# Holistic Education Review

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# Editorial
# Holistic Education and Poverty

This issue of *Holistic Education Review* focuses on the education of economically disadvantaged children. With one of every four children in the United States now living below the poverty line, it is morally and socially imperative that we address their particular educational needs. We are indebted to Jonathan Kozol for bringing this issue to public attention. His book *Savage Inequalities*, with its compelling images of the educational inequities suffered by school-age children living in poverty, shattered the illusion that educational reform was intended to respond to the educational needs of children. His work demonstrates the need to reform not only a funding system that violently discriminates against those at financial disadvantage, but also a conception of education far removed from the lives of living, breathing children.

A just reorganization of a system of public funding for education would constitute a necessary but insufficient response to the educational needs of economically disadvantaged children. A review of the past decade of educational reform and research by one unfamiliar with the American landscape would lead to the conclusion either that poverty does not exist or that it has no bearing on the education of children. While the concept of "at risk" students has become popular, and while attempts have been made to increase high school graduation rates, there has been little consideration of the nature and function of education in the lives of these children. All too frequently, they remain in school only to be placed in vocational tracks, in educational programs designed to give them basic employment skills and a numbing dose of the supposed virtues of the status quo. Similarly, economically disadvantaged children are often assigned to remedial educational programs — developed without critical assessment of the malady requiring remedy. Despite the good intentions of educators to create programs to keep children in school and teach them "the basics," the education children receive is shaped more by economic factors than by insights into the needs and potentials of children.

The underlying problem here is that as the social responsibilities of the schools have grown, the conception of education itself has shifted from a concern for the guided development of individuals to the preparation of producers of labor and consumers of goods. Consider the very language of educational policy debate over the past decade; consider how the imperatives for reform derive from conceptions of national economic and political interests rather than from respect for the needs of children as human beings independent of their capacity to serve as an economic resource. Whether debate has focused on the necessity to invest in "human capital," or the redefinition of "knowledge, learning, and skilled intelligence," as the "new raw materials for international commerce," or the responsibility to prepare individuals for a life of gainful employment and financial success, the value of education has come to be measured in the marketplace.

The sheer materialism and utter shallowness of the dominant economic conception of education is particularly debilitating for children raised in poverty. The education they receive frequently offers not "the good life," but the prospect of uninspiring employment and limited consumerism. It simultaneously fails to open the possibility of personal meaning beyond productivity or freedom beyond financial security. The schools frequently fail to provide aesthetic experiences that could reveal the hidden depths of their souls, or inspire them to contemplate who they are or what they ought to do. Few economically disadvantaged children are offered opportunities to be inwardly nourished, to be moved, to be drawn out and developed as whole human beings, to be educated in the spirit of the Latin term *educere*, meaning "to lead outward." The need for such education, for the growth of an active inner life, is not an abstraction, but an animating force that will not be denied; where we fail to nurture the capacity for inner movement, children may well seek drugs as either a passive substitute or a means of voiding the desire for such experience. For children in poverty, unlike those raised in relative degrees of affluence where the prospects for material success often sufficiently motivate children to provide at least a token commitment to their own education, the vacuousness of their daily lessons in school leaves them dispirited and without hope.

Ironically, the growth of vocational education and remediation programs only exacerbates the problem. Their emphasis on skills fragments further piecemeal curricula where subjects bear little relation to one another or to the needs and interests of children. Their emphasis on the practical overshadows the need for inwardly substantive experience that commands attention and response.

***Holistic education is not a middle-class indulgence made possible by material excess, but an educational imperative beyond the rhetoric of economic imperatives.***

In the final analysis, the educational challenges posed upon children in poverty in particular force us to come to grips with the fact that we have lost sight of what it is to be human, of what it is to be a conscious human being who asks, whether consciously or unconsciously, who am I and why am I here. Our inability to recognize the depth of these questions for children who live their lives without the anesthetic of material possession or expectation, renders us unable to realize the depth of the confusion, purposelessness, and sheer indifference that root in lives never given the opportunity for inner exploration or development.

Despite the common view that such considerations are abstractions or idealistic distractions from the practical task at hand, true practicality requires that we contemplate the ultimate purposes of education. Such contemplation is a prerequisite for educational reform capable of engaging students in their own educations. Holistic education is not a middle- class indulgence made possible by material excess, but an educational imperative beyond the rhetoric of economic imperatives. The contemplation of the true educational needs of the poor can help us to understand the poverty of our contemporary concepts of the nature and responsibility of education for all children. It is in this context that this issue of *Holistic Education Review* is offered. The articles are intended to offer not solutions but ideas and realities for contemplation — contemplation which, as stated previously, is a prerequisite for meaningful educational reform.

— Jeffrey Kane, Editor

# All Children Can Learn:
## A Developmental Approach

James P. Comer

**The failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school lies at the root of the poor academic performance among poor minority children from families beyond the mainstream. The approach of the School Development Program is one way to bridge this gap.**

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For the first half of this century, there was little need for schools to change. Prior to 1945, we were a nation of small towns and rural areas. People usually held jobs within walking distance of their homes. Children grew up in environments that could be termed — in the very best sense of the word — predictable. Their surroundings were populated by familiar adults — parents, relatives, neighbors, clergy, and other authority figures — who spoke a common language about expected behavior.

The regular social interactions among those adults functioned as a network, enclosing the children within a consistent value system. Children knew what to expect from these important adults, who conspired to ensure that their young people grew up to become responsible citizens of the community and of society. This created a sense of place, of belonging. Under such circumstances, the school played a natural role at the heart of the community. The authority of the home transferred automatically to the school.

It is important to understand the significance of this transfer of authority from home to school. The same phenomenon of attachment and bonding that permits the infant and the preschooler to grow comfortable and capable in the world of family and friends is also what makes academic learning possible. Just as very young children attach and bond to parents or other adult caregivers, so can the adults within the school community provide crucial resources to help children navigate within the social network of family, friends, organizations, and institutions.

In general, children whose parents are part of the social mainstream have the best opportunities for success in school, because the values and social skills they acquired from their parents and caregivers are consistent with those of the school, its teachers, and its administrators. For such children, those early experiences of bonding and attachment transfer easily from home to school. They receive a positive response from school authorities when they demonstrate adequate cognitive development and the abil-

ity to interact well with other children. Because they are appreciated, these children can attach and bond with the school as they have with their homes; they can imitate, identify with, and internalize the attitudes, values, and ways of the school. This creates a climate that gives meaning and purpose to their academic program, since it permits all of the adults in the child's life — both at home and at school — to support that child's total development.

When children trust in, and feel accepted by, the adults within their school, they can have experiences that allow them to grow and develop, to feel confident, to be curious, to think. (See sidebar on page 7, "Child Development: Bridging the Gap Between Home and School.")

Current educational reforms de-emphasize these interpersonal factors, however, and focus almost exclusively on curriculum and instruction. Such

## The Immigrant/Slave Experience: A Comparison

One way to understand the impact of a highly technical and mobile society on today's school population is to examine the experience of two groups — European Americans and African Americans. (Other racial and ethnic minorities underwent some social experiences that paralleled those of African Americans, including Latinos and Native Americans.)

Large numbers of European immigrants came to this country before 1915. They suffered hardships and discrimination in their new homeland. But no matter how few material possessions they carried across the Atlantic, these European immigrants brought their culture, a system of beliefs which was an ongoing source of strength and identity.

For the most part these traditions endured because they were upheld by a whole community: Families, friends, and neighbors from the same European village or town frequently settled near each other once more in American neighborhoods. This continuity of beliefs and experiences permitted European immigrants to gain the vote in one generation, and with political power came economic power. This made possible community progress and development that paralleled economic changes, which then limited family stresses and deterioration.

African Americans were brought to this country as slaves. They were torn from their families and communities, and disconnected from their traditional beliefs. A slave culture was imposed upon them, characterized by three elements: forced dependency, a sense of inferiority, and no possibility of an improved future. Contemporary social and behavioral science research and knowledge show these conditions to have a devastating effect on human functioning.

After slavery was abolished, violence and subterfuge denied African Americans the vote. Without the vote, gains in political or economic power were impossible. Blacks were greatly undereducated and were closed out of low skill, high pay jobs. In the areas where 80% of the African American population was located, 4 to 8 — and sometimes 25 — times as much money per student was spent on whites as was spent on African Americans. Despite that, African Americans did reasonably well into the 1950s. They did well because they were reinforced by important elements of traditional African American culture: extended families, church, and cooperative approaches to problem solving among community members.

During the 1940s and 1950s increased farming technology displaced large numbers of African American workers who migrated from rural to urban areas — many of whom lost their traditional community supports in the process (Lemann, 1991). As a result, many families that once functioned well began to function less well.

Undereducation, exclusion from better jobs, and loss of social supports all led to increasing family stress and deterioration among a segment of the population. The problem grew over two generations while education demands increased. Eventually many families were not able to give their children the preschool experiences needed for school success. Schools were not structured or organized to provide these students with the social supports they required. Educators, through no fault of their own, were trained to focus on children's intellectual or cognitive development, without considering how to meet their social and emotional needs in school settings. It wasn't simply that teachers weren't considering the whole child: Nothing in the educational system had ever been built that could support the full development of children.

approaches reveal a blind spot: They assume that all children come from mainstream backgrounds and arrive at school prepared to perform equally well. Educators must challenge this assumption.

**Education and environment — Then and now**

In the second half of the twentieth century, schools have failed to adjust and retool in response to the technological, demographic, and social changes that have had a dramatic impact on many aspects of our lives. Urbanization, mass transportation, rapid communication, and the application of science and technology to every aspect of American society have accelerated the pace of life and diminished our sense of community and belonging. Many children now grow up in a far less predictable environment, with the adults in their lives having far fewer opportunities for contact with the children and with one another. Major economic changes, including the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs, have created economic and social stress for many American families and for the communities in which they live.

*In general, children whose parents are part of the social mainstream have the best opportunities for success in school, because the values and social skills they acquired from their parents and caregivers are consistent with those of the school, its teachers, and its administrators.*

In the 1960s I began to speculate that the contrast between a child's experiences at home and experiences at school deeply affects the child's psychosocial development, and that this in turn shapes academic achievement. This contrast seems to be particularly sharp for poor minority children from families outside the mainstream (Comer, 1988). I believe that the failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school lies at the root of the poor academic performance among many of these children. It is important for educators to understand the critical role they play in either bridging that gap, or making it wider.

**Why build a bridge?**

A child from a poor, marginal family is likely to enter school without adequate preparation. The child may arrive at the classroom door without ever having learned such mainstream social skills as negotiation and compromise. A child who is expected to learn reading at school may come from a home in which no one reads, and in which no parent has ever read a bedtime story.

Such circumstances occur disproportionately among groups that have had the most traumatic experiences in this society: African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. The religious, political, economic, and social institutions that once organized and stabilized their communities have suffered severe discontinuity and destruction. Furthermore, these groups have been excluded from educational, economic, and political opportunity. These themes are particularly vivid in the African American experience. (Please see sidebar, "The Immigrant/Slave Experience: A Comparison.")

The conditions and issues faced by many American educators today are very similar to those found almost 25 years ago when the School Development Program began in two New Haven, Connecticut, elementary schools, as a collaborative effort between the Yale University Child Study Center and the New Haven Public Schools (Comer, 1980). Both schools had poor attendance, low academic achievement, and low staff morale. Parents were angry and distrustful of the schools; relationship problems among students, staff, and parents were common. Ninety-nine percent of the students in these schools were African American, and almost all were poor: More than 70% came from families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

At the beginning of the project, students in the two schools ranked near the bottom in achievement and attendance among New Haven's 33 elementary schools. Because of preschool experiences in families under stress, a disproportionate number of low-income children presented themselves to the schools in ways that were understood as "bad." They were judged to be undermotivated and of low academic ability. For the most part, their behavior reflected development that might be appropriate for the playground or for home, but inappropriate for school.

Both schools' staffs lacked training in child development and therefore were ill-prepared to modify the behavior and close the developmental gaps of their students: When faced with disruptive or apathetic behavior, staff members usually responded with punishment and low expectations. Such responses were understandable, given the complex social problems dropped in the laps of people who were trained as educators, not child developers. Those conflicts inevitably impaired staff members' interactions with both parents and the larger community. Everyone's performance level dropped — staff, students, parents.

Many parents sent their children to school with mixed emotions. One part of them hoped that the school would make a difference and give their children a better opportunity in life than they'd had themselves. But another part of them believed that the school, like all mainstream institutions, would probably let them down again by failing to keep its promises to this new generation of children.

The Yale University Child Study Center staff which consisted of a social worker, a psychologist, a special education teacher, and a child psychiatrist provided traditional support services from those disciplines. The greater focus, however, was on trying to understand the *underlying* problems and how to correct them, rather than on treating individual children or finding deficiencies among staff members and parents. We eventually identified the following underlying problems on both sides:

- family economic and social stress, with resultant student underdevelopment in areas crucial to school success;
- insufficient knowledge and skill among the staff in the area of child development; and
- ineffective school organization and management.

## Child Development: Bridging the Gap Between Home and School

Many educators feel that a large percentage of school-age children are neither ready nor able to learn. I believe that all children can learn, but that many are underdeveloped or differently developed because they come from families experiencing social or economic stress. This is as true for children with better educated parents who are under stress because of divorce or unemployment as it is for poor children with uneducated parents. As a consequence, families from a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds are increasingly unable to give their children experiences that support their development.

Development takes place along multiple lines and pathways. Our present educational system suggests the intellectual–cognitive path as the single route toward academic learning and preparation for life. In fact, there are at least six pathways along which children must proceed, both to achieve academically and to acquire the knowledge and experience that will permit them, in later years, to assume adult responsibilities with confidence: physical, social-interactive, psycho-emotional, moral, linguistic, and cognitive-intellectual.

The newborn is totally dependent, equipped with only his or her biological potentials, aggressive energy needed for survival, and capacities for forming relationships with other humans. These elements facilitate emotional attachment and bonding with parents, or with other persons who can consistently meet emotional needs and provide the child with food, protection, and the skills to manage the social environment. The primary caregiver — whether a parent or some other adult — is the child's first educator, and the nature of that early educational experience determines to a great degree how the child will learn thereafter.

Development over the pathways takes place incidentally in day-to-day life interactions with adult caregivers. But in a highly mobile society, many children are growing up far from grandparents and other relatives who might otherwise be contributing to their growth and development. In earlier times, the newborn came into a world populated with many such adults close by.

The same phenomenon of attachment and bonding that permits infants and preschoolers to grow comfortable and capable in the world of family and friends also makes academic learning possible. Young students attach and bond to those adult caregivers who teach them and mediate experiences for them. This enables adults within the school community to help children navigate within the school social network and motivates the children to achieve at an acceptable social and academic level.

Even when there was a desire to work differently, there was no mechanism at the building level to allow parents, teachers, and administrators first to understand the needs, and then to collaborate with and help one another address them in an integrated, coordinated way. This led to blame-finding, fragmentation, duplication of effort, and frustration. Furthermore, the lack of ownership and pride in the school resulted in frequent and severe behavior problems and a sense of powerlessness on the part of all involved. In such an environment, the kind of synergism that develops when people work together to address problems and opportunities could not exist. Two things were clear: (1) If the schools were to bridge the gap between home and school, then there was a need for an organizational and management system based on the knowledge of child development and relationship issues; and (2) a comprehensive approach, rather than one that addressed particular areas of need, would be best.

***A child who is expected to learn reading at school may come from a home in which no one reads, and in which no parent has ever read a bedtime story.***

**How bridges are built**

During the early years of the program a number of realities about the American educational system became apparent — and many of these realities are still true today. The organization and management of the vast majority of American schools is deeply entrenched in the attitudes, values, and ways of the larger society, and maintained by traditional training and practice. Furthermore, individuals and systems generally resist change. Thus, research findings, mandates from outsiders, administrators, in-service education, and the like rarely bring about significant or sustained change.

In order to promote necessary change, mechanisms must be created that allow parents and staff members to gain knowledge about systems, child development, and individual behavior. Furthermore, they must be permitted to apply this knowledge to every aspect of a school program in a way — and at a rate — that is comprehensible and non-threatening. Successful activities that bring together staff members, students, and parents build the resolve of those involved to repeat such successes, until the new way eventually replaces the old.

In response to the conditions we found, we worked collaboratively with parents and staff members to develop our nine-component process, which includes three mechanisms, three operations, and three guiding principles. The three mechanisms are (1) a *school planning and management team* — a governance and management structure representative of the parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff; (2) a *mental health* or *student services team*; and (3) a *parents' program*. The school planning and management team carries out three critical operations: the development of (4) a *comprehensive school plan* with specific goals in the social climate and academic areas; (5) *staff development* activities based on building-level goals identified in the comprehensive school plan; and (6) periodic *assessment*, which allows the staff to *modify* the program to meet identified needs and opportunities.

Three guiding principles help to create a positive culture and a good climate of relationships in a school, which in turn allow the school planning and management team, the mental health team, and the parents' program to work cooperatively and effectively. All working groups within a school agree to use a (7) *"no fault," problem-solving approach* in which people's energies are focused on solving problems rather than blame-finding. Decisions are made by (8) *consensus* to avoid "winner–loser" feelings and behavior. The school planning and management team (9) *collaborates* with the principal, meaning that the team cannot paralyze the principal and the principal cannot use the group as a "rubber stamp."

In some cases, a staff member rather than the principal serves as the leader of the school planning and management team. Often this happens after all involved have become comfortable with the process, but sometimes it occurs at the outset. This arrangement works best when it is a genuine attempt to promote leadership from within the staff, not an act of disengagement on the part of the principal. It is important for the principal to be present and fully involved in the meetings and in facilitating the process.

These nine components, developed in the 1968–1969 school year, continue to be the essential elements of the School Development Program.

The School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) is the most important component. Made up of representatives of all the adult stakeholders — as well as students in middle school and high school — it contains the "seeds" of the sense of community that flourishes throughout the school when the process is carried out properly. Working collaboratively, the SPMT gives a school a sense of direction, prioritizes and coordinates activities, provides communication, and most important, allows everyone to experience a sense of ownership in the program and a stake in the outcome. This motivates desirable behavior among parents, staff members, and students, and the components of the program become synergistic rather than antagonistic.

The Mental Health or Student Services Team, which meets separately, focuses equally on addressing and preventing individual student behavior problems. A support or mental health staff person serving on the SPMT recommends and facilitates changes in school procedures and practices found to be harmful to students, staff members, and parents. The mental health team helps the SPMT to apply child development and relationship knowledge to all of its activities.

But the insights and resourcefulness of school faculty and staff must be reinforced by an active and engaged parents' program. Parent participation is crucial: Parents must not simply be called upon to help out with chores, but must become key participants in school decision making. Parents participate in three major ways or levels: on the SPMT through representatives they select; as a parent group or team working with the staff to plan and support social and academic activities; and through attendance at various school events. Parents, along with staff members, sponsor projects designed to create a good social climate in the school, and they work as assistants in classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the library, and for other school functions. To facilitate parental involvement, a teacher or some other staff person serves as a liaison.

As the SPMT addresses the problems and opportunities in the school in a systematic way, the functioning of students, staff, and parents improves, and the hope and energy levels of the staff go up. This increases the time, opportunity, and motivation for planning which leads to improved curriculum development. Eventually the curriculum and the entire school experience begin to promote overall development of students along the six developmental pathways critical for academic learning. The staff development program helps the teachers gain the skills necessary to promote personal, social, and academic growth among students. Significant academic and social behavior gains often follow.

While our program has proved effective in raising the academic and social achievement of low-income children, it is important to understand that the School Development Program is not a "poor people's" program or one intended only for minority children. The process and underlying theory of the School Development Program can benefit all children: The statistics on substance abuse, suicide, vandalism, and other antisocial behavior reported in well-appointed, well-funded suburban schools provides evidence that children in more affluent communities are not being adequately supported in meeting the challenges in their lives. They too can benefit from having their parents and adults in their schools working together and making clear their common commitment to the success of every child in the building.

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# To Live on This Earth:

## Holistic Education from the Vantage of American Indian Education

Kathleen Dugan

**American Indian education, with its emphasis on relatedness and responsibility to the family, to the broader community, and to the earth, is a viable alternative to the individualism and consumerism that characterizes mainstream education and society.**

*Kathleen Dugan holds a Ph.D. in Theology and is a professor of Theological and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego. Her longstanding interest in Native American culture and treatment of people in the educational system, plus her commitment to enhancing multiculturalism in the university curriculum, provided much of the generative force behind this article.*

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That American education needs some drastic renewal is a growing complaint in our country, so much so that our presidential candidates selected it as one of their battlegrounds during the recent campaign. The dissonance between the ideal and the results achieved alarms many, and suggestions abound about what we should do to better this critical area of our culture. Yet perhaps the most probing analysis remains to be heard, although it has been voiced by one segment of the American people for generations. Could it be that the very model of education which we have received is flawed, that its methods are woefully inadequate for its stated task and its goals in dire need of revision?

