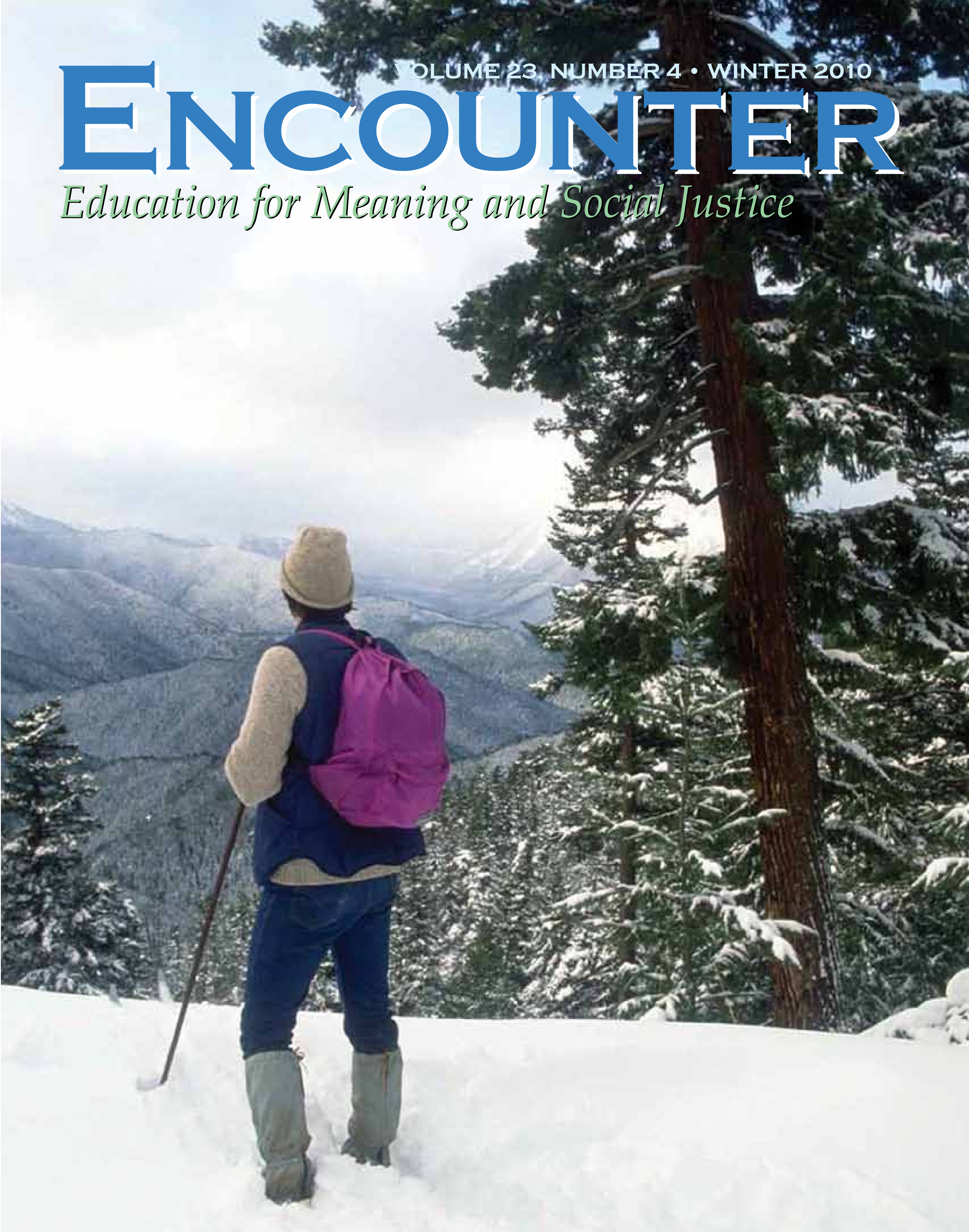

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ENCOUNTER
Education for Meaning and Social Justice

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EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Rethinking Cooperative Groups

Katharine P. Beals

Reliance on cooperative groups in the classroom has been oversold and is not working for many students. It is time to reconceptualize how it is conducted to insure that it meets the needs of all students.

For as long as anyone can remember, introductory physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was taught in a vast windowless amphitheater known by its number, 26-100.

Squeezed into the rows of hard, folding wooden seats, as many as 300 freshmen anxiously took notes while the professor covered multiple blackboards with mathematical formulas and explained the principles of Newtonian mechanics and electromagnetism.

But now, with physicists across the country pushing for universities to do a better job of teaching science, M.I.T. has made a striking change.

The physics department has replaced the traditional large introductory lecture with smaller classes that emphasize hands-on, interactive, collaborative learning. Last fall, after years of experimentation and debate and resistance from students, who initially petitioned against it, the department made the change permanent. Already, attendance is up and the failure rate has dropped by more than 50 percent.

M.I.T. is not alone. Other universities are changing their ways, among them Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, North Carolina State University, the University of Maryland, the University of Colorado at Boulder and Harvard. In these institutions, physicists have been pioneering teaching methods drawn from research showing that most students learn fundamental concepts more successfully, and are better able to apply them, through interactive, collaborative, student-centered learning.…

At M.I.T., two introductory courses are still required — classical mechanics and electromagnetism — but today they meet in high-tech classrooms, where about 80 students sit at 13 round tables equipped with networked computers.

Instead of blackboards, the walls are covered with white boards and huge display screens. Circulating with a team of teaching assistants, the professor makes brief presentations of general principles and engages the students as they work out related concepts in small groups.

Katharine Beals, PhD, is the author of *Raising a Left-Brain Child in a Right-Brain World: Strategies for Helping Bright, Quirky, Socially Awkward Children to Thrive at Home and at School.* Katharine is a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and an adjunct professor at the Drexel University School of Education.

> Teachers and students conduct experiments together. The room buzzes. Conferring with tablemates, calling out questions and jumping up to write formulas on the white boards are all encouraged.
>
> (*From a January, 2009,* New York Times *article, about the new Technology Enabled Active Learning (or TEAL) program at MIT.*)

Every once in a while the mainstream media showcases what it considers exciting new trends in education. In the article excerpted above, part of what appears as new and exciting are students working in groups. Two other recent front-page newspaper articles (see Appendix) also showcase this phenomenon in a 5th grade classroom in Mount Laurel, NJ and in a 9th grade classroom in Worcester, MA. As these articles collectively suggest, group work, also known as cooperative learning, has become a recurring feature of education reform, extending most recently to math and science classes and to university-level courses, and occurring in particular in schools whose classrooms and teachers are considered paragons for others.

Though I have been teaching since the late 1980s, first high school students and later college and graduate students, I first noticed the cooperative learning trend about 11 years ago when my children started school. My perspective on it, initially at least, was that of a mother of unsocial children. My oldest and youngest were quite shy and aloof, especially in their early years; my middle child has high functioning autism. How would they fare when working in groups with classmates?

More generally, how do unsocial children as a whole fare in today's social classrooms — whether they are shy, socially awkward, aloof, or afflicted with Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism? My research ultimately culminated in a book, *Raising a Left-Brain Child in a Right Brain World* (2009), in which I explore a number of challenges that today's schools present to those whom I have come to call "left brain" children. My research also informs several education-school classes I teach on the challenges faced by children on the autistic spectrum. The more I have looked at cooperative learning groups in particular, however, the more concerned I have become, not just for this subpopulation, but for students as a whole.

This essay gives me an opportunity to share what I have learned and concluded about cooperative learning — much of which extends beyond the scope of my book and my classes. I will begin with some historical background: where the idea came from and how it has persisted over time. I will then describe what cooperative groups look like today and under what circumstances they occur. Next, I will present the various arguments offered by today's educators for having students work in such groups. I will consider problems with these arguments and with group learning in general, and conclude with suggestions for re-conceiving today's groups so as to maximize the benefits of cooperative learning while avoiding the downsides.

History of Cooperative Learning

Though people often think of cooperative learning as a recent idea, its promotion by educators dates back well over a century to John Dewey, the father of Progressive Education. In such seminal works as *My Pedagogic Creed* (1929), *The School and Society* (1900), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey argued that education and learning are social processes and that the classroom is a place not just for academics, but for broader life skills. Dewey saw his ideas put into practice at progressive schools like the Dewey School in Chicago, where children would engage in such potentially social activities as cooking, sewing, and carpentry. But life skills, for Dewey (1929, 16), extended beyond these to learning how to be a good citizen and an agent of social reform:

> education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and … the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.

Some of Dewey's progressive followers were more specific about just how individual activity should be adjusted for the sake of society, explicitly promoting the group over the individual. Foremost among these was William Kilpatrick, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College. Training over 35,000 prospective classroom teachers, and promulgating popular treatises on what he called the

"Project Method," Kilpatrick exerted tremendous influence over teachers and teacher educators in the first half of the 20th Century.

Kilpatrick's projects, as he defined them in his 1918 essay, "The Project Method: Child-Centeredness in Progressive Education," are "whole-hearted purposeful activit[ies] proceeding in a social environment." While allowing that some projects occurring within this social environment may be pursued individually, "many," Kilpatrick envisioned, are to be pursued "conjointly." Indeed, Kilpatrick rejected what he called the "selfish individualism" inherent in the "customary set-task-alone-at-your-own-desk procedure" of traditional (non-Progressive) schools.

For Kilpatrick, projects were a way to build "moral character," which was all about "shared social relationships" and "the disposition to determine one's conduct and attitudes with reference to the welfare of the group." In the ideal classroom, the children would form "an embryonic society" that would "make increasingly finer discriminations as to what is right and proper." Under the "approval and disapproval of [their] comrades," which Kilpatrick saw as exerting much more psychological pressure than the authority of the teacher, children would develop an internal motivation to conform, "build[ing] the ideals necessary for approved social life." Such social conformity, for Kilpatrick, was a desirable end in and of itself, and a key justification for social classrooms and cooperative work.

The next set of calls came from the Life Adjustment movement of the 1940s, promoted by the National Education Association. Spurred on by public concern over weakening family and community ties, the NEA published a yearbook in 1947 entitled *Organizing the Elementary School for Living and Learning*, which argued that social skills and getting along with others are more important than academic skills. As far as Life Adjustment was concerned, the rationale for cooperative learning was less about molding students into good citizens, and more about fostering their psychological and social well-being — including, especially, their friendships and their acceptance by peers.

Skipping ahead several decades, past the educational detours inspired by Sputnik and *A Nation at Risk* in which schools refocused on academics, we find the most recent champions of cooperative learning in Constructivism. Dating from the late 1980s and permeating most of the education establishment in the course of the ensuing decade, Constructivism holds that students learn best through hands-on, child-guided, group-centered discovery. Some two decades since its inception, Constructivism remains stronger than ever, embraced by a broad spectrum of educational entities. These range from professional organizations like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, whose 1989 standards embrace "small and large group arrangements" (p. 69); to influential professional handbooks like Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde's 1993 *Best Practice*, which calls for "MORE cooperative, collaborative activity; developing the classroom as an interdependent community" (p. 9); to movements like the Partnership for 21st Century skills, whose "four C's" include "collaboration" (2009); to specific teaching protocols like the Stanford Education School's Complex Instruction (n.d.), which promotes "groupwork activities" in which students with wide-ranging abilities work "interdependently." As Nancy Walser reports in the May/June 2010 *Harvard Education Letter*, today's advocates even include neuroscientists like Chris Frith, whose research has focused on the "social brain."

At a seminar held in February at London's Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) to discuss implications of the social brain for curriculum, Walser (2010) reports that Frith said there was "consensus that work on the social brain does argue for expanding the group learning and cooperative learning projects" in schools." I certainly believe that the special feature of humans is that we can work together to achieve more than the sum of the individuals in the group."

All these recent calls for group work echo the various earlier calls we reviewed, some of them dating back over a century. But as this last paragraph suggests, and as we will explore in the following sections, never before has cooperative learning been so broadly advocated, enacted, or justified.

Cooperative Classrooms Today

What do today's classroom groups look like, under what circumstances do they occur, and how widespread are they? In terms of their size, an entire

classroom full of children, in theory, constitutes a single, large group. Indeed, the Constructivist ideal of self-guided, group-centered discovery includes activities in which the whole class engages in discussion, with the teacher, true to his or her role in the child-centered classroom, taking a back seat as the discussion gets rolling. But what Constructivism especially emphasizes and advocates, and therefore the kinds of groups I will focus on in this essay, are smaller groups of four to five students. Given that typical class sizes range from 20 to 30 students or more, the result is somewhere between five and seven groups within a class. What this means for the physical arrangement of such classrooms is that students no longer sit in rows facing their teacher, but in clusters facing their groupmates. As for the teacher, he or she spends relatively little time addressing the entire class, and more time moving among the groups of students, providing guidance, as needed, to one group at a time.

Small group activities occur during a number of academic settings, including writing or math assignments and conversation practice in foreign language classes. Writing assignments now include "writing workshop," in which small groups critique one another's work. Math assignments increasingly come from the new Reform Math curricula (Everyday Math, Investigations, Trailblazers, and others), and include frequent in-class assignments and math games in which students are specifically told to work in small groups. In foreign language classes the new emphasis is on "communicative competence," which calls for students to practice their conversation skills in small groups or with partners. In later grades, group work extends outside the classroom to the many collaborative projects that more and more high schools and middle schools are assigning.

As for the makeup of these groups, the Constructivist ideal has the teacher determining who works together, ensuring that the groupings are heterogeneous in terms of ability level — both for the in-class assignments and for the homework projects.

In education as everywhere else, ideals are one thing; application is another. How often does this kind of cooperative learning actually occur? As I noted above, at no other time in its century-long history has it been so widely applied as it is in present-day classrooms. Relatively unusual several decades ago — how many of us who are 40 or older experienced much group work in all our K-12 years? — it has become the norm in more and more of the schools selected by those parents whose income levels, children's test scores, and/or ability to manipulate the system allow them a choice of schools.

For those of us with college-educated, middle to upper class backgrounds, cooperative learning may characterize the majority of the schools to which we or our friends send our children. It is important to note, however, that this "majority" occurs within a relatively small socio-economic bubble. Cooperative learning environments, given their practical demands, are largely limited to the most privileged schools: those with the smallest class sizes, the highest number of teaching assistants or parent volunteers, and/or the best-behaved students — or schools like the Park Campus School in Worcester (see Appendix) that have benefitted from extra money and staff support through outside grants and partnerships. In classrooms that lack these perks, any attempt at cooperative learning would charge a single teacher with the unrealistic task of simultaneously supervising a half-dozen or more potentially unruly groups of four to five children each.

Internationally, collaborative learning has spread slowly. While its popularity has recently been gaining in other countries, it remains predominantly an American phenomenon and, to a lesser extent, a phenomenon of English-speaking countries more generally — particularly Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. But because many countries look to America for new ideas in education, and because the kinds of schools most able to engage students in cooperative learning are also the kinds of schools most often cited by educators and journalists as models for others, the relatively small number of cooperative learning classrooms worldwide wield a disproportionate influence over the future of education in general.

The Rationale for Cooperative Learning

The current rationale for cooperative learning spans a broad spectrum of arguments, some of which — socializing children to be good citizens and workers and meeting their emotional needs — echo

priorities that held sway many decades ago, and others of which — reducing bullying, enhancing learning, making classrooms more comfortable for non-Western minorities and girls, and narrowing the achievement gap — resonate instead with the broader concerns of contemporary society.

Let us begin with what remains one of the most fundamental reasons why teachers and education leaders think children should work in groups: to develop their social skills. Today, more and more lay people share this priority. Indeed, if popular publications and talk shows are any indication, never before has society as a whole been more concerned with social skills. They are thought to be more important than ever for productive participation in the modern work force, and increasingly urgent in a society whose social fabric and growing diversity is seen by many to be increasingly threatened by digital media, dysfunctional families, bullying, new forms of intolerance, and an unprecedented deterioration in political discourse.

As far as workplace success goes, influential books like Daniel Goleman's (1995) best-selling *Emotional Intelligence* and Daniel Pink's (2005) *A Whole New Mind* argue that social skills play at least as great a role as academics do. In today's complex, service-oriented economy, observers say, most jobs involve interacting face-to-face with clients and/or working on large projects in teams with co-workers. Even mathematicians, educators frequently insist, do most of their work in groups. Working in groups at school is thus purported to provide students with crucial vocational training, as we read, for example, in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider's (2000) *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work* (2000).

As for the broader societal concerns about intolerance and bullying, a number of social curriculum packages have emerged in the last few decades, for example Lions Quest for Learning, PATHs, and the Social Development Project. In the words of the latter, "the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum." Echoing this most recently is a *New York Times* Op-Ed Piece (2010) by Susan Engel and Marlene Sandstrom (affiliated, respectively, with the Williams College Teaching Program and Department of Psychology), which argues that one of the things teachers can do to reduce bullying is to encourage collaboration and "structure learning activities in which children are interdependent."

Moving from the social to the academic, we see arguments that group work also fosters cognitive development. According to the 1989 Standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics:

> Working in small groups provides students with opportunities to talk about ideas and listen to their peers, enables teachers to interact more closely with students,... and provides opportunities for students to exchange ideas and hence develops their ability to communicate and reason.

And according to Nancy Walser (2010):

> In the classroom setting, researchers and teachers say the power of collaborating — typically in small groups — comes from three main activities: identifying and working out differing viewpoints, synthesizing and vocalizing one's own knowledge, and extending one's knowledge through hearing the ideas of others.…
>
> Students who use the opportunity of working in a group to explain, clarify, and reiterate their understandings are facilitating what neuroscientists call "consolidation" — the process by which short-term "working memory" is converted to more permanent memory.

In short, working with others is said to help students brainstorm, to motivate them to put their ideas into words, to expose them to multiple viewpoints and to multiple strategies for solving problems, and to inspire them to synthesize and reconcile these multiple viewpoints and strategies. All these activities are said to foster creativity and facilitate both a deep understanding of, and an enduring memory of, the material at hand. Group discussions also purportedly help students become better communicators — another feature considered key in today's service-oriented economy. These effects, it is claimed, are particularly strong in mixed-ability groups, the Constructivist ideal: when bright students have to explain things to weaker ones, many educators argue, all students deepen their understanding.

Group work also lends itself to differentiated instruction, often a logistical challenge in large classrooms of students with a variety of academic needs. Collaborative assignments allow different students to serve different roles, depending on their interests and abilities, such that, according to teacher and neurologist Judy Willis, paraphrased by Nancy Walser (2010), "they can be challenged at a level appropriate to their understanding." One student might do the write-up; another might create the visual aids; a third might keep track of the materials involved. Proponents argue that this kind of within-group differentiation is both more effective and more ethical than between-group differentiation (ability-based grouping) would be.

Group learning proponents cite studies supporting the idea that working in groups enhances academic performance, as we see, for example, in Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne's (2000) meta-analysis.

Some of the cognitive and academic benefits of group work are said to come from the emotional benefits it confers — for, as educators have increasingly recognized, learning is optimized in positive, engaging, low-stress environments. Social creatures, students purportedly find working in groups more emotionally engaging than working on their own. As Nancy Walser (2010) writes: "Done right, group work can harness the natural propensity of humans to interact."

More importantly, collaborating on a group assignment for a group grade is credited with replacing competition with cooperation. Eliminating competition, increasingly viewed as toxic to learning, has become a huge priority for today's education leaders, first and foremost among them Alfie Kohn (1986), author of *No Contest: the Case Against Competition*. Besides improving self-esteem and reducing stress, eliminating competition is said to help students feel more comfortable about taking risks and making mistakes — crucial ingredients for in-depth learning.

Group work is also said to better engage students from non-Western backgrounds, who purportedly prefer cooperation to competition and individualism — as education professors Carol Malloy and William Malloy (1998) and Daniel Orey (1989) have argued. For example, in "Ethnomathematical Perspectives on the NCTM Standards, " Orey (1989) states that

> it is imperative that the teacher in an ethnically diverse environment, use cooperative strategies for problem solving because minority students come from cultures that place value upon interpersonal communication….

Cooperative learning is also said to be more suited to girls, as argued, for example, in Mary Belenky's *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986) and Sue Rosser's *Female Friendly Science* (1990). Karen Dillow, Marilyn Flack, and Francine Peterman (1994) state that "current research shows that girls in middle and high school benefit from cooperative learning" and have "scored higher on achievement tests than those working alone."

Finally, in purportedly improving academic achievement, meeting diverse needs, and eliminating stress and competition, cooperative group learning is credited with the potential to narrow the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged children, one of the greatest priorities in public education in America today.

Critique

I first became interested in, and concerned about, the proliferation of group learning environments because of my focus on shy and socially awkward children. It seems intuitive that groups might pose problems for those who don't naturally work well in them. But the more I examined the various arguments, the more aware I became of ways in which they fall short of their promises to students in general.

Social Benefits?

Let us begin with what appears to be the most obvious benefit of having children work in groups: enhancing their social skills. What seems obvious does not always withstand empirical scrutiny. To establish empirically that working in cooperative groups in K-12 classrooms enhances social skills in a way that not working in cooperative groups do not, one would have to conduct several comparisons of children who attend cooperative group classrooms with similar children who do not. First, one would have to

show that, after a certain number of years, the first group exhibits higher-level social skills than the second. Then, to establish that these differences are long-lasting, one would have to follow the two groups through adolescence and into adulthood and confirm that the first group continues to exhibit higher-level social functioning in comparison with the second group. Finally, to establish that any long-lasting differences in social skills are significant, one would have to show that the first group is overall better adapted to the demands of life in and outside the classroom than the second group. To my knowledge, no such studies, and no such empirical results, have ever been published in any peer-reviewed publications on social skills development in typically developing students.

While absent evidence doesn't disprove hypotheses, there is reason to believe that even if such studies were carried out, the results would not favor cooperative groups. For one thing, typical children have many opportunities to socialize outside of school or in the school yard and cafeteria, and these more naturalistic, open-ended interactions may foster social skills development more effectively than do the interactions of classroom groups assigned by teachers. Unlike, say, phonics or long division, social development in most children occurs naturally, without special intervention. Human beings become social in cultures all around the world, regardless of their level of formal schooling or percentage of waking hours spent working in cooperative groups. When it comes to typical, social children, it is therefore not clear that any sort of intervention has much effect on social skills development. If working in cooperative groups did make a difference, we would expect students from countries that do not use group learning to end up less social than their American counterparts. We would also expect Americans from earlier generations, when group work was much less common, to be less social than more recent high school graduates. Is this what we find? Nowhere in all my research have I found anyone making such observations, let alone defending them.

But what about children to whom social skills *don't* come so naturally? Perhaps unsocial children, for all my concerns about them, are not a reason to avoid cooperative groups, but instead a significant motivation *for* them. Indeed, when I ask my education students whether children with Asperger's Syndrome, given all the social deficits associated with this condition, should be required to work in groups, they invariably say yes, precisely because of these social deficits, and because of the importance of social skills in overall development.

But this raises the question of whether the sorts of groups that occur in today's classrooms will help children who struggle with their social skills. As many studies have shown, shy, socially awkward, and autistic spectrum children are frequent targets of teasing, bullying, and other social slights, particularly when they are fending for themselves in groups. Some of this ill treatment is quite difficult to detect at a distance. It therefore seems unlikely that teachers can supervise four to seven classroom groups comprehensively enough to make sure that no one is being hurt or shut out. Listservs and discussion groups for parents of unsocial children report frequent social mishaps of which the teachers were apparently completely unaware. Requiring an unsocial child to work in a group with classmates is thus akin to throwing him to the wolves — and more likely to cause him to withdraw in anxiety and resentment than to open up and start developing his social skills.

What *has* been found to help unsocial children is quite different, namely social skills groups. Run and supervised by a professional trained in social skills development in unsocial children, these highly structured sessions focus on social skills, not simultaneously on social development and academic skills, and take place outside the classroom with carefully chosen peers. As for the social skills that are most urgently needed inside the classroom — listening and turn-taking skills and respect for authority — a more promising way for an unsocial child (or a child lacking in basic politeness and respect) to learn these is through explicit teaching and feedback from a teacher rather through trial and error during group activities with his or her peers.

The subtle teasing and bullying of unsocial children during group work undermines another justification for classroom groups. Rather than preventing teasing and bullying, classroom groups — whenever the teacher moves out of earshot — can become

arenas for it. Even if they do not evidence overt teasing, such groups may be the occasion for other sorts of pressures and oppression. The students I interviewed for my book have observed that social dynamics in classroom groups tend to mimic the social hierarchy of the schoolyard and cafeteria, with the cool kids calling most of the shots and marginalizing others.

The negative dynamics of group work can affect all children, however social, particularly when it comes to the typical heterogeneous groupings of brighter or more industrious students with slower or less industrious peers. The former often complain about having to do all the work and about the slowness of the slower students. In Marian Mathews's interviews of gifted 6th and 8th graders (cited in Sykes 1995, 78) students reported not understanding why their groupmates couldn't grasp the material; resented having to explain it to them; and resented having to take time away from their own studies. They felt bored and used, and ended up doing most of the work themselves rather than cooperatively. As Sykes 1995, 79) summarizes Mathews's findings,

> Rather than developing social skills … working in groups appears to promote some arrogance, [and] a lack of trust in classmates (to do the work to the standards of excellence gifted students feel are necessary)….

The less assertive of the bright students, meanwhile, report feeling awkward about correcting their classmates' mistakes and concerned about appearing too bossy. Some feel caught between their desire to earn a good group grade and their fear of alienating peers. When they fail to convince their groupmates of the correct answer, they resent the low grades that they may receive as a result. On the education blog *kitchentablemath.blogspot.com*, one mother reports that her son got a low grade during his group presentation for not presenting the correct answer and, then, when he protested that he knew the correct answer but that his groupmates didn't agree with him, was told by his teacher that he still deserved this grade for failing to convince his group that his answer was the right one. The frustrations of the brighter students, naturally, spread to the weaker students, who may also feel intimidated by or resentful of their more capable peers.

Another parent on *kitchentablemath* effectively summed up the frustrations of group work:

> I can say from anecdotal experience that putting kids in groups tends to reinforce the group issues they already had, even cement their antisocial tendencies rather than correct them.
>
> For example, I was in my 4th grader's classroom awhile back when the kids were assigned to groups of four kids to work on a writing project. It was a pretty good idea and the kids came up with some very interesting ideas. BUT, the groups didn't seem to enhance the work product — nothing came out of it that they wouldn't have been able to do individually. And, the kids with the most trouble academically sat on the edges, didn't contribute or were rebuffed by their more able peers. For them, it was a complete waste of time. For the "good" girls, they had a great time sitting with their friends, putting down the boys in their group, and doing their best to come up with something the teacher would like.
>
> With the kids divided into 5 or 6 groups, the teacher could not be everywhere. She was needed full-time in at least 3 of the groups, and her dropping in for a few minutes on each group was too little too late. One kid in my daughter's group is in dire need of social skills. He spent the entire time spinning circles on his butt, standing up and asking to go to the bathroom or wandering off to the windows, or telling the other groups members that this was "stupid" or complaining that no one listened to him. When the teacher hovered, he acted out less, but at no point did he contribute.

