking and the people at the college looked on in horror. The teacher put them back on the bus and took them back to the school. He then taught them all the social skills they needed to make it in that setting and a good relationship developed. My point is that the social development of the children is critically important, and psycho-emotional development of the children is critically important if we are to prepare them for all kinds

of interactions with people and with the academic program that we want them to learn.

Another thing that's important is field supervision. I remember when as a young child psychiatrist, I had a patient that we called "the wild child." She was absolutely wild and was threatening to throw paint at me. I only had one suit when I was in training, and I had to protect it, so I got out of there. My supervisor said, "She likes you." I thought that's a strange way of showing that she likes me. He suggested to me that the next time she threatened to throw the paint that I say something like, "You know, if you throw that paint at me, I will be so angry that I won't want to play with you." I could not imagine that that would effect "the wild child," but I had to save my suit. The next time she threatened to throw that paint, I said it. Sure enough, that paint can slowly came down, and she never tried it again. We were able to establish a relationship. I'm not saying that the training of teachers needs to be the same as the training of psychiatrists or that teachers should be child psychiatrists. I am saying that teachers ought to have enough exposure before they go to the front lines and enough support once they get there, so that there's somebody they can turn to to help them understand what behavior means and what they can do to help that young person grow and develop.

Field work also is important in terms of the selection and counseling of prospective teachers. There are some people who simply should not be teachers. They don't like kids; they don't like themselves. They should be counseled out of education somewhere in the second year or so. Both of my kids are in the arts, and in the arts, they tell you at the end of the second year that you either have it or you don't have it so you can go do something else. We allow prospective teachers to go through entire programs and some shouldn't be in education. We allow failure all over the place for the individuals involved, for the children, for the parents, for the schools. That shouldn't take place.

Finally, I think that schools of education are in a position to influence practice, to be influenced by practice, and finally and maybe most importantly, to influence legislation. What worries me is that some of the people who know the least about children are

making very important decisions about what our children should be doing, what's good for children and how children should learn. I was in Missouri and listened to a feisty principal describe how she had changed the climate of the school by engaging the parents and the teachers. She brought the school around and made it a very supportive place. In passing she said that the school has a flag raising ceremony every morning. There was a legislator who was in the audience, and at the end he jumped up and he said, "That's exactly what we need. We need legislation to have flag raising ceremonies every morning and we'll end these problems." He was a good man because he wanted to do the right thing, but he didn't know anything about children. He's in the position to make decisions about the way schools should run. I don't think he should, educators

should. We, all of us, should be advising him and other legislators. It is schools of education and the expertise of educators that should inform policy that then effects the way schools are organized and managed.

Let me end by saying that I don't want to point the finger at anybody. Children and schools pose complex problems that have developed because of the speed of change. What is important is to recognize that everybody is a part of the problem and everybody is a part of the solution. Schools of education can play a key role by getting us to focus on children, childhood, and how we change schools so that they work hand in hand with families to support the development of children so they can become responsible disciplined citizens, workers, and, most of all, good people.

# PATHS TO LEARNING

## OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

### A New Magazine

For Alternative, Holistic, and Progressive Educators  
Will Appear in the Spring of 1999

Conceived as the spiritual successor to ΣΚΟΛΕ: *The Journal of Alternative Education*, **PATHS TO LEARNING** will cover public and independent alternative schools; homeschooling; fresh ideas on child development, spirituality, and education; and issues relating to educational choice and equity.

Publisher Ron Miller (the founding editor of **ENCOUNTER**) invites article submissions that are serious and informative but concise and nonacademic.

Inquiries and submissions should be sent to

**PATHS TO LEARNING**  
P.O. Box 328  
Brandon, VT 05733-0328.

Additional information is available on the Web at  
<http://www.great-ideas.org/paths.htm>

# Rooting Children in Place

Gregory A. Smith

**The lessons learned from places like the Tibetan province of Ladakh can help inform our efforts and ground our own experience in what Huston Smith has called the perennial wisdom of our species — a wisdom that highlights the nature of interconnectedness to all things and our fundamental need for mutual support.**

Rootedness was once the common experience of most human beings. Certainly, some populations migrated over long distances, but anthropological and archeological records suggest that the experience of being settled in one region has been more the norm than not. I recall hearing a story from anthropologist George Spindler a number of years ago about how residents of a traditional Indonesian village became physically ill when they left their own valley to visit another. They were so disoriented that they experienced a form of vertigo. Homesickness may be our version of the same ailment; although as we grow older, the mobility of our lives in modern society has diminished our susceptibility to the personal and psychic disruption that can accompany movement from one place to another. In the United States, the persistence of ties to a particular place and people is often seen as a form of weakness and dependency. Appalachian residents in the communities of Dayton and Cincinnati in Ohio, for example, make regular trips to their former homes in Kentucky and Tennessee, pulling their kids out of school for recurrent long weekends much to the dismay of teachers and school administrators. Rooted deeply in the mountains of their childhoods, they never give themselves to the cities they have sought out for employment. As a result they remain marginalized and discriminated against in their temporary homes, "guest workers" even though they are U.S. citizens. What they possess, however, is a deep sense of connection to place and people that has become increasingly vestigial in mainstream American society.

If this sense of connection to place has become so rare and so marginalized, why should we worry about reclaiming something that is going the way of the outhouse and horse-drawn carriage? For me, the answer can be seen in the growing alienation of youth, the diminished importance of civil society, and the disregard for the natural environment demonstrated by an economy bent on growth despite its

Gregory Smith is an Associate Professor of Education at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Education and the Environment: Learning to Live with Limits* (SUNY, 1992), editor of *Public Schools that Work: Creating Community* (Routledge, 1993), and co-editor with Dilafruz Williams of *Ecological Education in Action: On Weaving Education, Culture, and the Environment* (SUNY, 1998).

ecological or social consequences. People who are well rooted often display a deep connection to their neighbors and the land that informs their identities. They are not isolated, but instead experience a kind of intimacy and wholeness that is expressed in a level of fulfillment and sense of meaning that has become absent in a culture driven by the desire to consume. I once had the privilege of spending three days with a handful of Athabascan elders on the Koyokuk River in northwestern Alaska. What struck me when I was with them was their ease with the land and one another and the way in which the stories of their lives informed what to me would have been unpeopled wilderness if I had been exploring this country alone. Tony and Wilson Sam, two of the elders who hosted us, possess the capacity to support their lives along the Koyokuk River and its tributaries, knowing its resources and how to husband them well. They do not need to look elsewhere for their security but find their wealth in the land and their relationships to one another. It is this kind of wealth that is becoming rare in our own society as we have been taken in by the illusions of monetary and material well-being. By seeking this other form of wealth, we have laid waste the planet, turning it into a resource mine rather than making it our home, as Barry Lopez (1992) has suggested in *The Rediscovery of North America*. If we and our children were to become rooted in place, we might have less need for the illusory wealth held out to us by our society and seek instead the relationships that have traditionally held together human communities and given meaning to our lives.

Lopez centers his essay around the Spanish word, *querencia*, which refers to that place on earth from which we gain our strength and support. Lopez argues that the creation of an ecologically sane and sustainable culture — a culture that sees this continent as our home for generations to come rather than as the basis for our momentary enrichment — will depend on our becoming intimate with our regions and desirous of their protection. In *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943), Wallace Stegner draws a distinction between two American types he calls the “boomers” and the “stickers.” For Stegner, the boomers are those Americans who are always looking for a way to get rich fast and retire on easy street; the stickers, in contrast, seek to put down roots. Both

types can be seen throughout our history, but it is the boomers who have made the greatest impact on the landscape and our communities. Both Stegner and Lopez argue that it is time for a different response. More of us need to call forth the “sticker” in our own personalities and demonstrate a willingness to stay put — one of the most radical things any of us could do, according to poet Gary Snyder (1987). More of us need to teach our children to do the same.

The challenge will be that most of us have not been educated in this way. Schools are aimed at freeing us from the restriction of our local communities and giving us the capacity to participate in what is now a highly competitive global market. To root ourselves and our children in place may require looking to other societies to guide us in our efforts, societies that have demonstrated their capacity to raise young people who, like the Sams, experience their identities as intimately linked to others and the land, people who possess the capacity to support themselves where they are. In a course I teach on issues related to ecological sustainability, I draw on the work of Helena Norberg-Hodge (1991), a linguist and social activist who has devoted much of her energies to the people who live in Ladakh, a province of northern India located on the Tibetan plateau. Her films and writings about this region present a culture that has demonstrated its long-term sustainability in a challenging physical environment; it is a culture, however, that is now being threatened by the advent of the global economy and the forces of modernization. In the class, we attempt to identify generalizations about aspects of the Ladakhi culture that contribute to its sustainability and seem potentially applicable to us. Doing so is part of Norberg-Hodge’s intent as she believes that the practices she has observed in Ladakh could inform the future evolution of our own society. She does not suggest that this evolution must abandon all that is modern, but that elements of Ladakhi culture have much to teach us about the sources of human fulfillment and meaning. In what follows, I will present a brief description of Ladakh, focusing on those aspects that seem to contribute most directly to the development of children whose identities and sense of obligation are grounded in a deeply felt relatedness to others and the non-human beings and land around them. I will

then consider some possible implications of these cultural practices for the upbringing and education of children in our own society.

**Ladakh:  
A Culture that Roots Children  
in Community and Place**

The Tibetan plateau is perhaps one of the more inhospitable places where human beings have chosen to live. Its growing season is short, its winters harsh, and its rainfall measures approximately three to four inches annually. The advantage of these harsh conditions is that human beings have a relatively narrow margin of error with regard to the impact of cultural decisions on the viability of Ladakhi communities. Unlike Easter Island, for example, where abundant resources lulled its residents into a false complacency about the long-term availability of the palm trees and dolphins upon which their material security was based, the inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau have no choice but to acknowledge the fragility of their lives and the need to interact with the natural environment in a conscious and respectful manner.<sup>1</sup> The feedback system is rapid and unavoidable. The result has been a culture that has sustained itself for several centuries as opposed to one that precipitated a devastating and irreversible ecological collapse. Despite the land's and climate's harshness, people in Ladakh have been able to create a way of life that is culturally rich and materially secure. They live in substantial homes, generally produce a small agricultural surplus, and are able to spend much of their time each year in cultural and social activities that link their communities together. Although monetarily poor, the residents of Ladakh are rich in terms of social relations, cultural life, and access to the necessities required for physical well being. This is not to say that the absence of modern medicine, the impact of hard winters, and climatic vagaries do not take their toll on the human population. Overall, however, the impression gained from living with and interviewing these people is that they possess a level of contentment, happiness, and fulfillment that point to our species' capacity to live lives characterized by grace, civility, cooperation, and non-violence — lives that furthermore have few long-term negative consequences for the lands that we inhabit. How have the

Ladakhis achieved this desirable end and what can we learn from them?

To begin with, children are born into families and communities where ties to others are inescapable. In rural sections of Ladakh, it is not unusual for several generations to live in the same household, a phenomenon more common than not in indigenous societies around the world. Great-grandparents care for the offspring of their grandchildren in an unbroken sequence of support and love. When interviewed by Norberg-Hodge, an elderly man spoke of seeing seven generations pass through the home he had lived in since he was a child. This kind of continuity inevitably contributes to a child's sense of belonging and place. Because landholdings in Ladakh are not divided from one generation to the next, families remain able to support themselves on the same land for generations. Children are also born into an extended family of non-relatives where informal social organizations such as the *paspun*, composed of neighbors and friends, stand in readiness to help members when the need arises.

Not only are children drawn into a supportive social community, they are also brought into a meaning and belief system that focuses on the interconnectedness of life. In the Buddhist communities of Ladakh, this perspective is especially dominant. From it emerges a value system that emphasizes sharing, kindness, the non-violent resolution of disputes, responsibility toward family and community, and care for the environment. The continuity that children encounter in their extended families is mirrored in the vision of continuity and interrelationship that suffuses the philosophical and spiritual beliefs of the community as a whole. Religious ceremonies are tied into seasonal realities and provide the opportunity for communities to gather and share their common understandings in a spirit of celebration and gaiety. The essence of those understandings has been embodied in stories, dramatization, and visual art. While the more abstract and arcane aspects of Buddhist philosophy form the basis of the education of monks and nuns, their representation in public art and drama creates a strong link between monasteries and the community as a whole. Central to these beliefs is a recognition of the transitory nature of life. Rather than avoiding death and hard-

ship, people of Ladakh view suffering and their own mortality as part and parcel of the human experience. Much of their equanimity may be ascribed to their acceptance of events that are fled from or denied in many human cultures.

Tied to this understanding of the interconnectedness of all things is the Ladakhi approach to the natural world. The surrounding environment is not treated as an inviolable wilderness area; almost everything that grows within Ladakh is put to some human purpose. These resources, however, are used with both care and restraint. Water, for example, is available but must be rationed and protected. Irrigation channels direct glacial melt into fields of barley and rye and occasional orchards of apples and apricots. Informal procedures govern its distribution, and children are taught from an early age not to pollute or abuse this vital resource. Everything in the environment is used and reused, and there is virtually no waste. Under the pressures of modernization, cultural practices that preserved this land have in places been set aside in favor of approaches brought in from the outside. Land degradation, pollution, and litter have been the result. But until the introduction of modern ideas, products, and desires, the Ladakhis had established a way of life that merged culture and ecology in a manner that benefited both human beings and the land.

Within the context of this interlinked human and natural environment, Ladakhis learn the skills needed to feed, clothe, and house themselves. Practical knowledge that in industrialized societies has become specialized is held in common by the community as a whole. People in Ladakh are not dependent on distant farmers or expensive contractors for their basic needs. They instead provide for one another. Similarly, basic ritual knowledge is shared, allowing members of the *paspun* to chant the appropriate prayers following the death of a neighbor and to support their religious leaders in the carrying out of necessary ceremonies. These forms of social exchange free people from the necessity of seeking paid employment. They are in possession of what David Korten (1994) has called sustainable livelihoods, work that is part of the social as opposed to a wage economy. The return of labor shared with one's family and neighbors is food and shelter and the knowl-

edge that one's basic needs will always be met by the community. In a monetized economy, the individual is left to fend for himself or herself or rely upon the fickle and generally inadequate support offered by public welfare agencies.

One of the characteristics of the social exchange of labor as it occurs in Ladakh is that the boundary between work and leisure becomes blurred. There are periods when people join together to provide for their physical support, and others when they participate in celebrations that sometimes go on for days and even weeks. What characterizes both sets of activities is the opportunity to engage in conversation and social interaction with others. Labor is not engaged in for employers and stockholders but for and with the people one loves. During required activities such as grain harvesting, the spinning of wool, or the making of cheese, people sing or talk with one another in a relaxed manner. The work is done, but there is no exacting schedule or demanding supervisor. They labor at their own pace and in a manner that suggests that work is something not to be avoided but to be entered into with the same spirit of delight and sociality they bring to any other domain of their lives.

Traditionally, villages in Ladakh governed their own affairs. People, together, constructed the irrigation canals that are essential to the region's agriculture. When roads need to be repaired, members of the village organize themselves to accomplish this task. Conflicts are referred to a council of elders who mediate between disputing parties and attempt to prevent neighborly arguments from becoming sources of social division. Through this process of self-governance, people in Ladakh experience their own capacity to deal with the exigencies of political life. Their actions belie the assumptions purveyed by the political philosophers whose ideas have given rise to modern states. Thomas Hobbes (1962), for example, believed that in the state of nature human beings were inevitably self-serving, grasping, and contentious. Only an autocratic and all-powerful authority, whom Hobbes called the "Leviathan," was capable of reducing strife between individuals. The experience of the Ladakhis suggests otherwise.

The final element of Ladakhi life that demands the consideration of people concerned about rearing



children who possess a sense of rootedness to place and community is the way this culture has been transmitted to the young. What is striking to an observer from industrialized societies is that schools have played little if any role in the maintenance of Ladakhi culture. Children have learned primarily through observation and their interaction with adults who are closest to them. This kind of experiential and informal education is the way that most children have been acculturated until the past century. Certainly, some formal instruction in literacy and numeracy has been provided to a varying proportion of the population, and members of religious organizations have participated in more formal learning environments for hundreds of years. This is true of Ladakh as well. But for the majority, learning primarily occurred in context — through living shoulder to shoulder with one's family members and neighbors. And such learning was substantial. All one has to do to become convinced of this fact is to observe the knowledge of natural history or weather and the art and music of land-based cultures anywhere.

In summary, Ladakhi children have traditionally grown up in small communities where social ties with others are highly supportive and long-lasting. Through their participation in family and village life, they are inducted into a way of viewing the world that emphasizes interconnectedness to others and the world. They see adults make full use of available natural resources but in a manner that is characterized by an understanding of limits. As they grow older, children learn all they need to know to address their physical needs and join in the artistic and ritual endeavors of their neighbors. These activities — both labor and celebrations — are approached as opportunities for interaction and reciprocity. Work is not avoided; nor does it become the sole focus of their lives. Children, finally, have the opportunity to see adults govern their own affairs, deal with conflicts, and coordinate public works projects. Until the introduction of the global economy and modern media, this cultural apprenticeship prepared them to perpetuate a way of life well-suited to the requirements of their region. Although distant in space and time from our own civilization, their experience contains important clues about what adults and educa-

tors in the United States and other industrialized nations may need to do to revive in our own children a sense of place and responsibility to others and the Earth.

### **Educational Lessons from the Ladakhi Experience**

The education and socialization of the young has increasingly come under the purview of the state. With the exception of parents who homeschool their children, education tends to be seen as the obligation of paid professionals. Now, in the late-twentieth century, if children's academic achievement does not reach expected levels, schools have been assigned the blame for their failure. To some extent, this is a legitimate response. The tendency to ascribe that failure to "cultural deficiencies" is reprehensible, but we fool ourselves if we do not acknowledge the extraordinarily powerful role that home and the neighboring community have on the shaping of children's consciousness, values, and intellectual predispositions. For this reason, it is imperative that people concerned about bringing up children in ways that emphasize their membership in specific human and land-based communities understand that the learning youngsters encounter at home is necessarily as or more important than the learning they encounter in school. I will therefore initially speculate on what implications aspects of Ladakhi life have for parents, children, and community members. I will then move on to a consideration of the educational experiences schools might provide.

Perhaps the most significant lesson to be learned from Ladakh is related to the critical role that long-term and stable communal ties have on the development of the young. Children there are raised in an environment in which they are continuously surrounded by family members and neighbors who remain constant figures in their lives. Not only do these people remain with them over time, they are present to each other on a much more recurrent basis than is now commonly experienced in the United States. Children in our own society, like those in Ladakh, can count on regular visits with parents and siblings and grandparents and oftentimes aunts and uncles and cousins over their lifetime. These interactions, however, are often based on little more than a shallow acquaintance with the people they call fam-

ily. In the United States, for example, a recent study has suggested that outside of mealtimes, parents on average spend no more than 2½ minutes of “quality time” a day with their children (Pipher 1996). The generational divisions that have become so pronounced in the second half of the twentieth century should not surprise us. In a fundamental way, the cultural transmission that needs to happen in families has been truncated by a market economy that requires both parents to seek employment outside the home and an entertainment industry that has supplemented human interaction with sitcoms and police dramas. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam (1996) argues that the declining participation of U.S. citizens in civic life and their growing distrust of strangers are similarly related to diminished human contact linked to television viewing habits. If we want to establish meaningful connections with our kids and hope to connect them to their neighbors, the solution is a simple one: Turn off the TV and then reach out to the people who live around us.

Schools tend to disregard students’ need for social support. Although elementary schools strive to provide a friendly and family-like environment, especially in the earliest grades, as children grow older they find themselves in classrooms where teachers often interpret a child’s desire for personal contact and support as a sign of dependency and immaturity. In middle school and high school, the sheer teaching load prevents adults from establishing meaningful relationships with more than a handful of students. The extraordinary success of small high schools such as Central Park East Secondary School in New York City’s East Harlem speaks to the fact that adolescents — like kindergartners and 30-year-olds — thrive best when they are able to work and live in an environment where people are allowed to know one another well. At Central Park East, teachers work with no more than 40-50 students over a two-year period. In this kind of environment, they are able to gain some understanding about the way their students learn and their characteristics as people. Average kids thrive in this school, enough so that over 90% graduate; of this group, 95% go on to higher education (Meier 1995). If more schools were to cultivate the positive social relationships encountered at Central Park East and others schools like it,

adolescents would be more likely to grow up with a sense of belonging rather than the experience of alienation and disenfranchisement — themes that remain dominant in the music that gains the allegiance of many American youth.

