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Neurotheology, Education and the Transformative Experience

Dewey, Huxley, and the 1960s

Ronald L. Zigler

The search for spiritual awareness and transformation is an eternal human quest that has encompassed traditional religious practices and even drugs to induce altered states of consciousness.

In *A Common Faith*, John Dewey addressed the significance of broadly conceived spiritual experience, which he believed makes an important contribution to our lives by enhancing a host of meanings and values that ultimately should be “integrated into our normal social relations” (Dewey 1934, 70). Unfortunately, Dewey noted ironically “that religions now, prevent, because of their weight of historic encumbrances,” the spiritual quality of experience from “coming to consciousness and finding the expression that is appropriate to present conditions, intellectual and moral” (Dewey 1934, 9). This problem he predicted would be remedied through scientific inquiry that would one day liberate spiritual experience from these encumbrances and in doing so, make this domain more accessible.

In the 1950s, Aldous Huxley pioneered yet another route toward liberating spiritual experience from the trappings of history, religion, and culture. In his essays *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley attempted to examine his own chemically induced visionary experiences. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Huxley’s interpretation of his mescaline experiences shaped the attitude of a generation of seekers who, like Timothy Leary and the Beatles before them, followed Huxley’s example in an endeavor to foster that transformative experience which is said to lead to spiritual enlightenment. More than 50 years later, the proper context in which Huxley’s educational and cultural legacy may be assessed has begun to emerge.

This paper constitutes both an assessment of this emerging context as well as a personal reflection on the legacy of Huxley and his unwavering enthusi-

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asm for the role of psychedelic drugs like mescaline and LSD in the cultivation of spiritual transformation. As someone who became immersed in a quest for higher states of consciousness during the 1960s, I took a somewhat different route from those who followed Leary's advice too literally and thereby turned on, tuned in, and then dropped out of the conventional world of ordinary reality. Rather, I was inspired by the need to bring some measure of rationality to this dimension of human experience, which often appears impervious to reasonableness. Hence, I stayed in college, graduated, and even went to graduate school. Notwithstanding my modest efforts over the past 30 years, I believe the endeavor to appreciate Huxley's legacy has only now begun to fully emerge after 50 years of scientific research on altered states of consciousness. Indeed, because of recent advances in neuroscience, Dewey has also been proven correct in predicting that our understanding and appreciation of spiritual experience will eventually be illuminated by science — making those experiences, in Dewey's words (1934, 87), "more widely accessible and more generously shared." Huxley agreed with these sentiments, and this accounts for his enthusiasm for the potential role of psychedelics in fostering a personal, transformative experience. But, his enthusiasm did not blind him to the formidable challenges in advancing this goal, which occupied the remaining years of his life.

Psychedelics and Education

Even before Huxley, William James acknowledged the significance of chemically induced altered states of consciousness following his own experiences with nitrous oxide. James's experience compelled him to observe "that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness ... is but one special type of consciousness." For this reason he concluded that no account of the universe in its totality could be final which ignores these other forms of consciousness. For James (1958, 298) these experiences "forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality."

Unfortunately, the subsequent influence of behavioral and Freudian models of psychology did lead to a "closing of our accounts" with this important dimension of human experience. One reason for this is

that the research tools for studying human consciousness remained feeble throughout much of the 20th century. The impact of what James called our "rational consciousness" has been to elevate one special mode of consciousness to a status it does not deserve. This is not to suggest that we should abandon rationality and embrace some irrational Emotivism, but rather we need to supplement our rational powers through the systematic cultivation of the other realms of consciousness alluded to by James and more fully described by Huxley.

Huxley's personal interest in the use of psychedelics to access other realms of consciousness was a direct consequence of research that emerged in the early 1950s. Huxley was an avid follower of many fields of scientific inquiry, but what especially caught his attention was the work of Dr. Humphrey Osmond, an English psychiatrist conducting research on mescaline in Canada. Unlike most in the field of psychiatry, Osmond was among the early researchers who felt that substances like LSD and mescaline held more significance for psychological research than simply as "psychotomimetics" — drugs whose influence is such that they mimic madness. (Stevens 1987, 24). Rather, Osmond noted the potential of these substances for studying the unconscious mind.

Primed by his earlier wide reading in psychology and religious experience, Huxley immediately grasped the implications of Osmond's research and embarked on a correspondence with Osmond that ultimately led to Huxley's ingestion of mescaline in his California home. Yet, even before his first mescaline experience, Huxley specifically addressed the potential significance of these substances for education. In Huxley's estimate, the fundamental problem and challenge of education was how to "make the best of both worlds" — the world of our ordinary waking, rational consciousness and that realm of experience by which we gain "intimations of immortality" (Huxley 1969, 668-669). In one of his early letters to Osmond prior to his mescaline experience, Huxley (1969, 669) asks:

Is it too much to hope that a system of education may some day be devised, which shall give results, in terms of human development, commensurate with the time, money, energy and

devotion expended? In such a system of education it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to “taste and see” what they have learned about at second hand, or directly but at a lower level of intensity, in writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters and musicians.

Huxley’s initial experiences with mescaline did not disappoint him. However, it must be noted that he acknowledged that he did not quite encounter all that he had expected. The early experience he documented underscores the fact that while there are common denominators to these experiences, which are shared by most people, there are also idiosyncratic features to the psychedelic encounter (Huxley anticipated more visual hallucinations that would be present while his eyes were closed — a feature which, by contrast, nearly always distinguished my own experiences). Huxley invokes the central common denominator to the psychedelic experience by referring to a theory advanced by the French philosopher Henri Bergson: that for most of us, and for most of our lives, our brain and nervous system serve principally an *eliminative* rather than a productive function; as a result, the unique function of psychedelics is to help the mind bypass the “reducing valve of the brain” and thereby allow us to experience expanded realms of consciousness, realms that afford us a deeper, albeit non-verbal sense of meaning to even ordinary experience. Consequently, our so-called normal consciousness reflects a reduced level of awareness — reduced to the mundane, utilitarian datum necessary for carrying out the daily tasks of acting in our world; but it is a world that largely obscures the profound aesthetic and ontological element, which is an important part of the human endeavor to extract deeper meaning from our lives. In contrast, the psychedelic voyager is filled with a deep sense of meaning to even the most ordinary experience. Ultimately, I believe this experience threatens most institutionalized authorities, whether religious or political, since in some strange, miraculous way, the universe and all of creation is experienced as a perfect unified whole that can be neither diminished nor enhanced. In my estimate, the threat that psychedelics have posed to our culture is less

about driving people mad, and more about their role as a sort of chemical Socrates “corrupting” youth by inspiring them to question the fundamental assumptions which underlie our social, political, religious, and academic institutions.

In *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley began to address the educational concerns that would occupy his non-fiction writings for the remainder of his life. First and foremost was his observation that “every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born.” (Huxley 2004, 23). This linguistic tradition, the core value transmitted by our educational system, constitutes the accumulated records of *other people’s experience* which, when transmitted in our schools, has the effect of confirming for the student the belief that reduced awareness is the *only* awareness. In effect, the development of the student’s full awareness and a capacity to fully perceive our ordinary world is totally neglected. In its place we substitute an education that overvalues words and frequently worships conventional notions, whether those “notions” are political, religious, or philosophical (Huxley 2004, 36).

At this time, Huxley (2004, 76) began to advocate the idea of non-verbal education or what he also termed education in the “non-verbal humanities.” For Huxley, an education in the non-verbal humanities is one that involves teaching students how to cultivate their perceptual skills and to assist in training their awareness so that they may experience the world more fully. The idea of an education that addresses the non-verbal humanities expresses Huxley’s belief that the verbal humanities, alone, are not the humanizing force that advocates suppose they are. On this account, Huxley viewed psychedelics like mescaline and LSD as vehicles to shake us “out of the ruts of ordinary perception” so that we may more fully experience for “a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world.” This, Huxley (2004, 73) concludes, “is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual.” Without this experience, education remains predominantly verbal and, as Huxley (2004, 74-75) writes,

therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out stu-

dents of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else's.

In making these observations, Huxley was not naïve about the challenge which he set before educators and our culture. He was well aware of the fact that those who advocate cultivating our perceptual skills are often dismissed by the "Pharisees of verbal orthodoxy" as "cranks, quacks, charlatans and unqualified amateurs" (Huxley 2004, 77). Indeed, as someone who moved from experimenting with psychedelics to experimenting with meditation in 1969, I have personally encountered these attitudes at our academic institutions.

What then, was Huxley's plan for transforming our culture through the introduction of psychedelics? He recognized and anticipated many challenges and much resistance to the kind of changes he wished to foster. To some, Huxley's plan seemed elitist, since his goal was initially to introduce these experiences to those who occupied various leadership roles in our society. At the same time, Huxley also recognized the importance of pursuing scientific research on psychedelics. It was this common interest in scientific research on psychedelics that brought Huxley and Timothy Leary together in 1960. While the relationship between these two men was warm, cordial, and filled with mutual respect, Huxley became alarmed at the kind of publicity that Leary and his colleagues were getting by 1962. In a letter to Humphrey Osmond at the end of that year, Huxley wrote: "I am very fond of Tim ... but why, oh why, does he have to be such an ass?" (Bedford 1974, 335). Huxley believed these substances needed to be approached "delicately and respectfully" under the proper conditions and supervision. In contrast, Leary had already begun to generate troubling publicity that would ultimately get him kicked out of Harvard. Unfortunately, on November 22, 1963, (the date of Kennedy's assassination) Huxley died in his California home, under the supervision of his wife Laura who, at Huxley's instructions, and under the supervision of a physician, administered two doses of LSD intravenously in the final hours of his life — in effect, playing out an end-of-life script

which he had described in his final novel *Island* published a year earlier.

It is difficult to determine what the 60's would have been like had Huxley lived longer. Without a doubt, this period of time unraveled out of control and in a way that Huxley would have deplored. Leary's misconceived efforts to democratize the psychedelic experience, so that everyone might have access to it, accomplished two things: first, it unquestionably led to an unprecedented number of people who shared a profound experience of the inner dimension of life — many for the better, but some for the worse. Secondly, Leary's conduct led to the placement of LSD and similar drugs on a list of banned substances, effectively ending for many years, any legitimate scientific research on these chemicals and their influence on the brain and human consciousness.

Huxley was keenly aware of the potential pitfalls and challenges of drug use that could undermine and discredit the endeavor to introduce psychedelics in our culture. For one, he pointed out that even the literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors which may overwhelm those who come, too suddenly, face-to-face with some manifestation of life's most profound mystery (Huxley 2004, 55). So too, substances like mescaline, psilocybin, and LSD may not only foster positive experiences that enrich an individual's life, but they may also terrify — sometimes momentarily, but at other times the terror can last much longer. Huxley (2004, 55) accounted for this terror by pointing out that, in theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between a man's naïve egotism and what is described as the "divine purity" of a cosmic revelation of life's most profound meaning. Indeed, medical science has documented cases in which individuals reported these terrifying encounters while under the influence of such substances. These "bad trips" can become living nightmares, and in the 60s led many psychedelic voyagers to hospital emergency rooms. It is now acknowledged, as Huxley himself did, that the psychedelic experience is particularly problematic for unstable or anxious personalities even under favorable conditions, but especially in uncontrolled settings. Unfortunately, the publicity generated by these negative experiences over-

whelmed the many positive experiences — even those that had been documented by researchers in the early years of psychedelic research.

While research on psychedelics was officially stopped by 1970, even Huxley would have predicted that this ban, alone, would not end research or interest in altered states of consciousness. This is because he believed that there is a deep-seated urge for self-transcendence within everyone — a need, which can be misdirected but not eliminated. According to Huxley, properly directed “upward transcendence” always marks a positive experience, which expands our sense of identity with mankind and nature (Huxley 1999, 27).

In retrospect, the viability of continued scientific research on the quest for this upward form of transcendence was made possible by the popularization of meditation during the late 60’s and early 70’s. Huxley had recognized meditation as a component of the non-verbal humanities; and, given the total ban on psychedelics, the popularity of meditation provided researchers with a significant population of subjects upon which they could conduct their research. Among the researchers who have made significant contributions in recent years to our understanding of meditation and transcendence as neurological phenomena, is Andrew Newberg, a University of Pennsylvania neuroscientist who has begun to delineate a field of study, neurotheology, which was first identified by Huxley (2002, 167-172). Huxley defined neurotheology as the study of what is happening in the brain while you are having an experience of transcendence. The emergence of neurotheology today may finally alter how we think about the mind, the body, and the environmental conditions under which human life can optimally flourish. Indeed, this research may now provide the foundation for reimagining education and our schools in a manner Huxley would have strongly endorsed by virtue of linking science to the non-verbal humanities.

Neurotheology and Education: A Conclusion

When Huxley invoked the idea of the brain as a “reducing valve” in order to explain the effect that mescaline played in expanding our consciousness, he was, of course, only making an analogy. At that

time, neuroscience was in its infancy. The subsequent development of increasingly sophisticated research tools from the electroencephalograph to single photon emission computed tomography has allowed researchers to study brain functions with growing degrees of sophistication.

Following his studies of subjects engaged in a number of spiritual disciplines from prayer to meditation, Andrew Newberg has developed a profile of the brain while it is engaged in increasingly profound levels of transcendence. Overall, Newberg suggests that the subjective experience of transcendence involves the systematic activation of our brain’s anterior cingulate, which appears to be the source of our potential for love, compassion, and a mystical sense of unity with mankind and nature. This activation appears directly related to our capacity to bring the usual internal dialogue of our highly verbal left hemisphere to a close, while maintaining a state of restful alertness.

To underscore his point, Newberg even cites the experience of Jill Bolte Taylor, another neuroscientist who has written an account of her experience with a crippling stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain. Her book, *My Stroke of Insight* (2006), is a remarkable account of the subjective and objective dimensions of her experience, her recovery, and her endeavor to learn from it. Most notable from my perspective, was her description of her subjective experience when her stroke damaged and dramatically reduced the activity of her brain’s left hemisphere and thereby silenced the verbal, discursive, reductionistic thinking that often dominates our waking moments. The experience she subsequently described features all of the hallmarks of the intense, life-altering psychedelic encounter that distinguish an LSD experience, including the awesome sense of unity and bliss that appears to characterize all of creation. Newberg cites Taylor’s experience favorably, indicating it supports the notion that we all have a potential to experience the world in this way without undergoing the trauma of a brain-damaging stroke. His brain-scan research underscores the idea that these transcendent experiences are possible for healthy brains and is part of a neglected dimension of the human potential (Newberg and Waldman 2009, 59).

When Dewey addressed the generic features of spiritual experience in *A Common Faith*, he emphasized that these experiences often have the effect of creating a positive adjustment in life, an adjustment which “lends deep and enduring support to the process of living” (Dewey 1934, 15). Subsequent research on meditation has verified Dewey’s observation. Today, researchers on meditation widely recognize that one meditates not necessarily to access a profound, abstract, ontological sense of meaning; but to reduce stress, strengthen the immune system, and manage high blood pressure; as well as improving mood and enhancing our overall sense of well-being. These findings support Dewey’s opinion that when we cultivate spiritual experience, we promote a positive adjustment in life, an adjustment which lends deep and enduring support to the process of living. In recent years, some schools have even adopted a more holistic approach to physical education that moves beyond a model centered on competitive sports towards a focus on health and wellness in which yoga, tai chi, and meditation play a role. These schools illustrate the fulfillment of Dewey’s prediction and the application of Huxley’s vision of the non-verbal humanities. Currently, however, these programs remain the exception, not the norm.

Nonetheless, additional promise for fulfilling Huxley’s vision has re-emerged from a field of research that had been practically silenced for decades: research on psychedelic drugs like mescaline and psilocybin. The *New York Times* on April 17, 2010 reported that renewed research on psychedelics has begun to focus on the treatment of depression in cancer patients, post-traumatic stress disorder, addiction, and end-of-life anxiety (April 17, 2010). In view of the positive results reported in this research, we cannot rule out the possibility that in the future, we will once again have (legally) at our disposal a chemically induced option for shaking us “out of the ruts of ordinary perception.”

In the final analysis, neurotheology may provide a basis upon which we may finally fulfill the task John Dewey set before us in *A Common Faith*; namely, to liberate the spiritual quality of experience so that it may find expression that is more appropriate to our contemporary intellectual conditions, and therefore

render these experiences more widely accessible and more generously shared.

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Silence in Progressive Teaching

Paul T. Corrigan

Periods of silence in the classroom can help students really listen to what they are studying and what they are saying about it.

The issues facing us on all fronts are nearly apocalyptic in scope: ecological destruction, sectarian violence, economic injustice, and oppression related to gender, ethnicity, class, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. With these realities in mind, Richard E. Miller (2001, Cover 4) asks:

What do the humanities have to offer in the twenty-first century? Are there compelling reasons to go on teaching the literate arts when the schools themselves have become battlefields? Does it make sense to go on writing when the world itself is overrun with books that no one reads?

Many progressive teachers and scholars, perhaps particularly younger ones, including myself, would fervently answer: *yes, of course!* In fact, the theme of a conference on politics, poetry, and pedagogy that I recently took part in would do as a response to Miller: *Anything but Silence*. Indeed, if we look, say, at Edvard Munch's famous painting *The Scream* and consider that things aren't all that much better now than they were a hundred years ago when he painted it, we might conclude that even *screaming* is a sane enough reaction to the mess the world is in.

Writing, speaking, and teaching in resistance to the things that are wrong with the world are bold and essential tasks. Scholars and teachers have long resisted injustice through breaking the silence on oppressive systems and ideologies. On the whole, we have much to show for our work. In addition to critical perspectives on class, race, and gender, we have ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, disability studies, to name only a few. However, sadly, these movements have not in themselves ended the problems they address. They have not in themselves, say, fully given voice to the voiceless.