All these observations also pose problems for the idea that group work engages students, reduces pressure and fosters cooperation over competition. Rather, grouping stronger students together with weaker students, not supervising them constantly, and then assigning them all the same grade for their collective output, turns out to be a recipe for resentment, intimidation, boredom, and marginalization

of the weaker or less assertive students. In particular, what is lost in academic competition may be more than made up for in social competition.

What about the claim that working in groups enhances, not social skills in general, but the kind of team sportsmanship necessary for today's collaborative workforce? This claim begs two questions. One is whether today's jobs really do require more social skills than jobs did a generation ago when group work in classrooms was rare. Another is the same sort of question we asked about social skills with respect to other countries and earlier generations of Americans. Are adults from countries whose schools don't emphasize cooperative learning groups worse at collaborating than Americans are? Are older Americans who similarly spent little time in classroom groups worse at collaborating than their younger counterparts are? Once again, nowhere in all my research have I found anyone making such observations, let alone defending them.

It's also worth considering to what degree adults working in teams are involved in the kinds of face to face, cooperation activities that classroom groups typically involve, with everyone sitting together in a cluster. Take, for example, mathematicians, frequently cited by Reform Math advocates as working in groups. What do they do when they collaborate? Most mathematicians I've talked to report that while they do spend some time together discussing the issues and bouncing ideas off one another and, later, tweaking one another's strategies, most of their time is spent working apart. This characterizes many professional collaborations: participants divide things up and later reconvene to assess progress, run ideas past one another, and eventually combine results, but typically — unlike what students in classroom groups are supposed to do — they complete the bulk of their work on their own. As Catherine Johnson, a writer who has coauthored three books, mostly by working alone, puts it, "How many projects are ever created by people sitting in the same room together for hours on end?" In more corporate settings, a single person is typically in charge, assigns specific tasks, and sends people back to their cubicles. Indeed, it's the cubicle, not the conference table, that predominates at most offices.

Even when collaborators do meet at conference tables, the dynamic differs significantly from what happens in K-12 groups. Professional co-workers share common interests and common goals. Different collaborators contribute different areas of expertise, and, thus, play distinct, predetermined roles. Nor is there some generalized teamwork rapport that they engage in that can be abstracted from the specific task at hand, and from their specific roles in it, and imported into K-12 groups. As a New York tax attorney who works on many team projects puts it, "the best way to be a good team player is to be competent at your specific subtask." To the extent that professional interactions do involve generalizeable social skills, these are the sorts of skills — listening, turn-taking, showing respect — that most children pick up naturally in their homes and playgrounds, and that those who don't are most likely, studies show, to learn via explicit, structured, social skills training.

Cognitive Benefits?

Moving from the social sphere back to the academic, what about the more general cognitive benefits that working in groups is supposed to confer? What of Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne's (2000) meta-analysis? Other meta-analyses suggest that many cooperative learning studies are flawed, and/or show limited positive effects. Consider, first, what John Anderson, Lynne Reder, and Herbert Simons (1999) report:

> In a review by the Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance (National Research Council 1994), it was noted that research on cooperative learning has frequently not been well controlled (e.g., nonrandom assignments to treatments, uncontrolled "teacher" and treatment effects), that relatively few studies "have successfully demonstrated advantages for cooperative versus individual learning," and that "a number of detrimental effects arising from cooperative learning have been identified—the "free rider," the "sucker," the "status differential," and "ganging up" effects (see e.g., Salomon and Globerson 1989, 94-95).

Meanwhile, in *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (2008), John Hattie (2008) concludes that most studies showing positive effects for group learning exhibit rather modest effects. Cooperative groups appear to be most effective in reading groups, which have been a staple of K-12 classrooms for decades and don't present most of the problems I am discussing here.

To the extent that cooperative groups appear, anecdotally, to show positive effects, this may be merely a selection bias. As noted earlier, frequent use of cooperative groups is practical only in the more privileged schools, the kinds of schools with which it is also disproportionately associated. The advantages that such schools have in smaller class sizes, extra staffing, and students with better educated parents will tend bring about higher academic achievement regardless of whether or not their students spend significant time working in groups.

Some of the anecdotal evidence I collected during my research on my book suggests that the various specific claims of cognitive benefits also don't pan out. Consider, first, the idea that working in groups helps students brainstorm and exposes them to multiple viewpoints and strategies. This holds only to the extent that the different children actually have promising ideas that their groupmates haven't already considered, and that they are all willing to listen to these ideas. Some of my interviewees reported that such ideal circumstances rarely apply. Some find themselves ignored or intimidated by their more confident, charismatic groupmates. Others report that the majority often converges on a single way of doing things "by committee," in which the least common denominator rather than the most interesting combination of ideas tends to prevail. When groups do allow multiple viewpoints to surface, many of the children I call "left-brainers," who process things in a linear, one-thing-at-a-time fashion, find it difficult to keep track of them. To learn new ideas and strategies, such children need to work with them one at a time on their own, not all at once in an unstructured group discussion.

What about Walser's claims of the cognitive benefits that come from explaining things to others? First, to the extent that such benefits exist, they disproportionately affect the brighter students, who tend to do more of the explaining. Second, when surveyed, bright students report that this can be extremely frustrating. In Marion Mathews's surveys of gifted students, not one said that they understood the material better as a result of having to explain it to others. Third, as some teachers observed, when students explain things to others, they often make mistakes. As one teacher reports on *kitchentablemath*:

> I see this in class every single day, kids wrongly explaining to others what they've done right and wrong. Especially what they've done wrong! Even if it's a subjective question the kids will authoritatively tell each other exactly how wrong they are when they might be onto something really special.

What about the ability of groups to provide students with differentiated instruction (and give them a taste of what professional collaborations involve) by having different members serve different functions within their group? For example, as discussed above, one student writes up the results, another creates the visual aids, a third keeps track of materials, and a fourth presents the project to the class. The problem is that this doesn't ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity, and an equal motivation, to learn the underlying content. To the extent that teachers succeed in differentiating instruction within small groups, they risk sacrificing common, generalized learning, particularly for the weaker students (the ones most likely to be assigned the job of making a poster or of keeping track of supplies, rather than of writing up the results). Indeed, giving weak students academically low-level tasks in the potentially intimidating environment of collaborating peers combines the worst of two worlds: that of tracking students by ability, and that of requiring students of mixed abilities to work closely together for a common grade, with untrained peers rather than trained teachers serving as instructors for those in greatest need of instruction.

There are two additional ways in which working in groups appears to reduce learning rather than enhancing it. First, many students report that when their groups are unsupervised — as when the teacher is out of earshot or the group is meeting outside of school for a homework assignment — they

spend large amounts of time goofing off. Second, to the extent that an individual student only has so much influence over the group grade, students in general have less of an incentive to apply themselves than they do when working on individual assignments.

Help for Girls and Ethnic Minorities?

What about the idea that cooperative learning groups are well-suited to girls and to students from non-white, non-Western backgrounds? These arguments rest, of course, on troubling racist, ethnic, and sexist generalizations. Only the generalizations about girls have any empirical support (see, for example, Tannen 1996 and Baron-Cohen 2003). To the extent that these are valid, they present several problems. First, there are always exceptions: girls who prefer working on their own and find competition more motivating than intimidating. Second, even girls who like to cooperate in general still express many frustrations with working in classroom groups in particular. Third, what about the boys? Study after study (see, e.g., Sommers 2001 and Tyre 2008) show more and more boys struggling in school, achieving at lower and lower rates compared to girls, dropping out instead of attending college, and generally being less and less engaged in classrooms. Many of those who have examined this problem suspect that the proliferation of cooperative learning is one of the reasons why.

The final argument for group work is that it may narrow the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged students. To the extent that the weakest students withdraw, and that group environments don't provide expert instruction to them, and that its academic benefits for everyone are in question, there's little reason to believe that group work is narrowing this gap. My impression, indeed, is that in some ways it might actually be widening it — particularly in those non-academic roles that teachers often assign to the academically weakest students.

What Do Students Say?

Ultimately, the supposed benefits accrue only to the extent that group work actually engages students. But we've seen ample evidence that it often does the opposite. Many students end up withdrawing, whether they are bright and bored, weak and intimidated, bright *or* weak and frustrated, social and prone to socializing, lazy and unmotivated, or left-brained and unable to keep track of group discussions and multiple strategies. Group learning, it seems, poses problems for just about everyone. The more I have learned about it, the less motivated I am to use it when I teach. In recent years I have made all group work optional, and when I give my students (mostly current and prospective classroom teachers) the option, they rarely take me up on it — even when they argue for the theoretical virtues of group work for students in general.

All the objections to group work that we have reviewed here would seem to fly in the face of the enthusiastic newspaper reports like that found at the beginning of this article. Let us take a closer look, however, at what students say to those journalists who take the time to talk to them. Returning to the Technology Enabled Active Learning (TEAL) program at MIT, let's consider what the MIT student paper, *The Tech* (Zhou 2006), has to say:

> Most students do not bother to hide their dislike for TEAL. Their list of grievances is long and oft-repeated: the physical set-up of small tables makes it difficult to see the lecturer, the numerous homework assignments are tedious, the in-class problems are gone over too quickly, the students strong in physics end up doing all the work, and so on.…
>
> [S]tudents are uninspired by the course. [Lecturer Peter] Dourmashkin admits that "students don't like to go to class," while Professor John Joannopoulos, who teaches a section of [one of the TEAL classes] this semester, said that there is a "tendency for students to be lax and lose concentration."

Why Have Cooperative Groups Been So Popular With Educators?

All these concerns raise one big question: why do cooperative groups continue to be so popular with education professionals? Some of the problems I have discussed above are quite well known to them, even to those who rarely set foot in classrooms. One thing that nevertheless sustains their support is the

idea that, as many will readily admit, classroom groups rarely match the ideal. Properly done, they insist, group work avoids its potential pitfalls while conferring those many benefits I reviewed above. But proper implementation, as we've seen, requires circumstances that rarely obtain: for example, constant supervision that would typically necessitate as many qualified supervisors are there are groups. There are countless educational strategies that work only under highly unusual circumstances — anything from calculus in 7th grade to desk-free classrooms. Why lobby for group work in particular?

To understand the hardy support by education professionals for group learning, we must recall the historical background we considered earlier. As we saw, calls by education leaders for cooperative groups have been ringing out for over a century. Some of these leaders, most notably Columbia Teachers College professor William Kilpatrick, were able to influence tens of thousands of education students, many of whom then went on to become education professors themselves. The cooperative-learning juggernaut rolled on with them. Over the years, since few people are inclined to question the experts, more and more teachers have become indoctrinated in their views. Nearly all the K-12 teachers I know — whether they are the teachers I teach or those who teach my children — reproduce the same talking points: in particular, working in groups is necessary for developing social skills; for learning to collaborate; for functioning in society. The uniformity and ubiquity of these views is downright eerie, especially in light of how questionable they are, and of how strongly their adherents cling to them even when faced with counter-arguments that they often don't even attempt to rebut, or when they confess to not having enjoyed working in classroom groups themselves. It reveals an indoctrination as deep as it is widespread.

Reconceptualizing Cooperative Learning

Ignoring what is actually practicable is no more reasonable for education critics than it is for education professionals. In light of current circumstances, therefore, one cannot simply argue that the amount of time children spend in classroom groups should be drastically limited and then assume that schools will follow suit. Any solutions to the problems I have reviewed here will have to keep in mind the very strong predilection that those with power over classroom practices have for groups, and the deep entrenchment within the education establishment of the ideals of group learning — as well as the possibility that there may be some feasible modifications to group learning that could bring some benefits. In particular, exposing children to multiple perspectives and giving them practice collaborating strike me as potential virtues. With this in mind, is there some way to re-conceive classroom groups that will address the concerns I have raised, as well as those of cooperative learning enthusiasts?

One way to re-conceive groups is to recognize that they need not occur during regular learning activities, involve everyone in the class, or focus simultaneously on social skills and academics. A group reconceived in this way could target those who arguably most need group practice: children who do not develop social skills on their own. As I noted above, the best group environments for such children are highly structured groups run by trained professionals that focus just on social skills. These typically occur in clinical settings, but could also be offered by schools as special pullouts or as after-school programs for select groups of students, including some more sociable role models who volunteer to participate.

As far as the more sociable students are concerned, another way to rethink their cooperative opportunities is to recognize that they, unlike their less social counterparts, participate in extra-curricular group activities all the time.

Yet another way to re-conceive classroom groups is to look to countries that are said to focus more on cooperative learning than we do. In particular, there's East Asia, particularly Japan, a country often cited favorably by American education professionals as educating students in ways that promote collective over individualistic learning. But look more closely at Japanese classrooms, as Stevenson and Stigler (1994) do in *The Learning Gap*, and what you see is quite different from what occurs in America's group learning classrooms. Instead of five to seven smaller groups within a room, with groupmates facing one another, one sees the whole class, as a group,

sitting in rows facing the teacher. Instead of five to seven simultaneous activities, one sees the entire class engaged simultaneously in the same activity, collectively exploring, with explicit guidance from their teacher, various possible solutions to a problem. The result is a combination of individual and group learning as the entire class works together to solve a problem, and as individuals contribute their specific ideas one by one. The teacher thus simultaneously addresses students as individuals, and students as a group.

Re-conceived in this way, group learning avoids many of the pitfalls we discussed above, for example, lack of supervision, failure to recognize the efforts of individual children, and failure to give students equal opportunities to learn the material. On the other hand, as practiced in Japanese classrooms and as described by Stevenson and Stigler, this sort of whole-class cooperative learning is highly engaging of students. It also exposes them to more perspectives and strategies than what typically emerges from smaller groups, and then enhances this exposure as the teacher helps the students understand which perspectives and strategies are most promising. Moreover, inasmuch as the whole class is functioning as a group and collaborating on a solution, it reduces the negative competition that often occurs when students compete directly with one another, while not eliminating competition entirely — healthy and motivating (and inevitable) as it often can be.

These sorts of classrooms, of course, are not specific to Japan, or to Japanese culture, but rather occur around the world. As some of us former students can attest, they even occur in the United States. Here, in the classroom surveys he conducted for his just-published *How To Teach Like A Champion*, Doug Lemov (2010) finds that it is precisely these kinds of whole-class, teacher-led, cooperative learning ventures that many of the most highly effective teachers regularly practice.

But since groups of five to seven will probably remain the norm for quite some time, is there some way to re-conceive them so as to avoid their various potential downsides — without having to monitor each one constantly? One strategy would be to move away from mixed-ability grouping towards ability-based grouping, and also to group the most hard-working students, and the least hard working students, with their like-minded peers and, finally, to avoid assigning different students different roles. In other words, instead of heterogeneous groups of mixed-ability in which each student assumes a different role, have homogeneous groups of similar ability in which all students have the same role.

While many of today's educators find ability-based groupings unethical and ineffective, ability-based groups with uniform roles avoid the worst-of-both-worlds scenario we described above in connection with mixed-ability groupings with differentiated roles. They are arguably more equitable, in that everyone within the group participates in the same tasks and gets equal exposure to the material. They are arguably more effective as well. Different groups can be given different assignments that are specifically tailored to each group's overall strengths and weaknesses. In general, such groups occasion fewer of the frustrations, intimidations, and disengagements that occur when stronger and weaker students are forced to work together for a common grade. And they are more likely to inspire all the groupmates to contribute rather than relying on one or two students to carry the load.

There is reason to believe that such ability-based groupings, in fact, are much more effective than their mixed-ability counterparts. The biggest concern about ability-based grouping has always been the potential for detrimental effects on the weaker students. There is good reason for this concern: many studies show that students placed in the lowest tracks, subject as they often are to low expectations and ineffective teachers, perform worse than they would in heterogeneous classrooms. For students placed in special education classrooms, the results are even worse. However, it is important to recognize key ways in which grouping students by ability within a classroom differs from segregating students by ability into different classrooms (or entire tracks) with different teachers and different curricula. Ability-based grouping within a classroom is much more fluid, and particular groups can be readjusted as tasks change and students grow and develop. Even on a given school day, different tasks (and different subjects) demand different abilities; different stu-

dents have different strengths and weaknesses. Thus, each new task will entail a different set of ability-based groupings.

Another way to re-conceive groups is to reduce them to partnerships. Partnered activities retain many of the benefits of larger groups, however scaled down they are — more than one viewpoint, communicating and collaborating — while avoiding many of the downsides. In particular, one-on-one interactions are much less conducive to teasing and to ignoring a students' ideas, and much less likely to overwhelm or confuse the less social, more left-brained children. While this means yet more groups for the teacher to supervise, it's actually somewhat easier to check participation in a partnership than in a larger group.

One can also change the focus from cooperation to collaboration, encouraging students to quickly divvy up the tasks and then work independently. This addresses several concerns: it gives students a taste of something that more closely resembles workplace collaborations; by reducing the time students spend sitting together, it reduces the potential for toxic social dynamics; and it makes it easier for teachers to give grades that reflect individual output — individual grades, that is, that are based at least partly on the specific contribution that the given individual makes to his or her group. However, remembering our concerns about unequal tasks potentially resulting in unequal learning opportunities, it's important to set things up so that each student, ultimately, is equally engaged — perhaps by varying the tasks assigned to different students across different activities.

A final way to re-conceive groups is to make them optional. This is especially appropriate with the after-school projects, impossible as they are for teachers to supervise. Allowing any student who wants the option of working independently to do so will address many of the problems we've discussed in this essay. However, for all the students out there who object to group work, there are some who find it beneficial and engaging and they, in particular, could choose to work together. In fact, this is precisely what happens already in the many de facto collaborations that occur outside of school, whether or not classroom teachers, or other education professionals, are actively involved in promoting them.

Appendix

The three ninth graders huddled over the algebra problem: Which summer job would be more lucrative for their teacher's son? "Explain your reasoning. Show all work that supports your effort. Write a note to Mr. Knittle, telling him which is the better offer, and convince him to take that job," the assignment read. "Make sure you COMPLETELY explain how to change this into a mathematical exercise that everyone can understand."

The bar is high at this small public high school, and the hurdles are unusual. The school has earned international recognition and numerous accolades for its ability to take low-performing students and turn nearly all of them into first-generation college-bound teens.

(*From a March, 2008 front-page* Philadelphia Inquirer *article on the Park Campus School in Worcester, MA, and its partnership with Clark University.*)

[Jayne] King was one of just 93 teachers nationwide to receive the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching last spring.…

Several years ago, she said, she came across a quote that captured the classroom spirit she wanted to instill, a spirit of cooperation and collegiality. Each September, as a new group of students walked into her room, they would see it on the side of her desk. "None of us is as smart as all of us," it read.…

Risk taking, discovery and making math relevant were the goals she set for herself. The project that earned her the presidential award had all of that.

The point of the lesson was that the area of a rectangle can vary while the perimeter remains constant. But rather than say that, she let the students discover it.

Working in teams, students had to develop a plan for a dog named "Scruffy" whose owners decided that he spent too much time lounging on their deck. They wanted him to get more exercise, but in a safe environment. To that end, they had purchased 32 meters of fencing.

The project included multiple tasks and analysis, including pricing the cost of fencing, writing poems about area and perimeter, and assessing the pros and cons of different rectangular shapes for Scruffy's pen.

(*From a September, 2007 front-page* Philadelphia Inquirer *article on a recipient of the NSF-funded Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.*)

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Flow and Educating for Life

Paul Freedman

When we educate children primarily to receive input, when we value their stillness, their passivity, their compliance and their ability to regurgitate ingested facts, skills and behaviors without original thought, we are educating for death.

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If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try; If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd better start at once to die.
(W. H. Auden)

Not to be overly melodramatic, but simply put, this is a question of life or death. When we educate children primarily to receive input, when we value their stillness, their passivity, their compliance and their ability to regurgitate ingested facts, skills and behaviors without original thought, we are educating for death. Death's critical attributes include that it is motionless, cold, predictable, and without spontaneity, emotion, passion, relationship, or community.

Education *for life* must be a dynamic process. It must involve an in-and-out movement, what some holistic educators refer to as a breathing rhythm. It must be fluid and active. It is warm rather than cool. It involves interaction, relationship, emotion, inspiration, complexity, community, creativity, and self-expression.

How can we educate for life? When the school year came to an end, my class of 17 six- to ten-year-olds enjoyed a not-too-rare but blessed period of time where something seemed to go right. In a rather remarkable sequence of seemingly unrelated individual moments, I was privileged to witness a number of kids taking chances, becoming deeply absorbed in their work, and creatively expressing inner growth in a wide variety of ways. Over a period of a week or two, Heather danced with previously undiscovered expression, beauty, and grace; Sasha suddenly experienced newfound eloquence as he expressed himself through poetry; Justin demonstrated exceptional creativity through his play on the field. What was going on here? I found myself wondering about these clear signs of life, where had they come from, why had they not been more evident at other times?

Have other authors and educators written about these occasional floods of creative expressions? What is the meaning of such outpourings of creativity? Should this be the real goal of education? How would such a shift in focus change the whole mission of education — and the methods that it sanctions? Is it possible to create optimal conditions that will increase the likelihood of such creative expressions?

I do not believe that education should be entirely about expression, unbridled individual emoting and creating. Rather, it is my hope to restore balance to the educational mission. The pendulum has swung way too far toward valuing the *receiving* of information, and assessing learners' success based upon *im*pression and mimicry. I aim to return a much needed and often absent prizing of *ex*pression and creativity, integrating and applying learned concepts to meaningful creative projects, what Benjamin Bloom called the higher levels of thinking that include invention, design, composition, and synthesis.

The Language of Dance

Heather is a reserved, watchful first grader. She is one of the youngest in a multi-age class. This year she has learned the vocabulary and elements of dance. She has learned to move at different levels, at different paces and with fluidity as well as rigidity. She has quietly participated in all elements of her dance class but always with a careful self-conscious tentativeness. She is very aware of the movements and modeling of other group members and watches everything with her big brown eyes.

The class had wanted to include individual dance solos for the parent audience in our year-end closing celebration. For some children this was a scary prospect, one to be avoided at all costs. For others it was a chance to shine in the spotlight. Despite several rehearsals, as our closing day approached I wasn't sure who would actually choose to dance in front of this large gathering of parents and friends. When it was Heather's turn, she hesitantly took the floor, closed her eyes, and then what poured out of her small frame was pure magic. She turned her gaze inward and moved to the music with a rhythm and grace that I had not seen from her before. She expressed a huge range of emotions with sophistication and poise. She lunged, reached, withdrew, stretched, collapsed, and leapt. For about three minutes she was obviously somewhere else, totally immersed in self-expression but in a way that was mindful and integral. All she had learned and internalized was synthesized and reconfigured into a unique original, spontaneous yet intentional composition. I was blown away. What a privilege to be present for such a special moment in a young person's life.

While the arts are continually marginalized in mainstream education to make room for more acceptable modes of communication, there are pedagogies that value the many forms of creative expression inherent in children. The Reggio Emelia approach to education is one example of a model that grows out of a core set of beliefs that include an understanding of learning as an active and creative venture. Out of this tradition, Loris Malaguzzi famously wrote about the "hundred languages of children" (Edwards 1998). Malaguzzi suggests that children come to us with countless ways of expressing themselves. Formal education all too often whittles away at nearly all of these "languages" and reinforces the one or two acceptable methods and techniques of expression that are valued by mainstream education.

One of children's innate languages is that of dance in its many forms. Physical movement to a rhythm has been a means of expression in virtually every human culture. Why have we decided that it is not valuable? Is it because it can't be easily scored and assessed by a multiple-choice test? Ken Robinson (2006) an advocate for creativity in school, has written about the arbitrary discrimination against dance:

> I think math is very important, but so is dance. Children dance all the time, if they're allowed to. What happens is that as children grow up, we start to educate them progressively from the waist up. Then we focus on their heads, and slightly to one side.

Poetry

Sasha is an extremely verbal 8-year-old. In an end-of-the-year writing assignment a classmate described him as "like a rooster. He is proud, colorful and not subtle with his voice." Sasha exhibits a range of behaviors that in some settings may be diagnosable as ADD or ADHD. One area in which Sasha

struggles is his writing. The mechanics of writing are challenging for him. The fine motor skills, precision, and concentration required to form letters in a standard size and shape frustrate him. As a result, Sasha has shied away from many writing challenges. Lately, with a lot of encouragement and support, he has begun to enjoy the writing process more. He has in fact moved towards a personal style of long narratives infused with plenty of absurd humor. I see this shift as a sign of progress for sure, but still his writing has lacked form, care, and precision.

As the year came towards its close, we went outside into the beautiful natural setting of our schoolyard. We talked about the five (or six) senses and shared lots of poetry to inspire each of us. Then with clipboards in hand, each student found something that represented an aspect of beauty to him or her. The students were given as much time and space as they needed for their compositions.

Sasha returned to class with this gem:

> As green as grass
> The twig sits on the branch
> Gentle leaves waving in the wind
> As a gentle breeze ruffles my hair
> A spider silently weaves a web
> As the fantastic earth sings

It may not be obvious in this context, but for Sasha, these six simple lines represent a huge transformative and developmental leap in his written expression. Without prompting he has paid attention to and integrated previous lessons in rhythm, alliteration, simile, and imagery. In the peacefulness of the setting, Sasha went somewhere else. He became immersed in a moment of beauty and contemplation and used this opportunity to break through his many obstacles to become fully present, integrate his learning, and shape it into a composition that was entirely his own. How can we facilitate this journey for all learners?

Flow and Peak Experiences

Recently, a handful of authors, notably Ken Robinson and Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, have begun to closely examine the creative process. Robinson talks and writes passionately about the need in the contemporary world for creative outside-the-box thinkers and the need for schools to foster creativity as a central part of their educational mission.

Csíkszentmihályi (2008) has written at length about the concept of “flow.” Flow refers to those moments of extremely heightened creativity in which individuals become so thoroughly engaged in the process of creating that other perceptions are altered and the individual approaches a state of complete presence. Ultimately, I believe that proponents of integral or holistic education are striving to design educational approaches that facilitate such experiences.