One of the things that can be talked about among parents, children, and teachers is how we make sense of the world and our place in it. In the past, this sense-making occurred largely through the telling of significant cultural stories, stories that often had a strong religious or spiritual component. From these central, orienting tales — some true and some mythological — children were able to gain an image of what it means to be a good man or woman and to grasp what their culture viewed as the purpose, or *telos*, of human life. Recurrent in such cultural tales are plot lines that point to the dangerous consequences of selfishness, greed, anger, and pride, and the benefits of self-sacrifice, generosity, and compassion. As religious institutions have come to play a diminished role in the lives of the general public, adults need to find ways at home to explore these issues with the young, for it is from these meaning systems that moral perspectives emerge. In Ladakh, for example, cultural tales linked to Buddhist perspectives point to the unavoidable interconnection of all phenomena and underline the integration of human experience into the whole of existence. Children’s behavior toward one another and the natural environment is necessarily affected by the stories they have learned. Although environmentalists have rightly expressed concern about the way Western religious traditions have tended to elevate the human species above the natural world, both Christianity and Judaism have at different times brought forth schools of thought that also emphasize the interrelationship between human beings and the environment.<sup>2</sup> As parents, we need to convey to our children understandings and narratives that will enable them to experience their lives as part of a broader continuum and to understand that they have an obligation to care for both the human and non-human communities of which they are a part.

In a diverse society, public schools should not attempt to convey a single religious perspective. This does not mean, however, that issues of morality should be left at the classroom door. To some extent,

this has been one of the aims of contemporary education, and the result has been an emphasis on the teaching of functional skills as opposed to expressive understandings. A consequence of this emphasis is that children are receiving little guidance from adults about the big questions of human existence. Their response, in turn, is to create their own cultural understandings that increasingly express a deep sense of nihilism and despair.<sup>3</sup> To counter this tendency, teachers, as well as parents, have an obligation to help the young grasp the way their lives are linked to the lives of others. From an intellectual standpoint, the science of ecology emphasizes those linkages, pointing to the nature of interdependence, the importance of cooperation, the critical role of diversity, and the danger of pursuing individual desires at the expense of the whole. In essence, all of the communities in which we live are governed by the principles of ecology. If schools were to embrace this understanding, they would become places where care, respect, compassion, and an understanding of interdependence are demonstrated and learned. Without aligning themselves with a specific spiritual tradition, public school educators, too, could tell tales about what it means to live lives that are informed with a desire to benefit rather than exploit others.

From the Ladakhi understanding of the interconnectedness of all things comes a set of responses to the natural world that exemplify what it means to care for our place on the planet. As parents, we need to model that care and provide informal instruction about why it is important to do so. Creating opportunities for children to become responsible for the well-being of pets or house plants or gardens taps into their affinity for other beings and their desire to be of service to others. It is also important for them to become acquainted with the consequences of resource use. Members of the Northwest Earth Institute based in Portland, Oregon, now provide energy audit parties to interested people in an effort to help them and their neighbors learn more about ways they can reduce their use of electricity, fossil fuels, water, and other resources. Young people, as well as adults, need to know about such practices and how they can reduce their impact on the local environment by taking shorter showers, living in

cooler homes, turning off the lights, and learning techniques for increasing the energy efficiency of the structures in which they live.

Schools can further knowledge about wise resource use as well. Many children first become acquainted with the value of recycling in elementary school, and these messages then spill over into their homes. Teachers can also provide experiences that stimulate children's desire to reduce waste and carelessness toward the natural environment. A few years ago at a primary school in a Portland suburb, a teacher had her students conduct a survey of what was left in the cafeteria garbage cans after lunch. Children were shocked to find 72 unopened sandwiches, some with their crusts neatly removed, several pieces of uneaten fruit, and cans or boxes of unopened juice. They wrote a letter that was subsequently published in the school newsletter to alert parents to the fact that large amounts of food were being placed in the trash each day and that adults needed to be more conscious of what their kids were or were not eating. When this teacher's class began to flag in their own recycling efforts later in the year, all that was required to get them back on track was for one of their members to shout out, "Remember the 72 sandwiches."

This teacher has also sought to deepen students' understanding of their membership in a particular watershed. She and her class obtained salmon eggs from a local hatchery and raised them until they were ready to be released into the confluence of the Tualatin and Willamette Rivers, just a few blocks from the school. The project was accompanied by a unit designed to acquaint students with what happens to rainwater and other materials left on city streets or poured into storm sewers. Students stenciled "Don't Dump/Drains to Stream" on manhole covers in the neighborhood around the school. And because their "babies" were in the rivers below, they had developed an emotional understanding about why polluting water was to be avoided. For these children, being rooted to place is beginning to carry with it a strong understanding of their responsibility to protect it and treat it well.

Central to the sustainability of the Ladakhi culture is the self-sufficiency of the people who are brought up to live in this way. A similar self-sufficiency was

once more common in our own culture. In the past, the transmission of skills related to food gathering and growing, hunting, animal husbandry, house building, cooking, weaving, sewing, etc. was much more common. When children are separated from older family members to attend school, however, the time needed to acquire the knowledge that allows for the development of self-sufficient skills is not available. An Inupiat friend of mine from northwest Alaska once observed that his seal-hunting abilities had remained frozen where they had been when he was seventeen because it was at that point that he left Alaska to attend college. What this suggests is that as parents we need to consciously attend to teaching our children the basic survival skills we do possess, even if at the outset our kids are not especially interested in doing so. We could, for example, bring them into the kitchen and make them responsible for cooking meals, give them part of the garden to plant, engage them in house painting and construction activities, teach them to sew or weave, and instruct them in the knowledge we possess about native plants and animals.

In response to diminished agricultural knowledge among Vermont citizens, a number of public schools in this New England state have begun to put agricultural and environmental studies at the center of an integrated elementary school curriculum (Kiefer and Kemple 1998). By the time children have completed the sixth grade in one of these institutions, they have learned how to grow a Native American garden primarily consisting of beans, squash, and corn; a traditional New England garden; and a contemporary French intensive garden aimed at increasing productivity on small plots of ground. The schools that have embraced this program become community centers — drawing in elders who are willing to share their own food growing skills with the young and inviting the community as a whole to harvest festivals and meals during which students serve the products of their labor to family members and neighbors. Smaller projects can contribute to similar forms of learning.

At my children's elementary school in West Linn, Oregon, two classes took responsibility for the renovation of a neglected greenspace. In the process, they learned the names of native plants, important infor-

mation about different plants' requirements for sunlight and soil type, techniques of soil preparation, and skills related to the transplanting and care of native flowers, shrubs, and trees. This is knowledge they will possess for the rest of their lives. Other schools I have visited over the years have engaged students in the building of small hydroelectric plants, the installation and maintenance of solar panels, the restoration of degraded riparian zones or clearcut slopes, as well as the more common vocational skills of auto mechanics, construction, and food preparation. When many adults no longer possess such knowledge and skills, schools can provide a vital service to the young by making sure that all students — and not only those who show interest in working with their hands — acquire practical as well as academic knowledge. To achieve this educational goal, courses that focus on the practical need to be valued as much as calculus, physics, and honors English.

When the possession of such skills is general, people are better able to help one another with common tasks. The barn raisings of the past were possible because many of the people in a community were able to contribute their well-honed carpentry abilities to such projects. The revival of the social economy encountered in our own towns and cities will depend to some extent on the revival of the practical skills associated with providing for our basic physical needs. It will also depend on the desire to participate in non-monetized forms of exchange. Inducting children into this kind of economy will not be easy because this previously dominant form of human interaction has become so vestigial. Children witness gift exchanges during some major holidays, but they rarely witness the exchanges of labor (with the exception of shared childcare) that once created the patterns of obligation and support that were essential to the maintenance of human communities. Some members of Portland's Northwest Earth Institute are taking steps to rectify this situation. Participants in a voluntary simplicity study group sponsored by this organization are creating longer-lasting support groups whose members get together socially and help one another with larger home projects such as house painting, building a stone retaining wall, or constructing a fence. Children who have

seen their parents engage in such activities will at the minimum possess an understanding that this kind of sharing is both possible and satisfying. Families might also consider participating in volunteer activities with local organizations that involve the contribution of shared labor. Serving food together in shelters for the homeless or participating in local stream and river clean-ups provide valuable opportunities to join with others in non-paid forms of labor that benefit the broader community.

Over the past decade, many schools have taken steps to engage their students in similar forms of community service. These experiences can instill in young people the habit of working without paid compensation and a taste for the experience of fulfillment tied into such labor. A decade ago, I studied a program for students at risk of dropping out in a Wisconsin high school that cycled its eleventh graders through a series of volunteer activities in Madison, the state's capital (Wehlage et al. 1989). After a morning of academic course work, students would spend their afternoons renovating houses to be later sold to low-income families, working in daycare centers, and helping out in retirement homes or other health care facilities. These experiences had a profound impact on many of these young people, allowing them to experience what it means to be a valued member of a community where mutual support is not an abstraction but a lived reality. These experiences helped them move beyond the sense of alienation and worthlessness that had previously inhibited their learning and commitment to education.

One of the side benefits of this kind of activity is that the integration of work and leisure encountered in Ladakh becomes available to us, as well. When labor is situated in a social context where people are able to govern their own pace, enjoy one another's company, and not have to worry about being supervised by superiors, the distinction between work and play begins to break down. Shared human labor simply becomes activity. Teaching this lesson to our children will not be easy given the degree to which our lives are fragmented into paid employment and non-paid time. Still, I wonder what might happen in our homes if we took a lesson from Ladakh and made sure that when we ask our children to do chores, we share this labor with them. When meals

are cooked with another person, for example, this task becomes less a burden and more a form of social expression. Similarly, instead of sending our kids out to clean the garage, wash the car, or rake the leaves by themselves, we might work together. In this way we could reduce the social isolation that so commonly accompanies work and turn it into an opportunity to teach new skills, engage in chit chat, and have the joint experience of pleasure that accompanies the accomplishment of a needed task.

Schools are notorious for turning what would be play in any other setting into work. As a species, one of our primary traits is that we are learners. Outside of school, we often transform the work of learning into play. Schools could actively strive to offer children learning experiences that are characterized by both rigor and enjoyment. To some extent, this already happens in elective courses such as music, art, and drama, as well as during extra-curricular activities. Educational reformers such as Ted Sizer (1992) of the Coalition of Essential Schools argue that academic classes need to be taught in a way that embodies the kind of student participation, coaching, and performance encountered in the arts and athletics. Much of the pleasure associated with such activities is derived from their social context and their broader meaning for the communities of which we are a part. Translating what works in elective and extra-curricular elements of the school program into required courses entails providing more opportunity for student choice, group work, and public presentations of extended projects. Children who grow up with this orientation seem less likely to become one of Wallace Stegner's boomers — seeking to strike it rich and gain liberation from the obligation to work. They might instead seek to put down roots where they are and find pleasure in the labor and the play that are available to them in what is near at hand rather than "on the other side of the mountain."

Although the growing centralization of economic and political power in industrial growth societies limits the degree to which we can govern our own affairs, there are still many venues in which we can exercise some control over events and decisions in our local communities. As parents, we need to model involvement in these affairs. This can happen

through participation in neighborhood and school associations, non-profit organizations, and stream councils. Our children need to see us as active and committed citizens. If issues arise within our neighborhood that require some kind of organized response, we should strive to join with our neighbors to affect the outcome of public decisions. Adults who become involved in public life are often those whose parents demonstrated such involvement when they were young.

Schools, too, can do much to encourage thoughtful participation in the institutions of civil society. In the past, when more people belonged to churches and fraternal organizations and shared in their governance, the skills associated with democratic decision making could be learned in a less contrived and more organic manner. Today, many people are unfamiliar with the give and take and the forms of discourse and argument that are likely to influence public decisions. Their presentations in public hearings often are presented in combative language that harms rather than helps their cause. Schools could devote more energy to preparing students for settings in which group decision making occurs. Classrooms, for example, could be run as small democratic communities where basic decisions regarding rules and curriculum could be made. Some schools give students the opportunity to participate regularly in school-wide decisions. At the Jefferson County Open School in Evergreen, Colorado, governance meetings are held every Monday morning (Gregory and Sweeney 1993). Students and faculty jointly make decisions about a wide range of issues, including the hiring of new staff. These meetings are facilitated by adolescents who enroll in a class that focuses on the development of leadership skills and group process. Young people who have experienced this kind of authority and have seen the process by which individuals come to a shared understanding of common issues will be better able to negotiate the political terrain of the communities they live in as adults. They also may be more likely to value the political process rather than fear it and take steps to protect the rights of citizens in this country to be active participants in our common life.

Being educated in this way has unfortunately not inoculated the residents of Ladakh against the tech-

nological and economic attractions of modernization. Some Ladakhi, like members of many non-industrialized cultures around the globe, have become disenchanted when they compare their own experience with what appears to be the limitless wealth and ease of the inhabitants of the modern world. In Ladakh the media and attractions of consumer society have caught the imagination of the young. State-run schools have also contributed to the devaluation of local knowledge and culture by directing children's attention to the language, literature, social practices, and technological prowess of India, Europe, and the United States. Because children in industrial growth societies know little other than the messages they receive from the media, the market, and state-supported schools, the challenge faced by parents and educators concerned about moving our society in the direction of ecological sustainability is even more daunting. If we hope to root children in place in our own social context, we may need to engage in two additional domains of activity not encountered in Ladakh.

First, we need to make sure that young people are able to develop direct knowledge about the environment in which they are growing up. Because so much of life is lived out-of-doors in Ladakh, this occurs as a matter of course. The affinity with place encountered there is not being replicated in industrial countries. Recent surveys suggest that most Americans spend less than five percent of their lives outside.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising that as a culture we have become increasingly disconnected from the places where we live when we have so little personal knowledge of them. At home, we need to insist that our kids get out of the house more than they do, urging them to go bike riding and exploring. Gary Nabhan and Steve Trimble (1994) have written persuasively about the importance of children's spending time in nature alone, developing a sense of safety in the world as well as a sense of wonder. Given the schedules adults impose on children's lives, as well as our anxiety about letting them range far from their homes, these experiences are becoming increasingly rare. We must change this. At school, more learning needs to take place beyond classroom walls. At the Environmental Middle School in Portland, Tuesdays and Thursdays are devoted to field studies and community service.

Using the city's public transportation system, students go to the banks of the Willamette River to take water samples or travel to Forest Park to remove the English ivy that is choking stands of Douglas fir. Natural historian Robert Pyle (1993) has argued that if children do not encounter such experiences when they are growing up, they will have little inclination to respect or protect the land and natural resources that support them. If print literacy depends upon adults reading to children, then ecological literacy may well be dependent on children having access to natural places as part of their experience during the years they live with their parents and attend school. As adults we need to assure that there are places for them to explore, time to do so, and permission to encounter the world on their own terms in their own ways.

Second, beyond adopting learning experiences that allow the young to develop a sense of affinity with the natural world, parents and teachers must find ways to develop in children a critical understanding of the ecologically and socially destructive characteristics of industrial growth society and the ability to resist its attractions. Accomplishing this task will be very difficult, although the growing interest in the United States in the movement to reduce consumption and adopt a simpler and more community-oriented lifestyle suggests that a significant proportion of the population is skeptical about the values of a culture premised on unending economic growth and the relinquishment of more elements of life to the demands of the market (Calente 1997). Young people need to be exposed to these alternative perspectives and the forms of social experimentation that have arisen in response to them. They could learn, for example, about Community Supported Agriculture, the co-housing movement in the United States and Europe, efforts to develop timber harvest practices that preserve the integrity of forests, the work in a number of northern European countries to develop governmental policies that support ecological sustainability, and the cultural revival being sponsored by indigenous cultures around the world aimed at creating a viable alternative to industrialism and post-industrialism. If these young people have also developed a deep sense of regard for local communities and the land, they may become more

likely to support political leaders who demonstrate environmental values. They may also make consumer decisions that will influence market forces. At the heart of this process must be Gandhi's injunction that there are enough resources on the planet to supply everyone's needs, but not enough to supply a single person's greed. Instead of celebrating the sins of avariciousness and over-consumption as a vehicle for increasing material wealth, we need to find ways to once more value the virtues of generosity, thrift, and sufficiency.

### Conclusion

The idea of rooting children in their home communities and regions is at variance with many of the dominant trends in the contemporary world. When observing the development of a market society in the 19th century, Karl Marx (1954) wrote that "all that is solid melts into air." He was referring to the social and political relationships that then characterized bourgeois society and was anticipating the fundamental shifts he believed must accompany the continued evolution of the forces of production. In many respects, what has happened to Ladakh and to our own society since the efflorescence of the industrial and now post-industrial revolutions reflects this process of vast social disruption and change. As the solid has melted into air, so have we lost our footing in lifeways that offered stability, security, and rootedness. Most people until recently have seen this process of change as both necessary and inevitable, part of the cost of achieving higher levels of material comfort and security. Those who still argue that the principles of the marketplace provide the surest guidelines for the betterment of human existence continue to espouse a process that is leading to the commodification of all relationships and now, with the advent of cloning, the potential manufacture and buying and selling of life. The "law" of supply and demand and the anticipated efficiencies associated with it have become the new orthodoxy. In the February 1997 *Atlantic Monthly*, financier and philanthropist George Soros (1997) points to the dangerous consequences of this orthodoxy for the forms of civility that provide the foundation upon which the market exists. That foundation embodies many of the characteristics of social and ecological rootedness

encountered in indigenous, premodern societies like Ladakh.

For people concerned about the long-term social and ecological viability of U.S. society, finding ways to reverse this trend is critical. Children, marginalized by a global economy and educated by schools and the media to become rootless members of a commercial monoculture, will be ill-prepared to construct institutions capable of equitably providing for human needs in ways that do not compromise the long-term health of natural systems. The creation of an ecologically sustainable society will require people who share a deep commitment to the social and natural milieus in which they live as well as a knowledge base that is sensitive to the dynamics and needs of these environments. Without such knowledge and the moral capacity to care, we run the risk of failing to respond to the feedback the world and our own social institutions are giving us about the unsustainability of our current practices. Like the former inhabitants of Easter Island, we are in danger of overstepping the social and natural limits that necessarily impinge upon the quality of our lives. Parents and teachers must play central roles in helping the young acquire a new understanding of their place in the world, and a new vision of what it means to experience fulfillment. Lessons learned from places like Ladakh can help inform our efforts and ground our own experience in what Huston Smith (1982) has called the perennial wisdom of our species — a wisdom that highlights the nature of interconnectedness to all things and our fundamental need for mutual support. With this understanding, the young may be able to extend their roots into the habits of mind and heart that have traditionally grounded our species in place and community, and by so doing withstand the powerful winds of a society driven by the desire for growth and profits regardless of the natural and human costs of this quest.

### Notes

1. See Jared Diamond's "Easter's End" in *Discover*, August, 1995, pp. 63-69 for a description of current theories about factors that led to the disruption of the Polynesian civilization that had colonized Easter Island.

2. The writings of St. Francis are among the most obvious examples of Christian thought that touch on these issues. Contemporary Christian theologians such as Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox also demonstrate ways that ecological concerns can be linked to the Christian tradition. See Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club

Books, 1988) and Fox's work in creation spirituality. Cabalistic and Hasidic thought that emphasizes perceiving the divine in the phenomena of everyday life exemplifies the way some strands of Judaism are congruent with a more earth-centered orientation.

3. Basil Bernstein, the British sociologist, has described the way in which a focus on instrumental concerns in schools has left youth with little guidance in determining the broader moral purposes or meanings their lives might assume. See his chapter entitled "Ritual in Education" in *Class, Codes and Control: Volume 3, Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

4. See Gary Nabhan and Sara St. Antoine, "The Loss of Floral and Faunal Story: The Extinction of Experience," in S. R. Kellert and E. O. Wilson (Editors), *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993).

