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Contemplative Teaching

Journeying, Being Present, Serving Others

Kathryn Byrnes

Contemplative education is a journey that moves both outward into the world and inward into one's own mind, body, and heart.

Drawing from their own contemplative practices teachers are continually training in observation and self-reflection. Their own contemplative practices along with a profound understanding of the curricular design, enable teachers to continually and knowingly meet students within the context of the student's own personal journey. Together, teachers and students are inspired to view each day as a fresh opportunity to express more deeply their personal gifts, manifesting their inherent intelligence, compassion and confidence.

(Gil Thomas 2007)

Contemplative education offers an educational vision and practice designed to foster both personal and societal transformation. Interest in contemplative teaching has emerged recently among educational practitioners and researchers because of its emphasis on wholeness, unity, and the integration of the inner and outer worlds, which runs counter to many current mainstream educational practices.

While contemplative teaching has a long tradition in religious education and training, its relevance and value to mainstream education has garnered attention through the work of scholars connected with the Association for Mindfulness in Education, the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, the Garrison Institute, Naropa University, and the Mind and Life Institute. Contemplative teaching focuses on uniting the deep inner life of the teacher with his/her outwardly visible actions. Rather than acting like a teacher or performing the role of teacher in the classroom, one who exhibits a contemplative teaching presence engages in

a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning envi-

Note: This paper is based on *Portraits of Contemplative Teaching: A Third Way* (Byrnes 2009)



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ronments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (Rodgers & Raider-Roth 2006, 266).

Contemplative teaching is a path leading from the past to the future. Rather than viewing teachers and students as disembodied beings by focusing solely on their intellect and rational systems, contemplative teaching's emphasis on wholeness, unity, and integration moves education toward a view of teachers and students as beings with not only minds, but also hearts and bodies.

While acknowledging the realities of schools today, contemplative teaching has the potential to create positive learning experiences, improve the working lives of teachers, and create transformative experiences for school communities so that the individuals within can see themselves, others and the world in new ways. The current emphasis in our society on speed, multitasking, and "getting my way now" limits our ability individually and collectively to understand ourselves and our world. Contemplative teaching offers educational communities a third way, which allows students and teachers to live and learn in ways that offer the most potential for transformation and a holistic, integrative learning experience.

Gil and The Academy

This article will provide a portrait of Gil's approach to teaching at the Academy. His contemplative orientation to teaching was cultivated through his decades of contemplative practices and will be revealed through three qualities of teaching:

To illustrate the applicability of contemplative teaching to contemporary educational practice, I will focus on The Academy, a small independent elementary school in the western United States. Gil, a co-founder of the school, team teacher in the first and second grade classroom (2006-2008), and head of the school (2008-2010) will be profiled in this article.

The Academy¹ conceptualized education as a path involving three journeys: intelligence, compassion, and confidence. Intelligence was described as both acquiring and situating knowledge and being able to distinguish and discriminate. Compassion was defined as the ability to maintain one's own sense of self along with a sense of belonging to a larger group.

Confidence was the ability to know oneself in a way that allows one to act in the world in ways that manifest intelligence and compassion. These three journeys were visualized as involving students, teachers, and their families.

The mission of the school was to deepen intelligence, compassion, and confidence through five guiding principles tied to particular domains of learning. The guiding principles mirrored development that can occur within a person, while the curricular areas were external to a person but could facilitate the internal development of the principles. The guiding principles and their accompanying curricular areas were:

- Allegiance to the present moment nurtured through contemplative practices
- Appreciation and interconnection nurtured through the humanities
- Authentic communication nurtured through the arts
- Synchronized activity nurtured by embodiment disciplines (athletics, health and nutrition, etc.)
- Precision and insight nurtured through the sciences.

This article will provide a portrait of Gil's approach to teaching at the Academy. His contemplative orientation to teaching was cultivated through decades of contemplative practices and will be revealed through three qualities of his teaching: journeying (teaching with integrity), being present (teaching with mindful awareness), and serving others (teaching with compassion). Each teaching principle will be explored through excerpts of Gil's writings about contemplative education and data from classroom observations, interviews, and artifacts.

Journeying (Teaching with Integrity)

One of Gil's teaching principles was that education is a journey. He told the second graders one day that "learning is like a journey. You have to take it on your own. No one can climb the mountain for you." The comment was a response to a student who explained that she knew the answer to the math prob-

lem because someone told her the correct answer. Education at the Academy was both an individual journey and a collective journey of students, teachers, and the school community. Gil's journey was informed by contemplative traditions to "cultivate minds that are steady and relaxed as well as disciplined, empathetic and trustworthy."

Teaching with integrity can be seen in how teachers face challenges to their beliefs about students, teaching and learning, and themselves. Gil explained that challenges often revealed the "conservation of greatness" principle quite clearly for him. "When you are bloated up with accomplishment and then met by the phenomenal world, experience will typically knock you down to experience reality again" (Personal Communication, May 17, 2007). Gil observed that challenge is natural and neither teaching nor life are about perfection. When asked how he handles frustrations or challenges, Gil noted that he has two choices. One is to blame the other person or feel his own confidence being undermined.

The other alternative is when these challenges come up ... is that it provokes something inside of me.... The provocation rubs against my own habitual patterns and actually serves to do something and I kind of wake up. I saw that I am really tied in to what this other person thinks about my practice. So there this quality of waking up, of coming back to the present, that is inspired by the energy of this interaction that can actually serve to bring me back in the same way that Trungpa Rinpoche talked about how when you ride your mind it's like riding a horse. If you start to fall off, that experience of falling off can actually wake you up and can help you come back to your seat so the falling off part, the being provoked part is no longer a curse but actually a blessing.... You get these messages from the phenomenal world and if you don't take them personally, they're just lessons. They are just ways of understanding what is going on in yourself and in others. (Personal Communication, April 13, 2007)

Gil faced challenges in his teaching as learning opportunities. Challenges or frustrations helped him refine his answer to the school's three guiding princi-

ples: "Where do clarity and understanding come from? What is the nature of kindness? What is the experience of trusting ourselves? The concept of a journey implies hardship and struggle and a path to an often unknown destination. Unlike a journey that typically has an endpoint, learning and teaching are lifelong endeavors. The journey toward teaching with integrity is supported by attention to or mindful awareness of the present moment.

Being Present (Teaching with Mindful Awareness)

Gil's day often began very early. If he found himself awake at 3:30 a.m. worrying about his lessons for the day, he would get up and re-read his class notes. It was important for Gil to feel prepared so he could relax and be present during the lesson. Gil discovered through his years of teaching and meditating that for him to feel steady and relaxed he needed to be fully prepared for his lesson with a script written for what he would say and do. Gil thought that a Bob Dylan lyric, "I will know my song well before I start singing," was the perfect expression of how he felt about teaching. He believed if he wasn't prepared, he would use his mental and emotional energy on remembering what came next and what he should say to guide the students' learning rather than being present in the moment and being fully aware of his students.

Gil believed that clarity was important for his students and in order to facilitate their experience, he first needed to feel clarity in his own mind. Preparation for Gil was the key to clarity. He was challenged by learning the curriculum for first and second grades and spent countless hours planning and reviewing his lessons. He carried around a written daily planner with him, in which he wrote motivational sayings, such as "Be virtuous and rest in what arises" or "All great endeavors require relaxation." He used these daily reminders to help him remain present. Gil acknowledged, however, that successful teaching requires more than having a plan; he also needed to connect to his own experience as well as understand his students.

Mindful awareness focuses on wholeness, on the process, and on the potential of oneself, others, and

the moment through attention to both the immediate experience and the big picture.

Mindful awareness was present in the focus on marking beginnings, middles and ends of lessons, days, units, seasons and years. Gil explained that an underlying, unifying principle at the Academy was a sense of beginning, middle, and end, which stemmed from an understanding of contemplative practices.

They all have a beginning, middle, and end.... Not going too fast or not going too slow. Not being too careful or not being careful enough. Careful is not a good word anyway. But being mindful. So the end can actually provide some sort of feedback. Beginning, middle, and end. There's a sense of synchronizing mind and body. And there is also a sense of being connected both with your mind and body, and with the world around you. ...There was more of a sense of connection with others, with the world and that makes it a contemplative practice. There is some sort of sense of expanding out, expansive. And there's a certain balance and dance between not too tight and not too loose. (Personal Communication, April 13, 2007)

Like any school, the rules, routines, and structures of the Academy are taught at the beginning of the school year. A major difference is that the school staff take their time reviewing the rules and routines and easing into the structures rather than "laying down the law" on the first day or first week of school.

The staff at the Academy were consciously aware of designing rules and structures that accentuated the vision of a contemplative education and not creating or trying to enforce routines that were not necessary to the school's vision. The teachers were open to parental feedback and solutions reflected a decision both teachers and parents could support. Part of the contemplative view is a "both/and" orientation to the world rather than an "either/or" orientation which means that when faced with differing opinions, it was important to creatively synthesize both points of view or to find a new way to view or frame the issue. Approaching problems or tensions with compassion and a desire to be of service supports a

both/and orientation and opens the possibility for new perspectives or solutions.

Serving Others (Teaching with Compassion)

Gil advised the staff at the Academy and the parents during their inaugural year as a school not to feel like they needed to model "having it all together." By taking "an interest in and willingness to look at our own lives" Gil recommended to parents and teachers that they adopt an understanding, nonjudgmental attitude toward inadequacies and failures and that they recognize that one's experience is part of the common human experience.

Gil knew that he was hard on himself and often felt anxious. These were qualities he did not want to model for his students and yet they were a part of who he was. He was careful to observe his own emotional state and attempt to be more accepting of his own personal anxiety and self-criticism. Teaching with compassion involves compassion for self as well as for others.

Gil viewed the feedback he received as an opportunity for greater self-awareness and happiness in his life. He did not adopt a Pollyanna view that everything was good or perfect but rather, that everything offered a lesson or an opportunity for growth. Some feedback was hard for Gil to receive, but he approach it with mindful awareness, openness, equanimity, and wonder, he was able to look for what he could learn from the experience instead of blaming himself or something external.

He realized that to be an effective teacher, he must create relaxation for himself and his students. For Gil relaxation often involved physical activities like playing soccer with his students at recess or after school. Being able to run around the play area with his students was meaningful for Gil because of his own experience with teachers playing sports with him as a youth. Just like so many other teachers, Gil was influenced by his own teachers whom he looked upon as role models for himself and his students. Recalling a fifth grade teacher who played kickball with his students at lunch, Gill observed that

there was something of love, unconditional love, for what he did, what he was doing and who he was with us. Love for us and a love for

himself. I don't know. There was something there that was so inspiring. (Personal Communication, April 13, 2007)

Taking the time to listen and to be present with students, revealing his compassion and unconditional love, and making connections with students was a hallmark of Gil's teaching presence.

Gil served as a mirror for students. Anna, a first grader, asked Gil to watch her on the monkey bars. Gil stood about ten feet away, watching and smiling but saying nothing. He explained that students sometimes need someone to just watch them and not offer feedback or encouragement. Sometimes they just need to be seen. When Gil became a mirror for Anna he allowed her to simply experience performing on the monkey bars without feeling judged.

Similarly, when students shared stories about their lives during sharing time at morning snack, Gil fluctuated between making comments and only saying "thank you" in response to a student's story. Lila acted out the experience of seeing a rabbit over the weekend during a walk with her parents. When she finished, Gil commented to the class, "It sounds like you were watching it very carefully. When Lila acted like the rabbit, I could really see the rabbit coming out of her. She was so observant. She could be the rabbit." While presenting feedback to Lila, Gil mindfully focused on Lila and what he saw her do and presented less emphasis on his own reaction or evaluation of her story.

Compassion in Gil's teaching was revealed in his writings to parents and staff, in his self-compassion for his own inadequacies, in his love for playing soccer with his students, and in his mirroring of students' accomplishments. Compassion can also involve challenge to improve students' learning. It is a delicate dance to be aware of every student's learning edge and to support, encourage, and motivate each to work at a level that was "not too easy and not too hard."

Parker Palmer's *To Know as We are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (1993, 70) clearly resonated with Gil. Palmer spoke of the power of studying with a teacher

who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes

our insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn.

Gil felt that Palmer offered the reader or audience wonderful opportunities to think about what is a spiritual endeavor. Teaching and learning for Gil were spiritual endeavors that involved mind, body, and spirit. He actively and mindfully attempted to embody the principles of integrity, mindful awareness, and compassion in his teaching practice.

The Future of Contemplative Education

This article has offered an in-depth look at contemplative education through the practices and principles of one elementary school teacher. Teachers within this orientation attempt to embody compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness in their teaching in order to facilitate their students' learning and development as human beings who can connect their own inner wisdom with the wisdom of the outer world.

Gil described his vision of education as follows:

Our vision is to help children to trust and be true to who they are as people, and from this fertile ground build a nurturing and vibrant community of learners. We are not merely learning but are cultivating a deep appreciation for that learning and for life altogether. We stop to smell the roses. (Personal Communication, May 15, 2007)

Smell the roses. Live the questions now. The sacred lives in the details. These statements are rather transparent windows into the principles and practices Gil shared with his students, colleagues, and families at the Academy. Recognizing the frailty of our humanity, he also recognized the idealism expressed within the principles. Still, reality did not always reflect his aspirations. When explaining his teaching, Gil shared that he felt

a sense of synchronizing myself with what's going on. There is this free flow of movement and joy and grace. It's hard to know if the students are leading the class or if you're leading the class or if they are inspiring you or you are inspiring

them. It's all arising simultaneously. There's not a sense of teaching so much or of being taught or of a subject. It's not segmented in that way. (Personal Communication, May 15, 2007)

Gil's notion of flow in teaching and learning resonates with the research of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 4) who viewed flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter." Flow is a state of optimal fulfillment or engagement. Csikszentmihalyi's life work parallels Gil's in its emphasis on being happy and creating opportunities for others to be happy. Gil wrote, "With an open heart and a clear mind we look, we study, and we play with what it means to be truly happy."

Elizabeth DeBold (2002) wrote that

Csikszentmihalyi describes his life's work as the effort "to study what makes people truly happy." The emphasis here is on the word "truly" — because to him, happiness is not simply flow nor an emotional state nor even the experience of pleasure. The happiness he points to involves the continual challenge to go beyond oneself as part of something greater than one's own self-interest.

Gil desired to create synchronicity/flow/happiness in his teaching life. He embraced, embodied, and struggled with the qualities of compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness as a contemplative teacher. There is a story about a famous meditation teacher who would prepare for hours to teach a class. He read, wrote, planned, and reflected on his lesson. He was meticulous and thorough in his preparation. Before he would enter the classroom though, he would throw away anything he had prepared and be present in the moment with his class. Gil embodied a similar teaching practice. While he wouldn't literally throw away his hours of work, he was willing to forgo the plan if the class needed a different approach to the material to create a sense of synchronicity.

Gil's deep caring about his students and their happiness allowed him to experience a "free flow of movement and joy and grace" when teaching. When Danielle, a second grader, shared in a closing circle that school felt like home to her, tears came to Gil's eyes. He felt that if school felt like home then

Danielle felt comfortable bringing her heart into her learning environment at school. Gil brought his whole being to his teaching presence, which opened the door for students to bring all aspects of who they were to their learning.

Contemplative education begins with deeply intimate relationship with oneself. It is a journey that moves both outward into the world and inward into one's own mind, body, and heart. It is a journey of knowledge and self-knowledge toward transformation. Contemplative teaching attempts to create transformative experiences for both teachers and students and it describes both a process and an outcome. The potential for transformation occurs through a teacher's compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness.

Arthur Zajonc, the Academic Program Director at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, insightfully observed that

Knowledge, from the point of view of a contemplative tradition, is not primarily object-oriented. It is epiphany- or insight-oriented. It's not good enough to know about reality; you need to change how you see reality. Real education is transformation. (Boyce 2007, 73).

Being able to view oneself and the world in new ways or to change how one sees reality is the journey of contemplative education. Teachers have to be open to their own transformations in order to create transformative experiences for their students. Lee Worley (2005, 10), an experienced contemplative teacher, describes how teachers create transformative experiences for their students.

I would say that our job is to support [our students] in being fully alive — body, mind, spirit in this very moment. They need to have the tools to improvise, unafraid of life as it shows up. They and each moment are in a dialogue, a dance, and their confidence in themselves as good partners needs our support, nurturance, patience and recognition. Despite the seemingly counterproductive smokescreens students sometimes adopt, there shines a light. We must meet it with our own.... We must allow NOW to be more precious than past regrets or future goals for our students, of course, but be-

fore we can do that, it must be true for ourselves.

Worley integrates compassion, integrity, and mindful awareness in her understanding of the role of a contemplative teacher. The phrase, "there shines a light," implies teaching with compassion. "We must meet it with our own (light)" addresses the need for integrity in teaching and bringing out whole selves to our teaching. The emphasis on NOW focuses on being in the present moment and the quality of teaching with mindful awareness. The three qualities work together to support students "in being fully alive."

Transformation can occur over the course of a lesson, a day, a week, a month or a year. At the end of the school year, teachers often remark about the transformations they have witnessed in their students. Gil welcomed and invited his students' whole beings into the learning process and encouraged them to meet their world and themselves directly and with a sense of wonder. In order to create transformative experiences for his students, Gil needed to really know his students and be open to being transformed himself. In short, a contemplative approach to education focuses on how to be of service in the world, the importance of being who you are, and a focused attention in the present moment.

Note

1. The Academy was in operation from 2006 to 2010 serving grades K-5. It closed due to financial struggles during a difficult time.

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Fathoming Depth

Envisioning Deep Education

Paul Freedman

Deep education involves probing the depths of the material, rather than only skimming its surface.

I go down.
Rung after rung
I go down...
I came to explore...
The thing I came for:
The wreck and not the story of the wreck
The thing itself and not the myth
This is the place and I am here
We circle silently
About the wreck
We dive into the hold
I am she: I am he
We are. I am, you are.
— Adrienne Rich

We are a culture of surfers. We cruise across surfaces, channel surfing, surfing the internet, crossing vast terrains without ever, or at best rarely, scratching many of these surfaces. Whether this tendency is cause or effect, I am not sure but schooling seems to either reflect this cultural tendency or may be the very training ground where we become acculturated to the game of surfing. We teachers are obsessed with surfaces, how much ground can we cover, before handing our charges off to the next intrepid leader who will continue on the quest. Faster, faster, further, further.

The word *surface*, closely related etymologically to the word *superficial*, is defined, partly, as the extreme outer boundary or layer where an object meets the world around it. As a teacher I am not interested in surfaces. Yes, edges and boundaries can be interesting places, places where two beings (the knower and the known, for example) may initially meet, but can we engage even more deeply, from the depths of one being to the depths of another? Is it possible that the encounter with one's learning can be a richer experience than it typically is in school settings? Can the interiority of one's self reach towards a deeper



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aspect or essence of the living subject? How deep can we dig? What if the educational mission were not about covering subject areas. (The metaphor of covering, is another interesting one — in covering something we shield it from light and illumination. To cover a plant, for example, results in stressing its capacity to sustain its own life.) What if education were not about brushing past surfaces with the least possible effect on either knower or known, but rather exploring and exposing the “hidden wholeness” (Palmer 2004) of ourselves with the vastness and complexity of our study, with the goal of emerging from the encounter transformed? What would be the implications of such a shift on the contemporary practice of education?

I live on an island in North Puget Sound and I am often struck by the attitude of tourists who arrive here each spring. They are driven to cross the water and gaze over it without ever getting wet. They cross surfaces and report by cell phone to friends back home that they have seen the beautiful ocean, thinking that they *know* it. But with our limited access to the top, almost insignificant layers of the sea, we know nothing of its wonders, its diversity, its power, its fragility, grace, and wholeness, even if we were to devote a lifetime to its study.

Similarly, in schools as we guide our students over the “waters” of Algebra 1, Civics, and Language Arts, are we guiding them to *know* these subjects, their complexity and depth, or rather do we just surf across them? I would like to heretically urge us all to try to cover *less* territory and dive deeply into the particularities and complexities of our studies. Let us embrace a single poem and explore it with passion, openness, and wonder. As William Blake wrote, let us “see the world in a grain of sand.” I truly believe that it is only by studying the microcosm that the universal may be revealed.

Martin Buber wrote at length about what he called the Ich–Du or I–Thou encounter:

It is a relationship that stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. It is a concrete encounter, because these beings meet one another in their authentic existence, without any qualification or objectification of one another. In an I–Thou encounter, infinity and universality are

made actual (rather than being merely concepts). (Kramer 2004, 39)

Real education can be conceived of as a series of such I–Thou encounters, aiming towards transcendence and transformation. This is my goal in my classroom.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (2001, 65–65) once wrote: “Let us go into it deeply together. Not I see it and you don’t see it, or you see it and I don’t see it. But we both go into it. Deeply. Together.” This is such a simple and powerful image that reflects a transformative vision of education for depth.

After ten years of living on an island, I finally, with the encouragement of my teenage son, purchased a small used sailboat. Together we have been looking at our first nautical charts as we try to navigate through the waters of our new hobby. Bodies of water on these charts are covered with numbers, depth of water, measured not in feet but fathoms. The fathom seems such an odd and esoteric unit of measure, as well as a word with several meanings. It turns out that the origins of the word fathom are from an Old English word meaning “to embrace.” A fathom was the distance a man could reach out and thus embrace some other object (later standardized as a length of six feet.) “Fathom” also means to understand, as in “I can’t fathom what you mean by that,” which is related to knowing or embracing a subject. Education should be an embrace from the depths of one’s experience.

On my literal and simultaneously metaphoric island, I helped found a small independent school for kids ranging in age from the age of 3 to 12 called Salmonberry School. Over a decade of teaching and working to realize a humane and inspiring child-centered model of education, I have gradually evolved a personal pedagogy, which I have often called “holistic.” But when I now reflect on what truly differentiates my practice in the classroom most from a mainstream approach, it is this quest for both *embrace* and *depth*.

I was in a meeting with a school principal last week and experienced a most surreal moment. We were surrounded by so much that was familiar — new math books, school furniture, the language of the educational profession — but something was not quite right. When the principal said, “we’re really all after the same goals, aren’t we?” it reminded me of

the planet, Camazots in *A Wrinkle in Time*, where everything is so normal, it's somehow freakish and not right. "No!" I want to scream, "we are not after the same goals at all!"

