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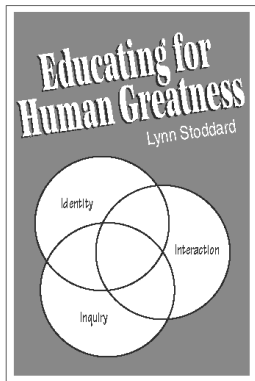
Education for Meaning and Social Justice



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Lynn Stoddard is a former classroom teacher and elementary principal (36 years in service!) who now writes and lectures on improving public education.

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EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 2007

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Stones

As a child, I liked to pick up small stones. At the age of seven or so, I found a few stones that I thought must possess secret, ancient knowledge because they looked very old. I don't remember a teacher or anyone telling me that stones were very old; they just struck me that way. I also remember feeling that my thoughts would sound strange to others, so I didn't share them with anyone.

Are most children fascinated by stones and rocks? Do they stir most children's fantasies? These are among the many questions that researchers have been slow to investigate. Indeed, developmental psychology textbooks rarely mention the child's experience of *any* aspect of the natural world, whether it is stones, animals, ponds, or trees. Nor do the texts say much about other topics of concern to children, such as ghosts and monsters. Instead, the textbooks cover the well-researched topics of motor development, language development, concept formation, academic skills, and social relationships. The topics reflect our society's priorities. Our society wants children to grow into adults who have cognitive skills and relate well to other people. It doesn't particularly value adults who love nature or delve into the inner world of fantasy.

Children's Developing Interests

For now, then, I can only share some personal observations about children's developing interest in rocks and stones. Toddlers, between the ages of about 1 and 3, like to pick them up, but just as quickly throw them down. If you try to get a toddler to join you in building something with stones or pebbles, the toddler is likely to participate a minute and then unexpectedly knock the structure down. Toddlers seem to use stones to express a defiance which, while upsetting to parents, is natural at a stage when they are asserting their powers as individuals.

In the next few years, children begin taking more interest in the qualities of rocks and stones and begin collecting them. A large rock in a natural setting in-

vites fantasy play. For example, the 4- and 5-year-olds at Sarah Lawrence College's nursery school, who are permitted considerable outdoor play, spontaneously call a large rock on which they climb the "Magic Rock." In the next few years, between the ages of about 6 and 12, children like to build small rock designs and structures such as model houses. They also look for stones with special qualities, such as smoothness and bright colors, and keep them at home or carry them in their pockets. They may enjoy rubbing them, sometimes for luck.

It's my impression that children have less interest in stones they see on sidewalks or streets than in natural settings. But today's children spend very little time in natural settings, and educators don't consider stones to be particularly important, unless they fit into a geology lesson. One exception to the dominant trend is Byrd Baylor, whose children's book, *Everybody Needs a Rock* (1974), gently and humorously tries to legitimize the child's search for his or her own special rock. Baylor tells kids, "If somebody says, 'What's special about a rock?' don't even tell them. I don't. Nobody is supposed to know what is special about another person's rock."

Children continue to enjoy stones in the teenage and adult years, although they are not likely to divulge whatever personal emotions and fantasies the rocks stir in them. They sense that the culture generally frowns on such responses, and they typically justify the stones they bring home as household decorations or scientific collections. To learn more about the personal and mythopoetic meanings of rocks and stones, we can turn to the psychoanalyst Carl Jung.

Meaning for Jung

When Jung's ideas diverged significantly from Freud's, their relationship ended, and the break threw Jung into an emotional crisis. Jung said he entered a "state of disorientation" in which he "felt totally suspended in mid-air, for I had not found my own footing" (1961, 170). He had strange dreams, but he could-

n't interpret them in any helpful way. "I lived as if under constant inner pressure," Jung wrote. "At times this became so strong that I suspected there was some psychic disturbance in my life" (1961, 173).

Jung therefore went over the details of his life to see if there was something in the past that could help explain the disturbance, but this review didn't help, either. Then he let his mind go freer and recalled a time when he was 10 or 11 and passionately played with building blocks. He had built little houses and castles, with bottles serving as the sides of gates and vaults. A bit later he used ordinary stones with mud for mortar.

"'Aha,' I said to myself, 'there is still life in these things. The small boy is still around, and possesses a creative life which I lack. But how can I make my way to it?'" (Jung 1961, 173-174).

Although Jung felt it would be humiliating to play these childish games again, he did so, and he called the decision "the turning point in my life" (1961, 174). He began gathering stones from the lake shore and built a model village with cottages, a castle, and a church. This play released a stream of fantasies and led to a journey into the depth of his unconscious. He said he realized that he was risking a complete psychotic break, but let himself fall into the unconscious realm to learn about it, and this exploration produced his initial insights into the archetypes and the universal unconscious.

Jung also engaged in creative work with stones at various times after this. Whenever "I came up against a blank wall, I painted a picture or hewed stone" (1961, 175). And each time, the experience opened up ideas that informed major psychological writings.

Much of his stone work occurred at Bollingen, on the edge of Lake Zurich. There Jung constructed an ever-expanding stone tower, in which he lived without electricity or running water. He did some of his most intense work on the tower immediately after the death of his wife, Emma. He likened his construc-

tion at that time to a womb that gave birth to his true self and linked him to the earth (1961, 225).

Why stones? Why were they so important to his psychological work? Jung's writings suggest several reasons.

First, Jung's stone work was most intense in response to two losses. The first loss was his relationship with Freud. The second was the death of his wife. These losses left him feeling "suspended in mid-air" and without "my footing." The work with stones helped him feel connected to something solid — the earth and nature.

During these episodes, in addition, Jung felt the need for the fantasies, ideas, and thoughts that can lead to self-discovery, but he also was suspicious of such mental ideation. Especially after his break with Freud, he seemed blocked. It is likely that he sensed (as he later explained) that fantasies and images can lead one down unrealistic and destructive paths. Creative activity with stones, in contrast, provides a connection to the real, physical world, so the fantasies that emerge during the creative work don't feel so overwhelming. Experiencing a tie to the real, solid world, Jung had the confidence to let his mind go. For Jung, stone work was necessary to release his



fantasies (Jung 1961, 175, 189).

Even when Jung enjoyed emotional equanimity, he distrusted purely mental work. Modern individuals, he felt, live too much in their heads; they need to be reconnected to their bodies and the earth. Jung even mistrusted words and paper. He built things with stone in an attempt to put the contents of the unconscious on more "solid footing" (1961, 223). Stones, Jung wrote to a friend, "compensate [for] the airiness of psychology" (Sabini 2002, 38).

Finally, stones appealed to Jung because they are so old. They go far back in time, to long before our species evolved. (Contemporary scientists estimate

that whereas our species' bipedal ancestors lived about 4 million years ago, some of the Earth's stones are 4 *billion* years old (Campbell and Reece 2005, 702; Bjornerud 2005). Stones also will undoubtedly exist long into the future, but Jung was primarily interested in the past. He came to see the universal or collective unconscious as a "mythic land of the dead," a land that gives ancient ancestors a chance to speak (1961, 191). Jung said the old stones in his tower provided the ancestral souls with a suitable abode (Sabini 2002, 38). Thus, stone work helped him to connect with ancient voices of the unconscious, which he believed we must all do to understand the forces that drive us (Jung 1961, ch. 8).

Lakota Beliefs

If the Lakota are representative, Jung would have found much in common with Native American beliefs. The Lakota also identified stones with the ancient spiritual world. John (Fire) Lame Deer, a Lakota medicine man, tells us that the Lakota word for god, grandfather, Great Spirit, and stone all contain the term *tunka*. In fact, "Our oldest god, Tunka was like a rock, old beyond imagination, ageless, eternal. The ancient ones worshiped this god in the form of a huge stone painted red" (Lame Deer and Erdoes 1972, 174).

To white people, Lame Deer observed, a religious attitude toward stones often seems strange. But this is because white people have short memories. "Your Bible is full of stories of sacred rocks set up in high places. Think of the Rock of Ages, of St. Peter, whose name means rock. Think of Stonehenge. White people have forgotten this and have lost the power which is in rocks." (1972, 175-176).

This power includes the power to cure. Lakota healers use special rocks to treat illnesses. Lame Deer said that "The old medicine men used to talk to the stones and were able to communicate with them" (1972, 174). Rocks also sometimes reveal invisible writing "to those who read with their hearts" (1972, 174).

According to Lakota elder Wallace Black Elk (Black Elk and Lyon 1990, 33-34), some rocks with healing powers have colors inside and glow in the dark. But people can't see the colors unless they approach the rocks with the right attitude. They must first pray and then let the spirit guide them to the

rocks. Black Elk told about some Western scientists who heard about colors inside the rocks and tried to find them by breaking the rocks with pick axes. They found nothing. One has to approach rocks with the necessary reverence.

Modern Uses

Although relatively few modern individuals subscribe to Native American beliefs, they can still use stones to help them negotiate life. Patrick Grahm, a Swedish landscape architect, tells how many adults hospitalized with medical and emotional problems find comfort in the stones they come across during their walks on rustic hospital grounds. They find inspiration in the stones' ability to endure through the ages, despite all the environmental assaults they must have experienced. The extraordinary age of the stones also helps patients view their current problems as less overwhelming in the grand scheme of things (Grahm 2004).

Stones may help children during periods of loss or illness. One mother told me how her daughter, at the age of three, had to cope both with lead poisoning and her parents' divorce. When the little girl visited her father in rural Pennsylvania,

she developed a love for small stones. She began to collect them as she walked with her father in the woods near his home, and a little later, whenever she walked on the beach. She favored small, smooth, round or oval shaped stones. Her father found a nature store that had a large bin of small polished stones from which customers could choose just the stones they wanted. Our daughter loved this bin. For a year or maybe longer, she carried stones wherever she went. She put them in her pockets, and throughout the day, she would put her hands in her pockets and touch them or take them out of her pockets and look at them. If she did not have pockets, she would fill each hand with stones and walk around all day holding them. That it was always two pockets or two hands was very important. She refused to hold stones with just one hand or fill just one pocket. She derived tremendous comfort from the stones; they soothed her. Eventually she stopped carrying stones with her, but to this day she loves stones.

This child experienced small, round, smooth stones as soothing. I wonder if such stones have a slightly maternal quality, something akin to that of the rosary beads that devout Catholics handle while praying to the Holy Mother. The stones' smoothness may be vaguely reminiscent of the smoothness of a mother's skin, and as Joan Erikson (1994) suggests, polished or shiny stones may evoke images of a mother's bright and loving eyes.

The meaning of stones also varies from person to person. This particular little girl, whose parents had just divorced, insisted on carrying stones in two pockets or two hands. This behavior probably symbolized her wish to retain both parents, a wish that she might not have been able to consciously acknowledge. In any event, while this girl's love for stones was unusually strong, and was a response to difficult circumstances, children generally may share many of her feelings.

Earlier I mentioned how Jung's creative work with stones helped him cope with his emotional problems. I suggested that stone work helped him feel sufficiently grounded to let fantasies and images emerge without feeling so threatened by them. Another feature of stone work is that it usually involves balance. A person either balances stones upon one another, or places the stones in a balanced pattern on a surface. The concept of balance is central to Jungian theory. We overcome emotional problems, and grow as individuals, when we balance our personalities by giving new expression to neglected emotions and capacities and finding our own true center. Perhaps stone work can, on some level of consciousness, help keep our psyche focused on the need for psychic balance.

By way of illustration, a young professional woman was going through a rough relationship with her mother and felt unsupported. The young woman also was staking out new territory by pursuing a Ph.D. degree. After 9/11, she felt even more out of sorts.

I could only find comfort in being with my friends and my children, and while walking in the woods in Inwood Hill Park. I had taken a year off to write my Ph.D. dissertation but couldn't work. I felt completely lost and confused. I couldn't find any meaning to life. I felt dead inside. The woods were a haven; I spent

hours and hours in the woods, walking every day. One day, I had the inexplicable urge to balance a stone. I didn't understand it, but I followed the impulse. Over time, I developed a very particular aesthetic to the sculptures; the balancing point had to be very narrow and the balancing stone could not lean on any part of the pedestal rock, but had to stand by balance alone. The result looked like something impossible was happening and yet it looked totally natural.

Anyway, for a long time it was very difficult to balance the stones. I had to concentrate completely and *feel* the stones, the wind, the grit. I thought of this work as my "stone meditations." When I was making them (and I made many) my mind was completely still; there was only the stones, the wind, the sun, the forest. This was very restorative. I began to feel calm and refreshed. Gradually, I regained a sense of inner liveliness and meaning to my life. I was able to work again.

It seems that this woman's stone work, which took place in a natural setting that comforted her, helped her work out her need to find her own center — her own balance point. Through stone work, she developed a calm inner steadiness that enabled her to pursue her own direction; she resumed her doctoral studies. During this time, in addition, she wrote poetry and was surprised by the vast amount of feelings and images that emerged. Perhaps the act of balancing physical stones somehow inspired her to achieve greater psychic balance by integrating previously neglected parts of her personality.

She adds:

I still make stone sculptures but not nearly as often. I make them when I feel troubled or when I want to feel particularly close to nature. Sometimes, unlike in the past when I needed to be alone, I will show a friend how I make them. Everyone I've shown joins in and seems captivated by the process. It's as if I *know* the stones now. I know without knowing just how to place it so one will stand. Now, if I cannot balance a stone, I know that I am out of balance.

Future Directions

In general, I recommend that we look more into the benefits of stones in at least two areas. First, because stones are so very old — some existing before life on the planet — they might stir many students' interests and imaginations. Whereas history lessons often strike students as boring, the rocks they find on a walk might start them thinking about a long and mysterious past. If a student finds some stone unusually attractive, he or she can be encouraged to look into its geological history and the powers that ancient cultures ascribed to it. (For an introduction into the role of stones in the ancient myths and practices of the world's cultures, I recommend Joan Erikson's *The Universal Bead*. For an interesting and readable introduction to the geology of rocks and stones, I recommend Marcia Bjornerud's *Reading the Rocks*).

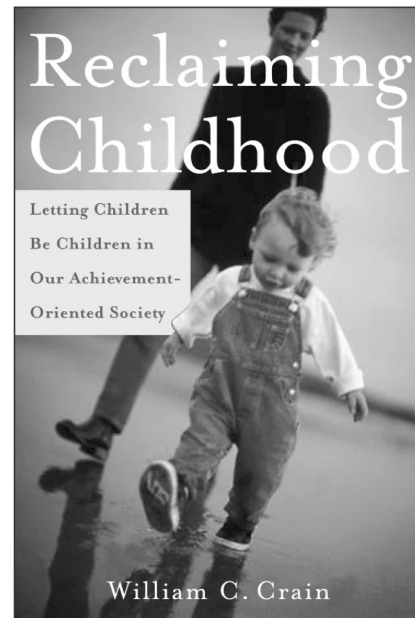
Second, we should look further into the ways stones and stone work can help people overcome emotional problems. I realize that this recommendation will strike some people as more relevant to clinical psychology than to education. But as holistic educators, we know that we are always working with a whole person, who has both a mind and emotions, and sometimes we cannot help a mind grow until the person finds a way out of an emotional impasse. I believe stones have untapped potential to help people with their emotional difficulties.

— William Crain, *Editor*

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Children

An Endangered Species?

Chris Mercogliano

Many people have seen or read *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss's parable about the mossy little man who tries to save the truffula trees before they are all cut down. The trees will be sacrificed to produce a useless piece of clothing people have been convinced they absolutely have to have. "I am the Lorax and I speak for the trees," the man announced to the greedy residents in a voice that was "sharpish and bossy."

As I write this column I am preparing to hit the road in my veggie oil mobile in order to speak for the children because I believe a similar fate is currently befalling the landscape of childhood. It too is becoming barren and denuded, stripped one by one of the qualities that nourish children's inner selves.

That's right, in a VW diesel wagon powered by the used vegetable oil I obtain from Chinese restaurants all too happy to give it away, I will be taking my message to twenty-two cities across the U.S. and Canada, to colleges and universities, parent forums, and assorted bookstores. It's going to be a good, old-fashioned book tour, prompted by Beacon Press's release of my latest book, *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness*.

Fueling me will be my fear that, as in Seuss's cautionary tale, our society is woefully unaware of the ominous implications of the changes childhood has undergone over the past couple of generations. It's not that we are completely oblivious. Many of us have noticed that kids go outside less than they used to and stay much closer to home when they do. In fact, this sad development was recently the subject of a front page

story in the *Washington Post*, in which reporter Donna St. George (2007) noted a 50% decline, from 16 to 8%, in the number of nine- to twelve-year-old children who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play, and gardening from 1997 to 2003. Let that statistic sink in for a moment: Less than one kid in ten, in the prime of childhood, spends significant time in unstructured outdoor activities.

Concerns about long-term consequences led to a recent meeting of 40 civic leaders, including several governors, three big-city mayors, and representatives from the Walt Disney Corporation, the Sesame Street Workshop, DuPont, and the gaming industry. The purpose of the meeting was to launch a \$20 million capital campaign that will ultimately fund 20 initiatives across the country to encourage children to get back outside (St. George 2007). So two major companies — Disney and Sesame Street — that have done so much to entice children indoors with their shows, want to rectify the problem and get children outdoors. Allow the irony of that prospect to sink in, too.

But it's not just outdoor play, or any single childhood activity or trait that is in jeopardy. It is childhood itself.

Now I'm not actually suggesting that children themselves are about to suffer the fate of the Lorax's precious truffulas. It's not that they will literally disappear, but I do believe that the wondrous inner spark that resides within every child — their "inner wildness" — is being placed very much at risk by what I call the "domestication" of childhood.