### Bibliography

- Calente, G. 1997. *Trends 2000: How to prepare for and profit from the changes of the 21st century*. New York: Warner.
- Gregory, T., and M. E. Sweeney. 1993. Building a community by involving students in the governance of the school, in Gregory Smith (Editor), *Public schools that work: Creating community*. New York: Routledge.
- Hobbes, H. 1962. *Leviathan: Or the matter, forme, and power of a commonwealth ecclesiasticall and civil*. New York: Collier.
- Kiefer, J., and M. Kemple. 1998. Stories from our common roots: Strategies for building an ecologically sustainable way of learning, in Gregory Smith and Dilafuz Williams (Editors), *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture, and the environment*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Korten, D. 1994. Sustainable livelihoods: Redefining the global social crisis. New York: The People-Centered Development Forum (unpublished paper).
- Lopez, B. 1992. *The rediscovery of North America*. New York: Vintage.
- Marx, K. 1954. The communist manifesto, in Saxe Commins and Robert N. Linscott (Editors), *Man & the state: The political philosophers*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Meier, D. 1995. *The power of their ideas*. Boston: Beacon.
- Nabhan, G., and S. Trimble. 1994. *The geography of childhood: Why children need wild places*. Boston: Beacon.
- Norberg-Hodge, H. 1991. *Ancient futures: Learning from Ladakh*. San Francisco: Sierra Club.
- Pipher, M. 1996. *In the shelter of each other: Rebuilding our families*. New York: Ballantine.
- Putnam, R. 1996, Winter. The strange disappearance of civic America. *The American Prospect* pp. 34-48.
- Pyle, R. M. 1993. *Thunder tree: Lessons from an urban wildland*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sizer, T. 1992. *Horace's school: Redesigning the American high school*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Smith, H. 1982. *Beyond the post-modern mind*. New York: Crossroad.
- Snyder, G. 1987. Don't move. *Upriver Downriver* 10.
- Soros, G. 1997, February. The capitalist threat. *The Atlantic Monthly*, pp. 45-58.
- Stegner, W. 1943. *The big rock candy mountain*. New York: Duell, Slone, and Pearce.
- Wehlage, G., R. Rutter, G. Smith, N. Lesko, and R. Fernandez. 1989. *Reducing the risk: Schools as communities of support*. Philadelphia: Falmer.



# "Pedagogy of Place" in a Southern Black Rural School

Laureen A. Fregeau and Robert D. Leier

**Early findings from the first six months of research in an isolated Southern Black rural school and community reveal a rich tradition of community culture-related pedagogy.**

This ethnography examines an isolated Southern Black rural school and community to describe how the community's culture and cultural history is embedded in the pedagogy of the community's school. The study of place is important for educators in understanding the dynamics of school and community in rural settings (Orr, 1992).

Understanding how education is embedded in "place" is the first step in maintaining strong rural schools that can provide settings for constructive change (Kemmis 1990). Until the interrelationship between rural communities and their schools are thoroughly understood by decision makers, racial prejudice and school consolidation efforts will continue to demolish these valuable learning environments (DeYoung and Howley 1990).

## **Black Schooling, White Racism, and School Reform: Historical Perspectives**

The Industrial Revolution of the late 1800s stimulated a general movement towards urbanization in the United States. Education in this era followed the tenets that "bigger is better" and "urban is better." Schools of this era came to be viewed as locales to produce the human capital needed for a changing economy. Instilling good work habits and skills, respect for authority, appropriate work behaviors, and the ability to work in an organized setting became the objectives of the new urban "factory model" schools.

The small eclectic community-based school of the 1700s and 1800s came to be viewed as archaic and inefficient in the new economic order. This perspective in part brought about the school consolidation movement, which the Southern states adopted "wholesale" after 1900. Small school districts were replaced with larger county-wide administrative

The research for this paper is funded by Annenberg Rural Challenge project.

Laureen Fregeau received her Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Policy from the Pennsylvania State University. She is currently Assistant Professor of Education Leadership and Foundations at the University of South Alabama where she prepares educators to appreciate diversity, promote equity in education, and realize their potential as teacher-researchers.

Robert D. Leier teaches cultural foundations of education at the University of South Alabama and is a research associate with the Harvard University Graduate School of Education in rural education and education reform. His ethnographic research involves issues of social equity, Central American development education, and education reform.

units (Maxcy 1981). For Blacks in the South this movement meant rural school consolidation, but there was little change in the domestic and agricultural labor skills vocational curriculum already in place.

Movement to develop Southern public secondary education continued during the early 1910s. By 1930 most districts had secondary education in place, along with reforms in curriculum and teacher preparation. Designed to prepare Black youth for their subordinate place in Southern society, Black secondary education, like all education for Blacks, continued to be inferior to that of Whites (Maxcy 1981). Intelligence testing and related counseling was employed to justify racist and classist agendas for the placement of Black and White youth alike. Yet, as Black educators moved into a Black middle class, their protests lessened, and testing became the accepted practice with little regard to its inherent discrimination (Thomas 1981).

The United States has passed beyond the Industrial Revolution and has entered the technological era. Service and technological knowledge may now be our greatest needs. Educational theorists and researchers agree that factory model schooling must be replaced with a model that fits present and future needs. What theorists and researchers cannot agree upon is which model schools should move towards and whether only one model is sufficient.

Educators in large urban and consolidated rural schools are currently attempting to create "smallness" and "community" by teaming teachers and implementing cooperative and collaborative approaches. Yet, small rural schools that epitomize "smallness" and "community" continue to be viewed as inefficient and in need of consolidation.

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) suggest that pedagogy of place fits the model of school reform needed in small rural schools. They contend that "[r]edesigning education for the purpose of re-creating community ... may well be one of the most critical needs of today's society" (p. 135). It is important that educators and policy makers recognize the value of the rural school to the nation; to our current vision of a more collaborative and cooperative citizenry, work force, and society; and to the very existence of rural communities.

Racism has determined the existence and directed the lack of development in rural Black schools in Southern communities for decades. School boards controlled by the "White" mentalities of power considered it their first duty to educate White children at the expense of the Black children. Where school boards were represented by mixed race members, the Black community interests were limited by Whites and dictated by a community of White values, i. e., "the American Creed, the Christian ethic, and even the majority prejudice against their own kind" (Powell 1973, 270).

Rural Black communities and schools reflect the solidarity of their Baptist origins, which emphasizes the preservation of local autonomy, and the experience of African Americans who had watched the White graded schools advance at the expense of their own children's education. Despite repeated setbacks, the localism and solidarity that was generated was in many respects an overly simple response to feelings of powerless and dislocation, yet their vision did hold out the possibility of more equitable schooling in a society of unyielding racial segregation (Leloudis 1996, xiii).

According to Prather (1979), "the Negro schools in the Black Belt were irretrievably doomed to inferiority" (p. 252). Black schools were relegated to inferior, "vocational" education, which was also true of Black teacher preparation. This followed the legacy of Booker T. Washington's agenda for the education and socialization of Black people in the South (Grant 1981; Spring 1994). What was acceptable practice for educating Black children has not necessarily been acceptable for the education of Whites. School Board members saw no conflict in this conduct; they targeted educational funding to schools that were considered successful either they achieved high standardized test scores or because they illustrated the proper social behaviors. It was also generally accepted that the closing of a school in a rural community would be the closing of the community (Prather 1979).

Inequity in school funding for Black schools has been a perennial problem. Swanson and Griffin (1955) documented this phenomenon over extended periods of years since the turn of the century. Black schools consistently received less operational fund-

ing than White schools. Per student expenditures also reflected these inequities as Black communities request equal funding to improve their educational environments — and receive excuses instead.

Understanding the meaningful relationship between community and school provides the educator and policy maker with insights that support a thriving and inspiring educational experience (Kemmis 1990). Though community components may differ regionally, their deep structural characteristics are analogous. Schools cannot stand alone without the community for guidance and support (Peshkin 1978).

### **Pedagogy of Place: Preservation of Possibility**

Findings from the first six months of research in Rivers Bend, Alabama, show that isolation, religion, race, community member participation in school events and local historic elements emerge as influences in the creation and practice of a pedagogy of place.

Pedagogy of place seeks to affirm the value of *place* through an "intense knowledge of place ... an intense consciousness of land" (Orr 1992, 131).

Orr writes that

Critics might argue that the study of place would be inherently parochial and narrowing. If place were the entire focus of education, it certainly would be. But the study of place would be only a part of a larger curriculum which would include the study of the relationship between places as well. For Mumford, place was simply the most immediate of a series of layers leading to the entire region as a system of small places. But parochialism is not the result of what is studied as much as how it is studied. Lewis Thomas, after all, was able to observe the planet in the workings of a single cell.

Pedagogy of place includes "[i]ntegrating schooling with the day-to-day life of the community, providing students with an opportunity to be a part of society now rather than at some time in the distant future, and involving students in the struggle to solve complex issues that are important to their community" (Theobald and Nachtigal 1995, 135). School reforms centered on pedagogy of place will recognize that education is "not just about improving standardized test scores or being first in the world in

math and science," but also "about learning to live well in a community" (Theobald and Nachtigal 1995, 135).

Rivers Bend's Madison High School (MHS) is part of the PACERS small school cooperative and the focus of this study. PACERS small school cooperative projects focus on the improvement of small rural schools through a pedagogy of place. PACERS Better Schools approach is "built on the faith that all students are valuable resources who not only can learn but can accomplish needed and important work in their communities. Better schools seeks to blend the academic and personal skills essential for all young people with the knowledge and capacities needed to live well in rural communities." Within the Better Schools components students gain and apply academic skills by doing community work that requires them to be researchers, writers, publishers, historians, scientists and artists.

Five categories of pedagogy of place have emerged from data collected during the first year of this ethnography: bookshows; celebrations of community and place; dramas; a school/community newspaper; and the school reform and development project. Bookshows are a combination of the reading of books, dramas in which the book story is performed as the children interpret it, the production of student books relating the original book's topic to the children's reality and imagination. Celebrations of community and place combine the stories and talents of community elders and groups with student interpretations in a performance which tells the story of the community and people. Dramas bring the stories, beliefs and lives of students to the stage. The school/community newspaper publishes community and school news. The school reform and development project is the community's and school's vision of what each can become.

### **Bookshows**

Mrs. Pillans, first and second grade teacher at MHS, has had an eight-year association with the bookshow project, the first project that PACERS initiated at MHS. Each year the school has a public presentation to display the work of the children. Students read thematic tradebooks and then write their own books on the same theme, such as "Reaching for

the Stars." Other themes have included the senses, Africa, and themes important to the community culture and history of Rivers Bend.

The class's favorite theme, "Grandparents," became the bookshow incorporated into the Celebration of Community and Place. In this project, the class interviewed their grandparents and later invited them to a reception at which the students performed interpretations of the books they read and presented their "grans" with a class-illustrated thank you card.

The Christmas drama included a bookshow presentation by the first and second graders. Dressed in costumes made by the students with community volunteer help, the children performed "Christmas Around the World," which was based on the children's interpretation of various books on world cultures that they had read in class. A version of this show was later performed for the PTA, when the books were put on display for parents to examine.

Tied to bookshows are student portfolios in which students express the relationship between their realities and dreams to the books in the program. Student portfolios demonstrate community attitudes, such as the view that multistory houses are culturally valuable, and the importance of familial love and local cross-generational activities like hunting and fishing.

### Celebration of Community and Place

Larry Long puts these musical celebrations together for the PACERS schools and communities. In one week he organizes the students and teachers to gather historical information from community elders and write songs describing cultural and historical aspects of the community that are performed at the end of the week-long celebration.

Larry incorporated the entire school and interested community members in the MHS celebration. Each class had a part in the celebration. Mrs. Collins' kindergarten performed a poem about elders' wisdom teaching children. Then Mrs. Pillans' combined first and second grade, dressed as characters from historical periods of the community, performed "At Grandma's House," one of the community celebration songs.

Elders from the community were special guests of honor who told their stories of community life and history through interviews conducted by the middle and high school students. Students inquired about good times and bad, and family and community culture and values. The students performed the stories they collected in song and dance. The song entitled *What Is it Like to Grow Up In a Town that Doesn't Have a Town to Grow Up In* refers to the lack of infrastructure, the need to leave town to find employment, and hopes for the future of the community. *On the Banks of the Alabama River* tells of the integral and historical importance of the river to the community, the difficulties of ferry crossings, and the fun of fishing or swimming. *Wasn't We Blest* is an expression of the importance of religion in Rivers Bend, and praise for the simple pleasures — fresh butter, healthy children, walking to church along peaceful roads — that are found in the community.

Choirs from the seven churches in the community performed Black gospel music. Elders performed traditional music on harmonica and spoons, while they retold stories from their lives in Rivers Bend. Tales of riverboats, isolation, and economic struggle unfolded between musical interludes. Larry Long tied everything together through joint performances by the children, elders and the audience.

### Drama

At the end of April, more than 30 MHS students from grades 7 through 12 participated in the musical drama production titled *Time Brings About a Change*. The production was a half-hour adaptation from a famous musical about Black struggles in American society. Students created all the costumes, sang, and danced. Costumes illustrated social class and occupation, religion, and racial identity. Students brought their own personal and community experiences and cultural interpretations into the performances, especially in the dance sequences. The entire school attended as well as numerous community members. The teachers commented on how they saw another side of students. Students who were quiet in class became assertive and vocal on the stage.

The second performance of *Time Brings About a Change* was rewritten to include the story of the attempted school closing. It "razzed" the new prin-

cial and satirized her unpredictable behaviors and disciplinary policies. Students expressed emotions ranging from frustration and anger to joyful silliness.

### School-Community Newspaper

MHS began producing its first school-community monthly newspaper in February 1997. This is the only local paper in the Rivers Bend area. The newspaper covers community issues, such as the newly paved road, the new water system, honoring war veterans, 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversaries, community events, and church news. It features articles on famous African-Americans such as Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as stories of local historical interest, such as the origin of Damian's Ferry. School news, entertainment, editorials, and graduation highlights are also included. *The Rivers Bend Times* school-community newspaper is the only local paper and the community has received its publication with great enthusiasm.

*The Rivers Bend Times* won the 1997 award for the best first-year community newspaper at the PACERS annual workshop/conference in Tuscaloosa. The paper's major difficulty in the first year was locating enough advertisers to fund the project. The staff cannot afford to have more than 100 copies of each issue and must charge 50¢ a copy. The biggest obstacle in the 1997-1998 school year has been the principal's mandate not to allow students to work on anything that is not preparation for the Stanford-9. In her view, *The Rivers Bend Times* does not contribute to increasing test scores and so has no place in the school curriculum.

### School Reform and Development Project

PACERS and MHS plan to collaborate on a school reform and community development project based on the specific rural values, characteristics, and resources of the community. PACERS will be remodeling and renovating the library/resource room, which will be available to the entire community. In 1997, the library contained mostly old and worn books, except for the five hundred new titles PACERS donated. Bookshelves will be built against the wall to allow more room for furniture and study areas. A portion of the library will contain computers geared to online research and teaching. Distance education technology installed in the library will be used to improve

educational outcomes and provide a site for an exchange of ideas. PACERS will implement a multiage approach for the elementary grades. The entire school will be wired for a computer network by a PACERS-trained MHS student team led by one of the secondary teachers. These students will be among the few in Alabama with experience in setting up a network. The intent is that MHS will, with PACERS assistance, become a model rural school for the Small Schools Cooperative.

### Conclusions

The first year of this project demonstrates the value of rural schools and pedagogy of place in the preservation of community and its values of collaboration and cooperation both within the school and between the school and community.

MHS's school-community newspaper provides students the opportunity to contribute something of real value to their community and "to be part of society now" (Theobald and Nachtigal 1995). It provides students the opportunity to discover history, politics, art, and to create literature. Students who participate in the community-school newspaper see their education as connected to the community and the community views the school as more connected to it.

The drama and music for the community celebration come directly from the community itself and its unique Black, rural cultural base.

The value of the community school is clear at MHS. The long history the community's struggle to provide education for its children, the faith that God will see it through each crisis, and the close community ties to MHS indicate that the school *is* the community and the community *is* the school.

### References

- Deyoung, A., and C. Howley. 1990, Summer. The political economy of rural school consolidation. *Peabody Journal of Education*.
- Grant, N. 1981. Government social planning and education for Blacks: The TVA experience 1933-1945. In R. Goodenow and A. White, eds., *Education and the rise of the New South*. Boston: Hall.
- Kemmis, D. 1990. *Community and the politics of place*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Leloudis, J. 1996. *Schooling the New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- Maxcy, S. 1981. Progressivism and rural education in the Deep South, 1900-1950. In R. Goodenow and A. White, eds., *Education and the rise of the New South*. Boston: Hall.
- Orr, D. 1992. *Ecological literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Peshkin, A. 1978. *Growing up American: Schooling and the survival of community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Powell, G. 1973. *Black monday's children: A study of the effects of school desegregation on self-concepts of Southern children*. New York: Meredith.
- Prather, H. 1979. *Resurgent politics and educational progressivism in the new South*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses.
- Spring, J. 1994. *The American school 1642-1990*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Swanson, E., and J. Griffin. 1955. *Public education in the South today and tomorrow*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Theobald, P., and P. Nachtigal. 1995. Culture, community, and the promise of rural education. *Phi Delta Kappan* 76(2): 132-135.
- Thomas, W. 1981. Guidance and testing: An illusion of reform in Southern Black schools and colleges. In R. Goodenow and A. White, eds., *Education and the rise of the New South*. Boston: Hall.

## ENCOUNTER ONLINE

- Contents of Current and Back Issues
- Selected Current Articles
- Full Catalog of Holistic Education Press/Resource Center Publications
- And Much More for the Progressive Educator

VISIT US TODAY AT  
**WWW.GREAT-IDEAS.ORG**



**Sprout House Inc.**  
Nursery School  
Kindergarten  
Elementary School  
Individualized Programs

7:30 am – 5:45 pm  
NAEYC Accredited  
An Equal Opportunity School

200 Main St., Chatham, NJ (973) 635-9658

# Rudolf Steiner

C O L L E G E

## WALDORF TEACHER EDUCATION

Early Childhood, Grades, and High School  
Full-Time, Part-Time, Summer, B.A., M.A. Options

## FOUNDATION/EXPLORATIONS YEAR

Anthroposophical Studies and the Arts  
Full-time Program  
Weekend Foundation Program Option



## SAN FRANCISCO WALDORF TEACHER TRAINING

Three Year, Part-Time

## REMEDIATION EDUCATION PROGRAM

Three Year, Part-Time

- **SUMMER 1999 WORKSHOPS FOR TEACHERS**
- **THE WALDORF APPROACH APPLIED IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOM**  
Summer Institute (July 1999) K - 6



## GOETHEAN STUDIES PROGRAM

Inner Work, Integrated Science and Art

## ARTS PROGRAM

Path of Self Development and Healing

9200 Fair Oaks Boulevard  
Fair Oaks, California 95628  
(near Sacramento)  
(916) 961-8727 FAX (916) 961-8731  
e-mail: [rsc@steinercollege.org](mailto:rsc@steinercollege.org)  
<http://www.steinercollege.org>

# Integrating Humanistic and Social Justice Education

## A Sequenced Approach for Teaching About Diversity

Ellen Davidson and Nancy Schniedewind

**Teachers can help their students appreciate diversity by creating an inclusive classroom community and by incorporating a systematic diversity awareness program in their classroom activities.**

We are grateful to Allyn & Bacon for their permission to reprint portions of *Open Minds to Equality* as an appendix to this article.

Nancy Schniedewind is Professor of Educational Studies at the State University of New York at New Paltz, where she teaches in the Masters Program in Humanistic Education. She and Ellen Davidson have also written *Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Lives*.

Ellen Davidson teaches education at Simmons and Wheelock Colleges in Boston and in a professional development program at the Education Development Center in Newton, MA. She also works with schools to investigate and understand diversity issues, writes geography and history curricula, and helps teachers explore their teaching of mathematics.

As we celebrate the publication of the second edition of *Open Minds to Equality* (Schniedewind and Davidson 1997), we cannot help but think back to the difference in the national climate when the first edition of that book was published in 1983. Then young people came into school from a society that was significantly more accepting of efforts to foster social justice; today bigotry is more socially condoned and economic inequality is increasing rapidly.