So what is "deep education?" What would it look like if depth were a real goal in our work with learners? I believe it would include an emphasis on Bloom's higher level thinking skills as a starting point. However, in many ways I believe that, in addition to "higher-level thinking," deep education must also include lower-level (in the sense that it is at the very heart of this form of education) feeling, experiencing, and knowing. A deep education would also at times include a sense of celebration and, at others, a sense of despair. It would include laughter as well as tears.

Deep education would involve cognitive knowing, but it would apply this knowledge to both a very personal sense of self, one acquired through experience and reflection, *and* to an insight into the universal. Cognitive knowing would be a window to connect to the cosmos. Like eating an artichoke, as depth educators we would patiently and diligently peel off the outer prickly leaves of living subjects as we move towards the tender and tasty heart, and in so doing we would also become ourselves.

Deep education would have much to learn from the deep ecology movement from the 1970s. Arne Naess, who coined the term "deep ecology" and first developed its theoretical underpinnings, was critical of the limitations of ecological science. He recognized that the field's scientific and scientific orientation prevented ecologists from articulating a moral and spiritual basis for their work, or adopting a position on how people should live. To have such a moral and ethical stance, Naess believed we must also pursue ecological wisdom. Deep ecology seeks to develop ecological wisdom by focusing on deep *experience*, deep *questioning* and deep *commitment*. These three aspects of deep ecology constitute an interconnected system. Together, these three aspects of deep ecology create what Naess would call an ecosophy: an evolving but consistent philosophy of being, thinking, and acting in the world that embodies ecological wisdom and harmony. Similarly deep education would also be about deep *questioning* and deep *commitment* rooted in deep *experience*. Like deep ecol-

ogy, it would also be about being and acting as well as thinking and feeling; it would be more interested in the goal of wisdom than knowledge. And like deep ecology, deep education would have a strong ethical and moral point of view. It would not only see the accumulation and unbiased analysis of facts as the primary educational goal, but would also encourage and nurture the capacity for right ways of being and acting.

What conditions might support deep education? To begin with, it seems clear that deep education requires a much higher comfort level with time and space, and a far greater emphasis on beauty and reverence. Learning experiences must be integrated and integral, cross-disciplinary, and expansive. The curriculum must include the study of self, including self-exploration, self-knowledge and self-reflection. But a deep education would not be wholly about self, it would also require the presence of a learning community, a sense of collaboration, and a dramatic decrease in learners' sense of isolation and competition.

As I continue to immerse myself in the in-the-moment practice of teaching, as well as study and reflection, it has slowly come to me — or rather come back to me — that I have rediscovered one huge defining feature of a Salmonberry School education. We value and pursue depth. Learning is not and cannot be summarized by checklists of age-normed standards. Rather than skimming and surfing across vast surfaces, and deluding ourselves that we have seen the ocean, we dive in, deep, and explore with both purpose and abandon. We are less interested in covering curriculum, and more interested in the many ways of knowing.

Not just knowing but *knowing*, feeling meaning and relevance in one's work, and connecting intimately with one's study. This is the kind of experience that makes education worthwhile and lifelong. This is how we try to keep children's learning whole and holistic, rather than fragmented and superficial. Let us commit to evaluating the quality of a learning experience by its depth and by the authenticity of the embrace. Can we "fathom" such a vision?

I find inspiration from John Moffit's poem, "To Look at Any Thing"

To look at any thing,
If you would know that thing,

You must look at it long:
 To look at this green and say,
 "I have seen spring in these
 Woods," will not do — you must
 Be the thing you see:
 You must be the dark snakes of
 Stems and ferry plumes of leaves,
 You must enter in
 To the small silences between
 The leaves,
 You must take your time
 And touch the very peace
 They issue from.

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Three Dimensions of Genuine Education Improvement

Peter Berger

Effective school improvement requires helping substandard teachers improve; coordinating curriculum better; and taking a realistic look at what is really possible in remedying student “disadvantages.”

When people talk about a laundry list, like a laundry list of complaints, for example, they usually mean an inventory that’s extremely long and tiresomely detailed. Speaking of long and tiresome, let’s talk about everything that’s wrong with schools. Because there definitely *must* be something wrong. We know this because all across the country, schools are writing school improvement plans.

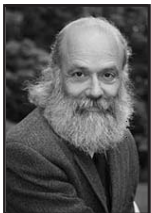
This epidemic of improvement plans is the natural and inevitable result of the government calculation that 80 percent of the nation’s schools are failing. Of course, this 80 percent failure rate is in large measure the natural and inevitable result of defining “failure” as any school where 100 percent of its students won’t be proficient in math and reading by 2014. That’s what No Child Left Behind mandated for every public school back in 2002.

It’s worth nothing that at the same time Congress and the president were decreeing universal success for 100 percent of my students, it didn’t occur to them to set the same high standards for themselves or their constituents. If 100 percent proficiency were the requirement everywhere else, we’d be closing down an awful lot of congressional districts, not to mention both houses of Congress.

We live in a nation where adults trample each other over Christmas bargains at Wal-Mart. Meanwhile, we expect schools to turn their children into model students.

As increasing numbers of schools find themselves falling irretrievably short of the “adequate yearly progress” required to reach No Child Left Behind’s looming impossible 2014 goal, more and more schools are, not surprisingly, being identified as failures. No Child Left Behind requires failing schools to devise improvement plans. Compiling and address-

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ing these generic, expert-spawned, multipage doorstops consumes precious time, resources, and money in schools already hard pressed to educate the generation that's showing up these days at the schoolhouse door.

From the latest curriculum fads and flashy technology to community gardens and prenatal care, schools are expected to address a laundry list of hot button issues, bandwagon education theories, and social problems. In their spare time, they're also supposed to teach children to read, write, use numbers, and know stuff.

Don't misunderstand. I'm not complaining about having to do my job. I'm complaining about having to do everybody else's job, the things *A Nation at Risk* described as the "personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve." *Risk* warned that these non-academic burdens would continue to sap our schools and "exact an educational cost."

They have, and they are.

I'm not saying that schools and teachers, including me, can't improve, or that some schools and teachers aren't legitimately lousy. But instead of casting concerned, effective teachers into a sea of excessive assessment, dubious data, pseudo-professional jargon, and pipe dream improvement plans, we need to allow them to take constructive, practical steps to really make their schools better.

Fortunately, real education happens in classrooms, not meeting rooms, which means that any teacher can make things better by simply teaching well. Beyond that, three dimensions that affect education quality warrant consideration.

Some teachers are good at what they do, but the fact is that some, like some doctors, carpenters, and teamsters, aren't. Schools need to invest more time coaching substandard teachers, and, where necessary, those teachers need to be dismissed. Teachers rely on contractual provisions to shield them from parental complaints when the wrong kid gets a C or stays after school. But those protections shouldn't provide a shelter for incompetence.

At least two factors complicate efforts to help classroom teachers improve. First, many principals were never teachers, at least not for long enough that they qualify as experts in the classroom, so their

coaching is often steeped in theory and less than worthwhile.

Second, to devote more time to coaching, administrators, and mentoring, teachers would need to do less of something else, and often the first something else that gets sacrificed is classroom instructional time, which obviously isn't the sagest route to improving a school.

Schools could also do some constructive work coordinating their curricula. This is perilous ground because curriculum writing is a perennial swamp of theoretical nonsense and big, empty words. Over the last few decades, though, content has been out of fashion among reformers, so many schools have lost the thread that used to give logical scope and sequence from one grade level to the next in all academic disciplines from math to social studies. Many schools could benefit from an audit of which skills and knowledge their teachers are covering year to year with an eye to determining what's being missed and what's being repeated excessively over the course of a child's education.

Finally, most schools spend vast amounts of time and resources trying to compensate for disadvantages that some students bring to class. Some packaged programs call it "asset building," while others exhort schools to build "bridges out of poverty." Advocates contend that some children don't learn well because they're unprepared scholastically and burdened by social, economic, and psychological baggage that they bring from home.

Unfortunately, there's very little, if anything, that I can do as a teacher to ease these burdens or solve these problems. I can't ameliorate poverty. I can't eliminate abuse. I can't turn all parents into supportive lovers of learning, or sadly sometimes even lovers of their children.

Schools can't fix the nation. In fact, by assuming additional family responsibilities, schools are simultaneously compromising their academic mission and further weakening the family ties that ought to be nurturing the children who come to school to learn.

I can be a decent human being. I can exercise compassion. I can be somewhat flexible when it comes to my expectations. But in the end my job is to instruct my students in English and history and determine whether they've genuinely mastered the skills, ac-

quired the knowledge, and achieved the standards everybody says students need to meet but too often don't.

That's already a pretty tall order, especially 20 kids at a time.

Nurturing the Well-Being of Urban Public School Educators

Lucila Rudge

Students who practice meditation regularly report that they are more connected with themselves, less reactive in difficult situations, more present in the moment, and better able to connect with others.

"My work is too stressful and I don't know how to relax or slow down."

"I want to learn to be able to cope with stress."

"I feel that I have no life, only work."

"Finally a course for my own personal development."

These are some of the statements I heard from public school educators when I asked them why they had signed up for my course aimed at personal development. As the course progressed and participants felt more comfortable to share their experiences, the overwhelming stress and feeling of disempowerment felt by these educators became even more apparent.

The emotional stresses faced by the class participants are not found only in Columbus, Ohio. Many teachers around the country, particularly those in urban areas, are suffering from stress. Heavy workloads, isolation from their colleagues, time constraints, emphasis on achievement testing, minimal decision-making power, and lack of support from their superiors and peers are usually listed as the main factors causing stress among teachers (Byrne 1994; Winzelberg & Luskin 1999; Murray 2005).

Coping with negative emotional response is also listed as one of the major stressor for educators (Montgomery & Rupp 2005; Sutton 2004; Carson, Templin, & Weiss 2006). Public school teachers are frequently exposed to emotional challenging situations and often respond in very negative ways. Teachers express negative emotions to student's behaviors almost every day (Carson & Templin 2007). The recurrence of negative emotions and the daily stress faced by teachers often cause them to be less tolerant, less caring, and less interested in cultivating positive relationships with their students (Blasé



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1986). Many teachers become so overwhelmed by the emotional challenges that they decide to leave the profession altogether. Emotional stress and poor emotion management are ranked as the primary reasons teachers become discouraged and leave the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond 2001; Montgomery & Rupp 2005). For those who decide to stay, there is an increasing risk for developing the "burnout syndrome," a result of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter 1997; Embich 2001). Burnout usually occurs when "teachers have attempted unsuccessfully to cope with stress over long periods of time" (Kyriacou 2001, as cited in Inner Resilience Program 2009, ii). Burned-out teachers are less prone to show care to their students, have less tolerance for disruptive behavior, and are less dedicated to their work (Farber & Miller 1981). Classroom climate tends to deteriorate as teachers feel less tolerant and less capable of effectively managing student disruption. The negative climate created in the classroom usually triggers other reactions in the teacher, leading to what Jennings & Greenberg (2009) refer to as the "burnout cascade."

Despite the evidence of the stress and emotional challenges that teachers face at work, there seems to be no effort from the educational system to provide support to teachers in this area. The lack of explicit pre-service or in-service training aimed at teachers' personal development demonstrates that the wellness of the teacher is not a priority in our educational system, or as Jennings & Greenberg (2009, 515) put it, "teachers lives and their concern with personal and professional development have long been put on the 'back burner' of education policy and research."

Taking Action

To attend to the stress and emotional challenges faced by public school educators in Columbus, Ohio, I developed a course, *Transformative Practices in Education and in the Community*, which I have been teaching at The Ohio State University since Spring 2009. The course is aimed at the educators' personal development. It is intended to nurture participants' wellness and foster personal and professional renewal. Six main activities integrate the course: interactive group activities, journal writing, selected

readings, small- and large-group sharing/discussions, self-analysis/self-reflection papers, and daily mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness is a central component of the course. Mindfulness practice consists of focusing attention, from a neutral position, on what is happening internally and externally as it occurs (Solloway 2000). It is an active act of watching and doing at the same time. Mindfulness practice is "participatory investigation in which you observe your own experiences while participating in them as they occur" (Gunaratana 1993, 30). One can practice mindfulness while sitting still, walking, doing the dishes, working in the garden, and so on. Mindfulness practice is gaining increasing attention in the fields of medicine (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1992; Kabat-Zinn 2005; Davidson et al. 2003), psychology (Brown & Ryan 2003; Carson et al. 2004; Barnes et al. 2007), and is beginning to gain attention in the field of education (Miller 2000, 2006; Lantieri 2008; Inner Resilience Program 2009).

Research has shown that the practice of mindfulness can reduce stress and have lasting calming effects (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1992; Kabat-Zinn 2005), improve the immune system, promote a sense of well being, improve attention (Davidson et al. 2003), enhance personal relationships (Carson et al. 2004; Barnes et al. 2007), facilitate emotional self-awareness (Brown & Ryan 2003), and contribute to interpersonal engagement or "psychological presence" (Kahn 1992). Educational studies have found that mindfulness practice can increase creativity, academic achievement and interpersonal relationships (Murphy & Donovan 1997). It can also help teachers feel calmer and more centered (Miller & Nozawa 2005), be less reactive to situations, more present in the moment, have better interactions with students (Solloway 2000), handle conflicts and anxiety more successfully, and cope better with stress (Napoli 2004). A recent study that examined the effects of mindfulness practice on 29 teachers over one academic year, reported significant positive results with regard to teacher wellness, including reduced stress levels, increased levels of attention, and greater perceived relational trust (Inner Resilience Program 2009). Teachers demonstrated reduction in emotion-oriented coping skills, fatigue, and emotional ex-

haustion and increases in mindfulness, compassion, and personal satisfaction.

This course, *Transformative Practices in Education and in the Community*, was first offered to teachers, school leaders, and other professional educators in an urban school district in central Ohio. Participants had the option to take this course for their professional development or receive graduate credit for it. The response from the professionals in the district was revealing. Among twenty courses offered to the district, this one was the first one to reach its enrollment capacity.

The Study

For this study, I examined the data collected from the course taught in Spring 2009. Twenty-five students were enrolled in the course. Principals, assistant principals, teachers, special education teachers, social workers, counselors, and a psychologist comprised the group. They worked for the same school district in central Ohio and faced similar challenges in their school environment, such as violence, animosity, pressure from excessive emphasis on testing and curricular demands. The group consisted of 20 women (16 Caucasians and four African-American), and six white males. Their ages ranged from 30 to 60. Most participants were experienced professionals, with several years of practice in urban schools. None of them had any formal experience with mindfulness practice prior to the class.

Students participated in nine weekly classes, each lasting 2½ hours over 10 weeks.¹ Data collected for this study included students' journal entries, mid-term and final self-analysis/self-reflection papers, and a course evaluation. Students were required to submit a short self-reflective journal entry every week. They were asked to keep a record of any changes they noticed in their personal self, their interactions, perceptions, and so on, as a result of the mindfulness practice. The journals were varied and followed no specific structure. Students wrote about their experience with mindfulness practice, reported personal and interpersonal changes, reflected upon the readings, and commented on their experiences in class. The written assignments were more structured with defined questions and guidelines. For their mid-term paper, students were asked to reflect upon

their views of life, spirituality, and reality; describe their personal experiences with spirituality; and explain their self-perception within the context of their lives. For the final paper, students were asked to provide a self-evaluation of any difficulties, resistances, or problems they had with the practice of mindfulness and a self-assessment of the changes they had experienced throughout the quarter. A course evaluation sheet was handed to students five weeks into the quarter to check their satisfaction with the activities included in the course.

I used constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 2002) to examine and analyze the data. In the first phase, I examined the students' experience with the practice of mindfulness and the frequency of their practice, and looked for explicit evidence of personal and interpersonal changes. To minimize subjective interpretation and inference, I looked for statements that explicitly revealed some transformation, such as, "I'm feeling less stressed," "I feel more patient with my students," or "I've never realized how empty and unaware I was before I began to meditate." For each of these statements I assigned a theme, such as "feels less stressed," "more patient toward others," or "increased self-awareness." In the next phase, I collapsed the various themes into fewer and more inclusive themes. Themes represented by just one or two statements that showed no resemblance with other themes were eliminated. Once I defined the final themes, I revisited students' materials and coded their responses accordingly.

Outcome and Discussion

All 25 students completed the course assignments and participated in the class activities, including 15-25 minutes of in-class sitting meditation. Students were required to do 10-20 minutes of daily sitting meditation practice outside class and engage in mindfulness practice.² Analysis of their journal entries revealed that ten of the students showed no resistance to the practice of meditation. They practiced regularly outside class, usually once a day. The remaining 15 students presented some resistance to incorporating meditation practice in their daily lives. Six students began to practice meditation outside class 3-5 weeks into the course. Three students practiced meditation in the first week(s), dropped the practice for few

weeks, then returned to it toward the end of the course. Six students practiced meditation only once to three times outside class during the 10-week period.

Participants' reasons for not doing the meditation practice outside class were varied. Some reported feeling guilty about dedicating time to themselves; others mentioned not being comfortable with the feelings that emerged during the practice; and others wrote about their difficulty in finding a quiet place to meditate at home. The most common reason, though, was time constraints. Many participants reported having no time to add meditation to their busy schedules. Jade (all names are pseudonyms), a senior teacher overloaded with responsibilities, wrote in her journal at the beginning of the course that it was a "waste of time" to just do nothing. On her final paper, she reflected upon her resistance:

The idea of just stopping my busy day to do "nothing" seemed a bit much to ask a teacher, parent, club member, coach, director, etc. To participate in an activity that one would have to not only do nothing but to concentrate on doing nothing was a difficult concept for me to wrap my brain around.

Analysis of students' response to ten weeks of mindfulness practice resulted in ten comprehensive themes related to four major personal changes: (1) physical changes (reduction of stress levels, increased level of energy and/or better sleep); (2) changes in perception (increased level of awareness, increased self-knowledge); (3) changes in self (increased ability to stay present in the moment, increased connection with inner self, improved attitude toward self and/or life); and (4) changes in interrelationships (less reactive to situations, more open, flexible, patient, and/or accepting toward others, improved relationships with others).

Physical Changes

The majority of students felt reduction of stress levels during the quarter. All students who practiced meditation, whether regularly or not outside class, reported feeling less stressed, more relaxed, and more peaceful throughout the quarter. Spring quarter is a busy time for public school educators. The practice of mindfulness, they said, helped them cope

with the pressures of the end of school year, decrease their anxiety levels, and keep their lives in balance. Daniela, a music teacher who practiced meditation regularly, reported at the end of the course that she had never felt so relaxed in her life.

I have not felt the typical stress associated with getting my students ready for the concert. I did not run around yelling and screaming at them to do it better. I did not go home with massive headaches from the school day. I did not lose sleep at night from worrying about whether my students were going to perform well. I did not stay up most of the night before the concert. All of these behaviors I profess to not doing have normally occurred before my concert.

Students who practiced meditation just once to three times outside class also reported feeling calmer and less stressed. However, rather than feeling an overall decrease of stress levels throughout the quarter, these students reported instances of calmness and relaxation, which occurred during or immediately after they meditated. As Dinah wrote in her journal:

Wow, I am so happy to say that after class last week — I was amazed at the impact of what meditating in class did for me.... I just remember that I was so emotionally drained walking into class and had a mindset that maybe I was not going to be able to make it through the whole class. But, after class I thought about my stress level and I had felt so much better.

In regards to sleeping better and/or feeling increased energy level, only students who practiced meditation regularly reported sleeping better and/or feeling increased energy levels. Danielle, for example, who was very committed to her practice, commented at the beginning of the course that she could sleep only three to four hours a night. She had already sought medical assistance to help improve her sleep patterns but was not very happy with the results. Three weeks into the course, she reported an increase of two hours in her sleep, from four to six hours a night. She then began practicing meditation twice and sometimes three times a day. By the end of ten weeks, she was sleeping seven to eight

hours a night, and was no longer waking up in the middle of the night.

Changes in Perception

I was intrigued to find that most students reported increased an level of awareness, even those who did not engage in regular meditation practice outside the class. I revisited their materials and realized that many students, who were not very committed to the sitting meditation practice, often replaced it by informal mindfulness practice (keeping focused attention while gardening, walking, doing the dishes, and so on), which was also greatly encouraged in the course. Students who reported change in this area wrote that they felt more conscious of their emotions, thoughts, and body sensations; more attentive to their interaction with others; more aware of the creatures and sounds of nature; and more mindful of what was happening around them.

Students' responses were mixed with respect to changes in self-knowledge. Almost all students who practiced meditation regularly reported an increase in self-knowledge; however, reports from students who practiced meditation less often were inconsistent. The positive response from students who engaged in regular practice, however, suggests that meditation practice may have contributed to increase students' self-knowledge. As Maria wrote in her journal, "meditation has a way of making you look at your reality whether you want to or not." Nonetheless, I could not attribute students' increased self-knowledge exclusively to mindfulness practice because of inconsistencies found in the responses of students who did not practice meditation regularly. The other activities in this course, I would argue, also played an important role in increasing students' self-knowledge. Self-reflection was a key factor in all activities. I also often challenged students to deepen their self-reflection, either through journals, papers, or in class. Sam's statement in his final paper reflects well the emphasis on self-reflection promoted in this course, "When I signed in for this course I had no idea I was in for a ten-week journey into self-exploration."

Changes in Self

Students' responses to being more present in the moment were also mixed. Although there were very

positive responses from students who practice meditation regularly, the responses of those who did not engage in regular practice were varied and inconsistent. Students who practiced less meditation outside the class reported more benefits than those who practice a little more often. This unexpected response, I would think, might be due to the emphasis I placed on "presence" through readings and in-class discussions, which encouraged students to be more present in the moment independently of their meditation practice. Dinah for example, who hardly practiced meditation outside class, made deliberate effort to be more present in her life, once she realized how out of touch with life she was. She wrote:

I have definitely learned a life lesson, which I feel I was never taught when I was younger, to "live in the moment." I feel sort of robbed that it has taken me so long to understand this concept. I am sure I have heard it before, but it has never really stuck with me like it does now.

Overall, students who reported being more present in the moment wrote that they felt more present in their interactions with others, more in tune with nature, more focused in their tasks, and more appreciative of others.

