Using Technology To Create Context in a Disconnected Culture

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Instead of lamenting the growing presence of technology and its effects, we must work to thoughtfully and holistically integrate it into our curricula in ways that enable students to experience both its benefits and its limitations.

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The pen tops clicking uncontrollably like a chorus of Morse code; the chewing of gum by the young lady who always prefers the entire room experiences her tasty treat; the effervescent coughing; the tapping of the laptop keyboards, some taking notes and others updating Facebook profiles or planning evening activities. At the front of the room is the professor, producing the figurative sounds of the trombone tone typical of the adult voices in Charlie Brown's world. This is the modern-day classroom on many college campuses; the quiet yet forceful sounds of a room full of present but disinterested students. The teacher struggles with the moments of silence that occur after s/he poses a question and *stops* speaking. For many students, however, the college classroom *with* the professor's voice is more reminiscent of Simon and Garfunkel's, "The Sound of Silence."

The teacher points to a student who has been raising his hand for a while. He asks, "Will this be on the test?" Suddenly, silence and lifelessness are transformed as the classroom comes to a halt, and for a fleeting moment, there is a sense of life and energy. The students are attentive for the first time since they sat down 35 minutes ago. When the teacher says that it will be, engagement occurs! Pencils and papers fly about as desks shift and students angle and reach for their backpacks. They all are looking for "the grail," their writing instrument, that will help take down the only information that matters, the information that will enable them to perform and attain their real goal: to get an "A." For many college students, the knowledge they will acquire is secondary to their degree, a tangible product which they can display

prominently to potential employers, a demonstration that their time and money have been well spent.

Ironically, most teachers think of the "will-it-be-on-the-test question" as a conversation stopper in class discussion. From the student's perspective however, it represents a conversation starter. What explains this discrepancy? In a previous *Encounter* article, Monke (2009) raised the concern that the "collapse of time and space" facilitated by video games, has altered children's expectations of the real world. He observes, for example, that in nature, wildlife never appear as quickly or dramatically as it does in a *National Geographic* clip, and that children immersed in media have changed their expectations for the real world. Researchers have also suggested that technology use has altered the ways in which children learn (Rainie 2009; Tapscott 1999; Prensky 1999). In this essay we will assert that the argument is not quite this simple. While media has certainly affected how children use their time, it is the ever-present access to media, coupled with a broader cultural shift to a consumer orientation, and the behavioral changes produced by this shift, that have created a classroom climate in which the consumption of knowledge, rather than its production, predominates.

Children's overall media use, including television, music, video games, and the like, has almost doubled since 1999 from just over six hours of use a day to nearly eleven hours (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). For youth aged 8-18, this amounts to an average of about 53 hours of "electronic engagement" each day, much of it spent multitasking (e.g., listening to music while doing homework). For the youngest of children, time spent with media poses an even greater concern in that they face the potential of becoming "always connected" (Lucas Gutnick et al. 2011). Growing up in a world "studded with gadgets" (Lucas Gutnick et al. 2011, 14), 80% of children under the age of five go online at least once a week. As children grow older, their computer use escalates. Nearly 50% of five-year-olds go online daily, and by the time they are between the ages of 8 and 10, they spend an average of 46 minutes each day surfing the web (Lucas Gutnick 2011).

In addition to affecting the ways in which children and teens spend their time, the increased availability of technology has also altered the nature of their interpersonal relationships. About two-thirds of homes (64%) report that the TV is on during dinner (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). The growing availability of cell phones and the internet has created "networked families" (Wellman 2008) in which electronic communication has become an important way of staying in touch. While conversations over the family dinner table have waned, in their place family members experience a kind of "ambient intimacy" as they remain apprised of one another's daily experiences through Twitter, cell phones, and screen sharing (Fox 2008).

Rosen (2007, 31) observes that

> to an increasing degree, we find and form our friendships and communities in the virtual world as well as the real world. These virtual networks greatly expand our opportunities to meet others, but they might also result in our valuing less the capacity for genuine connection.

Among college students, we believe there is ample evidence to support this claim. It is becoming increasingly common, for example, for college students to virtually develop and terminate personal relationships. The term "stalking" is commonly used when a student meets someone, "friends" them, and then regularly checks in on their activities in the hopes of "hooking up" with them somehow. Likewise, rather than meeting one's girlfriend for coffee or calling her on the phone to end the relationship, one can simply change his relationship status on Facebook to "currently seeking…" or even worse, post a picture with a new significant other that allows hundreds of "friends" to receive the news simultaneously.

For holistic educators, these trends are alarming. In the worst case, many of the principles we espouse, such as journaling (Klein 2010), silence practices (Haskins 2010), and the creation of deep mentoring connections (Weldon 2010), will appear as foreign concepts to a generation of children that is routinely plugged into electronic social networks that facilitate quick, public expressions of self which are disseminated widely, but which are ultimately somewhat transient and characterized by a lack of depth. We

will argue here that technology that is always accessible has enabled children to be "with" many others in many places at the same time. This, coupled with a generational persona that privileges "fitting in" over all else is turning the classroom into a kind of stage, a place where public performance (measured in grades) matters much more than knowledge production and the change within that it yields.

Our goal is not to demonize technology, but rather to suggest that it can be used in a more holistic way to enhance the learning experience by creating deeper and more meaningful outcomes for students. We assert that technology can become the means for resolving classroom disconnects when it is implemented to create context (Clark 2011).

Traveling Through Time and Space

The newest wave of immigration from the American homeland to the virtual domain has created profoundly different understandings of self, and hence a different orientation to engaging in the classroom community. Today's students are "Digital Natives" (Prensky 2001) on the frontlines of this change, where the result of time spent in the virtual world can become an impediment in academia. In the contemporary classroom, the presentation of the day's lesson can result in the teacher appearing as a foreigner, a stranger inhabiting a strange land with language, customs, and ways of being that are difficult for the student to comprehend.

There are few periods in Western history where such pronounced shifts in perspective have occurred. In the social science literature, these shifts correspond to what sociologists refer to as changes in social character types. Personality and generational differences are common and reoccur at patterned and predictable intervals across the age span and tend to be inherited biological and psychological temperaments. In contrast, social character types are a

> more or less permanent socially and historically conditioned organization of an individual's drives and satisfactions … with which [s/he] approaches the world and people … which [are] shared among significant social groups and which … [are] the product of experience of these groups (Riesman 2001, 4).

Social character shifts are rare. For most periods in Western history, common personalities and psychologies remained constant across generational divides because the various living generations were still linked by a relatively common set of values and experiences. Dramatic periods of social change result in transformations of social character types. The unprecedented lifestyle changes imposed by the Industrial Revolution in the 1700s, for example, brought about a shift from tradition-directed character types to more inner-directed types (see Riesman 2001 for a more detailed explanation). Similarly, around the middle of the 20th century, as Western populations entered into a period of declining manufacturing and rising consumerism, researchers and therapists began to unearth evidence of the leading wave of yet another social character type change, which they linked to the end of the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of what would eventually become the Consumer and Digital Ages.

The newest character type that began to appear in metropolitan areas among the well-educated white elite differed from previous character types in that their direction in life was derived from those around them. Described as the marketing type and the other-directed character type by Erich Fromm (1964) and David Riesman (2001), respectively, this character type was driven by an all-consuming need for conformity to the peer group. They saw themselves, objects, and other people as the same: things to be consumed, replicated, and to advertise one's social status, prestige and affiliation to the "correct group." For the marketing type, the sense of self is constituted by what the peer group demands and values. In this sense, personality becomes a commodity.

In childrearing practices, this shift in character types manifested itself in a pronounced transition. Strong parental figures, acting as authorities whose primary job it was to shape and mold the permanent character of the child into the parent's own image, were compelled to adopt childrearing practices that began to contract out this authority to the peer group (Riesman 2001). Hence, fitting in, being popular, and being accepted by the "correct" peer group became the overriding concern of parents for their children. From Superman as a moralizing, singular figure who rooted out evil (Riesman 2001) to other-directed me-

dia such as Sesame Street and Barney and Friends, where getting along with large diverse groups became the focus, children increasingly began to be socialized to respond to the groups around them. As described by Riesman, such character types were always being "judged by a jury of their peers" (Riesman 2001, 66). To be judged negatively was to be rejected by the peer group and was tantamount to failure. Paradoxically, the marketing and other-directed types also faced the contradictory pressure of not succeeding "too much," since this too was tantamount to failure to the extent that one stood out and did not conform to group standards. The social situation was coming to resemble the fictionalized and strikingly other-directed town of Lake Wobegone where, "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."

Yet also important in our discussion of the emergence of this new character type at mid-20th century, was the recognition by Riesman and Fromm of the expanding peer group created by changing media and consuming patterns. With a stabilizing population and the rapid accumulation of wealth, consumption began to take precedence over production. Likewise, the advent and growth of radio and television, and the ubiquitous nature of advertising that supported these media led to higher rates of consumption and caused individuals to relate to media and products in new ways (Schor 1999). No longer was media a unidirectional flow of information and entertainment; instead, one came to form emotions towards and feel connected to the people and groups in the media. Thus, the peer group that one felt a need to play to and be accepted by was expanding. Consuming the same products and looking like everyone else became the criteria for acceptance. And as the criteria for "fitting in" were expanded, the anxiety that goes along with knowing you are at all times being judged also grew. We are teaching to a new character type: the Digital Native.

In his work describing the profound changes that have occurred, Giddens (1990) moved beyond the notion of social character to examine how evolving social and behavioral patterns interface with the new social landscape. For Giddens, our era of "radical modernity," replete with technological innovations and the ever-expanding role that they play in society, has rendered the notions of time and space meaningless. Technologies have connected us to people and places far removed from our physical location and, in doing so, they have shifted our focus. We often know more about the private lives and inner workings of celebrities, for example, than we do about our own family members. In the virtual world, distance is irrelevant; and my choices about how I engage myself are driven by my interests, since essentially anyone or anything — local or distant — is accessible. Indeed, my interests come to resemble those of far removed groups and celebrities, and often local people, places, and interests come to appear increasingly strange and foreign and often are not even perceived.

Processes of social interaction are perhaps the most affected. For the last 50 years, Ervin Goffman's dramaturgical paradigm (1959) has been the dominant lens that social scientists, and especially sociologists, have used to view interpersonal interactions. Broadly speaking, Goffman saw interactions as akin to a theatrical play where our statuses worked as characters, requiring roles (scripts) and stages with props to convince ourselves and others of the authenticity of who and what we are at any given moment. Goffman's perspective helps us see more directly how we are playing to an audience for their approval. Integral to Goffman's theory was the demarcation between the front stage where we play to our audience, and the backstage where we can "take off our masks" and be ourselves. Backstage, we have room to make mistakes and to live free from the anxiety and stage fright that an audience implies.

In the context of Giddens's "radical modernity," however, problems present themselves for the marketing and other-directed Digital Natives. The virtual world, available 24-7, does not have a backstage. Cultural and interactional demands, driven by the need to consume and engage technology, require that today's Digital Natives must simultaneously play the role of student, son, daughter, teammate, and friend over technological landscapes that allow them to be physically absent but virtually present in many worlds at the same time. From social networking sites to computers and increasingly smart phones, the student is at always on various stages with multitudes of audiences expecting real-time performances. While for previous generations,

Shakespeare's famous line, "All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players… And one man in his time plays many parts" rings true and accurate, it is perhaps more accurate of the Digital Native to state "one man *at the same time* must play many parts." The Digital Native is always on multiple stages playing to multiple audiences, and is always being judged. It is little wonder that depression and anxiety medications recently overtook heart medications as the most common classification of pills prescribed to Americans (NCHS 2007).

It is because of the simultaneous presence of these various stages that we see a hyperization of the marketing and other-directed types within the contemporary classroom. Thus, while the pace of cultural change continues to increase — i.e., our movement from television and magazines to Facebook, Twitter, and smartphones is both perpetual and swift — our children have not developed a fundamentally different character structure, but one that has finally matured and is more pronounced than previous generations who were living within the transitory phase of the charactological shift.

Thus, for Digital Natives, personality and hence self, become simply manifestations of the demands and values of the Native's many peer groups. Embedded at all times on multiple stages without a stable sense of place and personality, experience, in the authentic sense of the term, becomes problematic, if not impossible (Mullahy 1948). And so, for our students, the other-directed and marketer types are both dominant and more pronounced than in the previous generations. It is the synthesis between this character type and the growing role of the virtual world in their lives that creates such a poignant discrepancy between the perspectives of teachers and students in the college classroom. Digital Natives have been socialized to *consume and replicate* information and objects associated with the distant groups with which they are more deeply embedded. In contrast, the locally situated teacher is hoping the Native produces original and creative thoughts that privilege the *immediate* world. The result is that each appears as a foreigner to the other.

Creating Connections Between Local and Distant

The current generation of college students grew up in an era where computer use, particularly time spent online, was steadily increasing. They began using social networks in high school or college, and if they owned a cell phone, as nearly 75% of teenagers now do (Lenhart et al. 2010), they acquired it during their late teens. In contrast, today many *middle school* children routinely carry a cell phone and retain an active online social profile (Lenhart et al. 2010). The effects of this longer-term virtual engagement are unclear. What is evident, however, is that many young children will develop habits and expectations about the "real world" from their experiences in the virtual world, a world in which internet sites like BrowseWithMe.com may become the means by which infants and toddlers spend "quality time" with their parents (Hooplah 2011). Co-author Birsh aptly summarizes the core dilemma for the current generation of students, to which he belongs: "College has proven to be a place where education is very accessible, but the 'distractions' are many times more accessible."

It has been easy to despair as the three of us have sat together week after week comparing notes and ideas about what the result of the seemingly ever-expanding role of media in children's lives will be. Perhaps in part, we found ourselves responding to the sense of "moral panic" (Bennett et al. 2008) that seems to drive discussions surrounding the impact of technology on learning. It is clear to us that the different social worlds in which students and teachers live, and the dispirate quality of our social interactions, leave us entering the classroom with dissonant agendas. Too often, we engage in the educational process from opposite ends of a spectrum. Because our lives privilege different types of interpersonal engagement, our habits, values, and expectations surrounding the learning process are often at odds as well.

The other-directed orientation of today's college students seems to resonate with Bellah et al.'s (2008, 279) profound words, written over two decades ago:

> Particularly in higher education, students were traditionally supposed to acquire some general sense of the world and their place in it. In the contemporary multiversity, it is easier to think of education as a cafeteria in which one acquires discrete bodies of information or useful skills.

In our "culture of separation" (Bellah 1985, 277) where the world is experienced in fragments, it is sometimes hard for students to create coherence between their learning experiences and their lives. It is difficult to focus on learning for learning's sake and the creation of knowledge in a culture that privileges more tangible outcomes such as "acing the test" or "getting the job." In a "front stage" world, the emphasis is on tangible, short-term consumables rather than invisible, deeper changes that knowledge often produces.

Fromm (1990, 14) recognized these changes and observed that modern civilization fails to fulfill us in the ways that we need it to.

> What is deceptive about the state of mind of the members of a society is the "consensual validation" of their concepts. It is naïvely assumed that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings. Nothing is further from the truth.

Fromm's words inspire us to assert that there *is* a place for the less tangible products that an education produces; in fact, we believe that today's young people are *yearning* to experience them. We believe that contemporary students want to witness the value of local relationships as a way to apply their knowledge in ways that can be felt and observed.