The Loss of Inner Wildness

Before I go on, perhaps I should explain exactly what I mean by the somewhat unorthodox use of these terms. "Inner wildness" is the luminescent



After 35 years as a teacher and administrator at the Albany Free School, CHRIS MERCOGLIANO is now devoting his time exclusively to writing and lecturing. His most recent book is *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness* (Beacon Press 2007).

spark that animates children, serves as the source of their uniqueness and creativity, and supplies the energy and the impetus for them to become who they are intended to become. It is an elusive essence that strives mightily to resist the control of others.

Although as far as I know I am the first to coin this particular term, the idea is hardly an original one. Really what I'm talking about here is soul, or spirit, both of which literally mean "that which animates us." Or Sigmund Freud called it the id, Henri Bergson the *élan vital*, and Jean Liedloff the continuum. However, many of these terms carry with them too much psychological, religious, or New Age baggage to suit my purposes. Besides, I was seeking something that especially evokes the sparkling effervescence and originality of children.

Perhaps more importantly I wanted to call attention to the powerful connection between inner and outer wildness, by which I mean the earth's wildlife and wild places. Henry David Thoreau (1981) once wrote that

It is in vain to dream of wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brains and bowels, the primitive vigor of nature in us, that inspires that dream.

And by analogy I wanted to alert us to the reality that, just as outer wildness is seriously threatened by environmental degradation and overdevelopment, inner wilderness is being equally threatened by the very same forces: progress, technology, greed, exploitation, and control. And if we don't launch a childhood conservation movement, so to speak, the damage, just like the crimes humans have committed against the atmosphere, will soon become irreversible.

I should also say what inner wildness is not, because I realize that by associating "wildness" with children I run the risk of invoking in some readers *Lord of the Flies*-like images of destructive, uncivilized children run amok, answerable to no one. Let me make it perfectly clear that there is no necessary link between inner wildness and the kinds of outward behavior we commonly call "wild." All children, whether their natural temperament is quiet and delicate or noisy and frenetic, are born with a certain wildness inside. While some children express it by behaving in ways that some might deem excessively ram-

bunctious or daring, others do so through art, the imagination, fantasy play, a deep sense of wonder, and unique perceptions of the world around them.

As for the savagery into which those marooned English schoolboys descended in Golding's iconic novel, I would argue that it was a projection of the author's Calvinist heritage — by day he was a schoolmaster in an elite Church of England grammar school — and the accompanying fear of wildness of any kind. Here I stand shoulder to shoulder with the most radical of Freud's students, Wilhelm Reich, who declared that children at their core are loving, responsible, and sociable beings. It is only when they are neglected, traumatized, excessively managed, or overindulged that they develop a defensive "middle layer" of distrust, aggression, and out-of-control impulses.

When I say that childhood, and along with it, children, are rapidly becoming "domesticated," I am sticking strictly with *Webster*, whose one-word definition for the word is simply, "tame." Then, if you look that adjective up you will discover it means "reduced from a state of native wildness so as to be tractable and useful." The secondary definitions are perhaps even more telling: "made docile and submissive, and lacking spirit, zest, or the capacity to excite."

I'm sure that many of you who are, or who have been, parents of two-year-olds or of teenagers are chuckling to yourselves. Submissive? Lacking the capacity to excite? But hold onto that meaning while I outline the situation as I see it.

Like so many deep human problems, this one involves a central paradox. Speaking generally, and ignoring for brevity's sake the pernicious racial and socioeconomic inequity that persists in this country, childhood in America is healthier, safer, and more comfortable than ever before. In the 19th century, for instance, 25% of American kids died before the age of one, 50% before twenty-one. In medieval and ancient times, for the majority of kids it was a story of infanticide, slavery, abuse, abandonment, and economic and sexual exploitation. Then, mortality rates ran as high as two out of three; whereas today, infant mortality is only slightly more than one in 2,000 (deMause 1974). And today there are no more child sweatshops, and far fewer fatal diseases. There is a foster care/adoption system for abandoned children, and universal schooling — though whether

that is a blessing or a curse to inner wildness remains open to debate.

So you might say that, at least at the general, physical level, the quality of childhood has been improving over time. In terms of their emotional lives, however, I believe that the quality of childhood is heading in the opposite direction. The same social, economic, and technological changes that have made it safer and easier are a double-edged sword at every turn because they are also squeezing out the juice from the lives of today's kids.

External Control

I say that childhood is becoming domesticated because so much of a contemporary children's experience is mediated or controlled from without. So little depends on their own inner resources. Their lives are over-supervised, over-managed, over-scheduled, and over-saturated with electronic media. Consider for a moment what has happened to real play, which is perhaps inner wildness's truest ally. Real play is play that children generate and structure themselves. It pours forth from their imaginations. It is unscripted and unpredictable. Again, you might say it is "wild."

Today real play is being entirely overrun by two powerful outside forces: adults and technology. Take kids' sports as an obvious everyday example. These days you rarely see children playing baseball or football by themselves. Even in my inner city neighborhood in Albany, New York, I see fewer and fewer kids on the outdoor basketball court every year. Instead they're indoors at the "Y" playing in the Saturday morning youth league.

It's not that there's anything wrong with adult-organized sports. They get kids out of the house or apartment, keep them moving, and give them an opportunity to learn how to play the game; and if the coaches are on their game, organized sports teach good sportsmanship and fair play. But as far as a child's inner wildness is concerned, adult-run athletics are dry, empty calories. All of the essential ingredients of real play are missing. There's no initiative required, no open-endedness or creativity involved, no place for improvisation.

Years ago I remember reading an article in a Canadian hockey magazine in which the stars of a former generation — Bobby Orr, Guy LaFleur, Gordie

Howe — were lamenting the fact that kids no longer play hockey out on the pond by themselves. That's where Orr, LaFleur, and Howe said they honed their Hall of Fame skills and developed their own unique moves. Instead, today's junior players are all being taught the same scripted style in youth hockey programs, and the flash and originality is disappearing from the game as a result.

I played a lot of organized sports when I was growing up. Still I would say that 90% of my athletic play took place without any adults around. My friends and I would arrange our own games and tailor the rules to the number of players, the equipment we could scrounge up, and our personal idiosyncrasies. For a couple of years a bunch of us fifth and sixth graders had our own kid-run football league. There were usually more than twenty of us involved, so we were able to play regulation-size games on Saturdays. The whole thing was very fluid and exciting. During the week we held secret strategy sessions on the playground at recess time, and during the games arguing over and constantly changing the rules were an important part of the experience and a key source of its wildness.

Or sometimes we would hybridize our own unique games. One day at the playground for example, when there were only a handful of us and a single tennis racquet and ball, we invented a game we called racquetball because it was half tennis and half baseball. Using a tennis ball eliminated the need for mitts. One of the basketball courts served as the infield and the intersecting white lines painted on the concrete provided the bases. The game was highly flexible, too. If there were plenty of players, we would expand the field to include the hedge at the end of the court and the grassy area above the bushes. We would also play by more traditional baseball rules. If there were only a few players, we would make the "outfield" out of bounds and alter the rules to make the game manageable. The game suited our needs so perfectly that it became a neighborhood tradition that endured throughout my childhood.

Today there is also the relentless takeover of play by technology, which is far too complex and controversial a subject to delve into here. Suffice it to say that play which revolves around electronic toys and games is not real play. I'm not saying it's necessarily

bad for kids; it's just that, like adult-organized sports, it lacks the essential nutrients that feed inner wildness.

The list goes on. There is the increasing takeover of children's lives by a control-based educational model that monopolizes more and more of their time and energy. There is an accompanying takeover of meaningful children's work by the adult service economy and the resulting loss of control that kids used to have over their own money. There is children's ever-expanding dependence on electronic media for entertainment. There is their ever-shrinking interaction with the natural world, what journalist and author Richard Louv (2005) calls "Nature Deficit Disorder."

Still Room for Hope

Viewed in its entirety, it's a very alarming picture. It's why I am going to travel nearly 8,000 miles to alert anyone and everyone who will listen that, if we don't begin taking active steps to reverse the domestication of childhood, then the time is not far off when we will find ourselves raising a generation of domesticated children who *have been* made docile and submissive, and lacking spirit, zest, and the capacity to excite.

The good news is that, despite the slide of childhood down the slippery slope of domestication, the wild nooks and crannies of childhood — make-believe play, reading exciting literature, unsupervised outdoor activity, working for cash, art in any form, encounters with nature, learning on one's own and pursuing one's passions uninterrupted — can be preserved. Ample opportunities for adventure and discovery still remain — and when those opportunities don't exist, we can always create new ones. That is the beauty of undomesticated experience: it is largely self-generated and seldom depends upon sophisticated resources.

Just as in *The Lorax*, the seeds of new possibilities still exist. It is not too late to save inner wildness from extinction, if we start planting them now.

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Homework

A Conversation with Sara Bennett

Kate McReynolds

A noted author discusses the insights she gained as she protected her children's free time, enthusiasm for learning, and family relationships against burdensome homework.

When criminal defense attorney, Sara Bennett, took up the cause against homework, children and families everywhere gained a valuable advocate. Sara, a veteran activist, was the first director of the Wrongful Convictions Project of New York City's Legal Aid Society and is an expert on the post-conviction representation of battered women and the wrongly convicted.

*Her 2006 book, *The Case Against Homework: How Homework Is Hurting Our Children and What We Can Do About It* (co-authored by Nancy Kalish), draws upon empirical research and personal accounts to show that excessive homework hurts children's wellbeing and full development. But in keeping with Sara's activist philosophy, *The Case Against Homework* goes further — it presents valuable and practical advice on how parents can work with teachers and schools to bring about meaningful change.*

Kate McReynolds: How did you come to write *The Case Against Homework*?

Sara Bennett: In 2004, I left the Legal Aid Society, where I had worked for almost 20 years, most recently heading the Wrongful Convictions Project. I didn't know what I was going to do next, but the issue of homework was on my mind. I had been talking to my kids' teachers and to heads of the school about homework for almost eight years and I was frustrated that homework issues seemed to dominate so much of our family time.

I decided to organize parents at my kids' school to do something about homework. I started a small group of about 6 to 8 parents and, at the same time, I started to read everything I could find on homework. I had read Etta Kralovec's book, *The End of Homework*, when it came out in 2000, so I knew that there was at



SARA BENNETT, the co-author of *The Case Against Homework*, is the founder of Stop Homework, a project devoted to changing homework policy and practice. Her website is <www.stophomework.com>. She lives in Brooklyn, with her husband and two children.



KATE McREYNOLDS is the Associate Editor of *Encounter* and a clinical child psychologist in New York City.

least one educator who didn't think homework was a good idea.

Every time I'd read something interesting, I'd bring it to the group, but no one else seemed too interested in the reading — it was pretty academic and dry. So I started looking for the book I thought parents would read. When I couldn't find it, that's when I decided I'd try to write it myself.

Kate: Is there a single homework issue that stands out in your mind that caused you to become an activist?

Sara: It started with my first child's very first homework assignment — a reading log. Julian was six years old. Every night, he was supposed to read for ten minutes and fill in what he had read — the book title, name of author, and the number of pages he had read.

Honestly, I didn't know young kids got homework, so I was taken aback just by the very idea of it. Julian could barely write. And we had been reading to him from the time he was born — and certainly much much longer than 10 minutes a day — so we weren't interested in turning our family routine into a school-imposed chore. So, my husband or I would just fill in that log every day and Julian wasn't even aware of it.

But at the first parent-teacher conference, the teacher told us that Julian was supposed to fill in the reading log himself. We said, "But he can't write!" and she told us he should get in the habit of writing and that she needed to know that he was reading, even though we'd already told her we read to him every day.

Kate: What was the teacher's reaction when you pointed out that Julian couldn't write?

Sara: She said it'd be good practice! We told her we disagreed, that he was only six, and that when he came home from school he was tired of school work and had a lot of pent up energy that he needed to get out. The teacher was very young, around 23 years old. I don't think she had any sense of what children need at the end of the day.

The work that came home after that was even sillier. None of it was interesting; most of it was rote busywork. But since there hadn't been much written about homework at that time, my husband and I had only an intuitive feeling that homework was a waste of time.

By the time Julian was in fourth grade, he'd bring home a big packet, and he would sit at this table and sit there and sit there, and talk and fidget, but he wouldn't do it. Finally, I set a timer and told him, "This looks like it should take about ten minutes, so why don't you see what you can get done in ten minutes and then you'll be done." He really wanted to please the teacher at that point so he did it. If I had a kid now, I wouldn't do that, and I didn't do it with Sophia. By the time Sophia came along I had learned a little more and I was simply not interested in having her do it.

Kate: Sophia had the choice from the start whether to do homework?

Sara: She was a different kind of kid. She's very dreamy. With Julian, once we set that timer, he'd do it incredibly quickly and easily. It wasn't interesting, he wasn't learning anything, but he did it. Sophia would get distracted — she'd start and then she'd end up drawing all over the page or decorating one of the letters. She wasn't learning anything and it would have taken her forever to get it done. As soon as we found ourselves battling with her over it, we stopped. We refused to ruin a wonderful, close relationship for no good reason.

Kate: Parents have a lot of knowledge about their children and how they learn. What do you say to teachers who don't seem interested in engaging in a dialogue about your child, when they persist in saying that the homework has value?

Sara: Ask them to show you the value of an assignment. When I was talking to my children's teachers and the school heads, I didn't have much knowledge, only a very strong gut feeling that the work wasn't valuable. But, after doing the research for the book, I learned that homework pretty much has no value. Everything I learned about homework is in my book, so now parents can have the benefit of that knowledge when they talk to teachers.

When I was in the midst of writing the book, we became much more radical. Before that, we had just told the teachers that the homework was taking too long and that we were going to stop our kids after they had worked for a certain amount of time — generally ten minutes per grade, since I knew that's what Harris Cooper, the NEA, and the national PTA all recommended.

But when I was working on the book, it was really hard for me to say nothing when they'd come home with the exact kind of assignment a top educator had just told me in an interview was a complete waste of time. By that time, Sophia was in 6th grade and Julian was in 9th. We didn't feel the need to talk to Julian's teachers about specific assignments, since he was doing that very well himself. But we did go in and talk to Sophia's teacher about all of the assignments. We ended up feeling sorry for the teacher because she couldn't justify them other than to say they were "fun." We told her that they weren't fun for Sophia and we wouldn't make Sophia do them any more because we wanted her to have time to do all the things she loved — playing, reading, writing music and poetry, singing, etc. Soon after that, we switched Sophia to a democratic free school. And, the following year, Julian decided to attend the free school as well.

Kate: Can we ask teachers to rethink what they're doing in the classroom?

Sara: You hope that your conversations with them will make them rethink, but you have to be very careful about how you approach them.

I have a background as an appellate advocate, so I spent many many years immersed in an adversarial process. As I became a more experienced lawyer, I learned that the more I approached my opponent in a nonconfrontational way, the more success I would have. So I tried to be as nonadversarial as possible with the school.

I think that's how you have to approach the teacher, not as an adversary, but more like, "We're in this together. We both love kids, that's why you're teaching. These are my children. Let's figure out what's best for my particular child."

One of the things I advocate in the book is to tell the teacher it's not working for your child. Even if the teacher says it's working for the other 25 kids in the class, you can say, but let's look at *my* child. The work is no fun for her, or she doesn't learn like this, or you've been doing this particular thing all year long but she's not getting it. Doing more of the same is not going to help her. Or, she gets it perfectly so it's a waste of time.

Kate: You describe saying things like, "We're on the same side and let's talk about what's best for my child." In my mind that automatically constitutes rethinking

what's going in the classroom because it's focusing on an individual child. It's already a dialogue.

Sara: That's what we are hoping. With things like spelling and vocabulary it's pretty easy. There's so much research about how kids learn spelling and vocabulary and it's not through rote memorization. So, if parents arm themselves with that knowledge, I can easily imagine teachers changing their practices in those areas.

It's harder when you get into how reading or English or social studies is taught, and it's even harder when you're talking about high school. You've probably read many of the same books I have and know that you'll ruin a love of literature if you make students respond to questions at the end of every chapter and underline and look up the definition of every unfamiliar word. But that's how teachers teach, and very few are going to want to examine what they've been doing.

And, by the time your kids are in high school, you really don't want to be going in and talking to the teachers about their assignments. Kids should be able to talk to the teachers themselves and the parents have to take on the school at a different level.

Kate: I found that in elementary school it was much easier to work with the teachers and with the school. For example, when my kids first started getting holiday homework, which didn't happen until my son was in the second or third grade, I was shocked that we'd have to do homework over the holidays, which had always been such a wonderful break. It finally dawned on me that I could say no. I was prepared for an argument, but the school was great. They said, okay, don't do it.

Sara: It is easier in elementary school. I never came up against a teacher in elementary school who wasn't reasonable. I did have a conversation with one of the school principals, though, who told us, "Well I bring home my work every night, so these kids should." But that's a choice she'd made. That doesn't mean that it's appropriate for 6-, 7-, or 8-year-olds. We shouldn't be treating kids like adults. We should treat them like kids.

Kate: What's a good approach with high school kids?

Sara: In high school, kids seem to have no problem telling their teachers that another teacher already gave them an hour's worth of work, or that they already have two projects or tests on that same day. Of

course, that doesn't mean the teachers listen to them. So parents need to get together with other parents, meet with administrators and school counselors, and tell them that the workload is unacceptable.

Kate: One of the problems that I've faced with my high schoolers is their own reluctance to challenge the system, particularly my daughter, who routinely did three to five hours of homework a night. She was exhausted and overwhelmed, but she didn't want to take a stand with her teachers and didn't want me to get involved.

Sara: I think that's a tough position and true for many kids. A lot of teenagers want their parents to butt out, which I understand. If your kid doesn't want you to intervene, you have to respect that. You can take on the system at a different level — the Board, for instance — but not within her school.