Several students also reported feeling deeper connection with their inner self and greater inner peace. Students who reported changes in this area were engaged in either regular or irregular meditation practice outside the class. Those who only practiced meditation in class did not report any changes in this category.

Most students who practiced meditation regularly reported feeling more positive toward self and/or life. They wrote that they felt less judgmental, more positive in conversations, and more confident about themselves. Several students commented on the positive feelings of releasing control. Mindfulness practice helped them realize that they do not need to be in control of every situation. Furthermore, through mindfulness practice they learned that life is a journey and how we "choose" to deal and focus on the things that happen to us and around us is in our control. Wayne, one of the most committed students to the practice of meditation, reported significant change in his perception of life and himself. He

wrote that meditation helped him feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually better; live his life more fully; see more beauty in things; and like himself better. In one of his journal entries, he commented, "Meditation is giving me the opportunity to listen to the person I am and getting to know and like that person much better."

Some of the students who did not practice meditation as often also reported some changes in this area. They reported feeling happier, having a more positive and disciplined mind, a more positive perception of self and the world, and increased ability to prioritize what was important for them.

Changes in Interrelationships

Students' responses to the three previous themes in this category were very similar. In all of them, there was a significant and consistent difference among students who practiced meditation regularly, those who practiced less frequently, and those who only practiced in class. The majority of students who practiced meditation regularly reported feeling less reactive to interrelational situations; being more open, flexible, patient, and/or accepting toward others; and having better relationship with others; whereas less than half of the students who practiced meditation less often reported similar changes, and only a few students that did not engage in meditation practice outside the class reported changes in this area. Students' responses suggest that regular mindfulness practice can promote positive changes in interrelationships. The more often students engaged in meditation practice, the more positive changes they experienced.

Students who reported being less reactive to situations commented that they were better able to maintain a sense of calmness when confronted with difficult situations, to step back and reflect before speaking, and respond to situations in a more cognizant way. Denise's statement is an example among many that reported changes in this category.

Since I have started meditating, I have also noticed a difference in how I react to other people, especially my students. I tend to be a reactive person by nature and often take things the students might say personally. But lately (thanks to the meditation and this class) I have been less likely to react so quickly. I am more able to "step

back" so to speak and reflect on why the student might be acting out. I have also been more cognizant of the way I approach a confrontational situation with a student. I remain calm and as a result I have been more successful in getting the student to calm down.

Students who reported changes in their attitudes toward others, wrote of feeling more open to others's ideas and suggestions; being more flexible, patient, caring, and accepting; and becoming more conscious and understanding of the feelings of others. A good example of their attitudinal change is illustrated by Derek's report of a disruptive incidence in his class.

Recently I had a student come to school and he told me a relative of his dad had died and I had a short discussion with him. Later he started acting out and wanting to fight another student for no reason. My typical reaction before this class would have been to write him up for removal, but this time I just talked to him and asked him to settle down. Later when the class was over, I asked him to stay and we thoroughly discussed the death. The discussion seemed to relieve his anxiety and he made it through the day without any more problems. I am not sure before this class I would have reacted that way. [I feel I am] more aware of the real pain of others [and I am] communicating better.

Finally, students who reported change in their relationship with others wrote feeling more relaxed with their students and having no need to yell and scream at them. They also reported having deeper connection with their students, being more friendly, loving, and compassionate towards them, and having better relationship with their so-called "problematic" students. Furthermore, students reported being less defensive in interactions, more honest with themselves and others, better able to express their ideas, and more attentive and engaged in conversations. They also mentioned placing more value on the time they spend with friends and family. One of the most powerful statements came from Wayne, a school principal, who did not miss one day of meditation practice.

I have seen a more positive effect in my relationship with the students in my school. I am deal-

ing with them on a much different level. I almost feel as if I have new ears and an ability to hear things differently. I have felt that in the past I half-heartedly listened and made judgment calls before hearing the entire "story." I really am relating to students in a different manner.... Even when dealing with difficult situations, I enter these situations in a more positive way. I am giving children more dignity. They may have messed up, but going off on them doesn't resolve a thing. When dealing with these situations, I am giving students more time to sit and reflect and then we talk. Before I was quick to make "my" assessment and then plan "my" action and then carry out "my" punishment. It was "my" world and I was the boss.

Conclusion

Overall, participants who practiced meditation regularly reported more positive changes in their lives than those who did not practice meditation as often. Students' responses confirm previous research findings about the benefits of regular meditation practice (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1992; Kabat-Zinn 2005) and the effects of mindfulness practice with teachers (Miller & Nozawa 1997; Solloway 2000; Inner Resilience Program 2009). Similar to previous research, students in this course who engaged in mindfulness practice felt more centered and connected with themselves (Miller & Nozawa 1997), demonstrated increased level of awareness (Brown & Ryan 2003), were less reactive to situations (Solloway 2000), more present in the moment (Kahn 1992; Solloway 2000), and reported improved interpersonal relationships (Solloway 2000; Murphy & Donovan 1997; Inner Resilience Program 2009).

Nonetheless, the outcome of this study cannot be attributed exclusively to the practice of meditation or mindfulness, since students also participated in other activities proposed in class, which might have contributed to the positive changes in their lives. The positive response of participants, who engaged in less mindfulness practice, in several categories, is also an indication of the benefits of the various components of the course. In some of the categories, for example, such as increased self-knowledge and in-

creased ability to stay present in the moment, the influence of the other course activities was apparent.

Students' course evaluations and their comments in journals also indicated that the course in general had positive effects in their overall experience throughout the quarter.

I have to admit that when I originally decided to take this course, I believed that this course was going to solely focus on meditation, relaxation, and helping to alleviate stress.... I feel that this course has not only taught me to calm down, but actually examine who I am and what I actually mean. I have never really sat down and thought about myself in the ways that the course has forced me to consider (life in a broader context). I had generally believed that people have lived their lives to the fullest and that life just happened. I never considered the deeper meaning of life and the various connections people have (nature, water, air, and even the universe).

The sense of wellness and personal renewal experienced by the participants were evident not only in their written statements but also in class discussions. I have taught this course other times and have observed similar changes. Most important though, is to note the positive impact of this course on participants' interrelationships. Time and again, participants report being more tolerant, respectful, and accepting toward others.

Final Thoughts

In teaching this course, I have gained a much deeper appreciation for the overwhelming emotional stress public school educators face every day and its impact on the classroom and school environment. I have also learned that we can and must help these educators cope with their daily stressors in a healthy and constructive way. Professional development is important and necessary but it is not enough. By continuing to ignore the emotional and personal needs of public school educators, we are affirming that the school environment is not important and that relationships are irrelevant in the process of learning.

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Notes

1. Students were out on spring break in the third week of class.
2. As explained above, mindfulness practice consists of focusing attention, from a neutral position, on what is happening internally and externally as it happens (Solloway 2000). The sitting meditation is the formal aspect of mindfulness practice, which is the act of sitting on a still position with the attention focused on the sensation of the breath or any other chosen object. The informal aspect of mindfulness practice includes all other activities in which we participate in life. It is the act of observing our "own experiences while participating in them as they occur" (Gunaratana 1993, 30).

Designing Schools as Learning Communities

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

If you want to know what's wrong with education today, figure out why there is such a difference between what's happening in kindergarten and what's happening — or not happening — in the fourth, or eighth, or tenth grade classroom.

I am dubious as to how far we can move toward global community — which is the only way to achieve international peace — until we learn the basic principles of community in our own individual lives and personal spheres of influence. (Scott Peck 1987)

In response to what he calls the “rampant cult of individualism” that has swept America during the last 50 years and is rapidly “spreading like a cancer around the world,” historian Christopher Lasch (1995) notes that “self-governing communities, not individuals [have been] the basic unit of democratic society.” He points out that it has always been the local, self-governing community that furnished “the sources of social cohesion” which made life satisfying and meaningful for its members. Here people experienced the “shared assumptions ingrained in folkways, customs, prejudices, habits of the heart” that provided them with both an individual identity and a sense of belonging. In addition to its impact upon its members, the self-governing community promoted and sustained the common good by protecting both the people and their natural resources against outside exploitation. Because of the breakdown of this fundamental social unit, Lasch argues that “a public philosophy for the twenty-first century will have to give more weight to the community than to the right of private decision. It will have to emphasize responsibilities rather than rights.”

Since the beginning of human experience, local communities — clans, tribes, villages — have always held a pivotal position as the mediator between the individual and the larger, impersonal outside world. Because political and economic forces outside the community have always tended to be exploitative, without the strength, support, and cohesion of a local

Note: Chapter references throughout refer to chapters in the full book, which have been previously published in *Encounter*.

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community of people, their natural resources rapidly disappear while individuals simultaneously feel increasingly disempowered and disenfranchised.

Today, without the mediating role of a local, self-governing community, the individual is cast adrift, alone in a vast sea of people, isolated from everyone else and dominated by powerful, anonymous forces such as big government and/or large corporations. As is increasingly evident in the political arena, when these two powerful forces combine their strength to mastermind the decisions that shape the lives of everyone in the society, individuals have little more than a token voice. Not only is the individual at the mercy of these impersonal economic and political forces, the natural resources that belong to us all — what ecologist Garrett Hardin calls “the commons” — the air, water, and land upon which all humans depend for survival, are increasingly exploited, often beyond any hope of recovery.

This would suggest that of the eight global dilemmas identified in Chapter One, the most pivotal and far reaching has been the breakdown of these local, self-governing communities. On the one hand, it has had disastrous consequences for whole societies where it has taken the form of genocide, abject poverty, and ecological devastation, to list but a few. On the other, the loss of supportive communities has resulted in a pervasive sense of helplessness in the face of these disasters on the part of ordinary citizens.

Nowhere is the emphasis on individualism at the expense of community more evident than in the way we educate our children. It should come as no surprise to find that

The schools play a more powerful role in stressing an individual rather than a common vision. Individual success and achievement are greatly emphasized. We are taught mostly to learn to be alone, to compete, to achieve, to succeed. It is not that the schools, like the culture, are not mindful of social identity, but they clearly put much more emphasis on our personal identity, especially as it relates to our obsession with personal success and achievement. (Purpel 1989)

Not only are we not surprised by the above description, but most adults would probably agree that this is the way it ought to be. I am certain that if asked,

the majority of parents would strongly support the current emphasis on competitive achievement and individual success as preparation for the real world. In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary (Johnson et al. 1984; Kohn 1986), there is the implicit assumption throughout Western society that competition to promote individual achievement, whether in sports or in school, brings out the best in people. And so, in virtually every facet of the educational experience, children are encouraged to compete with each other — for grades, for class ranking, and for special opportunities such as gifted and college preparatory programs. Two obvious consequences of this focus on competitive striving and individual accomplishment are that while there are a few winners, the great majority of our children are losers, and there is a loss of social cohesion derived from the shared goals and values of community.

As would be expected, this emphasis on the individual at the expense of community gets played out in the larger social arena. In a 1989 survey (Etzioni 1993) high school students were asked what was special about the United States. The two most frequent responses were “individualism and the fact that it is a democracy and you can do whatever you want” and “We don’t have any limits.”

This leads me to suggest that the most fundamental social issue confronting Western culture in general and American culture in particular is learning to find a balance between the rights and the good of the individual and those of the society as a whole. At its root, this is a philosophical issue — perhaps the pivotal philosophical issue facing our nation and humankind today. From this point of view, a primary culprit is our propensity for either/or thinking. An inheritance of Cartesian dualism, this reductionist view of the world incorrectly assumes that the individual and the community represent opposite ends of a continuum of rights and power that exist in a constant win/lose struggle for dominance. The alternative way of visualizing reality, which I have called systems thinking, implicitly recognizes that the common good and the good of the individual are inextricably bound together so that the well-being of either is dependent upon the well-being of the other.

Once we have reconceptualized this dilemma, we will have moved a long way toward resolving the re-

lated problems. While I believe that many of us intuitively understand the nature of this apparent impasse, few have conceptualized it in a way that empowers them to change their way of thinking and acting. As sociologist Jane Jacobs (1992) points out, "many of us have taken on casts of mind so skewed toward one set of values that we have little understanding of the other, and little if any appreciation of its integrity too."

Cultural tradition to the contrary, it was not always this way. Recognizing that it does indeed take a village to raise a child, the indigenous model described by Tewa Pueblo educator Dr. Gregory Cajete (1994) stands in sharp contrast to the culturally dominant model described above.

The ideal purpose of education is to attain knowledge, seek truth, wisdom, completeness, and life as perceived by traditional philosophies and cultures around the world.... It embodies a quest for self, individual and community survival, and wholeness in the context of a community and natural environment. The living place, the learner's extended family, the clan and the tribe provided the context and the source for teaching. In this way every situation provided a potential opportunity for learning, and basic education was not separated from the natural, social, or spiritual aspects of everyday life. Living and learning were fully integrated (and) unfolded through mutual, reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world. This relationship involved all dimensions of one's being, while providing both personal development and technical skills through participation in community life. It was essentially a communally integrated expression of environmental education.

Mitakuye Oyasin ("we are all related") is a Lakota phrase that captures an essence of Tribal education because it reflects the understanding that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world. Education is, at its essence, learning about life through participation and relationship in community including not only people, but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature.

Since it is primarily the students' future that is at stake, if they are to ever achieve global community, it seems appropriate that schools become the training ground where students learn to work cooperatively in "learning communities." Here they can experience and acquire the insight, knowledge, and skills necessary to ensure both individual and community survival and wholeness. As the research has made amply clear, cooperative or collaborative learning does not mitigate individual initiative, worth, and achievement but rather provides a context where these necessary qualities are enhanced. But it is more. In a learning community not only do individuals learn survival and wholeness, but the community learns survival and wholeness as well.

The Ecology of Learning Communities

Learning communities don't just happen. Although the insight, knowledge, and skills for cooperative behavior are intuitive, because of our cultural programming to the contrary, learning communities must be carefully designed and deliberately nurtured. The ecological community is a natural and readily accessible model for a learning community. A pond community, a forest community, a prairie community — indeed, all communities in nature — are, at a fundamental level, learning communities in which individuals, species, and the community as a whole learn, change, and grow. These communities share a set of essential properties characterized by the ecological principles identified in Chapter Six: interdependence, diversity, partnership, and co-evolution. Since I discussed these at some length earlier, here I will generalize on them by reflecting on the ecological features of a learning community as they apply to a classroom, a school, or a neighborhood.

- *In a learning community the curriculum is "Life in all of its manifestations."* The essence of education is learning about life through participation and relationship in community which includes not only people, but also plants, animals, and the whole of nature. Thus, the primary resources are the lives, the experiences, relationships, questions, and concerns of the learners themselves.

- *A learning community provides supportive, sensitive, valuing, responsive, accepting learning environments that enhance self-worth, creative intellectual en-*

deavor, and responsible behavior. Here one's contribution depends on what one brings to the experience and no one's personal worth is at stake. Ownership, responsibility, and accountability are assumed to be synonymous with membership in the community.

- *A learning community is designed to reflect the interests and capabilities of the learners/students.* Because it is relevant to the interest and abilities of its members, the individual has as much power over her learning environment as she is capable of handling. Students are encouraged to learn on their own and in as many diverse ways as possible.

- *A learning community is cooperative and synergistic.* Here everyone is both a learner and a resource for everyone else. The outcomes are designed to challenge the intuition, imagination, knowledge, and skills of the members, including the instructor. Peer learning is heightened, and everyone recognizes that in many situations, two or more heads are truly better than one.

- *A learning community extends beyond the walls of the classroom.* Because the curriculum reflects all the life experiences of the student, the community of learners is expanded to include other peers, administrators, support staff, parents, and members of the broader community.

- *In a learning community, learning is participative so that feelings and intellect are fully involved in every facet of the learning process.* Learning is always experiential and relevant in ways that ensure the learner of participation in the decisions that shape her or his learning. In this way, both intuitive and cognitive processes and knowledge are honored, and learning experiences are designed to reflect the multidimensional and multisensory nature of intelligence, thinking, and learning.

- *A learning community is characterized by both consistency and responsiveness.* Because the environment can be depended on, there is little or no anxiety and fear. When the learning environment is reactive, malleable, and responsive, students can actively participate in creating and shaping their learning experience.

- *A learning community provides regular, consistent, and appropriate assessment through a variety of feedback loops.* The primary purpose of assessment is to provide qualitative feedback vis-à-vis progress toward clearly defined learning objectives in ways that tap

the wellsprings of creative possibility inherent in each member of the community. Such assessment is nonjudgmental and noncompetitive.

- *A learning community is energized by a shared purpose, vision, or mission.* A purpose held in common can turn a random assortment of individual students who happen to be assigned to the same classroom into a genuine learning community. Shared visions are seldom imposed from above, e.g., by a teacher, but must emerge from the goals, aspirations, and dreams of the members themselves. A shared sense of purpose can create an alignment of energy that is empowering and energizing for everyone. In such cases, individual performance is often enhanced beyond predictable expectations.

Carole Cooper & Julie Boyd (1994), co-directors of Global Learning Communities, note that a collaborative learning community is

a philosophy as well as a place; it is a way of being as well as a working model. It is a mindset as well as a map. The foundation is collaboration — working together for common goals, partnership, shared leadership, co-evolving and co-learning — rather than competition and power given to only a few.

They remind us that “the focus of the collaborative learning community is *learning* [which] takes place within the context of *community*.” This is in contrast to the traditional classroom where the focus is on teaching, e.g., covering the content, and where students sit in quiet isolation presumably absorbing what is presented and taking written tests to prove it. In a classroom that has become a collaborative learning community, (1) students take responsibility for their own learning; (2) learning experiences are geared to students' interests and needs; (3) students are actively engaged in learning in a variety of groups and contexts; and (4) learning is understood, applied, demonstrated, and internalized (Cooper & Boyd 1994). These characteristics are, of course, the very ones that I have been promoting throughout this book. They are ecological in nature and humanistic in principle. To embrace them requires a different set of assumptions about human nature and the fundamental relationships that shape our lives. To

put it simply, they are the essence of a new and comprehensive paradigm.

Learning communities don't just happen. They reflect core values that are essentially the values of the community. The Center for the Study of Community in Santa Fe suggests some basic values that characterize creative, healthy learning communities (Cooper & Boyd 1994):

sense of shared values; agreement on core values; participation; communication; commitment; conscious choice; shared responsibility; equity; openness; respect for differences; acceptance; trust; collaboration; reciprocity; accountability; efficacy; perceived skill; and cohesion.

Imagine the difference it would make if every school in America were designed to reflect these values? The great irony is that we already have a model for learning communities that reflect all of these characteristics — the modern preschool or kindergarten. Visit a nearby kindergarten and note the ambiance: bright colors, lots of light from large windows, plenty of space, small unobtrusive learning centers designed for one or two students, small tables, bookcases and books, a warm carpet, and lots of pillows. There are also lots of toys: puzzles, pattern blocks, Cuisenaire rods, magnets, crayons, paints, paper, scissors. There may even be a couple of computers with fun games and creative tools for drawing, painting, and lettering. In some rooms you will find ladders for climbing and tunnels for crawling or hiding. There is a low murmur of conversation with other children and with the teacher who is unobtrusively moving around among the children. While a voice may occasionally be raised in excitement, in general the talk is "library talk" because the children are intensely involved in whatever they are doing. Look at their faces. They are alive and intent with concentration as they lie on the floor, lean across the table, or sit quietly in the corner with a book. In short, they are engrossed in whatever they are doing. Are they learning? Of course! Are they enjoying the experience? Of course. Are they a learning community? Of course.

After you've spent an hour in the kindergarten room, move on to the fourth or fifth grade classroom and spend an equal amount of time quietly sitting in the corner. Chances are that the children are sitting in

rows either listening to the teacher or doing seat work. Either way, there is no talking. If there is a question, it's for clarification: "Do we have to write in complete sentences?" "Does punctuation count?" Any other verbal exchange is in answer to a teacher's question. In these cases, note which students answer the teacher's questions. Watch their faces. Then look at the faces of the other students. Note the difference between the faces of these children and those in kindergarten. In general, these faces are blank, the kids are passive and, except for an occasional wiggle or squirm, the kids are perfectly still. Count the number of kids who are daydreaming. How many are just plain bored? The teacher sits at a desk or walks up and down the aisle looking over the shoulders at the seatwork, occasionally pointing out a mistake, a messy paper, or a misspelled word. Does the teacher look happy? How often does she smile? How often does she frown? If you want to know what's wrong with education today, figure out why there is such a difference between what's happening in kindergarten and what's happening — or not happening — in the fourth, or eighth, or tenth grade classroom. It's as simple — and as complex — as that!

By now it should be obvious that a "learning community" is not the same as a "community of learners." While educators may use the term "community" as a euphemism to describe the arbitrary assortment of individuals in a typical classroom or school, proximity doesn't automatically create community. And while the inclusion of cooperative learning activities may turn a classroom of individuals into a community of individual learners, it does not necessarily mean that they have become a learning community. As long as the emphasis in the classroom is on the individual at the expense of community, it can never be more than a collection of individual learners who may share some community-like experiences. In short, in a learning community, not only do the individuals who make up the community learn, change, and grow, but the community as a whole also learns, changes, and grows. As a result of the cooperative synergism of its members, the learning community thrives and moves in new directions with capacities that would be impossible without the common goals and shared leadership of its members. As the community changes and grows, the

members of the community benefit in innumerable and often exciting ways.

The Classroom as a Learning Community

It is obvious that the ambience of a classroom as learning community is radically different from that of a traditional, individual-based classroom. For the past several years, teachers at Thompson Middle School have been encouraged to organize and conduct their classrooms and teams as collaborative learning communities. It is obvious to even the casual observer that the ambience of these classrooms is radically different from that of a traditional, individual-based classroom. Special Education teacher Jan Sutfin reflects on the difference:

I, along with my special students, have experienced something very unique and enlightening. We have experienced inclusion into an integrated curriculum environment. It is an environment designed for learning at its deepest, most connected level. It is a place where learning opportunities abound and positive attitudes can't help but flourish. Sound like an unattainable ideal? Yes it does. But walk into a classroom where students are enthusiastically leaning in toward the center of their cooperative group sharing ideas, coming to consensus, and developing a plan; where there is an understanding that they are connected in powerful, wonder-filled ways by their unique talents, and you become a believer. Students with short attention spans get pulled into the action. Students who have difficulty expressing themselves begin to do so. Students who have difficulty writing have the confidence to record information for their group. A miracle is not occurring! However, something awesome is. People who have carried labels all their school lives suddenly don't have them any more. They too have something special to offer in this academic learning community. What they learn and how they learn it has relevance to them. Connections have been made that cause students to say, "I get it."