Csíkszentmihályi has suggested that the conditions that are necessary to achieve flow include the right blend of the task’s level of challenge and the individual’s level of skill. When both challenge and skill are high, flow is a much more likely outcome. A bit lower skill level and the individual might experience arousal, but not flow. A bit less challenge may simply lead to a sense of control. But if the challenge is too far out of balance with skills, the results could be either worry and anxiety (high challenge with low skill level) or relaxation and boredom (low challenge with high skills.) Neither polarity is at all conducive to creating flow. If the task is too devoid of challenge and the learner simultaneously lacks necessary skill, the result is what Csíkszentmihályi (1997) calls “apathy” — the condition furthest from flow in his spectrum, and the antithesis of engaged learning. Apathy is the nemesis of the holistic educator and what seems to be so tragically omnipresent in mainstream education today.

Achieving flow requires a high level of challenge combined with high levels of skill. I would add that in a school classroom, realizing flow also requires a high degree of differentiated, artful, and engaged teaching. It is rarely the case that two learners possess identical skill or require identical challenge to achieve flow. It therefore requires a very special teacher, one who pays great attention to the needs, learning styles, interests, preferred modalities, and developmental levels of each child. It requires that the teacher knows each learner intimately. It also requires a large amount of flexibility and willingness to adapt and modify lessons to meet the needs of individual learners.

In the second half of the 20th century humanistic psychologists including Abraham Maslow wrote about a phenomenon quite similar to Csíkszentmihályi's concept of flow, which Maslow called the "peak experience." The peak experience is "what you feel and perhaps 'know' when you gain authentic elevation as a human being." (Geiger 1993, xvi-xvii). Maslow claimed that the peak experience was a "climax moment" for a "self actualized" person, someone well on the path to fulfilling his/her ultimate potential as a fully human person. I can't claim anything quite so grand in my observations of children in my classroom, but perhaps just as learners gain proficiency in any new skill by making a series of small approximations towards the goal, these children's creative expressions when the learner seems fully engaged and lost in the creative process are little practice steps on the path towards genuine self-actualization. Perhaps this was what motivated Maslow (1993, 55) to write so passionately about the arts and creativity in education,

> …the concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy self-actualizing, fully human person seem to be coming closer and closer together, and may perhaps turn out to be the same thing. Another conclusion I seem to be impelled toward, is that creative art education, or better said, Education-Through-Art, may be especially important not so much for turning out artists or art products, as for turning out better people.

Maslow was not alone in focussing on self-actualization. Educational scholar Scott Forbes analyzed the historical landscape of holistic education in great depth. Forbes (1993, 17) uses the term "ultimacy," which he attributes to Paul Tillich, to characterize what all holistic educators strive for: "the highest state of being that a human can aspire to." From Rousseau and Pestalozzi, to Froebel and Jung, writers have identified a similar concept as the goal of education. Perhaps peak experiences and moments of flow are small steps along the path towards this lofty goal of ultimacy.

Flow at Recess

Though often thought to be without pedagogical potential or significance, recess can be an opportunity for extraordinary creativity, flow, and peak experiences. In the typical elementary school, the kids are let loose outside for recess twice a day to let off steam, use their "outside voices," and release their pent up physical energies. Often two or three yard supervisors, armed with whistles, clipboards, and first aid supplies patrol the open yard monitoring a couple of hundred kids. The educational goal seems simply to be to hang on and keep everyone safe until the bell rings. At that point, children line up, are met by their freshly re-caffeinated teacher, and are herded back into the classroom for more "real learning." Recess is seen as a largely valueless time other than as a break between lessons. In my experience, however, it is at recess that so much "real learning" and growth takes place. Maybe, because of the somewhat wider boundaries, it is a time when creativity can flourish. It is unfortunate that more teachers don't have a chance to join the kids in unbounded play and witness their occasional moments of flow.

During the last weeks of my school year, as soccer's World Cup approached, many of the kids showed a renewed interest in this sport. So at recess, we set up games. Several kids chose favorite players to emulate and invented team names, chants, and songs to cheer one another on to victory. In these games, however, one slightly built red-haired nine-year-old boy emerged as a unique voice and vision on the field. For Justin, it was all about the creative process, doing something that hadn't been done before, or that no one expected him to do. "The score doesn't matter!," he shouted over and over when peers would become mired in arguments about points and press for a win. He embodied what soccer players and analysts talk about when they describe the "creativity" of soccer greats. Justin would take the ball downfield and try a step-over move that would leave a defender behind. He would smile gleefully as he made a successful pass to a teammate even when the teammate misplayed the ball and gave it right back to an opposing player. He was determined, focused, but remarkably good spirited during his play. He seemed to genuinely wish everyone well on both teams, even as he himself competed fiercely. Everyone seemed inspired by his play. Everyone wanted to be on his team, although he was clearly not the best athlete on the field, but they

wanted to catch a bit of his "magic." A spontaneous cheering section emerged on the sidelines that shouted his name and yelled "olé" each time he touched the ball. Although it is rarely recognized as such, by playing soccer, Justin was expressing himself in one of his "hundred languages." And the flow he achieved in this self-expression was impossible to miss.

Moments of creative flow at school do not happen only when students are working in relative seclusion or stillness. Flow can come out of collaboration as well. Perhaps the very purpose of school is to create small communities that can facilitate growth and development and moments of heightened creativity. In addition to Csíkszentmihályi's need for skill and challenge to maintain flow, I would add the need for a supportive learning community. Community is the envelope within which creative risks become possible. A community that both values and respects diverse points of view and ways of being is critical. Even a well designed activity with a high level of challenge approached by highly skilled individuals can fall flat if it does not occur within a supportive community. Creating such a community, where learners push one another to reach further, yet simultaneously treat one another with unconditional care is a complex process, certainly the subject of much research and study in its own right. Creating such a community, what Parker Palmer (1998, 101) calls a "community of truth," is essential.

Complimenting the right blend of skill and challenge, Palmer further identifies several other critical tensions that must be carefully balanced in the classroom environment. He describes the need to create a learning environment that is both "safe and charged." The learners need to experience the energizing force of facing difficult tasks, yet they must also know they will be accepted whatever the outcome. Palmer (1998, 74) also identifies the need for space that is both "open and bounded." Schools seem to be very good at binding space. Both physical space and time are meticulously controlled. We need to do a much better job, however, at holding space open to allow room for exploration and creativity to emerge. I think many of the moments of flow my class experienced in the last weeks of school were partly a function of a relaxation of the usual boundaries.

Reaching for exceptional creativity as a regular part of a classroom culture also requires that students have teachers and mentors who are, themselves, highly engaged and passionately creative people. Learning in the presence of such inspiration exponentially increases the likelihood of achieving flow. In the presence of an engaged mentor, creativity, engagement, and pursuing one's passions take on real meaning and become part of the culture of the learning environment. Our school is blessed with several such teachers and they continually make it seem possible and reasonable to love what you do and lose yourself in your own creativity.

Getting to Flow

There are many impediments to nurturing flow in the traditional school environment that the classroom teacher must overcome. Woven into the fabric of school life is bounded physical space, which requires students to live most of their educational lives within the four walls of a classroom seated at desks. The bell rings in 45-minute intervals to indicate the end of one type of learning and the beginning of another.

The ratio of students to teachers is often far too large to allow for any real sense of intimacy between teacher and student. The escalating intensity of high-stakes testing, an atmosphere of competition, and a curriculum increasingly defined by state and national standards tends to encourage teachers to severely limit and narrow students' ability to make meaningful choices about their own learning.

Individual students are not seen as unique in any real sense, and perceived differences pose a challenge to the teacher and a threat to the order of the classroom. Out of necessity, teachers also tend to limit students' opportunities to apply their learning, integrate different areas of learning, and to be creative in the broadest sense. In general, students are not expected to — or even are not allowed to (Olson 2009) — compose and express new ideas or ways of seeing that have not been sanctioned by "experts." Educational activists and visionaries must work to design whole educational systems and settings where we can transcend many of these traditional impediments.

In the last few weeks of this last school year a number of factors came serendipitously together. My class had spent much of the year building a supportive community where individuality and difference were celebrated. We had the good fortune to have a number of teachers and mentors who modeled engagement and the creative process. And we shared a heightened sense of both tension *and* safety, challenge *and* skill as we built towards and practiced what were to be our several closing rituals. Finally, we enjoyed a loosening of our usual boundaries and time constraints as the familiar routine was modified to prepare for our closing. While I don't know precisely what combination of factors contributed to this wonderful period of time, I suspect it may be this "letting go of the reins" that was a key factor for us.

Moments of flow and peak experiences represent the creative outpouring of a dynamic in-and-out process. These transcendent encounters, when students are fully engaged and lose themselves in their own creativity can be useful barometers to measure whether or not a classroom is educating for life. The traditional model of a successful classroom, where learners are compliant, docile, where they can recall facts and perform learned skills with precision does not define the target for educators interested in educating for life. Let us instead reflect on what is needed in each particular learning environment to allow learners' creative juices to flow freely and abundantly. Let us reach towards ultimacy!

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Creating a New Educational Vision

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

An integrated curriculum that responds both to students' and society's real-world needs is essential if we are to truly educate for the future.

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

Ed passed away this past summer, and as a tribute to him and his unique contributions to education, Encounter is proud to republish, in quarterly chapter-length installments, his entire book, *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A Student-Centered Approach*.

This article is the third chapter from the book. The first two chapters were published in the Summer and Autumn 2010 issues of *Encounter*, respectively.

Until modern times young people could anticipate a future rather like that of their parents. Social change was that slow. Now young people face futures for which their parent's culture cannot prepare them. *The young must create the future themselves.* (Margaret Mead; emphasis added)

Before we can begin to design an integrated curriculum, we must define what is meant by curriculum. Most of us still think that is the focus of classroom attention and what, presumably, students learn in school. Given this context, it logically follows that the only difference between the present, textbook-based curriculum and an integrated curriculum is the content/subject matter that is to be studied. Implicit in this view is the tacit assumption that if there is something wrong with the curriculum, it can be fixed in much the same way that a defective machine part can be fixed — by replacing the flawed part with a new one. Ideally, this would involve little more than purchasing a new set of integrated textbooks with different, integrated information in them. Nothing could be further from the reality.

Eighty years ago Alfred North Whitehead (1959) proposed that "there is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations." Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) reinforced this point of view when she pointed out that the educational model created by our Western technological culture is the only one that defines curriculum in such a narrow way: "In other societies and times most of learning occurs outside the settings labeled as educational. Living and learning are everywhere founded on an improvisational basis." In their discussion of educational reform more than 15 years ago, Ernest Boyer and David Levine (n.d.) suggested that the curriculum focus on "the fundamental relationships, common experiences, and collective concerns that all humans share." Such a definition would include, as a minimum, *everything students ex-*

perience/learn in school — by feeling, watching, thinking, and doing. But even this definition is not broad enough to reflect "the fundamental relationships, common experiences, and collective concerns" of the real world. If we are to redefine curriculum as life in all its manifestations, we must also redefine the classroom to include the home, the community, and the world. In this expanded classroom everyone becomes both teacher and learner. Perhaps the *least* important component of this expanded educational experience is subject matter or content *as it is traditionally conceived*.

In order to reflect Life, an integrated curriculum must bridge the extensive network of chasms that exist among the various academic disciplines. Since the perspectives from which science, history or philosophy, mathematics, and art view life are obviously different, it should be equally obvious that these multiple viewpoints are complementary — no one of them can possess the ultimate or definitive perspective. Since the focus of each is the same, i.e., LIFE, it should also be obvious that there are extensive patterns of similarities and correlations among the many disparate academic subjects. Although it may be possible to catalog some of these similarities, the possible permutations are so numerous that no textbook could possibly accommodate them.

An integrated curriculum must also bridge the chasm that currently exists between the classroom and the world beyond its doors. Since what lies beyond the doors in Los Angeles may have little in common with life in Evanston, Atlanta, Dallas, or Fort Dodge, any curriculum that reflects the interests, questions, and concerns of students must be situation-specific. This means that *teachers must design their own integrated curricula*. But even that is no longer enough. If the curriculum is to be relevant to students in today's global information society, *students should be involved in the design process as much as possible*. In short, when designing a curriculum about life, there are no fixed rules and certainly no fixed content. There are, however, models, guidelines, and strategies like those presented in this book that may be used by teachers anywhere.

It is not necessary to start from scratch to design such a curriculum. Indeed, an integrated curriculum can even emerge within the constraints of traditional curriculum requirements. As seventh grade science teacher Bill O'Hagan discovered, it is possible to design a curriculum that meets all of the guidelines proposed here, while at the same time fulfilling departmental curriculum requirements. In this case, the departmental guidelines called for a unit on the human body. Bill began by asking students to identify the questions they wished to explore concerning the body. The results showed far more sophistication than he had anticipated from seventh grade students. Among some of the more obvious questions like "How do we hear?" "How do I speak?" and "How do I see?" were other more reflective questions: "What is puberty and why is it important?" "How are humans different from other animals?" "How do drugs affect the human body?" "What are the chances of getting skin cancer if I stay in, and stay out of the sun?" "How do organs work together?" "What happens when I am stressed?" "What do we really know about AIDS?" "How do I remember things?" "How do the cells in the body change?" Teams of students then decided on which questions they would research and present to the rest of the class. Integrated? Relevant? Provocative? Interesting? Substantive? The response of the students and the success of the unit was answer enough.

Barriers to an Integrated Curriculum

There are many barriers that keep teachers from embracing an integrated, learner-centered curriculum. My experience suggests that the major one may be fear of losing control of the classroom. Many teachers assume that a learner-centered classroom will lead to chaos. This is, of course, not true. Students recognize the necessity for structure and rules and when they "own" the rules, their will act responsibly. For example, students in one second grade classroom established their own rules: 1) We work quietly — library talk. 2) We share. 3) We put things back. 4) We plan our work and ask our questions before the teacher starts an instructional group. Needless to say, the rules worked.

A second barrier concerns motivation. The conventional wisdom which says that children won't learn without some external reward or punishment as a form of motivation is widespread among educators. It is a great irony that in any discussion of moti-

vation, the one factor that is almost universally overlooked is student interest. Like the rest of us, students learn what they are interested in learning! Every teacher has experienced the "teachable moment" when a student's interest is suddenly aroused by an "a ha!" event. Unfortunately, as teachers admit, such moments are rare. But they don't have to be. One creative and flexible kindergarten teacher designed an entire year's curriculum around a cocoon that one of her students brought in the first week of school! Under her imaginative, inspired, and nurturing guidance, the kids kept making new connections, seeing new patterns and relationships, and expanding the scope of their interests. She reports that the year was chock full of "a ha!" experiences as kids explored their world with new eyes, new questions, and newly acquired competencies. Like the rest of us, students don't want to spend time learning what someone else thinks is important. If they are forced to, unless we bribe them, they respond in the only way available to them — they tune us out!

But resistance to a learner-centered curriculum goes beyond discipline, control, and motivation. Teachers who embrace the latest theories on teaching and learning and are the first to implement new classroom methods like cooperative learning and portfolio assessments may still agree with educators like E. D. Hirsh (1987), author of the *Cultural Literacy* curriculum of core knowledge, that there is a basic set of concrete facts and hard data — what Bateson calls the "hallowed certainties" — which children in America need to learn in order to succeed in this society. This perspective is reinforced by both district- and state-mandated curriculum guidelines and by standardized testing programs that give priority to content-related evaluations. These, of course, reflect a general cultural expectation evident in the move to establish a national, content-based set of "world class" standards for educational success. This perspective is perpetuated by the great majority of textbooks whose publishers are more concerned about presenting noncontroversial content in an attractive package than with relevance and substance. Unfortunately, since most adults today are products of an education based on such standards, it is difficult for them to appreciate their inherent fallacies.

There is still another concern — that students don't know enough to ask intelligent questions and certainly aren't ready to make decisions about their own learning. As one high school history teacher argued vehemently, "My students don't even know anything about world history. How can they ask intelligent questions about it?" There is also the tacit assumption that the only thing of interest to adolescent kids is learning how to get along with their peers in general, and the opposite sex in particular. While there is a great deal of truth in both observations, when students' interests are taken into consideration, such reservations are unjustified. Like Bill O'Hagan, Sharon Mulcahy decided to give students a chance to explore their own questions within the context of eighth grade departmental requirements, which called for a unit on light and sound. Admittedly with a high level of anxiety, Sharon asked her students what they wanted to know about light and sound. At the end of a month's investigation, students studied everything from lasers to the Hubble telescope — moving far beyond the scope of any eighth grade textbook. The unit had been the most successful, diverse, and sophisticated — and not so incidently the most enjoyable — she had ever conducted.

Finally, there is the assumption among some middle school teachers that many, if not most, of their students are still "concrete" learners who are not yet capable of the levels of abstraction called for by an integrated curriculum. However, even elementary teachers who have implemented the ideas discussed here have found — often contrary to their own expectations — that their students are almost uniformly capable of highly abstract and speculative thought. Because they have misunderstood Piaget's work, many teachers haven't recognized that *when learning is made relevant in "concrete" ways to their own experiences, students can make highly abstract associations and imaginative speculations — in short, systems thinking.*

Thompson teacher Ruth Ann Dunton describes the response of her sixth grade class to a systemic exploration of "culture."

The Thompson Middle School, located in St. Charles, IL, was the site of one of the most ambitious applications of Clark's Integrated Curriculum. Many of the commentaries appearing in this article are from teachers and administrators at the school.

> As students became familiar with terminology, they seemed able to make astounding connections. Their understandings of the workings of cultures seemed to be beyond their years. They were able to relate what they were discussing in class, regardless of time frame, to themselves. They took off on their own, finding answers to questions they wanted to answer. It was truly impressive. Learning seemed so natural, discussions were lively, reflections were personal yet worldly. Imagery writing done the first week of school and then at the end of the year on the same topic showed tremendous growth in concern and knowledge of their world.

Ironically, some of the more encouraging responses to this kind of curriculum have been from children with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders. One high school special education teacher reported that "acting out" virtually disappeared in the classes where she was implementing some of the strategies discussed here. Where special education students are included in regular, grade-level science and social studies classes, instead of their normal struggle to retain facts, these students do quite well when shown the "big picture" and how it relates to them.

Jean Humke, special education teacher at Thompson, has described how two of her students were able to participate fully in an eighth grade science class where the integrated content was far more sophisticated than would have been considered possible for them in previous years. Although one "bright" boy had good auditory and mechanical reasoning skills, he could not read a traditional science textbook. In lab and group project work, he became the leader in his group. Someone else did the reading and recording, and he took over the hands-on part. His motivation improved and disruptive classroom behaviors disappeared. Another of Jean's students — an eighth grade girl — at first wouldn't even answer questions in class. However, by the end of the semester she was making oral presentations on team projects right along with the other members of her team. One of the surprises was seeing how much the regular children benefitted from having the "specials" in the classroom. Of all the barriers to substantive curriculum change, the most pernicious is the cynicism with which so many teachers have learned to live. It doesn't take long for a new, enthusiastic, visionary young woman or man to discover the political realities of institutional education. I have been confronted with this skepticism more times than I can remember from teachers who want to do things differently but whose hopes have been raised and dashed once too often. Because cynicism is difficult to express openly — especially to an administrator and sometimes even to oneself — teachers often raise the barriers discussed above as facades to protect themselves from the frustration, hurt, pain, and anger that many of them carry.

The point is that the barriers to an integrated curriculum, like most barriers to change, exist primarily, if not exclusively, in the mind. They reflect long-held, culturally conditioned assumptions that are not easy to relinquish — assumptions about schools and kids, about teaching and learning, and about life in general. Once these assumptions are identified and questioned, teachers are more willing to explore new ideas and risk new behaviors. Even then it is not easy. As eighth grade team leader Bonnie Pettebone observed, "These last three years have been the most difficult of my 19-year professional career. It's been like climbing out of a very deep hole." After a pause she added, "At the same time, they have been the most exhilarating and rewarding three years of my life." This kind of change is exceedingly difficult when faced alone. For most, it may be possible only with the support of a team of colleagues and the encouragement of an enthusiastic principal. This is why genuine learning communities are so necessary if substantive transformation is to occur in our schools.

An Integrated Curriculum Must Reflect A New Vision for Education

In a culture that actively fosters instant gratification, we seem to have forgotten the meaning and power of a long-term vision. In our frantic efforts to embrace the current fad, we are like the man who "jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions." In his conversation with Alice, the Cheshire Cat was more pragmatic. "If you don't know where you want to go, it doesn't matter which way you go from here." And so educators continue to promote what-

ever new program is in vogue, e.g., "multiple intelligences," "Outcome Based Education," or "TQM" (Total Quality Management), without any serious thought given to its long-term implications.

It seems to be a basic human need to have some sense of direction, a "vision of potential," for one's personal future. Children usually have some idea of what they want to be when they grow up; while their dreams may change as they approach adulthood, they will often spend many years and thousands of dollars in professional training in order to fulfill a personal vision. As might be expected, most of our personal visions are shaped by the dominant cultural norms of success reflected in the ubiquitous bumper sticker, "the one who dies with the most toys wins." Whatever vision exists also reflects the equally ubiquitous cultural norm of progress — the incremental expansion of human potential — engineered by technology — "ever upward" toward some undefined infinite horizon. In spite of the "downturns" in the economy, foreign competition, political chicanery and gridlock, and even holes in the ozone layer, most Americans seem to have an almost childlike faith that the long-term future is going to be a continuation of the present — only better. Only recently has this vision begun to be suspect. Unfortunately, few of us have an alternative vision to replace the one we have tacitly accepted.

Although most of us take our personal life-goals for granted, we are oblivious of the degree to which such cultural visions shape institutional behavior. For example, as long as the dominant cultural vision is that the next 25 years will be essentially an accelerated version of the past and present, educational policy and practice will continue in its present form. While a few new programs will be introduced, nothing essential will change. As teachers become increasingly cynical, their cynicism will be tempered by the never-ending seductive promises of powerful new technologies designed to make their jobs easier by transforming teaching and learning. According to this scenario, educational reform will consist of an endless series of innovative, patchwork programs, each of which has its "day in the sun" and then quietly fades into oblivion. Instead of embracing nicely packaged programs, we should be embracing visions.

If educational transformation is to become a reality, we must create a vision of education that is powerful enough to call forth the passion, energy, and untapped potential necessary to bring it into being. Peter Senge (1990) of MIT's Sloan School of Management has found that the level of commitment required to bring about *any* substantive organizational transformation requires a long-term perspective that is inspired by a powerful vision.

> People do not focus on the long term because they *have* to, but because they *want* to. In every instance where one finds a long-term view actually operating in human affairs, there is a long-term vision at work.

A generation ago John Kennedy created a national long-term vision of placing a man on the moon. Based on certain untested assumptions about our scientific and technological potential, this evocative vision literally transformed that potential into a reality. It wasn't long before the impact of Kennedy's long-term vision was felt in schools throughout America as science and math programs were strengthened and, in time, transformed.

The challenge to our generation is to create a cultural vision of a possible future for the next century that can capture our collective imaginations in the same way that Kennedy's vision did a generation ago. To paraphrase Daniel Burnam, chief architect of the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and author of the first master plan for that city — no small dreamer himself — "Have no little visions. They have no magic to stir men's blood!"

In the absence of a coherent cultural vision that challenges the status quo, it will not be easy for educators to evoke a vision of potential compelling enough to transform educational policy and practice. For some, the possibilities of liberating the unrealized potential of their students is challenge enough. For others, the challenges presented by a learner-centered, integrated curriculum will energize them because it taps into their own imaginative idealism. For the majority who have seen too many programs come and go, these challenges alone are not sufficient to cut through their passivity. Although a few schools and classrooms will be transformed, education as a whole will continue rela-

tively unaffected. The only thing that will overcome the cynicism and apathy and lead to systemic transformation is a vision of potential that will challenge the imaginations of educators in the same way Kennedy's vision challenged an entire nation. Since no such vision seems to be forthcoming in the political arena, enlightened teachers may have to create their own vision of the future.

It is appropriate that the space program — probably the greatest scientific and technological achievement of the twentieth century — provides us with the perspective necessary for such a vision. In a recent interview, America's senior astronaut, F. Story Musgrave (1994), described his space walk to repair the Hubble Space Telescope.

> The view of Earth — as something whole and interconnected — may be the most important thing to come out of the space program. That and a new sense of oneself as a "planetary citizen" — a citizen of the globe…. You have that big picture which can be really magical, of the entire forest as opposed to just seeing one tree at a time.

Given the twin realities that, like it or not, we are "planetary citizens" who face a set of ubiquitous global dilemmas, I suggest that the only vision that is powerful enough to reshape our educational system is a vision in which the present generation of students are *planetary citizens living cooperatively at peace in the global village*. Just as Kennedy's grand vision transformed science and math education, so a vision of global cooperation, because of its profound relevance to every facet of life, can transform the entire educational system. The relevance of this "macro" vision to educational transformation lies in the fact that it resonates at many different levels with the "micro" visions held by many teachers. For one thing, it reflects the cooperative learning and community building experiences that are beginning to make a real difference in many schools.

Even more significantly, a vision of cooperative behavior often touches teachers at a deep personal level because it reflects the dreams and aspirations that inspired them to enter the profession. Time after time over a 20-year period, I have asked teachers in my workshops to share the vision that motivated them to become teachers. When they begin to describe what their ideal or dream classroom would look like if they could teach the way they always wanted to, invariably they envision a classroom and curriculum similar to that discussed here. They have no difficulty imagining kids freely and cooperatively pursuing ideas, activities, projects, and questions of genuine interest to them.

Finally, a vision of global cooperation triggers a hope that lies deep within the human psyche — to live in a peaceful world in which everyone has enough and people can be free to pursue their own interests. While most teachers suspect that global cooperation is little more than a fantasy, they are willing to embrace it because they see the obvious correlation between the attitudes and behaviors being learned in cooperative classrooms and those necessary to make global cooperation a reality. In the absence of a cultural vision of this magnitude, the schools may be the best place to plant the seeds for a vision of global cooperation. Because children are by nature optimistic and because it is *their* future we are talking about, at least we can make certain they gain the knowledge and competencies necessary for participation and success in a global information society. In addition, it just may be that by prefiguring global cooperation in thousands of classrooms across our country, we are nurturing a vision of a possible future that will capture their imagination and energize them toward that end.

Since people only pursue long-term visions *because they want to* — I suggest that the first step in educational reform should be to invite teachers to "think big" and *create a vision of the future they desire*. In situations where teachers have been encouraged by superintendents or principals to create visions that reflect their deepest aspirations and dreams, they respond with the enthusiasm, passion, and commitment that can turn their dreams into reality precisely because they want to do it. Indeed, my informal surveys suggest that in many cases teachers would prefer having the freedom and support necessary to create their own ideal classrooms and schools than receive annual salary increments.