Our teaching evaluations affirm that when we provide these opportunities, they can be quite effective. For example, in a Social Stratification class, where students learn to recognize and understand difference and diversity in race, gender, and social class, we create purposeful connections between distant and local. Students learn about poverty programs through readings and online research, and they then apply this knowledge to an anonymous case study of a local, working poor family residing near our campus.

Clark (2011) argues that curricular design needs to create a context for learning such that students can adopt a sense of ownership over what they are learning and will no longer have to ask" why are we doing this?" As Clark observes, an integrated curriculum that is conscious of context begins with the "connectedness of things" (Clark 2011, 24). To foster a sense of connection, students begin to prepare for their work with a poor family by first reflecting and then writing about a time in their lives when *they* needed help or support: how they felt, the kind of things that helped them in resolving the difficulties that they faced. The writings are designed to increase their mindfulness and to enhance their ability to feel *with* others, rather than *for* others (Schwalbe 2009).

Students' reflective writing serves as a form of subjective context (Clark 2011) — a re-examination of their worldview as it relates to social supports — that provides a foundation from which they conduct more formal research on poverty programs using web-based resources. While they are completing their writing and research, the students are also asked to prepare a food basket for the family to bring them back to the more "local" reality and create a tangible outcome for the learning experience. In short, their online research helps the students learn what might be possible for this poor family in terms of more "distant" longer-term solutions, as they subjectively consider the concept of need, and objectively address at least one need — the need for food — for their assigned family.

By connecting "local" and "distant" aspects of poverty, the students come to understand the experience of being poor on a deeper, more personal level. Many of the course evaluations suggest that this culminating exercise is the most valuable part of the class for the students, as it enables them to:

> See the reality in which many people live and how it is kind of hidden from our lives.
>
> Learn about real-life families living in poverty and help them by donating baskets of food.
>
> Put ourselves in the shoes of a working poor family.
>
> Learn about what it feels like for those individuals who are constantly struggling in life.

Because they apply their research immediately and locally, and approach the issue of poverty in both subjective and objective ways, students can sense the empowerment that can come from creating genuine, if limited, connections between the local and the distant. They experience the phenomenon of interconnectedness in a profound way.

Social theorists identify two possible frameworks for interpreting the role of technology in perpetuating disconnects like those we have observed in our classrooms. Technological determinism suggests that technologies that enable new ways of interacting will exert an independent effect on the way that we live our lives and form our relationships. Our habits and practices will be modified *by* the technology which *causes* us to behave differently (Ogburn 1922). In contrast, social determinism acknowledges that while technology is powerful, it is only as powerful as we allow it to become. After all, people create technology, and people govern its application and establish norms for its appropriate use. Put more simply, we can decide when to turn it off.

Here we posit is a third possibility. We believe that teachers can serve as the "mortar" that enables students to successfully integrate their real and virtual lives in ways that can inform and enhance both. It is impossible for educators to ignore the enormous role of the virtual world in our students' lives. Instead of lamenting the growing presence of technology and its effects, we must work to thoughtfully and holistically integrate it into our curricula in ways that enable students to experience both its benefits and its limitations. We envision a new form of "place-conscious instruction," (Theobald 1997) whose main purpose is to establish linkages between what is "distant" and what is "local." By establishing a local application for an otherwise distant problem, we provide an important "counterbalance to the seduction of mobility and ever more material accumulation" (Theobald 1997, 149) that is characteristic of the marketing orientation of today's young people. Rather than devaluing technology or suggesting it is best to simply "turn it off," our classrooms can become the place for enhancing its value by carefully integrating its use in ways that can demonstrate powerful, local effects.

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Teachers and Directors

Artists in their Own Medium

Kathleen Kristin Ruen

Theatrical directors engage in a form of teaching and their insights are often applicable to the classroom.

Every art form can act as a metaphor for teaching, but I have found directing to be its closest companion, partially because it is an art form that works with people. In fact, when I took a directing class with Paul Austin while studying for my M.S. Ed., I found myself constantly taking notes. So many of Paul's hints to directors related to teachers! I investigated this further by interviewing seven practicing directors and noticed at least five categories where directing and teaching are quite similar. It is important in this discussion to think about both teaching and directing rather broadly, not only as one who "informs" or tells people what to do. Stanislavsky himself said: "A director cannot limit his role to being the medium between Author and Audience" (Gorchakov 1954).

The Power of Observation

Observation is a tool used in both the theatre and in education. Directors spend a great amount of their time observing the actors on the stage and sitting in rehearsals; they are not only involved with the actors themselves but also in creating the environment of the piece by collaborating with lighting designers, set designers, and costumers. Teachers as well have the opportunity to watch their students as they play in the yard and work in the classroom, and like a director, they are able to create a unique environment for them in the classroom. It seems in both professions that the closer and more descriptively one can see the actor/child, the better the director/teacher will be able to provide a direction for the child/actor that will make the most sense and produce the best result for them.

The kind of observation that directors and teachers must engage in is two-fold: they must be aware of

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the specific and the whole at the same time. There is dynamic interaction between the specific and the whole that is illustrated by the structure of our DNA. In the smallest particle of our selves is a blueprint of the whole. Likewise, in paying close attention to specific details of a person or character, one can reveal a larger idea or theme. In the realm of education this way of looking is grounded in the Prospect Descriptive Review Process, developed by Patricia Carini (Himley & Carini 2000). Some of Paul Austin's remarks relate directly to the work and ideas of Carini, and placing them in context with each other further supports the notion of teaching and directing as similar art forms.

"*A director must understand the life-objective of the character*" (Austin 1992). The life-objective is the character's essence, the drive that moves him through life and influences his decisions. A director must be pretty clear about the character's life-objective in order to help the actor. Likewise, when a teacher understands what may be driving the student — for example, her interests and ways of doing things — she too can truly begin to teach. A small change in a student will mean much to the teacher if that teacher is a careful observer. A director as well can help an actor highlight a turning point in the play by a change in his or her inflection and stance. "On a subtler level, when we know someone well, a slight refocusing of the gaze, or a slight variation in the angle of the body, may speak volumes" (Carini 1979).

"*Always make references to the specifics in the play*" (Austin 1992). A director will be able to communicate his ideas more effectively if he can use details within the play as examples. In this way the actor and the director can be grounded in what *is*, rather than in interpretations that may not be relevant. In a similar manner, the more specific a teacher is in describing a child's work to the child, for example, "I see that you used a lot of red paint in this area, and mixed it with blue a little bit over here," the more likely the child will be able to meet the teacher in understanding how the child creates and what is being learned in the process.

In both these instances — one where the director/teacher is understanding the character/child, and the other where the director/teacher is understanding the text/work of the child — the same dynamic between the specific and the whole is occurring. In other words, the teacher and the director must be able to observe and hold together the parts and the whole at the same time, and be able to see the individual child/character while also looking at the entire work/text of the child.

The Value of Questions

A valuable way for directors and teachers to communicate is through questions. Sometimes a person needs a direct question, while at other times a rhetorical question can help a person rethink what he/she is doing. Questions rather than commands give both the actor and the child a sense of autonomy and choice, while they steer them towards seeing things in a new way. Educator Eleanor Duckworth has written many books and articles on how questions help children enter into situations and how the phrasing of a question can be crucial to the child. "It is sometimes important to vary the words used until they make contact with the child" (Duckworth 2008). The directors I interviewed were very clear about how one can use questions with actors.

"*When in trouble, look for a question*" (Austin 1992). If directors are stuck in the play itself, a question can sometimes help them get back on track. Teachers can use questions about their own practice in the classroom to help them refocus and understand what to do next (Himley & Carini 2000). Often teachers find a large question that helps them support the growth of a class curriculum (Schwartz 1990).

"*When you ask (an actor) too often, 'How did that feel?' you are getting information for yourself, not helping the actor*" (Austin 1992). When a teacher asks, "What is that? What are you doing?" too often, the same thing is happening. The child, like the actor, may begin to shut down. Questions like these are needed at times, but too many make the relationship between the teacher and the child one-sided: the child informing the teacher. In a similar vein, Austin says, "Why questions are bad: They shut off actors" (Austin 1992). Both actors and children think that "why" questions must have right answers. The fear of critique for giving a wrong answer can halt the growth of the child and the actor.

"A good question is, 'So, what do you want to do now?' " (Austin 1992). In the relationship between a

director and an actor, this question can help both if the director is not sure what should happen next. When a teacher poses a similar question to a child, the child is empowered to make a choice about what is needed at that moment. The better a teacher and child know each other, the easier it is to have this kind of frank exchange. This goes for the director and the actor as well.

"The director helps the actor frame the right questions and how to ask them" (Austin 1992). In addition to asking good questions of students, the teacher should also be interested in the ability of a child to *ask* questions. Appropriate questions can help the child propel him- or herself into new investigations and understandings of an idea. Once a child is able to ask questions of herself and others, she will never stop learning.

"If you have a question, I will answer it. If I don't know it, I will find it out for you" (Freelon 1992). Embedded within this comment are two elements: the willingness to admit that one does not have all the answers; and the responsibility to respond honestly to a child/actor's question if the answer is known, and not feign ignorance in the name of "investigation." For some children/actors, asking questions is the way that they learn. It is important to take the time to respond to each question in a way that satisfies the learner. If there is a fear that an answer might end an inquiry, one must remember that if a child/actor is still interested in a direction of knowledge after getting an answer, he/she will continue to investigate it.

Questions are tools for both directors and teachers that allow the actor/child to become owners of their own learning and understand where they are currently in their own process. Knowing what kind of question might help is closely related to knowing the child/actor. Questions can be a way to understand where a child/actor is at a particular moment, but the most useful questions help the child/actor expand the possibilities of thought and action. "We need only broaden their scope by opening up parts of the world that that children may not, on their own, have thought of thinking about." (Duckworth 2008)

Timing

For teachers and directors, timing is a critical part of their work. Some of the questions directors and teachers ask of themselves frequently are: When do I ask this question, when do I introduce something new to this group, and when do I give an individual space. The sense of timing comes from observing both the mood of the group and the individual.

Cheryl Katz (1992) describes timing as "when to push when not to push; when to end early and when to take a day off." Human beings are not built to obey unquestionably and cannot perform consistently, no matter how much it is expected. The more a director/teacher can understand where a group is naturally headed, the better he can adapt and provide what the group needs to move forward. A high-energy day might call for many quick exercises, risk taking, and humor. A low-energy day may call for an extended period of listening and reflection. Slowing down or shifting to another activity can allow the cast/class to take in the prior work and ideas and process them, which is often far more helpful than pushing on to the next scene or lesson.

As with questions, timing works best when teachers and directors know who they are working with. If a strong relationship and bond is created within a group, the teacher/director can take more risks in offering more than the group can handle. Austin (1992) states that "there is validity in offering too much to the actor, as long as the actor can say no." Teachers and directors must be sensitive to overstimulation in their work. The behavior and reaction of the participants to the presentation of the teacher/director needs to be taken into account. Wise teachers and directors have reworked blocking or classroom arrangements after a day where it became clear that something was not working! And when a child/actor can come out and tell the director/teacher that "This is too much for me right now," it can be extremely helpful in modifiying one's practice.

Shirley Kaplan (1992), director, teacher, artist and playwright, has observed that "knowing the moment that the actors own the play [is vital]. You did what you had to do. Now is the time to disappear." This is perhaps both the hardest and most joyful moment for both the director and the teacher. The ensemble now knows enough to not need you hovering all the time. The students and the actors now have a true sense of themselves and the work they intend to do. It is difficult to step back and let go, especially

when you have spent so much time guiding and supporting what has occurred. The satisfaction of this moment is the realization that enough tools have been provided so the actors/children can now own the work, and that this ownership will continue long after, whether in the long run of a show, or in the learning life of a child. For a teacher, the feeling might resemble that of a director on the opening night of her show, watching proudly from the darkness of the house while the actors take the stage.

Timing is an element that is essential to the work of teachers and directors. The practice of this particular element of the art is hampered in the theatre by shorter and shorter rehearsal periods, and it is greatly hampered in education by the imposition of bells and set periods for learning, and in the race to cover what might be on a high-stakes test. In order to practice timing, one must *have* time, and somehow this is often in short supply.

Space

Space for teachers and directors has to do with where the action occurs, where the scenes and the learning will play out. For directors, the tangible space is the configuration of the stage. For teachers, it is how the classroom is arranged. Space can also be of an intellectual nature: the teacher or director's allowance for certain ways of thinking and expression. Within both the theater and the classroom, expectations of inner exploration should already be in place. It is obvious, but it still needs to be stated, that the elements and styles of both teachers and directors will be present in the spaces they create. Teachers must be constantly aware of the balance, and tension at times, between the scene of the "action" and what the actors or students bring to that space.

Paul Austin (1992) believes that "once one has a successful ground plan, all movement becomes inevitable." In directing, one needs to place set pieces in a way that interesting connections might take place between the actors. Levels (a sunken living room, stairs, chairs) work well for directors to show relationships, and help the actors explore those relationships in their work. In the same way, teachers need to be aware that the way tables and desks are placed will have an effect on the movement of the class. Intense discussions might occur around a large worktable or a large rug. Quiet chatting or reading is more likely to occur in a pillow-filled corner with a cosy chair and lamp. Many teachers quickly learn that the placement of a wastebasket can have a dramatic effect on the tone of the class. Like the director, the teacher needs to imagine the students in the space while she is setting it up.

Imagining the students in the space may help the teacher question some of the choices she has made. For example, the choice to have a "teacher's desk" and the placement of this desk set up a power relationship that will be obvious to the students from the first day of class. Rows of desks will often communicate individual, focused, competitive learning, while round tables with chairs send a message that students will talk to each other and collaborate. Between these two choices lie many variations, including outdoors schools that break all of these constructs (Leyden 2009).

Shirley Kaplan (1992) feels that for directors it is "important to create the environment and the spacing and the style." The style of the classroom space usually reflects the style of the teacher. Some teachers want to make a space for each discipline, to clearly emphasize this way of thinking for their students. Others might be interested in putting various books and materials in one space, related to a theme, like dinosaurs, in order to show how the disciplines are interrelated. Another teacher might mix up elements in order to free children to make their own connections. The style of the space also relates to the values that a teacher holds toward the purpose of education itself.

Paul Austin (1992) asserts that "one needs space for large ideas." A play reads differently when it is played in a tiny black box instead of a huge auditorium. Small spaces usually convey intimacy and personal relationships. The larger the space, the more often larger ideas will prevail. For the teacher, considering the architecture of the room and how the largeness or smallness of space will affect the depth of ideas is important. Teachers and administrators need to rethink the value of space, and how the design of schools and classrooms affect students' learning. The Mead School in Connecticut is a good example of how school design affects learning. Its spaces flow from one room to another with many openings

to let the building, and ideas, breathe. I can envision ideas floating around in this space and resting in corners to be found again later. In contrast, students who attend schools with only one working toilet, overcrowded and crumbling classrooms, and inadequate heat certainly understand how much their ideas are valued by the larger world (Kozol 2006).

But space can also be the intellectual space allowed by the teacher. If a teacher thinks globally, symbolically, and meaningfully, and encourages the students around her to think likewise, space for thinking and learning can be found in the "closets" many teachers find themselves working in, but this is an almost impossible challenge.

