



*LEARNiNg Landscapes*

*Curriculum:  
Issues and Innovations*

Spring 2009 Vol. 2 No. 2

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## Statement of Purpose




LEARNing Landscapes™ is an open access, peer-reviewed, online education journal supported by LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network). Published in the autumn and spring of each year, it attempts to make links between theory and practice and is built upon the principles of partnership, collaboration, inclusion, and attention to multiple perspectives and voices. The material in each publication attempts to share and showcase leading educational ideas, research and practices in Quebec, and beyond, by welcoming articles, interviews, visual representations, arts-informed work and multimedia texts to inspire teachers, administrators, and other educators to reflect upon and develop innovative possibilities within their own practices.

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## Editorial



In this fourth issue of LEARNing Landscapes we step into the contested area of curriculum. Our aim is to move away from the instrumentalist and accountability notions that tend to drive curriculum, into spaces that connect teachers and students actively, empathically, ethically, and democratically. It is in these spaces between the “curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-live(d)” that become the sites of “living pedagogy” where student interests and academic knowledge are connected, critical thinking and reflection are developed, and pressing social issues are addressed (Aoki, 2003, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 426). Throughout the issue the authors talk passionately and creatively about the “lived curriculum,” “the pedagogy of imagination,” the “child-to-child” curriculum, the “curriculum of desire,” “narrative curriculum making,” the “relevant curriculum,” the “real curriculum,” and “inquiry as curriculum.” They present nuanced and innovative lenses for thinking about the multifaceted dimensions of curriculum, the tremendous responsibility entailed in this work, and the potential and exciting possibilities that exist.

Our eminent commentators, Nel Noddings, Madeleine Grumet, and Michelle Fine, all of whom have made substantial contributions to education over many years, and to whom we owe a great deal of thanks, provide critical and inspiring “food for thought” about current curriculum issues. Noddings suggests that educators turn their focus from accountability to responsibility. She argues that accountability, narrowly defined as it is, has a deleterious effect on education, creating an atmosphere of compliance, competition, and even dishonesty in an effort to avoid criticism and negative outcomes. Responsibility, on the other hand, requires educators to meet all the needs of students placed in their care. She posits responsibility as a broad and all-encompassing goal that seeks to create physical, psychological, and emotional safety, to develop intellectual curiosity and honesty, to foster ethical and moral behaviour, and to teach imaginatively and holistically while maintaining integrity to

the particular curricular “area.” It is, she maintains, incumbent upon educators teaching from the vantage point of responsibility to continue their own learning. Grumet reminds us profoundly that curriculum “is made up.” Using the example of when scientists disqualified Pluto as a planet because of its size, she shows how definitions, beliefs and assumptions, and particular voices of power, in this case in astronomy, make the decisions about planets, and similarly in education, about curriculum. She suggests that teachers do not “need to be more creative or innovative than they are.” Rather they need to be able to claim public and political spaces in which to share their work, gain clout and participate in the politics of curriculum innovation. Fine decries a discussion about curriculum, before closely examining much more broadly the intent of public schooling, or what students need to know to both “flourish in and challenge” the current world laced with inequities and uncertainty. She calls for intentionality and participation as the key elements of “lived curriculum,” describing, among other examples, how the program, College Bound, developed collaboratively with women serving prison sentences and a group of advocates from the outside realized a “curriculum” of hope, passion, and liberation. She contrasts this with what takes place in public schools where race and class inequities are repeatedly reproduced rather than interrupted. She is adamant that it is only when curriculum intersects with participation, intentionality and democracy, within a context of rigor, relevance, and engagement that it can be re-visioned. These compelling commentaries poignantly set the stage for the articles that follow.

The articles by Armstrong, Mwebi, McCarney, Quenneville, and Leggo adroitly map out from different perspectives some conditions for curriculum innovation. Armstrong, a professor at Middlebury College in Vermont, elaborates strongly and convincingly for the need for a “pedagogy of the imagination.” Building on the work of Calvino and Dewey, Armstrong argues that imagination helps children find out what they know, provides the context for developing a skill, and guides the direction that teachers take in response to each child. The reciprocal kind of pedagogy that supports imagination requires close observation and interpretation, a “living within the work,” a commentary that expands the understanding of both the student and teacher, and a “critical response” that increases self-consciousness, but does not shut down subsequent initiative. It also includes formative assessment that both recognizes achievement and advances understanding. Mwebi, currently an assistant professor at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, began his teaching career in Kenya. In his study, he advocates what is called “a child-to-child curriculum approach” where students came to grips with the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on their rural community in Kenya. He shows how, through narrative inquiry and representing the students’ voices in found poetry, the students became empowered and able to confront

squarely the HIV/AIDS problem in their community and resist behaviour that might put them at risk. Also, they learned to challenge cultural taboos and became educational advocates inside and outside of school. Their collaborative work provided a democratic space for their voices and developed hope for their future. McCarney, a middle-school teacher at Selwyn House in Montreal, describes how he became committed to the idea of democratic classrooms, and moved with his all-male class of grade seven students into collaboratively constructing a democratically run classroom. He shares in text, pictures, and a reflective interview the lessons learned by his students and by him, and the engagement that was shared during this project. Quenneville, a grade eleven student at St. George's High School in Montreal, describes how his experience in high school has been engaging and very worthwhile because of the basic tenets of the school. These are that health must come first; learning comes from doing; the classroom should be freed from unnatural constraints; education should be adapted to the needs and differences of each child; group-consciousness and social-mindedness should be developed; and each child should have abundant opportunity for creative expression. He attributes the balance and successes that he has experienced in both intellectual and physical endeavours to these fundamentals that guide the curriculum. Last, but certainly not least, Carl Leggo, a professor of education at the University of British Columbia, transports us through the power of his poetry into contemplating life's learning or "the curriculum of desire."

Shaun Murphy, Simmee Chung, and Debbie Pushor, all narrative inquiry scholars, demonstrate the importance of relationship and narrative in curriculum making. Murphy, an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan, examines the narratives of a teacher and two students to show poignantly how "nested knowing" shaped the understanding and the ever-evolving process of curriculum making in a multi-age elementary classroom. Chung, a graduate student in education at the University of Alberta, inquires narratively and autobiographically into her experiences and "early landscapes" as a child as she emigrated from England to Canada and then moved to several different places. Frequently, as part of a visible minority, she felt marginalized because deficit notions of language and education prevailed. Her journey attuned her as a teacher to the need, above all, for focusing on "a curriculum of lives." Pushor, also an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan, explores how so often parents are a neglected part of the curriculum puzzle. She describes how through narrative inquiry and reflection, a teacher, Kelly, was able to re-imagine/re-story constructively and empathetically what had previously been a difficult relationship with a parent. She posits that this kind of relational understanding that Kelly developed has implications for both the school and teacher education curriculum.

Marguerite Comley, Cathrine Le Maistre and Diane Sprackett, Chris Milligan and Wes Cross, and Stewart Adam all direct their attention to curriculum from the lenses of different subject areas. Comley, the Department Head of Science at Lower Canada College in Montreal, discusses the importance of using inquiry-based laboratory experiments as part of the science program because it permits students to build on prior knowledge, attain a high level of conceptual understanding, and integrate the science curriculum with societal issues. It gives students voice and self-awareness in the classroom. She cautions that the benefits of exploration in inquiry learning can be lost if too great an emphasis is placed on course content. Le Maistre, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill University, and Sprackett, a teacher with the Lester B. Pearson School Board in Quebec, emphasize the importance of listening carefully to children in problem-solving mathematics. They describe a study with student examples where the teacher of a grade 2/3 mathematics class used a glove puppet called Sylvester to listen attentively to their understandings of problems, and their creative and differing solutions in what was a non-threatening environment. The students became sophisticated, varied, and collaborative in their problem-solving interactions and activities. Milligan, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill University and Cross, an administrator at McGill University, describe the evolution of a school-based project about Remembrance and World War Two. They show with interesting examples and links to Web sites how students used digital technology to record and analyze archival material and high school year books. They did this in conjunction with an oral history and community study to develop a contextualized understanding of the tolls of war, and a critical stance towards source materials. Adam, a student at Dawson College in Montreal, highlights his passion for computers and technology. He describes how he became enchanted with programming and then subsequently constrained by copyright. As a result, he has become an advocate for open-source software and he suggests how this may be used in “real-life” problem solving and translated into classroom pedagogy.

Teri Todd and Jacquie Medina, Susan Kerwin-Boudreau, Morgan Douglas, and Dorothy Lichtblau all turn their attention to curriculum issues and innovations in higher education. Todd and Medina, both assistant professors at California State University, Chico, in the departments of Kinesiology and Outdoor Education respectively, wrestle with teaching the curriculum set forth for courses at their university, while honouring the meaning that students derive from their own learning, or what they call the “real curriculum.” Todd ponders, particularly if outcome measures are pre-determined, “If a teacher values the development of knowledge from experience and believes that is the true learning, does this become the priority?” Medina advocates

with an example, for transforming the “hidden curriculum” or “real curriculum,” into the “understood curriculum.” They close with a discussion about the tension that arises when evaluating student learning as advocates of the real curriculum who are faced with institutional assessment requirements. Kerwin-Boudreau is a teacher at Champlain College in St. Lambert, Quebec. Her study explores, through interviews and concept mapping, the evolution of perspectives in six college-level teachers while engaged in the Master Teachers Program, a professional development program aimed at promoting the scholarship of teaching at the college level. She is able to show using interesting metaphors the process of how their thinking shifted from their perspective of teacher as a master of a discipline, to viewing themselves as master teachers or pedagogical leaders in their specific disciplines with increased attention dedicated to learner-oriented classrooms and courses. Douglas, a consultant for the Kativik School Board, advocates for what she calls a relevant curriculum. After extensive teaching and living in the Inuit community, she describes her initial naivety and then her subsequent understanding of the historical and detrimental impact on education in the north brought about by the colonizing intrusion of southerners. She discusses how, more recently, changes have been made to align the curriculum with the belief system and needs of the Inuit students. She suggests strongly, and with examples, that teacher education and professional development programs for southern teachers still need to develop more nuanced ways for acquiring cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance for teaching in the north. Lichtblau, a teacher, drama consultant, and currently the Horowitz Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, discusses how performative inquiry is an embodied and dialectical way for exploring curriculum that contributes to teaching and learning. She describes how she used the story of Anne Frank in a context of performative inquiry. The students were able to reflect on the convergence of the reader’s experience with the embodied experience of enactment. In this way, the inquiry becomes the curriculum and as a result, learning deeply, contextually, and collaboratively occurs through drama.

In closing, the important notions and nuances of curriculum discussed in this issue of LEARNing Landscapes may best be summarized in the following call to educators to re-vision curriculum articulated by the eminent Canadian curriculum theorist, Ted Aoki.

... the word *curriculum* is yearning for new meanings. It feels choked, out of breath, caught in a landscape wherein “curriculum” as master signifier is restricted to planned curriculum with all its supposed, splendid instrumentalism. I call on fine arts

educators in particular, with their strong sense of poetics, to offer inspiration and leadership in the promising work of creating a new landscape wherein “live(d) curricula” can become a legitimated signifier. We seek your guiding hand in reshaping and reconstituting the landscape such that in generative third spaces earth’s rhythms can be heard, at times in thunderous rolls and at other times in fingertip whispers, not only in fine arts classes but also throughout the school wherever teachers and students gather in the name of inspirited education. (Aoki, 1996, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 423)

L.B.K.

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## Commentary: Responsibility

Nel Noddings, Professor Emerita, Stanford University

### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

In this commentary, I argue that the current emphasis on accountability has overshadowed and weakened the far deeper concept of responsibility, and I ask readers to reflect on the scope and significance of teachers' responsibilities. Accountability, defined too narrowly, demeans the work of teachers and may even invite corruption. In contrast, a serious look at responsibility leaves us in some awe at the breadth and importance of the work we undertake as teachers.

We live in an age of accountability, and the demand for *accountability* seems to have diminished the role of *responsibility*. I will argue here that this is a bad mistake. *Accountability* forces us to answer to authorities for what we have accomplished or failed to accomplish; it points upward in the chain of power, and it encourages compliance or the appearance of compliance. We have to satisfy some authority that we have met some specific goal. There is some evidence that emphasis on accountability may even invite corruption. People, so focused on showing that they have met a particular goal, may cheat or “fudge” a bit to avoid penalties and criticism. In contrast, *responsibility* points downward in the power chain; it asks us to respond to the legitimate needs of those placed in our care. It is not satisfied by meeting one narrow goal.

Consider the breadth of *responsibility* in teaching. Teachers are responsible to various degrees for the physical and psychological safety of their students. Teachers of very young children must be constantly aware of physical dangers—tripping over carelessly placed belongings, swallowing dangerous objects. Teachers in secondary schools and colleges do not worry much about dangers of this sort, but

they must protect their students from embarrassment and verbal harassment. Teachers who use sarcasm or indulge in scornful responses to students' comments are derelict in this duty; their behavior is irresponsible.

Even when students are safe from ill treatment at the hands of their teachers, however, they may experience harassment by their peers. At every level, responsible teachers must protect their students against verbal bullying by other students. Here, teachers have several related responsibilities: First, they must eliminate such behavior as nearly as possible; they must protect the victim. Second, they must do what they can to correct and support the perpetrator; bullies must be helped to understand their behavior and work to change it. Third, they must encourage their students to share responsibility for a safe, cooperative classroom climate. Accepting this responsibility, good teachers do not rely heavily on authoritarian control but, rather, on a form of consistent guidance. They talk with their students about social problems, manners, and the rewards of dialogue. A healthy, safe classroom depends on mutual trust and respect.

Teachers have some responsibility for both emotional safety and intellectual honesty. Every conscientious teacher knows how difficult it can be to manage these two great responsibilities. Some teachers, wanting to protect their students from the embarrassment of public correction, react to every student contribution with, "good," even though a response may be plainly wrong. It takes skill and sensitivity to the needs of an individual student to provide correction without discouraging or humiliating him/her. Suppose a student expresses enthusiasm for the expression "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" but wrongly attributes it to the U.S. Declaration of Independence. The teacher can sustain the student's enthusiasm and encourage further exploration, but she must also remind the class that the words are from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Similarly, when a student gives a wrong answer to a mathematics problem, the teacher may say, "Let's see how you got that," and then suggest that three or four students simultaneously show their work on the chalk (or white) board. The ensuing discussion can invite something very like detective work on the part of a class seeking not only the right answer but further knowledge about procedures and pitfalls. Working together in this fashion, teachers can show that students who get wrong answers can still contribute to the search for knowledge.

Part of a teacher's job is to help students take greater responsibility for their own learning. This is not simply a matter of turning work in on time and passing tests, although there is a temptation for teachers under the pressure of accountability to

put the same pressure on students. In many classes, students are told exactly how many points they will be awarded for every task assigned. They are also told exactly how many points will be deducted for late work. It is not surprising that many students lose their love of learning and concentrate exclusively on points and grades.

Everyone recognizes that teachers have some responsibility for the intellectual development of their students, but too often today that responsibility is downgraded to a demand for higher test scores, and teachers are expected to “deliver” instruction on a tightly prescribed curriculum. In the best schools, however, teachers share responsibility for selecting curriculum topics and materials. They do not simply teach item by item, word for word exactly what authorities have defined as the curriculum. David Hawkins, the philosopher of science who contributed so much to open education, described the attitude toward curriculum in Dewey schools. Answering the criticism that such schools had no curriculum, he noted that in fact they

had a definite curriculum and there was no freedom to depart from this curriculum ... Within this, [however] teachers were *enormously* free to pursue these general subject-matter situations in any way they wanted to and it was quite clear also ... that an important group involved in making those decisions was the children themselves. (Hawkins, 1973, p. 498)

The freedom to choose within obvious limits—mathematics teachers must teach algebra if that is their assignment—places heavy professional responsibility on teachers. Working with the interests of students, teachers provide different educational projects and assignments for various groups and individuals. This responsibility is both demanding and delightful. It requires listening to students and responding to changes in the classroom environment. It also requires continued study and the exercise of imagination by teachers.

Not long ago, I chatted with an elementary school teacher, Mrs. X, who told me why she had taken early retirement. She had apparently been highly successful, and she loved her work, but the atmosphere had changed in recent years. One day, her fourth graders became very excited by the season’s first snowfall. Instead of insisting that they stop looking out the windows and attend to the planned lesson, she invited them to write poems about snow and winter activities. The kids were enthusiastic. Some illustrated their poems. Some softly sang songs about sleigh bells and sleds. They talked about rhythm and rhyme. In the middle of this activity, a supervisor came in and sat down for an observation. Later the supervisor reprimanded the teacher for being “off the curriculum.” This activity was not in the official lesson plan.

The teacher protested that she had taken advantage of a “teachable moment.” The supervisor replied scornfully that there is no such thing as a teachable moment. For Mrs. X, this response suggested that her years of creative lessons and enthusiastic cooperation with children now meant nothing. She was expected to do exactly what her approved lessons plans stated, and to receive that approval, she had to state a specific learning objective for every lesson. Accountability interpreted so narrowly may drive many creative, highly effective teachers out of the public schools.

Teachers clearly have a responsibility to teach the standard subject matter prescribed in the pre-active curriculum—provided that material is not too narrowly defined—but they also have a responsibility to teach other important things. Recently, I attended the funeral of an old friend, Wil, who had been an industrial arts teacher. One of the speakers was a former student of Wil’s. In his remarks, he said that his former teacher—obviously much loved—had taught him to speak grammatically and to exercise leadership responsibly (he was president of his senior class). Think about this. The boy learned from his industrial arts teacher, not his English teachers, to speak grammatically. My old friend had taken seriously a responsibility to teach the “whole child.” The speaker also told us that Wil had advised him to work cooperatively, recognize the work of others, and interact more diplomatically. As a result, a somewhat rebellious and self-centered boy became a successful class president.

Teachers are responsible for so much more than the specific subject matter of their own courses. In addition to preparing students for the next grade or course, they must be concerned with permanent or long-lasting learning. Over the years, students forget much of what they are taught in school. Indeed, all of us forget a mass of details we once learned in order to pass classroom tests. But responsible teachers hope that students will retain certain habits of mind, intellectual curiosity, and eagerness (or at least willingness) to go on learning. When a teacher sees that a set of lessons is killing the joy of learning, she reasonably creates new, worthwhile activities that may restore the desire to learn.

In responding to necessary changes and teachable moments, teachers design activities that further the development of thinking, organizing, and communicating. A good teacher does not simply give up and let kids do whatever they please when they show signs of being bored and restless. Keeping their interests in mind, she suggests activities that are likely to further the great aims of education. When the fourth graders in Mrs. X’s class wrote poems about the new snow, they were sharing ideas, writing, communicating, reading each other’s work, conferring about spelling and, yes, dreaming a little about sleds and snowballs.

We sometimes forget, in today's climate of accountability, that teachers are responsible not only for specific outcomes but also for what is offered. Responsible teachers are always learning, collecting anecdotes and objects, preparing for possible lessons that may seem spontaneous to observers. They *offer* topics, stories, and challenges that may excite the interest of some students, but they do not insist that every student must pursue a given offering. They invite new ideas from students, and they watch to see whether students become absorbed and work toward satisfactory completion or whether they flit restlessly from one topic to another. In the latter case, teachers accept some responsibility for helping youngsters to study their own habits, to settle down, to see things to completion.

In addition to a wide array of intellectual habits, teachers are also responsible for the development of social and ethical attitudes and dispositions. In the United States today, we are beginning to realize that bright, ostensibly well-educated people are too often greedy, insensitive, and even dishonest in their personal and occupational roles. We do not, and should not, blame elementary or secondary teachers for the social/moral deficiencies widely observed. But teachers do bear some responsibility for moral education. The question is how to go about this essential task. Should we establish courses specifically designed to teach morals? Should we publicize a set of explicit rules, together with equally explicit penalties for their infraction? Should we institute zero-tolerance rules? Should we tighten control, perhaps hire more police for our schools?

There is much debate on these questions, and the debate reminds us of another teacher responsibility. Teachers should know what is going on in their field. They should read, continue to learn, and be able to justify the answers they give to educational questions. For those of us who take a neo-progressive position on the whole child and related matters, every teacher is a moral educator and, to some degree, responsible for the continuing moral growth of her students. Even at the graduate level, many of us feel a responsibility to engage our students in a discussion of honor codes, plagiarism, intellectual honesty, and professional ethics. As we accept this responsibility, we recognize another—to listen to alternative views and commit ourselves to dialogue.

Consider the role of teachers in preparing students for life in a democratic society. Should responsibility fall entirely on social studies teachers? They are the ones who teach the history of their nation and introduce students to governmental documents and procedures. But is that enough? Again, many of us believe that every teacher has some responsibility to involve students in democratic processes and to

teach some of the skills required. Such teachers may establish class meetings at which students discuss the rules by which they will govern themselves. They encourage students to work together and use group work not only to enhance learning but also to increase the communicative skills needed in democratic life. They support a rich agenda of extracurricular activities because these activities provide a venue for students with very different academic interests to work together—electing leaders, planning and implementing activities, perhaps volunteering to work with community organizations.

Clearly, we could continue in this vein for volumes. Do teachers have some responsibility for their own intellectual growth? For the aesthetic development of their students? For spiritual development? For satisfying personal and family life? Notice that *responsibility* is broader and deeper than *accountability*. It is not so much concerned with answering to external authorities. It is reflective and answers to something essential inside us.

In emphasizing responsibility, I do not mean to suggest that teachers should reject accountability entirely. Of course, we are properly accountable to those who hire us and to our professions. If we have charge of monies and materials, we should expect to account for how we use them. But accountability is far too weak a concept by which to judge the work of teachers, and when it is used too narrowly, it actually demeans our work and undermines the effort to increase the quality of teaching. Taking *responsibility* seriously leaves us in some awe at the scope and significance of the work we have undertaken.

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**Nel Noddings** is Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, Emerita, at Stanford University. She is a past president of the National Academy of Education, the Philosophy of Education Society and the John Dewey Society. In addition to 16 books, she is the author of more than 200 articles and chapters on various topics ranging from the ethics of care to mathematical problem solving. Her latest books are *Happiness and Education*, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness*, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, and most recently *When School Reform Goes Wrong*.

Noddings spent 15 years as a teacher, administrator, and curriculum supervisor in public schools; she served as a mathematics department chairperson in New Jersey and as Director of the Laboratory Schools at the University of Chicago. At Stanford, she received the Award for Teaching Excellence three times. She also served as Associate Dean and as Acting Dean at Stanford for four years.







## Commentary: The Politics of Curriculum Creativity

Madeleine Grumet, University of North Carolina

### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

As we encourage creativity in curriculum, we often forget that the whole agenda is made up. Creativity is the foundation of all knowledge and all curriculum. In this essay I argue that teachers do not need to be more creative, but do need to participate in the politics that will diminish our subordination. Because the creativity of the corporation and the testing companies has swamped the creativity of the classroom, the current economic crisis may provide opportunities for teachers to reassert the authority of our imaginations.

### Look, All Curriculum Is Made Up.

Curriculum innovation does not suggest a radical or exceptional property or process of curriculum; it is its foundation. All of it has been made up. The so-called “basics” were selected from the disciplines of literacy and numeracy and are still contested. The bible, a founding text of Western schooling, is a collection of tales. Physical science is always under transformation. In August 2006, I was delighted to learn that at their annual meeting of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), astronomers from all over the world took a vote on the definition of a planet and consequently disqualified Pluto.

According to the new definition, a full-fledged planet is an object that orbits the sun and is large enough to have become round due to the force of its own gravity. In addition, a planet has to dominate the neighborhood around its orbit.

Pluto has been demoted because it does not dominate its neighborhood. Charon, its large "moon," is only about half the size of Pluto, while all the true planets are far larger than their moons. (Inman, 2006)

This definition of a planet was supported by an obvious majority of IAU delegates, so votes were not counted, but a subsequent resolution identifying Pluto as a "dwarf planet" was contested, passing with 237 votes in favor, 157 against and 17 abstentions (International Astronomical Union, 2006).

There it was on the car radio. I know that these collective decisions about knowledge are being negotiated all the time, but rarely do you get to hear the vote as you are driving to the grocery store. And this decision, leaving us with eight instead of nine planets in our solar system, was both shocking and a little sad. What would we do with the mnemonic we had learned in elementary school: "My very elegant mother just served us nine pizzas." We had to console my five-year-old granddaughter, distraught that the smallest of the planets had been exiled from the family.

And so the designation of this body of rock and ice, two thirds the size of Earth's moon but 1,200 times farther away, travels from scientists scanning the universe at the Palomar Observatory, through the disciplinary deliberations of the IAU, to the news announcements of Pluto's demotion, to the charts and textbooks, and descriptions, that make my little granddaughter sad.

Creativity drives this knowledge and its dissemination all along the line. The creativity that is curriculum animates the inquiry, and the deliberations, and representations that we grasp as knowledge. It animates the communication of this knowledge in news announcements, journals, textbooks, and talk shows. It generates the codes and displays extended in the materials and syllabi of classrooms, from kindergarten to graduate school; and finally it generates the conversations between my granddaughter and her family and teachers. What should we say to her about Pluto? Will we speak of it in terms of epistemology, how what we know about the world is constructed? Will we talk about the Hubble Telescope and how it has provided information about the edge of our universe? Will we talk about her own family system, her younger siblings, and the ways that the littler and littlest ones have complicated her life?

At any given moment, in any classroom in any country, the curriculum that offers children important information about their world can be unraveled and questioned. All these choices that constitute knowledge and its presence in schools are

generated by the social and material histories of the people who participated in them. Just to get on with the business of everyday life, however, we agree to a provisional version of the world, assuming that some of it is steady and stable, so that we can pay attention to pieces that are screaming for our attention and decisions.

As I write this piece, in the United States and in much of the world, the anticreativity of our banking and financial systems has been exposed, and these institutions which formerly enjoyed a spurious yet impressive reputation for reliability, are now understood to have been mystified about their own processes and dishonest in their representations of them. Although I recognize the suffering that job loss and loss of savings mean to populations around the world, I confess that I received the notice of this collapse a little bit like the news of Pluto, relishing the moment when knowledge is unmasked, revealing that under its apparent certainty and imposing demeanor is utter confusion.

Can we agree with President Obama that in crisis there is great opportunity (The Associated Press, 2009)? What kinds of creative opportunities do the current flux and sway of our world portend for curriculum? Do instabilities of finance, of national identities due to immigration and globalization, or of national security in the face of global terrorism, encourage legislators, administrators, parents and teachers to change curriculum?

Regrettably, I think that although schools rely on finance, and participate in national identities and national security, we imagine them to exist in a world apart that we think of as private, separate from the public institutions of money and war. This is the ancient division of public and private space, which feminist scholarship in the 1970s addressed, recognizing that the personal was political and the political was personal. This is also the legacy of romanticism that haunts our ideas about the past, about children and about ourselves, imagining children to be innocent, requiring us to shelter them from the contamination of society.

Feminist theory argued that these two domains, the personal and the political, are never independent of each other; instead, their relationship is dialectical, each containing customs, relations and practices that are possible because of those that exist in the other. In *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Grumet, 1988), I argued that schools provide opportunities to both men and women to compensate for the constraints they bear in their relationships to the next generation: men compensate for the inferential nature of paternity and the presence of mothers in our society as the primary parents by claiming the child through the codes of language, knowledge and

public institutions; women compensate for the symbiotic relationship that they have with their progeny by greeting education and schooling as processes which may bestow independence on both them and their children.

The ironic result of these relations and their compensations is that women, who constitute the majority of teachers in our public schools, are recessive when it comes to the politics that shape schools, their financial support, their construction, organization, and curricula.

In the United States, the *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report projected the blame for the failure of US automobile manufacturers to compete effectively with Toyota and Honda on to teachers and children. Our economy was failing, we were told, because teachers were not properly prepared and students were not learning and turning into productive workers. The next two decades saw curricula dominated by the pronouncements of corporate executives as school districts courted private finance and adopted the culture of industry for the languages of learning and teaching: standardization and accountability. Even as these industrialists are exposed as misguided, inadequately innovative and even worse, corrupt, schools continue to bear the weight of their curriculum *innovations*, visible in high-stakes testing, scripted instruction, and continuing attacks on the intelligence and preparation of teachers. The invasion of accreditation practices into the curricula and teaching of teacher education programs has only exacerbated this deadening of our work.

Teachers do not need to be more creative, more innovative than they are. Teachers need to engage in the politics that bring their authorship into the public debates, the elections, and the administration of schools. There are many ways to understand the exclusion of teachers from the public processes of curriculum. There is the history of the feminization of teaching which accompanied women's path from their kitchens to the classroom with an ideology of female nurture which portrayed us as gentle caregivers, but not as people capable of knowing the world and changing it. There is the history of sexism, relegating women to subordinate jobs, receiving less pay than our male counterparts. There is the failure of feminism to work simultaneously in universities and communities, abandoning the students and teachers in public schools for theories of identity that denied that they had any. There is the failure of collective bargaining that addressed blue collar wages and working conditions, but excluded teachers from negotiations about what goes on in the classroom. There is the failure of professionalization, which idealized the authority of knowledge, the so-called knowledge base, imposing university practices in the name of action research, and reinforcing the separation of teachers from children and families.

Many years ago I wrote an essay that addressed these issues, "Where the Line Is Drawn" (in *Bitter Milk*, 1988). In it I celebrated the creativity of teachers but recognized the institutional practices and cultural histories that consistently obscure it. At that time I called for borrowing two spaces from the world of practicing artists: the studio and the gallery. The studio was the place for withdrawal, a space away from the children where teachers work, alone or with each other, to create curriculum. The gallery was the place where they presented that work, to each other, to other educators, and to parents.

But now it seems to me that teachers need to make another space, and it cannot be borrowed from the university, or the corporation, or the factory. This needs to be a place where the creative work of teachers is projected into public and political space. The Internet certainly provides a way for teachers to communicate with each other and join together to build this movement. The shared interests and intellectual energies of the millions of creative and passionate people who work with children in our schools could generate substantial political clout. But if teachers are to participate in the politics of curriculum innovation, we must recognize that creativity, like schooling, is not a private or romantic practice to be sheltered from the world. It will always be contested, as it should be.

In crisis there is great opportunity.

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## Commentary: Creating a Curriculum of Intention and Justice

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### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

In this essay we will wander into the vibrant space of a college in prison, schools and communities in which research projects have been initiated by coalitions of youth and elder activists. And we will bear witness to a lived curriculum—curriculum in the making. Shaped by the wisdom of youth and adults and the conversations between, these projects breathe a fierce intentionality to expose the contours of social injustice and a thick desire to reveal the spaces of possibility for educational engagement. At the intersection of deep inquiry, the politics of survival and affective engagement, these projects represent a way to re-vision curriculum building as a public project fed by participation, across generations, fueled by a desire for a life not yet. In each case, youth, educators and elders came together to deliberate about the purpose of the work, the depth of participation, the nature of the processes, the shape of the products we would create, and the range of worthy audiences to whom we would hold ourselves accountable.

04.10.08

Last night, I cried, again, in the gymnasium of a women's maximum security prison. The occasion was a memorial service for my dear friend Thea Jackson who, in 1995, brought college back to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, after then President Clinton severed prisoners' rights to federal Pell grants.<sup>1</sup> A baby-faced 18-year-old covered with a head scarf sat next to a grey-haired aging woman who appeared well beyond 60. Each of the 50 or so college students and

graduates in the room is serving eight, 10, 12, 15, 20, 25 year sentences, life sentences for crimes of drugs and/or violence. We were choking, silently, on the knowledge that more than 500 years of prison time metastasized the air in the gym.

JC, serving 75 to life, opened the evening, *"I have been a prisoner here longer than many of you have been alive."* Correction officers circled: four White men, and one African American woman, encasing us as an (in)human(e) shield, an intimate embodiment of the spiked barbed wire outside.

Across 90 minutes, scores of women poured forth at the microphone, singing, dancing, presenting gifts of thanks to the Jackson family, reading from a box of "Letters of Thanks for College" written by students and graduates of the college program, and presenting emotion-filled speeches about why college matters "for me, my children, my grandchildren—even my sisters and brothers." We all listened to women speak the magic of education in their lives.

Joan<sup>2</sup> opened: *"I am a mother and now a grandmother. This past June I graduated, here in this prison, on that stage, valedictorian of my class. In the audience sat my five children from Staten Island and my grandbaby. They were so proud. Not only am I getting educated here, but two of my kids are now in college because they said, 'Mom if you can do this from in here, we can outside.' I thank Thea and the college program—none of this would have been possible without you."*

Medoora picked up the rhythm: *"I came to Bedford 20 years ago, not even with a GED. Now I have an Associates, Bachelor's and I'm onto my Masters. I read literature and history, I write poetry, have new thoughts and am interested in how others see the world. Mostly I realize I don't have to be driven by emotion."*

Cheryl, now released, offered us final words directed at Jack, Thea's husband: *"Jack, you know Thea tricked me into college. She told me, as Black women we need to be educated to get good jobs. She told me that her grandfather, a former slave, started the first high school for so called 'colored children' in Virginia. So I believed her. I thought I was going to college in here so I could get a good job when I got out. But what I learned is that college is really about meeting myself, again, opening to others, understanding the shoulders I stand on and my obligation to open doors for you—my sisters—when you come out. College is about responsibility and trust, giving back, stretching. You're not going to believe this, but I just came back from giving a talk to the Department of Corrections in South Carolina, and then in Virginia—a Black woman, former inmate, speaking to DOCS in the Confederacy about educating women in prison! Thea tricked me when she was alive, and now she's got me working!"*



I do not want to sound romantic. It was an awful and wonderful night. The women are locked away from children, freedom, family, friends, fresh air—for so long for crimes of poverty, pain and violence—against them and sometimes by them. For mistakes that recidivism statistics bear out, women are extremely unlikely to commit again (in a recent recidivism study of women who have served 20 years or longer, we found a 0% recidivism for a new crime after three years). But college, in this sadistic place called prison, has carved open a small space to *be*; to be *with*; to be *for*. Women gather, intellectually and emotionally, in community, to read, write, recast the past and redesign the future; planting seeds for self and their children, grandchildren, sisters and brothers.

Andora's poetry filled the musky gym with sweet aromas. Her words painted and scented our collective imaginary: "*Thea's vision was a garden, a garden of educated women, women of all colors. And from a seed, look at what has grown.*" At that moment, clothed in white shirts and prison-green pants, all of the students and the graduates rose. They carried themselves and each other to the front of the room, revealing the colors, contours, depth and community of Thea's vision for education in prison.

Over apple juice and stale cookies, "civilians" were allowed to speak with the students and the graduates, for just a bit. I hugged Donna, whom I had not seen in maybe six years since we completed our participatory evaluation of the college in prison program and were told not to return to the prison. As I approached Aisha, another co-researcher from the *Changing Minds* project (Fine et al., 2001), a short, wire-rimmed, White male guard pulled me aside with a quiet warning, "If you hug too many of the women, they will have to be strip searched before going back to their cells." A Foucaultian nightmare of surveillance and the Panopticon; Marquis de Sade or maybe he was just being nice.

### **Education for Liberation, Housed in an Institution of Coercive State Power; a Garden in Hell.**

Driving home from the prison, my face was tear-stained, as it has been on every other ride home. My body saturated with an exhausting combination of joy and outrage. At 9:15 on a rainy evening, my car sped along the windy, death-defying Saw Mill River Parkway. I accelerated, exceeding the speed limit, anxious to hold and be held by David, my partner, and our son Caleb, longing for heat, music and a glass of wine. My mind flipped into reverse. Three years ago, when Caleb was in fourth grade, he had fallen, quite by accident, during recess. His body weight landed directly onto

the leg of another child, whose femur broke. Ambulances arrived. Schoolyard rumors circulated, "Police're coming to get you." Caleb shivered in tears of regret and petrifying fear; confused about cause and responsibility and mistakes and consequences. His friend, Shadel comforted him, placing an arm around his left shoulder and a whisper in his left ear: "*Let's tell the teachers I did it. They already think I'm a bad kid and you're good. Won't matter if I get blamed.*"

Caleb is White; Shadel is Black. Maybe this is one more coincidence in a long line of racially aligned "coincidences" we have witnessed in the 15 years of attending the courageous, contentious, ambitious and hypocritical, desegregated schools in our community in New Jersey.

I volunteer in Caleb's classroom once a week and have come to know the predictable dynamics that unfold before, during and after Shadel [this year] performs "bad boy"; the one who acts out, especially when he does poorly on a test. And I know what happens to children who come to believe they are not smart, not college material, "bad" students who do not graduate ... How have these young bodies been marked so fundamentally, so young? How have we burned into their skin the tattoos of who is a good kid and who is bad, by age nine? How does education in one setting, a prison, take up the work of liberation, and yet education in another setting—a relatively sweet, desegregated, trying-if-clumsily-what-the-rest-of-the-country-has-refused-to-address public school—take up the work of branding?

There is a well-lubricated path for Shadel leading to Bedford or Sing Sing or ...; an automatic walkway, like in airports, as Beverly Tatum (2003) has described racism. He does not have to do much to be facilitated down the path. But someone would have to do something extraordinary to yank him off course. And this is where I want to talk about *intentionality* and the project of public education within profoundly unjust circumstances.

## Intentionality and Participatory Democracies

And so you ask me, how do you define curriculum? What should we be teaching? I do not pretend to know, but I do believe that the question of curriculum cannot be severed from a larger conversation about the intent of public education. Whether we teach in exclusively elite, desegregated or exclusively low income schools, before we ask what we should teach, we must ask ourselves what our project

is? What do young people need to know in order to flourish and challenge a world marked by enormous, scathing inequities in income and wealth, suffocating in an atmosphere of fear and deep existential uncertainty? We might ask, further: Why have we not gathered communities, educators and youth to consider this question of purpose; how is it possible that we have ceded this question to the testing industry?

Let me return to the prison to think about the elements that enabled us to create a school where education flowed with liberatory possibility. After the Pell grants disappeared, a series of meetings were called by the women in prison and Thea from the local community. Women college presidents, community advocates, women in the prison and representatives of the prison administration gathered weekly to consider how we might resurrect college without federal funds. After about six months, with the enormous leadership of Regina Peruggi, President of Marymount College, a consortium of universities was established, each contributing two faculty per semester. College Bound was up and running at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility with varied participatory committees of governance. The Inmate Committee, with the faculty, generated policies about what students would pay (even minimally, as they decided public opinion would never tolerate free education); how discipline would be administered for cutting classes; how remediation would be organized; that sociology would be the primary degree; that all students should be expected to mentor the next incoming class in the prison or once they are released. With the administration and the College Presidents, the women recommended that annually the College Bound program bestow gift of a college scholarship to the child of a woman in prison, the child of a corrections officer and the child of a victim of violent crime. The Presidents of the consortium colleges worked collaboratively on curriculum, books, how to integrate college-in-prison into their admissions materials, and on strategies to recruit faculty to the prison. The administration worked on keeping Albany<sup>3</sup> happy and figuring out how to offer courses for corrections officers. Within a few years, a participatory research collaborative of seven women from inside the prison and six of us from outside materialized, and we conducted a participatory evaluation, documenting the dramatic positive impact of college in prison on recidivism rates, tax savings, a reduction in disciplinary incidents and peace in the prison and increased interest in college, evidenced by children of prisoners.

With participatory beginnings, even today, in the prison, the educators, community advocates and the women collect ourselves in a self-conscious circle of intent. They/we gather around a “thick desire” (Fine & McClelland, 2006) for education as liberation, although we never use those words; where respect, responsibility, rigor and community carve collaboratively a small space that stretches toward justice. With

full knowledge that women in prison are among the most demonized people in the nation, *College Bound* was found in the soil of *radical educational intentionality*, dedicated to building and sustaining a space of exception and possibility.

Ironically, I do not know when/if the teachers in Caleb's public elementary school have ever been asked to think, together (much less with community and students) through the swamps of racism, poverty, privilege and justice about educational intent. Ensnared in the rhetoric of testing and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), packaged curricula and packaging children, even talented, justice-oriented educators have difficulty finding a corner where there is enough oxygen to sustain a serious conversation about purpose in the morass of grotesque social inequalities. Of course, no one in this school actively set out to convince Shadel that he is bad. To the contrary, most of the educators here are thoroughly committed to equitable, desegregated education. But perhaps the question about intentionality and purpose is less about whether or not a school intends to reproduce race and class inequity, and more about whether or not a school organizes itself to interrupt the reproduction of class and race inequities. Under what conditions do public schools refuse to collude in the ritual burning of the flesh? What would curriculum look like if communities, educators and youth—in rich, poor and mixed communities—were invited to engage critically in a collaborative inquiry project about the role of schools within contexts of pervasive (in)justice?

Perhaps I am off topic, and then again maybe I am drilling centrally into the muck of curriculum wars. If we avoid questions about purpose and the educational project within contexts of perverse inequality, then talk of curriculum seems like an exercise in dissociation—a psychic splitting off from trauma. And so I will end with some images of middle and high school curricula kneaded at the intersection of intentionality, participation and democracy: where educators, community and youth have collaborated on projects of meaning and inquiry; projects cultivated with messy cross-generational participation, unearthing varied forms of knowledge and producing materials of use.

### **PAR Projects: Intentionality and Participation in Profoundly Unjust Times**

Over the past decade, members of the Participatory Action Research Collective (PARc) at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York have worked with dozens of youth and educators on PAR projects. Young people in school and out, with varied adults, have designed research to excavate critical knowledge held in the bodies and memories of those long dismissed as not knowing and those

long revered as knowers. These projects self-consciously recruit both youth of privilege and marginalization to understand how their lives are linked, how privilege and oppression eat off of each other and how new knowledge can be borne when dynamics of injustice and possibility are interrogated in contexts that Maria Elena Torre (2009) would call contact zones. Together we have studied and published on educational engagement and opportunities denied; the history of desegregation; youth experience of homophobia and high-stakes testing; young people's judgments about education, health care and the criminal justice system. We have examined the impact of gentrification, privatization and mass incarceration on urban youth, and we have published and performed our findings with and to communities of educators, elders, activists and other youth.

I want to browse through a few projects to reveal the flesh of intentionality and participation as crucial elements of lived curriculum.

In 1998, Bernadette Anand and I co-taught an Oral History course at a middle school in Montclair, New Jersey where we trained the students to be oral historians of the struggles of desegregation in their community. For four sessions of nine weeks each, we met with one quarter of the seventh grade class at Renaissance Middle School to review and then select relevant newspaper articles from the 1940s through the 1970s, creating a time line of key protests, turning points, legislative moments, victories and defeats, identifying prominent and everyday activists in the struggle for desegregation. The youth contacted the elders, practiced interview questions, learned about "leading" questions and what to do when an elder goes off topic. They begged people who had organized against integration to come in for an interview, but could not get any to agree. With an archive of more than 20 interviews conducted with a diverse sample of educators, activists, parents and adults who were all students in the 1960s, we coded the material and produced a youth- and adult-friendly book, published by Teachers College Press, *Keeping the Struggle Alive: Studying Desegregation in Our Town* (Anand, Fine, Perkins, & Surrey, 2002).

With similar commitments, but working with a range of 13 schools districts, in 2001, Superintendent Sherry King of Mamaroneck, New York received a grant to bring together a set of superintendents from "desegregated" suburban districts to research the racial "achievement gap." King asked the PAR Collective at the Graduate Center to design the research that would focus on students. We agreed with the proviso that we would conduct research *with*, not *on* or *for*, students, and designed a PAR project with research teams comprised of high achieving and not-yet-achieving youth from 12 desegregated suburban schools and a few small urban schools from New York City.

At our first Research Camp, an overnight at St. Peter's College, we brought together more than 50 young people from suburbs and cities, wealth and poverty, foster care and summer homes, advanced placement/honors class and special education, to be taught about research methods and ethics: theory, survey development, and focus group interview protocols. We explained that students and push outs<sup>4</sup> hold significant insights about the causes, contours and consequences of the achievement gap; that they would know best what questions to ask of their peers and how to ask them.

Early in that weekend, Terese, a young woman who had seemed skeptical thus far, spoke up: "I'm willing to do this research, but only if you call it an *opportunity gap*, not an *achievement gap*. When you say achievement it puts the blame on us; when you say opportunity, it shines a light on the structures available to us." And so we began.

By the second research camp, we created a survey on educational opportunities, attitudes, biographies and hopes—filled with Likert scales, cartoons, open-ended questions and youth artistic designs. The survey was translated into Spanish, French/Creole, and Braille. Distributed to 12,000 ninth and twelfth graders across 13 districts, it was completed by more than 9,000 youth.

At camp #3, young people and adults analyzed and coded the quantitative and qualitative material by respondents' race/ethnicity, social class, disability and geography, and mapped the perversely differential opportunities available across different financed urban and suburban districts and then by race/ethnicity and class, within the same schools; the distinct experiences of being welcomed or scorned by educators; the sense of belonging or being marginalized within the same building.

After this session, teams of diverse students and educators presented the findings to schools, communities, youth organizations and at educational conferences including the Cross Cultural Roundtable at Teachers College, Columbia University. Young people also wrote articles for journals/magazines/newspapers, including *Rethinking Schools* and the *Annenberg Newsletter*.

In the summer of 2003, we held our last series of camps—the Arts, Social Justice and Social Research Institute. We recruited 13 youth to review all the findings and place them in historical context of national struggles for integration. An intensive week was designed with a series of seminars, workshops with choreographers and spoken word artists. Every morning the young people sat in conversation with civil

rights leaders, lawyers, educators, Black Panthers and Young Lords, feminists and queer activists tracking the history of civil rights as the political precursor to so many other movements for liberation. In the afternoon, the youth worked with dancer/choreographer Ronald K. Brown from the dance troupe Evidence, and spoken word artists to craft performances of the data, embodying, reflecting and resisting the historic struggles for educational justice and the unfulfilled promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Together we created *Echoes of Brown*, a montage of dance, politics, history, inquiry and spoken word, by youth and elders. Performed for an audience of 800 in May 2004 to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Echoes* was published as a book and a DVD by Teachers College Press, including the performances, the spoken word pieces, and the interviews with elders, including poet Sonia Sanchez, activist Thea Jackson, Judge Jack Weinstein, civil rights attorney Arthur Kinoy and others (Fine et al., 2004).

Most recently, we have launched another project, *Polling for Justice (PFJ)*, a third example of a deeply intentional, highly participatory, quite messy, multi-constituency educational project involving elders, youth and educators. A youth-led survey of young people's experiences of health care, education and criminal justice in New York City, PFJ involves a mixed-methods design in which youth have crafted a survey and focus group protocols and are analyzing official data, documenting the uneven topography of educational and health care opportunities, and the disproportionate policing of young bodies of color. After six months of youth research camps, the survey is being piloted, filled with provocative questions that signal young people's desperate sense of human insecurity and strong desire to be embraced by a society that cares about its young. In the process, they have learned the skills of research, literature reviews, social analysis and writing; they have found community among diverse peers and adult allies.

Across the prison project and these three PAR designs, we bear witness to lived curriculum—curriculum in the making. The projects were shaped by youth and adults, with a fierce intentionality to expose the contours of social injustice and thick desire to reveal the spaces of possibility for educational engagement. At the intersection of rigor, relevance and engagement, these projects represent a way to re-vision curriculum building. In each case, youth, educators and elders came together to deliberate about the purpose of the work; the depth of participation; the nature of the processes; the shape of the products we would create; and the range of audiences to whom we would hold ourselves accountable.

## Notes

1. Prior to 1994, Pell grants had funded college within 350 U.S. prisons, at which point prisoners were deemed ineligible. After the Violent Crime Act became law, prisoners were no longer eligible for federally funded college assistance. In 1996, eight prisons offered college programs.
2. All names from this point onward are pseudonyms.
3. State capital officials in Albany, New York.
4. Push outs are students who have been denied high school diplomas due to various policies and practices increasingly characteristic of inequitable urban schools in which there are many unqualified educators, high teacher turnover, inadequate laboratories and facilities, and high-stakes testing which determines whether or not a student will graduate.

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# The Pedagogy of the Imagination

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## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

The author takes an essay on the imagination by Italo Calvino as the cue for a reconsideration of the role of imagination in children's thought and action and its educational implications. He emphasizes the value of interpretation, or critical scrutiny, as foremost among a teacher's skills and central to curriculum design, teaching method and educational assessment, demonstrating the quality of children's imaginative work, and how to value it, by means of a close reading of an eight year old's brief meditation on coming to school for the first time.