Kate: I agree. But I found myself doing other things, like letting them sleep late if they'd been up very late doing homework. Then I'd write them a note so they wouldn't have an unexcused absence. It was a way of helping them maintain some kind of balance and sanity.

Sara: From the time my kids entered school, we'd give them "personal" days. We got those at work, and we thought the kids should also be allowed a few days a year where they stayed home for no particular reason.

People always ask me, "Aren't you teaching your children that they're special, that they don't have to follow rules?" My answer is "No." What we're trying to teach them is that you don't have to blindly follow rules, nor do you blindly follow your peers. You can change things you don't like and you can fight for what you believe in. You might not be popular, though. I don't know why homework has become this thing that we're not allowed to stand up against. It doesn't make sense to me that the school can send something home that makes your kid miserable, that interferes with your family time, and that interferes with your child's developing into a whole, complex person. And, to top it off, they can't even show that

homework has any value. They can make up a reason — responsibility, self-discipline, motivation — but that doesn't mean that it has any basis in fact.

Kate: I often hear the catch phrase, which I've grown to hate: "If I make an exception for your child, then I have to make an exception for all the children or it wouldn't be fair."

Sara: But that's a good idea. We should make exceptions. If you have more than one child, you know all about exceptions. You can't parent each of your children the exact same way because you have to take into account their different temperaments, needs, and abilities.

Kate: And teachers do make exceptions all the time, but I'd like to find a way to expand the scope of the exceptions, like taking into account the child's unique circumstances, or their learning style.

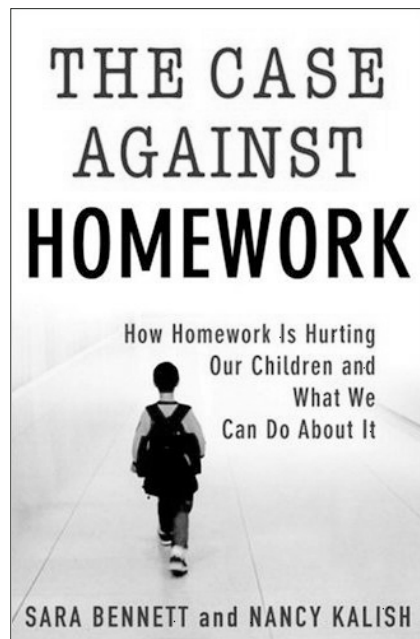
Sara: Well it's getting harder and harder. The more standardized testing there is and the more that funding is tied to performance on the tests, the less leeway teachers feel that have. That's part of a very big problem.

Kate: How *should* we be evaluating children's achievement?

Sara: What I'd like to see us measure is how well kids are prepared to be happy, successful, ethical adults. But instead, all we measure is how well the students do on the teacher-created test, course grades, or standardized tests. That's very narrow.

I came into this because I really hated homework, but the more I learned, the more I had to start thinking about what was going on in the school day as well. If the homework was of such poor quality, and it was supposedly linked to the school day, then what was going on in school?

And now, let's hope that the rest of the country doesn't follow New York City's newest idea to pay students for grades. It's a new initiative that's coming into effect this fall in a few New York City schools — the idea being that if you pay students for



good grades, they'll study harder, do their homework, etc. I find this horrifying for so many reasons I could probably write a book just on that. But here are just a few: I don't believe in bribery. What about internal motivation? What about the child who isn't a good test-taker so can't get a perfect grade?

Kate: Should we abolish the grading system?

Sara: I would definitely abolish grades. Once you abolish grades then you can get down to teaching. For example, if you have to grade a written piece of work, then you have to compare students' work to assign a grade. But imagine two students. One can write an essay that has perfect grammar and spelling and is structurally sound, but the student takes no risks with the ideas. The second student takes lots of risks with the ideas, but the grammar, spelling, and structure all need work. In the typical grading system, the first student would get an A and the second would get a C. But, as soon as you decide not to grade, you can work with each student on her particular problem areas and both will have learned more, improved their work, and not felt superior or inferior during the process.

Also, grading in general punishes the student who has a slow start. Imagine the student who gets Ds on all of the tests throughout the semester and gets a B on the final. That student made a lot of progress — probably more than the one who got As from start to finish — but that progress and hard work isn't reflected in his final grade. It can be very discouraging.

Kate: In your research, did you identify when that trend — teaching to a single standard — started becoming most noticeable?

Sara: What I heard over and over again from educators was that the public education system in our country hasn't changed much in more than 125 years. We've learned a lot about how people learn and about brain development, but school still follows the old factory model on which it was based.

Homework in kindergarten, though, is new. And the emphasis on learning skills at a younger age is also new. Kindergarten is the new first grade and pre-kindergarten is the new kindergarten. A lot of that shift has been because of NCLB and some of the increased homework is because of NCLB.

You'll read reports that say that kids aren't doing any more homework than they've ever done. I don't

think the research has caught up with that trend yet. When a study is published in 2004, they're looking at figures from the 1990s. We really won't know the effect on children for a few more years.

Kate: You mention that we've learned a lot about brain development, but I've been very disturbed by the expectation that as children enter high school, at 13 or 14, they should have the ability to manage their time, plan ahead, and be responsible in the way that adults are responsible. There's no recognition of the developmental process.

Sara: Yes, we give them a label now. It's called executive function disorder and it means that the child can't keep track of everything she's supposed to do. But brain research tells us that these organizational skills don't usually kick in until a person is in their early 20s. So the school's expectations are inappropriate. The "disorder" is creating a booming business for therapists and tutors, though.

Kate: Have we lost track of what children need at different stages? Are we too reliant on scientific evidence?

Sara: Even I fall into that trap. Publicly, I can say there's no reason to have homework because there's no proof that it works. But what I'd really like to say is: There's no reason to have homework because after spending the day in school kids should be able to come home and do something else.

Kate: I think it's important to approach the issue from an informed, scientific perspective, but how can we reconnect with the needs of children on an intuitive, feeling basis? Can we do more of that?

Sara: That's my hope. I read this funny essay by Nora Ephron, who pointed out that 20 years ago the term "parenting" didn't even exist. It was just moms and dads. But now "parenting" is a science and parents have lost faith in themselves and what they know. If we could get back in touch with what we know — that our children need to eat and sleep or they get cranky, that they need to let off steam, that they need lots of love, affection, support, and downtime — then we'd also know, without anyone telling us, that it's unhealthy for our children to come home from school and spend hours doing school work. And we would step up and tell the schools that we won't allow them to interfere with our children's health and well being.

Profanity Against the Teacher

A Personal Story

Sheridan Gold

Turning a personal written attack into an opportunity to model respect that leads to personal satisfaction.

Note: This story is dedicated to my soul mate, Dianna, and to my wonderfully supportive colleagues. You know who you are. S.G.



SHERIDAN GOLD has taught at an alternative high school in San Rafael, California, for fifteen years and has a Masters degree in Special Education. Her main interests are in the areas of character education, media literacy, and African drumming.

I have heard that life presents us with only a small number of truly transformative learning opportunities. I recently had one.

I am a teacher of high school students in an alternative education setting in San Rafael, California. Some students are emotionally disturbed; many have special education needs; some have serious attendance issues; and others are there because of gang activity or alcohol and drug abuse. After teaching this population for 15 years, I have learned nothing is predictable. To help prepare me for the unpredictability of my job, I ground myself each morning with a swim and a meditation in the steam room, where I align my chakras and set my intentions to speak kindly, to act with compassion, and to do what is best for the world.

For three years we have had guest teachers from the San Francisco Performing Arts Workshop who teach weekly Drama and Creative Writing classes in my school. One day in my third period class, the teacher told me of her plan to have the students create a "chain letter" story, where students build on what each preceding student wrote. It is done in a way to ensure that each student's sentences are anonymous.

The classroom was hectic from the beginning. The kids were not in a circle because the room was too small to accommodate a circle. We had a back row that was shaped in a U formation, and another row inside the U. Kids were unsure to whom to pass their papers, and because we had a guest teacher, the students were unusually loud, rude, and disruptive. I always stay in the classroom to help support the teacher, and on this day, I sent four students to our in-house suspension room right away because of their refusal to settle down.

The guest teacher explained the exercise even though the students were still not able to settle down

and were talking and laughing. But with gentle nudging, they quieted down and started focusing. After about ten minutes, it was time for them to read their stories out loud. I started walking around to see what they wrote and realized that there were some inappropriate things being said about some of the students in the class. I asked the guest teacher if she had read any of the responses and she said no. I swiftly collected all of the papers and told the students that the exercise was over. They were given another writing assignment, but were so agitated that I looked again at their original papers. Two entries, written by different students, said: "I ate Ms. G's twat" and "I fingered Ms. G."

I couldn't believe what I read. I was shocked and disgusted and angry and embarrassed and hurt. I didn't know what to do, so I just kept silently reading all of the responses while the kids finished their assignments. When it was time to clean up, there were about two minutes left. I walked up in front of the class and talked more sternly than I ever had in all my years as a teacher. "I am so angry right now," I began. "I can't believe somebody would write these words." My heart was racing, my breathing was coming in quick breaths, and I was fighting the tears that were determined to fall. "I ate Ms. G's twat?" I spat. "I fingered Ms. G?" My voice broke but I gathered my wits and didn't cry all the way. "I am so embarrassed and hurt right now. I have never had this much disrespect in all of my years of teaching at this school!" The class was stunned and silent.

The bell rang. "You better believe there will be consequences for this," a student yelled out. "How could you guys be so rude?" Another said, "Juvenile Hall ... that is sexual harassment." When the students left, I was left staring in bewilderment at the guest teacher. She was more shocked than I. She approached me and apologized, saying she never had this happen before. She was clearly upset. I gave her a hug and wished her better luck with the rest of the classes she was going to be teaching that day.

It was time to go to 4th period PE. I was still trying to deal with my feelings around this, so when I went out with the kids, my spirit felt broken. During PE, I told one of my colleagues (who co-teaches with me in a couple classes) what happened. He was shocked and told me he'd help me compare handwriting samples.

I just happened to have had a meeting scheduled with the principal that day, right after PE. The meeting was in regard to another colleague talking disrespectfully to me in a staff meeting, and the principal wanted to see how I was doing. Dealing with my colleague, who I thought was my friend, and then this, seemed too heavy of a burden to bear. "What is wrong with me?" I asked myself. "Why do people, kids even, think they can talk to me any kind of way they want? What is it about me that invites this kind of disrespect?" I felt personally attacked, demeaned, and the lowest I had felt in a long, long time. As 4th period proceeded, the feeling progressed into a great sadness for all women.

When I met with the principal and told her what happened, she was as shocked as I had been. She also told me that giving anonymous writing assignments was not a good idea and not usually done in our school. I understood her point, but I had given writing assignments like this in the past, and it had never been a problem before. I showed her the writing, told her of my suspicions about the kids whom I thought had done it, and asked her what we could do with only suspicions. She told me that we could talk to the students' probation officers and parents, and I could suspend the whole class the following day if I wanted to. I didn't know that was what I wanted to do, but I knew I would have the rest of the day and evening to think about it.

Then I went back to my classroom, taught my last class, and had to leave for an appointment, so I couldn't stay for the daily wrap-up with the rest of the staff. The principal told them that I had had a rough day, but I am not sure she shared the specific insults. On my way home, I called Dianna, my partner and soul mate of almost 30 years, for advice and support. I trust what she has to say, as well as the fact that she is in a Ph.D. program in Psychology. She wanted to know how I felt in my soul, and I tried to explain it to her. I felt angry, disgusted, disappointed, and sad, all at the same time. She talked to me about several things on my drive home that day: adolescence, boys and their hormones, the possibility that maybe one or more of them had a crush on me ("They didn't curse you out, Sher — they didn't call you names, or write how much they hate you...."), that perhaps I could use this situation to

educate rather than penalize. She also talked about the possibility that the students feel certain ways ("You are so nice and kind to them, right?"), but don't have the language to express their feelings. Perhaps no one has talked to them in a compassionate way, or helped them understand their feelings. What she said made sense to me, but I was still so angry. I wanted revenge! I wanted them to pay for what they had done to me! We talked long into the night about the plight of my students. I've never had to deal with such behavior before — it was so blatant, yet so mysterious.

The next day was a Thursday and I woke up feeling very sad. My spirit was not broken, but heavy. I felt a burden of all women that morning — for all the girls in my classes, the women that I work with, for all of us who are in the same boat and seen as sexual objects. I still didn't know what I was going to do. Dianna and I had discussed having the kids write how they felt about what had happened, and I thought that might be a good idea, but I wasn't sure. At some level, thoughts about students being suspended worried me.

On my way to work, I called the school about a scheduling matter and spoke to the receptionist. I asked her if she had heard about what happened, and then shared my feelings and confusion around it. This was new behavior for me. I never reach out to others. I never ask for advice. But I was doing it. I wanted her to help me somehow. I was reaching for anything that would make sense.

When I arrived at the school, she looked at me and said once again how sorry she was. I told her I felt like I had been verbally raped. She suggested that I might think about taking the day off, to which I smiled and said, "Honey, if you work here, you better be able to handle this stuff. A day off? I think not!" We had a good chuckle, and it helped me put things into perspective.

During first and second periods, several students approached and asked me if I was okay. I answered that, honestly, no, I wasn't okay; I was sad, but thanks for asking. As second period was ending, a colleague asked me what I was going to be doing with the third period class. "Writing," I told him. "You're sending everyone up to in-house, right? I told him no. I decided right there on the spot. Some-

how, it didn't see right; it didn't fit with what I wanted to do with the kids. Why should I send them all to in-house when only two students were responsible? That wasn't fair. I decided I'd handle it in my classroom. My colleague asked me if I wanted him to stay. I smiled and said I would like that. Having his support would benefit me, and I thought it would be good for the students to see that this man, whom they respected, was disappointed in them.

Right before third period, the period of the prior day's incident, other students asked me what we were going to be doing. "Writing," I replied. "What about?" they asked. "About what happened yesterday," I said.

The bell rang, and the students walked in quietly and expectantly. My colleague was not in the room. I began the class by writing on the whiteboard in big black letters, "I ATE MS. G'S TWAT" and "I FIN-GERED MS. G." I let the words sink in for about a minute. There was complete quiet. Then I began telling the class how disappointed and sad I was. I told them that the day before I had been angry and disgusted, but that today I was sad, "because you are going to be men very, very soon, and you are treating women like this."

I wanted them to be touched somehow, so I said, "I want you to think about the women in your lives. Let's look at your mother right now. What if she was teaching this class and someone said that to her?" What if it was your aunt? What about your sister? Your grandmother? Now let's go into the future a minute and pretend you had a child. What if it was your daughter?" I could see the faces of some of my students. Some were shaking their heads back and forth, as if saying no, others had their heads on their desks, and still others gave me total eye contact and attention.

During this part of the period, my colleague had come into the room and was quietly sitting and observing. Then I told the students that they were going to be doing some writing and I proceeded to write some questions on the board: (1) How do you feel about what happened yesterday? (2) How did your behavior add to a loud and rude class? Then I asked my colleague if he had any questions. I was a total blank! He came up with (3) Why do males think they can disrespect females in our society? (4) How can this be a lesson learned? Then I added, (5) Apol-

ogies: Who do you need to apologize to? the guest teacher? Ms. G? the class? Then I let them write.

After I collected all the writing, I told them I was going to read their essays the following day, anonymously. There were about two minutes left before the bell. I said to them, "You know, one or more of you might have a crush on me. Come and talk to me and we can discuss it. I can help you create healthy boundaries for yourself. I love you guys, but I am your teacher, and you are my students. This is all I have to give you, nothing more." I looked at each student, who, to my surprise, was staring back at me. I expected there to be snide remarks, or rude noises, something, when I mentioned the crush thing. But there was nothing like that. There was absolute quiet, with 100% attention on me. Wherever I walked, I had 20 pairs of eyes glued on me. Not even when the bell rang did they move. They just sat there. It was really weird. I had to actually excuse them. I was totally blown away by their attentiveness. It was like they actually cared.

Below are a few of their responses (all spelling errors are those of the students):

I just wanna say to you Mrs. G I didn't write anything discusting on the paper. I would never disrespect a teacher like that because you teach us. Like my parents say, the teachers show you what's good and what's wrong. I think people are dumb because they wrote that. If I was mad I would just act normal not give anyone problems. I would try another way to get it out. I just wanna say that I didn't do any bad writing on the papers. Your really nice to everyone even if your mad. I'm glad I'm in your class I like the work and everything that you teach even if it looks like I don't like it. thank you Mrs. G. I give a lot of respect for you.... That is disrespecting every woman in the world because that's where we came from. So think before you ever say something. This is to everyone.

I think it was wrong what was written because no matter how funny you want to be, or how much you hate someone, you should never say anything like that. I feel bad for Ms. G because even though she might make someone mad she has never done anything so bad that this had to happen. I know that if someone said that about

my mom or any female in my family I would be very mad so I can't even imagine how Ms. G feels. The person/people who did it should feel bad and know that they are very wrong for what they did.... In class yesterday I contributed to the loudness because I yelled out and talked a lot. I should have sat down and payed attention like some people did, but I didn't. I just helped make everything worse. Even though I wasn't the one that wrote it, I feel that in some way it's my fault because I didn't help calm down the class.... I don't think that all males disrespect females. I think that some do and they do that because that's how they are and they feel superior to females so they treat them differently. I also think that some females think they are superior to males. Most females to me think that just because they're females they have to be treated like queens and I don't think that is right or that they should feel that way... I think that now that people realize that stupid little things that they thought were funny can turn out to be serious to others people. Now that people see that some things said can be so hurtful they can change the things they say and the way they feel. Most people hopefully realize that this was wrong and they will feel bad inside and know they won't do it again. I apologize to the people who wrote this because if they had the nerve to write that then they obviously have a problem. I don't see how some can write that and think that it is okay. I also apologize to the guest teacher and Ms. G. because I was loud and disrespectful while she was trying to teach. I apologize to Ms. G because she didn't deserve to have something so disrespectful said about her. All she does is try to teach us better and she got disrespected.