In viewing several plays in different theatrical venues, I have noticed that plays that have worked well on a small stage lose their particular power when the action is placed in a larger setting, where even the actors have more physical distance between themselves. Epic plays (I am thinking about *Angels in America*, Shakespeare, and opera) are often more powerful on large stages. Intellectual, political, and philosophical ideas can play in a small space, perhaps not as grandly as on a large stage, but subtle, intimate, relational ideas need a closeness and smallness between the actor and the audience. If one makes a connection of this idea to education, schools need to have both kinds of spaces, with the spaces also replicated within each classroom. Spaces for big ideas and subtle connections need to be provided for students in schools.

Playwright and director Eduardo Manchado (1992) looks at space as "the foundation in which to base everything else on. It gives you a pad to sketch on. It tells you where you want to go off in to." The classroom space is both the grounding of the teacher in the tangible and the limits to which a class can expand an investigation in thought.

Qualities of Good Directing and Teaching

As a part of my 1993 interview study with these directors, I asked each one what they thought were the qualities of good directing. They responded:

- Patience
- Flexibility
- An understanding of psychology
- A good imagination
- An inquiring mind
- An ambition to work with people
- A willingness to assume responsibility
- A love of the medium itself
- Vision
- Courage
- Respect for all professionals in the medium
- Organization
- Compassion
- Not being afraid to do it
- Having standards while staying open in the hand
- Inquisitiveness
- Patience
- A love of design
- Life experience
- Perception
- Working one on one
- Listening
- A love of what motivates actors
- Trusting actors
- A respect for both the text and the actor

I believe that educators and teachers can see that these qualities also reflect the art of teaching. I find that there is a real connection between these two types of artists, one that should be explored much further, for both can learn a great deal from the other.

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From Critical Thinking to Critical Being

Catherine Broom

Critical being values all aspects of our human nature equally and, thus, all students with their diverse unique abilities and interests.

Evans' (2004) review of the history of social studies in the United States illustrates that social studies is a conceptually complex subject. That is, no single definition of the subject exists, rather definitions range from traditionalist views of social studies education as history study to progressivist interpretations based on the work of Dewey to reconstructionist orientations that aim to remake a more socially just society. Nevertheless, most of these orientations, particularly the latter two, aim to develop a number of key skills and abilities in students. The key skill that both progressivists and reconstructionists identify is that of critical thinking. Although the two orientations have different conceptions of what critical thinking is and how it is developed, they both agree on its importance. Indeed, for some, critical thinking is *the* reason and aim for social studies teaching (Darling & Wright 2004), and for schools in general. Dewey can be placed in this tradition, because he understood that the aim of education should be the development of a continually growing democracy, which requires individuals who are able to think critically. The latter involves "extending the limits of experience … to enlarge the mind … by remaking … meaning" (Dewey 2007, 8). For reconstructionists such as Freire, "meaning" is also remade but through a process of critical praxis and with the aim of transforming consciousness that leads to social justice action.

As critical thinking is given such importance in social studies, a number of theorists have attempted to clarify the elements of critical thinking and the processes through which it is developed. This paper will begin by reviewing some well-known conceptions of critical thinking, which link to social studies aims and pedagogies, such as those by Ennis, Paul, and

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Bailin et al. It will then illustrate one shortcoming found in all of these definitions: they are framed within a Western, Plato-Baconian tradition that privileges the mind over other elements of human beings' complex natures. This paper attempts to address this shortcoming by presenting an alternative model that considers all elements of our human nature and values all learners with varied abilities and interests. It argues that all elements of our nature must be addressed if the comprehensive development of students' thought processes is to occur. The model of critical thinking presented here is thus reconceptualized as *critical being*. It draws on current Western literature that refutes the Platonic-Baconian split between mind and body/nature such as that found in Postmodernist and feminist literature, as well as Western and non-Western traditions that encompass holistic philosophies of being. It aims to present a reframing of critical thinking that is "outside" of current Enlightenment discourses of rationality (Popkewitz 2010), which often underlie contemporary critical thinking theories and to present a model that is embedded in emerging ecological discourses (Broom 2011).

Well Known Definitions and their Roots

Many models of critical thinking exist, all of which are enmeshed in rational, Enlightenment discourse that argues for individual free will and the reigning importance of reason for effective thinking (Popkewitz 2010). For example, Ennis defines critical thinking as "reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe and do" (Darling & Wright 2004, 248). He argues that the process is composed of twelve abilities that are logical in nature, including being well informed, developing and judging the quality of reasoned arguments, distinguishing between statement types (reason versus assumption), and drawing rational, valid conclusions (Enis 2010).

Similarly, Paul's definition of critical thinking is a "mode of thinking in which the thinker improves the quality of his/her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them" (Darling & Wright 2004, 248).

Like Ennis, he views critical thinking as the teaching of critical thought processes in order to lead to better logical thought, to the "training of the mind," so that poor thinking processes such as logical fallacies and the use of incomplete information can be corrected. Teaching thus aims to develop students' abilities to assess the quality of information presented and how well arguments have been logically framed, to explore the points of view inherent in statements and the validity of conclusions that emerge from the argument, and to develop logical thinking elements such as defining terms clearly, including relevant arguments, and using logical procedures. He makes his connection to the ancient Greek roots of his conception explicit: "'critical' derives etymologically from two Greek roots: "kriticos" (meaning discerning judgment) and "kriterion" (meaning standards)" (Paul 2009). That is, critical thinking is the development of improved thinking processes through the learning and application of a number of principles of good thinking.

Improving thinking skills is also the definition critical thinking of Bailin and her collegues: "thinking through problematic situations about what to believe or how to act where the thinker makes reasoned judgments that embody the attributes of quality thinking (Darling & Wright 2004, 249).

They argue that this valuable thinking can be developed through the use of knowledge and the teaching of habits of mind and thinking skills embedded in a pedagogy that gives students problematic situations ("critical challenges") to work through. "Habits of mind" encompass the character traits that individuals need for critical thought, such as open-mindedness. Intellectual tools are the logical procedures that students can learn and use to think critically, such as, syllogisms and decision-making frameworks (Case 2005).

Finally, Lipman's definition is "skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it relies on criteria, is self-correcting, and sensitive to context" (Darling & Wright 2004, 249).

Lipman (2003) has focused on developing reasonable and rational critical thinking in children. He aims to improve intellectual thought by teaching the elements of logical thought, such as reasoning skills, judgment and recognition of logical fallacies, and teaching students how to consider contextual factors

in decision making through inquiry-based learning within a community of inquiry framework.

These definitions, in short, all view critical thinking as an activity of the "mind" controlled by intellectual processes such as reason and logic — all are thus developed from Enlightenment discourse (Popkewitz 2010). While some acknowledge the need to consider contextual factors in students' environments, they ignore or discount other elements of our being, such as the influences that our bodies may play in influencing thought. They view these as negative influences that must be controlled through the "higher" thinking processes of the mind.

This focus on reason and logic as being our highest attributes can be traced far back in one Western tradition. Plato, for example, hypothesized that individuals were composed of three natures: their appetites, emotions, and mind — the highest of which was the logical mind, symbolized by "golden" individuals in society (Plato 1999). Figure 1 illustrates this hierarchical view of our nature: our natural appetites encased in our physical nature (such as hunger) are the lowest elements of our natures; a little better (higher) is our spirit that encompasses our worthy emotions such as courage. At the top of the pyramid is our "best" feature as humans: our ability to reason and use logic, our mind. As this model privileges the mind over other elements of our natures, it values some abilities and kinds of students more than others.

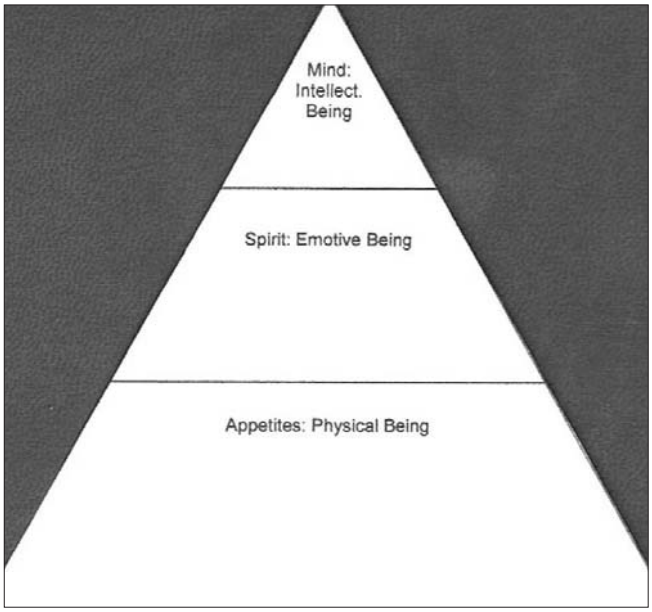

Figure 1. A Hierarchical Privileging of Mind in the Western Tradition

To become fully human, supporters of this orientation feel that we have to overcome our two baser natures through our highest nature: our intellect. Other Western thinkers, particularly individuals associated with the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment such as Bacon and Descartes, have also given primacy to the mind over other elements of our natures. This dualism, or split in our nature, inherent in this Western discourse divided us from our bodies and the natural world with damaging consequences for both self and nature and led to the valuation of the "intellectual" student over other types of learners.[1] Critical theorists such as Foucault and Popkewitz (2010) have made these Western perspectives "visible" and by doing so have provided opportunities for transforming our understanding, our lived reality, through the manner in which we apprehend the world around us.

Critical pedagogues' views differ to those of the "critical thinking" tradition described above as they explore the hidden structures of particular "truth" discourses that may support the oppression of particular groups in society (Burbules & Berk 1999, Foucault 1980; Freire 2000). This paper draws on this critical perspective to deconstruct critical thinking models framed within particular Western discourses and presents an alternative reconceptualization of critical thinking framed within twenty-first century ecological discourse that aims to reconnect mind and body, heart and soul, individual and society. The following section illustrates how current conceptions of critical thinking are flawed, and then presents an alternative model of critical being.

Possible Failings

A student may be bright and apt at logical processes, but if that student does not believe in him- or herself, that individual may deny the very logical conclusions he/she comes to: he/she will discard them as being of poor quality, even if they are actually logical coherent. The problem with this individual, that of insecurity, is not a flaw of the mind. It is a reflection of an emotional need, but it will quash critical thinking. Another individual may have the opposite character trait: he/she may be arrogant

(Callan 2008). He or she may believe that any conclusion he/she draws is the best possible. With this flaw, the individual will not be open-minded (Hare 1979) to the possibility that his/her logical processes or conclusions are incorrect. He/she will not take due diligence in drawing his/her conclusions. Again, the quality of critical thinking will be affected.

Yet another individual may be bright intellectually but lazy. The logical ability of this student is of no value as the individual lacks the passion to bother to think critically. Such individuals may be pushed to think, but if they lack the emotive being necessary to drive the intellectual endeavor, no critical thinking will result. They may be easily indoctrinated since they fail to critically engage with and question ideas presented to them. For example, an individual who smokes has bought into the false advertising of tobacco companies. He or she may believe he/she has "chosen" to smoke, but in reality he/she has been led — through advertising and mass media — exactly to the conclusions the tobacco companies aim at. This acceptance of falsities (or indoctrination), however, is more than an intellectual flaw; it is also an emotive flaw, linked to the need for social acceptance. It then also becomes a physical dependency, and our physical being will send false statements of physical being to the conscious mind to reinforce its addiction.

Another individual may be uncomfortable in the physical space he or she is in. This circumstance may influence the quality of critical thinking conducted, or the ability of that student to share his or her thoughts with the class. He or she may not feel a sense of emotional engagement (Egan 1997) and shut down intellectually. The physical space may affect a thinker in another manner: it may help to determine the precepts that are used to guide critical thought and the values used to judge the quality of precepts and conclusions drawn. The social construction of concepts such as childhood is an example (Vygotsky 2004). In addition, an individual may have physical features, such as illnesses, that impact on the quality of critical thought. For instance, the precepts thought about and the manner in which these precepts are understood and ordered can be influenced by conditions such as anxiety or depression. Finally, students might be learners whose intellect is embedded in varied elements of our being and whose forms of intelligence are thus not recognized in traditional and limited models of critical thinking. For example, a student might be a gifted dancer whose knowledge is a form of embodied knowing. Another might be an imaginative artist who intellectual gift is creativity. Another might be empathetic, able to understand and nurture other people through a kind and intuitive heart, and have a strong emotional intelligence.

Haidt's (2006) metaphor illustrates the power of emotions: he presents the mind as an elephant ridden by an individual. The elephant represents all our "older" brains, which process most of the automatic functions and processes we engage in daily. The rider represents the logical and conscious mind. The elephant has its own form of intelligence and conducts its daily work without much interruption from the conscious, logical mind. Indeed, it can structure the very manner in which the logical mind works, without its awareness. Haidt (2006, 14) explains:

> Likewise, exposure to words related to the elderly makes people walk more slowly; words related to professors make people smarter at the game of Trivia Pursuit; and words related to soccer hooligans make people dumber. And these effects don't even depend on your consciously reading the words; the same effects can occur when the words are presented subliminally, that is, flashed on a screen for just a few hundredths of a second, too fast for your conscious mind to register them. But some part of the mind does see the words … most automatic processes are completely unconscious, although some of them show a part of themselves to consciousness.

Importantly, the elephant can control the rider with its own "subconscious" agenda. This subconscious is formed during our very first years of life and is pre-consciousness (Greene 2004). Some interesting work has explored how this "pre-consciousness" affects or even predetermines the conclusions and actions of the conscious mind (Velmans n.d.).

Thus, considering critical thinking to be only an activity of the conscious mind is flawed thinking. We have many elements of our being as humans and these interact, and we have many kinds of learners with numerous and varied forms of intelligence

(Gardner 1999). These need to be acknowledged and included in our conception of critical thinking in a manner that does not privilege one element and discount the importance of other elements of our nature. This re-framing of critical thinking recognizes the manner in which effective critical thinking may lead to a variety of different and acceptable conclusions, depending on a number of factors related to our complex, multiple natures and contexts. Further, it understands critical thinking to be relational, that, is, to be nurtured within particular social environments (Burbules & Berk 1999) and to encompass a number of varied forms of intelligence.

An Alternative Model: Critical Being

This model defines critical being as methodical and insightful thinking about ideas and problems that emerge from the interaction of character virtues (linked to one's spirit), such as open-mindedness and empathy, with factual knowledge and correct concepts and skills like reasoning (in one's mind), in an individual who is motivated to think (emotive being) and values thoughtful reflection (affective being). It also understands critical being to involve insights and knowledge arrived at through other forms of being, such as intuition and instinct, which are embedded in other parts of our nature, like our physical body or emotions. Critical being is developed through discussion, questioning, and activities with the use of examples and practice, in an open and enabling environment. It recognizes the dynamic, interactive and systems-like nature of being and the importance of acknowledging and reflecting on the manner in which all elements of our being continuously interact and affect our thinking processes and are integral and essential elements of us as living creatures. This model builds on Miller's (2007) conception of holistic education as it encompasses balance, inclusion, and connection between our mind, body, emotions, and spirit, while being framed within an ecological consciousness.