So Miller's questions are worth lingering with, without rushing to answer. "Does it make sense to go



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on writing ... " and speaking and teaching? Miller's (2001, 136) own working answer is to look for balanced, sustainable ways of teaching. He suggests a "pragmatic pedagogy" "grounded" among other things in "compromise." Such an approach may not vibrate with as much energy as a call for "anything but silence" but will probably prove to be more effective in the long run. So in line with Miller, I want to suggest that we do indeed need to continue to write, speak, and teach but that we also ought to consider spending some time being silent. I want to suggest, paradoxically, that we can help those without a voice to come to voice and come to voice ourselves better through a proper use of silence than with no silence at all.

Facebook, for instance, offers the world all speech and no silence. Last year the social networking site boasted that it had more than 500 million active users, that the average user had 130 "friends," and that there were more than 60 million status updates posted each day. Facebook has accomplished something absolutely unprecedented in terms of providing people, including many who are oppressed and silenced, with platforms for public speech. But this wonderful, unimaginable wash of language from all corners of the world has not produced parallel achievements in justice or authentic voice. Most things that are said on Facebook are trivial and worthless. Many things that are said there are even harmful. This is not to denigrate the important role that Facebook has played in recent uprisings in the Middle East. Though the networking site certainly *can* and sometimes *does* facilitate meaningful interactions for those who use it for such purposes, on the whole, wisdom put into words in such an environment drowns in the din.

Our schools and universities also inundate people with language. Of course, academic language generally operates at a much higher level than Facebook. Instead of status updates, invites, comments, and pokes, we have classes, books, articles, and conferences. The "Anything but Silence" conference alone was awash in words. In 2004 the *Library Journal* reported that there are just under 50,000 scholarly journals. In all, this amounts to millions of peer-reviewed articles and thousands of millions of words. But the rub is that these words may or may not have a posi-

tive impact. These words may or may not increase justice and compassion in the world. These words may speak what needs to be heard — or they may drown it out. So even though we must continue to dialogue, we have to be careful not to talk ourselves into the idea that we can talk justice and peace into the world.

More and louder language does not necessarily mean deeper connectedness among people or greater voice for the oppressed. As Toni Morrison (1993) points out so nicely in her Nobel Prize lecture, language does not inevitably lead to goodness, truth, justice, and freedom. All words become noise when there are too many of them in too small a space of time. We are submersed in such noise almost all of the time. This noise does not make us freer, more whole. Noise complies with *silencing* more than silence does.

Noise works to drown out the authentic speech that could otherwise come out of silence. In fact, the silencing of those without voices is usually a noisy process. This is most obvious when advertising and the other sounds of consumer society drown out voices that desperately need to be heard and when guns, billy clubs, and tear gas are used to silence protesters. But, more subtly, education can also become part of the noise of society. Without room for silence, the language in our classrooms risks being reduced to just so much more noise in our and our students' already cacophonous lives.

None of what I am saying is intended to negate the importance of what has been accomplished through language or what we do with language on a regular basis. Instead, I want to suggest some ways of moving forward through language *and* silence.

There is a kind of silence absolutely different from the *silencing* of the oppressed. This is the silence practiced by poets, political activists, spiritual seekers, and contemplative pedagogues, like David Kahane (2009), Henri Nouwen (1991), and Parker Palmer (1993). Gandhi wrote and spoke prolifically. One of the most effective political activists of all time, he accomplished significant strides for justice in India. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* is one hundred volumes long, over 50,000 pages. But Gandhi's strength and effectiveness came not only from his words but also from his silence. Every week, he

spent a whole day in silence. I'm suggesting that we too could integrate something of this kind of silence into our writing and into our classrooms.

When our words fail to bring peace and justice to the silenced, silence can permit us to join them at a deeper level; silence can allow all of us to be changed and to come to voice more freely, more authentically, and more effectively. Silence can punctuate what has been said, allow us space to absorb it, and allow us to move beyond it. Silence can welcome the silenced to speak. Silence can help us realize the limits and proper uses of language. Silence can cut through the constructs that we are fed and that we feed ourselves. Silence can take us out of the "prison-house of language." As Albert Nolan (1985) suggests, silence can help us through the necessary disillusionment with language that is part of the process of maturing as persons and as scholars, educators, or activists. Speech that comes out of the depth of silence comes out *with* the depth of silence. As the spiritual writer Henri Nouwen (1991, 49-50) says, "Words can ... create communion and ... new life when they embody the silence from which they emerge." Many of the most poignant forms of language — the parable, the haiku, the sayings of wise women and men — are words that have "emerged from silence" and "return to it."

Most of us are addicted to noise. Even one minute of silence in a classroom or at a conference can produce palpable discomfort because we aren't used to silence. But we can grow out of this addiction.

Three Ways of Integrating Silence

I want to suggest three ways for us to integrate silence into our work and lives as scholars and teachers. I have put each of these into practice and found each sustaining for myself and my teaching, particularly in those instances where too much injustice can lead to despair, too much work to burnout, or too many words to numbness.

First, we can adopt silence as an *epistemological value*. This simply has to do with remembering the limits of language, the limits that literary and cultural theorists have already helped us to realize.

Second, we can incorporate silence into our scholarship as a *personal academic practice*. We can work moments of silence into our reading and writing pro-

cesses. So often the academic norm is to aggressively probe the object of study. But if this characterizes our whole relationship with a text or artifact or set of data or group of people — whatever we are studying, then we run the risk of doing all of the talking, ignoring what the text or artifact or data or people might be able to say to us. By taking moments of silence, we can learn to really listen to what we are studying and really listen to what we are saying about it.

Third, we can incorporate silence into our teaching as a *classroom practice*. We can work moments of silence into our lectures and discussions. The most practical instance is to wait after asking a question to give our students time to think and respond, as opposed to answering the question ourselves only seconds after we ask it. If teachers become comfortable in these silences, students can feel comfortable and feel welcomed to participate. We could also offer short periods of silence, say a minute, or even thirty seconds, after looking at some text or specimen or case study, before beginning to speak about it. The academic norm in the classroom is to fit into the allotted time as much content as possible, but by taking time for silence, we can teach our students to really listen to what they are studying and really listen to what they are saying about it.

A Classroom Reading Activity

To illustrate this last point, I end this essay by presenting a version of a classroom activity that I often do in my literature courses. The final scene of James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues" takes place in a jazz bar in Harlem. The band is playing. In part, the story is about music, an art form that occupies space between language and silence. For the story to mean anything for us, for it to have any impact, for it to do something for justice, voice, compassion, and even love, for it to do what it was written to do, for it to take part in what we work towards, we must first hear it, *really hear it*. Silence can help us listen.

In the classroom the activity proceeds like this: I read a selected passage out loud several times. Between readings I pause generously in silence. Sometimes I ask students to point out particular words or phrases that stand out to them or to share brief personal or aesthetic responses. The silence creates

space for the language, and the language frames the silence. I invite readers to take time to re-create this activity for themselves by reading aloud the following passage from Baldwin's story (1965, 103-141).

The first reading:

Then Creole [on the saxophone] stepped forward to remind them that what they were playing was the blues. He hit something in all of them, he hit something in me, myself, and the music tightened and deepened, apprehension began to beat the air. Creole began to tell us what the blues were all about. They were not about anything very new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.... [Sonny was playing the piano.] It was very beautiful because it wasn't hurried and it was no longer a lament. I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, and what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did.

Now, a moment of silence, followed by the second reading:

For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard.... It was very beautiful because it wasn't hurried.... Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did.

Again, a moment of silence, followed by the third reading:

[W]e suffer ... we are delighted ... we may triumph ... it must be heard ... beautiful ... it wasn't hurried ... listen ... be free

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The Cure is the Disease

Peter Berger

Nationally mandated educational reforms are not only ineffective, they are making our problems worse.

Back before public education became a crisis — and yes, there was such a time — the poet Virgil wrote a story about his hero Aeneas. The *Aeneid* is an epic filled with gods, heroes, battles and some pretty serious problems, like how to escape from Troy with your father on your back and later conquer Italy.

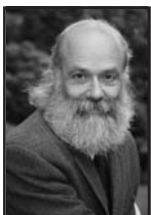
Anyway, toward the end of his tale, Virgil includes a line that is familiarly translated, “The cure is worse than the disease.” A closer translation renders it, “The disease worsens with the treatment.”

Most of the time public education lacks the drama of a descent into the Underworld. Nevertheless, Virgil’s observation perfectly suits American education reform. Reform treatments have typically prolonged and worsened our academic disease, except for those all too frequent cases where it’s impossible to tell the difference between the reform treatment and the disease.

If you don’t read Latin, it’s tough to follow the original *Aeneid*, but even though reform programs are written in English, it’s not so easy to figure out what the reformers are talking about. Unlike Virgil, who calls his hero Aeneas throughout the story, education experts like to keep us guessing by changing the names of their reforms.

For example, after their theories first failed in the 1970s, they offered to solve the problem they’d created by repackaging the same bankrupt ideas as “restructuring.” After their grand plan proved disastrous under that alias in the 1980s and 1990s, reformers licked their wounds for eight equally bewildering Bush years before roaring back with the same bankrupt nonsense, rechristened this time variously as the “reinvention” and “transformation” of education.

You can’t discuss the current education mess without including No Child Left Behind. This landmark federal legislation, enacted by the same Congress that levies taxes and declares war, and duly



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signed with fanfare by the President, somehow made it the law of the land that all American students would be academically proficient by 2014, a mandate that makes as much sense as a healthcare law that makes it illegal to be sick.

NCLB breaks each school's scores down into subgroups according to race, income, gender, and learning disability. If only one subgroup in a school fails to make "adequate yearly progress" toward 100% proficiency, the whole school is designated a failure. We could discuss whether that's a reasonable definition of failure.

We could discuss the embarrassing unreliability of the standardized tests used to determine which schools succeed or fail, or the lag time common between when students take the tests and schools receive the scores.

For example, Vermont's statewide NECAP test is given in October, but schools aren't told the results for months, sometimes not until the following school year. Last year's scores were released in May, which meant that schools had two months — June and September — to implement changes before the next October's tests. Those scores are then reported the following spring as evidence of another year of failure.

We could discuss the dubious premise that students with learning disabilities must meet the same standards as students without disabilities. Even though a learning disability means you have significant trouble learning, schools still "fail" if learning-disabled students score lower than the benchmark set for students without disabilities. How officials can be surprised when learning-disabled students score lower than students without disabilities is beyond me.

We could discuss how often schools fail because their low-income students' scores are low. No, income doesn't dictate academic success or failure. I've known plenty of kids who qualified for free lunch who were good students, and plenty of affluent kids who weren't. But while it's neither destiny nor an excuse, low-income children statistically tend not to do as well academically. It's ridiculous to expect schools to alter a reality that society can't.

We could discuss how NCLB's focus on low-performing students has compromised the education that top- and middle-achieving students receive. Post-NCLB international PISA math exam data show

"significant declines" for the nation's "highest achieving students."

We could discuss how people who don't actually teach ignore these awkward questions as they make careers decreeing pipedream solutions they don't have to implement.

But let's put all that aside for a moment. Let's look at some proposed treatments.

One middle school in trouble because its free-lunch kids scored too low has developed a "plan" to "improve student performance." Beginning next year, seventh and eighth grade recess will be cancelled and class periods will be eight minutes longer. Except instead of meeting every day, core academic classes, like math, English and science, will meet only four times a week, for an actual net loss of 16 minutes in every subject every week.

In place of the lost academic classes, all students will take a "mandatory" daily "study skills and tutorial class" to provide "extra help," whether they're one of the kids who needs it or not. And just in case you're worried about the kids' missing recess, which I'm not, "students may be allowed to go outside during their tutorial."

A "persistently low-achieving" high school adopted a typical "transformation plan" that required firing its principal. In addition to designating a scapegoat, the school will be "developing a more comprehensive system to use testing data," which might make more sense if the data produced by the tests meant something in the first place.

Teachers will also be offered more "professional development," which usually involves somebody who doesn't teach coming to your school to tell you how to do what they've never done. Unfortunately, it's tough to pass along expertise if you don't have any.

Another high school, after firing its principal, "revised" its schedule so students can "take yearlong courses rather than on a semester basis," an innovation billed to provide "greater continuity in learning." The punch line behind the jargon here is it means officials intend to fix the school by dropping block scheduling, the innovation that's still being touted by experts as the cure for schools where learning allegedly lacks continuity.

Officials are also considering “contracts” for parents that “spell out the support role that a parent is expected to play.” Try enforcing them.

Reformers and officials insist that public schools “require wholesale transformation, not just minor tinkering.” Then they endeavor to treat the disease with platitudes, meaningless tests, unenforceable contracts, and sleight-of-hand rescheduling.

Their cures make us sicker. Because the heart of our disease is our refusal to accept that learning is hard, that it often isn’t fun and that lacking will, effort, and family support, each of us is nearly certain to fail.

Our disease will worsen with the treatment as long as we refuse to treat the real disease.

Creating a Context for Teaching and Learning

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

Context, preferably one that students can personally relate to, is essential for learning to be real and lasting.

Events do not happen in a vacuum, but in a social, political, cultural, and economic context. The important thing is to craft your own worldview [as a context] to guide your work, ideas, relationship and contributions to society.
(Megatrends 2000)

One of the most disastrous consequences of our almost total reliance on fragmented thinking is the tendency to ignore context. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the analytical methodology of science breaks complex wholes into simple, discrete component parts. It then proceeds to study and assign a precise meaning to, i.e., define, each part. Implicit in this methodology is the assumption that meaning is inherent in the self-evident parts that can be encapsulated in the assigned definition. A tree is a tree is a tree, and a maple tree is always and only a maple tree. By definition, a tree can be nothing other than tree. With the introduction of the scientific/technological system of belief, definitions became increasingly important and, in time, have come to dominate not only our understanding of things but also our perception of things. Like blind men exploring an elephant, we tend to see things in terms of their defined qualities — as separate, discrete entities, complete in and of themselves. Wholes are perceived as being nothing more than a collection of individual parts. A forest is nothing more than an aggregate of individual trees that happen to be growing in proximity. Implicit in this perspective is the assumption that the whole is equal to a sum of its parts. Larger meanings can be discovered only by first understanding the parts and then incrementally reconstructing the whole.

And so teachers continue to present facts as isolated building blocks of knowledge and treat each

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Ed passed away in the summer of 2010, and as a tribute to him and his unique contributions to this Journal, ENCOUNTER is proud to republish, in quarterly chapter-length installments, his book, *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A Student-Centered Approach*.

academic discipline as though it were a discrete body of knowledge. One high school student wryly summarized the present curriculum:

English is not history and history is not science and science is not art and art is not music. Art and music are minor subjects and English and history and science are major subjects. A subject is something you "take." When you have "taken" it, you have "had" it, and when you have "had" it, you are immune and need not take it again. (Postman and Weingartner 1969)

In science students still learn the scientific method as an "objective" methodology that can be used to solve problems by isolating the variable. This strategy is much like isolating a single frame of a motion picture and assuming that you understand the plot of the film and can solve the mystery from it. In short, virtually the entire teaching/learning process to which students are exposed reinforces the illusions of separateness and objectivity. As a result, students soon begin to believe that the world really is this way.

On the other hand, systems thinking recognizes that because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, no single discrete entity can be fully understood apart from the complex whole of which it is an integral part. The whole provides the context without which our knowledge of the part is necessarily limited. To return to our example of the tree and the forest, while a tree can be described with detailed precision, our understanding of a tree will always be limited until we can study it in the context of its habitat, the forest or meadow ecosystem to which it belongs. In short, systems thinking is contextual thinking. It recognizes that without a context, meaning is truncated and incomplete.

Creating Contexts of Meaning

Futurist Willis Harman (1988) defines context as the meaning connection. To design a curriculum is to create "contexts of meaning." Because most textbook authors, curriculum committee members, and teachers don't think contextually, the context they create is

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

unpremeditated and almost accidental. The result is most often a curriculum that is, to use Leslie Hart's phrase, "brain antagonistic." Thus, it is important for the teacher who is designing an integrated curriculum to understand what it means to create contexts of meaning.

To do this, it is first necessary to recognize the significance of context in our daily lives. Although we seldom think about it, events never occur in a vacuum but in a cultural context consisting of a complex network of social, economic, political, and ecological influences and relationships. It is these relationships and not the events themselves that enable us to make meaning out of our experiences. In the words of Thompson [see inset below] team leader Chuck Robinson, "The context is what is becoming most important and kids then have ownership. They no longer ask 'Why do we do this?'"

Although we may be unaware of it, we are constantly receiving contextual feedback, i.e., information, vis-à-vis these relationships. Again, whether we are aware of it or not, this information both informs and forms us (Wheatley 1992). This information is the context that frames and thus provides meaning to the daily events of our lives. Although we are seldom aware of it, we are intuitively scanning this context as we continually monitor it for meaning.

The pragmatic quality of context is reflected in the experience of Thompson math teacher Mary Pat Ryan. Her team leader, Lin Stacey, was introducing his seventh grade science class to the use of data. He explained to his students that one way to display the data was by using a circle graph or pie chart. Mary Pat immediately recognized a teachable moment for introducing students to the concept of a circle. Her voice rang with enthusiasm as she shared this experience with her colleagues:

It took me no more than 10 minutes to have everyone in class understand the idea of multiplying the percentage times 360 degrees. In other years I would spend two or three days on that topic and then be frustrated at how many students still did not understand the concept. Here, in less than a class period, everyone knew and could use the knowledge. Why? Because it was important and meaningful to them. They had a context for learning.