How does this environment develop? In this case, the "how" is attributed not to the teacher alone, but to the entire classroom community.

After all, we are all connected; one cannot do it without the other.

This illustration reflects many of the ecological characteristics that characterize learning communities. Note, for example, how *interdependence* is expressed. It is obvious that the students understand implicitly that the success of each individual member depends on the success of the team/community as a whole, while at the same time the success of the team/community depends on the success of each member. They know that it is in everyone's best interest to see that everyone else succeeds. This is possible because in these teams everyone learns from everyone else. Rather than achieving a level of learning based on the lowest common denominator as often happens in other classrooms, the synergy of the team often quickens the insight, knowledge, and skills of even the brightest student and raises the level of learning to new heights for everyone. For example, special education teacher Jean Humke found that, given an appropriate environment, so-called youth-at-risk can survive.

I have seen the LD/BD students thrive in the integrated, cooperatively taught classroom. William was a bright boy with good auditory and mechanical reasoning skills, who could not read a traditional science textbook. In lab and group project work he became the leader. Someone else did the reading and the recording, and William took over the hands-on part. His motivation improved and negative classroom behaviors disappeared.

After the experience of having Jean's students integrated into her eighth grade science class, Bonnie Pettebone wrote,

The surprise was seeing that the regular children also benefitted from having the "specials" in the classroom. Although Jean kept an eye on her special students, she worked with the entire class. This was especially helpful for the lower ability students who didn't qualify for special education services. When special ed students were part of a group project, other "regular" students often came to the study hall where Jean gave her special ed students extra help. The

room that was once the “LD room” — an embarrassment to the students assigned there — became just another classroom. Soon, regular students were asking if they could come all the time.

A second essential in a learning community is *diversity*. Although tracking students by ability level or long-term goal, e.g., gifted, or college bound, has a long history in schools, research makes it clear that diversity both in age and ability results in more stimulating and productive learning environments than are possible with homogeneous groupings. While cooperative learning provides a unique opportunity for mixed ability groups, many teachers who have had only a cursory introduction to cooperative learning still operate on the assumption that if good and poor students are in the same teams, the former will do all the work while the latter share in the success. At Thompson, however, it has been demonstrated over and over again that this is not the case. When teams of students are free to explore their own questions in ways that they determine, each member learns to share in both the responsibilities and the benefits of team learning. Ownership of one’s own learning is, after all, the most successful motivation possible. In addition, students are the best teachers and soon those who initially tend to be lazy learn to participate more fully. As noted in the last chapter, one sixth grade team at Thompson reports that since students began to define their focus of study, only 3 of 125 students were chronically choosing to do poor work — far fewer than in previous years.

In his year-end summary report to the teachers based on the meetings he had had with the various teams, Kurt Anderson reflects on some of things they, as a community, have learned.

We are beginning to learn that there is no “right way.” That’s the exciting and frustrating part about it! Our commitment is to create and discover experiences that will be best for kids. As long as we have that goal and leverage what we learn from each other, we will reach the vision of “integrative learning” — whatever that is. I think we know it when we see it, but we can’t get it into words just yet!!!!!!

As has already been noted, as a result of Thompson’s inclusion program, special education students

are now full participants in regular science and social studies classes at all levels. And they are not merely tolerated by other students. Last year an eighth grade “learning-disabled” girl received the quarterly “team choice” award by her academic team based on her level of team participation. This was the first time an LD student had been selected for this award. In her end-of-the-year “A Celebration of Learning” report, seventh grade team leader Joanna Martin wrote

The team has openly accepted [the] special ed teacher and kids — something which couldn’t have happened four years ago. The growth has been phenomenal. To watch a special ed child who we didn’t think had any growth last year actively involved in dissecting a shark and anxious to get to a frog, has been most gratifying.

Team leader Bonnie Pettebone noted that one of her special ed boys “walked in as a six-footer with four feet of confidence. Now he is confident and leading — why — because the process is the emphasis, not the final test.” In the words of another teacher, “instead of being considered outsiders, special ed students are often defended by regular students in the same way they defend their closest friends.”

Another characteristic of learning communities experienced at Thompson is the countless forms of *partnership* strategies. These strategies reflect both cooperation and competition and involve students, teachers, teams, and the school as a whole. As a result of the new focus on cooperation, these groups coevolve through an interplay of creativity and mutual adaptation. For example, teams have been challenged by the opportunity to present their final product, e.g., a Medieval Fair, to the entire student body. On the other hand, the healthy but often subtle competition has stimulated some genuine risk-taking on the part of more reluctant student teams and teacher teams — a kind of “If they can do it, so can I” response.

The learning communities at Thompson are energized by the *free flow of information*, and the built-in *feedback loops* have been increasingly effective because of the cooperative groupings. Almost without exception, teachers consider the primary purpose of assessment to be feedback to students and have created a variety of assessment rubrics designed to accomplish this. Although teachers are still required to

give grades, instead of being stuck with a final grade, students are encouraged to redo for improvement, a process that truly enhances the learning. Teachers who still give quizzes and tests find that having students “take quizzes until you get it right — along with reminder hints during the quizzes — has really promoted learning.” In some classes, anything below a B is a “do-over.” For one team, math assessment is now displayed through portfolios, not homework and tests. Finally, “they are not the same kids at the end of the year. Because of ‘do and redo,’ grades are higher and more kids have learned more things better.” This year teams will be given the option of including narrative reports from teachers with the letter grade. Donna’s seventh grade team has decided that each grade they give will be accompanied by a brief account of the student’s experience and progress in that subject.

Feedback works both ways. One seventh grade teacher noted that “the kids have directed things a lot. When they see that we have listened to them and used the feedback they gave us — when they notice you have changed based on what they have said, they have great ideas and suggestions.”

Sustainability in learning communities requires both different and a greater variety of resources than those usually found in the traditional school. Most schools are still more like “ecological monocultures,” e.g., a cornfield, than ecological communities, e.g., a prairie. Just as prairies or forests require a greater variety of resources than a cornfield, so it is with schools that are becoming learning communities. As Resource Center Director Chris Sherman notes, this is occurring at Thompson.

Kids ... are exploring subjects for which relatively few materials have been available. *The result is that different kinds of resources are being ordered to meet the needs of both teachers and students.* (emphasis added).

I think the following insight, shared by Eva Pierrakos, co-founder of the Pathways Community in upstate New York, captures the essence of the ecology of learning communities.

The group consciousness does not level off uniqueness, but furthers it. The group is no longer used as a crutch because the self cannot han-

dle life. Nor is the group an authority that one needs to rebel against. The highest organization of group consciousness is that within which each individual has found ... autonomy. (Davidson & Davidson 1994)

Such a classroom is not an accidental happenstance, the result, say, of one of those truly outstanding classes that appear on rare occasions. Although the cooperative characteristics are intuitive, the classroom environment must be thoughtfully and carefully designed. Teachers must not only understand, but must experience for themselves what it means to belong to a learning community. Recognizing this need for an experiential introduction to cooperative learning, for the past three years the St. Charles schools have provided a series of week-long workshops and in-class training sessions in cooperative learning with Carole Cooper. Although attendance at these has been voluntary, most teachers have attended at least one such workshop. Many have participated in two or more and several teachers have become skilled trainers in their own right so that the district can now offer its own in-service training programs. As a result, the entire faculty of Thompson has become experientially grounded in both the philosophy and methodologies of cooperative, or what Carole Cooper prefers to call collaborative, learning.

When I first went to Thompson, I found it taken for granted that for most studies, students would be divided through a variety of combinations into learning groups or teams of four. These teams were characterized by the four elements common to cooperative learning classes — positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction among students, individual accountability for mastery, and interpersonal and small group skills (Johnson et al. 1984). The following report by eighth grade teacher Barb Gudvangen, reflects the general ambience of Thompson. Due to illness, Barb was two months late in starting school. She records her experience.

I was amazed at how well the cooperative groups were functioning. At first I thought I would have to work at gaining control of the classes. But I found control to be no problem at all. I attributed this to three factors. One was the

excellent work the other team members had already done with these students. A second factor was heterogeneous grouping. The third factor was the work done earlier by the sixth and seventh grade teachers who had been trained in cooperative learning.

During my first curriculum workshop, it was clear from the ease with which the teachers worked together that there was a level of cooperation among workshop participants that I had not found in other schools. In the succeeding months, I realized that the training in cooperative learning had prepared the rich and fertile soil within which creative and innovative strategies, such as the integrated curriculum, process writing, whole language, authentic evaluation, and outcome-oriented learning, have found root and are flourishing. Without the plowing and tilling generated by the philosophy and experiential methodologies of cooperative learning, the hard ground, though extremely fertile, is often so inhospitable that only the occasional seed can grow.

Principal Kurt Anderson was reminded of the importance of such preparation when he recently visited another district to introduce them to what was taking place at Thompson. On several occasions, he asked his audience of teachers and administrators to form teams for the purpose of discussion. He was amazed at the level of resistance and their reluctance to work together or to discuss anything of substance. In contrast, on almost any occasion if one walks into the teachers' lounge at Thompson, one can hear substantive conversations about what's happening in the classrooms — even including the failures. It is not unusual to hear excited voices describing classroom experiences that would have been unthinkable a few years earlier.

As a consequence of this training in cooperative learning, while there is still resistance to substantive changes on the part of some teachers, many of the interdisciplinary, grade-level teams at Thompson have become genuine collaborative learning communities. Even those teams that have resisted changes in the orientation of the curriculum are, to a significant extent, applying cooperative learning strategies in their classrooms. From the perspective of an outside observer, it is clear that the levels of energy, enthusiasm, synergy, creativity, and, not so incidently,

laughter are very high. One has only to walk through the halls and look into the classrooms to know that Thompson is different from most other schools.

Ruth Ann Dunton describes her team's experience:

I realized that it was through "systems" and the functions therein that the fundamental concepts are inherent. If students understand what a system is and how it works, they are able to understand and apply concepts such as diversity, interdependence, sustainability, change, etc., naturally. So, we introduced students to systems and have been using [the systems] matrix in many ways. Together, we — teachers and students, teachers and teachers, students and students — are doing some serious thinking. All of us on the team have been experimenting with the systems models in different ways. We feel that we have reached a new level of thinking, but that we are truly just beginning to explore the possibilities. We are impressed with the ideas the children have. At the same time we realize that we need to continue to work together as a team — always pushing ourselves to a higher level. Only in this way can we better facilitate in our classrooms. We are not always sure of ourselves. Sometimes we become exhausted from thinking, but it's that good kind of exhaustion when you're exhilarated at the same time. We feed on each other's ideas and need more time to explore our thoughts. We feel we are the students in a student-centered situation. Truly, we as a team find ourselves in a "learning community" situation which is what I have been hoping for all along. Hurrah!

The School as a Learning Community

As we have discovered at Thompson, when classrooms become genuine learning communities, the school itself is in the process of becoming a learning community. One model for the school as a learning community is the learning organization. Based on the work of Peter Senge (1990) and other corporate consultants, the learning organization provides an effective and practical prototype for organizational transformation from within. According to Senge, the learning organization is one

where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. The organization that will truly excel in the future will be the organization that discovers how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels in an organization.

One of the characteristics of the learning organization is that the *customer* is recognized as integral to the organization. For example, there are many parallels between the failure of Ford and General Motors and Honda's success in the 1970s and the failure of public schools during the last 20 years. In much the same way that Ford and GM believed they knew best what people wanted/needed — namely what Ford and GM wanted to produce, e.g., big cars — so educators believe that they know best what students want/need — namely what educators want to teach. On the other hand, Honda was a genuine learning organization that listened to their customers and responded by designing the kinds of cars they wanted. When a school becomes a learning community, its entire focus is designed to respond to the learners' needs. In short, the entire school is truly learner-centered. This focus on the customer has been one of the lessons that teachers and administrators at St. Charles learned from a series of Total Quality Management (TQM) seminars conducted by Arthur Andersen & Co. Kurt Anderson comments on this influence.

Our training in Total Quality Management helped us recognize the need for our work to be "customer-driven," "consumer-focused." For our immediate concerns, the students and their parents are our customers. Education is unique in that the primary customer is also the primary worker in the system. Suffice it to say that the student should come first in all our thinking. Now this philosophy permeates all our thinking — from scheduling, to delivery of instruction, from extracurricular opportunities to bussing.

On the other hand, we are also recognizing that teachers are also customers — that is, we are all learners.

Kurt is quick to point out that Thompson's mission statement is the only one he has ever seen that mentions adults. It begins with the words, "Thompson Middle School is committed to nurturing and involving students and adults." Reflecting on this inclusion, Kurt commented:

The first and foremost goal of staff development is to help teachers become healthy individuals. If we are healthy people inside this building, we will have healthy kids. If we aren't healthy ourselves, it doesn't matter what kind of curriculum or teaching strategies we have because only healthy individuals can allow and help kids make healthy choices.

It must be emphasized once again, however, that the fundamental issue here is not content versus no content, nor is it adults' content versus students' content. The issue revolves around the real-life needs of the consumers of educational expertise.

However, schools are unique organizations in that their students are not the only customers whose needs must be addressed. Parents are also customers and, indirectly, so is the larger community that the school serves. Thus, when we talk about the school as a learning community, we must include parents and others of the larger community among its members. In short, even as the one-room school of yesteryear often served as the hub of community activities, so this function is, I believe, implicit in the concept of schools in a democratic society. If schools are to become learning communities in which *all of its members* are, to some degree, learners, then the walls of the school must become permeable and true centers of learning for the entire community. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as evening classes and other activities that address adult needs.

One elementary school with which I worked several years ago provides an outstanding illustration of how the school can become a vehicle for creating community both within and beyond its four walls. Asa Messer Elementary School in Providence, Rhode Island, was a pilot school for Ecoliteracy, an ecologically based educational program that Fritjof Capra, Carole Cooper, and I designed as a model for restructuring education. Substantively, Ecoliteracy is modeled on and incorporates the philosophy and

strategies presented in this book. During the course of a year, Carole Cooper and I conducted a series of workshops for the Asa Messer teachers. An inner-city neighborhood school, Asa Messer draws its students from a widely diverse ethnic and cultural milieu — more than 40 languages are spoken by the 92% minority families of its students. All school family communications are printed in three languages, English, Cambodian, and Spanish.

The Providence Public Schools, like any large urban school district, suffers from the complex problems inherent in any bureaucracy. Giving lip service to school-based change is far easier than supporting it. Our Ecoliteracy team soon realized that the staff at Asa Messer were highly skeptical of and resistant to any new ideas — particularly when these ideas were introduced by what they interpreted to be administrative fiat. The protection of turf was endemic and resistance to any form of change was palpable. They had been burned so often and were wary of anything different. There were times when we became convinced that the only thing the teachers agreed on was a shared lack of trust in anything new or different. And yet, beneath their skepticism, we found that the teachers were deeply concerned, they did care for their children, often going out of their way to work with those who were having problems. In the words of Principal Jerry Landies, “We have to be mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, policemen, doctors, lawyers — and fit that all into the school day, as well as curriculum. So for some teachers, [Ecoliteracy] was just another thing they were being asked to do” (Cleland 1994). Dedicated to his work and desperately overloaded with the administrative trivia common to large bureaucracies, Jerry gave us complete cooperation and support within the limits of bureaucratic constraints.

During the summer preceding our involvement with Asa Messer, I had become acquainted with a unique program being conducted in rural Vermont called Food Works. Helping students and parents work cooperatively to design and build vegetable gardens that became “curriculum organizers,” this program assisted schools in designing integrated curriculums based on ecological and cultural concepts that were indigenous to the area. As we began to realize that the Asa Messer teachers needed some kind of practical, hands-on program that enabled

them and their students to actually experience the ecological principles we had introduced, I recommended that the teachers consider some kind of garden project similar to Food Works. Shortly thereafter, due to lack of funding and bureaucratic turf battles, Carole and I discontinued our personal association with the program. However, the idea gained support and, using local resources, the garden project began to evolve. The following report was written a year later by principal Jerry Landies.

To get the ball rolling, students and teachers built garden boxes with the help of community members. Teachers then began to formulate math lessons based on the planting of seeds and drew from farming folk tales and garden fables for their reading lessons. Weaving the educational requirements into the larger framework of Ecoliteracy began to make sense.... The more the teachers began to do these projects, the more they realized ... you don't do Ecoliteracy on Monday morning from 9:00 to 11:00 and do math from 11:00 to 12:00 and do English the rest of the day. You can combine it all; it's all one philosophy.

With the help of parents, volunteers, teachers, school administrators and local politicians, Asa Messer's 625 students enthusiastically undertook a hugely successful neighborhood cleanup near the end of the school year. The effort drew support from community members and businesses and brought the school neighborhood together. These was especially significant because the majority of Asa Messer students are from Cambodia, where reverent parents normally stay away from involvement with their children's school.... Many of the Cambodians maintain small garden plots in their own crowded Providence neighborhoods and bring several millennia of native wisdom about the land — resources that will add immeasurably to the school's gardening and cultural awareness efforts.

Landies concluded,

We developed some good will through the clean-up day.... Just the feedback alone was tre-

mendous. It gave the kids themselves a sense of being, that they had actually made a contribution that people appreciated.... We started out by learning the principles of ecology, but hearing them and really believing them are not necessarily the same thing.... [Ecoliteracy] is something that you have to experience.

National Education Association President Keith Geiger (1995) has recognized this important function of the school in the community.

The breakdown of community underlies much of what afflicts America today — drugs and despair, complacency and indifference, discrimination and bigotry, violence and rancor. We cannot return to the one-room schoolhouses that communities literally build with their bare hands. But we can begin to reinvigorate our communities by making our public schools truly community schools — ones in which everyone has ownership. In the community public schools, citizens, parents, teachers, support personnel, principals, and businesspeople pull together to make a uniquely American institution work. We return to the idea of the community public school not because it is old, but because it is true. When schools are the center of the community, as Thomas Jefferson envisioned, we have better schools and better communities.

“Make A Difference Day” was a step in the direction of involving the Thompson school community more directly in the larger community. Although individual classes had, from time to time, taken on community-oriented projects, this was the first time the entire school had participated. Since the day was an early release day with classes ending at noon, it was decided that teachers and students would spend the entire morning implementing the projects that their teams had chosen. Team projects included making sack lunches for a local homeless shelter, packed in individually decorated brown bags; conducting a river cleanup on the Fox River, which runs through the middle of St. Charles; helping with a local prairie restoration project, e.g., collecting seeds; undertaking school grounds clean-up; having a clothing drive; making and presenting paper-flower corsages with individual notes to residents of a local nursing

home; conducting a community-based food drive for the township Food Pantry; and making and distributing handcrafts and individualized letters to members of a local retirement center. The enthusiasm and excitement permeated the entire building. A district administrator who happened to be visiting the school that day described the ambience as magical.

Designing Schools as Learning Communities

Economist David Korten (1995) echoes the central theme of this chapter when he notes,

Healthy societies depend on healthy, empowered local communities that build caring relationships among people and help us connect to a particular piece of the living Earth with which our lives are intertwined. Such societies must be built through local-level action, household by household and community by community.

Korten might have added, “school by school.” I believe that schools are the most obvious places to begin re-creating community — first in the classrooms, and simultaneously within the school itself among the teachers, staff, and students. But, as happened at Asa Messer, the community that is centered in the school can be expanded to incorporate the broader neighborhood of parents, neighbors, friends, and businesspeople. Only in this way can parents once again reclaim their right to educate their children in schools that reflect and honor their values, beliefs, and standards.

For this to happen, schools must once again become community-based and neighborhood-oriented. This means that in the future, schools must be smaller rather than larger and may well be racially, ethnically, and culturally homogeneous. While this seemingly contradicts the ecological principle of diversity as well as the goals of cultural diversity espoused by many Americans, I suggest that it may actually be more ecological than our present legal interpretation of diversity and more educationally beneficial than many of our marginally integrated schools. It is significant, I think, that at the very time when schools and communities need neighborhood schools as a community focal point, the Supreme Court has eased the federal regulations that forced large metropolitan school districts to desegregate

their schools by bussing. While I initially supported bussing as a necessary way to integrate and equalize educational opportunity, I think the time has now come when the need to re-create sustainable neighborhoods and communities is greater than the need to integrate every school. When separation is by choice and financial resources are distributed equitably, everyone — children, families, schools, neighborhoods, and communities — will benefit from neighborhood schools.

This means that large public school districts must eventually decentralize into several smaller districts, while these districts must decentralize to the extent that substantive control and direction is provided by the community which is served by the school. In this way, neighborhood schools need not stand alone but can be linked within districts whose primary function is to provide a variety of support services but without the large bureaucratic systems that traditionally have accompanied such services. This is possible if the districts are designed from the bottom up so that the primary decisions, including allocation of monies, will always be made in the school by those whose lives are affected by the decisions. As NEA President Keith Geiger (1995) notes,

The community public school is the opposite of the factory-style, remote controlled school. In the community public school, citizens, parents, teachers, support personnel, principals, and businesspeople pull together to make a uniquely American institution work.

In this way, the function of school districts changes radically. No longer in control, districts can serve as resources, encouraging networking among schools and providing services at the request of the community schools. This will, of course, require that principals once again become educational leaders rather than building managers, a role that, unfortunately, many prefer. It will also require that local citizens learn the self-governing skills necessary for participative, nonauthoritarian leadership. For those who say this is an impossible task, I would remind them that, as Paul Hawken suggests, it is simply a matter of design.

In fact, this model is already being implemented. Geiger cites the example in Seattle, where adminis-

trators, parents, and citizens worked cooperatively to trim the system's central bureaucracy by 40%. By eliminating all layers of management between the superintendent and the principals, they saved millions of dollars that they promptly reinvested in the schools.