An ecological system is understood to be comprised of multiple entities that interact with each other in open and closed systems, and that need each other to live. One entity is not considered "better" than another; rather, all play a part in sustaining the system as a whole, sometimes in symbiotic relationships. The aim is not progress, but continually evolving balance. Applying this model to critical thinking leads to a view that individuals are composed of a number of different natures, or "beings" that interact with one another. We have intellectual, spiritual, emotive, affective and physical beings. Each of these elements is porous and open as it continuously interacts with and is acted upon by others, and is equally valued. This non-hierarchical model connects to current work in ecofeminism (such as Brammer 1998) and Connected Knowing (Broom 2010, Belenky et al. 1986).

Conceptual Terms

Physical being is our living body. It interfaces with the external world and has its own needs, wants, and knowledge. It is rooted in a physical place and requires identification and connection with this space. Lack of connection to place can lead to a form of "conceptual violence" (Jardine et al. 2004) against the other elements of the self and the physical environment. The physical being's needs must be satisfied to maximize critical being. Depriving these needs can have consequences for general well being. Physical being wants must be explored and critically questioned through dialogue and reflection and may be influenced by culture. Damage to physical being must also be addressed. For instance, the use of drugs damages all elements of our being. Studies have also found that consumption of too much sugar by students, or bad diets, can affect their emotions, behaviors, and abilities to learn (Jones et al. 1995).

Our body has forms of embedded knowing we call instinct and intuition. A study of how the "body" has been viewed in different times and societies and the impact this has had on "thought" can be illuminating. For example, during the Middle Ages in Western Europe, the body was seen as the "evil" seat of passions. This led to a splintering of the connection between mind and body, which has continued down to the present in Modernist thought. Western medicine today continues to treat isolated body parts, and not the whole person (Foucault 1980). Environmental destruction is accepted because we have separated mind (person) and body (place). This split is also illustrated in the traditional valuing of intellectual work more than physical work.

Emotive being are our emotions, housed within the subconscious brains ("elephant") and body. They express and influence the spirit, mind, and/or bodily conditions. Bertrand Russell (1915) acknowledges the power of emotions with the example of fear and its connection to social relationships and critical thinking:

> But if thought is to become the possession of many, not the privilege of the few, we must have done with fear. It is fear that holds men back — fear lest their cherished beliefs should prove delusions, fear lest the institutions by which they live should prove harmful, fear lest they themselves should prove less worthy of respect than they have supposed themselves to be.

In addition, the feeling of shame can be an indication that we have not lived up to our values — expressions, that is, of our spiritual being.

Emotions can be guides to subconscious thoughts that affect critical being. They can also be expressions of intuitive or alternative ways of knowing and can lead to creativity. Their power to shape and alter thought should be discussed. Appealing to our emotions has often been used by those aiming to shape public opinion, such as propagandists, with great success. The question of transforming emotion through other elements of being requires consideration. Transformed emotion can alter thought, and vice versa. Emotions are the drivers of motivation and thus of the desire to engage in learning. Their power needs acknowledgment: Hume went so far as to say, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (in Haidt 2006, 17).

The emotions are communicated, "exposed" and possibly transformed through art and discussion. Unlike Plato who viewed the arts are dangerous, the arts, both musical and visual, are a necessary part of humanity and education (Castiglione 1959). When explored, validated, and possibly transformed, these "passions" animate all our beings and can also lead to virtue (Roeder 1933) thus connecting to our spiritual and affective beings. Noddings (2003) illustrates the importance of emotive being in her work on the Ethic of Care. She describes the need for care to foster the relationships necessary for creating a space in which critical exploration can occur. This caring environment should be one in which all students are welcomed and included, in which each feels valued for his/her individual strengths and abilities. This emotion of care should extend beyond relationships with others to self-care (self-esteem) and care for the environment. Mass media is particularly good at exploiting our emotional need for social relationships; they insidiously influence our perception of social success. Developing our students' emotional intelligence is a requirement for critical being.

Intellectual being is our conscious mind. It is composed of knowledge, concepts, and skills (the "rider" of Haidt's elephant) and is the easiest element to control and develop consciously. Skills include researching, inferring, classifying, and writing. It is often affected by other elements of our being.

Spiritual being is our philosophy of existence that is manifested through our character and our virtues and vices. It "transcends" across different elements of being and shapes the manner in which concepts/precepts are chosen, constructed, and processed in the mind. For example, if I value (spiritual being) and live (affective being) open-mindedness, I will consider multiple points of view when investigating an idea. It includes character traits such as open-mindedness, empathy, courage, integrity, and respectfulness.

The spiritual being also places elements of thought into a hierarchical framework according to the importance of the value underscoring the material thought about and understands values to be context-developed and fluid. For example, if I value equity more than justice, I might, with logical validity, support unequal actions to achieve equity. Students should be aware that some values, such as open-mindedness, humility, and empathy, foster critical being. They should also be aware of their own values and how they interface with intellectual being. They can question the values undergirding situations and issues and recognize that a number of possible conclusions can be both different and equally valid. One possible means is through the exploration of the beliefs and values of a number of different social-cultural groups, across both time and space.

Affective being is the expression of our values in our actions. It can be explored through values identification and clarification activities as part of a unit on

controversial issues (which also links into emotive being), as well as through hands-on activities such as service projects. Affective being is apparent in what we do, and it is in the doing that it influences the other beings of which we are composed.

Significance of this Model

This model acknowledges, values, and encompasses all aspects of human beings and the interrelations and interconnections of these different "beings" that compose us. It integrates logical thought with other elements of our nature in a non-hierarchical, interactive manner. Each being has its role and is involved in the process of critical being. Just as each of our beings ought to be recognized and validated in the model, each student is valued: each is composed of our multiple, yet varyingly manifested, natures. As Whitehead (1929) argued, this model studies "life" (or being) as an integrated whole. It views our nature and thought as fluid and constantly evolving. It recognizes that critical being can be expressed in a number of varied ways in students of different abilities and interests. Valuing all aspects of ourselves as enriching us in different ways, it values all people as enriching our society as a whole as well.

Figure 2 illustrates the splintering of Plato's hierarchical pyramid into that of a metaphorical circle. In the figure, Plato's three elements — appetites (physical being); spirit (emotive and spiritual beings); and mind (intellectual being) — become of equal value as they continually interact with each other and are acted upon. Thus, intellectual being does not exert control unilaterally as our "best" human quality. Rather, our other beings influence the intellectual being in their own right and form, just as individuals have different abilities and express varying types of intelligence. For example, emotion can be an expression of the spirit as illustrated in intuition and creativity; emotions can fire the mind, and physical being is affected by (and affects) intellectual being: when I am physically healthy, my emotions are affected which influences my intellectual thought, as the premises I choose to focus on will be different than those I will chose in other circumstances. My actual thought processes will legitimately differ.

The model's aim to promote harmony and balance can be considered a nonwestern, or "Eastern" tradition. However, the model presented here is not truly embedded in Eastern philosophies. Many Eastern

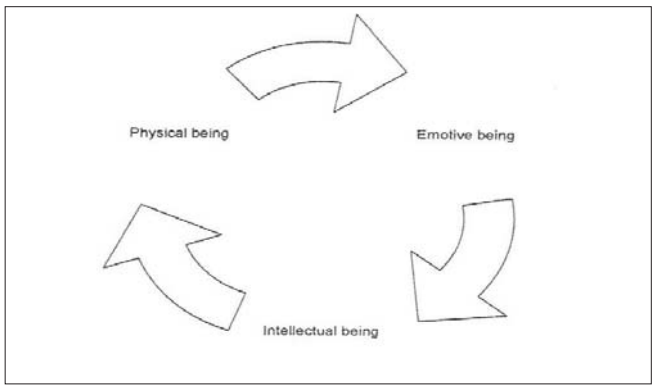

Figure 2. A Non-hierarchical Model

philosophies understand all things to be interrelated (Haselhurst & Howie 2011). Capra states:

> The most important characteristic of the Eastern worldview — one could almost say the essence of it — is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality. (Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* [1975], quoted in Haselhurst and Howie 2011)

Three key philosophies that illustrate this concept include Buddhism, which aims to have individuals find peace and harmony through the letting go of earthly desires and the imagined "self." Secondly, Hinduism understands all living matter "is one" and that "everything is everywhere, always" in a dynamic form (Haselhurst and Howie 2011). Meditation is understood as a way for individuals to see the unity of all. Finally, Taoism was developed by Lao Tzu. Tao translates into English as "the force of life" (Haselhurst and Howie 2011). Taoism is a way of living with, and understanding, nature. Tao, Nature, and Reality are understood as one. All living forms are seen to be inter-connected and composed of a balance and harmony of forces (yin/yan).

My understanding of the latter is that one "gives up" one's sense of self, becoming "one" with the natural environment (Haidt 2006; Reegan 2000). Further, one aims to remove one's desire for physical

needs and wants. The model presented in this essay aims to fuse Western and Eastern thought and to draw on Western traditions that eschew the Platonic and Baconian-like splitting of self and nature, such as postmodernism, gender theories, and social constructivism.

The model maintains a belief in a unique "self" in interaction with its natural and social environments; it does not aim to "erase" that self. It aims to integrate the different elements of our nature through consciousness-raising discussion and exploration in a manner that builds students' empathy by developing awareness of the contextual nature of being and the multiple ways in which students can be intelligent (Gardner 1999).

Critical Being thus conceives of critical thinking differently than some well-known Western philosophers. Passmore (1967), for example, argues that critical thinking is a character trait, and not a skill. Passmore and I both agree that critical thinking is more than an intellectual skill, but critical being is broader still in meaning than critical thinking as a character trait. Character traits are considered to be components of our spiritual being. They are not sufficient in and of themselves for critical being. The model presented here, moreover, acknowledges elements ignored by Passmore, such as our bodies and our emotions. It acknowledge the role of the mind, and the manner in which learning some skills, such as researching information, observing, and communicating can influence critical being, thus providing us with possibilities for transformation through education. Character traits are much harder to modify.

Passmore, in addition, argues that critical thinking should be considered to be an amalgamation of critical and creative thought, an area also explored by Bailin and Siegel (2002). This is problematic for his view of critical thinking as a character trait, as this implies that creative thinking is also a character trait, unless it is embedded within the first. Yet, creative thinking, or imagination, can be present when critical thought is absent. Mozart and other great artists have stated that their art "emerges" complete from within, rather than being a product of conscious thought or deliberation: creative thought and critical thought may exist apart.

In the model presented here, creative thought would be viewed as a different form of thinking that emerges from the interactions of the body's knowledge (intuition or embodied knowing), the expression of emotions, and the processes of the mind, including the subconscious (elephant). Creative thought can enhance critical thought by allowing for "connective leaps" of understanding that are intuitive (and thus rooted in body and emotions), not logical in nature. Egan (2008) has defined imagination as "the ability to think of what might be possible … the reaching out feature of the mind." His theory of different kinds of understanding includes within it somatic learning, or "bodily understanding" (Egan 2008). It is a different thought process than critical thinking. The following section explores how critical being can be developed.

Practical Application

Teaching critical being should be integrated into all classes, modeled by teachers, and pervade the school's atmosphere — it must, in short, be experientially lived, as that is the form of knowing encompassed in the body. It can be taught to students explicitly through respectfully developing their awareness of the many elements that compose our natures and how these interact upon (and are in turn acted upon) by each other, as well as how they can be modified. Possible techniques include concept clarification, discussion, stories (excellent for emotive being), research findings (Haidt 2006 presents some interesting findings), and exploration of interactions. Each subject can draw on its strengths to develop awareness of different elements of being. For example, art, stories and reflective writing can help to expose and transform emotional and spiritual being. Physical education classes can highlight the nature and needs of our body, and the manner in which physical health impacts other elements of being. Service and experiential activities can help to develop affective being. These classes will occur in warm, inclusive settings that value all of the beings that compose us in a manner that illustrates and also values the unique strengths and abilities of each student. They will include a variety of activities so that each student can develop his or her individual abilities and interests to his or her potential.

Developing critical being can occur through practical classroom activities. For example, lessons can include the body through kinesthetic-based learning such as ecological walks and living labs. These engage students in making sense through action. The mind and spirit can be developed through reading, comparing, and discussing the work of famous people, including Eastern thinkers and philosophers such as Lao Tzu. Activities that inherently model critical being such as inquiry based activities, investigative learning, and group work are recommended. Stories, poetry, art and varied forms of expression can lead to discussions that explore emotions and their power. Most importantly, however, developing critical being occurs best when activities link together our various beings through inter-disciplinary studies and projects. For instance, a unit on the health of our physical body can be used as a starting point for exploring our other beings and the interrelated nature of our world. Students can study what our bodies (and those of other living creatures) need for health and growth. Concurrently, students can explore nutrients through growing food, or participating in a hands-on activity at a farm. This links into Biology and general science classes. Students can also explore how food is embedded in power relations and how it is distributed and managed worldwide, thus linking into History, Geography, International Relations, Economics, and Math. Alternatively, students can study and practice a number of dances (or music) from different countries in gym classes and relate them to cultural studies and spiritual traditions (the Social Sciences), as well as to Physics such as motion and energy (Sciences), and to art as an expression and manifestation of emotion. Designing lessons that include all our forms of being and that link across subject areas to the world is an effective way of developing critical being.