A Vision Must Relate to the Real World

While it is necessary that a vision for education reflect the dreams of teachers, it must also reflect the

real world. Otherwise, it will be little more than fantasy. But educators cannot continue to think like the generals who, it is said, are always preparing for the last war. Because, as Margaret Mead observed, "young people face futures for which their parent's culture cannot prepare them," we cannot base a long-term vision on present, short-term realities. The world of 2020 A.D., when today's students achieve positions of responsible leadership, will not look like today's world. In order to prepare these students to *create the future themselves*, we must exercise what James Botkin (1979) calls "anticipatory thinking" or what I call "systems thinking." Unless we can anticipate what life may be like in the early decades of the next century, we cannot identify the kinds of knowledge and competencies that students will require to fully and creatively participate in the decisions that shape their lives. There are three arenas in which students must be prepared to participate. The first and most immediate is the marketplace.

Any discussion about education for life in the twenty-first century must begin with what is euphemistically called economic necessity. Students must acquire the knowledge and competencies to successfully compete in the marketplace — a marketplace that has been literally transformed over the past century. Until World War II, the marketplace for most Americans was local. People found jobs where they lived. In part due to the Great Depression, but primarily because of wartime demands, the marketplace became national with more and more people moving to where the jobs were. Today the marketplace is global. And while most Americans will never actually work overseas, the global nature of the marketplace will shape the economy of every nation in the world in ways that as yet cannot be fully anticipated.

Robert Reich (1992) is probably correct when he identifies the symbolic analyst as the prototypical occupation for which many of the brightest and the best will compete. These will be the professional managers and technicians whose job will be "to identify, solve, and broker problems" that may arise anywhere in the world. Although Reich's implicit assumption is that there will be enough of these jobs for everyone who wants one, this clearly will not be the case. Since the majority of students will have neither the capability nor the inclination to become symbolic analysts, they will look for well-paying jobs in the more traditional occupations. However, if projections are correct, these are often the very jobs that are being eliminated by downsizing or replaced by automation. Given such limitations, the successful will be those who are skilled at what Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) calls "learning along the way." They will have the ability to master new competencies quickly and adapt previously learned ones to new and often diverse circumstances. Many others will become self-employed entrepreneurs.

Decades ago Peter Drucker (1985), probably America's foremost management authority, noted the emergence of a new entrepreneurial economy that was even then transforming American business, the American workforce, and American society. He predicted that this "middle tech" and "low tech" economy, based on "systemic innovation, entrepreneurial management, and entrepreneurial strategies," will continue to shape major sectors of the national economy in the foreseeable future. Ten years later, as the accuracy of his predictions suggests, it is possible to project an even greater impact of entrepreneurial activity on both the national but global marketplace in the decades to come. In order to be prepared for such a role — and who at 18 or 22 knows if they will someday work for themselves — functional literacy for potential entrepreneurs will include those skills necessary to be self-directed and work well alone or with others. These are, of course, the proficiencies that are essential for learning how to learn.

The second arena in which today's students must be prepared to actively participate is the social/political. Just as economic necessity dictates that people work for their living, social necessity dictates that in a democracy unless they are willing to allow others to make decisions for them, people must participate responsibly in the decisions that shape their lives. Observing the increased apathy of the American electorate, the late historian Christopher Lasch (1995) argued that the greatest threat to democracy will come, not from military dictatorships, but rather from the new, elite class of scientific managers of whom Reich's symbolic analyst is the prototype. Already, in the face of massive apathy and inertia, by

default these professional managers and technicians are already making the political, economic, social, and environmental decisions that are shaping life in the global village — decisions that nations will not or cannot make for themselves. Lasch writes,

> Today it is the elites — those who control the international flow of money and information, preside over philanthropic foundations and institutions of higher learning, manage the instruments of cultural production and thus set the terms of public debate — who abandon the middle class, divide the nation, and betray the idea of a democracy for all America's citizens.

He argues that the only viable alternative to some form of benign global oligarchy is one Thomas Jefferson proposed two centuries ago.

> I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, *the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion*. (emphasis added)

While thoughtful people may disagree about the extent of the danger facing democratic institutions, I think we would all agree that education for the twenty-first century must prepare students to embrace both the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in order to participate fully and thoughtfully in the decisions that will shape their lives.

The rationale for a third arena of participation has already been established in the discussion above. Whether our children like it or not, they will be planetary citizens. Whether they are prepared or not, they will inherit a set of profound and seemingly intractable global dilemmas that, if allowed to continue unresolved, may destroy civilization as we know it. If they are not prepared to exercise the privileges and responsibilities of planetary citizenship, there already exists an elite class of technocrats prepared to address the multiple crises that will become full-blown in the next decade. The only alternative may well be some form of global cooperation based on democratic principles of self-governance. To accomplish this goal will require a fundamentally different way of thinking about ourselves and our relationship to the world — a way of thinking psychologist Roger Walsh calls a "global psychology" — the ability to think globally and act locally. Without negating the necessity for effective scientific management at both national and global levels, I am suggesting that *unless scientific management in all its myriad forms is shaped and driven by a powerful vision of an egalitarian form of global cooperation based on democratic principles of self-governance*, it will become a tool of absolute control by an elite class of technocrats whose benign vision of "one world" is a global village held together by military and technological might — Orwell's *1984* twenty-five years later. To counter this, today's students must be prepared as adults to assume both the privileges and the responsibilities of global citizenship.

In light of these real-world necessities, our educational vision/mission must be one in which *teachers and students are working cooperatively to insure that every student who graduates is functionally literate, that is, they are prepared to respond deliberately and creatively to the demands of economic necessity, enlightened and informed social responsibility, and qualified planetary citizenship*.

In a generalized way, functional literacy includes flexibility, transferability of skills, proficiency in anticipating problems, an aptitude for knowing more with less information, the capacity to improvise by making decisions without enough information, a willingness to do more and be satisfied with less, tolerance for and the ability to work and live cooperatively in the midst of diversity, change, ambiguity, uncertainty, and paradox, a high level of self-direction and personal discipline, and skill in listening carefully, articulating clearly, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Finally, functional literacy must include the capacity to consciously and deliberately create personal and collective visions of desired futures and the competencies necessary to make those futures manifest. This is a tall order. But I would argue that functional literacy is, and always has been, the essentially innate capacity that has enabled humans to not only survive but thrive. If functional literacy is a desired outcome for our graduates, teachers must find ways to tap their own and their students' innate capacities, thus enabling students to acquire the in-

trinsically different and distinctive types of insight, knowledge, and skill competencies discussed below.

The Insights, Knowledge, and Skills Required for Functional Literacy

The primary insight for calling forth this innate potential is the intuitive understanding that we live in a universe where everything is connected to everything else. Fundamental to a global psychology, this insight is also the indispensable source and essence of personal empowerment. If everything is connected to everything else, then each individual makes a difference because everything one does affects everything else. While for most of us this understanding will begin as an espoused theory, once it is transformed into a theory-in-use, thinking and acting in terms of connectedness will become second nature.

The core of common knowledge that unlocks our innate knowing is *an intrinsically different kind of knowledge* than the fact-based knowledge that has dominated education since its beginning. In a society "drowning in information and starved for knowledge," an educational system that stresses the *quantity* of information over the *quality* of information is woefully out of touch with reality.

The kind of knowledge necessary to become a lifelong learner is the kind that enables one to know more with less information. To return to Story Musgrave's analogy, while in the past education has focused on the trees, it must now focus on the "big picture of the entire forest as opposed to just seeing one tree at a time." This "big picture" knowledge highlights the whole rather than the parts. Like the picture of a jigsaw puzzle, it provides a context for understanding the structure and the relationships that enables one to see how the puzzle pieces fit together. Every academic discipline is in essence a thought system with its own internal structure or conceptual framework. This structure consists of the concepts and principles that are essential to the discipline and the way it is organized. Once you have grasped this structure (the big picture), it is relatively simple to identify the specific relationships and detailed information that you wish to investigate or is relevant to your need. In short, with this systems perspective, *you know how to learn what you need to learn, when you need to learn it*.

This common core includes the knowledge of whole systems, knowledge of the principles that govern all living systems, intuitive knowledge, and contextual knowledge.

Knowledge of whole systems. Our understanding of how living systems work as undifferentiated wholes is based on studies in ecology. Because the planetary ecological systems are the most basic systems on Earth, they are the prototype for all systems. Indeed, a case can be made that all living systems are intrinsically ecological systems.

Knowledge of the fundamental principles and concepts that govern all living systems. These principles and concepts provide the conceptual framework for understanding the connectedness of things. Because of their universal applicability to all thought systems, they are powerful cognitive bridges that make possible the transfer of learning from one arena to another.

Intuitive knowledge. Intuition is our way of tapping into the genetic knowledge and archetypal wisdom that characterize the human species. This capacity for direct knowledge of the world is the source of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity.

Contextual knowledge. This is the kind of knowledge that emerges from what Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) calls "peripheral vision" — the ability to recognize patterns and relationships. This knowledge of connections and correlations is the kind of knowledge that enables one to explore, understand, and create contexts of meaning.

The skill competencies necessary to become a lifelong learner are embedded in and activated by the integrative process I call systemic thinking/learning. These include competence in what are often referred to as the basics, self-reflection, communication and dialogue, and living responsibly.

The so-called basics: Reading, writing, math, and computer literacy. Contrary to conventional wisdom, both research and experience make it clear that success in the so-called basics is contingent upon having a "big picture" perspective. Just as children learn language and numbers experientially and contextually, when given an appropriate conceptual framework, people

can readily master the details of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Self-reflective consciousness: Thinking about the way we think, the way we make decisions, and reflecting on the consequences of those decisions. Our ability to make conscious or thoughtful — full of thought — decisions is contingent upon the capacity to reflect upon our thought processes, feelings, and actions. Self-reflection includes the capacity for unbiased self-assessment and is essential to critical and creative thinking, indeed, to all of the so-called higher order thinking strategies. In addition, self-reflective consciousness includes the capacity for disciplined contemplation, visualization, and imagination.

The fundamental human capacities for communication and dialogue, cooperation, conflict resolution, empathy, and artistic self-expression, e.g., through art, music, dance, drama, and storytelling. Humans are by nature social animals with the innate capacities necessary to live harmoniously in close association with other humans. These human potentials can only fully emerge when one is an integral part of a community of learners. Here one can learn to listen with open ears and see with open eyes. Here one can experience empathy. Only in community can one learn to speak directly, without dissemblance or ambiguity. When we are members of a learning community, we are free to express ourselves in whatever modes we choose, knowing that the community is enriched by our presence.

The capacity to live responsibly. Responsibility comes from a Latin root word meaning "to pledge or promise." This means that responsibility is a way of living in relationship. Responsibility is grounded in what might be called emotional literacy or personal integrity, that is, the integration of all of our relationships — to ourselves, to others, and to the great mystery of life. Genuine responsibility can only be learned when one is free to make mistakes. Thus, it has little meaning apart from a community of learners where mistakes are understood to be integral to the learning process. Here, one learns to be accountable for one's own feelings, beliefs, values, learnings, decisions, and life choices. Here one can fully accept, honor, and celebrate one's humanness with all of its paradoxes, ambiguities, uncertainties, and inconsistencies. Because responsibility can be learned and expressed only in community, its ultimate expression is learning to live with and do for others as we would have them live with and do for us — the Golden Rule. In essence, to live responsibly means living a life of service to fellow humans and to all living things.

All of the above might be summarized in two well-known injunctions: "Know thyself" and "To thine own self be true." While at first glance the list of knowledge and competencies may appear idealistic, they have been part of the lives of women and men throughout history and are evident in the experience of humans in every culture from prehistory to the present. They describe what Jean Houston calls "the possible human" and represent the *sine qua non* for our children and succeeding generations.

Whether they are prepared to do so or not, our children will create their own future. Their choices may well be between global cooperation or interminable armed conflict; between living productively in a world that honors human rights and community values or existing marginally in a world filled with greed, anger, crime, violence, and fear; between accepting the necessity to share scarce resources so that everyone has enough or facing the inevitable destiny of ecological catastrophe. Given these alternatives, every thoughtful person would choose the former. Just as future choices will be made by our children and their children, at this juncture in human history, the choice is ours to make. Although we prefer to deny it, to a significant extent *our children's future will depend on the future that we choose*. The great educational challenge is to adequately prepare the present generation of children to make wise decisions about their future.

Conclusion

Many men on the Western frontier taught themselves to read and write. Carrying dog-eared copies of the Bible, Blackstone, Dickens, and other nineteenth century classics, they learned to read by firelight and pondered what they had read as they rode herd in the stillness of the night. A few, without the help of any formal schooling, became competent teachers, ministers, lawyers, and politicians. This leads one to wonder how they were able to do this without the aid of teachers, textbooks, phonics, worksheets, or a grading system. It also raises the

question of why people today can’t seem to learn as naturally as men and women did a century ago before modern schools were invented.

I believe the answer is succinctly stated in the words of my middle son who on the night before he began school said to his mother, “You know, mom, today was the last day of my life that I could do what I want to do when I want to do it.“ And so he went off to be educated — to be socialized — to be enculturated — to learn to be a productive citizen. And what did he learn? He learned that knowledge was clearly divided into neatly labeled little boxes like science and math and history. He learned that life was ruled by clocks and bells. He learned that the rewards came when you listened to the teacher and memorized what she told him was important. He learned to raise his hand to ask questions, and that some questions — like “What is life all about?“ aren't good questions to ask in school. He learned to tune out when things got tough.

And while, in spite of the system, my son “made it,“ many don’t. And, ironically, the price of failure is paid not only by those who didn't make it, but also by our society that — believe it or not — seems bent on stamping out most of that enormous energy, curiosity, potential, and creativity that is the heritage and birthright of all children. The time has come to transform the educational system so that this generation of children and the next and the next are truly empowered to embrace an educational perspective that is contextual and to create a better and more humane world for themselves and for humankind.

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Discovering a Subject

An Intimate Affair

Carolyn Mamchur, Linda Apps,
Stephen Nikleva and Karen Kurnaedy

Artists create in part, of course, to be understood, but even more they create to understand the thing that haunts and even pursues them.

Artists have known for a long time what matters most is discovering a subject that you want, indeed almost need, to write about, to dance, to chisel, to paint. It is the beginning of it all. It often feels as if the subject finds you, it is that guttural, but in truth, we find it.

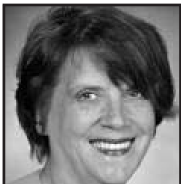
The writer gets ideas by spending part of his time in a state of open susceptibility. One person has said that a writer is a man with his skin off. He is particularly aware, uniquely receptive to impressions and ideas. He reads, he listens, he looks, he tastes, he touches. He is in contact with life in an uncritical way, accepting life (Murray 1968, 2).

Writers have told us of the importance of discovering a subject over and over again. And they have told us that what matters most, is "what matters most."

"Telling these truths is your job. You have nothing else to tell us" (Lamott 1995, 103). A subject comes from a place of deep interest, and a deep needing to know. We write in part to be understood, of course, but even more, we write to understand, understand that thing which haunts us. "You have to listen to what's gnawing away at your gut" (Murphy 1997, 35).

As Apps (2007, 13) observes, discovery requires that the subject to be approached by the artist

> with an openness that is neither presumptive nor prescriptive; approached with a willingness to not know. For discovery to take place, the artist must be open to possibility, without expectations. It is not a definitive or declarative process, but fluid mindfulness, embodied in "a state of open susceptibility" (Burnett 1983, 10). "The effective writer courts and appreciates the unex-



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> pected, the unplanned, the contradictory, the surprise" (Murray 1995, 46).

It is essential to remember that the creative end is never in full sight at the beginning and that it is brought wholly into view only when the process of creation is completed. It is not found by scrutiny of the conscious scene, because it is never there (Gheslin 1952, 21).

Most writers have one main story to tell. I write about childhood. Relationships between adults and children. Over and over again, trying to unravel mysteries of my past that still haunt me. Sometimes I actually fear the possibility of fully understanding, if such a thing is possible, or of understanding enough to satisfy myself. Will I then stop writing? Or will the writing fail?

One of my favorite authors, Sam Shepard, writes of his relationship with his father. *Buried Child* won him the Pulitzer Prize on that topic. Over and over again the topic emerges. In 2007, I traveled to Trinity in Dublin to see the opening of Sam Shepard's play, *Kicking a Dead Horse*. Though raw and funny, with his usual dark comedic brilliance and outrageous daring, it did not break my heart. He had finished writing about his big subject. I was a bit disappointed, but my loyalty to Shepard would not permit my saying so. *Ages of the Moon* premiered in Dublin's Abbey Theatre the next year. I did not travel there to see it, but I hope that his old subject has reawakened. As noted by a Abbey Theatre spokesperson, this play involves the struggle of two friends who bicker over love, friendship, and rivalry (Doyle 2009, para. 2). Perhaps his father figure has morphed. I am thrilled the play is coming to New York next year. I know I'll be there.

Discovering a subject is a complex and powerful issue for artists. This article will present the experiences of three different artists as they discovered their subjects in the visual arts, in choreography and dance and in musical narrative. Linda, the visual artist's re-occurring theme is her troubling questions around boundaries. Karen, the choreographer, dancer's theme is motherhood and responsibility. Stephen, the songwriter, musician's theme is curiosity and empathy. Stephen's main theme is more of an attitude than an actual issue. All of these big ideas were the spines behind each of the artist's specific story. Boundaries became an artistic photographic collage about touch. Motherhood and responsibility became a dance representing the sorrow of mother earth. Curiosity and empathy became two sound narratives of the lives of two marginalized musicians. My students had the courage to come to terms with themselves and to rely on who they are in their struggle for authenticity.

The specifics of their works grew out of a larger theme that is universal in nature. All creative work that reaches an audience must be both universal and specific; universal so that it can appeal to others, be understood by others, have significance for others; and specific, so that it belongs to the world of the artist. "Whether a writer writes 'grapefruit,' or 'God,' or 'freedom,' his indispensable subject matter is the world beyond the page" (Dillard 1982, 71).

In conversation with John Tusa (2005), "the artist Anish Kapoor explains how any phenomenon being explored can only be recognized and understood if it already relates to a universal concept" (Apps 2007, 11).

> Darkness is a fact that we all know about, an idea about the absence of light. Very simple. What interests me, however, is the sense of the darkness that we carry within us, the darkness that's akin to one of the principal subjects of the sublime — terror. A work will only have deep resonance if the kind of darkness that I can generate, let's say a block of stone with a cavity in [it] can have a darkness, is resident in you already; you know it already. (Tusa 2005, 155)

Artist after artist speak to the universal nature of subject, of the steep climb to discovering truth, whether in writing, drawing, or dancing.

Though "*what* the artist chooses as subject is important, *how* he chooses" (Apps 2007, 12) is equally important, especially to educators. Discovering a subject

> is an activity that must be impassioned and energized with emotion … a personal truth that has captured and suspended the artist in epiphany, recognition, curiosity that triggers an emotionally-driven response. Lari Pittman [relays to] interviewer David Pagel (1997, 174), "I'm fascinated with the pulse of birth and decay, birth and decay. But at the same time it's horrifying."

Discovering a subject involves focusing, framing, observing, accepting. It demands the artist chooses topics that she consciously and subconsciously knows and cares about. But how does one do that? How do we really discover those things that drive us? Those things that whisper to us in dreams and nightmares?

Kogawa (1986, 147) observes:

> Well, I had been asked many years before to write about the internment experience and had not been able to…. I did not want to address my Japanese-Canadianness or the people or any of it. It was horrific for me just to even think about all that stuff; it still is. I had spent my childhood convinced that the way to live was to be as non-Japanese as possible. I felt a kind of revulsion at the whole experience of ethnicity. I was prompted to write by some sense of "obedience" to the pen. The pen or the hand seems to have its own language, logic, wisdom, direction. So with *Obasan* there was that kind of "nonknowing" direction that I simply followed.

Graham (1991, 9-10) also felt our past experiences have a deep influence on our choices for art making. She agrees that our subject may come from outer inspiration or from deep within us, but she goes even farther than this by positing:

> For all of us, but particularly for a dancer with his intensification of life and his body, there is a blood memory that can speak to us. Each of us from our mother and father has received their blood and through their parents and their parents' parents and backward into time. We carry thousands of years of that blood and its memory. How else to explain those instinctive gestures and thoughts that come to us, with little preparation or expectation?

Dancer and choreographer Tharp (2003, 62), adds to this notion of memory as an aid to discovering your subject by observing:

> There are as many forms of memory as there are ways of perceiving, and every one of them is worth mining for inspiration. Memory, as we most frequently think of it, encompasses every fact and experience that we can call up at will from our cranial hard drives.

Toni Morrison ([1987] 1998, 198-199) describes this memory as a "flooding":

> You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally, the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory — what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding."

The artist Murphy (1997, 35) describes how she comes to discover her subject. "My experience has been that I keep discovering my obsessions little by little. Something keeps cropping up in my work again and again — and suddenly I'll realize what it's about."

Implication for Educators

If artists have known the complexity, the deep dark work of finding one's own truth, the creative path of gathering, sorting, accepting, rediscovering, trusting, then why is it that teachers have not? Is it that teachers have too seldom actually experienced the excitement, the fear, the hope, the thrill of discovering their own subjects and producing their own creative works?

Perhaps the first thing we can learn from what artists have been saying and doing, and what these three students have said and done is to give teachers the opportunity to create art, and teach them to do it well. Not essays or ideas assigned by professors, but work that is theirs. The opportunity to paint and dance and write music that insists upon truth and relevancy for the writer, the painter, the dancer, the recording artist. The gestalt of creation is, perhaps, the only real way teachers can be convinced to give students the space and time and opportunity to explore subjects in the manner which results in real cre-

ative process and products that please artist and audience. In becoming involved in projects that help students and teachers create meaning in their lives by exploring ideas about themselves and the world in which they live in, we are helping them connect "with the many ways there are or might be of being alive" (Greene 2001, 50).

This is especially relevant to the teaching of composition which is taught in every school in the country.

The second important lesson is that it is meaningless for teachers to assign irrelevant topics for students. Students need to be encouraged to discover and write about their own truths. The tragic reality is that too often students write to prove they have read a short story or the chapter on the French Revolution. Too often students act out dramas selected by teachers, play music dictated by the arrangement of the band.

Choice gives power to the student, power to the artist, power to the work. Choice becomes the second most important lesson related to art-making.

Third, it became apparent from the three very different experiences that it would be almost impossible to predict and prescribe how the student will actually come to discover the subject that is hers. The teacher's role becomes one of creating opportunity, of encouraging engagement, of accepting the student's ideas, of being willing to live in that nebulous world where intuition reigns, and discovery happens.

The discovery happens to the student. It cannot be given to the student. It cannot be forced upon the student. It cannot be lectured or drilled or tested. It belongs to the realm of "perceptual acuity, attunement, wonderment, novelty, and emergence" (Irwin 2003, 63).

In order for students to be able to enter this world, the teacher is responsible for creating an atmosphere of trust and risk, one in which students may enter what Tharp (2003, 6) calls the empty space of entering a "white room." "Filling this empty space constitutes my identity." How does one do this? I believe it lives in the realm of relationship, that important and powerful relationship between teacher and student and the ability of the teacher and student to dialogue in a way that Buber described as I and Thou (Buber [1958] 2000), which is made possible "if the people who are genuinely trying to converse, listen not only to what is said but also to what is felt without having been expressed in words" (Hodes 1971, 11). Such a dialogue pays attention to everything, to learning that takes place in the subconscious regions as well as on the surface of the fingertips and the tip of the tongue. "If writing is thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning, it is also awe and reverence and mystery and magic" (Morrison 2008, 71).

Such a receptive listening and sharing can only happen when a genuineness, an authenticity is there. The teacher cannot pretend to listen, pretend to care, pretend to believe in the student and his work. The teacher can let go of many of the more routine and control-centered ideas of management and the super responsibility of making all the decisions and having all the ideas to one of paying attention and being real. To one of deep caring and trusting. To one of joy.

This is the fourth lesson one can garner. Joy.

Appendix 1: A Visual Artist Discovers Her Subject by Linda Apps

An artist may use any number of methods at any stage throughout her career in order to find her subject. The primary factor is that she is drawn to it because it relates to her personally and passionately.

I came to the topic *The Laying on of Hands* through curiosity. The laying on of hands was a phrase that I had heard many times before, a phrase that always held a touch of the mystical, ephemeral, and magical for me. Now, for some reason, it did more than that — it intrigued me, caused me to pause and question its meaning.

As I spent time thinking about the laying on of hands, I began to consider the possible anomalies in the phrase that for so long had been associated with miracles, healing, and love. I began to consider the physical implications of hands laid upon the body: welcoming hands or unwelcoming hands, hands of healing or hands of abuse. I recognized an inherent presumptiveness of caring and healing in the phrase that warranted investigation. What does the imprint, the mark of touch look like? What residue is left behind? And of course, how did other people perceive this phrase? What images or thoughts did it hold for them? Perhaps the effect of touch on our bodies had been underestimated. Perhaps touch had been taken for granted.

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It is this type of questioning that often causes artists to take notice of and confront an issue they wish to explore. The writing process suggests avoiding any pre-judgment of a subject in order to be open to what the subject may offer. If I were to learn more about this topic I would need to move from the general to the specific, as suggested by Murray (1968, 1985) and Mamchur (2001).

I began to pay attention to anything that related to touch. I became more acutely aware of anyone touching me and anyone I touched and the discomfort or intimacy this created. As a follow-up to a presentation on touch, I asked educators to rethink how they did or did not use touch in their classrooms and what thoughts came to mind when viewing their own painted handprints. I explored the Internet for images of hands, handprints, working hands, idle hands, for bodies bruised from hands gone astray. I took note of how the filmmakers in the movie *Crash* presented their concept of touch and listened intently to the opening lines.

> It's the sense of touch…. Any real city you walk, you know, you brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A. nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we just crash into each other just so that we can feel something. (2005)

This was not only a search to understand how touch played out in the world, but a search for materials and ideas that I could use to compose a work of art that reflected this subject. I thumbed through art books in search of how other artists had depicted figures touching each other. Interestingly, I came across few paintings before the Romantic Era of figures touching each other unless it involved small children, acts of violence, damnation, or dying.

As with any subject, it is only theory until you begin, until something is externalized, something exists on the paper or canvas before you. I began in the common, awkward way that new artistic ventures often begin. I drew and painted bad images of hands and incoherent religious motifs. I applied areas of color that I hoped would replicate the energy I envisioned flowing from healing hands. None of this work was good or satisfying so I revisited the subject and returned to something simpler.