I feel that what was written about you is a violation of you and your rights. It is a disturbing piece of writing and very disrespectful. I feel that it is a very immature thing for someone of our schools ages to write and I'm sorry your rights were violated. It one thing to joke, but someone took it to an whole other level... You had the right to be upset in class yesterday. You were sexually harassed and if that had hap-

pened to me I would have been more than angry. Yesterday in class, my behavior wasn't that best. I was talking with other people were talking and joked in the story writing. Although I didn't take it anywhere close to that level.... I don't think all males disrespect females. Some do and some don't. There is a difference between a woman and a "bi#\$%." Classy females get respect, but the ones that aren't disrespect themselves, so that is why I think males treat them with disrespect.... One person wrote those sentences about you. I can speak for myself and tell you that it wasn't me. Now I see that jokes can really be taken seriously and hurt some people real bad ... Sorry for laughing, but I didn't write any sexual remarks about you, her, or any other females in this class. So that's it.

I feel bad because I think that we should respect woman because we all are humans I also think that is really sad and bad because what about if my mom or my sisters were the ones that got hurt by the students in the class.

While I was working at my desk after school that Thursday, a campus supervisor came in and started chatting with me. I ended up sharing with him what had happened, showed him the actual writing, and we discussed opportunities the universe provides to practice being different. This was one of those times. I really appreciated his love and support in that moment. He talked to me about having crushes on teachers when he was in school, and what he did about it. We talked about the difficulty of really sharing what is in our hearts instead of our heads, and I was even more convinced that I had done the right thing by being in the room with my students, holding them accountable, and letting them see how a few people's insensitivity had affected me.

The next day's class, on Friday, was pretty amazing. A student came in before the bell and asked me if I was going to read the responses, and I told him I was. He begged me to read his response last and we continued to have a conversation about why. I tried to relieve his anxiety by saying that no one would know his writing. He said, "But people can know because you laugh or turn red...." So I agreed to read

his near the end. He let out a big sigh of relief as the bell rang, and he found his seat.

When the kids came in and all sat down, they were once again completely silent — mesmerized. I told them that I was going to read the essays. I read for 35 minutes, commenting on some and thanking others for their insight and empathy. I read my shy student's response second to last. The last essay I read was one with no reflection, empathy, or sense of responsibility for his behavior. I saved it for last to emphasize that there was at least one student who felt no remorse.

My colleague came in about ten minutes into the class and listened to the essays. Since he has his own desk in the classroom, he walked over and took his seat. When I was done reading, he asked to read his own writing. What he wrote was deep, supportive, and reflective. Then he proceeded to talk about his feelings for the next ten minutes. Here is what I remember him saying:

I am hurt by what someone said about Ms. G. I've been working with her for 15 years. She loves to come to work every day and help kids in tough situations. Ms. G teaches me other ways to think about things. Here is a lady that has so much poise and composure. I couldn't have done what she's done for you. Like, if this had happened to me? I would have sent each one of you to in-house, made you write what you wrote on Wednesday, and if you couldn't remember, I'd suspend you from school. But she didn't do that. And it's just not the people who wrote these foul and disgusting things. What about those of you who knew about it but didn't say anything? If my son had been in this class and saw what was going on and didn't do anything, I'd be so disappointed in him. At least you could have thrown it away and told Ms. G not to read it.

Listening to this man, this friend, made me feel very supported, and very warm and loved inside. I thanked him and added some final thoughts:

When you insult one person of a group, you insult the whole group. Many of you are people of color. You are part of an oppressed group. Most likely you have had to deal with racism. But you are also a part of the majority because you are male. The female students are part of an op-

pressed group and have had to deal with sexism, but if you have white skin, you are part of the majority. We all have this in common. We all, all of us in this room, are oppressed. It doesn't feel good and we have to take better care of each other.

Right before the bell rang, my colleague asked me what the consequences were going to be. Then the bell rang. Not one student moved. This was two days in a row that the kids were glued to their seats. I said that "the principal is working with the probation officers and the parents. However, if the students who wrote these words come to me or write me a letter with their name on it and apologize, I will drop it." The kids were all ears. I excused them once again.

After they left, a couple kids hung around because they had me for PE the next period. They kept saying to each other, "Cody is so stupid — Cody doesn't care about anything or anybody — how could he say something like that." I walked up to my colleague and gave him a big hug and thanked him. He was amazing, not as a savior, but as a friend.

For the rest of the day, I felt lighter, freer, safer, and at peace. I had an inner joy waiting to explode. I knew this issue was bigger than me, that I was just the receiver of the foul language, but that the language wasn't me, wasn't my essence. The language had more to do with the boys and their lives, with their wounded souls. I felt released. I was able to look at myself in the mirror and be proud. I didn't have to be angry, rageful, or bitter.

I know that this was but a single experience in my life, but it was critical for me. It's easy to be punitive. I know that if I had simply suspended my students, I would have missed an opportunity to learn about the complexity of their feelings toward teachers. And they would have missed the opportunity to tap into their own experience, express their feelings, and hear the experiences of others. I don't know what will happen to Cody. It is still under investigation. I doubt that I will know how the episode affects my students' lives in the long run. But I do know that I am a changed teacher.

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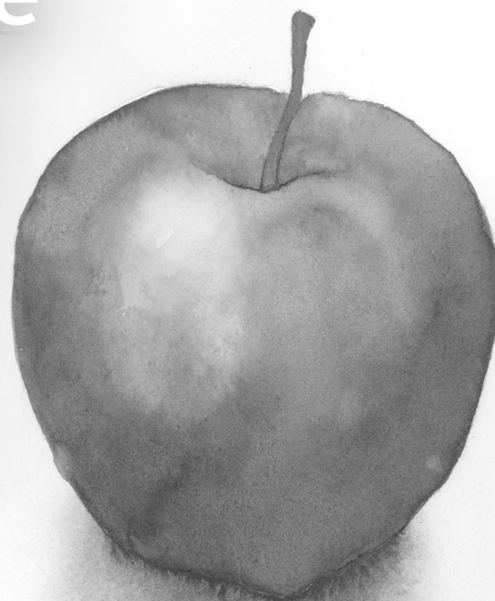
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What Trees Know

Talking with Teachers about The Imagination of Being

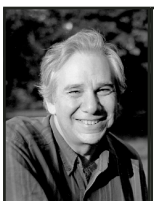
Richard Lewis

Children have the imaginative capacity to experience the world as just as alive as they are.

What else is there to say: a little girl, perhaps three or four years old, running down a low sloping hill in Central Park, her arms and legs abandoning themselves to the push and pull of gravity, while trailing behind her, exuberant with spring air, the floating sounds of her childish laughter.

What else is there to say, when here, in a very small moment, are all the elements of what our aliveness so often is: wordless, almost invisible, yet completely evident and felt. This was an “aliveness” I was trying to convey to a group of New York City classroom teachers recently, teachers who were taking a summer workshop on the identification and understanding of many elements of the natural world. Invited to speak about the role of the imagination in learning, I did not want to circumvent the relevance of the science within the workshop. Instead, I wanted to move the information they were studying to a different perspective. I sensed that we had to shift our attention to something of the child running down the hill — to the purely sensuous experience, to a form of knowledge that cannot be necessarily measured on a scale of learned abilities.

I asked them what they do on their summer vacations, and they overwhelmingly mentioned relaxing, taking time off from their regular activities. Then, after some probing, they elaborated on how they enjoyed sitting near water, gardening, listening to waves, walking in a forest, watching birds, being quiet. And when I moved the conversation to the children they teach, most agreed that what they did during the summer was not what the children had the opportunity to do during the school year. What was expected of them as teachers, of course, was to



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teach towards the known quantities of learning, those fractions of knowledge that can be measured and judged as having been learned or not learned. They pointed out that sitting, walking, listening — or even running down a hill — were not subjects with any reliable means of accountability. I concurred, and asked again what kinds of thoughts and feelings they had when they participated, during their summer vacations, in these activities. Slowly, and with some encouragement, they admitted to feeling young again and aware, as one of the teachers said, of being part of something more than this human frame of ours. Some said they were sometimes conversant with a language not only between themselves, but also with the waters nearby, the sand they were playing with, the birds they could hear — even another voice within their own speaking. I suggested that such a language may come from the ability of our imaginations to enter into the very things we are watching, listening to, and sitting with. Such imagining, I added, is a form of knowing that children, by the indigenous nature of their childhood, use as an active way of understanding — of being at the very heart of theirs' and others' aliveness.

Maybe then, I suggested, trees (which they were studying that day) cannot only be identified by their leaves, or bark, or the shape of their branches, but by their relationship to us personally. Maybe the qualities of a tree's presence — the story it tells in our minds, the sounds it makes in the wind — are also the very qualities we first knew, as young children.

As we spoke one of the teachers said she often thought about what trees know, what they must have seen or heard as trees. I smiled to myself because for a number of years now the artist-teachers of The Touchstone Center and I have also been exploring a similar question with the children we work with. Like this teacher, we have tried to expand our definition of knowing, indeed of learning, to include all forms of natural life — and in particular the knowledge, perhaps, inherent in trees.

Some of the children who participated in this Tree of Knowing project shared these thoughts with us.

My tree likes to look at stars
and its leaves makes the wind change colors.
My tree likes to give life to dead things
—Angie, 5th/6th grade

My tree knows it's not alone
My tree feels strong because it has branches.
The branches are not heavy.
They are connected to each other
and the air and light
The tree is never in the dark.
It always has light inside.
—La Porsche, 5th/6th grade

I think we know what a tree dreams
because at night we sleep next to a tree
and it is like two thoughts together.
—Case, 3rd/4th grade

Certainly, as I stressed with the teachers in our workshop, an innocence prevails here — but it is not necessarily an innocence we need to give up just because it seems useless in the competitive forward motion of schooling. It is an innocence that relies on children's innate ability to become a part of what they see and experience, to believe, through their imagination, that everything is as alive and responsive as they are. It is often children's lack of factual knowledge that allows them to rely on what they know through their senses and imaginations. It is an innocence — and an imaginative capacity — that we adults sometimes wish to return to, to find ourselves once again experiencing the world in all its *being-ness* and immediacy. In a subtle and precise way, the 17th century Japanese haiku poet Basho (1966) captured this kind of innocence when he wrote

Not knowing
The name of the tree
I stood in the flood
Of its sweet smell.

Ever since I started working with young children, I have been fascinated by their ability to take the simplest of objects — a ball, a stone, a twig, a marble, a feather — and build upon this object a multitude of worlds. I have been intrigued by how quickly I can give children a pinch of air I hold between my two fingers — and without too much convincing, ask them to smooth its edges, tickle its sides, turn it up so it faces the sky, and carefully put it in the palm of their hand. I am certain now this ability to have confidence with the invisible, as well as to treat the most invisible of elements with awe and respect, is due to the fluidity of their imaginations.

Yes, this might be innocence as well, but it is also at the very basis of all our poetic and scientific thought,

of a way of thinking that reaches out and integrates disparate ideas and possibilities that can emerge from the unknown. It's about what this six-year-old exclaimed: "Oh wow! Air opens. Air can open."

Or what the philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1969) observes: "There are moments in childhood when every child is the astonishing being, the being who realizes *the astonishment of being*."

When children are free at play, and not apparently doing anything related to school — this is a time of their aliveness and also their contemplation. When we think of these moments of childhood, when we were really just being children, we often remember our questioning. Amidst our running, playing, and shouting, perhaps for a brief moment, we stopped to look at the ground, and began to wonder why the leaves were going the same way we were going, why they fell, who would be there to catch them, who gave them colors, what they felt, and where they will be when it snows.

A child's questions, certainly, but questions filled with a child's way of asking — balancing the known and the unknown, the imagined and the real. And just as importantly, we can hesitate and think like children again. We can vacation ourselves in a leaf's world. And what might we call this hesitation — this departure from everything else that we are supposed to be doing and taking place around us? Might it simply be the craft of our imaginations, like those of children, to speak through and with the language of our being: the

marvel of our imaginative genes to build a bridge between ourselves and the community of all the other living elements that make up our world? Might we once again think like the 4th grader Ashrat, who says,

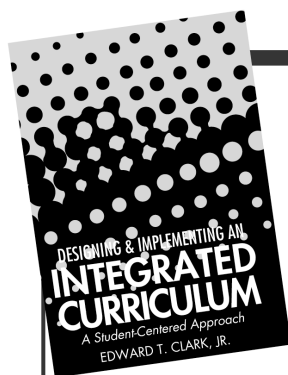
The light likes to play with me.
The light is going all around the world.
And the other lights are dancing.
I like those lights so much.

I love the dancing and the going around the world.

Children may not be fully aware of the impact their astonishment, playfulness, and imagining may have on their lives. But I would offer, as I did with the teachers, that in some vital and hidden corner of our imaginations, we all have imprinted those seemingly insignificant moments, and these moments sustain us as persons and keep us related to the world. The world's abundant elements — light, air, water, plants, insects and animals — constitute our collective sense of being, and they are far from useless. They are the essential body of the imaginative conversation we must continue to have if we, and our planet, are to have a viable future.

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Practice or Perfect?

Suzanne Hudd

In today's competitive, goal-oriented society, young people feel they must be judged perfect and achieve at any cost. They are afraid to take risks, to learn from their mistakes, to discover their unique strengths and weaknesses, and to enjoy work as a process.

Teenage achievement is in the news. The success of some high school students has been so incredible that college can essentially offer them nothing new (Papano 2007). These immense accomplishments are raising new concerns for teens, however. A recent survey, published in *USA Today*, found that 44% of teenagers feel they are under pressure to achieve at any cost (Jayson 2006), and the *Detroit News* reports that some undergraduate overachievers are taking Adderall, a drug for attention disorder, to get to the top of their class (Stulberg 2006). The *Boston Globe* described one principal's efforts to reduce teen pressure as controversial. His decision to stop printing the names of honor roll students in the local paper after a number of suicides received a mixed response from the community. Some accused the principal of "coddling underachievers" (McNamara 2006).

Contemporary American culture is outcome-driven, and like all of us, our young people feel unrelenting pressure to achieve — and to achieve visibly. Whereas I have generally looked at my own accomplishments as the culmination of a process, it seems that teenagers today are increasingly focused on the "the prize" — tangible evidence that one has achieved something worthy of acclaim. The process of working toward something (e.g., reading and reflecting on what I have read), which frequently offers greater satisfaction than the product (i.e., the publication) has been devalued in our culture of perfection. The final destination takes precedence over the journey.

As a sociologist, it occurs to me that our cultural norms that favor quantifiable achievement over the learning process are at least partially due to the loss of community (Putnam 2000). In a true community, people take the time to know one another fully. In contrast, our fast-paced, competitive culture does not provide the time and space for such knowledge to develop. Instead, we must quickly glean who people are by the achievements they list on their resume.



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No Time for "Dabbling"

It seems that our emphasis on achievement and competition has simply gone over the edge, and the ill effects of our national mantra of "perfection" can be readily observed in the daily lives of our young people. Our growing reliance on standardized testing to demonstrate learning provides a case in point. Today's elementary classrooms are increasingly characterized by an atmosphere of fear and anxiety as the concern with test scores has moved to the forefront of the learning experience (Crain 2006). Striving for perfection has been linked to a host of other concerns, including lower feelings of self-worth and social connectedness, as well as higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety (Rice et al. 2006; Landa and Bybee 2007; Neumeister and Finch 2006; Elliot 1999; Hewitt and Flett 1991). The quest for perfection has altered our teenagers' lives in real and qualitative ways.

Family researchers William Doherty and Barbara Carlson (2002) highlight the "lost art of hanging out," and the evolving role of parents as "opportunity providers in a competitive world." Social researchers Sandra Hofferth and John Sandberg (2001) report the following changes in American 3- to 12-year-olds' weekly time. Between 1981 and 1997, school time increased 2 hours a week; study time increased 20%; free play declined an average of 16%; time in religious participation dropped 45%; and household conversations decreased 34%. Another study (Juster et al. 2004), examining the weekly time of 6- to 17-year-olds, found roughly similar results. Most notably, between 1982 and 2003, weekly time in free outdoor activities declined from over two hours to less than one hour.

Because our culture compels them to do more and to always do better, our teenagers can no longer afford to dabble. Their time is structured with a purpose that is rooted in the future rather than in the present (Crain 2007).

Thinking "Inside the Box"

The culture of pressure shortchanges our youth in subtle, but important ways. I have, for example, observed in my college classroom an increasing inability of the young people I teach to take risks and to think openly. Within the past decade, I have observed a growing number of students who are "formulaic" in their approach to academic work. Each assignment re-

quires a rubric, a set of specific guidelines designed to maximize the potential for a "perfect" outcome, an "A." While there is certainly something to be said for providing clear directives, creativity is stifled when learning becomes structured in this way. Overtly, we may encourage our students to "think outside of the box," but their quest for perfection unnecessarily restricts the outcomes that they are willing to consider.

Because of the constraints imposed upon their learning, the selection of a paper topic can sometimes pose a greater challenge for my students than researching and writing the paper. They are so afraid of substandard performance, so concerned with "getting it right," that they do not know where or how to begin. They are unwilling to take risks, largely because they have never learned how. It seems that so much of their learning process has been "scripted" to ensure achievement that today's students have come to value the products of their education over the process of *being* educated. In a recent survey of sociology students at a mid-size public university in the northeast, 73.3% of those surveyed agreed with the statement "I would take a course in which I would learn a little or nothing but would receive an 'A'" (Delucchi and Korgen 2002). Clearly, perfection has become the priority.