There are several advantages to the small neighborhood school, most of which are obvious. The neighborhood provides a "sense of place" — a concept that is fundamental to indigenous educational practice but which is almost totally foreign to current American education where the same textbook content is being studied in a dozen different states and thousands of different schools. A sense of place includes an already established community and the opportunity for active parental involvement and local control. It includes, where appropriate, the school being available as a year-round community/social/learning center for learners of all ages. Another advantage that seems to be increasingly important is that neighborhood schools can become centers of cultural, ethnic, or racial identity and pride. Though a given neighborhood may lack a broad diversity of social groups that for some may seem to be important, there is a wonderful opportunity for schools to proudly reflect the mores, values, and standards of the local community as they did a century ago. If the parents in one neighborhood prefer to have sex education while the parents in another prefer not to, each can be governed according to parental desires. A school can include locally important ethnic or racial programs, e.g., Black Studies, Cambodian Studies, etc., without every school in the district having to adopt the same curriculum. There is still diversity but it is now at a different level — a diversity of schools within a single district. When a district is structured in this way, students can, through a voucher system, be given the freedom to switch to another school within the same district.

Along with this freedom of choice comes a new level of accountability: schools that are constantly losing students to other schools are obviously not meeting the needs of their constituencies and will, of necessity, be forced to change or close.

There are two perceived disadvantages to such homogeneity and both are related to finances. The first is that the local community may not have an ad-

equate tax base. Once again, it depends upon how the system is designed. An areawide, citywide, or statewide program designed to level the financial support for schools would solve this problem and insure that separate can be equal, if the separation is by choice and not by manipulation or law. The more serious perceived disadvantage is that large buildings can have better facilities than smaller ones — facilities such as gyms, lunchrooms, resource centers, and science and computer labs. I would argue that while such amenities are nice, they are neither necessary nor important enough to offset the advantages of small, neighborhood-based schools — particularly at the elementary level. However, I'm not convinced this is an either/or issue. Once schools become community centers where everyone in the community can participate in a variety of continuing education programs, schools will be open all the time, and will, therefore, be more likely to engender the financial support necessary to meet the needs not only of children but of the entire community.

Another feature of the traditional, one-room school-as-community that is slowly regaining acceptance is the multi-level classroom. We now know that kids learn a great deal from their peers and that students-teaching-students is one of the best ways to learn — for both the one teaching and the one being taught. It is ridiculous to assume that because a student is 12 years old, she or he automatically is ready for sixth grade-level work in all the subject areas. For those who believe in the school as factory model — where everything, including classrooms, must be organized into neat, discrete categories that follow some preset criteria — proposals such as multilevel classes will be considered a throwback to preindustrial times. However, for those who understand human developmental processes and who appreciate the informal ways that people learn and that communities function, multi-level classrooms will seem like an idea whose time has come — or, more accurately, has come again.

Another feature of the school-as-community that Kurt Anderson is implementing involves students in the care and upkeep of the school building and grounds. As a result of an experience last year when two students who were conducting an ecological audit of the school's utilization of natural resources rec-

ommended changes that were, in the long run, highly cost effective, Kurt requested and recently received administrative approval to have students perform much of the routine custodial work previously performed by two custodians. The money that was saved went into curricular resources requested by the teachers and resource center director. There is nothing better than participation in care to create a sense of ownership and a sense of place for students who spend so much of their day in school.

The High School as a Learning Community

While most parents today expect preschool to be a fun experience for children and some may even agree that elementary and middle schools should be enjoyable, satisfying experiences, influenced as they are by their own educational experience, few would be comfortable if classrooms for 16-year-olds resembled kindergarten. Communities are willing to build elaborate labs and expensive recreational facilities for their high schools, but when it comes to classrooms, the only acceptable design is the factory model with its inflexible structure, its production-line mentality, and the inevitable memorize-and-recall mode of learning. If, however, we accept the assumption that the best curriculum at any level is student-centered, then we must begin to rethink the role and function of the American high school. As Roberts & Cawelti (1984) note, there is no clear consensus on what the central mission of the high school should be. "Critics have long lamented the fact that high schools have tried to do far more than they could reasonably expect to accomplish and as a result have diluted the academic program."

In earlier chapters I have suggested that to adequately prepare students for life in the twenty-first century, e.g., learning how to learn, the fundamental purpose and role of the education must be transformed. This transformation must include the high school as well as lower grades. However, until we recognize the discrepancies that exist between the knowledge and skills for learning how to learn and the so-called world class standards that currently dominate high school outcomes, nothing substantive will change. These discrepancies highlight the constraints that must be addressed before substantive change can take place at this level.

For example, much of today's high school curriculum is based on the outdated assumption that once children achieve the capacity for abstract thinking and reasoning — Piaget's "formal operations" — learning no longer needs to be concrete or relevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. Regardless of age, true learning must always be relevant to the life experience of the learner. The lack of concern for relevance is reflected in the factory-model mindset, which assumes that students can switch their cognitive gears every 45 minutes — shifting from math to social studies to science to literature to physical education — all before lunch.

But relevance is only one facet of learning. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, everything that we know about thinking and learning, intelligence and the structure of knowledge, points to one conclusion: *all intellectual endeavor, regardless of age, is systemic and contextual.* In short, facts are not the building blocks of knowledge, but its fruit. The process is not linear but organic. The outcome is not an end that has been or will be achieved, but a process to be experienced hour by hour, minute by minute. Learning is not something that can be taught; it is as natural as breathing, eating, running, or playing. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) speaks of learning as "one of life's greatest pleasures." Once we acknowledge this, we will, in her words,

cease to focus on learning as preliminary and see it threaded through other layers of experience ... an open-ended introduction to a process of continual change in which self-observation can become the best of teachers.

A second constraint to substantive change at the high school level is the problem of scheduling. Exacerbated in large schools by the sheer size of the student body and the diverse multiplicity of offerings, the schedule has become the primary structural barrier to change. However, once the school's mission becomes clear, appropriate scheduling becomes essentially a design problem that can be remedied.

The last constraint may be more difficult to overcome: resistance on the part of teachers who have a significant investment both in their specialized disciplines and in the independence that accompanies such specialization. For this reason, Roberts &

Cawelti recognize that substantive change will necessitate a substantial program of professional development that involves the teachers directly in re-designing the curriculum. However, on every high school faculty there are a few teachers who are ready and eager to attempt innovative programs. For example, at St. Charles High School several interested teachers have been given permission to design team-led, interdisciplinary courses. At a neighboring high school, located in a major river valley, a science and a social studies teacher have received permission to offer a course based on the question, "How have rivers shaped American culture?" Because of back-to-back scheduling, the course will be conducted daily for 90 minutes and will include significant blocks of time for on-site investigations.

I think it is clear that, in time, high schools must find ways to adapt the middle school model, i.e., a team of four or five teachers with 100 to 125 students, to their unique requirements. One inner-city high school with whom I have worked initiated just such a program for 120 incoming freshman. While there were many adjustments to make, the major problem the five teachers faced was resistance from their colleagues. At the same time, however, it is significant to note that adults outside the educational system are beginning to support such a change. In a recent survey of more than 2000 respondents, 62% agreed that large schools should be broken into smaller communities (Friendly Exchange 1995).

Conclusion

The 1960s were the halcyon days for education. Educational reform was in the air. Workshops in New Math, Kitchen Physics, and "Man: A Course of Study" were popular among teachers at all levels, and schools were being designed and redesigned to accommodate the open classroom and experiential learning. Books like *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* and *Summerhill* were being discussed and debated among parents as well as teachers.

In 1968, George Leonard, a senior editor for *Look*, wrote a little book entitled *Education and Ecstasy*. As a professional journalist and therefore an outsider to education, Leonard's insightful combination of analysis and vision captured the essence of developmentally appropriate education. In the chapter, "Visiting

Day, 2001 A.D.," Leonard sketches his vision of a school of the future. The school is a campus rather than a building. There are no formal classrooms and no teachers as we know them today. There are, however a variety of learning centers or, more accurately, learning environments, where children can read, play, listen, contemplate, sing, dance, create art, participate in individualized computer instruction — all according to the student's inclination. Early on, students are encouraged to respond to their own internal rhythms rather than clocks, schedules, and bells.

The underlying assumption of Leonard's vision is obvious. Learning is as natural as breathing. Learning is as much fun as exploring a cave — as exhilarating as a wild dance, as stimulating as a mystery thriller, as challenging as Nintendo, as satisfying as discovering a new friend with whom you can share your deepest thoughts and dearest secrets. Just as every child loves to explore caves, dance in the streets, mold clay, paint pictures, sing songs, tell and listen to stories, ask questions, imagine answers, they can also thrill in the discovery of the beauty and structure of math equations and chemical formulas, the intricacies of cell structure or of an atom or of a city, the possibilities and nuances of language and communication patterns, and the emotional impact of history (his-story) and her-story.

In spite of the obvious logic of Leonard's assumption, we continue to have a cultural predisposition against the idea that learning can be exciting, satisfying, and just plain enjoyable. For most people, learning is considered to be serious work, and, though it is not stated explicitly, the school is, more often than not, equated with the workplace. Since surveys show that most Americans do not like their jobs or their places of work, which are, to a great extent, dehumanizing environments, it should not be surprising that schools are also dehumanizing environments. And that's the problem: We as a society have become so conditioned to living and working in dehumanizing environments — schools, factories, offices, stores, restaurants, crowded cities, and equally crowded suburbs, high-rises, and ghettos — that we can scarcely imagine alternatives. Whenever we are confronted with a vision of something different and more satisfying, we justify our present reality with a "Yes, but this is the real world!" And so, we continue

to inflict that same dehumanizing environment on our children day after day for twelve years or more, and we wonder why so many of them either fail or rebel. The reality is that in general, both our schools and our workplaces are what Leslie Hart would call "brain antagonistic" environments.

The irony is, of course, that all of Leonard's assumptions about human potential, thinking, and learning have, since then, been supported and expanded by research in many different fields. Indeed, these assumptions are the cornerstone of the integrated, learner-centered strategies presented here. Unfortunately, as is often the case with visionaries, Leonard's projected time frame was far too optimistic. What is important, however, is not his time frame, but the vision itself, at the heart of which is the recognition that, at the most fundamental of levels, education is about students, not curriculum.

Buckminster Fuller once observed that "Nature is clearly intent on making humans successful" (Golding 1995). The degree to which we as a species have achieved success is debatable. While we have literally taken over and remade the planet in our own image, it seems increasingly clear that to be successful in the future will require something more of us than just scientific and technological prowess.

It should be clear by now that I consider educational success to involve a great deal more than preparing our youth for jobs in a highly technological society. It is about far more than American competitiveness in what seems to be a dog-eat-dog world. Today, in the last decade of the twentieth century, educational success is about what it means to be human in a world gone awry. It is about human potential — about our hopes, our aspirations, our dreams, our visions. Today educational success is about the future — our kids' future and the future of their kids and their grandkids to the seventh generation. It may even be about the future of humankind on Planet Earth.

The theoretical formulations necessary to redesign a systemic educational structure that reflects our innately human process of meaning-making are already available. According to systems thinking the same theories and principles that were applicable at the micro level, e.g., curriculum design and learning strategies, can be applied at the macro level of insti-

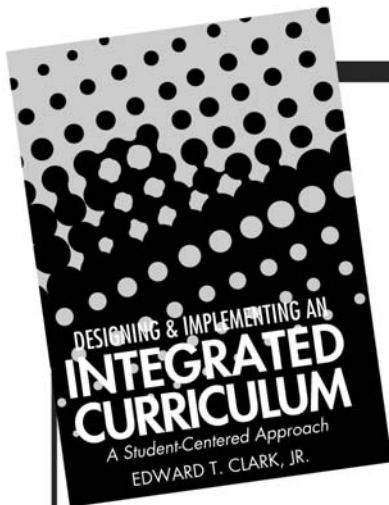
tutional purpose, function, and structure. If we combine Taba's taxonomy of knowledge, Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, the research that demonstrates the contextual nature of thinking and learning, Piaget's insights on cognitive development, and what we know about learning communities, we have a blueprint for designing a "brain-compatible" educational system.

Anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) sums up the challenge which we as educators — and as humans — face today.

We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way. Improvisation and new learning are not private processes, they are shared with others at every age so it is important to attend and respond. Even in uncertainty, we are responsible for our own steps.

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How “Healthy Motivation” Can Help Transform Education

Karl F. Wheatley

If we believe we must give children rewards in order to learn, we have to ask what is wrong with the curriculum or the teaching.

The question educators need to ask is not how motivated their students are, but how their students are motivated.

(Alfie Kohn)

A defining failure of traditional schooling is that it also often turns learners off to learning while causing many other motivational problems. Mention lost or distorted motivation to parents and many will nod sadly and tell you how their children lost interest in learning after beginning school — sometimes quite rapidly. Research confirms a steady loss of average intrinsic motivation to learn across the school years (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar 2005).

Much as unhealthy foods crowd healthy foods off supermarket shelves and out of our diets, the artificial and unhealthy incentives of traditional schooling (stickers, grades, winning a spelling bee) routinely displace healthy motivations for learning, with reduced curiosity and initiative being major casualties. For example, although children’s books are truly magical, formal reading instruction largely ignores children’s literature and efficiently turns many children off to reading. Paul Lockart (2009, 20-21), a former research mathematician who dedicated himself to teaching children mathematics, believes typical mathematics instruction may be even worse:

Sadly, our present system of mathematics education is [a] nightmare. In fact, if I had to design a mechanism for the express purpose of *destroying* a child’s natural curiosity and love of pattern-making, I couldn’t possibly do as good a job as is currently being done — I simply wouldn’t have the imagination to come up with the kind of senseless, soul-crushing ideas that constitute contemporary mathematics education.



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As a long-time early childhood teacher educator and unschooling parent who cherishes children's love of learning, I spend a great deal of time thinking about how we might promote paradigm change in PK–16 education. That is, how might we move from authoritarian, test-driven, factory-style schooling to learning communities that are governed democratically and focused on authentic learning tasks that build real-world competence? Also, how can we shift education from a narrow preoccupation with making money to a broader mission of building stronger democracies and a better world? In working with a few thousand prospective and practicing PK–3 teachers over three decades, I have found a few key levers for provoking change in people's thinking about education. One helpful lever is *healthy motivation* — both the phrase itself and the ideas it encompasses.

In this article I outline what I mean by healthy motivation, discuss how people respond to the phrase, explain the importance of using the right phrases to frame educational issues, and then explore how we might use healthy motivation as a lever in our efforts to promote paradigm change in education.

What "Healthy Motivation" Means, And Why It Matters

Just as healthy foods provide our physical bodies with the nutrients we need without introducing any unhealthy ingredients, artificial additives, or carcinogens, healthy motivation refers to those forms of motivation that promote the healthy long-term development of the whole child, without undermining development in any key ways. Put differently, healthy motivation is motivation that simultaneously meets basic human psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci 2002). Unhealthy motivation may drive humans to act, but it simultaneously undermines or fails to meet these basic needs.

Specifically, healthy motivation includes multiple elements of intrinsic motivation, including curiosity, competence, autonomy, fantasy, as well as those productive goals, values, and beliefs that we have fully internalized from our culture and integrated into our core selves. Learning goals (a focus on improving knowledge or ability) are generally healthy, but performance goals (a focus on *proving* one's ability or

one's superiority to others) are frequently counterproductive (Brophy 2005). Similarly, a belief that intelligence or ability is something that can be improved with effort (i.e., an incremental or growth view of ability) is consistently healthy, while a belief that ability or intelligence is something that people simply have more or less of (an entity view) is consistently unhealthy and counterproductive (Dweck 2006).

With regard to a core aspect of healthy motivation, researchers have been finding differential benefits for intrinsic/autonomous motivation over extrinsic/controlled motivation for decades. For example, compared to students whose motivation is more controlled, students who were more autonomously motivated have been found to have higher academic achievement, higher perceived competence, more positive emotions, higher self-worth, greater preference for and pleasure from optimally challenging tasks, stronger perceptions of control, greater creativity, and better retention of what they have learned (Reeve 2002). Raising questions for the controlling nature of current PK–12 education, when compared to students with more controlling teachers, students whose *teachers* were more autonomy supportive showed better academic achievement, higher perceived competence, more positive emotions, higher self-esteem, greater conceptual understanding, greater flexibility in thinking, more active information processing, greater creativity, and better retention of what they have learned (Reeve 2002).

Also, two recent studies with four-year-olds found that, compared to a more autonomy-supportive interactive style, when teachers used the controlling style of typical teaching, children were less curious and showed less initiative, active exploration, and creativity; they also showed greater dependence on the teacher to tell them what to do (Gopnik 2011). The highly controlling nature of most teachers and educational contexts is a major factor in changing so many young children from active learners in the preschool years into passive students in the elementary grades and beyond. In terms of the healthy development of the whole child, this loss of healthy motivation is a disaster and has negative consequences for the narrow range of outcomes we call academics. For example, Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar (2005), in studying relationships between intrinsic and extrin-

sisic motivation and academic outcomes, found intrinsic motivation to be a positive predictor of both grades and standardized test scores from third grade through eighth grade, while extrinsic motivation was negatively correlated with academic outcomes. Moreover, higher intrinsic motivation has been found to predict and likely contribute to better reading growth in lower ability readers (Logan, Medford, & Hughes 2011). Finally, an experimental study examined two versions of a video game, one designed to elicit intrinsic motivation and another relying on extrinsic rewards. Under fixed time limits, children learned more from the game designed to support intrinsic motivation, while under free play conditions, children played that game *seven times longer* than the game using extrinsic motivators (Habgood & Ainsworth 2011).

In general, consequences of healthy forms of motivation include strong curiosity and initiative, appropriate goal setting and help-seeking, effective self-regulation, non-defensive reactions to failure, enjoying learning so much that one gets lost in the experience (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi 1990), and a strong feeling of ownership of the learning process. People with healthy motivation generally aren't focused on the grade or reward, or how they appear to others; they continue to learn even when no one is looking and the official educational experience is over.

In contrast, unhealthy motivation results in weak curiosity and initiative, poor self-regulation and less appropriate goal setting, quitting or blaming others when failure occurs, a focus on looking good or performing better than others (rather than on learning itself), a feeling that one learns because one has to, and infrequent experiences with joyous immersion in learning. Unhealthy motivation alienates people from the learning process and even from themselves.

More deeply, as Kasser & Ryan (1996) found, people who pursued more intrinsic aspirations in adulthood (affiliation, personal growth, community contribution) had a better sense of well-being than those who pursued more extrinsic aspirations (wealth, fame, image). Most people have experienced both healthy and unhealthy motivation at various times in their lives, but, unfortunately, the dominant motivational approaches in schools these days (e.g., high stakes test, rankings, etc.) are precisely those factors

that tend to erode healthy motivation. Why? At the core of healthy motivation lie the basic human needs of autonomy, competence, and positive relatedness (Ryan & Deci 2002), but the controlling and competitive approaches that policymakers typically rely on prevent most students from having these needs met. In the end, learning science to satisfy our curiosity or expand our competence or to help cure cancer are all healthy motives and legitimate personal and cultural reasons for learning. However, learning science in order to pass a test dreamed up by politicians is neither a healthy nor legitimate motive for learning.

Of course, we *can* fuel our bodies on trans fats, simple carbohydrates, and foods that contain known carcinogens, and we *can* motivate children to learn using extrinsic rewards and artificial or unhealthy inducements, but both methodologies are broadly harmful in the long run. However, when educators try to make children pay attention to dull lessons on information of dubious value, the reliance on unhealthy motives can be as appealing as a sugar doughnut might appear to a tired office worker in late afternoon. Just as valuing short-term convenience over long-term effectiveness tempts individuals into unhealthy eating habits, concern for short-term expedience seduces parents and educators away from the healthy motivations that are most effective in the long run for the goals that we value most for the whole child.

Responses to "Healthy Motivation"

I have taught over forty teacher education courses involving over 700 students since I began using the phrase "healthy motivation" in my classes. To be sure, many prospective and practicing teachers treat my courses on curriculum and child development as mere hoops to be jumped through en route to a teaching license or master's degree. Even some students in my doctoral course in motivation are more focused on finishing a program than they are passionate about learning. Thus, it would be an exaggeration to claim that my use of the phrase "healthy motivation," accompanied by information on the negative effects of extrinsic rewards and competition, leads the majority of practicing and prospective teachers in my classes to become passionately committed to promoting healthy motivation. It doesn't.

Even when students affirm healthy motivation, some of their comments have the dull and artificial tone of students who have been well trained to voice agreement with their teachers, regardless of what they really think.

However, students generally get very engaged with the topic, and the vast majority of my students *do* post on-line comments extolling the virtues of healthy motivation and expressing concern about the hazards of extrinsic rewards. Students ask many questions, argue, and talk to friends about the ideas involved or conduct independent research to see what other sources say. Also, in any class of 15 to 25 students, there have usually been five to ten students who show real movement in their thinking. Some of these students have rethought previously held beliefs about extrinsic rewards and healthy motivation and others expressed a deepened commitment to promoting healthy motivation in children. One student in 2011 said “This section really made me think about how I was taught growing up,” and another noted, “I am definitely going to take from the readings and try to better promote the idea of intrinsic rewards in my classroom, by using less stickers.” Another student reflected, “Admittedly, a few things in my class need adjusting.... In a world of bonus cards and reward points I feel like this is a topic Americans need to pay closer attention to.” More significantly, each semester there are a few students who voluntarily change their teaching or parenting methods to support healthy motivation. These include many students who have experimented with reducing or eliminating their use of extrinsic rewards, competition, and controlling praise in their parenting or teaching, and even one parent who opted her son out of our state’s high stakes testing. Many successes from these personal experiments have been reported back to the rest of the class.

There are two other promising ways in which prospective and practicing teachers respond to sustained attention to healthy versus unhealthy motivation. First, even most prospective and practicing teachers who have difficulty imagining how children might be motivated to learn without extrinsic rewards or competition understand at a gut level that there is something wrong with any form of education that turns learners off to learning. I intentionally press this point with my

classes, noting that humans are both naturally motivated to eat and naturally motivated to learn. Because humans are naturally motivated to eat, if the food in a restaurant were so poor that you had to pay people to eat there, you’d know that the real problem was the menu or cooking. Similarly, because humans are naturally motivated to learn, if we find ourselves feeling that we must give children rewards in order for them to learn, we must ask what must be wrong with the curriculum or the teaching. Many students find this analogy compelling. Second, even those students whose thinking has probably changed little with respect to the core issue of healthy versus unhealthy motivation start using the language of “healthy motivation” and “unhealthy motivation.” Language has power and it can help leverage the changes in people’s thinking that are needed for paradigm changes in education. Thus, I turn next to discuss the power of conceptual framing.