Over the past 15 years the gains that women, people of color, and other oppressed groups made in the 1960s and 1970s have been pushed back and, at the same time, the economic situation of the average person, generally, has worsened. The richest 1% of the population now owns 37% of the wealth, more wealth than that owned by the bottom 90% of the people all together. Twenty percent of our children live in poverty; five million children go hungry. About two million Americans lack permanent shelter. The CEOs of the Fortune 500 corporations earn 157 times more than their average worker (Sanders 1994).

Many of our students come from homes where adults, less hopeful than 15 years ago, fear change, feel alienated from their work, and are without a sense of community. Concerned with their own survival, they don't see the connections between themselves and people different from themselves who may, however, be oppressed in similar ways. Ideas and organizations that provide certainty and simple answers are appealing. Just as ideas that challenge a

person's coherent worldview are feared, people perceived as "other" are easily scapegoated for social problems, problems that are often rooted in corporate or governmental policies.

In this context, to open people's minds and hearts to equity and social justice seems like a monumental task. Young people absorb the ideas and feelings of the adults and culture around them. This challenge necessitates building classrooms and schools in which community is genuine, work is meaningful, diversity is appreciated, and change is empowering. This, in turn, will enable educators and young people alike to know, through lived experience, that alternatives are possible to the social reality that they endure day to day and that they can become active in creating those alternatives.

### **A Humanistic, Social Justice Framework**

What we find encouraging, despite this changed social context, is that when given the opportunity to address issues of diversity, equity, and social justice in a supportive setting, young people and educators are open and eager to think deeply and critically and often become committed to fostering change. Fourth grade teacher, Karen Cathers (1994), writes that

children understand injustice in our society. They see it all the time, and I try to give them vocabulary so they can discuss it. Then we have some very sophisticated discussions.

The way we go about educating ourselves, our peers, and young people is crucial to our effectiveness. What we will describe here is an approach to social justice education that underlies both our book and our professional development work with teachers.

Content and process are important when teaching about issues of diversity and equity. Our approach fosters the development of knowledge and skills for both personal and social change. We draw on experiential skills and personally reflective perspectives from the field of humanistic education. The classroom process is experiential; students explore their own experience as a source of learning about equality. It is participatory in that students work with others to share experiences, investigate problems, and discuss issues. Since competition maintains inequality and cooperation fosters equity, classroom

norms are cooperative. We teach skills for communication, cooperation, and interpersonal understanding. The learning process is democratic; all voices and ideas are encouraged and differences are dealt with by listening and discussion. Young people often use community meetings to solve problems. With the sense of personal power and group support that comes from a humanistically oriented classroom, people are more willing and able to address issues of diversity and social justice.

Going beyond the personal domain, we bring to our work a social justice perspective, one that encourages the development of people's critical consciousness about inequality in their lives, schools, and society and stimulates action to foster equity. Given the ways distinct forms of oppression or privilege integrally influence our experience, we address a variety of forms of discrimination based on race, gender, class, age, physical ability, learning ability, sexual orientation, religion, language, among others. Both young people and adults can reflect on how institutional inequality has affected their own lives.

To this end, we encourage people to explore various aspects of their social identities. Some aspects of our social identity are typically constant, such as race and gender. Others like class, religion, physical/emotional/learning ability, and language may change over our lives. Age is guaranteed to change. Given institutional inequality in our society, we sometimes get benefits and sometimes pay prices because of aspects of our social identity. For example, upper income people receive benefits based on class status when tax policies enable wealthy people to pay a lower proportion of their income in taxes than poor, working class, and middle class people.

Our social identities and social group memberships are complex. Given the many aspects of each of our social identities, most of us experience some benefits and pay some prices because of institutional inequality. While an affluent African-American male, for example, will benefit from class and gender privilege, he will still face discrimination because of his race.

Various forms of discrimination combine to form a system of oppression throughout our social institutions. Since all are related, all must be dealt with in order to create a truly just society. How effective



would it be to try to change racism alone, for example, when often it is class-based inequality that fuels racist practices?

Oppression hurts us all — the privileged and those discriminated against — although to different degrees. While women are hurt most by sexism, many men also suffer. Some lose touch with their feelings, miss out on equal and intimate relationships, and never develop skills that are stereotyped as “feminine” because of sexist beliefs. We can change inequality when those from privileged groups work together as allies with those groups that are oppressed to change a system that hurts us all.<sup>1</sup>

In a year-long classroom experience where a teacher uses activities from *Open Minds to Equality* or in a professional development course employing comparable activities for adults, both students and adults can develop a heightened critical consciousness about racism, sexism, and other forms of inequality and their interrelationship. With this critical awareness, people often take action to change the inequities they see. This integration of the development of personal power, group support, critical awareness and action often fosters an ongoing process of personal and social change (Bell and Schniedewind 1987).

### **A Sequenced Approach for Teaching about Diversity**

We introduce people to issues of inequality and options for social justice in an accessible, carefully sequenced, supportive way. For purposes of this article we will introduce the sequence in the context of our book and use examples from it for illustration. Geared for students in upper elementary and middle school, lessons are easily adapted for high schools students and adults. Some learning activities examine one form of discrimination, ableism, or heterosexism for example, while others address the interconnection of various forms of oppression.

#### **Step 1. Create an Inclusive, Trusting Community Where Students Appreciate Diversity in the Classroom**

It takes intentional work on the part of a teacher to create an environment where students feel safe enough to examine their attitudes and explore ideas that may challenge their preconceived notions. *Engaging students in activities* that develop trust and skills for cooperation, listening, problem solving, in-

terviewing, decision making, group work, and critical thinking facilitate this process. When students feel comfortable with their teacher and peers have developed the skills for democratic classroom process, they will be more able to take risks to learn and handle difficult feelings and issues in reflective and fair ways.

A group problem-solving process called “We All Own the Problem,” for example, enables students to walk in another person’s shoes while, at the same time, generating constructive solutions to problems. Each student anonymously responds on a piece of paper to the following question, “What is a way that you are, or might be, treated unfairly in school by your peers?” In groups of six, students fold their papers, mix them in a container and draw one that is not their own. Each silently reads and thinks about the problem he drew.

The first person reads the problem as if it were her own and spends a minute talking about how she will deal with it. Then the group has two minutes to talk about other ideas before going on to the next person. After all have had their turns, students discuss how they felt about the process, what ideas they felt were useful, and ways they might use the process in class during the year. As trust develops during the year, often the anonymity is no longer necessary. The notion of collective ownership of problems can be reinforced by using community meetings to solve classroom problems. In this way students learn that they are not alone and there are supportive ways to work through problems with the help of others.

#### **Step Two. Enable Students to Empathize with Others’ Life Experiences and Explore Why and How Inequality Based on Difference Exists**

Students explore their own social identities and then engage in activities to empathize with the life experiences of people different from themselves. Students define and recognize prejudice, stereotypes, and the “isms.” They learn about the effects that individual and institutional inequality have on the lives and opportunities of people in various social groups.

“Left Out” encourages understanding of what it’s like to feel excluded because of differences in religion, family structure, physical ability, learning ability, or language. Small groups of students each read

a different scenario describing a situation in which a young person was left out. Group members discuss how that person would feel, what kind of difference was the basis for exclusion, and what they could do “as a friend” of that student. Groups then report to the class about, for example, Luis’s exclusion from a skating party because he uses a wheel chair or Jami-las’s feelings of exclusion, as a Muslim, when the class sings Christmas songs. After discussing each of five such situations, students compare the excluded young person’s feelings. They discuss the commonalities and differences in steps a friend might take to address the situations. They share anything they may have done in their own lives as a friend of someone who has been excluded because of difference, what they learned from that, and what they might do in the future.

We have found that in classes where teachers have consistently taught about discrimination using a combination of teachable moments, their own curriculum, and activities from *Open Minds to Equality*, students can then tackle activities that explore some complex dynamics of oppression. Students have examined, for example, the difference in the impact of ongoing or occasional bias on a person or group, and the dynamic of blaming the victim.

In “Believing the Myths” (See Appendix for a sample of this lesson) students begin to explore internalized oppression: the way people who experience institutional discrimination can believe stereotypes and myths about themselves. This lesson enables students to look at individual cases, as well as the way internalized oppression affects many different people similarly. Students consider how to respond to it in themselves and others. We have found that as early as in the fourth grade students understand these dynamics and the effect on their lives.

### **Step 3: Help Students Examine Discrimination in the Institutions in Their Lives and See How it Has Affected Them**

With their new consciousness, students explore their environment — home, classroom, school, community, the media — for examples of ways inequality is institutionalized. Because it is often perpetuated by people merely following habitual norms and policies, students often raise others’ awareness of unintentional ageism, anti-Semitism, classism, and

so forth. Students may be quick to point out bias in announcements. An announcement such as, “Dance Club will be at 3:30 in the gym; girls should adjust their after-school schedules accordingly,” reinforces not only sexist norms, but heterosexist ones as well. Its easy for young people to harass boys who take dance as “sissies” and “faggots” if the school reinforces traditional gender-based roles for females and males. However, when people become aware of discrimination, change can occur.

An activity like “Fairness in Reporting” encourages students to develop a critical awareness about biases in media reporting. Students choose current issues in the news related to equality. Small groups analyze sources — T.V., radio, newspapers, magazines — representing as wide a range of perspectives as possible using a set of criteria to analyze new reports related to issues of inequality. Among other things, they consider:

Who is interviewed? e.g., To what extent were the voices of those affected by inequality — racism, classism, ageism, etc. — heard?

Where is the focus? What is omitted? e.g., To what extent were a wide range of points of view presented?

What are the reporting biases? e.g., Were stereotypes present or reinforced? or From what perspective was the story framed? Was there a “media spin” to it, and if so, what was it?

Students report their data, reflect on what they’ve learned about media bias and share their findings with others through presentations to other classes, letters to media sources, and so forth. Students continue to use the criteria as they talk about current events related to issues of equity throughout the year.

### **Step 4. Empower Students to Envision and Create Change to Foster Greater Equality**

People have more energy and commitment to work for social justice when they know about others’ endeavors, both in the past and present. Particularly empowering for students is exposure to examples of young people their own age who have made a difference. With their heightened awareness and knowledge of change strategies, students are often eager to take action themselves to challenge unequal situ-

ations and promote social justice. For example, students who have identified classism in reading books, write and illustrate non-biased stories and read them to younger students. Through such initiatives, students gain self-confidence, personal power, and experience in collective responsibility and action.

In "Facing Discrimination, Finding Courage" students use high quality children's literature to explore alternative responses to situations where young people experience or observe bias and to consider approaches for dealing with it in their own lives. Groups of students each read a different book that describe children's varied positive responses to discrimination based on either race and gender, nationality, class, or anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup>

Group members then discuss the character's response to discrimination, as well as the reaction of other characters in the story. They consider what others could have done that they didn't do. Group members share analyses of their book with the whole class. Students see that, across different patterns of oppression, there are common ways to understand those experiences and approaches for dealing with them. Subsequently they discuss these issues in their own lives, paying particular attention to possibilities for becoming an ally, a person who speaks up for someone facing discrimination. Through such an activity, student clearly recognize the linkages between different forms of bias and the common ground they share with others seeking to foster human dignity and social justice.

### Teachers, Students, and the Power to Change

It is our experience that through this process students can develop perspectives that challenge those perpetuated by the contemporary media and culture. Students cultivate a deeper understanding of the effects of inequality on members of diverse social groups, as well how common dynamics of oppression can unite people across differences. They understand that the "other" may not be the source of their family's or their community's pain, but they look for the roots of problems in an inequitable society. They know that grappling with issues of diversity, equity, and social justice is complex and that there are no easy answers.

If students have experienced a just, democratic community in their classroom and school, they know, both cognitively and affectively, that social arrangements can be different than what exist. They can envision how our communities and society might be organized to be more fair for all. They can also discover the nation's powerful tradition of collective action for social change.

What we do in schools alone won't change society. Yet by practicing democracy on a small scale, students can experientially understand what democracy and social justice are, develop insights about what democracy and social justice can be when practiced on a broader scale, become knowledgeable about the sources of inequality and approaches to change, and act to create those changes.

In this context of deepening students' understandings of multiple forms of inequality, educators can chose to focus particularly on ways in which economic inequality and corporate priorities affect their lives. While some lessons in *Open Minds to Equality* address class discrimination, other resources provide valuable information and ideas to educate both ourselves and young people about economic justice.<sup>3</sup>

The prospect of dealing forthrightly with young people about diversity can raise fears for us as educators. It helps to let go of our expectations of having all the answers and to trust the process. As long as we maintain firm guidelines for respectful communication, the process of hearing the voices and life experiences of young people can be very meaningful for all of us.

Similarly, educators may become anxious about resistance to diversity education from other educators, parents, or community members. If this occurs we can speak clearly about the importance of public schools in a democracy respecting the rights of all. Bias or discrimination toward others because of their social identities or toward any social group is incompatible with American values of justice and equality.

We can seek allies among other educators, parents, and community members. Working together with others with similar perspectives is valuable practically and models for young people the importance of cooperative endeavors. If several teachers in a school are engaging students in diversity educa-

tion, they can provide support, feedback, and ideas for each other. Such groups can examine their schools for practices and policies that may maintain discrimination, such as tracking and hiring practices, and they can work to change them. When educators become involved in community-based projects and national organizations committed to social justice, they can share these efforts with students. Linking students with community activists involved with issues beyond the school is empowering, reinforcing the collective nature of social change.

Alternative and diverse sources of information can support both our critical consciousness and that of students. Books like Howard Zinn's (1995) *A People's History of the United States*, journals like *Rethinking Schools*, and periodicals such as *Extra* from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting will keep us critically informed.<sup>4</sup> They also connect us to numerous people who are working for similar changes. We are fortunate as educators to be in a profession where we can help shape a more just future.

What provides hope, too, are changes that come from working with our students. Below are two examples of such changes that students who have experienced this sequenced approach for dealing with diversity have brought about. An upper elementary teacher recently related,

In math class boys were dominating. We discussed it and students came up with ideas for dealing with it. I call on girl/boy, girl/boy now and this carries over into all my teaching.

A fourth grade teacher reported how students dealt with a situation of racism.

A student in another class was making a racist remark on the playground. It was now a classroom problem because everyone came in from recess and was very upset about it. They felt something had to be done. We held an emergency community meeting.... The solution they liked best was to send two representatives, one African-American child and one white child, to speak to the person in the hall and tell him how they felt and that they were hurt by it and the whole class was hurt by it. They told him about the community meeting and how they were representing the entire class.... It solved the problem.

Even with hopeful examples of change like these, the odds sometimes seem overwhelming. Yet there are many historical examples of how education and collective action have changed what seemed like fixed realities. The following account related by Marian Wright Edelman contains a hopeful metaphor to hold on to as we seek to educate for social justice.

Sojourner Truth could not stand injustice; she was an early feminist, and she constantly fought against slavery; she couldn't read or write but she knew right from wrong. One day when it was terrible unpopular to be speaking out against slavery, Sojourner Truth stood up and made one of her fiery speeches. A man stood up in the audience and heckled her. "Old woman, you think your talk does any good? Why I don't care anymore for it than for a flea bite." "Maybe not," Sojourner snapped back at him, "the Lord willing, I'll keep you scratching...." You dedicate yourselves to becoming fleas for justice.<sup>5</sup>

Let us take up Marian Wright Edelman's challenge and as educators, parents, students, and community members use our collective power to educate and act as "fleas for justice."

### References

- Adams, M., L. Bell, and P. Griffin. 1997. *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Bell, L., and N. Schniedewind. 1987. Reflective minds/intentional hearts: Joining humanistic education and critical theory. *Journal of Education* 169 (2): 55-77.
- Cathers, K. 1994. A cooperative classroom: The context for cooperative learning. *Cooperative Learning* 14(2): 14-19.
- Folbre, N., and Center for Popular Economics. 1995. *The new field guide to the U. S. economy*. New York: New Press.
- Molnar, A. 1996. *Giving kids the business: The commercialization of America's schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Sanders, B. 1994, January 16. Whither American Democracy? *Los Angeles Times*.
- Schniedewind, N., and E. Davidson. 1987. *Cooperative learning, cooperative lives: A sourcebook of learning activities for building a peaceful world*. Dubuque, IA: Brown.
- Schniedewind, N., and E. Davidson. 1998. *Open minds to equality: Learning activities to affirm diversity and promote equity*. Needham Heights, MA.: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sklar, H. 1995. *Chaos or community: Seeking solutions, not scapegoats for bad economics*. Boston: South End Press.
- Zinn, H. 1995. *A people's history of the United States*. New York: HarperCollins.

### Notes

1. For a fuller discussion of these issues as it relates to teaching adults, see Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997).

2. The children's books used in this lesson include *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffmann (race and gender); *The Rag Coat* by Lauren Mills (class); *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* by Gloria Azaldua (nationality/immigration), and *Make a Wish, Molly* by Barbara Cohen (religion).

2. Excellent resources for educators on economic inequality include Folbre (1995), Sklar (1995), and Molnar (1996). For material for students see parts of Schniedewind and Davidson (1987). Also Educators for Social Responsibility (475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 554, New York 10115) is currently developing ideas and materials for teachers and students to deal with economic justice.

4. *Rethinking Schools* (1001 Keefe St., Milwaukee, WI. 53212) and *Extra* (113 W. 25th St., New York 10001) provide excellent critical articles about education and the media that are valuable for educators and students alike.

5. This account was published in Marian Wright Edelman's column in *A Voice for Children*, a newsletter of the Children's Defense Fund.

### Appendix: Believing the Myths?

#### Objectives

- To help students begin to understand internalized oppression — how people who experience institutional discrimination can come to believe the stereotypes and myths about themselves.
- To have students think about ways to respond to internalized oppression in themselves and others.
- To help students consider how people would act differently if they didn't internalize so many socially-reinforced stereotypes and myths.

#### Materials

- Worksheet: Believing the Myths. Lamar's Survey
- Worksheet: Believing the Myths. Survey Quotations, cut in strips
- Worksheet: Believing the Myths. Lamar's Analysis" (optional)

#### Implementation

Divide students into groups of 3, with a person a, b, and c. Explain that they will be learning more about how the institutional discrimination they've been studying about affects people's beliefs about themselves. In groups, ask them to share responsibility for reading "Worksheet: Lamar's Survey." After they've done that as a class, discuss with them the idea of internalized oppression. Be sure to warn students not to blame people for internalizing oppression; the power of institutional and cultural discrimination often keeps people from seeing any alternatives to the prevailing myths and stereotypes. Distribute quotations 1 and 2 to person a, 3 and 4 to person b, and 5 and 6 to person c.

Each student is to:

1. Examine each quote and try to find why Lamar thought it was an example of internalized oppression.

2. Try to decide what stereotype(s) or myth(s) the young person might have believed about himself or members of his group.

3. If the person hadn't believed the myth, what might have she done instead?

For example, Lamar's uncle felt he wouldn't want to live in the neighborhood if there were too many blacks. The stereotype he might have believed is that white neighborhoods are better or that too many black people spoil a neighborhood or that white people are somehow superior to blacks. Any of these myths might influence his decision to move. If he hadn't believed the myths he might not have wanted to move.

Have each student first think about the two quotations she is responsible for. After several minutes ask person a to share her responses to the questions. After she does that, others can discuss those ideas and/or suggest new ones. Continue with person b and c.

If students are having trouble with these questions, you can give them "Worksheet: Lamar's Analysis" and ask them to compare their ideas to Lamar's. Then come together as a class for discussion.

#### Class Discussion

For each quotation discuss the following:

1. What stereotypes or myths reinforced in our culture might the person have believed about himself or group?

2. How would the person have acted differently if he didn't believe the myth?

3. If you read "Lamar's Analysis," to what extent do you agree, disagree, with his ideas?

4. Have you noticed any examples like these in your life? If so, which? Now that you have greater awareness, look for examples and raise them in class as you discover them.

Then broaden the discussion:

5. When have you seen young people or adults believe other oppressive ideas about themselves or members of their group? How have they acted on those beliefs?