Such a suggestion no doubt would be rejected by many educators as wildly anomic. Yet serious objections have been raised about the American educational project by one of its oldest minorities, the Native American Indians, who have been subjected to both private (church owned) and public (Bureau of Indian Affairs and state) education. They have suffered through an intense period in which the major goal of social management by the majority was assimilation of ancient culture to "allow" them to enter the mainstream of American economy and politics. Although we may recognize and understand the impulse pursued so relentlessly for more than 100 years, we need not be blindly accepting of its wisdom. The destructive nature of this enterprise has of late emerged in ugly profile as responsible for dehumanizing and disabling a large segment of the American populace. The biting critique made by American Indians on the education they received permits us to see another, much older model that remains native to their culture. Moreover, their critique summons us to reexamine the very structure and values of our own system to see *which* model is actually more productive of human dignity and informed participation in society. At the crux is the

question of whether some values (often not those of the dominant culture) may be of greater worth in a postmodern world. Crucial also is the question of whether a society can afford to subdue diversity in favor of homogeneity.

The history of the United States in its attempts to educate and assimilate the American Indians is one of trauma, brutality, and failure. There are striking statements of its ineffectiveness, but none so prophetic as that given by the neighboring Indians who gently declined the invitation to attend William and Mary College in Colonial America:

> We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges, and that the maintenance of our young men while with you would be very expensive to you. We are convinced that you mean to do us good by your proposal, and we thank you heartily.
>
> But you who are wise must know that different nations have different conceptions of things, and you will, therefore, not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours.
>
> We have had some experience of it. Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the College of the Northern Provinces. They were instructed in all your sciences. But when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Wood.... Neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally fit for nothing. (Thompson, 1978, p. 7)

Very early, then, the Indians recognized that there was great dissonance between their form of education and the preferred Western model. Their goals for education were thoroughly pragmatic, but also responsive to the deep needs of their people for wisdom in living upon this earth and in a society of diverse peoples. Foremost they responded to the need to learn how to be a member of their special family, the tribe.

The common method of educating Indian children during the beginning of government supervision was to take them from their families and place them into boarding schools, where they were punished for speaking their own language and were made to conform to the social model of the white culture. They returned to their people stripped of their Indianness, feeling at home with neither cultural group. By 1873, great changes resulted from the well-intentioned work of the mission schools: The Native Americans were stripped of essential traditional religious beliefs and cultural norms. By altering (and ultimately outlawing) native spiritual practices, the missionaries broke the Indian spirit. Familiar tribal myths and heroes were replaced by Western ones. More dangerously, mission schools taught Western European theories of human nature and society. The outcome was profound alienation, the terrible effects of which are still troublingly visible today (Thompson, 1978, pp. 4–5).

It became apparent by the 1920s that the federal Indian school system was badly out of joint and unable to prepare students to become productive members of society. When the noted Merriam Survey of 1928 was made public, it was an analysis and catalogue of every ill the system possessed. Although it made excellent criticisms and recommendations, however, it did not abandon the government's policy of assimilation. Its arguments nonetheless deserve serious attention, for they point obliquely to a better model, even for today. The study recommended that Indian children be kept in their native communities, and it thoroughly condemned the practice of taking children from their families and placing them in boarding schools distant from home.

Against the excessive discipline often enforced, the Merriam Survey recommended humanitarian values and urged increased funds for Indian education (Spicer, 1968, pp. 243–246). It was not until the revolutionary tenure of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the 1930s that a new policy emerged which argued for Indian distinctness and a return to traditional Indian values in education. Here at least was overdue recognition of the value of the native heritage. Education immediately felt the impact of the Wheeler–Howard Act of 1934, which allowed for the first time the hiring of large numbers of Indians in the federal Indian school system (Thompson, 1978, p. 6). The Collier era saw the establishment of day schools on reservations, the revival of Indian languages, and the initiation of Indian cultural programs.

***At the crux is the question of whether some values (often not those of the dominant culture) may be of greater worth in a postmodern world. Crucial also is the question of whether a society can afford to subdue diversity in favor of homogeneity.***

This optimistic movement forward was halted in the 1950s by federal efforts to terminate tribal status (and the benefits in education this entailed). The history since then has been one of some progress, but with much left to bring to life. It is in the visions of the people and in their successful programs that they urge us to rethink what education should be and what it should accomplish. They state that this article will affirm a universal truth — one from which the mainstream can learn much.

Patricia Locke (1978) has served the national Native American community as president of the National Indian Education Association, and as director for planning resources in minority education of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. In evaluating education in the United States, she noted that schools are shaped by communities, for the school is a social instrument. Thus, for the mainstream, education has been a catalyst in technological achievement, creating demands to keep technology advancing. In communicating certain values, schools define for us what is "good" and reiterate that only by achieving these crucial values can we realize our full personhood. Three major values, Locke suggests, have dominated education: individualism, mercantilism, and acquisitiveness. The cherished value of *individualism* urges us to work for ourselves and by ourselves, exalting the personal over the communal dimension of life. *Mercantilism* places a value on gaining "things," and becoming part of the buying-and-selling syndrome without regard to its effects on the marginal or natural environment. *Acquisitiveness* places a high value on possessions — costly possessions — as prizes of a successful life (Locke, 1978, p. 119).

The charges are chillingly true. What American, we might wonder, is immune from the powerful forces that structure the ways we envision ourselves and our relation to the rest of reality? Both Locke (1978) and Vine Deloria (1978) are right in tracing this litany of goods to an uncritical reading of the Judeo–Christian tradition, and suggesting that the American Indians have consistently, if futilely, refuted it. Yet even they have learned that some compromise must be made if they are to survive in the dominant "immigrant" culture. That does not mean that they quietly accept the entire system. Rather, their many suggestions and ideas compete for attention in the discussion of what constitutes a vital, holistic, and effective education.

Perhaps the most essential lesson that should be learned from traditional models of education is this: They are conceived as organic systems geared to bring the child into sensitive and responsible relationships with the entire kinship system of peoples and nature. Rather than concentrate on intellectual skills, the Indian child was instructed — indeed, gently and persistently shown — that being a person involves all the multiple ways in which we interface with the reality that surrounds us. Locke (1978) gives a striking example of this by describing the typical training of the Colville tribal baby, who was guided (normally by a grandparent) to perceive with all of the senses while learning to speak. His grandfather says the word *wighst* and slaps his hand on a solid surface. From his position on the ground, where he is playing, the child feels the vibration and stops to try to feel through his body and feet the movement of a stream over rocks, the shock of the strides of two-legged and four-legged beings as they affect the earth in their movement, the weight of the tree as it rests on the earth. So also the sense of hearing is awakened to attend to birds' song and insects' whispering, and the gentle rustling of the trees in the wind. The sense of smell broadens to take in the subtle aromas of human, animal, and earth. Sight opens to the wide array of all movement, color, and texture — even activity (or absence of it) in the peripheral sphere. The command *wighst* is given several times a day to encourage this attitude of listening attention.

As the child grows, his horizons are broadened in walks in fields and forests. In this way the seasons and cycles of nature become familiar, and the child is nurtured in knowing the proper ways to relate to the world in balance with all of its creatures. In this traditional training every gesture and word teaches the child that he has a valued and responsible place in the universe (Locke, 1978, pp. 121–122).

The core necessity of this traditional learning was that it be *organic*. In that concept we hear the experience of many generations living upon this earth who discovered that we must have more than intellectual learning to prepare us for the multifaceted experiences which will shape our lives. Stepping well away from the time-honored Greek ideal so long dominant in the West, it insists that the body and all of its senses be part of true education. That orientation in infancy and early childhood yielded adolescents and adults who were instilled with respect for all life and attuned to the many voices of creation. Deloria (1978)

testifies that the tribal values of his people and all native peoples centered on living in harmony with the environment, and that this led to awareness of both the gifts and the vulnerabilities of the earth. Such a vision cautioned that the guarding of natural resources was requisite for the maintenance of life. Deloria contrasts this with the deplorable record of Western civilization, which until very recently has lacked an ecological conscience (Deloria, 1978, p. 18).

Another element shaping traditional education is the sense that it must be the tribe which structures curriculum and method in the educational process. Though this value of community involvement in education has much agreement in the mainstream, there is a significant difference in emphasis among the native people. The difference lies, first of all, in the understanding of the very nature of human relationships in the tribal culture. In the traditional cultures the nuclear model of family was unknown. Rather, a child was born into an extended family network that included grandparents, uncles and aunts, and many cousins. The ancient ordering of society maintained the clan system as a means of support and identification, and at the core of this was the extended family. In the way of the traditional Navajo, a person has an identity that relates her to maternal and fraternal clans, in a relation of honor and responsibility. Thus, one is "born from" and "born to" specific clans. The effect on self-awareness is powerful, for it is impossible to think of oneself as alone. If such binding evokes obligation, probably the stronger sense is one of gift — of having a treasured place in the midst of numerous people.

In traditional education, all of the elders had a role in training the child in life's lessons, though some were more present than others. Grandparents had pride of place, for old age was revered as the time of wisdom in Indian life. Uncles and aunts played special roles, too, often sharing with the parents the teaching of necessary skills. It was this vital web of life that was so severely broken by the removal of Indian children to boarding schools. There should be little wonder that such a system not only created chaos, but also induced profound alienation.

Locke (1978) notes that such a history has led the Assiniboine Sioux to establish the Hope Ranch Project on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. Here they have created a living environment that provides children who are without families with the security of family and reaffirmation of Assiniboine customs. Indian surrogate parents, brothers, and sisters act supportively of one another in a natural home setting, and this allows the children to participate in normal tribal life. This program is recognized as a model for tribes who don't want children without families to suffer adoption out of the tribe or the alien atmosphere of an orphanage (Locke, 1978, p. 123).

The preservation of a strong family life is a goal shared by both cultures, and in each the family has suffered many blows during the latter part of the twentieth century. That both cultures hold family life as central, however, does not mean that both find the same answers or derive the same methods for education. The model of the person within the traditional Indian cultures has always been that of person-in-community, and this has mandated that all education keep as its goal the welfare of the people.

***That both cultures hold family life as central, however, does not mean that both find the same answers or derive the same methods for education.***

Contrary to mainstream American culture, a traditional Indian does not think of a career for self-fulfillment. This is not to deny that strong individualism plays a role in the development of the person; however, this individualism is subordinated to what is perceived as a higher goal — the need of the people (Locke, 1978, p. 121). With this always a guiding principle, children are taught to achieve goals and work diligently, so that they might have the happiness and the honor of contributing to their people those gifts which nurture life. This is in direct opposition to much career counseling and choice in the United States, but one could ask whether the traditional Indian vision is really so alien. The loss of its dominance is apparent, but surely its roots are present in the ideals that founded our country and in the models of education which we can retrieve from early New England Puritan schooling. An interesting challenge is raised by the traditional goals, and perhaps we would be a healthier society if we regained them.

Locke (1978) notes a striking example of the difference such a goal can produce in a society that prepares its members to achieve for other people. In

1971, medicine men, singers, healers, and respected elders from Canada, the United States, and Mexico met in Morley, Alberta. Their goals were to pray for their people and to discuss the issues affecting their survival. On the subject of education, several wise ones recognized that they should send some of their children into the white world to get the white man's education and so be able to help their people. But they viewed that world as harmful, rent with societal disorders caused by alcohol and drugs. Only the tough and strong ones should go. They urged that the tribes plan ahead to support these kids, and that they should receive honor when they came home (Locke, 1978, p. 128).

As another example, in 1972 the United Sioux tribes of South Dakota resolved that increased numbers of Indian students enter the fields of public administration, medicine, law, business administration, and economics so as to be better prepared to return to the service of the home tribe (Locke, 1978, p. 128). Such a vision is holistic in a broad sense, guiding education toward goals that transcend the personal and stressing that fulfillment can only come in the process of service to the people. It is interesting to reflect that this orientation is recognized by Fowler as the fifth of six stages of moral development. In traditional societies it is present from the first moment of learning.

All traditional models of education perceive that curriculum, as the heart of education, needs to be rounded in ways that engage the students not only in learning basic skills, but also in learning their history and culture in the fullest sense. The vision of how one does that in Indian society is instructive. Culture involves all the life-ways of a people, and it was, and is, natural for the Native Americans to think of religion as one essential part of this. More precisely, since no Indian language has a word for religion, it relates to seeing that religion (or what it represents) is the ground of life, the energy which constantly penetrates it. This was a great loss, and one not truly understood by missionaries. It may have been thoroughly understood by the federal government, however, which recognized that taking away Indian religion was a powerful step toward assimilation.

Certainly, under the Constitution of the United States, there are arguments against the teaching of religion in the public schools. But there is a great difference between public and private education, as it has been envisioned by Indian educators in the form of tribal colleges. But perhaps the deeper difference lies in the sharply divergent ways the very concept of religion is understood. In the West religion has come to be something apart from life, more a dimension with uniqueness than a living strand interwoven into the heart of culture. It may be that we cannot change this concept dramatically, against the force of so many centuries' derivation of it, but there is still room to shape the curriculum so that the interaction of religion in history and society can be learned. Most students who arrive at the college level are unaware that religion has played so thoroughly penetrating a role in the development of Western civilization. Materials that demonstrate this belong in a holistic education.

Another area that offers much for our consideration is the insistence on language as the bearer of culture. Among the Native Americans the stripping away of native languages was an early tool in schools seeking to produce acculturated Indians. It was immediately resisted and mourned by the people, who understood innately that the shape of concepts and the rhythm of a language speak the deepest life of a culture. More critically, the loss of their native tongue was intended to remove the great store of wisdom embodied in their stories, and the foundational symbols of their religious rituals. Now, in an era when it is possible to reinstate the teaching of native languages, the people argue for a balanced bicultural approach to learning. The hope is that children who have a different heritage from the mainstream can be given the opportunity to learn thoroughly the language of their culture, as well as become conversant with the dominant language which is the "lingua franca" of commerce and politics. This stance has important connections with the many places in the United States in which minority students are being phased into the mainstream. There are many arguments for and against public bilingual education, and behind the negative voices one hears the old goal of assimilation as the only way to educate a vital young population to take their places in the world. The experience and wisdom of the Indian population has much to say about the desirability of biculturalism. Indeed, it is a lesson they have learned at great cost, and therefore it deserves respectful hearing.

Perhaps one facet of their argument immediately appeals to our pragmatic sense. They say that much school failure and the high dropout rate among their native students can be traced to the traumas associated with entry into the educational system with an

inadequate command of English. The way of wisdom, they argue, would be to teach reading first in the native language and gradually introduce the child into using the English language. Locke suggests that the early grades function in the native tongue predominantly, but that from the fourth grade onward students should learn dual and multiple cultures. She notes astutely that learning the "foreign" languages is necessary in order to understand the values and behavior expectations of other cultures. The appropriation of them, then, is seen as a skill (Locke, 1978, p. 127).

More subtle gains are perceived in bilingual education. It is an established insight that bilingual instruction creates the environment for improved intellectual functioning. Also, the place given to the native tongue indicates respect for the traditional culture and helps to nurture pride in the child's identity (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1983, p. 209). Locke (1978) agrees by underlining the great need to restore dignity and a healthy self-image to minority students. The opponents of bicultural and bilingual education argue that it is regressive, an attempt to move the students into effete ways. The Indian community counters by saying that it is not simply a bridge to the past (itself an important part of identity), but especially a way to provide familiarity and skill in the handling of different cognitive systems. This is a great advantage, and one infrequently offered or attained in mainstream education. A fine example of success in this area can be found among the Navajo in the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona, which has attracted national attention for its work in bilingual, bicultural education. Such experiments show that bicultural education is necessary in a multinational, multiethnic world. Language is a powerful key to identity and protection against alienation and disorientation. Furthermore, when education is bicultural in a traditional society, community and parental involvement are more likely to occur; this is a great strength in any educational system, and could only be for the best.

Holistic education should be the goal of our educational system. However, there are historical and cultural reasons why this goal is not being reached. Within our country Native American Indians have a long-standing presence which in its traditional model of education offers much for our consideration. The Native American view of the person as engaged in many-faceted relations sees us as involved in interdependence in so many ways. To live properly on this earth, they say to us, is to be aware of the living bond of support and responsibility that we share with our human relations, but also with the earth and all its creatures. They tell us that intellectual knowledge is fine, but it is not enough, that we are called to develop the learning powers of all our senses. They urge us to see the value of living, not just or even primarily for ourselves, but for the people who are our home in this world. In defining culture in ways of respect for the orphans and the elderly, as well as for the heroes and the leaders, they present a healthy image of providing for the weakest among us. By insisting that culture includes religion as an inherent element which works throughout and for the good of all, they remind us that our concept of culture may have serious gaps. In urging the great needs for bilingual education, they affirm the value of preserving diversity in our nation, not as an impediment to unity, but as the creative power which makes that unity vital. They urge us to recognize that we cannot afford to cling to one dominant and time-honored cultural way, for we live in a world of profound multiethnic encounters, and these cultures have important lessons to teach us.

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# The Nation's Rural School Districts:

## Orphans in the School Reform Debate

Robert Stephens and Bruce Hunter

**Rural schools have been a low priority for policymakers at the state and federal levels for some time. This article explores the effects of neglect by policymakers and recent reform proposals on rural schools.**

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Rural school districts and the students they serve have been overlooked or misunderstood in the debate about reforming public education. Removed from the media centers, these schools have attracted little attention from reformers. When rural schools are noticed by reformers they are misunderstood because a standard definition of "rural" has not been applied. Furthermore, inequitable school finance formulas, changes in the structure of the economy, declining family incomes, changing population patterns, large-scale socioeconomic changes, neglect, and misunderstanding have greatly diminished the institutional capacity of rural schools to provide a quality education for all students and meet the many needs of poor children. All children deserve a quality education, but the difficulties of serving children in small numbers, isolated from many resources are compounded by well-meaning reform that fails to address the problems of rural schools in delivering education of increasing quality to students from increasingly financially distressed families.

The complex issues of urban school systems across the country have occupied center stage in both national and state policy circles for the past three decades. Six hundred seventy-nine of the 15,358 regular public school districts (or only 4.4%) had enrollments of 10,000 or more, yet these school districts accounted for nearly half (47.2%) of the approximately 41.2 million public school students in 1990–1991 (McDowell, 1992).

By contrast, rural schools enroll 16.6% of all public school students but include over 47% of all school districts. Many rural school systems have historically confronted a number of issues surrounding the quality of education they are able to offer. But even the strongest rural school districts are likely to be handicapped in the future as a result of socioeconomic trends impacting nonmetropolitan America for the past decade (e.g., the continuing out-migration of population from rural to metropolitan areas, the crisis in energy extraction industries, the industrial

restructuring underway in the nation from producing goods to producing services, higher unemployment and higher poverty rates in rural counties, the fiscal crisis in rural local governments).

On one hand, rural districts must not become orphans in this nation's reassessment of public education. On the other hand, our call for a new commitment to rural education should not divert attention from the needs of urban systems. Both sectors warrant the undivided attention of policy actors at both national and state levels.

**Definitional problems of rural school districts**

Definitional problems have hampered rural education studies for some time, although some progress has been made since Butterworth and Dawson (1952) felt compelled to remind the nation that rural education should not be equated with schools serving agricultural communities, but should also include those located in sparsely populated fishing, mining, and lumbering communities. Not much has changed, however, as a panel chartered by the American Association of School Administrators (1984) concluded after an extensive examination of current definitions. Even more surprising is that multiple definitions are used by a single federal department (Stephens, 1990, pp. 42–47).

The field of rural education studies is of course not alone in confronting the definitional problem. Jordan and Hargrove (1987) have concluded that researchers tend to use two basic approaches to operationalize rurality:

> (a) ignoring the problem by asking the reader to accept on faith the rurality of their samples, or (b) using some measurement of the geographical environment as their method. Researchers who have used the second method have conceptualized rurality as either a categorical variable (i.e., rural–urban) or a continuous variable. (p. 25)

In a comprehensive review of 178 articles, books, and other sources on rural sociology and rural mental health for the 1970s, Bosak and Perlman (1982) observed that a variety of quantitative measures (including what they called "homemade" ones) as well as diverse qualitative measures were employed. Even more striking was their finding that slightly more than 40% of the 178 sources did not establish a definition of any sort (pp. 5–6). These authors concluded that the continued use of multiple definitions makes difficult the analysis of urban–rural differences, hampers replication studies, and handicaps cross-sectional studies of different rural regions (p. 25).

The lack of a consensus concerning what type of school district should be included in the definition of a rural system has, among other problems, led to confusion about the number of such school districts. As a result the federal policymaking community has been forced to pick and choose from wide estimates of the number of rural school districts. In the past these estimates have ranged from two-fifths to one-half of the nation's approximately 15,000 public school systems, to more than two-thirds of the operating districts. Even more disparity is introduced when states chose to define rural school districts.