The Power of Conceptual Framing

At the heart of marketing efforts and political battles is conceptual framing — the effort to use language to persuade listeners — for example, that going to a Walmart store will allow you to “Save money, Live better” or that we shouldn’t raise taxes on the wealthy because they are supposedly the “job creators” at a time when we desperately need jobs. As cognitive psychologists point out regarding conceptual framing, facts often do not persuade people because if the facts do not fit the way an issue has been framed, the facts do not make sense and are ignored or rejected (Lakoff 2004). From “Operation Iraqi Freedom” to “Death Panels,” “No Child Left Behind,” and “Tastes Great, Less Filling,” politicians and businesspeople sink enormous effort and mountains of money into framing products, policies, and ideas in ways that favor their own interests. They do this because they understand that framing is essential to persuasion.

Unfortunately, progressive educators have often not framed educational debates in ways that effectively communicate their ideas, and moreover, they have unwittingly adopted the conceptual frames that the Business Roundtable and conservative politicians have chosen to market test-driven, top-down, corporate-style education (Emery & Ohanian 2004).

The language of “failing schools, unqualified teachers, higher standards, objective testing, and accountability” has played a pivotal role in priming the public to accept the kinds of policies that were unthinkable only a decade ago. The media endlessly uses the phrase “failing schools,” as if we all know that American schools are failing and know which schools are failing, and this frame sets the stage for what follows. Imagine if the default phrase was not “failing schools,” but “America’s remarkably successful schools,” a phrase that would be easy to defend even for those who trust test scores. Why? Adjusting for poverty, American schools routinely finish at the top or near the top on international tests (Bracey 2009; Riddile 2010). However, marketing succeeds in large part by creating dissatisfaction with what you have now, so the phrase “failing schools” is an essential tool for those who wish to privatize or take over schools, while the phrase “America’s remarkably successful schools” would pose a threat to those efforts. Changing education requires, among other things, new ways of framing the terms of the debate.

The Power of the Frames:

Healthy Motivation and Unhealthy Motivation

For those who believe, as I do, that we need paradigm change in education, authoritarian, factory-style schooling will not disappear overnight just because a growing numbers of educators, parents, and other citizens come to better understand healthy motivation, and begin talking about “healthy” and “unhealthy” motivation. However, until some tipping point is reached in education, the language of healthy motivation and unhealthy motivation are powerful tools for gradually but inexorably moving education in a healthier, whole-child direction.

Why? The favored motivational tools of advocates of authoritarian education and top-down policy efforts are rewards, punishments, and competition. What is so powerful about the language of healthy motivation is that once you have established shared understanding of what healthy motivation means, you can respond to arguments for rewards, punishments, and competition by saying that those strategies don’t qualify because they generally create unhealthy motivation. What we need is *healthy* motivation, not *unhealthy* motivation. This is powerful lan-

guage and it is the truth, given what we know about motivation and developmental research. By repeatedly drawing attention to the distinction between healthy motivation and unhealthy motivation, we not only speak up in terms of the healthy development and learning of the whole child, we repeatedly label the central motivational strategies of the test-driven accountability movement as counterproductive and unhealthy.

Why are “healthy” and “unhealthy” such powerful frames? Having passed the half-century mark in life, I grew up in an age in which children climbed around in the back of station wagons without seat belts, large percentages of adults smoked anywhere they wished, and most people assumed that a juicy red steak was good for them. In my childhood, there was no mention of unhealthy foods, there was just food, and food was the fuel you needed for life. Then, after advertisements for cigarettes were banned on television in the U. S. at the beginning of 1971 due to the health risks of cigarettes, information about healthy versus unhealthy foods has increasingly filled the media, our consciousness, and our daily lives. After decades of increasing attention to the healthiness or unhealthiness of what we eat, the term “healthy” has become a ubiquitous frame for talking about and evaluating what we eat. *Healthy* and *unhealthy* are very powerful frames that we all immediately understand and for which we have strong responses. Even if we don’t always do it, we know we should avoid that which is unhealthy, and pursue that which is healthy. Instead of continuing to think that motivation is some generic fuel we need for learning, the frames “healthy motivation” and “unhealthy motivation” help to educate and remind people that some approaches to motivation are healthy and others are not.

Healthy Motivation:

Three Key Advocacy Actions

From my experience teaching teachers and talking with many others about education, there are some concrete strategies for using the ideas and language of healthy motivation to promote paradigm change in education.

First, we can establish an important beachhead in educational discussions by standing firm on the

proposition that any educational system is fatally flawed if it undermines healthy motivation to learn. It is easy to grasp the idea that any diet that undermines your energy level and increases your risk of death from heart attack or stroke is unhealthy and undesirable. Similarly, people easily grasp the idea that there is something deeply wrong with science teaching that turns children off to science and reading instruction that makes kids dislike books. They grasp this idea even more easily when presented with key research findings showing that there is nothing inevitable or natural about children not liking learning. Specifically, Walberg's 1986 meta-analysis found that during the open education movement, children in traditional classrooms suffered steady declines in motivation, while children in open (progressive) classrooms liked school more each year. People can no longer assume that heart disease is a natural feature of life when presented with compelling evidence that switching from the traditional Western diet to a plant-based diet reliably reverses heart disease, and that the heart disease common in Western societies is simply absent in societies eating a plant-based diet. Similarly, people cannot sustain the assumption that the loss of healthy motivation is normal when faced with research showing that healthy motivation to learn actually increases under different educational conditions.

Second, we can work, at every chance we get, to establish the language of "healthy motivation" as a way of framing educational issues and tasks. For example, in the curriculum course that I have taught over sixty times, students do one assignment entirely on healthy and unhealthy motivation, and, in writing their lesson plans, must explain how they'd support healthy motivation to learn within teacher-directed activities. Why is this important? There has been a great deal of psychological research in recent decades on how different language and ideas prime the brain differently for subsequent thinking, physiological responses, and action. While we like to think that our thinking is stable and reliably rational, factors such as whether people are induced to smile or frown, to think of young people or old people, or to think of money or not yield noteworthy differences in subsequent thinking and action (e.g., Kahneman 2011). So, just as asking "What is something *healthy* I

can I eat for dinner" primes the brain to think differently than does simply asking "What can I eat for dinner," asking teachers how they can support *healthy* motivation evokes a different pattern of thinking and encompasses a different set of candidate responses than simply asking how they'll motivate students. When prospective and practicing teachers learn that tangible rewards reliably undermine healthy intrinsic motivation and praise often undermines healthy intrinsic motivation to learn, and then are asked to revise initial drafts of lessons that relied on rewards or controlling praise, this leads them to entertain new ideas about children, motivation, and education.

Third, we can steadily educate more people about the details of research on healthy motivation. In my experience, there are motivation research findings that surprise and engage everyone from the students in my doctoral course on motivation to the parent with whom I wound up chatting while waiting in line at the post office. Having been immersed in a culture that frequently tells them that competition brings out the best in people and that rewarding excellence creates more of it, many are very intrigued to hear just how deeply misleading these ideas often are. For example, discussing the fact that praise has been found to undermine intrinsic motivation of women but not of men (Deci, Cascio, & Krusell 1975), leads to surprise and questions about when and why praise might backfire. This leads to the finding that rewards in general and praise in particular tend to undermine intrinsic motivation when the rewards or praise are experienced as controlling (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan 2001), because feeling controlled is a key obstacle to meeting our basic psychological needs, and thus, to healthy motivation. In turn, the well-documented finding that feeling controlled undermines healthy motivation and interferes with meeting our basic needs directly conflicts with our current system of education, which is dominated by top-down authoritarian control. Similarly, if one starts with research on goal orientations, one bumps into numerous studies that found that focusing on performance is generally less beneficial for learning and healthy development than focusing on learning (Brophy 2005; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece 2008). This point raises profound problems for educational policies designed to focus students, teachers, and every-

one else on students' performance on high-stakes tests. In sum, the findings from research on healthy motivation conflict in many profound ways with authoritarian, test-driven, factory-style schooling.

Conclusion

For far too many children, traditional schooling dampens or extinguishes the natural passion for learning that is a by-product of millions of years of human evolution. This natural human passion for learning is one of our natural resources (along with our innate empathy), and all efforts to improve education should make wise use of this natural passion for learning — not squander it or squash it. Learning can and should be a marvelous adventure, and we need to find a way to help our educational system escape the joyless factory model that has dominated education since the 1800s. As Lockhart lamented (2009, 88), "What a sad endless cycle of innocent teachers inflicting damage upon innocent students. We could all be having so much more fun."

In a happy and virtuous cycle, the language of healthy motivation and the research on healthy motivation provide powerful tools for us to use in advocating for the paradigm change in education that will, in turn, sustain and nurture learners' healthy motivation to learn. Such advocacy will take persistence and long-term commitment, but it is exciting and important work.

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Teaching Destiny's Child

David Kowalewski

Destiny is not about feeling good but about feeling whole. It is not what we expect from life, but what life expects from us.

Young people see their spaceship earth hurtling towards disaster. They are the very ones who will need to fix it, yet apparently they have neither the will nor the way to manage the challenge. They hear ecologists predicting global warming and the sixth mass extinction, social scientists predicting nuclear war and revolution, and economists predicting peak oil and crushing debt. And the ultimate cheery thought: cosmologists are forecasting the heat death of the universe. For many, working to remediate the looming disaster seems meaningless. "What's the point? We're all toast!"

This article offers the notion of destiny as a tool for enlisting the creative energies of students for meaningful engagement in the global challenge. Today's youth lack the psychospiritual resources to deal with the crises they see on the horizon, let alone solve them. The most important resource needed for the task is a strong sense of purpose derived from personal destiny, which arouses our greatest potential, a vision of the heroic.

The notion of destiny resonates with students. Whether or not destiny *is* true, it rings true. Students sense that we need a strong purpose that involves a Big Picture that is much bigger than we are. That Big Picture has traditionally been envisioned as the Grand Tapestry of "the gods," those more wise and powerful immaterial beings that interact with the earthly realm. The core idea is this: We're here for a reason, and we need to live it out in order to fulfill our highest potential, which involves gaining the knowledge and power to serve the earth's creatures. I have found few topics better able to get students thinking, excited, wondering, struggling, engaged, enraged, and debating. Why? Destiny is a mythopoetic notion, which speaks to deeper layers of consciousness than mere reason (Barton 2000). For a teacher, it doesn't get any better than that.

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Why Destiny Matters

But today's youth live in a modernist world, which has an animus against destiny, a teleological antipathy bordering on taboo. Modernity, based on secularism, scientism, skepticism, and even cynicism, has turned out kids who are technological wizards but psychospiritual idiots. Losing themselves in the virtual reality of cyberspace to escape the dying planet, kids love their high-tech toys, but do the toys love them back? When biologists suggest that life's point is to selfishly pass on one's genes to the future, when economists laud impersonal market forces as the world's best decision-makers, and when social scientists abandon any notion of civic responsibility, it is not surprising that many young people feel "value-free." Add postmodern deconstructionism, which pounds metanarrative into the ground, nearly delegitimizing the idea of narrative itself, and it is little wonder that young people see their lives as random data instead of meaningful stories.

But where does meaning come from? It used to come from authority structures and figures, yet these are collapsing — governments, religions, parents — and with this has come the collapse of values, the very basis of meaning. Modernists and postmodernists have thrown out the meaning baby with the authority bathwater.

Parents and teachers have bought into this ideology: "Not imposing my values" has left many of their young charges with no values at all, who conclude that facts without any theme or narrative is the way to go. The young are asked what they like but not who they are. The result is the philosophy of Whateverism. Yet the road to soul disfigurement, according to the ancients, is paved with the word "whatever," the lack of passionate commitment.

This vacuum has a high price. Young people anxiously study for meaningless standardized tests instead of passionately for meaningful creative lives. Without structured encouragement by the elders to soul-search for destiny and a community that fosters and supports the quest, the young will look for meaning in all the wrong places. Some will find it in the unrealistic family expectations, which leads to rocky marriages and even rockier divorces. Others find it in eating disorders, libertine sex, drug and alcohol addictions, shopaholism, and cults. Those who can find

no meaning fall victim to alienation, depression, absenteeism, dropping out, vandalism, sports hooliganism, reckless driving, school shootings, and self-mutilation. Some of these will just give up; suicide is the third leading cause of death among U.S. children (Pearce 2005). Do youth with purpose take their own lives? Or contract "attention deficit disorder"? Should we not be talking about *the* ADD: purposelessness?

This all adds up to psychospiritual crisis, the crisis of meaning itself. The current generation may be the only one in history in which despair overshadows hope.

The Idea That Just Won't Go Away

But is destiny the answer? Today it is largely viewed as a quaint idea in mythology textbooks. Modernity tells the young to forge their own paths, so why search for it among the gods? Still, the idea of pursuing one's destiny just won't go away. The following six points, some of which students can easily come up with themselves, help convince them that destiny is still worth considering.

First, the notion has been around for thousands of years and never been disproven. Indeed, any idea that old may be *the* perennial philosophy. In fact, if it's been around that long, it may just have survival utility. For sheer historical reasons, then, it deserves a seat at the pedagogical table.

Second, the conviction that somehow our lives were written in the stars long before birth is still widely held (Burrus & Roesse 2006). The claim that the gods are pulling us into our futures is more than a mere abstract belief nagging at our consciousness; it touches our very souls. Most of us feel an undercurrent beneath the froth of daily life, like the thread that is spun, measured, and cut by three goddesses in Greek, Roman, and Norse mythologies that unites and make sense of the disparate events of our lives. So we still encounter the term, *destiny*, in popular culture, such as female rock groups (*Destiny's Child*), novels (*Destiny and Desire*), films (*Stone of Destiny*), and TV series (*Destiny Ridge*). It has also become a popular name for newborn females since 1960.

We see it in common sayings. Do our "best laid plans go astray" only because of bad planning or because we failed to heed the gods? We hear, "It must have happened for a reason," and "There must be

some reason for it that we don't understand." Are such protestations just magical thinking? — after all, flat-earthism, geocentrism, and six-day-creationism are still held — or are they probing a deep truth?

Third, the psychospiritual search for a soul's purpose has measurable physical benefits. Mystical experiences have healing consequences (Hood 1974). A key factor is the search for meaning itself, which correlates with physical and mental health, the ability to cope with problems, and longevity (deKlerk 2005; Hirschberg 2005; Okamoto & Tanka 2004; Palmer 2007; Skrabski et al. 2005). Meaningfulness in job and marriage helps the heart (Dossey 2005). The number one predictor of fatal heart attacks is lack of meaning in life (Chopra 2005). Pointlessness kills; meaning is not just good for the mind, it also seems a basic need for physical survival. We seem hardwired for it; the need for meaning is independent of demographic factors such as sex, age, and education, suggesting a universal striving (Debats 1999).

Fourth, the closer that people come to death, the more destiny appears. Near-death experiencers see, on the "other side," a review of their lives that have yet to reach completion. Hence they return to "this side" to fulfill their destinies, which normally involve serving their people. Many return with psychic gifts to do just that (Neimark 2003; Sutherland 1989). Terminal patients exclaim, "So that's what it was all about!" "It couldn't have been otherwise!" as if their lives had been preplanned, as if their destiny's thread had suddenly become visible.

Fifth, a century of high-quality paranormal research supports "time independence." The ability of humans to know their own future and wider upcoming events (precognition, presentiment, premonition, omens, prophecy, divination) has been amply demonstrated (Honorton & Ferrari 1989). Divination even has a physiological basis (Tedlock 2009). Some professional remote viewers can describe objects and events in the future in remarkable detail (Bem 2011; Radin 2006; Tart 2009). In fact, "laboratory evidence support[s] 'backward-acting' ... influences"; "observation retroactively influences ... events," where the future determines the present (Braud 2005; Radin 2006; see also Braud 2000). According to some quantum physicists, "we are consistently being influenced ... by our future selves"; a kind of "retroinflu-

ence" is operative; it "may be that our future already exists in some nebulous state that we actualize in the present" and that "our future and present are constantly meeting up with each other" (McTaggart 2007, 172-175). If so, then not only must there be some timeless reality that we can tap into, but more significantly, somehow our futures already exist and influence our lives. The future, it seems, while not changing the past and present, does affect their making.

Finally, other paranormal phenomena such as synchronicities point to destiny. Stories of what I call "ridiculous rescues," which suggest unseen guidance but which blind eyes can only call "dumb luck" abound (Kowalewski 2000). Many lives have been saved by a totally weird combination of circumstances, too improbable for words, as if they had been graced by some godly help. In destiny terms, they probably were saved because it just wasn't their time. Millions believe in angelic protectors for just this reason. In the film *Titanic*, Rose, who was misaligned with her destiny, was about to jump overboard but was rescued by Jack, her "guardian angel." It just wasn't her time. This film, a cautionary tale about destiny, became a blockbuster precisely because it touched a deep chord in popular experience (Kowalewski 2008).

Destiny Now and Then

Yet many false notions about destiny persist that need clearing away. Students, therefore, need to struggle with the following misconceptions before engaging the traditional concept. Teachers can divide the class into small groups, each assigned a misconception to discuss for 10-15 minutes with respect to whether or not it is destiny and why. Each group can then report to the class. Teachers should stress that the objective is to start thinking deeply about the idea, not necessarily come up with a right answer. Afterwards, the ancient understandings about the misconceptions and how they might be related to destiny can be presented.

Destiny is not fate, namely those circumstances we're born into and live through; instead, it's what we do about them. Fate is beyond our control — ancestral lineage, genetic endowment, historical age — but how we navigate it *is* our call. Fate is the hand we're dealt; destiny is where we'll end up at game's

end. Fate is our situations; destiny is the thread our life takes through them.

Destiny is not destination or a goal. It doesn't tell us where to go but how to live our lives. It's not about going somewhere, but about fulfilling our contract with the gods. Destination narrows awareness; destiny expands it. Destiny never tells us where we'll wind up; we won't know that until we get there. Whereas destination is where we *want* to go, destiny is where we *need* to go. Destination can be anywhere, where we may or may not belong; destiny is home, where we do belong. Spiritually speaking, we're all homeless people. Destiny is like a river, flowing toward the ocean because it has to, not because it intends to. If we follow the pull of destiny, we won't worry about destination; destiny will take care of that. The trick is to make every destination a way station to destiny.

Destiny is not parental influence. It's a fallacy to believe that parents determine a child's future life. The *daemon* or creative genius of destiny does, the *daemon* we must wrestle with when our path takes a detour (Hillman 1996).

Destiny is not talent. It is not about what we're good at, but what we're good for. Talent is free, but destiny is earned, a hero's quest, which never comes easy. Talent just supports the quest.

Destiny is not a career but a calling, not about what we do but who we are. It's not about what we've attained, but whom we're manifesting. A career gets us ahead, destiny gets us a life. Destiny is about a life journey, not a career trajectory. It's not the part we play in the social drama, but the one we play in the divine one. A career is only how we make our living, destiny is how we lead our life. Destiny is a process, not a product; we're here for the doing, not the result, which is the realm of the gods.

Destiny is not ethics. My students fall into stunned silence (often a good sign of deep truth) when I say, "Your job is not to be good, your job is to be you!" Destiny is about grace, not good. Ethics comes from without, destiny from within. Destiny is not about satisfying some authority but about fulfilling our purpose, not about doing the good but about living the vision. It's not a prescription but a calling.

Destiny is not happiness, which is notoriously fickle. It's not about what we like but what we need. To pur-

sue happiness means unhappiness; since the gods want us to pursue what is wise and powerful, happiness is beside the point. We don't find our destiny in pursuing joy, but find our joy in pursuing destiny. Destiny is not what we want from the gods, but what the gods want from us. It's not about feeling good but about feeling whole. Far from being a dream come true, it's a truth come alive. It's not what we expect from life, but what life expects from us.

Destiny is not reason. Modernity privileges the mind, claiming without a shred of evidence that it and not the soul should tell us what life is about. When it comes to destiny, analysis is paralysis. Destiny is anything but logical; we can't think our way to it. Reason is about abstractions, destiny is about energies. Destiny is not for figuring out, just surrendering to. To do that we literally need, temporarily, to lose our minds. This is why the ancients danced ecstatically, drummed into the wee hours of the night, and took sacred psychotropics. If we think we've got destiny figured out, we obviously don't. Destiny bypasses reason to fire imagination. It's the soul's deepest desire, not the mind's logical conclusion. Reason hasn't a clue what our destiny is, but our soul does. Destiny is found in mythical symbols, not logical syllogisms. Reason, then, is absolutely the worst way to make life choices, which it was never meant to do, while being the best for pulling them off. Its purpose is to serve destiny, not the other way around. Destiny is the *why* of life, reason is the *how*. Reason is for surviving, not for meaning. Destiny is not irrational, just suprarational; it simply asks us to see, not with physical eyes, but symbolic ones. It's for *invaluing* our lives; reason is for *evaluating* them. It's meant to be embraced, not understood. It's about surrendering to the mystery of life, not controlling it. Pursuing destiny, we jump into the Mystery, since only there do we discover the deeply meaningful. Into the hands of the gods we commend our spirit.

So What Is Destiny?

So, if destiny is not any of these, then what is it? Here students can be asked for ideas, during which teachers can make the following points. The Latin root of destiny implies "standing apart," in the sense of "selected out for a particular journey." Imagine bushels of wheat, each designated for a particular lo-

cale. Psychospiritually, each soul is selected out by the gods for a special journey. Destiny, then, makes us special and gives us a meaningful direction. It's what the gods have in store for us, the whole point of being here. It's our part to play in the Cosmic Drama that no one else can play. Shakespeare got it right: The whole world is a stage, but he might have added, for a plot dreamed up by the gods. For the Iroquois, destiny is our Original Instructions from beyond.

The seed of destiny is our highest potential. Contrary to career counselor advice, we don't figure out our potential then find a path for it. In fact we don't have a clue what our full potential is until we start walking our path. Put another way, it is destiny that unfolds our latent godly potential.

Destiny is the assignment we need to fulfill in order to graduate to the next stage of our soul's journey, the task the gods designed to make us enlightened and powerful. It's the experiences our souls need in order to acquire the knowledge and energy needed to move on to the next psychospiritual level. Both are necessary: Enlightenment without energy is lame, while empowerment without knowledge is blind. Destiny provides the soul with the knowledge to find its way back to the gods and the energy to fuel the sacred trip. The correct course of action is always the one that most enlightens and empowers our soul, equipping us for our postmortem adventure.