Reworking, reinventing, rediscovering is standard in the artistic process. At times it is nothing more that a reconnection with your original intention and commitment; the reason you were first impassioned by the subject. The artist John Willenbecher (2002) comments on the continual re-visioning of his paintings:

> Perhaps if I change the painting this way, and look at it this way, I'll be able to see something, see a way to progress. And then I will begin to work on it some more. And then I'll get myself to a point where I don't know what to do, so perhaps I will turn it again.

So I started again, and again. I wanted to see what the laying on of hands looked like and the physical impact of that action. Although I felt that I was unable to replicate the imperceptible emotion and energy that may accompany touch, I could reify the handprint. I began by making black and white photographic images of handprints on my body. I kept the image compositionally simple, clean, unencumbered and raw. At this point, photography became my primary medium of choice.

If I accepted the notion that one's real subject is discovered through process, then I needed only to begin, keeping in mind that one dominant subject with a consistent premise would eventually emerge. As I proceeded, questions continually arose about my dominant subject and whether it was present in both the individual pieces and the series. And more importantly, did the images still embody the concepts that made the topic personally relevant to me? Chuck Close commented on how he believes the personal enters into the artistic equation: "If you ask yourself an interesting question, your answer will be personal. It will be interesting just because you put yourself in the position to think differently" (Storr 1998, 90).

Once I had the black and white images in front of me, I felt I had successfully begun to work with the subject. I also realized that there were many different roads I could take. This brought back memories of crossroads that, as an artist, I have reached many times before. Not the memory of pleasant crossroads of opportunity, but crossroads where I felt confused and uncertain, unsure of which direction to take.

I can provide many reasons as to why I felt I had arrived at this juncture, but I knew that there was no going back. The only options were to stand still or move forward. Keeping in mind that subject is something worked and reworked and does not just appear, offered me the luxury of moving forward while moving towards a dominant theme. Eventually I knew that I would have a larger understanding of where I was or wanted to go.

Appendix 2: A Musician Discovers His Subject by Stephen Nikleva

> I think every work of art expresses, more or less purely, more or less subtly, not feelings and emotions the artist has, but feelings which the artist knows; his insight into the nature of sentience, his picture of vital experience, physical, and emotive and fantastic. (Langer as cited in Eisner 2008, 7)

Langer is describing the interrelationship that exists between who we are and what we do, to show how a work of art is capable of being a representation of all we know and feel. In his book *The Art Spirit*, Robert Henri (1984, 71) spoke about the relationship of the artist to his work as being manifest in the power and complexity of a brush stroke.

> Strokes carry a message whether you will it or not. The stroke is just like the artist at the time he makes it. All the certainties, all the uncertainties, all the bigness of his spirit and all the littlenesses are in it.

A subject is something you already know from your lived experience. Just as Walker (2001, xii) has said that, "there's no such thing as a good painting about nothing," we could say the same about music. "Discovering your subject," can be understood as the forming of a relationship or understanding between you and your material.

My *curiosity* about different kinds of music like Eastern European folk styles led me to perform with the Roma swing player Lache Cercel, and it was through this that I was introduced to Tamara. Her passionate Russian singing captivated many of my fellow songwriters like Linda McRae and Ana BonBon who heard her sit in with Lache's group at the Kino café. While curiosity can lead us to different experiences, it takes the ability to be *attentive* to notice the details that give birth and animate art.

I invited Tamara to record at my home studio. When she first arrived to audition the songs that we would later record, I set up a mic to capture this run through. Tamara burst into the room exuding an excitement and energy that was palpable. This was an opportunity for her to tell her story, and she was ready. Tamara sat in the center of the room playing acoustic guitar and singing, while a few feet away, I was at my desk managing the recording and playing mandolin.

It was mid-day, as I remember the light coming in from the windows that look into the walkway beside my apartment. Tamara had brought her 20-year-old daughter, who sat on the couch behind us. I think she thought her daughter could play some hand drums, which she attempted to do during the recording; or maybe she was there for support. Tamara began with a spoken introduction.

> Just like a village, right? My father grew up in a village. It's a beautiful morning, 4 o'clock in the morning, they sleeping peacefully before the war, the Second World War started, he was 13 years old and that is how the morning comes, and then comes the war.

The song had been interrupted by Tamara's talking and was never used on her CD, yet I was drawn back to work on it, to see what I could do with the material. A memo I wrote while reflecting on my process of creating this sound document captures my reaction at that time: "Her first sung melodic phrase had a haunting quality that lodged in my brain. Its rich mixture of pathos, of pain, and beauty, had spoke to me in some way."

Was Tamara's singing somehow bringing back memories or associations for me? I am of Eastern European ancestry on one side of my family, including some Russian, and although I don't recall hearing any of this music while growing up, I do recall that after the age of six we would visit these grandparents and listen as they sometimes conversed with each other in Ukrainian. I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that I felt that Tamara's singing embodied an aspect of "authenticity," of lived experience I responded to.

The creative process of developing this material into what became the composition "Tamara's Dad" was messy. Paths were taken that didn't work out, ideas were tried that proved difficult to execute; but there were also moments of excitement when something worked out or led to fresh insights. I didn't know what the finished product was going to be like but I knew when I was happy with the direction it was taking. My curiosity was sparked and I was engaged.

I returned to the song once more after studying electronic music at Vancouver City College, this time bringing in new ways of thinking and conceptualizing, which led to new ways of working with sound. Rather than eliminating the talking that occurred during the recording, I would try to incorporate it into the piece. This

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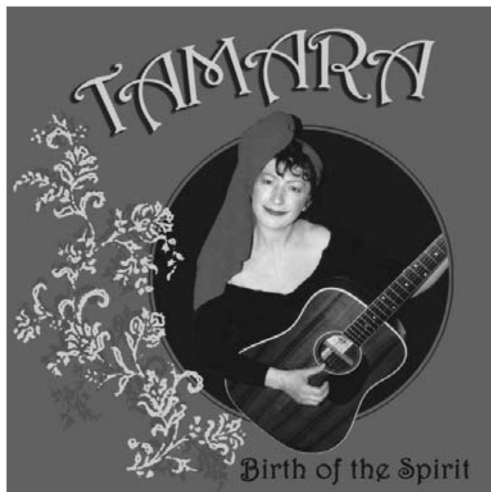
conceptual shift allowed me to move ahead. I introduced a new layer to the song in the form of electro acoustic orchestration; feeling that the sense of lived experience I responded to in her voice was now being conveyed by these additions. I felt like I was amplifying the emotion I heard in the song, while also showcasing a more personal relationship to the material. Layering, in creating a denser or thicker texture allows for a fuller richer soundscape that, like Geertz's (1973) use of the term "thick description," aims at offering a fuller evocation of Tamara's story.

Powerful themes of family, war, and death were established in Tamara's short but powerfully evocative introduction. These themes, combined with her sense of drama, offered hints, or foreshadowing, that I built on to provide a sense of narrative development to the piece. For example, the war gave me the idea of creating sounds to resemble the crackling of a radio, or of explosions, which gives the feeling of being swallowed up as the tonality of the song is gradually overtaken by the sounds of war.



By having her daughter present, Tamara was already introducing the element of family into the equation. Although on the original recording her daughter is barely audible, I focused in on her comments feeling that they added an important ingredient by providing another perspective. It was difficult work because to be useful her comments needed to be distinct from other sounds, as well, since in the background, the audio signal was weak and rather noisy. It was only later, after the piece was "finished," that I began to appreciate the role her daughter might play in Tamara's life. Her daughter saying, "It's OK Mama," "Don't be that way," and "That's alright," may reflect their real life relationship in which her daughter helps "contain" the moods of Tamara. In a sense, then, her daughter helps "frame" or "ground" both Tamara and this sound document. Her comments, which I initially viewed as distracting to the recording, now took on a central importance, acting like a recurring musical phrase to tie the composition together.

These things did not become clear in any one moment, but rather unfolded as I played with sounds and tried things out. There were times when I felt like I was painting with sound, and I was reminded of Apps's (2007, 53) description of a visual artist at work.

> Leo watches closely for the shapes that emerge from the drying pools of colour, the scrapings and the splatters of paint. It is from these emerging shapes that Leo discovers his subject.

Apps found that his work grew out of the painting itself. Like Leo interacting both physically and aesthetically with his paint, I feel I am interacting with sound and with layers of sound. As I do this I am making choices, I am engaging in the creation of meaning in the absence of rules. As Eisner (2004, 6) says, "…the work yields clues that one pursues."

Appendix 3: A Choreographer Discovers Her Subject by Karen Kurnaedy

Abbs (1989, 199-200) reflects on the complexity of all the functions of the body that contribute to and play into the creation of any work of art:

> …we must not forget that art making is a wholly natural activity, an astonishing outgrowth of instinct. Its blossom may open out in consciousness but its roots are down deep in affective impulse, in muscular and nervous rhythms, the beat of the heart, the intake and release of breath, patterns of perception, unconscious coordinates of the limbs, the obscure, fluctuating, dimly sensed movements of the organism, in the preconceptual play of psyche.

This notion that the body and its natural rhythms are the source of artistic creation can be reflected in music, dance and the rhythm of speech, which is the basis for prose and poetry. Our subject for art making may emerge from our subconscious in the form of deep or remarkable connections or intuitions, memories, or reflections of experiences that are prompted and encouraged by everything we have witnessed, read, or viewed. As creators, we try to convey our subject in some form and then let it stand alone to be interpreted by our audience.

Creating choreography is an exciting process. As a dancer/choreographer it is a special moment when you feel intrigued by an idea, experience the spark lit by an im-

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age or story, or when your curiosity is ignited by a piece of music. For dance creation a subject may be discovered or stimulated by just about anything the choreographer comes in contact with, be it memories, experiences, or stimuli from the world. But the idea or subject must stir the body to move and discover what will emerge physically from the first inklings of that idea.

During a grad class on creativity, I put into practice an idea from our text by Tharp (2003) that suggested we keep a "box" of ideas as a source of inspiration. I documented my process:

February 8, 2007: I am putting things in a box for the "Creativity" class final project. So far I have Argentine Tango music (an idea for a passionate dance) and material on ecology and our state of crisis concerning global warming garnered from the investigation my Grade Five class is doing on the ecology of our planet. This work has intrigued me as an idea for a dance piece. I also recently listened to a piece of music by Barber which really captures the mood of what I feel would be the Earth crying in sorrow over its destruction. I had a picture in my mind of the Earth teetering on the brink; it could go one way or another depending what people will do in the future. I had an image of tightrope walking and how our future is hanging in the balance. (Note that all are movement phrases.)

Can we save our planet for future generations? I think about this a lot as I drive my car. I am often concerned with life and death and birth. I think about my children and my own mother as I think about the earth. I am not sure why.

February 15, 2007: I am continuing to put things in my box for the final project. While exercising the other day with a giant gym ball I began to think of the earth as a big rubber ball. I give it a hard hit and imagine the pain.

March 5, 2007: I am doing a lot of research on the Greek god Atlas. I have this picture of him holding up the World. I begin to picture myself holding the earth. A stream of verbs comes to me. I write them down and put them in my box of ideas. I imagine the verbs as movements: dig, kick, strip, rape, bury, pour, dumb, use, abuse, ill, cop, destroy, spew, pound, jab.

March 6, 2007: I add a strobe light and have been experimenting with it. I would like to do more than one dance and perhaps use rave or techno beat music, something harsh and grinding to illustrate destruction and use the Earth ball in this piece too. I begin to add verbs that would not be so destructive: recycling, reusing and reducing, replanting, bicycling instead of driving. The destructive verbs don't fit with the Barber music. But the rave music works really well. It is high energy and I have an image of humanity blindly pounding away at the planet, oblivious to all the harm it is causing.

March 12, 2007: I have done a lot more research about the Earth and can't believe I overlooked the obvious image of Mother Earth. This image provides lots of new movement ideas. I see our planet protected and loved by Mother Earth, held and caressed, and dismayed at its current treatment by humans. She is a "being" that takes part in the Earth's journey around the universe and in its rotations among the other planets.

Tharp (2003) aptly calls the underlying idea of a piece its "Spine." She says if you stay true to your spine your work or piece will have consistency and hang together.

The spine for this work is definitely "saving the Earth," and creating an awareness of humankind's destruction of our planet as the main focus of the piece. The truth of my piece is the importance of motherhood, and of being responsible.

I narrowed down my ideas on how to personify Mother Earth. I could dance this solo and portray the Earth's pain and sorrow at the way humanity is treating her so badly. But the theme of Earth's lamentation and a deep worry needed to be juxtaposed with the attitudes and nonchalance of humanity. To show the sorrow without showing the destruction somehow seemed flat and too maudlin. Fast paced action in a first piece would really off set a second softer piece. I felt more complete.

Note

The material in the appendices was drawn from the authors' theses.

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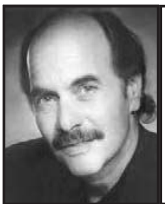
Waldorf Education: Back to the Future

Jack Petrash

Rather than being an anachronism, Waldorf education emphasizes the very attributes that students will need to cultivate for success in tomorrow's workplace.



Jack Petrash is currently a teacher at the Washington Waldorf School. He is also the director of the Nova Institute (www.novainstitute.org), an organization working with parent and teacher education and teacher renewal. Jack is the author of *Understanding Waldorf Education: Teaching from the Inside Out*.

Each morning when I open the door and step into my first-grade room, I immediately feel at home.

I like my classroom — the plants by the windows, the children's watercolor paintings brightening the walls, the wooden desks and chairs all ordered and arranged to face the blackboard.

I like to think that this classroom is lovelier than the ones I entered as a child, but the truth is that there are strong similarities between this room and the classrooms of my past. Many of today's young teachers would say that my classroom is old-fashioned. It is noticeably lacking the modern accoutrements. There are no laptops, no white boards, no markers, no active board, no CD or DVD player, not even an intercom speaker. My classroom is a low-tech environment — one seemingly behind the times. Perhaps I should be worried that I am a dinosaur, some relic from another educational era when teachers stood at the front of the room and when pencils and paper, chalk and erasers were essential ingredients in a school experience. And yet, when I read what is being written today about education, brain development, and the dramatically changed world that awaits our children, I am absolutely convinced that my Waldorf classroom is leading my students *back to the future*.

Two years ago, Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist and author of *The World is Flat*, spoke to a group of students at a highly respected prep school. The students wanted to know what they should do to prepare themselves for tomorrow's workplace. Friedman's answer was striking. He told these students that their education had primarily developed the left side of their brains and that if they wanted to be prepared for the future they needed to develop the right side of their brains as well. He told them "to think art, to think green, to think connectedness."

As it turns out, Friedman's ideas were influenced by what he was seeing in our rapidly changing global economy, in which American jobs are continually being outsourced to countries like India, China, and the Philippines, and by what he had read in a book by Daniel Pink, called *A Whole New Mind*.

In *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink makes it clear that our standard approach to education utilizes only the left side of the brain. This is the education that we are currently promoting with No Child Left Behind, and Pink states very clearly that it will not prepare our children for the future. If we educate only the cognitive capacities of children, only capacities that can be tested, we are going to make them economically obsolete. If young people are schooled in a traditional manner, using only the left side of their brain, someone in a developing country is going to do what they are trained to do more cheaply. Pink cites research which indicates that by 2015 at least 3.3 million white collar jobs and 136 billion dollars in wages will shift from the United States to low-cost countries like India, China, and Russia.

Pink also notes that if we educate children in this conventional way, using only the left side of their brains, the computer is going to do what they are trained to do more quickly. If we truly wish to prepare our students for the future, Pink proposes that we help them develop new capacities in *art, storytelling, play, empathy, finding meaning, and symphonic thinking*.

What I find reassuring is that these are the very capacities that are being developed in children at a Waldorf school. Art and storytelling are essential parts of the Waldorf experience right from the start of school. When children are taught their letters in grade one, they are introduced to the sounds and shapes of these letters through a story. A fairy tale about an enchanted snake can be told in a lively, expressive manner. In that telling, the students will hear the sound of the snake hissing as it slithers and slides through the softly stirring grass. On the blackboard they will see a large, colored-chalk picture of this sinuous serpent shaped exactly like the letter "S", which they will draw in the books they create. They will walk the letter "S" over the classroom floor, paint it, even shape it in modeling wax, all so that they will have a multisensory experience. But, most importantly, they will be developing their whole minds.

In her book *Endangered Minds*, Jane Healy (1990, 125) underscores the value of this approach to teaching letters:

> All thinking, even language processing, calls upon both hemispheres at the same time…. Since the hemispheres carry on a continual and rapid communication over the bridge of fibers (*corpus callosum*) that connects them, their ability to interact is probably the ultimate key to higher level reasoning of all kinds.

Healy (1990, 212) goes on to say that communication between the left and right hemispheres of the brain occurs when language instruction includes picture letters.

> People who learn to read both a letter-type and a picture-type script, as in Japan, tend to process language more equally between the two sides of the brain than do people who read only letter-type scripts.

But it is not just in the Waldorf elementary school where children are heading back to the future. The Waldorf preschool provides a similar mix of tradition and innovation that is truly in tune with our times. Americans are an intuitive people, and there are certain assumptions that we innately embrace. One of these is that youthfulness is a desirable trait. Sometimes we go about pursuing youthfulness in puzzling ways, spending millions of dollars on cosmetic surgery and on drugs like Cialis and Viagra. And yet, even when our response is misguided and shortsighted, we clearly sense that when older individuals retain a lively, adventurous spirit, it is a sign of health.

In *Geeks and Geezers*, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas note that this quality, which they call *neoteny* — the ability of a species to maintain youthfulness in old age — is often a characteristic of our creative leaders. For instance, the architect Frank Gehry is close to eighty years old, and yet he says that some of his best ideas come to him on the ice when he skates. What we see is that his playful, youthful nature is an important part of what makes him so creative.

Several years ago, the Smithsonian Institution held a conference on the role of play in the lives of geniuses. The conference underscored the formative influence of play in the lives of innovative individuals whose discoveries impacted our society in dramatic and positive ways. One of the unique capacities of scientists like Albert Einstein, Alexander Fleming, and Barbara McClintock was imagination. What was clear at the conference was that playfulness and imagination are characteristics of genius.

The wooden sinks and stoves, the natural building materials, the dolls, and the wooden toys that are still part of a Waldorf preschool classroom allow young children the creative play experiences that will enhance their problem-solving ability by fostering divergent and imaginative thinking. This stands in sharp contrast to most contemporary schools, where children are required to do less imaginative assignments at tables with workbooks and pencil and paper.

In the Waldorf high school, we are also working to lead students back to the future. Waldorf high schools are small schools with a required curriculum that is both diverse and integrated. Requiring students to take choral music, or to play an instrument, or to be on a sports team may seem restrictive to some, but these activities are a valuable preparation for the future.

Thomas Friedman (2006, 310-312) writes about the educational rebirth that occurred at Georgia Tech in the 1990s. The school's president, G. Wayne Clough, knew that the country needed more good scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs. He began rethinking Georgia Tech's approach by reflecting on his own experiences as a working engineer. Some of the best engineers he had collaborated with over the years had not been the best engineering students. However, they were able to communicate well, relate to others, think creatively, and tie things together from different fields and disciplines. On campus, Clough encountered students with these same characteristics and realized that they tended to be persons with varied interests and activities. They sang in a choir, played a musical instrument, were on an athletic team. Clough encouraged the admissions office to recruit and admit good engineering students who had artistic and extracurricular interests.

This ability to integrate knowledge and see connections in seemingly unrelated areas has been an emphasis in Waldorf schools since their inception. It is the reason the curriculum is integrated: music is taught in conjunction with history; art is part of all science studies; and writing is used to enhance the teaching of mathematics.

Daniel Pink calls this *symphonic thinking* — thinking that asks us to recognize patterns and motifs, to synthesize information, to see the big picture, and to make connections in surprising new ways. Frans Johannson, in a recent article in the journal *The Urbanite*, calls this capacity *the Medici effect*, referring to the Renaissance family that supported a remarkable burst of wide-ranging creativity in the fifteenth century.

It is this innovative thinking — the ability to connect the seemingly unconnected to create new solutions — that is at the heart of the kind of problem solving that we need for the future. It is this ability that led the architect Mick Pearce to design an office complex in Harare, Zimbabwe, that does not need air conditioning. To do this he incorporated into his architectural design an understanding of the way in which termites cool their mounds in the hot, African sun.

Writing in *The Urbanite*, Frans Johannson (2007, 56) describes the project:

> Pearce's passion for understanding natural ecosystems allowed him to combine the fields of architecture and termite ecology and to bring this combination of concepts to fruition. The office complex, called Eastgate, opened in 1996 and is the largest commercial/retail complex in Zimbabwe. It maintains a steady temperature of 73 to 76 degrees and uses less than ten percent of the energy consumed by other buildings its size. And it saved 3.5 million dollars immediately because [an air conditioning plant did not have to be installed].

Clearly, in our era of global warming with the heightened need to reduce fossil fuel consumption, Pearce's creative problem solving is in demand. If we are truly preparing our children for tomorrow, we should be educating them as Thomas Friedman said, "to think art, to think green, to think connected-

ness" — and this requires that they use both sides of their brain.

So when I enter my seemingly old-fashioned classroom each morning, these are the understandings that reassure me. When I taught my first graders their letters through art and storytelling, I did so with confidence that I was stimulating the kind of brain activity that will give rise to higher-order, creative thinking. And in fourth grade, when I will watch each of these same children begin to play violin, viola, or cello, I will rest assured that their ability to think creatively and to work collaboratively is being strengthened through music.

When these same students, in grades six, seven, and eight, encounter the synthesis of art and science and the love of nature that lived in individuals like Leonardo da Vinci, George Washington Carver, and Rachel Carson, I will hope that these same qualities will have been cultivated in them and that these students will be multidimensional individuals, accustomed to using their whole mind in surprisingly new and innovative ways.

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Spirituality and Literary Studies

Paul T. Corrigan

Teachers today are comfortable with class discussions about almost any topic — except spirituality. It is time that that changed.

On the whole, teachers and scholars have gotten pretty comfortable talking about almost everything, including violence, sex, and politics. Often these topics are discussed in great detail and in quite personal terms, yet some are still decidedly *uncomfortable* talking about religion and spirituality. In some cases there even seems to be an unspoken rule that religion and spirituality are taboo in the halls of education, unless they are analyzed in a strictly detached way. Cornel West (1991, 547) has observed, for instance, "that the history of black studies in the United States has been one in which music and religion have played a very, very small role, even though black religion and music play a fundamental role in the history of black people." Of course, as a recent report from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008) reminds us, religion and spirituality, whether musical, liturgical, contemplative or otherwise, play a fundamental role in the history of most people. So it makes sense that some, like Deborah Hooker, feel that "acknowledging spirituality, in all the myriad forms in which it might exist for people, ought to be part of the conversations we have in 'the academy'…."

My intent in this essay is to make a case for integrating spirituality into academics. Those of us who would like to draw openly on our spirituality in our academic work ought to be able to do so with skill and respect. In making this case, I will deal specifically with my own field, literary studies, and I will use perspectives and examples from my own spirituality, rooted in the contemplative Christian traditions. This will allow me to draw on what I know, and readers will be able to decide whether what I have to say is applicable to their own situations, their own academic work, and their own awareness, experience, and beliefs.

At a minimum, it is important to acknowledge spirituality in literary studies because so much of literature deals with religious or spiritual topics. In

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many cases, it is overt, as with Rumi's poetry, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, or Mary Oliver's *Thirst*. In the title poem in *Thirst*, for instance, Oliver (2006, 69) tells God: "Love for the earth and love for you are having such a long conversation in my heart." Literature also deals with spirituality indirectly, invoking transcendent themes without necessarily referencing religion. In one of our conversations, Deborah Hooker (1990) put it this way:

> Literature studies just beg for [discussion of spirituality] because the really good writing touches on something larger than ourselves — a mystery, perhaps, but a very fecund mystery.

Moreover, some people understand spirituality as integral to the process of meaning itself, and therefore integral to the meaning of all texts.

Another reason why it is important to discuss spirituality in literary studies is that we are limited by our own subjectivity and by our personal histories and contexts. Whether unashamedly or unwittingly, writers and readers allow their traditions, experiences, and beliefs to inform their work. Acknowledging our spirituality or absence of spirituality is simply a matter of intellectual honesty. More than that, we should realize that those things that limit us are also resources that we can draw on. I consider my spirituality to be closely wound up with the impulses, contexts, and purposes of my literary studies, and I consider my teaching and scholarship an integral part of my life as a whole. My academic work simply cannot really be kept separate from my spirituality. Beyond merely acknowledging spirituality, I want to integrate it into my work in open and personal ways. By integrating our spirituality into our work openly and intentionally, we can also do it critically and mindfully.

A growing number of scholars and teachers on the margins of the field have quietly been doing just that. Books like John Booty's *Meditating on Four Quartets* (1983), Parker Palmer's *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (1993), bell hooks' *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003), and quite a few articles in the journal *Spiritus* all explore spiritual/academic integration. Similarly, the scholar Cheryl Walker (1998, 166) admits in her essay on "Reading Elizabeth Bishop as a Religious Poet" that "I actually want to [read] Bishop because of the interest a religious person might take in her work." Rickey Cotton (1989, 2010) has shown that spirituality pervades literature and life, and he makes the case that we ought to be able to discuss it sensitively in our classrooms. Daniel Sartin (2008) introduced spirituality in his high school English classroom by inviting his students to share in two minutes of silence after reading about Zen Buddhist literature in their textbooks.

Finally, perhaps a sign of broader changes to come, two recent issues of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (2005, 2009) have explored spirituality in higher education. Works such as these provide useful precedents and models of writing and teaching about literature in ways that integrate spirituality. But these ways of writing and teaching still break the taboos of the dominant academic style.

Spiritual Experience

Feminist scholars have much to offer to the discussion of integrating of spirituality and academics. The feminist emphasis on personal experience becomes particularly pertinent when we realize that part of the personal is the spiritual. Writing and teaching that aim to integrate spirituality will certainly share much of the vision that Adrienne Rich (1972, 18) outlines in the beginning of her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," a vision of integration leading to new life:

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped us as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see — and therefore live — afresh.

Such writing and teaching will certainly be different from most work done in the dominant academic style, whose rules Olivia Frey (1990, 509) lays out neatly in her essay "Beyond Literary Darwinism: Women's Voices and Critical Discourse":

> The conventions of mainstream literary critical writing … include the use of argument as the preferred mode of discussion, the importance of the objective and impersonal, the importance

> of the finished product without reference to the process with which it was accomplished, and the necessity of being thorough in order to establish proof and reach a definitive (read "objective") conclusion.