To create a context means that, either deliberately or inadvertently, we take something out of its given context, in this case, a textbook example, and replace it with our own context of meaning. In so doing, we literally change the meaning. Rather than accepting someone else's interpretation that is implicit in the original context, we provide our own interpretation of events.

This is particularly relevant to our modern society where — to use John Naisbitt's mixed metaphors — we are "drowning in information and starved for knowledge." Because of information overload — much of it sterile trivia — it is perplexingly difficult to try to interpret for oneself the vast amounts of data that inundate us. Given our extraordinarily busy lives, it is seductively simple and far less complicated to accept the interpretation of events — the "spin" — created by those who make and report the "news." By controlling not only what we are allowed to hear — which may include deliberate disinformation, e.g., the 1991 Gulf War (PBS, Frontline, January 9, 1996) and the 1994 Health Care Plan (Carlson and Hey 1994) — but how it is interpreted, those in power (the ubiquitous "they") promulgate their own "contexts of meaning." This is the way thought control works. By shaping the way we think they are able to manipulate our decisions.

Recognizing the danger of this kind of thought control, John Naisbitt advises that "the important thing is to craft your own [context] to guide your work, ideas, relationships, and contributions to society." He warns,

Without some context as a frame of reference you won't know what to look for; what information will be most useful to you; what information will answer your questions. As a result, not only will the vast amount of data that comes your way each day whiz by you, but you will spend your time answering their questions and thinking the way they want you to think. (Naisbitt and Aburdene 1990)

In short, unless you have your own clearly defined frame of reference you won't know whether everything is relevant or whether, as Joseph Heller's more mature Yossarian observes, "Nothing makes sense and neither did everything else."

Kurt Anderson addresses the increasing significance of context at Thompson:

The principle of context has truly been the driving force of change in our building. Understanding that when there is no context, there is no meaning, has caused faculty members in and across teams to question all that they do. Consequently, what used to be a traditional study of Europe in Dan Kroll's seventh grade geography class has been transformed into a multi-disciplinary, collaborative investigation of the question, "Why can't the European nations become the United States of Europe?"

Four Contextual Relationships

There are four fundamental relationships that shape any given situation. These four relationships are fundamental in two ways. First, they are global in that they incorporate all other relationships. Second, they are ubiquitous so that to overlook any one of them is to neglect a significant and relevant facet of the situation.

The four relationships are:

- *The Subjective Context: Our relationship to ourselves and others.* Here we recognize and express the subjective and participatory nature of knowledge, experience, and reality.
- *The Time Context: Our relationship to the past, present, and future.* Here we recognize and learn from the historical, developmental, and evolutionary perspectives.
- *The Symbolic Context: Our relationship to the world of information and knowledge.* Here we recognize the significance of ideas, symbols, and metaphors in shaping our thoughts and actions.
- *The Ecosystem or Global Context: Our relationship to the physical world.* Here we consider our experiences of physical reality, the biosphere, and the global ecological systems.

If teachers — and hopefully, students — are to consciously and deliberately create contexts of meaning, it is important to understand the nature of these four relationships and how they influence the ways we think and live in the world.

The Subjective Context

The focus of the Subjective Context is on two relationships: our relationship with ourselves and our relationship with others. To begin with, we must recognize that all of our perceptions of the world are filtered through subjective lenses — our preconceived maps of reality. Our minds literally won't let us see what doesn't fit these mental maps. While some people may wear rose-colored glasses, our lenses come in as many diverse hues as there are people. Although the illusion of objectivity — that there is one "right" way to see things — is deeply embedded in our thinking, we must remember that while it may be useful at times, it is an illusion. Because of these subjective mental models of the world, in a very significant way, we create our own reality — a reality that is expressed through our opinions, biases, prejudices, values, and most importantly obviously, through our actions. We can no more shed our subjective perspectives than we can shed our skins. What we can do is to identify them, lay them on the table, acknowledge their influence, and then hold them as tentative pending new insights, knowledge, and information. Because our mental models reflect certain basic assumptions about how the world works — assumptions that for the most part are culturally ordained — they can be examined and, if one so chooses, replaced with other assumptions that more nearly reflect personal choice.

One has only to study the pattern of family relationships in diverse cultures to recognize that our relationship to other people is also culturally ordained. For example, the nuclear family is a recent Western cultural construct. So, too, is the assumption that the good of the individual is the highest good and the "common good" is contingent upon satisfying competing, individual self-interests. Any study of comparative cultures makes it clear that whether one is predominately competitive or cooperative is more a matter of cultural inheritance than genetic DNA. This means, of course, that we have a choice as to how we live in relationship with others. I believe the time has come to acknowledge that because humans are fundamentally social creatures, community — not the individual — is the basic ontological unit of human society. Since we are rational beings who can make conscious choices, it may be time for to relearn

the rules and skills of living in community. The first and most pragmatic rule of community living is familiar to us all; we call it the Golden Rule: treat others the same way we want to be treated. What is left unsaid is that when we live this way, we find that others are willing to live this way as well.

Chuck Robinson's eighth grade team at Thompson decided to have the students spend a week exploring "Who am I?" The concluding activity was to be a series of cardboard sculptures illustrated by personal memorabilia, e.g., pictures, banners, toys, and other objects that reflected facets of one's "self." To demonstrate the activities, the teachers prepared their own sculpture and presented it to the entire team of 125 students. The experience was a deeply moving one as teachers used many personal items and shared personal experiences that, just a year ago, they never would have considered. As a result, students followed suit. In Chuck's words, "Boys shared teddy bears and girls shared dolls." In short, the activity became a powerful experience in team sharing and bonding that included not only students but teachers as well.

Thompson's Jan Sutfin also provides us with another example of how subjective issues find their way into a learner-centered curriculum:

The issue of prejudice became the focal point during the winter. In trying to define or put meaning to the word, one student stated that she "was prejudiced against popular kids." I used this as an opening to expand the context of a single student's experience by asking if others ever felt this way. Soon others shared their prejudices, some of them even acknowledged that they had prejudice against themselves. Soon the students, without further guidance from me, began to recognize how jealousy, envy, fear and hate were related to their feelings of prejudice. By the end of the discussion, everyone agreed that the root cause of prejudice was fear. By this time it was clear that all of the students had a real understanding of prejudice and its implications in our culture.

The next day one of the students came into class and said, "Mrs. Sutfin, I had the neatest thing happen yesterday. My friend and I talked about

God and whether God was black or white or man or woman. And what it would be like and if it made any difference. It was a real neat talk. We never talked that way before. It was really neat."

Jan concludes, "Trust these kids. They are capable of a lot more than we have given them credit for in the past."

To summarize,

In the subjective context we recognize the subjective nature of human knowledge and experience, focus on individual responsibility, explore the value implications when making decisions, and emphasize the individual in community. (Goetz and Janz 1987)

The Time Context

The focus of the Time Context is on our relationship to the past and to the future and how we integrate these two perspectives into our personal and collective present. Conventional wisdom has always drawn heavily on the past — traditions, historical precedents, personal experience — for guidance in making good decisions for today. While we tacitly acknowledge the presence of some future possibility, for the most part, our views of the future are shaped by the past. As I have already suggested, the tendency to see the future in terms of the past is particularly troublesome when it comes to our collective future. Thus, we assume that problems like poverty and war are part of the inevitable nature of things. While there is much to learn from the past, when it becomes the primary criterion for action, we are doomed to repeat it.

Jean Houston points out that ours is the first generation in history with the benefit of the full sweep of human experience — from the earliest human almost three million years in the past to time beyond the furthest scope of human imagination. Given this evolutionary perspective, Marilyn Ferguson reminds us that "our past is not our potential. Where we are going is more important than where we have come from." In short, the time has arrived when the future must become the primary context for making the decisions that will shape not only our lives but our children's lives to the seventh generation. It is

with this perspective in mind that professionals in the field of organizational transformation (Senge 1990; Wheatley 1992; Hawken 1994; Korten 1995) place so much emphasis on the role of vision in organizational and social transformation.

During the annual residential outdoor education program at George Williams College on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Thompson sixth graders had an opportunity to expand their understanding of the Time Context by interviewing members of an Elderhostel program. Immediate feedback from both the students and the Elderhostelers alike made it clear that for everyone this cross-generational experience had been a huge success. Students heard first-hand what it was like to live through different times, such as during the Great Depression, and to grow up in different circumstances, e.g., on a farm. In teams, students were later able to explore and share their experiences by creating a book telling the tales they had heard through poetry, stories, cartoons, advertisements, flip books, and other inventive illustrations. One team even made a doll depicting their senior friend and videotaped their re-creations of the stories that they had heard. This two-month contextual process culminated with the mailing of copies of the book (including a photograph of each interview taking place) to the Elderhostelers.

To summarize,

In the Time Context we explore our relationship to time and change, incorporate an evolutionary perspective on time and change, and incorporate the historical perspective and the future perspective. (Goetz and Janz 1987)

The Symbolic Context

The focus of the Symbolic Context has several dimensions. This is the arena of human thought where we explore the ideas, knowledge, and symbols that inform and thus form us, making it possible for us to understand the world and communicate with each other. Here we become aware of the degree to which language as symbol creates and configures both what we think and the way we think, which in turn prefigures and thus shapes our actions. Because of the precision of our language, patterned as it has been by the scientific perspective, we have a tendency to mistake our symbols for

the reality that they represent. Ken Wilber (1981) explains our dilemma:

Our problem is that we create a conventional map, complete with boundaries, of the actual territory of nature which has no boundaries, and then thoroughly confuse the two. As Korzybski and the general semanticists have pointed out, our words, symbols, signs, thoughts and ideas are merely maps of reality, not reality itself, because "the map is not the territory." The word "water" won't satisfy your thirst. While it is fine to map out the territory, it is fatal to confuse the two.

Language not only reveals what we think, it shapes the way we think as well. For example, I used to believe that becoming fluent in a new language was only a matter of substituting unfamiliar grammar and syntax for the familiar grammar and syntax of my own language — essentially a word-for-word correlation. I now realize that people who speak different languages actually think differently so that learning grammar and syntax is only the first step toward fluency.

For example, when I was conducting a workshop in Mexico I found that Mexicans seldom ask direct questions. They seemed to wander around and finally came in through the back door so subtly that I often wasn't sure whether the question had been asked and if so, what it was. I soon learned that, for them, the way to ask a question is to first create a context for the question. I began to suspect that English — where definitions are precise and distinct — may be the only language that is not implicitly contextual. Chinese and Japanese, for example, are highly contextual languages; the context is implicit in the visual images projected by the ideograms. In Navajo and other Native American languages, distinctions that are so important to us — such as those between "mind" and "body" — do not exist. As a result of these differences, Native Americans think differently than Anglos — a source of much misunderstanding, confusion, and suffering.

Finally, the Symbolic Context, which I used to call the Information Context, focuses our attention on the way we use information, the amount of information we require, and the ways we organize information

for the purposes of communication. Unfortunately, one of the great illusions of the so-called information age is that more information results in better decisions. Thus, we assume that the way to change people's minds is to bombard them with more information. If they haven't learned to create their own context as a frame of reference to help them select the information that will answer their questions, much of it will whiz by them and they are likely to end up victims of someone else's thought control.

Thompson sixth grade social studies teacher Doug Lakin describes how one of his students used the same information that everyone else had to reach his own reasoned conclusion, a conclusion that moved beyond the either/or nature of the question. As the closing activity in a study of ancient Greece, his class conducted a debate on the relative merits of living in Sparta or Athens. Teams gathered their data, prepared their presentations, listened to their fellow students, and then wrote their personal conclusions. While most students picked Athens as the better city in which to live, Steve wrote:

I have no opinion on this matter. Each city-state had a different purpose and focus. It is seemingly impossible to compare two things that have nothing in common. I do feel, however, Sparta was a less complete city-state than Athens. Athens had a good balance of education, politics, and warfare. Sparta was all warfare. They gave no thought to education. They only cared about winning wars and being the best, and in the end, they ended up getting crushed anyway. That's dumb.

To summarize,

In the Information Context we emphasize concepts, integration, and connectedness; emphasize a systems approach to selecting, organizing, and processing information; incorporate the use of higher-order skills in addressing questions; and focus on the quality of information rather than the quantity. Different information means different things to different people. (Goetz and Janz 1987).

The Ecosystem Context

The focus of the Ecosystem Context or Global Context — the fourth contextual relationship that

informs and, thus, forms us — is our relationship to the physical world. Here we confront our relationship to the natural world — ranging from flowers and birds to the air we breathe and the food we eat. Here we also come face-to-face with our relationship to the manmade world of computers and automobiles, oil spills, and nuclear weapons. It is here that we are able to explore the nature of the infinite network of relationships that connect the two worlds of nature and culture. Rather than being two separate systems that interact at specific points, e.g., forests and oceans, the reality is that human culture is inextricably embedded in a vast network of interlocking, interdependent ecological systems of air, water, and soil that sustain all life on earth. One consequence of our embeddedness in this dynamic, systemic network of relationships is that everything we do makes a difference.

The Ecosystem Context is where I experience the external, physical limits within which I encounter reality. Because the Earth's ecological systems — which we euphemistically call “the environment” — provide the air, water, food, and shelter that are absolutely necessary for life, they are literally the life support systems of the planet. As such, they represent very real and pragmatic limits upon which our collective survival depends. From this perspective, the Earth ecosystem provides us with the “big picture” context that shapes and will ultimately determine the success or failure of life on earth.

Although in one way or another these ecological realities pattern and govern everything we do, most of us are totally ignorant of them. The irony is that this ignorance is a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to World War II, most Americans lived in rural environments — as did most of the world's people. As a result, humans were far more familiar with and sensitive to ecological realities than we are today. Now, compounding the potential damage created by or resulting from our ignorance of these fundamental principles, we have the technological capability for massive ecological destruction such as that being perpetuated in the Amazon rainforests and, though to a lesser degree, in our own country. Fritjof Capra (1993) reminds us that “our ignorance of ecology is one of the root causes of the economic and social crises of our time.” To refer to this contextual relationship as the Global Context is to be reminded of the

global nature of these interdependent systems and the dilemmas that threaten their integrity.

When Ruth Ann Dunton's sixth grade students at Thompson were asked to suggest laws that would govern a society dedicated to global cooperation, their answers demonstrated that sixth graders are perfectly capable of understanding the ecological constraints and global implications of living in today's world. After much discussion in their cooperative teams, the class came up with the following list.

- No pollution.
- Only ten trees per person can be cut in any given year. And when a tree is cut down it is replaced by two others.
- Only police can have guns.
- Animals can be killed only for food, never for fun.
- All garbage must be recyclable and recycled.
- No smoking.
- No racism.
- No homeless people.
- No deadly auto exhausts.
- No one with more power than anyone else.
- Equal justice for everyone.
- No one is illiterate.
- No more manufacturing of nuclear weapons.
- Wars are outlawed.
- More equity in the tax laws.

Even third graders can understand some of the implications of the Ecosystem Context. Following a district-wide workshop that I conducted on systems thinking, third grade teacher Ellen Smith introduced her students to a study of wind and air. Each student made a paper globe as a starting place for learning how wind and air circulate. This led into a broader discussion of various forms of pollution and concluded with the insight — demonstrated in a concrete way with their paper globes — that “there is no such place as away.” By the end of the study, all of the students had gotten their parent's agreement to start home recycling programs.

To summarize,

In the Ecosystem Context we emphasize a global perspective; recognize limits; stress the ecological concepts of interdependence, diversity, change, competition/cooperation, adaptation, cycles, and energy flow; and stress the organic nature of Planet Earth and all its systems, including cultural and knowledge systems. (Goetz and Janz 1987)

Designing a Contextual Curriculum: Seven Characteristics

Context is only one feature of an integrated curriculum. Before I discuss the remaining elements, it will be helpful to look at how the various components of an integrated curriculum fit together. Figure 4-1 provides a “big picture” overview that can be used as a conceptual blueprint. First, it identifies the seven elements that I consider to be basic to an integrated curriculum. Second, it suggests a step-by-step design strategy that will be particularly useful for the first time curriculum designer.

The first three “steps” of the process are philosophical. Without this theoretical context, the steps that follow become just another rather elaborate way of organizing information. However, because there is nothing more practical than a good theory, these initial stages may well be the most important in the entire design process. Each of these stages has been discussed in depth in the previous chapters.

The next three steps are actual “design” stages where teachers begin to identify the context of a topic by an appropriate use of concepts and questions. The final component is not really a stage at all because the learning community may already be in existence when the decision is made to integrate the curriculum. For example, at Thompson Middle School, several of the grade-level teams have already developed many of the characteristics of a learning community prior to their first curriculum integration workshop. In this case, the learning community provided the soil within which the integrated curriculum was able to thrive and flower. However, for other schools and classrooms, the curriculum design process itself may be the means by which learning communities come into being. The important point is that by its very na-

ture, a learner-centered integrated curriculum will be embedded in a learning community.

Before I discuss each of these seven components, I want to make one final comment about the blueprint in Figure 4-1. It is important to remember that any linear process has its inherent limitations. Once one has fully embraced the philosophical/theoretical context described above, designing a curriculum is a dynamic, systemic process that calls for greater flexibility and adaptability than is possible with linear, step-by-step procedures. In Chapter Seven I describe the dynamic nature of this process as it was used with one of the teams at Thompson Middle School.