**M**y title is taken from a late essay by the Italian novelist Italo Calvino. Calvino died in 1985, on the eve of his departure for the USA where he was due to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University. He had already written five of the six promised lectures and was planning to complete the sixth on his arrival in Cambridge. The five completed lectures were published posthumously in 1988, under the supervision of Calvino's widow, with the title which Calvino had chosen for the entire series: *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Calvino, 1988). Calvino devotes his lectures to "certain values, qualities, or peculiarities of literature that are very close to my heart" (p. 1): lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity. The fourth lecture, on visibility, is, in effect, a celebration of the literary imagination and of the role which it plays in Calvino's own work and the work of those writers of the past whom he most admires. It is with this remarkable essay that my argument begins.

Calvino distinguishes between “two types of imaginative process: the one that starts with the word and arrives at the visual image, and the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression” (p. 83). He further distinguishes between two modes of imaginative thought, “imagination as an instrument of knowledge” and “imagination as participation in the truth of the world” or as “a communication with the world soul” (p. 88). Calvino is in no doubt that his own work starts with the visual image. “When I began to write fantastic stories,” he tells us, “I did not yet consider theoretical questions. The only thing I knew was that there was a visual image at the source of all my stories” (p. 88). He defines his creative procedure as follows:

In devising a story, therefore, the first thing that comes to my mind is an image that for some reason strikes me as charged with meaning, even if I cannot formulate this meaning in discursive or conceptual terms. As soon as the image has become sufficiently clear in my mind, I set about developing it into a story; or better yet, it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities, the story they carry within them. Around each image others come into being, forming a field of analogies, symmetries, confrontations. Into the organisation of this material, which is no longer purely visual but also conceptual, there now enters my deliberate intent to give order and sense to the development of the story; or rather, what I do is try to establish which meanings might be compatible with the overall design I wish to give the story and which meanings are not compatible, always leaving a certain margin of possible alternatives. At the same time, the writing, the verbal product, acquires increasing importance. I would say that from the moment I start putting black on white, what really matters is the written word, first as a search for an equivalent of the visual image, then as a coherent development of the initial stylistic direction. Finally, the written word little by little comes to dominate the field. From now on it will be the writing that guides the story toward the most felicitous verbal expression, and the visual imagination has no choice but to tag along. (p. 89)

Although Calvino is in no doubt about his own creative procedure, he is less decisive in choosing between alternate modes of imaginative thought. In his opening lecture he had described himself as “accustomed to consider literature a search for knowledge” (p. 26), but he is equally aware of the existential quality of imaginative thought, its distinctive mode of being:

I have always sought out in the imagination a means to attain a knowledge that is outside the individual, outside the subjective. It is right, then for me to declare myself closer to the second position, that of identification with the world soul. (p. 91)

Above all, he recognizes in the imagination “a repertory of what is potential, what is hypothetical, of what does not exist and has never existed, and perhaps will never exist but might have existed” (p. 91). He cites the Italian Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno who defines the *spiritus phantasticus* as “a world or a gulf, never saturable, of forms and images,” and he concludes:

So, then, I believe that to draw on this gulf or potential multiplicity is indispensable to any form of knowledge. The poet’s mind, and at a few decisive moments the mind of the scientist, works according to a process of association of images that is the quickest way to link and to choose between the infinite forms of the possible and the impossible. (p. 91)

Calvino is anxious about the survival of the imagination, and in particular its visual aspect, in the modern age, “bombarded” as we are “by such a quantity of images that we no longer distinguish direct experience from what we have seen for a few seconds on television” (p. 92). It is this anxiety which leads him to propose,

some possible pedagogy of the imagination that would accustom us to control our own inner vision without suffocating it or letting it fall, on the other hand, into confused, ephemeral daydreams, but would enable the images to crystallise into a well-defined, memorable, and self-sufficient form, the *icastic* form ... (p. 92)

But this would be an unusual form of pedagogy, “a kind of pedagogy that we can only exercise upon ourselves, according to methods invented for the occasion and with unpredictable results” (p. 92)

I want now to extend and redirect Calvino’s proposal for a pedagogy of the imagination. But first we need to examine the way in which a young child, at the beginning of a writing life, exploits the literary imagination as Calvino describes it.

*New Kid* is a short meditation written by an eight-year-old boy named Chris, a third grade pupil in one of the public elementary schools in the city of Lawrence, an impoverished old mill town north of Boston.

## New Kid

**It's hard being a new kid you have to stand there holding a blue pencil and having a desk that's blue just like the sea when it's a wack and everyone making fun of you because you have no friends and the teacher analyzing you like a bird flying around you it's hard being a new kid.**

Like many of his classmates, Chris was born in the Dominican Republic. He is a large, quiet, soft-spoken boy, thoughtful, even dreamy. When he reads his work to the rest of his class at the end of the day, he reads shyly but with evident pleasure, smiling as he comes to the end. *New Kid* was not written in response to any assignment; it was Chris's own choice of subject. He wrote it at a single sitting and although he made a copy later, he changed no more than a single word, replacing the words "not good" by the word "hard" in the final line, a significant choice as we will see. His handwritten copy is faint but clear. The title is large and eye-catching, twice the size of the rest of the text, which begins immediately below and takes up ten lines; the individual words widely spaced, the letters distinct, every letter i surmounted by a tiny circle. Only two words are misspelt: "awake" is written as "a wack" and "analyzing" becomes "analying." There is a full stop after the last word but no further punctuation.

Visibility is the foremost quality of Chris's meditation. It opens with a visual image that is "charged with meaning" in much the same way as Calvino claims for his own work: the image of a forlorn child standing beside a blue desk, clutching a blue pencil. Although Chris told me that he was thinking of his own entry into first grade, his meditation is not strictly autobiographical. Its subject is "you" as the unpunctuated opening makes clear, immediately juxtaposing the word "kid" and the word "you" as if to identify the subject of the meditation with whoever might be reading it: "It's hard being a new kid you have to stand there." "You" stands for writer and reader alike, for anyone who has ever felt the loneliness of the newcomer, forced into a situation that he has in no way chosen for himself: "you have to." It invites us to make the experience our own, whether in memory or in imagination.

Calvino writes of how "it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities" so that "around each image, others come into being, forming a field of analogies, symmetries, confrontations" (p. 89). Chris's meditation matches this description word for word. The potentiality of its opening image depends upon the colour blue. Among the many meanings of the word blue in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993), we find "the colour of sorrow or anguish," "the clear sky, the sea, the desert; the indefinite distance; the unknown," "depressed, low-spirited, dismayed, downcast" (p. 248) The image of the child with the blue pencil by the blue

desk evokes each of these definitions in turn, almost as if the writer is playing on the meaning of blue, both colour and word. From the local and particular blue of the classroom, the meditation moves to the infinite blue of the sea “when it’s a wack.” Chris told me that he had in mind the sea in the early morning, adding that when he was in first grade he was often thinking of the sea, though he did not say why. “Awake” suggests activity, energy, renewed life, but the life to come is anything but peaceful or reassuring. The morning sea matches the morning classroom in its all-embracing blueness, the blue of the indefinite, the unknown, the downcast, the colour of anguish, a blue that both heralds the day and threatens its promise.

In one of his late essays, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) describes the exceptional significance of visibility in the work of Goethe in the following terms:

Even the very basis of a philosophical world view can be revealed in a simple and clear visual image. When travelling from Naples to Sicily, Goethe found himself on the open sea for the first time, encircled by the line of the horizon. He said, ‘No-one who has never seen himself surrounded on all sides by nothing but the sea can have a true conception of the world and of his own relation to it.’ (p. 28)

The simile of the wakeful sea in *New Kid* has the same philosophical resonance. Here too the truth of the world is represented in visible form, the child’s isolation mirrored in the blueness of the sea. There is a distant echo of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, even if Chris has never as yet come across Coleridge’s (1797-1798/1978) poem: “Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!” (p. 90)

But the child in the classroom is not alone, or rather, his loneliness is despite, or even because of, the crowded presence of his classmates and his teacher. As the text leads us back from the sea to the classroom, the child’s isolation is reinforced by the clamour of those around him, his classmates making fun of him and his teacher analyzing him “like a bird flying around you.” Under the influence of the image of the sea, the circling bird brings to mind, if not an albatross, then a seagull, screaming as it circles the boat. This time, however, it is not an image that evokes the simile but a word, the word “analyzing.” Around this word there hangs another story. I was surprised when I encountered the word in Chris’s meditation. It was not a word I would have expected to find him using. But then I caught sight of a notice on the wall of the classroom in which he was working: “Analyze: to look at closely.” A day or two later came an announcement on the school’s loudspeaker, after the morning pledge of

allegiance: “our MCAS word of the week is ‘analyze’; ‘analyze’ means to break into parts and look at closely.” Two children repeated the definition after the teacher. It seems likely that this is how Chris had first encountered the word. The authors of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System might be gratified to discover a child so freely making use of their word of the week. But in appropriating the word, Chris has, by means of a new simile, dramatically enlarged its emotional range. The word has lost its impersonal or positive emphasis and acquired the force of a nightmare. In a single flourish of the literary imagination, Chris has bestowed on the word “analyze” a poetical significance far removed from the blandness of the MCAS word list. By making the visual image an equivalent of the word, the reverse of Calvino’s declared procedure, the word itself has taken on a revolutionary new life.

In this extraordinary extension of the word’s connotation there is a distant echo of some remarks of Leo Tolstoy (1982) on the perils of comprehension exercises such as those which he himself had given to children at the peasant school which he founded on his family estate at Yasnaya Polyana in the 1860s. At the end of a devastating critique of one of his own lessons he writes as follows:

We must give the pupil opportunities to acquire new concepts and words from the general sense of what is said. He will hear or read an incomprehensible word in an incomprehensible sentence once, then again in another sentence, and a new concept will begin dimly to present itself to him, and at length he will, by chance, feel the necessity of using that word, he will use it once, and word and concept become his property. And there are thousands of other paths. But deliberately to present a pupil with new concepts and forms of language is, according to my conviction, as unnecessary and pointless as to teach a child to walk by means of the laws of equilibrium. Any such attempt carries a pupil not nearer to the appointed goal but further away from it, as if a man should wish to help a flower to open out with his crushed hand, should begin to unfold the petals, and crush everything round about. (p. 125)

It is in just such a way that Chris has made the word “analyze” his property and in the process has enlarged the word’s significance. It will be hard to think of word or concept in quite the same way again.

The meditation ends with the same six words with which it began. The self-consciousness of this ending is unmistakable, confirmed, as it is, by Chris’s cancellation of the words “not good” in favour of the original “hard.” There could be no clearer



sign of Chris's "deliberate intent to give order and sense to the development of the story." But the argument is not circular. To encounter these words once more is to understand them quite differently; the meditation has reconstructed their meaning, just as the image of the bird reconstructed the meaning of the word "analyze." And now we can see the value that lies in the absence of punctuation throughout the meditation. By binding his central vision so seamlessly to the dogmatic beginning and ending, Chris makes visible his intention to re-create imaginatively the newcomer's experience. "This is how we are to understand the plight of the new kid, now do you see?" the meditation asks us, and to confirm its argument the opening words are repeated, transformed by the vision which they frame. So the parable of the new kid is at the same time a parable of poetic form, of the way in which the written word makes all things new.

Chris's achievement raises the question which Calvino asks of himself: is his mode of imaginative thought best described as an instrument of knowledge or as participation in the truth of the world? The answer is, surely, that it is both. What is it that Chris knows? The experience of being a new kid is common enough in Chris's school. Almost every week there will be a newcomer in his own or a neighbouring class. His meditation brings that experience to imaginative life. It shows us what it means to be the newcomer, the outsider, the other. But the meditation is not evidence of his knowledge so much as its embodiment. In writing it he has come to understand for himself what his words and images make us, his readers, understand. His meditation represents what he knows. And like all imaginative thought his work reconstructs the knowledge which it represents. So the word "analyze" acquires a new shade of meaning, the blue of the morning sea seems more of a threat than a promise, the absence of punctuation becomes a merit rather than a defect.

What, then, of the imagination as participation in the truth of the world? Chris's evocation of the sea is the measure of his participation. It lifts his meditation above the local and particular setting of the small child in the classroom, into the universal experience of loneliness and isolation. I am reminded of a passage from the preface to Henry James's (1934) great novel of childhood, *What Maisie Knew*, in which James describes his intentions in writing the novel from the standpoint of a perceptive young child. "I lose myself, truly," he writes, "in appreciation of my theme on noting what she [Maisie] does by her "freshness" for appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough. They become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art; she has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions—connexions with the "universal"—that they could scarce have hoped for" (p. 147). "Meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions,"

these are the very terms that seem appropriate to the effects of Chris's wonder, as displayed in his meditation. His visual and verbal imagination connects the local with the universal, the incidental with the essential, converting the trivialities of the classroom into poetry and tragedy and art. This is the way in which he communicates with the world soul, as Calvino puts it. It is the quality of mind which W.B. Yeats has in mind, in *Among School Children*, when he stands in "the long schoolroom," taking note of how "the children's eyes/ In momentary wonder stare upon/A sixty-year-old smiling public man":

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent  
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she  
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event  
That changed some childish day to tragedy –  
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent  
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,  
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,  
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

Such an achievement, as notable as it is fragile, is no exception. On the contrary, it is characteristic of children's writing, from their earliest attempts to put their thought into written form (Armstrong, 2006). Works such as *New Kid* represent the early life of the literary imagination, much as Calvino describes it, and demonstrate its vitality from the outset of literacy. The educational value of the imaginative life can scarcely be exaggerated. In as much as children's imaginative work embodies their knowledge and represents their engagement with the truth of the world, it is fundamental to the entire educational process so long as that process is conceived in Calvino's humanistic terms. What works such as *New Kid* demonstrate is that it is through the exercise of imagination that children learn to participate in culture. The imagination, grounded in play, is the form of thought which determines their cultural practice from infancy onwards. Chris is no stranger to culture nor simply a spectator; he is a maker, a player, a composer, whose works reinvent the world even as they discover it.

The imagination is fundamental to education in a variety of ways. Firstly, imaginative work is both an embodiment of children's knowledge and the means to its advancement. Works build on works as children use their writing or art, their mathematics or science, to put their experience to the test, explore its significance, and represent their growing understanding in an appropriate form. Thinking and making are inextricable in their practice, as *New Kid* shows us. Secondly, it is imaginative work

which provides the appropriate context for the development of skill. So it was for Chris when he discovered the word that he could both appropriate and reconfigure in order to capture the new kid's experience, the word "analyze." So it will be later with the use he makes of punctuation, although for the moment he can usefully exploit the very absence of punctuation for dramatic effect, making a virtue of a missing technique. Thirdly, imaginative work sets the terms for the course of instruction, as teachers respond to children's interests, enthusiasms and concerns in ways that match the freshness of the child's wonder to the culture's accumulated knowledge. It is not that children's concerns in themselves determine the curriculum but rather that the curriculum represents a mutual exchange, never fixed, between the child's wonder, the teacher's experience and the subject matter of the various arts, sciences and technologies, that triangular relationship, memorably defined by the philosopher David Hawkins (1974), in one of his educational essays, as the relationship between I, Thou and It. So it might be that the way in which Chris's meditation brought to my mind Coleridge's poem would lead me to introduce Chris to the poem and to explore with him other poems or stories on similar themes. And fourthly, it is the imagination that makes formal education, from kindergarten onwards, a major expression of culture rather than a preparation for it. To examine the writing of a young child like Chris, as he explores the new kid's experience, is to rediscover the meaning of loneliness. His writing challenges us, even as we respond with our own reciprocal challenges.

I want to return now to Calvino's proposal of a pedagogy of the imagination and to ask what such a pedagogy implies within the context of a common education. Calvino's chief concern is over the fate of the visual imagination in what he calls "the civilization of the image," but I propose to broaden the investigation to include the imagination in all its forms: visual, verbal, auditory, and conceptual. According to Calvino, a pedagogy of the imagination is "a kind of pedagogy that we can only exercise upon ourselves." He has in mind, I think, the writer's ultimate responsibility for his own development from one work to the next and the uniqueness of every artist's predicament. His subsequent account of his own early life as a child obsessed by the world of the cartoon image bears out his claim. In the end it is children themselves who determine the progress of their thought from work to work. But teachers are the catalysts of children's imaginative growth and it is with children and their teachers together that I shall be concerned here.

So how do children learn to control and shape their inner vision and, in particular, how do teachers support their students' imaginative growth? I believe that the answer lies in interpretation, the art of observing, describing, responding and connecting, which seems to me foremost among a teacher's skills. By interpretation I

have in mind the close reading of children's work, whatever form that work may take. Close reading entails an intricate interplay between the observation of work in progress, unprejudiced description of the finished product, explication of the work's meaning, and the placing of the work within its cultural context. I want to identify four distinct moments or aspects of interpretation, linking each aspect to Chris's meditation, which for this purpose I shall take to be representative of children's work as a whole.

Interpretation begins with the identification of the teacher with the work. The teacher becomes the reader, whose responsibility is to live within the work as if performing a score. So in reading Chris's meditation our first task is to share his original vision, making it visible to ourselves in memory or imagination; to follow the movement of his thought from moment to moment and word to word; to grasp the force of individual words and images, words, for example, such as "analyze" or "awake"; to sense the rhythm, speed, and dynamics of his language; to become, in thought, the new kid, feeling his confusion for ourselves. It is only by living within the work that we come to understand how a work such as *New Kid* represents the child's developing imagination.

Next comes commentary, the exposition of the work, as we draw out its meaning by more closely examining its thought and its language. It is commentary that leads us to recognize in the ending of *New Kid* not so much a recapitulation of the opening as its reconstruction in the light of the vision to which the opening words have given rise. It is by way of commentary that we read in the image of the "sea when it's awake" the troubled mind of the lonely outsider. It is commentary that helps us to define the work's underlying argument and uncover its "self-sufficient form." Commentary is not to be understood simply as an unmasking of the author's "deliberate intent." Intention does not exhaust the work's meaning; indeed it is tempting to suggest that the work knows more than its author intends (Woods, 2005). More precisely, it is the work itself that extends and advances its author's knowledge, just as it enlarges its reader's knowledge. This excess of the knowledge expressed within the work over the author's declared or implicit intention is what makes a work such as *New Kid* so valuable in education, whether for children or their teachers. In particular, it is this excess which governs the reader's response to the writer's work.

Critical response is the third aspect of interpretation to which I want to draw attention. For a pedagogy of the imagination it is the pivotal moment. Critical response has nothing to do with analysis as Chris portrays it in his meditation, that is

to say the picking apart of the work. Its starting point is dialogue, or perhaps it would be better to call it conversation: the exchange of experience between teller and listener, reader and writer, teacher and pupil, and between both of them and the work itself. We relate the work to other works that we have read, to our sense of tradition, to our own lives and to our own imagination. Most readers of *New Kid* will immediately recall an image that echoes the blue pencil or the blue of the sea, while the sea itself will often call to mind a poem, a painting or a piece of music. The exchange of experience leads to questions between writer and reader, as when Chris was asked about the significance of the colour blue at the start of his meditation, and the questions, in their turn, give rise to a discussion of inconsistencies, gaps, puzzles, doubts, doubts for example, about the lack of punctuation or the purpose of the repetition of the opening words, or the significance of the sea being said to be “awake.” A critical response has its dangers, to which Calvino’s proposal draws immediate attention. At one extreme, critical response may only serve to suffocate a young writer’s imagination while at the other extreme, an overindulgent response may leave the writer a prey to the ephemeral confusion of a daydream. Not least among a teacher’s skills is the ability to avoid the danger without curtailing the conversation.

The purpose of a critical response is to help both writer and reader to become more aware of their imaginative goals and of the means to achieve them, that is to say to increase their self-consciousness, and it is this growing self-consciousness that conditions the fourth aspect of interpretation which looks to the future. What does a work such as *New Kid* tell us about the present imaginative interests of its author and what are the next steps that we might help him to take? The breathlessness of the text, however effective in the present instance, might lead us to discuss with Chris the value and purpose of punctuation and the way it will enlarge his formal opportunities. The metaphorical use which he makes of the sea will suggest to us the poetry which might engage his interest, not simply *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, but also folk tales such as the many sea stories among Calvino’s (1980) own collection of *Italian Folk Tales*, which would lead his imagination into any number of new directions. The understanding of a young child’s predicament displayed in his meditation might suggest a research project into other children’s memories of their first day at school. It would surely encourage us to explore the problems of the newcomer further with Chris and his classmates, in drama, dance and narrative, as well as in classroom discussion. The teacher’s responsibility is to take note of how the one work fits into the pattern of the child’s work as a whole, to observe the direction of the child’s thought, to reflect on the knowledge displayed within the work and to make connections to other aspects of the child’s course of study and to the work of other students in the class.

I may have made it appear that interpretation is a matter for the teacher and each child individually. Calvino's insistence that the pedagogy of the imagination is something which we can only practice upon ourselves tempts us to stress the privacy of the task. But this would be a mistake. Education is a collaborative enterprise and the success of a pedagogy of the imagination, within the common school, depends on reconstructing the classroom as a collective workshop, that is to say a community of students and teachers, jointly engaged on exploring the world through the critical practice of the various arts and sciences. Within the workshop, amid all the thinking and making, interpretation is a fundamental skill, not just for teachers, but equally for students. It is the way in which they come to share each others' insights, and respond with critical sympathy, the way in which they learn to read as imaginatively as they write. It is the way in which creative writers learn to become their own critical readers. Interpretation is necessarily circular, returning again and again to the work under review, though at different levels of understanding, and in Chris's classroom it was within the circle of children, sitting on the carpet with their teacher, that the work of interpretation would usually begin, as children read their work aloud to the rest of the class and the class responded with questions, comments, appreciations and tales of their own.

The educational value of interpretation is determined by the way in which it is documented. To document the work of a class of children is to tell the story of learning, and in so doing to answer the claims of accountability. A great variety of means may be brought together in the telling: the individual or collective works themselves, drafts of works in progress, written or taped notes and reflections by children and teachers, plans and projects, photographs and videos, sketch books and journals. In part, these documents form a record of the class's achievement, demonstrating to parents, school governors, local authorities, as well as to the children themselves and their teachers, the growth of the children's knowledge and the significance of that knowledge, not just for themselves, but for the world beyond the classroom, the cultural world in which the children are growing up. To exhibit children's work, in booklets and portfolios, exhibitions and displays, inside and outside the school, is to acknowledge its cultural value as well as to account for its success in terms of the children's advancing knowledge. But documentation is also essential to the process of learning itself. It is by observing, describing and interpreting their own work as it progresses from day to day that children become conscious of how to control their inner vision in ways that echo Calvino's account of his own procedure as a writer. Interpretation is thus the key to learning.

The best example of documentation I know is to be found in the series of booklets published by the Municipal Infant Toddler Centres and Preschools of Reggio Emilia in Italy under the title *The Unheard Voices of Children*. In these extraordinary works the conversation, drawing and writing of very young children is juxtaposed with their teachers' comments and reflections in accounts of classroom projects devoted to subjects such as the nature of shadows, the problems of measurement, the workings of fountains, the study of children's rights. In the published report of the collaborative research project undertaken by Harvard University's Project Zero and the staff of Reggio's pre-schools, Carla Rinaldi (2001) sums up the purpose of documentation as follows: "Documentation, therefore, is seen as visible listening, as the construction of traces (through notes, slides, videos and so on) that not only testify to the children's learning paths and processes, but also make them possible because they are visible" (p. 83). The world of Calvino's great essay seems suddenly very close.

What, then, of assessment? What part does judgment play in a pedagogy of the imagination? In a chapter on "Criticism and Perception", in his book *Art as Experience*, John Dewey (1934) distinguishes between two kinds of judgment: the legalistic and the aesthetic. Legalistic judgment aims at delivering a verdict while aesthetic judgment Dewey defines as "an act of controlled inquiry." Legalistic judgment finds no place for the claims of the aesthetic. "Criticism is thought of as if its business were not explication of the content of an object as to substance and form, but a process of acquittal or condemnation on the basis of merits or demerits" (p. 299). By contrast, within the sphere of the aesthetic,

the critic's office is to further [the] work performed by the object of art. Obtrusion of his own approvals and condemnations, appraisals and ratings, is a sign of failure to apprehend and perform the function of becoming a factor in the development of sincere personal experience. We lay hold of the full import of a work of art only as we go through in our own vital processes the processes the artist went through in producing the work (p. 325)

What Dewey says of works of art can be extended to the imagination as a whole. Within the realm of the imagination, interpretation and judgment are identical. "Explication of the content of an object as to substance and form" is precisely what interpretation entails. It is a central implication of interpretation that legalistic judgment is suspended in the interests of critical scrutiny. The teacher's task, or rather the reader's task, whether teacher or pupil, is not to assign the work a score but to inquire into its significance. That means, as we have seen, to bring the work to life in the act of reading, to elaborate its meaning, to challenge its confusions and respond

to its insights, and to place it within the context of the child's and the class's developing culture. To describe and interpret work in this way is to value it. By the time evaluation is complete the urge to score the work for the most part disappears or comes to seem irrelevant.

Within a pedagogy of imagination criticism is formative rather than definitive. By submitting children's works to critical scrutiny, it aims both to recognize children's achievement and to advance their understanding. Its means are not the test and the score but the archive and the commentary. In this, as in so much else, the pedagogy of the imagination is at odds with the prevailing educational orthodoxy on both sides of the Atlantic. The improvisatory methods and unpredictable results, to which Calvino draws attention, are incompatible with a heavily prescribed curriculum. The language of targets, levels, standards, high stakes, is, at best, unimaginative. Above all, the innovative culture of the classroom is denied or belittled. Education becomes seen as a preparation for culture rather than a distinctive expression of culture. But I would not wish to end on a negative note. Better to reaffirm the imagination's credentials.

There is a passage in one of John Keats's letters (to his friend J.H. Reynolds) which seems to me to express perfectly the ultimate value and purpose of a pedagogy of the imagination.

Many have original Minds who do not think it — they are led away by Custom — Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel — the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with such a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean — full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury — But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions — It is however quite the contrary — Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all at last greet each other at the Journey's end — a old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his Path, and the child left thinking — Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and



there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees." (Keats, p. 66)

John Dewey quotes from this passage, at the end of *Art as Experience*, to define "the way in which poetry acts" (p. 347). It is not in any way accidental that it should also be as fine a way as any to define both the method and aim of a pedagogy of the imagination and to assert its democratic credentials.

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# Children's Voices, Children as Innovators: A Poetic Representation of Children's Experiences Learning About HIV/AIDS Through a Child-to-Child Curriculum Approach

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## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This paper reports how children experienced and reflected on issues of sexual health and the risks of HIV infection as well as providing glimpses of their narratives of empowerment, created as a result of the child-to-child approach which was implemented in a grade four classroom in a rural Kenyan school. The children felt, it is time to break the taboos around open discussion of HIV/AIDS. Their words, in the found poems in this paper, illustrate how capable these children are of initiating this vital change.

*They say it is a taboo for a circumcised boy  
To talk about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted  
In front of their parents  
But I want to break that taboo  
So that they are not infected by HIV/AIDS.  
(Gidi Gidi, June 13, 2003)*

In 2000, the government of Kenya introduced HIV/AIDS curriculum in all schools (Kenya Institute of Education, 1999). The curriculum was designed to develop the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to help learners develop appropriate behaviours (Aduda & Siringi, 2000). Despite this curriculum initiative, a significant number of young people in Kenya continue to be infected with HIV (Central

Bureau of Statistics, 2003). The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya requires more intensive measures. This paper reports how children like Gidi Gidi experienced and reflected on issues of sexual health and the risks of HIV infection, as well it provided glimpses of their narratives of empowerment, created as a result of the child-to-child approach I implemented with a grade four teacher in a rural Kenyan community.

In order to address the real-life situations of the learners, many studies (Kelly, 2000; UNICEF, 2001; Kiiru, 2001) have suggested that teachers have to adopt a teaching approach that is highly interactive with a broad participation of the children, that is, a teaching approach that involves engaging children in problem solving and decision making regarding high risk behaviours and practices. I looked for such a teaching/learning method and was drawn to the child-to-child approach.

## The Child-to-Child Approach

One interactive and participatory curriculum model that has been tried in health promoting schools is the child-to-child curriculum approach (Pridmore & Stephens, 2000). The child-to-child approach is greatly influenced by the notions of active learning and empowerment education (Dewey, 1929/1997; Freire, 1970). According to Hawes (1988), the specific principles underlying the child-to-child approach are:

... education is more effective if linked to things which matter to children, families and community ..., education in and out of school should be linked as closely as possible so that learning becomes part of life [and] ... children have the will, the skill and the motivation to help educate each other and can be trusted to do so ... (p. 3)

The child-to-child approach works from a belief that the purpose of the curriculum is to develop children's own capacities and problem-solving skills through stimulating their intelligence and imaginations rather than transmitting knowledge and facts (Barton & Booth, quoted in Hara, 1995).

I worked with one teacher participant, Praxey [this and all names of participants in this study are pseudonyms], and her classroom of 40 children in this study for eight months in 2003. The heavy reliance on the traditional lecture method, overemphasis on medical and biological facts, and a lack of addressing the real-life situations that young people find in their homes, communities, and the world (Galava, 2001; Kelly, 2000; Kigotho, 2000) made us adopt a child-to-child approach to teach HIV/AIDS curriculum in grade 4 in a primary school in Kenya.

As part of this approach, students were encouraged to take an active part in the lessons about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and ways to protect oneself from this deadly virus. I saw the stories lived both in and out of the classroom as moments of curriculum making. Praxey and I invited students to take part in a learning process that included introducing concepts such as how HIV is transmitted, asking students to investigate the concepts, to gather information from sources like their siblings, parents, and community members, and then sharing their findings through posters, drama, songs and stories. This view of curriculum making comes out of the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1992) who suggest that curriculum is where “teacher, learners, subject matter, milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392). These four are referred to as curriculum commonplaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Schwab, 1978) and helped me to attend to and understand more about our curriculum-making experience. Of central importance in this paper is the gathering of information children were asked to undertake, because without this aspect of the child-to-child approach, students would not have been able to provide the insights they did in the found poems such as Gidi Gidi’s at the beginning of this paper.

### **Using a Narrative Inquiry Methodology**

I used a narrative research methodology developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to inquire into children’s experiences learning about HIV/AIDS using a child-to-child approach. I worked with Praxey in the classroom on whole-class activities using the child-to-child approach such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph, which enabled all 40 students to create empowering narratives and/or artwork around the dangers of HIV/AIDS. However, the participants whose responses I draw upon here were from a focus group of eight children aged between 10 and 11 years with whom I spoke after school in a series of group interviews. The four boys and four girls were purposefully selected from a classroom of 40 based on equal gender representation. These eight were children who: talked openly about issues in their community; engaged willingly in a conversation with me; and who had parental consent to participate. After consent was obtained from parents, I invited the eight children to one-hour weekly conversation for a four-month period. For each session, the eight children reflected on their learning experiences through the child-to-child curriculum approach in the classroom on the topic of HIV/AIDS. The conversations were tape-recorded to document the work and to permit easy revisiting of the sessions.

## Threads in Narrative Accounts

As a narrative inquirer, I read and reread the transcripts of each child participant and I created narrative accounts for each. As I reread the children's narrative accounts, I looked for threads that linked elements in the stories they were living in these moments of learning about the subject of HIV/AIDS. I pulled out threads or themes that resonated across the eight children's narrative accounts.

I decided to represent the child participants' stories in found poetry because after listening to their conversations, I saw the power in their words and the way these were expressed. The idea of writing found poems has been part of my work since I started my graduate program. Reading the works of Butler-Kisber (2002) and Glesne (1997) gave me the impetus to present the narrative accounts of the child and teacher in found poems. Butler-Kisber (2002), on using found poems, wrote:

The researcher uses only the words of the participant(s) to create a poetic rendition of a story or phenomenon. Because I was most comfortable working with words rather than other alternative forms, I decided found poetry might offer a viable way of portraying what I was finding. (p. 232)

Like Butler-Kisber, I chose found poetry because I felt it had more power, energy and vividness.

Five threads or themes stood out in the transcripts of the children's conversations with me: students living as empowered learners; students taking up educators' roles in and out of school; students challenging cultural taboos; students becoming empowered to sustain themselves; and students imagining their lives in a hopeful world. Each thread reveals significant ways in which the children were becoming knowledgeable and independent activists in HIV/AIDS prevention. As I considered each thread, I developed found poems which contain the children's voices, and then responded with comments about the meanings I made from what each child said. As I responded to the various threads, alongside my comments I looked for other scholarly or theoretical conversations in which to engage. I pulled forward the works of scholars to add depth to my understandings of these resonant narrative threads.

### Thread #1: Students Living as Empowered Learners

The first thread that emerged across the narrative accounts of the eight children is of students living as empowered learners in and out of school. When children

told their stories of confronting people engaged in what they described as immoral activities in different contexts, it showed they were committed to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. Freire (1970) writes of problem-posing education where “students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (pp. 68–69). As children were faced with the problems of HIV/AIDS relating to themselves in the world, I heard them speak of feeling both challenged as well as obliged to respond. In the following found poem, drawn from transcripts of conversations with one student, Sharon [pseudonym] tells her story of being accosted by a guard:

*During the school holidays  
I was going to fetch water from the river  
I met a guard who seduces young girls  
I told him not to continue that practice  
He will be infected with HIV virus  
He was bitter and chased me with a cane  
I left him and went to fetch water  
On my way back I found him drunk  
There was a girl accompanying him  
I didn't know where they were going  
These days since I learned about HIV/AIDS  
I have stop those who indulge in risky behaviour  
I report those who indulge in such behaviours  
That is why I confronted the guard  
We are expected to teach them to stop the practice. (Sharon, May 7, 2003)*

Sharon experienced this incident as a moment of empowerment, an empowered way of living both in and out of school. She felt she had to stop people who were sexually harassing young girls. According to Greene (1971/1997), “the student will only be in a position to learn when he is committed to act upon his world” (p. 146). For Greene, only when students are empowered are they in a position to learn. Such is the way Sharon has been learning now that she is empowered to act vigorously to change the world around her.

Stephanie [pseudonym] describes a similar experience when she told how she challenged people who were engaged in unsafe sexual intercourse:

*Since I came to know about HIV/AIDS  
I stop people from engaging in illicit sex  
I tell them not to play around with their bodies  
They can be infected with HIV/AIDS*

*One time I found a boy and a girl  
 Having sex in a maize plantation  
 Belonging to my cousin  
 When they saw me, they ran away  
 I reported them to their father. (Stephanie, March 18, 2003)*

Stephanie describes this experience as finding courage to tell people to stop engaging in reckless sex. Freire (1970) suggested that when we bring consciousness into existence, “that [which] existed objectively but ... [is now] perceived in its deeper implications begins to stand up, assuming the character of a problem and therefore a challenge” (p. 70). Stephanie’s words suggest she was becoming conscious of problems posed by HIV/AIDS. Stephanie was living an empowered life in which she was challenging behaviours associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Rock (pseudonym) describes a similar experience of wanting to confront young people who publicly displayed “bad behaviour.”

*I was sent to Kisii town  
 On my way I met two boys and a girl  
 They were talking, holding one another  
 I stopped and watched them  
 I wanted to tell them that is bad behaviour  
 They were older,  
 I feared they would hurt me  
 I was undecided, to follow them or to proceed  
 I decided to continue my journey. (Rock, May 7, 2003)*

Rock’s experience was risky too—he wanted to confront them, but feared he would be injured. Freire (1970) suggests education is liberatory if it “bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (p. 71). As Rock was faced with a reality—a context where HIV/AIDS could potentially be spread—he felt challenged and obliged to take action.

Sam [pseudonym] experienced empowerment by describing how he shadowed and then reported child sexual abuse involving a school watchman and a school girl:

*I saw a school girl in this compound  
 She is in Standard 5  
 She was coming towards our home  
 Then a school watchman called her*



*This girl went to meet him  
They entered in one classroom  
It was on Saturday evening  
It was around 4pm  
I decided to monitor what they were doing  
There were no other students  
I told her there were boys calling her  
She told me to tell she was coming  
They made love as I hid in a corner  
The girl complained, she was tired  
The man set her free  
I went home and told my father  
My father came and inquired about it  
He denied what I had seen. (Sam, May 7, 2003)*

Nyerere (1967) suggests that education should “prepare young people to live in and serve the society, and transmit the knowledge, skills, and values and attitudes of the society” (p. 2). I observed Sam felt morally challenged to take action as he monitored the crime the watchman was committing.

## **Thread #2: Students Taking Up Educators' Roles in and out of School**

The second thread that resonates across the narrative accounts of the eight children is of students taking up educators' roles in and out of school. When I read the stories of the children, I heard them speak about how they have become empowered educators (Dewey, 1929/1997; Freire, 1970). They had a sense that they could be educators both in and out of school. Freire (1987) explains how “education is a moment in which you seek to convince yourself of something and you try to convince others of something” (p. 33). As I read what the child participants were saying, I understood they were, in many ways, taking up the educators' role. Sam describes how he experienced a change in how he felt about what he needed to do:

*I want to educate children  
Not to indulge in illicit sex  
They be good children  
They would become good adults  
I would like to show how it spreads  
I would go to the community  
When I will tell them  
I would recite them my poem*

*To announce HIV/AIDS is dangerous  
If they want me to use a radio  
I will use it to educate about HIV/AIDS. (Sam, June 13, 2003)*

Sam experienced empowerment as taking up the role of an educator of children about the dangers posed by the HIV/AIDS menace. Sam now believed that it was his responsibility to educate children to protect themselves from being infected by HIV/AIDS. Noddings (2002) suggests that educators of moral education should be those who “reach towards the living other with a feeling that responds to the other’s condition” (p. 42). Sam wanted to share his stories of experiences, the poems, and radio announcements and, in so doing, reach a wider audience in and out of school. Sharon described a similar experience out of school:

*I have taught people  
There is this girl who indulges in sexual adventures  
I told her the dangers she risks  
I told her she could be infected by HIV/AIDS.  
She has stopped the practice  
She now goes to school  
Then there is other woman  
Who liked to move around  
With men in the bar  
I talked to her about the risks  
I told her HIV/AIDS is dangerous  
It has no cure  
It has killed many people  
And it has no friend  
These days she has stopped  
She now stays at home. (Sharon, June 13, 2003)*

Sharon spoke of being an educator of girls and women in the community, making inroads by highlighting dangers posed by HIV/AIDS. Her actions resulted in a change of behaviour in two women’s lives. Freire (1985) suggested that “education for freedom is an act of knowledge and a process of transforming action that should be exercised on reality” (p. 102). Sharon’s words suggest that she experienced education for freedom which empowered her to act on the reality of the HIV/AIDS menace, as she tried to change risky behaviours of women and girls in and out of school. Similarly, when I read what Bevin [pseudonym] was saying, I could hear a voice of an educator.

*I can educate people about HIV/AIDS  
I can stop illicit sex  
I can stand before people  
I can recite a poem  
I can draw picture of infected people  
Tell them how HIV/AIDS is transmitted  
I would like to have good life  
I will be careful in relating with boys  
I don't want to be infected by HIV/AIDS. (Bevin, June 13, 2003)*

Bevin would like to educate people to hate the HIV/AIDS menace by reciting poems, drawing pictures of infected people, and being a model of living a good life without HIV/AIDS. Freire (1973) explains the “role of man was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world—that through the acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality and therefore adds to the natural world” (p. 43). I found Bevin trying to re-create the world by educating people to change their choices in the face of the HIV/AIDS menace.

In the same way, when I read what Rock was saying, I heard the voice of a boy who was becoming an educator about HIV/AIDS. He says:

*At home I educate men when earning salaries  
They shouldn't spend it all in bars  
Look for prostitutes to spend with  
They shouldn't leave their children starving  
Should take care of their families  
I teach my friends not to steal maize  
Not to steal money to take to friends  
In exchange for sex, it is dangerous. (Rock, March 18, 2003)*

I found Rock to be particularly interested in educating adult men who spend their time in bars with prostitutes. Rock thought that not only do these men abandon their families, but also they were likely to expose themselves to many risks associated with such behaviour including illicit sex and HIV/AIDS infection. Freire (1985) suggests that a student attained what he calls “vigilant attitudes ... [when she or he] ... wants to transform reality so that what is happening in a given manner begins to happen in another manner” (p. 158). Rock appeared to be a child who had developed a vigilant attitude about immoral behaviours as he tried to educate adults in bars and the youth he knew.

### Thread #3: Students Challenging Cultural Taboos

The third thread that resonated across the narrative accounts of the eight children is of students challenging cultural taboos. In learning through a child-to-child approach, children sought information from the parents and communities in the broader milieu outside of the school. Consequently, these children found themselves challenging the cultural taboos within their community. Silin (1995/1997) writes that talking about HIV/AIDS means “talking about sex, drugs, and even death, often taboo subjects that are not easily packaged” (p. 235). Talking about HIV/AIDS in this Kenyan community raised issues such as Kelly (2000) noted, specifically that “in many societies, parents do not provide information on or discuss sexual issues with children” (p. 21). In this situation, “a wall of silence surrounds it, publicly and privately” (Kelly, 2000, p. 30). Now that these children were empowered, they felt capable of challenging these walls of silence which prevented them from talking about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Sharon is one of those who wondered how to negotiate an opening with her mother, to start talking about the subject matter of HIV/AIDS. She says:

*The teacher asked us to go and find out  
More about HIV/AIDS from our parents  
I went and asked my mother  
I just went and asked her  
I was asking her while outside the house  
We were seated under a shade  
I interviewed her in the evening, 4 pm  
I was with my elder sister  
I was afraid my sister was laughing  
She was laughing  
I thought I will be punished  
My mother was just quiet, she didn't laugh  
At first I was annoyed,  
Then mother asked her to leave us alone  
It is when she left  
My mother asked me who sent me  
I told her, it was my teacher. (Sharon, March 14, 2003)*

In her story, I particularly understood her thinking that this was a taboo subject. Sharon felt vulnerable to those around her, her mother and elder sister, but she too persisted and felt that the “source of knowledge lies in inquiry, or in the act of asking questions” (Freire & Antonio, 1989, p. 37). It was not until her mother learned Sharon had been sent by her teacher that her mother created space to talk about HIV/AIDS.

Similarly, when I read Rock's story, I heard the voice of a frustrated boy who had a challenging task in getting information about HIV/AIDS from his parents.

*I went and asked my older sister  
She laughed at me and ran away  
I was ashamed I went and asked my mother  
My mother told me she had not been taught  
I asked my father,  
He told me to let him think about it  
He was going to work the following day  
I went to ask my elder brother  
I was at first scared  
I feared he would blast me  
He was not worried, he knew about HIV/AIDS  
He was laughing with his wife  
I also started laughing too  
He told me HIV/AIDS is dangerous. (Rock, March 14, 2003)*

From Rock's story, I understood that he was uncertain about how to get the information. I wondered if Rock's parents were genuinely ignorant or if they were feeling vulnerable discussing a taboo subject. Silin (1995/1997) explains that for "some adults the reluctance to talk with children about HIV/AIDS reflects their own lack of knowledge" (p. 233). However, Rock's brother's response made him feel secure in pursuing the subject. Only by being persistent and challenging was he able to get the information he was seeking.

#### **Thread #4: Students Becoming Empowered to Sustain Themselves**

The fourth thread that resonated across the narrative accounts of the eight children is that of students becoming empowered to sustain themselves. Dewey (1929/1997) writes that to prepare a child

... for the future life means to give him [child] command of himself; it means so to train him [child] that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command ..." (p. 18)

As the children came to know the risks posed by HIV/AIDS, they did not want to be drawn into any activities associated with sex. This was the beginning of what Dewey refers to as giving children command of themselves for future life. When

I read Nyamote's story, I recognized his voice as one that is empowered:

*This man would stop young boys  
 He demands sex by force  
 He will threaten you with a cane  
 He gives you money in exchange for sex  
 There is a boy in this school  
 He is in Standard 2  
 He gave him money  
 So they could have sex  
 He one day tried to grab me  
 I beat his arm  
 He hit me back  
 I then stoned him and ran away. (Nyamote, May 10, 2003)*

In reading Nyamote's story, I understood him telling young people to learn to say "No!" to any sexual advances even if it takes a fight to escape, as this would save them from being infected by HIV/AIDS. Silin (1995/1997) suggests that "children need to study what is, reflect on what might be, and experience strategies that help them to achieve their ends" (p. 249). Similarly, when I read Sharon's story, I recognized it as the voice of a girl who is empowered:

*One evening I met a man at the shop  
 I had also been sent to the shop  
 He bought sweets  
 He wanted to give me  
 I refused and dropped them  
 I refused his kindness  
 I bought what I wanted to buy  
 I then ran back to our home  
 I have been taught by my teacher and mother  
 To say NO! to such gifts  
 I could be lured into risky activities. (Sharon, May 15, 2003)*

In reading her story, I understood Sharon was showing her firmness not to entertain gifts from shop owners or strangers. Her resolve to say "No!" helped her escape daily traps. Silin (1995/1997) argues that "we have the responsibility to provide opportunities for children to know themselves as young community activists and to experience the power of collective responsibility to large and small social problems" (p. 249). Sharon was a child who was concerned with the spread of HIV/AIDS in her community. In Silin's words, she was an activist in her community.

Likewise, in Rock's story I recognized a voice of a young boy who has made a decision to abstain from sexual activities. He writes:

*There a woman living near our place  
She sells goods by the roadside  
She likes to make love  
She fights after people's husbands  
She says this is mine  
One day she tried my father  
My father ignored her  
She would snatch young boys  
Take them to her house  
One day she grabbed me,  
Taking me to her house  
I beat her hand, I ran away  
One day at 6am as I was going to buy milk  
Another man came out of her house  
He was tall and bearded. (Rock, September 24, 2003)*

Silin (1995/1997) also argues that “students should be asking questions about societal responses to HIV/AIDS and learning to see themselves as citizens who can make decisions that will give directions to that response” (p. 242). Rock was living in the context where adults did not seem to care that they could be infected by HIV. Consequently, Rock decided not to indulge in sexual intercourse that could expose him to HIV.

When I read Nyamote's [pseudonym] story of almost being raped, Rock's story of being invited to a woman's house, Sharon's story of being bought sweets, Sam's story of being invited and declining, I understood they were becoming empowered to sustain their lives in the face of these encounters.

### **Thread #5: Students Imagining Their Lives in a Hopeful World**

The fifth thread that resonates across the narrative accounts of the eight children is of students imagining their lives in a hopeful world. In their stories I understood they were living in a hopeful world. Freire (1994) describes,

The moment we not only lived, but began to know that we were living—hence it was possible for us to know that we know, and therefore to know we could do more .... We cannot exist without wondering about tomorrow. (p. 98)

I hear Freire's ideas echoed in the words of the children as they began to imagine living empowered lives and were starting to have a sense they could change the world, making it more hopeful through taking social action. When I read Sam's story, I recognized his voice as one of a happy boy who had made a decision to live a hopeful life:

*I have learned HIV/AIDS is dangerous  
I want my life to be good  
I have learned the good and the bad. (Sam, June 13, 2003)*

When I read what Bevin was saying, I recognized the voice of a hopeful girl who had made a decision to live a good life:

*I would like to have good life  
I will be careful in relating with boys  
I don't want to be infected by HIV/AIDS. (Bevin, June 13, 2003)*

Jevne and Miller (1999) point out that "the person speaking really does believe, really does see the possibility" (p. 21). Bevin's words suggested she thought HIV/AIDS could ruin her good life and that she had to be careful in the way she related with boys. When I read what Stephanie was saying, I recognized her voice as that of a hopeful girl who had made a decision to try new ways to live in her world. Stephanie was hopeful she would succeed. She explains:

*I will be the model  
I want my life to be good  
I would like to show good behavior  
I should not indulge in reckless sex  
I will be careful when I go to shop  
I will refuse free pops from boys. (Stephanie, June 13, 2003)*

Jevne and Miller (1999) suggest to "begin by turning off your 'interior judge,' that part of you that so easily squashes untested ideas. Tell yourself ... Sometimes, in fact, it is that seemingly absurd thought that will ignite your hope" (p. 31). In reading Stephanie's story, I understood she wanted to try these untested ideas of being a model, avoiding sex, and refusing gifts for the good of her life.

When I read what Gidi Gidi said, I recognized his voice as that of a hopeful boy who had made a decision that life was worth living by setting criteria around sexual intercourse. He describes:

*I want my life to be good  
Before I marry I will be tested for HIV/AIDS*



*My wife will also be tested*

*Then I will marry her.*

*I will avoid taking illicit drugs and alcohol. (Gidi Gidi, June 13, 2003)*

Jevne and Miller (1999) explain that, "hope is not about moving mountains. It's about moving one single stone, and then another. Hope is not about changing the world. It's about making a little difference in one part of the world" (p. 33). Hopeful is how I describe Gidi Gidi as he tells the stories he has chosen to live by. Gidi Gidi, Sam, Stephanie, and Bevin are now imagining their lives in a hopeful world.