More recently, through Elder's work (1991) based on the Merged File of Common Core Data Public Schools Universe and Public Agency Universe maintained by the National Center for Educational Statistics, a procedure has been established that permits development of a topology of school district locales (e.g., city, urban fringe, town, rural). In his landmark work, Elder presented the following data:

- Rural districts represented nearly half (47.2%) of the nation's 15,123 operating districts in 1989–1990.
- These 7,145 rural districts operated over one-fourth (22,412) of the 79,307 public schools in the country.
- Slightly more than 6-1/2 million students (16.6%) of the nearly 40 million public elementary-secondary school-age population attended these rural schools.
- More than one out of eight (13.4%) of the nation's 2.2 million teachers were employed by these rural districts (Elder, 1991).

Thus, rural school systems, despite great fluctuations in their number over much of the past half-century, remain important actors in national planning for the improvement of education. What happens in this segment of the public school enterprise ought to be of great interest, particularly to those who design ways to make schools more responsive to the changing requirements for public education brought about by the long-term socioeconomic trends occurring both nationally and internationally. The significance of the rural component for individual state school systems is also established by Elder (1991); his calculations are reported in Table 1.

**A profile of the institutional capacity of rural districts**

What can be said about rural school districts' institutional capacity to meet rising expectations for schools? For example, do rural schools possess the

Table 1
*Number and Percentage of Rural School Districts by State*

| Percentage of Rural Districts | Number of States | States and Percentage of Rural Districts |
|---|---|---|
| 91–100 | 1 | North Dakota (92) |
| 81–90 | 4 | Kansas (82), South Dakota (85), Montana (85), Alaska (82) |
| 71–80 | 2 | Minnesota (71), Nebraska (72) |
| 61–70 | 7 | Vermont (65), Iowa (70), Missouri (67), Arkansas (64), Oklahoma (64), Colorado (63), Idaho (64) |
| 51–60 | 5 | Maine (55), Wisconsin (54), Texas (54), New Mexico (55), Washington (57) |
| 41–50 | 4 | New Hampshire (43), Mississippi (44), Nevada (41), Wyoming (47), |
| 31–40 | 11 | Delaware (37), Illinois (39), Indiana (34), Michigan (36), Ohio (40), Virginia (40), West Virginia (40), Kentucky (35), Arizona (40), Utah (35), Oregon (38) |
| 21–30 | 6 | New York (27), Georgia (29), North Carolina (28), South Carolina (29), Tennessee (21), California (27) |
| 11–20 | 8 | Connecticut (14), Massachusetts (13), Maryland (17), New Jersey (12), Pennsylvania (20), Florida (13), Alabama (19), Louisiana (12) |
| 1–10 | 1 | Rhode Island (8) |
| 0 | 1 | Hawaii |

*Note*: Rural districts are those systems where 75% or more of the students attend a regular public school located in a rural locale. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
*Source*: Elder, W. L. (1991, November). *A descriptive analysis of rural schools and rural school districts* (Table 8). Columbia: University of Missouri, Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis.

organization-structural features to address the U.S. Department of Education's ambitious AMERICA 2000 strategy?

Attempts at profiling the more than 7,000 rural school systems are complicated by the great variations among them. Although low enrollment, low population density, and relative isolation are the defining features of most rural school systems, great diversity also marks them, a point stressed by Sher (1977):

> The point is that rural America is far too heterogeneous and complex to be amenable to simplistic definitions or comfortable stereotypes.... Like rural America as a whole, rural schools and school districts are distinguished by their diversity. Despite increasing standardization, rural schools still tend to reflect the pluralism found among the rural communities they serve.... As a consequence, treating rural schools and school districts as if they were a unified, monolithic entity would be a serious mistake. (p. 1)

Sher's 1977 caution reinforces those of a number of earlier observers who also warned against grouping all rural districts into one universal category, but whose concerns were largely ignored in the ensuing years (Butterworth & Dawson 1952; Commission on Schools in Small Communities, 1939; Department of Rural Education, 1957).

The profile that follows stresses the selected input, process, and outcome indicators that I believe to be significant gauges of the health and performance of a school district, rural or otherwise.

***Fiscal features of rural school districts.*** One of the most important determinants of the health of a school district, rural or otherwise, is its ability to finance quality programs. I am not persuaded by periodic efforts made to minimize the importance of fiscal resources. Large sectors of nonmetropolitan America have experienced severe economic difficulties in recent years, and these of course have had negative effects on rural education, and on the students of these schools and their families. Especially noteworthy are the following:

- the higher than average unemployment rates in nonmetropolitan areas for much of the past decade, which in 1991 equaled 11.5%, well above the 9.5% rate in metropolitan areas (Economic Research Service, 1991a);
- the higher poverty rates in nonmetropolitan areas (historically the rates have exceeded those in urbanized areas), which increased to 16.3%, compared with 12.7% in nonmetropolitan areas in 1990 (Bureau of the Census, 1990);
- the lower incomes of residents of metropolitan areas, which for most of the past decade were only approximately three-fourths of those in

metropolitan areas (Economic Research Service 1991c);

- the significant population losses in approximately half of the nonmetropolitan counties between 1980 and 1990 — these losses were primarily centered in manufacturing-, agriculture-, and mining-dependent nonmetropolitan counties (Economic Research Service, 1991b); and
- the population losses that included large numbers of the more educated of working age (Economic Research Service, 1991b).

The negative effects of economic and demographic trends have diminished the fiscal capacity of rural districts to deliver quality education programs. Most state aid programs, especially the prevalent fiscal equalization grant programs, include a requirement of a local contribution that is either assumed or mandated by the states (Salmon, 1990). In addition, most states permit local school districts to raise additional revenue for the support of their schools. It is Salmon's position that the additional local revenues, or local leeway funds, are

> the primary contributing factor to the lack of fiscal equity, e.g., variance in per-pupil expenditures, average annual salaries paid classroom teachers, and various other fiscal measures of public schools. The inability of low fiscal capacity school districts to generate sufficient local revenue has contributed significantly to the disparities that currently confront rural education in America. (p. 6)

Although some of the economic and demographic trends impacting rural America might be cyclical, they do suggest that the fiscal capacity of rural communities is at present seriously limited. The ability of rural communities to support ambitious reform proposals is problematic. Moreover, education is in competition for shrinking local tax support with local governments, which have historically lagged behind metropolitan area local governments in their efforts to provide basic public services (Rainey & Raney, 1978; Reeder, 1987).

***Instructional features of rural school districts.*** Unlike my overwhelming negative view of the fiscal capacity of rural systems, I offer a more mixed judgment concerning the institutional capacity of these types of schools. Most rural schools offer the commonly accepted core program at the elementary level, although fewer rural systems than urban or suburban districts offer programs for gifted students (Coe, 1989). At the secondary level, however, rural districts tend to lag behind their urban and suburban counterparts, in instructional programming features, especially with regard to a lack of breadth in secondary core curricula in science and math (Monk & Haller, 1986; Sherman, 1992), and number of advanced placement courses (Sherman, 1992).

As the number of disadvantaged children grows, rural districts tend to have available more limited, important instructional support services, health services, and social services for at-risk students, alternative programs (Sherman, 1992), or special education services (Coe, 1989). Moreover, rural systems tend to have more limited instructional equipment than do urban or suburban systems (Monk & Haller, 1986), and they lack specialized instructional facilities (Honeyman, Wood, Thompson, & Stewart, 1988).

***Although low enrollment, low population density, and relative isolation are the defining features of most rural school systems, great diversity also marks them....***

An important positive in the instructional practices of rural districts is the tendency to have smaller student–teacher ratios (Miller, 1988; Nachtigal, 1982) and smaller class sizes (Helge, 1989). Furthermore, rural schools devote more time on-task than do urban or suburban systems (Springfield & Teddie, 1990).

The relatively rapid development of distance learning technologies is of course helping to alleviate some of the concerns cited above regarding the instructional handicaps under which many rural systems function. Methods primarily employed thus far have been noninteractive and two-way interactive video (Jefferson & Moore, 1990). The federal government invested heavily in distance learning through the passage of Public Law 100-297 in 1988, which created the Star Schools Program. A number of distance learning initiatives have also been undertaken at the state level (e.g., Iowa, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Texas). These and other interactive satellite instructional initiatives enable rural schools to address some of their instructional programming inadequacies, as well as enrich their staff develop-

ment services — another common limitation that is addressed below.

***Staffing of rural school districts.*** The staffing of rural systems represents one of the most troubling aspects of the institutional capacity of such districts to effectively participate in school reform. Although the work of Matthes (1992) tends to dispel one of the lingering myths of rural staffing practices — the inability of rural schools to recruit staff — other issues clearly call into question the staffing capacity of rural districts.

***An important positive in the instructional practices of rural districts is the tendency to have small student–teacher ratios and smaller class sizes. Furthermore, rural schools devote more time on-task than do urban or suburban systems.***

For example, though rural systems may not experience more difficulty in their general recruitment, they do experience greater problems than urban or suburban schools in the recruitment of qualified teachers in science, mathematics, and foreign languages (Monk & Haller, 1986). This no doubt accounts for the pattern of rural teachers teaching in subject areas for which they are not prepared (Miller, 1989). The smaller size of rural systems also accounts for the fact that rural teachers have more daily lesson preparations (Luhman & Fendes, 1989; Miller, 1988) and that the classes they teach often comprise multiple grade levels (Miller, 1988). Moreover, rural teachers tend to have less experience and are less likely to have advanced degrees than urban and suburban teachers; as a consequence, rural teachers receive less pay (Stern, 1992).

The National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) has made possible a rich new data source for comparing features of rural school principals and their counterparts in other settings. Rural principals tend to be younger and less experienced, less well-trained, and receive lower salaries and benefits (Stern, 1992). Importantly, they tend to lack the support services to function as the instructional leader of the school (Jacobson, 1990; Nachtigal, 1987). Staff development services available to rural teachers and principals alike tend to be more limited (Matthes, 1992).

***Student outcomes in rural school districts.*** One of the best measures of the institutional capacity of an educational institution is student outcomes. If a class of school systems compares favorably with the entire public school universe, then this class of schools should be viewed as having the capacity and the wherewithal to function effectively. Evidence of submarginal performance, on the other hand, would suggest deficiencies in the organizational-structural properties of these districts, as well as flaws in the processes they use.

The most comprehensive national data on student achievement are included in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In existence since 1969, NAEP measures student progress in five basic areas: reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Rural districts, classified as Extreme Rural, are systems located in nonmetropolitan areas having a population of under 10,000 and whose residents are farmers or farm workers. Welch (1991) has completed the most extensive analysis of rural district performance on NAEP data:

> At the national level, rural school student scores now are consistently comparable to the national mean proficiency levels and have been for a decade.... NAEP scores for Extreme Rural students were generally higher than those for the Urban Disadvantaged group and lower than those for the Urban Advantaged group. (p. 3)

In another probe, Welch (1991) compared rural student performance on the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88), a second data set maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. NELS: 88 is a survey of 25,000 eighth-grade students in three community types: urban, or central city; suburban, or community adjacent to a central city in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA); and rural, or community outside a MSA. Welch concluded that

> rural eighth graders scored at or about the national average on measures of science, mathematics, reading, and history/government. However, they scored significantly lower than their suburban counterparts on all four achievement tests but significantly higher than urban students. (p. 4)

Comparisons of rural and other types of school systems are also available for other outcome measures. Using data from the High School and Beyond

Table 2
*Major Illustrations of State Strategies Having Rural Districts as Primary Intended Target, and Estimated Extent of Current Use*

| Major Strategies | Estimated Extent of Current Use[1] | Time Period Majority Initiated | Primary Intent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Seek reorganization of small enrollment size districts into larger administrative units | Limited | 1950s–1960s | Enhancement of the quality of education |
| Promote use of locally determined multidistrict sharing of whole-grades and/or staff | Limited | 1980s | Enhancement of instruction |
| Promote use of locally governed, multidistrict regional single-purpose schools for special populations | Limited | 1970s | Enhancement of the quality of instruction for special populations |
| Promote use of locally governed multidistrict regional comprehensive secondary schools | Moderate | 1960s | Enhancement of curriculum and instruction |
| Seek creation of state network of locally governed, limited purpose regional service centers for special populations | Moderate | 1980s | Enhancement of service for low incidence handicapping conditions |
| Seek creation of state network of locally governed, comprehensive regional service centers | Moderate | 1960s–1970s | Enhancement of curriculum and reduction of administrative costs |
| Seek establishment of state network of state-governed technical assistance centers | Limited | 1970s | Enhancement of the quality of instruction |
| Promote use of distance learning technologies | Moderate | 1980s | Enhancement of the quality of curriculum and instruction |
| Seek modifications in state funding formula to reflect sparsity; other revenue enhancement plans | Majority | 1980s–1990s | Enhancement of overall quality of schools, staff, and curriculum |

[1]Estimated extent of current use: Limited = ten states or fewer; Moderate = more than ten states, but less than half of them; Majority = half of the states or more.

Report (another data file maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics; it includes the class of 1980 and defines a rural student as one attending a high school located in a nonmetropolitan county), Marion, Mirochnik, McCaul, and McIntire (1991) concluded that

> proportionately fewer rural than non-rural seniors intended to pursue college and advanced degrees. During the four years following high school graduation (1980–1984), significantly fewer rural (62%) than urban (70%) or suburban (73.5%) youth attended at least one term of college, either part-time or full-time. (p. 3)

While Marion, et al. indicate that dropping out of school could not be attributed to urban, suburban, or rural location, they do conclude that "black and Hispanic students in rural areas also were far more likely to drop out than were metropolitan members of these minorities" (p. 6).

### External help for rural systems

Many states have long been engaged in efforts to develop the institutional capacity of rural districts. Stephens (1992) recently classified the primary intent of what were labeled "extraordinary efforts" on behalf of rural districts; namely, efforts directed toward one or more of four overarching goals, including (1) enhancement of the quality of the instructional program, (2) enhancement of the quality of programming for special populations of students in attendance at rural schools, (3) enhancement of the quality of the professional staff of rural systems, and (4) enhancement of the institutional capacity of rural systems.

The results of this assessment are shown in Table 2. The construction of the profile presented was drawn from both individual state files that have been maintained for several decades, and from a companion, loosely structured cross-index file that is used to track state legislative action. The development of a meaningful system to monitor state legislation having implication for education is no easy task, even for what now appear to have been the quiet decades of the 1960s and 1970s, as students of school government will attest. There is no single source that provides a comprehensive content analysis of all facets of state legislative developments. Rather, one must continuously review the publications of a relatively large number of national professional education associations, both within education and in other fields, and those of federal and state governments that regularly report on developments in the states. Although these procedures have clear limitations, they do permit one to establish a sense of the focus and direction of state activity, which can subse-

quently serve as a useful guide for the development of patterns and tendencies.

Rural systems have also been the benefactors of targeted federal programs. In an earlier work that attempted to examine the scope of programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education that by statute or ED regulation were specifically targeted on rural, small school districts, Stephens (1990) established that 12 of the 140 elementary-secondary assistance programs administered by this agency in 1990 were so designated. The most prominent of these were (and continue to be): the Rural Technical Assistance Centers; Chapter I (Public Law 100-297), begun in 1989; the Rural Initiative, a separate rural set-aside that has been part of the contracts governing the work of the then nine Regional Educational Laboratories since 1987; and the long-standing ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. The rural share of the big-ticket items administered by ED (e.g., Vocational Education–Basic Grants to the States, Educationally Deprived Children–Local Educational Agencies, Bilingual Education, Chapter 1) could not be established because many of these, as well as other big-ticket programs administered by other departments of the federal government (e.g., HHS Head Start), are formula grants to the states that have some discretionary authority to make use of their own distributive formulas. Adding further complexity to the question about the equity of the rural share of federal programs is that different federal departments and independent agencies make use of differing definitions, a point raised earlier.

This much can be said about the orphan status of rural education in the present workings of ED: The vast majority of rural set-aside programs administered by the agency are categorical programs targeted on special populations of students that were initiated by congressional action, not by the Department of Education. Furthermore, there was no "rural superintendents' network" similar to the relatively long-standing Urban Superintendent's Network that is intended to provide urban superintendents, among other objectives, a platform to share their interests and priorities with the staff of ED. One of the new Research and Development Centers created by Congress has a clear mandate to focus on urban issues, but there is no comparable center with an emphasis on rural issues. The regional education laboratories and centers are expected to include rural topics, but the initiative is not a high-profile issue for educational leadership. The most recent example of the priority given by ED to urban education is the appointment last fall of the superintendent of Jefferson County, Kentucky, schools to assess all programs in the department to ensure that all available agency resources are used to address issues in urban education.

***One of the new Research and Development Centers created by Congress has a clear mandate to focus on urban issues, but there is no comparable center with an emphasis on rural issues.***

My interest here for establishing evidence of the low status of rural education compared with urban education clearly is not to suggest an argument for complete parity. Rather, my intent is to point out that there is another section of the public school universe greatly in need of the attention of federal decisionmakers.

**The folly of one-size-fits-all reform**

The profile of rural school systems sketched here gives prominence to indicators that are judged to be associated with the health and performance of these types of organizations. It is in many respects a troubling profile, not only from the perspective of the millions of students to enroll in these schools, but for the nation as well. The profile raises serious questions concerning the institutional capacity of many rural schools, for example, to respond to many of the six national goals for education that ostensibly serve as the cornerstone of the U.S. Department of Education's AMERICA 2000: An Education Strategy. These national goals, which have been adopted virtually intact by many states, make the erroneous assumption that all of the 15,000-plus public school systems in this nation have the wherewithal to (1) seriously mount effective school readiness programs, (2) add breadth and depth to their curricular offerings in science and mathematics, as well as other academic fields, (3) adequately staff the schools with qualified professionals, and (4) provide the necessary instructional support system required to do so.

Similarly, concern can be raised regarding the ability of rural systems to address other currently advocated reform proposals. Three additional examples

that enjoy widespread support in the federal and state policy communities are raised here to illustrate this point.

Although no single set of principles exists on which all those who regularly come forth with proposals labeled restructuring would agree (causing Edmore in 1990 to make the observation that the term has many of the characteristics of a "garbage can"), a consensus seems to have emerged around Corbett's (1990) definition. That is, the term ought to be used in efforts to alter a school district's pattern of rules, roles, and responsibilities which affect the results of the schooling experience (Corbett, 1990, p. 2). Although at present perhaps as many autocratic administrators are serving rural schools as are to be found elsewhere, nonetheless most rural systems by definition have less bureaucratic structures. Similarly, the notion of school-based management has little currency for the very smallest rural systems, where all students might be housed in a single facility under the supervision of a principal–teacher.

Intradistrict parental choice options are also unlikely to have much effect on many rural systems, simply because there are few other schools within a rural school system. On the other hand, the interdistrict variation of choice could be potentially devastating to a rural system having as few as 100 students in high school, as many do, because the loss of 10 or 20 students would diminish the system's ability to effectively and efficiently offer needed courses.

The third popular current reform proposal calls for greater collaboration among human resources providers. Again, this proposal is likely to have little effect on many rural systems, especially the more remote districts serving communities not adjacent to metropolitan centers, where accessibility to health, welfare, and social services is either limited or nonexistent.

I am neither endorsing nor criticizing the three examples cited above. Rather, my intent is to point out the meaningful absence of the proposals' likely impact on rural systems, which represent nearly half of the nation's public school systems. Public policy choices for the improvement of education must give greater attention to the institutional capacity of rural systems. They simply cannot continue to be treated as orphans in this nation's continuing debate on ways to improve the public school enterprise.

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# Poverty, Spirit, and Education

Joan Kirby, RSCJ

**Poverty has devastating effects on children's ability to explore the inner world of the spirit. To free the spirit of love and creativity in children who are poor, it will be necessary to provide secure, safe, and loving communities in the 1990s.**

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What we are witnessing in our society is a rapid decline of life's opportunities for the poor. As Cornel West, a Princeton theologian described it in an article in August in the Sunday Times *Magazine*, "A lethal linkage of economic depression and political lethargy has left the poor in a situation which worsens annually." As we address the spiritual needs of children trapped in poverty, we need to acknowledge the spiritual flaws of our society — flaws that are both rooted in and seeded for racial, class, and cultural inequities in housing, education, and job opportunities.

Children of the poor often enough follow the path that Wordsworth describes in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*. Infants who trail clouds of glory, grow up to be the boys in the shade of the prison house, and men and women who allow the vision to die away and fade into the light of common day. This is a path followed by too many. True accounts about childhood circumstances provide much better insight into the causes for the loss of spiritual vision and the absence of opportunity to recover it. At issue is how to interrupt the pattern.