Social studies can play an important role, as critical thinking is one of its main goals in curriculum documents. In these guides, critical thinking is conceptualized in a traditional manner, as the process of assessing information for good decision making, including awareness of multiple viewpoints and developing

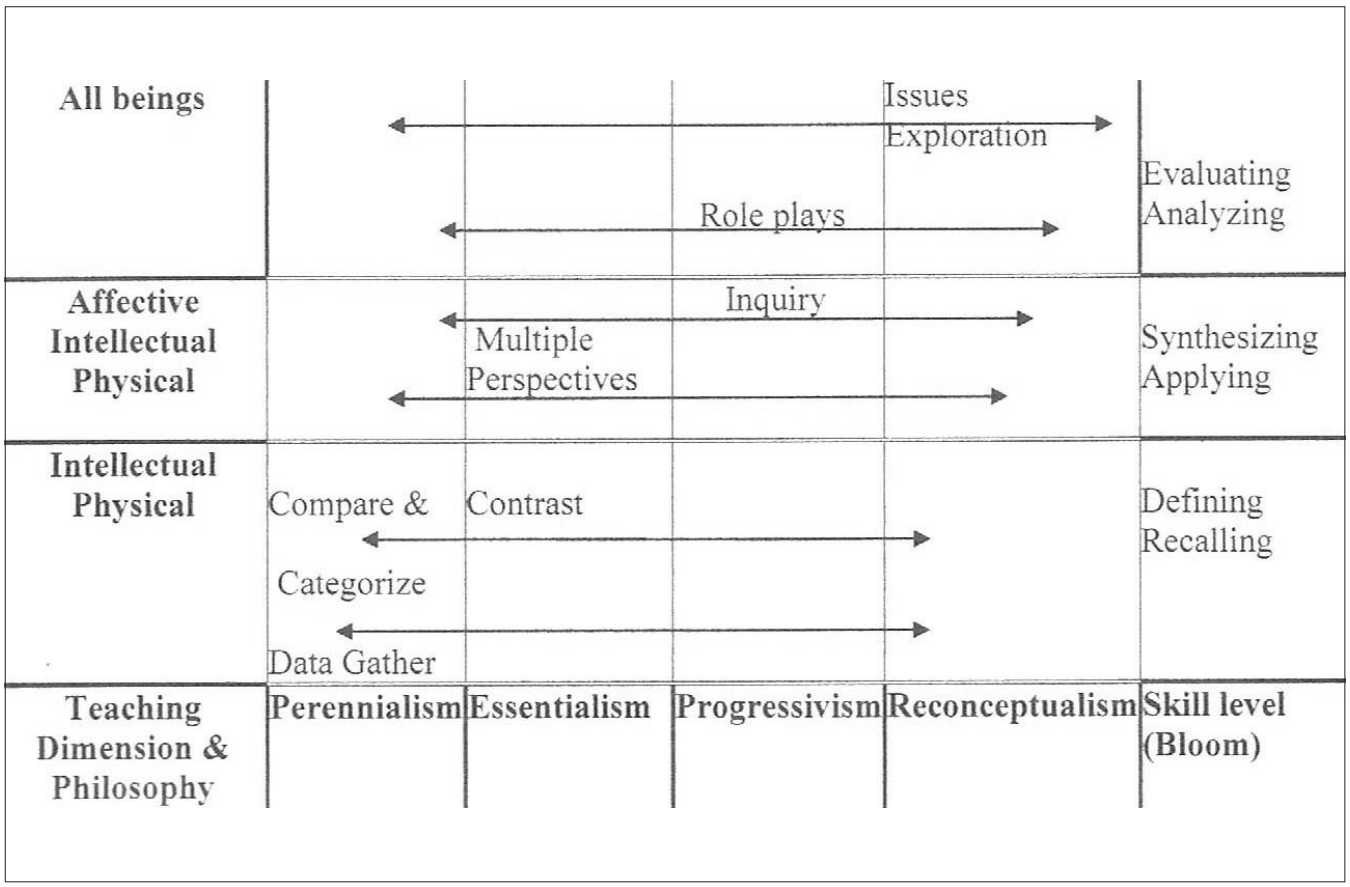

Figure 3. Possible Methods for Teaching Critical Being, builds on Zevin (2000)

hypotheses. More attention can be given to developing critical being through the integration of the elements described above into curriculum documents, with a decrease of emphasis on content learning and the deliberate attempt to cultivate national identity (which could be construed as propaganda [Broom 2008]), in a manner that validates multiple abilities.

Possible methods for teaching critical being in social studies are summarized in Figure 3. The figure illustrates that the social studies methods presented can be used across a number of philosophic perspectives. As well, some methods are more effective than other methods as they aim to develop higher elements of critical thinking (such as evaluating information), which are listed on the right side of the table and come from Bloom's hierarchy of thought, and which engage varied learners, as the activities draw on a number of our beings. The right side of the figure lists which types of being are developed through the different methods found in the central section of the figure. More effective methods engage more elements of our beings, and thus foster the learning of students with varied interests and abilities, as well as critical being. Issues exploration, the method that simultaneously develops the most elements of our being, involves students in actively exploring issues in their nation or society, while also acknowledging the need to consider the personal experiences of students (Forrest 2008) and to draw on their strengths and abilities in exploring real world problems.

For example, students can investigate the issue of the health of our food and our planet. They can begin by watching the documentary *Food Inc*., and then carry out investigative research into the use of pesticides in agriculture through a variety of methods including interviews, individual and group research, and analysis of varied art forms. They can explore the noxious chemicals in pesticides and their links to increasing rates of environmental damage and cancer in living creatures. Students can go on a field trip to see pesticides being sprayed into the air; they can grow their own plants and learn about the complexity of agriculture. This can be complemented by a "nature study" of the areas surrounding farms in their Biology classes. They can even consider their cafeteria lunches and their links to environmental damage (Stone 2007). They can engage in research projects and panel discussions on the multiple points of view that are encased within this complex issue and then discuss how our situatedness influences our beliefs, and our actions. For positive change, students can discuss and physically, emotionally, and ethically *experience* humans' actions in a variety of socio-economic and physical contexts.

Other more effective pedagogies include simulation games such as a United Nations meeting on poverty or gender, debates, panels, investigative reports, devil's advocates, mock trials, research projects in local communities (such as compiling local histories through archival work or investigating the actions of company practices on the environment), interviews with individuals from different political backgrounds on issues in the local community, policy making role plays, field trips to garbage dumps and sewage treatment plants to illustrate how "waste" does not simply disappear and how everything is connected together, and community service projects. Further, students can be involved in the governance of the school through student councils. All of these methods should be encased in a caring community of learning essential for the emotive, spiritual, and affective engagement of students and can include deep, complex and respectful exploration of values. The classroom itself should be a physically comfortable space with student-friendly seating and arrangements, light, fresh air, and varied activities that provide spaces for physical movement in which all of the varied abilities and interests of many types of learners are valued and encompassed in learning activities.

Conclusion

Critical thinking has long been argued to be an important aim of schooling. However, current conceptions of critical thinking privilege one form of our being over other elements that compose our nature. They draw on Plato-Bacon models that focus on the mind and thus fail to acknowledge our complexity and the many interacting elements of which are composed. This paper has attempted to heal this limited perspective by presenting a reconceptualization of critical thinking as critical being. It equally values all of our human nature and, thus, all students with their varying abilities and interests.

This ecological model views our intellectual being as one element among other forms of being, including emotive being, affective being, spiritual being, and physical being, that interact together. Thus, critical being acknowledges complexity and multiplicity and builds empathy and harmony by acknowledging that varied thought processes can lead to different conclusions. This model has implications for teaching practice, particularly for teaching as a transformative activity: teaching should do more than focus on the conscious intellect. It should integrate and explore all elements of our being and their relations to the mind in an environment that values all in order to nurture our emotive and spiritual beings.

Some teaching methods are thus better than others, for they develop not only our intellectual being, but also other elements of our natures, including our emotive being (thus leading to engagement), our spiritual being (thus developing our character), our affective being (thus leading to action) and our physical being (through experientially rooted learning and thus developing grounding in and for place). These better methods also provide for, and value, a variety of learning styles and abilities. They include inquiry projects, role plays, and issues exploration and will help to expose the "pre-conscious" roots of much "critical thought":

> When preconscious mental processes have an appropriately complex architecture they can make informed choices (within the constraints of heredity and environment) in the light of inner needs, goals and external contingencies. Conscious experiences arise from such preconscious mental operations. Once they arise, they usually represent those operations in a highly compressed, global way — but nevertheless faithfully, and for practical purposes we can take them to *be* those operations…. "I" include my unconscious and preconscious mind/brain as well as my conscious experience (Velmans, n.d.).

Teaching critical being will break the Western mind-body divide that privileges the mind and thus splinters us from ourselves and our world. It will bring us the potential for transformative education as well as individual and social harmony. Consider this quote from the perspective presented in this paper:

> Who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear…When a sage sees this great Unity and his Self has become all things, what delusion and what sorrow can ever be near him? (Upanishads, quoted in Haidt 2006, 213).

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Note

1. Writers such as MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (1998, New York: Macmillan) have described this mind-body dualism. Some Western academics and movements (Postmodernism, Gender, and Ecology), have also written about this dualism with the aim of presenting more holistic alternatives, for example, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1981) and Patrick Curry's "Rethinking Nature: Towards an Ecopluralism" in *Environmental Values* 12:3 (2003) 337-360. Blythe Clinchy has criticized rational critical thinking for not considering women's ways of thinking (Darling & Wright 2004).

We Need More Than Democracy To Make School Meaningful For Students

Patrick Farenga

More than making our schools more democratic, we need to remember that everything we do in our lives is educational and that our children are watching us and learning from us all of the time.

Pat Farenga is a writer, editor, consultant, and educational activist who worked closely with John Holt. He was President of Holt Associates and the publisher of *Growing Without Schooling* magazine from 1985 until it ceased publication in 2001. He homeschooled his own children and speaks as a homeschooling expert at conferences around the world and on radio and on television.

We are often told that we need an educated citizenry in order to have a well-run and just democracy, yet traditional schools are among the least democratic institutions humankind has created. From its origins in ancient Greece to our present day, schools have been used more as tools for social control than as centers for civic or personal development. Indeed, there is far more talk in education today about children being a commodity, "human capital," to be developed for the sake of the national economy than about helping each child to become a well-adjusted person, or, more precisely, to become a citizen "with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is interesting that though they debated it, the Founders of the United States decided not to mention education anywhere in the United States of America's founding documents.

In 1968 Michael Katz argued that the

> extension and reform of education in the mid-nineteenth century were not a potpourri of democracy, rationalism, and humanitarianism. They were the attempt of a coalition of the social leaders, status-anxious parents, and status-hungry educators to impose educational innovation, each for their own particular reasons, upon a reluctant community.

John Holt wrote in the late seventies about David Nasaw's book *Schooled To Order*:

> From the early days of the 19th century the rich and powerful in this country have always seen school, first and foremost, as a way to contain,

> control, and subdue the children of the unruly poor. This was true — I was surprised to learn this — even when all our poor were native-born Americans, long before the first waves of immigrants came to our shores.
>
> Nasaw gives us one quote that is almost too good (or bad) to be true. In 1908 James Russell, Dean of Teacher's College of Columbia University, said to a symposium of the National Education Association:
>
> How can a nation endure that deliberately seeks to rouse ambitions and aspirations in the oncoming generations which in the nature of events cannot possibly be fulfilled? If the chief object of government is to promote civil order and social stability (Ed. Note: not quite what the Declaration of Independence says), how can we justify our practice in schooling the masses in precisely the same manner as we do those who are to be our leaders? Is human nature so constituted that those who fail will readily acquiesce in the success of their rivals? … Is it any wonder that we are beset with labor troubles?

Other writers have developed this theme, most recently and forcefully John Gatto, but it is a narrative that is rarely examined by parents and educators, who prefer, to paraphrase Katz, the myth of public education as a triumph of the working class. But this myth serves as an obstacle for seeing how schooling contributes to our social problems, often the very problems schools claim to be addressing in the first place.

For example, schools are often considered an essential meritocratic and democratic institution that creates citizens who participate in democratic processes for the benefit of the nation and society. Ironically, for just as long a period, schools have been criticized for not nurturing democracy and for creating disengaged, ill-informed citizens. For instance, in 1923 Knopf published a book about homeschooling, *A Mother's Letters to a Schoolmaster*. Chapter Two is titled, "… democracy cannot be learned in a place where it is not lived."

Decades of research have shown that Americans have become increasingly disengaged from civic life (in our most recent presidential election, cited as bringing a record number of voters, nearly 40% of all eligible Americans did not vote). Indeed, even our elected officials are ignorant in their grasp of the U.S. Constitution. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute (Brake 2011) "has been conducting a national survey to gauge the quality of civic education in the country" and "those elected officials who took the test scored an average 5 percentage points lower than the national average (49 percent vs. 54 percent), with ordinary citizens outscoring these elected officials on each constitutional question."A current example is Rep. Michelle Bachmann shout-out to New Hampshire voters that "You're the state where the shot was heard around the world in Lexington and Concord." Our elected officials, sworn to uphold the Constitution, appear to know less about our civil rights and responsibilities than average citizens do, even though most elected officials may well have attended more years of schooling than the average citizen. Examples such as this illustrate why more classes and even participation in classroom civics are inadequate responses to the problem of a disengaged citizenry: forced learning is often forgotten once the reason for learning it — typically a test — is completed.

The standard response to this situation by educators is to offer more hours and courses in civics. But reducing democracy to questions on a test, participating in a poverty simulation lunch, or touring impoverished neighborhoods has not turned the situation around in the past and is unlikely to do so now. Teaching *about* democracy will not solve many of the problems we have in our schools nor will it necessarily result in a more engaged and intelligent citizenry.

Too often, we think of democratic education as giving children the opportunity to debate, vote, and act upon their own decisions, but this often doesn't play out as intended because democracy, like life, is messy and subject to all sorts of interpretations and agendas.

For instance, democracy in school, as in the rest of the world, is totally dependent upon the people who control the electoral process, which is why the United States has courts and legislatures to act as a check on the tyranny of the majority. However, such protection is not offered in a school setting.

In 1970 Holt wrote that democracy should never be viewed as an end, but rather as a means

> toward more difficult and important human ends — growth and freedom among them. And it is an equally serious mistake to equate democracy with voting — to assume you will create a democracy if you arrange things so that nothing can be done until a vote is taken, and that whatever the majority decides shall then be done. Our democratic institutions still exist in theory and on paper, but it is one of the bitter facts of our times that few people have any sense of controlling the circumstances of their lives; instead most people feel that life ("reality" as they like to call it) is slavery and they are slaves.

Of course, many adults will argue that this is simply the "real world," that adults must do things they don't want to do in order to make a living, so we should have no problem with creating the same world, in miniature, for school children. What gets overlooked is that learning is *not* really work, but an integral part of our fundamental nature. Further, because learning is so much a part of human nature itself, it is state-dependent: if you're in a depressed or excited state, it is hard to sit down and focus on something someone else wants you to learn when you've got other issues of deep concern on your mind. Except for a few empathic teachers and administrators, the real lives of many schoolchildren are essentially ignored with each new school reform that ratchets up accountability and testing, regardless of the real needs in any student's life.

There are other ways to help children develop civic capacities and concern for others, but they are often non-academic and are therefore not used often in conventional schools. The non-academic obstacles to learning are the elephant in the middle of the room that nobody wants to talk about: emotional and psychological stresses, poor housing, unemployed parents, bad nutrition, abusive adults, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of health care, lack of friends, lack of books, lack of technology, and so on. Having access to educational services and getting to vote on what to do in school hardly addresses the issues of social capital and the considerable advantages it gives to those who live in "good" zip codes. Indeed, Jonathan Kozol and others have argued "that child-centered free schools represented an escape from these problems rather than a serious engagement with them." Engaging with these problems is something that can get a teacher fired, as Kozol himself learned, and that is one reason why it is easier to fix the technical aspects of school — the curriculum and certification issues — and kick the can down the road for someone else to deal with the messy, democratic, social issues that are left undisturbed by school reform.

Unfortunately most teachers feel, probably correctly, that if they were to discuss social and political conditions with children they would anger their students' parents and perhaps even lose their jobs as a result. Hence, only a few brave teachers or schools dare to address social issues in the classroom. But the controversies don't disappear for the students: whether in the first grade or their Junior year of high school, students are usually, at some level, aware of their parents' conversations and attitudes towards the controversial issues of the day: creationism, sex education, and gender issues, to name a few contemporary (or should I say perennial?) hot-button issues. When these issues appear in school an opportunity to "teach the conflict" or "engage in the issues" arises, yet it is often ignored in order to keep the curriculum on schedule and not upset parents and school officials. Conversely, if parents or teachers do involve children in political action, their critics often charge them with indoctrinating the children into their political beliefs. Despite all our talk about the importance of democracy in school and life, it seems like we don't want people to exercise it as much as talk about it.

Some schools feature the democratic process as an integral piece of their operation, most notably Summerhill, Sudbury Valley, and the Albany Free School, but such schools are not popular parental options for their children. To paraphrase Alfie Kohn, if progressive education is so good, why are progressive schools so often on the ropes financially and unsupported by the majority of adults? An obvious answer is that most adults like schools just as they are. This is also why some teachers and parents leave conventional school to seek like-minded people among the alternative or home schooled; after trying, they decide they really can't change the major-

ity-rules nature of school, so they seek or create a different kind of school for themselves or their children.