It's these experiences that give meaning to life, its whole point. Contrary to most philosophers, we don't figure out what is meaningful and then construct our path. Instead, we walk our path, which is the only meaningful way to live.

Life, then, is not just one damn thing after another, but has a storyline unique to each of us. Destiny is our sacred plot, about how we, lost children, return home, which longs to have us back, but smarter and stronger.

We can resist or surrender. We forge our own path, making it convoluted or straight, woeful or wealful, self-negating or self-affirming — that is *our* call. But the path will end up where destiny needs us to be. So destiny is willingly compelling. As Jack, who was perfectly aligned with his destiny, told Rose as he rescued her in *Titanic*, "I don't have a choice." But he also rescued her willingly. Both necessity *and* freedom. Whereas reason is the world of

either/or, destiny is the world of both/and (as in yin *and* yang, wave *and* particle) — a deeper bittersweet logic. Einstein got it wrong: God does play dice with the universe, it's just that they're loaded.

Even though the events of our lives may seem chaotic, destiny is always there, a strange attractor, keeping them within the plot the gods have designed for us. Destiny is not about a series of specific events but a set of spiritual experiences. Thus, the long-term motion is predictable, even though the particular details are not. Our soul's condition when we die is fixed; the route we take to get there is our choice.

Classroom Explorations

The ancients used many sacred technologies to help the young discover their destinies. Students today also have many practical ways to find their own paths.

Vision quest. Today's world fails to properly initiate the young into maturity. High school graduation is a pathetic substitute that provides no graduation to adulthood. A true initiation is not "all about the child," but everything about the tribe, which cannot survive if adults remain children.

Lack of initiation inhibits emotional separation from parents, a prerequisite for maturity. Uninitiated youth will stay children, resulting in dependency, whining, and self-indulgence, with some living at home until well past their twenties. Or they will seek initiation elsewhere, in rebellion. (Contrary to conventional wisdom, adolescents do not "naturally" rebel against their elders, but only when those elders fail to initiate them properly.) They will seek out other kids — uninitiated youth trying to initiate each other, such that the blind are leading the blind. Here we see bullying, misogynistic rapping, and hazing in fraternities and sororities and gangs.

The vision quest has traditionally initiated youth into maturity. Typically the young go alone into the wilderness to fast and seek a "vision," namely their destiny's gift to the tribe. In the wild, away from civilization with its rationalizations and expectations, the young find the nature of their spirits from the spirits of nature. A long stay in the wilderness fosters a silence inside, where one can hear the voice of the soul, which is the call of the wild, namely the beckoning of the gods to free ourselves from domesticity.

Such a rite of passage is critical, since without vision, the young are stumbling around blind and the tribe goes unserved.

Today, though, the vast majority of students are not prepared, in any way, to fast several days alone in the wilderness. Some students, I've found, are downright biophobic. Logistical, legal, medical, and other issues surrounding the quest are also almost insurmountable in primary and secondary school settings. Actual questing as an assignment, therefore, is not recommended. Teachers, however, can make their own quests, and invite other questers and professional guides into the classroom, in order to provide first-hand stories for discussion. They can also describe the theory behind the quest (Dugan 1985) and recommend books relating vivid personal accounts (Brown 1988; Lame Deer 1994; Somé 1995). Audio and other materials can be presented during class time (Ingwe 1995; Black Elk 2008). Responsible organizations that have sponsored vision quests for several years might also be mentioned (e.g., animas.org; visionquest-spiritualretreats-womensretreats-yoga.com).

Honor code. Destiny is seen in our honor code, what the gods designed us to stand for, the sacred principles they need us to manifest. In traditional cultures, such codes were embodied in various collective ways, such as tribal taboos and medicine society oaths. In more modern individualist cultures, teachers can ask students such questions as: Am I willing to die for anything besides self-preservation? If so, what? What principles do I stand for? What would I never sacrifice no matter what? Who and what are the most important things in my life that I'll never be willing to give up? One useful exercise is to ask students to fill in two columns under the headings, "I always" (e.g., "keep my promises") and "I never" (e.g., "gossip"). The items are our mythic self, our deeply desired character. Three months later, have students cross out the items they failed to follow — these are our hypocrisies, the lies we tell to ourselves, the talk we don't walk. What's left are the rules that keep our soul whole and on destiny's track, what we need to live by in order to live with ourselves. It's the foundation of self-esteem.

Archetypal resonance. The gods gave us archetypal energies, such as Healer and Teacher, for our destiny's journey (Moore & Gillette 1990). We recognize

these energies by their resonance; they are the vibrational urges of our lives. When we encounter them in films, novels, anecdotes, billboards, travelogues, and biographies, we feel a strong energy arise, an inspiration. We identify with such characters, because they are in fact *our* identity, our true self. When we resonate with them, it means that the gods are literally "turning us on" so we will move in the direction we need to go. We just have to attend to our soul's vibrations. Destiny animates us via archetypes that move the soul, the anima. Joseph Campbell got it only half-right: "Follow your bliss" is a nice thought, but it lacks power. "Follow the buzz" has a lot more juice.

Whereas talents are bestowed by our ancestors for physical survival, archetypes are bestowed by the gods for spiritual fulfillment. Archetypes are not about occupations but about energies, our charismas for the tribe. Young people with Warrior and Scribe archetypes do not need to join the army and major in literature, much less become war correspondents. They just need, when feeling pulled, to fight and write. Archetypes are about sensibilities. The Artist may, of course, become a professional painter, but he could just as well become an art teacher, museum director, art therapist, private collector, art historian, or generous patron.

Each archetype manifests as Light or Dark, depending on whether our path is currently straight or crooked. Queens can be gracious or imperious; Servants, selfless or masochistic.

The teacher can present a list of classic archetypes from Caroline Myss's *Sacred Contracts* (2001), while students write down all those that resonate, then shorten the list to twelve for their "Personal Round Table." They can then arrange them so that related archetypes are grouped with each other, for example Hermit and Martyr and Puritan; such groupings constitute "energetic syndromes" that exert the most powerful influence on our lives. Next to each of the twelve archetypes, students can then privately write "L" or "D" to designate whether it manifests in their lives as primarily light or dark. Students enjoy making similar lists for parents, friends, neighbors, political figures, and rock stars. Another fun exercise is to find characters in films, comic books, and TV series who illustrate the archetypes, e.g., the King in *JFK*.

Pilgrimage. Treks to sacred sites, or “power places,” are a metaphor for our spiritual journey, but one with scientific cachet. Princeton University engineers have shown that certain such sites make random number generators behave nonrandomly (McTaggart 2007). Travel to mythical magical places such as Mt. Shasta and Lourdes involves starting out from a mundane spot and ending up in a sacred one, just like our earthly journey back to the gods.

Teachers can ask students to list a few sacred or “power” places to which they might like to make a pilgrimage, then ask: What does the place say to your soul? What personal needs might it fulfill? What meaning for your life might you expect to find there? What specific questions would you ask there? What ceremony might you do there to honor the place and why?

Autobiography. Since stories give meaning to facts, we can discover the meaning of our own facts through autobiographical media like diaries, memoirs, dream journals, and old-fashioned long letters to friends. Self-narrative enables us to connect the dots of the seemingly random events of our lives. It extracts the most *meaningful* events from the rag of daily life, so that destiny’s thread emerges — the plot of our personal mythology. Such events are precisely the ones traditionally seen as manifesting destiny’s journey. In this way, autobiography reveals destiny, and destiny is seen as shaping autobiography (Dillan 2011).

Students can be encouraged to keep a daily journal with an eye to destiny, i.e., the meaning of the events, and later perhaps to share entries with the class. They can also be asked to tell their life story in the third person for one hour to a sympathetic listener who stays silent with rapt attention but without judgement. The listener then asks questions to tease out the thread of the student’s destiny. The third-person narration lessens reluctance to self-disclose, while establishing a distance between the self and the events, fostering a certain objectivity (Medicine Story 1997).

Psychic experiences. By cultivating the spiritual technologies that transcend the five physical senses and unleash the soul’s psychic abilities, the young can receive direct revelations and strengths from the gods that point to their destiny. Such experiences take many forms, such as clairvoyance and miracu-

lous healing. “Divination,” for example, uncovers what “the divine” has in mind for us. Likewise, outer vision for physical survival needs balance from inner vision for psychospiritual growth, namely intuition. (Socrates got it wrong: It’s not the unexamined life that’s not worth living, but the unintuited one.) Destiny, then, is revealed through the psychic senses. It’s where the magic is. Magical thinking is essential to life’s meaning.

Classroom sources for “unleashing your psychic powers” are many, but I’ve found that working with auras is enough to pique student interest and introduce them to the broader field (Andrews 2002). A surprising number of students can see auras in spectacular detail, while the others often know somebody who can. Students can be asked to share this and other types of psychic experiences in essays or class discussion, with an emphasis on what broader meaning the experience may have had (e.g., a precognitive dream about missing a car ride, only to find out later that the riders had a fatal accident). They can also ask others, such as parents or friends, about such psychic experiences and their meanings.

Mentors. Special elders used to be very important for the young’s maturation, but today we see only pale imitations who are ill-equipped for the job. Few are even in the same real or fictional league as John the Baptist or Merlin. Parents and grandparents should not be mentors; they care too much about the youth’s survival and reproduction, and have too much emotional stake in the youth’s affection, to worry about destiny. Some in fact will sabotage the youth’s destiny if it seems a threat to survival, as Rose’s mother tried to do in *Titanic*. But aunts and uncles, with their familiarity and caring from kinship and their wisdom from years, can make excellent mentors. Teachers, recruitment officers, career counselors, coaches, and drill sergeants normally face too much pressure to meet recruitment, retention, and placement quotas, and to boost test scores, graduation rates, and won-loss records, to be of any deep soul use to the young. The true mentor is only invested in the soul of the mentored, because that is where destiny lies.

Lacking mentors for guidance, kids stay childish; without grownups to guide, they will not grow up (Bly 1997). The mentor leads the young to the very

depths of their souls, treating them like little adults. Mentors recognize the youth's daemon and provide both lore and special knowledge to cultivate it (Hillman 1996). They help the young find their mythic lives. Having perceived the thread of destiny in their own lives, they can tease it out in those of their psychospiritual charges (Kowalewski 2008).

No one can plan to meet a mentor, nor can anyone arrange the ideal mentor for someone else. It's the gods who bring the two together, which is why mentor and mentored recognize each other immediately and deeply as ancient prenatal companions. They have shared destinies, the mentor's destiny being to illuminate the mentored's.

Mentors are not role models. They discourage the mentored from modeling what's without, and encourage them to activate what's within. They are not in the business of birthing little clones of themselves or anybody else, but rather the mentored's unique path.

I've found that students are hungry for mentoring, since most adults they know work long hours at stressful jobs — or two or three — then "multi-task" the rest of the time. As such, the classroom comes alive when just the word is mentioned. The teacher can introduce the topic by asking students about their own mentors or lack thereof, for example by writing an essay. But by far the best way is by showing clips from films about mentoring, which together constitute almost a genre in themselves. *Titanic* is the most familiar to students, but as a love story and not a mentoring one, yet the original screenplay is far more psychospiritual than romantic (Frakes 1999). As such, the film is ideal for pointing out the value of mentors for youths. Teachers can also show three other films that illustrate excellent mentors: Mr. Miyagi in *Karate Kid*, Maude in *Harold and Maude*, and Grandfather in *Trial of Billy Jack*. Questions for discussion might include: What common life problems faced by young people did the mentors help resolve? What personal qualities did the mentors display? What methods and techniques did the mentors use? To what extent would you like to have a mentor like these and why? Which mentor did you like most and why? Is there anyone you feel called to mentor yourself? Student assignments might include performing

skits about how a modern mentor helps a youth discover destiny; conducting a random survey of other students in the school about their mentors; and asking their own guardians about their own mentors and how they helped.

Meditation. Meditation clears one's consciousness of meaningless chatter and clutter, providing a sacred space for meaning to arrive. The meditator surrenders trivial pursuits to find the big pursuit. Silence is one of the best ways to hear the gods telling us our story. Outer silence nourishes the inner one, letting us hear the gods whispering. Not surprisingly then, at the root of most spiritual traditions, time is set aside for silencing the internal dialogue.

I've taken several groups of students to a Zen Center for a day of meditation, their assignment being to sit motionless for several 1-hour sessions while counting to 10 without losing focus. The unanimous response at the end of the day was, "That's the hardest thing I've ever done!" Comments included, "My mind is a zoo!" "I never realized 10 could equal 32!" "No wonder the world is so screwed up!" Students realize forcefully that, to the extent their lives seem meaningless, their own monkey minds might be responsible.

Naming ceremonies. Modern personal names reflect the heritage and preference of secular parents, not the destiny of the sacred child. Still, we can consciously take many names in a lifetime to symbolize new meaningful stages on our path (Lame Deer 1994; Schultz 1962). When our old names no longer resonate, the gods call us by a new one (Abram became Abraham, Saul became Paul). At these times of transition, the newly named can get the reinforcement and support of the tribe every time their names are called. Re-namings facilitate course corrections.

Teachers can ask students to draw a long line at the bottom of a sheet of paper, with year of birth at the far left and the present year at the far right. Students then give a name for themselves at Year 1, then new names whenever their lives took dramatic personal meaningful turns. They can then be asked if they see a common thread running through the names. Some may wish to share their monikers and explanations with the class. The teacher may then ask students for permission to call them by their new chosen names.

Eschatology?

Today's youth see a cascade of crises on the horizon, yet they lack the psychospiritual resources to even face them, let alone remediate them. Young people seem lost, with only the weakest sense of their own unique paths of meaningful service to their tribe. "What-ever!" they say, drugged up on Ritalin and Prozac, as they rearrange their deck chairs on the ship they've been taught is sinking.

Teachers today prattle endlessly about "identity," but only about *what* students are — age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation — not *who* they are. What the young need instead is personalized purpose, initiated by the gods and initiated by the elders. In classical times, teachers appear to have actively cultivated this sense of destiny in their students, as seen in the Latin etymology, *educare*, literally *to draw out what's already there*. Good teachers *inspire* their students, and if you check that Latin etymology, *to infuse with spirit*, then teaching should be a godly quest, concerned less with purveying knowledge than midwiving destiny.

So destiny seems the godly thing to teach, a pedagogical task of psychospiritual import. Besides, the young don't want to follow the teacher's rules, just chase their stars, which is to see every situation, no matter how grim, as a chance for godly enlightenment and empowerment, an idea that should hardly be a stretch for most religious people, who claim to believe we are all made in the divine likeness.

But if children remain out of tune with their destinies and do not render gifts of service from the gods to their tribe, then it is *children* who will soon be running the world.

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Book Review

Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy: Engaging Students in Global Issues Through the Arts

By B. Beyerbach and R.D. Davis

Published by Peter Lang (New York, 2011)

Reviewed by Peggy Albers

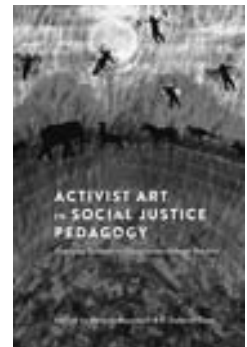
Jeanette Winterson (1995, 3) wrote, “[The artwork] had more power to stop me, than I had more power to walk on.” The arts, argue Beyerbach and Davis, do just that; they stop us and prompt us into pedagogical action with a social justice focus. *Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy* is a collection of 15 chapters that bring to the forefront issues that have enabled educators, students, and artists to engage in social justice work. They mindfully help readers understand the power of the arts to push our thinking, and engage us in important global work. Within this book is a range of stories including those that describe the photo-documentation of the lives of farm workers in Brazil and the U.S.; cultural groups who, through music and dance, stop violence and encourage change; participatory documentaries that feature and bring visibility to issues of homelessness and truancy; and open-ended interactive narratives to study such issues as racism. As the authors suggest, the intent of this book is to engage readers in thinking about how the arts can encourage deep thinking about social issues with participatory activism in mind.

The chapters in this book address a number of arts ideas within which social issues are investigated and explored by the authors themselves or by their students. Beyerbach’s opening chapter introduces various approaches to teaching social justice through the arts and situates these strategies within the remaining chapters. She suggests that by studying social ac-

tivist artists’ work, and engaging students in activist art projects, students will develop critical habits of mind (Eisner 2004) and their learning will be enhanced. She also speaks about the range of arts through which social activism can emerge from fine art to drama to film to multimedia. Across these chapters, the idea is to articulate art strategies that have worked for the authors and their students, and position readers to consider these strategies in their own classrooms. Authors situate their own art and teaching in social settings, in and out of formal classrooms, and provide ideas around which readers can better understand the link between the arts and social justice. This book conveys a rationale for why the arts are significant for studying social issues, and offers insights into how to work interdisciplinarily. The authors take up social justice issues within North and South America, describe how the arts can make these social issues visible, and offer insights regarding social justice for arts projects participants.

Most of the chapters, although of varying lengths, have recognizable organizational features. They start with an overview of the topic, followed by historical and/or sociological perspectives that situate their work within the field and within the social issues around which the chapters are written. Social issues within these chapters cut across racial and ethnic boundaries and position the arts as a way to encourage new understandings and insights. Most chapters have a pedagogical section in which authors offer advice or suggestions on how readers might work these ideas in the classroom, while others are narratives about authors’ own work as artists and its significance for global issues.

As an artist, literacy scholar, and educator, I was drawn to the title of this book and how its contents



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might inform my own arts-based social justice perspective. This collection presents rich histories of art or the art-making that inform social issues, as well as the authors' own success with projects around which social issues are explored. In this way, the book is successful: readers are offered a wealth of resources around which to build their own ideas and they can consult many identified websites that provide more guidance for their own classes and curricula. It is also significant that those who have written chapters are artists themselves. They acknowledge how the arts have shaped their perspectives on global issues, and encourage those with whom they work to engage in similar social action.

For example, Leah Russell in Chapter 3 documents her work with Brazilian favelas, or community groups in Rio de Janeiro, and in particular the role of the AfroReggae Cultural Group within these favelas. Through dance and music community activities, this cultural group has worked towards creating jobs, training, and education of favela members, and encouraging "new understandings" between rival and sparring groups, all with the intent of spreading messages of social justice and the need for change.

In classroom settings, authors describe how they have engaged students in social activist work. For example, Jane Winslow in Chapter 7 describes how her own work as a filmmaker inspired her to engage her students in the study of digital filmmaking, and to use this art form to study social issues through collaborative community participatory documentaries. For example, she describes her student's production of a promotional video about Tent City, a homeless shelter in Seattle, to raise funds and awareness about the homeless.

Although *Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy* offers ideas for how to enact social justice pedagogy, this book would have benefited greatly if the ideas for arts integration had been more explicitly described. The authors in this book tend to talk about what they did, but are less successful in showing how they worked with their ideas. Descriptive examples would offer readers stronger insights into their own integration of these ideas. At times, I was left wondering what types of projects or activities the chapter authors used to engage students fully in critical literacy and social justice pedagogy. For exam-

ple, Nordlund, Spiers, Stewart and Chicago begin their chapter with Judy Chicago's compelling story of how her artwork entitled "The Dinner Party," comprised of "numerous media, including ceramics, china-painting, and an array of needle and fiber techniques, to honor women's achievements" (p. 136), initiated a great deal of grassroots social action. Inspired by this powerful artwork, Stewart organized a one-week institute to develop a K-12 curriculum that investigated feminism and feminist art. However, the chapter does not fully describe the activities and in-depth thinking that emerged from this institute. Rather, readers are left to wonder what teachers did to engage their students in discussions on feminism and "The Dinner Party."

Kibbey's chapter is similar in the description of how one teacher infused media into her classroom. We know she did, but as readers, we are less aware of how she was able to engage her students in powerful discussions on stereotyping. Stout's chapter on larger than life portraiture, "In the Grey," is initially interesting, but the end of the chapter leaves us wondering how educators could integrate self-portraiture into their classrooms. She leaves us with a bulleted list of ideas, but little in the way of how to support this art form in classroom practice. Had the chapters in this book been a bit more explicit in how they described the activities, they would be more successful in inspiring readers to consider integrating these ideas into their own practice. Across chapters, this is a shortcoming that, without a sense of curriculum and the arts, readers might have some difficulty integrating the ideas.

On the whole, however, *Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy* is a book that needed to be written and has a place in critical pedagogy. With the arts being cut and/or eliminated in schools, Beyerbach and Davis's edited book is a demonstration of the inspiration that the arts engender, the deep understandings and critical reflections on social issues, and the activist stance that artists, community members and students can take when the arts are part of their learning. The authors in this book, artists themselves, fully recognize and have experienced how the arts have shaped their perspective and engaged them actively in social justice. Their stories beam with the energy and commitment needed in schools and com-

munities. With the disengagement of the human element in curriculum these days, as represented by the often mindless word-centric exercises that children are required to complete in schools, the authors in this book teach readers to view learning differently. This book invites us to stop and really see the arts as an impetus for social activism, deep understandings, critical thinking, and the power to change parts of our world.

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Book Review

Three Famines: Starvation and Politics

by Thomas Keneally

Published by Public Affairs (New York, 2011)

Reviewed by Alan Singer

Since 1948, the United Nations General Assembly has recognized access to adequate supplies of nutritious food as a fundamental human right. This commitment was made even more explicit for children in 1989 when the United Nations developed a Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet despite this commitment, hunger, malnutrition, and famine, the central focus of this new book by Thomas Keneally, remain pressing concerns in the world today.

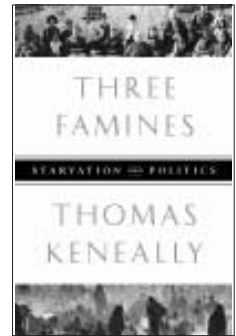
One of the reasons this book is important is that the United States has had an uneven record in this area, a record that Americans need to address. Although the United States was involved in drafting the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the U.S. Senate has not ratified the treaty because of concerns by some that it would make domestic policies subject to an international body. During the 2008 Presidential campaign, Barack Obama called this failure an "embarrassment" and promised, if he were elected, to expand the country's commitment to human rights. However, endorsing the Convention has not been a priority during his administration.