Appropriate Fear

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that pressure is always bad. Sometimes fear can be helpful and adaptive; sometimes it is necessary. If I wasn't a bit intimidated to give a talk before an audience of my colleagues, my presentation might not be as professional. Appropriate fear enhances performance. It reminds us that what we are doing matters and is important. In contrast, fear that arises from unrealistic expectations is limiting. If I suddenly were required to deliver a paper on electricity to a room full of physicists, for example, my fear would be qualitatively different. I might pass out at the podium. Appropriate fear is rooted in the hope and expectation that I might achieve a goal for which I have carefully and thoughtfully prepared.

The Need for Self-Direction

Much of the reason that the fears our teenagers confront are so overwhelming is that the pressures often

come exclusively from the outside. Teenagers lack the opportunity to set their own goals, let alone the ability to opt out of a competition. The culture of perfection demands that they pursue many things, and they must be good at all of them. As a result, teenagers rarely get a chance to determine for themselves where their talents lie and what kind of effort success requires. They are unable to test and define their own limits.

By prescribing their choices, we deprive our young people of a critical skill: self-direction. We also fail to teach them one of the fundamental lessons in life: That the process of perfecting something is often that which gives one pleasure; and that joy can be found in the hard work that is required to achieve something — not just in the achievement itself.

Our culture of perfection stifles other lessons as well: that we all make mistakes; that we aren't perfect; that we all have limits. For many of us, coming to terms with our deficiencies and accepting them, rather than blindly striving to conquer them, provides the greatest learning experience of all.

Excellence: A Process Not a Product

I marvel at the fact that my fourteen-year-old, having worked to develop her talents in music and writing, has chosen instead to create an art portfolio upon which she will stake her chances for admission to the arts magnet school she so dearly wants to attend. In our outcomes-based, perfectionist culture, why would she not gravitate to her more "proven" talents? Her response to this question during her interview, "because I have more to learn in art," illuminates the critical shortfall inherent in our culture of perfection. While "practice makes perfect," the practice is generally more fun and rewarding than the perfect outcome; and it offers more opportunity for personal growth and development. In encouraging our teenagers to strive for and then sustain perfection, we deprive them of the opportunity to experience these deeper pleasures inherent in the learning experience.

As educators, we can begin to effect a change for our students. Let us define excellence as a process. Let us define the process as one that encourages our children to be open-minded, to persevere, to take risks, to explore, to stretch, and to embrace and learn from their failures as much as their successes. If we provide our young people with the freedom to take their eyes

off the prize, the space to try new things and the privacy to define perfection for themselves, excellence will likely follow. And even if they never develop "talent" within a particular activity, our children will benefit because they will acquire the ability to identify and pursue goals within the context of their unique, self-discovered strengths and abilities, passions and interests. Ultimately, they will be able to create a personal standard of excellence and strive to meet their goals autonomously. In this way, we can exert a lasting effect on their future by teaching them to more fully experience the present, in all its imperfection.

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Distorted Graduation Rate Statistics In Higher Education

Paul Attewell and David E. Lavin

We should consider graduation rates in light of today's students, who often face different circumstances than the more privileged students of the past.

Undergraduate enrollments have grown sixfold in the last half century and continue to boom; today more than 80% of high-school graduates go to college within approximately eight years of graduation. One might expect those accomplishments to be celebrated, but the expansion of higher education has been accompanied by ambivalence, anxiety, and opposition. As enrollments continue to climb, the intensity of criticism grows ever louder.

We are told that public colleges admit inadequately prepared students, that graduation rates are scandalously low, that students take too long to graduate, and that university graduates lack appropriate job skills. Last fall's report by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education followed suit in calling for more institutional accountability for what students learn and for graduating them faster and at less cost.

Many of the questions policymakers ask are distorted by conceptual blinders that evaluate today's undergraduate experience against a norm from an earlier era when students entered college immediately after high school, attended college full time, lived in dormitories, and rarely worked for pay because they were financially dependent on their parents. But such traditional students, whose needs and experiences still drive public policy, make up less than a quarter of today's undergraduate population. We need to focus on what higher education is, not what it once was.

It should come as no surprise that today's undergraduates — often commuter students who typically juggle family or work obligations, or both, with college — do not fare well on performance measures designed for a different kind of student. Today many undergraduates cycle in and out of college. They stop for

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a while or drop down to part-time status to earn enough money to pay for next semester's tuition, or for rent, or to have a child, or to accept a promising job opportunity. For such students — remember, they are the large majority of today's undergraduates — a college education is something that has to be fitted into the rest of life. College is no longer a phase of youth to be enjoyed before real life begins.

That became all too clear to us in the course of our long-term study of female college students and their children. We followed the women who entered the City University of New York system from 1970 to 1972, as the CUNY campuses began accepting all New York City high-school graduates. It took the students we tracked a long time to complete their degrees, but 30 years after entering college, 70% of women who had attended the CUNY system had earned a degree, and more than three-fourths of those had earned a bachelor's degree. In parallel analyses we conducted of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which until 2000 tracked students nationwide for 20 years, we found that the graduation rate was 61%. Even among the weakest prospects — students who entered college with high-school averages of C or below — we estimated that among recent national cohorts, about half are graduating in the long run.

What accounts for the discrepancy between the critics of higher education, who bemoan its shortcomings, and our research? The distressingly low graduation figures that scandalize critics are typically collected six years after college entry. They give the impression that huge numbers of students — particularly economically disadvantaged and minority students — fail to benefit from attending college. That approach measures success or failure far too soon. Working-class and minority students are taking longer than six years — in some cases much longer — to get through college, but many more of them ultimately cross the finish line than the short-term assessments imply. Recent government data indicate that more than 28% of bachelor's recipients get their degrees more than six years after entering college. Women, members of minority groups, and poor students tend to take longer than the average.

Despite delayed graduation, college makes a big difference in the lives of working-class students and

their children. Two findings stand out. First, despite a huge increase in the college-educated population, the value of a degree has not eroded over time. For women, in particular, it has grown. While the students we studied who entered college with poor preparation or economic disadvantages did not earn as much as straight-A or middle-class collegians, poorly prepared students who attended college nevertheless earned 13% more annually than students from similar backgrounds who went no further than high-school graduation.

Moreover, after controlling for IQ, high-school performance, and family background, we found that even students who attended college but failed to graduate earned significantly more than equivalent students who never attended college. Thus when high-school counselors encourage their poor or academically weak students to aim for college, they are not misleading them.

Second, an important but underappreciated benefit of higher education is the impact that college attendance has upon the life chances of the next generation. We discovered that when mothers from poor and working-class backgrounds went to college, they changed the way they raised their children. Their educational expectations for their children climbed, and their style of interacting with them was affected, compared with similar women who never attended college. College mothers became more involved in their children's schools and turned into advocates for their kids. They took their children to museums, zoos, and theaters, or provided other forms of cultural enrichment. They involved themselves more in community and church groups. In combination, such parental activities associated with maternal college attendance improved their children's educational performance, whether measured by test scores or chances of college entry. In short, maternal college attendance interrupts the cycle of poverty.

The picture that our research uncovered was not one of unalloyed success. The disadvantages of race and class continued to stretch across generations, so that children of minority and poor mothers who attended college were less likely to succeed educationally than children of white and affluent mothers. College access did not erase disadvantage for everyone.

On average, however, we found that maternal college attendance had a significant positive impact on the prospects for the second generation among various disadvantaged groups.

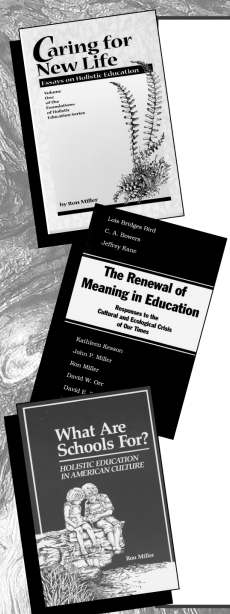
If we are to have accountability and benchmarks for higher education, then let us measure what matters for our society: the long-term impact of educational access upon college students and their offspring. Adopting measurement systems that count disadvantaged students as failures because they take longer to graduate will inevitably make those institutions that serve working-class and minority students appear inefficient, while ensuring that colleges that enroll more-affluent students look highly productive. That is not accountability or fiscal prudence; it is an excuse for further cuts in financing for public universities and camouflage for reversing past gains in access to college.

Instead, we should concentrate on the aspects of educational policy that stack the deck against disadvantaged students. Although our study documented the success of many of those students, we also saw the obstacles that they faced:

- Skyrocketing tuition at public universities that makes college less affordable for working-class and middle-class students alike. In the last 30 years, the percentage of the costs of attending a public four-year college covered by Pell Grants has fallen by nearly one-half, winching up the pressure on poor students.

- Reductions in government aid punish students who work their way through college. Part-time students are made ineligible for certain kinds of assistance, yet financial stress pushes students to take fewer credits to accommodate longer work hours. When economically stressed students take time off from college to earn money to meet tuition, their temporarily increased earnings reduce their aid eligibility for the following year. It's a Catch-22.
- Federal requirements state that most college students be classified as dependent on their parents until they are roughly 23 years old, thus reducing their aid. That is unrealistic for students from poorer families who have been financially self-supporting since their late teens. They can't or won't take money from their struggling parents (if anything, their parents may ask for their assistance), while they soldier on with grossly inadequate aid.

We can cling to an increasingly unrepresentative image of undergraduate life and document through statistical measures that universities filled with working-class and minority students do not live up to that privileged benchmark. Or we can acknowledge the emergence of a system of mass higher education and develop policies that recognize that college attendance has profoundly changed.



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Asian Women Past and Present

A Closer Look at the Meaning of Tradition

Sung Ha Suh

As Asian women pursue higher education and professional careers, it may be helpful for them to know that their ancient traditions are not merely those of female subjugation. Their traditions are complex and sometimes even empowering.

Asia's transition from a traditional to a modern society has opened new options for women. In many Asian countries, women attend college at equal or nearly equal rates as men (United Nations 2005), and since 1990 the non-agricultural employment of women has increased in all regions of Asia (UN Millennium Development Report 2006).

Despite expanding opportunities, however, Asian women face serious obstacles. For example, female college graduates report that they have difficulty obtaining positions commensurate with their level of education due to gender discrimination (Cho 1994; Orenstein 2001; Ueno 1994). Across Asia, unemployment rates are higher for women than for men at every level of education. This is true even in countries that have achieved educational gender parity at the university level, such as Indonesia and Sri Lanka (UNESCO 2003/2004). Asia's punishing professional system exacerbates the problem. Professional women contemplating motherhood feel pressured to stop their careers and become fulltime housewives (Cho 1994; Orenstein 2001; Ueno 1994). Some well-educated women simply choose not to work. These women perceive their education primarily as a means for an advantageous marriage (Cho 1994; Ueno 1994).

The challenges faced by Asian women are often described as conflicts between modern and traditional values. It is typically believed that women who pursue higher education and professional careers violate the traditional role of the subservient female. However, this is an oversimplification. A closer look at the traditional role of women reveals more complex patterns.



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Confucian Ideals

Certainly, Asian societies are characterized by strong gender roles, which were promoted by Confucius (c. 551-479 BCE). But the history of these roles deserves some attention. Confucian thought was guided by the concept of the yin and yang, the notion that natural balance requires that all things have an equal opposite. Confucian societies applied this natural balance to the roles of men and women. The bilateral exchange of duties between the genders was believed to be conducive to the overall stability of a

Women in contemporary Asian societies keep their maiden name, but in contrast to earlier practice, their children must take on their husband's name to be accepted by society.

family. Men and women were seen as having totally different but complementary roles and functions. These roles were not conceptualized in terms of the equality of individual rights. Rather, the emphasis was on the mutually interdependent relationship between the individual's different functions, privileges, and duties within the family. Thus, the relationship between the sexes for Confucius was considered a union of complementary roles that stressed reverence and reciprocity.

Most Confucian concepts regarding women, however, stem from the teachings of Confucius's successors, who developed their thoughts during the warring states period (c. 475 to 221 BCE). This was a time of widespread social and political strife. As conflicts between warring clans intensified and power became concentrated in feudal structures, survival became dependent on groups' ability to defend against attacks and invasions. Power and control became increasingly valued in the social order, replacing the older Confucian ideals of reciprocity, respect, and interconnectedness. The Confucian ideal of the complementary union between the sexes gave way to a hierarchical arrangement that ascribed the male function

above its female counterpart. Gender roles became stratified (Yoon 1979).

The adulteration of Confucius's original teachings was facilitated by the fact that Confucius did not write down his ideas. Ultimately, the governing state reinterpreted Confucius's teachings to ensure its authority by promoting his emphasis on being a virtuous citizen, which for women meant blind obedience (Cho 1994). Female oppression, however, is antithetical to true Confucianism.

But even within the more gender-stratified culture of Neo-Confucianism (which in China traces back to the 9th Century A.D.), the status of ordinary women increased in the later years of the life span. Because of the cultural veneration of the aged, both men and women gained stature, but women's status increased more dramatically. Whereas a young bride and daughter-in-law occupied the lowest position in the family, this all changed if she bore at least one son who married. As a mother-in-law and then a grandmother, she became the powerful matriarch of the extended family.

A woman's emotional ties also became more secure in old age. She continued to have a close relationship with her son even after he married; she received the devotion and respect given to elders by younger family members; and she enjoyed a deepening peer relationship with her husband because of all they had been through together. She was expected to work less, giving her time for religion and activities such as matchmaking and friendship. The presence of a daughter-in-law also allowed the son's mother to spend more time with her grandchildren, nurturing them without the responsibilities of being a parent. Socially, the matriarch was less restricted and could be outspoken in her opinions and even smoke in public. Essentially, as a woman advanced in age, she was gradually released from the male domination of her early life. As a mother-in-law and grandmother, she assumed the role of the powerful and respected matriarch.

More Ancient Customs

Little attention has been given to the important leadership roles occupied by Asian women during pre-Confucian times. Considerable evidence points to matriarchal influences that were much more exten-

sive and powerful than those we have discussed so far (Yang 1961; Yoon 1979). Some historians believe that the archaeological remains of the 6000 year-old Banpo village in Xian, once a capital of China, show that it was governed by a system in which women had primary authority (An 1988). Even today, traces of matriarchal communities still exist in China's Yunnan province, among the Moso people, whose women make most major decisions (Shih 2001).

Women's power in ancient Asia is also revealed by studies of Korean and Japanese society prior to Neo-Confucian influences. For example, the marriage customs during the Koguryo Dynasty (37 BCE – 668 A.D.) required a husband to live with his wife's family and to adopt its traditions upon the birth of their first child (Jay 1996). These practices run contrary to Neo-Confucian domestic customs, in which a bride is expected to leave her birth family and become a member of her husband's family.

In addition, records from Korea's Silla Dynasty (57 BCE – 936 A.D.) reveal only genealogical links based on maternal family names. The importance that Asians attach to their names heightens the significance of such matrilineal descent. Women in contemporary Asian societies keep their maiden name, but in contrast to the early societies described, their children must take on their husband's name to be accepted by society.

In Japan, according to legend, emperors and royal families draw their power and lineage from a female deity, Amaterasu Omikami, a mythological Sun Goddess associated with the origin of Japan. Amaterasu's emblem, the rising sun, appears on Japan's national flag (Takeshi 1978). Of the first 20 historically verifiable emperors, eight were female, and two of these empresses ruled twice under different names (Jay 1996).

Evidence of female imperial succession can also be found in Korea during the Silla period (57 BCE – 935 AD), where there were three female rulers: Queen Seon Deok (632 – 647 A.D.), Queen Jin Deok (647 – 654 A.D.), and Queen Jin Seong (887 – 897 A.D.) (Jay 1996). In fact, prohibitions that prevent women from becoming ruling monarchs are recent creations. For example, the Japanese Imperial Household Law bar-

ring women from becoming an emperor wasn't introduced until 1947.

Conclusion

As Asian women pursue educational opportunities and advanced careers, they often feel that they are breaking with tradition. Perhaps it will be helpful for them to know that, in reality, their traditions are complex and not entirely those of subjugation. Asian traditions include, at least at some points in history, the recognition of women's authority. Thus, when contemporary women think about their cultural past, perhaps they can see it as offering a degree of empowerment.

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Transformative Principles for Teaching

Barbara Hruska

Although many principles of teaching might strike us as contradictory, we grow as educators — and human beings — by developing balance between them.

When I became a public school teacher, I began a journey that has provided 25 years of creativity and challenge. Now, as a teacher trainer, I observe student interns and first-year teachers grapple with life in their classrooms, and I am struck by the bountiful opportunities for growth this profession has to offer. Not only do we facilitate student learning; we also gain insights about ourselves.

Both my teaching and personal growth have been greatly informed by philosophical principles I learned in a meditation class taught by Ellen Tadd. In this article I describe three pairs of these principles (Directivity and Receptivity, Discipline and Spontaneity, and Conviction and Openness) that came directly from her personal experience and were shared in an ongoing class over several years. Each week we focused on understanding the essential meaning of a principle, then took this understanding out into the world and applied it, observing how it operated in our lives.

As an educator, I integrated these principles into teaching environments. After 20 years I can report that they have helped me address areas of personal weakness and have guided me toward greater internal balance. They have served as a lens through which to view classroom interaction, and they have improved my interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Because these concepts rarely, if ever, appear in teacher preparation or professional development materials, I offer them to other educators as useful tools to apply in, and outside of, their classrooms.