6. What can we do when we notice ourselves doing that? When we see it in others?

Talk with students about the idea of conscious choices. Sometimes when people become aware of how they've internalized a stereotype they still might choose to act in a similar way. For example, after Chantelle realizes that the idea that straight hair is the only "good hair" is a racist stereotype, she still may choose to straighten her hair because she's ready for a change

in how she looks. While internalizing a stereotype is not a conscious choice in the first place, with new awareness students have the power to address it intentionally.

Discuss with students the way oppressions overlap in life. For example, Rodney might be in the resource room not only because he learns differently, but because he is black or poor. Students of color and low-income children are disproportionately referred to special education. Ask students and teachers to look for these overlaps. Also look for the ways the school or other institutions perpetuate these myths and stereotypes and how people can work together to change those. For example, maybe the staff in Maria's school doesn't talk with students about sexual harassment; they could be encouraged to do so and request outside resource people to help as needed.

7. How could those people benefiting from the myths internalize a sense of false superiority? Try to answer that for each of the survey situations.

### Going Further

1. Ask students to keep watching for examples of internalized oppression and discuss them in class as they come up.

2. Read stories and books that deal with ways young people who have stopped internalizing negative myths and stereotypes about themselves that are perpetuated by institutions in our society. Some examples include *Thank You Dr. Martin Luther King* by Eleanor Tate and, for younger children, *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman.

3. Music often can reach young people in ways that words don't. Bob Blue's excellent tape, *Starting Small*, includes several songs that contribute to multicultural understanding. Young people who understand how institutional discrimination affects them are much less likely to internalize oppressive ideas and values about themselves.

### Worksheet

#### Believing the Myths: Lamar's Survey

#### Background

Lamar is a sixth grade student whose class had been studying a lot about all kinds of discrimination. When his uncle came to visit a few weeks ago Lamar got very confused by something he said. He announced that he was moving his family to a new neighborhood because they were too many blacks moving into his. Lamar couldn't understand that because his uncle is black.

Lamar talked to his teacher about what his uncle said. Mr. Lewis, also a black man, explained that sometimes people who are exposed to lots of stereotyped

messages about their social group through society's institutions — like the media and schools — come to believe the myths. He said he's heard other blacks say things that suggest that they believe that white people are somehow better than blacks.

Mr. Lewis explained that this is called internalized oppression. People take into their minds ideas that keep them feeling inferior to others, even though these ideas aren't usually true. Lamar wanted to learn more about this so Mr. Lewis suggested that he do a survey and then share it with the whole class.

Lamar listened to the conversations of friends, classmates and relatives over the next week. He wrote down examples of what he thought was internalized oppression. Work on the quotations that Lamar noted. Your teacher will give them to you.

#### Worksheet: Survey Questions (Selected Items)

**Sarah:** "I had a good idea for our group science project today. I explained it to my group members. Next Ken gave his idea. His idea was interesting, but I thought mine was more creative and exciting. My group members just discussed his idea, and not mine, and decided to take his idea for our project. I guess Ken's idea is really better."

**Chantelle:** "I'm so happy. My mother's going to let me get my hair straightened tomorrow. She admitted that I wasn't born with 'good hair' — hair that's soft and wavy. Mine is so kinky and rough, like lots of other black people's hair. I'll look so much better after tomorrow."

**Rodney:** "I got into trouble today when I went to Ms. Wang's resource room for reading. Whenever I make a mistake I say to myself, 'you stupid jerk.' Whenever Todd messes up I call him 'doofus.' I did that three times today. Ms. Wang got really annoyed and assigned me extra homework."

**Carlos:** "I went to my guidance counselor, Mr. Molina, to be interviewed to be an assistant in the kindergarten after-school program. He's bilingual. I really wanted to speak to him in Spanish because I can explain myself better, but I was afraid he'd think I wasn't smart. I talked to him in English. I hope I got chosen."

**Peter:** "I'm sorry for getting mad at you, John, when you cancelled out on the ride to the soccer game with me and my uncle. Other people, too, have been afraid to ride with my uncle because he's gay. I guess I can understand."

**Worksheet**  
**Believing the Myths – Lamar’s Analysis**  
**(Selected Items)**

**Sarah**

a. Sarah might believe a sexist stereotype. She might believe that a boy’s ideas in science are better than those of girls.

b. If Sarah hadn’t believed the myth, she might have encouraged the group to give serious consideration to her idea as well as to Ken’s.

**Chantelle**

a. Chantelle might believe that her hair is not attractive or as good as soft, wavy hair. She might believe that the more hair is like many white people’s hair, and the less it is like many black people’s hair, the better it is.

b. If Chantelle didn’t believe those myths, she might have left her hair the way it was naturally and not get it straightened. She might feel attractive and proud as a young black woman for being who she is and not compare herself to a white image of beauty.

**Rodney**

a. Rodney might believe that because he goes to a resource room for help with reading that he is “stupid.”

He might believe that about anybody who goes to the resource room.

b. If Rodney didn’t believe those myths he might not put himself and other students down whenever they made a mistake. He might understand that people have all kinds of minds and learn in different ways and at different rates. He might know that lots of very intelligent, capable people learn differently from most.

**Carlos**

a. Carlos might believe that English is a better language than Spanish and to look smart a person should use English.

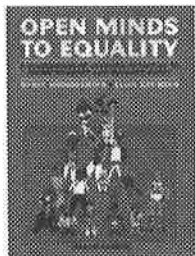
b. If Carlos didn’t believe that, he might feel comfortable speaking in Spanish with anyone who understood Spanish. He might feel that being bilingual is an asset and not a problem.

**Peter**

a. Peter might believe a heterosexist stereotype. He might believe that it’s not safe to be with people who are gay.

b. If Peter hadn’t believed that myth, he might have worked harder to explain to John that he’d be safe with his uncle and that gay people are as safe to be with as other people.

## A long-awaited second edition of a bestseller!



### **OPEN MINDS TO EQUALITY:**

**A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Affirm Diversity and Promote Equity, Second Edition**  
*Nancy Schniedewind & Ellen Davidson*

©1998 307 pgs *paperback*  
 ISBN: 0-205-16109-X Order # H61096 Price \$36.50

*Open Minds to Equality* is an educator’s sourcebook of activities to help students understand and change inequalities based on race, gender, class, age, language, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability and religion. The activities also promote respect for diversity and interpersonal equality among students, fostering a classroom that is participatory, cooperative, and democratic. This book is an essential resource for teachers, leaders in professional development, and curriculum specialists.

“The Second Edition of *Open Minds to Equality* is a powerful resource for classroom teachers. Building on the excellent work of the first edition, Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson have expanded the framework of equality to include other issues such as language, religion, and sexual orientation. The result is a book that invites teachers to develop classroom lessons based on fairness and equity and to create learning environments where all students are affirmed.”

— Sonia Nieto,  
 author of *Affirming Diversity*

### **ORDER TODAY!**

**Phone:** 800.278.3525

**Fax:** 515.284.2607

**E-mail:** [ablongwood@aol.com](mailto:ablongwood@aol.com)

**Longwood**  
 Tap into the Experts! Professional Books from Allyn & Bacon

**Allyn & Bacon**  
 160 Gould Street  
 Needham Heights, MA 02494

# "My Dream Catcher is Tired"

## The Importance of Visualization as a Meditative Practice for Young Children

Marni Binder

**Visualization can be a powerful tool to help a child "evoke the truth the student holds within."**

Grandfather,  
Look at our brokenness.

We know that in all creation  
Only the human family  
Has strayed from the Sacred Way.

We know that we are the ones  
Who are divided  
And we are the ones  
Who must come back together  
To walk the Sacred Way.

Grandfather, Sacred One,  
Teach us love, compassion, and honor  
That we may heal the earth  
And heal each other.

— Prayer/Ojibwa

Education can be thought of as a spiritual discipline and a spiritual practice. We may learn to hew to the line of our destiny as human creatures on this extraordinary planet, Earth.

— Mary Caroline Richards

The world, at present, is what Parker J. Palmer calls "a cosmology of fragmentation" (1993, xiv). Changes in society are occurring at such a rapid pace, that we, as individuals, are perpetually losing the ability to find "space" and "stillness" in our lives. As organisms on this planet, our existence is often in a vacuum. Connections have become short-lived and the essence of meaningful relationships, to ourselves, others, and to the planet are often cast aside by the imposition of immediate need and gratification.

Educational institutions reflect a deficit-driven society. We must make do with and do more without. Curriculum is being put back into solitary units of learning. The creative challenge to make integral

Marni Binder is presently teaching a SK/1 class at Lord Dufferin Public School, an inner city school, in Toronto. She is currently pursuing her Ed.D., parttime, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Her focus is in holistic and aesthetic education.



connections between the learning strands is stunted by the density of material that must be covered in the school year. Each area of learning has its own crucial agenda. Educators are being forced to teach to a prescribed set of expectations.

The need for holistic education becomes more critical. Children are being deprived of being able to make connections in their learning, to themselves, and to their world. Solitary confinement of education can only lead to an incomplete mind, body, and spirit.

The term *holistic education* is often interchanged with integrated curriculum. This is a philosophical mistake. One can integrate the curriculum, but to have a truly holistic philosophy, one critical variable must exist: that of spirituality. In our present system, the spirituality of the child is not acknowledged.

Miller (1992) asks the question: "Can there be a 'spiritual' education that allows teachers and students to awaken to the connectedness of the universe?" (p. 44). I believe the answer is yes. Miller defines that which is spiritual "as the life force within us, or our deepest most fundamental nature" (1992, 44). Education must provide a way to tap into that life force. Acquiring spiritual literacy is one way to do this.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat (1996) define spiritual literacy as "the ability to read the signs written in the texts of our own experiences" (p. 15). One must recognize these signs, explore them through the inner self, and connect the experiences to the outer world. The inner lives of children should be nourished and attended to. The only way to achieve this within an educational frame, is to allow for the development of spiritual literacy. One way to start this journey is through the use of visualization as a meditative practice for young children.

### Why Visualization as a Meditative Practice?

Garth (1994) states that "meditation is like opening a door which has been closed. By opening the door, we invite children to enter into a different way of thought" (p. 4). Visualization is creating pictures in the mind. It is listening to the words being spoken and attending to them. Contemplation occurs when the mind and body are still and receptive to the space

around us. There is an awareness that arises through the images, resulting from a strong focus.

"The word meditation comes from a Sanskrit word, *medha*, which means wisdom. Medha-tation means doing the wisdom, getting in touch with the wisdom inside oneself" (Rozman 1989, 1). Miller (1994) describes this as "deep listening" (p. 53).

Through this "deep listening," children are able to develop a sense of who they are by focusing on a specific and translating it into terms they can understand. The concept is not abstract for them. It is something tangible and identifiable. However, this form of spiritual literacy does take practice.

I have been exploring the use of visualization as a meditative practice with young children for several years. I am convinced that it is the path to take to allow children to explore the nature of their inner world. It is a safe practice where children can find the space and stillness needed in their lives. By providing time to center themselves, children are allowed the joy of using their imaginative abilities to see deep into themselves and relate the inner to the outer. This is a crucial component of the educational process.

As an educator of SK/1/2 children (ages five, six and seven) in the inner city, I observe them bringing to school emotional baggage from home. Children are struggling to make sense of their world. It is often difficult for the them to articulate what creates distress in their lives. There are children who are happy and adjusted, but I have observed more and more children carrying burdens that take away from the essence of their childhood.

I began to use visualization as a means of introducing themes and explaining concepts. I found the response quite astounding. The children were able to transfer their visions into words. There was an innate knowledge emerging that was not from the curriculum. Something else was happening.

I had been striving towards a holistic approach to learning. I recognized the one area truly absent, was attention to the spirituality of the child. Without it, I was really only integrating the curriculum and providing the environment for children to make connections within the structures of learning expectations. I began to use visualizations from Maureen Garth's work (1991, 1994).

I observed that the children were beginning to discuss issues of meaning to them (e.g., dreams, community, events, personal relationships). They were relating their experiences to the visualization sessions. Some of the children were opening up and talking about their fears. These discussions were spontaneous. Attention had to be given to what was emerging. There was a need to further explore the inner source.

One cannot just “do” visualization with the hopes that something wonderful will emerge. One source stems from the educator. A certain type of environment in the classroom must be created, with the hopes that it will translate beyond.

The learning space must be redesigned internally. The term “to educate” means “to draw out.” Palmer (1993) suggests that the “teacher’s task is not to fill the students with facts but to evoke the truth the student holds within” (p. 43). As educators, we must draw out the tacit knowledge the child holds within and let it emerge externally. Redesigning the internal learning space creates the environment for this to happen.

Palmer identifies three major characteristics of an authentic learning space: openings, boundaries, and an air of hospitality. Visualization experiences provide all three.

Openings are the moments where the teacher can provide stillness. With visualization there is stillness of mind and body, as the child focuses internally and is in the present. Though many of the images created may relate to past or future, there is still the importance of the moment.

The boundaries provided are the external structures of the sessions themselves. Palmer defines the use of boundaries as a way that the teacher can provide openness with care and firmness. The children will not flee the space. In visualization, the boundaries of the moment allow the child to remain present, with the knowledge that there is a caring person guiding them.

“Hospitality means receiving each other, our struggles, our newborn ideas with openness and care” (Palmer 1993, 73). When discussing the images and feelings that arise from a visualization session, it becomes clear that there is a mutual sense of acceptance, respect, and honoring. As children learn to

understand and honor themselves, they are able to interpret their experiences into the external world.

Visualization helps unite the mind and body. Hendricks and Wills (1975) describe this as centering. “As we begin to integrate our bodies and minds, we feel more responsive to our environment” (p. 5). Through centering, the “inner eye” is awakened.

Rozman (1985) believes that

Children come to the world endowed with certain natural abilities to perceive clearly which becomes clouded as interaction with external environment (home, school, society) increases. By keeping this spiritual eye of true perception open the child is able to perceive life’s experiences clearly and to extract wisdom and the needed lessons from them without delay (p. 15).

Richards (1980) states that to “awaken the inner eye is part of the task of education. To see with the inner eye into the inner form is part of perception” (p. 4). It is using the “context of our experiences” in a connected way with the world.

I have always believed that children “see the unusualness of things.” Unusual to whom? Is it not perhaps the filters that have clouded our vision as adults that children see so clearly through? One only has to watch children to see their joy in looking at a blade of grass, a stick, or a stone. They relish in the everyday. Education often takes that away. Visualization allows the child to reconnect with that joy and explore within the educational frame.

Zaleski and Kaufman (1997) state

Children, most of us believe, have a special relationship to the divine. We see this in their spontaneity, their sense of awe, their very closeness in years to the origin of life and thus to the Mystery from which it springs. (p. 179)

Children must be given the opportunity to explore this relationship to the sacred. Visualization provides the time to contemplate, to center, and to see with the inner eye. Education can only be enhanced through the development of the inner source of one’s nature. Authentic learning, where the child can explore his/her relation to truth, can only nurture the ability to deal with questions we often do not listen to.

### Visualization in Practice

As mentioned earlier, I use the work of Maureen Garth (1991, 1994). Her approach provides a safe path for children to visualize. Prior to the actual reading, I do a relaxation exercise to help them focus. This involves slowing down the breath and relaxing parts of the body. Gentle music plays throughout the whole session.

The journey begins with seeing a beautiful star for the children to hold and to cherish. The star is filled with white light that pours through their bodies. There is an image of love for people, animals, the world. The heart gets bigger and bigger. A guardian angel appears as the child's protector. The guardian angel takes the child to the Worry Tree.

The image of the Worry Tree is wondrous. The Worry Tree is a place where the children can put their problems and anxieties. "This tree accepts anything that you would care to pin there" (Garth 1991, 20). By placing issues or events of concern onto the tree, the children are able to "let go." There is an emotional release that rids them of anything troublesome.

After the whole session, the group shares their feelings and images. Speaking is voluntary. One observation was more children were eager to disclose their "worries" once they realized it was safe and no judgments were being made. The following are the children's responses from several sessions<sup>1</sup>:

**T:** What did you leave on the Worry Tree?

**VCR:** this morning and afternoon.... I left my hard work.... I put my not listening;... bad dreams.... bad days.

**CR:** Bad feelings. When my mom had an operation, they were in my dreams of Valentine's Day. It was about my dad. He went somewhere. I said something and people heard it and called the police. Someone was dressed like my dad. This guy I didn't like. He wasn't my dad. My real dad was in the store.

**CR:** Another worst nightmare. This guy makes bad dreams. Him takes good dreams away. He puts on bad dreams.

**T:** It sounds like you need a dream catcher.

**CR:** I do and sometimes it gets tired.

**CR:** I dreamt I went to sleep in my mom's room. My mom had a dream catcher. Then I heard something downstairs. It was a funny sound. I

had to go all the way downstairs. It looked like a devil. I went back upstairs. I took the dream catcher. I went to my room and closed the door. The next morning it was gone.

**VCR:** I put a sad dream inside the Worry Tree.... I put my play fighting from outside.

**CR:** I put my really really bad dreams.

**T:** Do you have alot of bad dreams?

**CR:** Yeh.

**T:** Why are they bad?

**CR:** Because I watch Goosebumps.

**CR:** I put my worries from my mom and dad.

**T:** What are those?

**CR:** We live in the building. In the hallway there is a drunk. At night she bangs on the door and yells. In the morning we saw blood.

**T:** How does this make your parents feel?

**CR:** Sometimes my dad comes home early and she is out there.

**CR:** I put me in the Worry tree.

**T:** Why?

**CR:** I don't like my feelings.

**T:** Why don't you like your feelings? (Silence)

**T:** Do you want to keep it a secret?

**CR:** Yes.

**VCR:** this morning when I hit Jack.... I hugged it and thanked him for all he's done for me.

**CR:** I put my bad feelings, myself in the Worry Tree.

**T:** Why?

**CR:** I push everybody. After I come back good.

**VCR:** my bad afternoon and my day.... my bad days so I can have good days.

**CR:** my room on the Worry Tree.

**T:** Why?

**CR:** Cuz my worst nightmares are cleaning up my room.

**CR:** myself. To see how it feels to be in the Worry Tree. It feels like more than one soul.

**T:** What does that mean?

**CR:** Two souls, three souls.

**T:** What do you mean by soul?

**CR:** A soul feels like ten souls mixed together.

**T:** What is a soul?

**VCR:** a spirit. It is important. It helps your brain and heart.... the soul makes your body do whatever you have to do, like your homework.... a soul is something inside of you and it makes you move.... spirits help you move and breath.... see a star in the sky. You are a shining star light.

The image of the Worry Tree opens the door for the children to talk from deep inside. Sometimes immediate issues such as fights in the day or bad feelings come out. However, as the sessions progressed, the Worry Tree became the trigger, opening up issues and thoughts of deep importance: signs from the texts of their own experiences.

Palmer (1993) discusses the significance of emotional space as one "that allows feelings to arise and be dealt with (p. 83). The emotions emerging, were bursting to come out. By having the chance to talk about them, a sense of closure and understanding was achieved.

The children sense there is acceptance. They can just "be." Garth believes the children should "pin their worries before entering the peace of the garden. When they return from their garden, they will not want to pick up their worries and bring them back"(1991, 13).

The recurrent theme of dreams and nightmares had often been discussed outside of the visualization sessions. The children are earnest in their efforts to unlock these mysteries. These are issues of importance to them.

The space for stillness and contemplation allows the children to relax their bodies. There is a sense of peace as one observes them relaxing to the words or lifting their faces to the "white light." The most heart-felt moment was the child who hugged the Worry Tree and thanked it.

The comments on soul and spirit were spontaneous. There had been discussions on soul and spirit through sharing of the different religions in the class, but this was more universal. Children are spiritual creatures and given the "chance" and "time" will unlock their perceptions to what appear to be mysteries. They do have a connection to the sacred. This must be recognized and cherished.

After the children leave the Worry Tree, the gate is opened and the children enter the garden. The garden takes on many forms, evolving into a variety of scenarios. One particular journey involved meeting "The Grandfather Tree" (Garth 1991).

The children enter the special garden and hear trees beckoning to them. There is one tree that stands out. He is very old and "full of knowledge and wisdom" (Garth 1991, 27). A vivid description of the tree follows. The description of the tree and surroundings is sensual, allowing the children to use their senses to experience nature around them.