The human right to food and the need to aggressively and humanely respond to famine that Keneally develops in *Three Famines: Starvation and Politics* have received attention in New York State where I teach. In 1996, the New York State legislature voted to shift the focus of the state's social studies curriculum away from a general and diffuse commitment to studying about human diversity that was rarely given a high priority. Instead, the legislature substituted a requirement that public schools devote attention to human rights issues, particularly the right of people to food, life, and freedom. To achieve this mandate, social studies classes are supposed to include grade-appro-

priate lessons on the European Holocaust, the Great Irish Famine, and slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Because of my association with Dr. Maureen Murphy of Hofstra University, a past President of the American Conference for Irish Studies, I was fortunate to become part of the team that produced the interdisciplinary grade 4 through 12 New York State Great Irish Famine curriculum which is available online at www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/gt/gif/curriculum.html.

Dr. Murphy recruited an international team of educators and historians for the curriculum project. During one international teleconference, Dr. Cormac O'Gráda of University College Dublin, questioned why American middle school and high school students should invest time studying about the Great Irish Famine, which was barely explored in the Irish national curriculum. After considerable discussion by the curriculum team, Maureen Murphy responded in the introduction to the guide:

Perhaps the most compelling reason to study the Great Irish Famine is that hunger and homelessness are still with us; that there is want in a world of wealth. The famine's legacy has affected the psyches of the Irish and the Irish of the diaspora teaching us that distress and dislocation have long-term consequences on its victims and its descendants. The lessons of the Great Irish Famine have a claim on our fundamental humanity; they remind us that we have an opportunity to help our neighbors who face similar suffering.



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Students studying the Great Irish Famine in the context of other famines will develop a better understanding of the factors which contribute to famine in today's world and will, as a result, become actively concerned about the human right to adequate nourishment.

As part of the research and curriculum writing team, I examined the work of Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winning economist concerned with social justice. His book, *Development as Freedom*, provides much of the theoretical background applied by Keneally in *Three Famines*. Sen argues that advancing human freedom and the general welfare should be the primary goal of an economic system in a democratic society. For Sen, substantive freedom, the ability of people to live a higher quality life with adequate food, housing, medical care, and educational opportunity, as well as the process of democratic decision making, are all crucial components of a democratic society. He rejects mechanistic economic theories that ignore democratic values and promote competition to maximize private profit as the best way for a society to meet the needs of its people. He also believes famines are caused by the failure of social institutions in non-democratic societies to respond to natural disasters.

For example, he argues that the Bangladesh famine of 1974 was not caused by a lack of food but the lack of access to food when poverty was intensified by a natural disaster, in this case floods, and then the failure of officials to respond. He makes similar claims for famine in Bengal in 1943, China 1958-1961, and Ireland in the 1840s.

A major part of Sen's economic analysis focuses on widespread and endemic hunger and the recurrence of famine in the modern world since the start of the industrial era. Perhaps his most important insight is that while food shortages and hunger may be endemic in certain parts of the world, famine, starvation, and high death rates directly correlate with the absence of democracy. In non-democratic countries, including regions colonized by other governments such as Ireland in the 1840s and India in the 1940s, those in power, in both cases Great Britain, did not feel public pressure or an obligation to adequately respond to food emergencies. More democratic and locally based regimes, even in countries where re-

sources are in short supply, either respond to human needs or fail and are replaced. As examples, he cites post-independence India (a drought in Maharashtra in 1973) and Botswana and Zimbabwe where food production declined in 1979-1981 and 1983-1984 but government action successfully prevented famine.

Sen is an academic economist and his writing tends to be relatively inaccessible to general readers. Because of my interest in both the Great Irish Famine and the relationship Amartya Sen detailed between famine and the lack of democracy, I welcomed Keneally's comparing famine in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, Bengal during World War II, and in Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s. From the outset of the book, Keneally makes clear his obligation to Sen's documentation and analysis, but more importantly, for his general thesis that "No famine has taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy." (p. 7)

In *Three Famines: Starvation and Politics*, Keneally does what Sen was unable to do. He produced an important, albeit derivative, work that presents what we know about the causes of famine in the modern world to a broader audience. Keneally does not hesitate to place the blame for famine in the modern world on the "mindsets of governments, racial preconceptions and administrative incompetence," which were in every case "more lethal than the initiating blights, the loss of potatoes or rice or livestock or of the grain named teff." (p. 6)

Rather than presenting each case study separately, Keneally alternates between the three famines throughout the book. While this leads to some repetitiveness and confusion, this structure helps the author highlight similarities between the events, their causes, and government responses. He starts with chapters on the causes of food shortages, including droughts, agricultural pests, and war, and explores how affected people cope with the initial problems. A major focus is on the individuals he identifies as the villains in each of the crises. Next he examines the effects of famine, disease, death, and migration, and he concludes the main part of the book with extended discussions of relief efforts in each area. A final chapter briefly describes similar food-based catastrophes in the Soviet Union, China, and other parts of Africa during the 20th Century and first decade of the 21st.

One of Keneally's major points is that while famines have "natural triggers," hunger, starvation, and death are the result of human action or inaction. In this he echoes John Mitchel, a member of Young Ireland who challenged British dominion over Ireland in the 1840s. In *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*, Mitchel wrote

No sack of Magdeburg, or ravage of the Palatinate ever approached the horror and dislocation to the slaughters done in Ireland by mere official red tape and stationery, and the principles of political economy.... *The Almighty sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine.*

Other important contributions are Keneally's discussion of the problem of mono-agriculture as peasant societies try to adapt to new market demands; the ways traditional coping mechanisms and beliefs can actually interfere with the mobilization needed to prevent famine; the long-term health problems that arise in populations experiencing food shortages; and the need for outside relief agencies to exercise care and respond to local conditions. His discussion of Ethiopia explores problems that successful revolutionary movements can face when they consolidate authority and attempt to rule.

However, while I agree that governments, especially democratic governments, can perform better in response to natural disaster, I am not convinced by either Sen or Keneally that democracy is always a sufficient solution. Witness the inadequate response by the Bush administration in 2005 to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, especially in the Ninth Ward, which was in the shadow of an antiquated levee and had a large, poor, African-American population. In Ireland, between 1700 and 1840, the population increased from approximately 1.5 million people to over eight million, a large part of which was dependent on potato mono-agriculture for sustenance. It was a demographic disaster waiting for a natural trigger. A more responsive government could have provided faster and more effective relief, but the imbalance between population and environment would have remained until the next disaster struck.

While this in no way excuses the British government for its inadequate humanitarian response, bu-

reaucratic inflexibility, and ideological rigidity, the Irish were fortunate that the potato famine occurred at the same time as the Industrial Revolution and they had the ability to migrate to growing industrial centers in England and the United States where they settled, found work, and built new lives. Part of the problem in Bengal in the 1940s and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s is that there was no escape valve. Starving people were not welcomed in already hard-pressed cities or in neighboring countries. They certainly were not permitted to resettle in the United States or Western Europe.

There are major weaknesses in the Keneally book. Thomas Keneally was trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood as a young man and he cannot contain moral outrage when discussing villains in the eternal battle between good and evil. His self-righteous religious tone often mirrors the language of British bureaucrats when they blamed famine on divine action and the lazy poor instead of their own policies and used it to justify the inadequate government response to natural disaster that transformed it into a human catastrophe. His case is strong enough on its own without the vituperative language.

An even bigger problem is that Keneally's search for individual villains detracts from what would be a much more scalding and useful critique of exploitative social, political, and economic systems. In Ireland, Keneally blames Charles Trevelyan, the administrator of the British relief effort who never visited Ireland during the famine (pp. 62-70); in Ethiopia it is Haile Marriam Mengistu (pp. 115-126), whom he describes as a murderous and psychotic dictator (p. 120). Keneally finds it more difficult to place blame for the starvation and death in Bengal because local British bureaucrats actually tried to address food shortages. As a result, the villain becomes Winston Churchill and the World War II wartime cabinet that stymied relief efforts they believed interfered with their primary objective of defeating Japanese forces threatening British hegemony in South Asia. Keneally needed to at least introduce a critique of capitalism, imperialism, and globalization.

Just as food shortages in Bengal became a famine because of World War II battles between the British and Japanese, the famines in Ireland and Ethiopia were also very much part of broader global eco-

conomic transformation. Between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I, peasant populations were being forced off of traditional landholdings and out of their villages across Europe as farms were consolidated, agricultural production was rationalized, and production shifted from support for the local population to supplying urban markets for profit.

At the end of the book, Keneally looks at what he calls other 20th Century food-related "catastrophes" (pp. 285-302) in Russia, China, the Sahel region of Africa, and Zimbabwe as the government became more autocratic in the 1990s, but surprisingly ignores events in Cambodia and Haiti and the impact of the U.S.-NATO War on Terror on Islamic countries. He also barely mentions potential social collapse in Southern Africa where large parts of the adult population are infected by HIV/AIDS, a health crisis that could develop into a food crisis as more and more producers are unable to work or care for each other.

However, the biggest failing of the Keneally book is that it lacks a conclusion. While Sen systematically develops the case for democratic economic development that includes substantive freedom from the irrationality of the market, ideologically driven solutions to practical human problems, and state interference with or neglect of fundamental human rights, Keneally is satisfied with documenting horrors and generating outrage. A powerful narrative would have become a much more effective manifesto for change if Keneally returned to Sen's work at the end of the book and included a final chapter on the ways scientists, multinational organizations such as the United Nations, religious groups, and democratic governments can promote policy solutions, social reorganization, and global action that will preempt the conditions that could produce future famines.

The New York State Great Irish Famine curriculum is actually a good example of how this can be addressed in schools as well as in global deliberation. Its final section focuses on the legacy of the Great Irish Famine. It includes lessons on famine in India, Somalia, and other parts of Africa and involves students in evaluating relief plans and developing proposals that use the study of history to expand awareness of hunger today. Among other things they examine are the power words and symbols to mobilize people to combat hunger and prevent famine in the future.

I believe public discussion of books like Keneally's and the use of curriculum packages such as this one in our schools are vital steps if the human race is going to learn how to take preemptive measures that restore the environment and protect human life. A series of articles in *The New York Times* recently reported on the melting of Arctic permafrost caused by global warming. This is a particularly worrisome phenomenon because it could lead to the release of long buried deposits of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere further warming the planet.

During the 2011 Republican Party Presidential nomination debates, Texas Governor Rick Perry challenged the idea that "that man-made global warming is what is causing the climate to change." Perry may be right, although I, along with 98% of the scientific community, doubt it. However, what Perry and other global warming deniers fail to address is that whether global warming is caused by human action or not, climate changes are real and threaten human populations with a series of natural disasters, shifting agricultural production zones, and widespread famine far beyond the levels described by Keneally in this book.

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Book Review

Awakening Creativity: Dandelion School Blossoms

by Lily Yeh

Published by New Village Press (Oakland, CA 2011)

Reviewed by Fang Wu

Awakening Creativity is a book that documents an artist and activist's journey into the heart of China, where she helped transform a school for the children of migrant workers in a village located in the suburbs of Beijing. Yeh has also worked in the "badlands" of North Philadelphia, PA, in a village of survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as well as in many other countries, which could all serve as a prelude of the Dandelion School Transformation Project in China.

Lily Yeh was born in mainland China, brought up in Taiwan, and educated both in Taiwan and the United States. In her search for a spiritually "dustless world" (p. 15), where she could retreat as an artist, Yeh found home in the abandoned dusty land of North Philadelphia. There, Yeh co-founded the Village of Arts and Humanities, and for eight years this non-profit organization transformed hundreds of empty lots in the city into parks and gardens, and became a national model for urban revitalization. From Philadelphia, Yeh set off on a "barefoot" journey that expanded into the global communities of Rwanda, Ecuador, Haiti, Ghana, Kenya, Syria, and Italy. As she states in her book, her mission was simple: "bringing beauty to places in need." By using broken places as her creative canvas and people's life stories

as her pigments (p. 21), Yeh made art live — not only in the neighborhoods but also in the heart of their people.

In 2006, a school in China became Lily Yeh's next mission. With the country's economy booming, much of the focus in Chinese society has been on the rich and the richer. Rarely anyone was willing to acknowledge the other side of China where, behind the glorious spotlights cast on the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Expo, lies poverty and social injustice. Those who migrated thousands of miles from their remote homeland; those who left their young and elderly behind to look for a better life in big cities; and those who, earning a few dollars a day, constructed the high-rise buildings, swept the streets, grew vegetables, and provided domestic service to the city people, are generally neglected and forgotten. But not by Lily Yeh. In 2006, Yeh came to the Dandelion Middle School, the only non-profit school for the children of migrant workers in Beijing. Armed with canvases, paints, broken tiles, and boundless creative ideas, Yeh was determined to transform the school into a more habitable place for the students, teachers, and parents, and an inspiring cultural center for the forgotten community. She wanted to build a place where the children of low income migrant workers could flourish along with their peers who had residential status in the city.



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Yeh opens her book with a brief review of the path that she traveled in becoming an artist. Influenced by Chinese paintings dating back more than a thousand years, the 15-year-old Yeh enjoyed the traditional way of learning to paint by modeling the ancient masters' work and creating her own art pieces within the boundaries of the past. Her life changed during the 1960s when Yeh attended the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania. There, she was awakened by the "wild, experimental, explosive, and

cutting-edge" art scene in America (p. 13) which drastically transformed her way of making art. As Yeh recalled, "[C]oming in contact with modern art in America shook to the core my understanding of art, its purpose, value, and relationship to society" (p. 15). It was that shift that sent Yeh on her journey of revitalizing communities with art around the world. In addition to being an artist, Yeh has become a community builder, a humanitarian worker, a peacemaker, and an advocate for social justice.

As she described her work in China, Lily Yeh brought me to a neighborhood that even I, a Beijing native, had not been to. Photos of makeshift vegetable greenhouses, a muddy pig sty, a trash collecting station, and low dwellings made of broken bricks with cement tile roofs set the backdrop of the Dandelion community in Daxing County. Less than 30 kilometers away from the heart of Beijing, where Tiananmen Square is located, Daxing County is one of the settlement places chosen by the migrant families for its relatively low cost of living and high hopes for opportunities to thrive. Lily Yeh visited several families in a village in Daxing and learned about their lives as migrant workers. Each family has endured its own hardship in the past and is still facing challenges for survival on a daily basis. Some of their children were fortunate enough to be admitted to the Dandelion School, others were hanging at the school gate excluded from the enrollment roster for violent conduct, and all face an unpredictable future.

A poem in the book, written by a girl who had experienced domestic violence, a broken family, an alcoholic parent, and uncertainties caused by the family's multiple migrations across China, deeply moved me. The girl wrote on a self-portrait: "Although I am a puppet, I do have a soul. Although I am a puppet, I do have a dream. I urgently need you, my friend. I am like a dried-up river, waiting for the falling rain" (p. 33). It is a voice of a child who is desperately crying out for help and rarely gets a chance to be heard. As I read stories like this I felt as grey as the gloomy Beijing sky, not polluted by the waste of traffic or coal-burning furnaces, but dimmed by inequality and injustice. However, Lily Yeh does not leave her readers depressed by these stories. Some of the images she included, such as the Dandelion children in uniforms doing morning exercise in a school

yard or a family of three with a new harvest in their hands and gleams of happiness in their eyes, told me that these migrant families and their children remained hopeful despite the harsh reality.

Lily Yeh describes in great detail how she approached the project by engaging and involving the entire Dandelion community. In order to accomplish her goal, Lily Yeh took a humanistic approach. She started by awakening teachers' and students' self-pride, self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth. She encouraged them to find their inner selves. She showed them endless possibilities that had never been available to them, and she spurred everyone, teachers and students alike, into action. The chapter headings in this book provide the reader with a clear chronology of the process: "Meet, Listen, Inspire, and Explore" in 2006, "Discovering the Creativity Within" in 2007, "Teamwork, Leadership, and Re-Creation" and "Developing Awareness Locally and Globally" in 2008, and "Preserving the Experience, Sustaining Transformation" in 2009. Through these chapters Lily Yeh documented her five years of efforts to awaken the Dandelion School community.

The impact of the Dandelion School Transformation Project is stunning. Yeh collected many photos of the school both before and after the project. From a deserted old factory courtyard that no passerby would pay much attention to before the project, to a vibrant, colorful, and energetic school after its completion five years later, the dramatic transformation of the school environment impressed everyone.

More than a physical change of the campus, the project also transformed the people and the school community. The principal is proud of the uniqueness and beauty of the school; the teachers appreciate their livelihood and the therapeutic effect they sense simply by being on campus; the students "enhanced their ability to imagine and take action" (p. 180), the newly enrolled students behave better because they are proud of being a Dandelion student; and the school itself, by marketing the high quality arts and crafts that grew out of this project, has become financially stable. This kind of change is sustainable and it will help the school flourish after the project ends.

Lily Yeh has transformed one school in China, but she hopes that the same kind of change can be brought to more schools in any impoverished com-

munity. As Yeh wrote in the preface, “[M]y intention in writing this book is to share my experience and offer my methodology to people who are interested in doing similar kinds of work” (p. 8). In the final chapter entitled *Methodology*, Yeh uses a tree diagram to lay out her requirements for a successful project which include needs, vision, plan, and implementation. Each of these components, just like a tree branch, has many extensions that will grow and stretch out with the right timing and resources. It is an “Organic Design” (p. 192) where the needs of a community serve as the roots of the “tree” from which the “branches” will grow. The “leaves” of each tree, then, will be different, fulfilling different needs. Yeh believes her organic design can be replicated, “not so much in its form, but in its intention and methodology” (p. 192). Nevertheless, any future project should be guided by the same two principles: “awaken creativity from within” and “school-wide participation.” It is the belief in people and the actions taken by the entire community that generate energy for the project and empower everyone who is involved.

Awakening Creativity is filled with lively photos, beautiful artwork, and inspiring stories told by the author, the students, and the teachers of the Dandelion. Even before I opened it, I was struck by the bold colors on its cover, an image from the first mural designed by Lily Yeh for the Dandelion schoolyard. It is a tree of life full of beautiful flowers and lush green leaves, incubating a dandelion plant with countless tiny, snowy white, feathery seeds at its root. This tree genuinely reflects the spirit of the school, where children of migrant workers with unearthed roots and unlimited growth potential might find protection, stability, and comfort.

When I read the book I felt a special connection to the people it depicted. I do not know Lily Yeh personally, nor was I familiar with Yeh’s work; however, China, Chinese history, Beijing, education, school, creativity, children of migrant workers, social justice, and human rights are subjects that I have keenly cared about since leaving China 28 years ago. As a Beijing native, Lily Yeh’s book brought me home, but *Awakening Creativity* contains a wide array of elements for almost any reader. One who enjoys vibrant colors will be attracted by the countless pho-

tos and paintings created by Yeh as well as by the students and teachers of the Dandelion; one who is interested in Chinese art history will find herself submerged in the rich art patterns, forms, and styles represented in the bronze artifacts, clay roof tiles, wall paintings, or folk art dating as far back as the third century BC; one who cares about China’s “invisible” population of migrant workers and their families will be deeply moved and encouraged by Yeh’s stories, photos, and student drawings and writings about their own journeys from a remote hometown to the big city; and one who believes in social equity and justice will be inspired by Yeh’s approach of cultivating belief in democracy and freedom at the very bottom of a society. As a Chinese idiom says, in a good book “a benevolent person sees humanity, an intellectual sees wisdom.” *Awakening Creativity* belongs to that category.

Lily Yeh is a visual artist, but she also writes as a poet with rhythm and narrates like a storyteller with dramatic appeal. A few times I had to put the book down to distract myself from the children’s sad stories, but it did not take me long to reopen it and read on because I wanted to know what changes the project brought to them. One of the techniques Yeh used to revitalize the school was creating giant mosaics with broken tiles and mirrors on the school buildings and gate. The mosaics symbolized the project. Little by little, through revealing their inner selves and freeing their minds, Yeh helped children at the Dandelion piece together a broken childhood, and find hope. “When fragments are made whole, beauty returns.” (p. 191)

I would be remiss in this review if I did not “migrate” myself and the readers of this review from the ideal to reality. As much as I admire Lily Yeh’s efforts for bringing new life to an old factory building for the children of migrant workers, and as excited as I am to see that schools like the Dandelion exist in China, I must also speak the truth about the tens of thousands of children of migrant workers. According to the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, as of 2011 there were 433,700 school-aged children of migrant workers in the city. More than 100,000 of these children were enrolled in private schools for the children of migrant workers. However, most of these private schools could not be

granted a government permit and are, therefore, operating illegally. Nearly 30 such schools were shut down or demolished during the most recent wave of “reorganization” of private schools for the children of migrant workers in September 2011. Schools that survived the raids lack qualified teachers; many school buildings are deemed uninhabitable; and learning conditions for students are minimal compared to those in public schools in the same area. Because of the city government’s strict control, a great number of the children of migrant workers are not eligible for free compulsory education alongside the children of city residents in public schools. There are three options left for these children: to pay an unaffordable amount of tuition to continue basic education in a public school, to be separated from their parents and returned to their hometown for schooling, or to simply drop out. Understandably, thousands of children are forced into the third option.

The 630 students at the Dandelion School are fortunate because they are enrolled in a school that is supported by the city government, NGOs, and the international community. They are fortunate because they have artists, activists, and volunteers like Lily Yeh to bring much needed change to the schoolyard and, more importantly, to the minds of the students, teachers, and school officials. Dandelion School is a showcase of what is possible for the children of migrant workers whose roots were pulled prematurely from their land of origin. The Dandelion School Transformation Project demonstrates that, with proper nourishment, these children will be able to re-root in a new land, and thrive. I hope that this project, and the book, will function as a “rock into the pond, sending ripples through people’s minds and hearts in ever expanding circles” (p. 203), bringing much needed change that expands well beyond one or two schools.

The dandelion has always been one of my favorite plants because of its simplicity, versatility, and adaptability. The name of the Dandelion School inspires me to envision hundreds of thousands of tiny, snowy white, feathery seeds drifting in a gentle breeze, seeking the earth where they can “put down roots and live on” (p. 39) with hope and happiness. I wish that all children in China, regardless of their social class, family background, and homeland origin,

will have a fine school to go to, just like the students at the Dandelion.