Directivity and Receptivity

Being directive involves taking action, taking charge. Being receptive entails looking, listening, perceiving, and waiting. Classrooms are great en-

Note. For more information on the professional work of Ellen Tadd that inspired this article, visit her website at <EllenTadd.com>



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vironments for practicing and synthesizing these two principles.

Although most of us would like to be both directive and receptive with equal ease, it is common for some people to be more naturally directive, their energy emanating outward, while others are more receptive, easily taking energy in. The synthesis of the two is necessary, however, because teaching is a natural cycle of action informed by receptive perception.

Teachers need to be directive in order to manage large groups of students. It may take new teachers a few years to develop a comfortable, effective directive presence. This can involve learning to project our voices, lower the pitch, and reduce the speed at which we speak to create a greater force behind our words. It calls for using words that concisely express our intentions, rather than wading through superfluous verbiage that dilutes the message and loses students in the process. It means requiring our students' attention and respect and being comfortable providing guidance, instructions, and ultimatums. Well-developed directivity allows us to express ourselves, and say what needs to be said. Until teachers develop the principle of directivity, they may struggle with classroom management and have difficulty maintaining students' attention. Directivity means being able to have presence, to be expressive, and to take action.

In contrast, overly directive teachers, who do not have a well-developed receptive side, often lack the input needed to inform their teaching. For these teachers, receptivity may feel like they are "doing nothing" and are abdicating their responsibilities as teachers. But receptivity is essential to good teaching.

One aspect of receptivity is observation. It is scanning the class frequently and learning to read student body language. Who is engaged? Who appears bored? Who is off-task? Based on observations, receptive teachers know when to pause and when to step back, giving students time to think or grapple with problems independently. Watching students provides clues about preferred learning styles and their strategies for approaching new tasks. Receptivity involves intently listening to students, their opinions, their concerns, and their feedback. Who talks, who doesn't? What is important to them? Do they interact respectfully with each other? What are they saying that will assist you in tailoring instruction to

better meet their needs? Receptive teachers develop the ability to read their classroom climate. Does it feel positive and productive or negative and resistant? Focused or unfocused? Lethargic or energized? Although often less visible than directive aspects of teaching, receptivity is equally important. It contributes to a life-long reflective professional practice.

Some people, however, are overly receptive. Because overly receptive people easily absorb energy, they can quickly become overwhelmed in situations such as schools and classrooms, where there is constant activity, with many people interacting and expressing thoughts and emotions all at the same time. Once overwhelmed, the teachers cannot function effectively. They have difficulty focusing or making decisions. Often their response is to withdraw in order to protect themselves, sometimes leaving the profession altogether. For these teachers, learning to be more directive brings them back into balance. They can choose to act or wait as appropriate to the situation. Their actions are informed by their perceptions.

Students are also likely to be more comfortable with one of these principles than the other. As teachers we can help them to work toward achieving balance by encouraging them to develop their weaker side. To strengthen directivity students could be asked to give their opinion, speak in front of the class, or lead a small group. To strengthen receptivity they can be guided to listen closely to a classmate, ask questions based on what they heard, learn to read body language, or focus on how someone else is feeling.

Discipline and Spontaneity

Discipline involves attending to the details and creating order. Spontaneity is the ability to act in the moment, and to be flexible and creative. As teachers we want to develop both discipline and spontaneity.

In a classroom, discipline can translate into having clear routines and explicit expectations for student behavior. It includes procedures for entering and exiting the classroom, lining-up, doing group work, transitioning from one activity to the next, handing in assignments, and engaging appropriately in class discussions. These day-to-day practices keep classroom life running smoothly. And through the use of such external guidelines, we assist students in the development of internal discipline.

Teachers who have a weakness in this area may find themselves handling unnecessary management crises. Students realize that the rules and routines don't have to be respected since they are not held accountable. Some teachers may find it difficult to plan clear lessons and may find themselves searching for teaching materials or scrambling for activities. In extreme cases chaos may rein.

While at first it may feel like it takes great effort to develop discipline, it becomes easier and more automatic with sustained practice until it becomes naturally integrated into your teaching practice. The order it creates becomes enjoyable. Students settle down, and classroom management becomes more manageable.

Teachers who are overly disciplined, on the other hand, can become rigid and frustrated by unexpected events and changes. Their teaching may lack inspiration. Being able to draw on spontaneity by going with the flow, or changing course in midstream, allows teachers to respond to the here and now, to specific students and circumstances, and to adjust accordingly. It is part of the artistry of teaching.

For example, when a group of young students is trying to imagine just how big a *Tyrannosaurus Rex* really was, a teacher might spontaneously take them out to a playground to trace the dinosaur on the pavement to see how long it would be from nose to tail. Or, a teacher might suddenly decide to integrate singing or movement into a lesson to inspire students and address a need for a quick change of pace. During a class discussion a student might make a suggestion or introduce a point that the teacher chooses to pursue because it captures the enthusiasm of other students and moves the lesson forward.

Spontaneity brings joy to the learning process and prevents school from being rote drudgery. It is the delight in discovery during science or the creativity of a musical composition or piece of writing. At other times, spontaneity can be used to break tension by doing something unexpected such as tossing a stack of papers into the air, standing on a chair, or asking everyone to draw an abstract design that represents their feelings about an event or reading.

Some teachers easily access spontaneity, but when it is not balanced by discipline there can be a lack of structure and order. When there is established order

and routine, adding spontaneity can be invigorating for students and teachers.

In children, spontaneity tends to be more dominant than discipline. Children are naturally spontaneous and creative. They take joy in learning and discovery. Spontaneity without discipline, however, can be irresponsible and dangerous for children. We need to encourage this creativity, but also instill discipline to keep children and adolescents safe and functional in the world. They need to learn to look both ways when they cross the street, when to wash, how to eat a healthy diet, and to exercise. At school they have to learn how to take turns. They must organize desks, notebooks, and homework folders. Once again, the goal is balance. Like accomplished jazz musicians, students need to combine structure with improvisation.

Conviction and Openness

The combination of conviction and openness is one that serves teachers well. Our convictions help us define who we are, what we believe, and how we choose to operate in our classrooms and in the world at large. Openness, in contrast, has a fluid quality or the ability to accept new possibilities and new experiences.

As teachers, we are likely to have convictions about the purposes of schooling, the role of teachers and students, and how students learn. Convictions also shape how we interact with parents and inform the positions we take in relation to local and national educational policy. From conviction we take action. If we don't act on our current beliefs and understandings, due to fear of being wrong, we impede our own learning. Better to move forward in conviction, err and learn, than to stagnate. Learning from our mistakes is part of the process of refining our convictions.

An overemphasis on conviction however, without the balance of openness, can result in narrow-mindedness and stubbornness. People sometimes follow their convictions blindly without considering alternatives or new information. Teachers may cling to a particular curriculum or program and may not see that it is not meeting the needs of some students. Such teachers may be resistant to change, or may want to have their own way regardless of the circumstances. Convictions from such a closed-minded perspective can lead to feelings of superiority and judgmental attitudes. But

when openness is coupled with conviction, we are guided by our convictions, which provide direction, but are open to other possibilities, which might lead to changing or revising previously held beliefs.

Openness is being receptive to new ideas, new possibilities. It creates an avenue for refining concepts and staying current. Openness means we don't dismiss new ideas out of hand, but consider what they might have to offer. In a classroom, openness can mean considering a new instructional practice or revising one already in use. From openness we are willing to consider our students', parents', and colleagues' points of view. We listen to others' views and sometimes make changes.

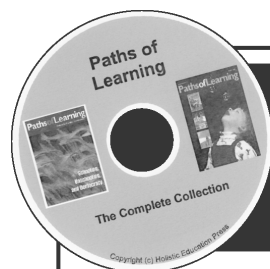
An overemphasis of openness, however, can leave one without self-definition and subject to the influence of others. Overly open people sometimes appear wishy-washy, not knowing what they want. They can have difficulty acting with conviction. Their management or instructional practices may lack consistency, leading to an unstable classroom environment where students are able to walk all over them because they have no set of coherent beliefs underlying their practice. Too much openness, just like too much conviction, leads to ineffective practice.

Students can also be encouraged to follow their convictions while remaining open to new understandings. Science experiments can reinforce this combination of principles. Students begin with the idea that something is true, but then test it to see if it really is true, and remain open to the results.

If students have trouble taking a stand or making a decision, encourage them to take a tiny step in some direction so that they can begin to stretch a little more and develop self-definition. Ask them to articulate their beliefs and say which way they lean on issues. Let them know that people's positions do change, especially in light of new facts and experiences, so that as long as one remains open, conviction helps to provide direction without being constricting.

Conclusion

I have discussed three sets of complementary principles. With respect to all three, I have suggested that balance is optimum. But the ideal is never easy to achieve. I suggest that, as a first step in working with these principles, you identify your own strengths and weaknesses. Are you great at being spontaneous but not so consistent with the discipline? Or perhaps you are disciplined in some areas such as lesson planning but not in others, such as getting reports turned in on time? Are you strong on the side of directivity, having a strong presence in the classroom, but could stand to develop more receptivity and the ability to consider students' needs and input? Might you have very strong convictions, but not be open to new ways of approaching instruction? Becoming aware of, developing, and applying these principles will provide you with a repertoire of choices that can enrich your students' experience and your own growth.



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Contemplative Urban Education

David Forbes

**Even in the frenzied,
unreflective atmosphere of
urban public schools,
contemplative practices open
students and teachers to
moments of peacefulness and
uncharted realms of awareness.**

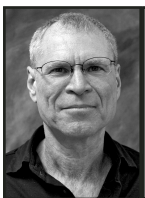
Contemplative urban education is a Zen koan: How can one be calm, meditative, and present in an urban school? Such sites are most often typified by overworked, impatient activity governed by the pressured demand to meet pre-established goals: The past determines the present for the sake of a future that never arrives. The reverse is also true: Urban schools tend to be places marked by mind-numbing boredom and dead time; for many, the future (the bell, summer, retirement) cannot arrive soon enough. In all cases urban schools appear to be the antithesis of the contemplative realm, the ability to be fully present, right here, right now.

A contemplative stance, gained through mindfulness meditation, is characterized by uncertainty and open-endedness, a state of awareness in which one is receptive to whatever is occurring in the present. As such it cannot be captured by rubrics, reduced to objectives, or translated into empirical, measurable observations. A contemplative perspective considers education to be more than just academic achievement and economic success. It envisions the cultivation of wisdom and compassion in us and in all our students. There is an urgent need for the contemplative in all levels of education to the extent they share traits similar to Stephen C. Rockefeller's (1994) description of undergraduate education as

too head-centered as distinct from heart-centered, more interested in information than appreciation, more concerned about the knowledge which is power than wisdom and ethical values, more oriented toward I-it than I-thou, more skilled at striving for future ends than living a fulfilling life in the present.

The study and practice of contemplative approaches in urban education is an emerging field. Higher education courses that teach a contemplative perspective exist across the United States and Can-

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ada, ranging from law and medicine to psychology and the arts. Courses on contemplative approaches to education per se are taught at Columbia, Naropa University, the University of Toronto, and Brooklyn College, among other schools. Linda Lantieri's Project Renewal, which addressed the post-9-11 trauma of New York City students and educators, has developed a contemplative-infused curriculum for urban public schools (Lantieri 2004). Inner Kids, led by Susan Kaiser-Greenland (n.d.), teaches mindfulness practices to public elementary school children in Los Angeles. Even public school administrators have begun to express an interest in spiritual development as part of educational leadership (see *School Administrator* 2002).

The Finger is Not the Moon

Educators tend to seek solutions outside themselves, such as more training or skills, and to seek certainty in the learning process (Sparks 2003a). Yet certainty — knowing the answer or objective in advance — diminishes learning and growth. The field of education favors whatever can be categorized, labeled, observed, and measured, and tends to neglect the realm of conscious development and higher awareness. Educators who become more concerned about test scores, rubrics, and measurement instruments than the experience and process of learning confuse the constructs with the thing itself, akin to Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness. To borrow a metaphor from Zen, they are mistaking the finger pointing at the moon with the direct experience of seeing the moon itself.

The social complexities of urban education are considerable. To survive and thrive in such a world, the cultivation of higher consciousness beyond empirical reductionism becomes a universal imperative. Steinberg and colleagues' postformal cognitive theory argues that the way to do so is to contextualize urban education within social, cultural, political, economic, historical, and ideological categories (Steinberg, Kincheloe, & Hinchey 1999). It also calls for the meaning of personal identity to be seen within broader, socially constructed realms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.

Contextualizing of this sort through social constructions is necessary, but even such a process may

not be sufficient for the enormous task at hand. Contemplative urban education takes this project a step further: it places all social and ideological contexts themselves within an all-encompassing context. It does so by employing mindfulness meditation, a tool of the contemplative tradition, within everyday urban life. Mindfulness meditation subjects every socially constructed category, identity, and thought to nonconceptual, nondual awareness. To rest one's mind in this infinite, spacious context is to transform the moment and to see things as they are. Social constructs are useful, but they are not ultimately descriptive of the interdependent and unified nature of reality. Over time a meditative practice leads to the experience of wholeness and equanimity, the capacity for compassion and understanding toward all people, and the ability to create a life inseparable from everything in the universe.

Contemplative urban education enables educators to be open to the present and to see the transformative, everyday possibilities that are hidden by socially defined categories. Contemplative practices extend beyond students' construction of their social identity to the level of spiritual meaning and purpose. This is an interior realm, one with which many educators are unfamiliar and uncomfortable; yet exploring it can lead to higher levels of awareness and growth. In a case study, high school student athletes were able to refer to the experience of "the zone" as a metaphor for higher states of experience that transcended socially constructed categories such as ethnicity (Forbes 2004a). The zone is a state of higher awareness that can occur when the athlete is playing in the present and can be reached through persistent meditation.

An urban environment is an added challenge. The external distractions and challenges of city life are greater than in a small town or suburb and can match those that our own minds conjure up. Yet from the standpoint of contemplative traditions themselves, the urban school setting is precisely the place in which to practice mindfulness. Contemplative traditions encourage practitioners to take every distraction not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to get to know one's mind better, to see how it operates, and to bring it to peaceful awareness. Situations that produce disruptions and lead to disappointments, frustrations, ten-

sions, and difficulties are tremendous opportunities to observe the nature of one's mind. At heart, the urban school evidences the very things that the contemplative vision perceives from a higher perspective: the interdependence of everyone, the necessity for all of us to get along, the appreciation of difference, and the realization of underlying similarities.

Contemplative urban education occurs from time to time within the spaces of everyday urban school life. When a teacher and a class are in sync, silently reflecting on a significant question the answer to which no one knows; when a poem that has been read aloud touches everyone deeply and stuns them into silence; when a genuine dialogue occurs after a painful conflict that opens up the participants to realms of uncharted awareness; when a teacher creates a few moments of meditation to still the mind from frenzied, unreflective thought, and everyone in the room catches a glimpse of peacefulness: that is when a profound, nonconceptual experience occurs that cannot be captured by language.

Many educators are startled by such moments and consider them to be serendipitous, inchoate events that are churned back into ordinary classroom experience and forgotten. Contemplative urban educators, however, are mindful of those moments and consciously seek to rescue and nurture them. They propose that the awareness that characterizes these experiences is what education is all about.

While bearing in mind that any theory is not the practice itself, contemplative practices that enhance such moments deserve to be legitimated as a higher order educational approach. The contemplative thrives in everyday spaces wherever urban educators and students become mindful of this reality. It is a realm accessible to everyone. Once it is pointed out, it can be practiced, cultivated, discussed, and theorized about. Many of its practical effects can be measured as well.

Roots of Contemplative Practice in Education

A significant source of contemplative urban education is the holistic education movement (Miller 1997; Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr, & Kates 2005). Holistic educators consider education as a spiritual endeavor that must involve the whole child and his or her interconnectedness with the world. Education in

a holistic sense acknowledges the human condition and seeks to promote each individual's search for higher meaning rather than socially determined notions of success and happiness (Krishnamurti 2000). It transcends the reductionist view that regards education primarily as a means to enhance society's economic efficiency, competition, and domination. Holistic education can include contemplative practices such as being open to and attending to the present, taking care, and seeing in each present moment the opportunity for transformation (Glazer 1999). It includes both inner development and meaningful social community. Parker Palmer (1998) appealed to educators to be faithful to both the inward teacher and the community of truth, and to hold to thinking that allows for both/and, not either/or experience. David Purpel (1989) invoked a prophetic education in which educators promote social justice and oppose violence and exploitation and places these values in a moral and spiritual vision and tradition. Linda Lantieri (2001, 7) noted that spiritual values such as the capacity for creativity, love, meaning, and purpose cannot be taught, but in schools they can be "uncovered, evoked, found, and recovered."

The contemplative dimensions that give life meaning and purpose have been at the heart of liberal education since its inception, according to physics professor Arthur Zajonc (2003). The contemplative is a method and a realm that is related to truth and is not reduced to religious faith, and can be included in teaching and research (Wilber 1998; 2000). Contemplative practice, along with empirical and rational ways of knowing, leads to the ability to look more deeply at the nature of things within any discipline. Zajonc (2003) has described how contemplative practices in science and music courses heighten awareness, attentive listening, and concentration along with traditional analytic approaches (see Burack 1999). Contemplative practice then is not anti-intellectual, nor does it seek a return to prerational, intuitive levels that celebrate myth or magical thinking; rather, it incorporates and transcends empirical and rational knowledge (Wilber 1998).