At the end there is time for the children to explore what they chose to. There is always this component in the journeys. I leave the children there for awhile. This is a time to "see" and to contemplate. After sharing reflections from the Worry Tree portion of the journey, the group expresses their visions from the garden.

**T:** What did it feel like to walk up to a tree so old and wise?

**VCR:** It was nice.

**T:** Why?

**VCR:** The tree was nice.... it makes you feel happy.... it was sad to see an old tree.... it gives you shade.... happy.

**CR:** It feels comfortable.

**T:** Why?

**CR:** I was sitting at the bottom. Leaves were falling down because I sat on it.

**CR:** I hugged the tree. After I planted a friend tree for it.

**CR:** It feels warm. He hugged me.

**VCR:** I like old trees.... I saw two trees helping the old tree.... I put a string in it and attached it to others so love can go after he dies.

What is interesting from this discussion is the perception of "oldness" through the eyes of the children. Though the journey spoke of wisdom, there emerged a clear perception of old being something close to death. For a young child, being old seems to signify the need for help and the end of life. Still, there arose feelings of love and happiness.

Other visualization experiences have been taken from storybooks, where the story is read without

showing the pictures. The process of the sessions remains the same. Stories that involve transformation and universal images such as those from Joanne Ryder's *Where butterflies go* and *Earthdance*, provide spiritual experiences for the children. Connections from the inner self are able to unfold into a union with the planet. It is the beginning of a cosmic understanding.

Roszak (1992) states that

Children's innocence endows them with the purity of perception. They greet life, and especially the natural world around them, with an instinctively animist response. It is alive and personal for them. It has a voice. In the lucidity of their experience, something of the old sacramental vision of nature is reborn. (p. 297)

The spiritual force that exists in human nature is the essential quality of who we are. For children, this force lives inside, struggling to come out. It is the source of their wisdom. Spiritual literacy guides the emergence of this wisdom. Education should be the epistemological extension of what children are. The union of the mind, body, and spirit allows for their stories to come out; their voices to be heard.

### Conclusion

Thomas Merton believed that "the purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world" (in Palmer 1993, 12). If a child can begin to define his/herself authentically, then the inner knowledge can be woven into a connected tapestry that gives birth to a wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. Young children must be given the opportunity to delve deep inside and make sense of their world at a spiritual level.

Visualization as a meditative practice provides this opportunity. A nurturing learning space that allows for stillness, contemplation, and awareness enables the life force of young children to emerge. Acquiring spiritual literacy not only opens the inner door for the child, but for the educator as well.

Richards (1980) states that

The human individual is a spiritual being with a destiny. We live in a continuum of spirit, a continuum from which we are born and to which we die. Education helps us to get soul, body, and spirit together. (p. 170)

This continuum of spirit is the source for learning. The classroom community is one place where this source can be mutually explored by all its members. This vision of education is the beginning of a journey that can bring a sense of union to the planet and to the universe.

### References

- Brussat, F., and M. A. Brussat. 1996. *Spiritual literacy: Reading the sacred in everyday life*. New York: Scribner.
- Garth, M. 1991. *Starbright*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Garth M. 1994. *Sunshine*. North Blackburn, Australia: CollinsDove.
- Hendricks, G., and R. Wills. 1975. *The centering book*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Miller, J. P. 1992, Spring. Toward A Spiritual Curriculum. *Holistic Education Review* 5(1): 43-50.
- Miller, J. P. 1994. *The contemplative practitioner*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Palmer, P. J. 1993. *To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Richards, M. C. 1980. *Towards wholeness: Rudolf Steiner education in America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Roszak, T. 1992. *The voice of the earth*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rozman, D. 1985. *Meditating with children: The art of concentration and centering*. Boulder Creek, CA: University of the Trees Press.
- Rozman, D. 1989. *Meditation for children: Pathways to happiness, harmony, creativity and fun for the family*. Boulder Creek, CA: Aslan.
- Ryder, J., and L. Cherry. 1989. *Where butterflies go*. New York: Dutton.
- Ryder, J. 1996. *Earthdance*. New York: Holt.
- Zaleski, P., and P. Kaufman 1997. *Gifts of the spirit: Living the wisdom of the great religious traditions*. New York: HarperCollins.

### Note

1. In the dialogues printed in this article VCR stands for Various Children's Responses. CR refers to a particular child's responses and T denotes the teacher's comments or questions.

## Insight-Imagination The Emancipation of Thought And the Modern World by Douglas Sloan

\$16.95

Holistic Education Press  
1-800-639-4122

# Book Reviews

## Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures

by Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash

Reviewed by Robyn Opels and Bernhart Voetterl

We could write this book review similar to many others we have read in the past. We could tell you how intellectually stimulating the book is and how adeptly it addresses pertinent theoretical and relevant social issues; how great it would fit into an existing curriculum or course; or how thoroughly enjoyable it is to read. We could recommend it wholeheartedly and without reservation to anyone in the academy interested in social justice issues, education, politics, social activism, economics, or living a more thoughtful humane existence.

We could, but we won't.

Instead, and in keeping with the spirit of this distinguished publication, we will describe for you a most remarkable journey — an undertaking heretofore impossible sans this guide, this beautiful-ugly looking glass to attend us on this most breathtaking exploration of "Grassroots Post-Modernism."

Like the authors' profound "self-disclosure" of authorship at the beginning of this book, we resonate with their need to "weave the threads of our different perceptions, emotions, and views into a common fabric" (p. 15). The "we" writing this book review are two: one a budding academic, a white middle-class (by birth) American graduate student; the other, a white middle-class (by birth) male "educated" German immigrant community activist, who struggle to find meaning and community both within and without the academy's hallowed halls.

Biologist Gregory Bateson once called for scholar and schoolboy alike to explore with him the patterns that connect. "Break the pattern which connects the items of learning," wrote Bateson, "and you necessarily destroy all quality" (p. 8). Nearly two decades later, Esteva and Suri Prakash echo Bateson's plea and ask "educator" as well as "educated" to join forces with "real people" to end the destruction of "quality" by escaping "from the opaque vision of

conventional thinking and the frozen language of modern ideologies and formal categories" (p. 200).

"...To find words, a language adequate to the times we live in ... to keep us human. Without a public language to help us find our own words, our needs will dry up in silence" (p. 90). The quest for a language which clearly articulates these times we live in is the essence of *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*. Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash have eloquently and passionately taken upon themselves the arduous task of exploring the depths of "real peoples'" struggles to create a postmodern language to describe the world's present situation, and to reconcile their experiences and knowledge of life at the grassroots. Speaking with, rather than for, grassroots peoples and cultures, Esteva and Suri Prakash examine "the grassroots epic" as a challenge to the "three modern sacred cows that still remain unchallenged": global thinking ("the global project"), the universality of human rights, and the myth of the individual self (p. 9). Refusing to pray before these sacred cows, they courageously chronicle an ongoing bovine deconstruction occurring before our very eyes in corners of the globe most would like to forget exist. These struggling billions or "social majorities," "ordinary men and women, who autonomously organize themselves to cope with their predicaments;" who dare to live contextualized, cultured lives in spite of the encroaching "improvements" dictated by modernity, are more often than not perceived as uneducated, underdeveloped, or backward to most social planners, government officials, and educational researchers. Yet when viewed through the experiences of Esteva and Suri Prakash these grassroot lives take on hues and dimensions that up to now have remained unarticulated and unexplored.

In the tradition of social critics and thinkers like Wendell Berry, Ivan Illich, and Raimon Panikkar, Esteva and Suri Prakash's descriptions of ways in which local communal cultures are "striving to grow by escaping national and global 'neoliberal' projects and designs" and "learning from each other's struggles how to evolve their own cultural notions of a 'good life' lived in thriving local spaces" are striking in their clarity (p. 46). They ask simply for the world's "social minorities" (modern peoples degenerated into consumers' of the natural and cultural spaces of the world) to end their assessment and

Robyn Opels is a graduate student working on her Ed. D. in Curriculum and Instruction: Community and Environmental Renewal at Portland State University.  
Bernhardt Voetterl is a community activist living and working in Cascade Locks, Oregon.

judgment of the world's "social majorities" and to begin an earnest "cross-cultural" dialogue regarding human rights, the global project, and the interdependence of individuals.

Our journey with Esteva and Suri Prakash has been at once exhilarating and disturbing: exhilarating in that most of the ideas presented here have been felt, but up to now have remained unarticulated. And disturbing in its profound thoroughness and lucidity. Esteva and Suri Prakash dare to speak "the peoples' " truth to modernity's power and do so in a most provocative way. Following in the footsteps of elders like Mohandas Gandhi, they appeal to the highest moral ideals of the worlds' colonizers to critically examine and reflect on the latest incarnation of colonialism: cultural imperialistic global development and the education systems that propagate the global project. Their descriptions of "the peoples' " struggles have animated our discussions with peers and faculty, re-kindled our hope for and passions with regard to a more humane existence, and deepened our awareness of our own inter-related existences. We have taken to heart their warning that "until the lions find their own historians, the histories of hunters will continue to celebrate hunting" (p. 196); and hope that others will join us in "abandoning [our] certainties, going beyond the grave limits of their hard print or electronic text in order to enjoy the lived practices that constitute grassroots post-modernism" (p. 197).

Tackling such provocative issues as universal human rights, the individualized self, and global thinking is not an easy task and this book is not for the faint of heart. Their descriptions, drawn from the everyday realities and experiences of life at the grassroots, of the abuses that "social minorities" either consciously or unconsciously thrust upon "social majorities" are jarring in their honesty. "At the risk of being accused of parochialism, cultural relativism or, worse yet, inhumane indifference to dowry deaths, clitorectomies, gay bashing, and to the million other ways in which people torment and torture each other," they write,

we want to explicitly reject all contemporary attempts to globalize human rights. Their moral and philosophical foundations are increasingly suspect to us. Their negative impact cannot solely be attributed to wrong interpretations or inappropriate enforcements; the problems inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lie in the very nature of such ideals; in their core and their essence. All of us interested in struggling against injustices and power abuses will enjoy greater freedoms once we learn to extend our-

selves beyond our own cultural context, enlarging our understanding of the conceptions of violence, torture and other evils that plague people in unique ways in their own cultural contexts; as well as the varieties of good they enjoy, in terms that make them singular, unique and culturally distinct. (pp. 137-138)

As self-described "historians of the currently hunted," they ask the "social minorities" to revisit the modern mantra of "most people want economic development or progress," and check it for signs of vitality or truth. Are we (social minorities) sure all human beings need or have a right to water closets and modern sewage systems? Are we (social minorities) certain that universal human rights which have been sanitized of localized human responsibilities and cultural traditions are desired or morally legitimate? Are we (social minorities) confident that the individual is the basic social unit of the "civilized" and "cultured?" Are we (social minorities) secure in our anti-communal communities and anti-tradition traditions which keep us at arm's length from humble and convivial relationships?

This is not the one best book or recipe for the amelioration of cultural imperialistic practices, nor does it claim to be. However, it offers an excellent place to begin an honest conversation about issues real people face everyday of their lives and a chance to venture a peek behind the mask of the global project. For anyone ready to move from the abstract to the concrete, from the global to the local and from their minds to their hearts; who relished the "weeds" which grow from between the cracks in concrete, read this book and enjoy your journey.

### References

Bateson, G. 1980. *Mind and nature: A necessary unity*. Toronto: Bantam.

### Note

1. Consumer (from *consumere*, Latin: to consume): to destroy, do away with, use up, spend wastefully, eat or drink up, devour, absorb completely.

## Looking Back and Thinking Forward: Reexaminations of Teaching and Schooling

by Lillian Weber, edited by Beth Alberty

Reviewed by Diane Mullins

With all its limitations, there is the school. We have it. Without being the savior or the bulwark against the community, school exists as a place that children inhabit for a long time, and it exists in a way that, in the

past and today, poisons children's feeling and causes teachers' feelings of despair and disappointment because it is not working as they imagine it might.... The school exists and so one continues the effort to make it better. The first principle of making it better is DO NO HARM (p. 179)

Lillian Weber was a spokesperson for children, teachers, and parents. Beginning her work in the nursery school, where she spent twenty years. She continued her engagement with children, parents, and teachers in the New York City public schools for another twenty years. Founder of The Workshop Center for Open Education and Professor of Education at City College of The City University of New York, until her retirement in 1987, Weber was on and at the forefront of education. Weber believed in the inherent capacity of the person, in the educability of all human beings. This trust in the capacity of children, parents, and teachers was also a call to action. Often Weber's voice was adamant: Contempt for the world is contempt for content. Contempt for the learner is contempt for humans (p. 127). Other words I remember Weber so clearly speaking are: WITHOUT YOU, without you, without you, without you. Without you this class wouldn't work; without you this school wouldn't work; without you this world wouldn't work. I am brought back to my classroom. Yes, Andrea has come to realize her own import, but how does she come to understand that Carlos is equally essential? How do I help make that happen? In this book, *Looking Back and Thinking Forward: Reexaminations of Teaching and Schooling*, Weber is my guide.

Weber had been working on an anthology of her work until her death in 1994. Included is an introductory chapter by Weber as well as the organization for this anticipated book in outline form. Alberty's arrangement of the book in four parts and the titles of each of these, mirror main themes in Weber's thought: "The Context of Learning," which centers on the educative surround for the child; "Commitment and Professionalism," which addresses the teacher's capabilities and responsibilities; "Valuing Human Intelligence and Capacity for Meaning," which establishes the positive base for educating; and "The Status of the Vision," which positions education in the larger political context of democracy

Diane Mullins teaches 2nd/3rd grade children at PS 3, the John Melser Charrette School, in Manhattan, New York City born and a teacher for thirty years, she is committed to public education. She is a member of the PS 3, City College, and Prospect Center communities.

and democratic aspirations. This arrangement and Alberty's introduction to the book invite the reader to grapple with these fundamental ideas.

Across these headings, Weber speaks very particularly to the devaluing of our schools, the devaluing of society. Looking towards what is possible, Weber fosters a course. The writings include descriptions of curriculum for student teachers, anecdotes about Weber's children and grandchildren, reference to a film Weber made about separation (1959), and racial tension felt at a North Dakota Study Group meeting that demanded thoughtful response (1990-1993). Weber was a woman of enormous strength, wisdom, and courage. Weber's language, descriptive of actual situations, makes room for human variability, for differences among people. Weber was committed to finding what she termed "cracks," opportunities for making small changes, and using them for making space for human expression. Sharing the important work of colleagues, "joining with" others, Weber made pathways wider. Taking an historical perspective allowed Weber to anticipate clearings ahead. Realizing the campaign of violations particularly against young people in the schools and society, Weber refocused her thought to "deschooling." Her concept of "deschooling" meant making room for the human order of things and attending to the human scale. Restructuring, changing the rules and content, was not enough.

Weber is clear about her beliefs and revisits them over and over again. She tells us of the inherent abilities and educability of all human beings. She does not offer structures, she does not impose. Rather, she provides questions to consider. Weber reminds us of the primacy of relationships and relatedness. Through her stories she shows us how making small changes provide opportunities.

Weber's extraordinary work is intimate and at the same time international. She was recognized as a moral voice and leader in education by all who knew her.

Weber was a talker who came to understand her thinking through talk. She tried things out. I remember the Chinese restaurant on 125th Street near Broadway, the owner always welcoming the Professor. These meetings around food, like many other social occasions, provided the context for releasing Weber's thought. Sometimes it was the two of us, sometimes a group gathering. Always it was a gift.

The City College Workshop Center, renamed after her death The Lillian Weber Workshop Center, pro-



vided an incredibly rich surround filled with plants, animals, batteries, bulbs, mirrors, weights, bicycles, pendulums, materials without particular use, students' work, reference books, journals, artwork, musical instruments, photography equipment, and people. Weber built and fostered community by introducing people to one another. Weber, as medium, invited relationships. She made and maintained connections and friendships and, by her example, taught us how important it is to introduce one person to another.

Weber was a remarkably well-read woman. She read science, philosophy, education, poetry, novels, history, biography. Weber had an account at Dillons' of London, and would order and read books before they came out in this country. She wrote letters to people whose articles provoked her thinking. She wrote proposals for grants. She used the necessity of reporting to granting agencies as the occasion to expand her own thought and communicate her ideas. These reports she shared with colleagues. Weber set up *Notes from The Workshop Center* as a forum where educators — teachers and parents — could articulate their thinking and read about the current struggles in education. For many, myself included, this was a first place of publication..

My first encounter with Weber was in 1976 at the Workshop Center at City College. I had gone there to attend a workshop on mathematics. It was a very crowded room on the main floor of Sheppard Hall. I remember nothing of the workshop, just Lillian.

That summer I took the Summer Institute and never left the Workshop Center. Weber gave me the right book: Susan Isaacs's *Intellectual Growth of Young Children*. This work is filled with the voices of young children, their conversations around natural phenomena. This was the book that taught me to want to read. The Workshop Center was a place where everyone was welcoming and everyone was welcome. I joined the Friday afternoon gatherings of experienced teachers. I remember being part of the ritual of grant submission. We would work through the night making copies, collating, stapling, as well as running after necessary signatures and letters. I became an admirer, friend, and member of the Workshop Center community. In 1977 Weber sent me to the The Prospect Center and later to the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. These continue to be growing places for me.

Three members of that grant proposal group were Beth Alberty, Ruth Dropkin, and Stan Chu. Alberty

worked alongside Weber for many years, as a friend, colleague, and editor. This book, *Looking Back and Thinking Forward: Reexaminations of Teaching and Schooling* would not have happened without Alberty. As literary executor, Alberty gathered Weber's writings, talks, dictations, conversations, scribbles and intertwined them into a coherent whole. Like Weber, Alberty did not do this work in isolation. Alberty sought the thinking of colleagues. She invited Patricia Carini to write the foreword and Dropkin the brief biography. Chu gathered the photos, which bring Weber's face to the fore of this extraordinary work. The writings are written in the first person plural: WE, US. Weber did her work "in relation to" and envisioned herself as "among." Weber cites those who provoked her thought or helped her think through. These thinkers made enormous contribution to Weber's understanding and warrant investigation themselves. I feel this particularly about Elizabeth Newson, who wrote about the "unreasonable care and irrational commitment" given children by their families. The kind of commitment we adults need to provide for all our children. The extended references in the volume include Bussis, Cazden, Delpit, Duckworth, Erickson, Gliedman, Kamii, Marti, Morrison, Newson, Rosen, and Perrone. As a help to the reader the book is also well indexed.

Weber continually prods us to observe, listen, stand back, examine, reflect, remember, recollect, and reexamine. Weber's last work, anticipating a collection of papers to be published, is phrased in question form: "Reexaminations: What is the Teacher and What is Teaching?" — certainly these are relevant questions. To answer them, Weber revisits the Open Corridor program, the Advisory Service and the Workshop Center. Just as Weber noticed the small accomplishment by the nursery school child holding onto a fence, she recognized the value of small accomplishments of the institution or setting "because they created some easement and space for the child's development" (p. 176).

Throughout the book, Weber keeps returning to the home surround.

Out of the big buzzing swarm of speech going on around the child, speech clots out like cream in clumps around a content.... The mother responds to all the gestural language that the child has, his eyes looking, his nose pointing, everything pointing and helps the child 'clot out' by accepting his or her agenda, intent, and purpose. (p. 25)

This message from the 1976 essay, "Comments on Language by a Silent Child," reverberates in her final chapter.

One constant accompaniment to human growth is the presence of people of many generations creating an unevenness in both the child's human and material surround. (p. 158)

The family from whom we emerge has a major function in carrying the memory of who we are. Before we could remember and when we can't remember, the family reminiscences keep us whole.... and even larger condition .... the acceptance of the child's own identity.... the unconditional acceptance of the child's 'is-ness'.... the continuities in the surround of others. (p. 159)

A bit later in the chapter Weber writes:

Teaching is also present in the context that allows or fosters noticing, following-after, and joining-with, as well as providing support for the child's independent inquiries.... The teacher is not just assisting the child. The teacher is present as adult and adds to the educative context of the school by that presence. (p. 174)

Weber raises large questions, each one helping her grapple, and each one taking her to a new place. This questioning, reconsidering, reexamining, reflecting, recollecting, reformulating is the process through which Weber becomes, as Maxine Greene might say, "who she is not yet." This thinking through is in collaboration; looking back and thinking forward is a constant for Weber.