## Conclusion

As a result of having a space to tell stories of themselves as empowered persons determined to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and as willing to discourage others from unsafe practices, the children in this paper have hope of a future free of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. The child-to-child approach provided a democratic space for children to make personal meaning about how HIV/AIDS shaped and may shape their life experiences. The children were able to speak loudly and confidently of what they were experiencing personally and in the community with their friends and relatives afflicted by HIV/AIDS. As Gidi Gidi states in the opening lines of this paper, it is time to break the taboos around open discussion of HIV/AIDS, and it seems that children like Gidi Gidi and his classmates will be leaders in this movement. Their words, in the found poems in this paper, illustrate how capable these children are of initiating this vital change.

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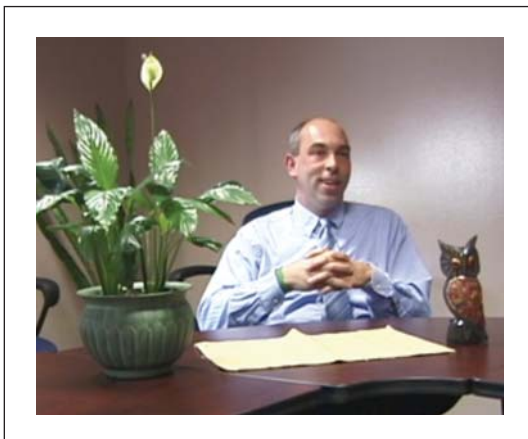
## Who Put You in Charge? Democracy in a Middle School Classroom

Matthew McCarney, Selwyn House School

### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

In this article three strategies are examined for their efficacy in the implementation of a democratic classroom environment. The first is modeled on ancient Athenian democracy, the second employs a Class Council, and the third uses a Class Committee. The author implemented these three strategies with a group of twenty grade seven boys in an effort to increase their engagement in the day-to-day running of their classroom. The students in question rise to the occasion and become fully committed participants.

### Reflective Interview With Matthew McCarney



(Press here to see and hear Matthew.)

## My Democratic Experience

**A**s I brainstormed ideas for my Master's project, I found myself reflecting on the type of school environment in which I had grown up. My high school experience took place in a co-educational Catholic school run by the Grey Sisters. My teachers were a mix of nuns and lay people, and, the nuns were open to discussion and suggestion. As members of the student council, we were given a tremendous amount of autonomy in the running of activities and a great deal of say in the direction of the school. The student body was informed of major decisions and we were asked for our input. It was empowering to be part of a school like that. We were a small school. We did well in many areas, but we did not excel in any particular one. The student body as a whole, however, was fully engaged in the life of the school. We held monthly dances that everyone attended. We fund-raised for various charities and everyone participated. We cheered on our sports teams regardless of their record. This broad engagement in school life stemmed from, in my opinion, the fact that we were consulted and made aware of the decisions facing our school. We did not always have a say, but we were definitely aware of what was transpiring.

My first teaching job was in a similar school. Our principal was there to provide guidance to his staff, but he trusted us with the stewardship of our classes. He was positive and engaging, and he worked hard to create a school culture that was similar to the one in which I had grown up. It was logical to me upon reflection that I should look at a way to create a similar culture in my current school. With the focus on student led-conferences, and a proactive approach to student learning that comes with the Quebec Education Program, I thought that the best way to achieve this was to implement a democratic classroom environment in my grade seven class.

## Why Educate for Democracy?

Schools fulfill a multitude of needs in our modern society. At their most basic level, they serve to educate the population in a variety of subjects such as English, history, science, mathematics and others. But schools also play an important role in socializing our children. It is in schools that children learn how to interact, how to speak, and how to work with others. In their book, *Toward Schooling for the Twenty-first Century*, Dalin and Rust (1996) focus on schools educating students to be democratic citizens of the world. "They [schools] must be the arena where different children learn to get along, to resolve differences, and debate points of view" (p. 104). Henry Giroux (1993) further explains the idea that we should educate students to be democratic citizens.

At issue here is recognizing that democracy is not merely about the formality of voting but more substantively about having access to the technological and cultural resources necessary to be informed, make decisions, and exercise control over the material and ideological forces that govern people's lives. (p. 12)

These concepts were key to my project. Far too often students are passive vessels in the classroom environment. If there is conflict, I want them to be able to see each other's point of view and be able to come to a mutual understanding that is not imposed by me as a teacher. They are far better served being able to solve their own problems. Sadly, too many teachers adhere to the old ideal that students are young and/or immature and unable to do so for themselves. I would argue that given the tools and skills they need, students would not only be able to solve their own problems, but would also relish the opportunity.

Too often teachers teach as they were taught. As Rothstein (1996) writes in *Schools and Society*:

... students sit at their desks and interact with their teachers; who are located in the front of the room. Teachers are typically adults who have been trained and certified in a university. Teachers choose the materials and methods for the students' work in-class, assuming their need for instruction in these areas. Teachers are more mature physically and have greater experience, competency, and status than their students. Nevertheless the authority is derived from their appointment to a teaching position in the school bureaucracy. They lead as a consequence of this organizational role, following behaviour patterns that have been developed over many years. Teachers are the instructional leaders of the class, and their status and charisma are attached to their rank as a teacher, and not to any particular qualities they may possess. (p. 107)

Rothstein has accurately depicted the traditional example of teaching. Teachers are given authority and are told to provide direction on the basis of their apparent superior understanding of the needs of students. I would argue that who knows the students' needs better than the students themselves? Their voices should be heard and considered when engaging in curriculum design or decision making that affects them directly. There needs to be a paradigm shift in our view of the purpose of school. We are not merely here to impart knowledge to the students, but rather to help them learn how to think, how to be productive, and how to work

together. In addition, there is a moral and social component to our job. We must be models of moral and ethical behaviors for our students. That is not to say that we no longer have to fulfill the role of imparter of knowledge. We do. It should not be our central role though. "Sometimes teachers were still disseminators of information, but more often we were learners as well as facilitators of learning" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 98).

As Ken Osborne (2001) writes:

A democratic liberal education consists not of stockpiling the knowledge of the past, an approach that Paolo Freire condemned as a "banking" concept of education in which students amass knowledge / capital for later use, but of using knowledge to evaluate and participate in the life of the present with the aim of shaping the future. (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 44)

Democratic classrooms move away from the traditional view of the classroom that Rothstein describes. In a democratic classroom, all the students can be authority figures. At its core, a democratic classroom is a student-oriented, open learning environment that allows students to engage in shared leadership. The students take ownership for their behaviour, their classroom, and their learning, which will hopefully increase their engagement in the school. Increasing their engagement and empowering them to be autonomous will give them the tools to engage in that shaping of knowledge that Osborne describes.

One of the key facets in democratic classrooms and education for democracy is engaging in shared leadership. The students are expected to participate in all aspects of the class, and they should therefore be given a say in how it is run, how rules are established, how discipline is meted out, and how conflicts are resolved. In a democratic classroom, the teachers also participate in the activities alongside the students. In doing so, the teacher is removed from being a power figure in the class, and instead becomes one of the members of the class. The decision-making power can then be shared among all the members of the group, and everyone benefits as a result. The teacher does remain an authority figure based on his/her expertise in his/her particular subject area. The teacher remains a facilitator with regards to the curriculum, but shares the decision-making power with the students in order that their best interests be served. By engaging in this shared leadership the teacher can help empower the students. In his essay entitled, *Democracy, Democratic Citizenship and Education*, Ken Osborne (2001) explains the importance of teachers engaging in the process and activities alongside their students:



What matters is not so much whether the teachers use this technique or that technique, but whether they deliberately espouse democratic citizenship, with all its implications and possibilities, as a fundamental goal and organize their subject matter, their pedagogy, and their classrooms to attain it. (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 47)

There are arguments that some critics of democratic classrooms bring up when discussing the topic. Some argue that students are not capable of engaging in these types of activities. Some teachers who fear the shift in power might say that allowing students to engage in the decision making would open the door to chaos. I would argue that students have the ability to be active, engaged learners, and they only need to have an opportunity to rise to the occasion. True, some lack the maturity to be serious when engaging in shared decision making, but if the bulk of the students are participating and participating well, they will eventually regulate the situation themselves. The students, along with the teacher, can exert some positive peer pressure to bring the noncompliant students into the fold. Often it is the most “troublesome” students who are quickest to buy in to the democratic schooling model. I am a firm believer in the Pygmalion effect.<sup>1</sup> If we believe that the students are capable of doing it, then they themselves will believe that they are capable.

Democratic classrooms may start out as just that, classrooms, but the ramifications they have for society are tremendous. If students can realize that the skills they learn in a democratic classroom can be extrapolated and applied to their daily lives outside of school, then teachers have taken a tremendous step towards educating our students to become better citizens and better people. Students will have the necessary skills to participate more fully in our democratic society. Learning collaborative skills and taking ownership of their decision making may enable them to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to participating in our society at large.

In their book, *Pockets of Hope*, De los Reyes and Gozembera (2002) provide a case study of McDowell County, West Virginia that engaged in a democratic education program on several different fronts simultaneously. The authors worked in the high school as well as with the various communities in McDowell County, which was one of the poorest counties in the United States at the time and was experiencing a tremendous feeling of disenfranchisement. McDowell County had been a mining centre for many years, but in the recent past its economy had declined and businesses had left the region, leaving it in a devastated state. It is a thought-provoking case study that shows how it is never too late to engage in education for democracy. Helen Lewis was the community educator that worked with the people of Ivanhoe,

West Virginia, and she worked diligently to empower them to understand their role in democracy.

The people of Ivanhoe, like millions of Americans, had always imagined themselves practicing democracy through the simple act of voting. ... Not until they tried to bring about change in their community did the people fully understand that they had long ago ceded their power to others. (p. 187)

As they began to motivate and mobilize themselves to bring about change in their community through the democratic process, one participant articulated this change in outlook. “We have been on a train for the last hundred years and we rode as passengers. And now we’re not passengers; we’re engineers” (p. 187).

## The Democratic Classroom Project

I teach in a private boy’s school, and I engaged in a democratic classroom project with my 20 grade seven students.<sup>2</sup> I see them roughly twice daily for English and History class. The project was begun in April 2008, and the boys had been together in the same class since September 2007. This circumvented the need to do icebreaker activities with the boys. They already knew their peers and were quite comfortable with them and myself. Had I begun the project in September, some initial team-building activities would have proven beneficial. As it was, I chose to proceed with the status quo.

There are many variations on the ideas for creating a democratic classroom environment. For the purposes of this project, I focused my attention on three particular strategies. Each strategy was scheduled to last for two weeks. The first one was modeled after ancient Athenian democracy where every *citizen* had a say by virtue of the fact that he was a member of Athenian society. The students were already familiar with this method from their time in history class. When studying Greece, we engaged in an interactive simulation of Greek society, and one of the units was on Athenian democracy where students debated issues such as slavery, Persian invasions, the rights of women, etcetera and each person had a vote. For our purposes, each of us in the class, myself included, had one vote by virtue of the fact that we were citizens of our class.

The second strategy was that of using a Class Council. The boys were randomly divided into five groups of four. Each group elected/chose one member of its group to represent its interests on the Class Council. There were designated meeting

times where each representative could sit down with his constituents and discuss issues that confronted them. The Class Council was given time to meet in the school's conference room to discuss the issues at hand. The boys then presented our decisions to the class as a whole.

The third strategy was the Class Committee approach whereby the boys chose one of five committees to sit on. The five committees were: discipline, teacher liaison, curriculum planning, classroom management, and mentoring. Specific meeting time was set aside for the committees to meet and discuss how they could impact the working of the class. The committees rotated their locations so that the same group was not always in the school's conference room. Some went to the library or to empty classrooms, or they stayed in our classroom. Some committees, such as discipline, met more often as they had issues that had to be dealt with nearly every day.

My goal in using these three strategies was to see if one was more effective than the others and also to see if there were elements arising from the different strategies that could be effectively combined together. My students had more than a passing experience with democracy in the classroom. I often allow for some informal choice opportunities in the day-to-day running of the class. Students have been allowed to choose "mental health days," where we focus on things other than schoolwork, and they have also been able to move assignment due dates if they are stressed or overworked.

On the whole, the boys were excited at the prospect of making decisions that impacted their class time. After explaining the project to them, they were eager to begin. One notable dissenter was Eric B.<sup>3</sup> His body language indicated that he was not eager to participate. When I asked him why, he replied that he felt he was lazy and would not be able to govern himself effectively. He did not want to choose the path of least resistance and cheat himself of a good education. This was frustrating to me as he absolved himself of all responsibility and placed it squarely in my hands. It is notable that he was the lone dissenter. In discussions with colleagues and administrators, most feel that Eric B's attitude would be prevalent in a democratic classroom; the students would choose the path of least resistance and take the easy road. Initially I argued against them and when the project was completed, my theory was validated. The boys rose to the occasion and engaged fully in every activity. Eric B. eventually did participate in the majority of the activities but he remained skeptical. He voiced his reticence to participate even as he was doing so. Often it was clear from his body language that he was enjoying the class. This proved problematic to his peers and left me with questions as he was clearly enjoying being a part of the

project. One wonders if he enjoyed being contentious or if he truly rejected that it could make a difference in his academic life.

We engaged in one initial 75-minute class discussion and brainstorming activity where we discussed what democracy meant, what someone's responsibilities were in a democracy, and how and why we could effect change. We shared our ideas in small groups and then brought them together in a large group plenary session. Everyone agreed that participation and listening to each other's opinions were key elements. We agreed that being a citizen in a democracy meant that you had both rights and responsibilities. These were listed on the board and included the responsibility to share decision making, participate fully, and share thoughts and opinions. During these discussions I was surprised at the number of students who felt that they lacked the ability to effect change. Quite a few said that they were too young, or lacked life experience to make a good decision. Some said it was better for the teachers to make the decisions for them. I told them that I could see their point, but it had been twenty three years since I had been a grade seven student, and while I have taught grade seven for ten years, I suggested that they know better than I do the challenges they face every day in 2008. They seemed to understand that. I did not want them to feel that they could not effect change or that the decisions they made in the project were simply for the purpose of the project itself. I explained to them that the strategies that worked in the project might find their way into classes in our Middle School in the future.

For the first strategy, Athenian Democracy, the boys were divided randomly into groups and we brainstormed what was involved in the running of the class. When it came time to share with the large group, they looked to me to run the discussion but I held back. Two students quickly moved to the front of the room, and began to write down the ideas that the class had come up with. It was mildly chaotic to start, but the boys quickly sorted themselves out and decided that they had to take turns talking.



Fig. 1: List of items involved in running our classroom

Adam referred to it jokingly afterwards as “controlled anarchy.” At the end of the class, the boys had come up with a concrete list of what was involved in the running of our classroom.

The next class involved the boys working in different randomized groups again, and deciding on five rules for our classroom, and the consequences that should be applied if someone broke a rule. The students took to this activity and there was a great deal of debate and discussion over which five rules would be most appropriate. A final list was generated by the class as a whole and we all signed off on it. For the remaining week and a half we used the Athenian Democracy method to decide upon our course of study, what consequences to impose on those who broke rules, and what to do when. The boys felt empowered during this time, and there were fewer instances of forgotten work. They participated fully and the stress level seemed to decrease as they were able to shuffle some due dates to accommodate other classes. One drawback was the fact that the discussion often consumed a great deal of time as the various opinions were debated. While we did get better by

the end of the two weeks, these discussions continue to consume roughly one fifth of our class time.

With the conclusion of the Athenian democratic model, we were ready to move on to the second strategy: the Class Council. The Class Council essentially consisted of establishing a representative democracy in our classroom. I began this portion of the project with a mini-lecture on representational democracy. We examined what a representative democracy entails, what people's roles are, and I explained the idea of constituents and the importance of representing other people's interests fairly. Again, I was impressed with the students' background knowledge of democracy and democratic structures. They were willing to discuss the concepts at length, and they were often quite familiar with the terms I used.

I randomly arranged the boys into five groups of four. Names were pulled from a jar in order to ensure complete randomization. I did this because often in grouping students, they feel that I have some sort of secret agenda. I am almost always asked if the groupings were really random or if I had manipulated them somehow. In order for the students to know I was being fair and honest, I pulled the names in front of them. Again, this appealed to their sense of fairness. Once they were situated in their new groups of four, I provided them with a very brief outline of what this section of the project would entail. Each group of four would elect a representative to the Class Council. As a group we brainstormed a list of how people could possibly choose leaders. The students all mentioned voting and electing people, but they were also well acquainted with strong-arm tactics, and they got quite creative with their bribery and threat scenarios. Initially I was going to instruct each group to vote for its representative, but after the brainstorming session I wanted to see how each group would respond. I told them the students had free rein to elect/choose their representative in whatever fashion they chose. Would anyone decide to strong arm their way onto the Council?

We set a ten-minute time limit to engage in initial discussions. If the students needed more time afterwards, we decided rethink our timeframe. The discussions were animated and excited from the outset. Only one group remained seated, and the other four leaned towards each other and raised their voices. While they were not shouting, they were definitely speaking forcefully to each other, and the debates were fast and furious.

After ten minutes three of the five groups had chosen their representative, so we allowed a few extra minutes for the two other groups. Their methods of selection

included voting, pulling names from a hat, and flipping a coin to decide who their representative would be. Once the groups had all chosen their representatives we moved on to the next phase of the project. The five representatives came with me to the conference room down the hall. I provided them with markers, chart paper, and anything else they requested. I told them that aside from the rules that we had decided on together, and the fact that we had to study the novella, *Of Mice and Men*, they were free to change or do whatever they wanted with regards to the class. I left them alone in the conference room and told them that they should come back to the class in roughly twenty minutes to share their decisions with the rest of the class. I observed them informally for a few minutes from the other side of the door, and they got right to work. They used the easel and markers and began to jot down ideas. Afterwards they told me that they wanted to have a written record of what had been said in order to share it with the rest of the class.



Fig. 2: Lester trying to persuade his group to elect him as its representative

While the Class Council planned the coming two weeks, I returned to the class and gave each group a sheet entitled *Representative Democracy* and asked the students to answer the three questions. The first was straightforward as it asked for the name of their group's representative. The second dealt with how they chose their

representative, and the third question asked why they chose him. Taking their cue from my grouping of the class, two of the five groups picked their leader out of a hat. Three of the five groups voted for their representative but then ran into trouble. Those three groups found themselves deadlocked between two candidates. Two groups chose to flip a coin to break the tie between the two candidates, while the other had someone write a number on a piece of paper and the one who came closest won. Oddly enough everyone seemed happy with the outcome in these cases. I was surprised that they were so willing to put their faith in chance.



Fig. 3: Members of the Class Council establishing classroom practices

What strikes me as interesting is that in all five cases the student chosen by the groups to be their representative is the same one I would have chosen had the decision been up to me, even in the four cases where they left the final decision up to chance. The Class Council consisted of Francis, Nathan, Aaron, David, and Andrew. All five were top students in the class, and respected by their peers. They are friendly, warm, and open, and they are also good listeners. Aaron's group said this about him: "Aaron is very responsible. He has very good judgment. He represents with pride and responsibility." Andrew was chosen because: "... we knew he was pretty smart and that he'd make the right decisions. We also chose him because he wasn't stupid." As I said, the final decision was often luck of the draw but the best candidates won, and everyone was quite content with the final decisions.



The Class Council proved to be quite responsible. The Council met with its constituents for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of each class and listened to their concerns. At the end of the class the Council took another 5-10 minutes to meet together, discuss issues, and make changes if it felt it necessary. The five-minute meetings were easy to accommodate as it took only the first few minutes of the class. Allowing the boys to feel like their ideas and concerns were being heard seemed to set them at ease during the class, and we had fewer discipline issues during that time. There was also far less complaining about the test dates, due dates, and the detentions since they were coming from their peers rather than from me. This strategy was labor intensive at the beginning but was much quicker and smoother as time went on. We concluded the two weeks with a roundtable debriefing and two main ideas came out of this. The first one was that the students felt that their ideas were being listened to and appreciated more. The second was that they would all have liked a chance to sit on the Council, and they recommended that Council membership be changed on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Even Eric B., the initial dissenter, was eager to sit on the Council.

The third phase of the project was governing the class by committees. Five committees were established: The Discipline Committee (DC) dealt with issues of discipline and individuals breaking the six rules we created as a class. The Curriculum Planning Committee (CPC) dealt with curriculum planning and areas of study. The Mentoring Committee (MC) served as a group of boys to go to if there was a particular concern about anything in the class. They could offer advice or be our advocate if need be. The Teacher Liaison Committee (TLC) worked with me. Its mandate was to present student concerns to me and to relay any concerns/issues I have. The Classroom Management Committee (CMC) was responsible for the daily management of our physical space (i.e., tidying the class, taking care of recycling, etcetera). These five committees had four members each. I circulated a sheet to each student, outlining the committees and their responsibilities, and asked them to choose three that on which they would like to serve. These committees and their responsibilities had been decided upon by me in advance of the project. This was largely due to time constraints. Ideally students should work in conjunction with the teacher and establish which committees are needed in the particular class and what their responsibilities should be.

Luckily for me all members of the class had volunteered for every committee. Some students got their second or third choice, but they were all given something they wanted. I had grouped them in their committees and then created four subgroups of five which contained a member from each of the five committees. I

often use this idea in my history courses. I have the students engage in a jigsaw where they are in an initial group of four or five students who then break apart to become experts in a particular area. These experts in the field then team up with similar experts from other groups. They work together to find as much information as they can and then return to their initial groups to teach their initial group in their area of expertise. The reasoning behind doing this was that each committee should meet and come to decisions or put forth ideas. The committee members could then return to their subgroups, which would contain a member of each of the other committees, and report back to them.

With fifteen minutes remaining in each class the students generally came together in their committees. They were urged to think about issues that faced their committee and what they could do about them. The Classroom Management Committee started to work right away and straightened up the classroom. The Discipline Committee often had issues to deal with. The students would often retire to the hall where they dealt with these issues. Initially the other three committees told me that they could not think of what they needed to do, so I circulated and spoke to each one. I sat with the Mentoring Committee and urged its members to talk to the students informally and see if anyone had pressing concerns or issues. The Curriculum Planning Committee had to come up with prospective areas of study for the coming week. The members of this committee were somewhat limited since exams were coming in two weeks, and there had to be some sort of review period. I urged them to set out a review schedule that we could adopt for exams. The Teacher Liaison Committee is composed of Lester, Eric. B., Jacob and Justin, who ironically enough take up a fair bit of time. They often come to me with questions or misbehave slightly in order to get my attention. I was surprised to see that they had all chosen it as their first choice. I sat with them and they were quite excited to work with me. On one particular day, they asked me what sort of concerns I had, and I told them that it had been a pretty trying morning outside of school. They immediately told me that they would take care of it, and they turned into a mini police force who maintained control of the class. I had to sit them down and tell them that the goal of the committee was not to maintain control of the class, but to ensure communication between me and the students. The other students complained that the Liaison Committee was abusing its power. After talking to the Teacher Liaison Committee, I spoke to the class as a whole, and we had a brief discussion about how the class felt when an individual abused his power. The Teacher Liaison Committee realized that it had been a bit overzealous, and quickly apologized to the class.

Once each committee had met, the students would return to their sub-

groups to share information and decisions. This took a few minutes, and we then came back to the roundtable in order to share everything as a group. I asked each committee if it had issues it wished to raise or decisions it wished to share.

We followed with the same structure for the remainder of the week. Perhaps due to upcoming exams, the students did not seem as engaged in this phase of the project as previous ones. The Committees often decided they had nothing to do, or they would decide on something quickly so that they could return to their subgroups and get back to work. The Discipline Committee did the lion's share of the work, and this was something that came up during the final reflection. One event that stood out for the Discipline Committee occurred midway through the week. The students were very hyper and were not focused when they came into class. It took everyone close to fifteen minutes to settle down. I was not standing there asking them to be quiet, because I felt that the Classroom Management Committee and the Discipline Committee should have taken care of it. When they finally settled, I convened an emergency meeting of the Discipline Committee to deal with the issue. The committee members took a few minutes in the hall and decided that the entire class would have a detention at lunch hour. I was on duty that day, so the students volunteered to come serve their detention in the schoolyard. I was surprised, to say the least. I did not think that they would open themselves up to the ridicule that could come with such a public detention. They also volunteered to stand along the wall for the fifteen minutes that they had lost during class. It must be noted that the other grade seven classes as well as the grade eight classes made some initial snide remarks. Our class stood there and took them all without responding. I was impressed that they had imposed a moderately harsh punishment on themselves, and that all twenty students showed up on time for the detention. It is also interesting to note that the boys wasted fifteen minutes of class time, and rather than choosing to make up for that time by doing something constructive, they choose a punitive course of action. They deprived themselves of their free time but did not see that they could recoup the lost fifteen minutes by covering the material we would have covered in class.



Fig. 4: Our class serving its class detention in the schoolyard

For our final roundtable discussion, the results were mixed. The bulk of the students felt that they had not contributed to the running of the class as much as they would have liked. Some felt that their committees did not have enough to do (Curriculum Planning), while others felt that they had been overworked (Discipline). Aaron said that he felt that over the long term the work load would balance out between all the committees. The students felt that with the committees in place all areas necessary for running the class had been adequately covered. They felt that should an issue arise in class, the proper committee was in place to deal with it. On the whole, in our experience the formation of committees was the least successful method of implementing a democratic classroom.

### Lessons Learned

In our final debriefing session we held an initial vote about which of the three methods each student had preferred. Only one student chose the Athenian Democracy method. Four students chose the Committees, and fifteen chose the Class Council.

The Athenian Democracy method was interesting because everyone had the chance to have a say if they wanted it. However, it was far too easy for them to be shouted down or ignored by the more vocal students. There was a great deal of shouting using this method, and the quiet students were content to sit back and allow others to make the decisions for them. I am somewhat leery of this method in a class setting as it sets up the semblance of democracy but it is far too easy for the

stronger, more vocal students to take control and steer the agenda in whatever direction they want (which is precisely what happened in Ancient Athens). The students echoed this opinion as only Eric B. chose it as the most effective method. If it were to be used in the future, speaking guidelines would have to be established so that everyone had the opportunity to speak. Ideally some sort of monitoring system would need to be in place to ensure that there is equal and fair participation. Perhaps some sort of signal is needed to allow the speaker to share his opinion, or a speaking order should be listed on the board. If those two elements could be brought in, it might prove to be an effective strategy, albeit a time-consuming one.

The strength of the Class Committees strategy came from the fact that there were five distinct committees, each of which had the mandate to deal with certain issues. If something came up, then they were able to deal with it. Over time, those committees could become well versed in their particular areas and could hopefully deal effectively with the situations that arose. Another benefit of the Class Committee strategy was that the students chose their committees. This provided them with intrinsic motivation as they were participating because they wanted to participate. In our class, the Mentoring Committee members were quite upset that there were not more students with problems as they truly wanted to help their peers. One of the negatives of the Class Committee was the time commitment needed for the students to meet with both their committees and their subgroups. Even though the time was maybe five to ten minutes more per class beyond the time allotted to the Class Council, it did add up over time. While the expertise of each student on the committee is a positive, it can also be a negative. Students can become well versed in their particular area but may be distanced from the other areas of classroom life, only hearing about them in their subgroups. The decision-making power lay completely in the hands of the respective committees. The other students were forced to trust that the committee would take their best interests to heart and make a good decision without meeting with them.

The majority of the students chose the Class Council as their preferred method. Their reasons for doing so varied. The students felt like the Council had represented their interests best, enabled them to get more things done, and got more things done within the class. They also felt that the Council got better with practice and made strong, fair decisions that benefited the class. David felt that even if you were not a member of the Council, "... you still had a say by telling your group council member. It was very effective because only five people had to decide." I am inclined to agree with those fifteen. The small groups enabled even the shyest students to speak their minds and share their opinions.

The simple act of involving the students in the decision making allowed them to more fully engage in the class. While observing them during those six weeks, I noticed that they seemed more relaxed about the work they had to do. The underlying stress level that had plagued them for the bulk of the year seemed gone during the project. The incidences of immature behavior also decreased dramatically. One has to remember that these are grade seven boys who attend an all-boys school. They can be immature and rambunctious at times, both in and out of class. This type of behavior almost vanished within the class, and I think this was due to the increased level of responsibility they felt. I was no longer the only one making the decisions and imposing consequences. They were now responsible for their own behavior and the monitoring of it.

I also noted a greater degree of academic success during the project. This was a positive by-product of the democratic classroom environment. I was looking to have the students take on more responsibility for their behavior and engagement in school, and the fact that their academic results improved demonstrated that they were feeling good about the way their class was being run. They were engaged with the subject matter due to a greater feeling of ownership. The poetry anthologies the boys produced were meticulously assembled and were well illustrated. The students took great pride in showing them off to each other before submitting them. Would this have happened anyway? Possibly. While the students were all quite able, we had not experienced such a high degree of success as a class before. I cannot prove definitively that the democratic classroom had a positive effect on the boys' engagement in school, but from what I observed I would say it did. The positive looks on their faces, the enthusiastic way they came into class, the excitement they shared during discussions, and the success they experienced as a class all lead me to conclude that sharing the decision-making power with our students can only serve to help them be better students and better citizens in the long run.

## Notes

1. “The Pygmalion effect, or Rosenthal effect, refers to situations in which students perform better than other students simply because they are expected to do so.” For source and more information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion\\_effect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmalion_effect).
2. Since it is an all-boys school, the pronoun “he” is used throughout the text.
3. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

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## The High Wire of Success

Jordan Quenneville, St George's School of Montreal

### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This article focuses on the need for balance in the educational system and the importance of extracurricular activities to student growth. Using examples from St. George's School of Montreal, the author shows how balance can be implemented in the curriculum. The article also addresses the different ways St. George's implements its six main principles into both the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

Many people are concerned about the future. Some people worry about the economy, some worry about the environment, and some people worry about their career. But many people worry about their children's future. Educators know that the key features of a meaningful learning environment are the engagement of students in the classroom as well as extracurricular activities. As a student at St. George's, I have my own opinion on why these aspects of education are important and also how we can help improve them. First, let us take a look at this school. Kids at St. George's seem to love the extracurricular activities and their classes. Now the million-dollar question is: Why?

Many schools have their own specialties. Some are more sports oriented; some are arts or science oriented. Many people wonder which school style is better for students: the arts allow students to be creative and think independently. Sports give students confidence and teach them the importance of teamwork and cooperation. I believe that the fundamental issue is that schools have gotten too focused on maintaining a certain image or reputation as being a good sports or academic school, and the students suffer as a result. However, I believe that the success of the St. George's model is balance.

St. George's is founded on six main principles: Health must come first; Learning comes from doing; The classroom should be freed from unnatural restraints; Adapt education to the differences of the individual child; Group-consciousness and social-mindedness should be developed; The child should have abundant opportunity for creative expression (Cross, 1933). This article focuses on one of these principles: Adapt education to the differences of the individual child. This is one of the core principles of St. George's and represents how all the teachers there are trained.

Philosophies can be very abstract; they are not meaningful unless they are implemented. The atmosphere around St. George's is unique. The six main principles are implemented almost everywhere. There are vending machines full of healthy snacks (Health must come first), the gym is usually open at lunch (Learning comes from doing) and the teachers are available during all of the students' free time and are always willing to help (The classroom should be free from unnatural restraints). The school itself is somewhat small: only 315 students are currently enrolled in the high school. The building is big enough to accommodate everyone, but small enough to feel intimate. There are four floors, with the second and fourth floors reserved for classes. The first and third are for lockers and administration. In the student lounge, kids hang out on couches, enjoy snacks from vending machines, and play foosball. All in all, the school feels very comfortable and secure, like a home. Everybody knows everybody. It can get crowded when everyone changes classes, but that is only for ten minutes.

The atmosphere is also unique at St. George's because we have such a diverse population. While the tuition might be steep, approximately 50% of the students receive student aid, a little known fact (M. Webster, personal communication, April 30, 2009). Thus, the students are exposed to a variety of people from all walks of life. We also have a huge international student population, which enriches our understanding of cultures. And of course, as one of the few co-ed private schools in Montreal, young men and women learn to work and socialize together. Policies which stimulate diversity in our school are all a part of the balanced approach to the creation of "responsible world citizens" (J. Officer, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Now that I have described the atmosphere and population of St. George's, I would like to focus on the balanced curriculum. The overall curriculum is based on the principle that every students' education should be adapted for their personality and their learning needs. Naturally, St. George's follows the requirements of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). However, certain classes

become optional after Grade 9. These courses include: Art, Drama, Music, Science, and Computer Arts. This allows students to have some knowledge in all fields, which lets them make better class and career choices in the future. After Grade 9, a variety of more academic optional courses also become available to the student, such as: Marine Biology, Physics, Chemistry, AP Psychology, Media and Humanities. As the students grow, they are given more choice over their courses. This curriculum creates more motivated students and a higher quality of education, while still teaching the students about all areas of life.

Now that I have discussed St. George's curriculum, the next step is the classroom environment. When students are young, they require more structure and discipline to maintain an optimal learning level. Naturally, the junior classes at St. George's reflect this. But as students get older, the teachers become more like "learning partners" than stereotypical teachers. The teachers at St. George's are in the midst of a five-year professional development plan focusing on Differentiation of Instruction (M. Webster, personal communication, April 30, 2009). This means that the teachers recognize that each student's needs are different and that they need to create a different path for various students to reach the same goal. They create these different paths based on the students' interests, how they learn best and their degree of learning readiness. The result is a classroom in which everyone is striving for the same goals, but in ways that are adapted for individuals. This way, everyone understands what they are doing, and why they are doing it, so learning can move at an accelerated academic rate.

Now I am sure some of you are thinking that all this child-centered and custom-made learning could be a bad idea. If a school does not specialize in a certain way, then the students will have no forte and have a harder time succeeding in CEGEP and university, you might think. In fact, the opposite is true. At St. George's it is not only the academic courses that build the student, but also the extracurricular activities. By providing a balance of extracurricular activities, students can specialize in areas in which they are interested. This way, students have the opportunity to go into whatever activity they want and enjoy it. If the students enjoy the activities they are in, they will learn better, faster and the projects they are working on will show improvement. Also, by engaging in after-school activities, students will generally learn better time-management skills and their class marks will improve as well. Yet the key to the balanced extracurricular style is good planning.

The extracurricular activities at St. George's reflect this approach. There are sports activities: everything from basketball to dodge-ball to badminton to yoga.

There are activities in the arts: Stage Crew, drama productions, Music and even AP Art. Then there are also the sciences: S.O.S. (Students on Sustainability, the school's green committee), Science Fair, Robotics, Math Trail and Physics Challenge. There are even school trips that help teach students in a fun and interesting way like the Water Quality trip, Stratford and New York drama trips, the Honduras marine biology trip and even the India trip. The India trip reflects another of the school's six founding principles, learning by doing. It is a trip which immerses the students in the local Indian culture by living at a home for orphaned girls, which the school supports, and also by traveling to other major cities in India. These kinds of trips are a privilege for a few. Many of these trips and activities were started by teachers; and they continue to create new activities throughout the year, such as the recent addition of an anti-stress workshop, designed in response to students' needs.

But the most important aspect about all these extracurricular activities is choice. This way only the students who want to be in a certain activity participate, making the students and teachers happy as well as producing a high-quality experience. However, the school does make it mandatory to participate in at least one sport and one Arts or Science activity (this can also be an activity outside the school). This is important because it ensures that the school produces a well-rounded student with a variety of skills. Basically, the St. George's extracurricular program has two levels of balance: the first is variety of extracurricular activities and the second is the requirement of these activities.

I love it when I find interest in a new topic and there is already a class or extracurricular activity waiting for me. It allows students to fully reach their potential and let their minds grow in any direction they wish. I feel passionate about my work, and the activities that I participate in strengthen that and open my eyes to the world beyond academics. I have a little bit of everything on my academic plate and am proud of that. I think that balance is important in all aspects of life. I have been in St. George's since kindergarten. My parents worked very hard to place me in this school, and I have worked hard to stay here. But that is only half the story. The teachers and administration care immensely about their students; they make sure you reach your full potential, no matter what it is. I do not think I would have it any other way. In the circus of the educational system, it is hard to cross the high wire without balance.

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## The Curriculum of Desire: Four Poems

Carl Leggo, University of British Columbia

### Lost and Found

(Press Here for Sound)



always wanted to be a saint,  
perhaps St. Francis of Assisi.

But somewhere along the long way  
to middle age, I lost my way,  
at least my conscience  
(learned I am no more  
a saint than Roger Moore  
or a St. Bernard).

Nobody has turned my conscience  
in at the *Lost and Found*,  
even though, like false teeth,  
it's no good to anyone else.

All I know is I once had  
a conscience, but lost it.  
I'm not sure when or where.

One day it was gone,  
like losing hair, heart,  
teeth, smooth skin,  
elasticity in underwear.

Now I confess I have only  
a few thin proverbs to guide me,  
like combing sparse wet hairs  
over a shiny skull.

## What I Want

(Press Here for Sound)



n the cusp of old age I no longer  
want to argue about the lack  
of soap in the shower and whose  
responsibility it was to replace  
the fragile wafer, so many  
details like armies of mites.

Instead I want to remember  
the pineapple juice with psyllium  
I sipped in this slow motion morning  
and the organic banana I forgot to eat  
and *The Vancouver Sun* I didn't read  
while I stared out the kitchen window

at the parade of men in denim overalls,  
men, like my father, I will never know,  
who ambled to the noisy warehouse  
where they shuffle with acetylene torches  
all day amidst clanging iron composing  
the alchemic syntax of girders and trusses

while Mr. Burns sleeps in the patio door  
steeped in the late winter sunlight  
filled with hope for an early treat,  
a long day's sleep, and dinner  
that can never come fast enough,  
but will come, he is sure.



## Diaspora

(Press Here for Sound)



I have seen sea gulls far from the sea  
at KFC in Fredericton, keen as giggling  
adolescents for deep-fried chicken

I have seen sea gulls far from the sea  
in Sault St. Marie, scavenging  
for sprinkled Timbits at Tim Horton's

I have seen sea gulls far from the sea  
like hoarfrost in wind-tossed fields  
of Saskatchewan canola and flax

and I have seen sea gulls suspended  
in Atlantic gusts between sea and sky  
like bleached rags blowing in the wind

or white flags calling a weary truce:  
I too have explored ample possibilities  
for returning, if possible, to the sea

## Alex Faulkner

(Press Here for Sound)

he first Newfoundlander to play in the NHL  
was Alex Faulkner, and one time I stood in line,  
a long time, outside the CBC in Corner Brook,  
for his autograph, sure the Detroit Red Wings were  
the greatest hockey team that ever played,  
and when I told Nicholas how great  
Faulkner was, he nodded politely

then last summer while bussing across Newfoundland  
from one coast to another, Nicholas read  
*The Central Newfoundland Tourist Guide*,  
and learned what happens to hockey greats,  
slipped me a folded scrap of paper, an advert  
for the Beothuck Family & RV Park:

*A Great Quite Family oriented Park to Relax  
Owned and Operated by Alex Faulkner  
The First Newfoundland NHL Player  
6 foot water slideRV Dumping Station*

(no punctuation between *slide* and *RV Dumping*, only  
the image of sliding 6 feet into what RV's dumped)

and while I flinched with a stab for extinct Beothuck  
families who will never relax in Faulkner's park,  
my first thought was the predictable punctilious response  
of an old English teacher: Alex needs a better editor

*the grasshopper  
jumped, bumped  
into my leg, tumbled  
head over heels, somersaults  
like a Cirque du Soleil artist,  
perhaps just for the fun of it*

now we have all gathered in the hospital  
where Pop is on a ventilator, propped up,  
in forest green pajamas with a maroon trim  
like Hugh Hefner wears, glad he is still alive,  
surprising himself and all of us

Sterling just dropped in, and Pop tells him  
how Joe Gullage's bed was wheeled away  
to palliative care an hour ago, and now  
ten of us huddle around Pop's bed like angels  
who can't find our flaming swords  
and everybody talks at the same time,  
even if nobody can hear anybody,  
even if we've long run out of things to say

and when Cliff asks Pop how he is, Pop holds  
up the oxygen line, I'm tied on too short

and the nursing assistants and doctors  
with their clipboards come and go  
as if rehearsing for guest spots on *ER*  
and none of us knows, so we make up  
scenarios stewed in familiar TV fictions

*the grasshopper  
jumped, bumped  
into my leg, tumbled  
head over heels, somersaults  
like a Cirque du Soleil artist,  
perhaps just for the fun of it*

Michael Crummey's new novel *The Wreckage*  
lies on the window ledge

as I watch people in the parking lot,  
far below, I ask Nicholas, Do you think  
this is what God sees when he looks down  
at us scurrying here and there

but Nicholas growls, Don't make me come down there,  
and I like that line, a lot, and according to Picasso  
cited on a stamp in my moleskin journal  
like Hemingway wrote in (according to the sign  
in the Nikaido shop in Steveston):

*There's nothing more difficult than a line*

and I determine I will commit whatever life I have left  
to body-building and joy and writing zigzags  
in the sharp brokenness all around me

*the grasshopper  
jumped, bumped  
into my leg, tumbled  
head over heels, somersaults  
like a Cirque du Soleil artist,  
perhaps just for the fun of it*



**Carl Leggo** is a poet and professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. His poetry, fiction and essays have been published in many journals. He is the author of several books including: *Growing Up Perpendicular on the Side of a Hill*, *View from My Mother's House*, *Come-By-Chance*, *Teaching to Wonder: Responding to Poetry in the Secondary Classroom*, and *Lifewriting as Literary Metissage and an Ethos for Our Times* (with Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Cynthia Chambers). Also, he is a coeditor of *Being with A/r/tography* (with Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, and Peter Gouzouasis), and of *Creative Expression, Creative Education* (with Robert Kelly).

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## Stories in Relationship: Experience, Identity, and Curriculum Making in an Elementary Classroom

M. Shaun Murphy, University of Saskatchewan

### ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

In this paper the narratives of one teacher and two children show how nested knowing, relational knowing based on personal epistemologies, shaped a narrative understanding of experience and curriculum making in an elementary classroom. Issues of interruptions, ethical tensions, shifts in relationship, and subsequent shifts in knowing are explored. The nested nature of knowing was not only central to the relationship of the teacher and the children, but was also part of the relationships among the children.

In her 1990 paper, “Dilemmas of Knowing: Ethical and Epistemological Dimensions of Teachers’ Work and Development,” Nona Lyons wrote a small section on the relational knowledge of teachers and children and referred to it as nested knowing. Her ideas on this way of knowing were brief and she ended that small section with a question about what more could be said about the concept. Intrigued by her ideas and interested in understanding this kind of knowing, I included it in my own doctoral research into the lives of a group of children and their teacher in school. As my research progressed, nested knowing became centrally located in my research and I began to focus more on the nested relationship of the children and the teacher who were participants in the inquiry. It became evident to me that the nested nature of knowing was not only central to the relationship of the teacher and the children, but was also part of the relationships among the children. The idea of knowers knowing knowers is complex and multiperspectival.

There is no simple way to describe nested knowledge. It does not follow a simple domino effect of action and result. Rather, it is more complicated, involving the many relationships that occur in the classroom. It is reminiscent of looking at oneself in a mirror that contains the reflection of another mirror, thus creating an infinite number of reflections. Then imagine adding another set of mirrors at a different angle so that the image becomes even more complex.

Nested knowledge refers to how knowers know knowers. The foundation for this is the epistemological basis of knowledge and the shifts in knowing that can occur as experiences are created that may alter the knower. Lyons used the trope of a web to explain the complexity of the connections. *Stories to live by*, a narrative term conceptualized by Connelly and Clandinin (1999) to “refer to identity, [and] given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context” (p. 4), provided me with a narrative term for understanding how the members of the classroom contributed to a multi-textured, multi-layered nested knowing within their community. Lyons (1990) wrote, “students and teachers come together in a special relationship in learning, having a clear epistemological basis” (p. 173). In this inquiry it became clear to me that nested knowledge was one way to understand how the teacher and the children shaped each other’s story to live by and made curriculum together (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Nested knowledge helped me understand how stories to live by were shifted in the teacher-child relationship.

At the beginning of this inquiry<sup>1</sup> I initially thought the teacher was the only scaffolding agent for the shifts in the stories to live by experienced by the children in relation to her. However, what became apparent was this was only one dimension of what was occurring. The teacher as a knower of children experienced shifts in her story to live by as she encountered the knowledge of the children, therefore the children were also scaffolding shifts for the teacher. An added dimension is how knowers know themselves by how they are known by others; this both influences their identity composition and the curriculum they are shaping. I used Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) understanding of curriculum as a course of life, rather than the more common understanding based on subject-matter curriculum guides. A contributing factor to the complexity of this web was that children as knowers also knew other children as knowers. In the classroom community the teacher is only one part of this web; she is not the only factor in the shifts that occur within all the relationships in the class which impact nested knowledge.

## Situating the Research and the Method

At the start of the 2002-2003 school year, I began to work in Lian Elliot's<sup>2</sup> year five/six classroom<sup>3</sup> in Ravine Elementary School, which is an ethnically and economically diverse urban school in western Canada. As a doctoral student in educational research, I had negotiated a research relationship that would allow me to position myself as a narrative inquirer alongside Lian and the children for the school year. I was interested in the ways children held and used knowledge about their lives in school (Murphy, 2004). Field texts generated in this narrative inquiry included student work (found poetry, reflective pieces, narrative verse, journals, collages, and other written artefacts), researcher field notes, and transcripts of taped conversations with children, teacher, and the school principal.

Narrative inquiry helped me to explore how individuals understand and talk about their lives and experiences in narrative ways in relation with one another in school. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) referred to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry as time, place, and sociality as a way of understanding experience. These commonplaces framed my understanding of the narratives in the later part of the paper by showing the influence of people, classrooms, and shared history on the experiences. There is an inherent ethical structure in relational narrative inquiry, an important aspect of this inquiry and something that I would encounter in my work with Lian and the children. This meant that I needed to continually negotiate an ongoing, evolving ethical relationship with my participants.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) helped me consider that epistemology might be understood as an individual's story to live by, the narrative structure (Carr, 1986) by which we make sense of the world, or in relation to epistemology, the ways we know, but as a narrative construct. Teachers and children come together and corresponding shifts occur in their stories to live by. Relationships shape this coming together and are deepened by nested knowing.

For the purpose of this paper I focus on two of the children in the inquiry. Catrina, a girl in year five, and Travis, a boy in year five, helped me understand in diverse ways how their stories to live by were shaped by the contexts of their experiences. Catrina, Travis, and Lian foregrounded how children and teachers negotiate their stories to live by within relationships. Catrina showed me how privileging one telling over another shaped my own story to live by as a researcher. She drew my attention to the ways telling and retelling positions us in relation to others' stories to live by. Travis shaped my understanding of the interconnectedness of our shifting stories to live by and the ways interruptions possibly shift our epistemology and what

happens when our claims on knowledge are not recognized or honoured. My work with Travis allowed me to see how, as a researcher, I was located within the nested knowledge of the classroom and experienced shifts in my own knowing. The way in which Lian confronted him showed how she was attending to a curriculum of preparation or intentionality in her work and how she imagined him in contexts other than her own classroom.

## Nested Knowledge and Curriculum Making

Lian's nested knowledge of her students helped her scaffold curriculum and experiences with them in school. It could be suggested that she was also scaffolding epistemological shifts, but it was difficult to judge if a child's epistemology had shifted. Certainly the students' knowledge shifted, but can the same be said about their way of understanding knowledge? This inquiry into the epistemological basis for nested knowing would indicate that, as knowers know knowers, small shifts did occur. Thinking about how nested knowledge and experience influence each other invited me to consider how the children and the teacher experienced shifts in what they knew about themselves. This is different than what they know about their knowing. It is a dynamic movement between knowing self, being in relationship, having a pedagogical response, and a subsequent reknowing. The following diagram illustrates the interaction of the three components in a curriculum making (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) context.