In our cities we have guns, drugs, and plain dirt. Many parents are so stressed that they are unable to provide for the spiritual and emotional needs of a family. A child's needs are a miniature of the parents' needs. When the basic rights of food, shelter, and clothing are unmet, parents are unable to provide for the child what they need themselves. I heard about one mother who was asked why she neglected to take her children to the free breakfast and lunch program. Her reply was that she was so hungry herself that she couldn't handle the sight of food and the children eating without her.

One of the families I have known best in the past few years lived down the street from me in Clinton (better known as Hell's Kitchen) on the west side of New York City. Tanya was the teenage mother of two boys. She had come from Puerto Rico with her mother, who now lives in Oklahoma. Tanya had good intentions; she loved her sons and they loved her. But Tanya had many needs, which she filled by using the drugs easily available in our neighbor-

son, William, was severely learning disabled, she decided to give up her job and attend to the needs of this two-year-old boy. But of course, she lost her home when income stopped and she could not pay the rent. Cheerfully and hopefully, she braved the ordeal of welfare and homelessness as the consequence of her decision to attend to William's learning problems. After several years, she moved from the homeless shelter when William was old enough for special education classes. Now Diane is back at work, is keeping her new home, and still cares deeply for William. Smiling, she seems to be saying, "This is the price I expect to pay for my son's needs."

Mothers who sacrifice for their children can always be found. Christopher, the child specialist at the shelter, tells the story of his own mother. The face of poverty has not changed. Forty years ago, Christopher's mother was called a *charwoman* — meaning she cleaned government offices at night. The term was demeaning, but there was nothing demeaning about the way she cared for her family, even though she was working. At 6:00 P.M., the carpool arrived to take her to work. The children had the menu for the evening meal and the homework schedule before she left. The first telephone call came every night at 9:00 to make sure all was right; the second call was always at 11:00 to make sure they were all in bed. At 1:00 A.M. she came home and the children, restless until she returned, were aware she was there and could then sleep soundly. In the morning, clean clothes and breakfast were laid out; the children's personal grooming was checked; and they were off to school. Life in the worst public housing project in Washington was not a deterrence. The children learned that everything they did was a reflection of their race. The mother knew the value of raising her children to stay out of trouble: Blacks were struggling to attain a place in society, and they should do nothing to give a bad name to the whole race. The family carried the responsibility of their people. Today, Christopher's life is dedicated to bringing love to other children. To share what he learned about loving community in his family has become a life work for Christopher.

The schools can help these children to experience spiritual sources of strength both within themselves and in the warmth of a loving community. There are some classrooms (such as classes 6–124, 6–103, and 6–126 at Junior High School 51 in District 15, New York City) where the spirit is nourished and given a place to grow. Special funding for a poet-in-residence allowed a true mosaic of children, ages eleven to fifteen, to publish a book of their own poetry, *The Endangered World*. The children had one purpose in mind — to let people know what they think of the world they will inherit. Much of the poetry opens the inner door to their feelings and thoughts, revealing dreams and nightmares. In the safe community of the classroom created by Maria Mar, the poet-in-residence, and by their teachers, the children wrote about drugs, abortion, homelessness, prejudice. I quote only one, chosen because it reflects such insight into human feelings:

**The Frosted Dragon of Fear**
by B. Eagle Stanton

In the frost of the night
I feel its frozen touch on my face,
cold and brittle,
It keeps moving slowly and steadily,
It knows that if it stops
It will die.
It is melting away, as it says
"Help me, for my wings are tied."

His voice is soft, as he says:
"Carry me on, that I will die
So you shall live."
"I will go now."
I ask: "Take me with you."
It cares too much about me
to let me die.
"DO NOT LEAVE" I cry.

It is too late,
He is gone.
There is excitement in its place.

How do children experience the spirit and learn about how others have expressed their experiences? Do they, as Wordsworth intimates, remember another life? Has the soul come from afar trailing "clouds of glory"? What transports them from concrete everydayness to the realization that human life has more dimension than that which normally is seen and heard and touched in the here and now?

Just as emotions and intelligence and other human traits are human inheritances, so openness to spiritual influences is part of what it is to be human. When children grow within a loving community of family or even a classroom, their spiritual potential flourishes. Someone has to open them to the spirit; someone has to educate (draw out) their spiritual

potential. "Someone" usually refers to a parent or a family member. But as we have seen in too many instances, the appropriate family member is dysfunctional and the child is the loser.

A teacher, like Christopher or Maria Mar, can create the loving environment to supplement what is lost today among children of the poor. Spiritual awakening depends on an experience of the sacred, whether in the beauty and majesty of nature, or in a loving relationship, or in worship. To know or interpret the meaning of one of these experiences, someone has to teach how to express one's experience in word, art, or deed. By learning to understand and speak a spiritual language, the child is able to listen and talk about and share spiritual experience — the way that the children in the shelter were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Such language is an integral part — perhaps the keystone — of the soul. Children need to hear the language of the spirit in order to understand their experience and to share it. To feel sure of themselves in naming the invisible and the intangible, they need words like *sacred, holy, love, sacrifice,* and *selflessness.* They will sense firm ground in distinguishing right from wrong, good from evil, if they can name it.

Parents, especially mothers, are the primary communicators of this language, but teachers today may have to be the surrogates. Conversations that include experiences of love and communion are essential if children are to thrive spiritually. It is with love that a child is introduced to and responds to spirit. Love and nurturance open up the spirit and induce a natural response to what is good, true, and beautiful; and respect for nature, for animals, and especially for other human beings are the fruits of an awakened spirit. Mysteriously, left alone, children do not learn the language of the spirit and are deprived of spiritual growth. Although they have a propensity for knowledge, they will not know spiritual things without nurturance from a significant other.

It is no wonder that the predisposition to spirit grows and flourishes in some and that it dies and fades away in the light of common day in others. Everydayness without support or love leads almost inevitably to loss of spirit. Everydayness in a loving community gives strength and belief. The issue is to remind children of the spirit within them. It seems clear that the loving, caring environment created in the shelter, in Diane's sacrifices, in Christopher's family, and in this special classroom point to the secret answer. The same spiritual yearnings are present in the 1990s despite the poverty, drug use, and worsening urban decay. The invisible spiritual world, although unknown to so many, is still available to those who seek. To bring hope to children in poverty must be the spiritual challenge of our time. For them to perceive possibilities, to think that life is worth living, they need to belong unconditionally to a loving family, a community, a class in school. It is through love that they will receive the fire to ignite the spirit in them.

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# Social Justice and Education:
## The Odd Couple

David E. Purpel

**Traditional education has not been much concerned with social justice and has contributed to or ignored human suffering. To remedy this situation, we as educators must reexamine our basic assumptions and ground our work in moral and religious critique.**

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I accept as fact (and I truly believe that most people do also) that there is enormous unnecessary human suffering in the world, in our own country, and in our own communities. By unnecessary human suffering I have in mind the horrors of poverty, disease, war, and bigotry, whose origins and possibilities of resolution are basically human. It is in this sense that I use the first of two notions of responsibility — namely, that we as a people must accept responsibility for the creation and continuation of unnecessary human suffering. By suffering, I refer not to that which originates in nonhuman events — such as earthquakes and drought; nor to individual existentialist crises — such as unrequited love or the loss of loved ones. Rather I am speaking to the suffering that emerges from human greed, hostility, and stupidity as reflected in the cultural and social policies, practices, and traditions that have led to our present human condition, which is one of intense and unbearable suffering for many and a life of comfort and ease for a few.

There is a second meaning of responsibility that pertains to the ability to respond, or how we deal with intentional and unintentional human suffering. Even though we are not responsible for earthquakes and *may* not be responsible for birth defects, we are responsible for dealing with the consequent suffering and pain. Our responses have many human dimensions in addition to the material ones such as medical and disaster relief. There are matters of empathy, caring, and understanding of the pain — and of the capacity to restore dignity and autonomy.

Consider, for example that each year 40,000 children in the United States and 11 million children in the world die before their first birthday. In 1968 the United States ranked fifteenth among the world's nations with lowest infant mortality. Twenty years later, the ranking had fallen to nineteen. Fourteen million children die of hunger-related causes per year. Four hundred fifty million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition (Sivard, 1985). According

to the 1990 report of the Children's Defense Fund, 13 million children — 1 in 5 — grow up in poverty in America, and the rate is even worse for some ethnic groups. It is estimated that as few as 60,000 and as many as a half-million children are homeless in the nation with the world's largest gross national product. This is nothing less than an outrage, but what is even more stunning is that we as educators do not focus on this outrage as *the* central point of departure for our work.

I have had over the years some fairly consistent reactions from other groups when I have presented such data. In fairness, the most common reactions are of remembered anguish, suppressed outrage, and pained impotence. However, I also am challenged on the validity and reliability of the statistics and accused of engaging in intellectual reductionism and rhetorical excess. Some people get irate because they've heard all this before and wonder why I'm wasting their time with the obvious. Some remind me of the limitations of a pedagogy of guilt induction, while others self-righteously insist that they are doing something constructive about these horrors. The most depressing reaction, however, is the shrugged shoulders, pursed lips, clenched mouths, and uplifted palms of powerlessness, futility, and despair.

I accept all of these responses (and others) as significant because they are at once authentically human and intellectually plausible. However, the basic and essential point I want to make is that beyond all the skepticism about the analysis and methodology and beyond all the interpersonal and intrapersonal pain, there is indisputably an unacceptable amount of unnecessary suffering in our world, our nation, our community, and our neighborhood. This unnecessary suffering has been going on for a great many years, goes on as we speak, and will go on into the indefinite future *unless* there are enormous changes in our culture. Indeed, this condition is so obscene, so heinous, and so evil that we find it too painful as a culture and as a society to confront.

This apocalyptic pronouncement of our present human condition neither emerges from any scholarly tradition nor is justified within the terms of a particular academic paradigm. I make this point partly to address the limitations of scholarly discourse, but more to set the focus of my presentation. If this pronouncement is in any significant sense true, then we must face once again the most troubling questions of human history: Am, I my brother's and sister's keeper? If not now, when? Who are we? Where are we going?

Indeed, if this pronouncement has validity, then we must wrestle with the reality that most of us conduct our affairs *as if* it were *not* true. My challenge is to reflect on what we ought to do if this pronouncement is true, and if we all believe it is true, whether we will make any changes in our lives.

Personally, and paradoxically in this case, I believe that the pursuit of truth is highly problematic and that we have to accept a life of continuous and profound uncertainty. In spite of this, I have no doubt about the general validity of my pronouncement, since for me it is true enough and yet still lets me pay my respects to the awesome shadow of uncertainty. What, in this case, would it take to significantly reduce this shadow so that most of us could reach a useful conclusion? Will it ever be possible to do this? If so, when? If not, would it be better to assume that it is true, false, or not knowable? Is further research necessary or expedient? What are the dangers of overestimating or underestimating the degree of human suffering? More to the point, what is *your own* assessment of the amount of unnecessary human suffering? How important is it to make such an assessment, and how significant are its implications for how we live?

***Forty thousand children in the United States and 11 million children in the world die before their first birthday.***

My own view is that the magnitude of unnecessary human suffering is so vast and pervasive that it ought seriously to inform our personal and institutional projects. It ought to become our overriding and dominant concern, consequently displacing our obsessive concern with national pride, institutional glorification, and personal success. A commitment to a significant reduction of unnecessary personal suffering ought to supersede our present commitments to achievement, hierarchy, privilege, and domination. This requires a major shift in our thinking, but we are capable of such changes in consciousness. When there is a fire in someone's house or at a place of business, we typically show concern and sympathy for the victim, acknowledge the courage and skill

of the fire fighters, pray that we not ever have to experience a fire, and then go on with our work. On the other hand, in the event of a catastrophic earthquake or forest fire, we as a people are energized to take more dynamic steps — organize major relief efforts, examine the basic causes of the event, and push for major policy changes in such areas as building standards and land use. Compare our reactions to the assassination of American soldiers in West Germany and to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Contrast our research effort in atomic warfare and our commitment to research in solar energy. I share the view that we must come to see social injustice as more like a conflagration than a fire, more like a world war than a skirmish, more like an issue of cultural survival than one of social adaptation.

Within this broad context, I address the relationship between formal education and social injustice. In this analysis, it is extremely important that I affirm from the very beginning the enormous contribution that tens of thousands of educators personally have made by working for a world of justice and joy. These contributions involve the courage of commitment, the genius of research, and the energy of teaching; without them our condition clearly would be even more dire and dangerous. My criticisms of formal education become even more poignant and painful in light of our extraordinary tradition of struggling for social justice, for they highlight the power of the cultural and social forces that thwart even that heroic effort. By the same token, it must be acknowledged that our profession contains its share of rogues, parasites, incompetents, and charlatans, although I doubt that we are significantly different in this regard from other professions. However, as serious as the problem of "bad apples" is, my focus is not on them, but rather on the policies and practices of our solid and respectable educational institutions — the ethos of the educational establishment, which at best shows relative indifference to unnecessary human suffering and at worst contributes to it.

I want to examine the official claims and goals of the champions of enlightenment education. The basic claims are twofold: first, that the pursuit of truth makes a profound contribution to the creation of a just world; and second, that the pursuit of truth is in itself the highest form of fulfillment. We are told that the truth shall make us free, that the unexamined life is not worth living; furthermore, that democracy requires a well-informed electorate, and that the life of the mind is one of exquisite sublimity.

As educators we claim that beyond the acquisition of certain basic skills lies the possibility of learning how to be thoughtful, interpretative, critical, analytical, and creative. These processes make up the core of our educational aspirations, because we for the most part believe we can forge a life of justice and joy through highly developed rational, analytical, and creative understanding. In addition, for educators getting there is at least half the fun, because we have faith not only in the utility of these processes but also in their inherent aesthetic value.

Within the basic rhetoric educators use, knowledge, analysis, and understanding are keys to solving major human problems. The argument on the high plane is that a democratic society requires an informed electorate, that a life of meaning emerges primarily from a life of reflection, and that the highest aspirations of a culture are intertwined with the scholarly pursuit of knowledge. A corollary of these assumptions is that it is incumbent on a society to promote and nurture its academic traditions of free and open research for their own sake — that is, that the serious pursuit of knowledge is a good in and of itself. This rhetoric covers both bases — scholarship not only is to be treasured per se, but it's also good for us.

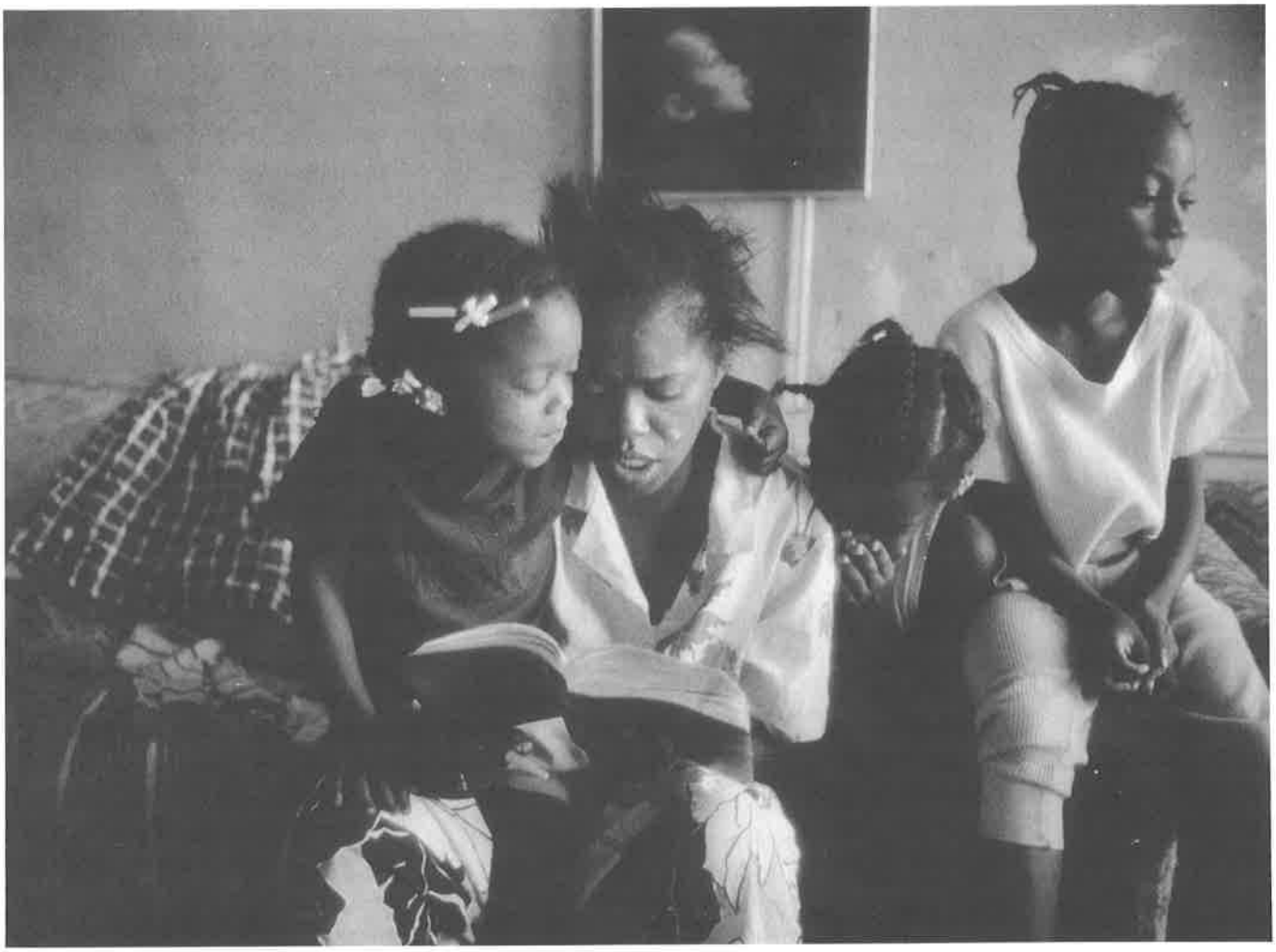
This highly developed rhetoric has become hallowed over the years by dint of an eloquent and persuasive discourse to the point of becoming hegemonic. Indeed, to challenge the validity of this dogma is to open oneself to charges of barbarism and anti-intellectualism. Of course, there are other reasons besides eloquence that explain the incredibly strong faith in formal education — such as the political interests of those who benefit from the rhetoric of the nobility and grandeur of formal education. A great deal of money is spent to subsidize what for other people would be called hobbies or benign obsessions. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created by our reverence for formal education; and the public's willingness to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods of the academy seems boundless. We offer up our money, our commitment, even our children to appease and satisfy these idols.

More particularly, schools and colleges do deliver on a number of commitments, some of which are more profane than sacred. Formal education does indeed legitimate social and cultural hierarchy: It provides credentials (some of which are even appropriate), facilitates meritocracy, offers a pleasant environment for like-minded people, and supports a

great deal of research, some of which is extremely important for a variety of purposes ranging from redemptive to destructive. Parents and students get a chance to get ahead, get well connected, and get cultured. The society gets disciplined and orderly workers, and, in many cases, shrewd and creative leaders and artists. The culture gets transmitted and preserved; the power structure is stabilized; and the social class system is maintained, having somehow survived the keen and thorough criticism of academic analysis. Professors get stuff published and thereby become virtuous; students get certain grades, thereby earning honor; and universities receive the grants that enable them to become national treasures. Degrees are given, tenure is granted, friendships are bonded, truth is pursued, privilege is mystified, and credentials are stamped amid the pomp and pride of re-created vows of poverty and service.

The scorn and anger that I am expressing emerges out of my own deep ambivalence toward our profession. I do not offer myself as someone who has been able to rise above the contradictions, failures, and corruption that attend to formal education; rather, I offer myself to witness and confess. What I want to witness and confess is not, however, abject evil, but something less dramatic and perhaps more troubling — and that is the degree to which we may have been overzealous and pretentious in our claims for enlightenment, for the efficacy of analysis, reason, and science. I have seen stunning statistics from a study (Sivard, 1985) designed, in fact, to give some measure of progress since the Enlightenment, capital E. According to this study 100 million people have been killed in wars since the 18th century, 90% of them in the 20th century.

Even without statistics, we surely know that well-educated people (whether more or less than uneducated people is still not clear to me) are capable of cruelty, destructiveness, insensitivity, moral callousness, and cynical manipulation. Yet it would be the height of absurdist reductionism to dismiss reason



and scholarship as being handmaidens of the self-serving and/or another path to hubris. We need to sort out genuine possibility from pious hope and to discriminate between what is parochially interesting and what is societally important.