Feminist scholars often resist this dominant style by making room in their own writing and teaching for their subjectivity and humanity. Sometimes they do this through experimenting with external forms of scholarship like narrative or autobiographical criticism. More importantly, though, they make space to attend to their motivations, to the human impulses that underlie their work, and to the processes they undertake in reading and writing. As Nancy Sommers (1993, 425) writes in her essay "I Stand Here Writing,"

> At the outset, many of my students think that personal writing is writing about the death of their grandmother. Academic writing is reporting what Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has written about death and dying. Being personal, I want to show my students, does not mean being autobiographical. Being academic does not mean being remote, distant, imponderable. Being personal means bringing their judgments and interpretation to bear on what they read and write, learning that they never leave themselves behind even when they write academic essays.

We begin to integrate our spirituality into our teaching, reading, and writing when we allow our past experiences to inform our reading and allow our reading to inform our past experiences. We go even further when we bring our *selves* to the texts for new experiences.

Thomas Merton, monk, poet, and public intellectual, connects literary experience with spiritual experience in his essay "Poetry, Symbolism, and Typology." Though he writes specifically about religious poems, what he says is applicable to spiritually integrated criticism and teaching in general:

> The experience which [religious poems] convey, and which the reader must try to share, is not only a poetic but a religious experience. Religious poetry — as distinct from merely devotional verse — is poetry that springs from a true religious experience. (1985a, 328-329)

Whether or not we want to consider some poems spiritual and others not, the useful idea here is that spirituality plays out in and through the experience and process of writing and reading. Writers try to "convey" experiences, and readers try to "share" them. When Merton speaks of religious experience in this, he does not necessarily mean something particularly extraordinary, but only something associated with an awareness of the transcendent. Even a moderately sublime literary experience, a poetic moment of heightened awareness, can be a religious or spiritual experience. Integrating spirituality into our work will mean paying attention to and being intentional with these dynamics.

In another essay, "Why Alienation is for Everyone," Merton (1985b, 382) describes a writing process that includes extensive free association, drafting, discarding, rewriting, and silence. He writes that "rather than making an intellectual point and then devising a form to express it, we need to release the face that is sweating under the mask and let it sweat out in the open for a change…." If we consider reading and writing as extensions of each other, this applies to both. Through free association, drafting, discarding, and rewriting, we stage an interaction between literary texts, academic texts, and our *selves*. By helping us pierce through our routine assumptions about the world, practices like these (which also happen to be advocated by the best of composition theory) can lead to spiritual, literary experiences and to honest, original criticism.

Particularly when silence is part of our reading and writing process, we can make ourselves present to the text and present to the spirit beyond the text. This kind of silence, which is intentional, spiritual, and very different from the *silencing* of the oppressed, can cut through the constructs and stereotypes that society feeds us and that we feed ourselves. Silence has long been an artistic and spiritual principle, say, for haiku writers and monks. Henri Nouwen (1991, 56-57), a contemplative priest, writes that

> a word that bears fruit is a word that emerges from the silence and returns to it…. Words can

> only create communion and thus new life when they embody the silence from which they emerge.

Thus, with something like this kind of silence in mind, Mary Oliver (2006, 26) writes:

> I know a lot of fancy words.
> I tear them from my heart and tongue.
> Then I pray.

Parker Palmer (1993, 117) explains that "in silence the rational mind wearies of seeking truth by main force and humbles itself to the truth that seeks us." Spirit and truth are both beyond language. Silence allows us to take into account the relativity and constructedness of all particulars while holding onto hope of a transcendent absolute. For those of us in Christian traditions, for example, that transcendent truth is in Jesus. Thus Nouwen (1991, 48) suggests that "we can even say that words are meant to disclose the mystery of the silence from which they come," and T. S. Eliot (1982, 27) writes:

> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God.

Practices of silence and practices of language infused with silence may become central to our teaching. These practices bring our whole selves, our whole personal and spiritual selves, into our academics and into presence with each other and with the texts we read.

Spiritual Discourse

Questions of truth, justice, and humanness are at the heart of spirituality. But because of the histories of oppression, violence, and opposition to free thinking associated with religion and religious discourse, we must ask what the integration of spirituality and literary studies has to do with the critical conversations about, for instance, gender, race, and class. In one way of looking at it, religious discourse has forced itself out of academic discussions through exclusionary binaries like in/out, saved/lost, heaven/hell and through epistemologies of monolithic certainly that close down the possibility of dialogue. Because many traditions simply can't be "toned down" without being essentially altered and because there are ways of being spiritual without religious trappings, we might integrate spirituality into our academic discussions by welcoming only those spiritual perspectives that are safe, generic, and without, say, cosmologies of hell. In many situations, this may be the best thing to do in order to maintain a welcoming environment for teaching and learning. But we should also keep in mind that excluding specifically religious spirituality amounts to another layer of marginalization for many people who are already categorically marginalized.

For example, Cornel West (1999, 547) explains that many black scholars avoid their religious roots because they are afraid "that any association with black religion [will make] them look bad in light of the secular orientation of their white colleagues." So we ought to look for ways to allow spirituality and religion into academic discussions that avoid oppressive discourse and foster authentic dialogue. Several possibilities come to mind.

First, because spirituality can be such a sensitive issue, teachers must be proactive about creating and maintaining a safe environment in their classrooms. Power arrangements and peer tensions in school settings complicate matters, and most students will be unfamiliar with incorporating spirituality into discussions. Parker Palmer (1993, 81) points out that spirituality "must be introduced cautiously." bell hooks (1994) recommends that instructors carefully lay out guidelines for discussion, explain their theories and motives, and be open to questioning and dialogue. Students must feel that their beliefs and traditions or lack of beliefs and traditions will not leave them open to abuse and will not influence their grades.

Secondly, we can speak and write and teach our students to engage one another in generous and non-oppressive modes, such as *self-reflection*. By this, I mean using spiritual traditions as mirrors rather than grenade launchers. In the Christian tradition, for example, it seems clear that Jesus intended that his teachings be applied self-reflectively rather than by pointing fingers at others. Another mode is *dialogue*. In *Exclusion and Embrace*, contemporary theologian Miroslav Volf (1996) explains a process of embracing the other *and* letting go, allowing the other to be other but not *utterly* other, and not allowing the self to remain utterly the same. Still another mode is

the prophetic. As Walter Brueggemann describes in *The Prophetic Imagination* (2001), the prophetic mode involves giving the lie to the ideologies in power by expressing suppressed grief about death and injustice. This leads to spiritual hope. By laying out proper parameters and using such creative modes of expression, spirituality can be integrated into literary studies in ways that work against oppressive systems, avoid dogma and coercion, and maintain diversity.

Conclusion

Practically speaking, the integration of spirituality and literary studies will be realized among small pockets of interested students and teachers. A group of students may meet to talk about a short story and then relate their personal beliefs and experiences to its themes. Teachers and students might read a poem out loud and then sit without talking in presence of the poem and of one another. Scholars might sift through fragments of an author's work to look for wisdom rather than to impose a thesis. Quietly but surely such scenarios are in fact already playing out.

Olivia Frey (1990, 524) concludes her essay by "talk[ing] about love and end[ing] with a prayer." I would like to do the same thing with a few lines from Mary Oliver. In the poem "Praying," Oliver (2006, 37) describes the type of criticism and teaching I believe is important:

> just
> pay attention, then patch
>
> a few words together … this isn't
> a contest but the doorway
>
> into thanks, and a silence in which
> another voice may speak.

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Educational Standards

Counting What Can't Be Counted

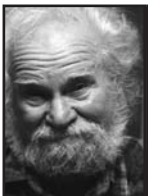
Arnold Greenberg

If we are to really know if our schools are fully preparing young people for the 21st century, we are going to have to begin to measure their ability to collaborate and become creative problem solvers.

Here we go again with yet another set of academic standards. Now called The Race to the Top, they are an attempt to replace the grand aspirations of No Child Left Behind. We now have brand new recommendations for what all students should master in English and Math as they move from elementary through high school and graduate ready, it is hoped, to succeed in college and flourish in their futures.

English and math experts consulted last year by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief School Officers went to a great deal of trouble to produce the new standards. The English section, for instance, is 600 pages long and attempts to define what all students are expected to know and be able to do. The Obama administration is taking a "tough love" approach: firing principals and teachers in schools that do not meet the standards while encouraging states to compete for a piece of the four billion dollar federal pie if they adopt the new standards. The goals are to end up with national rather than widely different state standards, and ultimately to enable our young people to compete with other countries, most of which have national standards and outscore the U.S. on international tests.

Unfortunately, there is little substantial difference between Race to the Top and NCLB. It's more of the same dressed up with a fresh coat of paint and reminds me of Einstein's famous definition of insanity: doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results. Einstein also said, "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." The purpose of this essay is to explore what "counts" in education but can't be counted, as well as possible ways to measure those



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aspects of becoming educated that I believe are more significant than what we now measure.

Our current approach to education hasn't changed much in over 200 years. It was designed to meet the needs of the Industrial Age and was based largely on techniques developed in Prussia when its work and military forces required a compliant citizenry. Known as "psycho-physics," the Prussian model involved breaking knowledge into segments that were interrupted by a horn or bell before moving on to another subject, thereby making students dependent on the teacher. It was an effective way to mass produce factory workers and to sort young people into different levels of employment — executives, managers, and common laborers. But it is now woefully obsolete.

While our schools emphasize preparing young people to be productive members of society, there is evidence that many people learned how to do it without ever going to school. The list of self-educated people who went on to be successful is extensive (Lincoln and Edison come instantly to mind). What qualities and characteristics enabled them not only to learn the work skills they needed, and to be creative, determined people who lived significant, productive lives?

My concern here is the emphasis our schools place on measuring what is easily measured at the expense of developing those qualities that many self-educated people learn outside of school. Since measuring everything that schools do seems to be so important, is there a way to measure the qualities that I will call a "different standard?" Can we learn to count what can't be counted?

Before looking more closely at those questions, it is important to look more deeply at the unique qualities of each child because they are ignored and smothered by our current approach to learning. We are likely to miss a major component in understanding individuality and why our schools are thwarting the true potential of so many young people unless we consider the following statement by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know. It is chosen and foreordained and he only holds the key to its secret.

Unfortunately, the utilitarian nature of our schools ignores individuality and instead the goal is homogenization.

Emerson also wrote that "the purpose of education is to teach how to live, not how to make a living." Clearly, this is the antithesis of our current approach to education, with its overarching emphasis on what all students should know in order to be prepared for college or the workplace.

To create schools able to meet the utilitarian goals of society, a systematic approach was created by a team of university presidents, who, beginning in 1892, devised the Carnegie Unit, a system of breaking down knowledge into lessons that, if dispensed for a certain number of minutes each day, five days a week, could, by the end of the year, produce the desired results. All subjects could be presented in this way and after twelve years, students would be ready to graduate. On paper this "scientific" approach was neat, clean, and measurable. However, it ignored many variables.

Two of those variables are the teacher and the individuality of the students, both of which are impossible to control. Lip service is given to respecting individuality but in reality, the student is also a "unit" whose uniqueness does not count. Some students manage to succeed with this approach and learn what is expected, possibly at the expense of their talent, intelligence, and creativity. Others refuse to learn and either became discipline problems or passively go through the motions of learning only enough to get by. Others learn by pursuing their interests and passions outside of school. Today, according to the Gates Foundation, an estimated 3,500 students drop out every day — a figure that does not include those who drop out mentally but are still enrolled. The reality is that today only a small percentage of students graduate from high school prepared to do college work, and less than half of students who go to college complete their education — some for financial reasons but most because they simply are not prepared.

It is important to see our approach to educating our children in the context of our times. Anyone who has read Tom Friedman's, *The World is Flat* or seen Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" knows that things are radically different today than they were just ten

years ago. Our children and the "yet to be born" are inheriting a world and way of living that is becoming unrecognizable. The awesome power and potential of the Internet is transforming how we communicate and collaborate, while at the same time we are on an environmental collision course, the results of which are impossible to calculate.

If our schools are expected to prepare young people for the world of the twenty-first century, how are they to meet that challenge?

To answer this question, we must consider the research on how the brain works. Children are naturally powerful learners and acquire a great deal of knowledge and skills through playing, observing, asking questions, and experiencing the world around them. They learn by doing and solving problems, figuring out what works and what doesn't, and pursuing what is relevant to them in the moment. It's amazing to watch children learning so spontaneously and proficiently while mostly having fun.

However, the way our schools approach learning is the exact opposite of the way children learn prior to going to school. Suddenly learning becomes equated with following instructions, and too often the natural joy of learning is replaced by a prescribed curriculum whereby the teacher dispenses information to be reproduced on a test. This approach isn't questioned by parents because that's the way they were also taught. Only now, barraged by the media, the Internet, and increasing numbers of adult-structured extracurricular activities, young people today have very little time to call their own. It's interesting that the original source of the word school is *schole*, which in Greek means "leisure" — the leisure for discourse, pursuing interests, and play.

Everyone acknowledges that our schools are not working and that they are resistant to change. Bailing out our banks and Wall Street without really changing how they do business and expecting different results is a form of Einstein's insanity. Pouring more money into our schools and coming up with a new revision of standards is another. It hasn't worked in the past and it will not work in the future.

Why are our schools so resistant to change? The reasons are many, but a major one according to Seymour Sarason in *The Culture of Schools and the Problem of Change* is the hierarchal structure whereby curriculum mandates and policies are created by corporations, universities, and government and passed down to Departments of Education, then to superintendents and principals, and finally to teachers with little or no autonomy. No Child Left Behind is a recent example. It has stifled creative change, destroyed morale, and proven to be largely ineffective, and there is no reason to believe that Race to the Top, with its added threat of principals and teachers losing their jobs if their students do not meet the new standards, will be any different.

So what is the alternative? I believe there needs to be a paradigm shift in education before we can create schools that are based on how children actually learn and that address 21st century realities. The shift I am proposing centers on a problem-based curriculum in which the goal is to develop the ability to articulate important questions about issues of concern and to learn how to find solutions. "Let the questions be the curriculum," Socrates once advocated. He "taught" by asking questions to which he did not know the answers, and he said he owed his wisdom to his willingness to let his questions guide him. Here I think it is illuminating to note the relationship between the words "quest" and "question." For Socrates, it is the quest for knowledge that is important. A good question is a quest and can be the beginning of important journeys into the unknown.

A problem-based approach to learning is as natural as breathing. It could dramatically change how schools are structured and how teachers teach, and ultimately enable students to develop the abilities that really "count." Problem-based learning is built on the assumption that the most effective learning takes place when students are using their knowledge to solve real life problems that concern them. It encourages them to work either individually or collaboratively on problems that are relevant to their lives in order to create and propose solutions, rather than simply regurgitating prepackaged information. Through analysis, strategizing, and the gathering of data and information, student learning is deepened because it is being used to solve real problems. Imagine students exploring the causes of global warming and proposing solutions, or analyzing our current food distribution system that leaves a billion people

hungry and suggesting how these problems can be remedied.

In a problem-based curriculum, the three Rs are replaced by the four Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The emphasis is on is *how*, not *what,* to learn, and the structure of the school day is no longer divided into units of time and separate subject matter disciplines. The classroom is no longer organized with rows of desks with the teacher at the front "teaching." And the children are no longer passive recipients of information, but active problem solvers. They are learning how to look at the root causes of problems, gather data through research, and collaborate on possible solutions. When they are finished, they present the results of their quest to their learning community, prepared to defend their proposed solutions in a critical dialogue. Getting feedback and evaluating themselves are important aspects of the learning process.

The role of the teacher changes from dispenser of information to model, guide, facilitator, and more experienced learner. I like to think of the teacher as a consenting partner in the learning process and of the relationship between teacher and student as a loving, collegial friendship, as opposed to the authoritarian style that is now the norm.

What are the different standards that can be achieved with a problem-based curriculum? Here are a few that I believe are most valuable: the ability to determine and articulate a significant question; to collaborate and communicate clearly orally and in writing; to become an independent, self-directed learner able to sustain motivation, to use time wisely; and to be a joyful, spirited citizen in his or her community and the world.

All of this brings us back to the question, is it possible to "count" what can't be counted? Schools currently depend on multiple choice tests to measure performance, but I believe a different method is necessary, one that is based on observation and students' self-perceptions. This approach to "measuring" would attempt to evaluate growth in certain areas over a period of time. Comparing a student's self-evaluation with the observations of the teacher would be one way to measure what formerly was not measured.

Mark Van Ryzin, a doctoral candidate in Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota, has made significant progress in measuring the student qualities that are developed in a problem-based curriculum. In what he calls the "Hope Study," he surveyed students on issues like their relationships with peers and teachers, their perception of the impact of learning environment on them, and how they feel about their progress and their futures. He placed their responses in the categories of autonomy, belongingness, and hope, and he discovered it is possible over a period of time to see how a student's self-perceptions evolve over time. By focusing on students' self-perceptions, perhaps we will be able to determine how successful a problem-based approach is in improving students' performance as well as their attitude toward the futures; that is, are they happier and more hopeful?

In Mary C. Clark's seminal book, *In Search of Human Nature,* a vast study of various cultures, she determined that there are three "propensities" that are essential to human happiness: autonomy, bonding, and meaning. This is similar to what the "Hope Study" attempts to measure. Autonomy is a sense of self, feeling that one's individually is respected and, in Emerson's words, one's "fore-ordained" uniqueness is allowed to flourish. Bonding is the sense of belonging to a family and community. Meaning refers to having a sense of purpose; that one's life is of value to one's community.

Comparing the growth in these areas as students transition from a traditional to a problem-based approach with the results of standardized tests of academic achievement would provide significant information that could encourage more schools to adopt a problem-based approach and radically change how schools look and operate. Not only would students from problem-based schools do well on the "Race to the Top" tests, but they would also be measured on what previously was not counted but really does "counts."

A paradigm shift in how we structure our schools, and how we engage young people intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively in ways that develop their ability to be collaborators and creative problem solvers can truly make a difference.

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Death

The Unwritten Curriculum

Katie Doering

Talking to children about death can be difficult and uncomfortable, but it is needs to be done when a child they know is dying.

For those who seek to understand it, death is a highly creative force. The highest spiritual values of life can originate from the thought and study of death.
(Elizabeth Kubler Ross)

For the past seven years, I have worked as the principal and teacher of the school at Ronald McDonald House in Toronto. My students, ranging in age from four to eighteen, are seriously ill or siblings of seriously ill children. Working with this vulnerable population, I am forced to confront death on a frequent basis. By sharing my experiences, I aim to provide mainstream classroom teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to address this difficult topic with children.

March 2006
Teacher Katie: "Today we are discussing the Olympics. Do you know that in 2010, the Olympics will be coming to Canada?"
Students: "Really?" "Wow, where?"
Teacher Katie: "They will be held in Vancouver. I hope to be able to go to them. Do you think any of you will go?"
Student with Cancer: "I'll be dead by then."
Another Student with Cancer: "Maybe I will be too."

December 2007
Student 1: "Did you ever know someone who died?"
Teacher Katie: "Yes, I have known some people who have died."
Student 2: "Have any children from your class ever died?"
Teacher Katie: "Yes, unfortunately, that is always very hard for me."

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> Student 1: "It's okay, you don't have to talk about it. We would understand."
> Teacher Katie: "No, it's all right."
> Student 2: "Do you think I am going to die?"

These children so innocently inquiring about their own mortality shook me. I was affected not only because they voiced the fears in my own mind, but also because they seemed to look to me for direction, and for confirmation or denial. It is common for students to look to teachers for guidance, but on the topic of death their trust frightened me. Ann Arbor (1992, 16) writes,

> Death is an uncomfortable topic to think about, so we look for reasons not to teach it. We rationalize by thinking, "How can I even begin to explain something to my class of small children that I don't understand well myself?"

No one knows what happens when we die. There are theories, but it is the one true mystery in life — a mystery that will not be solved. As teachers and parents, we feel we should have the answers. Having no answer, and no means of explanation makes us feel inadequate.

My feelings of inadequacy and nervousness have led me to a detailed study of death and how it can be discussed in classroom settings. First, it is important to understand the strong correlation between age and children's understanding of death.

Children's Understanding of Death

Children Aged 3-6

Children aged three to six do not understand that death is permanent. They think it is temporary or magically reversible (Lee 2004). Cassini and Rogers (1996, 8) explain, "To the three and four-year old, there is no final or forever. They may ask repeatedly when Grandpa is going to stop being dead and come back and play with them." At this age, children also worry about the dead person being hungry, cold or in pain: "They will tell you that dead people don't see well because it is dark underground, or that they can't move 'as much' because they are restrained by the coffin" (Arbor 1992, 2).

Children Aged 6-9

By age six or seven, children start to see death as something that comes and takes a person away (Danielson & Bushaw 1995). This view causes children to feel scared and anxious about death. Children at this age may also believe death can be caught like a cold, or that they can cause the death of a loved one with bad thoughts (Danielson & Bushaw 1995). The causes of death and what happened physically to the body after death are also of great interest to children at this age. Significantly, at this stage of childhood, fear and anxiety stops many children from voicing their concerns, and they no longer talk about death freely.

Children Aged 9-12

By the age of nine, children start to see death as the final and inevitable end to life. They understand the difference between alive and dead, and understand feelings of loss. Children in this age group may start to show more concern for surviving family members and express concern for widowed grandparents (Cassini & Rogers 1996). There is still a tendency for children aged nine to twelve to see death as a punishment for bad deeds, causing feelings of anger, guilt, and grief (Danielson & Bushaw 1995). Children also begin to understand that death will happen to them one day.

Teens/Adolescents

Adolescents are able to intellectualize about death, and will often come to terms with religious and philosophical views about life after death. At this age, they are looking for the meaning in death as intently as they are looking for the meaning in life (Cassini & Rogers 1996). Teens may also take on a lot of family responsibilities after the death of a family member, concerning themselves with financial well-being and other family matters (Danielson & Bushaw 1995).

Talking to Children about Death

Understanding child development and its effect on children's grasp of the concept of death is important, but it is also crucial to explore why we need to speak to children about death.

Teachers often feel ill-equipped to talk about death with their students. The majority of parents also try hard to avoid the topic (Richardson 1993). Teachers and parents do not discuss death because they are not experts on the subject and because they

want to shield children from this harsh reality. But death is everywhere; it is on the news, on television, in video games and fairy tales. Children are exposed to death every day and by steering children away from the topic, we are doing them a disservice; it teaches them that discussions about death are not good and should be avoided altogether (Lee 2004). In addition, they depend on the media to teach them about death with dire consequences:

> Since those media usually illustrate death in a violent manner and connect it with evil or bad behaviour consequences, children often grasp the concept of death with far more fear and confusion than reality. (Seibort & Drolet 1993)

By remaining silent, parents and teachers allow children to draw their own conclusions based on the information they have at their fingertips. This information is mostly incorrect.

Parents and teachers also avoid discussing death because they feel children are not mature enough to grasp the concept. Although children cannot grasp the full reality of death until adolescence, various studies conducted by bereavement psychologists indicate that children who do not receive any information about death or educational intervention are often severely traumatized when actually confronting the death of relatives, siblings, or parents (Bluebond-Langer 1977; Richardson 1993, as cited by Lee 2004). The same research indicates that children as young as two or three can benefit from discussions about death.

Evidence suggests it is important for parents and teachers to ensure their children have an understanding of death, even if it is an uncomfortable topic. In my case, it is even more important. An average seven year old in North America is probably not going to encounter too many death experiences, but it is very likely that children staying at Ronald McDonald House Toronto *are* going to lose someone they know. Undergoing cancer treatment or awaiting a transplant, children become exposed to a variety of other children with serious diseases. Unfortunately, some are going to die.

My experiences with parents indicate they often adopt the stance of complete denial. Three years ago, a second grade student in my class died of cancer. The parents in the House learned about the death and many approached me, begging me not to tell their children at school. I asked how I should explain the absence. A few of the mothers told me they were going to tell their children the student got better and was able to go home. At the time, I had not had a lot of experience dealing with death in the classroom, so I promised them I would communicate the same information. I learned this decision was wrong the hard way. Some children found out about the death, and they mentioned it to other children in the class, who turned to me in anger. How could I not tell them? Why did I lie about where he went? Why was I not upset? This scenario parallels a parent's story shared in *Know Before You Go: The Childhood Cancer Journey*. She wrote,

> One child, Josh, in our clinic died and I was thankful that my seven-year-old didn't seem to know that he was gone. A year later he asked where Josh was. It turned out that he knew Josh died and feared this would happen to him. He also thought everyone forgets about the dead person because no one ever mentioned him. (Lozowski-Sullivan 1998, 167)

Children are more aware than we think, and are looking for cues from us.

Having done little research into the topic myself at the time, I have had to walk a very fine line at the House, trying to respect parent's wishes while still validating the right path. I have often been placed in a difficult position, but now if a child mentions a deceased student in class, I will tell the truth. By telling the truth, I can control what information the student discovers, and I can take the opportunity to dispel myths about death and validate children's emotions.

Helping Students Cope with Death

A popular Zen saying is, "The most dangerous thing in the world is to think you understand something" (Miller 2006, 11). As teachers or parents, we cannot even pretend to understand death, but we can pass some universal messages on to our children to help them in their struggles to comprehend its mystery.

First, it is important that all children understand that death is irreversible. There is no way to bring

back a person who has died. It is a final conclusion. We can help children understand this simple fact by avoiding euphemisms for death. Words such as sleeping, resting, loss, passed away, and taking a long trip should not be used to describe death (Danielson & Bushaw 1995). Using this unclear language only promotes misconceptions. For example, if a parent or teacher explains a deceased family member has taken a long trip, the child will constantly ask where they are. The sooner a child understands the finality of death, the faster they can come to terms with the loss.

Second, it is important to convey there are real causes for death. Children need to understand that their thoughts and behavior cannot cause a person's death (Brookshire & Noland 1985). Depending on the age of the child, a discussion of the illness or accident that caused the death may be appropriate.

Children also need to understand that death is inevitable and part of the natural life cycle. It is not a punishment for living badly or for doing something wrong. All living things are born, live, and die. People are no different, and some people will live for a long time and others will not. It is not a reflection of the kind of person they are, but simply a fact of life.

Children must also be told that when a person dies, all bodily functions including eating, breathing, cognition, and sensation cease (Arbor 1992, 2). The following story illustrates how misunderstandings about this concept can lead to additional trauma.