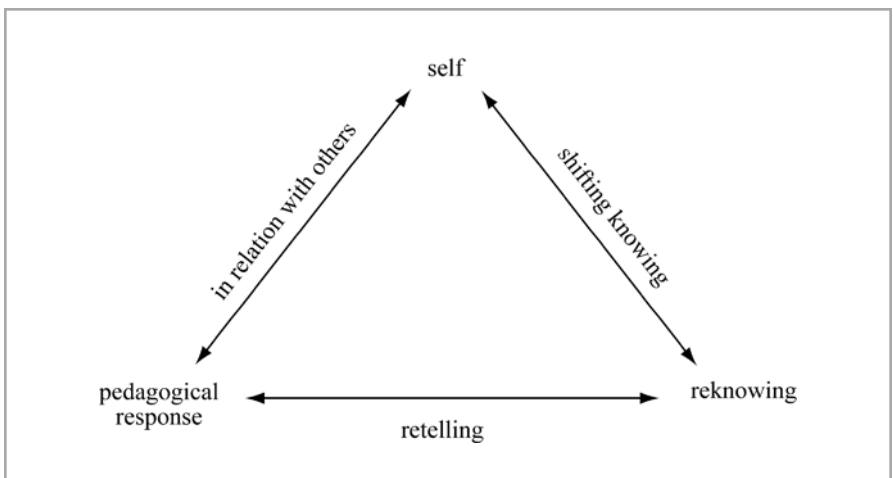


Fig. 1: Three components in curriculum making



Curriculum in this view is situated in the relational lives of people and is shaped in the shifts that occur when living and working together. In the research narratives in the next section of the paper, the curriculum commonplaces of teacher learner, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1978) all interact to shape experience. The subject matters foregrounded in this paper are not school subjects, but rather the stuff of life with others, what Aoki (2005) referred to as the curriculum-as-lived versus the curriculum-as-planned. This shaped the curriculum of lives for Lian and the children (Clandinin et al., 2006) that occurs “as children’s and teachers’ diverse lives meet in school” (p. 135).

### Working With the Children

The following narratives situated in Lian’s year five/six classroom illustrate how the elements on the diagram interact. I was able to use this diagram to further understand the experiences of the children, Lian, and myself as researcher. When I first began to use the diagram I would place at the top the individual who I assumed was the main character, but as I considered these narratives the “self” in the diagram became each person in the narrative; in each narrative there was no clear one *self*. My understanding of each narrative became more fluid. The diagram helped me understand experience in Dewey’s (1997) terms of context and continuity and Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative terms of living, telling, retelling, and reliving.

### A Curriculum of What Is (not): Shifting Knowledge and Ethical Dilemmas

One day when I arrived at school Lian shared that Catrina had told her and some of the girls in class that she was Leo’s<sup>4</sup> girlfriend and they were going to a convenience store close by after school that day. Lian expressed her concern that Catrina was opening herself to more teasing from the girls. When Lian talked to Leo, a year six boy in the class, about it he denied anything was going on. When she talked to Catrina about it Lian told her she should not be making up stories that would encourage other students in the class to tease her. When I talked to Catrina about the incident she told me a different version about the convenience store and Leo.

Catrina Well what happened is me and Leo were supposed to go to the [convenience store] over, over after school.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: And so I got so excited about that that I told a lot, two of my friends and the teacher that he was my new boyfriend.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: And it's none of her, it's none of anyone's business if it like if I have a boyfriend or not but I just told them because I trusted them.

Shaun: Yeah.

Catrina: Miss Elliot told him and our plans got cancelled and so Leo ended up lying and I got in trouble.

Shaun: And how did Leo lie?

Catrina: Well like you said, he never said that he said, and he said he said no. And he didn't. (individual taped conversation, February 5, 2003)

It was evident in this conversation that Katrina felt betrayed by both Lian and Leo. Katrina felt betrayed when Lian confronted Leo and chose to believe his version and his denial of the pending meeting at the convenience store. Katrina had decided Leo was her new boyfriend because he had agreed to go to the convenience store after school and let her buy him candy. It was understandable from Leo's point of view that they were not boyfriend and girlfriend; they had only decided to go to the store together. When Leo denied this, he confirmed Lian's suspicions that Katrina was telling a fiction. In this moment Lian privileged Leo's version over Katrina's based on her knowledge of the two of them in school. Another way of understanding this might be to say that Lian used her nested knowledge to understand a story taking place in the class. However, in this instance this nested knowledge was based on what Lian perceived to be true, rather than empirical evidence from both students. Leo, who denied the story, and Katrina, who did not refute it, aided her in this misunderstanding. Perhaps they did this because of their knowledge about the power of teachers in school, even though this was not the typical story of Lian in the classroom. However, it was still a component of her story to live by with the children.

When I talked with Lian later in the year about the convenience store episode we discussed how Leo had scaffolded a shift in Katrina's story to live by denying the story,

Shaun: Because in a sense you could say that Leo scaffolded an experience for Katrina when he sort of ditched her over the ... convenience store.

Lian: Yeah well that's my fault too.  
(individual taped conversation, May 15, 2003)

In her willingness to understand her role in the convenience store story, Lian accepted the fallibility of her knowledge of Katrina. This understanding began to

shape the ways Lian and I responded to stories of and stories by Catrina. By being able to hear the more complex version from Catrina, Lian and I were able to retell this story in a way that honours Catrina; being able to understand Catrina in a different manner provides an opportunity for reliving alongside her and in the possibility for a different pedagogical response.

Curriculum making in this moment is a nested event with Catrina, Lian, and Leo playing key roles. As they interact, they all cause shifts in each others' knowing and impact the stories to live by of each person. Later, I too enter the model by returning to the moment with Lian and considering how she was influenced by Catrina and Leo's stories to live by. This moment influences the following narrative as I consider who owns a narrative moment.

In another story of Catrina, Lian recounted how she had put on a CD by a popular female singer that Catrina had brought to school. Many of the girls in class had come up to dance close to Lian's desk. Catrina had joined this group, but according to Lian had danced only on the edges and separate from the community of the other girls. When Lian told the story, Catrina was positioned as an outsider. When I talked to Catrina about the event, she told the story of dancing among the girls, and of singing along with another girl. Initially it was Lian's story that shaped my understanding of the event, the version I took to be true. However, upon reflection, I saw how the story was true for Catrina; the experience belonged to her and, therefore, was hers to interpret. In privileging Lian's version over Catrina's, I was culpable. This was not unlike Lian's privileging of Leo's telling of the convenience store episode. In our work together Lian and I scaffolded for each other a different story to live by in relation to the stories of Catrina. This drew my attention to the ways we privilege the tellings of some over the tellings of others. It highlighted the ethical nature of my relationship among my participants as the receiver of multiple tellings and the ways I needed to negotiate this among them. Catrina helped me begin to understand the ways in which privileging stories influenced my understanding of the lives of children and shaped my nested knowledge of them in school. I became aware of how I had become part of the web of knowing in the classroom. These two stories show how we shifted our knowing in relationship with each other and found possibilities for retelling and reknowing.

For me, as the researcher in this relationship this reknowing and subsequent retelling taught me about the complexities of the narratives we have the privilege of hearing. These moments with Catrina and Lian interrupted my way of thinking about Catrina. The tension for me was in the trajectory I had taken for granted in the ways I

understood Catrina and the power I accorded Lian's telling of Catrina's experience. The possibility for a shift in pedagogical response lay in how I could attend to the unfolding narratives of my own children in the classrooms in which I taught. I am left to wonder about Catrina's curriculum making and identity composition in relation to the other people in her classroom.

### **Relationship Shifts Cause Epistemological Shifts: Lian and Travis**

Travis and I, like the other children in the inquiry, had direct conversations about nested knowledge. His conversations about relationship moved in and out of an understanding of nested knowledge. Much of what he talked about in his relationship with Lian could be thought about in terms of nested knowledge. Their history together provided a basis for understanding Travis as a learner and for Travis to understand Lian as a teacher. This meant they had a history of knowing each other as knowers in the context of school. For Travis this history meant she understood him personally and academically.

His understanding of how she knew him as a knower meant she knew he liked sports, that he was "sporty." When I asked him more pointed questions he told me she would know he was not good at mathematics. When I asked what this would mean to her as a teacher his response was she would give him more sheets to make him better at it. Pushing at this I brought their history into the conversation and he told me she had known him "[f]or my whole life" (individual taped conversation, December 12, 2002). Lian had not known him for his whole life and Travis qualified that statement with "in this school she's known me."

Lian had, indeed, known Travis for his whole life in school. She knew his mom, brother, and sister. He thought that knowing his family would help him, "maybe." Then the history of Travis as a knower entered into the conversation. When I asked, "Why do you think teachers need to know things about their kids?" Travis told me, "So that they can help them on their like report cards, um, e-mail people like how good these people are and all that" (individual taped conversation, December 12, 2002). This made him feel safe academically. Importantly, in Travis's knowing, nested knowledge helps people know "how good these people are and all that." Safety, at least emotional safety, was important to Travis and was one of the ways Lian responded to him. He was the boy she wanted in her class, the boy she felt it important to attend to in relation to his need for nurturing. Lian's classroom was a safe place in which to make curriculum and compose an identity.

Lian was aware of her need to prepare the children with whom she worked for the transition to and their life in junior high, years seven to nine, where the children would experience multiple teachers within a school day. For Lian and the children this could be considered a curriculum of preparation. Throughout the year Lian often spoke of how she felt responsible or worried about how the children would do in the different structure of junior high school. This came up in conversations about many of the children in the inquiry. As the year progressed it also became evident to her that Travis could be at risk in the junior high setting.

Lian had become aware over time of Travis's difficulty in completing tasks and the ways he used his relationship with Lian to avoid some of his work. Lian began to wonder if requesting him in her classroom had been in Travis's best interests. In reaction to his work habits and also to her knowledge that due to a personal move in her future Travis would have a new teacher for year six, Lian began to demand more from Travis and eventually confronted him halfway through the year about his work.

I had a long conversation with Travis about this moment, which I edited for the purpose of this paper. When I told Travis I was aware of what had happened with Lian he replied, "See, that's hard." A comment that led to him telling me it was uncomfortable for him knowing that I knew, "Well first of all, well this isn't about that but sometimes when people tell other people about things I get angry ... what she told you, that was my and her business" and that she had talked to him in "kind of a strange voice ... Well she talked to me the way she hasn't ever talked to me ... it was kind of rude" (reconstructed field text from individual taped conversation, February 13, 2003). During our conversation he repeated that he wanted to move to a new school. His words about my knowing placed me once again in the space of ethical tension. Lian asked me to talk to him about the incident. She did this relying on the strength of my relationship with Travis. She felt it would be good for him to talk about it. During my conversation with Travis I told him that that had been the intention behind her telling me.

It was important for my relationship with Travis that I talk about the tensions I felt around our conversation and my knowledge of his confrontation with Lian.

Shaun: ... so that was a cool conversation. I liked that. But it was hard wasn't it? It was hard for me too. Do you know why it was hard for me?

Travis: Why?

Shaun: Because I was aware that it was a private thing for you. Because you told me that at the beginning and I wanted to make sure that I was respectful of your privacy. So did I do a good job? Yeah?

Travis: Yeah.

Shaun: OK. So that was hard for me too. OK. But I feel pretty good about it now.

Travis: For once it's hard for you.

(individual taped conversation, February 13, 2003)

What emerged in this for me was the understanding that Travis did not think I experienced tensions around our conversations. I thought it important he know that I did experience tensions not only in relation to this conversation, but also to others we had had, in which I refer to what Travis and I call the “really big story”—a story he told me about, and one of which I told him that while I would not talk about the details, I would talk about how “really big stories” shape our experiences.

In the unpacking of this moment it became evident how Travis had experienced a shift in how he knew, epistemologically speaking, or in narrative terms, his story to live by, in relation to school and Lian. This shift or interruption was related to Lian's pedagogical shift and influenced Travis's reknowing and relationship with others. It also highlighted for me the nested quality of my relationship with the children and Lian in the inquiry. Lian was hopeful that my relationship with Travis would help him shift his anger. Travis showed me how my knowing of him was situated in our research relationship and I helped Travis understand how his work with me shaped how I knew myself within the research relationship.

In these two moments I was able to see how nested knowing shaped the stories to live by of all the research participants, including myself. It showed me how children compose their stories alongside, or within, the plotlines teachers construct for them. Their experiences together construct their curricula, both real and imagined, as we see in the work of Lian as their teacher. The use of the diagram helped me see the relation between the people in the narratives and the ways their knowing was shaped.

These conversations also shaped an understanding for me of the ethical negotiations necessary among researchers, children, and teachers when they live relational lives within the parameters of the research. It highlights the nested nature of the research relationship and upon reflection draws my attention to my position within the web of knowledge that exists as part of the classroom. In relation with these children and Lian, my knowledge was nested in the knowing they generated around these moments in school. Lian was an active agent in these children's stories to live by as she composed and interpreted their actions, prepared them for different

teachers and school contexts, and tried to protect them, whether erroneously or correctly with her curriculum of intentionality.

### **An Opportunity for Retelling**

Catrina's story highlights how ethical questions, such as whose story we privilege in school, provide or do not provide opportunities for retelling. Catrina desired a story of belonging. She tried in the moments shared in this paper to retell who she was in relation to her class and the people within it. In her story of Leo and the convenience store, Lian's interruption repositioned all of us in relation to it. My subsequent retelling then repositioned Lian, although with no subsequent follow-up with Catrina by Lian, Catrina's story remains interrupted. In the story of dancing with the girls in Catrina's telling, Catrina's version remains uninterrupted and it is I, the researcher, who is left to make shifts in my knowing, not only my knowing around the details of the story, but also in my knowledge of how I privilege some stories above others. Lian and Catrina shifted my epistemology in important ways in relation to my story to live by as a narrative researcher in an ethical relationship with participants. When I place myself in the space of dynamic tension between self, pedagogical response, and reknowing I am able to understand my own epistemological shifts.

With the story of Travis, I inquired into this interconnected shifting of stories to live by which happens when knowledge claims are questioned or ways of knowing are no longer allowed. In this research moment Lian and I positioned me as a mediator of relationships. Having learned from Catrina, I trod carefully in the place of privilege I was accorded in the stories to live by of Travis and Lian. Living in relationship as a researcher with these people meant I had to accept the ways I was responsible for their nested knowing and my own. I had become, to borrow Lyons' (1990) web trope, a strand within this classroom, and when another strand on the web was plucked, I felt the vibrations as surely as they felt mine. I do not know how deeply Lian's story was shifted by her interruption of Travis's story, but it is evident in the field texts that Travis's was, and upon reflection, mine was, too. It highlighted the ways I lived in relation with this class and provided powerful moments of teacher education for me.

Nested knowing was sustained and interrupted by the stories of others that existed within the tensions of this classroom. My year in this classroom drew my attention to the ways our stories to live by, our epistemologies, are shaped in relationship and how this influenced curriculum for the children and Lian. The tensions around the interwoven nature of these classroom stories to live by provided

transformative possibilities for the children, the teacher, and me. They were instrumental in broadening my understanding of the ethics surrounding the privileging of some stories over others, and in causing me to consider the ways nested knowing shaped all of our stories to live by. This also highlighted the ways the stories to live by shaped the curriculum making of individuals and communities. It drew my attention to the ways a curriculum of preparation, often decided upon by a teacher, might interrupt children's identity and curriculum making.

## Notes

1. This research was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant held by F.M. Connelly and D.J. Clandinin.
2. Pseudonyms are used for the teacher, students, and the school in this paper.
3. Because of the multi-age organization at Ravine Elementary School, the research site, I refer to the children's year in school rather than grade. Year 5/6 refers to the diverse group of 10-, 11- and 12-year-old children in the classroom.
4. Leo was a year six boy in the same classroom as Catrina.

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# A Reflective Turn: Towards Composing a Curriculum of Lives

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## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This study is part of a larger inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), attended to children's, teachers', and parents' narratives of experience situated within institutional, cultural, and social narratives shaping particular school contexts. As one teacher engaged in an autobiographical narrative inquiry alongside her mother's lived and told stories, she learned curriculum making is intergenerational and woven with identity making. This teacher's narrative inquiry led her to new ways of knowing, reshaping her practice. The study illuminates the importance of attending to the interwoven, intergenerational stories of teachers, children and parents stories in composing a curriculum of lives.

## Introduction: Slowly Awakening

**A**s I re-read the children's book, *What You Know First*, I closed the cover, firmly ending my thinking about it or so I thought. Only a few phrases adorned the pages of MacLachlan's (1995) book but somehow her words lingered. A child's story of leaving a known and loved place was all too familiar to me. While the words were scarce, the story was complex. I began to wonder about my life story and what it was that I knew first. And so I reflected on my first landscapes or what Greene (1995) might describe as my "rememory" (p. 82). Although Greene points out that, "We cannot return to the landscape of those pre-reflective days," she reminds me of the importance of reflecting on earlier landscapes for "We can only become present to them by reflecting on them" (1995, p. 73). Through reflecting and rewriting my storied

landscapes, I invite new possibilities of being present and aware of stories not yet written in my “open-ended selves” in my process of becoming (p. 72).

At first, I found myself thinking “within” the frame as I often did, seeing my stories as fixed, already written, as if they were “once upon a time.” Not until I began to attend to my stories and listen to others’ stories “lived and told,”<sup>1</sup> that is, to engage in autobiographical narrative inquiry, did I begin to see beyond the borders that confined who I was and who I could become in my personal and professional landscapes. As I continued to inquire, I eventually attempted to write *my* life stories (Clandinin, Steeves, & Chung, 2007) and awakened to understand that who I am, and am becoming, is not composed in isolation, nor is it fixed. My stories are both deeply interwoven, and can be re-told and re-lived, with those who live alongside me. Setterfield (2006) calls me to consider the complex interconnections of my life as interwoven with the lives of others. She writes,

Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families are webs. Impossible to touch one part of it without seeing the rest vibrating. Impossible to understand one part without having the sense of the whole (p. 59).

Setterfield’s metaphor reminds me that my past, present and future stories are shaped by narratives “lived and told” of others in my life. My story does not begin or end with me, for my stories vibrate, touching others’ lives, just as theirs touch mine. I can shift and rewrite my “stories to live by”<sup>2</sup> (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

Greene (1995) recalls the shapes of her childhood as she describes the layers of complexity in life stories that shape and shift who each of us are, and can become. She writes,

I cannot truly say, “*my* life story.” For that would imply that, spiderlike, I have somehow spun a web solely from the stuff of my own being. When, in fact, I cannot exclude the contexts of gender, sibling, and maternal relationships, political and professional phenomena, and even aging and decline from “myself.” I am not so “individual” that I can claim to be free from the shaping influence of contexts ... (1995, p. 74).

## Coming to the Research Puzzle

My narrative puzzle started when I began graduate studies at the University of Alberta in 2004. Not knowing what to expect, I decided to take a course titled, *Life in the Elementary Classroom* taught by Jean Clandinin and Pam Steeves. The safe space created in this course and the openings to look inward and outward, backward and forward, helped me unfold a narrative life puzzle that continues to be composed and re-composed. As I attended more closely to stories lived and told of my personal and professional landscapes, I slowly began to write and re-write my autobiographical narratives (Clandinin, Steeves, & Chung, 2007).

As part of my narrative inquiry, I was encouraged to bring in memory items from my lived stories. The first artifact I brought was a photograph of my mother and me in front of our Fish and Chip shop. At the time, I was not certain why I chose to share this picture, but somehow I was drawn to it, compelled to speak to it.

With two colleagues in my "Works in Progress,"<sup>3</sup> I shared fragments of growing up in England. I began with telling cheerful anecdotes that implied my story was a fixed entity, already written. I all but stated, "The end." At the time, I did not realize I was just beginning my narrative inquiry. As we listened and responded to each other's stories, trust between members of my Works in Progress group grew. They asked me more questions and I began to awaken to the cover stories and the secret stories I told. Connelly and Clandinin (1995) describe cover and secret stories as narratives composed to help an individual portray and uphold more acceptable images of one's life in order to fit into the dominant school culture. These "masked" stories are told to others both on and off the school landscapes (p. 61).

Inquiring more deeply into the stories that lived outside the temporal, social and emotional edges of this photograph, the safe cover story I had shared slowly began to unravel. As I awakened to the layers of the stories, I felt a tension that momentarily dispositioned<sup>4</sup> me. As I thought about the unraveling of the stories, resonating were my teachers' words, "Attend to the edges, examine the gaps ... the silences." In learning to look beyond the edges of this photograph, I uncovered multiple plotlines to the stories I was telling. There was a more complex story being lived as my mother and I negotiated our "living curriculum" whilst living out our "curriculum as planned" (Clandinin et al., 2006). The happy anecdote I first told about the photograph was incomplete, resisting framing as our "curriculum of lives,"<sup>5</sup> was being co-composed on a multiplicity of landscapes. This "once upon a time" story was not enough. I began to tell and retell my stories and my mother's stories through narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Greene noted, "No one of us can see the

whole or sing the whole.” Greene reminds me that “no one’s picture is complete” (Greene as cited in Miller, 1998, p. 145). In coming to know the necessary “incompleteness” of my mother’s and my stories to live by, my narrative inquiry puzzle began.

The stories I share in this paper are rememories of earlier landscapes with my family. Although the narrative accounts are written from my vantage point, they were composed through conversations over time with my mother. My mother’s telling of her lived experiences provided me insight into her vantage point. Therefore, in collaboration with my mother, I wrote family stories grounded in both of our rememories and retellings. As we retell and relive our stories, our family stories continue to vibrate onward, touching the stories we now live. Necessarily, these vibrations linger, reverberating into who I am and can become as a teacher as I live alongside young children.

In this paper, I also share a story of a child I lived alongside. I retell the story of this child in order to show how thinking narratively allowed me to “know” and “unknow” my students in new ways (Vinz, 1997). As I attend closely to the vibrations from my past, I begin to understand that, even as adults, vibrations in our webs of life, linger ...

## Vibrating Stories

### First Landscapes: The Fish and Chip Shop

My family and I experienced many transitions over the years. We moved from England to Fort Saskatchewan, to Wainwright and then to a little town called Edgerton. As I looked through old photographs, I was drawn to a photograph of my mother tightly holding my hand. In the background was our small Fish and Chip shop in England. Clinging tightly to my mother, I looked like a timid little girl.

I do not recall much of England as I was so young, but I do hold onto the rememories my family tells of it. My mother and my siblings tell me I cried often at pre-school. Sometimes my sister was asked by the principal to keep me company. I wonder why I do not remember that. I do recall a fire in our Fish and Chip shop. I cried as we watched it from inside the car. I was certain the fire was an inferno but, when my mother tells this story, she describes it as a small kitchen fire. I remember the enormous slugs that blanketed the sidewalks whenever it rained and it rained often. Terrified to squish them with my feet, I asked my parents to lift me up. Looking back at who I was in that photograph, I see a little girl who was afraid of many things.

My mother also describes a moment of tension when she thought she almost lost me. Distracted, as she was tending to a friend's child, I wandered onto the busy road in front of the shop. My mother grabbed me off the curb just before the oncoming traffic went by. I wonder if, from that point on, my mother felt a need to keep a watchful eye on me. She proudly reminds me that when I was a baby, while she worked, she carried me on her back.

### **Earlier Landscapes: Leaving What I Knew First**

My siblings and I spent most of our time at the Fish and Chip shop. It was only fitting that we celebrated our birthdays there. After all, it was home, or so it seemed to me. Not long after my fourth birthday, my parents announced we were moving to Canada. I was sad to leave what I knew first as my homeplace. I did not understand why we would leave a place we loved.

My father, brother, sister and I moved to Canada first while my mother stayed behind to sell the Fish and Chip shop. With no home of our own, we lived in the basement of my uncle and his family's home. A new place, so many unknowns, I was scared without my mother by our side. During my mother's absence, my father tried his best. He bandaged our wounds, comforted us, and even styled our hair or at least attempted to. Eventually, I had to start kindergarten, another unknown. With so many transitions, I grew more fearful. My dad had to work so my aunt took me to my first day of school. Carrying me in her arms, my aunt tried to hand me over to the teacher. Refusing to go, I kicked the teacher squarely in her shin. There were many tears to follow that day as I stood on my own with no one to carry me. However, still carrying me with her words, I sought comfort in speaking to my mother every day over the telephone until she eventually joined us in Canada.

### **Blurring of Past and Present Landscapes: Bean Sprouts Do Matter**

We came to meet and leave many "homeplaces." Eventually we moved from my uncle's home to new places as my parents went wherever opportunity took them. Now my parents live in a trailer nestled beside their restaurant in a small village in Saskatchewan. I moved to Edmonton for postsecondary education and have stayed ever since.

I recall one cold day when I visited. My mom sighed as she told how the pipes froze again and the dishwasher was broken. Awakening early one morning to help my mother open the restaurant, I noticed she was daydreaming. As if in a half

sleep, her tacit knowledge artfully guided her in cutting vegetables for the daily soup special. Gazing at my mother, I wondered if these seven days a week, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. workdays, was the life she had imagined for herself.

As I served local patrons who have become more like family than customers to my mother and father, they said to me, “Ah ... so you’re the school teacher. Your mother is so proud of you. She talks about you.” I smile and remember how my mother once had hoped I would take over the family business. I pursued my dream whereas she chose a life to give her family opportunity.

In another visit, I remembering helping my mother prepare our evening dinner at 10:00, after the restaurant finally closed. Placing a large bowl full of bean sprouts in front of her, my mother began carefully tearing off the top of the sprout and the tip, leaving only the stem. I grabbed a few bean sprouts and began imitating my mother’s actions. After painstakingly tearing only a handful of stems, I wondered why my mother took such time and care to do what seemed like such a trivial task. Impatient and tired, I asked my mother, “Why can’t we just eat the bean sprouts the way they are?” As my mother leaned over to redo some of my carelessly torn bean sprouts, she shared a story that made me realize that there was a purpose and story to everything my mother does, no matter how small or big it might seem. Not looking directly at me, my mother asked if I knew what my grandmother did for a living. I was eager to hear more as my mother always spoke so lovingly of her mother who passed away from cancer many years ago. I could tell my mother was proud as she described how my grandmother used to work in different five-star restaurants in Hong Kong. Always holding at least two jobs, my grandmother’s job was to peel shrimp as well as to tear off bean sprout tips. My mother’s eyes watered as she told the story of my grandmother who raised four children while holding down multiple jobs. As I listened, I began to understand why she took such care in tearing those bean sprouts for it reminded her of her mother. Awakened to new stories of my mother, her mother, that night, in silent appreciation, I continued to tear bean sprouts with my mother until the entire bowl was finished.

### **Treasured Landscapes: Tattered “Little Sister”**

During my usual spring “clean sweep,” I rummaged through my closet to find items to donate to a local charity. I gathered three bagfuls of clothes and, eventually, a bag of stuffed animals, most of them gifts. Each stuffed animal was a memory trigger of a time, person, or place; there was one in particular that I loved: my childhood teddy bear from England. As a child, I affectionately named my bear in Chinese,



calling it “little sister.” Tattered, with yellow stuffing coming out of its belly, my bear was clearly well loved. This last keepsake, my ragged teddy bear, recalled, for me, the security I felt being with my family in England. I knew it was my favourite childhood toy as I had seen countless photographs of me hugging it tightly as a little girl. As part of the clean sweep, I decided to let go of my childhood love. An adult surely did not need childhood mementos. Putting my precious bear in the bag, I was certain it would be the last time I would see it.

I meant to bring the bags to the charity but they ended up collecting dust in the basement, that is, until my mother visited. Seeing the bags labeled “Donations,” she asked if she could give the items to families in need in the small town where she lived. In her usual way, she was tending to people in the community. My mother took the bags when she left.

Several months later, I looked up on my closet shelf where “little sister” used to sit and I found myself missing my English bear. As I recalled fond memories of our life together, a realization struck me. Who on earth would want my tattered teddy bear but me? I could not believe I had given away my childhood treasure which reminded me of a place I loved.

I was a bit frantic as I could not remember what I had done with the donation bags. I was certain my bear was gone for good until the day my mother called. With exasperation in her voice, she first gave me a lecture on how I was wasteful, throwing out perfectly good things. Then she told me she had found my “little sister” bear among the clothes she took from my basement. She had stitched up my bear’s ripped belly because she thought I might like to keep it. On my mother’s visit, she handed me my bear. It was what Lugones (1987) would call my mother’s “loving perception” of knowing what the bear meant to me, and, perhaps, her way of reminding me of who I was and where I came from. When my mother gave me my bear, I hung tightly to it and to her every word as she told me more stories of England. When I was a toddler, she used to bring me to the fish market at six in the morning in order to get the best produce for our shop. I laughed as my mother described how I would cry whenever we forgot to bring my “Little Sister” to the market, which was apparently quite often. Even if we had almost reached the market, my mother and I turned back to get my bear. I think my bear meant as much to her as it did to me for it brought us back to our special times together in England. Undoubtedly, my mother wanted me to remember this.

## Reliving, Retelling ... in the Margins

At the age of eight, I was in grade three in my third school. Being a shy student, I hardly ever spoke in class. However, my family tells me that, to their dismay, I had no shortage of words at home. Although shy in school, I attempted to respond whenever the teacher spoke to me. Unfortunately, my soft voice was often barely audible. I remember dreading my turn to read as our teacher went up and down the rows beckoning us to read aloud.

Grade three was full of new knowings and unknowings: I had my first crush on a boy; learned the multiplication table; wrote my first standardized achievement tests. Being Chinese, I was the only visible minority in my class. There were not many Chinese people in the school except for my brother, sister and me. I wanted desperately to fit in and be like other children. I was thankful I was losing traces of my British accent which had not helped me fit in. I did not realize that grade three would also be the year I was labeled a struggling ESL student. I do not recall exactly how I came to earn this "special" label, but I do remember the feeling I had when I first became aware I was labeled as an ESL student and a struggling learner. I was not even aware that English was my second language for it had become the language I was most comfortable with as I lost my grasp of the Chinese dialect.

Many times I was pulled out of class that year for remedial English. I had to go to a small room at the end of the hallway with what seemed like an enlarged door sign noting "Learning Assistance." As I half-heartedly completed isolated vocabulary exercises and simple board games, I wondered what was wrong with me. Why was I the last to know I was a struggling learner? I wondered if I should stop reading the novels I loved so much. In 'Learning Assistance' I frequently earned prizes and even a ribbon once for my apparently exceptional efforts. These prizes did not deter me from wanting to scream and shout, "I am not dumb!" every time I was pulled for remedial instruction. Instead, I said nothing. I stayed silent. I wondered if my school friends thought I was dumb too, for I was the only student who always pulled out of class.

From an early age, I took solace in books and music. A vigorous reader, I found myself immersed in literature where I could imagine my life as otherwise, that is, a life where I was a "smart" student. The day I was given a series of standardized tests, the remedial instruction abruptly stopped. I did not know why it ended but I was elated. Was I cured of my dumbness? Strangely, I did not recall feeling smarter. I wondered if the board games had done wonders after all. I did not dare question why remedial instruction ended for I grew apprehensive, fearing the teacher might change her mind and send me back. As I progressed through grade school, I was

relieved not to be singled out for my deficits, only for successes and accolades. However, the memories and labels I carried in grade three unknowingly lingered as I grew fiercely determined to show my family, friends, and teachers that I was, indeed, a good student, a smart student.

In grade eleven, I transitioned to another school. After a year in my new school, one day, unexpectedly, the jovial high school principal summoned me over the intercom to his office. I was surprised as I was now known as a “good” student. Going to the principal’s office was uncharted territory for me. To my relief, my principal only wanted to know if I wished to review my educational history. As we looked over my profile, he wondered why, in grade one, my report card noted that I liked to stay in at recess and read by myself. My principal found this particularly amusing as he saw me as an outgoing student. Then he marveled how in grade three my reading score in an achievement test was recorded to be three years above grade level. Being the first time I heard this news, I was rather shocked myself for it was the same year I carried my insignia, as the dumb student.

I did not know how my memories of this early landscape would linger with me as I continually questioned who I was. Was I an ESL student? Was I a good, smart student? Was I still dumb? After nine years and having experienced continued academic success after grade three, I still wondered about the assumptions placed on me as a child. Even as an adult, in my graduate classes, I had silenced this story but it was through this self-facing narrative inquiry that I began to ask myself, “Why?” I wondered how these stories of coming to know myself and who I was vibrated into my teaching.

### **Vibrating Into the Classroom: A Right-Sided Heart**

As his mother picked him up to go see the doctor, Vlad<sup>6</sup>, a child in my classroom, made a point of coughing forcefully. Eventually all of his classmates noticed him. They turned around in their desks to look while one asked, “Vlad are you sick again?” In a weary voice, he replied, “Yeah ... as usual” (field notes, October 19, 2006). I remember when I first met Vlad. I thought he was in contention for an Oscar with his frequent theatrical outbursts. Early in the year Vlad had an angry rage over an accidental brush with a classmate during gym class. It took almost an entire afternoon to calm him. Shortly afterwards, Vlad complained about a pain in his chest. “My heart hurts,” he said as he put his hand over the right side of his chest. “Is my heart here?” he questioned. I gently told him that I thought his heart was on the left side. He was adamant he could feel his heart on both sides (field notes, October 4, 2006). “What an

actor!" I initially thought. As I thought more about Vlad, I began to wonder about who he was. In that moment, I awakened to how I would come to unknow Vlad; beginning with this unknowing, enabled me to know him. I thought I knew this nine-year-old boy of Bangladeshi and Anglo heritage. Was he not an extremely high achiever and a fierce competitor? I had many labels for how I knew him but I realized that none of these imposed identities helped me know the whole of him.

During a mathematics test I began to know the layers of complexity in Vlad's life stories. A high achiever, Vlad, a seemingly tough boy who showed little affection to me or his peers, began his test with what seemed like his usual intent of getting 100%. However, during the test, I noticed Vlad uncharacteristically losing focus. Eventually, Vlad put down his pencil and requested a private conversation with me. His voice quavered as he asked, "Ms. Chung, are people allowed to copy movies?" I asked Vlad why he was worried about this. He shared his worries about the repercussions of what might happen to his father who copied movies. He loved his father and treasured the time he had with him as Vlad traveled back and forth between his mother's house during the week and his father's house on the weekends. I listened to Vlad tell his life story. Afterwards, still worried, Vlad wanted to finish his test. Wiping away his tears, in his usual quest for perfection, Vlad told me of his expectations to get all "A's" on his report card. He prided himself on being seen as a "smart" student. When he completed his test, I was surprised when Vlad, such a private boy, wanted to continue our conversation.

I marveled about how much I learned about who Vlad was on that singular day. That day I let go of my assumptions, my labels. I became a "world traveler" (Lugones, 1987) as I saw the parallels between our stories. Vlad, too, defined himself by his achievements. He, too, was trying to make sense of his dual world, living in between two cultures. I thought about the assumptions and labels I unknowingly placed on him, ones similar to those stamped on me as a child. There was so much more about this little boy I needed to know. As we continued our journey of unknowing and knowing ourselves together, more stories came forth. Vlad was an important thread in my life. As Vlad felt safe to share more of his stories, not only with me but his classmates, we all began to know him in beautiful ways. Vlad passionately shared with us his dream of being a researcher who would find a cure for cancer and diabetes (field notes, June 6, 2007). Through listening to his lived stories and those still yet to live out, I knew there would be complex layers to knowing the depths of who Vlad was and who he would become. As his teacher, it was not my position to determine and write out his life script for him. My important role was to listen and to embrace stories of his open-ended self in his personal journey of becoming.

## In-Between Spaces: Retelling the Stories

### Beginning With a “Master” Story

Much like Aoki (1993) described in his own self-facing as a teacher, I, too, began my first year of teaching with “curriculum guides woven into a master story” (p. 264). As a character in this “master” story that was already written, I merely enacted the script, carrying out the “curriculum-as-planned” (Aoki, p. 264). I made sure I taught the curriculum objectives as outlined by policy makers. I consulted with my daily planning book that kept me “on task” and “on schedule.” Yet, I felt there was always something that happened in the ongoing life in the classroom that disrupted *my* rhythm. These “things” were life stories that I did not know how or where to fit into the already brimming mandated curriculum.

By engaging in narrative inquiry, I began to ask myself questions about the place of subject matter in composing a curriculum of lives. Does the subject matter of mathematics, sciences, language arts, and other curricular subjects have any relevance at all in composing a curriculum if we do not attend to lives, the lives of the children, parents and me, as starting points and move from lives to subject matter (Clandinin, Steeves, & Chung, 2007)?

### Letting Go of the “Master” Story

This study helped me understand that what I initially thought was taking me “off course” was the “other” curriculum, the “lived curriculum.” Aoki speaks of this lived curriculum as one that is not laid out in a plan but a plan more or less lived out (1993, p. 257). I have come to know, the most important curriculum of all cannot be scripted, pre-meditated or mandated. Our interwoven stories, those told, lived and yet to live, need time and space to be and “inter-be” (Nhat, 2003). As I work to co-compose the classroom curriculum making alongside the children, our narratives live at the forefront. What I once thought to be “disruptions” to the curriculum, I know now, to be the core. Stories *are* the rhythms in our classrooms; they give life to our curriculum.

It is through narrative engagement that I can now be on course as I move forward, seeing “big” as well as seeing “small,” (Greene, 1995) rather than being confined to my previously recycled, unchallenged “cul-de-sac” ways of thinking and attending as I held on to my preconceived notions and labels as ways of seeing curriculum in schools, the world and others (Clandinin, Steeves, & Chung, 2007). In an achievement testing era of increased accountability, Greene (1995) reminds me of the importance of not losing sight of seeing “big.” She writes, “When applied to

schooling, the vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable" (p. 10).

In coming to know more of what has shaped my childhood and who I have become, my curiosity stays with me as I wonder about the webs of lives vibrating in the classroom. As we make safe spaces for children to share stories of who they are with one another, I wonder if the children know where they came from and what they knew first. I wonder how their stories will vibrate onward, influencing each other's stories still yet to be written. I wonder what the children know and will come to know of each other. I have come to understand that identity making is interwoven with curriculum making as subject matters will have no authenticity if we do not begin with what we know first. Who we are and our unfolding open-ended selves, our stories, do matter ...

### **Staying Awake: Living in Possibilities**

I live in the stories of who I am and who I am not. Am I determined through my discourse to be an immigrant child, a struggling ESL student, a good student, or a high achiever? Through inquiring into my narrative puzzle, I came to know that these labels could never encapsulate all that I am and all that I am not. My stories are fluid and ever changing as they move with me through diverse landscapes. To understand who I am in any narrative sense as an individual, as an educator, I must understand the threads of my interwoven, intergenerational stories. The social, institutional and cultural narratives that shape my personal and professional landscapes influence who I am and how I teach.

I am a little girl who treasured memories of many homeplaces, places I had grown to love. I am a daughter who understands the loving perception that my mother has unknowingly taught me. I am an educator who works to dispel assumptions and labels. I have come to learn that bean sprouts do matter. I understand that it is possible to feel our hearts on both sides of our chest. I work to honour my students' living curricula by giving them the time and space to write their own stories. I am able to listen to their stories and "add a dab of glue to the important words that burst forth" (Paley, 1986, p. 121). By attending to the interwoven vibrations in my life stories, my family's stories and my students' stories, I am a "world traveler" in the way Lugones (1987) means as she reminds me of my capacity to remember other worlds and to see myself in them. I am able to imagine the world through my students' eyes. I can say, "I've been there too. I live alongside of you."

Although I was deeply humbled to have recently received a teaching award, I know that labels and accolades do not define who I was, who I am or who I will become. My life stories are shaped and continue to be shaped by stories of those I am so fortunate to have live alongside of me. My mother reminds me of this when she wrote me this letter attached to a congratulatory card.

Simmee,

Congratulations you are one of ton good teacher. Mom's English is very poor, but still try my best to write, hope you understand what I mean. All my family is so happy and hoping you keep going and do better and better. O.K. sweet heart. Now I send you some lucky money you can go out have a big meal ok. I will see you soon. Enjoy yourself Honey. I love you so much. Congratulation again.

Dad & Mom & Family (letter, April 25, 2008)

This was the first letter my mother had ever written to me. It was also the first time she wrote more than a sentence in English. I hung onto my mother's loving words as I knew every word was carefully thought out, just so. I know this letter will not be the last, for my mother and I will keep writing new stories—together. Numbered birthday cakes, a tattered teddy bear, a community garden, a singular fading flower, and tensions in our hearts—these are not things at all. These are our stories that give our lives rhythm.

On my most recent visit with my mother, she handed me a bagful of old congratulatory cards from my high school graduation. She told me she held onto them as she thought I might like to have them as keepsakes. At first I was inclined to quickly toss the cards and to begin my rant to my mother regarding her packrat behavior, but then I stopped myself. I stayed awake to knowing that these were not just cards. These cards reminded me of earlier stories, new possibilities to imagine, representing the intricate webs in my life. I find myself weaving MacLachlan's (1995) words into my new ways of knowing, "What you know first stays with you ..." but just in case I forget, I know the threads in my life will remind me to not take our stories for granted. My mother and my interwoven stories remind me of where I came from. I understand that what I know first is a part of me, but not the whole of me. My identity, my stories to live by, are multiple. Greene reminds me that, "Neither myself nor my narrative can have, therefore, a single strand. I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces; and, in any case, I am forever on the way" (1995, p. 1).

As I sat in an overflowing room filled with other world travelers at the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) 2008 conference in New York City, we had the privilege of wondering alongside Greene who recently celebrated ninety years of living with possibilities. Speaking ever so eloquently, Maxine Greene's words wrapped around me, "I am what I am not yet ..." Awakened, I know that I am not closing this narrative with these words, I am only beginning. As I imagine and re-imagine the open-ended spaces in my life, I am present to who I am and I live in the possibilities of who I am, not yet ...

## Notes

1. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) see teachers trying to develop a coherent narrative account of themselves in the living and telling of their stories.
2. Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) notion of "stories to live by" refers to a narrative conception of identity, an understanding in which our stories to live by are shaped by secret stories, sacred stories, and cover stories. Our stories to live by are fluid, multiple, and shifting stories, composed and recomposed as they are shaped by the past and present landscapes in which a teacher lives and works. Stories to live by link the concept of teachers' personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape.
3. Works in Progress groups are small story groups that remain constant throughout the course in order to enable sustained conversations through listening and responding to each other's stories and writing.
4. I borrowed this term from Vinz (1997) who suggests the practice of "shifting valances of dispositioning" (p. 145) in which educators move between "unknowing," giving up present understandings (positions) of our teaching to "not-knowing; to acknowledge ambiguity and uncertainty" (p. 139).
5. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) conceptualize curriculum as a course of life, or as a "curriculum of lives." (p. 392).
6. Vlad is a pseudonym used to protect the privacy of this participant and to ensure anonymity.



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## The Situation of Parents in the Curricular Commonplaces: A Place of Equal Rank?

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### ABSTRACT ([Press Here for Sound](#))

Schwab (1973) argued that four commonplaces of equal rank must be taken into account in curriculum making: students, teachers, subject matter and milieu. While he insisted that none of the commonplaces can be omitted without a vital loss, attention to milieu, particularly in relation to parents and families (rather than schools or classrooms), is largely being omitted in teacher education curriculum. This article explores how a teacher education curriculum attending to the positioning of parents helped interrupt one teacher's story of parents. The article challenges us to consider who is rendered in/visible, who is in/validated, who finds schooling an educative process—and who is/does not—in the dominant plotline of parents as outsiders to curriculum.

Schwab (1973), a well-known curriculum theorist, argued that curriculum must be comprised of four commonplaces of equal rank: the learners, the teachers, the subject matter, and the milieu. Knowledge of the learners, for Schwab, included both a general knowledge of the age group and an intimate knowledge “achieved by direct involvement with them” (p. 502). Knowledge of the teachers included knowledge of their backgrounds and their personalities, what they know and what they are ready to learn. Knowledge of the subject matter included knowledge of the scholarly materials of the discipline. Knowledge of milieu included attention to the school and classroom, the family, the community, and “particular groupings of religious, class, or ethnic genus” (p. 503). It attended to relations between and among children, children and adults, and the various subgroups and communities.

Schwab asserted that “[n]one of [the commonplaces] can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and value” (p. 509). He spoke of the relations between the commonplaces as being one of “coordination, not superordination-subordination” (p. 509).

If I were to take a quick survey of the current curriculum field, would I see attention being paid to all four curricular commonplaces? Would I see a foregrounding of the commonplaces as equal in rank? In regard to learners, a review of courses offered in representative Canadian teacher education programs makes apparent to me there is a continued shift of attention away from teaching toward that of learning. I see a common focus on aspects of learning such as assessment for learning, student reflection and metacognition, the interplay of gender in subject matter learning, and processes of student inquiry. In regard to teachers, my search of “teacher knowledge” and “teacher identity” in our library database produces a large body of literature.<sup>1</sup> In schools and school divisions, I see professional learning communities abounding, underpinned by work such as Craig’s (2003) conceptualization of knowledge communities. In regard to subject matter, I observe the continued revision of curriculum documents across Canadian provinces and territories. I hear subject matter specialists each speak of the literacies of their discipline—ecological literacy, mathematical literacy, the range of literacies within the field of technology. Within the subject matter areas, I witness a renewed emphasis on constructivist pedagogy, of inviting students to learn how to learn rather than what to learn. And what about milieus? Have there been any shifts in attention in this commonplace? Do I see recognition of the family and community as places of learning for children? Do I see what parents know about children, and about teaching and learning, being acknowledged and used in classrooms alongside teacher knowledge? Do I see parent knowledge being used to inform decisions on school landscapes about curricular policy and programming?

There is a large and growing body of literature on parents and schooling which speaks to the positive impact parent engagement has on their children’s academic achievement and other educational outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Redding et al., 2004). In the face of this field of research, a lack of attention to the curricular commonplace of milieus, particularly in regard to parents and families, continues. In a search of 10 prominent universities in Canada, no undergraduate teacher education courses were identified which offer a curriculum focusing on parents. At the graduate level, two teacher education courses were identified: one at the University of Alberta, *ECE: Home/School/Community Relations*, last offered in Summer Session 2008, and one at the University of Saskatchewan, *Parents and Education: Contemporary Developments and Issues*, last

offered in Spring Session 2007.<sup>2</sup> While I am aware that the topic of parents is an element in some courses, particularly in educational administration courses in relation to governance and roles and responsibilities as defined by the School Act, or in educational foundations courses which explore cultural and historical constructions of childhood or the family,<sup>3</sup> a foregrounding of beliefs and practices around the engagement of parents in their children's schooling is not a focus in courses offered by curriculum studies departments.

Recently, in a lunch time conversation, a group of teacher educators were conversing about the experiences of their students in field experience placements. As stories were shared, stories of parents became a part of their telling. I was struck by the term “helicopter parents,” apparently a term used by some teachers in a school to describe parents who are perceived to ask too many questions, to visit the school too frequently, and who want to be too big a part of the daily life which unfolds there. Not long afterward, I was participating in a meeting with teachers and student teachers in which we were determining dates and activities in which the students could be out and engaged in the school. Again I was struck when a teacher insisted that the student teachers not be present during parent-teacher conferences. My sense was that she felt it was too anxious and exhausting a time for teachers to have any added considerations. I believe we see reflected, in both of these instances, a dominant plotline common in education, a plotline which positions parents as outsiders to the school landscape, as individuals who are perhaps demanding, interfering, needy—and perhaps, even, people of whom to be wary. Without consciously designed curriculum, at preservice, inservice and graduate levels of education, how do we interrupt this dominant plotline to create new stories of parents, stories in which parents are positioned alongside educators in relational and equitable ways? How do we interrupt this dominant plotline so that we do not continue to omit a “vital factor” (Schwab, 1973, p. 509) in the schooling of children?

### **Kelly's Story: Living the Dominant Plotline**

In this story, Kelly Lacey, a practicing teacher, moves backward in time to her early days of teaching to tell a story of her lived experience with one family. She makes visible the assumptions and beliefs she held at that time regarding parents and their position in relation to their children's school landscapes. Kelly's story, in its detail and particularity, invites us to learn—and to “unlearn” (Williams, in Loomba, 1998, p. 66)—alongside her.