I share our culture's commitment to freedom — to the right to pursue our own interests and inclinations insofar as they do not significantly interfere with those of others. This freedom surely includes the freedom of artists, poets, musicians, writers, and scholars to explore and deepen their private imaginations. It surely includes the right to celebrate those pursuits as well as those that involve inquiry into the natural and social order. There are, however, two major sticking points to this kind of freedom. First, not everyone — indeed only a very small number of people — has this kind of freedom to any appreciable degree. Of course, some very well may choose not to define their lives through such pursuits, but the reality is that many others are in no position to make such a choice because of poverty, ignorance, and other forms of preventable and remedial oppression. Surely our moral traditions do not allow us to assume that such a freedom can be divisible. In other words, we accept the dictum that we cannot endure half-free and half-slave, that we cannot rest until freedom is available to all of us. Even more noxious, of course, is the reality that the freedom of some comes at the expense of the oppression of many. Hence, our moral task has been, and will continue to be, to relentlessly and constantly enlarge the benefit of freedom to an ever greater number of human beings.

The second hitch with this freedom emerges from the first one, and this is the relationship between the cluster of artistic and scholarly pursuits that constitutes the core of our educational establishment and the struggle to enlarge the boundaries of those who are free. Aye, and there's the rub. It is one thing to say that scholarship is valuable unto itself and that people ought to be free to engage in it. It is quite another thing to say that this same scholarship is necessary for the liberation of the oppressed. What a wonderful world it would be if what academics studied and taught was not only personally interesting but also socially important. What an incredible synchrony it would be if what promoted social injustice was aesthetically satisfying. How joyous it would be if the intense energy directed at individual pursuits contributed equally to the alleviation of unnecessary human suffering. How wonderful, how joyous, how naive — and how blind. I believe that we put an unnecessary burden on our profession when we make such a preposterous claim and that such a claim prevents us from confronting the limits of our present notions of education. I believe that it is accurate and liberating to acknowledge that the basic educational processes of analysis, critical thinking, and reasoned inquiry are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the creation of a socially just order. Surely they are necessary, for it is research that helps us become aware of the human suffering and it is critical thinking that enables us to see much of it as unnecessary. It is through analysis and imagination that we penetrate the ignorance and blindness that surround social inequities and that we find ways to alleviate human misery. But this is not true of *all* scholarship nor of *all* research. The particular percentage is not crucial; what is crucial is to recognize that the pursuit of truths and flights of imagination are not inevitably linked to issues of social injustice. In a time of catastrophic human suffering we must ask ourselves if we are or are not directly contributing to its alleviation and to what degree. Why in the name of heaven would we do that which does not? Why are we not, as we would in a state of emergency, directing *all* of our energies toward what is urgently needed rather than toward what is at best of marginal value? I go back then to the issue of whether or not you and I and we believe that we are now in such an emergency. Elie Wesel has said that "we live in biblical times." If by that he meant that we are engaged in a titanic struggle over our ability to meet our highest aspirations to create a just world, then I am in agreement. If there are stakes, how could they be any higher than they now are? If there is a tenuous struggle for human dignity and survival, is it going well enough to allow for the luxury of education as usual? Will a few publish while we all perish?

Furthermore, we must confront the reality that however necessary knowledge and critical thinking are, they have been used for a variety of political and moral purposes. We live, after all, in a world where decisions are made by people who typically have a lot of formal education. Wars are declared and organized more times than not by people who know and think a lot. Our economy, our social policies, and our cultural affairs are for the most part not in the hands of the unschooled, but in the hands of multi-degreed and multi-honored graduates of our educational institutions. Indeed, as I look around our world I worry more about the schooled than about the

unschooled. Do we realize the significance of advocating the extension and deepening of the kind of education that has informed our current political and social leaders? Have they done so well that we need to emulate them? What all this adds up to is something our grandparents keep telling us: It's not enough to be smart. If only we were smart enough to know that.

Why is it that highly creative people use their imagination and artistry to persuade children to buy toy weapons? Why is it that brilliant chemists would help create real weapons, and why is it that people with a sophisticated understanding of politics would order their use! It took genius to develop both penicillin and napalm; demographic research is used both to help alleviate poverty and to sell shoddy products to the poor. We need not only to respect knowledge but also to be wary of it, because it has enormous potential for good and evil. What we need to focus on, therefore, is the "not sufficient" aspect of my belief that traditional education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of a just society, or even for the reduction of unnecessary human suffering.

What would make traditional education sufficient is its integration with wisdom, with a moral vision that informs and directs the insights, reflections, and findings of serious inquiry toward a just world. The pursuit of knowledge, the delights of analysis, and the fun of building models — what one wit has called "the leisure of the theory class" — is not what the suffering hope for. What they hope for is compassion and wisdom. Buckminster Fuller challenged our society twenty years ago with his assertion that with existing knowledge and existing technology we could sufficiently clothe, feed, and shelter the world's population. He claimed this could be done even if we were to shut down immediately every university, every school, and every research institution. What is needed to reduce unnecessary human suffering is not more knowledge, but rather the will to follow through on our most profound commitments.

In addition to knowledge and critical refection, then, there must be compassion, wisdom, moral commitment, and political will. Are these aspirations and goals appropriate to universities, colleges, and schools? Is it fair or even logical to ask teachers and students to be committed to serving justice, to dedicate their lives to the struggle to alleviate unnecessary human suffering? Is the language of moral vision and wisdom congruent with the language of dispassionate scholarship? It seems to me that the responses to these troubling questions can help us see more clearly the odd coupling of traditional education emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge and critical refection with the social goal of creating a just world. Let me make some suggestions about how we educators might address more constructively the dilemma that reflects our passion for both education and social justice.

First, it would seem particularly appropriate for us to remember and recognize the humility inherent in our vocation. Whenever we look at our work honestly and seriously we are almost always knocked off our feet by the complexity and perplexities of the topic, and it usually doesn't take a great deal of prodding to be humbled by the mysteries and enigmas that attend efforts to make sense of the world. It is a cliché among academics to say that the more we study the less we know, that every answer seems to beget more questions, and that more research is needed. Why then should we presume to claim that the truth shall positively make us free, that an unexamined life is surely not worth living, that we really know what critical thinking is, that there is such a thing as basic education without bothering to describe what it is the basis of — or that truth and progress are going steady? Would it not be more seemly for us to accept a role other than the last great hope for Western civilization?

If we are truly unwilling to transform our notions of what constitutes the essentials of education, then the least or perhaps the most we can do is to accept a more limited role in the process of social transformation. Perhaps, as I have indicated, we can acknowledge that critical reflection is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creating a just society. We might go further and release the aesthetes and pure scholars from the hostage of relevance and even admit that social justice is at best an unintended consequence of scholarship and inquiry. This would be more honest, would clarify the role of formal education, would reduce guilt and confusion, and most important, would recognize the development of other vital processes that are more directly concerned with reducing unnecessary human suffering.

It would be an act of very great generosity (albeit one clearly involving great risk) if educators would focus neither on what their country can do for their specialty nor on what their specialty can do for the country. Since both of the formulations are essen-

tially self-serving, it would be much more responsible to ask what our country, community, and planet most need at this moment and to prepare to deal with the results of an honest assessment of these needs. When there is an earthquake or a forest fire there is surely more need for medical and rescue personnel than for tap dancers and tattooists. Granted our society is enriched by tap dancers and tattooists, but we need not stretch our sense of what is urgently needed in order to accommodate them. No doubt the tap dancers and their colleagues can make some personal contribution to easing the horrors of our earthquake, but it is unlikely that it will take the form of tap dancing. No doubt the members of the National Association of Tap Dancers are fuming and likely to suggest that tap dancers can lighten the misery of the survivors through sparkling performance or therapeutic tap dancing. As for me, I have no difficulty insisting that on the whole, medical and rescue workers are what are needed most. Is there some role for tap dancing and tattooing in such a situation? Probably, but it surely is a marginal and modest one.

There is a second major contribution that educators can make to the serious reduction of unnecessary human suffering, and that is to offer leadership by raising public consciousness. Russell Jacoby (1987) describes what he believes to be a dying tradition in America, that of public intellectuals. Whereas America once was enriched by the contributions of very creative and brilliant intellectuals who made it a point to address a public rather than an academic community, Jacoby asserts, our younger generation of intellectuals does not seem to accept the responsibility. There is great irony in this situation since, according to Jacoby, our current crop of intellectuals are not only talented but also strongly ideological. At the heart of Jacoby's interpretation is his belief that intellectuals have by and large accepted university positions rather than trying to make it as freelance writers, as did intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. This, according to Jacoby, has meant that these intellectuals, ideological as they still are, tend to be preoccupied with the life of the academy and tend to write for one another rather than for the public at large — preferring academic collegiality over public involvement. In Jacoby's own words,

> To put it sharply: the habitat, manners, and idiom of intellectuals have been transformed within the past fifty years. Younger intellectuals no longer need or want a larger public; they are almost exclusively professors. Campuses are their homes; colleges their audiences; monographs and specialized journals their media. Unlike past intellectuals they situate themselves within fields and disciplines — for good reason. Their jobs, advancement, and salaries depend on the evaluation of specialists, and this dependence affects the issues broached and the language employed.... (p. 6)

This has contributed to the impoverishment of what Hannah Arendt has called "the public space," a place for well-informed dialogue and debate on community and public issues. In a culture that celebrates couch-potatoes, in a society where political campaigns take on the qualities of slick cynicism, and in a culture of happy-talk news, the erosion of the role of the public intellectual is an extremely serious event. Surely, teachers and educators can and should participate in efforts to raise public awareness and understanding of the immense unnecessary human suffering that surrounds us. We as concerned educators and citizens can contribute not only our insights and understanding, but also our moral energies and our share of outrage, compassion, and commitment. As educators we receive a significant amount of respect from the larger public and considerable access to our students and colleagues. It is wise to remember the adage that silence is consent and to be alert to the consequences of our *not* speaking out on the obscenities of social injustice.

In addition to offering up the gifts of humility and leadership, educators also have the opportunity and responsibility to engage in the ongoing process of reconceptualizing education. Ours is not only an era of untold human suffering. It also is an era of extraordinary intellectual ferment; a time when paradigms are shifting; and a time when virtually every professional and academic area is locked in heavy-duty soul-searching and methodological debate. Among the dominant themes of this ferment are renewed concern for a religious sensitivity, rediscovery of human subjectivity, and reenergized reliance on the imagination. Our language is becoming increasingly constructivist, and our faith in science is beginning to wane. We have heard that epistemology is dead, that patriarchal images in religion must be replaced, and that power precedes knowledge. Scientific certainty is getting as quaint as religious dogma even as it is difficult to tell the difference between some scientists and some theologians without an ontological scorecard.

This ferment is sure to spread to notions of what constitutes a valid education. Even now we can envision a shift in emphasis from mastery to mystery, from objectivity to subjectivity, from departmental studies to holistic inquiries. Most important, we

must come to grips with the growing realization that knowledge cannot legitimately be separated from its historical and moral contexts, that we must construct a curriculum that takes into account the intensely relational nature of knowledge. As educators determined to direct our energies toward the horrors of unnecessary human suffering, we must be particularly concerned with the task of consciously infusing our scholarly traditions with moral visions. This task is surely as important as it is perilous, for it is fraught with the dangers of self-righteousness and zealotry. Thankfully, there are people who are sensitively engaged in this process, especially theologians and most particularly feminist theologians. Sallie McFague (1987) has provided us with startling new religious metaphors that complement her very helpful analysis of the significance of metaphors. Sharon Welch (1985), another feminist theologian, who in courageously addressing her own conflict between a growing intellectual uncertainty and her strong moral convictions, urges us to have both "absolute commitments and "infinite suspicions" (p. 91).

Cornell West (1988) has provided me with the best clue as to how this process might best proceed. His analysis of the problem of locating the preparation of ministers in a university setting has clear parallels with other professions, particularly in the education of teachers. Let me quote from this fascinating and provocative article:

> An appropriate starting point for reform in theological education is seminary professors creating for themselves a sense of vocation and purpose that revels in the life of the mind — always in conversation with the best that is being thought and written regarding their intellectual concerns — yet puts this at the service of the people of God. Seminary professors first and foremost must view themselves as servants of the Kingdom of God and thereby resist the lucrative temptations of a flaccid careerism and a flagrant demoninationalism. (p. 273)

It is clear that not all educators can or will want to consider themselves as servants of the people of God. However, in a time of moral emergency and human catastrophe, educators must with others respond in good faith. I see no reason to choose between a life of moral responsibility and a life of the mind. Another theologian, Matthew Fox (1979) has said:

> Just as there can be no justice without ideas and an intellectual life, so there can be no compassion without an intellectual life, for compassion involves the whole person in quest for justice and a mind with ideas is an obviously significant portion of any of us. (p. 7)

However, Fox is not unaware of barriers in the academy as he goes on to say:

> Compassion, being so closely allied with justice-making, requires a critical consciousness, one *that resists all kinds of Keptness, including that of Kept academics and Kept intellectuals.* [my emphasis] (p. 7)

We are in yet another era of "the worst of times, the best of times," in a moment of both tremendous danger and extraordinary opportunity. It is clearly a time, as Reinhold Nieibuhr once urged us, "to avoid both despair and sentimentality." We must not flinch at the harsh realities of unnecessary human misery either through avoidance *or* paralysis. There are indeed hopes and possibilities embodied in the energies and imaginations of tens of thousands of our sisters and brothers committed to creating a more just world. Let me conclude by quoting myself:

> We must regard this moment as a time of utmost crisis, and, therefore, must respond ... with all our energy and imagination. We cannot disregard the horrors of misery, starvation, poverty for millions of people, nor the possibility of nuclear destruction of billions of people. Not to act or not to respond fully are acts of enormous consequence. As educator — prophets we can be guided by [Rabbi] Heschel's precept that "it is an act of evil to accept the state of evil as either inevitable of final".... Nor can we disregard the immense human capacity and interest in continuing the struggle for a world of love and joy. We must confront our enormous capacities for both good *and* evil: What we have broken we can surely mend, what we have yet to create we can surely construct.

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# The Real Poverty in my Classrooms

George Larkins

**A "poverty of self" is a deadly companion for many students. It needs to be replaced by a sense of personal and social grounding.**

Some education "experts" believe that the problems of American education lie in the classrooms or in the "system." Many who work in the schools believe the problems lie in the disorganized families living in inner-city communities.

While there is obviously some truth in both of these views, I have experienced a more fundamental problem in my inner-city school. I have referred to this as "poverty" in the title of this article, but it is not a dollars-and-cents poverty. I will illustrate what I mean by describing two personal experiences in my school and a contrasting event that I found in a movie.

Morning line-up at school has begun and, as usual, it is far too noisy. I want quiet, but I don't want to use a whistle or a bullhorn, nor do I want to deliver a harangue about the importance of silence and order. Instead, waving my arms like Arsenio Hall, I almost shout, "There is somebody great in the house."

The students, 10 classes from grades 4 to 7, begin to look around. I have caught their attention. I continue, "Right here, today, we have somebody who is destined for greatness."

The children are staring intently at me as I walk rapidly back and forth, raising my voice to reflect excitement and joy. "We have somebody from this community who we are sure is destined to do incredible things."

The students' eyes and facial expressions are asking who I'm talking about. Now I have everyone's attention. There is not a sound. It's time to pump up the volume. I hold up the index finger of my left hand and cup my right hand alongside my mouth and proclaim: "The descendants of greatness, who will one day lead us, are here with us right now!"

Now I move to a call-and-response rhythm: "Do you want to know who this somebody is?"

"Yes!"

"That somebody is *you*!"

There was no laughter or joyful surprise. There was only confused disappointment that I was talking about *them*. My effort to elicit excitement or self-recognition

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(effective in church) fell flat — bombed — in school. There was no "self" to recognize or excite, and without a sense of "self" they couldn't even find me absurd.

I believe that this "poverty of self" also separates the child from attaching meaning to the simple linguistic and logical-sequential offerings that we present as "education." I will discuss this more fully below, but first another story.

My first close encounter with Tanya began when I carried her bodily from the street where she had started a small riot. She had viciously attacked another child whom she felt had wronged her. (I never found out what the "wrong" was.) As I carried her into the school, Tanya cursed me, hit me repeatedly, threatened to kill me, and finally ran away to get her mother "to beat my butt."

Eventually, under calmer circumstances, Tanya appeared with her mother. I was well aware that yelling or administering disciplinary action would not have a lasting effect. Instead, I asked her how she expected me to feel after her cursing and screaming at me. She shrugged and said she didn't know. I pressed on, asking her how *she* would feel after being cursed at and threatened by someone she was trying to help. At that moment Tanya smiled — a knowing, sheepish, childlike smile. "That's right," I continued, "you would be angry and hurt."

Tanya pulled back in amazement as if the idea that *I* could have injured feelings had never occurred to her. I smiled and looked at her eye-to-eye and said, "I'm not angry with you. I like you. I just want you to be who you really are and not act like someone neither one of us would want to be around." I can still recall the look of plain wonderment she gave me on hearing those three sentences.

The next time I encountered Tanya she was waiting for me near my office door. She said she had walked out of her class because she was going to argue with the substitute teacher. "So what you're telling me, Tanya, is that you walked out of class without the teacher's permission to come and tell me this?" I said this while shaking my head in wonderment.

"No, Mister Doctor Larkins [many of my students think my first name is Doctor], it wasn't like that. See, I was going to curse that heifer out 'cause she said I wasn't supposed to correct her. But I knows you don't like that so I came right here before my temper take over."

Tanya related all this in a calm, reasonable tone, and after we talked a little more, she went back and made peace with her teacher. That teacher later came to me, raving about the sincerity of Tanya's apology. When I told Tanya about the impression she had made on the substitute teacher as well as myself, Tanya went back and apologized *again*. Tanya never thought that what she had done was wrong. She had apologized (twice) because she thought it would make me pleased with her. In her view *that* was acting in the correct manner. She had missed my point—or, to see the matter more usefully, I had missed *her* point of view.

When we ask the usual questions about why Johnny or Jill or José, or Jamala doesn't learn, all too often we look for an academic (classroom) answer or we look for learning dysfunction in the learner and/or dysfunction in the social environment. But there is another possible perspective, and this leads

me to my third story — from the movie *Grand Canyon*.

Danny Glover, has been asked to tow a disabled car out of a neighborhood in which a local street gang (that rides in a customized pearl white BMW) was bullying the disabled car's owner. Glover, who has a streetwise intelligence, approaches the gang leader and asks a favor—to be allowed to tow the car—even though Glover is a head taller than any of the gang members. The gang leader grants the request but says that Glover must honestly answer one question: Did he give respect (by asking permission) because of the natural respect he had for the leader, or because he knew the leader had a gun? Glover answers by explaining how crazy the situation is and how everything in the neighborhood — and the world for that matter — has gone wrong and the gang leader must know that both of them would not be having this conversation if there wasn't a gun present — because of how wrong everything has become. As he walks away the gang leader replies, "That's why I have a gun."

***There are many ways that this "syndrome" has been considered. Psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists have their own ways of diagnosing and managing the victims of intrapersonal poverty. But what might the school do?***

In this brief exchange lies the essence of education's challenge in the inner city and across the nation. Glover is faced with a life/death issue. What is his response? He respects the individual who is a potential threat. He effectively communicates his position. He takes responsibility for his actions. He negotiates a settlement they both can live with. And he remains truthful even when it may not be to his benefit. During this exchange he remains honest and straightforward. The gang leader, on the other hand, expresses no self-worth either for himself or those he is manipulating. The only things that seem to have meaning for him are his car and his gun, both of which he owns and without which he believes he would have no power.

In school Mr. Glover's qualities would make an excellent student. I doubt that any school "improvements" would be necessary for him to excel. Students with Glover's sense of self would excel and achieve in any school or social environment. He probably could not be stopped. His qualities are those required for constructive social progress in a democratic society.

The gang leader, on the other hand, would probably be recognized as a candidate for "special ed" from the beginning (in our present structure). Without a sense of a personal "self," he would see insults and oppression in almost every action or statement of classmates or teachers. He would always be trying to manipulate situations for his own comfort — situations that he could control or in which he would go unnoticed. He would easily resort to subterfuge, tantrums, or violence, claiming (perceiving?) some form of abuse or impropriety by teachers or classmates.

Underneath all of this kind of behavior is the unspoken premise that there is no hope of improvement. Nothing will change or can be changed. When Tanya walked out of the classroom without permission to tell me that she did not curse her teacher, she was hoping to feel good by receiving my approval. She did not see herself as a class member. She saw only that I would like her for what she saw as "correct behavior" — confession and apology. Presumably I would like her more if she apologized *twice*. For her there is no "future" to think about — and no hope, that anything will change. The gang leader feels safe and comfortable owning a gun. Tanya feels safe now that she has learned (owns) confession and apology. Neither has long-term value and neither recognizes a relation to a larger social world or the possibility of changing self or environment. Each person with this impoverished "self" can feel little or no hope, and each person is alone. Very often my students tell me that they do not feel that they will live through their teen years.

As I see it, the behaviors we are worried about—excessive anger, failure, weapons proliferation, drug use, alienation, increasing sexual experimentation, even the emphasis on expensive, faddish clothes — are an attempt to distract from or adapt to the feeling generated by the poverty of self-esteem in which there is no hope.