> In one assembly of fourth-graders, three had experienced the death of a parent or guardian in the previous 12 to 18 months. All three had been to a wake where the casket was open and all of them had thought, at some point, that they saw the body move. Because of their incomplete understanding of the concept of death's finality, all three children still had recurrent nightmares that their [dead] parent or guardian was, in some way, "buried alive," fighting to get out of the grave. (Arbor 1992, 2)

Clearly, these children could have avoided additional pain and suffering if they were made aware a person cannot think after death. A Child Life Specialist at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children told me she has had to accompany siblings into hospital rooms after a patient has died. She has the child do a variety of things to help them understand their sibling is dead. For example, she will ask the child to put their hand on the patient's stomach and ask if it moving up and down. This exercise helps a child see their sibling is not breathing. By having young children understand death in concrete terms, it helps them come to terms with what has happened.

Teachers also can do things at school to help students talk about their feelings about death and gain deeper understanding of it. In lessons on the life cycles of plants and animals, children begin to see the natural world and how it works. They can connect with the idea that all things live and die. In addition, teachers can introduce a variety of books into the regular school day that provide views on death. Booklists on death are extensive, and include *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs* by Tomie de Paola, *Saying Goodbye to Daddy* by Judith Vigna, and *Am I Still A Sister?* by Alicia M. Sims. By reading books on dying and grief, teachers are communicating to children that death is not a forbidden topic. They are saying it is okay to talk about it, and share feelings of pain, fear, and grief.

Teachers can also observe their children's play and listen to the stories they are telling about death. Play, for children, is extremely therapeutic and can lead to insight for them. I remember watching students play a few days after a young child passed away who was staying at Ronald McDonald House, but not old enough to be in school. The children were playing school, and they had removed one stuffed animal from the carpet and placed her at the back of the room. I began watching them to see if they would explain this stuffed animal's position. The child playing teacher explained to the other students that Dora (the stuffed animal at the back) would not be at school today. She was dying. The child playing teacher also said children could go and visit her throughout the school day if they wanted. As the play continued and the school day enfolded for these children, I saw many students bring a stuffed animal over to Dora and stare at her. Some said, "I'm sorry" or "I'll miss you." Others said nothing.

I did not interrupt the children's play even though it went well over the regular recess time. I just watched and at one point, I too decided to visit the

stuffed animal Dora. The children watched me go, but did not interrupt or talk to me as I stood silently making my own peace with Dora. When their play finished, I asked if anyone wanted to tell me about the story they created. They shook their heads, and then I intervened and said, "I think Dora appreciated the visits she received today from all of her friends. She wasn't lonely and she learned many people love her." The child playing teacher smiled and the play finished. I learned from this experience that children sometimes have their own spontaneous way of coping and coming to terms with scary thoughts. By allowing children to play, we are allowing them a space to work through those shadowy parts of the soul.

My most soulful and enlightening death-related experience occurred one Spring when students from my class stumbled upon a dead bird at recess. When we found the dead bird, I immediately told students to back away and leave it. The children were shocked by my insensitive behavior. They connected with this bird and insisted we give it a proper burial. A spontaneous funeral service emerged with children stating their emotions around the makeshift grave. For the last three months of school, children visited the grave often, bringing small gifts like rocks and flowers, or using it as a quiet place for reflection.

The dead bird incident taught me children are not naïve about death. They know about it, and they understand how society copes with the loss of someone or something. To ignore their knowledge diminishes their capacity for feeling emotion and trivializes their own responses. Often it is through play or the spontaneous teachable moment that children can be reassured that it is all right to express emotions regarding death. Crying, feeling sad, or choosing to remain silent are all normal ways to respond to the possibility of death, and the death of a loved one. Children need to understand this simple reality. As teachers, we can give children opportunities to move towards understanding in their own way.

Answering the Hard Questions

For most teachers knowing how to talk to children about death is enough, but in my job I need to be prepared to answer even harder questions. Children have asked me, "Do you think I am going to die?" Others have said, "What will happen if I die?" These questions are too important to ignore, and if children have the courage to ask me, based on my research, I feel my students deserve honest responses. The children I am working with are receiving the best treatment possible at the top children's hospital in Canada. Their doctors are experts in the field, and will go to extraordinary lengths to try and save them. I feel comfortable telling my students all of these facts. However, I must also tell them some people's sicknesses are too far along or too difficult to treat. They must know that not all sick children survive.

Answering the second question, "What will happen if I die?" is more difficult, because no one has the answer. According to a special handbook (Deasy-Spinetta 1993) created for parents of children who have leukemia, the following points have proven helpful when discussing impending death with patients or siblings:

- Reassure children they will not be alone in death. As religious beliefs often dictate what happens after death, direct children to ask their parents about what will happen at the end.
- Tell children even a short life can be meaningful. Young children can touch the lives of people they deal with at school, at the hospital, and at home.
- Explain that children will not feel pain when they die. Doctors will make sure the pain stops.
- Admit that it is normal for people to want to say goodbye to loved ones when they know they are going to die. It is okay to want to say goodbye.

Answering these questions is scary, because it means coming to terms with a child's possible death. For siblings of sick children and parents, facing this horrific reality is sometimes too much to handle. If they can face it, however, they can gain a sense of freedom and understanding. By freely talking about their emotions, parents and children can support each other and be ready for anything. Their souls will also be nourished through this sharing, because "the soul seeks to be in touch with basic realities of

life, which include pain and suffering as much as love and joy" (Miller 2000, 28). If denied the opportunity to share, young people may be left with unexpressed important thoughts and feelings, and their dying may be very lonely (Hughcroft et al. 1996).

Several of the families I have taught have websites and message boards to keep family members updated. On one of these sites the sibling of an ill child posted the following entry on the public message board:

> i called this morning and talked to dad but i didnt know if he wanted you to talk to me because we both would have been really sad when we had to say good bye! well i am really going to miss you over the next few months! just remember i will always be your sister even if you dye or survive!!you will always be in my heart sis. love you so much. (CaringBridge 2007)

This message was posted shortly after the ill child went into isolation for a stem cell transplant. When I first read the entry, I was taken aback, but upon further reflection I thought about how brave this child was. She shared her fears in a public place, and assured her very ill sister that no matter what happens she will be there for her. She sent a very powerful "soul-to-soul" message to her scared sister.

As an educator working with seriously ill children, death is a topic that I cannot avoid. Dealing with multiple deaths every year, I am constantly coping with my emotions and grieving. I am also always teaching children and siblings who are facing death, many for the first time. For all of us, it is scary, but it is also spiritual. Talking about and coming to terms with the greatest mystery in life brings people together in a very soulful way. In the foreword to *Death and the Classroom*, Jacqueline Kowalski explains,

> To touch death and be touched by death is profound, and is a part of the life and death cycle experience of every living person. Teachers are integral to this cycle for their task is to prepare their charges to live this cycle holistically: intellectually, spiritually, psychologically and physically. (Cassini & Rogers 1996, 1)

The way I respond and deal with the subject of death in my classroom can affect how my students feel and how they cope. By validating concerns and providing honest answers, I hope to help my students cope holistically with the profound impact the touch of death leaves on all of us. It is a difficult task, but one I am prepared to face, because I understand the shadow side of our souls must also be nourished.

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Teacher Sarcasm

Arthur Beane

If teacher sarcasm were eliminated from schools, students may be better motivated to become more passionate and inspired learners.

Jasmine remembers listening to her teacher's sarcastic comments: "Nice job Jasmine! Maybe you'll get it right the next time if you study! Well, if you'd done your homework in the first place you might be a little smarter!" and "If you'd take your work home like I told you to, you wouldn't have to do it in class!"

Jasmine recalled her third-grade year with great feeling and in vivid detail nearly 50 years later. She commented, "Oh my god, sarcasm could be a form of bullying. Sometimes my classmates were reduced to tears after Mrs. M. publicly berated them. I was always on the defensive and confused. That year was a loss for me. I've often wondered how a teacher could be so cruel." As an adult, Jasmine wonders how children can be motivated to learn and at the same time be petrified of a teacher. "After all, weren't we expected to respect our teachers?

Anecdotal information is interesting, yet it is nowhere near enough to eliminate sarcasm by teachers.

What's Been Done? A Sample of Researcher Contributions

Thomas H. Biggs, professor emeritus at Teacher's College, Columbia University, served for five years as a collaborator with the United States Office of Education and wrote extensively about language use in the classroom. In 1928, he wrote an article on sarcasm.

Briggs noted that the word is derived from the Greek verb *sarkázein* meaning "to tear flesh," and is connected to terms like "cutting," "biting," and "irony." Its synonyms — "ridicule," "derision," "mockery," and "satire" — clearly illustrate what Jasmine experienced at the hands of her teacher. As a nine-year-old, Jasmine was compelled to remain silent and simply "take it."

Most nine-year-olds lack sufficient confidence to confront a teacher to redress his or her behavior in the classroom. While children today (at least teens) are more assertive in telling teachers what they think

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and why, most children in the 1940s to late 1960s unquestioningly followed school rules, raised their hands before speaking and were expected to live by the adage, “Children are to be seen and not heard.”

Thomas J. Cottle, clinical psychologist, former TV adolescent hotline host, professor, activist, and author of over 45 books and 500 articles writes (2003, 53) that “violent acts, all acts of injustice for that matter, are acts of devouring.” When students feel devoured, being motivated to learn and enthusiastic about participating in class discussions is nearly irretrievably lost. Most students have not mastered how to resolve the problem of simultaneously being afraid of a teacher and excited about learning. Often they withdraw, sometimes permanently.

Recently Patricia Rockwell, a professor at University of Louisiana, Layafette’s Department of Communication, conducted a sarcasm survey to determine how it affects communication and whether people even recognize it for what it is. Of the 218 respondents, 25% did not complete the question; and of the remaining 75% who were asked to provide an example of a sarcastic comment, only 45% did so.

Rockwell (2006, 3) writes that sarcasm is often misused and misunderstood because it breeds confusion and is hurtful. “More than half of us can’t recognize sarcasm in the first place.” Rockwell also notes that most sarcasm is directed at others rather than oneself. In her presentation, Rockwell observed that

> research into sarcastic messages involves the severity of the remark. Many researchers have suggested that most sarcasm is light-hearted or teasing but others have noted that much sarcasm is highly destructive and damaging to relationships.

Positive Effects of Eliminating Sarcasm

In sharp contrast to sarcasm’s destructive and damaging elements, Cottle (2003) writes that considering a person’s feelings increases the chances he/she will feel affirmed. Blame is also linked to sarcasm. Being held responsible for making a mistake is one thing, but being blamed for not learning everything there is to know to pass a test is absurd. Student learning styles and learning readiness vary, but interest and motivation, two essential components for learning, are the responsibility of teachers. If students are put down by sarcasm or blame, how can they be expected to feel enthusiastic about learning in school.

Thomas Gordon (2003) was an clinical psychologist mentored by his colleague Carl Rogers. Gordon believed interpersonal differences emerged from conflicting needs. As a result of his extensive research with families and in schools, he developed what is generally known as the Gordon Model, which has become a positive, effective, Win-Win relationship-building curriculum for schools, businesses, and families.

In his work with school personnel, Gordon discovered that when problems existed, blame was the reason for what he termed a “downward shift in responsibility.” For example:

- If those elementary school teachers would only focus on the basics, then we [high school teachers] wouldn’t have so much remedial work to do.
- If the high school teachers would stop blaming us elementary teachers for what we aren’t doing and support what we are doing, maybe we would be less defensive about working with them to support district initiatives.

The shifting of blame was quite common. School hierarchy blamed those below and those at the bottom blamed both administrators and students. Students blamed the teachers. Teachers blamed the administrators or the Departments of Education. Parents blamed their children and teachers and sometimes even blamed themselves.

John Dewey

John Dewey’s ideas have been, and continue to be, respected and influential in education and social reform. Dewey is often considered an educational reformer and one of the founders of pragmatism. His love of democracy, and its inherent value of self-disciplined freedom, supported his advocacy for an educational structure that strikes a balance between delivering knowledge and taking student interests and experiences into account. The salient connections between student interests and experiences are limited in a sarcastic school culture that is filtered through a lens of intermittent blame.

Students of Dewey are familiar with his beliefs about blame. He noted (1908, 110-111) that

> morality that makes much of blaming breeds a defensive and apologetic attitude; the person subjected to it thinks up excuses instead of thinking what objects are worthy to be pursued.

Dewey's thoughts prompt the question: How can an 11-year-old child (or a student of any age) be excited about learning when his or her teacher's actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values devalue curiosity and promote unquestioned compliance?

Eliminating Sarcasm

Sixty-two years after Dewey, Paulo Freire, an exiled Brazilian educator and author, argued for better education for illiterate and dispossessed Latin Americans living in "a culture of silence." His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critiques teaching methodologies designed to stifle freedom and crush creativity through an oppressive ideology. He advocated for governments to change their exploitive labor practices and embrace the willing spirit of his countrymen. One way to do this was through education based on Dewey's democratically based principles.

If we are to attempt to eliminate sarcastic and blameful classroom practices, reviewing and analyzing what teachers do becomes essential. Sarcasm is neither a viable or acceptable form of classroom communication.

Donald A. Schön, an education and urban studies professor at MIT, formulated his learning research on Dewey's reflective thought. His concern with the development of reflective practice and learning systems within organizations and communities illuminates his research, writing, and practice. Schön created "Knowing-in-action," a procedure he described in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*.

According to Schön, knowing-in-action was framed in two ways: reflecting-on-action, a habit of thinking that occurs before and during action; and reflecting after action, a method of preparing for subsequent events. Schön suggested that reflecting-on-action can help professionals initiate internal conversations about situations before they occur and/or while they are happening.

Many teachers and administrators encounter unexpected behaviors in children for which predictable solutions may be difficult to find; however, *how* they respond determines student perception. Occasionally, thoughtful steps are taken to help children help themselves. Other times, however, little thought is put into how students are addressed.

For example, instead of saying to students:

- "What's the matter with you? Ever since school started you have been late for everything including going home! Can't you ever be on time?"
- "Next time we do math try to open you book to the right page!"

Consider alternate language such as:

- "I've noticed you've been late to classes since school started three days ago. How about meeting after lunch today for a few minutes and you can tell me what is going on."
- Leaning over and talking in a whisper next to the student, "Can I see you after math today for a minute or two before you head to reading?"

Teacher Fulfillment and Inspired Learners

As Dewey (1911) believed, teachers can feel more fulfilled by becoming more aware of how their actions, thinking, and words influence the students with whom they interact. By eliminating teacher scarcasm in schools, students may be better motivated to become more passionate and inspired learners.

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Book Review

Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-imagining the Language Arts Classroom

by Linda Christensen

Published by Rethinking Schools (Milwaukee, 2009)

Reviewed by Debra Goodman

> I begin my teaching with the understanding that anyone who has lived has stories to tell, but in order for these stories to emerge, I must construct a classroom where students feel safe enough to be wild and risky in their work. My curriculum uses students' lives as critical texts we mine for stories, celebrate with poetry and analyze through essays that affirm their right to a place in our society. I attempt to craft a curriculum that focuses on key moral and ethical issues of our time because I have discovered that students care more about learning when content matters…. Teaching for joy and justice makes students the subject of their own education. (p. 1)

In *Teaching for Joy and Justice* Linda Christensen provides a richly layered text about transformative high school teaching. The book is an inspirational read and teaching companion for teachers of fifth grade through college. A major focus is on teaching writing — poetry, narrative, and essay — and the book provides detailed descriptions of lessons and learning experiences along with a wealth of resources. At the same time, while describing how she engages students in writing where "content matters," Christensen has also written a book about teaching (multicultural) literature, writing across content areas, critical literacy, language policy, and evaluation.

Debra Goodman is an associate professor in the Literacy Studies Department at Hofstra University. She taught in the Detroit Public School for fifteen years. She received her Ph.D. from Michigan State University where she explored the social nature of literacy learning in whole language classrooms in inner city Detroit. Her research, writings, and extensive work with teachers across the country focuses on evaluating writing, reading development, working with struggling readers and writers, language study, and transformative pedagogy. She is author of the book *The Reading Detective Club*.

Although the book provides extensive discussion of teaching writing, literature, and language, the overarching focus is on teaching writers and readers. Christensen is a professional teacher and literary scholar who brings students into academic writing and literature study by first helping them to see themselves within that world. She writes,

> Too often when I see student failure, I see students who have looked into the mirror of their school and their image is not reflected — in the curriculum, in the portraits that line the hallways, in the choir, in the theater productions, or in the honor society roster. (p. 15)

This quote builds on the words of Adrienne Rich,

> when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. (Rich in Christensen, p. 15)

Throughout this book, Christensen brings high school students (and her readers) into academic discourse by sharing her own brilliant literary insights and academic understandings of writing, linguistics, and schooling.

The book is organized in five chapters focused on language learning and teaching (Writing Poetry, Narrative Writing, Writing Essays, Literature in Context, and Language and Power) and two chapters on evaluation (Responding to Student Work, and Grading: Moving Beyond Judgment). The lessons and learning experiences are not presented in the didactic voice of teacher planning guides but rather through the reflective — and often beautifully written — narrative voice of a teacher scholar sharing her experience and insights with colleagues.

Teaching for Joy and Justice respects and celebrates the intelligence and passion of all adolescent learners.

> Students, particularly students who don't fit the social norms because of their race, language, class, sexual orientation, weight, or ability to purchase the latest fashions, have plenty of reasons to share their anger and frustration — sometimes at inappropriate times and in inappropriate ways when they feel they've been disrespected. The classroom can be a safe place for students to not only talk back but affirm their right to a place in the world. (p. 28)

Here Christensen shifts the systemic view of youth "who don't fit" as "inappropriate" and even dangerous, and elevates "talking back" as a tool for channeling injustices and unfair treatment into effective writing.

Using Margaret Walker's poem "For My People," Christensen encourages students to consider who their people are — so that their "histories as members of a particular race, class, or even illness become part of our class anthology" (p. 15). Students write praise poems that "talk back" to judgments and honor their social communities. Christensen writes, "Through poetry, we reclaim any part of our lives that society has degraded, humiliated and shamed" (p. 15). As students consider the powerful message of Walker's words, they are also learning how to write.

> Walker's poem teaches the strengths of using repetition and lists in poetry. If students don't notice her delicious language on their own, I point out the rhythm of the line — "their dirges and their ditties and their blues and jubilees" — as well as the repetition of sounds in each of the phrases: singing slave songs, dirges and ditties, and praying prayers. For beginning poets the format of a repeating line followed by a list as well as repeating sounds is a helpful link into the poem. (p. 28)

Christensen begins each teaching chapter with an overview advocating for the richness and potential of this genre for novice writers and scholars. These opening essays invite sharing with administrators and parents. For example, Christensen teaches poetry all year long because she believes that

> Poetry levels the playing field. Students who struggle in other areas of literacy education often succeed in poetry — if it's not taught as a memory Olympics for literary terminology…, poetry unleashes their verbal dexterity — it's break dancing for the tongue. (p. 14)

Christensen's use of metaphor and poetic phrasing through this book illustrate her contention that poetry provides a strong preparation for writing narratives and essays.

In the chapter "Narrative Writing," Christensen bemoans the "genre-apartheid" in schools requiring that high school students abandon narratives in favor of essays. Christensen argues that, especially in social justice classrooms, "the narrative is the heart of the class." She writes

> I take narrative teaching seriously. Over the years I have discovered that students learn best when I embed writing assignments in a rich curriculum. When I give students time to grapple with big concepts in their lives or the lives of historical and fictional characters by talking, brainstorming, and studying the characteristics of a genre, they are more likely to write with passion and power. So I rarely teach narrative writing in isolation. (p. 61)

Christensen also stresses the importance of teacher choice and judgment in selecting texts and challenges anthologies and classics. Christensen writes,

> As a social justice teacher, I understand that my choice of stories is critical as I encourage students to imagine a more human, democratic world in my 55-minute class periods. Stories can shape students' beliefs about how we treat each other, how we work together, how we live on our land, what's important and what's worth working for. (pp. 162-163).

In the chapters focusing on teaching writing, language, and literature, Christensen provides more than 20 specific lessons and thematic units. These lessons are written in rich, first person narratives that walk teachers through the learning experiences

and include detailed examples of student talk reflections. Learning experiences are grounded in literature (poetry, narrative, essay) and/or video or film and include significant content connected with student's lives, as well as a focus on writing process or skill development. Using an analogy from her waitress days when she was advised to "make every trip count," Christensen advises making every lesson count,

> …my teaching needs to serve multiple purposes: I help students learn to "talk back" to the world while I teach them how to write essays. I select multicultural novels, practice close reading, and root the lessons in students' lives through narrative writing prompts. (p. 28)

Keeping current with contemporary literature, Christensen's selections and open discussion position her as a learner alongside her students. For example, she shares a video of Daniel Beaty's performance of "Knock Knock," from an HBO Def Poetry Jam special. In the discussion, one of the girls picks up on the line "We are our fathers' sons and daughters/But we are not their choices," saying "We aren't the reason why they made bad choices and their decisions aren't our fault." Christensen is struck by this comment, "I never thought about how a child might feel like they might bear the burden of guilt for their parents' choices" (p. 34). Using Beaty's performance poem as a model, students write a letter poem to themselves, giving themselves "the advice they need to hear."

Within these teaching stories, Christensen offer countless tips and theoretically grounded advice for Language Arts teachers. She writes about the need to provide time for writing in class, "I want to stress that it's critically important that struggling writers get a big chunk of writing time in class where I'm on hand to help them" (p. 64). She provides several examples of creating a quiet space for writing. During one poetry lesson, she told the kids,

> I'm asking you for 15 minutes of silence, so you and your classmates can find that silent spot and write from it. I encourage you to be wild, to write fast and furious — to put it all in, to dare to be outrageous…. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Just spill the words out on the page. (p. 40)

Teachers that I work with often struggle with creating open-ended writing experiences while supporting students in becoming independent writers. Christensen often uses models and prompts to scaffold student writing; however, she celebrates adaptations, such as Shona writing about music rather than people in response to Ellis's "Raised by Women." She writes, "In this and all class writing, I encouraged students to abandon the prompt and my suggestions and find their own passion and their own way into the assignment" (p. 19). Christensen also reminds teachers to focus on the larger goals rather than immediate demands of the assignment,

> Each poetry exercise works towards the goal of writing and reading poetry and learning to use language. In other words, I don't obsess if students write a poem where verbs aren't the focus because the bigger piece of instruction is to find voice and passion and a way to show us their lives. (p. 45)

Christensen's descriptions of classroom reading and writing experiences provide a most convincing argument for the need for community in language learning. She says,

> Learning to share pieces of our personal history and listening closely while others share theirs is absolutely necessary if I want students to write deeply and passionately about their lives. This authenticity lays the groundwork for both academic achievement and social insights. (p. 25)

Imbedded in the writing lessons and teaching units is a rich scaffolding that provides opportunities for all students to develop skills of writing, in expression, craft, and in language conventions. In reading a student essay on the theater, students used markers to highlight language and explore sentence structure. Before writing a poem, students are invited to make lists of words and ideas related to the focus of their writing. She writes,

> Once students have a large stash of language, reasons and phrases, I point out that writers use the list, the rush of repetitions, the sharp, spe-

> cific nouns, the cumulative sentence in many forms of writing. (p. 40)

After viewing and reading narratives on language suppression, students are invited to draw metaphoric representations of language policies in schools. Christensen writes that drawing "might seem like a day of child's play" but it helps students

> rehearse the creation of a thesis and support for their upcoming essay…. [C]reating an image that summarizes their understandings about language pushes them to think more deeply about the patterns they saw across the readings and to start articulating those understandings as they draw, as they write their explanation, and as they present their piece to their peers. (p. 215)

Christensen's insightful approaches to linguistic diversity in her discussions of home language, academic discourse, and language conventions are a major feature of this book. For example, she tells students, "The verb is the work-horse of the sentence. Look at how it harnesses the rest of the stanza and moves it forward" (p. 18). She describes poetry as, "community builder, grammar text and literary teacher." She writes, "…through poetry students not only learn to harness their sassy, audacious playfulness into art, they learn a few parts of speech and ways to work with language along the way" (p. 41).

Christensen starts with the premise that language conventions are learned within meaningful contexts. She writes,

> My students at Jefferson and Grant High School didn't have the time or patience for repetitious language and sentence drills. The work of becoming writers — and skillful readers — requires a playful attention to detail while writing a piece that matters in a room where experimenting is honored. (p. 41)

She adds,

> When I discovered I could give up grammar ditto sheets, I became a teacher. Instead of following mindless mandates and old school rules, I started observing my students' writing, and I dared to say, "What happens when students are treated as intellectuals instead of intellectually challenged." (p. 44)

While addressing language conventions in context, Christensen emphasizes the importance of students, particularly those traditionally marginalized in school, learning conventions of academic English. She writes,

> I believe writing must begin in students' lives and be generated for real audiences. However, in recent years I've witnessed too many low-income students who have not learned how to use Standard/ Marketplace English — the language of power. Sure they can write great slam poetry; some can even write killer stories; a few can write essays, but they are often riddled with convention errors. (p. 264)

In the chapter on responding to student's writing, Christensen provides a highly detailed discussion of how she approaches teaching conventions through mini-lessons, writing conferences, and close analysis of student writing. In some cases, student "errors" are part of a student's home language. Christensen writes,

> In that case, the correction process needs to make it clear that the student isn't wrong, but that each language has it's own way of making plurals or using verb tenses. Students need to learn the differences between their home language and Standard English. (p. 266)

She adds, "simply correcting these grammar errors without acknowledging their roots in his home language is not only inefficient, it sets Standard English up as the 'correct language' and African American Vernacular English as wrong"(p. 267).

Christensen addresses language policy issues through a unit on Language and Power that explores the "colonial roots" of language policies that privilege high-status dialects of English over students' home languages and spoken English outside of school. She writes,

> Although I intentionally invite and acknowledge the variety of languages and voices from our community into the classroom, I learned this wasn't enough. I can tell students to use

> their home language in their poems and narratives, and I can bring August Wilson's plays, Louis-Ann Yamanaka's stories, and Jimmy Santiago Baca's poetry into my class to validate the use of home dialect and home language; but without examining the legacy of language supremacy, I maintain the world order because I haven't explored why Standard English is the standard and how it came to power, and how that power is wielded to make some people feel welcome and others feel like outsiders.

The Language and Power unit is a strong resource for college courses on language and culture as well as high school English classes. Through narratives, films, essays, and inquiries, students study naming as a practice of power, language and colonization, dialect and power, Ebonics and stories of resistance and language restoration.