1. *An integrated curriculum begins with an assumption of “the connectedness of things.”* As I have already noted, this elemental assumption is essential to our understanding of the integrated curriculum. With-

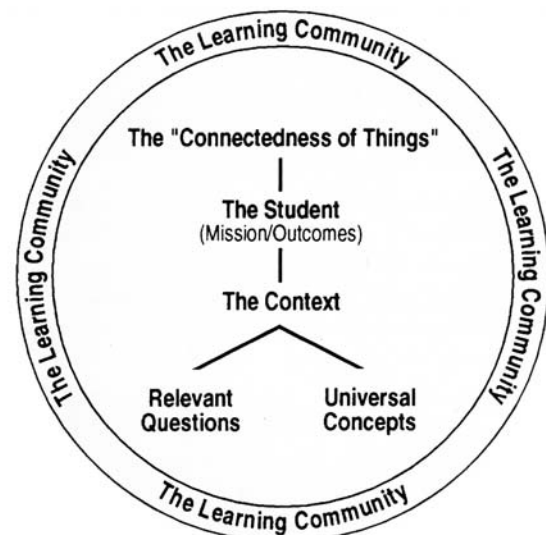


Figure 4-1
Designing and Integrated Curriculum

out an appropriate philosophical context, any efforts to redesign the curriculum will fail. As has happened so many times before, the sheer force of custom and inertia will prevail and things will return to the status quo.

2. *An integrated curriculum is learner-centered.* Learning is “meaning-making.” In order to create meaning, we are constantly making connections, identifying patterns, and organizing bits of knowledge, experience, and behavior into meaningful wholes. However, while I can share *my* thoughts, *my* ways of putting ideas together, *my* meaning — as I

am doing through this book — I cannot create meaning for anyone else. In the end, each of us as learners must create our own meanings. We will do this by making our own connections, by identifying the patterns and relationships that make sense to us, and then organizing the ideas in ways that satisfy our needs and goals. Genuine learning comes only when I stand at the center and take ownership of the process.

3. *An integrated curriculum is mission-driven.* The goal of learning — expressed as a mission statement — represents the vision, the dream, the ultimate objective. This mission serves as both a lodestar and an inspiration, providing both direction and motivation. It should go without saying that the mission must honor the centrality of the learner and reflect his or her real-life needs.

4. *An integrated curriculum is contextual.* To conclude the discussion above, I will only note here that when I use the term context I am referring to the frame of reference that provides meaning. When there is no context, there is no meaning. Facts presented as they are in most schools are essentially meaningless. Their only practical value may be in a friendly game of Trivial Pursuit, or to pass a test — that is, a not-so-friendly game of Trivial Pursuit. If learning is to be meaningful, it must incorporate context.

5. *An integrated curriculum focuses on relevant questions.* Context is created and explored through questions and through concepts. In Chapter Five I will focus on “questions worth arguing about.” These are essential questions that are relevant to the life experience of the learner. While traditional curriculum too often seeks to answer questions no one is asking, an integrated curriculum focuses on the learner’s questions that reflect real-life interests.

Questions are designed to focus attention on the four contextual relationships discussed above. Using the various subject areas as resources in service of a central Focus Question, the contextual questions provide horizontal integration, that is, integration among the various subjects. The primary criterion for selecting the contextual questions to be explored is their relevance to the focus question.

6. *An integrated curriculum is framed by a set of universal principles and concepts.* Concepts also reflect context. In Chapter Six I will suggest a set of universal concepts that are relevant to all subject areas and

can be used as a cognitive framework for learning more detailed information in any of these areas. Because of their widespread relevance, these concepts become powerful bridges across which ideas, principles, and experiences learned in one area can be adapted and applied in many other areas — the transfer of learning. These concepts can be revisited over and over again, each time with increased insight and meaning.

When these universal concepts are used to frame the curriculum at several grade levels simultaneously, they provide vertical integration, or integration across grade levels. This is the basis for the so-called spiral curriculum, where the same concepts are explored in many different contexts, year after year.

7. *An integrated curriculum is shared by a “community of learners.”* According to indigenous wisdom, it takes a village to raise a child. In like manner, it takes a community of learners to educate a child — or an adult. Community, however, requires more than proximity. Just because teachers and students spend six hours a day together, doesn’t make them a community of learners. It is difficult for classrooms and schools that give priority to competition, individual achievement, and personal success to generate a genuine sense of community. The need to design schools and classrooms as authentic learning communities may be one of the most pressing needs in education. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

Having identified the systemic process by which one can design an integrated curriculum, it is instructive to look at the primary attributes that characterize an integrated, learner-centered curriculum. Remember that the following characteristics reflect priorities of emphasis, not either/or options.

An integrated, learner-centered curriculum gives priority to:

- context over content
- concepts over facts
- questions over answers
- imagination over knowledge
- intuition over rational logic
- developmental intent over graded content

- the learning process over the product of learning, and
- quality of information over quantity of information.

Human beings seek meaning like ducks seek water. Anyone who has observed children at play knows the kind of meaning they inject into objects or situations that, to the observer, mean something quite different. A piece of paper becomes an airplane, a saucepan becomes a boat, a storybook character becomes an intimate friend. Daydreaming is another important way children — romantics by nature — make their own meaning. They imagine themselves in Walter Mitty fashion as explorers and heroes or a hundred and five other marvelous and exciting ways of being in the world. Or, lying atop a hill on a summer's day, they may just let their minds wander "lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills." In short, children are masters of creating contexts of meaning that suit their needs.

Then they enter school, which, as psychologist Charles Tart (1994) reminds us, "isn't primarily about education — but a brainwashing into the dominant ways of thinking which characterize our particular culture." They are soon inundated with information that other people think is important for them to learn. In order to survive, they soon learn the rules, the chief of which is to remember everything the teacher says. There is little time left for looking out the window or for any other form of "learning through meaning-making." No longer free to create their own context in hundreds of imaginative ways, children have little choice but to accept without question the teacher's context and the meaning. They accept that the purpose of learning is to pass tests; that the name of the game is competition; that real success means being number one; that others are best qualified to grade you; that sitting quietly and paying attention pays off; that most questions are stupid; that mistakes are costly; that imagination is childish, silly, and a waste of time; that life is run by clocks; and finally, that you can't beat the system!

By the time our children grow up, they are ready to take their place in society as productive workers, a role for which they have been well prepared — at least until recently. Now, however, 80% of them

don't like their jobs but can't imagine an alternative. When they turn on the radio or TV they are still inundated with information — sound bytes that have as little meaning as the facts presented in school. But they have learned the lessons of school well: let others create the contexts of meaning that will guide their work, shape their ideas and relationships, and determine their contributions to society. Since they don't really know what they want to do, they don't know what to look for or what questions to ask. Thus, as Naisbitt suggests, most of the information that comes their way each day whizzes by them. What is remembered makes it easy to answer someone else's questions and think the way they want you to think.

A caricature? Of course. And yet, it's certainly one way of explaining the almost overwhelming sense of apathy, powerlessness, futility, frustration, and anger that seem to pervade our society. What is needed, perhaps most of all, is the realization that there are alternatives, that we do have choices — and one of the most important choices we make is how we educate our children.

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Preparing Ourselves for Conflict

Examining Our Own Beliefs

Matthew Rich

The way we approach conflict and children will largely be determined by the beliefs we hold.

If there is anything we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves. (Carl Jung)

The vision of the teacher should be at once precise like that of the scientist, and spiritual like that of the saint. The preparation for science and the preparation for sanctity should form a new soul, for the attitude of the teacher should be at once positive, scientific, and spiritual. (Maria Montessori)

It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor. (Matthew 7: 3-5 Peterson, trans.)

In her book, *Education for a New World*, Maria Montessori wrote, "An ordinary teacher cannot be transformed into a Montessori teacher, but must be created anew, having rid herself of pedagogical prejudices" (1963, 67). Montessori frequently refers to this process of renewal as the "spiritual preparation of the adult," and she gives many examples of the inner work she believed adults should do before they are ready to work with children in constructive and meaningful ways. In this essay, the first in a series of six, I will explore some aspects of this spiritual preparation specifically with regards to preparing ourselves to approach conflicts that involve children.

Conflict can often bring out the most violent and harmful parts of ourselves, or at least lay our pretenses bare. A potent cause of stress, it often con-



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stricts our access to inner resources. As a result, our past experience and memory of trauma may assume a large influence over our actions, causing us to fall into impulsive, habitual patterns and diminish our capacity for self-reflection and perspective taking (Siegel & Hartzell 2003; Forbes & Post 2006).

The ways in which we choose to approach conflict and children, whether we are in conflict or attempting to mediate one, will always be dictated to some degree by the beliefs we hold. If we are going to help children resolve conflicts in useful and adaptive ways, it is important that we bring our personal judgments and perspectives to the surface and view them clearly and objectively. For example, What is childhood? What are children capable of? What is the “right” thing, and who gets to decide? Who has responsibility in the situation? What is of ultimate concern?

Because every individual’s response to these questions will be different and undergo constant — and often very subtle — changes, I encourage you to pose each of these questions to yourself, record your responses, and repeat the enquiry regularly.

What is Childhood?

Definitions of childhood differ widely, and how we understand the concept has a direct impact upon the way we interact with those whom we consider children. A quadrivial analysis¹ yields some interesting results (see Figure 1 below). In the Upper Left quadrant, which deals with the subjective-interior perspective, or first person knowledge and experience, we might understand childhood as an inner or developmental state. Theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget are among those who have attempted to explain childhood from this perspective. “What is the existential experience of being a child?” they seem to ask. “What goes on *inside* the child’s soul?” Or, as Montessori put it, “What is the secret of childhood?”

The schooling paradigm focuses on one of the many different lines of internal development: the cognitive line. This is, to be certain, an important dimension of development, but it hardly supplies a complete picture of the internal world of the child. If children were to excel at all of the tests that school

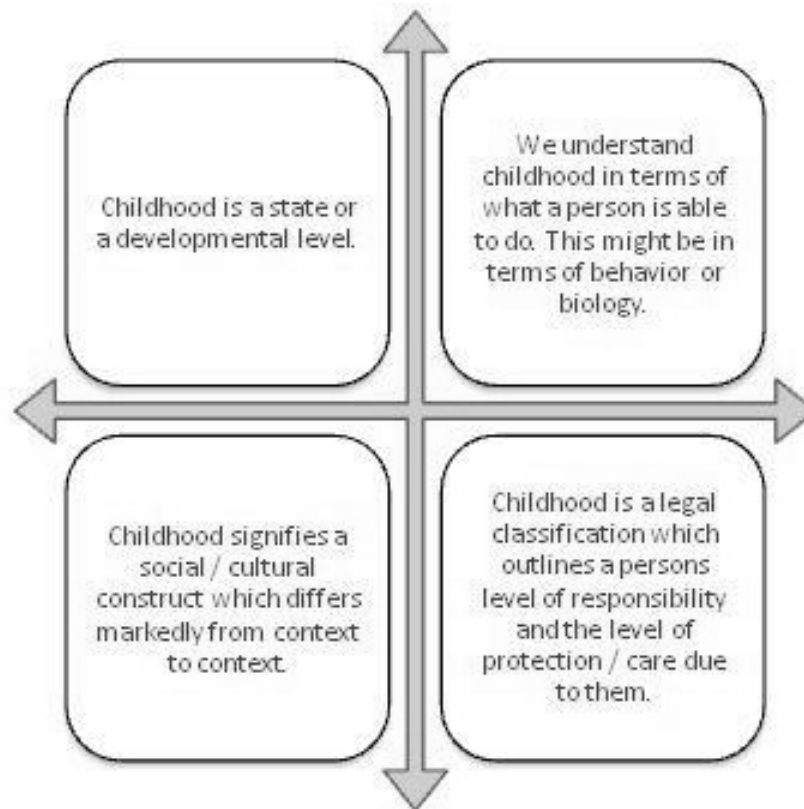


Figure 1: Examples of the way “childhood” may be interpreted in different quadrants.

throws at them and prove themselves to be at a higher level of cognitive development than their teachers, would they not still remain children?

In the Upper Right quadrant, which deals with exterior-individual, or third person singular experience and knowledge, we can understand childhood in terms of children's behavior and biological development. Obviously, there are some correlations between this quadrant and the upper left one. For example, we can see puberty unfolding in very concrete, physical ways (Upper Right), but this is not the same as psycho-sexual development (Upper Left). Likewise, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and other cutting edge technologies have enabled us to map the rapidly expanding neural pathways within a child's brain (Upper Right quadrant), but this does not fully explain Montessori's "absorbent mind" theory in which she postulated that young children have a hidden capacity to absorb and assimilate certain types of information (chiefly sensory impressions) in their environment (Upper Left quadrant). This is another prevalent way of understanding childhood and is propagated largely by medical — and to some degree educational — discourse. There is also a lot of historical precedence for the idea of puberty as the passage to adulthood, with menarche (for girls) and ejaculation or nocturnal emission (for boys) being an important sign post on the road to maturity.

The Lower Right quadrant (the exterior-collective, inter-objective) might place childhood in a legal framework. There are different definitions depending on the system to which one subscribes. Under the principles of Roman-Dutch law that are prevalent in the Western world, for instance, we come into being as a legal person with our first breath and remain a child until the age of 18, or 21 in some countries, at which point we enter legal majority and are expected to take responsibility for ourselves. Up until then, the law supplies special protections, such as not allowing minors to enter into a contract without the ratification of their legal guardian. Their criminal liability might also be reduced.

The Lower Left quadrant invites us to understand childhood as a social construct that differs from one socio-cultural context to another. It is fascinating to note that, while children are often told "to be seen and not heard" and seem to be less valuable members of

society, they also are venerated by religions all over the world. I have experienced this in my own work in early childhood education in different cultures. In South Africa it is acceptable to let children play in the mud, or fall and scrape their knees because it is understood that these activities strengthen not only character, but also the immune system. In China the same behavior would indicate that the adult caring for the child is reckless and incompetent.

When one looks at this analysis it quickly becomes clear that all four perspectives are true and are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Most people have a view of childhood that contains a number of these perspectives, and our understandings differ one from another as a result of the complex interactions between these perspectives.

When we can clearly identify our own beliefs around the nature of childhood, it enables us to be more mindful of the ways in which we choose to interact with children. For example, a parent with a behaviorist orientation, an Upper Right bias, will focus her interactions with children on trying to find the best stimuli in the environment to create a desired response. A parent with a Lower Right orientation, on the other hand, will focus on constructing the right sort of system to facilitate effective child rearing. Or a third parent who is a practitioner of attachment parenting (UL bias) will be primarily focused on maintaining heart connection and closeness with her child. These three approaches may produce very different behaviors in the adult and certainly originate from very different thinking. Furthermore, each of them expresses a very important truth of how children develop but none have a grasp of the bigger picture.

What are Children Capable of?

I also don't think there can be one correct response to this question. We can answer it only in relation to each individual child, i.e. what is this particular child capable of doing at this moment? Of course, in practice it is necessary for us to make certain generalizations for the sake of convenience, and there exist a number of developmental frameworks that suggest what children might be capable of doing at a particular age.

It is important not only to be aware of these frameworks, but also to keep them in mind along with our

own personal observations whenever we interact with a child. Because we often underestimate children's capabilities, we don't allow them to do what they are able and indeed want to do. Practically any four-year-old, for instance, can be taught to use a knife to cut fruit and vegetables, or to make their own tea and wash up afterwards. However, we often expect children to do complex things that are far beyond their present level of maturity, such as taking some rather advanced perspectives during interpersonal interactions while they are still in the midst of their rather egocentric sensorimotor and preoperational phases of development.

What is the "Right" Thing, and Who Gets to Decide?

In general, adults have a great deal more access to what I call "structural power" than children do. By this I mean that adults are privy to external resources that make it possible for them to exercise power over children. The temptation for us, therefore, to claim a monopoly on morality is great.

An adult's justification for moral superiority is often tied up with a set of religious mores. For instance, a conservative Christian parent² might reason:

You must pack away your blocks because I am your father and I am telling you to. I believe that packing away your blocks is the right thing to do because it is an expression of good stewardship and consideration of others. By virtue of our relationship (a relationship which mirrors the relationship between Father God and his children) I have authority over you and am charged by God with the responsibility of raising you in the ways of righteousness. I am willing and able to use my power to compel you to be obedient, thereby bringing you under God's Lordship, because I do this in accordance with God's will.

This is, of course, not a definitive statement of how a Christian parent would reason in any particular instance, but is rather an expression of how a set of beliefs might manifest itself on a particular occasion at a particular developmental level. It is also worth noting that, even at the same developmental level, the reasoning might be expressed differently.

This is not as simplistic as it may appear to some readers. What is the relationship between our structural power and our authority? Does this kind of authority exist at all (i.e., as something distinct from power)? Are we entitled to make and enforce a decision regarding our rightness when we feel we are in fact right and when it serves the "good"? How would we begin to establish what the "good" is? Your answers to these questions will powerfully influence the ways in which you choose to use your power in relation to children.

I would like to make two additional points. First, judgments stemming from rightness and wrongness are, according to a number of important thinkers,³ the primary source of violence in the world. Imagine if we could shift our consciousness from trying to find fault to trying to find a solution; if we could ask ourselves "what needs are met (or unmet) in this current situation" rather than "who is wrong and who is right." What would that be like? I believe that if we, as a species, can learn to cultivate the capacity to shift our focus from judgments to "needs," we will build the foundation for a more caring world.

Secondly, the response to oppressive morality by such late 19th and 20th century philosophers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, was simply to deny an objective morality. Right and wrong are more or less replaced by power, and as a result our morals are socially constructed and entirely subjective.⁴ This has led to a terrifying moral relativism which, although it has been largely demolished by more progressive academia, still remains firmly entrenched in popular thought.⁵ This is not a solution to the oppressive and violent results of conventional morality; rather I would argue that it is moral and intellectual arrogance and laziness.