*I am reminded of an experience I had with a parent during the early years of my teaching career. I was teaching a grade 3 class at a perimeter city school in which Beverley (a pseudonym) was a student. I remember Beverley's quick smile and clever, intuitive ways, her surprising distance from the other students and her daily visits with me after school where we would talk about books she was reading and the journal she often chose to write in during the evening. Like many students that year, Beverley came dressed in clothes that were dated and old, but clean.*

*In November I expected to meet her parents at the scheduled interview yet, to my surprise, no one showed up. While poor parental attendance for parent-teacher interviews was quite common for that school, I anticipated that someone would arrive for Beverley since she was doing well in school. In retrospect, I made several assumptions without ever meeting or communicating in any way with her parents.*

*Throughout the year, bits of information began to change my understanding of Beverley's home life. I was to learn that her father was an alcoholic who was unemployed, angry, and explosive; her mother had left them during the middle of the night while the kids were very small; Beverley and her older brother were responsible for a significant number of daily chores that included washing their clothes and making their lunches; Beverley spent a lot of time in her bedroom with the door shut reading and writing in her journal; and, Austin (also a pseudonym), Beverley's older brother, was the troubled boy I often heard other teachers talking about. Regrettably, I never once spoke with Beverley's father that year.*

*The following year, I was given a grade 7/8 combined classroom. The students were remarkably diverse and confrontational. One of the children within the class was Beverley's older brother, Austin. Austin would fight with kids, swear in class, and challenge me, other teachers, and administrators in seemingly any manner he could. He was violently angry, and during the year he was suspended many times. I hoped desperately that with time and patience he would come to trust me and that his behavior would improve. As I search my photo album for a picture of Austin, I am struck by the fact that while I have several class pictures from that year, I have no pictures of him. It speaks to me of his distance from school, from me, and from his peers.*

*Quite soon into the school year, I called Austin's father at home to speak to him about his son's rude and violent behavior. By this time, I had been warned by my*

*colleagues of the volatile nature of this single parent. While not necessarily expecting appreciation over the phone call home, I did expect he would hear me and offer some support in dealing with his child. Instead, his reaction was awkward, angry silence.*

*Our strained communication became increasingly hostile as the year went on. Austin's father blamed me for setting his son off or for picking on him. I recall my incredulous reaction that he felt I could be to blame for his son's behavior. Certainly, as Austin grew, so did his anger. I remember the principal being present during my scheduled meetings with his father and how my interactions with his father continued to deteriorate to the point where I was fearful for my personal safety. Years later, I am struck by the lasting personal impact this negative relationship has had on me. I now also wonder about the impact it had on Beverley, Austin, and their father. (Lacey, 2007, pp. 90–93)*

### Interrupting the Dominant Plotline

During her master's program, Kelly took a course entitled *Parents and Education: Contemporary Developments and Issues*. The course centered on four themes: challenging assumptions, parents in context, parents in educational policy, and parents and curriculum (Pushor & Stelmach, 2007). It was during this course that Kelly pulled forward this story, a story that had stayed with her, a story that continued to have an effect on her years later. In relation with her instructors and her classmates, and in "conversation" with course readings, Kelly was able to tell her story—and to retell it, and retell it, and retell it—as she came to know and understand it differently.

*I recently paused to reconsider the dynamics of the relationship I had with that father through a different lens. I realize now I made many assumptions about who he was, his parental skills, his lack of involvement within the school, his anger, and his family. From my first interaction with him, I was unintentionally negative and judgmental. Upon reflection, why would I have expected the interaction between this father and me to have been any different? We had no relationship. Why would he trust me when all I did was judge his child, his parenting, and his life?*

*I realize now I missed an incredible opportunity by failing to make contact with Beverley's father during the time I taught her. That year could have been a gift, one where a positive relationship between school and home could have been nurtured, and one that allowed Beverley and her father opportunities to*

celebrate success. I wonder now, how many times did Beverley or her father receive positive phone calls or messages from the school? I did not bother to reach out because I perceived all was well at school for Beverley, and yet it would have been so simple and so potentially powerful in changing our relationship.

*The next year, while I taught Austin, I never once called home with a positive statement. Moreover, while I remember many details of this family, I cannot recall the name of the father. That in itself speaks volumes. I never valued him or his opinions, or considered for a moment that he could teach me about his children. What a loss. I was the knower, the professional. I was the empowered critic. The message I gave, the one he clearly received, was I knew best. He had no voice. It is no wonder he spoke in anger and that I in turn felt rendered voiceless by his anger, when all of our conversations were silently encircled by judgment.* (Lacey, 2007, pp. 93–95)

Kelly's telling and retelling of her story challenges us to consider what opportunities are missed, and what harm may be done, when educators continue to live out the dominant plotline in their stories of parents. Her story challenges us to consider who is rendered visible, who is validated, who finds schooling an educative process (Dewey, 1938)—and who is/does not.

### Unpacking Kelly's Story

In Kelly's story, we see her implicit beliefs about the position of educators being lived out. When she travels backward in time to her early years as a beginning teacher, she remembers herself as someone who believed she was a knower, a holder of professional knowledge, someone who knew best. In speaking of Austin's father she writes, "I never valued him or his opinions, or considered for a moment that he could teach me about his children." She expected that when she called him at home, he would hear her and offer her support. It was her knowledge of teaching and learning that she saw as central.

When Kelly recalls her concern for Austin at that point in time, she recalls her concern as being related to the classroom and school setting. "Austin would fight with kids, swear in class, and challenge me, other teachers, and administrators in seemingly any manner he could." She does not speak about wondering if he displayed this anger at home as well, or out in the community. She does not speak about wondering about or knowing what his relationship with his sister or his father was



like. She does not situate herself as knowing how Austin spent his time outside of school, other than to mention the chores he was responsible for. She expresses no wonders about links between his anger and the large responsibilities he seemed to carry in his life. Her school goals—for Austin to be respectful and to get along with others—seem to be the goals which she saw as taking priority. The place of school was the center of her concern.

In looking backward, Kelly tells us, first, of her warm relationship with Beverley and then, later, of her troubled relationship with Austin. While the potential for a relationship with the children's father began with Beverley, Kelly did not meet him until she was seeking support from him for her interactions with Austin. At the time, she saw her responsibility as being solely to the children. A relationship with the father was not deemed necessary when Beverley was her student because Beverley was compliant and doing well in school. It only became necessary to her when she wanted the father's support in responding to Austin's behavior.

Kelly's story awakens us more deeply to what is problematic when we continue to live out beliefs such as these according to the dominant plotline. What opportunities were missed? As she moves forward in time, with more years of teaching experience, now as a mother of three sons, and as a graduate student engaged in coursework on parents and education, Kelly sees the "incredible opportunity" she missed in not building a relationship with Beverley's and Austin's father. "That year could have been a gift ..."—time to nurture a positive relationship, time to celebrate strengths and successes, time to learn from one another. She recognizes now the father had knowledge to share with her about his family and his children, knowledge she could have learned from, knowledge that would have enriched her interactions with all of them and their experiences with school.

What harm may have been done? In her story Kelly says, "I realize now I made many assumptions about who he was, his parental skills, his lack of involvement within the school, his anger, and his family. From my first interaction with him, I was unintentionally negative and judgmental." She sees how, in judging him as deficit or lesser, she gave up the opportunity to build trust and a relationship with this father. Their lack of relationship led to each one blaming the other for the difficulties Austin was experiencing in school. "Austin's father blamed me for setting his son off or for picking on him. I recall my incredulous reaction that he felt I could be to blame for his son's behavior." With this statement of incredulity, Kelly implies that the fault lies elsewhere—perhaps in the home?—perhaps with the father's drinking or his parenting skills? With the need for someone to be at fault, for there to be someone who

is right and someone who is wrong, their interactions deteriorated to the point where the principal needed to be present when they met. Kelly continues to feel the lasting hurt of their negative interactions. She wonders now how the father and his children may have been hurt by it as well.

Who was rendered in/visible? As Kelly tells her story of her early experience with Beverley, Austin and their father, and then retells her story awake to assumptions and beliefs she was not conscious of at the time, she is struck by the fact she cannot find a picture of Austin in her photo album and she cannot remember the father's name. "... while I remember many details of this family, I cannot recall the name of the father. That in itself speaks volumes." These absences speak to Kelly in her present-day space and understandings. She sees now how Austin and his father were distanced from school—marginalized—given no place, or no comfortable place, on the landscape. She understands now how Austin's father's expressed anger was his attempt to be rendered visible as a knower and a decision maker in regard to his son's schooling.

Who was in/validated? In Kelly's story, we feel the emotion experienced by both Kelly and the father in their interchanges regarding Austin. "While not necessarily expecting appreciation over the phone call home, I did expect he would hear me and offer some support in dealing with his child. .... I recall my incredulous reaction that he felt I could be to blame for his son's behavior." When Kelly was not appreciated or supported by the father in her judgments of Austin's behavior and, in fact, was blamed by him for setting Austin off, she felt invalidated in her role as teacher and as a holder of professional knowledge. Feeling unsafe, she called on the school principal to be present in her interchanges with the father and to stand with her, validating her perceptions and actions in regard to Austin. Given that Kelly tells us Austin was suspended from school many times that year, it appears she was validated through the support of her principal.

Austin's father, too, felt the emotion of their interchanges. "Our strained communication became increasingly hostile as the year went on." Also feeling blamed, feeling judged as a person and as a parent, not having his opinions listened to, not being given the opportunity to have his knowledge of his child considered, Austin's father was invalidated. Unlike Kelly, he had no where else to go for support and validation. The power and position of the principal, the power inherent in the structure and hierarchy, only served to invalidate him further. Just as Austin's many suspensions over the course of that school year speak to Kelly's validation, they speak to the father's continued invalidation.

Who finds schooling an educative process—and who does not? Through Kelly's story, it appears Kelly, Austin and Austin's father all learned something about power and position through their interchanges. Kelly, centered on the school landscape, experienced the privileging afforded by power and position. Austin and his father, living in the margins of that landscape, experienced the silencing imposed by those in positions of power. Kelly believes, "The message I gave, the one [the father] clearly received, was I knew best. He had no voice." While Kelly accepts responsibility for her message, the message that educator knows best was also the message communicated by the principal, and the message inherently communicated by the hierarchical structure of the institution. Austin's and his father's experiences with the school, as a result, were mis-educative (Dewey, 1938), teaching them to anticipate that in their experiences with educators they, as family members, would be voiceless and powerless on school landscapes.

It is years later, as Kelly retells her story of Beverley, Austin, and their father, that this experience truly becomes an educative one for her. Awakening to the unconscious assumptions and beliefs at play for her then, Kelly recognizes that the family's milieu and the place of the father as a holder of knowledge about his children, their teaching and their learning was not something she saw as relevant in her former practice. Kelly's living, telling and retelling of her stories of Austin's and Beverley's father challenge her to relive those stories in present time in new ways. Her stories challenge all of us to ask new questions and to see new possibilities as we thoughtfully and deliberately break in on a dominant plotline in which parents and families are overlooked and marginalized in their children's schooling.

## Living New Stories in Relation With Parents

### Meeting Beverley's and Austin's Family

Let's imagine that in her graduate class Kelly had the opportunity to move backward in time to restory her experiences with Beverley, Austin and their father. How might Kelly have chosen to relive her stories with this family? Perhaps when Beverley became a student in Kelly's class, Kelly would have made a call home to Beverley's dad to introduce herself, and to chat with him about his family. Maybe she would have proposed having a coffee together after school as a way to get to know them better—at school, at a local coffee shop, at their home—perhaps including Austin's teacher as well. Maybe she would have invited him to write her a note, telling her important things about Beverley as an individual and a learner and what he

hoped for her that year. Maybe, given Beverley's interest in journaling, she would have asked Beverley to write about herself and her hopes and dreams, sharing her entry with her father before bringing it to Kelly at school.

With genuine interest expressed in knowing Beverley and her family, with celebratory calls, notes, and visits to the father about Beverley's contributions and accomplishments, with continued and varied invitations to the father to take part in his daughter's schooling, how might Kelly have come to know this father and his children over their time together? Would her story of him still have been a deficit story—an alcoholic who was unemployed, angry and explosive, a man deserted by the mother of his small children—a story told by others? Would her story of him instead have been a story of strength—someone working hard to love and care for his children in very difficult and complex circumstances—a story she came to know on her own?

How might Kelly's relationship with Beverley and her father, and her understanding of their family, have positioned her differently with Austin in her grade 7/8 combined class and differently in her interactions with his father when she wanted to talk with him about Austin's anger and defiance? Perhaps their strained and hostile interactions may have become a conversation.

### Imagined Parent/Teacher Conversation

*Kelly: Thanks so much for coming in. I'm trying to get to know Austin, to understand his anger, and to know how to respond to it. When he loses his temper, I just don't know what to do. What I have been doing isn't working. I need your help. I wonder if together we can figure this out.*

*(Austin's father is given time to respond, to share his knowing of Austin.)*

*Kelly: (Responding to what the father has shared with her, she asks more questions.) Can you tell me about Austin at home? Does he get angry there too? What kinds of things seem to set him off?*

*(Austin's father is given time to respond, to share his knowing of Austin.)*

*Kelly: What do you do then? As a teacher, I've learned that with some kids, when I respond directly and firmly, their pushing stops. I've learned with other kids, though, when I am direct like that, they rise to the challenge and just push back harder. I need to come to them more gently—perhaps with humor, or by giving them space or time, by stepping in quietly and privately. I'm just not sure with*

*Austin.*

*(Austin's father is given time to respond, to share his knowing of Austin.)*

*Kelly: I know that suspending Austin isn't working. I realize it just makes the problem yours and that isn't helping any of us. What else do you think I might do?*

*(Austin's father is given time to respond, to share his knowing of Austin.)*

*Kelly: A school I visited one time had an elders' program. When a child was having a tough time, that child was invited to go and spend time with the elder. The child could just go and have a cup of tea and a visit, like at a grandparent's, or play a game of cards or a board game with the elder. Is there an adult in the school Austin likes and respects that he might like to spend that kind of time with?*

*(Together, Austin's father and Kelly discuss a number of possibilities.)*

*Kelly: I really want Austin to come to trust me. I know that will take time. Do you think I might spend some time with Austin outside of school every now and then—maybe going for lunch or an after school snack, maybe doing something like going bowling with him and a friend? How do you feel about that? What kinds of things do you think he'd like to do?*

*(They make a plan, both for response to Austin's anger and for building more trust with him, a plan they both feel committed to. They leave their conversation, having learned from each other's knowledge and experience with Austin, and feeling supported in their roles as parent and teacher.)*

## Attending to a Curriculum of Family

Kelly's storying and restorying helps us to see how the curriculum commonplaces are typically lived in a way that privileges teacher knowledge and establishes the school as "the site of the 'main game'" (Cairney & Munsie, 1992, p. 1) in children's education. It also helps us to see the inherent "superordination/subordination" (Schwab, 1973, p. 509) within the commonplaces, particularly in relation to milieus existing off the school landscape. As curriculum makers, what do we need to do to situate parents in a place of equal rank within the curricular commonplaces? As curriculum makers, how do we attend to children, teaching, and learning in the context of parents and of family and community milieus just as we do in school and classroom milieus?

## Using Parent Knowledge Alongside Teacher Knowledge

Because Kelly's telling and retelling of her early career experience with Austin's father shares only her story—how she knew and understood the father, his children, their schooling, their lives at that point in time—we are not privy to what knowledge Austin's father may have also held and used in those moments. We can only wonder. What knowledge might he have held as a result of his lived experiences? What knowledge might he have garnered from single parenting his children in the intimate and complex environment of their home and their shared lives?

In the restorying of Kelly's interactions with Austin's father, she recognizes him as a knower, as someone who brings both experience with and insight into Austin's patterns of behavior. She sits alongside him as someone who also holds knowledge of children and their behaviors. While their knowledge is different, arising from varied contexts and varied experiences, Kelly and Austin's father are both positioned to talk and listen, to teach and learn, to lead and follow, to give and take. One knower or one way of knowing does not pre-empt the other. The chances they each will leave their interchange feeling affirmed and supported in their roles are greatly enhanced.

## Family and Community as Places of Learning for Educators

An important point of attention, as we work to create new stories of parents on school landscapes, is how we honor children's lives as they are lived in the context of the families and communities that surround them. When children come to us in schools they are already living multiple identities as grand/daughters or grand/sons, sisters or brothers, nephews or nieces; as orphaned, detained or wards of the system; as situated in neighborhoods, Reserves, on the streets or in other geographical places; as members of racial, cultural, religious, economic groups; and as members of other chosen communities. When they come to school, they come in this multiplicity and contextuality, not independent of it. In both direct and indirect ways, they bring their families and communities with them. Our challenge as educators is to learn to share space in classrooms and schools with all those who accompany them.

Children's education begins when they are born and is already well underway when they come to school. Schooling adds just one more element to their education. While educators have goals and outcomes for children, mandated by departments of education, reflective of principles of child development, representative of their own philosophical stance, so do parents and family members have hopes and dreams for their children and their education. What might Austin's father have wanted for his son? How might the school have helped Austin move toward his or his father's educational goals?

In new stories of school, we can invite children to bring their lives and their families to school, to tell stories of their families and to hear stories of ours, and to work toward their families' and communities' goals of education as well as our more specific goals of schooling. New stories can move us away from a narrow focus on children's academic achievement to a broad and holistic focus on children's growth and well-being. They can move us away from a stance that isolates us as educators within the walls of the school to one that invites us to move out and attend to lives and learning as "nested" (Lyons, 1990)—nested in families and communities, nested in contexts of food and housing security, labor and employment, adult literacy, the arts, culture, sports and recreation—nested in ways that both shape and are shaped by what we do in schools. New stories can invite us to ask, "How do we make the most significant contribution to children?"

## Some Closing Thoughts

The restorying of Kelly's interactions with Austin's father begins, in small ways, to reflect the benefits for him which may arise out of his interactions with Kelly. The opportunity to share what he knows about Austin, about how best to respond to Austin's anger, to have a voice in and to influence decisions being made at school about responses to Austin's outbursts all honor his right to have power and autonomy in decisions which have large impact for him and his family. As time goes on and their relationship strengthens, how might more attention be paid to what the father and the family may need or want from their engagement with the school? Perhaps Austin's father will want to spend time with Kelly in the classroom, or with the mentor they put in place for Austin, to observe and learn from their interactions with him. Perhaps as a single parent he will want to have coffee occasionally with Kelly or other school personnel who know Austin so he has someone to talk to about his joys, frustrations and the things he is trying to figure out as a parent. Perhaps he

will want to use a school computer or come in and read the school newspaper as he pursues his search for employment. Perhaps he will want to spend time in the school where he does not have to be alone or is in a safe space away from the pull of his addictions. Perhaps he will want to share with students a hobby or craft he has. Perhaps he will want to take an adult upgrading class offered in the school, get help with completing some forms, seek connections to other human services.... Kelly and the other educators will only know his purposes if they build a trusting relationship with him, if they truly listen—and if they ask him.

In the restorying, we see the benefits of attending to the agendas, the needs and wants, of parents and families at the same time we attend to the agenda of the school. Kelly is stronger because she now has the support of Austin's father and she is learning from what he knows. Austin's father is stronger because he is being listened to, asked for input, learning from Kelly, and being honored as a human being with worth. Austin and Beverley are stronger because there is less anger in their lives and more unified attention being paid to their success and well-being, in school and outside of it. The restorying reflects what I believe was Schwab's (1973) conceptualization of the four curricular commonplaces as being equal in rank and coordinated. Each "vital factor" (p. 509) is attended to when the work of teachers and schools is done relationally and situated in the midst of families and communities. Children, parents and families, educators and schools are all strengthened in this new plotline.

With Kelly's telling and retelling of her story, we challenged ourselves to consider what opportunities are missed, and what harm may be done, when educators continue to live out a dominant plotline in their stories of parents. We challenged ourselves to consider who is rendered in/visible, who is in/validated, who finds schooling an educative process—and who is/does not. I believe we have responsibility to ask ourselves these same questions about the curriculum of teacher education, both preservice and inservice. What opportunities are missed, and what harm may be done, when we do not develop and implement a teacher education curriculum that invites educators to tell, and then to retell and relive their stories of parents in ways that create relational and socially just educational experiences? Without a teacher education curriculum that attends as equally to milieus, particularly those of family and community, as it does to the other commonplaces, who will continue to be rendered in/visible in our schools, who will continue to be in/validated, and for whom will schooling be a mis/educative process?



## Notes

1. See, as examples, the work of Clandinin and Connelly, Clark, Cochran-Smith, and Lytle, Hollingsworth, Loughran, Russell, and Schulman.
2. In February 2009, Elise Hoey, an undergraduate research assistant, searched the Web sites of Faculties of Education in representative universities across Canada (University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, University of Saskatchewan, University of Manitoba, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE]/University of Toronto, McGill University, University of New Brunswick, St. Francis Xavier University, University of Prince Edward Island, and Memorial University) to determine what courses developed around the topic of working with parents are being offered in undergraduate and graduate programs.
3. See, for example, EADM 425 Legal and Institutional Contexts of Education (University of Saskatchewan, 2008-2009) or ED 5062 Cultural Constructions of Childhood (University of New Brunswick, 2008-2009).

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# The Inquiry-Based Science Pedagogy Debate

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## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

The science curriculum reform by Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) mandates the use and evaluates the performance of students in activities that would be defined as inquiry-based. This article discusses the importance of using inquiry-based laboratory experiments and assesses the challenges that teachers face when using this type of pedagogy.

Last March I attended the annual National Science Teachers' Association conference in Boston. At the conference store, I eagerly picked up and bought the book *Teaching Inquiry-Based Chemistry* by Joan Gallagher-Bolos and Dennis Smithenry (2004). As I had been teaching chemistry for ten years and have struggled with designing inquiry-based laboratory experiments that linked directly to the curriculum, I was excited to explore any new ideas.

As I flipped to the first chapter and read the description of the inquiry-based experiment that these teachers had created for their grade 12 chemistry classes, I quickly became disillusioned by the content and left the rest of the book unread. The inquiry-based activity had the class perform the following task for the duration of one month near the end of the school year: "In a cost-effective and creative manner, your company is to produce two pounds of packaged, quality soap that meets and appeals to the consumers' demands of a specific soap market" (Gallagher-Bolos & Smithenry, 2004, p. 15). The teachers organized the students into groups based on different jobs required to meet the goal: research scientists, engineers, accounting, marketing, advertising, public relations, plant manager, science supervisor, business supervisor and quality control supervisor. Gallagher-Bolos and Smithenry presented

the students with clear objectives and well-defined tasks. They also gave clear instructions to other teachers running a similar course about the role of the teacher: to act as facilitator and to limit intervention in class decisions.

Why did I dismiss this book so quickly, when it had received accolades from well-respected college educators in chemistry? My first reaction to this soap project was that there was very little science content covered in the month-long project. While some students worked on the production of soap, others were involved in more project-management types of roles. This project integrated many work and social team-building skills into the study of soap. From my own experience, I have found that inquiry-based laboratory sessions are often time consuming for the amount of content the students are able to cover. For the past number of years, the province of Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) (2008) has been implementing a new educational reform. This new curriculum mandates the use of inquiry-based learning activities to study the curriculum content. Students are encouraged from grade seven through eleven to study science using experiments and models that they have developed on their own or in a group. Students are expected to be evaluated on their competency to seek solutions to scientific problems. But is inquiry-based pedagogy an effective and efficient way to learn about science and evidence-based scientific inquiry?

In this paper I will define inquiry-based education, and I will discuss the advantages of inquiry-based learning activities and challenges to implementing this approach in the context of the Quebec science curriculum. Three theoretical principles on how students learn science, developed by the (American) National Research Council (Donovan & Bransford, 2005) provide the framework for my analysis of the arguments for and against inquiry-based pedagogy.

## **Inquiry-Based Education**

Inquiry-based science is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1910, John Dewey discussed the importance of teaching science through scientific inquiry rather than the instruction of scientific facts (Olson & Loucks-Horsley, 2000). Joseph Schwab, a science educator in the 1960s also emphasized the role of experimentation in the development of scientific understanding. The National Science Education Standards defines inquiry-based education as the following,

Inquiry is at the heart of the *National Science Education Standards*. The Standards seek to promote curriculum, instruction, and assessment models

that enable teachers to build on children's natural, human inquisitiveness. In this way, teachers can help all their students understand science as a human endeavor, acquire the scientific knowledge and thinking skills important in everyday life and, if their students so choose, in pursuing a scientific career (Olson & Loucks-Horsley, 2000, p. 6).

The guidelines for teaching science inquiry follow the thought processes of many scientists. They initially create a question from their background knowledge. To analyze this question they propose a hypothesis to explain the phenomenon. They then design an investigation to test their hypothesis. They gather data and they propose an explanation to the problem based on an evaluation of the evidence. They consider other explanations and compare their ideas to the other models. The scientist then communicates his/her findings and continues to test the explanation. Student objectives for inquiry-based activities at the high school level from the National Science Education Standards are listed in the table below. Teachers act more as facilitators rather than providers of information in inquiry-based activities.

### **Content Standard for Science as Inquiry: Fundamental Abilities Necessary to Do Scientific Inquiry**

Grades 9–12

- Identify questions and concepts that guide scientific investigations.
- Design and conduct scientific investigations.
- Use technology and mathematics to improve investigations and communications.
- Formulate and revise scientific explanations and models using logic and evidence.
- Recognize and analyze alternative explanations and models.
- Communicate and defend a scientific argument.

(Olson & Loucks-Horsley, 2000, p. 19)

### **How Students Learn Science**

The (American) National Research Council produced a series of articles analyzing how students learn in science, mathematics and history. Donovan and Bransford's (2005) analysis led them to propose three general principles of learning, particularly in the sciences: engaging prior understanding, the essential role of factual knowledge, and the importance of self-monitoring for understanding.

## Principle #1: Engaging Prior Understandings

“Students come into the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concept” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 1). Many of our everyday experiences create misconceptions about specific concepts in science. For example, many students in chemistry believe that an ice cube would melt faster in a salt solution than in distilled water. They would give the evidence that we put salt on the roads in the winter to melt the ice. Students’ prior knowledge understanding of the concept must be addressed in order to evoke a conceptual change.

## Principle #2: The Essential Role of Factual Knowledge and Conceptual Frameworks in Understanding

This principle places an emphasis on the subject matter, the understanding of the material and the links between content and comprehension. In science it is the “knowledge of what it means to do science” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 402). This idea stresses the importance of scientific inquiry that enables students to link observations with the desired concepts. If students study the melting process of the ice cube in both salt water and distilled water, they find that the ice cube in the salt water melts at a slower rate. The students can then test theories that they may have through experimentation. The process of experimenting may help them learn more about the concept. Factual knowledge in the area of study is imperative to this principle. Students must have enough background knowledge so that they can produce some reasonable theories and ways to test their ideas.

## Principle #3: The Importance of Self-Monitoring

For students to improve their understanding of a concept, they must be aware of how they learn and remember information. In science, concepts are abstract and often difficult to comprehend. In chemistry, for example, models are often used to explain the structure of molecules at the atomic level. When using models, students must be aware that there are limitations to these models. Students need to reflect on their own understanding and comprehension. Teachers need to “help

students compare their personal ways of knowing with those developed through centuries of scientific inquiry” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 411).

### The Advantages of Inquiry-Based Science Activities

Inquiry-based science learning is active learning. Students take on the role of the scientist to develop their understanding of the scientific method. Evidence in the literature of the advantages of using inquiry-based laboratories is widespread (DeHart-Hurd, 1997; Gallagher-Bolos & Smithenry, 2004; Donovan & Bransford, 2005). Inquiry experiences enable students: to build on their prior knowledge, to develop understanding and attain a high level of content or conceptual understanding. In addition, this pedagogy allows for the integration of the science curriculum into societal issues and gives students their own voice and self-awareness in the classroom.

Students often enter the science classroom with preconceived ideas about science and their physical world. Many of these ideas have come from their own observations of their environment around them. Students are able to address preconceived ideas about scientific concepts through inquiry-based laboratory experiments. “Simply telling students what scientists have discovered, for example, is not sufficient to support change in their existing preconceptions about scientific phenomena” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 398). For example, most students would believe that two objects of the same size but of different masses, such as a 50-g ball and a 5-kg ball, held at the same height would fall at different rates depending on their mass. If students drop these balls from the same height and record the time it takes for the balls to hit the ground, they quickly see that the objects fall at the same rate. If the concept is explained to students but not demonstrated or experienced they may be able to memorize the law; however, they may resort back to their faulty preconceptions because they trust their instinct that a heavier object would fall at a faster rate over the newly memorized concept. This idea links directly to the first principles of how students learn. “Learning experiences need to develop from first hand concrete experiences to the more distant or abstract” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 512). Students need to see the link from their prior knowledge to the new concept. This link can be facilitated through an inquiry-based lab.

Students need the opportunity to think as scientists. Often in science classes, we tend to “emphasize teaching and learning of science, at the expense of learning about science and to do science” (Bencze & Di Giuseppe, 2006, p. 336). Bencze and Di Giuseppe argue that we teach scientific facts; however, little time is devoted to scientific inquiry. Many of the laboratory experiments that the students perform in class

are already developed and written in laboratory manuals. The students follow the set of “recipe-like” instructions and note the observations. In chemistry, it is often particularly difficult to see the connection between the observations and the concept studied. Because most observations in chemistry are indirect (such as a colour change in a reaction), students are challenged to see the link between the observation (colour change) and the concept (evidence of a chemical reaction). These step-by-step laboratory sessions do not fall into the category of inquiry-based ones. These guided laboratory sessions do not allow the student to create, observe and reason on their own. These are key components of the second principle of how students learn science. Students need to see science as “a process of inquiry rather than inquiry time” (Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 405). They need to develop their imagination and reasoning skills. This development will enable them to conceptualize and visualize the models that are developed in science because they have been pushed to create their own models and ideas about a specific phenomenon. A study (Ogan-Bekirouglu & Sengul-Turgut, 2008) of grade 9 physics students found that they were able to develop higher-level thinking using inquiry-based laboratories. “Results indicated that teaching methods and strategies based on constructivist approach (inquiry based laboratories) helped the students move their epistemological beliefs in physics through upper levels” (p. 1). Students engaged through inquiry-based activities will be pushed to think like scientists. Through this inquiry, they are able to work on their observational, imagination and reasoning skills. This skill development in my opinion will help them reach a higher level of thinking such as conceptualization of the models—an ability essential to understanding science.

DeHart-Hurd (1997) argues that the American national science standards need to be revised for our changing world. He states that students need to see the link between science and real-life situations. The disconnection between the workplace and school is a detriment to science education:

What is required is an assortment of higher level thinking skills a number of which can be developed from a study of science in a work context. These are also skills required of students to achieve economic success in life (p. 10).

Inquiry-based laboratory sessions such as the soap project allow the student to study science using a real-life situation. Inquiry-based laboratory sessions can be used in the development of the integrated curriculum. Scientific discoveries and decisions made by scientists have a huge influence on our society. We cannot study the sciences in isolation; we must integrate societal and economic influences of science in the science classroom. DeHart-Hurd argues for the use of real-life situations in the study of science.



Since our founding, school science has been taught in the context of America as a producer of new knowledge about the natural world. Today the focus changes to developing learning skills that are essential for a consumer who utilizes science information. This means the subject matter of science is selected for its value in resolving personal, social, and economic problems, and for augmenting our adaptive capacities as human beings (DeHart-Hurd, 1997, p. 80).

Real-life inquiry-based problems allow for true curriculum integration. Take the current environmental and economic crisis as an example. Each decision made to improve our environment requires major economic changes. Giving the content social significance enables students to see the relevance of what they are learning. Students may also discover that the work of scientists is linked to our society.

Tools have meaning only when their usefulness is understood: indeed their meaning lies in what they can be used to do. This means that students should grapple with the problems first and learn to use the tools as they find them helpful (Parsons, 2004, p. 778).

If concepts are repeated, inquiry-based labs allow the student to reinforce knowledge by applying these theories to different situations. This type of activity is a key component of the second principle of learning that states that the linkage of content to concept through different activities reinforces understanding.

“Effective learning requires that students take control over their own learning” (Gallagher-Bolos & Smithenry, 2004, p. 90). In the soap activity, Gallagher-Bolos and Smithenry found that the students were encouraged to look at their own skills as students and as contributors to the class during their inquiry experience. Students offered positive feedback to being given the opportunity to learn and make decisions independently. One student commented, “I really enjoyed doing this project. It was the ultimate test to see if we could learn and work on our own. Nobody’s ever given me that opportunity before. I didn’t even know what I was capable of” (Gallagher-Bolos & Smithenry, 2004, p. 28). The ability to monitor our own capacity to learn is the key component of the third principle on how students learn science. When students take control of their learning situation, they are forced to assess their development, an essential skill to learn.

Inquiry-based activities address all three principles of how students learn. The laboratory sessions enable students to use prior knowledge to study new material

that is fundamental to addressing preconceptions in science, the first principle. Students who use inquiry-based labs act as scientists, a key component of the second principle. Asking their own questions and reasoning through observations enables students to develop skills that lead to higher-order thinking. Often these activities help integrate other social topics to the sciences. Students are able to see the relevance of the scientific material they are studying. Giving students a chance to work independently forces them to evaluate themselves as learners. This covers the third and final principle of how students learn, that of metacognition, teaching students to take control of their own learning.

## The Challenges of Inquiry-Based Science Activities

Bencze and Giuseppe (2006) studied the implementation of inquiry-based pedagogy in the science department at a school in Ontario whose mandate was to encourage teachers to use inquiry-based, self-directed learning. They found the science department had difficulty carrying out the mandate despite support from its administration.

Why is there resistance by science teachers to use inquiry-based laboratory sessions when the research literature supports this method of teaching as an effective way for students to learn? Bencze and Giuseppe outline a number of challenges and obstacles that teachers must address when they decide to use inquiry-based activities. Three major concerns which impeded the use of inquiry-based laboratory sessions were found to be: the fear of the inability to address the content of the course using this pedagogy, the challenges of designing effective inquiry-based laboratories, and demands for a more traditional approach from the students and parents.

In the past four years the Quebec government has redesigned the science curriculum for grades seven through eleven. One of the primary changes is that the students are to use inquiry-based activities to develop their understanding of the material. Inquiry-based laboratories take time. Rather than giving a twenty-minute didactic lecture on the topic, two or three classes would be necessary to have the students arrive at the same conclusion. While this development would not be considered a waste of time, the curriculum is loaded with content that must be covered. Teachers struggle with the task of covering the intense content list mandated by the government using this more time-consuming teaching process. Bencze and Di

Giuseppe found the same problem arising in the Ontario school. One teacher voiced the following concerns:

I know that there is a worry and fear [amongst teachers]. There is a brand new curriculum for grade nine and it is chock-full [of content], and [teachers ask,] How is it all going to be covered? And are kids going to be prepared the same as everybody [else]? If kids have to go out there and do it on their own, then how do you know it is getting done? (Bencze & Di Giuseppe, 2006, p. 349).

Teachers are receiving a mixed message. For inquiry-based activities to be successful, students need the time to explore. The amount of content in the curriculum needs to reflect the desired pedagogy. Curriculum planners will have to decide what concepts are core topics rather than insisting that the teachers cover all concepts presently mandated. This issue is fundamental to the second principle of how students learn. Factual information is essential for students to develop an understanding of the concept. If too much content is placed in the curriculum, teachers will avoid using inquiry-based activities in order to address the required material.

Inquiry-based experiments are challenging to develop. Bencze and Di Giuseppe looked at the laboratory activities that the science teachers were using in their classrooms. Rather than use laboratory sessions that promoted science inquiry, the students were given activities that focused on technological designs (inventions) and laboratory sessions that were teacher-directed and closed-ended. The authors' rationale was that "these teachers preferred to preserve the integrity of professional science and its products (laws and theories)" (Bencze & Di Giuseppe, 2006, p. 347). Teachers were worried that students with misconceptions would continue to explore and look for evidence that proved their misconceptions true rather than revise their theory towards the scientifically proven truth. Secondly, many teachers felt that some students left on their own path may become distracted and off-task. Reflecting back on principle one of how students learn, it is important to address the students' misconceptions. Some theories in science are very complex. A more teacher-instructed approach may help direct the students through their misconceptions rather than having them spend hours trying to disprove their views.

Egan in his article, "Competing voices for the curriculum" (1966), discusses how the influences of different "stakeholders" in education can direct the curriculum. In the case of the Ontario school, the stakeholders that resisted the inquiry-based laboratory sessions were the students and the parents. "Ninth grade students at

Beaverbrook seemed to have deeply ingrained expectations that it was a teacher's job to regulate their learning" (Bencze & Di Giuseppe, 2006, p. 352). Students were concerned that they would not "learn anything" and "get frustrated" using inquiry-based laboratories. They preferred the more teacher-directed approach and instruction-based laboratories. Parents of Beaverbrook students were concerned about the level of academic standards their children would receive in a less-guided environment. They too promoted a more didactic and teacher-led class.

When reflecting back on the book *Teaching Inquiry-Based Chemistry*, I too had many reservations and questions regarding inquiry-based labs such as the soap lab. Can I fit these types of laboratories into a busy content-based curriculum? What do I do with students who get off track conceptually with the lab or are socially distracted or disinterested? How do I explain spending so much time on one concept to my administration, and parents? How do I go about designing an inquiry-based lab that challenges students yet is possible to do in the classroom? These questions and doubts may make it challenging for a teacher to feel confident implementing inquiry-based laboratories in their classroom.

## Conclusion

As in Egan's article there are two opposing views as to how science should be taught. If one focuses on viewpoints of the different stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, school boards, etc.—it is difficult to make any decisions about the best teaching approach. Egan believes that we must look at the differences in viewpoints in terms of theories of pedagogy before we can discuss the issues. Bencze and Di Giuseppe state that the issues about inquiry-based education stem from opposing views of science education.

It is apparent to us that the resistance residing in these various entities indicates the existence of at least two opposing ideological camps; that is, a collection of people whose views about education largely place students in the role of knowledge consumers and those who believe that education should—in addition to knowledge consumption—involve significant *knowledge production* by students (Bencze & Di Giuseppe, 2006, p. 355).

It has been argued that inquiry-based science is a method of pedagogy that allows the student to be a "knowledge producer" in the class. This teaching approach

addresses the three principles of how students learn science. However, the amount of content in most science curriculum places students as “knowledge consumers.” These opposing views place teachers in a difficult predicament.

Gallagher-Bolos and Smithenry argue that the teacher can work through these opposing views. They do not promote an entire curriculum devoted to inquiry-based laboratories but suggest integrating small inquiry-based activities throughout the year. These laboratories are intertwined by didactic lessons and teacher-directed activities.

An international symposium was held in 2002 which discussed inquiry in science education (Abd-El-Khalick et al., 2004). There were two suggestions that arose from this discussion that may help teachers in Quebec. The first proposal stated it was imperative to provide education for teachers on inquiry-directed laboratories:

Most science teachers have never directly experienced authentic scientific inquiry during their education in the sciences or within teacher education programs ... Teachers need to be well versed in scientific inquiry as a teaching approach, a set of process skills, and a content area” (Abd-El-Khalick et al., 2004, p. 404).

When mandating this new curriculum, our government must support teachers with instruction on how to design and use inquiry-based experiences effectively. Secondly, teaching inquiry may not always require an inquiry-based laboratory. The authors suggest that students perform a more teacher-directed scientific investigation and follow this laboratory with reflective journal writing about their understanding of the laboratory. According to the authors there is empirical evidence which demonstrates that this form of pedagogy will help students improve their concept of scientific inquiry (Abd-El-Khalick et al., 2004).

In conclusion, teachers should be encouraged to use inquiry-based activities in their science classes. Learning of science and higher-level thinking is promoted when students are pushed to develop their own understanding, when they have to think as scientists. However, it is important when writing a high school science curriculum that mandates inquiry-based laboratory sessions that the content in the curriculum be lowered to respect the time need for such inquiry. Teachers will struggle if the content is too demanding for an inquiry-based approach. When this is the situation, it is the inquiry-based laboratories that are eliminated, not the content.

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# Listening to Children—Learning From Children

Cathrine Le Maistre & Diane Sprackett, McGill University

## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This article reports the experience of a teacher and researcher who instituted a problem-posing component in her Grade 2/3 mathematics class with the help of a glove puppet, “Sylvester.” The activities, based largely on the intuition of an expert teacher, are substantiated by the literature on problem posing. The authors describe what happened in the classroom and some of the benefits of the strategy. Among the most important of these benefits was what the teacher learned about the children and their understanding of mathematics by listening to what they were saying.

## Introduction

“It is no great secret that many people have a considerable fear of mathematics or at least a wish to establish a healthy distance from it.”

(Brown & Walter, 1990, p. 5)

All teachers of mathematics would like to reduce the distance between learners and the mathematics in their curriculum and to do so as early as possible in the children’s school careers. Children may develop skills in processing numbers mechanically but come to a halt when they are confronted with word problems. The knowledge that problem solving is improved when students pose their own problems is not new (Brown & Walter, 1990, 1993; Silverman, Winograd, & Strohauer, 1992), and there was considerable interest in the topic during the 1990s (English, 1997a, 1997b; Silver, 1997; Silver & Cai, 1996), supported by the *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (NCTM, 1989). Silver (1994) gave five benefits of having students pose their own problems: the connection

to creativity and exceptional mathematics ability; the improvement of students' problem solving; the ability to observe students' understanding of mathematics; to improve students' disposition towards mathematics; to develop autonomous learners. English (1997b) cites evidence that encouraging children to pose problems

can foster more diverse and flexible thinking, enhance students' problem-solving skills, broaden their perceptions of mathematics, and enrich and consolidate basic concepts....provide us with important insights into children's understanding of mathematical concepts and processes, as well as their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, problem solving and mathematics in general. (p.183)

But as Lowrie (2002) points out, most of the studies from the 1990s investigated children who were older than 10 years of age. Do younger children achieve the same benefits? Can young children compose mathematical problems? And how can children, especially young children, be given the opportunity and confidence to pose problems?

In this paper, we would like to share the experiences of Diane Sprackett, who set up her Grade 2/3 mathematics curriculum so that children could develop and solve their own problems in a non-threatening environment. We will describe what she did and by sharing Diane's words and showing some examples of the children's problems and their problem-solving strategies, we will describe some of the things we learned, and propose some benefits of her strategy. We will then propose that what Diane did from intuition has a well-established theory base, and that she foreshadowed the type of activity advocated in the recently revised curriculum in Quebec (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2001). This curriculum is based on a socio-constructivist approach and on the development of competencies within and across disciplines. Two of the cross-curricular competencies are problem solving and communication, and these are especially relevant in the mathematics curriculum from Kindergarten through Grade 11. Several years before the revised curriculum was implemented, Diane's classroom practice showed that she was encouraging children to construct their own knowledge, as well as breaking down the silos between disciplines.



## Background

At the time Diane started the activities that we are describing, she had been teaching in elementary school for 18 years. She had always been especially interested in Language Arts, but two events prompted her interest in her students' learning of mathematics. A resource teacher was assigned to Diane's class to help her with some children with special needs and when the resource teacher probed individual children with questions like: "How did you get that answer?" Diane listened to some of the answers and recognized the variety of strategies that the children were bringing to the solution of mathematics problems. This made her conscious of the need to take the children's strategies into account to help her to assess their understanding. She had this in mind when she was asked to work on a committee to plan changes in the evaluation of mathematics in her school board's elementary schools. In her own class, she looked for ways to encourage children to talk about their mathematics and share the variety of their problem-solving strategies but she realized that sharing seemed to be much easier for them in story time than it was in mathematics.

Then came the Aha! experience. She had been using a teddy bear as a motivator for the children to create stories and thought, since the teddy bear had been so successful in creating stories, why not find an equivalent to help create mathematics questions? The idea was born—Sylvester the mathematician was bought!



Fig. 1: Sylvester

Early in the term, Diane modeled story problems that were relevant to the other class activities to give them ideas for contexts that might be fertile ground for mathematics problems. Then Diane said:

*I'm tired of making up all these math problems, but Sylvester LOVES to make up problems. Would someone like to take home Sylvester the mathematician with his problem book tonight and make up a problem that we could solve tomorrow?*

Children volunteered to take home Sylvester and an artist's pad so that Sylvester could make up a problem in his mathematics journal and the child could draw him and write out the problem and its solution. This became a pattern for the year and each child had the chance to set at least three problems during the year. There were two rules: The problem had to be one that the child knew how to solve, and he or she had to try it out on someone at home before bringing it to class. Unlike Brown (1984) and Silver (1994), Diane felt that posing the problem was not enough on its own: the child posing the problem had to be able to solve it as well. Sylvester quickly became so popular that Diane often had to help children plan their time by asking:

*Is this really a good night for you? Or do you have Brownies? Swimming? Some other activity?*

In mathematics class, the child (and Sylvester) read the question to the class, while Diane documented key information on the blackboard. The class asked extra questions for clarification and help, before trying to solve the problem. For example, Sara's<sup>1</sup> question was not clear enough:

My dad had 6 pens. I had 10. My mom had 7. And my sister stole 4 pens from all of us. How many are left?

Did her sister steal 4 pens? Or 12 pens? The children needed to ask appropriate questions and Sara needed to clarify her thoughts so that the rest of the class could understand and solve her problem.

Sometimes the problems became impossibly complex if "Sylvester" tried to show off. The confusion of coins and dollars in Figure 2 suggests that Jake was more interested in the story of "Jim and the Beanstalk" (Briggs, 1970) that the children had been reading in class than in posing a problem that anyone could answer:



Fig. 2: Jake's first problem

When the problem was too complicated for the problem poser, Diane might say tactfully:

*You and Sylvester sound like you're a little lost, do you want to have another go at this? Let's not make it so complicated that we stop having fun.*

Then Sylvester went home for a second evening with no penalty to the child. The goal was to have children develop authentic problems that were mind-stretching, but not for the developer to show off. Even so, some of the problems demonstrated remarkably sophisticated mathematics.

After a second attempt, Jake's problem was much more amenable to solution (see Figure 3).

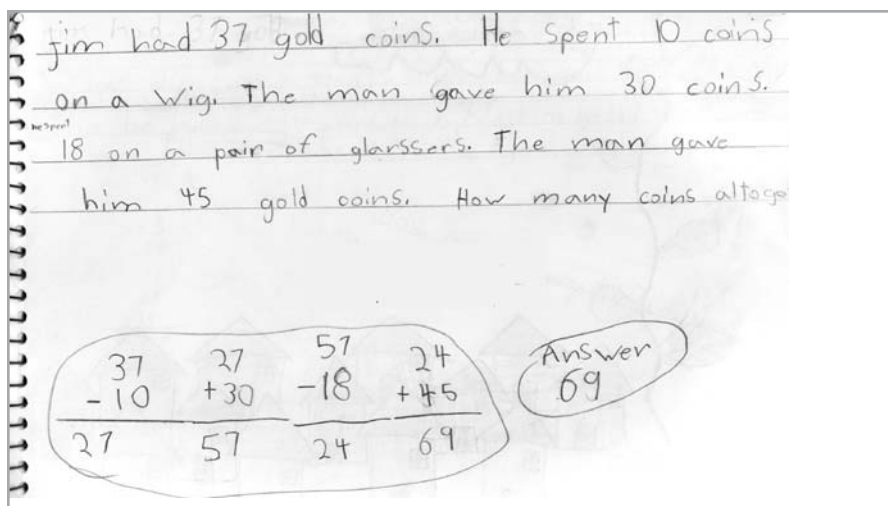


Fig. 3: Jake's second problem

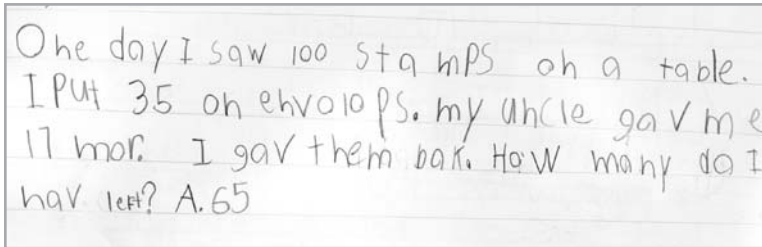
When the problem was defined clearly enough, the children usually returned to their tables where they worked in groups around a big sheet of newsprint to solve the problem. This encouraged children to work together and to talk to each other about what they were doing. Diane cut up these sheets of newsprint to add to each child's portfolios, and to give her information if she had not had the opportunity to talk to that particular child during the class. By using these sheets of newsprint in conjunction with the work they had done in Sylvester's mathematics journal, Diane was able to assess the children's progress during the year. Manipulative materials were always available, as well as a laminated hundreds chart and a number line at each table and on the classroom wall. Diane circulated and tried to give time to every child. At **the very** least she visited every table, to see that everybody was contributing, and to identify anyone who was completely lost. The following quotations are typical of her conversation with different children:

*How could these manipulatives help you solve the problem? -- Find someone else at your table. Get them to explain to you how they did the problem. -- Show me another way you could do it.*

After all the children had the opportunity to try the problem, they would reconvene to discuss their solutions and share their strategies with the whole class. Then Diane's conversation included questions like:

*Who tried it a different way? -- We'll talk about the answer eventually, but what I'm most interested in is HOW you got your answer. -- Or if you haven't got the final answer yet, I'm interested in what you've done so far and how far you've got.*

Some children became good at including red herrings in their problems, but the class also became good at detecting them. Brian's extra 17 stamps did not confuse them for long (see Figure 4),



One day I saw 100 stamps on a table.  
I put 35 on envelopes. my uncle gave me  
17 more. I gave them back. How many do I  
have left? A. 65

Fig. 4: Brian's stamp problem

Clearly, they did not confuse Brian either:

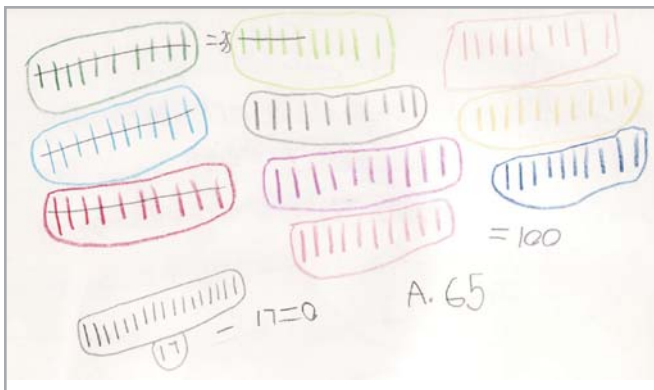


Fig. 5: Brian's solution

In Brian's solution, we can see that he is well on the way to making the transitions among using manipulatives, translating the manipulatives into symbols, and translating the symbols into numbers. Diane's relaxed and extensive use of manipulatives (LEGO®, straws, plastic bag ties, bottle caps, etcetera) made this transition a natural process that individual children could undertake when they were ready, not according to an arbitrary date.