How do human beings take in from the neighborhood, the street, the home, the community? In each educative setting what are the modes of learning? (p. 177)

I thought of the teacher as being engaged with where the child was going anyway, as enabling the child to get there, to fulfill what was already existent and pushing forward in the child. (p. 161)

The question of difference and unevenness in children's growth was enormously important to me. The teacher had to understand that what was set up to foster the child's development had to be responsive to this difference and unevenness without predictive conclusions.... Let's wait and see.... Whatever you were not seeing in the child was encouraged to emerge. (p. 161)

Weber's thoughts have enormous implication. Her ideas and questions are complex, although stated in simple language. What follows are questions teachers, parents, administrators, and community members need to address — questions teacher education programs need to address.

Was this context various enough, dense enough, to be responsive to and supportive of all the particular children and children? Was there a sufficient mesh with the child's interests? Were the children's contributions

to context encouraged? Were the child's interests even understood? (p. 165)

What was an educative context...? Was school such a context? What would it take to make school more so? For this child, or that one? (p. 166-167)

Dare we not recognize the import of these settings  
Weber proposes

that there is no way to relate to children as though they must be protected from their homes and community context. There may be enormous negative factors in the community, but the elements that can rebuild the community are also situated within the community (p. 179).

This book is not one to be read quickly. There is a command for reflection and an invitation to unsurface one's own questions about family, classroom, school, community. A close reading of Weber's book in collaboration with members of a school community, may well be the impetus for an ongoing reexamination of learning and teaching. This book has already served as text in many teacher education institutions. It would be valuable for public education policy makers to read. The book has made me think about my practice. What could I have done to deepen the art experience for Robeson, a child in my mixed age class? How could I soften the social connections for Jorge and better support Sita, who during these last months came to class at a loss of some zest for life? I am in the classroom to better support these children and their lives.

This powerful volume makes Weber's voice and mission clear. *Looking Back and Thinking Forward: Reexaminations of Teaching and Schooling* is about heart and love, but it is also about action. In the foreword to this volume Patricia Carini refers to love as a calling. Weber used "love" as a term of endearment. Lillian Weber's life work was an expression of loving. This book is a critical directive to make the world better. The demand on all of us to use ourselves intelligently, to consider respect for each and all persons an imperative on our actions, is perhaps the moral statement for educators, one we reflect on, consider, and reconsider; one we try and try again to realize (p. 127).

**Educational Freedom for a Democratic Society  
A Critique of National Goals, Standards  
and Curriculum**

Edited by Ron Miller

\$18.95

Holistic Education Press

1-800-639-4122

## **Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development**

Edited by Enid Lee, Deborah Menkart, and Margo Okazawa-Rey

Published by Network of Educators on the Americas, Washington, D.C., 1998.

Reviewed by Janet R. Price

This "guidebook" is really two books in one. Part of it is a varied, if uneven, collection of curricular materials for classrooms on a wide range of topics. Although the book is billed as a K-12 guide, most of the curricular materials are geared to secondary school classrooms. I plan to incorporate quite a bit of it this coming year in my high school American studies classes and to pass on other parts to colleagues who teach math and science.

The curriculum guide is sandwiched between a set of readings for adults to use in staff, family and community development sessions and a final section, entitled "Talking Back," which includes some examples of grassroots activism by young people. The book is replete with thought-provoking essays that caused me to test and rethink my own teaching practices and philosophy of education. As a result of this reflection, I conclude that the basic premise of this book is somewhat flawed or, more precisely, incomplete.

This book is much more about anti-racist education than about multicultural education. The editors note that they are guided by the work of the late Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who argued that the purpose of education in an unjust society is to bring about justice. Thus, the main thrust of the book is social change, not the study of many cultures. Indeed, the most common topic in the readings and classroom materials is the harm that dominant or mainstream American culture does to outsiders. The problem is, the outsiders, be they Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants or women tend to

emerge as more acted upon than acting, particularly in the classroom materials. That is the danger inherent in the editors' choice to stress the causes, nature, and effects of oppression over the cultures of the oppressed.

The title of the book comes from a selection by James A. Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform" which sets up a hierarchy of approaches. Least favored is the "Contributions" or "Heroes and Holidays" approach, with its danger of trivializing ethnic cultures and reinforcing stereotypes and its relegation of ethnic content to special days or events outside the main curriculum. The next step up for Banks is the "Ethnic Additive Approach" which integrates ethnic content and perspective into an unstructured "mainstream-centric" curriculum. The preferred approach is "Transformative," which restructures the curriculum to emphasize "how the common U.S. culture and society emerged from a complex synthesis and interaction of the diverse cultural elements that originated with the various groups that make up American society." Banks observes: "When the focus is on the contributions and unique aspects of ethnic cultures, students are not helped to understand them as complete and dynamic wholes." True, but when the focus is on synthesis and interaction, will students still have the opportunity to enjoy the uniqueness and vitality of specific cultures for their own sake, including their own home cultures and those of their classmates?

As Americans, we are constantly balancing our individual characters and values with the teachings and examples of our home cultures and with mainstream culture. This is a particularly daunting task for those disadvantaged by the mainstream culture, political system, and economy. For the students I teach, teenagers recently arrived from non-English speaking countries, it is a Herculean effort. Students need to reflect on and take control over the interplay of "diverse cultural elements" in their own lives as much as they need to understand the interplay of these forces in the larger world. Most enjoy sharing their home culture with others — be it through telling their own immigration stories, interviewing their families about their economic choices or sharing and comparing traditional music. Many also seek out opportunities to explore other cultures in depth. I would argue that these "micro" explorations are as important as the "macro" study of Banks' "complete and dynamic whole" and that the two can

Janet Price teaches American history and literature at the International High School at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, and serves on the National Teacher Policy Institute. She previously served as Executive Vice President of New Visions for Public Schools, a school reform group, and as managing attorney at Advocates for Children of New York, Inc. She is the co-author of the third edition of *ACLU Rights of Students* and has written a number of reports and articles on school reform issues.

complement each other in the restructured, transformative, constructivist curriculum this guide envisions and contributes to but does not (how could it?) fully exemplify.

To illustrate my argument, consider my students' choices when asked to write reports and give group presentations on Chinese immigration. Jaime, an Ecuadorian, chose to dwell on the culture Chinese immigrants brought with them: their religious beliefs, their art forms, the significance of certain colors. When an Iranian student then talked about the Chinese Exclusion Act and widespread violence against Chinese, the rest of the class could more fully appreciate the humanity of the persecuted Chinese workers and the philistinism of their oppressors. The Ecuadorian and Iranian also walked the streets of Manhattan's Chinatown creating a witty photo essay juxtaposing mainstream cultural icons — a McDonald's arch, a luxury car — with pagodas and signs in Chinese lettering. It was as much about their own immigrant lives and about the "complete and dynamic whole" of New York City as it was about a particular ethnic enclave.

In another class, Kam, a Chinese student, chose to concentrate, in an impassioned and riveting presentation, on the contributions Chinese made by building the nation's railroad system under incredibly dangerous and depriving conditions. That made his Peruvian teammate's painstaking analysis of American immigration policy towards the Chinese much more meaningful to their classmates. They could see why other laborers resented the willingness of the Chinese to work under such conditions but they also could feel in their guts the appalling unfairness of the government's response. It was not much of a stretch to explore the role of business interests in this scenario or to compare it to immigration policy and politics today. But the students' initial explorations of the specific qualities of Chinese culture and contributions proved to be important building blocks.

I expect next year's exploration of this topic to be enhanced by a particularly good curriculum unit by Debbie Wei, entitled "Exclusion: Chinese in 19th Century America." It exemplifies what is most useful about this guidebook, as well as its limitations. The objectives of the unit are "to know about the lives and contributions of Chinese immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century" and "to analyze the roots of anti-immigrant sentiment which led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts." The suggested activities promise to be engaging and

empowering for students and the materials are ideal for achieving the second objective. However, Chinese immigrant culture and life are seen almost exclusively through anti-immigrant rhetoric and mining songs and accounts of violence and discrimination. The voices of the immigrants themselves are only heard in the very moving selection of poems carved in the walls of Angel Island by detainees. It's a great unit, but it will still need the additions of students like Jaime and Kam to be complete.

This is an anthology with some 75 different contributors and so, not surprisingly, the entries vary widely in style, format, and purpose. The math section, for instance, includes a simple one-page description of the Algebra Project with a contact for further information, but without any sample curricular activities. (A shame, because a fully developed example would help illustrate how it is possible to teach math by building on what students already know from everyday life.) Another entry, by a college professor, is a painstakingly detailed description of what she has done in class, including an analysis of the underlying theoretical basis of her work and many scholarly cites. A third entry includes very specific, simple instructions for the classroom teacher and graphs and charts in a convenient format to duplicate and hand out to students.

As in most curriculum guides, the "handouts" for students are usually more important and useful than the directions that go with them. Most people aware enough to consider using these materials can figure out what to do with them. When they are used in a staff development setting, the participants would be best off brainstorming together how they could be used. In fact, in some cases, the instructions for using them should be disregarded because they amount to teacher-centered pedagogy, far removed from Freire's premise, adopted by the editors in their introduction, that students must play an active part in the learning process and that teachers and students are both simultaneously learners and producers of knowledge. In other cases, the instructions come close to insulting the reader's intelligence, a common problem in curriculum guides.

For instance, one curriculum writer, after helpfully suggesting a well-chosen poem by Langston Hughes be taught in tandem with a fascinating interview with an ex-Klansman, then finds it necessary to advise: "Point out to students that the poem was written many years ago and that the poet used the term 'man' in the generic sense to mean all people,

female and male." Duh! And by the way, wouldn't a better approach be to ask the students what Hughes meant when he used the word "man" and what words a poet writing today might choose instead? On the other hand, perhaps I shouldn't bite the hand that has fed me excellent material I will certainly use in class. I will use it, but I will use it my way. And that

is the advice I would give to others.

If I had a second copy of this book, I would put it in a time capsule for historians of American culture and education in the next millennium. What about life and schooling in America in 1998, I would have them ask, made this particular book so necessary?

#### Statement of Ownership Management and Circulation

Publication Title: Encounter Publication Number: 1094-3838 Filing Date: 9/18/98 Issue Frequency: Quarterly. Number of Issues Published Annually: 4 Annual Subscription Price: \$75 for institutions; \$35 for individuals Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: P.O. Box 328, Brandon (Rutland County) VT 05733-0328; Contact Person: C. S. Jakiela; Telephone: 802-247-8312. 8. Mailing Address of General Business Office of Publisher: P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733-0328. Publisher: C. S. Jakiela, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733; Editor: Jeffrey Kane, L.I.U., 720 Northern Blvd., Brookville, NY 11548. Managing Editor: C. S. Jakiela, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733. 10. Owner: Psychology Press, Inc., Brandon, VT; Charles and Nancy Jakiela, Brandon, VT 05733. 11. Known bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders: None. 12. Tax Status (for nonprofit organizations): Not applicable.

Extent and Nature of Circulation (Roman typeface = Average copies last 12 months; Italic typeface: September 1998 issue). Net press run: 1200, 1200. Sales through dealers: 240, 240. Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 724, 673. Total paid and/or requested circulation: 964, 913. Free distribution by mail: 16, 16. Free distribution outside of mail: 0, 0. Total free distribution: 16, 16. Total distribution: 980, 929. Copies not distributed: 220, 271. Total: 1200, 1200. Percent paid and/or requested circulation: 98.367, 98.277.

Publication of this statement is required. It will be printed in the December 1998 issue of this publication. Certification: Charles S. Jakiela, Publisher (9/18/98)

*"There is nothing but is related to us, nothing that does not interest us — kingdom, college, tree, horse, or iron shoe — the roots of all things are in man." Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## High Mowing School

*a boarding and day Waldorf high school with a challenging, integrated curriculum in a beautiful, nurturing environment.*

P.O. Box 850 • Abbot Hill Road • Wilton, New Hampshire 03086  
603.654.2391 • fax 603.654.6588

# Questions Worth Arguing About

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

**Enthusiasm for real learning builds when an integrated curriculum is built around questions that are significant in themselves and are important to students.**

If *they* can keep you from asking the right questions they don't have to be concerned about your answers. (Thomas Pynchon)

One of the methodological foundations of science lies in the avoidance of the most fundamental questions. It is characteristic of physics to never really ask what matter is, biology not to really ask what life is, or for psychology not to ask what the soul is. (C. F. Von Weizsaecker)

During my first workshop at Thompson Middle School in the summer of 1991, I asked the *teachers* to identify the real-life questions that their students were asking. After some discussion they agreed on the following seven: Who am I? What are my legal rights? Why must I learn this? How will I be graded and why are grades important? How do I relate to my peers? How do I juggle the expectations of so many teachers?

I then asked, "How does what you are currently teaching address these questions?" The silence that followed was, as they say, deafening!

Later a colleague, Carole Cooper, visited a number of classrooms where she asked *students* to write down some of the questions that they were most concerned about. It is significant that none were trivial questions. What is even more significant is that their concerns are both personal and social, local and global. This is just a sampling of students' responses: "What will I be when I grow up?" "What will the next war be about?" "Is there going to be enough room for landfills?" "Why am I here?" "Will the ozone layer get thinner?" "When will racism end?" "Will there be another depression?" "Can we help all of the suffering people?" "Can we save the rainforest?" "Will I succeed?" "How can I get along with my parents?" "What will the future be like?"

The late MIT physicist Jerrold Zaccharias once defined education as "the raising of questions worth

This article is the fifth chapter in Clark's *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A Student-Centered Approach*, published by Holistic Education Press. The first four chapters were printed in prior issues of ENCOUNTER. Readers interested in purchasing the full bound edition at \$18.95 per copy are invited to do so by phoning the Press toll-free at 1-800-639-4122.

The references to "Thompson" are to the Thompson Middle School in St. Charles, Illinois.

Edward T. Clark, Jr., specializes in integrated curriculum design and site-based educational change. He has been involved in teacher education for over 30 years — as Director of Teacher Education at Webster University, as Professor of Environmental Education at George Williams College, and as an independent educational consultant for the last fifteen years.

arguing about." These students' questions certainly fit this characterization. Any one of them could be the starting point for a semester's course of study. It should be obvious that the most effective way to educate anyone is to ask the kinds of provocative questions that elicit the interests of the learner and motivate them to seek answers that satisfy their needs. This simple, yet profound truth may well lie at the heart of what ails education today. In our efforts to analyze, manipulate, and formalize the teaching and learning processes, we have forgotten that "*Nothing shapes our lives so much as the questions we ask — or refuse to ask*" (Keen 1994). Perhaps the reason is that in our product-oriented culture where answers are so important, we have forgotten the art of asking tough, sticky, value-laden questions.

Michael Ray and Michelle Myers, in their book *Creativity in Business* (1986) based on their pioneering course at Stanford's distinguished Graduate School of Business, devote an entire chapter to the topic, "Ask Dumb Questions."

You'll soon become adept at knowing a dumb question when you hear it. You'll recognize it by the answers it generates. A dumb question creates explosions, concatenations, cascades of insights ... a dumb question is not *dead-ended, etiquette-oriented, accusatory, or shallow*.

These are the questions that one Nobel laureate called "jugular questions" that reach the essence of things. They're the kind of off-the-wall questions that a four-and-a-half-year-old named Scott asked in less than an hour: What's behind a rainbow? — What color is the inside of my brain? — What's inside of a rock? A tree? A sausage? Bones? My throat? A spider? — Does the sky have an end to it? If it doesn't, how come you can see it? — Why are my toes in front of my feet?" (Ray and Myers 1986).

One example of a dumb question suggested by Ray and Myers is pretty basic: "What is a question?" Michelle Ray who has spent her life examining the nature of questions, offers the following suggestions.

- A question is an opening to creation.
- A question is an unsettled and unsettling issue.
- A question is an invitation to creativity.
- A question is a beginning of adventure.
- A question is seductive foreplay.
- A question is a disguised answer.

- A question pokes and prods that which has not yet been poked and prodded.
- A question is a point of departure.
- A question has no end and no beginning.
- A question wants a playmate.

It is clear that we are not discussing the kinds of questions that one usually hears in school. Indeed, I think it is safe to say that because of the linear, cause-and-effect logic of our schooling, when we think of questions, most of us immediately assume not only that there is an answer — but a right answer. I think there must be a correlation between the emphasis in education on right answers and the fact that as a society, we seem to have lost the art of asking open-ended, provocative questions worth arguing about. But as Robert Sternberg, IQ theorist of Yale University, points out, intelligence includes the ability to ask appropriate questions, a capacity that is apparently fundamental to higher-order thinking (Sternberg 1987).

It is sad but true that conventional wisdom at all levels of our educational system from kindergarten through graduate school holds that teachers never ask questions they don't know the answer to. The result — as noted earlier — is that too many teachers spend most of their time providing answers to questions students never ask.

I suspect that one reason elementary science has been so poorly taught is the fear teachers have of questions that they can't answer. In an age of specialization, few elementary teachers consider themselves scientists. As a result, they teach only the most elementary facts, which elicit few if any questions. Of course, teachers may not always be able to control the questions that pop into the minds of their students. I often ask teachers how they handle off-the-wall questions that seem to have little, if any, obvious relevance to the topic being discussed. The truth is that as kids get older, most learn very quickly the kinds of questions that are allowed and those that may elicit a response like: "Where in the world did you think of that question?" — "We're not talking about rainbows — or trees — or sausages — or bones — or ...."

And yet, one of the most endearing, and sometimes frustrating characteristics of little — and sometimes not so little — children is their ability to ask questions. Beginning at an early age, they are full

of questions about everything from “What makes flowers yellow?” to “Where do the stars come from?” “Where does God live?” “Where did I come from?” Ted Sizer calls these life’s “essential questions” and argues that these are the grist for learning. However, almost as soon as children begin formal schooling, their questions cease and by the sixth grade, teachers are convinced that their students don’t know enough to ask intelligent questions. It is obvious that teachers who disparage students like this are not ready to design a curriculum around students’ questions and concerns. But teachers can learn, as members of one sixth grade team at Thompson discovered to their surprise.

Having resisted curriculum changes for almost three years, the team decided to invite me to help plan their year-end program — the only all-team activity of the year. Ostensibly, this was to be an integrative, learner-centered endeavor. For two hours I kept asking questions and suggesting alternative ways of organizing the “content” of the activity — apparently to no avail. Prodding for some glimmer of flexibility was like pulling teeth. I left the room feeling both frustrated and discouraged. Imagine my surprise a few days later when the principal called to tell me that the team had really enjoyed our time together and felt it had been very worthwhile. I heard nothing more until the following fall when one of the team members stopped me in the hall and told me that the activity had been the best and most rewarding they had ever had. What amazed her most were the *questions the students had asked, their eagerness and excitement about exploring those questions, and the depth of learning that resulted.*

Historically, education has reflected the agenda of the adult world rather than the agenda of the child’s world. And, perhaps to some degree, that is necessary. But, as in most other cases, the issue is seldom “either/or” but rather “both/and.” For example, Jerome Bruner (1960) points out that most basic concepts and general ideas can be made relevant to children in some way at any age. The operative word is *relevance*. Unless the content of the curriculum matches the intent of the growing organism we call the child, the results are unpredictable and can even be chaotic, e.g., high school dropouts who complete their schooling by earning what Bob Samples (1993)

calls a “Ph.D. in street smarts.” When there is an appropriate “fit” between content and nature’s developmental plan, the child’s enthusiasm and capacity for thinking and learning seems to know no bounds. In short, while the content may be selected by the adult, the clues as to its appropriateness not only must, but I believe, can come from the child. After all, in the final analysis, it is the child’s curiosity rather than the adult’s desire to provide answers that will direct and shape the successful curriculum.

### Learning to Ask Questions Worth Arguing About

In the absence of textbooks — except as possible resources — and in light of the sheer amount of knowledge and information available to teachers and students alike, it may be difficult for teachers — and, hopefully, students and teachers working together — to decide what knowledge and information is most important to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The Contextual Matrix (See Figure 1) helps teachers determine the relevant knowledge and information appropriate to a given area of study. At the same time, the Matrix is a powerful cognitive model for organizing the curriculum to graphically depict both the interrelatedness of these contextual perspectives and the unique focus of each. The Matrix can be used at any level in a single subject, or with several subjects. It has also been used effectively in both personal and organizational settings where people wanted to create and explore their own contexts of meaning.