Who has Responsibility Here?

When we first approach a conflict situation one of the first things we often ask is, "Whose fault is this?" Many of us are conditioned to look for blame; it is rooted in our parenting, our education, and even our myths and media. When I was a child sitting in front of the television, for example, the first thing I would ask my parents about any character was, "Is he good or bad?" This was useful information given the na-

ture of the media (stories that consisted of characters who were, unlike real people, either good or bad); in fact, it never occurred to me at this age that a story was possible without this polarity. In our social interactions we either tend to turn the spotlight outward to identify a culprit or we turn it inward and blame ourselves. The inevitable result is some form of violence. The way in which we assign blame, and the importance that we give it, will play an important role in any interaction we have.

When we are looking at the concept of responsibility another question that often comes up is: "Who should be in charge here"? This question takes us back to the complex interaction between authority and power. Where does an adult's responsibility begin and end when she is interacting with a child? Do children have a limit to their freedom? How does it differ from an adult's limits?

While I would contend that, by virtue of their higher development, adults should have greater responsibility and authority in their interactions with children, I would add that the measure of responsibility and authority should be directly proportional to the discrepancy in their relative developmental levels. If a child happens to be more developmentally advanced than an adult, then the relationship might conceivably be reversed. It seems silly, and downright pathological, to have a lower level of development lording it over a higher one simply on the basis of age (or on any basis for that matter). On the other hand, I would say that adults in general, and especially parents and guardians, have a particular responsibility to protect and care for their children. This is a socially embedded principle upon which the survival of our species hinges, one that is also enshrined in most systems of common law.

In short, I believe that just because adults can, by virtue of our increased access to structural power, exercise our will over children is not sufficient reason to do it. I believe that we have a responsibility to help life, to be supportive guardians of children rather than dictators. The educational revolutionary A. S. Neill (1962), put it this way:

No one is wise enough or good enough to mould the character of any child. What is wrong with our sick, neurotic world is that we have been moulded, and an adult generation that has

seen two great wars and seems about to launch a third should not be trusted to mould the character of a rat.

In our interactions with children we might first strive to protect life. Like a gardener watching over a blossoming flower, we supply only the little, if any help that is needed to allow the miracle to unfold.

What is of Ultimate Concern?

Our answer to this question reveals a great deal about our spiritual development and profoundly influences everything we do in life. Is our life meaningless or meaningful? How do we make or live that meaning in every moment of our life?

It is interesting to note that people's answers to this question — their most fundamental beliefs about what is most important — are very often at the core of conflicts. Unless we know what we believe and what we are willing to stand for, we are not likely to be effective in the face of conflict. We can't hope to help children live meaningful lives if we have not been courageous enough to live meaningful lives ourselves. The great existentialist psychologist and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl (2006) wrote, "Challenging the meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human." Surely this is an essential part of our inner work not only in the face of conflict, but in the face of life itself.

What is Really Important to Us?

When I teach compassionate communication to parents I almost always start our first session by asking, "What is really important to you in your relationship with your child"? This question helps us quickly cut through all of the strategies and methods that have attached themselves to people's parenting practices and instead focus on what really matters. By inquiring deeply it is possible to arrive at a list of needs or values that is more or less universal. For instance, if someone says education is an important value, I would ask why, and then we'd likely discover different needs underneath it, in this instance perhaps security or learning. Not everyone values formal education, but we all value security and learning. These universal needs are expressions of life reaching out for itself, like the blind tendrils of a vine groping for sunlight. All of our actions are at-

tempts to meet needs. All of them! They are the basis of all of our striving and are therefore integrally important to our understanding of conflict and our approach to conflict resolution.

When we approach conflict we invariably encounter a clash between views or strategies that are apparently incompatible. When we accept that all of these strategies are merely attempts — successful or disastrous — to meet needs, the commonality that underlies the ostensible rift begins to emerge. Although our strategies, much like our judgments or perceptions, can easily come into conflict, our needs cannot because they are universal by definition. Any need that I strive to meet is a need that is shared by you and every other human being on earth. When we choose to focus on reconciling strategies, our conflicts can appear intractable; however, when we choose to focus our attention on needs, we are immediately able to choose the path of connection.⁶

I believe our contribution to a conflict — either constructive or destructive — is more or less directly proportionate to our level of inner preparation. To put it another way, our ability to bring about change is directly related to our capacity, as Gandhi put it, to *be* that change. This requires a great deal of clarity, self-knowledge, and self-compassion.

In this essay I have posed a number of questions that I believe have a critical impact on the ways in which we approach conflicts involving children. Examining these questions and answering them for ourselves involves a process of deep enquiry which can help us to meet the intensity of conflict with more clarity, authenticity, and honesty. Morihei Ueshiba, the Japanese artist-poet-philosopher and founder of Aikido, wrote:

The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace.... Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.

I honor all of us who work to bring the art of peace into the lives of children, and who courageously undertake the internal refinement required for this task.

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Notes

1. A quadrivial analysis is a tool using the four quadrants of Ken Wilber's AQAL model. This approach is introduced and explained in depth in his ground-breaking book *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: the Spirit of Evolution* (2000).
2. This is one interpretation of Christian doctrine at a particular developmental altitude, in this case one stemming from an amber consciousness (Wilber 2001, 2007), i.e. from a mythic worldview (Gebser 1985) or a conventional stage of faith (Fowler 1995).
3. For instance, the theologian Walter Wink, cultural historian Riane Eisler, evolutionary theorist and futurist David Loye, and psychologist and peace advocate Marshall Rosenberg. I think it could well be argued that this is also an implicit value in post-structuralist (and post-modernist in general) morality.
4. It is, of course, a gross over-simplification, in my opinion, to reduce a reading of postmodernism to a doctrine of moral relativism as many like the so-called Christian Right critics (e.g., McCullum 1996, and McDowell & Hoestetler 1998) have done.
5. I would add that I do not believe that the social-constructionist movement in fact offers a position of moral relativism in the true sense at all. Rather they take a position of agnosticism with regards the possibility of understanding the true nature of understanding reality and therefore restrict themselves to making epistemological rather than ontological claims. The type of moral relativism which has become so prevalent in popular society is based on a very partial understanding of these thinkers.

6. This is an approach which forms the basis of the Nonviolent Communication work of Marshall Rosenberg and the Center for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org). See Rosenberg (2003).

International Test Scores, Educational Policy, and the American Dream

William J. Mathis

Governmental policymakers continue to embrace educational reforms that have little positive effect and ignore reforms that *could* make a real difference.

For the 27th year, government officials have yet again been surprised, shocked, and dismayed by the latest international test score rankings. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said “We have to see this as a very serious wake-up call.” Former Reagan education official Chester Finn reported that he was “kind of stunned” by the results of the Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) results. In hyperbolic overdrive, he compared the results to Pearl Harbor and Sputnik.

The PISA tests were given to 15-year-old students in 65 nations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Nine nations had higher average scores in reading, seventeen in math, and twelve in science. While ranking nations based on test scores is a pretty sorry way to evaluate education systems, there is simply no reason to expect that the results would be any better than they were the last time we heard from this same chorus of surprised, shocked, and dismayed pundits and politicians.

The reason is simple. Federal and state policymakers continue to embrace reforms that have little positive effect (if not downright negative effects) while ignoring reforms that could make a difference. Buried within the PISA report is an analysis of educational systems that registered high test scores. Here are some of the less-reported findings:

- The best performing school systems manage to provide high-quality education to all children.
- Students from low socio-economic backgrounds score a year behind their more afflu-

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ent classmates. However, poorer students who are integrated with their more affluent classmates score strikingly higher. The difference is worth more than a year's education.

- In schools where students are required to repeat grades (such as with promotion requirements), the test scores are lower and the achievement gap is larger.
- Tracking students ("ability grouping") results in the gap becoming wider. The earlier the practice begins, the greater the gap. Poor children are more frequently shunted into the lower tracks.
- Systems that transfer weak or disruptive students score lower on tests and on equity, largely because those who are removed from their peers end up with lower student and adult expectations. One-third of the differences in national performance can be ascribed to this one factor.
- Schools that have autonomy over curriculum, finances, and assessment score higher.
- Schools that compete for students (vouchers, charters, etc.) show no achievement score advantage.
- Private schools do no better once family wealth factors are considered.
- Students who attended pre-school score higher, even after more than ten years.

As Paris-based OECD official Michael Davidson said in National Public Radio comments, "One of the striking things is the impact of social background on (U.S.) success." Twenty percent of U.S. performance was attributed to social background — which is far higher than in other nations. Davidson went on to point out that the United States just does not distribute financial resources or quality teachers equally. In a related finding, students from single-parent homes score much lower in the United States than they do in other countries. The 23 point difference is almost a year's lack of growth.

Unfortunately, federal and state policies have done little to adopt the reforms that other nations have found so successful. Countless financial studies

show that funding across our schools is inequitable and inadequate. Federal and state governments may note this concern but they do little to resolve the problem. Our way of dealing with economically deprived students is to house them in segregated schools and shunt them into tracked programs.

A number of "get tough" social promotion policies have been adopted in states, even though we know they are harmful. Despite a clear research consensus, early education is still politically disputed. Tracking students still remains the national norm, although we know that tracking increases the achievement gap. As the federal government (under both Republican and Democratic administrations) has become even more top-down and prescriptive, local schools become less autonomous and less like our successful international counterparts. Finally, the push for privatizing public education through charters, tuition tax credits, vouchers, and the like does not result in better test scores and has the effect of increasing segregation and the inequalities that lead to low test scores (Evergreen, Miron, and Urschel, 2008; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, and Tornquist, 2010; Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009).

The American Dream

The American Dream is that all children have an opportunity to be successful, no matter how humble their roots. Thus, the most troubling finding in the PISA report is the lack of "resilience" among our children. OECD measured resilience by looking at the scores of the least wealthy 25% of students and comparing what proportion of these students have academic scores in the top 25% of countries with similar socio-economic levels. In the highest scoring nations, 70% of the students are rated resilient. The U.S. figure is less than 30%. In a nation which sees the top 1% controlling more than 50% of the nation's wealth and the collapse of middle class jobs, we face the specter of building a country of social, economic, and educational apartheid. Secretary Duncan calls the PISA scores a serious wake-up call and thinks these scores represent a diminished economic future for our nation and a loss in international economic competitiveness. But that is a misunderstanding of the nature of economics and global competitiveness.

Due to our pursuit of ineffective and ill-focused educational and economic reforms, we may be slamming of the door on the American Dream.

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A Holistic Approach to Graduate Education in Iran

Ebrahim Zarin Shoja

With Mehdi Mahdavinia

True education only occurs when learners actively bring about changes in themselves. It is not something done *for* them by their teachers.

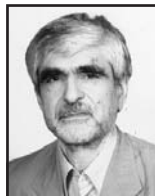
One autumn day in 2009, I was sitting in the teachers' office with my new colleagues who were engaged in criticizing everything: prices, the government's policies, elections, our people's culture, and envisioning the need for a totally free and democratic society. While we were talking, a student knocked on the door and stepped in the office to get something for the principal. When a colleague saw the student, he stopped talking and shouted, "Who let you in, you stupid!?" When the student tried to explain his mission, he interrupted him and said, Shut up! Get the hell out of here!" To justify his behavior, my colleague said that if you smile at them right at the beginning of the school year, you won't be able to control them anymore. Most of the other teachers in the room treated students the same way and they nodded in agreement.

I couldn't let this pass, so I quoted Gandhi to them: "We should be the change we wish to see in the world." And I asked if we shouldn't treat our students the way we want governments treat their people?" The room was silent as the bell rang.

We all may have a list of theories and suggestions for changing national and even international policies, but when the real challenge of change confronts us directly we try to avoid it. In Paulo Coelho's (1992, 16) words, we seem "to have a clear idea of how people should lead their lives, but not about [our] own."



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We often forget the fact that positive social change begins with the individual.

In July 2009, a few months before that incident, I had an appointment with my professor, Dr. Mahdavinia, to talk about my thesis. Before beginning to talk about our planned topics, I asked him about his reaction to popular response to our recent president elections. Dr. Mahdavinia responded that

whatever happens in a society is a true manifestation or product of education of that society; good or bad. The education of most of the courtiers including Iran is government dominated to a large extent and curricula are prescribed. The outcome of such approach and its political purposes deeply influences particularly the social sustainability of the country.

Dr. Mahdavinia added that true education consists of the changes that occur in the learners *by* the learners and *with* their own active participation in the learning process; true education is not something done *for* them by a teacher. Students in such classes make their own meanings when they involve their body, mind, and soul holistically in all class activities. Learners construct their own knowledge and master their own desired skills and attitudes. In addition, people educated holistically will definitely learn how to shape their own society as a part of the larger global society.

In what follows I'm going to shed some light on the classes my friends and I have experienced with Dr. Mehdi Mahdavinia as our instructor. He showed us how it is possible for an educator to "be the changes [he] wishes to see in the world."

The First Class

It was my first session of the learning theories course and I was a little late. I hesitated behind the closed door of the class for a moment and summoned the courage to knock on the door and open it to see my new professor. I wondered how he would react to my lateness. When I stepped in the classroom I was received with a friendly greeting from him and I was invited to sit down among my friends who were mostly experienced teachers from language institutes, government-run schools, or tutors. After a warm welcome, our professor asked us to sit in cir-

cles, which, as one student later put it, gave "the impression that we [were] going to have a course of discussion and cooperation, instead of unidirectional lectures."

The course syllabus was handed to each participant. Goals were listed, followed by a brief description of course organization, methods of assessment, and methods of instruction. After we read the syllabus and handout, each student introduced himself and his goals to others.

In their reflective essays on this first class, students noticed the difference in approach between this class and more traditional ones:

I think his method of teaching is different from the teachers that I have had before, because he puts emphasis on whole person learning....

I think students will be given the opportunity to express their views in the class and they will learn a lot from each other.

Class Procedures and Activities

Each class began with warm greetings and the distribution of handouts and the professor's comments on the students' most recent reflective essays. The handouts described the theme of the class and included focus questions that would form the basis of later group discussions. We were required to discuss different issues from our own viewpoints in groups and relate them to our experiences in life. The question also encouraged a sense of integration and connection and led students to explore issues holistically.

Stillness and Activity

One of the principles of holistic education is keeping balance which is

based on the concepts of the Tao and yin/yang which suggest that at every level of the universe there are complementary forces and energies ... that need to be recognized and nurtured ... in the classroom" (Miller et al. 2005, 2).

Rationally-focused educational scholars tend to emphasize the yang energies (p. 2). However, in this course, there was a holistic balance between paradoxes: a balance between reflection in separate peri-

ods of silence and serious hot arguments. A holistic teacher's role is to create an harmonic symphony by challenging and involving a student's whole attention and then by providing periods of reflection and stillness. In our class when each student got the initial handout, our instructor would ask him to reflect silently on the topic sentence, picture, or the quotation that introduced the topic for the day. The silence would be followed by a period of intense activity in which the participants actively discussed the results of their personal reflections in groups. This process of reflection and discussion accompanied each argument.

Periods of silence and reflection at the beginning, during, and even after class (provided by the reflective essays) were not wasted time for us. They "are used to organize what [had] been gained in periods of activity" (Dewey 1938, 63). Moreover, "in the silent space of meditation soul and mind can mingle; imagination can freely move in a state of reverie and without the restraints of order or structure" (Miller et al. 2005, 163). One of the students reflected on the value of these periods of silence:

Some may think that the more the students and teacher talk in the class, the more they are involved and the better students learn; but there must be some short periods of silence in a class (especially in graduate levels) for students and teacher in order to find themselves, and reflect on issues better. We should keep in mind that "music is the space between the notes...."

The dialogic nature of this class was an important factor in creating meaning, because we were constantly "theorizing about [our] experiences in the dialogue process" (Macedo 2002, 17).

Heath (1993, 187) paraphrasing Bakhtin, writes:

Whenever we speak, we actually talk through the words of ourselves and others — words and phrases that we have heard many times and that become our own when we use them to say new things in what are new times and places.

The use of metaphors eventually increased in our class discussions. Encouraged by our instructor, we were expressing our understandings freely through metaphors, allegories, and even by doodling on the

board. We were talking about advanced concepts and relations for which academic language had run short of words: "Through metaphors, we link previously separated selves and understandings, with the usual connections yielding surprise and release" (Diamond and Mullen 1999, 256). The ground was ready for stepping up to a more advanced level of holistic learning in which art played a crucial role.

Dance to Art's Tune

One day we were thunderstruck when our professor distributed some crayons and large sheets of paper among us and asked us to draw our conclusions about theories and their relationships.

We were wondering how we could illustrate those highly abstract concepts like *learning* merely by colorful drawings. Though some of us had practiced similar but more limited tasks before on the board with some scribbles, we seemed frustrated at the beginning. However, some wonderful holistic perspectives began to emerge out of our creative artworks, even though we had not yet studied the literature on holism.

For example, we were asked to graphically compare traditional classes with our own. We illustrated our class as a part of the universe. We conceived of students as both a part and whole of the universe. One can hardly recognize the teacher among the students because he becomes a participant, someone like them.