There are many ways that this "syndrome" has been considered. Psychologists, sociologists, and criminologists have their own ways of diagnosing and managing the victims of intrapersonal poverty. But what might the school do?

As Paul Byers (1992) pointed out in this journal, the present socioeconomic function of education is to produce people with the job skills society needs. When political leaders speak of supporting education, this is the rationale. An earlier view of education supposed that education endowed a person with the skills to participate in a human and/or democratic society. Such an education would embrace the qualities, the larger perspective, of the Glover character in *Grand Canyon,* and it would also include the values required for their human use outside the classroom. This would necessarily embrace the relationship between the school and the larger community. The school would be seen as an inseparable and interactive part of the community, with each responsive to the other and each recognizing a still larger national or global community. In such an education, the word *my* would not simply imply the power guaranteed by individual ownership. It would imply the power to be part of a dynamic, growing, and changing future that schools influence and are influenced by.

Some educators have called for the return of spirituality in the classroom. I have translated this into the return of *hope* to students. In both cases the fundamental concern is the same: the recognition that the individual is always a participating part of a larger social (or cosmic) whole. It is sometimes said that the downfall began when prayer was removed from the classroom. I do not believe that repeating, silently or aloud, what for many students would be meaningless words would make a significant difference. Putting prayer into the classroom would not remove the almost total acceptance of the prevailing notion than an individual cannot make a difference in his or her community — as putting "In God We Trust" on our dollars does not make them less materialistic to a materialist owner.

What, then, can be done in an inner-city school like mine to encourage recognition of a child's larger social self and as a participant in his or her own and the community's well-being and future?

To me the answer, or at least the direction, is simple and obvious. The school can participate in and make a positive difference in the immediate community of which *it* is a part. We cannot convincingly ask a child to recognize his participatory relation to his community of others when the school itself appears more adversarial than cooperative; when parents are invited mostly only to hear the bad news about their children; when the school plays no part in working toward solutions to community problems.

### Reference

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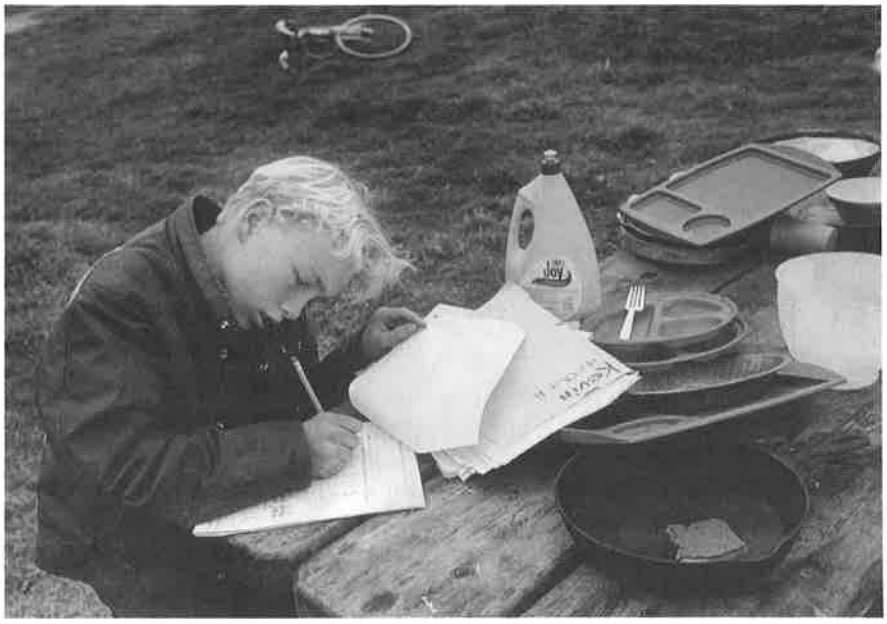
# Student Voices: A Portfolio



## The Present and the Future

I have asked myself over and over a million times what I am going to be, but nothing comes to me. I feel so much pressure because so many people in my family are counting on me to finish high school and go to college. They want me to do something with my life instead of being shot and killed on the streets or imprisoned like the rest of the men in my family. I don't have clear goals in my life yet, and I'm not certain yet if I'm going to go to college. There wasn't ever a male figure that I could look up to while I was growing up, except maybe my uncles who were in and out of jail.

In my spare time I play basketball in the courts down my block. There I let out my frustration when I'm depressed. I have a lot of fights in the courts over stupid things. One time I got in a fight while playing ball, but I wasn't looking for a fight. The guy I was fighting with just swung at me because I beat him in a game. I fought back and his friend jumped in. I ran to my coat that was lying on the floor and took out my shank, switch blade, and cut one of them in the face. This experience showed me that I had a bad temper. Even after he felt the blood dripping down his face, he still wanted to fight, but some people broke it up. I'm the type of person that once you start fighting with me on the streets, I'm going to try to hurt you badly. Sometimes I can't walk into certain places because the element of danger is present, and I don't want any trouble.

Sometimes I feel that I have two personalities when it comes to the streets and school. It's probably that I let my guard down. Right now I like to use my mind and I feel good in school. I'm not so thrilled about being in school, but it's somewhere where I know that I will be safe. My future is somewhat of a blur, but I do like my artwork. Lots of people give me compliments. I know that I don't want a career in that line of work, but that's what I am interested in now. Most of the time when I am alone I think to myself about considering college. Who knows, maybe I will!

Manuel Rivera
Eleventh Grade
Central Part East Secondary School
New York City

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## School and Me

My education means a great deal to me, but it hasn't always been that way. I just went to school to have fun. I never even considered going to college because it wasn't real to me. Now that I'm going to a school like Central Park East Secondary School, my outlook on life has changed as far as going to college is concerned.

I started going to school at C.P.E.S.S. in the fall of 1990. My behavior has changed since I started coming to C.P.E.S.S. I used to be very short tempered and I got into a lot of fights with boys and girls. When it came to schoolwork I was okay, but as far as behavior went, I was terrible.

The fact that I've had such a drastic change in my behavior and the way I view my education has a lot to do with this school. When I got here and saw how seriously everyone was taking their work it really surprised me. Everyone helped each other with their work. When I saw all of this it made me want to do my best.

The teachers here at C.P.E.S.S. have also had a good effect on me. My first humanities teacher in ninth grade was the first person to tell me I could be a great writer if I tried harder. He pushed me in class to get all of my work done and to get the best grades on all of my papers. He wasn't so serious all of the time. I felt very comfortable in his classroom. My first advisor was

also my math/science teacher. She knew I was more comfortable with writing than I was with math/science. Because of that, she pushed me even harder. She pushed me to get the highest grades possible on all of my exhibitions. She was always saying, "Revise this and you'll get a better grade." Most of the time I did and received pretty good grades in her class. My humanities teacher in tenth grade helped me a lot as far as writing goes. She's one of the nicest teachers I ever had.

Going to C.P.E.S.S. has been a positive experience that has influenced me in many good ways. I have good friends that I can trust and teachers I can depend on. Now I'm in the eleventh grade and all I think about is going to college.

Tandeka King
Eleventh Grade
Central Park East
Secondary School
New York City

## Who Am I?

I look fly, I'm 5 feet 5 inches tall. I have hazel eyes. I'm pretty big.

I come from Puerto Rico and part of my family does too. We came from Puerto Rico to seek a better job and a better life. My mother was a doctor's aide and a secretary.

The thing that the teacher should do is help the kids more with their work, and I think the teachers should help us when they give us homework. They should explain it more, because some kids don't know what to do in a class. I think the teachers should be more specific about their work and coach kids that need help. We need teachers who could translate the Spanish of kids that speak it. We have teachers that force the kids to do their work and we can't have that in the school. We took pictures for our advisory but students shouldn't have to if they choose not to. Some people don't know how to read or write and that is not fair. The teachers have to spend enough time with the kids that need to learn. I would like the teachers to be kind to us. I told people that the school is dope, and I like it a lot and other people do too. This is my life in school and what I think of the teachers.

I want an education and I want a lot of girls. I'm special to people because I help them. I want to be bright and smart to people. I have changed a lot now since I'm older. My dream is to stay in school, go to college and finish my education. I hope that all the things I wrote come true. I'm in the Boy Scouts and I'm a junior assistant scoutmaster, a Life Scout. That is my ticket to my eagle rank. Are you good at your work? Yes I am; I take care of my troop, like a leader.

Angel Moya
Seventh Grade
East Side Community
High School
New York City

## What Is Life

*Life is a dream*
*a dream in which*
*you meet friends*
*and enemies*
*It is also a*
*journey*
*where you go to different places*
*learn to survive*
*and once you wake up*
*from this dream*
*you have just died*
*and your new life*
*awaits you*

*Adam Kaplan*
*Seventh Grade*
*East Side Community High School*
*New York City*

## The Addict

*When I look in the mirror*
*I hate what I see*
*someone whose life*
*has fallen apart*
*someone who has lost*
*his family and friends*
*alone all day*
*sleeping in a lot*
*existing for drugs*
*but what do they bring?*
*Only death.*
*When I look in the mirror*
*I hate what I see.*
*Please, someone,*
*help me!*

*Anonymous*

## Who Am I?

I am a person who never gives up unless someone gives up on me. I'm the type of person who will open the door for an elderly person, or for a person in a wheel chair. I'd help out a friend in need, and I'd give money to a bum on the street. I care for my community and for younger children. I don't listen to anyone except for myself.

I respect my family's morals and values. My family never has stolen or been in prison; they work hard for their money. My family is a very private family. We don't start trouble with anyone.

When I get older and I have children I would not want them to be ducking bullets like I do today. I don't want them to be thinking that selling drugs or being a prostitute is the only way to survive.

In my neighborhood, the only way to get out is to either sell drugs or get a job paying minimum wage (and some people aren't so lucky for the simple reason that they're lazy). Sometimes I feel the need to go away from my neighborhood. But my conscience tells me to stay. Some girls I know lost their virginity at 14. This is an example of our society today because so much of what causes this is peer pressure.

To end this, Who Am I? The answer can only be me.

Juan Tavarez
Seventh Grade
East Side Community
High School
New York City

## Who Am I?

If I said I was an ordinary boy I'd be lying. I was born in 1979, December 7. I had only one parent, my mother, and was greatly under her influence. I come from a smart family, so I had an unfair advantage, but, being bright, I didn't leave it at that.

By the age of five, we moved to my godfather's house in upstate New York. Now I'm living in Queens. Yahoo!

Why did we move, you ask? My godfather also happened to be my mother's boyfriend, and they, supposedly, wanted the best for me. Years have gone by and I have found that I have always been the biggest, strongest, smartest, heaviest, and, well, call me wildest too.

When I was ten, mom had a baby girl. Good news; NOT! I lived in the boonies! Dirt roads, fireplaces! The distance to stores was measured in miles. Need milk? Ha!, Start driving!

On December 28, 1989, we moved to Brooklyn. Booo! I wasn't too keen on that idea, and that's an understatement. I went to a new school, made new friends, but my reputation as a bad seed somehow followed me. Anytime something went wrong, I would hear, "Aha, Mr. Lee!"

Meanwhile, at home, my life was falling apart. They favored my sister, they didn't understand me (although I don't know who does) and my mom seems to hate me, though she says she loves me. I don't seem different, but she says I am. I'd better listen, seeing as though I'd probably get grounded for a month for asking. Go figure!

So I'm here at a weird school with new people. I'm trying to make new friends, but that's hard. Life's hard! Home? Forget it! All my friends go to different schools, and me, I have to start all over again.

Let's talk about this weird school for a minute. Normally, this would be my dream school. I mean, who, in the real world, would give you a choice between drama, poetry, and doing science experiments?

I don't want to seem nasty, but this school is cracked! It's not bad mind you. It's great! It's just that I'm used to having a drill sergeant for a teacher, eight classes and absolutely no choices whatsoever. We call our teachers by their first name! It's great, but its strange.

I'll go into detail. We have Spanish, which is okay. I even learn some things. "Yo camino dos cuadras norte para la estacion." That means "I walk two blocks north to the station." Pretty good, huh?

We also get to choose a fine arts subject. We choose between poetry, drama, and science. The teachers are good, and they explain things, not just tell you what to do. That's good.

I still have problems, but don't worry! For a kid with a very bad sense of dreams (I have none), I'm tough. I may even live to see fifteen.

Lee Domaszowec
Seventh Grade
East Side Community High School
New York City

## The Open Window

In my room at night
I look through my window
toward the sky
and see the blue-white moon
and all the stars.

When my window is open
I can hear the wind whistle
it be scary
if my room is dark.

When I'm in my room
with nothing to do
I stare at the sky
and think about God.

But when the window's closed
it can seem as if
the sky isn't even there
so I always leave
my window open.

Jonita Brooms
Ninth Grade
Josephium High School
Chicago

# Portfolio Assessment and Exhibits:

## Moving From Recall to Reflective Understanding

Lyle Davidson

**Portfolios have become viable educational tools to document and assess student achievement. Process portfolios (one of three basic types) stress the evolution of a student's response to a larger project.**

This work has been supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation.

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Portfolio assessment is a strong alternative to traditional standardized testing practice. Once only a tool of visual artists and diplomats, *portfolio* has come to encompass a wide variety of practices related to assessment. ASCD videos, *Educational Leadership*, training institutes, workshops, Arts PROPEL: It seems everyone in education wants to talk about, understand, and implement portfolios.

A portfolio is not a single assessment practice, but one of a group of strategies for documentation and assessment. Indeed, three basic approaches are emerging from current portfolio uses: best works, collections of work, and process portfolios. The three types are not equally suited for educational purposes.

### Best works portfolios

Representing one end of the continuum of portfolio practice, the *best works* portfolio is the most typical portfolio, devoted to only a single perspective — those pieces that reflect the highest quality. Every artist makes and cultivates a best works portfolio of pieces that will convey the desired image: mastery of craft, imaginative use of materials, creative thinking, expressive work. This selection of work helps situate the accomplishments of the artist, and serves as an introduction to an artist. It is efficient and easy to interpret by the observer, but it is not a tool for learning and teaching.

### Collections of work portfolios

New demands for accountability are being made. Increasingly, the public wants evidence that students are able to do more than recall information. A "B" grade might indicate a level of reading ability, but it does not intrinsically provide evidence of one's reading comprehension. The public wants to know that students are developing both skills and understanding, and teachers are responding to student work.

Increasingly, teachers are asked to document what they do. They need evidence that their teaching program, curriculum, or pedagogy is effective; that their

students are learning what has been mandated. Until recently, summary grades evaluating students' achievement have been the primary formal evidence — and in some cases the only evidence — available.

To demonstrate the effectiveness, quality, and range of their practice, teachers are increasingly using student work collected in portfolios. These teachers find that portfolios have multiple uses: to catalog what happens in class, to provide evidence for parent conferences, and to help students keep track of what they have done. Such *collections of work* can be used to document levels of achievement as well as to gauge change and growth. In these classes, students save work to document their learning and understanding. However, relatively little is done with that work beyond collecting it. Generally, there is little guidance through the collection; few suggestions are offered to gain a sensitive and comprehensive interpretation of the work, and the result is only an accumulation of student work. The reader, not privy to the class, has no way to interpret the papers collected in the portfolio. Without guidance, interpretation of the work's significance is difficult. Furthermore, although the collection of work documents what occurred in the class, it may not help the student. In short, a collection of work is not a comprehensive or reliable tool for learning and teaching.

**Documenting process**

To turn the portfolio into a learning tool, it is necessary to link it to the process of learning. The *process portfolio* does just that. It is constructed specifically to encompass a broad educational point of view. On one hand, the process portfolio is used by the teacher to help students focus on learning and understanding: to develop and expand the vision of what work is, to see what path growth takes, to observe how standards develop. On the other hand, it is designed to present one or more of the aspects that the student and teacher, working together, wish to highlight or draw to the reader's attention: critical thinking, problem solving, best work, growth, achievement, understanding. The designer of the process portfolio takes full advantage of potential interest, whether the reader is another member of the class, another teacher, the administration, parents, or the broader community within which the school functions.

The Arts PROPEL portfolio (see Figure 1), developed under the support of the Rockefeller Foundation by researchers at Harvard Project Zero, the Educational Testing Service, and teachers in the Pittsburgh Public School System, is a good example of the process portfolio (Scripp & Gray, 1992; Winner, 1992; Winner, Davidson, & Scripp, 1992; Winner & Simmons, 1992). Specific perspectives about work and learning are collected in various domain projects, which focus deliberately on making, perceiving, and reflecting about work. Domain projects allow student and teacher to capture and document the learning process in ways appropriate to the specific domain or discipline. The PROPEL portfolio contains various views of what students can do, obtained through samples of work, questionnaires, journals, even interviews with classmates about their work. Although this approach to portfolios was developed in the arts, the Harvard Graduate School of Education Assessment Institute employs these principles across a wide range of disciplines, including the arts, the sciences, and the humanities.

Incorporating a constructivist perspective of cognition, process portfolios are based on the premise that learning takes place best when activity engages perception and reflective thinking — whether expressed through words or in the medium of the domain (e.g., sound in music, two and three dimensional space in visual art, movement in dance).

Several factors inform this type of portfolio: a cognitive-developmental orientation, formats from new test practices, and examples of excellent teaching practice. Three aspects come from cognitive-developmental psychology: first, the use of a constant repeated measure (in the form of a performance task or domain project) across the grades spanning middle and high school; second, the establishment of benchmarks as reference points against which to measure change over time; and third, the importance of taking a "multiple intelligences" perspective of domains or disciplines (Gardner, 1985).

**Documenting development**

For some, giving a test at the beginning of a class appears to be a waste of time — students haven't learned anything yet. Indeed, classes normally begin with little reference to the knowledge students bring to the class. The best works and collection of work portfolios do not challenge the assumptions that support the sequence: Teach first, test later.

In contrast, the process portfolio is based on the assumption that comparing and contrasting the differences discerned from frequent observation of what changes over time — throughout the duration of a course — produce powerful occasions of learn-

ing. By comparing different drafts of the same work and comparing the developing comments about them, it is possible to gauge the depth and breadth of a revision, perhaps the source of the idea, the connection to other work (both inside and outside the class) — and even predict the future direction work might take.

Thus, the process portfolio contains samples of ongoing work: first drafts and sketches, interim and successive versions on the way to the final product. This focus on an array of work enables the reader of the process portfolio (or the student and teacher constructing the portfolio) to observe the changes that take place in a student's understanding while learning.

Furthermore, for assessment purposes, analyzing the qualities of change yields important indices of understanding. The process portfolio contains a variety of materials because it enables the user to gain a view of learning that results from a specific profile of learning, rather than the recall of specific information. Projects and journals combined with questionnaires and interviews make it possible to obtain multiple views of students' ability to think back over their work, revise with purpose, and develop standards for self-evaluation.

Thinking occurs in and is visible during work; therefore, the process portfolio contains a series of developmental snapshots that highlight and document the changes in students' use of appropriate vocabulary, the ability to conduct critical inquiry, and the thought that supports the purpose and process of revisions. Students and teachers alike are able to consider the differences from one sample to another, to evaluate the quality (as well as the quantity) of change.