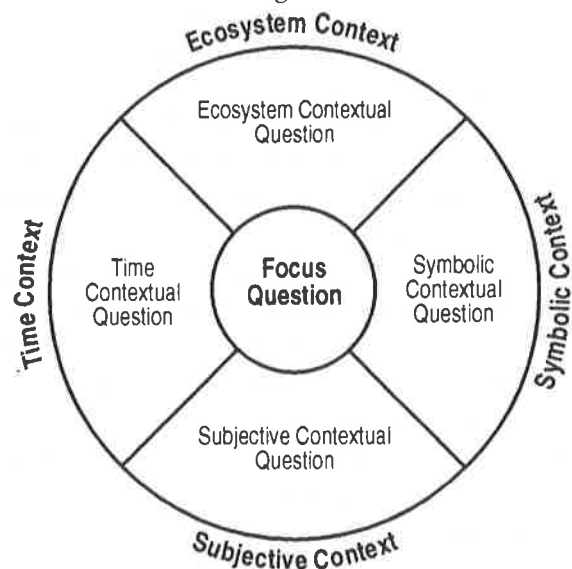


Figure 1. The Contextual Matrix



In order to understand the relevance of these four contextual relationships to a given topic or situation, we need to ask the appropriate questions: questions that are open-ended and have no absolute right or wrong answers. These are not questions that invite polarized, yes/no answers like the questions around which academic debates are organized. Instead of seeking factual answers, these questions reflect a search for meaning. In short, they are contextual questions.

### Focus Questions

The first step in designing a program of study or exploration — euphemistically called a curriculum unit — is to select a Focus Question. As its name implies, this question captures the essence of the study, is necessarily broad in scope, and provides the directions that will be pursued. Implicit in the Focus Question are the anticipated outcomes. When the Focus Question reflects a preestablished theme, e.g., the human body, it might be something like, “*How does the human body work?*” When the Focus Question reflects a proposed exploration of students’ real-life experiences, it might be “*What does it mean to grow up in today’s world?*”

In an inner-city district where I conducted workshops, the ninth grade students were required to study John Steinbeck’s novel, *The Red Pony*, the story of a boy growing up on a Montana ranch. Forced to teach a novel that, based on her previous experience, seemed to be totally irrelevant to the lives of her predominately Black students, the teacher decided to redesign the study using a Contextual Matrix. By selecting as a Focus Question, “*What does it mean to grow up in today’s world?*” and eliciting her students’ responses to this question, she created a context for the novel that was relevant to their lives, and in doing so, captured both their interest and their imagination. Not only was it the first time everyone had read the entire book without pressure from her, they eagerly extended their study beyond the Montana ranch to other sections of the country as well, in each case using an appropriate novel as the basis for further exploration.

Focus questions can be used within a discipline to turn what was once a content-centered unit into an integrated one. For example, a high school science

teacher designed an entire semester’s class around the question “*How will genetic engineering affect human life in the future?*” Students spent the first week reading and discussing the science fiction novel *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* by Kate Wilhelm (1976). In addition, they read as much as they could find about genetic engineering and biomedical technology in newspapers, magazines, and other materials supplied by the teacher and the resource center. By the end of the week, they had enough information and knowledge to begin formulating the questions that teams of students would explore during the ensuing weeks. From time to time as appropriate, the teacher presented mini-lectures, but always in response to the readiness of the students. Periodically, students would report on their findings to the class. These reports were always followed by in-depth discussions in “jigsaw teams” — temporary dialogue groups composed of one person from each of three or four study teams. As students became more sophisticated in their insights and knowledge, deeper and more “professional” questions began to emerge — many of which focused on the social, economic, political, and ecological ramifications of genetic engineering. The open-ended essay on the final exam (required by the district) provided ample opportunity for students to summarize and synthesize what they had learned during the semester. Needless to say, the grades were the best she had ever seen in what traditionally had been viewed as a tough class.

A ninth grade history teacher designed an introductory course on U.S. history around the question, “*How has the natural landscape shaped American history?*” Another high school teacher used as a Focus Question for an Introduction to World History, “*What makes a culture ‘civilized’?*” A college professor used as a starting point for an Introduction to Philosophy course the Focus Question, “*What is philosophy?*” Social studies classes are ideal vehicles for integrating the various subject areas into a single focus. For example, another high school teacher designed an interdisciplinary unit around the question, “*What do the various disciplines tell us about war?*” An eighth grade civics teacher designed an integrated course on the U.S. Constitution around the question, “*How is the Constitution a systemic model for a democratic society?*”

When a teacher or a team of teachers wants to design a fully integrated program of study that ranges far and wide and incorporates several subject areas, broader questions are more appropriate. The following grade-level Focus Questions were used by the United Catholic Parochial School in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, to design an integrated K-8 curriculum.

Grade One: How big is my neighborhood?

Grade Two: How am I a member of many families?

Grade Three: What makes communities work?

Grade Four: How does the world work?

Grade Five: What is culture?

Grade Six: What does it mean to be human?

Grade Seven: How do systems work? What is our relationship to the Earth?

Grade Eight: How does one live responsibly in the global community?

### Contextual Questions

After the Focus Question has been identified, the next step is to find Contextual Questions that focus attention on the appropriate relationship. Sometimes it may be useful to have more than one question for a relationship. These questions focus and frame the exploration, capture the essence of each contextual relationship, and may serve to highlight one or more aspects of that relationship. Some of the Contextual Questions below were designed by the parochial school faculty. The rest come from other sources. As might be expected, there are obvious similarities among questions at the different levels. However, since the focus or context of each is different, e.g., family and community, essentially they are different questions.

#### First Grade Focus Question: How Big is My Neighborhood?

*The Subjective Context:* What is my neighborhood? How many neighborhoods do I belong to?

*The Time Context:* How has my neighborhood changed?

*The Symbolic Context:* Who are my neighbors and how are their families like my family and different from my family?

*The Ecosystem Context:* How does nature affect my neighborhood?

#### Second Grade Focus Question: How Am I a Member of Many Families?

*The Subjective Context:* Who am I? How am I alike and different from other children? How many families do I belong to? How is my body like a family?

*The Time Context:* Where did I come from? How does my body change? When will I become more independent?

*The Symbolic Context:* What kinds of families are there? In what ways are families alike? Different?

*The Ecosystem Context:* How do different families relate to the Earth? How do families use the Earth's resources? How do plants and animals and people live together?

#### Third Grade Focus Question: What Makes Communities Work? (See Figure 2)

*The Subjective Context:* How is my life influenced by my community? In what ways do I communicate with others? What communities do I belong to?

*The Time Context:* How do human communities grow and change? How do natural communities grow and change? What can we learn from patterns of change?

*The Symbolic Context:* What makes a community? What kinds of communities are there? What are the rules that communities live by?

*The Ecosystem Context:* What can we learn from natural communities? How can communities preserve natural resources?



Figure 2. Contextual Matrix: What Makes Communities Work?

#### Fourth Grade Focus Question: How Does the World Work?

*The Subjective Context:* What are the rules/limits I have to live by? What kind of rules do I set for myself? Why do different people have different rules?

*The Time Context:* How have the rules/limits by which humans live changed over time? What kind of rules/limits will we need in the future?

*The Symbolic Context:* How have humans discovered and created the rules/limits we live by? What are the patterns to be found in human rules/limits? In natural rules/limits?

*The Ecosystem Context:* What are the rules/limits that make natural systems work? What happens when we don't follow nature's rules/limits?

#### Fifth Grade Focus Question: What is Culture?

*The Subjective Context:* How does my culture influence my life? What is my culture?

*The Time Context:* How have humans and cultures changed over time? What will cultures look like in the future?

*The Symbolic Context:* What is culture? How are cultures similar and how are they different?

*The Ecosystem Context:* In what ways are cultures and ecosystems interdependent? How have cultures been influenced and shaped by their land?

#### Sixth Grade Focus Question: What Does It Mean to be Human? (See Figure 3)

*The Subjective Context:* Who am I? Where do I belong? How do I relate to family, peers, strangers? How am I star stuff? How do I know myself?

*The Time Context:* Where did I come from? Where did humans come from? How did life begin? What is the origin of the human species? What is my personal history? Where am I going? What do I want to be/do when I become an adult? What is the future of the human species? What is time?

*The Symbolic Context:* How do humans communicate with each other? How do humans know? How do I think and learn? How does the human perceive information? How does language influence and shape the way we think? What is the effect of tech-



Figure 3. Contextual Matrix: What Does It Mean To Be Human?

nology on how we perceive, organize, and communicate information?

*The Ecosystem Context:* What is our relationship to the planetary ecological systems? What is my personal relationship to these systems? How are we responsible to and for living and non-living things? How do human societies interact with living and non-living things on the planet?

#### Seventh Grade Focus Questions: How Do Systems Work? What is Our Relationship to the Earth?

*The Subjective Context:* How does my body work as a system? How do I depend on the Earth? What is my relationship to the Earth? How do I use natural resources?

*The Time Context:* How has human's relationship to the Earth changed over time? What will it be in the future?

*The Symbolic Context:* How do natural systems function? What are the patterns that are similar in human and natural systems?

*The Ecosystem Context:* What can we learn from natural systems? What are the natural constraints that humans must learn to live with?

Order a printed copy of Ed Clark's *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum*. \$18.95 from Holistic Education Press. 1-800-639-4122.



Figure 4. Contextual Matrix: How Does One Live Responsibly in a Global Community?

**Eighth Grade Focus Question:**  
**How Does One Live Responsibly in the Global Village? (See Figure 4)**

*The Subjective Context:* In what ways am I a citizen of the global village? How does living in a global village influence my daily life? What are my obligations to other members of the global village?

*The Time Context:* What can we learn from our past that will help us understand how to live peacefully

in the global village? What kind of goals or rules should exist for global citizens?

*The Symbolic Context:* In what ways is the global community a village? What are the rules for village and community living? How can we create global channels of communication through which knowledge and information can be shared freely? What are the barriers that keep us from communicating with each other? What role do other "languages" such as mathematics, computer language, art, and music play in shaping the ways we — as individual or nations — relate to each other?

*The Ecosystem Context:* What are the ecological constraints that must shape life in the global village? What are the ecological principles that can guide decision-making? What can we learn from ecological communities that can help us create more effective local and global communities?

**Expanding the Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions**

So far, all of the Contextual Matrixes have been the simpler models that include only Focus and Contextual Questions. The Matrix can also incorporate Perspective Questions. This expanded Matrix (See Figures 5 and 6) is particularly useful when the intent is to explore a Focus Question from the perspective of several academic disciplines. Initially, teachers at

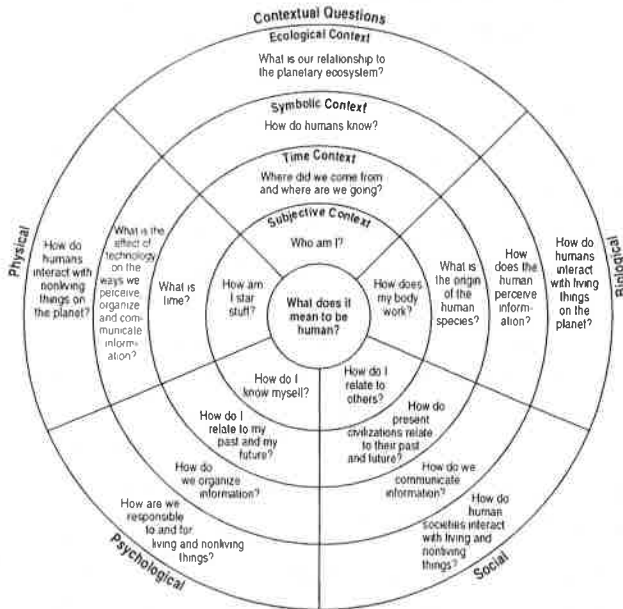


Figure 5. Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions: "What Does It Mean to be Human?"

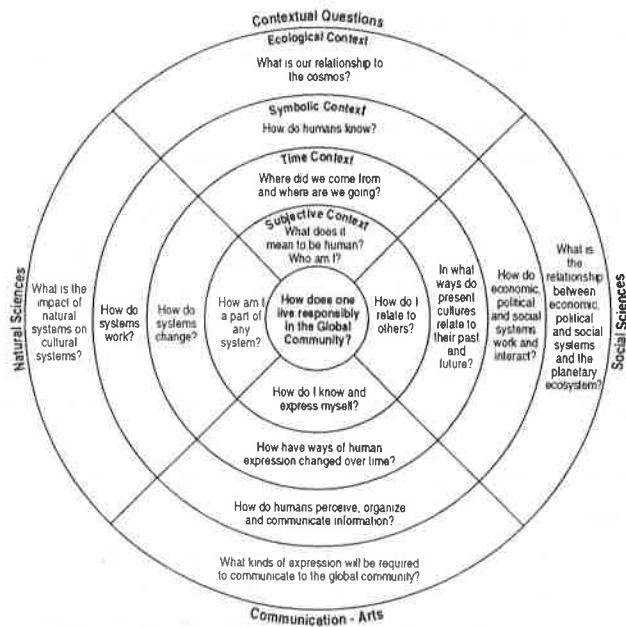


Figure 6. Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions: "How Does One Live Responsibly in the Global Community?"

Thompson used this more inclusive, interdisciplinary Matrix. However, they soon found that the more questions they identified, the more they were preempting students' questions. The second year they unanimously decided to use the simpler matrix, which was in fact designed by Doug Thompson, an eighth grade team leader. Figure 7 is an example of a matrix created by the three eighth grade teams working cooperatively. In addition to the questions, this matrix includes the concepts that are relevant to the questions (See Chapter 6 which will appear in the next issue of *Encounter*).

Several of the Focus Questions above could be used at the high school level where departmentalization makes most forms of an integrated curriculum difficult if not impossible. For example, the Focus Question, "What does it mean to be human?" has been used to design an interdisciplinary curriculum at several different grade levels and, in its expanded form (Figure 5) could also be an effective organizing question for an interdisciplinary high school curriculum at any grade level. In the same way, an entire high school curriculum could be organized around the question, "How does one live responsibly in the global community?" using questions such as those in Figure 6.

Indeed, questions like these can be revisited periodically through a student's entire school career, each time eliciting from students more penetrating

questions and expanded sophistication of understanding.

### Student Questions

One concern that has been raised is the degree to which the curriculum is designed around teachers' rather than students' questions. As Bill O'Hagan and Sharon Mulcahy discovered (See Chapter 3 in *Encounter* 11[2]), the two are not mutually exclusive. While one can make the case that in an ideal situation, all of the questions are generated by students, realistically teachers are limited by the constraints of content requirements and their own comfort levels. However, when the initial Matrix is created by one or more teachers, it is important that student questions be elicited as soon as possible. It is also important for the students to discuss the Focus and Contextual Questions both as a whole class and in small teams. This assures that everyone understands the questions; it also provides an opportunity to expand the students' horizons prior defining the specific questions they want to study. Then students are invited to identify their own questions vis-à-vis the particular question that will be the next focus of study. After all the student questions have been identified, the whole class can participate in sorting and synthesizing the questions into a few general questions. These then become the focus for cooperative team exploration.

Once students become involved in exploring their own questions, one of the not so surprising consequences is noted by Resource Center Director, Chris Sherman, "Kids are generating questions and then staying on-task in the LRC. They aren't just copying from encyclopedias any more."

### Conclusion

My experience at Thompson has taught me that major change is not easy and that most teachers can apply these new ideas only incrementally. For example, many teachers still prefer to organize curriculum around topics and theme rather than questions. As I noted above, this seems to reflect a still strong attachment to a particular content that, for whatever reason, the teacher considers to be important. They are comfortable with themes — holiday, seasons, countries — and it is difficult to wean them from

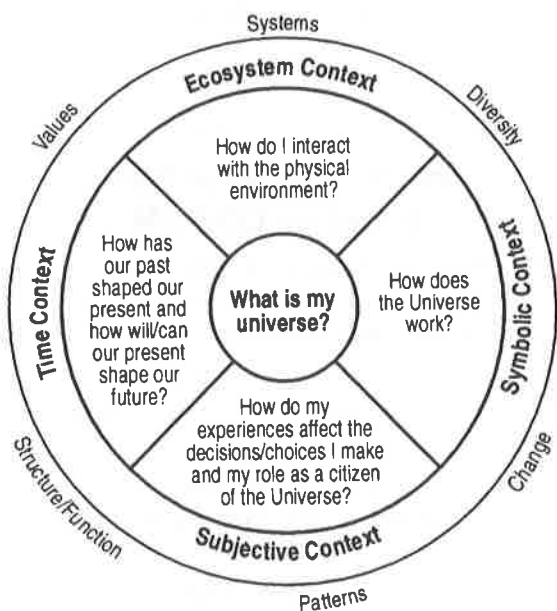


Figure 7. Eighth Grade Team Contextual Matrix and Concepts

such seemingly innocuous habits. Does it really make a difference?

This debate will continue because, like most other ideas, there is no single right way for everyone. However, I will continue to encourage the use of questions for two reasons. First, questions reflect the way we learn. By stimulating curiosity and interest, they can be highly motivating. The second reason is that the outcome is always implicit in the question. Because they focus attention on the outcome, questions provide greater direction to a unit than a theme. For example, it seems obvious that a thematic unit on Thanksgiving could be more focused and more motivating if it were organized around the question, "Why are the United States and Canada the only countries in the world to celebrate Thanksgiving?" Implicit in this question is the outcome — that students will understand the uniqueness of Thanksgiving as a North American holiday. Or to take an example from Donna Stockman's seventh grade team, which next year plans to integratively teach two units sequentially — the first on Systems, which will be followed by a unit on the Human Body. It seems to me that a provocative question like "How is my body like the Earth — or the Universe?" might integrate both units more fully and simultaneously generate a much wider range of questions from students. What would emerge in the process might be more challenging for both students and the teachers.

However, it seems to me that the important thing is not whether a given unit is designed around a theme or a question, but rather that the content of the unit reflects the questions students ask rather than the prepackaged material written by someone else. And, as we have seen, students can and, when given the opportunity, do ask questions well worth arguing about. And, as we have already seen, when they feel that their questions are important, students have no difficulty in identifying enough questions to fill any curriculum.

I remember a discussion about the use of questions with one of the high school history teachers at St. Charles High School. When I suggested that he could design his class around students' questions, he insisted that his students didn't even know enough to ask questions about the Civil War. When I asked what response he would receive if he asked his stu-

dents what they wanted to know about the Civil War, he said the first question would probably be, "What was the Civil War?" My response was: "That's a good question to begin with, isn't it."

It seems to me that an astute teacher could well begin a unit by having students research that very basic question. As they began to get some insights, the study could be expanded into a full-blown unit that consisted only of student investigations, research, reports, etc. I think it could become a very exciting unit.

Good teaching is a matter of creating a context that not only allows but vigorously encourages students to become actively involved in their own learning. Good teaching is an art that requires sensitivity, humility, and an infinite confidence in the innate ability of kids to learn about the world in which they live. It's a matter of pointing the direction, turning it over to the learners and getting out of the way! Sam Keen provides us with a healthy reminder that with questions such as these, "in the beginning is the end" — both the answer and the process are implicit in the question.

### References

- Bruner, J. 1960. *The process of education*. New York: Random House/Vintage.
- Keen, S. 1994. *Hymns to an unknown god*. New York: Bantam.
- Ray, M., and M. Myers. 1986. *Creativity in business*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Samples, R. 1993. *The metaphoric mind: A celebration of creative consciousness*. Torrance, CA: Jalmar.
- Sternberg, R. 1987, October. *Mind/Brain Bulletin*.
- Wilhelm, K. 1976. *Where late the sweet birds sang*. New York: Harper & Row.

### Holistic Education Press Books on CD-ROM

The Renewal of Meaning in Education:  
Responses to the Cultural and Ecological  
Crisis of Our Times (Ron Miller, ed.) \$15.50

Holistic Education: Principles, Practices,  
and Perspectives (Carol Flake, ed.) \$15.50

**P.O. Box 328  
Brandon, VT 05733-0328**

**1-800-639-4122**