Being very sensitive to the fragile egos of young mathematicians, Diane used much indirect teaching and many gentle offers of help:

*Would you like me to help you find another way to solve this?*

But she made a mistake when she criticized Daniel's problem.

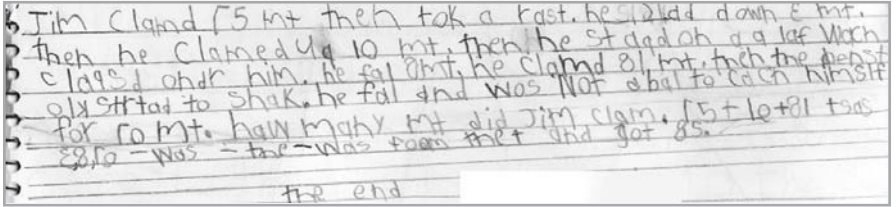


Fig. 6: Daniel's difficult problem

Daniel was new to classroom life, having been home-schooled for a year. He began the year as a non-reader and his invented spelling made his work very difficult to understand, so we will “translate” his first problem that was based on “Jim and the Beanstalk.”

Jim climbed 75 m then took a rest. He slid down 3 m then he climbed up 10 m. Then he stood on a leaf which collapsed under him. He fell 8 m then the beanstalk started to shake. He fell and was not able to catch himself for 70 m. How many metres did Jim climb?

His answer could be translated as:

75 + 10 + 81 pluses. 3, 8, 70 minuses. Minus the minuses from the plus and get 85,

but in the bustle of the class, Diane could not do the necessary translation quickly enough, and suggested that Daniel try again. An angry and upset Daniel went home saying: “SHE didn’t understand it.” In his next problem, his father helped him to lay out the answer so that Diane *could* understand it.

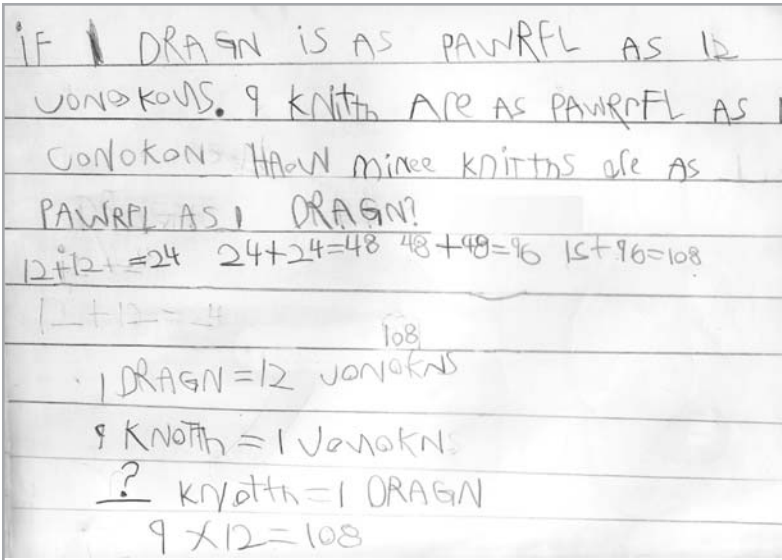


Fig. 7: Daniel's second problem

Again we will attempt a translation of Daniel's words:

If 1 dragon is as powerful as 12 vongkons (?) and 9 kittens are as powerful as 1 vongkon, how many kittens are as powerful as 1 dragon?

$$12 + 12 = 24 \quad 24 + 24 = 48 \quad 48 + 48 = 96 \quad 12 + 96 = 108$$

$$1 \text{ dragon} = 12 \text{ vongkons}$$

$$9 \text{ kittens} = 1 \text{ vongkon}$$

$$? \text{ kittens} = 1 \text{ dragon}$$

$$9 \times 12 = 108$$

Daniel's solution shows that although he could not yet multiply  $9 \times 12$  (the last lines were added with his father's help), he had an amazingly sophisticated grasp of algebra and ratio and could keep track of successive additions. The message from Daniel's work was: ask children how they got an answer and then listen carefully to their explanations to find out what mathematics they know.

Because this was a multi-age, multi-level class, Diane was dealing with a wide range of abilities and problem-posing skills, from Sara to Daniel and Brian. Like Ellerton (1986), Diane found that the more able children developed, talked about, and solved more complex problems than weaker students, and could communicate

about them better in conversation. The range of problem difficulty provided insights into the abilities of the problem-positors as well as the solvers and Diane decided that occasionally giving children problems that are beyond their abilities gives a lot of information regarding their *understanding* of mathematics. Unlike many of the mechanical exercises found in textbooks, they could not solve Sylvester's problems by simply taking a recently learned algorithm and applying it to two numbers. Yet they could often develop their own algorithms and apply them appropriately.

## Benefits of This Approach

"I do believe that problems are the heart of mathematics, and I hope that as teachers... we will train our students to be better problem posers and problem solvers than we are." (Halmos, 1980, p. 524)

In allowing so much time for developing good problem posers and solvers, other aspects of mathematics were not neglected. There was still a place in the daily mathematics lessons for learning strategies, dealing with misconceptions and using the textbook as a resource, but as Diane reflected on the children and their problem posing, and as we later discussed her strategies, many benefits became clear to us, making the time spent worthwhile. At a superficial level, children were learning to be realistic in planning the time available to them when they volunteered to take Sylvester home. On a deeper level, they were taking the initiative in their own learning and setting the agenda for their mathematics class. We will list some of the more salient advantages that we observed with more examples of the students' work.

### 1. Connections with the child's world

Modeling questions at the beginning of the year had led Diane to ask—and to propose an answer to—the question:

*What's a real problem? -- The standard textbook example is: "If you went to the store..." or "...Farmer Brown has 15 cows..."*

*It's better, because it's more relevant to the children, to start with: "The lunchroom can only take  $x$  children. Can it hold Mrs Gray's class and Mr Hackett's class and ...?" or "Camp is going to cost \$40 each...." You know they're doing math, they think they're just going to camp.*



In brief, we should be conscious of things that are happening around the children that are mathematics problems and that are relevant to them, rather than relying on problems contrived by textbook authors for generic classrooms. Having them compose their own problems was a way to allow children to draw from their own worlds. When the child has made the connection with his or her own world, the problems are truly an intellectual challenge that is worth accepting, or an “intrinsic motivation” (Kilpatrick, 1985).

## 2. Children develop their own strategies according to their own abilities

There are many instances from Diane’s class of children developing their own methods for solving their problems, showing that they are truly constructing their own knowledge. We will give two examples:

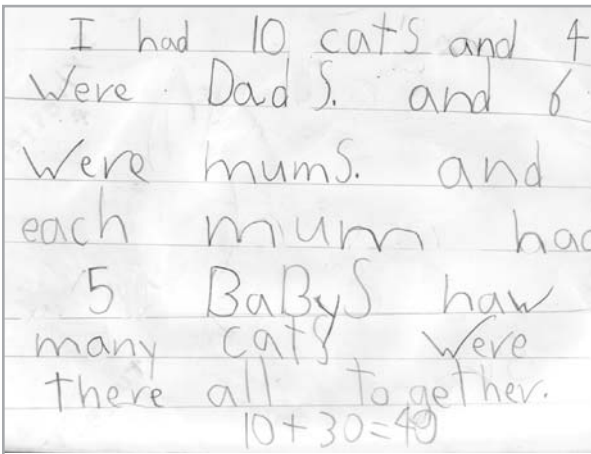


Fig. 8: Jake’s baby cats

On the page that gave the solution to this problem, Jake had solved the problem of multiplying 5 by 6—an operation he had not yet learned formally—by drawing six cats’ heads and making five dashes alongside each of them.

Paolo’s solution to his problem is an impressive indicator of his sense of place value and his ability to manipulate 3-digit subtraction, again, an operation that had not been taught to the class.

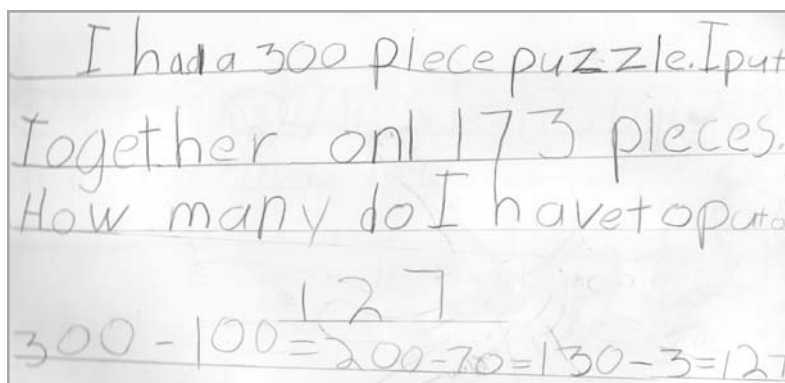


Fig. 9: Paolo's solution

### 3. Process, not product is emphasized

Because Diane's class had a wide range of ages and abilities, some children set 4-step problems that others could not even approach. When they first listened to the problem, Diane observed the children's reactions and asked

*Who's feeling totally overwhelmed?*

Children were quite honest about where they were in mathematics, so they made the decision about how much they could do. Then weaker students were told:

*Just go this far.*

Children were not upset by this, as Diane constantly emphasized:

*I'm looking for your strategies. You don't have to get an answer.*

But her method also gave the opportunity for some students to shine. As well as children like Sara and Jake, whose work has been shown earlier, there were also children like Bora, whose first problem has tricked many adults who have seen it:

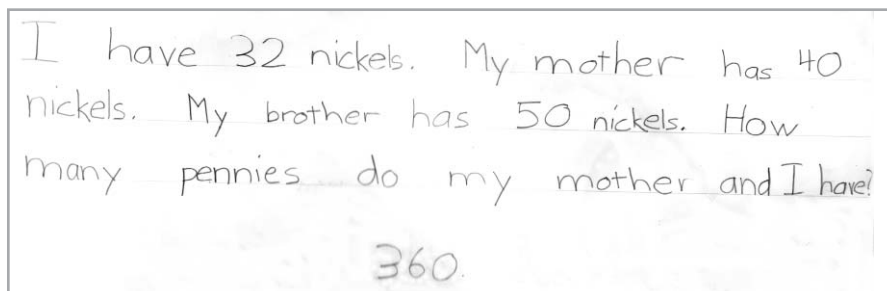


Fig. 10: Bora's first problem

It would be difficult to find a textbook with a range of problems that would serve such a range of children, yet teachers are faced with this spectrum of abilities on a daily basis.

#### **4. Assessment is authentic**

Walking around and observing the children's work at their tables gave Diane an overview of their abilities, and she recorded these observations on sticky notes to add to their portfolios and supplement their newsprint solutions. Most interesting was the opportunity to note how different children saw the same problem and applied different strategies. By emphasizing process, and by encouraging different solution strategies, Diane was able to probe the children's understanding and to assess their knowledge of mathematics.

#### **5. Learning in a group**

In the regular classroom setting, the teacher is interacting with one child, and the others are not necessarily engaged. When they are grouped around a child solving his or her problem, or working around a table on one large piece of paper, there is much more involvement and learning is socially constructed.

#### **6. Communication among students**

It is clear that children are communicating in a variety of ways in these classes. They are listening to the question being read by its creator (and Sylvester); they are asking for clarification and the problem poser has to clarify; they are sometimes working together on solutions; and they are listening to each other's explanations and descriptions of strategies.

#### **7. Communication with parents**

The children were required to try out the problem with somebody at home to resolve any initial difficulties. Pierre had behaviour problems as well as difficulty in processing numbers and he struggled in mathematics, causing him to sit for half a year with his arms folded saying, "I don't know." Often, he could not see the first step in a problem because there was too much information, too many numbers. Sometimes Diane substituted smaller numbers, sometimes modeled for him with manipulatives. Pierre benefitted from much support at home. His father said that he would help him to set easy problems, but Pierre wanted to set more difficult ones. He

was aware of the level the other children were working at and knew it would improve the other children's poor image of him if he could do the same. So his father helped him organize and structure his problems. After a while, Pierre presented this problem:

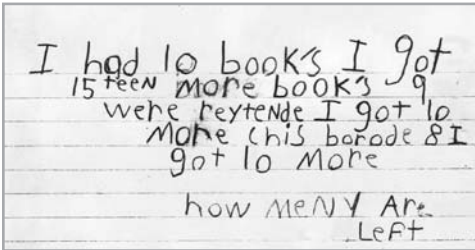


Fig. 11: Pierre's problem

I had 10 books. I got 15 more books. 9 were returned. I got 10 more. Chris borrowed 8. I got 10 more. How many are left?

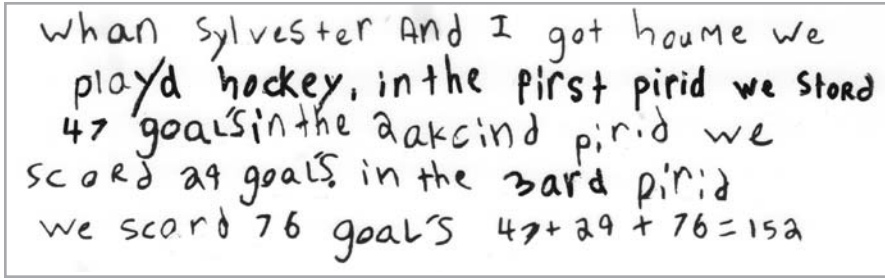


Fig. 12: Pierre's solution

Gradually, with his father's help at home, Pierre's self-confidence improved by developing a problem that challenged his classmates, and by reading his problem to the class. This improvement in his self-esteem could not have happened without communication between Diane and Pierre's family, and this communication helped the adults to understand what Pierre was feeling and gave him the support that helped him to succeed.

## 8. Helps children learn what a problem is

We sometimes forget that many young children are not clear what a problem is. For children like Dina, the problem is finished when they have created the situation and given the facts, and they often forget to pose the question.



When Sylvester and I got home we  
 played hockey, in the first period we scored  
 47 goals in the 2nd period we  
 scored 29 goals in the 3rd period  
 we scored 76 goals  $47 + 29 + 76 = 152$

Fig. 13: Dina's hockey "problem"

These are the children who often respond to assigned problems with, "I don't understand the question!" Giving them the opportunity to create their own questions and present the problem to their peers is a valuable learning tool.

## 9. Mathematics and other disciplines

Sylvester also showed the child's ability with writing in areas such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Children were not penalized for weakness in language, yet it transpired that children were not generally weak in just one area, so the problems they developed were often representative of their other abilities, and gave Diane insight into their other abilities.

Many children's books have an unexpected amount of mathematics content. When the class had read "Jim and the Beanstalk" (Briggs, 1970), this gave another springboard for children's mathematics problems when Jim did such things as measure the giant's mouth for new false teeth and his head for a wig (see, for example, Jake's problems in Figures 2 and 3 and Daniel's in Figure 6). Like Lowrie (2002), we found that most of the children's problems were based on knowledge of number concepts, even when they could have involved other mathematical strands, perhaps because of the emphasis on number in the early grades curriculum.

## 10. Children's enjoyment

Diane described Anna as a waif. She came from a troubled home and had no self-confidence. She was the last child to take Sylvester home, and her first problem was almost a copy of the one before it in Sylvester's journal. Later in the year, she was able to set a problem like the one shown in Figure 14 and even proposed a realistic solution for dealing with the remainder. Halfway through the year, Diane was overjoyed to hear Anna say: "Math is fun!"

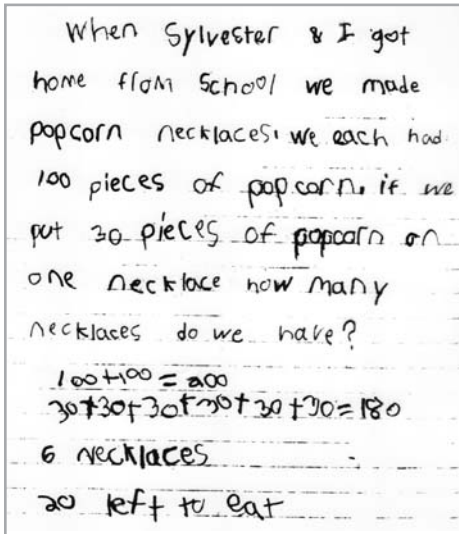


Fig. 14: Anna's popcorn problem

Part of the children's enjoyment came from the way that any anxiety about mathematics was reduced by using the glove puppet as an alter ego and mouth-piece. If the problem was too hard, or the child's solution was wrong, Sylvester could be the culprit, while the child could take credit for good work. This benefit of student enjoyment cannot be overestimated. Ownership of the problem to be solved—and indirectly, ownership of the curriculum for that lesson—leads to enjoyment, which leads to success.

## 11. Opportunity for the children to design the curriculum

Eventually, Sylvester became too popular, the discussion of the variety of strategies was taking a long time; the children said that it would be better if Diane did not listen to so many solution strategies. By the time it came to share solutions, the

children had already discussed strategies with their groups, and Diane had already talked and listened to a number of students. This led her to perform a judicious sampling of strategies that gave voice to a wide range of abilities, but that did not take too long. In this way, the quicker students were exposed to alternative strategies and the slower students could listen to a range of strategies that often allowed them to develop a strategy of their own. It also gave the children the opportunity to have input into their curriculum and for Diane to modify her plans to accommodate their opinions.

## 12. Listening to children

Finally, we emphasize an issue that has pervaded this whole description—Diane’s use of problem posing, helped by the use of a surrogate in the form of Sylvester, gave the children the freedom to speak and her the opportunity to listen to what the children were saying. This gave Diane insights into their thinking and learning so that she could modify her teaching to meet their needs.

## Summary

The program is organized around three competencies: the first refers to the ability to solve situational problems; the second pertains to mathematical reasoning, which implies familiarity with concepts and processes specific to mathematics; and the third focuses on communication using mathematical language. (Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec, 2001, p. 140)

This extract from the mathematics curriculum for Quebec elementary schools might have been written to describe the activities Diane had previously developed for her class. The children’s problems were developed within “situations” that were relevant to them. Mathematical reasoning, sometimes previously learned, sometimes developed by the child, is clearly apparent in the children’s work. All aspects of the classroom communication were based on correct mathematical language.

The program of studies in Quebec has been revised to incorporate socio-constructivist methodology and cross-curricular competencies, one of which is problem solving. In this, it is similar to initiatives in other jurisdictions, putting emphasis on student-initiated learning. Problem solving has been a focus of worldwide

mathematics education since the 1980s and continues to interest teachers and researchers. In the upcoming conference of the International Commission for the Study of Improvement of Mathematics Education (ICSIME) (slated for July 2009), two of the themes to be investigated are “Problem solving and institutionalization of knowledge,” based on Lakatos’ (1976) statement that mathematics is a dialogue between individuals who have problems to solve, and “Creativity in mathematical activities,” supporting the assertion that:

Mathematical creativity and innovation are often cited as critical to success in work and in life in this twenty-first century world. Teachers, mathematics educators, mathematicians, researchers, parents, and students themselves all have a stake in learning how best to nurture and support this development of mathematical creativity and the realization of mathematical promise. (ICSIME, 2009)

Diane’s initiative in using Sylvester to support her children’s creativity in problem solving surely epitomizes these themes and her activities in mathematics classes would be as current today as they were innovative when she was doing them. We will end with some more of Diane’s reflections about what she did:

*Sometimes we get so tied up with following the curriculum, and we get nervous about what we’re leaving out, but when you listen to what the kids are showing us they can do, they are setting the curriculum and we don’t realize that kids can do that. We teachers think we’re the ones who have to do it all.*

*I feel I’m addressing the children’s needs more at this time than at any other time in math class. I feel that I learn more about the children’s mathematical ability by watching them solve problems than by any other method. Open-ended questions allow that kind of scope, then I hate going back to the textbook questions....I’m learning from the kids about how kids learn math....If we keep listening to the kids, they tell us how to teach them.*

And finally, during one session where strategies were shared, Diane told her class what any teacher would love to be able to say at the end of a lesson:

*Wow! Now I’ve got thinkers!*



## Notes

1. This, and all the children's names, are pseudonyms.

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# We'll Meet Again<sup>1</sup>: New Classroom Perceptions From Old Material

Chris Milligan & Wes Cross, McGill University

## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This article reports on the evolution of a school-based project about Remembrance and World War Two. The focus of the project is the use of wartime era high school yearbooks. The use of digital technology by students to record and analyze prime source archival material, high school annuals, in concert with oral history, and local community study techniques, provides classroom students the opportunity to learn about World War Two from a far more realistic and personal perspective than can be achieved using standard textbooks. It also aids in the development of a greater understanding of the human toll, and a more critical understanding of source material concerning World War Two and other conflicts.

## The Ghost of Students Past



In a dead-end Montreal street, a cul-de-sac in realtors' parlance, a building bearing the unmistakable architectural signature of an old school now fills a second vocation as a seniors residence. Unknown to almost all is the role the building and its continually changing occupants had played in local and world history. In addition to having housed three distinct schools in succession during its sixty-year pedagogical role, it also produced an array of famous individuals who made important contributions to the Canadian mosaic.

Originally named West Hill High School (1919-1951), it later became Westward Intermediate High School (1951-1955) and, finally, Monklands High School (1955-1979). Although sharing the same building, each school remained largely

unknown to the others. The history and fabric of each school community was unconnected—in fact they may as well have been three individual schools housed in separate buildings. In a manner of speaking they shared geography, but not history. The worn stairs and hallways spoke of thousands of prior footsteps, but there was no record of who these people were.

As historians, we were interested in both the story and the challenge that establishing a school history would provide. It seemed like elementary schools were among the most neglected segments of community histories. What would we discover as we started down this unexamined path? We started with our own limited personal knowledge of the last school (we chose the school we had both graduated from almost a decade apart) but were soon inexorably drawn towards the “unknown”—the history of the earlier schools.

Developing that history was quite a challenge. The paucity of resources available was dismaying. School board documents were sketchy in their coverage of specific school developments, and perusing local papers for information was a slow and rarely rewarding effort. Finally we were able to peel back the layers of history through the acquisition of first one and then many school yearbooks preserved by alumni who came forward when they heard of our work. These rare tomes provided a wealth of material and information carefully documenting each year’s achievements. It also inspired the development of a new approach to engaging history in the classroom.

The yearbooks (known as the *WHHS Annual* from 1925 through 1951) finally revealed the individual students who had attended the school. Most appear in the pages as unassuming, and largely anonymous adolescents who stare out awkwardly or proudly in graduation photos. Some are triumphantly grouped around sports trophies and other markers of achievement. A small number are very recognizable—famous artists, athletes, writers, lawyers, politicians and judges in later life. The most compelling of the yearbooks, however, was the 1946 edition. Earlier 1940s *Annuals* proudly enumerated the students who had enlisted—each year’s entry longer than the last. In 1946, a single “In Memoriam” tribute page listed the 128 West Hill High School alumni who had died in military service during World War Two. To those of us who had attended the same school in later years, this was a surprising and stark fact.

Culminating in the 1946 *Annual*, the school had produced a rich panorama of art, literature and opinion that told the story of a world conflict as seen from the perspective of youth in a small community. Perhaps, in some way, this was a means to

transmit their concerns and hopes to future generations. In fact, we were able to see this expressed in a poem written by a graduate, John Grant who was subsequently killed in action overseas in June 1942:



TO A STUDENT OF WEST HILL  
A THOUSAND YEARS HENCE

*I who am dead a thousand years,  
And wrote this sweet archaic song,  
Send you my words for messengers  
The way I shall not pass along...*

*Since I can never see your face,  
And never shake you by the hand,  
I send my soul through Time and Space  
To greet you. You will understand.*

Fig. 1: "I send my soul through Time and Space"

"I send my soul through Time and Space" is a powerful line which recalled what Sonja Susut (2000) refers to as "the magic of reflection" (p. 28). The yearbook pages provided a backdrop that reflected a connectedness between students and the wider world. This wider school "family" shared its thoughts, feelings, and concerns in dedications, editorials, letters, poems, essays, artwork, and photographs about this unique time period. There was a rich, useful, important, and deeply personal voice to be appreciated in the content. Research with veterans has noted that seeing history through their eyes, and using the words of those who were there, supplies a significant source of knowledge through intergenerational communication. Their oral stories can be used by teachers to supplement the classroom curriculum with a focus on social solidarity and the attainment of group goals (Susut, 2000, p. 1).

However, these perceptions are not found on the pages of "dull" standard textbooks (Chick, 2006). Denenberg (2001) is harsher, stating that history textbooks are "deadly dull" and that "history is a story, and textbooks eliminate the story." The

WHHS Annuals, on the other hand, provided a personal approach to history that connects school students “then” with school students of “now.” In this manner individuals were indeed sending their souls (and stories) through Time and Space to connect with those in the present. This has similar qualities to the “Bringing Heroes Alive” concept that Denenberg uses with elementary education students to “really enliven their (future) classroom.” All of these rich Annual resources were the “voice” of the wartime student generation. We realized that there was perhaps no better way for present-day elementary or secondary readers to understand this time period. This would be more like an “experience in encountering history as historians do, rather than in predigested textbooks” (Martin et al., 2008). Denenberg (2001) promotes the concept for teachers in a quote from Will Rogers: “You can’t teach what you don’t know anymore than you can come back from where you ain’t been.”

It was a similar “voice” that Sonja Susut experienced while interviewing World War Two veterans. In their stories she found herself beginning to see history from a human position infused with “the anger, the anguish, and the excitement.” She also added that many veterans viewed the conflict as a *world war*. Certain historians have labeled it a “necessary war.” This prompted her to raise “issues that even grade four children are able to question—What causes wars? Which wars are justified and which wars are not? Are any? Regardless for the reasons for war, the process itself robs society of its youth and it robs the youth of their innocence” (Susut 2000, pp. 20, 28), and this process was being revealed in the school yearbooks.

## The Year of the Veteran

In 2005, the Canadian government declared the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of World War Two as the “Year of the Veteran.” Following on the personalized information/experiences we had learned from West Hill’s participation in World War Two, we conceptualized a classroom project for elementary and/or secondary school students to guide them in a more personalized and meaningful approach to commemorate this historic anniversary (Milligan, Cross, & Allison, 2005). Ours was a modest project focusing on the concept of memorial plaques and Rolls of Honour and the individual names inscribed on them located in older schools and other local community sites. Many present-day schools that were operating during the time period still have such commemorative plaques on display.

## Research in Support of Inclusion of World War Two in the Curriculum

Unknown to us at the time was the research of Sonja Susut, a grade four elementary school teacher from Saskatchewan who explored how to effectively incorporate the stories of Veterans (from World War Two, Korea, Vietnam, and peace-keeping operations) into the elementary curriculum in support of a peace education program (Susut, 2000).

She maintains that if the elementary school curriculum is concerned with teaching the prevention of war between nations, then “who better to question than those who have experienced the battlefield.” Her research also focuses on the elementary educational experiences of the veterans themselves. What did they learn and what was important to them? Did any of these experiences prepare them for going to war? In what ways was the battlefield an educational experience? Did their war experience impact the aspirations of their own children, and, could their grandchildren, given the present educational system, “go to war” in the same manner they did? (Susut, 2000, p. 16)

Susut’s major research tool was the use of “oral history and interview techniques.” She quickly became aware that through “caring” for the veterans’ contribution during a time of war, and “caring” for “the enlisted men who did not return from battle,” elementary students could become active in the promotion of peace (pp. 16–17). She concluded that children can be taught about peace, “but it must begin in kindergarten and grade one” (p. 33).

Based on the oral history stories and interviews with veterans she discovered “a fountain of wisdom for her classroom children” (p. 30). This enabled her to design a year-long (grade four) curriculum. The 10-month-long units were divided into Self, Peace, International Conflict, Security, Conflict Resolution, Cooperation, Changes, Responsibility, and Togetherness (pp. 31–32).

At the high school level others have motivated students to serve “as active discriminating seekers of information” in order to produce “classroom newspapers” about the Second World War (McMurray, 2008). Mraz (2008) looked at students using personal diaries while Hutchinson (2005) used letters of soldiers for his students to gain a better understanding of the American Civil War where using the “dynamic process of **real people** and **not simply facts**” (our emphasis) included “the everyday struggles, concerns, passions, fears, and convictions held by many of the soldiers.” Hutchinson reports that as many of the civil war letter-writers were the same age as the present-day students, the letters of those who did not return home were the “primary sources that seemed to touch [the students] most deeply” (p. 320).

There is additional research that focuses on various ways to include themes associated with war (Kirkwood-Tucker, 2006); and, “international conflict and peace making” (Rossi, 2003, p. 156) into the school curriculum. Potter (2005) uses army enlistment records to search for a famous person, a relative, or other who enlisted in the American army between 1938 and 1946 and, “make meaning out of them” (p. 120). Similarly, electronic records about individual Japanese Americans relocated during World War Two contain detailed data that enable students to analyze the data, draw conclusions and write about the Japanese American experience. At the elementary level, Haas (2008) offers a bank of possible appropriate questions elementary students can ask grandparents when learning about World War Two that would be consistent with Susut’s view.

There is also a respectable body of children’s literature devoted to topics and themes associated with global and regional conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Fertig (2005) suggests how biography can be used as a focus on issues of fairness, democracy, and social justice, as well as, being a springboard for children about other times, places, and issues—all in an effort to teach elementary students how to discover and interpret the past. Denenberg (2001) achieves this by using “Heroes for Kids” in the classroom.

### **Support for a Technological Input in the Social Studies Classroom**

There is ample current research addressing the myriad of new technical skills (Internet, digital imagery, and digital prime source material usage) classroom teachers need to integrate into the school curriculum for the new century (Risinger, 2008a; Risinger, 2008b). Others like O’Brien (2008) support the potential of technology as an “essential part of students’ preparation for life in a digital society” (p. 383).

Others report on a host of exciting Internet-based “digital” resources and activities for use in the social studies classroom. Risinger (2005b) notes some elementary Internet resources concerning “real individuals” and “their times,” including additional information about those lives in “specific historical eras.” Isaacs and Potter’s (2008) designed “Digital Vaults” as an innovative spinoff of the American National Archives “Public Vault” of thousands of primary sources for visitor exploration. The “Digital Vaults” feature 1,200 selected primary resource documents, photographs, posters, artifacts, sound recordings, and moving images divided into useful categories for school children. Among the selection are people and items connected with World War Two.



Lee and Clarke (2004) had students create a “digital story” of a local 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgia family based on the discovery of local community primary source historical documents and artifacts. The students utilized this digitized material as “a telescope into the past [to gain] a deeper understanding of the past.” (p. 203). Ferster, Hammond, and Bull (2006) see the creation of digital documentaries to achieve student engagement with primary sources in the social studies classroom.

## **Renewed Enthusiasm for Oral History and Local Community History in the Social Studies Classroom**

There appears to be a resurgence in the use of oral history techniques and local community study in elementary and secondary schools. Most recently in North Carolina, Walbert (2002) states academic disciplines are enriched by “oral sources and the perspectives on the past and on human interaction that can be gleaned from (them).” She continues to praise the technique claiming it provides “benefits that no other historical source provides [by enriching] historical knowledge; enhanc[ing] research, writing, thinking, and interpersonal skills; [it] gives students a connection to the community; and helps all students feel included” (Walbert, 2002, p. 764). Putman and Rommel-Esham (2004) demonstrate an integrative approach that investigates change in the community based on the analysis of photographs, documents and newspapers to heighten students’ interest and understanding of the past (p. 204).

Others (Chick, 2006, p. 1) see great value for elementary pupils in using shared family and community history to provide an “intimate view of the past human experience.” Lattimer (2008) presses for student ownership of historical understanding in a history/social studies classroom through an “essential question” strategy to encourage the recognition of “multiple perspectives” to consider causes and consequences, and to avoid “present-mindedness” by understanding the historical context during which events unfold” (p. 328).

Even younger elementary pupils (Alleman & Brophy, 2003) hold ideas about the past coloured by “presentism” or viewing the past through the lens of hindsight and thus contrasting it (unfairly) with the present. They suggest that “presentism” can be countered by teachers in helping students “develop historical empathy: the ability and disposition to view past lives and events through the eyes of the people who lived them” (Alleman & Brophy, 2003, p. 108). Morris (2006) suggests that this may also be achieved in the elementary school via a walking tour of the local town to visit common but often overlooked sites such as the town square, local history museum and the cemetery. These tours connect elementary students to their community (p. 131).

Risinger (2005a) takes the concept a technological step further, suggesting the use of “Virtual Field Trips” on the Internet where students combine their digital photography and computer skills to create their own virtual fieldtrip of a local historical site (p. 194). We view such virtual fieldtrips as an important information-gathering tool for our school project.

## Playing Fields to Battlefields: A Nine-Step School Memory Project

What follows are project steps outlined for classroom teachers to help commemorate Remembrance especially during the Year of the Veteran. It reflects the concept of “sending souls through Time and Space” (hence, our choice of the title “We’ll Meet Again”). The initial focus started with commemorative World War Two plaques or Honor Rolls in local schools or other community venues. Teachers were free to modify the steps according to their own grade level needs. The steps were made available on the Internet, and participants were requested to submit project results.

**Step 1.** Identify a source plaque. The plaque can be in your school (see Fig. 2), local place of worship (see Fig. 3), town hall, local cenotaph (see Fig. 4), community centre, library, or Legion Hall. Remember some old community companies (stores) may have commemorative plaques of employees who served and died during war. Take a digital photograph of your chosen plaque and the names it contains (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 2: 1939-1945 — In Memory of former pupils of Westmount High School who made the supreme sacrifice (Photo: C. Milligan)



Fig. 3: Honour Roll WW1 Cedar Park United Church, Pointe Claire, Quebec. (Photo: C. Milligan)

Fig. 4: The Westmount, QC Cenotaph (WW1 & WW2) across from the Town Hall (Photo: C. Milligan)



Fig. 5: The above are close-ups of two of the five panels of names on the Westmount High School memorial. Each individual listed has an individual story to tell that includes school days at Westmount. (Photo C. Milligan)

- Step 2.** Produce a list of the names exactly as they appear on the plaque or Honor Roll as a reference record.
- Step 3.** Each Canadian who died in battle in WW2 (and WW1) can be identified at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Web site.<sup>3</sup> Identify the CWGC information for the individual reference record above. Follow the instructions at the site to identify any additional information about each individual on the plaque. You may electronically copy and paste this information to your project (see Fig. 6). Remember to indicate the CWGC source of this information.

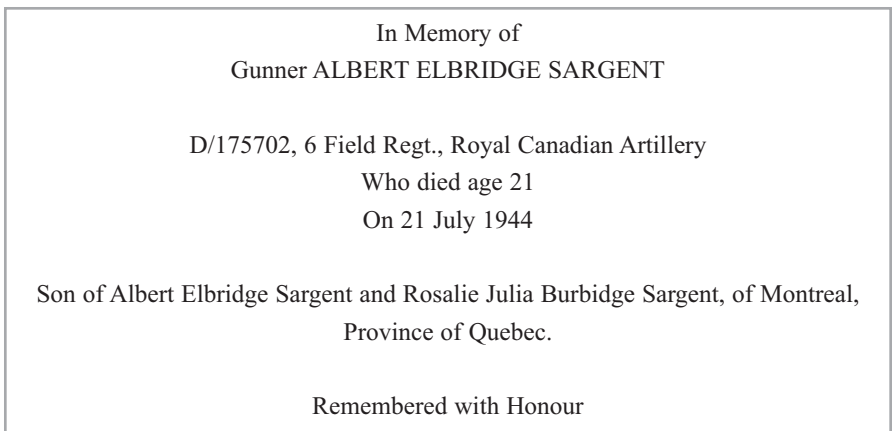


Fig. 6: In memory of gunner Albert Elbridge Sargent

- Step 4.** Each Canadian who died during war is listed in the Books of Remembrance. With the year of death of the individual found in Step 3 locate the Remembrance memorial entry for each individual. Download an electronic copy of each relevant JPEG page (see Fig. 7). Remember to indicate the Books of Remembrance as the source of this information.

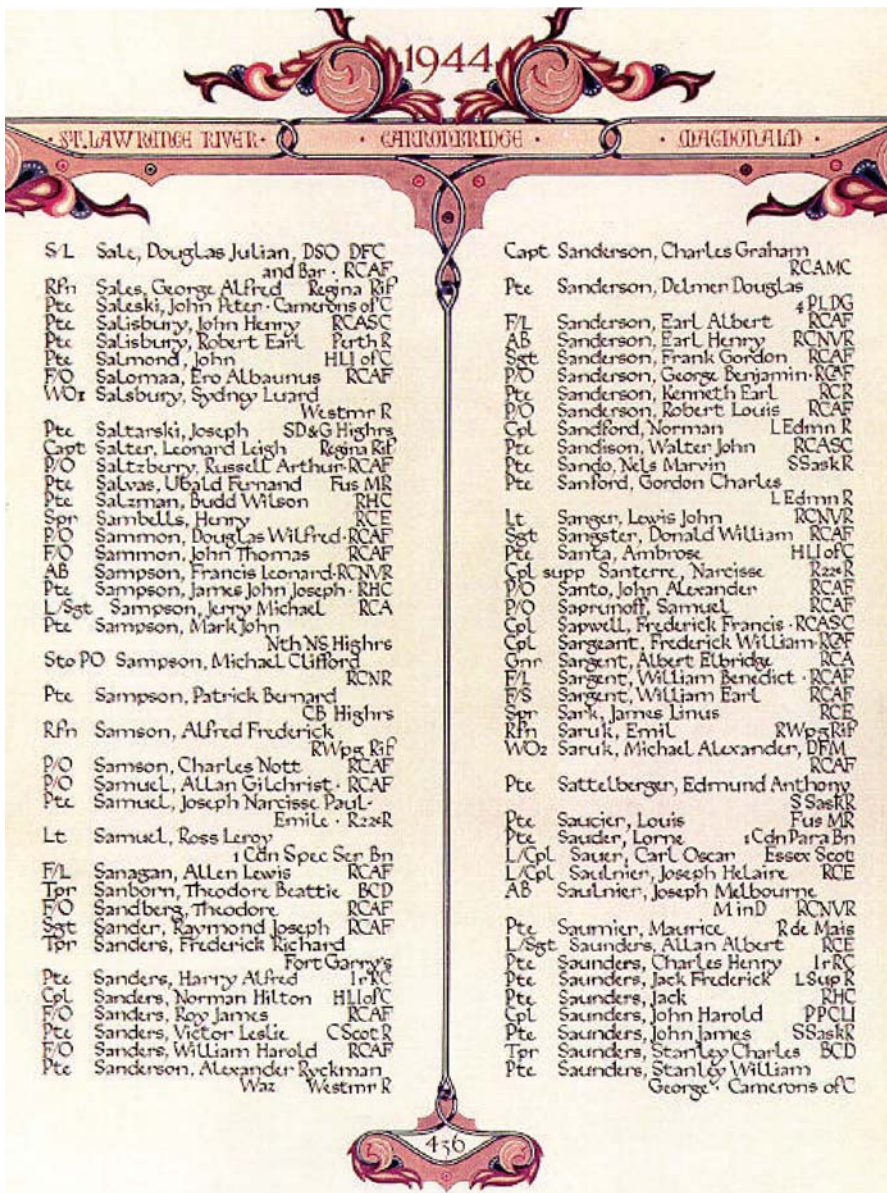


Fig. 7: Entry for Albert Elbridge Sargent in the Book of Remembrance,<sup>4</sup> Ottawa

**Step 5.** Choose any individual from the plaque or Honor Roll for a more “detailed personal history” (DPH) treatment/study.

**Step 6.** Locate copies of local school annuals the DPH choice attended between 1939 and 1945. Try to locate the graduation year annual, if possible. It may be necessary to check pre-war Annuals. Scan any such photograph(s).

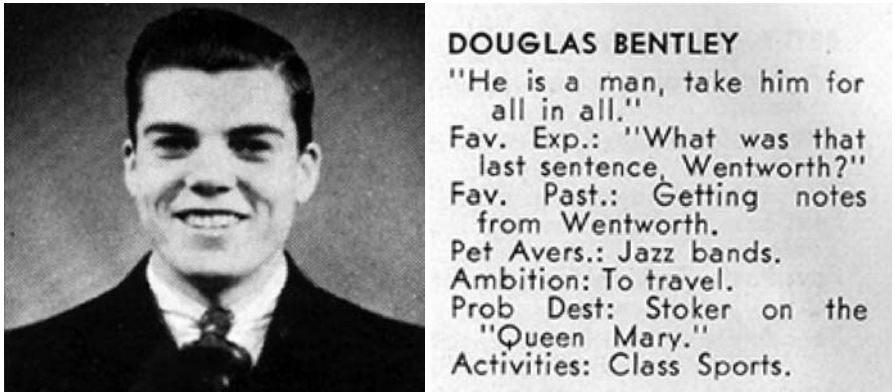


Fig. 8: Douglas Bentley

Above is the West Hill High School 1938 graduation photograph and biography of Douglas George Bentley. Where possible locate a picture of the DPH choice in uniform from the Annuals.



Fig. 9: Junior basketball team



Fig. 10: Horace Baittle

*Note: To locate old annuals, check the school library, the School Board archives, or communicate with older members of the community to see what they can find in their archives. A request for old annuals can be placed in the local newspaper or requested on the local community cable TV service. It may also be worthwhile using Internet resources.*

**Step 7.** Using old annuals, try to locate any of the DPH individuals on School teams, or school functions. What kind of students were they? What subject(s) did they like, dislike? Did they play on any school teams? Play in the band? Did they write poetry or a short story in the school Annual? Did they take a photograph or produce a piece of art work (see Fig. 12) used in the Annual?

From the Annual we learn that Horace played on the basketball team at West Hill High School. In 1938 the Junior Basketball Team won ten straight games to win “yet again” the Junior City basketball championship. Horace Baittle (in Grade 9) wrote the article to accompany the junior basketball team. In 1939 he played on the West Hill High School Senior Basketball team. The team finished fourth in a six-team league and took comfort in the fact that it was one of the highest scoring teams in the league. Horace and three others were noted for having “played stellar roles” that season. Interestingly, teammate Graham Bower also became a casualty of World War Two one year after Horace died.

**Step 8.** Check the archives at the local library or local newspaper(s) for an obituary. Are there any other articles about the DPH individual.

**Step 9.** Finally, try to locate a living relative of a DPH individual, or maybe a former school friend who remembers the DPH individual. Try to gather as much detailed personal information for a personal history of this former student.



At left is the memorial placed by present-day family members of Douglas Bentley that appeared in the Thursday, November 11, 2004 Remembrance Day edition of *The Montreal Gazette* (p. E7).

Fig. 11: In memoriam — Fo. Douglas G. Bentley

TO A STUDENT OF WEST HILL  
A THOUSAND YEARS HENCE



"I who am dead a thousand years,  
And wrote this sweet archaic song,  
Send you my words for messengers  
The way I shall not pass along."

I care not if you realize  
We who have gone before do pay;  
But there down noisy halls, Time cries,  
*Win Labore et Honore.*

But have you masters staunch and true,  
Like those of mine, though changed the day?  
Forever may they implant in you,  
*Win Labore et Honore.*

How shall you conquer? Be like men,  
Remember this to be the way,  
It will not harm to tell again,  
*Win Labore et Honore.*

O friend unseen, without a name,  
Though I'll be gone yet this I'll say,  
Play up! Play up! And play the game!  
*Win Labore et Honore.*

"Since I can never see your face,  
And never shake you by the hand,  
I send my soul through Time and Space  
To greet you. You will understand."

JOHN GRANT.

*John Grant was killed in action overseas in June, 1942. This poem, which he wrote while a student at West Hill, appeared in the 1937 Annual.*

Fig. 12: *To a student of West Hill a thousand years hence*





Fig. 13: Obituary of Horace David Baittle

Similarly, Horace Baittle was remembered in 2004 by his teammates Les and Mickey as a star basketball player from 1940. *The Montreal Gazette*, Nov. 11, 2004. p. E7).

We believe that the preceding project steps taken by present-day elementary and secondary students to view World War Two through the eyes and personal memories of former students of their schools would be a fitting Remembrance Day tribute. It would help generate a more meaningful understanding of this tragic period in world history. Using war experiences and other related materials reported in the high school annual would assist students in gaining a more detailed, human and personal understanding of World War Two at a level not covered in standard history textbooks.

## Conclusion

In this article we have reported on the evolution of a school-based project about remembrance and World War Two. In identifying individuals named on historical plaques and Rolls of Honor, and using wartime high school annuals, classroom students are able to undertake more detailed personal histories of these fallen heroes. With the yearbooks past students are able to share their “voices,” thoughts, feelings, and concerns through their dedications, editorials, letters, poems, essays, artwork, and photographs about their period.

This approach provides a far more personal, meaningful and realistic experience with World War Two that connects the souls and stories through “Time and Space” of students “then” with students “now.” The project uses local and community study techniques, and is augmented by classroom and Web technology. The project allows students an opportunity to learn about World War Two with a more realistic, critical, and personal perspective than could be achieved using standard classroom textbooks. It is suggested by Susut (2001, pp. 16–17) that by studying and caring about those who experienced the battlefield, elementary students could learn to care

about the promotion of peace in their own lives. This fits in well with the current elementary social studies and citizenship curriculum of Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS).

The underlying concept of this school-based project became the framework for a similar project in the B.Ed teacher education program. The Elementary Social Sciences methodology course used the idea of researching a fallen World War Two hero of McGill University under the title, The McGill Remembers Project.<sup>5</sup> For these students it permits for a more critical understanding of prime source material and the impact this and other personal material have on the content and delivery of classroom curricula. As Denenberg (2001) maintains, when heroes are brought to life in the elementary classroom the effect "enlivens" the social studies classroom.

## Notes

1. The song "We'll Meet Again" was released in 1939 and originally performed by Vera Lynn, with lyrics by Hughie Charles and music by Ross Parker. For more information on the song, please see:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We%27ll\\_Meet\\_Again\\_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We%27ll_Meet_Again_(song)). To hear Vera Lynn singing it accompanied by a wartime montage, please visit:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHcunREyZNY>
2. For a "sampling of children's books dealing with military conflicts," please visit:  
[www.edee282b-cm-w09/AppendixA.htm](http://www.edee282b-cm-w09/AppendixA.htm)
3. For more information, please visit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Web site at: [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)
4. The source department of this JPEG image is Veterans Affairs Canada. This non-commercial reproduction is taken from the following page of its Book of Remembrance Web site:  
<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/content/collections/books/bww2/ww2436.jpg>
5. For more information, please visit:  
<http://www.edee282b-cm-w09/mrap2009.htm>

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**Wes Cross** is currently an administrator at McGill University and holds a BA and a graduate diploma in educational administration from Concordia University. He has worked in schools, universities and school boards in both administrative, support and teaching roles. A background in collections management has led to an appreciation of source materials, particularly as they pertain to local history. He has also contributed to and managed web-based historical resource sites in conjunction with both Canadian and international organizations, and is actively involved in the pursuit and preservation of social history across a wide spectrum.

LINK TO:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We%27ll\\_Meet\\_Again\\_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We%27ll_Meet_Again_(song))

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHcunREYzNY>

<http://www.education.mcgill.ca/edee282b-cm-w09/AppendixA.htm>

<http://www.cwgc.org>

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/content/collections/books/bww2/ww2436.jpg>

<http://www.education.mcgill.ca/edee282b-cm-w09/mrap2009.htm>





# Using Open Source Software to Engage in Real-Life Problem Solving

Stewart Adam, Dawson College

## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This paper reviews the impact of computers and technology on the learning process of a 17-year-old student. It highlights the key IT experiences that transformed a curious boy into an open source software developer—one with an opinion on teaching practices. In contrast to a culture of ownership and copyright, the paper acknowledges the importance of the concept of using, remixing and sharing information to meet the needs of every learner. This concept is described as creating the pedagogy needed to motivate and engage students in the classroom.