Meditation in Schools

Mindfulness meditation has measurable benefits that can be applied to education (Goleman 2004;

Hart 2004; Miller 1994). Meditation is a significant means of contemplation. Through meditation one deliberately creates time for cultivating peace or stillness. The only purpose is to be fully present in the moment. This is a challenging task, as we often spend much if not most of our mental energy thinking about the past or worrying or planning for the future, including fantasizing about what we do not have right now. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist peace activist and educator, says,

We tend to be alive in the future, not now. We say, wait until I finish school and get my PhD degree, and then I will be really alive. When we have it, and it's not easy to get, we say to ourselves I have to wait until I have a job in order to be really alive. (Kessler, n.d.)

Peacefulness falls into this category of being a vague goal in some distant future. For Nhat Hanh, however, there is no path to peace; peace is the path. Being peaceful now is what is required. The means must be the ends; a mindful, meditative approach is both a means and an end.

Meditation is the contemplation of one's own mind, which begins by attending to one's breathing as a way to keep bringing the restless mind back into the present. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, 21),

When you sit, you are not allowing your impulses to translate into action. For the time being, at least you are just watching them. Looking at them, you quickly see that all impulses in the mind arise and pass away, that they have a life of their own, that they are not you but just thinking, and that you do not have to be ruled by them. Not feeding or reacting to impulses, you come to understand their nature as thoughts directly. This process actually burns up destructive impulses in the fires of concentration and equanimity and non-doing. At the same time, creative insights and creative impulses are no longer squeezed out so much by the more turbulent, destructive ones. They are nourished as they are perceived and held in awareness. Mindfulness can thereby refashion links in the chain of actions and consequences, and in doing so it unchains us, frees us, and opens up new directions for us through the moments we call life.

Developmental Aspects of Contemplative Urban Education

The contemplative is a means to uncover and evoke spiritual experience as part of the whole development of the child. Children are natural contemplatives (see Hart 2003); however, their contemplative capacities are not fully blown and need to be cultivated with respect to developmental levels. Contemplative practices in school classrooms can include deep listening, body focusing, and journaling (Hart 2004). The contemplative approach also assists in a number of different aspects of development including those noted below.

Cognitive Development

Insight meditation (vipassana) may be a valuable tool for cognitive development. It can promote the practice of metacognition, the ability to think about thinking and to further categorize one's thoughts from a higher perspective. The higher stages for developmentalists like Kegan (1994) and Loevinger (Loevinger & Wessler 1970) involve the ability to reflect on one's own reflective categories, to make thinking itself an object of higher order thought. Meditation also can help a teen gain insight into the self, by examining thoughts and feelings and tracing them back to broader categories of thoughts that in turn can be examined and attended to with compassion. It provides a method and practice to let go of the attachment to anger and oppositional thinking that often accompanies critical consciousness. Some research suggests that meditation improves cognitive development as measured by Loevinger's sentence completion test (Alexander & Langer 1990).

Gender Identity Development

Both young men and young women experience the strain of maintaining conventional gender identities. Male youth feel their identity must be constantly tested as to whether it is ever masculine enough. Girls feel pressured to be popular and gain approval of boys, often losing their sense of self by taking the perspective of the other (Pipher 1994). Through meditation young men can become less attached to identifying with constructs of conventional masculinity: acting tough, not expressing nurturing feelings. This provides a way out of the dilemma of

either giving up all power or clinging to pressured expectations of manhood, and allows them to develop a broader definition of self. Girls learn to listen to their inner voices and invoke and identify their higher sense of self, one based on nonjudgmental compassion. They watch thoughts and feelings come and go rather than succumbing to conventional pressures and losing their authenticity.

Emotional Development

Meditation helps one become attentive to bodily sensations and emotional feelings. This may be especially beneficial for male youth (Forbes 2004a). Part of the gender role of conventional masculinity is that men are not taught how to recognize their feelings. When boys are asked how they feel, they often do not know how to answer (Kindlon & Thompson 2000). Ronald Levant (1995) presented data that suggested that most boys display low-level alexithymia, being emotionally shut off. Meditation helps all children open up to feeling states and sensations by attending to what they are experiencing. It creates the space for one to notice the changing nature of feelings such as anger or boredom, to trace their origins, and to be mindful enough so that authentic responses to what is going on become possible. Contemplative approaches to music, art, and journal and poetry writing are similar in this regard.

Social Development

The contemplative appreciation of difference can lead to higher development (Simmer-Brown 1999). Relationships are changed through commitment to openness and a tolerance for uncertainty without preconceptions. Through meditation one is more open to and understanding of the other, and learns to see the other as ultimately inseparable from oneself. Multicultural and contemplative awareness complement each other as development occurs in both inner and outer terms (Fukuyama & Sevig 1999). In multicultural settings meditation can diminish anxiety, frustration, and judgmental reactions. Rather than relying on culture-specific knowledge, people are more understanding of others when they assume a contemplative approach: Detach from one's own experience, observe one's and others' behaviors and reactions, refrain from prejudging, and relax enough to gain an understanding of why differences are dis-

turbing (Fukuyama & Sevig 1999). A contemplative approach can be used in peer mediation and conflict resolution programs in schools. The practice of mindful social engagement as part of a curriculum cultivates compassion for others (Arguelles 2002)

Wellness

Urban adolescents undergo considerable stress. With respect to health and behavior, adolescent students had lower blood pressure from practicing meditation as well as better concentration and fewer attendance and behavior problems in school (Barnes, Bauza, & Treiber 2003; Busch 2003; Fischer 1998; Fontana & Slack 1997). In one college level study relaxation meditation improved the memory of African-American college students (Hall 1999). James Garbarino has shown that meditation offers a middle way between acting out and repressing one's feelings, and can provide a spiritual grounding for interventions that seek to reduce some effects of early trauma (Garbarino 2000; Getz & Gordhamer 2005).

As a contemplative practice yoga has physical and emotional benefits for children and has become popular in some schools (Brown 2002; DeChillo 2002). Yoga curricula that avoid language that can be construed as religious have been successfully implemented in schools (Sink 2003). Students, especially in urban schools, need a sacred time and space to center themselves and feel a sense of peace. A structured, protected time for meditation and visualization provides some students with the only quiet moment of the day during which they can connect with a deeper part of themselves and the world (Glickman 2003; Kessler 2000).

Teachers

Urban teachers themselves undergo considerable stress. They are often exhausted, experience time pressures, and have little time to reflect; some realize they impose some of these pressures on themselves, and often express interest in finding a more balanced life that includes time and space for reflection on what is really important in their lives. Parker Palmer speaks of the courage to teach and says that the best teachers are those who teach on the basis of who they are (Palmer 1998; Intrator 2002). He has encouraged educators to cease being divided from themselves; to

live a whole, full life; and to evoke the voice of the teacher within through contemplative practices before trying to create this kind of community for others (Sparks 2003b). Using Tibetan meditation in teacher education, Richard Brown refers to the importance of making friends with one's mind through the direct experience of meditation and compassion (R. Brown 2002). Sam Crowell, a professor of education, suggests that teachers conduct "a genuine investigation into ourselves as part of the process of teaching authentically.... When we respond to knowing with our whole being, it not only changes us and our circumstances, but it also transforms the nature of what is known" (Center for Contemplative Mind 2002). Rachael Kessler (2000) refers to the teaching presence as necessary for good teaching. This requires being present, open to perceiving what is happening and being responsive to the present moment, being able to let go of a particular approach, and clearing our minds and hearts before class (see also Arrien 2000; O'Reilly 1998). A mindful educator practices letting go of being attached to one's ego and is able to take things less personally. Tobin Hart (Center for Contemplative Mind 2002) describes how members of his department are committed to an empathic, contemplative approach, which he refers to as beholding. *Beholding* means the open possibility for creative problem solving, discovery, and openness to each other through mindful awareness in which one sees things in less rigid categories, so that the possibility for the unexpected can increase.

After-School Athletic Programs

David Forbes (2004a) led a meditation/discussion program with an urban high school football team. The young men were motivated to practice meditation as a way to increase their chance of playing in the zone, a state of higher awareness. They worked on noticing and letting go of judgments, worry, irritation, doubts, anger, and other distractions that got in the way of attending to what the moment calls for. Some of the students were able to become more mindful, which allowed them to play in the present, and they applied these skills in other everyday situations with their peers. Athletics and other after-school programs that provide both sufficient motivation and interest to students are potential sites in

which educators can cultivate and disseminate contemplative practices within the school.

Whole School

Within the school itself a mindful approach can generate more advocacy and collaboration. Deborah Rozman (1994) suggested that teachers also can refer to meditation as awareness training, concentration, centering, and relaxation, among other alternative terms, when bringing a program to members of the school community. She and other educators have discovered that meditation or some contemplative time at the start of the day creates a more calm, relaxed, and respectful classroom that promotes learning. Mindful classes are linked with good group counseling skills: noticing the stress level in the room, the body language, the energy and participation of the students, and the commitment to cultivating compassionate, open, and wise qualities. Contemplative educators acknowledge difference without becoming overly attached to one's own ethnic, gender and class identities, and the fixed perception of them in others. A meditative approach can contribute to a climate for emotional safety that promotes higher development for all school community members. A contemplative urban educator considers the well-being of the entire school community and is committed to making it a caring, emotionally, and physically safe place or sanctuary (Bloom 1997; Forbes 2004b; Noddings 2005).

Being in the Present: The Teachable Moment

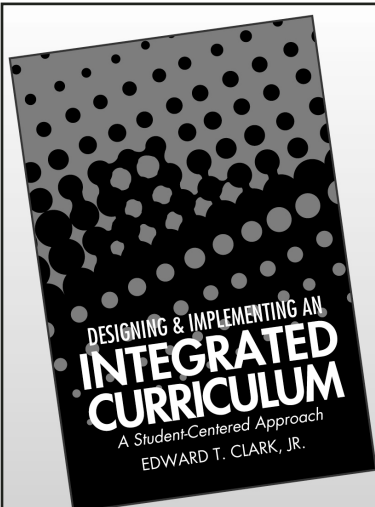
Urban schools face considerable challenges. There is little in urban education that encourages contemplative practices or provides the space for mindful reflection and awareness of the present that can lead to genuine knowledge. What is more often found is indifference and mindlessness, the lack of presence. Yet bits of awareness are there everyday; what is needed is the sharpening of the contemplative eye to focus the vision. There may be no more pressing need than mindfulness as a means to sanctify and transform the everyday in urban schools. To bear witness with presence and compassion to the pain, humiliation, violence, and hurt feelings; to behold the joys, rhythms, humor, and epiphanies all in the

mind's eye is to engage in the life processes of learning, healing, and growth. To contemplate the contemplative within the everyday urban school, a microcosm of the world in all its mad glory, may be a higher awareness still.

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Edward T. Clark, Jr.

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- Designing Schools as Learning Communities

Dr. Ed Clark is an international educational consultant specializing in integrated curriculum design and site-based educational change. He has been involved in teacher education for over thirty years.

Book Reviews

Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools

by Sharon L. Nichols and David C. Berliner

Published by Harvard Education Publishing Group,
2007

Reviewed by Susan A. Fine

In *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*, Sharon Nichols and David Berliner provide a surfeit of examples to demonstrate how the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act are laying siege to the moral, intellectual, and practical endeavor of schooling today. This important book shows how the corruption and misuse of data at the school and state levels leaves our children anxiety-filled and undereducated. In her introduction, Nel Noddings reminds us that policymakers who support NCLB believe that the pressure of testing, rather than developing the trusting relationships with students, will close the achievement gap. This book intends to convince policymakers that NCLB is having the opposite effect. Nichols and Berliner present overwhelming accounts of what happens when schools are forced to follow the path of high-pressure testing.

In this volume, the authors have collected and categorized journalist reports of cheating and corruption, ranging from student-level cheating to state-level misrepresentation of data. This is followed by an analysis of this cheating on students' and teachers' morale. The authors recognize the limitations of their investigation. There are likely to be innumerable unreported instances of cheating, making the already overwhelming descriptions included in this book feel like the tip of a very complicated iceberg. Nichols and Berliner frame their accounts within the social theory Campbell's Law, first articulated by social psychologist Donald Campbell in 1975. Evoked repeatedly throughout the book, this law stipulates that "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the

more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social process it is intended to monitor" (p. 26-27). There is common sense to this idea. The more high stakes are attached to a policy, the more likely it is to result in distortion and dishonesty. Nichols and Berliner note that this theory can be applied to arenas beyond education policy, such as the corruption found in businesses that tie bonuses to sales figures. In the context of schooling, they suggest that children are being damaged as a result of this misguided attempt at school change.

The first chapter of *Collateral Damage* provides a brief history of high-stakes testing and suggests that these tests have been all too easily incorporated into American schooling because of the application of the corporate model to many facets of our lives, from health care to tax policies. Certainly, there has been a rise of business leaders as superintendents and school chancellors across the country.

Interestingly, Nichols and Berliner also suggest that privileged families have accepted high-stakes tests. This view requires more substantiation than that included in the book. It would have been helpful to see accounts that support the notion that these families are not concerned with high-stakes tests because they can afford tutors, as Nichols and Berliner suggest. Nonetheless, the NCLB accountability measures certainly reflect the competition and efficiency values characteristic of corporate models, with the assumption that these values can be directly applied to schools. Unfortunately, there is a fundamental flaw in the testing systems, which assume that children learn discrete skills in a linear progression. This simply does not reflect what we know about how children (or adults) learn.

SUSAN FINE received her Ph.D. in Politics and Education in 2002 from Teachers College, Columbia University. She spent the last four years at Pace University as the Director of Alternative Certification and currently works with Empowerment Schools in the New York City Department of Education.

The heart of *Collateral Damage* deals with the breadth of adult cheating and the moral ambiguity that underpins some test-driven decision-making. The central three chapters describe the forms of cheating and the use of misinformation at the various levels of influence, from teachers and principals to state-level administrators. Nichols and Berliner remind us, rightly, how Kohlberg's studies of moral development help us understand the dilemmas that teachers experience.

In Chapter Two ("The Prevalence and Many Forms of Cheating and the Problem of Absolute and Relativistic Standards for Judging Such Occurrences"), the authors clearly describe the moral quandary that some teachers find themselves in, describing a more nuanced context than we might initially assume. Nichols and Berliner ask, when is cheating defensible? Is helping a struggling student with one or two test items as "reprehensible as cheating to receive a bonus for having a high-achieving class?" (p. 34). As the authors continue to describe the ways in which teachers cheat before, during, and after tests, the moral complexity provides a lens through which to understand the untenable position in which teachers often find themselves.

Principals, too, are described as cheating both for purposes of self-preservation by changing scores, and as a form of resistance, such as when a principal in North Carolina refused to test her special education students (p. 52). Nichols and Berliner include examples of resistance not to condone cheating, but to express the ways in which cheating often can only be interpreted outside the boundaries of absolute standards.

In Chapter Three, Nichols and Berliner detail the ways in which adult corruption harms various types of students. In particular, they describe the ways in which students who are perceived as "score suppressors" are excluded from taking the test. There has been documentation of students being pushed out of high schools over the past several years, including Michelle Fine's excellent work, *Framing Dropouts*. *Collateral Damage* summarizes sim-

ilar territory. While some students are excluded from the tests, Nichols and Berliner describe others as being improperly expected to pass tests: Notably, special education students, the vast majority of whom are required to pass the same tests as all other general education students, and English Language

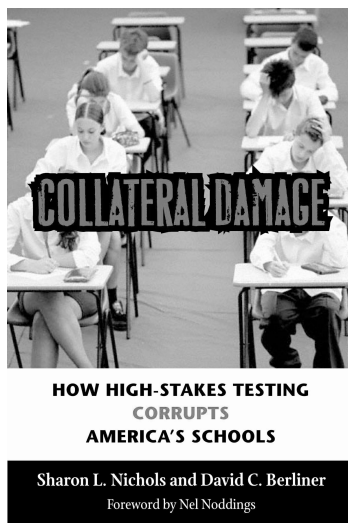
Learners who are often unable to pass the exit exams frequently required for graduation. As Nichols and Berliner describe one student, "Anthony Lau-Segarra felt proud to earn As and Bs in special education at Washington High in San Francisco and planned to go to college. But after failing the exit exam four times, Anthony gave up his goal" (p. 66). These are the children who are being left behind.

Some students, though, are perceived as "bubble kids" and are provided with additional support, often to the neglect of the score suppressors or high achievers. Principals and

teachers are often exhorted to mine test score data to determine which students are the "reachable fruit." These are students who, with additional support, could raise the schools' overall test performance and, hence, their progress report results. This is an implicit devaluing the "score suppressors" who are presumed incapable of learning, or at least incapable of learning quickly enough to be successful on the high-stakes test results. As one teacher describes it,

If you have a kid who is getting a 22, even if they improve to a 40, they won't be close — but if you have a kid with a 60, well, they're in shooting range. Bush says that no child should be left behind, but ... the reality in American public schools is that some kids are always going to be left behind, especially in this district, when we have the emphasis on the bubble kids. Some are ... just too low. (p. 76)

Nichols and Berliner present a powerful argument, then, to policymakers that even if NCLB appears to close the achievement gap, it may be only through the neglect of some children and the pushing out of others.



It is not just teachers, principals, and students who are cheating as a response to the stress of high-stakes testing. State administrators are reacting in equally disturbing ways. In Chapter Four ("States Cheat Too! How Statistical Trickery and Misrepresentation of Data Mislead the Public"), Nichols and Berliner describe the political decisions that drive many states to present scores in ways that mislead the public. One example is Mississippi's claim that 89% of fourth graders achieved a "proficient" rating on their state tests, even though only 35% of these same fourth graders scored that well on the NAEP test (p. 93). Examples are rampant of states manipulating data to demonstrate "success." In addition to test scores, graduation rates are also often reported in misleading ways, by not including students who dropped out or were pushed out. Nichols and Berliner cite New Mexico, which declared a graduation rate of 90%, and North Carolina, which reported a 97% graduation rate in 2002-2003, as prime examples of data manipulation at the state level. Beyond cut scores and graduates rates, test score errors add to the stress that results from high-stakes testing, as in Minnesota, where "about 8,000 students were unjustly denied a high school diploma because it was determined that they 'failed' the test when in fact they did not" (p. 102). All of this data misuse is surely not reflective of the intent of federal and state policies, including No Child Left Behind.