Projects and tasks that reflect the most important ideas of the domain are necessary: Those containing problems robust enough to sustain revisiting over

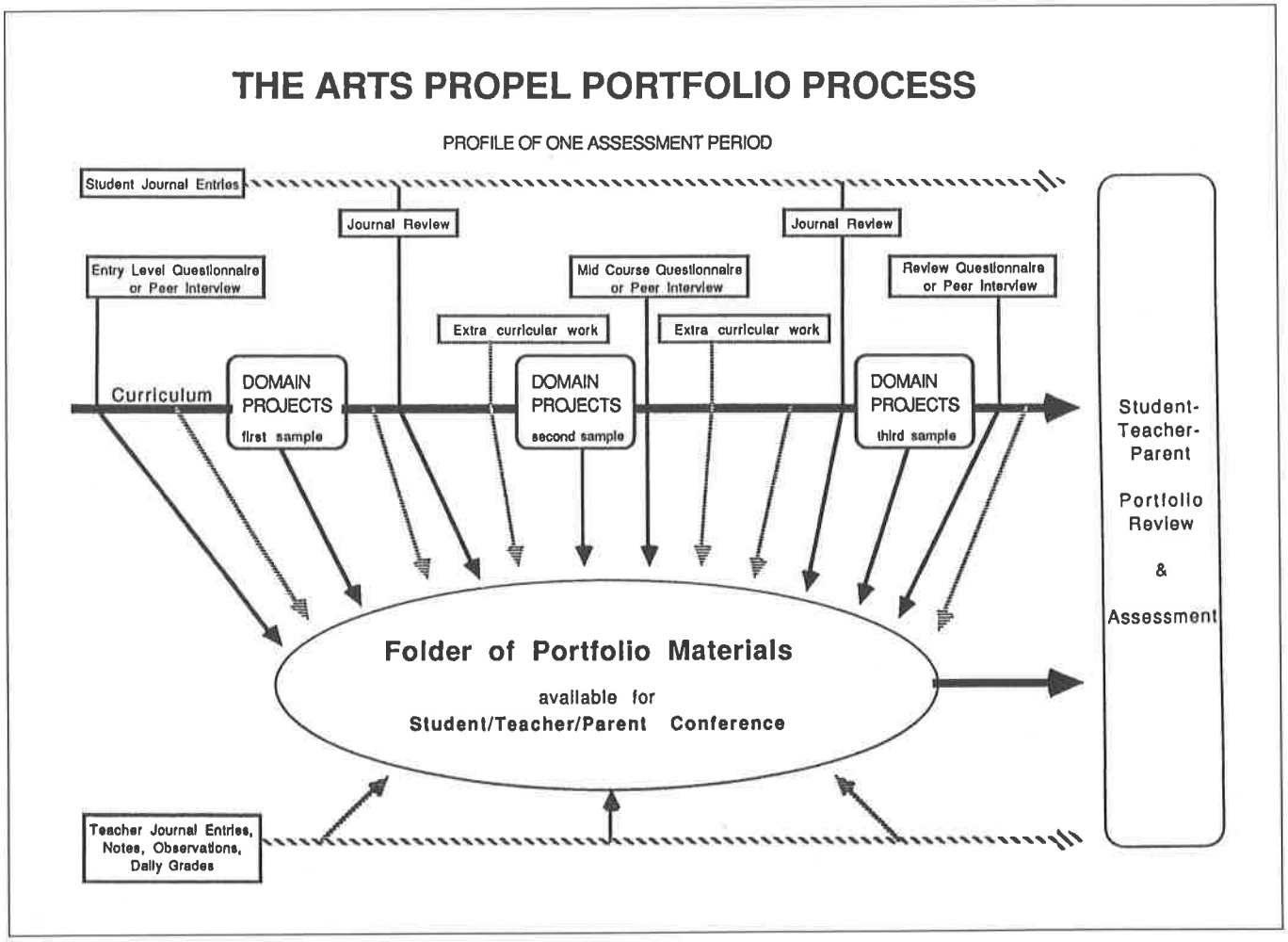


Figure 1.

time are necessary to allow students to gain further insight into the nature of the domain as well as into the learning process. The work contained in projects is designed specifically to capture the ability to think with the materials of the domain (e.g., sounds in music, color and two dimensional space in visual art, subtext and nonverbal communication for character in theatre, and three dimensional space in dance). Monitoring and correlating the changes that occur across a series of samples collected over time, the changes that appear in the language used to describe intentions and goals, and the choices made enable both students and teacher to form a more grounded interpretation of the learning taking place.

Process portfolios increasingly allow students to bring their own accumulated experience to bear on what they are doing. Because of the periodic re-engagement with the domain projects and performance tasks, students are able to see the impact of their own contribution to learning as it emerges over time, as they begin to understand the nature of the relationships made available during the class and to document connections across the range of contexts in which they live.

**Multiple perspectives: Teaching, learning, and assessment**

*Production: Activity and modeling.* Action and thought have to be linked in education — mindless work is no better than airy discourse. Work without reflection is no better than talk disconnected from its application to work. Activity or creating is a useful entry point into a domain. Projects based on issues central to the domain of study make ideal meeting grounds for more coordinated learning that includes activity and discourse.

Academic models of learning focus our thinking on verbal learning: using terms, wielding concepts. Learning defined as acquiring information places little value on physical doing, making, working. There is little to talk about in action, less to examine "intellectually." But acquiring information is not the same as developing understanding (Gardner, 1991).

It is necessary for understanding that students work with the materials and concepts of a discipline or domain. Through engagement with central issues in a domain, students begin to develop the habits of mind necessary for working in that field. In the context of carrying out their projects, they begin to develop appropriate sensitivity to skills, concepts, and issues whose mastery is necessary for success in that field.

Not only does the work setting provide the most important context for developing the capacity to discriminate among the elements and practices essential to the support and development of the work, it also makes the ideal context for engaging in thoughtful consideration of the work itself, the development of standards, and the participation in the cultural traditions of which one's work is a part. The work setting in which making, discriminating, and thinking are being done ensures that these three ways of knowing are brought together in the educational setting — that learning for understanding is being supported by the coordination of multiple perspectives.

*Perception: Making discriminations.* Perception and its more passive form, recognition, are clearly emphasized in education. Success within the most employed testing process (the standardized test format of multiple choice and true or false questions) depends on one's ability to recognize instances, not on the use of concepts (as when creating). This relatively passive relation to knowledge, knowing, and intellectual life contrasts especially with other forms of symbolic knowledge, such as those common in the arts.

However, perception without concrete reference points is too disconnected to be maximally useful in learning. It is unconnected to the process of internalization. Internalizing a skill or concept involves moving its location into the background of awareness. While a new technique is being learned it is the object of focal awareness. After it has been mastered it no longer rides the leading edge of consciousness, but rests below the surface of self-awareness, still actively guiding the construction of knowledge. The process of transforming the focal awareness into a subsidiary and tacit level of awareness is largely what the educational transaction is all about (Polanyi, 1956).

Perception linked to work and working habits becomes the vehicle for forging connections in several ways. First, it expands the individual work and connects it to the classroom culture. Students at work learn and borrow from one another. Second, it provides the links between the work of the classroom and the community values. Finally, through learning about the values represented in their own work and the place of their work in the repertoire or tradition, students can have a direct connection to the work of

their own culture and a means of making contact with relevant work from other cultures.

Finally, by using one's own work as the field within which to develop a sense for what is important, a student can begin to integrate the various facets of the work into a more unified whole (Ehrenzwieg, 1956). This is necessary if one is going to become a competent judge of what works and what detracts from the intended effect of the piece. The ability to make an integrated interpretation is developed in a setting of work that contains the relevant features of the domain. This situates any reference and interpretive creating within the context of work — practices the development of perceiving essential aspects of working and thinking critically within the domain.

*Reflection: Thinking about work.* Some artists say that too much thinking can interfere with the creative process; however, they appear to assume that thinking takes place only in words. Thinking also takes place within the language of the domain — sounds in music, shapes in art, physical movements in athletics — and education that is based on understanding must feature the broader range of thinking and reflective skills necessary to capture critical components of work.

Reflection, even more than perception, integrates the various ways of knowing (Davidson & Scripp, 1992). Describing one's intentions, evaluating the effect, surveying the ways others solved a problem similar to one's own, contemplating the impact that changing a note, a color, a movement, a word may have on one's work — reflection gathers all these aspects of work.

Finally, reflection engages students in dialogues that extend far beyond the classroom: conversations with others working in the same field, study of examples from the tradition, participation in dialogues with critics. Reflecting about issues made close by active engagement in central problems of the domain makes the learning both deep and broad. It provides the ideal setting for developing an understanding of the lessons to be learned by studying the domain.

*Projects*: Working with central issues of the domain. The assumption underlying domain projects is that while the novice and the professional are not expected to be engaged at the same level when they work on the same project, they can be expected to be engaged at *some* level. To accomplish this, tasks for a project should come from deep within the domain, deep enough to touch and deal with big ideas. Even though students may not yet know the elements of the discipline they will study, they can approach problems that are real to those who work in the domain. For example, a big idea in theatre might involve distinguishing among the actions contained in the dialogue and the subtext; in music, learning to constructively critique performances (including one's own) is an important skill; in social studies, an important issue is tracing the relationship between authority and freedom over several historical periods.

The successful project is situated in the domain of real work as it is experienced by adult practitioners. This situation draws easily from Vygotsky's (1978) concept of a zone of proximal development in which learning takes place within the guidance of a more capable other, whether fellow student, parent, or teacher. Thus, projects and tasks worth teaching, learning, and assessing share the characteristics of work or projects that engage adult practitioners: They are not reduced to simple (minded) problems from which the thorns of ambiguity have been trimmed; rather, they are situated in the domain of real work, full of (ambiguity and) rich complications.

Projects such as these may appear messy to those accustomed to a set of lesson plans that are derived from a subtask analysis of a project. However, it is exactly this ambiguity of focus within a rich setting that makes projects work. The typical Suzuki violin concert provides a good example of a setting that enables every student to participate at his own level, without sacrificing standards or seriousness of purpose.

Finally, in the context of a project, students can engage in the negotiation of standards with the teacher and with their peers. This struggle toward standards is an important part of school. It provides students with a situation in which they are able (indeed, required) to maintain contact with the work of the class, the culture, and the group to whom they are responsible.

**Shared construction of dimensions for assessment**

Where do dimensions for evaluating students' work come from? Typically, teachers or curriculum supervisors decide on the basis of what is important to them, or what they think reflects the school's or community's values. But in the process portfolio, dimensions can come from students as part of the activity of developing standards. Even the dimensions students champion reveal their knowledge of the project. If students want to evaluate their fellow

students' intonation, for example, we can assume they are ready to deal with it (of course, how well they are able to deal with the dimension is not predicted by their willingness to entertain it).

Inviting students to provide some dimensions along which they would want to be assessed gives them considerable ownership in the learning and assessment process. The benefits of this are easy to see. Students realize that they are able to contribute to the development of standards — even though they are not experts. They also learn that they can negotiate their way from what they already know about quality work toward criteria and standards. The effect of letting students participate in assessment, set criteria for good work, and determine the direction of their growth is an inestimable investment in their learning process.

**Broad audience for assessment**

> Reading scores suffer a 10 point drop. The Superintendent's office says ...

There. The entire community knows how well the school is doing, how well teachers are carrying out their responsibilities. But let's think more deeply for a moment. What does everyone in the community, from pauper to prince, really know? What level of understanding is any reader not working in a school able to reach from such shallow reports? Clearly, the typical yearly report that measures the quality of education is inadequate. Relatively opaque to the public, only teachers know the details that fill out the stark figures making up the statistic. Who should the audience for portfolio assessment be? What reports should they receive?

"NOT JUST ANOTHER CONCERT, CONCERT"

Performed By

THE HEATH SCHOOL SENIOR BAND

Mr. Fred Taylor, Conductor
Mrs. True Burley, Piano Accompanist

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 1992
HEATH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
7:00 p.m.

Featuring

Instrumental Solos
Student Compositions
Guest Conductors
and
Display of Student Projects

Figure 2.

Some may think that carrying assessment and evaluation beyond the classroom is not a good idea — in spite of the typical newspaper coverage of education. Doing so weakens the position of the teacher, in some ways. After all, it brings the voices of people who are disconnected from the practice of teaching — or at least not participating fully in the rigors, trials, and successes of teaching and learning — into the classroom. On the other hand, bringing in voices from beyond the classroom can be seen as strengthening the position of the teacher. Including a wider audience for assessment provides teachers with an unequalled view of classroom practice and results. It enables the general public to see firsthand what students are able to do when the class is organized around documenting the thinking process and the development of understanding.

Why would we want to inform a wider public about what takes place in school? First, teachers need support. They need to cultivate that support among various constituents of the community. Second, teachers need to develop among the community a broader sense of what education involves. Schools need the wider framework within which to work. Education limited to the school day, to the classroom, is weakened by the absence of educational values that are shared with the community. Third, students need to be included in the wider effort; they need the support of the larger community; and they need to understand that they are valued members of society, that their work is important not merely for its immediate commercial value, but because they are the future stewards of the culture. Finally, everyone who does good work needs to share the feeling of accomplishment and the pride of good work with others. Choked off from an appreciative public, school administrators, teachers, and students are all left with the bitterness of being unappreciated for having done good work.

How can schools and teachers convey what gets left out of the reports of falling and rising numbers? Parents, members of the business community, and the wider public can be far better informed than they are currently. Portfolios make powerful tools for this. Best works portfolios, in spite of their limitations for classroom use, frequently demonstrate that quality work takes place in school. Concerts, publications, art shows, and theatre all represent various forums in which schools attempt to show what students do.

Unfortunately, these demonstrations are usually limited to the arts. Math, science, social studies, foreign languages (to mention only some) are not represented in best works exhibits. But teachers in all disciplines can use process portfolios modeled on the PROPEL approach to reach a wide variety of audiences — and show students' understanding of what they are learning. Observation of what students do, how they use their perceptions, and what they think about during work on their projects is facilitated by process portfolios.

Imagine the impact of combining a best work demonstration with materials of a process portfolio. Fred Taylor, an elementary music school teacher in Brookline Massachusetts, does just that. He makes highly effective use of process portfolios by incorporating them into his concerts. Upon entering the hall, the audience member is presented with a program (see Figure 2) and invited to take a sample portfolio from the box of portfolios carefully placed in the aisle. Before the concert begins, the audience is learning what type of activities, perceptions, and reflective thinking led up to this concert. The audience is thus prepared to better appreciate the musical learning, critical inquiry, use of evidence, judgments, and values being demonstrated by the concert. The program notes are all taken from student journals and present students' viewpoints about the pieces they have written and are conducting and playing. At the reception after the concert, the audience is invited to view selected videotapes highlighting the individual lessons and rehearsals that led up to the concert. This level of preparation and follow-up brings the public close to the educational exchange that occurs in the best situations. The fact that the vice-principal has decided to play in the band suggests the value the school places on this approach to teaching, learning, and assessment.

Process portfolios can be used for many purposes (e.g., supporting learning, providing vehicles for assessment) because they reflect the combined effort of students and their teachers. Students who have some input into the dimensions for assessment, who have the responsibility for maintaining their own portfolios, who have specific opportunities to talk to their peers about one another's work, are students who have considerable stake in their portfolios. Responsible for the process and the content of their portfolios, these students are able to work with teachers to construct specific views of class accomplishments. This level of engagement makes it possible to develop a series of portfolios designed to present the public with a view of school that focuses on growth, as well as achievement, the use of information, demonstrations of understanding, and even the range of use of the school's lessons in other settings.

In closing, it is important that teachers, schools, and districts that want to employ portfolios decide on what they want to show, how they want to show it, and who they want to see it. Process portfolios have many advantages over less formal procedures: They provide a means of documenting the range of intelligences seen in the disciplines taught in school; they provide ways of documenting understanding and use of knowledge; they encourage joint participation in assessment by teachers and students; and they can be shaped to address the concerns of specific audiences ranging from school administrators and teachers to parents and other members of the community.

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# Authentic Assessment in Practice

Giselle O. Martin-Kniep

**Alternative assessment is a process that allows for the meaningful integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The arguments for using alternative assessment are compelling and its resulting benefits multiple. While it is possible to design alternative assessment measures in at least two different ways — one which proceeds from the existing curriculum, and one in which the curriculum and assessment are conceptualized at the same time — both of these strategies have significant merits and shortcomings, some of which are discussed in this article.**

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*[Alternative assessment] is more open-ended and more student-driven. There are many right answers and/or ways of exhibiting the knowledge. It deals with philosophical issues — not just numbers.*

— sixth grade teacher

*The process seems so incredibly complex and time-consuming. I worry that people will discard authentic assessment as too cumbersome and take the easy (prepackaged materials) way out.*

— ninth grade social studies teacher

My recent experience working with professional staff members from a number of different schools has led me to realize that little is known about how to design or implement new forms of student assessment. Furthermore, even though new forms of assessment call for a high degree of congruence between instructional and assessment tasks (Camp, 1991; Wiggins, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Wolf, Bixby, & Gardner, 1991), not much has been written about the role that teachers and others close to the instructional process should play in designing and implementing these new forms of assessment.

In this article, I will first describe the context for the increased attention to alternative forms of assessment by summarizing the arguments against traditional measures of student outcomes. I will then describe the characteristics of alternative forms of assessment and define the term *authentic assessment*.[1] Next, I will present some of the challenges to the design and use of alternative forms of assessment. I will end this article by describing two different processes for designing such measures and by discussing costs and benefits of using each of these processes.

## Assessment versus testing

*Assessment* is a process for gathering information to meet a variety of evaluation needs. It is built around multiple indicators and sources of evidence, and in this sense, is distinguished from testing. In other words, it is a process of collecting and organizing information or data in ways that make it possible for people to "judge or evaluate." Thus, it precedes

the final decision-making stage of evaluation. (Anderson, Ball, Murphy, et al., 1975).

**Problems related to the use of standardized assessment**

Much has been written recently about the need to move beyond standardized, norm-referenced forms of assessment (Brown, 1989; Wiggins, 1989b, 1991). There is a great demand within the educational testing community for student assessment techniques that go beyond standardized multiple-choice tests (Frederiksen & Collins, 1989; Nickerson, 1989; Norris & Ennis, 1989; Paris, Lawton, Turner, & Roth, 1991; Shepard, 1989). There are at least three arguments against the use of traditional and standardized forms of assessment.

The first of these arguments concerns the reliance of traditional and standardized tests on "knowledge about" instead of "knowledge-in-use." The educational community is increasingly calling for the evaluation of student outcomes that are socially and personally derived, and of outcomes that require the application of knowledge and skills rather than knowledge recall and decontextualized demonstration of skills (Moss et al., 1991). As we learn more about how knowledge is constructed rather than acquired, we increasingly realize that we create knowledge all the time through social interaction, shifting the nature and use of this knowledge according to personal and social needs (Brown, 1989). Moreover, having knowledge of an issue or topic does not ensure the translation of such knowledge into its use in different contexts or under different conditions. Standardized tests are inadequate if the broader goal is to have students apply knowledge in different settings and to employ what they've learned to create new images (Camp, in press; Calfee & Hiebert, 1989).

A second argument against the use of traditional and standardized forms of assessment concerns the influence of these tests over the curriculum teachers use. The assessment measures used in school have a significant influence upon the role that teachers play in identifying what should be taught and how it should be taught. When schools emphasize the use of these measures and teachers feel compelled to "teach to the objectives" of such tests, other curriculum goals and strategies are underemphasized and student achievement is underestimated.

Finally, the kinds of assessment used in schools also have an impact on the extent to which assessment serves instructional goals and processes. Traditional and externally constructed and imposed tests are too removed from the wide array of student outcomes that teachers try to foster (Camp, 1991). Since often they are externally scored, they offer little information that teachers can use to inform their practice. When schools and other educational stakeholders rely on scores from these measures to make decisions about the adequacy of the curriculum and of teaching, teachers as professionals are disempowered from having a meaningful role in the assessment process. This has resulted in the recent call for more integration between curriculum and assessment, so that the assessment can support, elicit, and even produce valued student outcomes.

In summary, traditional and externally imposed assessment measures neither promote students' learning, tend to measure anything more than limited and superficial student knowledge and behaviors, nor support the curriculum and instructional approaches used by teachers (Moss et al., 1991; Wiggins, 1989b; Wolf, 1991; Wolf et al., 1991).

**What are alternative forms of assessment?[2]**

In response to the perceived limitations of traditional forms of assessment, there has been a great deal of interest within the evaluation community in *direct* or *authentic* assessment of educational objectives. The characteristics of authentic or alternative assessment have been described in detail by a number of authors, including Wiggins (1989b, 1990), Chittenden (1990), Paulson et al. (1991), and Wolf et al. (1990). For the purposes of this article, I will highlight just a few of the features of these new forms of assessment. First, authentic assessment measures include contextualized, complete, and integrative tasks that call for the use and application of different kinds of knowledge and skills. Second, authentic assessment measures are embedded in the curriculum and can often be distinguished from instructional tasks only by identifying the purpose for which they are used. In other words, authentic measures, like rich instruction, involve meaningful learning experiences. Third, authentic assessment measures are flexible, allowing for multiple modes of representation and for the use of students' preferred learning styles. Finally, authentic measures encourage self-reflection and introspection, by providing students with an important role in reflecting and analyzing their own learning.

In summary, authentic assessment measures, such as portfolios, performance measures of students' knowledge and skills, and curriculum-embedded measures that are derived and inherently associated with the curriculum used, have the potential of allowing students to assess their own learning, and for teachers to assess the effectiveness of their teaching practices.

### Challenges to the use of alternative forms of assessment

Alternative forms of assessment pose significant challenges to schools seeking to use them as substitutes for, or even as supplements to traditional forms of assessment. These challenges stem primarily from the need to shift from a curriculum that is validated and "measured" through tests, to one in which curriculum and assessment are integrated. This shift is evidenced as we examine some of the assumptions on which traditional forms of assessment are based, which are: (1) We need secrecy from the test to ensure validity; (2) we must not teach to the test; and (3) curriculum and assessment are two different things.

First, rather than relying on secrecy to ensure validity, authentic assessment emphasizes explicit and agreed-upon standards of performance and competence among relevant stakeholders. Second, to the extent that the measures used involve the integration and application of knowledge in ways that "pull together" relevant knowledge and skills, teaching should focus on such tasks. Third, when assessment and curriculum share in common the application, transfer, evaluation, and analysis of knowledge, assessment and curriculum tasks might be distinguishable only on the basis of the purpose served by the tasks.