This action usually results in criticisms such as Kozol's, cited earlier: "You took care of your kids, but you've abandoned the larger cause." Must we forever be stuck in the dilemma of helping one's own at the expense of helping society? Isn't it possible that by doing something different for one's children, such as homeschooling or enrolling them in an alternative school, it shows a new way to configure society, a new path that is being blazed for others can follow? How can innovation occur if we are not encouraged to think — or act — outside the box to test those innovations?

Another school-caused problem that adds to our confusion about the role of democracy in education is that of equality. Students are classified by schools now more than ever. There can be no doubt that a student's personality, sense of self, and emotions are affected by school judgments about them. Students internalize the message that their proficiency levels, academic rankings, and behavior are being recorded and will be used as important factors as to whether they should go to college, work, vocational school, or simply drop out. But the caste system of school goes beyond academic tracks and the common student labels of slackers, nerds, and jocks. Anyone who attends school soon learns that there are different types of schools for wealthier families and it doesn't take long for students to figure out where they stand in the educational pecking order. Race, class, and gender issues are not equalized in school; indeed, as the current bullying crisis demonstrates, they often proliferate there.

Ongoing efforts to raise test scores and graduation rates among minorities and to involve more women in science, technology, engineering and math are well-intentioned, but these problems haven't responded to similar efforts in the past, nor do they address the social problems that keep many children from participating. Talk about educational equality becomes mere lip service to these students and their families because they witness educational inequality all around them every day. Talk about democracy becomes hollow to them as they see schools get funding for various programs while their families lack health care, job opportunities, and good food. Parents may expect school to make their children's lives better than their own lives, but it is apparent that is no longer the case. School diplomas do not guarantee that one is employable and college degrees are no longer a ticket to middle-class or better status. The economist Paul Krugman wrote recently:

> But there are things education can't do. In particular, the notion that putting more kids through college can restore the middle-class society we used to have is wishful thinking. It's no longer true that having a college degree guarantees that you'll get a good job, and it's becoming less true with each passing decade.
>
> What we can't do is get where we need to go just by giving workers college degrees, which may be no more than tickets to jobs that don't exist or don't pay middle-class wages.

The notion that schools create equal opportunity for all is vastly overstated, and runs the risk of creating a disillusioned populace when the school rhetoric about democracy doesn't match their personal experience of democracy.

Too much is expected of teachers and schools today: we want them to act as guardians, counselors, and provide physical and mental health services, as well as daily meals. And like other industries, schooling has become too big to fail. However, our resources are now limited and we must make choices. We've already drastically reduced or cut out art, drama, music, recess, and physical education to give our children more teaching and testing time. Today we promote longer school years, lowering and raising the compulsory school age, less vacation, more tutoring, more test preparation, more extracurricular activities that children may not want to do but which look good for schools, but it still isn't enough for some educators. Spiraling educational costs may create difficult decisions for many poor communities in the near future: whether to fully fund schools, police, fire, and other departments of civic importance or use that money to fund social programs that improve the health and welfare of the population. There is a limit to the money and time society can expend on all these programs and we need to start discussing not how to cut them out, but how to blend them so we can all survive and thrive.

For instance, until the late seventies the Federal government had a department of Health, Education, and Welfare because these vital activities were viewed as equally important and linked. However, education was considered to be more important and was then given its own department; it has been expanding its reach and power ever since. Perhaps it is time to view education more holistically again, to view learning as a natural, ongoing human activity that is linked to living a good life rather than just a collection of technical skills to get you a job (one hopes!) when you graduate. Funding the local library, running a neighborhood basketball league, and maintaining vegetable gardens on city rooftops would also raise literacy rates, improve fitness, and help children cherish nature but, outside of a few home and alternative schools, there aren't a lot of people willing tomake these activities central to their mission in place of increasing test-taking skills.

There's a reason why alternative and independent schools seem to accept homeschooling and unschooling more readily than conventional schools:[1] we share certain core principles and attitudes towards children and learning. Perhaps we can unite around some shared core principles and work together to improve children's lives, and therefore their educations. Here are a few that we might be able to agree are worth fighting for as technocratic education continues to push our concerns out of the picture.

- Proper nutrition and health care, safe homes and neighborhoods, easily accessible playgrounds and sports facilities, and decent libraries are needed even more in poor neighborhoods than in wealthy ones. Can we push for those services to help create "the tide that raises all boats" rather than pushing to create more college graduates than other countries produce?
- Learning is not the result of teaching. You can teach, but that does not mean that others will learn. Sure, anyone can fake knowledge for a test or a report (journalists and talk show hosts do it every day), but it is often forgotten as soon as the test, the article, or the show is finished. Real learning is often self-motivated learning.
- We can celebrate the many ways that children learn that fall outside the lines of conventional education.
- Relationships are vital to learning. In a time when small class size, personal attention, and parental involvement are all diminished in favor of the super-teacher lecturing a large class, we can unite to show that children do indeed learn well in intimate settings from ordinary people.
- Mastery is a goal that is necessary for children to see and work toward, and real-life examples of people doing things competently — local professionals, union workers, parents, other children — can be found and utilized to help children learn in and out of school.
- The role of the teacher should be more of guide and facilitator so children can "own" their learning. As some teacher trainers like to say, "Don't be the sage on the stage; be the guide on the side."

Bill Ayers (Graves, n.d.) writes that

> democratic education is less about facts and dates…. It's much more about opening windows and opening doors … learning from the world, not about the world; learning from nature, not about nature; learning from the questions we can generate; and learning from democracy, not about democracy.

Democracy, as envisioned here, is not a subject to be studied but a process to be participated in. Involving children in it with us is the best way we can "teach" them democracy.

Ron Miller, in his analysis of education and democracy after the 1960s, writes,

> the withdrawal from public education into free schools and homeschooling blazed a trail for those who truly do understand democracy as personal sovereignty and unfettered freedom of private choice. Just as Deweyan progressivism became problematic in the rising technocracy of the 1950s, potentially a recipe for social engineering, free school ideas were co-opted by

> the conservative restoration of the 1970s and 1980s. The rampant individualism that grew rapidly in the post-1960s era was not the product of countercultural existentialism alone, but also of the dominant cultural values of competition, materialism, and consumerism that commoditized many of the ideals of the 1960s. So long as this culture remains dominant, those who subscribe to radical educational ideals cannot afford to ignore the progressives' urgent call for a "democracy of the human spirit" to complement their search for personal authenticity.

The call for a "democracy of the human spirit" is a vague concept, but it holds meaning if one is willing to see democracy as more than just tallying Democrat or Republican votes to deliver or cut services. We need to go beyond partisan politics and actually see that everything we do in our lives is educational and, most important, that our children are watching us and learning from us all of the time.

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Note

1. There are, of course, significant exceptions to this statement among alternative educators who feel only specially trained teachers should work with children and among homeschoolers who feel any connection to any school is wrong.

Questions Worth Arguing About

Edward T. Clark, Jr.

Too many teachers spend most of their time providing answers to questions students never ask.

If they can keep you from asking the right questions, they don't have to be concerned about your answers. (Thomas Pynchon)

One of the methodological foundations of science lies in the avoidance of the most fundamental questions. It is characteristic of physics to never really ask what matter is, biology not to really ask what life is, or for psychology not to ask what the soul is. (C. F. Von Weizsaecker)

During my first workshop at Thompson Middle School in the summer of 1991, I asked the *teachers* to identify the real-life questions that their students were asking. After some discussion they agreed on the following seven: Who am I? What are my legal rights? Why must I learn this? How will I be graded and why are grades important? How do I relate to my peers? How do I juggle the expectations of so many teachers?

I then asked, "How does what you are currently teaching address these questions?" The silence that followed was, as they say, deafening!

Later a colleague, Carole Cooper, visited a number of classrooms where she asked *students* to write down some of the questions that they were most concerned about. It is significant that none were trivial questions. What is even more significant is that their concerns are both personal and social, local and global. This is just a sampling of students' responses: "What will I be when I grow up?" "What will the next war be about?" "Is there going to be enough room for landfills?" "Why am I here?" "Will the ozone layer get thinner?" "When will racism end?" "Will there be another depression?" "Can we help all of the suffering people?" "Can we save the rain-

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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 over the years, ENCOUNTER is proud to republish, in quarterly chapter-length installments, his entire book, *Designing and Implementing an Integrated Curriculum: A Student-Centered Approach*.

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.

forest?" "Will I succeed?" "How can I get along with my parents?" "What will the future be like?"

The late MIT physicist Jerrold Zaccharias once defined education as "the raising of questions worth arguing about." These students' questions certainly fit that characterization. Any one of them could be the starting point for a semester's course of study. It should be obvious that the most effective way to educate anyone is to ask the kinds of provocative questions that elicit the interests of the learner and motivate them to seek answers that satisfy their needs. This simple, yet profound truth may well lie at the heart of what ails education today. In our efforts to analyze, manipulate, and formalize the teaching and learning processes, we have forgotten that "Nothing shapes our lives so much as the questions we ask — or refuse to ask" (Keen 1994). Perhaps the reason is that in our product-oriented culture where answers are so important, we have forgotten the art of asking tough, sticky, value-laden questions.

Michael Ray and Michelle Myers, in their 1986 book *Creativity in Business,* based on their pioneering course at Stanford's distinguished Graduate School of Business, devote an entire chapter to the topic, "Ask Dumb Questions."

> You'll soon become adept at knowing a dumb question when you hear it. You'll recognize it by the answers it generates. A dumb question creates explosions, concatenations, cascades of insights … a dumb question is not dead-ended, etiquette-oriented, accusatory, or shallow.

These are the questions that one Nobel laureate called "jugular questions" that reach the essence of things. They're the kind of off-the-wall questions that a four-and-a half year-old named Scott asked in less than an hour: What's behind a rainbow? — What color is the inside of my brain? — What's inside of a rock? A tree? A sausage? Bones? My throat? A spider? — does the sky have an end to it? If it doesn't, how come you can see it? Why are my toes in front of my feet?" (Ray and Myers 1986).

One example of a dumb question suggested by Ray and Myers is pretty basic: "What is a question?" Michelle Ray who has spent her life examining the nature of questions, offers the following suggestions.

- A question is an opening to creation.
- A question is an unsettled and unsettling issue.
- A question is an invitation to creativity.
- A question is a beginning of adventure.
- A question is seductive foreplay.
- A question is a disguised answer.
- A question pokes and prods that which has not yet been poked and prodded.
- A question is a point of departure.
- A question has no end and no beginning.
- A question wants a playmate.

It is clear that we are not discussing the kinds of questions that one usually hears in school. Indeed, I think it is safe to say that because of the linear, cause-and-effect logic of our schooling, when we think of questions, most of us immediately assume not only that there is an answer, but that there *is* a right answer. I think there must be a correlation between the emphasis in education on right answers and the fact that as a society, we seem to have lost the art of asking open-ended, provocative questions worth arguing about. But as Robert Sternberg, IQ theorist of Yale University, points out, intelligence includes the ability to ask appropriate questions, a capacity that is apparently fundamental to higher-order thinking (Sternberg 1987).

It is sad but true that conventional wisdom at all levels of our educational system from kindergarten through graduate school holds that teachers should never ask questions they don't know the answer to. The result — as noted earlier — is that too many teachers spend most of their time providing answers to questions students never ask.

I suspect that one reason elementary science has been so poorly taught is the fear teachers have of questions that they can't answer. In an age of specialization, few elementary teachers consider themselves scientists. As a result, they teach only the most elementary facts, which elicit few if any questions. Of course, teachers may not always be able to control the questions that pop into the minds of their students. I often ask teachers how they handle off-the-wall questions that seem to have little, if any, obvi-

ous relevance to the topic being discussed. The truth is that as kids get older, most learn very quickly the kinds of questions that are allowed and those that may elicit a response like: "Where in the world did you think of that question?"

And yet, one of the most endearing, and sometimes frustrating characteristics of little — and sometimes not so little — children is their ability to ask questions. Beginning at an early age, they are full of questions about everything from "What makes flowers yellow?" to "Where do the stars come from?" "Where does God live?" "Where did I come from?" Ted Sizer calls these life's "essential questions" and argues that these are the grist for learning. However, almost as soon as children begin formal schooling, their questions cease and by the sixth grade, teachers are convinced that their students don't know enough to ask intelligent questions. It is obvious that teachers who disparage students like this are not ready to design a curriculum around students' questions and concerns. But teachers can learn, as members of one sixth grade team at Thompson discovered to their surprise.

> Having resisted curriculum changes for almost three years, the team decided to invite me to help plan their year-end program — the only all-team activity of the year. Ostensibly, this was to be an integrative, learner-centered endeavor. For two hours I kept asking questions and suggesting alternative ways of organizing the "content" of the activity — apparently to no avail. Prodding for some glimmer of flexibility was like pulling teeth. I left the room feeling both frustrated and discouraged. Imagine my surprise a few days later when the principal called to tell me that the team had really enjoyed our time together and felt it had been very worthwhile. I heard nothing more until the following fall when one of the team members stopped me in the hall and told me that the activity had been the best and most rewarding they had ever had.

What amazed her most were the questions the students had asked, their eagerness and excitement about exploring those questions, and the depth of learning that resulted.

Historically, education has reflected the agenda of the adult world rather than the agenda of the child's world. And, perhaps to some degree, that is necessary. But, as in most other cases, the issue is seldom "either/or" but rather "both/and." For example, Jerome Bruner (1960) points out that most basic concepts and general ideas can be made relevant to children in some way at any age. The operative word is *relevance*. Unless the content of the curriculum matches the interestst of the growing organism we call the child, the results are unpredictable and can even be chaotic, e.g., high school dropouts who complete their schooling by earning what Bob Samples (1993) calls a "Ph.D. in street smarts." When there is an appropriate "fit" between content and nature's developmental plan, the child's enthusiasm and capacity for thinking and learning seems to know no bounds. In short, while the content may be selected by the adult, the clues as to its appropriateness not only must, but I believe, can come from the child. After all, in the final analysis, it is the child's curiosity rather than the adult's desire to provide answers that will direct and shape the successful curriculum.

Learning to Ask Questions Worth Arguing About

In the absence of textbooks — except as possible resources — and in light of the sheer amount of knowledge and information available to teachers and students alike, it may be difficult for teachers — and, hopefully, students and teachers working together — to decide what knowledge and information

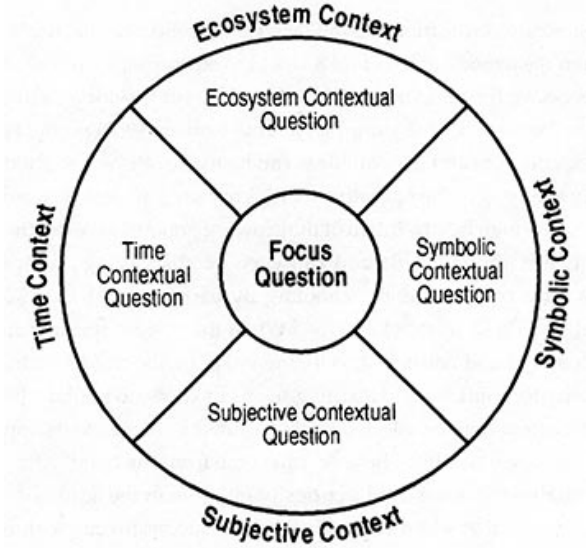

Figure 5-1. The Contextual Matrix

is most important to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The Contextual Matrix (See Figure 5-1) helps teachers determine the relevant knowledge and information appropriate to a given area of study. At the same time, the Matrix is a powerful cognitive model for organizing the curriculum to graphically depict both the interrelatedness of these contextual perspectives and the unique focus of each. The Matrix can be used at any level in a single subject, or with several subjects. It has also been used effectively in both personal and organizational settings where people wanted to create and explore their own contexts of meaning.