**M**y name is Stewart Adam and I am currently studying pure and applied sciences at Dawson College. Pure and applied science is a two-year pre-university program in Quebec that focuses on physics, mathematics (calculus) as well as chemistry and biology. I have always had a great interest for knowing how things work, which is why I like learning about science, physics and most of all, technology. We use technology daily, but we rarely get the chance to understand how its underlying components work. When my family purchased a new computer a few years ago, I was extremely excited and, over several months, I was slowly able to determine how the system worked by tinkering with it. Since then, I have started designing computer software. I would like to explain my learning experience and how I think it can be applied to the school classroom.

My fascination with computers and technology started the moment I put my hands on a keyboard at the age of four. I remember looking at the screen and being amazed at how I could tap “a” on the keyboard and a small “a” would appear on

the screen. How did the computer know which key I was pressing? From that day on, I was interested in computers and more specifically, how they worked. When I was in my last year of elementary school, students were asked to design and program a small game using software called “MicroWorlds” as a computer science project. MicroWorlds is a program that uses the “logo” programming language to control one or more turtle icons on the screen. These turtle icons can be given various commands that enable them to move around, draw shapes on the screen or even change in appearance. In my game, the user navigated through a maze I had designed. If the turtle touched any part of the maze wall, the player would have to start over from the beginning. I used multiple turtles together in order to create various obstacles, such as a power-up that increased the turtle’s movement speed and a moving maze wall which required precise timing to pass through. Our teacher was very knowledgeable and communicated her passion for technology through such well-designed class projects. By the end of that project, I was proud not only of being able to use a computer, but also of having designed something that other people could use. That accomplishment gave me the push to write computer software.

One of the things I learned quickly about commercial software is that in most cases, the consumer’s rights are very restricted. For example, commercial software is typically distributed in a small box with the product manual inside, as well as a CD-ROM to install the program on a computer. Unfortunately, installing the program is just about all one is authorized to do. In most cases, one is not permitted to share software, view its inner working nor create new software based on the original. I found this very annoying, as I wanted to know what went on between the time I pressed the power button on the computer and when I was ready to enter my system password. However, because of the licensing terms of my operating system, reverse engineering any part of this process was illegal. I was shocked. How could it be illegal to view how something works, even if the objective is to enhance it? If I buy an old videocassette recorder, I may not have its blueprints, but nothing stops me from taking it apart. How was this not the case for computer software? I found the answer to these questions in open source software. Unlike the typical piece of commercial software, the source code (programming code used to create any software) for all open source software is published. Any programmer can examine the source code of an open source program to determine how the program functions, tweak it if so desired, or even publish his or her own program based on the original software. *Use, remix and share* captures the essence of open source in three words; one can use open source software, *remix* it to make it better for their uses, and *share* copies of it—both the original copy and the “remixes”—with anyone else.



The year after I had created my “MicroWorlds” game in grade six, I decided to install Fedora® Linux, a free and open source operating system. Similar to Microsoft’s® Windows XP or Apple’s® OS X, Fedora Linux let me perform all of the usual tasks like checking my e-mail or browsing the Web. However, because it was formed entirely of free and open source software, I was able to view precisely how any part of it worked! This was how one of my software projects was born. I was curious as to how an audio converter program I used at home worked, so I examined the program’s source code which presented me with its logic flow statements and the various commands it executed to convert audio files. By learning from this code, I was able to create my own program which I uploaded to my Web site for others to use, share and remix. This example shows how the open source software I was using enabled limitless creativity, as any software could be remixed until it was something completely new and innovative. I had discovered a cycle of creativity and learning; a new idea that required challenging software programming led to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which in turn enabled me to transfer this new knowledge to programming more advanced software and develop still new ideas. The user community was also a highlight of the experience. Other Linux users, like me, were volunteering their knowledge via online forums. I was able to learn something new about Linux, and then share the same knowledge with another new user from whom, in turn, I would learn something new. For instance, when I joined the forums I wanted to know how to install certain hardware drivers that would let Linux use my computer’s hardware to its full potential. After reading the forum posts and finding this information, I noticed that many new users also asked this very same question. I wrote a small tutorial on installing these drivers and posted it to the forum’s “how-to” section so that new users could find instructions on how to install the drivers in an easy manner. So once again, I found myself in another cycle of learning. I was constantly engaged in the wonderful online learning experience of passing on knowledge through the forums. There was such a diversity of people from all over the world because anyone could join and play a part in this community. Age and geographical location was of no importance. We were all coming to the same place to learn about Linux. For the most part, we all participated during our free time.

My terrific learning experience about Linux and open source software in general left me thinking about how we could transfer this type of learning to the classroom. Too many students perceive their classes as boring, but perhaps that can be changed completely by just modifying the manner in which the course content is delivered. The children of my generation are much more technology oriented, and I think teaching practices should take this into account. Students need to be able to *use*, *remix*, and *share* information. These three words that describe open source

software are key to learning. Social learning environments are not only more enjoyable, but they can also let students engage in and take some control over their learning experience. I think students would enjoy learning and retain more content if they found it pleasurable. Students need to be able to use material, remix it to make it their own, and then share it once they have finished their work. Achieving a competency, or developing competencies in any discipline, involves learning to make appropriate choices to solve a problem and/or meet a challenge. Applying the open source principles to learning helps students do just this—acquire knowledge, transfer that knowledge to another learning situation when appropriate and to problem-solve along the way using one's personal and external resources. It gives students a sense of purpose and fulfillment which leads to further motivation to learn. Once the work (or “remix”) is finished, it can be used again by the community of other teachers and students.

One example I would like to give is about waves and optics studied in physics classes. There are quite a few formulas to remember, and often the textbook questions are rather dry. For example, “if the value of  $a$  is this and the value of  $b$  is that, use this formula to calculate the value of  $c$ .” What if the students, using the signal intensity (the “signal bars”) displayed on a cell phone, decided to calculate the distance to the nearest cell phone tower? To apply abstract content to real-world problems in this manner challenges the students and gives them a sense of control over their learning. Additionally, it deepens their understanding of the physics behind the problem as they encounter obstacles in the calculations, and discover how to overcome them. The abstract content comes to life in authentic, student-created examples that develop the very competencies that teachers want their students to acquire.

Upon reflection, my learning experience with open source software has been one of engagement in real-life problem solving and knowledge acquisition that is continuously used and transferred to other problems. I think that by applying authentic problems to the classroom, students will not only enjoy learning more, but will also be proud of what they have accomplished afterwards. This was certainly the case for me.



**Stewart Adam** is currently attending Dawson College in Montreal. He has been creating open source software for the last five years and at the age of 14, started Diffingo Solutions Inc. In 2008, he received the Millennium Excellence Award for outstanding community leadership and in 2009, received the prestigious provincial Claude Masson award for volunteer hours committed to producing tutorials on open source software. He is the youngest community manager at Fedora-Forum, an online Linux forum with over 130,000 members.

LINK TO:

<http://www.diffingo.com>

<http://www.firewing1.com>





# Balancing Act: Respecting the Required Curriculum While Honouring the Real Curriculum

Teri Todd & Jacquie Medina, California State University, Chico

## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

Two authors from different disciplines share their views on meeting both the curriculum set forth by the institution and honouring the meaning that students make of their own learning. Believing in the importance of learning that reaches beyond that which is taught, the real curriculum, the authors discuss the challenge of finding a balance between assessing required course content and honouring individual growth in our assessment-laden society.

## Introduction

The importance of moving beyond simple regurgitation of information by students is increasingly recognized by educators. This article suggests finding a balance between the curriculum required by the institute and the value of deeper learning, or the real curriculum. The authors present their own stories of how they have come to value the real curriculum and find balance with the required curriculum.

## Teri's Story

As a university instructor I took the business of covering expected content very seriously. I studiously planned lectures and designed activities to encourage students to use, and reflect on, what they had learned. I assessed students on what I

believed was critical content knowledge. Therefore, it was with some surprise that I listened to students answer a question which I asked on the final day of class. I asked "What did you learn in this class?" As I walked slowly back to my office I reflected on the answers and found that I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment, not because their answers reflected the curriculum outlined in the course syllabus, but because the learning they spoke of was a far deeper learning which enabled them to change their world-view.

My high school and undergraduate education consisted, primarily, of listening, reading, and answering test questions. I spent formidable amounts of time memorizing facts which I kept in useful memory for a short period of time, typically just until the exam was over! As I think back to those years I remember very little of what I learned in the classroom but I do remember an internship, a special hands-on project, and a special bond with a professor. The knowledge I recall from these experiences is a mix of what the book or lecture said and the feelings and outcomes of my experience. This "constructed" knowledge is what led me to my first job, compelled me to attend graduate school, and still guides much of my thinking today.

Employers are searching for graduates that can take knowledge and create new products, students who can look at a problem and find a solution, and people who are able to apply theoretical constructs. Our job as instructors, professors, or teachers is to not only teach theory, but also encourage each student to make meaning of this knowledge internally. Only in this way will students be able to create new knowledge that is of practical value to themselves (Hanson & Sinclair, 2008). Unfortunately too often students complete courses without assimilating the content. Kaste (2004), a professor in teacher preparation, made this very point when she stated, "it is often the case that the university course leaves little impression on pre-service teachers in either philosophy or practice" (p. 32).

This idea has led me to look at curriculum from two perspectives: required curriculum and real curriculum. I use the term "required curriculum" to refer to the formal content of a course prescribed by the institution while the term "real curriculum" represents the true learning or meaning making by the student. Required curriculum is typically designed by program coordinators and consists of a set of classes designed to form a course of study that will provide the student with critical content knowledge for a particular field of study. With that in mind, where or how does the real curriculum fit? How does one measure true learning?

This constructivist way of thinking is not new and has been an issue in education in recent years. Educational models which are based on constructivism have been developed and there is a mixture of the traditional didactic methods of knowledge transmission and experiential education in many educational institutions (Richardson, 2003; Sudzina, 1997). Interestingly, and not dependent on which teaching orientation is chosen, courses are typically created with specific student outcome expectations and outcome measurements. These facts are then stated in syllabi, and students seem to appreciate when they are concrete. In addition, we are often evaluated as teachers with regards to how well the course objectives are met. The required curriculum is very apparent while the real curriculum is invisible; tension can occur as instructors work to meet the required curriculum and at the same time honour the real curriculum. Creating a balance between the two becomes necessary.

How do we reconcile these two viewpoints? How do we, or should we, measure deeper understanding? Do the goals of the course remain tied to the outcome measures and we simply hope deeper learning occurs? In the case of my discipline, adapted physical activity, this deeper learning may include the creation of a new understanding of disability and people with disabilities. This learning often occurs during the first-hand experiences provided as part of the learning environment. Theoretical information is transmitted via traditional techniques: readings, lectures, discussion, and films, and it is this information that matches the course content and is tested to establish course outcomes. Field work, designed to promote hands-on application of the information imparted during the course, is carefully constructed to lead the student to a level of independent functioning. There are aspects of hands-on learning that can be evaluated, and often are, but they may not reflect changes in attitude or ways of thinking. Therefore it may be impossible to evaluate if students have attained any of the real curriculum.

The idea of constructivist pedagogy dates back to the early 1900s when Dewey (1933) suggested that knowledge is created through learning as a process of construction and reconstruction of meaning as the learner engages in active, systematic, informed experiences. Piaget (1971) proclaimed a similar view of learning; he explained that knowledge is the process that is created by the activity of the learner in interaction with the environment. With development and experience, a child's levels of reasoning change and the child begins to engage in complex reasoning. The term constructivism was formally adopted in the mid-1960s and is influenced greatly by Piaget and Vygotsky (Watson, 2000). Though institutes of higher education have expressed interest in constructivist education models, there is limited empirical evidence of effective teaching practices (Richardson, 2003). Traditionally, education

has been conservative and relies on high-stake testing procedures which not only allow student promotion, for instance adequate GRE scores are critical for admission to many graduate programs, but also indicate the effectiveness of the institution. This conservative nature of education was observed when Hanson and Sinclair (2008) interviewed 277 professors in 92 faculties about the importance of three student learning outcomes: theoretical knowledge, professional skills, and knowledge creation. The majority of university lecturers perceived the most important learning outcome of undergraduate education was theoretical knowledge. Even more troubling is that although teacher education programs have improved in discussing many issues, for instance diversity, little is done to model active learning practices in the university classroom (Kaste, 2004). Therefore, even though teachers may prescribe to a constructivist model, they probably will not have experienced the method in the classroom.

As an adapted physical activity instructor, I believe it is essential that my students have first-hand experience. As in many aspects of dealing with people, all the answers are not in the book. Students must create a knowledge base from which they can meet the vast demands of their job. They must be able to analyze situations, make decisions that are practical, effective, and ethical, and be able to evaluate the outcome. These skills are taught directly, are required, and can be observed and measured. Of equal importance is the student's ability to maintain composure in a difficult situation, to display energy and happiness in order to motivate students, and to act compassionately and respectfully to all people. This list of skills is not as easy to teach. These are the skills that I believe come from the true learning and reflect the real curriculum. This does not reflect the knowledge typically evaluated by written or oral test questions, nor is it the focus of videotape analysis. Yet, these skills/attitudes enable a teacher to be great at the job.

As an instructor using practical experience as part of course content I have to balance the two curricula. I must be ready to help students construct knowledge, to help them use their experiences to create new meaning. This may require me to follow a student's lead, to alter my agenda for a lesson, and take opportunities to connect experience to theoretical notions. In turn, though these opportunities are wonderful moments to create knowledge, I run the risk of not covering the curriculum that was set out for the lesson. If this occurs in lesson after lesson, tension can mount, especially if outcome measures are predetermined. The question that arises is: If a teacher values the development of knowledge from experience and believes that is the true learning, does this become the priority?



There is some evidence to suggest that hands-on learning does in fact lead to changes in attitude and the way one thinks about topics. In fact, Mentokowski and Associates define learning that lasts, or deep learning, as “it connotes change in behaviour and flexibility in perspective” (2000, p. xv). Sudzina (1997) reported that students who had to use theoretical information to solve problems presented in case studies made gains in moral reasoning when evaluated by a standardized test. Kaste (2004) found that her students expanded their notions about teaching, learning, and diversity through interaction with diverse learners. As teachers we can guide students and hope that the meaning they make of the knowledge they acquire is beneficial to their development as a person, their career, and society. Even though the importance of meeting the required curriculum often is considered of more value than the real curriculum in many of today’s classes, it is the true learning, the real curriculum, which drives people to fulfillment. When a student articulates the shift in his or her paradigm, I know that true learning has taken place and a foundation of knowledge is being formed. I interpret this as success.

### Jacquie’s Story

I have always been a fan of structure and clear expectations. Tell me what I need to do and know and I will make it happen. I succeeded in the traditional school setting by reciting rules of grammar, verses of long-forgotten poems, and names and dates significant in history. Rote memorization served me well to attain the letter grade of choice on the short-term test, but long-term memory and application of knowledge was gone like the wind as I became introduced to new material and information. I finished my early studies with the understanding that knowledge acquisition and well- defined goals would propel me through life. I had so much to learn.

One day, in my first job out of college, I found myself in the forest, on the top of a 25-foot wooden rappel tower, with a 10-year-old girl crying in fear of descending the tower. She was properly wearing the required safety gear, understood the climbing systems, and had swiftly climbed the pole to ascend the tower. She was safe. But now she stood before me crippled by her fears, frozen in position, unable to listen or communicate rationally. What was I to do? I searched my brain for ideas and reflected upon experience with lightning speed. The issue was not about gear, technique, information, or achievement. The issue was much bigger. It was about the human spirit and how the experience was impacting the individual and how the individual was going to deal with it, learn from it, and make application. The girl was fine. With the

support of others and efforts to address her fears, she came down the tower. But I had changed. It was my own growth and understanding as a teacher that blossomed.

I have come to believe that the real curriculum is the development of the whole person that evolves through the learning experience—not just the content presented nor the student’s ability to articulate his or her knowledge and understanding of the content through assessments, but the personal growth and construction of knowledge that occurs. What does the student bring to the experience, and what does the student interpret the value to be? How is the student affected by the material, discussions, challenges, and interaction with others? What perspectives and ideas do they glean and develop on their own? What does the student take from the experience and what does he or she do with this information, his or her new ideas and emotions? These are the questions that need to guide us and to be asked: how is the student transformed or not from the experience?

As teachers we are charged with the responsibility to teach the required curriculum and achieve desired learning outcomes. How we foster both the required curriculum and real curriculum can be challenging. We give a child a jar of Play-Doh and teach him or her how to mould a dog. What if the child understands the material, its malleability and uses, but sees a pancake, a house, or a cat, not a dog? The student learns that if the Play-Doh is left out in the air too long it gets hard, and that getting back to the original color is quite difficult, if not impossible, once colors have been mixed. Has the child met the learning outcomes? It seems to depend on whether I am measuring learning on the required curriculum or real curriculum. Perhaps it is both, and that is our challenge: to find balance and value in both.

To do so, it is critical to create an experience that fosters the intended outcomes and promotes personal growth, construction of knowledge and understanding of and beyond the content. For this to happen, we must move away from the real curriculum being the “hidden curriculum” to the real curriculum being the “understood curriculum.” We must be clear on what the real curriculum is, articulate it, and move forward in fostering desired outcomes.

In the field of outdoor education, our classroom is the natural environment. The risks are real and the consequences immediate. The fresh air, sounds of nature, and interaction with plants, animals, and humans in a less stimulated and technologically driven world slows the students’ pace and opens their minds and hearts to new ways of doing and thinking. While the benefits of the natural environment are immeasurable, a traditional classroom can also become a place where students can

open their minds and hearts to new ways of doing and thinking if we shift our focus from imparting knowledge and skills to fostering a learning experience. How do we do this? **Trust.**

**Trust in oneself** to create an opportunity for learning to occur and letting the learning experience unfold.

**Trust in your students** to be accountable, construct knowledge, and make application without over processing and assessing the experience to the point that the students' own meaning making and value dissolves.

**Trust in the process** — that education occurs through reflection and that this reflection may or may not result in desired or required outcomes immediately if at all, but that what the student gleans has value and application.

Models of experiential learning emphasize the role of experience and reflection in the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Jarvis, 1987a, 1987b; Joplin, 1995). Kolb's model is cyclical in nature and consists of four elements of learning: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. A student has an experience and the experience is followed by reflection. From this reflection, the student gains new insights and understanding which can lead to creating new ideas and concepts as the student actively experiments creating new experiences from which the cycle can begin again. Jarvis (1987a) expanded on the work of Kolb, but thought Kolb's model was neat and oversimplified.

According to Jarvis (1987a), learning is the process of transforming experience into knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and that while learning may begin with experience, experience does not necessarily equate to learning. Jarvis (1987b) believed that "some experiences may not result in learning" (p. 165), that students may be led elsewhere from the experience. In Jarvis' (1987a) model of the learning process, a potential experience can result in nine different paths that may or may not lead to learning. Potential outcomes presented include a person "may grow and develop as a result of the learning experience, may remain virtually unaltered, or may actually be harmed as a result of the experience of learning" (Jarvis, 1987a, p. 24).

So what is our role as teacher? *Create experiences* that offer the student immersion in the course material. We understand the material and required curriculum; how can it be delivered in an experience that will also foster the real curriculum? *Allow for reflection* of the experience both individually and guided so that students can glean ideas and concepts that mean something to them. In Priest and Gass's

(1997) generations of facilitation, “letting the experience speak for itself” allows students to have the experience and let it be theirs and what they make of it without breaking it apart using processing techniques or assessment tools. “Debriefing the experience” involves learning through reflection, and often occurs after an experience. Journal writing is a reflective tool that promotes individual reflection. This reflection can be guided by the student and/or teacher. Small and large group discussions and activities can also be used to debrief the individual and group experience. Framing the experience and directly and indirectly front-loading the experience are more developed methods of facilitation that can be used during the experience and before and afterward to facilitate the experience. All of these strategies provide opportunities to affirm required curriculum and promote the real curriculum. However, Wattchow (2008) argues that Priest and Gass’s generations of facilitation overlook the value of the less sophisticated technique of “letting the experience speak for itself.”

Joplin (1995) differentiates between experiential learning as when the “debrief may occur within the individual” (p. 19) and experiential education as when the student’s learning is made public. Joplin states, “It is the publicly verifiable articulation which makes experience and experiential learning capable of inclusion and acceptance by the educational institutions” (p. 19). Wattchow (2008) finds Joplin’s pedagogy problematic in its relationship between the experience within the learner and the “necessity for articulation and public verification of that experience” (p. 66). Wattchow argues that while this approach may move the learner more deeply into his/her own verbalized experience, the approach “may not move the individual more deeply into his/her experience of the world” (p. 66). Perhaps the technique of “letting the experience speak for itself” can provide opportunity for student meaning making that teacher guided facilitation approaches cannot provide. By giving students the necessary time and venue for introspection, we can minimize the potential outcomes of diminishing the experience, its value, and potential for learning.

Lastly, *continue the cycle*. Encourage new perspectives and ideas and provide additional experiences to apply new knowledge, to develop the real curriculum, and to introduce more of the required curriculum. As Einstein so eloquently stated, “I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn best” (Priest, Gass, & Gillis, 2000, p. 6). The process of balancing and finding value in the required and real curriculum involves *shifting paradigms*. Namely, making the shift away from the view of “educating students” to “providing learning experiences,” and fostering opportunities for students to learn (acquire skills and knowledge) rather than educating or imparting skills and knowledge on students. It may be

argued that these concepts are one in the same, however, this paper proposes that beyond semantics, educating and fostering learning experiences are very different philosophies and can result in different strategies and outcomes for student learning.

### Making Meaning of the Real Curriculum

What does all of this mean and why does it matter? It matters because the real curriculum is the fabric in which the required curriculum is woven. We must find a way to balance the value and growth of both curriculums in our students and institutions. In an assessment-laden society, we must also tackle the challenge of measuring the real curriculum. This proves challenging for a variety of reasons. How do we assess something that is dynamic and unique to the individual learner? Outcome measures for university classes are typically concrete, as are the evaluation methods. This is required by the schools and expected by the students. This elicits questions such as: What types of assessment will capture the learning I want to foster? (Windschitl, 2002). How can I gain the support of administrators if I change assessment methods? And finally, is it ethical to evaluate students on the meanings that came from their experience? If we assess the real curriculum—shifting paradigms, changes in attitudes and world-views, feelings, compassion, respect—how can we determine what students are actually learning if we are assessing it through our own lenses as teachers and administrators?

We are left with the challenge of finding practical means of assessing student meaning making that not only represents the value of student learning and the real curriculum, but also meets institutional assessment requirements. Can we simply honor a student's efforts at making meaning from an experience? Perhaps a demonstration or articulation of learning grounded in the material but applied and disseminated along the learner's path would be viable. Are we in a position to judge if the student made the correct meaning? Within this lies the tension when evaluating student learning, Windschitl (2002) states that "it is equally important to honour student's efforts at meaning-making, even when it reflects immature understanding. As teachers try to strike a balance between their obligations to the discipline and their obligation to the learner, they must frequently settle for partial understandings on the part of learners" (p. 149). We argue that a student's partial understanding of the required curriculum coupled with application and understanding to self and the world is preferable to the ability to demonstrate complete content knowledge with little to no meaning to the learner.

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# The Master Teacher Program: Professional Development for College Teachers

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## **ABSTRACT** ([Press Here for Sound](#))

In this qualitative study<sup>1</sup> I explored six college (CEGEP) teachers' perspectives on teaching and learning over a two-year period, as they completed the first four courses in a professional development program, the Master Teacher Program (MTP). Repeated, semi-structured interviews were analyzed, using the complementary processes of categorizing and connecting. Results revealed, through four patterns and three major dimensions, a process of evolution from a teacher- to a learner-centered perspective.

## Situating Myself

I am a teacher in the Quebec CEGEP system. CEGEP is an acronym for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel, or College of General and Vocational Education. Launched in 1967 and exclusive to the province of Quebec, Canada, the CEGEP represents the first stage of postsecondary, higher education. Students can enroll in either a pre-university program that leads to university studies, or a technical career program that prepares them for the job market. All CEGEP students take a core of common, general education courses.

The impetus for me to begin this research in 2002 originated with some questions I had concerning my own practice. I had been teaching psychology at the CEGEP level for almost 30 years. While I enjoyed teaching my discipline and received favorable feedback on student evaluations, my knowledge of pedagogy was founded on years of accumulated classroom experience. Essentially, this amounted to a privatized, trial-and-error self-assessment of my teaching, which was largely based on my

own experiences as a learner. My practice was neither particularly reflective, nor was it informed by current findings in the field of education. Through my involvement as a course consultant in a professional development program for CEGEP teachers, the Master Teacher Program (MTP), I began to explore the educational literature on teaching. This led me to embark on doctoral studies in order to further investigate the two domains of professional development and reflection in higher education, and to reflect on this knowledge, in light of my own practice.

## Review of the Literature and Research Question

Decades of research have established clear links between the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. However, much of this research has focused on primary and secondary teacher education, where the emphasis is placed on pedagogy. The situation is different in higher education, where teachers are disciplinary experts, and, in spite of a lack of grounding in pedagogy, they are expected to be able to teach effectively. Beaty (1998) has referred to this assumption as double professionalism. According to the author, current research suggests that expertise in how to teach is as important as expertise in one's discipline.

Over the past few decades, teaching has assumed an increasingly central role in higher education. The heightened status of teaching has been fueled by developments such as Boyer's (1987) Scholarship of Teaching movement, and by the changing landscape in higher education (Nicholls, 2001), that is, the increase in student numbers and diversity. Factors such as these have led to demands for greater accountability in the areas of both teaching and student learning. In spite of these demands, the fact remains that the idea of learning to teach in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon that has met with considerable resistance (Brew, 1999). Knapper (2005) maintains that this resistance can be linked to a lack of formal preparation for learning to teach in higher education, the absence of accreditation for minimum levels of competence, and the lack of faculty involvement in continuous professional development. New teachers are particularly vulnerable. Emerging from disciplinary-specific, research-oriented training in graduate school and faced with an overwhelming teaching load, they resort to survival mode in their teaching. The combination of these factors does not foster teaching practices that develop complex levels of thinking in students (Saroyan & Amusden, 2004).

Colleges and universities have responded to the challenge to improve teaching by offering support for faculty that ranges from workshops to courses to longer-term programs. Many of these initiatives have been critiqued for not meeting teachers' needs. These needs include the fact that learning to teach is a process that evolves over time and is enhanced through interactions with competent peers. As well, such professional development initiatives need to be embedded in relevant theory and research, so that teachers can establish clear links from theory to practice and from practice to theory (cited in Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1996). Programs that integrate these criteria need to be developed, implemented, and evaluated.

One area of particular importance that underlies the process of teacher development concerns faculty perspectives or beliefs about teaching and learning. These perspectives are based on complex influences that include one's experiences as a learner, and often operate at an unconscious level (Kember, 1997). Perspectives act as filters and play a critical role in decisions that teachers make (Saroyan et al., 2004). According to Kember, efforts that focus on changing teachers' approaches or teaching new skills without examining and reorienting perspectives will be short-lived. Others, including Kember and Kwan (2002), McAlpine and Weston (2000), and Hativa (2002) have also concluded that in order to improve the quality of teaching in higher education, teachers' underlying perspectives about the nature of teaching and learning must be addressed. At the pre-college level, a significant body of research on teacher perspectives exists. In contrast, at the college level, very few studies have been conducted into how these perspectives might influence teaching practice (Fang, 1996). Hence, this has emerged as an important area of investigation.

A number of theoretical frameworks can shed light on the process of change in teacher perspectives in higher education. Prominent among these are Ramsden's (1992) theory of teacher thinking and Mezirow's (1981) theory of transformative learning. As well, several researchers including Kember (1997), Kember and Kwan (2002), and Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) have described a progression in teacher perspectives from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered orientation. However, many studies have arrived at this continuum as a result of conducting single interviews with several teachers. For example, Samuelowicz and Bain outline the framework that they derived from single interviews, each lasting from 1–1.5 hours, with several faculty members. According to the authors, the categories that emerged were "as far as possible ... based upon the transcripts rather than our preconceptions" (p. 304). What is missing is a description of the underlying process that individual teachers might experience, as their perspectives shift from teacher- to learner-centeredness.

If and when this shift happens, it often occurs when teachers are exposed to pedagogical knowledge that challenges their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning. According to Kember, there are few documented attempts to promote conceptual change among teachers in higher education, since such endeavors require a sustained effort over time. Therefore, it is important to examine the process of evolving perspectives that might occur within individual teachers over time, as their beliefs are challenged, and if necessary, reoriented. Further, the amount of time it takes to bring about this change in perspectives needs to be explored.

In this study I examined college teachers' perspectives over time, as they were enrolled in a professional development program, the Master Teacher Program (MTP). The overarching question that guided my research was, "How does reflecting on teaching and learning throughout the first four courses which cover a two-year period in a professional development program (MTP) contribute (or not) to teachers' changing perspectives on teaching and learning?"

## The Master Teacher Program

The MTP is a professional development program tailored specifically for Anglophone college teachers within the Quebec CEGEP system. The program is unique in that its curriculum has been designed and is taught by well-reputed CEGEP teachers, many of whom have been instrumental in building the college system (Bateman, 2002). From its outset, the MTP has sought to embody a sense of mutual ownership. A Consortium of Anglophone CEGEPs was established to oversee the program. A steering committee, composed of local representatives from member CEGEPs was created, and meets regularly to administer the MTP. Affiliated with the Performa Program at the University of Sherbrooke in Quebec, participants can earn either a Diploma in Education (D.E.) after accumulating 30 credits or a Master's in Education (M.Ed) after 45 credits. Over the past several years close to 300 participants have registered in the program and taken at least one course. Currently over 140 students are pursuing course work. As well, a number of students have completed the D.E. and the M.Ed.

The MTP seeks to promote the scholarship of teaching by providing CEGEP teachers with the requisite knowledge, competencies, and personal qualities that effective teaching at this level requires. In particular, the program aims to "develop in each new teacher the ability to simultaneously observe, monitor, analyze, and adjust

when necessary the complex intellectual, psychological and emotional processes that occur in their respective classrooms” (Bateman, 2002, p. 2 of 6). In offering direct and practical assistance to new teachers, it aspires to shorten the time it takes to evolve from a novice to a master teacher (Bateman). The MTP’s strong academic component is based on contemporary theorizing about how people learn (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, & Donovan, 2000), and in particular, how adults learn (Mezirow, 1992).

The first four courses form the core of this program. These courses include College Teaching: Issues and Challenges, Psychology of Learning for the College Classroom, Instructional Strategies, and Assessment. These courses are compulsory for all students and are usually taken in a sequential fashion. Through these courses, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their perspectives on teaching and learning, and to reconsider these, in light of current findings from cognitive science. In this study I tracked teachers’ perspectives on teaching and learning as they completed these four core courses.

## Methodology

The cohort that I selected to study began the MTP in the fall of 2005. Six female teachers agreed to participate in the research. They were from a number of CEGEPs, with teaching experience ranging from one to twenty-five years in a variety of disciplines. They taught in both pre-university and professional programs. To ensure anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym from A through F (Anne, Barb, Carly, Deana, Ella and Fran). I interviewed each participant after she completed each of the first four courses in the MTP, and a fifth time for a retrospective interview. In addition to collecting a total of 25 hours of interviews with the six participants, they also sent me their concept maps and journals. I used their reflections from these three sources that covered a two-year period to assess their perspectives on teaching and learning over time.

In this qualitative study, I applied the dual processes of categorizing and connecting to analyze the data (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). When used together, these two procedures can provide a more holistic understanding of the results. To categorize the data I used the constant comparative method as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and by Charmaz (1998; 2000; 2005). Over a period of approximately 15 months, I manually coded every line of 418 pages of transcribed interview data. I also examined other sources including two sets of the participants’ concept

maps on effective teaching, and approximately 360 pages of their reflective journals. I did not code the concept maps and reflective journals but rather used these materials as evidence to corroborate the findings from the interview data. After categorizing the interview data, I used a connecting strategy to construct three narrative summaries that were based on a more contextualized analysis of each participant's story. The three participants that I selected for the narratives differed in terms of years of teaching experience, disciplinary background, and type of program. Therefore, they represented a purposive sample. I applied a methodology known as holistic content analysis as outlined by Lieblich (1998) and Seidman (1998) to identify major themes for the summaries. I also used a technique known as ghostwriting (Rhodes, 2000), whereby I constructed the narratives in the first person, using the participant's own words as much as possible. I sent the stories to the participants for their feedback; therefore the narratives became jointly constructed products. Throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation I wrote analytic memos. These memos helped me to remain aware of my biases, as well as the particular lenses, including that of researcher/teacher, through which the data were filtered.

## Results

In this section I describe the findings that emerged as a result of categorizing and connecting the data. Through categorizing, four major patterns became apparent. The process of connecting the data revealed more contextualized themes. Findings from these two methods converged into three major dimensions. Reflection on practice proved to be the principal mechanism underlying changes in the participants' perspectives on teaching and learning. These results are elaborated in the following section.

## Four Patterns

### **Categorizing the Data**

The process of evolution in the six participants' perspectives on teaching and learning over two years was revealed through four major patterns or phases. These patterns became apparent as a result of coding the interview data. As I examined the categories that emerged I asked myself, "What does this remind me of?" The images that resulted provided me with a way of clustering the categories, and

allowed me to view the data, at increasingly abstract levels. I used a metaphorical term to represent these images. The metaphors of *awakening*, *stretching*, *exercising*, and *shaping* provided a new lens onto the data (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). As thematic pieces of a process, the particular kinesthetic and emotional qualities that these metaphors evoked allowed me to view the phases in a qualitatively different, more integrated fashion.

When I analyzed the first set of interviews, three major themes emerged. First, the participants had become aware of their original perspectives on teaching and learning, which placed the teacher in a central role. They were also becoming unsettled, as they encountered evidence that challenged these perspectives, and they slowly began to shift their thinking. For some teachers, the process of becoming unsettled had begun even before the MTP, and had served as an impetus for them to seek professional assistance. Deana, a new teacher, was plagued by student failure: "I remember my first semester. I was well prepared; I thought I was doing everything a teacher should be doing. But the students were not learning."

Fran, an experienced teacher, was seeking a sense of community:

I was feeling quite alone in the classroom. I was feeling extremely marginalized. I felt that what I did in the classroom did not get seen by anyone. It was seen by my students and that's what I'm most concerned about. But everyone, once in a while, you'd like a bit of appreciation for what you do, from your colleagues, from somewhere at your work.

The three themes of becoming aware, becoming unsettled and shifting evoked the image of someone being roused from earlier ways of thinking, and suggested the metaphor of *awakening*. Further evidence for this metaphor emerged when I examined the participants' two concept maps on effective teaching, which they completed at the beginning and toward the end of the first course. I used the concept maps as a method of triangulating the data. In a commentary on her first concept map, Deana described her initial portrayal of the effective teacher as follows:

The effective teacher is one who knows the subject, who communicates with the students, and who cares about the students. As long as the teacher is well prepared, then the students are supposed to learn. There is no notion of learning strategies [in this map]. Students are expected to absorb the knowledge of the teacher by osmosis.

The contrast is evident in Deana’s commentary on her second map. In her portrayal of the effective teacher, students and their learning processes feature much more prominently:

The effective teacher is able to design a course where objectives are met through student involvement and learning activities.

Deana’s first and second concept maps are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

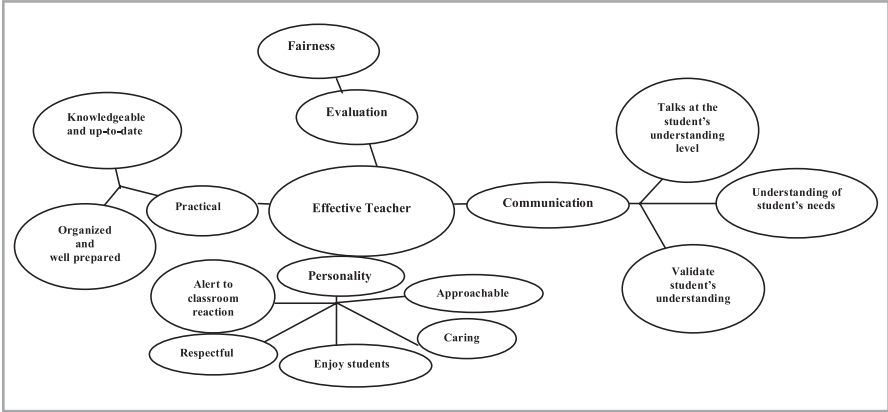


Fig. 1: Deana’s first concept map

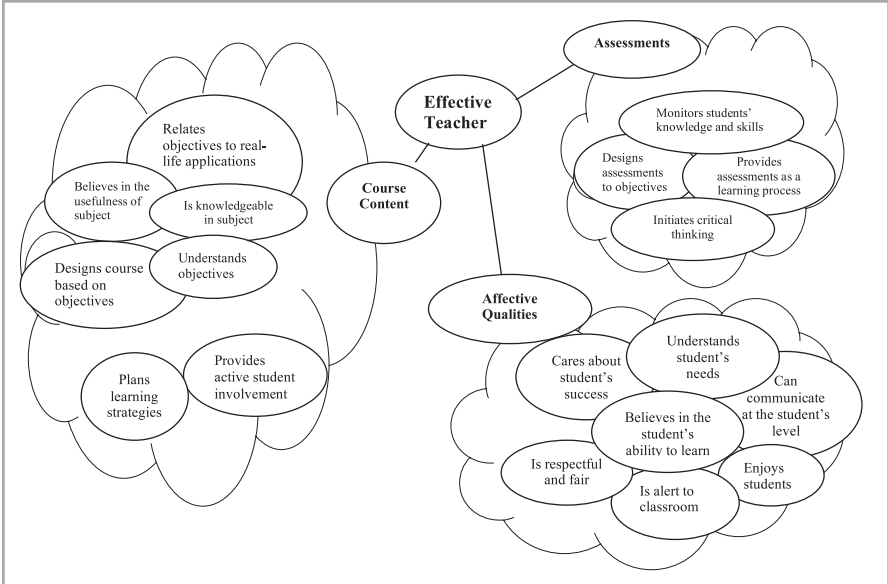


Fig. 2: Deana’s second concept map



During the first set of interviews, the participants expressed enthusiasm for the new ideas they had encountered. However, they were uncertain as to how to integrate these ideas into practice, as revealed in the following excerpt from Anne:

I wasn't really implementing a lot of what I was learning. I think I felt very invigorated and realized there was a lot to learn here and I enjoyed what I was learning, but I wasn't feeling comfortable enough to initiate a lot of new changes in the classroom.

When I met the participants for the second set of interviews, they had completed the second course, Psychology of Learning. Their knowledge of the learner and understanding of the learning process had expanded. Anne summarized the impact this knowledge had on her practice: "I have become more aware of looking at students as individuals and trying to figure out why they are there."

However, several participants regarded the course material as challenging, and they experienced difficulty making cognitive links between theory and practice. Ella expressed this sentiment as follows: "It raised a lot of questions in my mind and I have some answers, but I don't know if I have a lot of the answers. I think the psychology of learning is pretty complex."

I represented this second phase through the metaphor of *stretching*. Comprehending how a theory can be used as a tool to understand and diagnose issues related to learning proved to be a demanding task for the participants. The reflective journals which they completed throughout the program helped them to make links between theory and practice. In the following excerpt, Deana describes her initial resistance to journal writing, followed by a breakthrough:

At first, I did not want to think about who I was as a teacher. It was just too difficult. After the third or fourth journal I started to recognize their use. I started to connect the readings with my teaching. I was becoming a little more open.

During this phase, the MTP classroom milieu, in which ideas about learning were shared among teachers from various disciplines, was mentioned by several participants as an important component of their learning process.

In general, it was only after the third set of interviews that participants reported feeling confident enough to implement new instructional strategies in their

classrooms. These findings emerged in the second year of the program. The participants stated that they were moving out of their comfort zone and away from traditional ways of delivering content, as they integrated strategies designed to promote active student involvement. They also demonstrated an enhanced capacity to critically reflect on their practice. If classroom activities did not go as planned, they were able to call upon tools of analysis that enabled them to evaluate the situation, adjust the strategy, and try again. I referred to this phase as *exercising*, as the participants reportedly made the leap from theory to practice. Their background knowledge on how students learn appeared to be activated, influencing both their preparation and use of class time. Several teachers, including Fran below, mentioned a move away from “covering the content.”

The thing that I’ve learned more than anything else is to not sweat the content quite as much as I used to. Give them the tools to go to the next level; let them be learners and find the joy in it.

Data from the fourth set of interviews showed that participants had reached new insights about the meaning and purpose of assessment. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from Barb’s interview: “Back in the old days I would think, I’m teaching, now I have to do an evaluation; what a drag! Now I know that assessment drives the learning. Students learn what they’re going to be assessed on.”

I would describe the participants’ encounter with assessment as the most significant group awakening moment of the study, as they came to view assessment as a benchmark of student learning. This not only impacted their perspectives, but also, according to self-reports, influenced their practice. At this time, in the second year of the program, they demonstrated a more integrated understanding of the roles of teacher, learner, and curriculum. I referred to this phase as *shaping*.

## Connecting the Data

The four patterns that emerged as a result of coding the interview data also appeared, to greater or lesser extents, in the individual narratives which I constructed, using the participant’s own words. This served to confirm further the themes that had emerged. In her narrative which I entitled *Becoming Open to Change*, Deana, a new teacher, describes her process of learning:

When I look back over the MTP, I would say I’ve gone through several stages. First I had to learn this new knowledge. Then I had to take ownership for it

by connecting it to my discipline—I resisted this step. Finally, after careful planning, I tried new strategies....I felt I was becoming more open to change.

The two other narratives suggest similar patterns, that is, that a change in perspectives on teaching and learning preceded changes in practice. In general, results indicate that it took at least one year before perspectives were sufficiently in place to enable the participants to feel confident enough to implement changes in the classroom. However, Fran, a more experienced teacher, showed earlier signs of implementing changes in her practice, and this finding attests to the importance of including a more contextualized analysis.

The major themes of becoming open to change, learning as a student, and learning in community emerged in the narrative summaries. Anne, who had taught for five years, describes how her experience as a learner in the MTP has caused her to rethink her pedagogy. I entitled her narrative, *Learning as a Student*:

I've become even more aware of my students as individual learners. I realize I am quite motivated in my studies but I often think about what motivates them. I think the fact that I am a student has helped us to have a more open relationship—they know that I have assignments and deadlines too! I'm realizing even more that assessments have to match learning objectives. I'm wondering whether all those tests and assignments that I give and all that stress is really warranted. Perhaps we can assess more with less. I'm thinking of exploring group work.

The search for community was the driving force that first led Fran, an experienced teacher, to seek professional development. What emerged in her narrative was not only the sense that the program had validated her as an educator, but also that it had helped her to further validate her students and their learning. I entitled her narrative, *Learning in Community*:

We [teachers] have a lot to teach each other. I need the nourishment that this program provides at this point in my teaching career.... I believe in communities of learners. I didn't know that was my educational philosophy before, but now I do. I believe we are all in this together. Not only am I willing to give my students more information and more transparency, but I invite them to take part to a greater degree. I'm more open to negotiating what gets learned. In the past when I did this I felt I was being subversive,

and, in some ways, not a “good teacher” in the old, unenlightened sense of the word. All that has changed.

Findings from the dual analytic processes of categorizing and connecting converged to reveal similar results. Evidence showed that the participants’ perspectives had shifted from a teacher-centered/content-focused orientation, toward a student-centered/learner-focused orientation. This shift from teacher- to learner-centeredness has been described by other researchers (e.g., Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2002; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). Further, my findings provided empirical support for theoretical models such as Robertson (1999). My findings also showed that this shift was marked by three major dimensions: increased awareness of the learner and the learning process, increased intentionality to align the curriculum, and increased self-knowledge.

## Three Dimensions

At the beginning of the program, the participants’ initial descriptions of the learner revealed a number of misconceptions, which were often based on their own experiences as learners. As they encountered new information these perspectives altered, from viewing the student as a passive player, to one who learns best when actively engaged in the learning process. As well, there was a notable increase in their awareness of the individuality of student learning styles. Increased knowledge and awareness of the learner and the learning process have been identified as principal components of effective teaching in higher education (Beaty, 1998; Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987).

A second major dimension concerned the teacher and the teaching process. Initially, the teacher was viewed as the center, and the emphasis was placed on the delivery of content. As perspectives evolved, participants showed evidence of expanded pedagogical knowledge and a more critical outlook on their teaching. There were also signs of increased intentionality as they sought to align the curriculum by matching course objectives, learning tasks, and assessments. Their emphasis was on demystifying the learning process for students and orchestrating specific learning outcomes. Ella describes this change as follows: “The clarity [in my teaching] has improved and students need that. They don’t need the data dump. They have access to information. They just need focus.”

The third dimension, knowledge of self, is defined by Grossman (1995) as an awareness of one's values, strengths, weaknesses, and pedagogical goals. It has also been identified as a key component in successful teaching. As the participants became more aware of what was transpiring in the classroom, they reached new insights about themselves as educators. They reported an increased enjoyment in their teaching and an enhanced feeling of confidence. This confidence was manifested in their sense of themselves as teacher professionals. Anne describes this as follows: "I'm much more confident in the classroom. I speak from a position of knowledge of teaching, as opposed to just my discipline."

In spite of some of the challenges that participants had referred to throughout the program, such as balancing teaching responsibilities with their studies, an important outcome of the MTP appears to be an enhanced sense of identity as a teacher professional. The participants had shifted from viewing themselves uniquely as masters of their discipline, to viewing themselves as master teachers of their discipline. This suggests that knowledge of self as a teacher professional is a critical element of self-knowledge and of successful professional development programs. Grossman's definition of self-knowledge cited above should be expanded to include this component.

### Reflection on Practice

Reflection on practice over time emerged as the major mechanism underlying changes in perspectives on teaching and learning. The process of reflecting, which was assessed through interview data, journal entries, and concept maps, helped the participants link theory with practice. It provided them with tools to deconstruct what was happening in their classrooms, a process that Schön (1987) has described as "thinking on your feet." Anne describes how the process of reflection has afforded her critical insight into her practice: "The MTP has taught me to take the time to reflect. If you don't reflect, you're not going to change. And what you're offering the students isn't going to change either."

Journal writing served as an important medium for Fran's reflections:

It's the process of writing that does the teaching. It helps you shape those ideas. I feel that I am embarking on a career as a connoisseur and it changes things entirely. I see with new eyes, sometimes things I have seen for years, and not really seen.

Through reflection, participants reported that they were better equipped to examine the learning environment, assess the situation, and adjust their practice accordingly. Furthermore, as their knowledge base increased, their reflections became increasingly grounded in theory.

## Discussion and Limitations

The importance of examining teachers' perspectives was underscored in this study. New teachers, in particular, often hold misconceptions about teaching and learning that exert a negative influence on their practice. In order to improve the quality of teaching in higher education, these perspectives must first be addressed (McAlpine & Weston, 2000). The discourse on teacher perspectives offers an opportunity for radical change (Goodyear & Hativa, 2002). Professional development programs such as the MTP that address these perspectives represent a productive way forward.

Findings from this study detail the process of evolution in perspectives among teachers in higher education. In particular, these findings provide empirical support for the evolution in perspectives that has occurred among CEGEP teachers involved in the MTP. This evolution was demonstrated through the four patterns of awakening, stretching, exercising, and shaping. Additional signs of evolution as teacher practitioners were evident through increased awareness of the learner, greater intentionality in teaching, and enhanced self-knowledge. Moreover, the four patterns revealed that changes in the participants' perspectives preceded changes in their classroom practice, confirming one of the basic assumptions the MTP is based upon (see Bateman, 2002). In both describing a process of evolution from a teacher-to a learner-centered perspective through four patterns and three dimensions, and in specifying a time period of one year before perspectives impacted significantly on practice, this study answers the research question posed, and in doing so it contributes to the literature. This study is also unique in terms of its methodology, in that both categorizing and connecting procedures were used, with each procedure providing a unique analytic lens onto the data. For example, although evidence for the four patterns emerged through both procedures, some contextualized differences with respect to the time frame became apparent in the narrative summaries. Novice teachers seemed to adhere to the four patterns and time frame more closely than the experienced teacher. Both experience and disciplinary background may influence the rate of progression through the four patterns. Further research is required to clarify this.

Teacher professional identity emerged as an important component of self-knowledge in this study. The participants' identity as disciplinary experts expanded to include that of pedagogic expert. To this end, several participants mentioned the importance of engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues. They also stated that, aside from programs such as the MTP, few opportunities exist for teachers at the CEGEP level to become involved in this type of exchange. These findings suggest that more spaces need to be created to encourage a sense of teacher professional identity. In order to promote teaching excellence, institutions of higher education must be prepared to invest in this process. Finding additional ways to support and reward teacher participation in professional development programs such as the MTP are crucial.