> The power of the standard language is so pervasive and so invisible that students need to uncover what they take for granted and internalize as personal failure. But I also need to teach them how and why some languages have power and others don't. (p. 210)

Having spent the past two years studying writing assessment with a group of kindergarten through high school teachers, Christensen's discussions of evaluation and grading were particularly refreshing and resonated with the work of our study group. Rather than giving "gotcha" quizzes, she provides "poetry pit stops" where students might explore a character or event. She writes,

> I know who hasn't read, and I'm trying to entice students in rather than push them out. These poetry pit stops help students get caught up, and re-engage them in the content so they can learn from their classmates, but they provide structures for students who have read to catch their breath and talk about the "texts" in new ways. (p. 51)

In an atmosphere of six-trait rubrics and extensive test prep for essay writing on high stakes tests, Christensen advocates evaluation practices that focus on students' growth as writers. She writes,

> In too many classes, grades are the "wages" students earn for their labor. Teachers assign work, students create products, and grades exchange hands. There are problems with this scenario. Students who enter class with skills — especially reading and writing skills — are rewarded with higher grades. They already know how to write the paper; they just need to figure out what the teacher wants in it. Essentially, they take what the teacher talks about in class and reproduce it in a paper. Students who lack these basic skills are at a disadvantage. Unless there has been an explicit teaching of how to write the paper, they don't know how to produce the products the teacher expects. This doesn't mean they lack intelligence, desire to achieve, or capacity to learn; it means they lack skills. As a result they receive lower grades. (p. 273)

Christensen further argues (p. 274) that

> Numbers on a six-trait analysis or grades for content and mechanics on the top of the papers don't teach students how to write, nor do they push them to their next drafts — even when we promise them an improved grade for a revision. (p. 274)

When teachers keep the focus on student learning rather than grading it means

> creating meaningful and important work that students want to do and creating communities where good work can happen. It also means explicitly teaching children how to write essays, articles, stories, poems, and memoirs and finding real audiences to read that work.

Linda Christensen has long been one of my heroes, and I was excited to review her newest book on teaching. I found myself amazed by Christensen's multi-layered teaching narratives reflecting the complexities of learning and teaching in high school. The theoretically grounded and accessible writing exemplifies *Rethinking Schools* publications; however, Christensen provides rare stories of creative, transformative teaching. From the title to the closing the book illuminates theory-in-practice, with rich descriptions and smart discussion that I can't wait to

share with the teachers I work with. In a time of extreme mandates and pressure to conform, it is refreshing to experience Christensen's brilliant and fearless teaching. In her words,

> Too often today, schools are about "power standards" and common curriculum: *Scarlet Letter* and *Huck Finn* first quarter, move on to *Great Gatsby*…. And too often, I get caught up in that land too. Then my heart gets cracked open by students, and I remember that first I must teach the child who is in the class. By structuring a curriculum that allows room for their lives and listening to their stories, I can locate the right book, the right poem that turns pain into power — while I teach reading and writing. Unless I consciously build these opportunities into the curriculum, there is little opportunity to get authenticity from students. (p. 33)

Book Review

Mindful Teaching

by Elizabeth MacDonald and Dennis Shirley

Published by Teachers College Press
(New York, 2009)

Reviewed by Paula Rogovin

Mindful Teaching is the perfect book both for new teachers and more experienced educators. The authors, Elizabeth MacDonald and Dennis Shirley, along with the teachers in their book, wrap their arms around us in a warm embrace. They support us in our efforts to maintain our dignity and our values within a system of education which constantly batters and assaults us.

This much needed book helps us catch our balance and hold our heads high — when, year after year, there are new programs imposed on us, programs which, we are told, are the new "right way" to teach reading, writing, science, or math. There are new initiatives with the newest "politically correct" standards, or we are hit with the new 'just right" assessment standards tests and quality control programs. I laughed and smiled to myself as I read in *Mindful Teaching* that scholar Eric Abrahamson referred to this phenomenon as "repetitive change syndrome" (p. 6). That really sounds like a medical disorder! To those of us who have been teaching for many years, that's exactly what it means to us. We all need the help provided in books like *Mindful Teaching* to deal with this rather dysfunctional system in order to survive.

Mindful Teaching provides strategies to work individually and collectively when our advocacy for students or curriculum initiatives may lead to "heightened surveillance by administrators" (p. 70) or pressures of "groupthink" (p. 70) from colleagues versus dedication to what we think are the needs and interests of our students. This is a guide that helps us examine some of the tensions in education and to view ourselves in this context. It enables us to see that, though many educators may feel alone and isolated, actually we are not — yes, there is a whole world of us facing very similar issues and problems. And yes, there are ways we can break through that sense of isolation. In fact, they advocate that breaking through is essential to our survival and to the needs of our students.

As I read and underlined and marked the margins of *Mindful Teaching*, I kept saying to myself, "Yes, exactly, me, too." I remember the pain and loneliness coming from that sense of isolation during my first 11 years of teaching during the 1970's and 80's. I remember specifically the day when our school district joined (temporarily) the Teachers College Writing Project. Under the leadership of Shelley Harwayne and Lucy Calkins, we, a group of enthusiastic but isolated teachers from around New York City, were brought together as teacher researchers. I could feel the same thing happening for the teachers in *Mindful Teaching*. Like the teachers in Boston, through that learning community, we broke through the isolation as we rigorously worked on our research topics, broke bread together, often became lifelong friends, and came to feel empowered. I know, for me, it changed my entire teaching life. I know that it also changed and enhanced the lives of my students and their families. I hope that *Mindful Teaching* will do the same.

Here are some of the issues from *Mindful Teaching* which I think are particularly relevant. They rang true for me, and I know, many other teachers will nod their heads and agree.

The authors refer to John Dewey who was concerned about the tendency to think about the world

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in terms of *eithers* and *ors* rather than in finding intermediate possibilities. Dewey talked about overcoming those extremes in the effort to provide greater balance in education and to develop new capacities (p. 61). In our time of corporate influence on textbooks, curriculum, and even administration, we certainly need that support. *Mindful Teaching* is about more effectively negotiating that world.

Seven Synergies of Mindful Teaching, But No Prescriptions

While the authors provide a host of remedies, they do warn us, however, that their seven synergies of mindful teaching

> cannot pretend to be prescriptive in all situations and contexts. Schools will continue to struggle with abused and abusive administrators, and children whose parents are depressed, in jail, or on drugs. School funding streams will go up and down… Promising innovations, even when they yield excellent results, will be phased out…" (p. 71)

The seven synergies (pp. 60-68) which the authors explore in detail include open-mindedness; caring; stopping; professional expertise; authentic alignment; integration and harmonization; and collective responsibility.

As an educator in the New York City public schools for 38 years, I appreciate their warning. Too many times prescriptions for solving all of the problems are imposed on us. Too many times professors, who may have spent only a few years in a classroom many years ago, are hired by Departments of Education, to come up with solutions to our problems in education. I was delighted to read instead about the true collaboration in doing the research for *Mindful Teaching*. It is especially important that the theoretical underpinnings are illustrated by direct testimony from classroom teachers. This makes it real and actually serves to document the complicated and complex nature of the teaching profession.

The Need for Cultural Space and Time

The authors discuss the need for teachers to have time and space to "share instructional problems, select and modify curricula, and review, discuss and use data to improve pupil achievement."(p. 8) Definitely, we do need time and space to discuss disparate philosophies and differences. Over the years, I, too have seen that such important discussions are crowded out by bureaucracy or don't happen because time has not been allocated.

The authors point out the tension which occurs when genuine teacher collaboration through inquiry groups is compromised, and when the issue of improving test scores is imposed on those groups. I know from my many years in the New York City public schools that even the best of administrators have to juggle with this issue. Ever-expanding quantities of quality control data, improving school ratings and test scores, are so often imposed by administrators from outside of our school. This is terribly frustrating and unnerving to many of them and to classroom teachers. This is one of the big tensions of mindful teaching.

Alienated Teaching

Liz MacDonald discussed her own teaching experiences and her reading about Karl Marx's "alienated labor." She then developed the concept of "alienated teaching" to describe the process in which teachers "neglect teaching practices that they believe are best suited for their pupils and instead comply with externally imposed mandates out of a sense of deference to authority" (p. 15). She and other educators are seriously concerned that this loss of professional autonomy leads to low morale and disinvestment in teaching.

How true this is! I remember when a district superintendent in Northern Manhattan, where I taught during my first 20 years, decided to impose what was called a synthetic phonics-only program, where all of the reading materials provided were preselected to teach a particular element of phonics. Some of the stories didn't even make sense or were totally irrelevant to our students. Each day the children had to sing and recite the sounds of the letters: "Block A, block A, AAA. Beating heart, beating heart, BBB. Cracking nut, cracking nut, CCC," and so on. While I happen to love phonemic awareness, there is so much more to teaching reading. Many of us wanted to be able to bring in those other aspects of teaching, but our lesson plans and teaching were closely moni-

tored. I thought that particular program robbed teachers of our integrity. After a few years, an investigation proved that a principal at another school in the district had stock in the company which produced the program. Both he and the series were removed! But we soon moved on to yet another "right way" to teach reading.

Another superintendent from that same district came in and told us that the 20,000 students in the district should all have the same basal reader series and workbooks. He said that we had to start from the bottom and we could all be lifted up from there. A district-wide committee was set up to meet with publishing companies who basically advertised their own teach-and-test programs. So the basal reader of choice was imposed on all of us.

Liz MacDonald outlines four basic teacher responses to such alienating instructional practices. The first is protest which

> typically comes at a high cost to teachers, for while they might not actually be fired for failing to comply, they can suffer loss of profession opportunities and status as a result of public disagreement with district reforms. (p. 16)

Many of us were horrified by the synthetic phonics and the strictly basal reader approaches. Other readers will remember a time during the Bush Administration where the concept of whole language was nearly banned from professional literature. Most teachers were afraid and for many different reasons did not speak up. I have done so over the years, picking and choosing my battles. So often colleagues quietly thanked me for speaking up and voicing what was also their opinion. But it is a lonely route. I applaud efforts to protest but also urge educators to seek out colleagues in and outside of their school to find study groups or professional learning communities, or to read of such efforts in *Mindful Teaching*.

Others use the second strategy that MacDonald calls loyalty, where one "goes along to get along" (p. 16). I have seen that in schools where scripted curriculum and pacing calendars are imposed. I, too, believe that this is tragic. I think that the right to personal integrity, to experimentation, to examining programs in relation to students' needs and interests, and to creativity are constantly being taken away from teachers. There is a sadness and a dullness which sets in when this happens. I have seen so many teachers who did only what was expected, and that ate their hearts out. The smiles were gone. Many were counting the years or days until retirement. We are wasting the potential of bright, caring, and thoughtful educators.

In the third response,

> one can *go underground*, so to speak, shutting the door and carrying on a quiet, surreptitious revolt as a lone rebel…. This option of privatized teaching is popular, perhaps even widespread, with many veteran teachers, who have tired of the perpetual merry-go-round of reform initiations and prefer to simply hone their craft in the solitude of the cellular classroom. (p. 16)

I speak, often, to my student teachers and other graduate students about this and have written about it extensively. I talk about learning to do what is required so you can maintain your job, but learning also to stretch the curriculum so you do what you think is appropriate for your students. My mother, Anne Rogovin, a former special educator, always warned me that when we choose to go outside of the box or to go underground, we must be sure to teach to the very best of our ability. I would add to that the need to work very closely with the families of our students.

I protested the basal readers to no avail. I loved my students and their families, so I remained in that neighborhood school for 15 years, always trying to comply just enough to keep my job, but at the same time bringing in alternative approaches and resources. I deliberately chose to work with the children in what was called, "the bottom track," one that quite clearly discriminated on the basis of race and class. I protested that, too, to no avail.

I realized that some administrators were not terribly interested in the success of my "bottom track" students, most of whom were usually from lower income Latino families. Because of that, some of my supervisors (who have since retired or passed away), rarely entered my classroom. Thus, we had our own small "private" domain within a gigantic school. I'm

sure that many dedicated teachers also have found a myriad of ways to go underground. You can read about some of them in *Mindful Teaching*.

The fourth option, exit, that MacDonald describes is terribly sad to me, but the reality, according to her, is that nationally more than half of beginning teachers in urban schools leave during their first three years of teaching (p.16). The authors of *Mindful Teaching* are particularly concerned about that very high rate of burnout and "the needs of the teacher for a profession that invites not three years of idealism followed by burnout and exit, but long-term sustainable growth and fulfillment"(p. 69).

The Issue of Mindfulness and Buddhism

When I read Chapter 2, Growing into Mindful Teaching, I suddenly found myself out of my comfort zone. I have personally steered myself away from formal meditation. Perhaps it doesn't fit my very full and busy lifestyle that involves family and friends, teaching, culture, and political activism. Perhaps I do my own kind of meditation — at night when I should be sleeping, on my drive to and from school each day, and when I spend much of my Sundays thinking and planning for the upcoming week. When I read in *Mindful Teaching* of the work of Thich Nhat Hanh, I was gently shaken out of my comfort zone.

As an activist in and outside of the classroom, I was struck by Hanh's history. He protested the war in Vietnam as a young man and lived for 40 years in exile. The authors said that his

> unwavering commitment to nonviolence and social justice, seemed especially attractive to us, given our social justice commitments as urban educators — as well as an important refutation of the fear that mindful contemplation might entail political passivity or apathy. (p. 25)

The authors bring meditation into their theory of action, "not as a panacea, but as an additional resource to help teachers to detach themselves from and gain more critical insight into the broader educational context in which they are enmeshed"(p. 25). Formal meditation calms and concentrates the mind. The authors view it, not as a cult-like activity, but as a way to help people clear their minds through breathing activities that would help keep their minds from drifting away with preoccupations (p. 34). Focusing on the present moment allows one to turn the mind to the topic of concern from a more calm and nonjudgmental frame of awareness. This makes a lot of sense to me. Slow down. No need to react immediately. Take time to pull back and think. Whether we call this practice Buddhism, meditation, or critical thinking, I agree that this practice should play an important role in the lives of educators.

The authors present Ten Clusters of Questions where this more contemplative approach could be used in both our school and home lives. Some of the questions they actually practiced thinking about in their seminars include:

- What should I do when my beliefs conflict with new mandates?
- How should I act when it seems that the district administration is not aware of the on-the-ground realities of my classroom and school?
- How can I preserve my sense of inner dignity and self-respect when I am treated badly by administrators in my building?
- What possibilities do I have to change the climate in a positive manner by not lashing back reactively but by modeling professional ethics in my own classroom and my interactions with colleagues?
- How can I develop positive relationship with parents and other community members who are important constituencies in my school?
- How can I contribute to changing historical patterns of mistrust and even animosity to active trust and compassion?
- What factors should we be aware of when we differ from our students in regard to race, class, culture, home language, or gender?
- What assumptions might we be making or what stereotypes might we hold that have been transmitted to us by the broader culture, and how can we teach against stereotypes in our classrooms while still

> respecting state standards and curriculum frameworks? (p. 39)

After listing these and several other important questions, teachers examined some of them in the context of their own classrooms. This takes the questions from mere theoretical topics to issues with real and practical implications in classrooms. This kind of documentation makes *Mindful Teaching* extremely meaningful and useful.

Isabel Beaton, now retired, always said, "The pendulum of education reform will keep hitting you. So, keep your feet firmly planted on the ground." As colleagues and friends, we spent many an hour before school, during lunch time, and after school, doing informally just what the authors and teachers in *Mindful Teaching* called on us to do: stop, contemplate, work and study together, keep an open mind … reach out. (p. 79)

Recently when voters were called on by candidates to vote for change and hope, many people expected the proposals for educational reform to match their dreams. Some of the policies of the current administration seem positive, some seem like more of the same, and some make educators simply furious. Rather than just becoming angry and discouraged, we must persist. We must take the time to put into practice the concepts raised in *Mindful Teaching* so that we can involve others in the efforts to stop, contemplate, and to be part of the movement for quality education. Liz MacDonald sometimes feels there are days,

> that I teeter on despair and feel like giving up the fight to educate all children because of the external factors beyond my control. It is at those times that I rely most heavily on one of basic tenets of mindful teaching: stopping. I stop to contemplate why I teach and am and reminded like many of you reading this now: I teach because I care. I care about all of the children and especially about those who require support, guidance, and stability both emotionally and academically and for whom school is the only place they find it. I care about the quality of education of urban school children who too often have their standards lowered. I care about the families who do not have the human or social capital to seek out the best resources for themselves and their children. I care about my fellow educators who have fought long and hard for the rights of teachers and have weathered many a storm of reform … And I care about the profession of teaching and the future it holds for all of the young, bright, and fervent individuals who have the power to legitimize the importance of good teaching. And then I reach out to those around me who care too. (p. 78)

Book Review

Great Peacemakers: True Stories from Around the World

by Ken Beller and Heather Chase

Published by LTS Press (Sedona, AZ, 2008)

Reviewed by Mara Sapon-Shevin

Did you know that

- Henry David Thoreau was a war tax resister.
- Gandhi was thrown off a train after refusing to change seats (to the "colored" section) just like Rosa Parks.
- Mother Theresa cancelled an awards dinner to be held in her honor so that the money could be used for the poor.
- Desmond Tutu was criticized for his reparations program because some believed it allowed the "guilty" to get off "scot-free."

Although I would call myself a peace activist, there was so much in this comprehensive book that I didn't know that I was completely "hooked" and read it with eagerness and excitement. The book features individual profiles of twenty "peacemakers" divided into five sections: (1) Choosing Nonviolence; (2) Living Peace; (3) Honoring Diversity; (4) Valuing All Life; and (5) Caring for the Planet. Some of the profiles were of people whom I knew, but others were new to me. Even when the peacemaker was someone I believed I knew about, I was often surprised that what I knew was so partial, or so sanitized.

Each profile is six pages long and is followed by a section of quotations from each peacemaker. The writing is designed to be accessible to students as young as middle school or high school, but I found the narratives interesting and engaging. There is also a website, greatpeacemakers.com, linked to the book which contains an extraordinarily high quality teachers' guide with activities linked to all the featured individuals.

MARA SAPON-SHEVIN is Professor of Inclusive Education at Syracuse University where she teaches about diversity and social justice and stands on street corners with signs. Her latest books are *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* (Beacon Press, 2007) and *Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities*, 2nd Ed. (Corwin Press, 2010).

The kind of scholarship represented in this book is very much scholarship in the service of action; the authors have thoroughly researched the people they profile and have provided important and far-ranging information. In the book's introduction, the authors state that they had four criteria for selecting the twenty peacemakers they feature (out of a possible database of more than 250): a strong commitment to nonviolence, a birthdate after 1800, available biographical information in English, and other available sources of information.

These criteria were selected because the authors' intention is one of education, and they want readers to be able to extend their learning beyond the book. Because of this orientation, I have chosen to frame this review in terms of (1) things I learned; (2) ways the book could be used with young people and adults; and (3) other possible sources of information about peacemaking and peace education. As I read this book, my mind immediately turned towards curriculum writing and ways of expanding on the concepts presented.

Many readers will be familiar with some of the peacemakers featured here: the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Jr., Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, Albert Schweitzer, and Jane Goodall, for example, but there are others who may be less familiar to readers.

Consider, for example, the life of Anderson Sá, a Brazilian musician who grew up in a favela, an illegal squatter settlement; Sá was involved in drug trafficking like most of the rest in his community, until the death of his own brother made him turn his life around and began thinking about how to use music

to end violence. Sá began giving drumming lessons to favela youth and formed a musical group called Afro Reggae. But the group then expanded way beyond the band — to become a nonprofit group, Grupo Cultural AfroReggae (Afro Reggae Cultural Group); they built a community center, provided music, dance, and soccer for children and teens; literacy and socialization for toddlers; and child-rearing skills and domestic violence prevention for parents. Then, in the midst of this program expansion, Sá had a surfing accident which left him completely paralyzed. Despite a grim prognosis, after ten months of rehabilitation, in 2004 Sá was back on stage singing and dancing. He linked his struggle to that of the favelas, saying "Now all the favelas must start to move for the first time. We must all begin to show that we are able — that we can lift our own arms, that we can raise our heads."

This powerful narrative could be explored very effectively with teens, perhaps by focusing on both the role of music in social change and the courage to break away from a dysfunctional, dangerous culture and make a difference.

Students might also explore the life of Astrid Lindgren. Many of us know Lindgren as the author of the popular books about Pippi Longstocking, which later became movies. But Lindgren fought actively for three other issues: animal rights, ending cruelty to children, and unfair taxation. Like her storybook character Pippi, Lindgren opposed the abuse of power and worked actively to end violence against children. She believed that although child rearing sometimes require firmness, it never requires violence. She said,

> It is a joy for all of us if [a child's] attitude has been determined by love and not violence, for even the character of statesmen and politicians is formed before they are five years old — this is a horrifying fact, but it is true.

Lindgren also fought actively against unfair taxation in ways that brought about tax cuts. Another of her missions was to end industrial factory farming which she likened to other forms of abuse. She campaigned actively on behalf of animals and the debate she engendered led to Sweden's passing of its 1988 Animal Welfare Act.

There were other peacemakers I knew little or nothing about. I knew about the community Neve Shalom/ Wahat-al-Salam (Oasis of Peace) in Israel/ Palestine, but didn't know anything about the founder, Bruno Hussar. Although I have been a vegetarian for over thirty years, I had never heard of Henry Salt who was an active voice for the rights of animals. And I was fascinated by the story of Nader Khalili who left a career as a designer of urban skyscrapers to devote his life to developing Geltafan, a firing process for turning adobe homes into durable ceramic structures, and then Superadobe, a system of building with earth-filled sandbags that are coiled, held together by barbed wire and covered with plaster. These inventions enabled people to have safe and affordable shelter in places where there are limited natural resources.

There were two features of the stories that I particularly admired. First, I was impressed that controversies surrounding the peacemaker were not glossed over. For example, Mother Theresa's commitment to personal approaches to dealing with poverty was challenged by those who thought that she should be dealing with social structures that created poverty. Responding to the challenge presented by the old maxim "If you give a man a fish, he eats for a day; if you teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime," Mother Theresa responded that the people her missionary work served were too weak even to hold a fishing pole. Discussing this tension — between individual acts of love and kindness and systemic, structural change — could occasion an excellent discussion with students.

Those of us working actively for peace should be heartened to know that things don't always go smoothly and that those trying to make change or raise issues are not always appreciated or valued very highly in their lifetimes.

The myriad choices that peacemakers must make in defining their struggle and deciding where they direct their energy also allows us to see that every challenge pursued inevitably means that other struggles are neglected. It also allows us to see the links between various struggles. Henry Salt, for example, devoted his life to redefining "humanitarian" to mean one who has compassion for both human and animals. Salt believed that although our society

claims to be highly civilized, savagery towards animals and humans was actually quite prevalent. He said that "by condoning cruelty to animals, we perpetuate the very spirit which condones cruelty to men. Salt wrote nearly forty books addressing violence towards animals and seeking to enlarge the scope of peoples' efforts towards peace.

Another strength of the book is the way it explores linkages *between* the various peacemakers. Salt's efforts towards promoting vegetarianism, for example, were influenced by Gandhi's work. Gandhi's work was influenced by the writing of Henry David Thoreau, and both of these peacemakers were important to Martin Luther King Jr.'s understanding and pursuit of non-violence. It is important to understand that no one learns or makes changes in isolation, and that the legacy each of us leaves may influence others long after our deaths.

The Study Guide on the book's website has a wide variety of activities. Some of them are quite basic,but other activities are quite complex.

One activity, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, asks students to "recognize various forms of physical and passive violence and to suggest ways to decrease this violence, thereby strengthening their skills in critical thinking and problem solving." Students are asked to work on two columns on a Violence Worksheet, discriminating between "Physical Violence" and "Passive Violence" and then responding to the following questions:

- What types of bullying could be considered physical violence?
- What types of bullying could be considered passive violence?
- How can passive violence lead to physical violence?
- How can physical violence lead to passive violence?
- Which examples of physical violence do you believe are most prevalent in our school or community?
- Which examples of passive violence do you believe are most prevalent in our school or community?
- What could be done to decrease these types of violence in our school or community?
- What could be done to decrease these types of violence in the world?

I was also very excited by activities which asked students to move beyond learning *about* peacemaking to actually engaging in political activism. One lesson involves students in designing and implementing a Community Service Project to promote peace. At a more radical level, students are invited to engage in creating their own Truth and Reconciliation Commission to resolve a conflict in their school or community by using restorative justice rather than retributive justice. After reading the biography of Desmond Tutu and his work in South African, students are asked to identify a conflict and then divide into three groups: one side of the conflict, the other side, and the moderators. Another activity invited students to "exercise their right to free speech and public assembly by planning and conducting a Nonviolent Demonstration regarding an issue important to them.

My own two daughters were virtually raised on the picket line, and I can attest to the importance of having young people become politically involved early on; their understanding of the power of collective energy and voice were actualized by those actions and allowed them to feel more engaged and less hopeless when confronting injustice.

Those who are captivated by this book and by the desire to help young (and old) people understand the power of individuals and groups to effect political change should be aware of two additional, exciting resources. The project, Americans Who Tell the Truth (http://americanswhotellthetruth.org), began with fifty portraits by Robert Shetterly of people who have told the truth about various social justice issues. The portraits and accompanying quotes are powerful examples of how people of various ages and backgrounds have made a difference in environmental justice, racial justice, economic justice, women's rights, and other causes. There are three people who are in both Americans Who Tell the Truth and *Great Peacemakers*: Rachel Carson, Henry David Thoreau, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The book, published in 2005, contains short biographies

and an essay by Shetterly about the intent of the project. Although the book is suitable for all ages, its target audience is middle school and high school students, making it a fantastic complement to *Great Peacemakers*. Americans Who Tell the Truth also has an extensive curriculum published on its website.

Another book/project that will be of interest to fans of *Great Peacemakers* is *Peace Jam: A Billion Simple Acts of Peace* (Suvanjieff and Engle, 2008). This inspirational book describes the work of Peace Jam, an international organization that pairs youth with Nobel Laureates in peace, including the Dali Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Rigoberto Menchu Tum. Peace Jam offers programs for children from ages 5 through 19, and all include projects related to ending racism and hate, halting the spread of global disease, rights for women and children, controlling the proliferation of weapons and breaking the cycle of violence.

Although *Great Peacemakers* could be an incredible resource in teaching young people, I would love to use it at the university level, since I know for certain that most of my college-age students do not know most of these people, nor do they fully understand the struggles that these peacemakers addressed. I feel personally and professionally enriched by this book and highly recommend it.