Creative tension arises when we are asked to do something that at first seems illogical or impos-

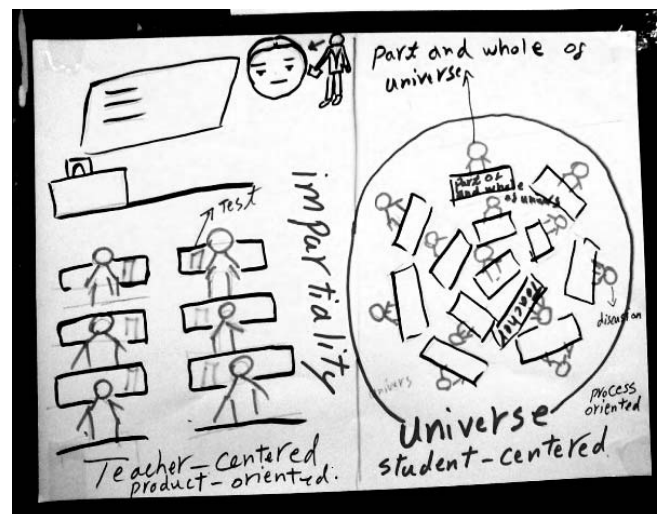


Figure 1

sible. Palmer writes, "Awareness is always heightened when we are caught in a creative tension." (Miller et al. 2005, 163)

Assessment

Although we were quite busy, nobody was in hurry or worried about the nightmare called final exam. From the very first session Dr. Mahdavinia assured us not to worry about final exams and grades like we would in other courses. He told us to simply enjoy being together in the class.

He used occasional assessments only for to find out who we were, what our abilities were, what we needed to know, and how we perceived that the learning affected us (Richards and Renandya 2002, 346). In short, he used assessment to become acquainted with us.

One of our most argumentative and productive classes was on assessment. We delved into this concept as a group through our drawings. We were asked to think of some drawings to illustrate the characteristics of an alternative approach to assessment that would eliminate the shortcomings of the traditional approach, based on our experience in our classes and related literature we had studied (see Figures 2 and 3). Some of the characteristics of alternative assessment were described by the student descriptions of their drawings.

- An alternative assessment approach to traditional testing should be a "process based" humanistic approach in which "the teacher is a part of the process of learning who puts emphasis on understanding ... in a stress-free environment."
- Assessment "should encourage a student's reflection on his own performance and learning."
- "Factors like student's feelings, creativity, and what he specially is able to do should be considered" in assessment.
- Assessment "should see the class and each student in relation to the whole universe."

In Figure 2 below I projected my own conception of the traditional approaches to assessment and teaching as preplanned filters and molds intended to

create human beings the way those filters prescribe. Top students are those who adjust themselves to these filters' expectations. These prescribed expecta-

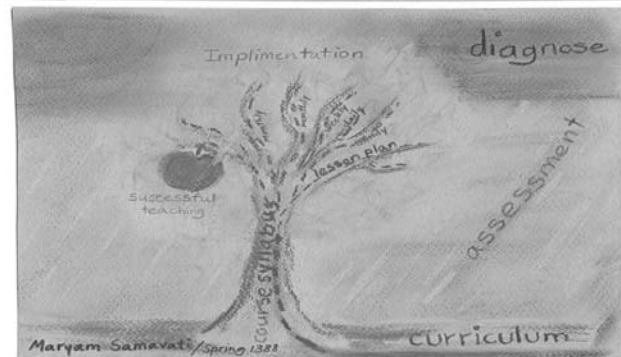


Figure 2

tions burn students' wings of creativity and inspiration and may cause them to lose their connection to their consciousness and source of inspiration for the rest of their lives. Indeed, they may lose their real Self.

However, in a healthy approach to assessment and education in general, students are considered seeds and eggs with unique and unlimited potentials (see Figure 3 below). In this way they will flourish freely in the warmth of a wholesome education, and they will be the source of others' growth as well.

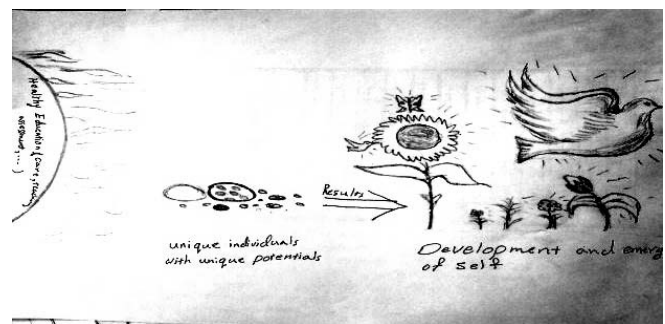


Figure 3

In this class, each student was asked to create a portfolio, a cumulative collection of the work he/she had done (Richards and Renandya 2002, 347). Our portfolios were supposed to have at least four main parts:

- A paper on a favorite topic for that semester. Each student was free to present a lecture or teaching procedure in its stead.
- A glossary of key terms. Each student was supposed to build a unique collection of tech-

nical terms he encountered during his studies with a brief definition of each, which was followed by its source.

- Activities and lesson plans that were created by students in groups or individually.
- And the last but not the least were the reflective essays. It was one of the most powerful features of this class. Students were asked to shed some light on at least five basic questions in their reflective essays: What was the topic? What was discussed about the topic? What did you understand out of those discussions? What do you want to add to it? What conclusions and comments do you have about the class?

The Teacher's Role

At each session, after distributing handouts, our professor sat down on one of the chairs in the circle, just like one of the students. Dr. Mahdavinia believes that "when a teacher enters a class as a teacher education fails. [In this class, we usually] "let go of roles for which we had been conditioned ... instead we [began] to see ourselves as whole people where opposites, or polarities lie within us"(Miller 1996, 5). We worked together in harmony without regard for gender and status. Our instructor acted more like an impartial participant, rather than a dominant authority who knew everything or as someone who should shovel his knowledge into students' minds through unidirectional lectures.

Not all of the students were comfortable with Dr. Mahdavinia's impartiality. Some students would have liked it if he expressed his own thoughts more, but others felt that his approach was very productive. One student wrote:

Teacher was the one who spoke the least, because he wanted to give the chance to students to express themselves.... Instead of answering the questions himself, he let the students approach the questions by their own reason, knowledge, and experiences and this is a good strategy to involve the students actively in the learning process. This can be a big leap toward whole learning.

I personally prefer the latter because I think an opportunity to be revealed and expressed is something that our real Self needs, and a teacher's impartiality provides this opportunity. His role was more of a dissolver rather than a solver because

he did not want to solve, but rather to dissolve, philosophical problems, to expose the confusions and illogicality inherent in them so that they lost their power to mislead. (Miller et al. 2005, 89)

One of the female students objected and said that "each time I leave the class with a lot of questions." Dr. Mahdavinia smiled and said, "That's what I'm after. When you come to the class with questions and leave it with more questions, real education happens."

Another student observed that "beginning and ending the class with question gives the impression that we are in a never-ending process of learning and inquiring."

Each Student's Unique Role

As shown in Figure 1 above, the roles of students and teacher are intermingled in a learner-based class. If it wasn't for the age difference between us and our instructor, a visitor entering the room while a class was in progress might have problem recognizing the instructor in our circle. We were a group made of unique members. In our soul-oriented educational practice we were meandering with the help of our teacher in "paradoxical territory, a liminality, you might say, a capacity to stay on the border between the universal and the unique" (Miller et al. 2005, 12). Our uniqueness came from the soul, not from a focus on personal circumstances and a delimiting of learning to what is personally relevant. Our unique experiences were considered and cared for. Everybody was encouraged to express his own ideas and relate them to his experiences without regard to whether they were considered right or wrong.

Realization of a Holistic Vision

In the process of data gathering we noticed that there is an interesting match between students' comments and themes found in the literature of holism, such as lifelong learning, the role of spirit, transfor-

mation, love, peace, and integration. We were developing theories and ideas that were sometimes a paraphrase of what the pioneer scholars of holism had said. It is important to know that we hadn't studied any formal literature relating to holistic education prior to the class; instead, we spoke from direct experience. Our holistic attitudes and ideas increasingly matured with the passage of time. The intensity of such comments reached their climax in the middle of the semester, but they unexpectedly began to decrease by the end of the course.

It was a frustrating situation and it had occupied my mind because one of our primary goals in writing a paper on that class was tracing the development of holistic attitudes in participants. I went back to my own reflective essays and to my great surprise I saw the same pattern in them. I was at my wit's end for a few days until I jumped out of the bed one morning with the answer: in my dream I was discussing the issue with Dr. Mahdavinia and I thumbed through Miller's *Holistic Learning* and showed him Eliot's comment:

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive at where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(Miller et al. 2005, 25).

I found out that I should not look for a linear relationship, because "change is not linear" ...; it also has a "non-verbal or tacit dimension" which we don't notice always (Miller 1996, 181).

Conclusion

Today there is an urgent need for our souls to be healed; and because a teacher deals with souls, he needs wisdom and a strong imagination more than information (Miller et al. 2005, 15). A teacher's main concern should be his students' soul-center: feelings that should be nurtured in a peaceful and cooperative environment. Holistic wisdom helps him to be balanced and organized and to know what he is doing and where he is standing. He helps his students find balance in the paradoxical aspects of their inner and outer worlds by helping them explore the inseparable relationships among themselves, others, all things in universe, and the flowing universal Self: God, Spirit, Soul, Tao, Allah.... A holistic teacher should provide time for reflection and silence in which students get a

clearer vision of themselves. These periods of silence should be balanced by periods of activity that challenge the soul and every cell of student's body. Like a river bed, a wise teacher simply lets his students' Selves flow and transform into their infinite potentiality without attempting to fight their ignorance. In fact, the best role a holistic teacher can bestow his students is to let them be themselves and develop respected and valued voices of their own. In assessing his students, a holistic teacher should bear in mind the fact that much of the change in a human being is invisible and nonlinear.

The call for wholeness is a "self-organizing revolution" (Miller 2008) in education all over the world. While it is true that we have a long way to go "to make the vision of wholeness a reality in today's world" (Miller et al. 2005, 6), the journey by itself is incredibly rewarding and enjoyable. Moreover, we should never forget, in Lao-tzu's words, that

The tree which fills the arms grew from the tiniest sprout; the tower of nine storeys rose from a (small) heap of earth; the journey of a thousand miles commenced with a single step.

What *does* matter is to begin somewhere, based on our abilities and talents, no matter what, and let ourselves and our students taste the sweetness of this journey. Hallaj (858-922; Majdian 2000, iii), an Iranian ascetic Sufi, said, "If you can't be the sun in the dark night, be the moon at least; and if you can't be the moon, at least, be the glow-worm."

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Restorative Justice in Alternative Education

Sheridan Gold

Dealing effectively with anti-gay insults in the classroom through Restorative Justice

I teach at a community school in Marin County, CA, where we serve students who are kicked out of their home schools for fighting, drugs, or truancy. The students who attend my school are usually students of color and from a low socio-economic background. They, as a group, are angry, disrespectful, and wounded. After 17 years of teaching, I have come to realize that I teach these kids because I want to help them gain a sense of internal power with which they can advocate for themselves and not perpetuate the stereotype of at-risk youth. But it seems the only voice they have is either one of silence or one of negativity. I ask myself on a daily basis, how can I affect change in my students? How can I create a positive difference in their lives? As a result of one student's threatening and abusive behavior, I was given the opportunity to create such a difference.

Last May I had the vilest homophobic slurs I had ever heard of slung at me. During PE, my student was angry at a decision I had made in our basketball game. "That was a goddamn faggoty-ass bitch thing to do!" he yelled at me, and continued pacing and escalating his comments. My out-of-control student had to be escorted from the school by three campus supervisors. I pressed charges, a police officer went to my student's home the next day to alert his family of this fact, and he was not allowed to return to our school. Instead, he had to enroll in an Independent Study program. The principal and our director met with the student, his grandmother, and me and told him of the decision. His grandmother was understandably upset and demanded that he say he was sorry. "I'm sorry," he mumbled, but it seemed empty. He was being forced to apologize and it wasn't coming from an authentic place. "Isn't there anything we can do to get him back in school?" she pleaded. All I could do is shake my head in the nega-



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tive. The director showed her the board policy regarding hate language and sexual harassment.

The day after the event occurred, I gave the kids who were present during the event a chance to write about it. I thought long and hard during the night about their feelings, their voices — silent once again. How were they affected? This student needed to hear their experience. He needed to hear mine. There is no way, absolutely no way that they didn't have feelings about what happened. Out of twelve responses, eleven wrote that they thought it was funny. Only one student said he felt sorry for the teacher because she was gay. I was saddened by those responses and couldn't help but think 24 hours was too long of a wait to get their genuine feelings. I felt defeated and sad.

I wanted to write about the incident, which took place near the end of the school year, but it didn't have an ending I was proud of. The student disappeared from our school. No explanation was given to the students, and hardly to the staff. Silence. The all-too-familiar silence when someone is wronged. Nobody can talk about it without all parties in the room. So no talking occurs.

During the summer I often thought about this boy and wondered what had happened to him. Did he care? Did he have any regrets? But, I still could not write. I knew there was going to be an ending, unlike the one with which we left the school year, but I didn't know what that ending was going to be. So I did not write.

During the next two months, the District Attorney called me and let me know that the student had written me an apology letter and to be on the lookout for it, and also that he wanted to move on with his life and get off probation. The letter arrived a week or so later, and even though the words said, "I'm sorry," it again felt empty and inauthentic to me. I needed more. I needed to see him, to search his true feelings, to look into his eyes. Had he changed? Had he been affected? Was he truly sorry? Did he do this just to get off probation?

During this time, my colleagues and I began to receive trainings in Restorative Justice. After listening, participating, and researching RJ, I was convinced that this was the tool that was missing. This was the thing that I knew would help my student finally hear

the voices that surrounded us that day — the silent voices that never had a chance to speak — the voices of my students, of the campus supervisors, of the administrators, and my own voice. This was the tool that would allow my student and me to communicate and heal.

By the time I was able to make my wishes for a Restorative Justice Circle known, it was already November. Many of the students who were present that day in May had moved on to other schools. There were five students left of the original twelve and four of them were returning to their district schools at the end of the semester, which was the second week of December. I was getting worried.

The RJ facilitator came to the school and ran the pre-circles, which allow all parties a chance to retell the story from their perspectives and answer some very open-ended questions. Separate pre-circles were run for the students who were present, the student who was the "author" of the event, and another pre-circle for me, the "receiver" of the event. I remember telling the facilitator about what happened, and for the first time, I allowed the tears to flow. "I felt betrayed," I told her. "He and I were close and I truly care for him. Why did he do this?"

Getting all of us together proved to be even a bigger challenge. It didn't happen before the semester's end, so there was only one student left of those who actually witnessed the event. Then, I got very, very ill and was out for three weeks. And now, here it is, the last day of March, and even though there were fewer people present that I had hoped for, we just had the most AMAZING circle experience.

The student, a campus supervisor, and I were finally in an RJ circle together, joined by three RJ facilitators. I was happy to see my student and smiled as I said hello. We all checked in and then the facilitator asked two questions. "What do you want to say and who do you want to say it to?" and "What do you want us to know about how you are feeling right now?" She didn't tell any one person to start, and after a moment or two of silence, my student started talking. "I want you to know (looking at me) that I've had a lot of time to think about this and I want you to know how sorry I am that I said those things to you. I was wrong. You've really helped me in many, many ways while I was at the school. You talked with me

and you helped me. But I didn't think of these things at the time. I just was so mad. It's taken me a long time to come around, but now I know I was wrong and I'm sorry." I felt he was sincere as he looked at me.

After more silence, I said to the student, "I want you to know that when this happened, I was scared and I was hurt." My voice started shaking and my eyes filled with the tears that I had been holding for so long. I let them fall. "I was hurt because I felt you and I had an understanding. You are African American and have to deal with racism every day and will have to deal with it the rest of your life. And I thought you would understand me, and my life, and what I have to deal with every single day of my life, too. You used your words as a weapon and you hurt me." At this point, when I said the word, "weapon," his face crumpled and his eyes filled up. His tears did not drop, but he was crying inside. I could see it. I wiped my eyes and continued. "I also felt sad for you. I care about you, and for you to say such vile things is not good for your soul." Everyone in the group sat there quietly and respectfully, watching the student and me communicating. He responded, "I had no idea that you felt this way. Thank you so much for sharing this with me. Wow." He seemed stunned as he continued. "I've never done this before. I didn't know. Thank you for showing me."

I looked out the window and saw a fence. I asked him, "Did I ever tell you the story of the fence, a grandfather and his grandson, and the hammer and nails?" He shook his head no. "Well, there was this grandfather and his grandson. And his grandson said some very mean things to his grandfather, so his grandfather told him to take this hammer and 50 nails, and go hammer the nails into the fence. When the grandson was done, the grandfather told him to take the nails out. When the grandson had finished taking out the nails, he exclaimed, 'Why did you have me hammer the nails in and then take them out? What a waste of time!' To which the grandfather explained, 'When you say mean things, it's like hammering a nail into somebody's heart. When you take the nail out, it's like saying you're sorry. But the hole is still there.'"

My student sat there and then smiled. "I like that story. You always have stories. You always try to help us learn. I learned a lot from you in the anger

management class. I didn't realize it, but it's helped me. And I thank you. That was a great story." I was pleased that he liked the story, but even more pleased that he had listened to me during class. Normally, I don't get feedback from my students. His response was a gift.