In order to understand the relevance of the four contextual relationships illustrated in Figure 5-1 to a given topic or situation, we need to ask the appropriate questions: questions that are open-ended and have no absolute right or wrong answers. These are not questions that invite polarized, yes/no answers like the questions around which academic debates are organized. Instead of seeking factual answers, these questions reflect a search for meaning. In short, they are contextual questions.

Focus Questions

The first step in designing a program of study or exploration — euphemistically called a curriculum unit — is to select a Focus Question. As its name implies, this question captures the essence of the study, is necessarily broad in scope, and provides the directions that will be pursued. Implicit in the Focus Question are the anticipated outcomes. When the Focus Question reflects a preestablished theme, e.g., the human body, it might be something like, "How does the human body work?" When the Focus Question reflects a proposed exploration of students' real-life experiences, it might be "What does it mean to grow up in today's world?"

In an inner-city district where I conducted workshops, the ninth grade students were required to study John Steinbeck's novel, *The Red Pony*, the story of a boy growing up on a Montana ranch. Forced to teach a novel that, based on her previous experience, seemed to be totally irrelevant to the lives of her predominately Black students, the teacher decided to redesign the study using a Contextual Matrix. By selecting as a Focus Question "What does it mean to grow up in today's world?" and eliciting her students' responses to this question, she created a context for the novel that was relevant to their lives, and in doing so, captured both their interest and their imagination. Not only was it the first time everyone had read the entire book without pressure from her, they eagerly extended their study beyond the Montana ranch to other sections of the country as well, in each case using an appropriate novel as the basis for further exploration.

Focus questions can be used within a discipline to turn what was once a content-centered unit into an integrated one. For example, one high school science teacher designed an entire semester's class around the question, "How will genetic engineering affect human life in the future?" Students spent the first week reading and discussing the science fiction novel *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* by Kate Wilhelm (1976). In addition, they read as much as they could find about genetic engineering and biomedical technology in newspapers, magazines, and other materials supplied by the teacher and the resource center. By the end of the week, they had enough information and knowledge to begin formulating the questions that teams of students would explore during the ensuing weeks. From time to time as appropriate, the teacher presented mini-lectures, but always in response to the readiness of the students. Periodically, students would report on their findings to the class. These reports were always followed by in-depth discussions in "jigsaw teams" — temporary dialogue groups composed of one person from each of three of four study teams. As students became more sophisticated in their insights and knowledge, deeper and more "professional" questions began to emerge — many of which focused on the social, economic, political, and ecological ramifications of genetic engineering. The open-ended essay on the final exam (required by the district) provided ample opportunity for students to summarize and synthesize what they had learned during the semester. Needless to say, the grades were the best she had ever seen in what traditionally had been viewed as a tough class.

A ninth grade history teacher designed an introductory course on U.S. history around the question, "How has the natural landscape shaped American

history?" Another high school teacher used as a Focus Question for an Introduction to World History, "What makes a culture 'civilized'?" A college professor used as a starting point for an Introduction to Philosophy course the Focus Question, "What is philosophy?" Social studies classes are ideal vehicles for integrating the various subject areas into a single focus. For example, another high school teacher designed an interdisciplinary unit around the question, "What do the various disciplines tell us about war?" An eighth grade civics teacher designed an integrated course on the U. S. Constitution around the question, "How is the Constitution a systemic model for a democratic society?"

When a teacher or a team of teachers wants to design a fully integrated program of study that ranges far and wide and incorporates several subject areas, broader questions are more appropriate. The following grade-level Focus Questions were used by the United Catholic Parochial School in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, to design an integrated K-8 curriculum.

- Grade One: How big is my neighborhood?
- Grade Two: How am I a member of many families?
- Grade Three: What makes communities work?
- Grade Four: How does the world work?
- Grade Five: What is culture?
- Grade Six: What does it mean to be human?
- Grade Seven: How do systems work? What is our relationship to the Earth?
- Grade Eight: How does one live responsibly in the global community?

Contextual Questions

After the Focus Question has been identified, the next step is to find Contextual Questions that focus attention on the appropriate relationship. Sometimes it may be useful to have more than one question for a relationship. These questions focus and frame the exploration, capture the essence of each contextual relationship, and may serve to highlight one or more aspects of that relationship. Some of the Contextual Questions below were designed by the parochial school faculty; the rest come from other sources. As might be expected, there are obvious similarities among questions at the different levels. However, since the focus or context of each is different, e.g., family and community, essentially they are different questions.

First Grade Focus Question:
How Big is My Neighborhood?

The Subjective Context: What is my neighborhood? How many neighborhoods do I belong to?

The Time Context: How has my neighborhood changed?

The Symbolic Context: Who are my neighbors and how are their families like my family and different from my family?

The Ecosystem Context: How does nature affect my neighborhood?

Second Grade Focus Question:
How Am I a Member of Many Families?

The Subjective Context: Who am I? How am I alike and different from other children? How many families do I belong to? How is my body like a family?

The Time Context: Where did I come from? How does my body change? When will I become more independent?

The Symbolic Context: What kinds of families are there? In what ways are families alike? Different?

The Ecosystem Context: How do different families relate to the Earth? How do families use the Earth's resources? How do plants and animals and people live together?

Third Grade Focus Question:
What Makes Communities Work? (See Figure 5-2)

The Subjective Context: How is my life influenced by my community? In what ways do I communicate with others? What communities do I belong to?

The Time Context: How do human communities grow and change? How do natural communities grow and change? What can we learn from patterns of change?

The Symbolic Context: What makes a community? What kinds of communities are there? What are the rules that communities live by?

The Ecosystem Context: What can we learn from natural communities? How can communities preserve natural resources?

Figure 5-2. Contextual Matrix: What Makes Communities Work?

Fourth Grade Focus Question:
How Does the World Work?

The Subjective Context: What are the rules/limits I have to live by? What kind of rules do I set for myself? Why do different people have different rules?

The Time Context: How have the rules/limits by which humans live changed over time? What kind of rules/limits will we need in the future?

The Symbolic Context: How have humans discovered and created the rules/limits we live by? What are the patterns to be found in human rules/limits? In natural rules/limits?

The Ecosystem Context: What are the rules/limits that make natural systems work? What happens when we don't follow nature's rules/limits?

Fifth Grade Focus Question
What is Culture?

The Subjective Context: How does my culture influence my life? What is my culture?

The Time Context: How have humans and cultures changed over time? What will cultures look like in the future?

The Symbolic Context: What is culture? How are cultures similar and how are they different?

The Ecosystem Context: In what ways are cultures and ecosystems interdependent? How have cultures been influenced and shaped by their land?

Sixth Grade Focus question:
What Does it Mean to be Human? (Figure 5-3)

The Subjective Context: Who am I? Where do I belong? How do I relate to family, peers, strangers? How am I star stuff? How do I know myself?

The Time Context: Where did I come from? Where did humans come from? How did life begin? What is the origin of the human species? What is my personal history? Where am I going? What do I want to be/do when I become an adult? What is the future of the human species? What is time?

The Symbolic Context: How do humans communicate with each other? How do humans know? How do I think and learn? How does the human perceive information? How does language influence and shape the way we think? What is the effect of technology on how we perceive, organize, and communicate information?

The Ecosystem Context: What is our relationship to the planetary ecological systems? What is my personal relationship to these systems? How are we responsible to and for living and non-living things? How do human societies interact with living and non-living things on the planet?

Seventh Grade Focus Questions:
How Do Systems Work?
What is Our Relationship to the Earth?

The Subjective Context: How does my body work as a system? How do I depend on the Earth? What is my relationship to the Earth? How do I use natural resources?

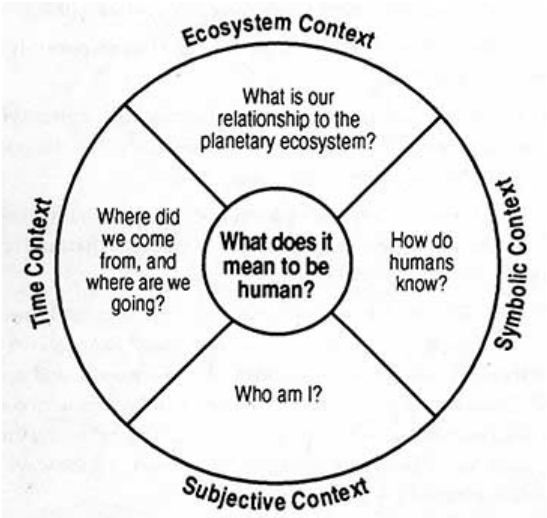

Figure 5-3. Contextual Matrix: What Does It Mean to be Human?

Figure 5-4. Contextual Matrix: How Does One Live Responsibly in the Global Village?

The Time Context: How has the relationship between human beings and the Earth changed over time? What will it be in the future?

The Symbolic Context: How do natural systems function? What are the patterns that are similar in human and natural systems?

The Ecosystem Context: What can we learn from natural systems? What are the natural constraints that humans must learn to live with?

Eighth Grade Focus Question: How Does One Live Responsibly in the Global Village? (See Figure 5-4)

The Subjective Context: In what ways am I a citizen of the global village? How does living in a global village influence my daily life? What are my obligations to other members of the global village?

The Time Context: What can we learn from our past that will help us understand how to live peacefully in the global village? What kind of goals or rules should exist for global citizens?

The Symbolic Context: In what ways is the global community a village? What are the rules for village and community living? How can we create global channels of communication through which knowledge and information can be shared freely? What are the barriers that keep us from communicating with

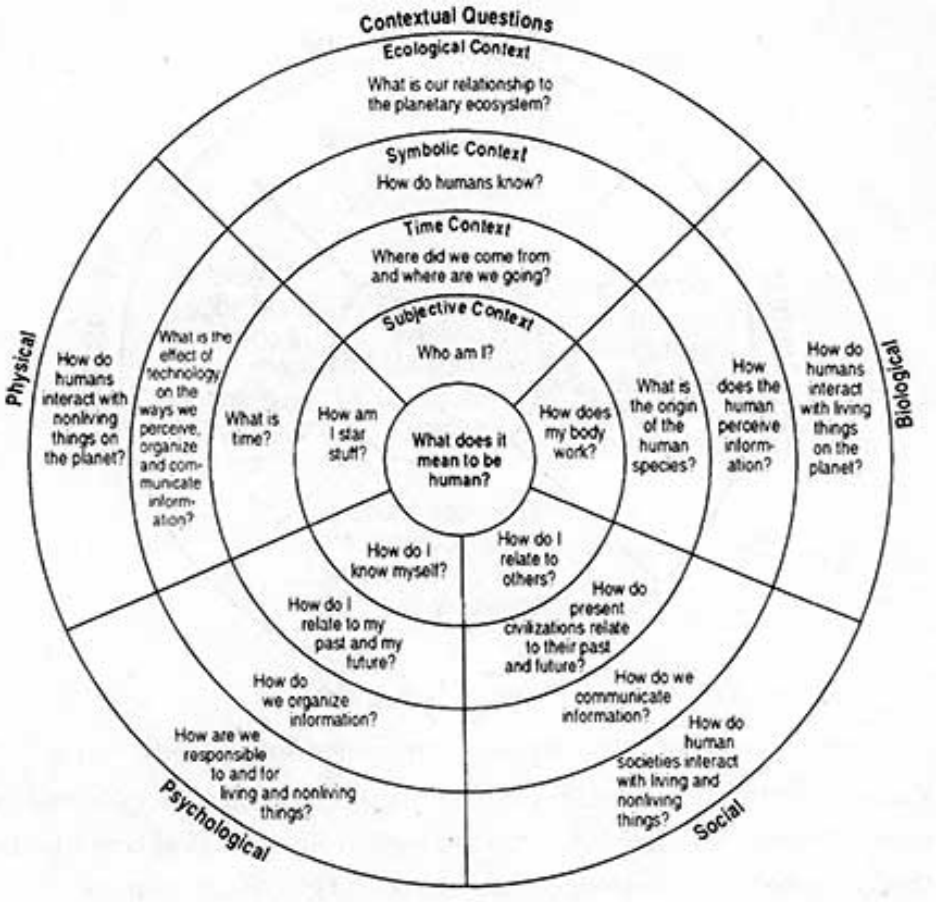

Figure 5-5. Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions: What Does it Mean to be Human?

each other? What role do other "languages" such as mathematics, computer language, art, and music play in shaping the ways we — as individual or nations — relate to each other?

The Ecosystem Context: What are the ecological constraints that must shape life in the global village? What are the ecological principles that can guide decision-making? What can we learn from ecological communities that can help us create more effective local and global communities?

Expanding the Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions

So far, all of the Contextual Matrixes have been the simpler models that include only Focus and Contextual Questions. The Matrix can also incorporate Perspective Questions. This expanded matrix (See Figures 5-5 and 5-6) is particularly useful when the intent is to explore a Focus Question from the perspective of several academic disciplines. Initially, teachers at Thompson used this more inclusive, interdisciplinary matrix. However, they soon found that the more questions they identified, the more they were preempting students' questions. The second year they unanimously decided to use the simpler matrix, which was in fact designed by Doug Thompson, an eighth grade team leader. Figure 5-7 is an example of a matrix created by the three eighth grade teams working cooperatively. In addition to the questions, this matrix includes the concepts that are relevant to the questions (See "Concepts as Organizing Frameworks," to be published in the Autumn 2011 issue of this Journal).