The last chapter of *Collateral Damage* details recommendations for alternative assessments. These include formative assessments, an inspectorate, end-of-course examinations, performance tests (including project and portfolio defenses before judges), and value-added assessments. Nichols and Berliner acknowledge that these types of assessments are often time-consuming and a challenge for psychometricians. However, they properly argue for their use on the grounds that they are educationally valuable. They allow teachers to better understand their students as learners. Some of the most innovative implementation of these kinds of efforts is currently taking place in New York City. School progress reports are complemented by annual quality reviews. Low-stakes formative assessments are required between three and five times a year, and the progress reports include measures of student progress along-

side indicators of student proficiency. These reflect the good practices laid out in Nichols and Berliner's book, although the implementation of these reforms is, of course, complex. Certainly, these efforts are worthy attempts to assess schools in ways that reflect the complexity of teaching and learning. We have yet to see how the responses to these new reforms will be explained through Campbell's Law.

Collateral Damage should be read by all who care about how NCLB and high-stakes testing are affecting our schools, particularly as NCLB heads towards reauthorization. Nichols and Berliner have written this book with a clear sense of urgency and passion. There is no attempt to present a tone of professorial neutrality. Their partisan position is most obvious with chapter titles such as, "How High Stakes Testing Undermines Public Education and the Teaching Profession While Also Destroying Both Teacher and Student Morale." Occasionally, portions of the text are equally provocative, such as "When President Bush has difficulties using the English language properly but expects leniency, shouldn't we consider giving the same to our students?" (p. 71). On the one hand, the frank language is refreshing and will appeal to many like-minded educators. On the other hand, there is a risk of it turning away the very policymakers whose opinions they hope to sway. One unintended consequence may be that the authors will be perceived as the Michael Moore(s) of educational policy. Perhaps they feel that this language is the only way to break through seemingly calcified policies and the uncritical acceptance of testing as the only way to hold schools accountable.

Nichols and Berliner ponder today's society as a cheating culture. Yet, by presenting such devastating accounts of corruption resulting from high-stakes testing, as well as viable options for assessment, Nichols and Berliner are suggesting that it is possible to change at least this one area of our society. Their hope is that by placing a moratorium on high-stakes tests and creating a system of accountability that reflects the complexity of learning, we can reclaim the morality, practice, and purpose of schooling. Let us hope that policymakers as well as educators read *Collateral Damage*.

Holistic Special Education: Camphill Principles and Practice

Edited by Robin Jackson

Published by Floris Books (Edinburgh, 2006)

Reviewed by Linnea Van Eman
and Diane Montgomery

Robin Jackson has collected essays, illustrations, and photographs of the ways that over 100 residential communities have followed the Camphill philosophy in working with students with special educational needs. This book is a refreshing reminder that there are viable alternatives to the widespread educational reform movement that promotes standardized testing and educational philosophies based on district mandates. The Camphill approach is committed to a child-centered worldview (Kessler 2000) in which each human is treated with value and dignity.

At a time when mainstream classroom inclusion seems to be the innovation promoted in public day schools, the Camphill philosophy demonstrates the value of residential care for students with special needs. The emphasis is on the therapeutic community, a learning and living society to benefit children. The concept presented in the book is called curative education. Stories are told about these special schools and the children's progress from the perspectives of people who are involved in holistic special education on a daily basis. Indeed, over a dozen staff members candidly share their enthusiasm and professional experiences. From them, the reader gets a fine sense of the collaboration and human relationships central to curative education.

The first two chapters describe the historical events and the work of Dr. Karl König, who developed a pedagogical philosophy, programs, and schools that embrace Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophic worldview. Adopting a three-fold understanding of humans as body, soul, and spirit (Hart 2001), the Camphill philosophy integrates education, therapy, and care within a holistic approach that re-

jects the idea of viewing the child through the lens of a deficit model, in terms of disabilities. Each individual's unique situation is viewed as a learning opportunity, and problems are viewed in terms of imperfections *all* humans have. Each person is treated in a positive and loving fashion. In the Camphill model, total positive regard for each individual promotes growth and development.

Throughout the book, collaboration and teamwork are stressed. Work among educators, psychologists, therapists, and family members provides the support necessary for students with special learning needs. Sometimes, however, the collaboration seems nearly too good to be true! The reader rarely gets a sense of various problems that might need to be worked out. Perhaps greater exploration of how problems were solved would allow others to expand on their own implementation of holistic education.

The third chapter presents the theoretical framework for curative education. Conceptualized by Rudolf Steiner (1988), Waldorf Schools and curative education suggest that developmental milestones occur in seven-year phases. Camphill's academic curriculum follows these phases as *learning by doing* (birth to seven years), *learning through imitation and loving authority* (eight through 14 years), and *independent knowledge through the factual/scientific approach* (14 up through 21 years). The input for the equivalent of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) assists planning long-term goals through short-term objectives. Staff plan IEPs incorporate many of the suggestions of international experts in special education (see Sorrells, Rieth, and Sindelar 2004). The book doesn't provide the reader with sample IEPs, but this oversight is intentional; the book emphasizes planning according to the opportunities presented by the student — not external standards or benchmarks.

Several chapters speak to the holistic value of the arts and play as an integral part of curative education. Art, music, play, crafts, therapeutic speech, eurythmy, and horseback riding are used to connect students to nature through art. Parents and professionals involved with Camphill communities rave about its impact, offering anecdotal examples and case studies. Of particular interest is a chapter on the

LINNEA VAN EMAN is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University. She also is a teacher and a coordinator of programs for gifted students. DIANE MONTGOMERY is Professor of Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University. Her research interests are American Indian education, holistic learning and teaching, and gifted adolescents.

transformational experience that the school offers to students who come to complete internships or practica on site. The book concludes with final chapters that lament the work that is necessary to maintain the schools, the compromises that may be looming, and the hope for sustaining such a movement in the United Kingdom.

The book presents strong arguments for Camphill's effectiveness, especially through the voices of writers who are directly involved in the care and education of the children. Each writer's contribution entreats the reader to embrace the positive and curative aspects of an arts-integrated holistic education (Lee 1993) within a residential setting. The school environments — the architectural structures, natural surroundings, and living spaces — illustrate the importance of environments that instill a sense of comfort and belonging.

One of the book's drawbacks is a lack of discussion of how these values can be infused into public education. Many readers will be left with a breathless ideal without a good place to start. The curative therapy chapters would benefit from a glance at the research that supports curative education, and from clearly defined case studies that enable the reader to see the steps and procedures that lead to success. The details of case studies would authenticate the personal stories and point to the therapy that might be chosen for any individual child. In addition, a chapter on the assessment of the sequenced IEP would help build a case for the therapeutic power of Camphill education and further substantiate its compliance with legislative mandates. This book takes great care to include documentation, but it does so more as a resource at the end of the book rather than references underpinning each chapter.

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Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms

by Mara Sapon-Shevin

Published by Beacon Press (Boston), 2007

Reviewed by Britt Hamre

In *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms*, Mara Sapon-Shevin weaves an engaging text that provides teachers with a moral vision of inclusive classrooms. The book addresses the primary obstacles raised by skeptics and opponents, and it includes specific strategies, examples, and resources to support those educators that choose to embrace the question "How do we make inclusion work?" Many educators will enjoy this book — especially those who believe that schools can prepare our children to be participating citizens in a democracy and redress social injustices that characterize and marginalize individuals. Critics of inclusive classrooms will likely disregard her engaging anecdotes, question her research (some of which is not very recent or quantitative), and describe her final section as being feeble on specific strategies and step-by-step instructions for teachers. (For additional instructional games, songs, poems and general teaching ideas see Sapon-Shevin's book *Because We Can Change the World*, 1999).

I am fortunate to work with preservice teachers who typically espouse a strong commitment to righting the wrongs of society related to issues of race, class, and gender. My students also recognize that sexuality, family composition, religion, and language differences can make people vulnerable to prejudice and marginalization. But few of my students initially make the connection between the injustices surrounding these issues and the segregation of students labeled as "disabled." I certainly don't blame my students for their understandings. After all, why would they think about prejudices in the area of disability when the topic is typically omitted from academic, social, and political conversa-

BRITT HAMRE is an Assistant Professor at Teachers College in the Elementary Inclusive Education Program. Her primary research interests are in the ways beginning teachers conceptualize difference, and how they enact social justice oriented curricula that is accessible to a full spectrum of learners.

tions around diversity? At its core, *Widening the Circle* focuses on how teachers may cultivate rich spaces of possibility and learning to ensure the growth of all children whose needs may not be met in the general education classroom. Sapon-Shevin makes her point forcefully: Inclusion is not a disability issue. Inclu-

sion is about providing an excellent and equitable education for all our children, an education that values the infinite ways in which they are different.

Teachers today are under immense pressure to push children to achieve (i.e., pass standardized tests), and some educators fear losing their jobs if their students do not perform well. Many of these poli-

cies have taken curricular decisions out of the hands of professional educators and have placed them in the control of our elected politicians. As a teacher-educator I try, not only to prepare my students to not only develop the pedagogical, curricular, and inquiry skills necessary to support the learning of all their students, but also to inspire these future teachers to sustain the moral fortitude. I feel so strongly about *Widening the Circle* that we will be using it in our core foundations class this coming fall. As the book vividly unwraps her vision of inclusive classrooms, answering the arguments of critics, and sharing classroom stories, Sapon-Shevin convincingly shows why inclusive classrooms are absolutely “essential to a thriving democracy” (p. xiii).

A Vision Seeped in Morality

Perhaps one of the most challenging tasks we ask our preservice students to do is identify and critically examine their deeply held beliefs and biases. Confronting their explicit and implicit values is necessary to visualize a truly inclusive society and classroom. But it is also very scary. Because Sapon-Shevin recognizes it is “psychological or emotional safety [that] is essential for us to thrive” (p. 29), she first

urges readers to reflect on their potentially deficit-oriented beliefs about children, education, and capacity, and to consider what it means to truly belong. She doesn’t stop there, however. She also inspires readers to take up the considerable task of constructing a community that is seeped in the moral conviction that *everyone* is invaluable and that the community is diminished if even one person is excluded.

Right from the start and through a multitude of approaches, Sapon-Shevin reveals how and why inclusion is not a special education issue. Inclusion is about welcoming *all* students, recognizing their multifaceted identities, and reconfiguring an educational space that capitalizes on everyone’s unique qualities, experiences, and strengths. In fact,

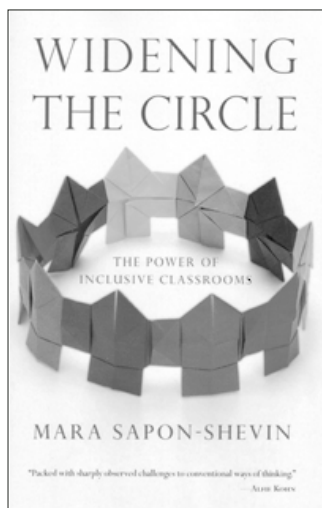
inclusion is about creating a society in which all people are valued and embraced as important members of the community.... We cannot simply teach about the values of inclusion and respect for diversity; it must be *experienced* in order to be real and to be understood as both desirable and possible. (p. 217, emphasis added)

Our classrooms are the fertile ground for planting those first seeds for nurturing individuality, acceptance, and inclusion of all humans.

Considering the Classic Arguments

In the section of the book titled, “Challenges: Understanding and Answering Critics of Inclusion,” the author responds to the primary arguments of skeptics and staunch opponents of inclusion. The arguments are longstanding and often situated in the fields of both special and general education; however, it is beneficial to have them delineated all in one place. Dividing the section into the various criticisms — such as “But some kids just can’t learn” (p. 71), “It can’t be good for special education students” (p. 85), and “But what about all these other mandates?” (p. 115) — is helpful and practical. Proponents at all levels of teaching may revisit this section repeatedly. It is a good reference tool when addressing incredulous inquiries from colleagues, administrators, students, parents, and the wider community.

Sapon-Shevin’s straightforward approach to the challenges to inclusion makes this part of the book accessible to educators. Inclusive teachers know that



sophisticated teaching is required in classroom communities where every student is honored, valued, challenged, and supported. The teacher's work is intellectually, emotionally, and personally taxing. It is hard work even under the best of circumstances. The author doesn't attempt to gloss over the complexity of establishing and sustaining inclusive classrooms; she acknowledges it head on, over and over again. In these passages, Sapon-Shevin (pp. 63, 66) elucidates her understanding:

Having a vision is essential, and having a wonderful vision makes us hopeful. Turning that vision into reality is much harder and demands that we be able to respond to challenges and objections....

Inclusive education, implemented seriously, is not simply tinkering: it involves fundamental restructuring of much of schooling as we know it....

Telling teachers that inclusion won't take any more work than they are already doing, or that they won't have moments of frustration and distress sets up false, unreasonable expectations. Promoting an overly simplistic positive picture also makes those who do experience difficulties feel as though they have failed personally or are inadequate to the task.

By frankly acknowledging the difficulties, the author will help many readers make a realistic commitment to (or at a minimum consider) a philosophy of inclusion.

Taking Hold of the Practical

Finally, the book closes with "Getting It Right, Doing It Well," a section in which the author shares strategies for teachers based on hers' and others' classroom experiences. The moral vision outlined in the first and second sections of the book reverberates here. Not surprisingly (and thankfully) Sapon-Shevin doesn't clutter this section with a litany of suggested models for teaching or an instructional kit for creating inclusive classrooms. Some teachers may complain that this book is light on specific strategies and suggestions. Sadly, if they do so, they have truly missed the power of this book. Inclusion is not formulaic. Decisions vary from classroom to classroom,

school to school, and year to year. Moral dilemmas are often unique to the situation. The "best practices" for creating inclusive classrooms are ones that are personalized for the group of individuals on a given day and time, and in any given context.

In this final section the author again emphasizes that creating an inclusive classroom is complex and demanding work. Conflict, struggle, and the need for flexibility are always present. Sapon-Shevin is so aware of the need for new teachers to know that the problems they are facing are not unique to them that she has compiled many stories that will help them keep their successes and failures in perspective.

Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms is most persuasive when the author is speaking straight from her heart. Her strengths as a writer are her deft use of metaphor and personal and professional anecdotes. By interlacing her articulate vision and arguments seamlessly with engaging stories, Sapon-Shevin fashions a text that is accessible and compelling to both preservice and experienced teachers at all education levels.

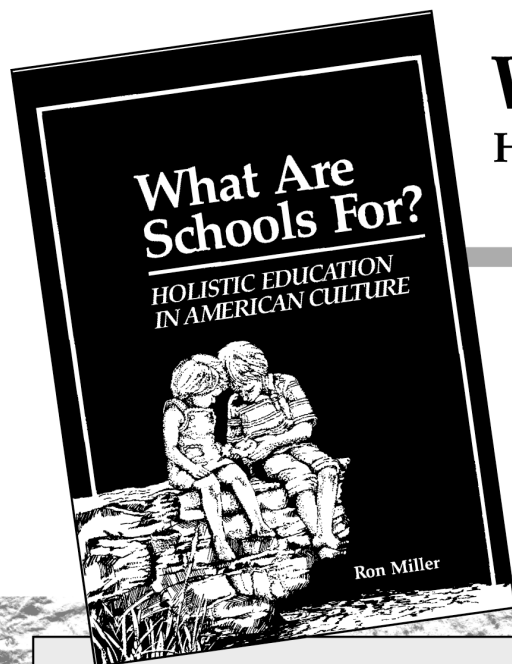
At the turn of the 21st century, amid governmental "policy [that] all but legislates out good practice," Fine and Weis (2003, 2) remind us that

Preservice teachers, current teachers, and those of us in the university must understand and protect public schools as the only spaces in which all youths — across racial, ethnic, class, legal and (il)legal [status], sexualities, languages, abilities, and (dis)abilities — gather to interrogate the world as it is, and imagine the world as it could be.

In our current culture of high-stakes testing, and the incessant press for a standardized curriculum, *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* has real potential to assist teachers, teacher educators, and all citizens who desire classrooms in which all people are genuinely valued.

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What Are Schools For?

Holistic Education in American Culture

by Ron Miller, Ph.D.

What Are Schools For? is a powerful exposition and critique of the historical context and cultural/philosophical foundations of contemporary mainstream American education. It focuses on the diverse group of person-centered educators of the past two centuries and explores their current relevance to the new challenges facing education in the post-industrial age.

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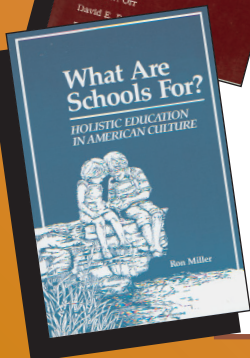
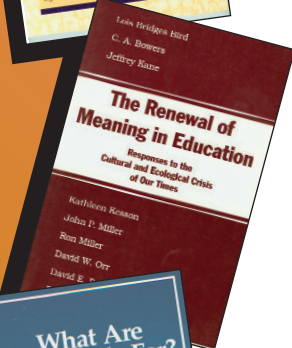
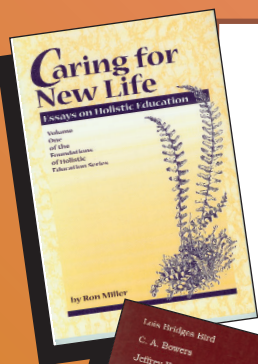
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