The facilitator then asked, "What would you like to have happen?" My student said, "I would like your forgiveness, and I would like to put this behind me." At that moment, saying that I forgave him did not seem like something I could do. I knew I needed to say it, but it didn't feel real to me, yet. I said, "I know forgiveness is what you need right now. I can't forget though." He nodded, like he understood what I meant, perhaps after hearing the hammer and nail story. Then I said, "What I would like is for you to call people on their homophobia." He started smiling. "I can do that," he replied. As we brainstormed on how he might find the words, he realized it wasn't going to be as easy as he first thought it would be. He tried role-playing with one of the facilitators, but couldn't find the words when she said, "That's so gay!" He asked me how I respond when I hear this homophobic slur. I was happy that he asked for help and it made me think that people don't really know how to respond to homophobia, even if they good intentions, so they stay silent. "When I hear, 'that's so gay,' I say to the speaker, 'What's gay about it?'" He liked this response and said he could see himself using it, as well as cussing out his friends who use homophobic slurs. The campus supervisor said, "Maybe you could even call your teacher and let her know when you correct someone." He said he could do that, too.

The campus supervisor said she'd like to see this student come to the school and present to the students what he has learned through this whole process. He was totally into it. They came up with a plan, which would be to present to my class. The one student left that witnessed the event back in May was in this particular class. Then the campus supervisor asked, "Why don't you write your experience up?" "I'll do that," my student replied. "As soon as I get home. I might even write a song. And it's going to be a long song, not a four-minute song, but a six-minute song." It was hard not to feel his enthusiasm in the

room. My student then got up and gave me a hug good-bye.

We left the group with a written agreement. It's up to us now. Our post-circle is in two months. It will be held a year after the event took place. I think I will finally be able to write an ending.

Education and the New Story of Human Existence

Arnold Greenberg

We need to replace the “old story” of what it means to be a human being with a “new story” that recognizes our responsibilities as planetary citizens.

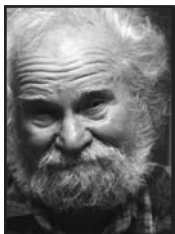
There is a new story emerging that is replacing the old story of human existence. The new story is urging us to learn who we are as humans and how to live so we do not destroy the planet. What is the old story and why is the new story so essential to our existence?

Change is taking place so rapidly that we often do not realize it is even happening. Technology, communication, travel, and global economics are transforming our lives. At the same time, there is abundant evidence we are also facing dramatic ecological and environmental changes that are threatening existence as we know it.

We are living like the “unsinkable” Titanic, ignoring the icebergs ahead of us. Unless we regain awareness of who we are as humans and our relationship with the environment, our present course may find us facing “icebergs” from which there are no escape.

What is the new story and how is it connected to education? With the help of anthropologists, archeologists, historians, we have a good sense of our evolution from hunter-food gatherers to the present. We know the impact of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. We know that empires have been built on the backs of slaves and armies. We know that myths, superstition, religions have attempted to interpret and offer explanations or “stories” to satisfy the times. Stories get told and passed on and often changed along the way.

In 1976, during the Bicentennial celebration, Walter Cronkite interviewed an Indian chief who said, “The biggest mistake the settlers made was not to learn how to live on this continent from us.” The English settlers brought their way of life, their farming, and building techniques. But they also brought a consciousness of their place in the universe that was



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fundamentally different than the natives. The hunter-food gathering societies that preceded the agricultural societies did not see themselves as separate from nature, but rather a part of nature. Men, women, and children gathered food and shared it equally. It was important for their survival that everyone participated and thrived. There was no wealth and no poverty.

The teachings of the Bible influenced the Europeans and central to the Judaic-Christian view was that man has “dominion” over nature and all non-human creatures. The Black Death of the 13th century that wiped out over a third of Europe and entire populations of towns had a major impact. People believed that man was doomed unless he was chosen by God to survive and that the way to salvation was good works. The notion of heaven and hell, damnation and grace led to the puritan ethic — hard work and virtue would be rewarded in the afterlife. The Protestant Reformation liberated people from dependence on the church but emphasized a personal relationship with God. This gave rise to the merchant class, the accumulation of wealth through exploitation of workers and nature, plundering of other countries as the need for markets and resources grew. Empire building resulted in wars, death, wealth, poverty and destruction — often in the name of God’s will or Manifest Destiny.

Descartes believed that the only reality we can know was that which could be measured; Newtonian physics and the emphasis on reason as the path to knowledge dominated the universities. The idea that there might be another way of thinking and living was not known or considered, since everything appeared to make sense from that particular point of view. It was not until the relatively recent realization that we were killing the planet and that human existence is threatened that we began to question the “story” we were living. In addition, scientists were becoming aware of phenomenon that could not be explained by current views. New sciences were evolving; quantum physics, astrophysics, bio-genetics and others were probing deeper into the mysteries of existence. A new story of the relationship between humans and the non-human world was emerging.

The new story inspires a new consciousness, a new awareness that we are part of nature, not separate or dominant. Though we are human, we are not superior to non-humans — trees, plants and all other creatures. We are equal inhabitants of the planet. When we speak of rights, we must not only speak of human rights but the rights of all living entities. That doesn’t mean we don’t cut down trees to build houses, but that we do so with reverence and in ecologically sound ways — replacing what we cut. We don’t clear-cut huge rainforests to graze cattle for McDonalds, causing dramatic changes to the atmosphere and climate. As Ghandi said, “There are enough natural resources for everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed.”

The separation of humans from the non-human world, the view that humans have dominion and can take whatever we want from nature at the expense of the health of water, land, air, and other creatures that share the planet is the old story. The consciousness that the earth is a living organism and that humans are part of the organism is essential to the new story. Just as the cells and organs of our body are interconnected, the health of a body and the health of the planet are dependent on the harmonious interaction of all the parts.

At present, our approach to education is perpetuating the old story. The emphasis on reason, memorizing facts, preparing young people for an economy that does not see the environment as essential to our existence, that ignores the “icebergs” ahead is jeopardizing the lives of our children and their children. Our education is still preparing young people for our past and not their future. The new story is challenging us to live in an ecologically sound way and to develop an approach to education that cultivates the heart as well as the mind, inspires cooperation rather than competition, empathy and love instead of violence and hate. The challenge to bring the new story to our children is a huge task for parents and educators since the old story is so dominant.

The good news is we now have the technology to reach children in ways we’ve never had before. Computers, television, movies, music and most important, teachers who are empowered to create learning experiences that cultivate an ecological consciousness give us a powerful opportunity to teach

the new story. Having a course in ecology is not enough. The entire curriculum must explore the relationship between humans and non-humans. All courses must be interconnected and help young people learn how to live their lives in harmony with nature, not separate from it.

Our present approach to education and the “leave no child behind” emphasis grows out of an obsolete industrial age model. The new story can awaken in our children their full potential to live gently, peacefully, lovingly. I believe that all children are born with the capacity to learn from the wonder of their existence, that learning is as natural as breathing, and that education can nurture the love of learning rather than stifle it, as now happens in so many instances.

The new story needs to be told. Where are the storytellers?

Book Review

The Classrooms All Young Children Need: Lessons in Teaching from Vivian Paley

By Patricia Cooper

Published by the University of Chicago Press
(Chicago, 2009)

Reviewed by Rosebud Elijah

What if your four-year-old eagerly and enthusiastically went to preschool every day to play, dictate stories, and act them out with his/her peers? And what if this same preschooler got to ponder questions of justice and care in preschool: Is it okay to exclude some children from your play by saying, "You can't play"? and, Is it alright for someone to topple the towering structure you spent all morning building; and if not, is there an appropriate punishment for it?

Of course, you might have some closeted angst were the teacher not to offer a letter of the week, or skill-and-drill at letters and numbers, or practice at penmanship. But despite this, you notice that your child's storytelling gets more detailed and precise over the course of the year and that her vocabulary grows at a rapid rate. And your child remains enthusiastic and eager about school, storytelling and story acting, establishing friendships, and developing social skills. You do your research and find that preschool skill-and-drill academic gains last only until first grade, and that this type of teaching-learning correlates with poorly motivated students in the future. You recognize that this research flies in the face of mainstream directives and policy that advocate

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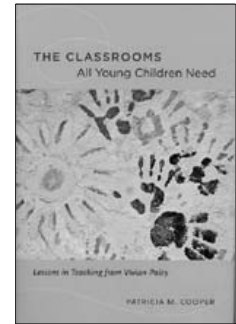
academic learning for early childhood. So you research some more!

You learn that your child's classroom makes sense from a sociocultural perspective: "imaginative play reigns as the highest level of development in early childhood" (p. 36), and that "young children's learning in the years before formal schooling (around age seven) is shaped by their language experiences, imaginative play, and the mediation of thinking with significant others" (p. 28).

Further, your child's classroom seems aligned with a progressive (Deweyan) perspective: the teacher begins with the children's interests and moves them "to where they can intellectually go next" (p. 27). You see that the classroom is entirely constructivist (Rosseau, Piaget, Frobel): "exemplified by [the teacher's] intense focus on what young children do and say" (p. 27).

Welcome to Vivian Paley's classroom where the early childhood curriculum is rooted in a pedagogy of meaning and fairness. In *The Classrooms All Young Children Need*, Patricia Cooper showcases the remarkable pedagogy of Vivian Paley, and simultaneously takes a critical look at public education. Cooper is committed to public education that serves all children, not just a select few, and contends that Paley's pedagogy can fulfill this commitment.

One positive outcome of NCLB and Race to the Top has been the focus on the achievement gap between schools in middle class and poor neighborhoods. Attempts to close this gap include increasing standardized assessment, longer school days and years, higher academic standards, more homework, and "better" teachers for more academic learning. All of this amounts to, well, less play! The argument is simple: Children from poor neighborhoods need more teaching-learning time to catch up to the advantages of children from wealthier neighborhoods.



Cooper's argument for advocating Paley's pedagogy is simple. It is true that middle class children come to school with many advantages that poor children do not have, such as adeptness and familiarity with decontextualized knowledge that is now seen as critical to success in later years. This ability to use decontextualized knowledge is rooted in contextualized caregiver-child conversations and opportunities for play in middle-class children's lives. To contend with these differences in background, Cooper argues against a curriculum focused on subskills and decontextualized knowledge at an early age. Instead, she argues that early childhood educators need to level the playing field by providing all children with opportunities for building contextualized knowledge. This argument is further sustained by research findings that students from academic early childhood environments do not sustain any academic advantages past first grade, and that these children show lower motivation for future learning.

Cooper's argument against mainstream "catch-up" thinking is embedded in research and framed by a democratic intent to level the playing field through pedagogy. While many believe that Paley's practices rooted in children's play can potentially undermine the achievement of poor children, Cooper argues that the opposite is true. In a vein similar to the kinds of questions Paley poses, Cooper asks, "What justifies giving young children in poverty less play and more work?" (p. 25) In asking this question, she points to the moral underpinnings of effective pedagogy, and also suggests that we are dismissing all that we know about early childhood development and the psychological self of the child.

What is a pedagogy of meaning and why is it essential for all young children? Paley believes that the meaning children make inside sociodramatic play is what must guide the teacher (pp. 35-36), making story playing and storytelling (a narrative form of play) the curriculum in her classroom. In a pedagogy of meaning, teaching involves helping young children explore those things in the world that they find meaningful. This requires teachers to implement a curriculum that stokes young children's immediate interests and yet stimulates their attraction to new ideas and ways of thinking about the world (pp. 37-38). Cooper's argument is simple: All children (mid-

dle class and poor) bring to the classroom stories that they find meaningful in the context of their lives. Heeding Paley, we might develop their literacy skills by making these stories the center of the curriculum.

A pedagogy of meaning focuses on curricular matters that affect young children's pursuit of truth in the classroom. A pedagogy of fairness ... concentrates on relational matters that influence the teacher's sense of moral purpose in the classroom. (p. 96)

Exploding one of the myths of early childhood education, "Paley makes visible how exclusion is built into the very fabric of early schooling, from expectations of achievement to who gets asked to play" (p. 94). In fact, she argues that if teaching is to become a moral act, the goal of fairness "must surpass even fantasy play and story as a priority in the early childhood classroom" (Paley, 1990, xii, in Cooper, p. 94). Paley consistently asks moral questions about schools and classrooms: "Why do we invite young children to school: to take them in or weed them out?" (p. 8) She is clear that a pedagogy of fairness demands that teachers

be alert to any bias, superimposed expectations, or measure of success that preordains who young children should be, what they should feel, or (as increasingly and aggressively suggested by the pushdown of academics) what they should know and become. (p. 97)

Cooper does many things in her exploration of Paley's pedagogy, but the most important is that she demands that teacher educators consider her pedagogy seriously. She is both timely and thoughtful in her analysis of the kind of education all young children need. The book is not simply a response to the conservative direction that early childhood education is heading; it is a thoughtful deconstruction of aspects of both the so-called conservative and progressive agenda. For example, she critiques the use of writing workshop in early childhood education, and calls to our attention the significant shift towards academics in the agendas of both the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the International Reading Association. This book is a must-read for any educator who wants to

thoughtfully add to the conversation about the direction of education in this country.

Why read Cooper on Paley, when Paley is an author in her own right? Cooper addresses this question at the beginning of the book, but for me, examining Paley's pedagogy through Cooper's lens is sheer delight. Cooper's integration, synthesis, and analysis of Paley's work showcases her pedagogy in novel and authentic ways. Cooper demonstrates Paley's masterful deciphering and analysis of the stories children share as the intersection of psychology and art. Further, Cooper clearly shows the development of a teacher: an inspirational, unusual teacher willing to ask and re-ask questions of justice, care, and meaning not just of the classrooms she teaches in but also of schools and our democracy. Cooper writes:

Too often we speak of professional development as a matter of course not admitting that many very good teachers will never be truly great teachers unless they habitually investigate not just new ideas but old ideas as well. (p. 40)

And while Paley might not have been interested in furthering the educational debate through her pedagogy, Cooper *is* because she believes that public schools must serve all children, not just a few.

As someone who was inspired by Paley since early in my career, I want to re-read the books I have read, and read the ones I haven't yet read. Cooper's analysis suggests that I can read Paley's books in more and different ways: "Paley's stories of children at play are full of moments where the rules are made, tested, broken or repaired" (p. 30), attesting to the undivided attention she gave to making meaning of their play. Paley's ability to depart from and question theory, her ability to open up the possibilities in children's play, and her ability to ask authentic questions about play, suggests a master teacher constantly seeking to create democratic spaces. Cooper is correct in suggesting that Paley has something for *all* of us to consider in order to teach *all* young children.

Book Review

Classroom Conversations: A Collection of Classics for Parents and Teachers

by Alexandra and Maureen Miletta

Published by The New Press (New York, 2008)

Reviewed by J. Camille Cammack

Classroom Conversations: A Collection of Classics for Parents and Teachers by educators and mother/daughter team, Alexandra and Maureen Miletta, is a thoughtful anthology of essays, book chapters, articles, and poems. The collection includes well known, seminal pieces, such as an excerpt from Gloria Ladson-Billing's *Dreamkeepers* and lesser known favorites like "Understanding Students" by David Hansen. The nineteen pieces are organized into five thematic sections: Understanding Children; What's Worth Learning? The Work of Teaching; On Equity and Issues of Social Justice; and The Final Word: Purposes of Education in a Democracy. In addition, each selection begins and ends with a reflective commentary by Alexandra or Maureen.

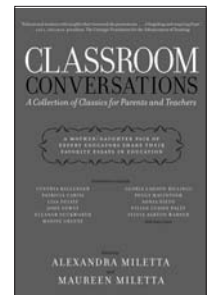
Part I, Understanding Children, includes four pieces. It begins with Patricia Carini's, "A Letter to Teachers and Parents on Some Ways of Looking at and Reflecting on Children." The choice of a letter as the opening piece creates a conversational feel to the text. Carini describes a process for observing and reflecting to help teachers and parents paint rich portraits of children as deeply complex individuals worthy of our careful and caring attention. Carini claims that "the child's preferences, interests, and choices are windows to the child's modes of thinking and learning" (p. 9). Indeed, each piece in this section honors the humanity of children — one of the major themes of the book.

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Next, David Hansen considers the nature of teacher/student relationships in "Understanding Students." Drawing on Rousseau's definition of childhood, he discusses the unique quality of relationships in the educational context. Teachers, he claims, must develop intellectual and moral attentiveness to the students they teach. Intellectual attentiveness is characterized by deep insight into students' responses to subject matter. It includes "mindfulness and understanding of psychological, cognitive, cultural, and social aspects of their students' learning" (p. 23). Moral attentiveness is required because education presupposes a value for human growth and development. Again the focus is on careful attention to students as individuals. It includes an emphasis on both the individual student's character and on how the teacher treats the student. A lifelong part of the development of teachers, understanding students, is central to the growth and development of children.

Also included in Part I is a classic piece by Vivian Paley. Through her storytelling, Paley paints vivid portraits of very young children in classrooms. With a tape recorder as her ally, Paley describes her own process of becoming reflective about her teaching and her journey to learn to really listen to young children. Paley shows us the way to listen with curiosity to the ideas of children, inspiring teachers to listen carefully enough to provide the glue to connect children's ideas together.

Loris Malaguzzi's poem "No Way, The Hundred is There," is a fitting end for Part I of the book. Observing and documenting children's thinking in collaboration with them is at the heart of the Reggio Emilia approach to education. The commentaries by Alexandra and Maureen that begin and end each selection reiterate their commitment to understanding children as deeply complex and fully human. This



becomes the lens through which the four conversations in the remaining parts are viewed. Collectively the pieces in Part I might lead the reader to ask herself, What and how do we teach if we know children in this way?

Part II, *What's Worth Learning*, includes four selections. It opens with Maxine Greene challenging us to think about the role of the arts in imagining new educational possibilities. Contrasting the technocratic nature of Goals 2000 with creative inspiration unlocked through the arts, Greene presents a convincing argument for the place of drama, music, art, dance, and film in education. She contrasts simply knowing *about* art with the participatory involvement *in* art and encourages us to involve children fully in the process.