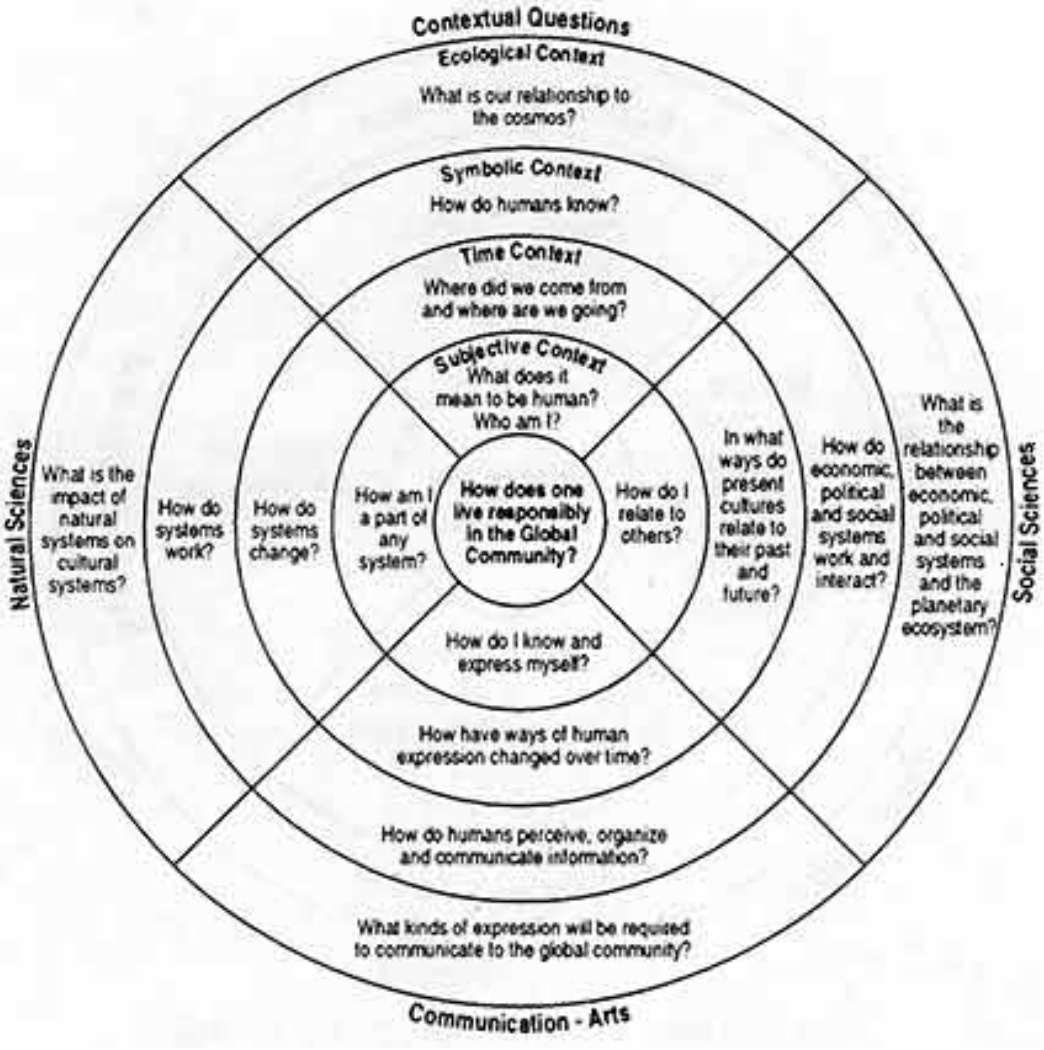

Figure 5-6. Contextual Matrix with Perspective Questions: How Does One Live Live Responsibly in the Global Community?

Several of the Focus Questions in Figure 5-5 could be used at the high school level where departmentalization makes most forms of an integrated curriculum difficult if not impossible. For example, the Focus Question, "What does it mean to be human?" has been used to design an interdisciplinary curriculum at several different grade levels and, in its expanded form (Figure 5-5) could also be an effective organizing question for an interdisciplinary high school curriculum at any grade level. In the same way, an entire high school curriculum could be organized around the question, "How does one live responsibly in the global community?" using questions such as those in Figure 5-6. Indeed, questions like these can be revisited periodically through a student's entire school career, each time eliciting from students more penetrating questions and expanded sophistication of understanding.

Student Questions

One concern that has been raised is the degree to which the curriculum is designed around teachers' rather than students' questions, but the two are not mutually exclusive. While one can make the case that ideally all of the questions should be generated by students; realistically, however, teachers are limited by the constraints of content requirements and their own comfort levels. However, when the initial Matrix is created by one or more teachers, it is important that student questions be elicited as soon as possible. It is also important for the students to discuss the Focus and Contextual Questions both as a whole class and in small teams. This assures that everyone understands the questions; it also provides an opportunity to expand the students' horizons prior defining the specific questions they want to study. Then students are invited to identify their own questions vis-à-vis the particular question that will be the next focus of study. After all the student questions have been identified, the whole class can participate in sorting and synthesizing the questions into a few general questions. These then become the focus for cooperative team exploration.

Once students become involved in exploring their own questions, one of the not so surprising consequences is noted by Resource Center Director, Chris Sherman, "Kids are generating questions and then staying on-task in the LRC. They aren't just copying from encyclopedias any more."

Conclusion

My experience at Thompson has taught me that major change is not easy and that most teachers can apply these new ideas only incrementally. For example, many teachers still prefer to organize curriculum around topics and theme rather than questions. As I noted above, this seems to reflect a still strong attachment to a particular content that, for whatever reason, the teacher considers to be important. They are comfortable with themes — holiday, seasons, countries — and it is difficult to wean them from such seemingly innocuous habits. Does it really make a difference?

This debate will continue because, like most other ideas, there is no single right way for everyone. However, I encourage the use of questions for two reasons. First, questions reflect the way we learn. By stimulating curiosity and interest, they can be highly motivating. The second reason is that the outcome is always implicit in the question. Because they focus attention on the outcome, questions provide greater direction to a unit than a theme. For example, it seems obvious that a thematic unit on Thanksgiving could be more focused and more motivating if it were organized around the question, "Why are the United States and Canada the only countries in the world to celebrate Thanksgiving?" Implicit in this question is the outcome — that students will understand the uniqueness of Thanksgiving as a North American holiday. Or to take an example from Donna Stockman's seventh grade team, which next year plans to integratively teach two units sequentially — the first on Systems, which will be followed by a unit on the Human Body. It seems to me that a provocative question like "How is my body like the Earth … or the Universe?" might integrate both units more fully and simultaneously generate a much wider range of questions from students. What would emerge in the process might be more challenging for both students and the teachers.

However, it seems to me that the important thing is not whether a given unit is designed around a theme or a question, but rather that the content of the unit reflects the questions students ask rather than the prepackaged material written by someone else. And, as we have seen, students can and, when given the opportunity, do ask questions well worth argu-

ing about. And, as we have already seen, when they feel that their questions are important, students have no difficulty in identifying enough questions to fill any curriculum.

I remember a discussion about the use of questions with one of the high school history teachers at St. Charles High School. When I suggested that he could design his class around students' questions, he insisted that his students didn't even know enough to ask questions about the Civil War. When I asked what response he would receive if he asked his students what they wanted to know about the Civil War, he said the first question would probably be, "What was the Civil War?" My response was: "That's a good question to begin with, isn't it."

It seems to me that an astute teacher could well begin a unit by having students research that very basic question. As they began to get some insights, the study could be expanded into a full-blown unit that consisted only of student investigations, research, reports, etc. I think it could become a very exciting unit.

Good teaching is a matter of creating a context that not only allows but vigorously encourages students to become actively involved in their own learning. Good teaching is an art that requires sensitivity, humility, and an infinite confidence in the innate ability of kids to learn about the world in which they live. It's a matter of pointing the direction, turning it over to the learners and getting out of the way! Sam Keen provides us with a healthy reminder that with questions such as these, "in the beginning is the end" — both the answer and the process are implicit in the question.

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Learning @ My Library In Luang Prabang

Dawn Starin

While libraries in some highly developed countries are closing, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic a unique library is flourishing.

Throughout the UK, one of the world's most developed and most literate countries, local branch libraries are being threatened with closures. Authors are holding sit-ins and read-ins and shhh-ins. Readers and writers, parents and children, librarians and trade unionists are up in arms. Protests and petitions are escalating. Unfortunately, the harsh truth is that here library visits are down, and fewer books are being borrowed. More people are accessing information through the Internet, making a trip to the local library a trip too far, and around 500 libraries (just over 10%) have been identified as likely victims of the Government's spending cuts.

In contrast, halfway across the globe in one of the world's poorest and least developed countries with a high infant and maternal mortality rate, a low life expectancy, an annual per capita income of US$340, and a low literacy rate, a little library is flourishing. Landlocked, mountainous Lao People's Democratic Republic is poor, very poor, and yet in the center of the ancient royal town of Luang Prabang library visits are up, borrowing books is up and a trip to the local library is a trip worth taking.

Not far from the banks of the muddy, mighty Mekong and its tributary, the Nam Khan river, across the road from the glistening gold roof of the richly decorated Wat Nong Sikhonmeuang is a revolutionary learning experiment: @ My Library. This small NGO, occupying a little building, has big hopes and aspirations for the many students who walk through its doors every day.

On the ground floor, two young novice monks, wrapped up in orange robes, sit at computer terminals practicing English. A high school student sits at another computer terminal playing Scrabble. Computer skills are highly sought after in this poor coun-

Note: Portions of this article previously appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor* in 2009.

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try and @ My Library students pick up basic skills along with learning how to create a website, reformat hard drives and reinstall Windows.

Up a narrow set of stairs is a room lined with bookshelves, one young man reads a science book; another reads a history book and a third is engrossed in a novel. Books on art, history, and Laotian folktales are very popular and there is a range of Hmong language books which the ethnic Hmong users are amazed to find. Most of these learning materials are simply not available anywhere else in Laos. There are about 1,200 books, all carefully selected to be appropriate for the users in terms of reading level, subject, and language. This may not be a huge library but it is one of the best libraries in Laos.

This oasis of calm and quiet supplies thirsty minds with dictionaries, novels, and non-fiction. Students, who have never owned books, are able to check books out for two weeks. At present about 1,000 books a month are being checked out for free and almost all of them are being brought back on time. Students who normally have no access to quiet corners for concentration have a dedicated place to come to where they can read and learn in silence. @ My Library puts a premium on learning here and the students appreciate that.

This is an eclectic education enterprise. It is not just computer skills and reading and writing that are encouraged. Artistic endeavors are taken very seriously. Cameras have been donated, volunteer photographers have provided tutoring, and Lao, Hmong and K'hmu students have started snapping people and places, making a record of today's Laos. Carol Kresge, the powerhouse behind this eclectic educational enterprise, tells me "anyone can borrow basic cameras. The more advanced cameras are used by our superstars and, as you can see, we definitely have some superstars."

On a large table in the back of a sunshine-filled room a young student looks through his portfolio. Imaginative prints of elephants and Laotian faces and landscapes spill across the table.

Here, the walls have become a photo gallery. The pictures are all for sale and each time a photo is sold, the photographer gets half the money and the library gets half. The students are learning a craft, presenting their culture through their own native eyes and learning about running a business and earning money. It seems to be a perfect win-win situation.

Learning here does not stop with reading, writing, and photography. Nor, does it stop at the end of the day. There is a music studio where budding musicians can come in and lay down tracks and after hours they come in and record Lao and Hmong music using guitars, keyboards, and synthesizers @ My Library is unique. Photography, advanced computing skills, music lessons, Lao and English typing skills, five different languages, Japanese calligraphy, and artwork instruction are all available for the asking and all of them free. This drop-in center is where young Laotians are given the encouragement and support to learn anything they want to learn — absolutely anything.

This experiment in all-around, holistic learning was started in 1999 by Carol Kresge. Carol originally taught at a private school in Bangkok for privileged students and came here for what she thought would be a short visit. Taking in the lack of experienced staff and educational opportunities, she was blown away by the clear desire to learn and the complete dearth of materials. "I looked around me and decided there and then that my time teaching in Bangkok private schools had to end. I needed to come here and start this program."

At first this project was simply a library with a few computers. Now the students actually build their own computers, fix earphones, play Scrabble and other thinking games, and hold public speaking contests. At first no one was able to use a computer or even control a mouse. Now, 25,000 computer hours

are clocked up every year by users ten-finger typing in Lao, English, and Hmong. One of the students, Vanh, has actually developed a computer-based Lao-English talking dictionary — the first of its kind in Laos.

Analytical learning (thinking and problem solving) is encouraged. In Laos the education system is based on learning by rote and it actually discourages intense analysis of thought, so Carol tries to encourage analytical thinking. Problem solving is encouraged. According to Carol,

> this project is not just about book learning — that is already a part of the school system. Learning by rote, memorizing facts and spitting them out again is not what we do. Here it is about thinking and analysing and problem solving. Here it is about giving students self-confidence so that they can learn to question themselves, me, the greater world outside these doors.

Every day, almost 150 users, usually between the ages of 14 and 27, take off their shoes, check their bags, and enter this door. They come from many different places: English colleges, business colleges, accounting schools, high schools, novice schools attached to the Buddhist temples, teacher training colleges, the Law school, the University, and the Nursing college.

Carol explains that absolutely anything is on the agenda.

> If someone wants a specific book, we try and get it. If they want to learn a particular subject, we try and find someone to teach it; if they want to practice a craft, we will try and find the space. We look for gaps in the market and try to fill them. One time we had a series of classes on English for working in a restaurant. For the last class we set up a pretend restaurant with real food and we all practiced greeting and serving and eating in a restaurant. It was a real eye-opener for me and for the students. I realized that many of the students had never eaten in a restaurant and many of the students realized that a restaurant venue is not the same as one's own home.

This space is not just about books, but it is a place that is supportive to the individual challenges that learners in Northern Laos face. "By encouraging creativity, curiosity, thinking and pride in an environment that is fun, we empower people to pursue their interests and realize their dreams," Carol explains.

This is also not a building containing stale information on paper pages and CDs and DVDs; rather, it is a place where young people come to help each other and learn about problem solving. It is a place where students realize that they can also learn skills, gain professional experience and even become mentors to other students. @ My Library provides valuable midwifery services for new writers and readers and thinkers on a daily basis. This is their gateway to their future and to the outside world.

> I needed to get involved with a labor of love. I'm here for the long haul. Ultimately I want to make this Lao-sustainable and I will then take a back seat. After all, eventually I am going to die and this project needs to live on.

"I don't think of things as failures,"' she says when I ask her if she has ever had any failures.

> I have to be positive, hopeful. I can't wallow in sorrow and adopt a "woe is me" attitude. And anyway, every so-called failure is actually a success. We learn from our mistakes. That is one of the important lessons we have to share with the students who come in this door.

Carol and her five Laotian staff members are creating an almost non-stop culture of learning. This place is open at least 55 hours, six days a week, a schedule that would put many western libraries and educational drop-in centers to shame.

Just before I leave, Carol says to me

> education is not just about book-learning. To be really educated it is necessary to understand yourself and others, to know your own culture and history and that of others. Hopefully we are encouraging that. We are giving access and experience and opportunities and we are setting a standard — a high standard — and we are succeeding.

Travelling around Laos it is immediately obvious that reading is not a common practice. Often, reading is seen simply as something one does to pass an exam; that is, if one even goes to school. On top of this, the books are prohibitively expensive, difficult — if not impossible — to obtain, and often written in a language that is not the readers' mother tongue. And, if one could afford to buy a book or find one discarded by a tourist, the constant noise, poor lighting, heat, and humidity would make it very difficult to concentrate.

It is also immediately obvious to anyone who enters the doors to @ My Library that Carol and her dedicated staff are simply trying to make reading and writing and learning and thinking commonplace and giving anyone who walks through the door an environment where the imagination can soar and creativity can explode.

Perhaps there is a big lesson here from a small, poor country for western, highly developed, highly literate societies. Perhaps libraries, if they maintain convenient hours, welcoming environments, and appropriate services, will once again become "the medicine chest of the soul," as inscribed once above the door of the ancient library at Thebes. Perhaps libraries are still relevant, still essential as producers, preservers, dispensers and instructors of life's many questions.

Note

Further information can be found at www.thelanguageproject.org and www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sZW3AM7v0k