This study has a number of limitations. Although the six participants represent a purposive sample, including male voices as well as teachers from all of the CEGEPs involved in the MTP would result in even greater representation. While I mention peer support as an important component of successful professional development programs, the time and scope of this study did not permit me to explore this factor more fully. Another limitation of this study is that I was unable to corroborate participants' self-reports with evidence from their teaching practice. In a follow-up study, I would examine a recording each teacher makes of her teaching in the second year of the program. This would allow me to explore the link between what teachers say they do (espoused beliefs) and their practice (theories-in-use) (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002).

Learning to teach in higher education has emerged as a complex process that evolves over time. The results of this study further challenge the assumption of double professionalism, that is, that disciplinary expertise entails a capacity to teach effectively (Beaty, 1998). I am grateful to my six participants for sharing their perspectives on teaching and learning with me. Their insights and reflections have provided me with much food for thought, and have helped to inform my evolving practice.

## Notes

1. This study was conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Education at McGill University. The PAREA grant that I received through the Ministry of Education of the province of Quebec, Canada, during the 2007-2008 academic year, enabled me to complete the study.

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# Southern Teachers Working in Canada's North: The Need for a Relevant Curriculum

Morgan Douglas, Kativik School Board

## **ABSTRACT** ([Press Here for Sound](#))

Great transition is happening in education in the north for Inuit students, in both program development and teacher orientation for southern, non-Inuit teachers. This article looks at a brief history of the north, the impact of southern intrusion, and how changes taking place today in both curriculum and development will bring about stronger educational experiences for Inuit students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**T**his article looks at the effects that post-colonization (Battiste, 2004) has had on education in the Arctic from a non-Inuit teacher's perspective. It is a chance for me to start looking at why changes need to be made by Qallunak (southern) teachers in northern classrooms, as well as looking at examples of curriculum changes that are currently taking place and the importance of these alterations. I come to this as a teacher myself, with most of my teaching career being in Nunavik and, for a short period, Nunavut. Working now as a pedagogical counselor and consultant in the north, I have had the pleasure of working with many southern teachers new to this culture; and finally I have had the joy of being involved in many curriculum projects aimed at hopefully improving education for the students of the north.

## **An Abbreviated History**

This journey starts by looking at the history, albeit a brief overview, of this particular area of the north, Nunavik, which is a provincial territory in Quebec, Canada

(Kativik School Board Social Studies Program, 1997). Nunavik, unlike the federal territory of Nunavut, is under the umbrella of three governments—the Canadian federal government, the Quebec provincial government, and its own local government called Kativik. This, however, is starting to change with the recent signing by all three bodies to create a new government system called the Nunavik government. Unlike Nunavut, which holds its own federal status, Nunavik will still be under the wings of the federal and provincial governments but will have more autonomy than the current Kativik government.

Historically, Nunavik was once called Quebec Nord, and in our southern schools was presented as a “barren land” and populated with the Inuit then called “Eskimos.” The nomadic way of living was necessary as the Arctic is a frozen desert so the land base is sand on top and permafrost underneath, making an agrarian society impossible. However, the land was rich with animals, especially seal, walrus, fish, ptarmigan, and other animals that sustained life.

In the 1600s, Rupert, cousin to the King of England, claimed the lands around the Hudson Bay—so named for Henry Hudson, whose men mutinied and left him and his son and loyal followers behind on Digges Island just off the shores of Ivujivik—thus began the invasion of the north by Europeans. Fur was the new gold for Europe, and the best way to get this “gold” was to use the people who knew the land. Trading posts were set up, creating a new kind of economy in the Inuit life, one that did not always benefit the culture. Inuit culture began serving this new economy, and Inuit autonomy on the whole began to slowly erode. This was not the only thing affected by the invasion by the Europeans.

Around the middle 1800s, the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches began to send clergy to the north to convert the Inuit people to Christianity. Along with this attempt to change the spiritual beliefs of the Inuit, came a decision by Anglican missionaries to create a written language for the Inuit. Until this time, Inuktitut was an oral language, rich in its way of preserving the history and ways of the Inuit. Stories had been passed down for many generations, that were both rich and comprehensive. For example, a mere reading of the book *Unraveling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony* (1983) shows how exacting the stories remained through many generations.

The missionaries decided to borrow the syllabics from the Cree culture, to create a written language for the Inuit. The oral tradition, which had sustained the society so well for thousands of years, was considered insufficient by the Europeans.

The power these ministers wielded for creating and implementing a writing system was another example of the European colonization of the culture. They knew that written language would ultimately help the Christians bring the Bible and other documents to these northern people, thus rooting Christian spirituality in the society in a permanent way. Inuit society was changing.

The nomadic traditions of Inuit culture were altered. By the 1940s and 1950s, the federal government informed the Inuit that if they wanted their government cheques, medical services, and so forth, they would have to move to permanent settlements along the coast of the Hudson Bay, the Hudson Strait (known as the Ungava Coast), and the Ungava Bay. Education was provided mainly in the form of residential schools (in Quebec, the school system for aboriginal students was both federal and provincial). Inuit people were told to wear the E number disks<sup>1</sup> for registration purposes for various government services (*The Voice of the Natives: The Canadian North and Alaska*, Blohm, 2001). Inuit family names were changed to English ones through government intervention. In short, the colonization and erosion of the Inuit culture steadily increased.

This abbreviated colonial history of Nunavik gives a sense of how the strong external controls and outside influences emanating from the South were eroding the culture. The continuing control of the north by government persisted into Canada's modern history, as late as 1972, during which time the government of Quebec, under Premier Robert Bourassa, decided to build a hydroelectric dam on the LaGrande River in Northern Quebec, with future plans to also dam the Great Whale River. This story becomes the centre point in the Quebec secondary four social studies program, and it is why I am relaying it here. I will discuss the social studies program as an example of important curriculum change for Inuit students.

The LaGrande River is in Cree territory and the Great Whale River is in Inuit Territory. Neither the government nor representatives from any of the societies or corporations involved with this hydroelectric dam project made an attempt to contact Cree or Inuit groups to inform them of what was going to happen to their native hunting grounds or homelands before the project began. With little consideration for these people, the government started its multimillion dollar project that would take many years to complete. The project drowned the lands of the Cree and Inuit people, taking away their homes, and affecting the migration of the animals they relied on for food. Finally, the northern people of Quebec, having had enough of government interference in their lives, formed a coalition and fought back.

The leaders of the coalition of Cree and Inuit people were Charlie Watt of Kuujuaq, now Senator Charlie Watt, and Billie Diamond, Cree chief and leader. This group went before Judge Albert Malouf of Quebec with a demand that the LaGrande River project be stopped so that negotiations could take place. These negotiations ultimately acknowledged the Cree and Inuit as the inhabitants of the north, and allowed their claims to the land to be established. From then on the government had to consult with the Cree and Inuit before the project could go ahead.

In an unprecedented move, Judge Malouf granted an interlocutory injunction supporting the claim of the Inuit and Cree. It stopped the dam project completely. Despite pursuing the project through the appellate court, the government realized that it would have to settle with the two groups. The James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) was thus created.

## **The Changes Begin**

Out of the JBNQA the Kativik School Board, Kativik Regional Government, Kativik Housing Board, Kativik Health Board, Kativik Social Services, Kativik Police Force, and so on was born. The future for the people of the north was looking better, but while extensive changes had been made for the Inuit to regain control of their land and culture, many still had huge problems gaining control of their lives. Much damage had been done to the people in terms of cultural and personal self-esteem. It would and will take a great deal of time, perhaps many generations, to right all the wrongs done in the name of “well-meaning” trading, educating, and activities involving trade, education and religious conversion by the south.

## **Changes Starting in Education—A New Inuit-Oriented Social Studies Program**

In terms of education, the federal and provincial school systems for aboriginal students in Quebec were eliminated and replaced by the Kativik School Board. Plans were made for new schools to be built in each of the communities, though this would take many years to complete. Along with physical ownership of education, the JBNQA made allowances for the Inuit culture to have a direct say in the way education would be handled for their children. The best illustration of this change in Inuit education is in the social studies program.

Until 1989, the program used for social studies in the north was the same as in the south—the Secondary One program focused on geography, Secondary Two on

history and Secondary Three on geography again. In all the curriculum documents there was barely a mention of the north and the people living there—they remained, in short, a mystery to the rest of Canada. Also, the board offices were administered out of the south in Montreal. Many of the people working in the office had never lived or taught in the north. In 1989, Inuit representatives expressed their unhappiness with the southern social studies program that was being taught in the Kativik school system. This group included elders, parents, and Inuit teachers. With the implementation of the JBNQA, a door was opened to allow the Inuit to take control of their educational needs, making programs more relevant and sensitive to their context and culture. The Kativik Social Studies Guide describes how the Inuit of Northern Quebec wanted a social studies program

that would include the study of the history of Nunavik including geography, economics, politics; reflect an Inuit perspective of history, geography, economics, and politics; develop the students' interest and skills in Inuktitut language; address the needs of second language learners. (Kativik Social Studies Program Guide, Secondary 1 to 5, p. i)

In 1990-1991, two curriculum developers were hired to build the Kativik School Board Social Studies program. For the next five years, with the help of elders and other people from the society, they looked at the needs and challenges of providing a culturally relevant social studies program. The implication of this forced the southern government in charge of education to admit that the educational needs for children of the north were very different from southern students, and that these needs had to be addressed.

Today, the program is in transition again and in need of further development to address the requirements of Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) by integrating the geography and Canadian/European history components throughout the program in a competency-based approach (i.e., an approach that encourages the development of "a set of behaviours based on the effective mobilization and use of a range of resources," both internal and external to the student) (MELS, 2009, Competencies section). However, it will still have Inuit history components, both modern and ancient, as well as a continuing look at the changes in Inuit culture and society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The goal is to help students develop competencies in the social studies area relevant to them as citizens of Nunavik. This means that Inuit students who successfully complete social studies will have developed an interest in Nunavik, northern politics, as well as in their country and the world. They will acquire the ability to not only present their perspective, but also to

try and understand the perspectives of others. The implementation of a program that is about the Inuit, for the Inuit, and uses Inuktitut alongside the second language is a significant development for the north and the students living here.

The current social studies program is not competency-based, but instead combines and integrates Inuit history, geography, northern economics, and relevant parts of European history. The competencies that will be developed for the Inuit social studies secondary program will be shaped into a program that is relevant to the Inuit people's own historical culture. It will enable Inuit students to see their society, and help them understand their role as responsible citizens in their communities and in Nunavik.

## Relevant ESL Program Created for the North

Another change relevant to schools in the north was the realization that a southern ESL program or English language arts program did not focus on what was needed for the students of Nunavik for whom English was neither their first language nor the language of the local community. In order to create a distinctive second language curriculum that would specifically meet the needs of the Inuit students, research was needed to decide the frame of reference for the new curriculum. First, the mission statement for the school board needed to be considered. Secondly, the philosophy of the Quebec Education Program (QEP) had to be looked at. These two values needed to be compared to see how they fit together. Once these two ideas were married, the beginnings of a new language curriculum could be deliberated.

The development of this new ESL curriculum had to consider many factors. First of all, the students were working in a forced second language situation where they had to learn all their core academic subjects in their second language. Secondly, this ESL program had to be extremely practical, so that when completed all students would be able to work with "southerners" in a second language situation, read and write in their second language, and continue their education and job training in a second language.

More importantly, this program needed to allow the students to rely solely on themselves for gathering information, generating opinions, translating, and feeling comfortable in any situation where their second language was necessary. In short,



we were creating an entirely new ESL curriculum that would sit comfortably with the culture, and yet give them the freedom and independence from translators to acquire and express ideas for themselves.

A team of educators from services and curriculum development in the north spent three years putting together a competency-based language program that allows Inuit students to learn a second language in authentic situations that are relevant in terms of culture, northern work, and social interaction. It allows for the fact that in most of our communities, teachers have to deal with one class of several secondary groups together. The scales and descriptors developed with this program allow the teachers to use common material amongst the group and also allow them to assess and evaluate based on the scales for each group within the class. The teacher is able to be creative not only in assessment situations, but also in using Learning and Evaluation Situations that have been developed specifically for these classrooms. They can also develop their own LES situations using the materials they have in the class as well as those that are sent to them by the Board.

The constant challenge for curriculum in northern schools is the multi-level classrooms that remain. It is not unusual for a teacher to be expected to teach a grade seven secondary one, two and four class, with the expectation that she/he will be able to teach the appropriate sciences, language, math and social studies that will benefit everyone in the multi-age class. The new language curriculum helps this situation a great deal, but we are still struggling with other subject areas that are still being developed to meet the unique requirements of many of the schools.

Despite all the work done in recent years to create an education foundation that is strong and meaningful to the culture, there is still great reliance on the south. This is especially true in the secondary sector where southern teachers come north to work in Inuit classrooms. The question remains: What can be done to help these teachers succeed?

## **Southern Teacher Development**

As a pedagogical counselor for secondary ESL and social studies, my approach with new teachers from the south is as follows. I emphasize that while they will be given all the books and materials required to perform well in the classroom, they must learn about the students first. If they do not develop a rapport with the students, if they do not try to find out about the students' cultural and social milieu, then successful education will not happen in their classes.

Secondly, I remind these teachers that they will eventually leave the north, unless they become married to a beneficiary, which would allow them to live permanently in Nunavik. Currently, anyone without beneficiary status cannot remain in Nunavik unless they are employed by a northern organization. The JBNQA makes it impossible for those who are not beneficiaries to stay, so educators come to Nunavik for the purposes of work, but with the knowledge that one day they shall leave. I remind the new teachers of this and tell them to make sure that when the time has come to leave, that they leave behind something constructive and positive for their students. I urge them not to leave a mess or a conflict and to be respectful of the place in which they have chosen to work.

From my perspective, successful teaching in the north happens when southern teachers rework their methodologies to adapt to the learning styles of Inuit students based on their knowledge of the milieu in which they have chosen to work. Sometimes this happens; at other times it does not. However, I wonder sometimes how many of our students succeed given the turnover of staff in the north. In many situations, I am sure that I, as a student, would not be successful.

Let me share my own realizations as a teacher. I wanted to be successful in the north, so I needed to try and put myself in the shoes of the students I was teaching. I took Inuktitut classes, as I had taken French classes all through school and high school. I kept thinking that I understood the nervousness that a student learning a second language has because, I thought, I too have been in their situation. But of course, this was arrogance at an extreme. First of all, my way of living was not “on the line” if I did not learn this second language. Secondly, I was not forced to take the second language; it was by choice, so I had the ability to walk away any time I wanted. Thirdly, I always had the “power language of English”—it was my first language and it was in societal control, and so there was never any danger to my self-esteem or cultural esteem development if I learned that second or third language.

In short, I had no idea what the students I was working with were really going through. My naivety was unbelievable. It created a journey for me with my students teaching me along the way, showing me how my own inability to understand what they were feeling could affect them in their learning.

Psychologist Haim Ginott (1972) has stated,

I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily

mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized. (p. 47)

Coming to any classroom brings great responsibility to the teacher. I feel that part of that accountability of the teacher is to understand the unique learning situation of the Inuit student. For this student, the language of power in the class is not his/her first language, and so the student is forced to learn in a second language. If the teacher is not from that culture, or does not try to understand the situation that the student finds her/himself in, it can wreak havoc on that student's learning, esteem, and cultural development. In situations where the power language is that of the teacher (i.e., English) and not that of the student, the teacher is always in control. For both the teacher and the student, this is a scary and daunting position to be in, even more so if the teacher is not aware of, or does not take the time to understand, what that means to the student.

In fact, I believe that the teacher from the south, who is teaching the power language, steps into what Freire calls "banking education" (Freire 1970; 2000). Without excusing the situation, the teacher may automatically revert to what Freire calls the "anti-dialogical banking education," sticking to content and keeping control of the class by controlling the language used and what will be done. This obviously creates the teacher-oriented class. A teacher sometimes can forget that students are trying to not just survive but thrive in a class where they have few choices in how they are going to learn or what they are going to learn.

In a recent article Kublu (an Inuk) and Mallon (2000), Kublu relates a story where she applied to an Inuit organization in Ottawa. She had her résumé written in English, but thought it should be translated into Inuktitut. This is how she described the text after the translation: "... and it sounded arrogant, boastful, and cold, cold, cold. Then she sat down and wrote a resume directly in Inuktitut. It came out fine, until she translated it into English. The English version was vague, unfocused, even wimpy!" (Kublu & Mallon, 2000, ¶ 3)

The translation between the two languages also brought what I would describe as a distinct change in tone. To an Inuk, the Inuktitut version would make perfect sense, but the translation to English made it inadequate and vice versa—from English to Inuktitut it became unclear.

This story pinpointed for me what I have been struggling to understand as both teacher and counselor for a long time. Are Inuit students being forced into a learning situation where they are personally negated—where their “Inukness” takes second place in themselves when they are working in their second language? Are southern teachers as a whole insensitive to the fact that learning this power language brings to this culture a sense of “dismissiveness” of their own culture? Given that southern teachers are unable to really walk in the footsteps of their Inuit students (i.e., the teachers’ language is never compromised), are they able to foster and create an atmosphere that is appropriate for learning the second language while still honouring and creating an academic environment that is inclusive of the Inuit culture?

It behooves educators to create the appropriate classroom milieu and learning situations for northern students when they are in a forced second language situation. Each August, the new teachers are invited to a week of orientation in the north. When they arrive, they are placed with a family from the community so that they can experience first-hand living in the culture. They will also see the lives of their students, and so starts the first contact and introduction to the culture for southern, non-Inuit teachers.

During the course of the week, I give four workshops for teachers. Two of them are in conjunction with the Kativik social studies program, in which the teachers come to understand the differences to the southern or other Canadian programs and the emphasis on Inuit history. Stress is placed on the importance that the program be followed. The other workshop is the explanation and implementation of the new ESL program, and how it allows for authentic learning situations for the students. While these two workshops are necessary in terms of what the teacher will be doing within the classroom, they also provide a place for discussion and questions.

In this workshop, which is predominantly presented in visual form, I discuss the importance of understanding that non-Inuit teachers cannot unilaterally impose their teaching style and southern perspectives on the students. I discuss the importance of ego-permeability, where a teacher needs to be open to what is happening for the students and to use those teaching moments whenever they arise. I also discuss language usage—how one should never leave the first language at the door (Cummins, 2000), and that it is important to let students use their own language to help them with their comprehension of their second language. For example, if a teacher has a concept that he or she would like the groups to present, the students could discuss, in their first language, the concepts, and then work together to create

their second language presentation. Also, when a concept explained by the teacher is not understood by all students. The teacher should invite students who did understand to translate the concept into Inuktitut. This not only honours the language of the students, but also allows all students to grasp the needed knowledge

I encourage the new teachers to go to the homes of the students they are teaching, meet the parents on "home ground," discuss things other than the school, and join in, whenever invited, on outings with people from the community. I strongly suggest that each teacher ask the students to teach them some Inuktitut as well, which allows both parties to see each other in a different light. Then, and only then, can a southern teacher begin to acquire an understanding of the milieu in which he or she has chosen to work. We encourage teachers to not compare their southern ways to northern ways. Both are unique and rich and must be experienced in their inimitable distinctiveness.

By virtue of their very presence at school, southern teachers are deeply involved in the development of Inuit students. They must create a receptive atmosphere for those students. Canadian schooling and learning of the second language must not threaten Inuit cultural identity and self-esteem. Educators must continue to develop programs that give strong foundations in education and honour the culture of the learners. To accomplish these goals, it is critical to help southern teachers become ever more aware of the clientele for whom they are working. It is a high expectation, but one that the Kativik School Board and Nunavik are addressing.

## Notes

1. Baptismal and Inuit names were recorded, along with the disk number, or E (Eskimo)-number, assigned to each Inuk. The disks were approximately the size of quarters, and were made from pressed fiber with a hole punched in the top, allowing them to be worn on a string around a neck or wrist. With approval of the Secretary for the Department of State, they were stamped with the Canadian Coat of Arms as well as their unique four-digit number. (Bonesteel, 2008, p. 38)

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# Theatre of Possibility: Performative Inquiry as Heuristic, Holistic, and Integrative Learning

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## ABSTRACT [\(Press Here for Sound\)](#)

This paper illustrates what Performative Inquiry, an embodied, interpretive and dialectical means of investigating curriculum, may contribute to teaching and learning. By contextualizing the discourse in a workshop on drama as a way to study Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, I demonstrate that Performative Inquiry builds on learners' experience and knowledge and recognizes their perceptions of who they are within certain contexts. I show, too, that this educative practice provokes critical thinking, increases self-understanding, and permits greater integration of mind and body. My overarching aim is to demonstrate that Performative Inquiry is a practice that fosters personal and community development.

## Prologue

*Imagine this: Sixteen women and men are spread randomly around a large classroom. They are standing quietly with their eyes closed. The open space they are occupying has been designated, some might say sanctified, for inquiry through dramatic play. During the previous few minutes they were guided through gentle stretches and breathing exercises intended to quiet their minds and relax their bodies. Now each person is listening to her or his breath enter and exit the body. Once most persons seem focused, the group facilitator asks them to note silently in which parts of their bodies they feel the greatest tension, stress, or discomfort as she guides them through a brief scan that starts with the toes, feet, and legs and gradually travels up to the shoulders, neck, face, and head. The participants are invited to breathe into any area that feels especially tight or painful. After providing time for the participants to release their muscles and become*

*more sensitive to their environment, the facilitator asks everyone to pay attention to his or her internal and external worlds in order to discern sounds on either plane. The participants are reminded not to hold their breath. As everyone and everything become still, background noises become apparent.*

*At the conclusion of this physical-sensory exercise the people in the group are asked to reflect on this experience. One person reports that he heard his heart beat, while another noticed her stomach gurgling. A few people mention that they became aware of the heating system shutting on and off and heard voices and laughter in the hallway. Others joke about the sound of traffic outside the building or the eerie creaking noises the floor makes. Several participants say they noticed that they felt more connected with their bodies, calmer, more at ease in the room, and attuned to one another. One or two people realize that the chatter in their heads has decreased.*

*The instructor thanks everyone for his or her contributions and reflects, "Isn't it interesting how much we may perceive when attending to our environment with our entire being?" The comment sparks a number of responses.*

Neither a transcription or an exact reproduction, this scene illustrates a preface to the practice of Performative Inquiry (Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Pelias, 2008), an umbrella term that covers many genres and forms of drama and theatre used in social science research and in education. Teaching and learning experienced through drama processes is embodied, heuristic, interactive, and imaginative. It is an educational practice that seeks to build on what students know, on their current perceptions about themselves and their societies, and on their concerns and interests. It, therefore, prioritizes relationships with and among students. Experiential, holistic, and multi-vocal, Performative Inquiry is an alternate way of understanding and approaching curriculum studies.

The following depiction draws on several investigations of drama as/in inquiry that I have led, but is contextualized in an introductory Bibliodrama (Pitzele, 1997) workshop that I facilitated for a graduate class in education. What follows is an illustrative reconstruction of what drama as/in learning may offer. My aim is to show how Performative Inquiry is an enlivening and empowering developmental practice.



## Dialogue One: Why Performative Inquiry?

*We human beings shape our realities from the meanings we have derived from experience. Since we are situated in particular bodies, eras, geographic locations, cultures, and belief systems, what we know is not transcendent, objective truth, but a complex, limited, evolving, subjective, and contextualized interpretation of existence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Gadamer, 2003). We, therefore, need pedagogies that will wake us to understanding epistemology (or how we know) as socially constructed and guide us to critical examinations of language and cultural narratives so that we may see beyond accepted systems and received knowledge (Freire, 1974; Greene, 1995). Due to the complexities and multiplicity of our worlds we need pedagogies that encourage embodied, holistic, multimodal and heuristic processes and demand attentiveness, reflexivity, and a “beginner’s” mind.*

*As educators interested in human development, we are obliged to consider the educative quality of the experiences we offer and whether our students are gaining tools and competencies that will shift their understanding (Dewey, 1997; Freire, 1974). As well, we need to ask if we are attempting to cast out generalizations and assumptions about students to make room for their conceptualizations of who they are and what interests them. We need to ask, too, if we are helping individuals to perceive that they are capable of engaging in some form of critical dialogue.*

*For me, Performative Inquiry is a means of teaching and learning that is especially compatible with these criteria. Not formulaic or reductionist, it allows learners to physically, sensually, emotionally, and cognitively enter the circumstances they are studying as if they were there. These intimate and playful examinations of narratives permit students to notice the relational qualities of knowledge and that stories may be told in more than one way. They also may perceive that their choices and actions influence the direction of the account and/or the quality of the experience (Wagner, 1998). Through dramatic play, students connect their personal and social knowledge with curriculum material and thus engage in a dialectical process that shifts their understanding (Dewey, 1997; O’Neill, 2006). Additionally, Performative Inquiry is collaborative and invites multilateral and multi-vocal discourse. Players can participate according to their abilities and interests yet still be involved in the inquiry. By asking creative questions that lead to imaginative reconstructions learners challenge the taken-for-granted and attune to unconscious knowledge. Performative Inquiry thus provides a window through which to envision alternate existences (Greene, 1995).*

## Dialogue Two: Performative Inquiry and Teacher Development

A couple of years ago I was asked to demonstrate a learning methodology to a group of educators, within the context of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1997). The warm-up exercise depicted above is one I did with this masters level class as we embarked on the investigation. During the previous few weeks, the group, which mostly consisted of secondary school English teachers, had discussed the book and written responses to several of its sections. Now I was going to facilitate embodied, interactive explorations of a few scenes and some themes the group had been grappling with by looking at the narrative off the written page and in a tangible physical space. We were about to enter segments of the narrative imaginatively, as if we were currently experiencing them.

I had been invited by the professor of this class to introduce her students to drama in/as education. The aim of the course was to consider the association between adolescents' autobiographical writing and the formation of identity. The class was studying stories by young people to try to discover how these authors were interpreting who they were in the situations they were describing. The site of our investigation was the writing of Anne Frank, a young Jewish-Dutch teenager, who was approximately eleven years old when the Germans invaded Holland in 1940. On June 12, 1942, Anne's thirteenth birthday, one of the gifts she received was a diary. Written in the form of intimate letters to or conversations with a friend, her journal entries began on the day she received the book.

June 12, 1942

I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone and hope you will be a great source of comfort and support (Frank, 1997, p. 1).

A few months after this birthday, Anne brought her diary, which she named Kitty, with her when she and her family escaped the Nazis by quickly moving to a hiding place in the old building where her father had worked.

I had corresponded and met with the class professor a few times before the date I was to work with her students because we wanted to exchange ideas about which themes and relationships to examine. We also wanted to converse about how to sensitively approach this work. My teaching practice involves coming to know the persons in my class. Since I would have only one occasion to work with this group,

I sought general information about the students and familiar learning modes of the class before meeting them. I also wanted to know if the students had any concerns about moving from the usual learning format.

Most of the students in the graduate class had little or no background in drama or performance and did not use drama in their professional practice; therefore the professor spoke to them about the types of activities I might ask them to try. I had requested that she explain that the work we would be doing focused on process. Acting ability or experience was not necessary, since we would view performance as embodied learning.

The students wondered: Would I treat Anne's story with respect? Would "acting out" scenes make them feel foolish or embarrassed? Would role-play trivialize the persons and the circumstances of the story? On the other hand, might I drag them through some form of emotionally grueling exercises?

These thoughtful questions made sense to me. They, along with the information and material the professor had shared, provided guides to follow as I planned the workshop. I definitely wanted to tell and show the students where I stood as an inquirer and as a teacher and the knowledge framework in which Performative Inquiry is located.

*I choose to situate this discussion in work with educators because innovative approaches to teaching and learning require practitioners who not only have experience with and knowledge of alternate processes but also identify with the frameworks that these methods enact. As Giroux (1987) argues, teachers must understand themselves as agents of transformation. As such they are persons interested and willing to critique the narratives that shape their knowledge and their work and perceive themselves as co-inquirers alongside their students. Interested in growth, inclusivity, change, creativity and justice, these teachers are receptive to dialogue, emerging knowledge, and unplanned curricular directions. Understanding themselves as explorers motivated by curiosity and passion, they build learning communities engaged in creative inquiry.*

*Betty Jane Wagner (1998) states that the aim of drama in education is to shift understanding. To achieve this aim, teachers must move away from practices based on formulae or dedicated to the transmission of knowledge. Dramatic play is a vehicle for close examination of aspects of human experiences and a means for trying out alternate ways to enact these situations. This work delves into the complexities of issues more than it attempts to find neat resolutions for them. Greene (1995) writes that*

*the challenge for teachers is to “devise situations in which the young will move from the habitual and the ordinary to consciously undertake a search” (p. 24). Teachers who employ Performative Inquiry must take up that challenge.*

## Dialogue Three: Preparation

On the day that I was to explore *The Diary of a Young Girl* with the education students, I felt excited and nervous. I had read and re-read my translated version of Anne’s diary and selected parts of the narrative that exemplified themes we would explore. To understand the larger context of Anne’s life, I had researched the events that led to the Second World War and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. I also had dipped into the literature on Anne Frank’s diary. Nevertheless, despite all my preparations and a firm sense of the directions I wanted to head with the class, I knew that nothing is predictable and that where we would travel would depend on how all the elements—the students, me, the room, and the circumstances—came together.

Another significant consideration was the itinerary of the exploration. I had to decide where and how to start our journey. Since the participants had already spent a fair amount of time closely reading and discussing the text, I decided to plunge directly into animating parts of the diary. Along the way we would pause to reflect on the processes in which we had been engaging. Afterward, there would be time to talk about ties between this work and theories about teaching and learning. One of the first things we did once the class had started was move the furniture to create room for play, movement, and interaction. It was a way to get bodies into action and to launch people into working together. I do not always use this tactic, however, in this case, not only was it a means to configuring the room to our needs, but also it was a signal that we were jointly preparing for a different way of learning. With tables out of the way, we formed a large semi-circle of chairs so that we could see one another and have a direct view of the playing space.

Once everyone was seated and seemed ready I thanked the class for the opportunity to work together and spoke briefly about why I engage in Performative Inquiry. I then invited each student to tell his or her name and to describe one thing he or she wanted to obtain from the workshop. Thus each person in the group was acknowledged and his or her interest recognized. At the same time the introductions initiated reflections about the process and where each person located him or herself within it.

*When using drama in teaching and learning we need to make time for dialogue outside of role-play. Various forms of discussion and communication around and beside performative explorations allow relationships to develop between the teacher and students and among students. It is through caring relationships that trust, an important ingredient in learning, is built. As well, through articulation learners gain competency in different types of communication and begin to think about which form of language might be most appropriate to a given situation. By being attentive to students' responses to curricular material or classroom events, teachers may gain insight into individuals' subjectivities, students' self-perceptions, aims, or needs (Paley, 2005). This knowledge may guide curricular choices.*

*Discourse in the classroom allows all members to contribute and be heard. It also can be a process for inclusive decision making, working through concerns, and evaluating activities. Discussion also offers a forum for establishing ethical criteria and behavioral boundaries in the classroom. Taking time to communicate makes people and relationships priorities.*

The first exercise we did aimed to attune participants to the environment and to thinking through the body.

"Let's get our bodies moving. Using all the open area start walking randomly around the room. Remain aware of other people and objects as you come across them but concentrate on walking. Avoid going around in circles, following others, or falling into any pattern."

After everyone was underway, I invited the group to try various modes of walking. "Walk as tall as you can," I called out. "Walk as small as you can. Now let your back lead you. Try letting your left shoulder point the way. Walk as quickly as you can," I challenged. "Can you walk as slow as molasses?"

During the exercise there were a couple of minor collisions and several times giggles erupted, nevertheless everyone was listening and enacting their version of the directions. Gradually we stopped and I asked the students to stand in a neutral position (feet hip width apart, arms at ease at the sides of the body, shoulders relaxed, and head and neck tall but not tensed) and to silently reflect on what they had experienced while walking. Soon after, I asked everyone to do a few limbering movements with me. These included neck and shoulder rolls, stretching arms upward and outward, bending forward, with flexed knees, to stretch out the spine, and shaking out limbs. Then we transitioned to the "listening" exercise I re-created at the

beginning of this paper. Afterward, I asked the participants to return to their random walk about the room.

*The “warm-up” stages (all the preparations and exercises previous to investigating curriculum through role-play) are crucial to teaching and learning through drama. First, the teacher must have a strong grasp of the subject matter that he or she will explore with students as well as facility with performance tools and techniques (Pitzele, 1997). If these are lacking the teacher cannot adequately shape educative experiences that stimulate insights and questions about the curriculum. Secondly, the teacher must designate a fair portion of time for games and exercises that initiate cohesion among the participants, allow persons to become relatively comfortable with physicalized learning, increase spontaneity, decrease inhibitions, and catalyze imagination (Spolin, 1983). Since learning through drama is a holistic process that draws on the body, senses, emotions, as well as the intellect, the practice of Performative Inquiry includes the cultivation of alert and responsive beings.*

## Dialogue Four: Reflection, the Crux of a Developmental Process

Since we were looking at Anne Frank’s story through the lenses of “freedom,” “oppression,” “hiding” and “resistance,” I devised an activity that would allow us to experience these concepts physically and metaphorically. As they strolled around our performance area, I asked the participants to join me in setting the circumstances.

“Let’s think about time and space in relationship to freedom, oppression, and hiding. First, we’ll close our semi-circle by adding more chairs to create a bounded area. Please leave plenty of room in the centre. Good. Now, resume walking as before, but inside this space. As you walk I will retell parts of Anne’s diary. I would like you to put yourselves in her shoes. Try to imagine the world she described as if you are experiencing it.

You are Anne walking in your neighbourhood in Amsterdam after the German invasion. In certain ways things are the same; in many ways they are not. Now you must go to a Jewish school. Former classmates shun you. Your neighbours avoid you. You may shop at Jewish stores only and within limited hours. You cannot own or ride a bicycle. You must be home by 8 p.m. because there is a curfew.”

I ask the participants to stop and to listen to their breaths. Then together we tighten the circle of chairs and resume the exercise.

“Anne you no longer are allowed to attend school but must study at home. When out of doors you must wear a yellow star to indicate that you are Jewish. Your father has lost his job. Your family subsists on poor quality food. A number of people in your community have disappeared. Either they have escaped across a border or they were transported to camps by the Nazis.”

We pause again. This time we bring the chairs in very close before continuing.

“Anne, now you and your family and four other people are hiding in the Annex of an old building. A secret passage leads to the rooms you and the others occupy. There is no other exit. You cannot go outside. You cannot make any noise during the day. All curtains must be drawn. You had to leave most of your possessions behind. Your friends do not know your whereabouts. You do not know what has happened to them.”

Within the tiny area between the chairs people can hardly move. They bump into one another. One woman knocks into a chair. I ask everyone to stop and to take a deep breath. “Can you describe your experience?” I inquire.

After a several moments, a woman says, “I felt everything around me shrink. It was as if I was being squeezed into something.”

“For me, it was like the world was being drained of colour. Everything was turning gray,” another woman offers.

More voices contribute to the conversation.

“I felt I was losing my sense of who I was.”

“I thought about my dog and how glad I was that we would walk to the park this evening.”

I thank everyone and suggest that we reform our semi-circle and sit down.

“While keeping the concepts we’re exploring in mind, let’s create a living sculpture of who is in this account. Anne writes about two main groups: the persons

in hiding upstairs and a few trusted employees who work in the offices downstairs. The Dutch people who continue to run the business are safeguarding the lives of those beyond the passage while endangering their own.

Why don't we begin by considering who dwells in the Annex. I invite each of you, one at a time, to choose an individual who is in hiding and say his or her name out loud. Then come onto our stage and strike a pose that for you expresses that person in some way. Keep your position, but don't hold your breath, as other members of our group come forward to add to the sculpture. You don't have to choose a person of the same gender or age. You can represent anyone you want. After the first person comes to the stage, everyone else must place him or herself in relation to the others who are forming the sculpture."

I demonstrate what I have described. I call out Mrs. Van Daan's name and step into the area in front of the group. Planting my feet wide apart, I lean forward, raise my right arm and point a finger accusingly toward the audience. I hold the pose for a few breaths.

"Okay, whenever one of you is ready just stand up and say the name of the character you are assuming. Not everyone has to participate, but I encourage you to join in."

Once everyone who wishes to has added to the sculpture, I ask the people who are creating the image and those in the audience to briefly look up and around to perceive what has been depicted. I then ask those still seated to form a parallel sculpture of the people who work downstairs. After the sculptures have been constructed and experienced they are dissolved and we all sit down. Again we share perceptions, thoughts, discoveries, and feelings about our experiences.

"This time we'll remain in our chairs for a while but I want each of you to imagine that you are Anne living in the Annex. This afternoon you are sitting away from the others, pretending to read a book, but actually thinking about former school friends. Your mind wanders to the boy you were attracted to. Where is he now you wonder? You remember your circle of girlfriends. Your mind flits to the news reports about Jewish people being rounded up and taken to labour camps or being shot. The Germans have occupied much of Europe. Beginning with the word 'I,' Anne, say what you are thinking and feeling."



"I want to be outside," one fellow states. "I want to breathe fresh air and see what's going on out there."

*"I hate being cooped up and isolated," I echo the participant's words to draw out the sub-text.*

"Everything is so murky and confusing. I feel nervous all the time," a woman says.

*"I don't understand what has happened. I'm anxious," I respond.*

Another woman calls out, "I'm angry. My life has been stolen from me. I should be free and enjoying my adolescence. Why doesn't anyone understand?"

*"Does anyone know or care how hard all this is on me? Do I dare hope to realize my dreams?"*

A person at the back says, "I try to be cheerful and make jokes. I don't want to add to Mama and Papa's worries but inside it's a whole other story. Sometimes, I'm very sad."

*"There's no one here I can really talk with. I feel very alone."*

We continue until everyone who wishes has had a chance to speak and then let Anne return to her book.

As the participants become more comfortable with the Bibliodrama process and further immersed in Anne Frank's story, we move to exercises that let us consider people and relationships from different points of view. I also explain that just as in the fantasy play of our childhoods we can be anyone or anything we wish and objects may represent any place, thing, or person.

I lift a chair and place it centre stage in front of the group. "Once again each of you is Anne. You have just had another run-in with Margot and your parents because you took a book Margot was reading. In your diary you write that you only have contempt for your mother. You feel she is hard hearted and speaks to you sarcastically. She never sees your side of a matter.

Anne this chair is your mother. She is ready and willing to listen to you. What would you like to say to her?"

Immediately one person speaks up. "Why do you think everything Margot does is wonderful and everything I do is bad or stupid?"

*"Don't you like me?"* I echo.

Another person responds, "I'll never be like Margot."

"Yeah," one of the men chimes in, "you don't know me. Why don't we ever really talk?"

*"I want you to see things from my point of view."*

After numerous lively interactions, we debrief what we discovered from this experience.

One woman confesses, "The situation took me back to when I was a kid, a young teen. I was so supersensitive. All the hormonal changes and life changes made my days one huge drama. Lord, I fought with my mother all the time. And Anne, she's going through all that and the insanity of war and persecution."

"Anne is an ordinary person in an extraordinary time," says another woman. "She's struggling to become her own person. It makes me sick to think how we older people twist kids' lives."

A thirty-something man sighs, "I have a seven-year-old boy. I think about all the times I did not stop to give him my full attention. I think about what my son will have to negotiate in this world ... How can I be there for him ...?"

Afterward, I offer another way to examine a relationship.

"I'd like to invite someone to come on to our playing area to represent Anne." A young woman steps up. "Thank you. Now, would someone like to be Margot?" A second woman volunteers. "Great. Now if you would stand back to back. Yes, like that. I'd like each of you to take turns starting a sentence with, 'You don't understand that ...' and complete it with something you want your sister to know. Let's start with Margot, the eldest, then it's Anne's turn, and then go back and forth."

After a slow start the two actors find they have much to say to one another.

Margot: You don't understand that my insides feel shredded because I'll probably never see Nathan again.

Anne: You don't understand that I care about you, but I can't control my emotions like you do. I need to talk.

Margot: You don't understand that I feel guilty because I'm the reason why we're all trapped here.

Anne: You don't realize that life would be so much worse; it would be hell if we had allowed the Nazis to take you away.

Margot: You don't understand that I feel responsible for you and wish I could change all this.

Once they each have had a roughly half a dozen turns, I ask them to pause and to turn and face each other. I place them about three feet apart and ask them to hold hands. Then I tell them to resume the exercise.

Anne: You don't understand that I wish we could share our experiences and feelings.

Margot: You don't understand that I want to reach out to you ... I just don't know what to say.

I let them continue the exercise for another minute and then ask them to stop and to step closer to one another. I ask them to look at one another and to give each other's hands a squeeze. I then thank them and invite them to go back to their chairs. When we reflect on this experience, I first ask the two players if they could share what they experienced.

In another scene we employ a technique called "doubling" (Pitzele, 1997). This time we turn to the two secretaries downstairs. Miep baked bread for Pentecost and has brought a loaf for the families in the Annex. Bep chastises her for doing too much. Besides, food is scarce and Bep feels that her friend should consider her and her husband's needs first. Miep views things in an opposite way.

Two volunteers are on stage playing the secretaries. I asked Bep to argue that Miep must consider her own welfare. Miep is to insist that she is doing too little. The two players are doing a fine job but we would benefit from hearing other possible ways to negotiate the relationship and tackle the issues. I ask the actors to freeze and ask if another participant wishes to play Bep. I choose one of the persons who has raised her hand and she switches places with the first Bep. A little later, I ask if there is someone who would like to offer another view of Miep. Actors are interchanged two

to three times; therefore we witness a few ways to interpret the characters and the circumstances.

I expand the role-play further by creating a scene that includes all the upstairs residents. I set the scene at dinnertime. I ask the students to choose what the meal consists of and who made it. Once all the players have come forward and are sitting around the dinner table, I ask the audience to give each character an action to play, while eating and interacting with the others. For instance, the person playing Mrs. Van Daan might continually reminisce about the excellent chicken and dumplings she used to cook on Friday evenings and the person who is Mr. Frank might obsessively refer to the news reported on the radio the night before.

Our final scene takes a different perspective on Anne's world. Once again I place an empty chair in the centre of the playing space. I turn to the students and say, "Each of you is a resident of the secret Annex. The chair represents pre-invasion Holland. As you look back on that time what do you remember? I invite each of you to say who you are and one of the things that you recollect."

"I'm Mrs. Frank," someone calls out. "I remember the tiny vegetable garden outside our kitchen. It was peaceful there. The air was sweet."

An older woman declares, "I'm Peter. I recall playing rugby at school. We had a strong team that the whole school cheered on. That was before Hans van Liefde told me and Alex that no one wanted to play with chimpanzees."

"I'm Mr. Van Daan," another person says. "I remember the pub where Eric and I would meet on Thursday afternoons. We'd gossip, tell jokes ... I remember Eric."

*Performative Inquiry investigates customs, language, speech, physical habits, ideas, relationships, and other large or small facets of human life. No matter from what vantage point, a teacher facilitates dramatic inquiry, a key aim is to enhance students' cultural literacy. Often Performative Inquiry begins with some form of "text" study. This may be a "reading" and examination of written, oral, or visual material from any genre of communication including historic account, memoir, anecdote, poem, short fiction, novel, journal, film, song, mural, or essay. Whatever kind of work, all its nooks and crannies are scrutinized and questions are posed about what they contain: Who was there? What season was it? How did they drink their tea? What was the name of the dog? Why did she wear those shoes? What happened before the story began? Why was he careless with his gift?*

*Every exploration is a convergence of the reader's experience and knowledge with the experience and knowledge of the character she/he is playing, the context in which the material is read, the author's intentions, the contents of the narrative, and much more. In other words, most sites of learning about people and societies are dense and complex. To confront this is to realize that what may be known is limited in scope and related to time and place. This information, however, does not diminish the value of reflection, analysis, or interpretation of facets of existence. However, the accumulation of knowledge is not the aim of inquiry. It may be helpful to ascertain how to build a fire, win friends, or make a fortune, but there is no definitive recipe for any of these. Though I am not dismissing the necessity and benefits of practical knowledge, I wonder if the significance of reflection is the discovery and rediscovery of who we are as human beings and how we act out the stories we live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in diverse life contexts. When we investigate stories are we not conjecturing how we would deal with these circumstances? Concurrently, are we not envisioning a shifted story of who we are, and in so doing, shifting? (Wagner, 1998) And, though questions may range from the seemingly banal to the seemingly sublime, do they not imply movement in thinking, some reforming of consciousness?*

*Teachers need to allow students' interior or tacit understandings to surface and crystallize into tangible material with which learners can interact. Teachers also must guide students to seeing how their daily existence and interests connect with larger issues and systems and how the personal and political impact one another.*

*In our example, "The Diary of a Young Girl," Anne Frank's writing reveals a bright, lively, cheeky, and playful thirteen year old, who is riddled by the concerns and anxieties typical to her age. Her questions about sex and sexuality; her conflicts with her sister and parents; her frustrations and hopes are states and situations with which contemporary youngsters may relate. However, Anne's stories about daily life in the Annex depict more than the trials of coming of age. Performative Inquiry is a vehicle that allows students to act as if they were in Anne's circumstances to discover what thoughts, feelings, and actions the situation elicits from them. With their teacher's guidance they may reflect on the significance of social-political constructs to individual lives and possible personal responses to these conditions.*

*When stories are taken into a performance space they gain dimensions. Inquirers not only are enacting plots but also relating to other living bodies physically, emotionally, intuitively, and spatially. Each player brings his or her subjectivities to the circumstances and is in dialogue with others' perspectives. Everything on stage is at once symbolic and interpretive.*

*At times, to enhance or deepen understanding about the lives and contexts we are considering, it may be worthwhile to depart from the narrative as it is written. Doing so provides additional paths to explore. For instance, if I create a scene between two people who, in the text, never meet, it is to consider how this encounter can illuminate the story told. These “what if” exercises point out who or what is missing from the text or suggest another way to conceive the experience described. In Performative Inquiry we need not stick with the letter of the script. We can play with time, place, points of view, or relationships in our search for the worlds within the cosmos of the narrative.*

*The performative learning space is highly demanding but also stimulating, provocative, and resonant. It is a location in which players may dare to fully be themselves and in so doing discover who they may become. Reflection on embodied experience permits integration of internal knowing with external being and external learning with internal states. This fusion of understanding illuminates what it means to be fully alive. I suggest that these are the kinds of experiences we want to evoke and have students learn from.*

*People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're really seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. (Campbell, 1988, p. 2)*

## Dialogue Five: Curriculum Studies and Performative Inquiry

At the end of the exercise, I ask everyone to stand and to shake out their arms and legs and to stretch in any way they desire. “Good. Take a step forward. Now take a step back. You are no longer a person from Anne Frank’s diary. You are yourself, back in your classroom, at your university, in the present time. Please be seated. Thank you for all your hard work and wonderful insights. I’d like you take out your pens and paper. Think about Anne Frank in the Annex, writing in her notebook. Is there a brief message you would like to send back to her? Could you please write it?”

I give the group two minutes to create its messages and then ask if anyone would like to read his or her note. This time, we just listen to one another, but make no comments.

Later, I give each person a piece of blank paper and some crayons. I ask everyone to find a spot in the room where they can comfortably draw. I give the participants five minutes to draw an image that represents their experience of the workshop. They must also give their work a title. Afterward, the participants present their work and explain what it signifies.

Our study of Anne Frank's diary is over, but I have left an ample amount of time for questions about Performative Inquiry. During this phase of the workshop, I also ask the students to brainstorm ideas about possible implications this work has for teaching and learning.

It is late, time to leave. We all have worked very hard even though it seemed like play.

*A conscientizing (Freire, 1974) endeavour Performative Inquiry is a non-normative approach to learning in which teachers, students, classrooms, resources, courses of study, and learning strategies all matter. A way to study curriculum, Performative Inquiry also is curriculum. Investigative and analytical, it also is interpretive.*

*Performative Inquiry is a practice founded on the notion that learning is a life-long process of change and growth. Ironically, as teachers and students venture into new knowledge territories, they re-create the landscape as they tread it. Fels and Belliveau (2008) explain that Performative Inquiry is situated in a paradigm that understands existence as a process of "generative unfolding" (p. 28). In learning through drama, coming to know a phenomenon entails changing it and it changing you. In this system, curriculum may be described as emergent, dynamic, co-constructed, complex, tied to context, shaped by subjectivities, intertextual, and relational.*

*On this voyage there is no promise of a grand revelation at the end of the road. Along the way travelers are shaped by what they make of the experiences they encounter.*

*We are the echo of the future*

*On the door it says what to do to survive  
But we were not born to survive  
Only to live.*

*W.S. Merwin "The River of Bees" (Merwin, 1973 as cited in Libby, 1984)*

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