Included next is a piece written in 1948 by Caroline Pratt. Pratt's central point that play *is* a child's work is artfully illustrated by her description of her first educational project and the play/work it inspired. Pratt convinces us that if children are to learn what is important, their inspirations and understandings must come to them in their own way. Little or no adult interference is necessary for important learning to take place. Children learn through their own first-hand experiences with the world they encounter as they build a fish market with blocks or become an engineer conducting a train made of kitchen chairs.

In the next essay Brian Cambourne describes the conditions that exist in the natural environment that make learning to talk, an extremely complex yet almost universally achieved task, effortlessly mastered. He then suggests that because the necessary conditions for written language learning do not exist in the natural world it is important for schools to create them with respect to reading and writing.

Part II concludes as Christopher Clark makes a case for the value of qualitative inquiry in education. He describes how a close case study of first and second grade children making applesauce was used by teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and lay persons to learn and think about educational practice. This piece can be read by many with a sense of nostalgia; after all, what teacher can't conjure up images of satisfying experiences like this in our work with children. Perhaps the nostalgia of this piece also

metaphorically sums up the works selected for this section. Each piece selected by Alexandra and Maureen takes us back in time to an era when schooling was less defined by test scores and outcomes. Each piece defines learning as a joyful process of coming to live more fully in the world.

Part III, *The Work of Teaching*, is the shortest section of the book and includes just three pieces. The first selection, an excerpt from Eleanor Duckworth's well-known work, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*, provides us with important insights into the teaching/learning process. Learning includes experiencing life first hand and then explaining to others the meanings made. Through her provocative examples she shows us how teachers learn about teaching by paying attention to *their own* learning process.

If the reader knows Sylvia Ashton Warner's work with Maori children, she will enjoy this short excerpt from her book, *Teacher*. Ashton Warner's own words best capture her ideas of what schooling should look like:

I like unpredictability and gaiety and interesting people however small, and funny things happening and wild things happening and sweet, and everything that life is, uncovered. I hate covers of any kind. I like the true form of living, even in school. (p. 148)

In the concluding selection of Part III, Cynthia Ballenger describes her work in a preschool in a Haitian neighborhood in Dorchester, Massachusetts. With help from her Haitian students and colleagues, she comes to understand differences in the way discipline is enacted in Haitian and mainstream North American culture. Aware of the Haitian teachers' and parents' dismay at the way the Haitian children were being allowed to behave in the neighborhood schools, Ballenger uses as text the talk that occurred when Haitian teachers corrected children. A powerful and moving analysis of this talk provides important insight into multicultural understanding and cross-cultural communication. In her commentary Maureen takes issue with some of Ballenger's conclusions but presents the piece as "an excellent example of teacher research" (p. 164). Indeed, each piece in this section defines the teacher's work as in-

quiry based and reflective. No mention is made of the teacher as technician or tester.

Section IV of the book, *On Equity and Issues of Social Justice*, includes five selections and opens with a short version of Peggy McIntosh's well-known essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." McIntosh compares the privileges and advantages afforded white people with an invisible backpack of "unearned assets" (p. 171). She lists some of the daily effects of white privilege in an attempt to help white people see the privileges they have but have been taught not to notice. This is an important piece that certainly warrants inclusion in this book. In addition, it is a fitting opening for this section and foreshadows another major theme of the text as a whole: that understanding, valuing, and teaching across difference is central to teaching.

Teaching for democracy also means engaging students in discussing and debating the controversies inspired by multiple viewpoints as illustrated in Diana Hess's description of the little understood controversy surrounding the Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. She documents the fact that *Brown* is widely accepted as important for children to learn in schools and yet the controversies surrounding *Brown* have not made their way into the school curriculum. In her analysis of high school textbooks Hess found that *Brown* is represented almost exclusively as an icon or a turning point and the controversy surrounding *Brown* is noticeably absent. Hess then makes a case for engaging students in controversy of all types as a "democratic imperative."

The Hess piece is followed by a chapter from Gloria Ladson-Billings book, *The Dreamkeepers*, a piece by multicultural educator and scholar Sonia Nieto, and a landmark piece by Lisa Delpit. Each of these scholars has been instrumental in forwarding the cause of multicultural education.

Ladson-Billings paints portraits of four teachers' classrooms to illustrate different characteristics of culturally relevant teaching. She describes these classrooms to show that even though the strategies teachers use may differ, culturally relevant teaching, in its myriad forms, shares underlying ideological commitments. Ladson-Billings uses these teacher portraits to extract tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, including commitments to believing that chil-

dren can learn, creating community, and focusing on instruction.

"Whose taking calculus? Who's teaching the children?" These are some of the profound questions raised by Sonia Nieto. Nieto poses these questions to help us think in deep ways about equity and social justice in education. Although many efforts to create a more multicultural education have occurred, Nieto reminds us that we must be as attentive as ever to the vast inequities that continue to exist in our schools.

Lisa Delpit writes of the responsibilities of teachers who teach children who speak Ebonics at home. Both an understanding of the child's home language and an understanding of the importance of learning "the national 'standard'" (p. 252) for children who live in our stratified society are necessary. Delpit discusses practices that help children learn Standard English while celebrating the beauty of Ebonics.

Part V, the last section of the book, is titled *The Final Word: Purposes of Education in a Democracy*. With just three selections it seems fitting that this part begins with an excerpt from Dewey's *Democracy in Education*. Dewey asserts that for education to be a democratic project it must be organized to include informed decision-making power on the part of teachers and students:

Until the public-school system is organized in such a way that every teacher has some regular and representative way in which he or she can register judgment upon matters of educational importance, with the assurance that this judgment will somehow affect the school system, the assertion that the present system is not from the internal standpoint, democratic seems to be justified. (p. 260)

The next, somewhat philosophical piece by Carla Rinaldi was my personal favorite. Rinaldi maintains that our educational practices reflect our societal and human values. Values are context-specific and are transmitted, discussed, and constructed within the social context. Values of difference, participation, democracy, learning, and fun are discussed. She looks to the future to consider new cultural values that might "overturn every rigid barrier of culture, class, ethnic group, and wealth (p. 282).

Classroom Conversations ends as it began with an essay in the form of a letter. Joseph Featherstone writes of his passion for education in a letter to the beginning teacher. He describes his grandmother/teacher's commitments to education, insisting "that schools should offer what students need to take part in a democratic society and its culture" (p. 287). This is a fitting end for Alexandra and Maureen whose commitment to the ideals of progressive education is revealed through their choice of essays and the conversation they create.

The dictionary defines classics as serving as a standard, model, or guide. In *Classroom Conversations* the standard is education as a democratic project. Schools should be places where the ideals of democracy are practiced and take root in the minds of the young. They should be places where the multiplicity of ideas and values of a diverse society are embraced and flourish. The work of teachers, then, takes on a profound meaning far beyond the tyranny of standardization and testing. *Classroom Conversations* is a valuable collection for those who work with and care about our children.

Book Review

The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and Battle Over American History

by Jill Lepore

Published by Princeton University Press
(Princeton, NJ, 2010)

Reviewed by Alan J. Singer

Liberals have no answer to the current political and economic crises in the United States. This is made clear, largely by default, in Jill Lepore's well-written, anecdotally rich, but conceptually shallow attempt to explain the Tea Party phenomenon. Lepore is so wedded to telling engaging personal, historical, and contemporary anecdotes, that the narrative thrust of the book is repeatedly lost. As best as I can tell, she places the Tea Party and its adherents within an American tradition of misusers and abusers of history, especially Revolutionary era history, that can be traced back to the early national period, charges them with pseudo-religious historical fundamentalism and "presentism," and blames their latest manifestation on the 1970s debate between radicals on the right and the left over the true meaning of, and proper way to commemorate, the American Bicentennial (71-72).

As a "fair and balanced" liberal, Lepore blames leftist in the chaotic anti-war movement for distorting history for their own ends, thus they share blame for blasphemy against Clio, the Greek Muse of history, and the emergence of the Tea Party Express three decades later. As proof, she cites a statement by Howard Zinn, made in court after he was arrested in a 1970 demonstration. Zinn claimed he was acting "in the grand tradition of the Boston Tea Party" (66).

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Lepore is widely recognized as a sound and systematic historian. I utilized her book about the 1741 New York slave conspiracy (Lepore 2005) for which she received a Pulitzer Prize nomination, in my work as editor of the *New York and Slavery: Complicity and Resistance* curriculum guide (Singer 2008). But this book lacks the same historical depth as *New York Burning*. Lepore tries too hard to weave together four different narrative strands, the history of the original Tea Party, the historical uses of the Tea Party in the past, the actions and ideas of the contemporary Tea Party, and her own contemporary actions (visits to museums and artifacts) and political commentary. The book might have worked more effectively if instead of shifting back and forth within chapters, she dedicated a separate chapter to each strand.

While parts of this book are engaging, Lepore tells readers about visits to Lexington and Concord reenactments with her family (154) and to her child's classroom for a history lesson (162), I have a number of serious problems with Lepore's claims about the Tea Party and history. She provides no evidence of continuity between the Bicentennial debate of the 1970s and the emergence of the Tea Party in 2008. Without continuity there is no causality. Second, blaming the anti-war movement and Howard Zinn for misusing history and encouraging the right to do the same may make for an entertaining magazine commentary, but it is bad history.

When the governing elite or the right lacked a genuine ideological or political threat that they can use to stir up patriotism and mass support, they simply invented one, as they did in the early national period anti-sedition campaigns, during the 1890s anti-labor union attacks and the Red Scare at the end of World War I, under McCarthyism during the Cold War, and with the charges that Obama is a socialist. They neither needed an actual opponent or evidence. As Ambrose Bierce (Schultz & Joshi, 2000) so tellingly described it, "Patriotism is as fierce as a fever, pitiless as the grave, blind as a stone, and irrational as a

headless hen" (328). If the contemporary Tea Party Express did not have Howard Zinn to kick around, they would have invented him.

I have an even greater problem with Lepore's rejection of "presentism" — the re-interpreting of the past in light of the present (15-16). Lepore applauds a somewhat bitter John Adams, it seems Adams was always somewhat bitter, who wrote in 1790, "The history of our revolution will be one continued lye after another." Lepore says Adams was right to worry because "in the national imagination, the Revolution is a fable" (44). For today's Tea Baggers, "rejecting the bailout is like dumping the tea; health care reform is like the Tea Act; our struggle is like theirs" (14). However, Lepore also argues that "The telling of history is, by its very nature, controversial, contentious, and contested; it advances by debate" (47). The revolutionary events taking place in Boston have been embraced as a symbol by both the left and right because they have constantly been reinterpreted in light of contemporary political struggles taking place in the United States. The original Boston Tea Party was sung about by Paul Robeson in "Ballad for Americans" (written by John LaTouche and Earl Robinson in 1939) as he helped mobilize support for the war in Europe. The day Timothy McVeigh blew up the federal office building in Oklahoma City was both the second anniversary of the federal assault on the Branch Dravidian compound in Waco, Texas and the 220th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Curiously, Lepore praises Martin Luther King Jr. for identifying with the Boston Tea Party as a "massive act of civil disobedience" (23).

Lepore should discuss her problems with "presentism" with her friend Eric Foner. In cover notes, Foner described Lepore as a "superb writer" who "offers a lesson in what history actually is and how it seems to constantly be used and abused." However, he has written more than once that "Each generation ... reinvents history in its own image" (Foner 2000). If we set aside that there are some people we like and others we don't, doesn't all this mean that the study of history is always shaped by our understanding of the present.

In other cover comments, Adam Hochschild described Lepore as a "national treasure" who is an "on-the-scene observer of our present-day follies"

and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. exclaimed "no one writes about our Revolutionary history and its effects upon the shape of our culture and society today with more wit, verve, and sparkling intelligence." But while insightful observation coupled with wit and intelligence make for entertaining salon conversation and pithy magazine pieces that target an elite intellectual audience, the book began as an article in *The New Yorker* (Lepore 2010), they do not substitute for historical analysis.

Hochschild, Gates, Lepore and their Ivy League crowd (all three have ties to Harvard University) can have a good laugh at the historical myths championed by Tea Party adherents and dismiss them because of their biases and ignorance, but that does not explain their current prominence, vehemence, or political impact. All it does is reinforce the right's belief, best expressed in the words of former Vice-President Spiro Agnew, that liberals, specifically those who control the media, are "nattering nabobs of negativism" representing a "closed fraternity of privileged men (*sic*), elected by no one" (Edsall 2006, 99-100).

Lepore went out of her way to meet and talk to Tea Party adherents and she tries to portray them sympathetically, although at least one, Austin Hess (2010), has blogged about his feeling that Lepore misrepresented and betrayed them. Personally, I think Hess overreacts. There are no villains in this book, just quant, somewhat funny, historical re-enactors who participate in essentially and harmless rallies (137). Lepore believes, at least in Boston, Tea Party adherents are serious about their identification with the original Tea Party (21). Their idiosyncrasies are almost endearing and they could be forgiven except for their misguided fundamentalism and misuse of history.

For Lepore,

historical fundamentalism is marked by the belief that a particular and quite narrowly defined past — "the founding" — is ageless and sacred and to be worshipped; that certain historical texts — "founding documents" — are to be read in the same spirit with which religious fundamentalists read, for instance, the Ten Commandments; that the Founding Fathers were divinely inspired; that the academic study of history (whose standards of evidence and meth-

ods of analysis are based on skepticism) is a conspiracy, if not blasphemy; and that political arguments grounded in appeals to the founding documents, as sacred texts, and to the Founding Fathers, as prophets, are therefore incontrovertible" (16).

The book is an argument against historical fundamentalism, but does not explore the social, economic, and political conditions that produce fundamentalist movements.

Right-leaning populist movements are not new in the United States. Populism in the 1890s had both radical and reactionary elements. It coupled a demand for political reform with anti-intellectual currents. William J. Bryan, who emerged as a leader of the movement and three times was a Democratic Party Presidential candidate, could champion the poor and disposed, oppose imperialist war, and launch a crusade against teaching about evolution. Historian Samuel Hays (1957) defines the era 1885 to 1914 as a response to industrialism. He argues that farmers, small businessmen, and workers were caught up in a "vise of impersonal market forces" that lead to the disintegration of rural society and urban growth. The "shock of change" gave rise to both progressive and reactionary movements.

In 1920, Warren G. Harding, who coined the term "founding fathers," ran for President using the slogan "return to normalcy." What the term suggested was a return to a utopian version of pre-World War I conditions in the United States, a small town Protestant world where women could not vote, there were no Eastern and Southern European immigrants, and there were fewer cities and factories. Of course it was not possible to turn back the clock to a world that never really existed, but Harding's supporters did succeed in imposing prohibition, breaking the labor movement, arresting political radicals, and severely limiting immigration. The 1920s witnessed a resurgent, anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-Jewish Ku Klux Klan fueled by the status slippage of "traditional" Americans.

Participants in these populist movements were displaced by the rise of industrial capitalism that led to new work and workers, shifts in population and power, great concentrations of wealth, and new groups that defined themselves as Americans. As a

self-proclaimed "presentist" (Singer 1997), I cannot fail to draw parallels between current displacements caused by globalization, the loss of jobs, and the further erosion of traditional power centers in the United States with the election of Barack Obama, who has come to symbolize this shift, and these earlier developments. As I am writing this review tens of thousands of protesters are marching against repressive governments in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen and it remains unclear what ideological directions these movements will take. Similar protests in Iran in 1979 led to the creation of a theocratic state.

Lepore has an extended discussion of the Tea Party's dismissal of race as a factor in the past and present and rightwing efforts to minimize the significance of the history of slavery in the United States. She calls it a history of America "without race" (95). It is also a history of America without "slavery, poverty, ignorance, insanity, sickness or misery.... There were only the Founding fathers with their white wigs, wearing their three-cornered hats, in their Christian nation, revolting against taxes, and defending their right to bear arms" (95). But for some inexplicable reason, perhaps she does not want to sound like one of Bill O'Reilly's "loony liberals," Lepore never uses the word racism or attributes racist motives to the Tea Party and its adherence.

In the book, Lepore credits CNBC business commentator Rick Santelli with calling for a new Tea Party in February 2009 because he was outraged by the Obama stimulus package (but evidently not Bush's financial bailout of the banks and insurance companies). Fox News commentators Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin are referred to repeatedly, but only in passing references. However, the role of the media and figures like Rupert Murdoch (not mentioned) in creating the Tea Party phenomenon is never really addressed. Also missing is a discussion of the Koch Foundation that has provided much of the movement's financial support.

Opposition to change such as that expressed by the Tea Party and its adherents is often expressed in religious terms and secular fundamentalism or calls for return to an idyllic past. Samuel Freedman (2010) has an excellent discussion of this in his *New York Times* column "On Religion." But the cause of the Tea Party movement is the inability of displaced groups

and individuals to adjust to major social, economic, and political transformations. Unfortunately, a discussion of these more fundamental forces is missing from Lepore's book.

As a social studies teacher educator, I have been involved in campaigns to strengthen history education in our schools (Singer 2010). New York State recently suspended 5th and 8th grade social studies standardized exams to focus instruction on math, reading, and writing skills. It is also threatening to eliminate the 10th and 11th grade World history and United States history assessments because of the cost of administering the tests. But the cost of ignoring the study of history is much greater. In January 2011, CNN reported, "High school students' lack of a historical knowledge base can partially be explained by the decrease in class time spent on social studies at the elementary level. History is not an area that requires testing under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, so it often gets shortchanged" (Holland 2011). Unfortunately, the less students know about history, the more vulnerable they become to misleading claims and manipulation by the Becks, Palins, Murdochs, and Kochs who are promoting the Tea Party movement.

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