A shift from a testing culture to an assessment culture requires altering students' expectations and responsiveness toward testing and assessment. Traditional forms of assessment convey to students that (1) assessment comes from without, and it is not their responsibility; (2) what matters is not the full range of their intuitions and knowledge, but their performance on the specific skills that appear on tests; (3) first-draft work is good enough; and (4) achievement matters to the exclusion of development (Wolf, 1989).

Alternative forms of assessment assume that students know that it is all right to collaborate with other students, that revisions are likely to be helpful, and that a test does not call for the recall and recitation of what was done in class (Wolf et al., 1991).

The use of alternative assessment measures calls for increased congruence between assessment and instruction. Students who are instructed in ways that foster the development of applied knowledge and higher order thinking should not have to answer a multiple-choice or true-false quiz on knowledge recall. Similarly, students who are expected to complete a performance test in science should not have to learn science by relying mostly on a textbook and memorizing formulas. In short, authentic assessment should be substantiated by authentic instruction.

Finally, alternative assessment measures, such as portfolios, performance, and curriculum-embedded measures are costly, both in terms of their design and implementation. Although students and teachers who use them often find them more interesting and valuable than they do traditional measures, the time required to summarize, "grade," and report on these measures is considerably greater than the time required to use traditional forms of assessment.

Together, these challenges to the use of alternative forms of assessment suggest that replacing traditional forms of assessment will be, at best, a slow and difficult process.

### Process for developing alternative forms of assessment

The articulation of curriculum and assessment is at the heart of authentic assessment. This articulation must provide educators at large, and especially teachers, with a central role in the design and implementation of assessment measures. Ironically, however, while teachers are constantly in the process of assessing their students, this assessment process rarely becomes legitimized outside the confines of the classroom. Furthermore, educators in general, and teachers in particular, are not psychometricians, nor have they been trained in designing student assessment measures. Therefore, we need to develop opportunities and frameworks for building the capacity of teachers and other educational stakeholders to develop and implement new forms of student assessment.

One possible framework begins with a dialogue among relevant educational stakeholders.[3] These include teachers, administrative staff members, and if possible, parents and students. The dialogue should lead to the identification of student exit and performance outcomes that are valued by the different educational stakeholders, and at the very least, teachers and administrative staff. It should also lead

to a discussion about the congruence between the desired exit outcomes and the school's curriculum.

In this section, I will describe two processes for designing alternative assessment measures. The principal assumption underlying these processes is that the measures which result from their implementation will serve primarily the needs of teachers and students.[4] Both of these processes begin with a dialogue among stakeholders. However, the starting point for this dialogue and the scope of the design process are different.

One process for designing alternative forms of student assessment involves identifying student outcomes and generating performance standards out of the existing curriculum. I will illustrate this process by referring to a staff development program in which I worked with a group of 30 elementary and secondary school teachers from a suburban school district in Long Island, New York. The purpose of this program was to provide participants with an introduction to alternative forms of assessment and to help them in the initial design of alternative measures of student outcomes. After several background sessions, we began the design process with the articulation of exit student outcomes which were valued by the entire group. Some examples of these outcomes include "ability to apply different problem-solving strategies in content areas" and "ability to work collaboratively."

After discussing these outcomes and identifying different curriculum and instructional strategies that would lead to their attainment at different grade levels, the group divided itself into subject/area and/or grade level teams. The teams identified (a) a unit that addressed one or more of the outcomes originally identified and which they thought would benefit from the use of alternative assessment, or (b) an area of the curriculum that might be best served by the use of portfolio-based assessment. Among the projects identified were an interdisciplinary unit on the Holocaust for ninth grade, a career awareness unit for the eighth grade, a first grade unit on Earth awareness, and a language-arts assessment profile for kindergarten. My review of the project drafts generated by the different teams, and the formal evaluation of the program by participants, have provided me with insights about some of the merits and shortcomings of an assessment design process derived from the existing curriculum.

First, although teachers had no problem articulating broad student outcomes for their students (e.g., will demonstrate an intermediate oral proficiency level in another language), it was difficult for them to use these broad outcomes as the starting point of their assessment design, or to relate these outcomes to the standards and scoring rubrics that they devised. Instead, most program participants used unit or project objectives as the starting point for the design (e.g., will use the appropriate verb tense). Moreover, participants who worked on a subject area (e.g., foreign language) tended to break down the exit outcomes into narrow objectives and competencies. These objectives and competencies were then used to generate tasks that were indeed richer and more contextualized than many assessment tasks used in foreign language (e.g., a teacher assessed students' use of the past tense through the use of journals in which students recorded their activities during the winter recess). However, because the tasks were driven by narrow objectives representing one part of the year's curriculum, and not by broad educational outcomes from which these objectives and competencies were derived, teachers either missed the opportunity to assess more than a narrow set of competencies, or constructed the tasks in ways that compromised their authenticity. This means that the design of alternative assessment tasks from broad educational outcomes is not consistent with the curriculum and instructional practices that many teachers use, especially if they teach academic subjects such as mathematics, social studies, and even foreign language. It also supports the point made earlier in this article, that the design and use of alternative forms of assessment is inconsistent with the culture of schools and with teaching practices that are oriented toward a testing culture.

***Replacing traditional forms of assessment will be, at best, a slow and difficult process.***

A second insight that is derived from this staff development process refers to the absence of flexibility in the assessment process in terms of allowing students to meet a standard in different ways. Related to this, only one of the assessment drafts clearly stated the standards to be met by students

and is explicit about making those standards known to students at the beginning of the curriculum unit.

In their evaluation of the staff development program, participants shared their perceptions regarding their difficulties and frustrations with shifting to alternative forms of assessment. Following are some illustrations:

> While my understanding continues to expand so does my corresponding frustration. Each time we sit down to discuss this area [assessment] I get another piece, but it also is *quite* overwhelming and time consuming....
>
> I feel as though I sort of had an idea about how to do "authentic" assessment, but this course helped me focus on the planning that has to come before you "announce" that something is authentic.
>
> I've started to think in terms of "what kind of alternative assessment can I do" at the beginning of a unit as opposed to sort of letting it happen at the end.

I believe that the design of alternative assessment measures from the existing curriculum can pose significant problems. Possibly the main problem has to do with the "authenticity" of the assessment produced. To the extent that the design process is based on an operational curriculum organized around narrow instructional objectives, the assessment derived from this curriculum might at best be richer and more descriptive, but probably will not be authentic. In other words, the curriculum[5] on which the assessment is based may not be authentic and therefore cannot lead to authentic assessment. Another problem inherent to this design process is that to the extent that teachers are generating unit or grade level outcomes and assessment tasks without articulating these across grade levels, there could be serious discontinuities in both the curriculum delivered to students and the experiences that students have as they move from one grade level or course to another.

On the other hand, there are also advantages to working from the existing curriculum. The first advantage is that the process for implementing alternative forms of assessment can occur at the classroom or school level and within one or more subject areas. A second advantage is that teachers who grapple with the design and use of alternative forms of assessment acquire greater insights as to the relationships among curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and are better able to see the wholeness of the learning process. This is illustrated by the following comments:

> Before we began all this I rarely used anything of my own — fearing subjectivity — I trusted pre-made tests as more acceptable. I no longer do that.
>
> Students can better assess their products and know *exactly* what is expected of them.
>
> The assessment measures I've used in the past have been much narrower and did not allow for as many diverse means to demonstrate mastery.

The second design process I will propose also begins with an articulation of exit performance outcomes for students. In this case, however, these exit outcomes are not linked to the existing curriculum, and provide the basis for the design of both the curriculum *and* assessment processes and tasks for the entire district.[6] This design process remediates some of the shortcomings of a process that arises out of the existing curriculum. It also leads to the design of both a curricular and assessment system that is guided by explicit exit outcomes and performance standards. However, this design process is costly, takes a significant amount of time, and requires a significant commitment on the part of schools and school districts.

Regardless of whether the design process precedes or stems from the curricula, the identification of student exit and performance outcomes should begin with an individual and collective vision of the best possible performance of students emerging from a particular grade level or at the end of the entire curriculum.[7] This performance should be stated in terms of what the student will know and/or will be able to do.[8] An example of an exit outcome might be: *"Students will be able to make appropriate and realistic vocational choices based on marketable work-place skills and the ability to assess their own interests and abilities."*

Before proceeding with the assessment design process, educational stakeholders need to articulate the specific manifestations or characteristics of a person that would provide evidence of the desired outcome. These manifestations should address the core of the outcome and then link this core with its modifiers. The core of the preceding outcome is "make appropriate and realistic vocational choices"; the modifiers add specific information about the core (e.g., "based on marketable work-place skills"). Two manifestations that stem from the outcome stated above are: *"Is aware of her own interests, talents, and strengths,"* and *"Can access resources that are relevant to his career or vocational choices."*

Following the specification of all relevant manifestations and performance of the outcome identified, there needs to be an articulation of the standards that such behaviors or performances should meet in order to support exit outcomes of excellence or mastery. The identification of the standards involves the

transformation of the manifestations into observable actions/events/performances. It is possible that some manifestations already incorporate a standard, and it is also possible that a standard may address one or more manifestations of the outcome. Two standards that might be used as evidence of the outcome are contained in the following examples: *"When confronted with a career or vocational decision or choice-making situation, the student can describe one or more strategies for pursuing career or vocational choices,"* and *"The student can identify a variety of vocational options relating to the student's abilities and interests and job-market needs."*

The standard-setting process also involves describing the characteristics of different performance levels in order to differentiate an excellent performance from minimum or moderate performance levels.

The identification of standards and the standard-setting process are possibly the most difficult aspects of the design of alternative assessment measures and processes. Although it is not difficult to recognize the importance of explicit and shared standards of student performance, the dialogue required among educators in order to define outcomes and set standards cuts deeply against established practices in schools. Moreover, the clarification of one's standards of performance in the assessment tasks and processes also involves defining the conditions and instructional practices that might lead to such performance. In this fashion, issues of preferred instructional strategies, approaches to curriculum, and professional accountability cannot be ignored. On the other hand, the benefits that result from this dialogue are multiple, and relevant not only to the assessment design process, but to the curriculum design and implementation process as well. Once defined, the behaviors and standards that are to elicit or produce desired student outcomes can be used as the framework for identifying or designing authentic assessment tasks and processes. They can also identify appropriate curriculum and instructional tasks if these are not yet in place.

The process of designing authentic assessment outcomes and standards is iterative. That is, we proceed from the outcome to its manifestations, to the standard, and then back to the outcome and its manifestations. The design process is also holistic in that the characteristics and standards of a given outcome need to be "real" and integrative. Otherwise, we would be generating what would translate into decontextualized, isolated, and contrived assessment and curricular tasks. In this assessment process, one or more standards may be used to provide evidence of the attainment of one or more outcomes. This is possibly the most important distinction between generating mastery objectives and "authentic" student outcomes and standards. In authentic assessment, we strive for a process for documenting student outcomes that might resemble real-life outcomes. Therefore, the assessment measures used by a school might include a variety of assessment tasks designed to make explicit the achievement of certain outcomes, as well as the use of rich and systematic documentation of the learning processes and experiences of students, which can provide evidence of desired student outcomes attained.

To conclude, alternative assessment involves the identification of desired student outcomes. It proceeds to the identification of the conditions leading to student attainment of such outcomes, to the definition of performance standards, and to the design,

implementation, and validations of alternative assessment tasks or processes. As such, it is a holistic and integrative process that impacts curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In other words, alternative assessment is both a process and a product. It is a process because it enables us to determine what and how to teach and what and how to assess through the articulation of our vision for what we want to "produce" in students. It is a product in that it leads to the design of assessment tasks and documentation systems, such as portfolios, that make it possible for students to demonstrate the attainment of the outcomes we value. To the extent that educators recognize and appreciate the possibilities that alternative assessment has to offer, the design and use of alternative assessment could have an impact, not just on what and how we assess, but on what, why, and how we teach.

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## Notes

1. In this article, I use the terms *authentic* and *alternative* synonymously.

2. *Authentic or alternative assessment measures* include portfolios, performance, and other curriculum-embedded measures. A *performance measure* requires students to apply knowledge in solving a problem or in using it in different situations. A *portfolio* is a purposeful collection of a student's work that exhibits efforts, progress, and achievements. This collection is selected and reflected upon by the student, following guidelines from the teacher.

3. The scope and length of this dialogue depend greatly upon the extent to which school staff members and other educational stakeholders have discussed and agreed upon exit or grade-specific student outcomes.

4. This is not to imply that these measures could not be used for accountability purposes within and across schools in the same school system, although, to do this, the measures would require a significantly greater degree of validation and scrutiny. Furthermore, because these measures are intrinsically tied to the curriculum, they are not as transportable as measures that were originally designed for large scale assessment.

5. I am using a broad definition of *curriculum,* namely, everything that is taught and learned in the school setting.

6. The description of this process is based on work with Education 2000, a school design initiative of the American Forum for Global Education, in which the exit student outcomes that have been identified stem from a three-year process of informed input from different school district and community stakeholders, leading to the development of a curriculum blueprint for the entire school district.

7. The process of identifying exit and performance outcomes is interesting and valuable, since it often results in the recognition by educational stakeholders that regardless of the grade and even of the subject taught, they share similar broad goals for their students. An added benefit of this process is the realization that, while student outcomes are inherently related to instructional processes, teachers are rarely provided with opportunities to identify exit outcomes for the students they teach. Instead, the structure and programmatic characteristics of schools, at best, allow teachers to plan on a day-to-day basis and to consider student outcomes only as they relate to lesson objectives.

8. To illustrate the design process from here on I will use examples that are based on the work of the Education 2000 project in Yonkers, New York. These examples address exit outcomes for twelfth graders.

# Book Reviews

## A Letter to Teachers: Reflections on Schooling and the Art of Teaching

by Vito Perrone

Published by Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1991. 134 pages, paper.

### Reviewed by Elizabeth Goetz

> For me, teaching has always meant decision making about curriculum, materials, and pedagogy. As a teacher in the schools, it has never occurred to me that I should, or had to, ask permission to use particular materials, choose not to use a textbook, rearrange the furniture, or make use of diverse community resources. I assumed it was my responsibility to develop what I considered the most appropriate curriculum for the students with whom I worked (though I did understand, of course, that I should be able to explain my actions and my purposes and their relationships to the learning of the students in my classes).
>
> I learned rather quickly that my outlook was not altogether common. Still, it seemed to me that if teachers lacked such basic decision-making authority, schools could not possibly get better, and the people we most needed as teachers would likely choose to do other things. (pp. 80–81)

I don't know of any teacher who wouldn't agree with Perrone. In fact, I suspect that students, parents, principals, administrators, and school boards would all agree that this is the kind of teacher and this the kind of classroom that we all want for every student. So how do we get there?

In *A Letter to Teachers*, Perrone offers a number of attainable, provocative, challenging suggestions. We must start, he says, with teachers, who "need to construct for themselves a more powerful voice" (p. 133). It is not so much a question of teachers demanding authority as their rightful due as it is a need for teachers to recognize and accept their own status as professionals. Out of a self-confident professionalism, teachers will be able to speak — and act — with authority. Perrone makes frequent use of Dewey's "students of teaching," and further states, "The exceptional teachers I know are passionate about learning" (p. 117).

The first few chapters of Perrone's book make comfortable reading, establishing through a weaving of educational philosophy with actual classroom experience a solid groundwork for the idea that the teacher in the classroom is the only proper authority for what is taught and how to teach it. He deals adequately with the question of accountability, offering alternatives to traditional methods.

In subsequent chapters, Perrone beckons teachers to recognize themselves as the professionals they are; the process of reading the book evokes, in itself, this reaffirming sense of self-acknowledgment as a professional. Chapters entitled "The Community and the School" and "Valuing Differences" are of particular interest as we struggle to meet the rising need for parent and community involvement in schools and the challenge of multicultural classrooms that are able to enrich *all* students. Perrone offers a variety of inspiring models of school and community linkages and multicultural programs that enliven both the classroom and the community.

As a teacher in one of the world's 300 and some Waldorf schools — where the teacher's authority in the classroom and in the hiring, firing, and development of new teachers has always been a primary assumption — I found much of Perrone's book to be a pleasing validation of what we have always done. It works. But when I read his chapter "Evaluating and Grading Student Performance," I was electrified. As a teacher, I have moved through the years from being inarticulately unhappy with the grading system to being urgently determined to find a reasonable way to function without it. Particularly in high school, there is an obvious need for some objective means of evaluating and grading student performance. But when the legitimate need for accountability is met by a system of grading and testing that, in effect, cripples or even prevents the learning process itself, the urgency of finding new means becomes evident. Perrone illustrates the problem with examinations:

> I learned a good lesson about exams very early in my teaching career from a sixteen-year-old. He had not really done well on the first exam, which consisted of four essay questions. In my conference with him (I established a conference with every student who hadn't done well), the student wanted to assure me that he had really learned a great deal about the Greeks but I had asked him *all* the wrong questions. I asked him to state four questions that he judged to be important that he could have dealt with better, and then to share with me how he would have responded to them — and he did! He knew and understood more about the subject than his performance on *my* exam would suggest. (p. 62)

A recent episode in my own tenth-grade English class illustrates the effect of "grade anxiety" on student learning. As I was reading a student's essay to the class, I noted a spelling mistake I had overlooked in correcting the paper. "No fair!" came a voice, "That's double jeopardy!" If students are focused on learning, they

*want* you to help them find and correct their errors. If students are focused on grades, do we have the kind of learning environment we — and the students — hunger for?

In *A Letter to Teachers*, Perrone offers some viable and intriguing suggestions for working toward finding new, learning-centered means for evaluation.

> I have not put a grade on a paper for the past twenty-five years, of my now thirty-six years of teaching. And I haven't given an examination in any traditional sense for twenty-three years.... I start always with the premise that *each* student will be successful and, in fact, that I am as responsible as the student for making sure that our experience together is successful. (pp. 62–63)

*That* is the statement I would like to be able to make as a teacher. Working with the germinal ideas in Perrone's book, I believe I am going to get there.

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## The Tact of Teaching: The Meaning of Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

by Max van Manen

Published by the State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991; 192 pp.; paper, $16.95; cloth, $49.50.

### Reviewed by Dale T. Snauwaert

Max van Manen's concern in his insightful book is the nature of pedagogical relationships between adults — including both teachers and parents — and children. Van Manen perceives the role of adults in the pedagogical act as intentionally mediating the influence of the world on the child so that the child grows and develops in multiple, holistic ways. As an act of mediation, pedagogy is situation specific and dynamic. It is contingent upon the unique circumstances of the situation mediated by the adult, circumstances that are not static but rapidly changing. Given this dynamism and uniqueness, one cannot predict the precise response of the pedagogue before he or she enters the pedagogical situation, nor rationalize genuine pedagogy in bureaucratic form. Rather, each pedagogical situation involves what van Manen refers to as thoughtfulness and tact. He writes:

> The real stuff of teaching and parenting happens in the thick of life itself when one must know with a certain confidence just what to say or do (or what not to say or do) in situations with children. Therefore, pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact may be seen to constitute the essence and excellence of pedagogy. We might say that thoughtfulness constitutes the internal aspect and tactfulness the external aspect of pedagogy. (p. 130)

Pedagogical thoughtfulness, according to van Manen, is a type of reflection that involves a total personal response to a particular situation without reflectively distancing oneself from that situation. In other words, when engaged in concrete, unique situations with children, one must call upon one's knowledge and experience while both remaining sensitive to the child's subjectivity and guiding the child toward maturity and understanding. Pedagogical thoughtfulness is thus a kind of mindfulness — a mindfulness of the needs and interests of the child in dialectical interaction with the demands and influences of the environment. Being reflective in this way serves to mediate the situation in terms of the best interests and well-being of the child. However, thoughtfulness is not sufficient; it must be combined with tact.

Pedagogical tact is the complement of pedagogical thoughtfulness. It captures the action dimension of pedagogical praxis. "Tact is the pedagogical ingenuity that makes it possible for the educator to transform an unproductive, unpromising, or even harmful situation into a pedagogically positive event" (p. 130). Tact is the capacity to apply reflective mindfulness in a way that actually reaches the child. It is a way of being and knowing that creates receptivity so that the student is open to learning and growth. Pedagogical tact is thus a way of relating to children/students that creates readiness and receptivity to the guiding influence of the teacher.

It is impossible to capture the richness of van Manen's conception of pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact in this short review. The complex reality of pedagogical interaction is brought to considerable light by van Manen and made concrete by rich anecdotal material. Van Manen offers a conception of pedagogy grounded in experience and reflection, and centered in the interests and well-being of the child. From this perspective, becoming an educator is a long, long process of experience and reflection. It has more to do with wisdom and being wise than with technical training — and this is an insight we should heed as we reflect on teaching and help prepare teachers for their professional lives with children. The question becomes, How do we help cultivate teachers who are wise, who possess pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact?