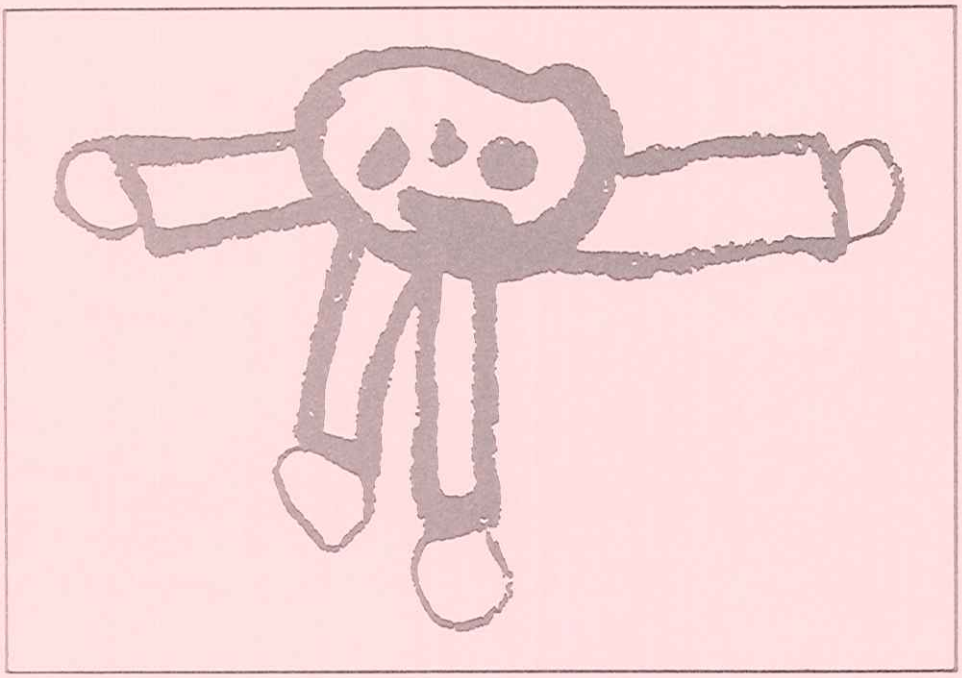
North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Cecelia Traugh Rhoda Kanevsky Anne Martin
Alice Seletsky Karen Woolf Lynne Strieb

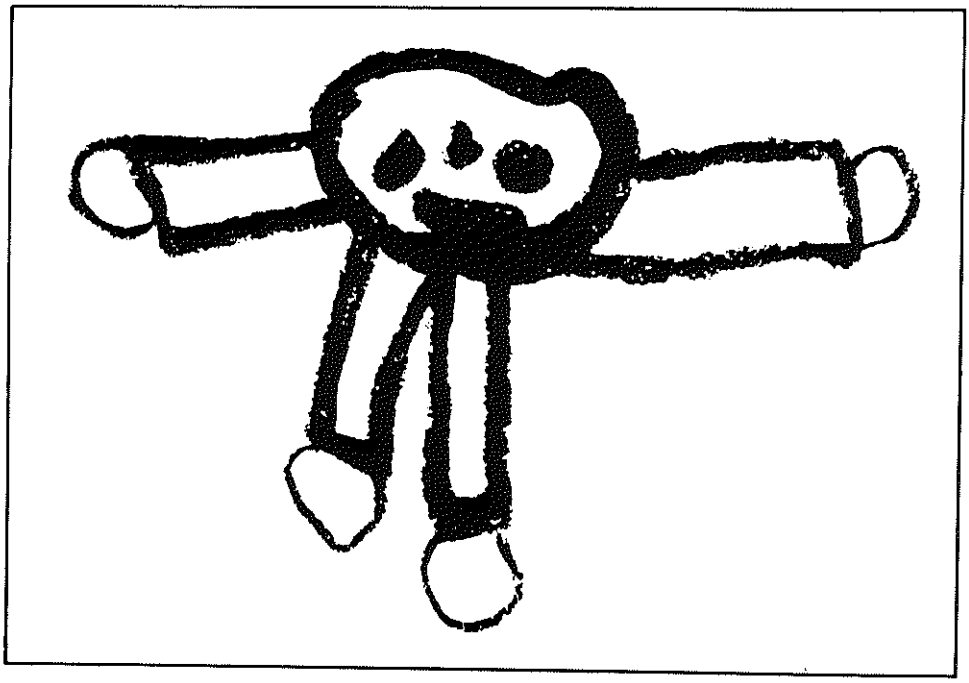
SPEAKING OUT: TEACHERS ON TEACHING

In November 1972, educators from several parts of the United States met at the University of North Dakota to discuss some common concerns about the narrow accountability ethos that had begun to dominate schools and to share what many believed to be more sensible means of both documenting and assessing children's learning. Subsequent meetings, much sharing of evaluation information, and financial and moral support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have all contributed to keeping together what is now called the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. A major goal of the Study Group, beyond support for individual participants and programs, is to provide materials for teachers, parents, school administrators and governmental decision-makers (within State Education Agencies and the U.S. Office of Education) that might encourage re-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling.

Towards this end, the Study Group has initiated a continuing series of monographs, of which this paper is one. Over time, the series will include material on, among other things, children's thinking, children's language, teacher support systems, inservice training, the school's relationship to the larger community. The intent is that these papers be taken not as final statements--a new ideology, but as working papers, written by people who are acting on, not just thinking about, these problems, whose implications need an active and considered response.

Vito Perrone

North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Cecelia Traugh Rhoda Kanevsky Anne Martin
Alice Seletsky Karen Woolf Lynne Strieb

SPEAKING OUT: TEACHERS ON TEACHING

University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, North Dakota 58202
October 1986

Contents

1

Speaking Out: An Introduction

Cecelia Traugh

Rhoda Kanevsky teaches a first and second grade combination class at Powel School in Philadelphia. She has been a public school teacher for 18 years. *Alice Seletsky*, who has taught for 27 years, teaches a 5/6 combination class at Central Park East School in New York City. *Lynne Strieb* teaches first grade at Kelley School, Philadelphia. She has been teaching for 18 years. *Anne Martin* teaches at Lawrence School in the Brookline, Massachusetts, public school system. She currently teaches in kindergarten. *Karen Woolf* teaches second grade at Cutler School in the Hamilton-Wenham District, Wenham, Massachusetts. She has taught in this district for 15 years. *Cecilia Traugh* directs the Middle School at Friends Select School, Philadelphia. She has been a teacher and administrator in high schools and in university teacher education programs for the past 18 years.

For a range of reasons--for example the hierarchical structure of most schools and the fact that most teachers are women--teachers are usually not the speakers of their craft. In the recent spate of reports and critical studies on schools and schooling, the viewpoints of teachers have not been represented. Very little has been heard from those who spend the most time in schools and classrooms and who have a comprehensive store of knowledge about children. In fact, not only are the voices of teachers unsought, they are often mistrusted and disparaged. This monograph is a challenge to the assumptions and attitudes about teachers and teaching which allow such an imbalance to continue.

This monograph is about our teaching practice--what it is and what it could be. It is about teachers--what we do and how we think about and learn from what is done. It is an exploration of a set of ideas about teaching--ideas which have a long history--which are made particular by our current, lived experience. Finally, and most importantly, it is about having a voice in what we do.

Having a voice is critical and political. We create, share, and change our world with and through language. Recognizing that day-to-day experience is a powerful source of understanding and knowledge which, when articulated, can be fed back into the quality of work is critical for teachers in gaining a voice. Recognizing knowledge and voicing it is basic to changing the ways teaching is thought about and enacted.

Voices, of course, need to be cultivated and supported. About 15 years ago, groups of teachers across the country started creating varying opportunities to lend each other the kinds of support needed to make themselves heard. For the teachers participating in this project, collegial groups (described later in this monograph) have been particularly important. They allowed teachers to talk about their practice and the children they teach, to describe both in some detail, and to help each other find the patterns and relationships, and thus meanings, within the wealth of detail of their teaching lives. These groups created space and time within which teachers could do this kind of thinking.

For many members of our by now large group, writing voices developed alongside our speaking voices. The way is not easy for teachers who want to become writers. Many are fearful of writing. For some people, teacher and student alike, this fear probably grows out of the nature of writing itself--the potentially public and permanent exposure of thought--and from commonly held views that there are right and wrong ways to write. In any event, recognition of the uncertainties was an important part of developing our voices. Lack of time was (and is) another, perhaps even more important, obstacle. Teachers are not usually provided time in their schedules for scholarly efforts of any kind. Teachers wanting to keep written records of their children's activities or to keep teaching journals have to set aside time in already full teaching days. Time is an ever-present issue for teachers; making time for journal writing, for example, only occurs when it is considered tremendously important. For many of us, it was through learning to keep teaching and personal journals that we found a writing voice. In addition, child studies done for academic purposes and master's papers were important parts of the writing history of some members of our group. A few of us have even succeeded in publishing articles in professional journals. Looking back over the writing efforts of the group, it seems a natural though effortful growth, with the personal, informal, and detailed journal always at its source.

This monograph was initially conceived as a pamphlet of papers for the local use of teachers. The papers were intended to provide a forum through which teachers could add their perspectives and opinions on the issues raised by the aforementioned national reports. Since these reports, for the most part, offer little access to the actual day-to-day life of the classroom as it is experienced by teachers and students, the authors of this monograph decided to use classroom stories as the vehicle for their commentary.

The collection of these first-hand, personal accounts began in the 1984 Prospect Summer Institutes and were added to by a series of group interviews and journal-style compositions contributed by members of local teacher cooperatives and study groups. As material was amassed, the sheer amount of it as well as the understandably uneven consistency of the contributions began to pose major selection and editorial questions. However, both the amount and the range of the response were also incontrovertible testimony to the enthusiasm felt by teachers for this project. Indeed, if there had been any doubt that teachers wished to have their voices heard in the educational debate, the response to this opportunity to speak would have resolved it.

Anne Martin, "Back to Kindergarten Basics," *Harvard Education Review*, 55:3 (August 1985); ____, "Storytelling in Kindergarten," *Teachers & Writers*, 16:5 (May-June 1985); ____, *The Words in My Pencil: Considering Children's Writing* (Grand Forks, N.D.: University of North Dakota Press, 1981). Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative, "On Becoming Teacher Experts: Buying Time," *Language Arts*, 61:7 (November 1984). Alice Seletsky, "Where the Action Is," *The Nation* (May 25, 1985). Lynne Strieb, *A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal* (Grand Forks, N.D.: University of North Dakota Press, 1985).

The Prospect Summer Institute is a summer study program for teachers and teacher educators sponsored by the Prospect Center for Research and Education, North Bennington, Vermont, and funded by the Noyes Foundation. For 16 years, this Institute has been characterized by the exploration of the reciprocal relationship between philosophical ideas and classroom practice and by the ongoing participation of a core-group of teachers.

We had literally stacks of material to sort and organize. This was a daunting task for a far-flung group of collaborators, almost all of whom were full-time classroom teachers. Out of the need to keep the project alive and active, a Writing Project Committee was established. The task of this Committee was to give shape to the materials so far collected, and to expand the source of the stories to include teachers from minority groups and from a broader range of school and cultural circumstances. In the course of these discussions was born the idea of a monograph re-envisioning teaching. Believing that the ground shared by all teachers is the classroom, we are asserting the knowledge and power which comes from this different vision.

We find ourselves living and working in an educational climate which is narrowing thought about what teaching and learning are. An example: "Teacher-proof" materials that give teachers tasks with prescribed boundaries and methods and rules to follow. Teachers using these materials are expected to follow prescriptions, and, in so doing, become cogs in a machine. Another example: Much of what children are asked to learn in school is presented in a workbook/paper and pencil format, in easily testable segments. Intended to teach such subjects as reading, writing, or thinking, the individual pieces often are not recognizable either to teachers or students as belonging to a meaningful whole. A third example: Classroom experience is viewed as an unreliable source of knowledge, one which cannot be trusted, one which shifts and moves. Teachers have learned to doubt the knowledge gained from their experience and have learned to defer to outside experts.

Teaching as art is one way we have of describing the set of ideas which guide our practice. Using art as a metaphor for teaching allows us to envision our work as having a wonderfully broad array of possibilities. Such a conception of teaching helps keep us alive as teachers: It helps us continue to speak out, to do what is increasingly difficult. Describing teaching as an art helps us "face up to the harshness of whatever confronts [us] and imagine it anew."*

*Edward L. Murray, *Imaginative Thinking and Human Existence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1986).

Teaching as art is actually a traditional way to describe teaching. However, in current educational discussions, this view seems to hold little sway. It is an idea which seems to have lost its substance. One overall aim of this monograph is to enliven the metaphor; to explore the possibilities of viewing teaching as a mode of expression and as an aesthetic way of knowing. Further, this monograph is an attempt to provide the kind of detail needed in order to better understand teaching, to better know how teaching as an

art develops, and to begin to know what kinds of contexts can support that development.

"Classroom Life: Some Interpretations," the first chapter, is a collection of descriptions teachers have made of their lives in classrooms. One of the aims of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the written sources we have drawn on. Another is to share stories or parts of stories which provide the kind of detail needed to better understand teaching and children. Some of the selections are written in the immediacy of immersion in the classroom; others are reflections made when enough time has passed to allow some sense and meaning to come forth; still others are recordings of group conversations from which patterns are emerging.

The second chapter focuses on our "beginnings" as teachers. The individuals who reveal themselves in these stories come from a wide range of backgrounds and have various interests. All were drawn by the adventure and challenge they saw in teaching. Teachers' stories of what drew them to or pushed them into teaching make it clear that their choices had to do with their own values, preferences, and aspirations as well as with what teaching makes possible as work. These emphases are different from those in current studies which emphasize salary, working conditions, and teacher hierarchy. These stories are full of idealism, of aspiration, of wonder at children and their learning, and of the richness of life with children. However, they also recognize social and political realities, like racism, sexism, poverty, and the politics of public education.

"Nurturing the Possibilities" describes the potentials teaching has as a way of life. The words that appear and reappear throughout this chapter are *discover, challenge, unpredictable, risk, growth, sharing, being human.* These words take on meaning in the contexts of children, learning, and classrooms. Teachers know that their work extends them productively, is an intellectual challenge, and has worth to both individuals and to the community. This knowledge carries in it both a description of actuality and a lively vision of possibility. The stories teachers relate in this chapter tell of possibilities which are available to them as teachers and of how, even in the most difficult of circumstances, these possibilities keep them alive as teachers and passionate about what they do.

While teaching is full of possibilities for many of us and, indeed, is practiced by many as the art it can be, it often has to achieve this fullness in the face of adversity. Many schools are difficult places in which to work and grow. "Hard Times" documents the conditions which undermine quality practice, which make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve teaching's

The small group of us writing this monograph took on this responsibility as a kind of trust. It was a trust from all the teachers who shared a story about their teaching lives. Even though all these voices are not quoted in this monograph, they were all heard and are part of the spirit giving shape to the effort. It was also a trust from Pat Carini and the Prospect Center. We began telling our stories in the context of recent Prospect-centered activities and, more importantly, it is the context of our long association with Prospect which has strengthened our voices and our desire to make them heard.

We also gratefully acknowledge the very substantial help and support given to us by the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, which funded the Prospect November Conferences and Summer Institutes at which much of our work was done. We also thank the North Dakota Study Group, which heard panels of us tell our stories at two recent February Conferences and whose moral support can always be counted on. A special thanks goes to Brenda Engel, who read our manuscript and gently gave us the critique and help we needed as we finished our work.

potential as art. The stories told in this chapter describe problematic political and social conditions in schools as institutions; they tell of teachers' feelings of isolation, fear, and powerlessness. These stories talk of time--its lack and its waste. And, they describe the struggles to fight fragmentation and garner the support needed to merely survive. The stories in this chapter speak of value and of courage. It should be noted, however, that the stories merely touch on the constraints placed on teachers by mandated curriculum, testing, inequality of resources, racism, and the status of teachers and so on. To discuss these issues fully, another volume would be necessary.

The art of teaching is best cultivated within a supportive community. This belief grows out of the experience of the educators speaking in this volume and their ideas about what contributes most to our humanness. "Community and Collegiality" is an exploration of the ideas of community, trust, and conversation. It is also a collection of descriptions of a variety of ways teachers have found to build community and strengthen themselves as individuals by developing collegial relationships. This chapter is another statement of possibility. It is also a statement of political intention.

2

Classroom Life: Some Interpretations

Rhoda Kanevsky and Cecelia Traugh

In many ways, the materials drawn on in this chapter are raw and unprocessed: selections from teachers' journals--journals which are the day-by-day, year-by-year recording of the work and thought involved in teaching; selections from school records written for the official purpose of documenting children's school lives; selections from recorded conversations held in teachers' groups and interviews done to elicit teachers' stories; and, finally, selections from conversations and curriculum interviews, activities which have supported teachers in their quests to make their work more explicit and accessible. They are the recordings of minds at work, talking together, telling stories, asking small and large questions, observing, remembering, worrying, wondering, understanding, looking for meaningful patterns in classroom experiences accumulated over time, in a variety of contexts.

Our classrooms are complicated and complex. They are full of the details of people living together. They house the web-like structures of relationships which develop over time. They generate lives of their own but they also include and respond to the lives people lead outside their walls. They are the setting for the exploration and implementation of ideas. They support the *having* of new ideas. The images that shape our talk about classroom life are of beehives of activity; popcorn poppers, with ideas bouncing off walls; workshop/laboratories where students and teachers engage in serious, purposeful work; tapestries of interwoven lives.

As teachers, we are temporarily immersed in this busy life, a part of what occurs. The question is: How do we lift our heads up out of the stream, which in its movement carries us along, to see where we are going and look back at where we have been? And, if we are able to see, how do we keep track of what we see? How do we make sense of it and see the patterns in it?

Taking advantage of the classroom's potential as a source of knowledge which will nurture and feed the quality of work done in that classroom requires special efforts and energy. However, the means we can use to pull what is important out of the vague, undifferentiated background of experience are readily available to us and indeed they have long histories in the ordinary human effort to keep track and make sense of our work lives: conversations, journals, interviews, and stories are among the most useful of these modes.

Even though in the life of our classrooms, or in our thinking about them, things don't fall out quite so neatly, here for the sake of discussion we have organized the materials loosely around the themes of children, curriculum, and classroom practice.

TEACHERS THINK ABOUT CHILDREN

In attempting to learn more about children and about their education, we attend to who they are, what they do, and what they make. We record incidents in a child's classroom life so that the child can be understood more deeply and planned for more effectively. At

its best and most serious, teaching practice means detailed knowledge of children and subject matter. A common way for teachers to record what they have observed and know about a child are anecdotal records:

*The names of children throughout this monograph are pseudonyms.

*Ann Marie:** What a delight to have her again this year. She's comfortable, and I know just how to reach her. First day of school, she wrote a poem in her journal--she called it a song she made up. And she was spunky enough to sing it at sharing time for everyone. (No one giggled.) It set a good tone for the rest of the sharing. I remember how she dictated in her first grade journal, "everything belongs in the world." She's affectionate and tells lots of stories about families and friends. She doesn't like scary things, scary songs like "The Ghost of John," or gory monsters. But she's trying cheerfully to bear them when necessary. She even is trying to handle the praying mantis this year. She worked a lot with pattern blocks this week. She couldn't get the triangle blocks together to put them away on the shelf. She kept reversing them and missing the way they go together to make a rectangle. Her handwriting is still pretty rough, too. Lots of reversals. And math is hard for her. I have to remember not to embarrass her and to be sure to give her lots of concrete experiences with numbers. But as is typical of her, she keeps persisting and cheerfully accepts any task I give her to do.

She still loves the taped Bill Martin books. I am convinced that she really learned to read listening to *Fire, Fire Said Mrs. McGuire* last year. I have seen rhythms just sweep her away. She seems to get hypnotized by rhythmic repetitions in songs and poems. I can see her moving with them and she gets a glazed look in her eyes. Very available to feeling of all kinds, come to think of it. She does get her feelings hurt pretty easily, too. She tries hard to hide it when she gets upset. I'll have to think of some ways to give her words for that.

Rhoda Kanevsky

Another is the classroom journal, here tracking the progress of individual children:

> Edward was bored and I thought he'd enjoy learning Origami. I felt that his interests in construction and detail as well as his pride in Japanese things would lead him to this. I also called Ben because he seems to love detail. Tami asked if she could do it too. Alas, we got as far as the fourth fold and I couldn't follow the instructions. I really want to learn and teach this.
>
> When Foster asked what he was doing, Edward said in a snobbish way, "It's Origami, if you know what that is," and he turned his back to Foster. I was annoyed by the unkind way in which he treated Foster, and I told him so.

> Abdul is so negative. Every time he gets a paper to work on, he complains. Today he cried in his reading group when Liz, the Reading Aide, asked him to name the letters. It was upsetting to him to be shown what he does not know. As we looked at and talked about the mice, he was a completely different child. He is always so confident and knowledgeable when we talk about trees, plants, animals, and works of art. And when he drew a picture and dictated its story to me, he was able to find other words on the cards that started with "m" as in "mice." It's too bad that in some classrooms children like Abdul are not given an opportunity to learn through the things in which they are interested. They are permitted to use only the dry workbooks and basal, and there are no alternatives in which they can find a place for themselves. If I could just keep working in this direction (teaching him to read from his own writing about the animals, etc. in the classroom), he'll gain confidence.

Lynne Strieb

The teacher in the following journal entries is paying attention to both individual children and the classroom as community:

> *October 14:* Discussion today about rules--what rules do we need; who should make them--kids or grownups, etc. They chose the bathroom and homework as the ones that were major issues. I asked Charmayne to be the moderator, and she did a good job keeping the discussion moving around, not allowing R., and J., and S. to monopolize the talk. I mostly sat and listened. They were in general agreement that they shouldn't make the rules--I should do it and they'll give advice and consent.

I agreed to write them up and submit them for approval. Lots of talk about what constitutes appropriate "penalties" for not doing homework, etc.

October 23: Victoria is having a very hard time settling in. Doesn't know what she wants to do; says she isn't interested in anything--everything's "boring" and goes through the motions, but her heart's not in it. Worked a little in clay, didn't want to paint, spent a lot of time chatting with various friends, and then had a tiff with Maryanne, which resulted in various friends of both girls taking sides, going off into corners to discuss, etc. It continued on and off all morning, and was a giant pain in the neck because I had to give a lot of attention to the group that's starting their animation, and felt myself pulled in more than the usual number of directions.

November 20: Max, Freddie, and Peter came in together, earlier than the rest, and just sat around chatting with me while I finished setting things up. Such a nice easy conversation. Max told a dream he'd had about his grandmother being shot and how terrible it made him feel because she had raised him--"When I was born, my mother and father were young and they wanted to go out a lot so my grandmother took care of me." The others were appropriately solemn. Then we talked about dreaming--Peter talked about REM sleep, and was being very professorial. Now, everyone doing quiet reading, and I'm observing Ruthanne: sitting on the rug leaning against the wall, head back staring into space. Book is on her lap, legs straight out and feet are moving rhythmically. Looks down at book, looks up and around the room and catches Max's eye and smiles at him; plays with her nose, holding the tip in her fingers and moving it from side to side. Gets up and goes back to place on the rug, reads a half page or so, looks around the room. Is this the symptom or the cause of her problems with reading?

Alice Seletsky

This brief entry focused on one child:

After three occasions in the computer room Billy got some words down. He didn't have difficulty doing that. Why did it take so long? Lots of energy and hard for him to focus. He worked better alone and with specific instruction from me along with my being at his side. Ari also took three shots to take

stuff seriously. He felt good about learning how to manipulate the machine.

Diane Mullins

The next two entries were written not in the immediacy of classroom life, but from the vantage point of elapsed time. Sometimes, the passage of time itself allows one a clarity of vision not possible in the immediate circumstances:

. . . I was a conservative New Hampshire teacher, but at the same time I was beginning to open my ears and open my eyes, and I was beginning to listen to kids. What I really noticed, was that any time I taught anything that had a manipulative, touch-feel-smell ingredient to it, the children remembered so much longer than the ordinary things that we would do. One time, two little kids were talking about a cardboard bridge that they had built--five, six weeks before. I'd forgotten all about it. They were going into tremendous detail. And I thought, they can't even remember what we did yesterday. Why are they remembering that? That's when I started tuning in . . .

Dorothy Welch

In the beginning I had a rather traditional kind of class. I followed the teachers' guides and tried to do the basics plus a lot of the supplementary activities. But when an activity involved drawing, the kids in my third grade would get upset and say that they didn't know how to draw to make it look right. They asked me to show them how. In the middle of the year, I was yanked out of that class and put into a kindergarten class. The regular teacher was on sick leave. I had never taught kindergarten before and I tried very much to follow the routines set up already, and to be responsive to what the kids were doing. To my amazement, these kids did wonderful, creative artwork of all kinds with no concern about making it "look right." Their drawings were lively and expressive and quite clearly their own. I began to look around the school, wondering what had happened to my third grade that made them so afraid to draw. (Or did I do something wrong?) I saw that kids after kindergarten were given only dittos and color-in-the-outline pictures. As the years went by they had fewer and fewer opportunities to draw themselves. Pretty soon, they figured that they needed those outlines, and they got afraid of trying themselves. I decided then to

change my approach and I began to look for more ways to give children opportunities for creative expression.

Rhoda Kanevsky

Sometimes the meaning of classroom events also gains clarity with time:

Last year I had a really difficult class. Being the newest one in the school, I had lots of boys who had problems, didn't like school, and were trouble-makers. Bradley was one of the biggest boys in the room, and he couldn't read, and had lots of other learning problems, too. I noticed that he was drawn to the science activities. I saw that he and all the kids talked to each other differently when they were working on science materials. I brought in magnets, batteries and bulbs, and the kids spent a lot of time doing simple stuff: they put paper clips onto the magnets, moved magnets under paper, and generally played with the stuff and got the batteries and bulbs to work together. This was very interesting for Bradley, but it was the electromagnet that finally caught him. (I didn't have a lot of storage space so that the stuff was all kind of mixed in a box together. He kept going back to that box again and again and exploring the magnets with the batteries and bulbs.) One day he brought in speakers. I can only hope that he found them in the trash. He said that he wanted to take them apart. I got him the tools that he would need. He discovered a magnet in the speaker. He then took the rest of the kids on a whole new direction in exploring electromagnets. He took me way beyond my knowledge of electronics. I realized how valuable this was for him and that others were getting involved along with him and that new relationships were being made in the group. I took a risk and bought a crystal radio kit. I didn't know much about it, but I hoped that they would figure it out. They struggled, and I helped them with the directions and finally after long serious involvement/work they got it together. So, I learned that even though I didn't know about how to build the kit, or about science in this particular area, a lot happened. I followed their interests and tried to feed them with books about electricity and electromagnets, and it resulted in a lot of learning about electricity. Kids made big leaps in their understanding. In addition, through electricity, the class was coming together. Usually it happens for me through language arts. But this group was different, and exploring science made the connections for them.

Judy Buchanan

Like the last excerpt, this story is a more formulated account of a classroom incident, written at a later period. Also like the last excerpt, it shows the insights teachers gain about teaching from paying close attention to what particular children are doing in the classroom:

Michael and the Pig Brain

Secco did not exactly have open classrooms. At the time it was classified as a Remedial Disciplinary Secondary School. But the boys were considered bad enough to make class size small and daily rosters flexible. Curriculum was left up to the teacher. Coming from more traditional high school teaching, I enjoyed the freedom I had to combine a Biology course with a Reading course. The principal also gave me funds and carte blanche to buy dissecting tools, good biology texts, and to take time to use them to best advantage. I never quite felt right about dissecting what had once been live animals. Some of the boys would tease me. "Mrs. Wice, they're gonna come back and get you someday." In fact, I have had some pretty terrifying nightmares involving a basement full of tanks of fluids with not-quite-live, not-quite-dead creatures. But the transparencies in the book, the color 16mm films, even the rubber torso, seemed insufficient compared to the real thing. I tried to stress that what we would learn from the real body would somehow compensate for the loss of life. And no one had to do any cutting if he didn't want to.

Mike was one who very much wanted to dissect. He liked to get his fingers on the parts that make things work. At home he spent hours tinkering with his motorcycle and stereo. Mike was careful to follow our procedures for entering the fetal pig. No butchery: the body must be correctly anchored to the dissecting pan, strings and pins placed properly. At the end of each dissecting session, we would carefully wrap it to return it to the pail of preserving fluid.

We were up to the brain. Mike worked slowly, skillfully, chipping away the top layer of the skull. At the end of the period, I invited him to come back during my free period later that afternoon. Only 3 or 4 others were around. I was listening to Rodney read aloud from his basketball book. Steven was copying over a letter to his girlfriend that he had earlier dictated to me. Mike worked on his own, with occasional curious questions from one or another of the fellows who might drift in to watch for a minute, half-fascinated, half-repelled.

Mike had located the cerebrum, cerebellum, olfactory nerve, optic nerve, all the structures in the diagram. He wanted to untie the pig from the pan and keep exploring, freehand. I figured it was O.K. We had pretty much finished with that pig (not much left to put back in the fluid).

Mike held the pig perpendicular to the pan as he worked his way deeper into the brain matter. I wasn't paying much attention to his procedure when I heard him shout: "It goes all the way down!"

In class we had "covered" the nervous system, how the voluntary and involuntary actions of the extremities result from stimuli that begin in the brain. But Mike was understanding the continuity of the brain in a new, more immediate way as he chipped away lower and lower portions of the spinal column and continued to find the same soft substance inside.

I came over to look. Through the hollowed-out skull, looking down toward the lower end of the upright pig, I too could view the narrowing channel of brain tissue continuing down inside the spine.

Mike helped me see the mammal brain from a new viewpoint. He also helped me see my role as teacher from a different angle. I had come to Secco with tight plans: 15 words a week to learn spellings and definitions, assigned pages, quizzes every Friday, lock-step program for each of the 5 separate classes, with well-spaced desks facing forward to the blackboard. After all, these undisciplined boys would need structure. I certainly did.

But Mike and many others didn't need to be policed in straight rows if they were working on a compelling project. Steven didn't need me standing over him to recopy that letter to get it in the mail to South Carolina.

We set up a Satellite Room in the old Restaurant Practice classroom. The sinks, exhaust vent, and metal surfaces made it an ideal lab for biology and chemistry research. We outfitted it with posters, microscope, bunsen burner, test tubes, chemicals (household variety and more arcane compounds and elements). Students on work-study programs could come during the first hour of the day to brush up on math and reading for graduation tests or college entrance exams. Small groups could arrange to be excused from other classes to come down and work on projects. Seniors were expected to complete a sequence of lessons in biology or chemistry to earn graduation credits--but they could work out of a variety of books, at a variety of paces.

I'm teaching at a different school now, with a new set of tight structures being imposed through a mandated curriculum in a skills-oriented Reading

Lab. But there are still chances to learn things from students. We were working on Getting the Main Idea of a paragraph about seed dispersal. We looked at some dandelion fluff. Someone asked if we could put it in dirt and water to get new plants. I had my doubts: how long would it take for such hard, dry little things to sprout? Was it really still alive? On the other hand, why not? And, indeed, after a few weeks of watering and watching, we had our own crop of seedlings (weedlings).

Betsy Wice

TEACHERS THINK ABOUT CURRICULUM

Curriculum conventionally comes into the school in discreet units of knowledge, vetted by administrators who are preeminently concerned with responses that can be captured and quantified in standardized assessment procedures, nice and tidy. We are concerned about being able to understand and meet children's needs adequately, using their interests as a guide for content in the various areas. In other words, in thinking about curriculum we take cues from children, and we spend time considering the nature of particular content areas. Considering the nature of the particular reminds us of the connections and relationships among the various fields of knowledge.

Here is a teacher reflecting on children and science:

I felt so good when I knew that I had done just the right thing with my kids. There were praying mantises in the classroom. I knew that I had to let them go soon so I tried to have a discussion about them with the kids. I wanted to get as much out of the experience as I could. I tried to encourage them to observe the praying mantises and then I wrote down what the kids said. We started with the physical characteristics. But pretty soon the kids were getting bored and itchy. They were tired of doing it. One kid who had started a sewing project wanted to go on with it and he asked if he could sew instead. The others said they wanted to sew too. So I set them all up and got them going on the sewing. I was a little disappointed, but I felt like I had to go with it. They seemed to stay near the insects so we just sat around sewing, and pretty soon they started talking and I saw that the conversation was really continuing. They said, "We can sew, but the praying mantis can't sew." And they started to

think of all the ways the insects were the same as they were and all the ways they were different. They began to list physical characteristics of the insects in relation to their own physical characteristics. They took turns writing statements on the list. Another kid said, "The praying mantis can't write. We can write. We can write about the praying mantis." We can write about writing about the praying mantis.

Susan Donnelly

Here is another:

We played a game outside in the front of the school after the children had finished drawing the trees with their fingers.

It's a kind of variation of the "statue" game we played at the Art Museum. I told them to run, stop, point to their shadows and then point to the sun. I did it again and again. Some of the children realized that the shadow was always opposite the sun. (Is it? I must check this out.) Karl seemed to understand about shadows because, when I asked, "Why are all the shadows pointing in the same direction?" He answered, "Well, if the sun were over there (pointing to another place), the shadow would be over here." He indicated that he had observed a certain regularity in the appearance of shadows and their relationship to the sun. In addition, he was able to explain it. Many children who are six cannot do this.

I finally prepared the fish tank. Now I must get the fish to school. Why does it take me so long to do some things? These fish should have been in school long before now.

I put a long stick into the tank. The children noticed that it appeared to break at the point where it entered the water. I didn't ask them why they thought that happened, nor did they ask me. They just noted the phenomenon. Sometimes it's best to wait rather than to give information that may not be truly understood. On the other hand, it may not hurt to give information because if the children don't understand, they'll just disregard it. But then there are children like Sandy who hear the words and can parrot them without having the slightest idea what they mean. And their parents think they really understand what they are parrotting. Anyway, I'll wait until the fish get in the water before I draw attention to the phenomenon again.

Lynne Strieb

This teacher is concerned with a different area of the curriculum and a different level, writing in a junior high school:

> I read the newspaper article I had brought entitled "The Subway Hoodlums Got What They Deserved," giving the students some background details of the story, as the article was an editorial. Some of the students had heard about the case, and I seemed to catch the interest of most of the class with it. Even though I usually ask them to write their thoughts down before talking about the topic, this case seemed to bring forth a burst of comments about relatives or other people they knew who had been robbed or in some way assaulted, had guns, etc. After ten minutes or so of this I asked everyone to take some time to write out their thoughts in response to the article I had read.
>
> I collected all of their writing and later read them; some were quite tough, others sympathetic, even poignant. Most students thought there was both right and wrong in what the vigilante had done. I was impressed, once again, about the students' ability to think something out reasonably when their opinions are sought honestly.
>
> I had been giving my students compositions for homework from time to time on various topics, such as their reactions to the new city and culture they are living in, their thoughts on school life, interviews with their parents about some aspect of their parents' lives, etc. I then asked the students to present their compositions to the class, and initially this caused some of them discomfort, but it was not forced, and all of them became more comfortable with it over time. By now they are very able at this, and recently one student asked me if they couldn't have these compositions and presentations every Friday. By now I am sure that the students really do enjoy hearing what their classmates have to say, and that the activity may serve to help the students sort out their feelings of being new and different and adjusting to things here.
>
> This morning a few students come to tell me they have nothing to write about, something that happens now and again. I remind them that anything can be written, even the words to a song. This somehow turns into a general class discussion, which takes about five minutes. Most of my students write daily without a problem, and some even look forward to doing so, and I have come to expect this to go smoothly. I sometimes forget what a problem it was for many of my students last year. I think I have got better at initially directing them at this, but there is also no denying that no two classes are

ever alike in what they find to be easy or hard.

Second period is my prep time. I use it to read, and often comment on what my students have written in their journals. This is an incentive for them to write each day, knowing that I'll read it. There is a dialogue going on between us that I call literacy, even if the grammar and spelling aren't always correct. My students are practicing putting their thoughts into written words, words that will be read and reacted to. I have learned so much about my students in this way, learned to appreciate them more deeply.

Barbara Montoya

Here is a teacher, writing about curriculum, who is thinking about her own learning and growth in confidence that has come from working with children:

I'm so happy to say that I've been trusting myself more in science. I've always been intimidated by science, but as I trust myself more, I do more things naturally with children that fall into the category of science experiences. I had the advantage of a huge play yard with a mulberry tree next to my classroom. This play yard provided me with many wonderful experiences.

One day I walked into Rhoda's room and saw these silkworms. She asked me if I wanted some and told me that these were the best pets for a classroom. You didn't get allergic to them and they never never would crawl away out of the box. They were very easy to take care of. All you had to do was to give them fresh mulberry leaves every day. Of course that was easy because of our tree in the yard. There was so much excitement that developed around those silkworms. Every day I was excited to come to school in the morning to see how they were. I was drawn to them. It was so interesting to see how they grew. And the children were fascinated watching them every day and feeding them. It opened up such fascinating questions for me. How did it come to be that silkworms don't crawl away? I thought that was such a wonderful thing that this could have developed so that the caterpillars stayed in the box and the moths don't fly away either.

We learned so much about them. And whenever I had a question, I could just ask Rhoda and she would tell me to do this or that, and not to worry, they were doing fine.

Then one day the kids noticed that ten caterpillars were on the mulberry tree. It became a natural extension of the silkworm experience. The kids wanted to know how they were different, and how they

were the same as the silkworm caterpillars. They all wanted to catch them and put them into containers. We had to scrounge around to find every plastic container in the school so that each one could have a caterpillar to watch and take care of. They were so attentive. Then they talked about them and drew pictures and wrote about them for many days.

Then we were studying Chinese mythology and we were in a backyard. The children dug a deep large hole and it reminded me that when I was little I used to love to dig too. I told them that I used to think that I could dig all the way to China. They thought this was amazing. That you could dig all the way to China. Well they knew all about China. They kept talking about how wonderful it would be to get there. This talking about China really pulled things together: the silkworms, and the caterpillars, and the stories from China. Then the holes got deeper. They started making comments about how the soil looked different at different levels.

This got us into a study of the soil and why there would be differences in it. One thing just led to another. I was glad that something I had thought to share from my childhood had meant so much to them. All of these activities felt so connected and whole to me and to the children.

Judy Mintier

This lengthy journal entry describes the process of curriculum developing in a seventh grade class. The format itself is of interest:

November 3

Want to think just about mapping. We included it in exploration study as a piece--seemed likely but would not be central theme. Making maps of routes was activity which seemed most appropriate. In our discussions, Rena had mentioned tracing and locating. I had responded negatively because they seem like activities which don't engage people quite enough, too passive. A problem we had early on in all this was fact our classrooms had no maps.

Rena recalls that students seem to have greater familiarity with solar system than with view of Earth.

My idea is that if sketching an object is a way of knowing and remembering it, then why not a map? Is quite different from tracing.

It seems to me that one kind of knowledge of the world we have is that basic recognition of the shapes and position of those shapes which are the land masses and water bodies of the world.

This is not happening. Two reasons: time and technical problems in getting big map drawn. Overhead idea did not work terribly well with overhead I had.

People ask, "Do they use uptown and downtown instead?" Some do, but not sure of extent of substitution.

Issue of naming came up indirectly in this activity. Many maps of explorers' routes students used were overlaid onto current states or nations. Idea that the land was there without these names and boundaries becomes difficult to get across. Didn't do enough with this

What have we done? Students spent an afternoon drawing the world as they remembered it/conceive of it. This was a wonderful activity. Lots to learn from it. I must return to those maps and see what is there. Many didn't know where to begin. Following this a few weeks later was a sketching of a world map. Using an atlas, looking at a world map carefully, trying to duplicate what they saw. This came out also of attempts to put explorers' routes on a blank map of world. Many were not familiar enough; couldn't recognize land masses from water. Many didn't know where Europe was. Many couldn't look at an atlas map and make a connection to their blank maps. In any event, the sketching activity worked well--engaging. Students were proud, used colors, etc. Maps of explorers was major event. Original idea was to do individual maps which would later be put onto a larger map, one which included all of the explorers from one nation, and one which was decorated as maps in the explorers' days were decorated. Must collect all the particular things we learned about kids' understandings from this activity. Some of them: directions--lack of real comfort and ease with; where major items like Europe, North America, the Atlantic are; that Spanish people come from Spain; how to identify rivers on

point. Idea that places don't come with names, they can be changed, former ones can be ignored--an act of imperialism.

need to return to this

need to return to this

What is relation of study of geography to mapping? Which is larger idea?

(need way into atlas)

an atlas map; what a bay is; what a boundary is.

Maps of neighborhood were another effort. Idea was to make idea of map one related to lived world. We gave no specifications. (This threw some kids, was fine for others.) We wanted to see how students approached task. We got a mix of perspectives, amount of detail. I don't think that idea of a map having particular purpose--different kinds of maps have different purposes--is a clear one. In art, tried to have idea of point of view explored--what can be learned from looking at a thing from different angles (top, side, corner)--and relate that to maps. Art teacher made lesson too elaborate--didn't see it as art issue and did too much on kinds of maps, etc.

Geography hunts are another cluster. These are lists of questions students look on maps to answer. They are given to students who complete activities so not everyone gets all of them. Are popular with most. There are a few students who want answers given to them--hunting is not a habit yet. Learned that much basic information is not part of repertoire--Great Lakes--where, what? for example. Kids enjoy looking at maps and globes when they have a way into them. Feeling a total blankness, that there is no way to deci-

desire is for comfort and familiarity

pher morass of words, colors, shapes a map presents seems to be (or have been) state of some of our students. What do these hunts do? Get them looking at maps; give them feeling of learning as questions have particular and bounded answers. Not sure particular knowledge sticks--and for me, that is not the point. Is a point for Rena, I think.

So, now what can we do? A list.

- book on maps
  What are all the different kinds of maps?
  What can be learned from each kind?
  Drawing a variety of these kinds of maps
- different maps have different uses
- collect maps they see in magazines, newspapers, postcards, describe purposes, what can be learned
- maps as historical documents
- naming
- how maps are made and history of map making
- map to aquarium as part of field trip
  - go from subway stops to surface; translate
- map a school--floor plan map and cross-section
- idea of point of view
- map of library }
- intro. scale }
- atlas as a book activity
  what is in an atlas
  how do you locate what's there
- directions

- map of school neighborhood, home, route to school
- go back to neighborhood maps; have students describe kind of map they drew and its possible uses and to draw another kind of same place
- study map of North America as it was being drawn after explorers

Cecelia Traugh

And this long description of a primary classroom's intense interests over the course of a year illustrates the importance of time as an element in the growth of knowledge:

> It started on the first day of school, when Carla brought in a monarch chrysalis, whose metamorphosis we followed with rapt attention. The idea of metamorphosis took on new dimensions as the children began to find other larvae--such as maggots and apple worms--and bring them to school to see what they would hatch into. Many of them never changed into anything, but the children were interested in finding out what they *would* have hatched into, had they made it. Some of the cocoons which were spun in our room we kept all year, because we thought perhaps they needed to winter over and would hatch out in the spring. (They didn't.)
>
> Different things were interesting to different people. Some of the children were captivated by the notion that familiar insects, such as butterflies, moths, and flies, grew out of these wormy looking things. Most everyone wanted to know *how it happened*, how the larva "knew" to become a butterfly or moth or whatever. Closely aligned to this was the desire to see the process in action, which of course we couldn't do without killing the animal. Then, from early on, there were children who got interested in the pattern of it, or, I should say, the *patterns*.
>
> Pattern was another theme which meandered through the children's lives and mine over the course of the year. Early in the year, I began reading and telling folktales to the children--mainly Native American and African. I was telling the children about folktale and the oral tradition, how the stories were passed down from generation to generation by

telling, each person telling the story in her own particular way. Then I was reading a story, I think it may have been *Who's in Rabbit's House?*, and Jason burst out, "I get it! It's an over-repeating story!" There was a power in that phrase, which came from its capacity to unite two ideas (at least)--the over-repeating in terms of retelling, and the over-repeating in that the story had an element that repeated and repeated, that is, a pattern. The phrase took hold among the children, and over the year they took delight in finding the first hint of that particular sort of pattern, "Oh! It's an over-repeating story!"

But to get back to butterflies. . . . Some of the children were finding larvae of various sorts. One day for homework I asked the children to bring in an insect, or anything they thought might be an insect. So, the next day we got crickets and grasshoppers and flies (including a roll of flypaper) and ants and centipedes and one fascinating collection of several grasshoppers and crickets and a spider, all in one jar. During the morning the spider got hungry, and children watched with a mixture of fascination and horror as she began to devour the other animals in the jar. (Eventually they all decided to free what was left of those animals, because they couldn't bear to watch it anymore.) This assignment and the discussion that came out of it raised the question of what is an insect anyhow, and how can you tell, which became a whole study by itself.

Right around this time, bits of bees' and wasps' nests began to come in. The children used tweezers to extricate bees at various stages of development. They were then able to look at the insects under lenses. We had some books about bees, and the life cycle pattern was familiar. This pattern was becoming part of some children's understanding of what some insects at least had in common with each other. But I mention this also because it was here that our "over-repeating story" phrase resurfaced in a different context. Some of the children began to talk about the life of insects as an over-repeating story, again with several dimensions. There was the dimension of the cycle itself repeating--egg, larva, chrysalis, adult, egg--which raised the question, "Where did the first one come from?" or "How did this start?" And then there was the over-repeating of the story in different forms of insect life, variations on a theme.

One of the things which caught a few eyes was the illustrations in the bee books of the cells in the nest. They were drawn as hexagons. The children who got interested in this were puzzled by it, be-

cause our real nest sections didn't look like they were made up of hexagons. Our cells looked more like rough circles. There was a question raised here, a dissatisfaction: Why doesn't it look like the pictures in the books? How can we know if they're really hexagons? (I can now think of some interesting work that could have come out of this, had I set the children the challenge of trying to make circles tessellate. But I didn't.) The question didn't get answered, but hovered around us, and later in the year recycled in some interesting ways.

Let me just note for the present that in the flurry of partial nests that came in, Katherine brought in an intact nest, with all its outer "skin." In fact, it was still attached to the twig it had been hanging from. We did not take that nest apart because most of the children and Katherine in particular (and me, I might add) didn't want to. It was so exquisite in its entirety. We hung it near a window and the swirly patterns you could see if you looked closely at the outside became slightly iridescent in the light. And then there was its form itself; as a whole thing it felt just right.

Winter came hard upon the heels of autumn, and crystals began to emerge as an interest, in particular among some of the girls. Roberta brought in some crystals she had gotten from various relatives, and announced that she wanted to make a crystal museum. She solicited contributions from others, and various "crystals" began to arrive. We grew sugar crystals and alum crystals, and looked at them under the microscope. As with insects, the question of what is a crystal and how can you tell arose.

What we noticed that was similar in the various crystals was the presence of what the children called "shapes." Some of the "shapes" were familiar from some work we'd done with geometry, growing out of children's pattern block designs.

One day Roberta was reading about crystals and found some pictures of snow crystals. There was one in particular that she said she thought she could make with pattern blocks, and set out to try. She was able to get a close approximation. (We had all the right shapes, but the size relationships were different.)

At Meeting, she shared her pattern with the class and showed the picture of the snow crystal that she was trying to copy. There was a big discussion about the shapes people saw in her pattern, and several children thought that if you "built it out" (that is, filled in the spaces until it became a polygon), it would become a hexagon. Fritz and a few pals set out to do this. Fritz continued to

work on this problem, but his friends got off on building hexagons of their own. When he finished, Fritz discovered to his surprise that he had a 12-sided polygon. When Fritz shared it with the class, Patrick commented that 12 is the double of 6. ("Doubles" was a concept I had introduced to the children who were learning number facts.)

Meanwhile, some of Fritz' friends, who had started out trying to turn Roberta's "snow crystal" into a hexagon, had made hexagons of their own. Those patterns came into the circle, and the children, taking their cue from Patrick, began to look at them (and, I might add, at endless variation on the theme which continued to pour forth from all quarters for the rest of the year) in number terms. They were looking not only at the number of sides and angles, but also at how many they could find of various shapes which they identified inside the polygon. What interested some of the children was that 3, 6, and 12 came up again and again, and they recognized that relationship of doubles. Other numbers came up as well, principally 1 and 2. This was interesting to the children, and for many of them it was just that: interesting. But for some of the more number-oriented children in the class it was disturbing; it didn't fit. The 1 and 2 didn't seem part of the 3, 6, 12 . . . pattern. So I did work with that group on factors of 12. The children didn't come to a precise understanding of the relationship between the factors and the patterns, but they were beginning to see connections.

I might mention that there were some children who loved making the patterns for their sheer aesthetic appeal, and really didn't see the number side of it. Nonetheless, their patterns became rich material for the number crowd to work with. And then, the patterns were appealing in part because they *were* beautiful to look at. And because though each particular pattern ended where the child chose to stop, each also contained within it the possibility of going on and on, of infinity.

Hexagons became a big theme. One day some of the children asked if we could open up Katherine's bees' nest. She decided that it was O.K.; in fact, she became part of the dissection. We were all spellbound at what we found inside. It was a layering of sections, nesting from largest to smallest, each one made up of all those cells we'd seen in the nest sections we had examined in the autumn. The other amazing thing was that each layer was very roughly hexagonal in shape. This brought back the question about why our cells didn't look like the hexagons in the books, and were they really hexagonal anyhow?

But the richness of association to the word *hexagon* had changed for us, the observers, since we'd last thought about the question.

I presented a challenge to the group the next day. Could anyone make a hexagon using only hexagonal blocks? Fritz and Patrick took up the challenge, and struggled with it. They finally decided that they *had* to have some other shapes, diamonds. They made a big hexagon using all hexagons on the inside and the diamonds they needed around the edges to "even it out." They shared this with the class, and in the ensuing discussion, we took the diamonds back out to see "how close it would be with just hexagons." What the children saw was a *roughly* hexagonal form with ragged edges . . . not unlike the layers of Katherine's bees' nest.

In the spring, a display of Islamic designs made by seventh and eighth graders went up in the hall. My class was quite drawn to them, initially because they were so beautiful. Several children said, in walking past, that the designs reminded them of some of the patterns we had made, or Altair designs which many of the children had been working on. I had two seventh-eighth graders visit my room to share about their patterns, and their study of Islam. They showed my class how they used compasses to make the patterns, and everyone wanted to have a go. Mostly the children messed around with the compasses, playing with circles.

One of the things the older children had demonstrated was how they used the radius of the circle to cut arcs around the circumference, and then connected those points to make patterns. Though none of my children took up that approach (which is not surprising, this being their first experience with compasses), I played around with it with my own pattern, and the children were fascinated to watch shapes emerge as I connected points, and, once again, to discover our old friend the hexagon. Several of the children began to play around with similar ideas, but the compass work was really at a beginning point. It became frustrating as well, because control of the compass was difficult, and getting the pattern to come out was not easy.

There isn't a real ending to this story, except that the school year ended and so we had to stop.

What I want to say about this story has something to do with a science and a lot to do with time. I never conceived of doing "a unit on hexagons" (which this wasn't), or even of connecting crystals and bees. This wasn't an intentional science or math unit, though science and math played a major role. The children learned some information about insects

and crystals, but that was only one dimension of the science. Another dimension entered with questions like "What makes an insect an insect?" or "How can we tell if it's a crystal?" On this level, the children got some beginning understandings, not only of the answers but of how those generalizations arise. Still another dimension was introduced with the notions of over-repeating story and of hexagon. I'm not particularly concerned that they can't define an insect or crystal, or verbalize the importance of the hexagon. I *am* concerned that they have the opportunity and encouragement to return to such themes in future schooling, because, as this one year has shown me, it is in the returning that understandings begin to take form and deepen.

We as teachers have the opportunity to see not only the daily engagements of particular children with stuff that intrigues them, but also to have a longer-range view. If I were defining interest only in terms of butterflies, or bees, or folktales, or hexagons (in the formal sense), then I would necessarily have an impoverished view of what really were the vibrant themes that brought the class together on a common search of which each piece was an important but not isolated contribution.

There's a problem for me in defining our curriculum in terms of units, even "integrated" units; it erodes the ease with which we gain access to the larger themes, by focusing our attention (and the children's) on x (e.g., insects) as distinct from y (e.g., crystals). A unit implies one, a thing that stands apart, on its own. An integrated unit seems to me a contradiction in terms. Connections take time to make themselves apparent. It took a year for this story to unfold, and it's not really over; it's just that this particular class won't be together as a group anymore.

Ellen Schwartz

TEACHERS THINK ABOUT CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Those in the profession understand better than anyone the demands teaching makes. The Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative is a group of teachers who meet weekly to discuss teaching, question accepted practice, and do staff reviews of children.* Lesson plans and homework are the subjects of ever-recurring discussions:

*A process of discussing children's school lives developed at the Prospect Center for Education and Research.

P.: I wonder why teachers write lesson plans. Some people seem to need it to help them think. Principals are requiring them to try to catch people who

aren't doing their jobs. It seems to me that if you can do your job, and cover what you should, regular lesson plans should only be done if you find them of help. A teacher can demonstrate what she/he has done with the children by keeping records on them, keeping their work.

P.B.: I come to school early and write in my journal which I use like a plan book. I write about the children and what happened the day before, but it is my plan for the day and gives me ideas about how to meet each student's needs. I also find it helpful to write out monthly goals for each subject. My principal is happy with the plans I do.

B.: Satisfaction seems to come for me from looking back. Even though it takes me about one hour a day, I feel satisfied if I keep anecdotal records of what I've done during the day. It makes me see that I really have taught something. This may be helpful for people who learn by looking back.

B.: Day-to-day planning is more helpful to me.

G.: Most days don't go exactly the way I had planned. I like to pre-plan each night. What is killing me this year is that the Social Studies and the Science Curriculum are not related. I usually do these two areas together.

S.S.: Some people have babies in their lives and can't do such detailed planning.

J.B.: We do plan, anyway. But we don't always write it down. I think in the shower, walking to school, etc., and all that thinking counts. We have to give ourselves credit for this.

E.: Styles of planning, thinking things out versus writing things down seem to be different for everyone.

K.: Lesson plans always used to make me freeze. I was always so unwilling to do them. Now I've decided to put down in words what I plan for my class, and not to let it freeze me.

S.: We seem to be saying not to worry about lesson plans. Go with what is good for you. It is helpful to keep records on the students, and what you can do as a teacher to plan for individual kids or for the whole group in the future. This can also serve to

show that you have been doing your job and what exactly you have covered in class.

We thought it was good to have this discussion on such an important issue. It made us think about all the complications of homework. Some of us who don't like having to give homework see the value of some types of homework assignments, and certainly the public relations aspect. There is also a lot of busywork in the homework that is given now to children, and there doesn't seem to be as much time now to learn things as before. Kids need time to play too. Are some teachers paying their students back in kind for the aggravation they suffered as students doing their homework? *Kate G.*

Giving homework has been difficult; it is a place you can win or lose parents. I want to give homework that will make everyone happy, not too hard, not too easy. I run off things that the students must paste in their homework books. Sometimes I staple things in because the students get things mixed up. Everyone brings their homework books and shares them. The homework depends on the parents helping the children. This year it is working because parents have been helping in the classroom, but homework assignments still take a very long time to organize. *Barbara R.*

Kate G.: Rita sends her homework policy home to parents every year, saying that parents must be flexible, some children will do more and others less homework. But in practice not one parent is flexible. Parents don't have as much interest in it as teachers do.

Edna M.: It would be good to have a discussion with parents at the beginning of the year about what their expectations about homework are.

Katie Z.: Last year the parents of the children who came from [the Walnut Center] had high expectations about homework; they wanted their children kept busy at home so they would have time to do what they needed to do. To me that's terrible.

Allen B.: At Dobbins we all had to send home a sheet with our expectations, including those for homework, and the parents had to sign and return it. It would be good to have included a portion where the parents could have written in what they expected as well.

Judy B.: There have been historical changes about

homework and it would be good to explore this. It feels like another way of setting up barriers for success, and of separating children. Some people use homework that way, like the kids have to know it ahead of time.

Sometimes teachers can sort out *ex post facto* the reasons some curricular projects don't work or the reasons some do:

There are some things that don't work at all. I thought it would be terrific, but it was kind of a "negative" lesson for me when I gave the children homework of watching and drawing a twig. But I assigned it: "Pick" a twig and draw it over two weeks. I didn't want them to break it off, just choose it. Well, they must have picked some pretty meager dry twigs and not much happened. It just bombed. It was an unfortunate choice of language, I guess.

Another idea, that wasn't too great either, was the solstice stick. It never worked right. It just caused us grief. It kept falling down and the light wasn't right where we'd look.

Barbara R.

Daily life in the classroom . . . For our third and fourth graders it's liable to include fights and disagreements which get quite physical. For quite a while I tried to deal with this by saying to the two antagonists, "Talk about it until you agree on what happened, and then come to tell me." I liked the idea of settling things that way, but it never really worked. Somewhere along the line a teammate told me about the notes she wrote to children about what she noticed about them. The notes invited response from the children and a dialogue ensued which made it possible for the child to get recognition of what was bothering him/her and then to move beyond the problem--at least in many cases. I have been using this kind of dialogue for a while now; its effectiveness never ceases to amaze me. Getting what is bothering you down on paper seems to help in and of itself.

I had a good day. It's the first time I've said that yet I've felt it often. We worked with the BSW and not Logo; there was no asking about Logo and great enthusiasm about writing stories. That's terrific. I wrote yesterday about isolating skills. Let the children work that out. I don't have to protect them from feeling intimidated. And they will readily see themselves as teachers and learners and that's what it's about. There's such a good en-

gagement between and among the children, a real working at a story, and humor galore. It was glorious seeing and hearing Eric.

Diane Mullins

In the following journal entry, life in the classroom is described in all its richness, variety, and humor:

October 12: Two good days in a row. Projects getting under way and the program at the Jewish Museum is going to be terrific. It helps that Andy is a real archaeologist, young and enthusiastic, and really likes kids. . . . Math is a problem which needs a lot of thinking about and sorting out. Has to do with "ability" groups and self-segregation, and discussions about who's doing what in which group and why--doesn't get to the heart of it. Another part of the problem is that I haven't been keeping up with each kid's math folder (they may not be such a good idea if they take such a lot of time) and there are always a bunch of kids sitting around "waiting" for me to get to them. . . . The multiplication test today was funny. I sort of sprung it on them--partly to see how they'd react--and a lot of them got mad at me because I expected them to give the answers *fast*. . . . Doing fractions with Roger and had a strong sense of how he hates the feeling that he doesn't know something; his self-assurance is wonderful, but sometimes hovers just this side of arrogance. What saves him, I think, is that sense of "justice" or "honor" that's so very strong--but also makes him sound self-righteous, and other kids resent it.

January 12: Snowing today. Nine kids are absent--room is very quiet; everyone seems subdued. I almost *don't* like it, because it lacks vitality, somehow--but we got an awful lot done. Also a *real* clean-up of the art area, shelves and everything, and now it looks so nice I wish I had the energy to do more of this kind of clean-up more regularly.

March 15: Monday morning. I'm feeling very energetic. The room looks lovely, and it occurs to me that it's important to keep it looking nice. I've been trying, these last couple of weeks, to make a conscious effort to keep things tidy and attractive and I suddenly discover it's paying off. But it means staying late every single day, and I'm not sure how long I want to keep that up. Kids have been helping, being much more responsible about stuff. Mindy and Janice finished their paper mosaic

pictures, shellacked and mounted them, and they look gorgeous. Took a long time, and was painstaking work; didn't think Mindy would stay with it, but I suspect working alongside Janice was what was important. She wants that friendship so badly, and Janice is not always encouraging. . . . Changing the morning schedule was a good idea. Now we're doing math as the first activity. Kids come in and get started, without the usual hubbub that accompanies project work. The tone is very nice, and we seem to be getting a lot done. Fractions are a problem for that whole little group--M., J., V., B., R.--they're just not getting it, and it was probably a mistake to try to push on, but they're worried about seventh grade, and I don't know how to reassure them. There is that Big Reality out there.

Alice Seletsky

This series of journal entries, too, reflects the energy, variety, and immediacy of the classroom:

November 20: I gave my yearly explanation of Thanksgiving. The Indians were here first. I described a little about how they lived. Then I told about the Pilgrims, and prejudice against them and why they left England. I put a cutaway map of the *Mayflower* on the wall.

Using the Cuisenaire rods, I had the children compare sizes of rods. I used the symbol = after they matched rods.

At Project Time, many of the children copied the recipe for corn muffins. Ben, Henry, and a few others enjoyed copying the cutaway map of the *Mayflower*. They've been doing cutaway pictures of their own invention anyway and it was nice for them to see this commercial drawing.

Sally asked, "Do you think I can read *The Littles*?" I said, "I'm not sure, but if you want to, why don't you try it. That's the best way to find out if you can read a book. Try it."

More organization: I organized the children's card boxes. I also had several children put rods in plastic bags so that it won't take so long to give them out on Tuesdays. I was giving out one color at a time.

Belinda, Jane, and I went over their original list of farm animals which they've incorporated into their large pictures. I asked them if they would like to make a game out of the picture. I made the suggestions that they write an animal name on a card and match it to the picture. They are thinking about rules for the game.

I'm thinking a lot about these projects and how to help the children to do them. I feel that they should have some sense of what they already know and what they want to accomplish. I should also be able to use these projects to help them with other lessons, I think. For example, Belinda and Jane, after writing the names of each animal on a card, could work on putting the cards in alphabetical order.

One thing I know is that the projects should not drag on too long, or the children will lose interest and never complete them.

We finally visited the beech tree. The leaves are a beautiful gold, and they are almost gone. The talk focused on the leaves. When we looked at the maple the children talked mostly about the shapes of the branches and one of the nests there.

November 25: Today was our traditional Thanksgiving Feast day. The children came in and put their fruit and nuts on the table. I made a graph listing all the things the children brought. They signed their names in a column over each item they brought. Everyone seemed to understand.

Laketa was upset because once again she didn't have what she was supposed to have. There was no fruit in the house, so she brought a piece of peppermint candy. I think she really brought it for herself, but after she saw that everyone had brought something, she gave it to me. I promised her I'd use it at Christmas time and that was fine with her.

I'm concerned also because she seems to get into many fights. There were two within five minutes this afternoon and she expressed fear that Bethann might beat her up after school.

She also does not finish copying her homework and also does not tell me about it.

I really need to find a way to help her with the children.

Things to do this week.

a. I want to write a newsletter which was to have been attached to the report card but which I didn't get a chance to do. It will tell what we've done in the classroom in the areas of art, music, social studies, and science.
b. finish ordering supplies
c. tomorrow
   - give Bonnie order form
   - run off newsletter
   - get word lists for Book B children's homework
   - finish list of story ideas and copy on large paper

- make cards to put on board that tell each reading group what to do--for each day

Daniel's mother, Mrs. Larson came to help today. She told me that she'd never ever been asked to help in any school that her children have attended and she is delighted to be invited. I told her how she could help with writing--writing words on cards, checking stories, not crossing out spelling, but writing correct words lightly over the misspelled ones. During Project Time she walked around a little and then helped a lot by putting books on the shelves in Room 213. Diana and Susan helped her. They sorted the books into "categories"--crafts, mammals, birds, insects, etc.

This afternoon I labeled the bookshelves. Do I have too many books? I know that I have more than can fit on the shelves. Do I need so many? Should I give some away? I think that this year, I'm going to make some major decisions about which books to keep and which to get rid of. I hope that sorting them by subject will help the children to use them more. After all, why have books if the kids won't read them?

I'm doing a lesson with Cuisenaire rods every Tuesday for a while. As usual, I wasn't organized about passing out the pieces, and that took forever. (Next week we will pre-sort the rods.)

Lynne Strieb

No one who is not a teacher could have written the foregoing accounts. No one else can fully understand the infinite complexity of the classroom and the innumerable interactions among people both positive and negative that make up its texture. No one else can fully appreciate the almost magical way the children and the curriculum can come together, the ways knowledge and understanding grow and, above all, the elusive qualities that give particular ideas and activities meaning and excitement for children.

3

Beginnings
Alice Seletsky

There are many ways to become a teacher. The stories of how and why we and our colleagues have been drawn to this particular lifework tell much about what teaching *is*, and why attempts to reduce it to some set of uniform, standardized, quantifiable behaviors are not likely to succeed. These stories of beginnings also reveal teachers to be, like the rest of humankind, unique, individualistic, caring, adventurous, quirky. Understanding teachers and the practice of their craft is as much about recognizing the inherent strengths in this diversity as it is about acknowledging our view of the value of the individual, the educability of each child, and the worthwhileness of what we do.

For some of us, teaching was more a *calling* than a career. We discovered a love for it early in life, and the progression from playing school in childhood to teaching school in maturity seemed a natural, easy, sometimes inevitable one. It was a relatively clear choice, too, for those of us who found teaching to be the expression of a personal idealism: an answer to the felt need to serve, to contribute to the lives of others, and to help bring about change in a society which creates glaring inequities and imposes them on the lives of children.

Many men and women decided to become teachers for pragmatic reasons. In some parts of the country, jobs were easy to get, and during periods of teacher shortage, certification requirements tended to be few. Salary, though usually low, was steady and job security assured. The five-hour workday and two-month vacation was especially appealing, especially for those who had to combine working and parenting, as I did.

A number of people--the young and not-so-young--came to teaching by a more circuitous route. Some were determined to do anything *but* teach, and a surprisingly large number of individuals who eventually became elementary schoolteachers originally trained in specialized areas of the humanities--art, history, English literature, anthropology, classics. Their choices as undergraduates were based on a determination *never* to teach young children, and they avoided teacher education courses with considerable tenacity and ingenuity. Others became teachers because there wasn't anything

else they especially wanted to do, or because they had already tried other kinds of work and found them to be unrewarding. There are those who found their way into teaching almost by chance. They wandered and wondered, made false starts, tried other careers and came to teaching while engaged in actual or spiritual journeys of self-discovery.

Whenever it occurs, some part of the impulse to *be* a teacher is rooted for all of us in the past. How many of us never played school? For those who knew they were born teachers, it is remembered as more than play; rather, the experience was a special kind of rehearsal--with rows of dolls, younger siblings or compliant friends taking the roles of pupil and audience. (One teacher whose voice is included in this monograph recalls that, in childhood, her illiterate grandmother was her "first and best pupil.") The vision was often confirmed and strengthened by sensitive adults who recognized the passion and seriousness of the play and supported it. Wise parents and observant teachers are specialists at that sort of thing, but the responses of participants were also important:

> Almost as far back as I can remember, I was teaching. I recall with clarity the "school" I set up when I was eight, for my five-year-old brother. He was learning to read, and we approached the lessons with that intensity which permeated much of my childhood: it was hard play. I can recall our mutual elation as the world of print began to take form for him.
>
> Throughout a latchkey childhood punctuated by frequent moves, my brother and I were constant explorers and teachers to one another. It was in this relationship that I had my first inkling of the marvels of diversity. I had several years on him--in development and formal learning--but he had an approach that was different and inevitably turned up things I never would have stumbled on myself. I was entranced . . .
>
> Age nine and a friendship that fueled my love affair with language. A girl moved into our neighborhood straight from Puerto Rico. Despite our total inability to understand each other's language, we became instant best friends. In our private worlds, Spanish and English intermingled, aided by mime and signs. More hard play--teaching and learning.
>
> I think of these early experiences as the incubus of my interest in teaching. What I recall most strongly is an atmosphere which I can best describe as passion-filled. These experiences also had their own internal rhythms which bore little relation to the schoolroom clock. As I struggle with the issues

of time in the classroom now, I am reminded of the timeless quality of these childhood "classrooms."

Ellen

When I was young, I used to play school with my friends. I was *always* the teacher. At ten and eleven, I ran a day camp in my garage and did all the things I do today in the classroom though it wasn't quite so sophisticated back then. I loved children and was like a magnet to all the little kids, probably because of the way I got down with them and joked with them.

Susan S.

The thing that was most important to me was that a Sister in the Catholic school I went to asked me to do the bulletin boards, when I was in second grade. I can still feel the delight of it, and how, by the time I was in fourth grade, some other girls and I were doing everything in the school--helping teachers all the time.

Evelyn

I knew from first grade on that I was going to be a teacher, and I never wavered from this. I was shy and quiet as a child, nervous about school, and I remember how wonderful my teacher was when I was late the very first day of school. I remember the kindness and humanness of that teacher when I lost my first tooth. It was really a traumatic thing for me, but she wrapped me up in a big coat and let me lie down on one of the tables. I was the oldest of four children, and I was always playing school. Everybody said I was a born teacher.

Roberta

Hearing from parents or grandparents that one is a "born teacher" nourishes the dream in special ways. Frequently, a love of teaching has its roots in the feelings of affection and admiration inspired by a particular teacher:

My second-grade teacher was the first one to give me the idea I could become a teacher. But even before that--I don't remember exactly how old I was--I was teaching. I was always helping my cousins with their work. My older cousins would sit around and read, but they couldn't figure out all the words and I could. I was really tutoring them, and I did it all the way through school. I played teacher with my little sister, too. I had her memorizing poems a lot. Then we would rearrange the furniture to set up a schoolroom.

It was helping others that made me comfortable; then I wasn't just the little Indian girl--I had something to offer. I had a lot of support from my mother and dad, and especially my grandmother, who was one of those old Indian women who really valued education. My family always talked about school, and what all of us would do when we grew up. I was always going to be the teacher. It gave me something to work for; it was something I could do for my family.

Mary U.

When mothers and fathers are themselves teachers, the work which is central to their lives takes on special meaning for their children. Schools and classrooms become familiar worlds, and can be almost an extension of home. The particular demands which teaching makes on the individual for emotional commitment, a continuous engagement with ideas, political involvement--all are experienced in an especially intimate way:

If teaching can be in your blood, it is in mine. I had great aunts on both sides of my family who were teachers; one was a principal. My father was a high school math teacher, and as a young child, when asked where my father worked, I remember saying, "He doesn't work; he goes to school." Teaching wasn't a job to me.

Peg D.

I've wanted to teach since before my mother's death. Practically as far back in my life as I can remember, it seemed the natural thing to do. My mother was a teacher; my father had been; one grandparent was still teaching, and two others had taught until they were fired during the McCarthy witch-hunts. But it was more than family history that made me view myself as a future teacher, though I cannot remember when the idea first came to me.

I've always loved being with people: talking, playing, laughing, listening. My brother David was born when I was a year-and-a-half old. He was my constant companion. With the wisdom of my extra year and a half, I would explain the world to him. A few memories stand out: I remember showing him how to draw curly hair, and my special way of climbing our favorite tree. Later, I remember holding the back of his bicycle, running with him as he learned to balance. (I ran beside him again last spring as I taught him to ride my motorcycle.) I remember teaching him the alphabet, and my anger and hurt at not being allowed to teach him to read.

My decision to become a teacher came together

slowly. The idea took root and grew so quietly at first that I was not fully aware of it until it seemed a natural part of who I was. The ideas solidified that first summer as a counselor (at a summer camp) which reaffirmed my desire to teach and my confidence that I could do it well. Probably the idea of teaching arose first when I was in the fourth grade. That year I had a teacher whom I adored. She expected everyone to work hard, and she knew that everyone could learn. She accepted no excuses from anyone, and she was warm, kind, compassionate to everyone. In addition, she had a sense of justice with which I identified, and a similar view of how things should be. I idolized Mrs. Kelly and wanted to be just like her.

My other model was my mother. She loved teaching and was loved by her students and their parents in return. She spent her free periods at school tutoring students. At home, too, students often dropped in or phoned for help with homework--our phone number was on top of every assignment. I never questioned their presence; they were part of her life, and I could see how much she meant to them. I was proud of my mother. Although she enjoyed working with "bright" students, my mother's special energies went to the so-called "slow" ones. Those students, cheated by an unjust and inequitable class/caste system, or by life, or because of color were the ones about whom my mother cared most. I watched her try to inspire confidence and questions in young people already almost beaten. This was her way of trying to change the world. Watching her, I saw the amazing impact she had on so many of her "disadvantaged" students.

In many ways, I have become Mrs. Kelly and my mother--or maybe they have become part of the woman who is me. Their memories inspire me to teach, as I look to others like them to teach me.

Naomi

My mother really made the decision for me to teach. My brother and I used to do our homework together in the evening at our big dining room table. I can remember my mother ironing clothes and talking to us as we worked on our homework. She would say, "Edna, it will be great to be a teacher. You'll help children, and you'll have the summer off." She painted a lovely picture of teaching for me. I took it for granted that I would be a teacher, that it was the right course for me. I went to a black college, where some relatives of my father had gone. They were all teachers. I liked that connection. I was so happy when I graduated and got a teaching

job. I picked the public school in Philadelphia where my mother had worked as a classroom aide. I'm still there.

Edna

Familiarity with the world of the schoolroom persuades some to follow parents into the teaching profession. For others, that knowledge initially acted as a deterrent:

When I was growing up, schools were an extension of home. Both my parents are in education, and from third grade on, I attended a Lutheran school in which my father was a teacher. I often stayed with him after school, roaming around, talking to other teachers, exploring the janitor's closet. . . . The whole school was familiar territory for me. In junior high and high school, I became aware of how bad some teaching could be, and what the effects of that were. . . . I was determined not to be a teacher, and adamant about not attending a religious education college, as other family members had. I went to Harvard instead, with the intention of studying psychology. I was interested in the large questions--those on the scale of what is the meaning of life? I did take a course in the School of Education, and read about the Open Education movement. I was particularly struck by George Dennison's *Lives of Children*. What really impressed me was that Dennison wrote about the children as people and about the community life of the classroom--not just what the children learned or knew. My focus changed to child development, and when I finished college, I took a job with an educational research project on how children think. Working with children was fascinating, but the thin, disconnected, cut-and-dried research approach was just the opposite. I decided I needed to work with children in a school. When I told the project director about my decision, he urged me to remain in research--there was no prestige in teaching, especially not in nursery schools where the teacher's major function, he said, was to "tie shoes and wipe noses." This wasn't my experience at all. I was blown away by the richness of life with young children.

Mark

Traditionally, teaching has been "women's work"--especially on the elementary school level. It has been one of the few occupations in which being female is regarded as an asset, and acquiring a teaching license has often been urged on women as a kind of insurance, something to fall back on should nothing better turn up

or circumstances require us to work. The myth that teaching is easy, undemanding work has contributed to the notion that it is particularly suited to those with home and family responsibilities in addition to career demands. A theme common to many of these stories of beginnings is of the discovery that teaching offered compensations quite unrelated to salaries, hours of work, and fringe benefits--that it could be, in fact, a fascinating, rewarding, and challenging enterprise of its own:

> I became a teacher because my parents told me to be one. They wanted me to have a job, and teaching was a job. I saw teaching as a source of income. Once in the classroom, I discovered that I loved it and looked forward to being with the children every day. I discovered how much I liked to watch and listen to children, and how much I could learn from them.
>
> Kate

> For me, teaching was a good job when I had three small children. I worked in a nursery school, half days, and could be home with my children when they needed me. I hadn't finished college but, later, I talked my way into a job in a parent co-op nursery school. I took courses in early childhood education, but mostly learned by teaching. Then I began to realize that my own children were not attending a very good nursery school, and I enrolled them in what I recognized as a very good one. I began to work there, and it was all very interesting. In the beginning, even though I was interested in teaching, I thought of it as a *job*, but now I began to see what was possible in teaching and I began to love it.
>
> Edie

> I studied anthropology in college and planned to get a graduate degree in it. But for *insurance*, I took some education courses as electives in order to get secondary education certification. When I graduated, I took the National Teacher's Exam, and though I didn't know anything about early childhood education, I just used my common sense and that's the test I did best on. Later, when I needed a job, I looked for one as a nursery school teacher. After eight years of nursery school work, I got a job running a parent nursery. The mothers of the children were wonderful, and we made it all up as we went along, and it was a thrilling experience. I loved the freedom of the job; I used my common sense and also listened to the mothers and the kids. We were

innovative and fought together for what was right.

Peggy P.

When I graduated from college, I was a professional English major. I could read Chaucer, explicate a sonnet, discuss the symbolism in *Moby Dick*, and write long term papers. I intended to do something *big* in the literary line, but had no notion of what it would be. I began my career as an elementary school teacher in the Bronx, working as a per diem substitute. I chose elementary school because I assumed young children were the easiest to work with. I wasn't sure I was going to like it, but there were some very real advantages: I didn't have to work every day, and I could choose schools close to home. Also, there was a small, but reasonably steady, paycheck.

What I knew about children was based largely on my experiences with my own two little girls, some useful bits from Spock, Gessell, and Freud, and the kind of specialized knowledge one gains from reading lots of novels. I didn't fall in love with teaching right from the start, but I found the children absolutely fascinating. Every day was an adventure (often an adventure into the unknown in those very early days) but I found myself immensely interested in figuring out what was going on in all those little heads, and what, if anything, it had to do with what I was *teaching*.

Alice

While teaching may be regarded as ideal for women, young men who choose it as a career usually get a very different response from the world. Mark was reminded that it was work which lacked dignity and prestige and was in no way equal in status to his position as a researcher. Lee's choice of a career as classroom teacher of young children was questioned by his family:

I started out of college as an assistant teacher in a class of four-year-olds. My inexperience and uncertain commitment led me to react defensively whenever I perceived any criticism of my career choice. I hid behind dogmatic explanations rooted in Feminism. During introductions at social gatherings, I discovered that women generally seemed surprised, but also pleased and interested in my choice of work. Most men, however, reacted with incredulity, if they responded at all. Middle-aged men, with a firm grip on the ladder of success, made me feel especially foolish.

Looking closer to home, members of my family were

> overtly supportive, but they also raised considerable self-doubt by asking: "What are your prospects for advancement? Do you think you might want to be an administrator some day?" and "When are you going to graduate school?" Their concern for my future was genuine, even though their questions came from traditional assumptions about work, success, financial security, and men's roles in society.
>
> Lee

Many young adults were drawn to teaching through idealism, and the wish to serve others in some meaningful way. "I had a desire to work in the Peace Corps," says Betsy of her youthful aspirations, "but instead I compromised and decided to teach in the public schools." For Lynne also the Peace Corps held genuine appeal, especially after a disillusioning year of graduate work in art history. A similar vision drew Diane V.:

> . . . but I attended seminary instead, got a degree in religious education, and worked with adults. My intention was to do a lot of things for a lot of people. Some years later, when I decided to teach elementary school, I thought of it as a calling rather than a job or career.

And Ginny:

> When I first began, I couldn't find a job in public school. I would have taught anywhere within driving distance. Finally I got two job offers, one as the director of a daycare center and another as a first/second grade teacher in a private school. I had gone to Wheelock College in Boston, very much like Bank Street College, and I was on fire to teach in a classroom. So I took the job, even though it would be less money and more time working than the job in daycare. I was dying to teach, but I also thought that teaching in a private school, with a privileged population, was not what I wanted to do. I adored the job as no other job I've ever had. But I couldn't support myself there, and eventually I had to have two jobs--teaching and then waitressing at night!

Some of today's serious and dedicated teachers come from the ranks of those who came of age in the sixties and seventies and found themselves caught up in the political and social turmoil of the times. They were uncertain about how best to use their energies and passions, and unclear about the directions their lives

ought to take. Political activism was essential to some; others were influenced by the work of the educational reformers and critics who were making their voices heard through books and articles describing the lives of children in ghetto schools. For many of that generation, classroom teaching was seen as a way station in the quest for meaning and personal identity:

> I got hooked on teaching by accident. I was taking part in a college urban studies program and ended up being placed in a newly opened public middle school for 10-14-year-olds. The open space classroom I worked in and the entire school year was on the verge of explosion. Children had to fight a deafening noise problem, large classes, and a stark, forbidding atmosphere just to exist, let alone learn. It was often physically impossible for the children in the back rows to hear the voice of their teacher at the front of the class. I spent my time in the back rows, and I got to know those children. They couldn't read the text, couldn't do the homework, couldn't hear the discussion, and couldn't keep out of trouble. Some of them were thought of as "won'ts" rather than "couldn'ts" in those days before proliferating special education categories. What hit me, though, was that despite repeated failure, those kids appealed to me. They could argue themselves out of any corner, keep track of complex social relationships, stick up for themselves or a friend against anyone. They struck me as whole, curious, thinking individuals, yet those qualities went unrecognized, or ignored all day, every day in school. . . .
>
> I've taught in a variety of grade levels since then from pre-school to second grade and studied my own teaching practice as well as that of many other experienced teachers. What drew me to teaching is a fascination with the wonder and mystery of how people learn. I think of teaching as a small world in which children can experience democratic values: independence, self-reliance, sense of purpose, cooperation, self-confidence, diversity. In short, I am committed to creating an educational setting which doesn't have any back row children.
>
> David

> What drew me to teaching is complicated. I always liked children. Thinking about why one has become something is like looking through a window to tell about your life, all the choices you've made that led you to where you are now. I went to a liberal arts college, small and away from my home. I was not interested in education. I took a lot of

different courses and was drawn to people things. I majored in anthropology and also enjoyed linguistics. I studied children's sentences to see if they fit Chomsky's theories. Later, I did some graduate work in reading--on the use of syllables. At this point, I became disillusioned with college research. I wanted to work in the real world, so I got certified to teach. I hated university politics, couldn't stand the attacks on each other and putting others down. I didn't want to spend my whole life in that kind of atmosphere.

I enjoyed working with kids and being creative. I'm idealistic, and I know that if you've done the best you can then nobody can undo it or take it away from you. I read all of the education books of the sixties--*Death at an Early Age* and others. I believed what those books said; I thought there was racism in the schools. I thought I could help make a difference. I began teaching at a tough school and was lucky that there were some open classroom teachers there to support me. The children are what keep me in teaching. I am intrigued by how much they know. There is nothing more interesting to me than teaching.

Judy B.

I was politically very active in college. I was a member of various radical campus organizations involved in anti-war and anti-racism activities. I saw my life revolving around politics and, based on that, didn't make any career plans. I had no role models for people who were in professions and politically active in ways that I respected. So I finished college and was "doing politics" seriously. I was a substitute teacher in Detroit for a couple of months--elementary, junior, and senior high school, wherever they sent me. You didn't need special certification, just a B.A. It was gross, and I hated it. When I moved back to New York, I did a lot of odd jobs, but they were all boring and my political work wasn't successful or satisfying either. I volunteered for a while at a neighborhood daycare center which was part of a tightly knit political community. A friend of mine worked there, and he invited me to come and jam with him; he played his flute, I played my clarinet, and the kids danced around. I discovered I really liked being with little kids.

Another move--this time to Berkeley--and a job as assistant in a "free school" type nursery. The teacher was very good--thoughtful and knowledgeable about child development. I learned a lot from her. She was a strong feminist, and those issues were

very important to me at that point; a lot of the books and classroom activities were about sex role questions. They were very important during that part of the seventies and very important to me so, again, there was the congruence of politics and work.

Once I had the nursery school experience, I knew I wanted to work with kids--at least for a while. I enjoyed being with them, and it fit in with other aspects of who I was. I've always been very athletic and very active; I love being outdoors, hiking, and climbing, and that's something I could do with kids. I decided to move back to New York and part of the reason I made that decision was because I knew I could get a daycare job here. The idea of combining political activism and teaching was still important, and I found a center where I felt at home. I worked with kids and became active in the fight for community controlled daycare. I knew that I absolutely wanted to teach, and enrolled at Bank Street College, taking courses at night. I got even more interested after that because Bank Street was that kind of place.

After a while, I knew that I wanted to teach five-year-olds--I was fascinated with beginning reading, and beginning writing--kids' entrances into the beginnings of abstract thinking. I started looking for a public school job, and it became clear to me that I couldn't take just anything that came along. It had to be a school I really liked--an extension into the primary grades of what my nursery school had been. I found it because somebody read an article in a newspaper--and I've been thrilled ever since.

Donnie

The choice of a life's work is not always easy to make, and it's interesting to note how many teachers who are competent and even inspired practitioners began with the determination *never* to teach. That so many of them have found it to be an immensely absorbing and rewarding work is a testament both to our capacity as human beings to find others worth serving, and the power which the sense of performing worthwhile work exerts over its practitioners:

I loved school, and never questioned the curriculum, the assignments, the homework--anything. I remember everything about my school experiences very clearly, and I have vivid memories of many of my teachers. But I knew I was never going to *be* a teacher--even though I joined the Future Teachers of America as an extracurricular activity, I wrote an essay titled "Why I Would Never Be a Teacher." I

went to graduate school, but found it unsatisfying and, more and more, the idea of spending my life doing research on subtle points of scholarship and teaching college students to do the same thing seemed limited and totally unrelated to the real world. A friend who had left graduate school was teaching kindergarten, and she invited me to visit her classroom. I began to think about teaching children as a way to do something in the world. I'd refused to take my family's advice to take education courses to have something to fall back on, but when I began looking for a job, I discovered that my own kindergarten teacher was now the Kindergarten Supervisor. She was very encouraging and hired me as a long-term sub. The only training I got, at that point, was a two-week workshop for kindergarten teachers. But once I got into the classroom, I found that what I liked most was the children's wondering--the wondering that led them to ask questions, discover things, figure things out.

Lynne

I didn't set out to be a teacher; it was the existence of the Prospect School that led me to the idea. I was working in a local factory--because I couldn't not be working at something--and discovered the school needed a driver for a Middle School trip to Quebec. So I did that and found it an interesting experience. Then the school needed a janitor, and I did that. I was in the area during the summer, and got involved in the Summer Program for children, in addition to doing maintenance work at the school. Some time later, I did a six-week internship.

When I went to Middlebury College, I majored in English literature, but also got teacher certification. Since Middlebury is a liberal arts college, it isn't possible to major in education. In fact, education as a discipline was quite low on the totem pole--only dance and drama fell lower in the hierarchy. Status apart, the courses in education were really quite good. I was interested in teaching, but hadn't intended to do it for any extended period of time. That was eight years ago . . .

Dirck

I hadn't intended to teach young children, but rather college students. I volunteered at a Head Start program while working to finish a master's degree in Scandinavian studies. At the time, I was already beginning to question my choice, because I saw no way to really use the degree once I had it,

living in a small college town in the middle of Washington state. Working with exuberant four-year-olds was a welcome change from reading critical essays on the plays of Henrik Ibsen. I came home refreshed and filled with anecdotes about the children to share with my husband. I've always enjoyed singing, playing music, and storytelling, and those skills provided me with an entry into the program. In contrast to the critical essays I was reading, and would later be expected to write, the real struggles of the parents and the children who attended the program seemed so much more relevant.

Karen

I wasn't ever, *ever* going to be a teacher. My parents and others thought I should be, but my heart was set on medicine. I had always been interested in science and math and in how things work. I was accepted to a specialized high school where I could take accelerated and advance placement courses. I also won a National Merit Scholarship. I ignored all remarks like "girls aren't doctors" and worked in hospitals all through high school.

Then, in my senior year, my father had a serious accident at work and, for the long period of time while the case was being settled, there was no income. I had younger sisters and brothers and had to contribute to the family income. The only educational option I had was a local teacher education college. I hated it. The course work was dull, and boys were an unfamiliar distraction--I'd always gone to an all-girls school. After graduation, I was married, and Vietnam was the focus of attention for many of my generation. I also discovered that teachers were needed in the Peace Corps, and went to Mexico to teach English as a second language.

Later, when I had children of my own, I organized a nursery school, and then an elementary school. That went on for ten years, but teaching--the conscious choice to be an educator was never a decision that I made. I enjoyed the children, and teaching never seemed like work--I just kept finding myself doing it. Finally, I decided to go to Goddard and get an M.A. and learn about the job I had been doing for the past ten years. As a teacher, I think I'm doing what I wanted to do as a pediatrician--helping people recognize who they are so that they are able to be themselves. It's something related to healing. So I guess I'm actually doing what I set out to do--I just took a different route to it.

Anne F.

Attracting and keeping good, wise, imaginative classroom teachers is a continuing problem in American education. Many of the proposed solutions are good ones: a broader, more thoughtful selection process, more rigorous education, internship, and mentor programs, higher salaries. These are all fine as far as they go but, as the stories here suggest, they don't quite get to the heart of the matter. What drew many of us to teaching is a complex of factors having to do with who we are as individuals and what we value. The stories reflect the ways in which, having once entered the world of the classroom, individuals were captivated by the opportunities the work offered for serious commitment and grand adventure. The paths which lead to the classroom are many and diverse. Whether we came to teaching because of a passion discovered in childhood, or a mother's guidance, or the chance meeting with a friend, or some practical necessity, we have in common the knowledge that this is the place we belong.

4

Nurturing the Possibilities
Karen Woolf

Our energy during the day is spent finding ways to *link up* with our students, to facilitate connections. We speculate on the possibilities within situations, and encourage our students to do the same, and together we discover new areas of potential within ourselves. That interactiveness between student and teacher is at the heart of our work. As a colleague said, "We are never finished as people." We see our students grow and change over time and there is a great satisfaction in that. And we change as well.

Teaching is unpredictable, and by its very nature forces us to be flexible and open to new ideas, experiences, and feelings. When we integrate our personal lives with our teaching lives, we often find that each enriches the other. There is a wholeness in teaching that arises from a connection with the cycles of the seasons, and the growth of our students. It is a position that allows us to become *socially useful*, to refute stereotypes, and to broaden the possibilities for others. As one of the teachers said, "Teaching allows you to live through a large range of human-ness."

First of all, we spend a great deal of time (and sometimes our own money) creating a well-provisioned and interesting classroom. We arrange furniture and materials to facilitate relationships among the students and to create a diverse and appealing environment. In elementary schools, we spend much of our time together with children in one room, and it's important that it be as comfortable and rich in materials as possible. In some settings, this presents a real challenge; oftentimes parents may be asked to help construct and paint bookcases or lofts, and the children to lend books and things from home. Eventually, a room reflects the efforts of all who work there, and becomes to them, a special place:

> I will give an example of how something comes out and what I do with it. Shells and sand. Usually in the beginning of school, the children have just come back from the summertime, many of them have been to the beach. I try to recapture that. I have a display of shells and sand in an outside display case, or I display them in the room where the children can

handle it. I have sand from different parts of the country and some different parts of the world. So there is a variation of sand in color and texture. It's not in jars so children can feel it. The same with shells. Children sort the shells according to which shells they like the best or which are similar. Some they match with pictures in books. I have some commercial shell collections that contain elaborate, fancy and unusual shells. Children like to paint pictures of them.

I also have live animals. I have a turtle, two garter snakes, two toads, two guinea pigs, and two rabbits. The children had the job of digging holes and finding earthworms to feed some of the animals. That is a marvelous experience for those children. Two children who are very good at that just loved to do that, finding those worms, putting them in a container with soil, bringing them in and feeding them to the animals. The guinea pig and the rabbit had a number of litters during the year, and the children were very much a part of that. From those experiences came many questions about life and death and birth and old age. Privacy became an issue when new babies were born, because I would cover the cage and the children were respectful of that. I felt that through the animals, I was able to teach them so much about what life was about.

Peggy P.

I like getting messy. I can't think of any job where you can get messy and get away with it; where you can sit for an hour and play with blocks. I love saying, "Now where am I going to put my water table?" I just love that. It's so much fun, and you can't do that anywhere else. I go home on public transportation, and I have, you know, paint spattered here, somebody's accident over here . . . You know, I think I should just wear a button that says, "It's O.K. I'm a teacher." They'll say, "Yeah, that's right, she's a teacher." Those are really strong reasons why I stay.

Lisa

Teaching can so totally engage us when we are in the classroom, that the more practical or mundane parts of our lives get pushed aside until the children leave for the day:

It is so absorbing. When I'm in that world, I'll put a note in my pocket in the morning with the phone number of the doctor I'm supposed to call to make an appointment, and I'll carry it around all

day. It's just impossible to think of that kind of thing when you're absorbed in something. And, the contrasting feeling, after vacation has sort of worn down, of freedom, you get used to that. That different sort of pace of being able to lie down and read something, or not. I don't feel as alive then as I do in the middle of school.

Betsy

I like having a separate world to go to. There's a line in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* I like to quote. I forget the situation, but he's really angry at everything that's going on, and he says, "There is a world elsewhere," and he stalks outside the walls of the city. I've sometimes been all dressed up, standing in the middle of some la-de-da kind of thing, miles from school, on the weekend or something, and I think, "There is a world elsewhere." It's wonderful, having this contrast in my head.

Betsy

Young people by their nature are lively and expressive, extending their knowledge through actions, conversations, and thought. Because of the multiple perspectives within a classroom, there exists a liveliness of thought that easily generates new ideas and insights. That energy and exchange of ideas is the very heart of teaching. The following conversation between two experienced teachers focuses on the spontaneity and interactive character of their work:

A.: I think the classroom makes room for everybody's whole being. The liveliness of all that human experience sometimes makes me feel as if I live in a popcorn popper. You can never predict where a new idea will pop up or what all the responses will be. Teaching is living on the edge; there is so much energy and immediacy in a classroom. I wonder why it is so hard to explain to others what it means to have the experience of being with children and living all that.

R.: Lots of adults don't perceive the interactiveness and wholeness of a classroom. They perceive teaching as imparting, and learning as acquiring . . . as something quite static. It's hard to convey how many different voices a teacher is able to hear or the range of feelings and experiences a teacher encounters in a day with a group of children. You're it: teaching allows you to live through a large range of human-ness.

Allison and Rhoda

There is a satisfaction with teaching that sustains us through some of the daily frustrations we all experience. Perhaps it comes from the feeling that we are making a difference in a child's life, while they in turn open us to new ways of seeing the world:

> I have always enjoyed teaching, and I like the children. I've taught first, third, and fifth grades, and I think each grade level was the best age to teach. I stay in teaching because it keeps me connected to the spirit and vitality of childhood, a connection I don't want to lose. It keeps me connected to a part of my own childhood.
>
> Bonnie

During the time they are with us in our classrooms, children often change a great deal, although the daily rhythm that we establish in our teaching sometimes makes it difficult for us to perceive those changes:

> I like watching the kids change. You don't even really see it. One month you're having this incredible trouble with Thomas, and seven months later, he's this kid who's just amazingly bright, mature, and self-reliant. You think, "My God, remember when seven months ago you were having parent conferences every week to find out what to do with him?" These changes are really exciting to watch!
>
> Lisa

> I love to see children come here speaking no English and ending up speaking and communicating. I love what they have to say. I love hearing their thoughts. M., for instance, was here last year and spoke very little English. Today, a year later, I was playing a game with her. Now all she needs to refine her English is some review. She's just very funny! Today we were playing with some dialogue, and I said, "That's my pencil," and she said, "No, it's my pencil," and I said, "Are you sure?" and she said, "Yes, that's my pencil. I brought it from downstairs." I mean things like that, to have her converse more. Her ideas just made me laugh as she was going on. You just get to know their personality, and that's what I like. You know they're so quiet at the beginning, they don't know anything, and then they open their ideas, which is great. And I just love hearing them talk in English.
>
> Maria

Close relationships with children based on trust and caring often enable us to give support to children through some difficult times. It allows us to make a real difference in a world which is becoming more difficult. Learning is hindered when a child is intimidated, hungry, tired, or angry, so we try to ease whatever difficulties we sense. Often both parents work or there may be only one parent responsible for raising several children. Creating a classroom community in which each child feels secure is very satisfying:

> There's therapy in it without you being a therapist. That I like. In the course of a year, you want this one to be able to kind of let loose, and try something that she thinks is dangerous. Or, you want this one to be able to control herself when a fight comes up, and to figure out ways to solve it with her friends. And then there's the idea that the environment can help a kid calm down or become more peaceful with herself or enjoy life more. I love it when a year passes and I see a kid who is happier at the end.
>
> I guess the last thing to say is, I've had a lot of different jobs. In a lot of those jobs, I'd sit down after four, five, and six months, and say, "What were those things that I did that I thought were worth having done?" And lots of jobs you can't really say anything. There's just literally nothing. One job I remember, I figured out the only thing I had done that was worthwhile, was washing the windows in the office. We can finish five, six months of teaching, and know there's an enormous amount that we did that's really socially very, very useful. And that's very satisfying to me.
>
> Ginny

Maria, an ESL teacher who works part time in an urban school, enjoys the contrast between working with children and adults:

> I have an afternoon job, I work at the airport, and I work with adults. Children are so innocent and warm, and they're funny. Adults are in a different category. I mean adults are worried about their afternoon and their daily life and their work and everything, so it's very different. With children, it's so much more interesting.
>
> Maria

Much of the talk about education these days centers on ideas of excellence and the widespread use of tests to assess if children are "getting the basics." Those of us in the classroom want excellence too, but

we also want children to be able to find their own connections between ideas and experience. We are concerned with the fulfillment of potential, not just finding the deficiencies. An important part of our work is keeping alive the curiosity and wonder that facilitate real knowing, the personal process of making sense of the world:

> It's very serene for me to teach, and rewarding. I like what I learn with them. They teach me how to become a better teacher, actually, because I'm able to see their needs. I really struggle to see if I can satisfy those needs. You can't teach every kid the same way, because they are all different. When I get a student I cannot get through to, it's a challenge for me, and I find ways to be able to reach the child. And when I do, I feel very successful. It's like a test, but it's stimulating and that's fun for me.
>
> Maria

> I like teaching, because it keeps me awake. Each day, as people have said, is different. The needs of the children change and their enthusiasms change. I find that plans are a kind of valuable structure, but in the end, unless I'm awake and really in tune with what's going on with each of those children at each moment, it's really for naught. It's the kind of job where if you get into a routine and don't have your eyes open, so to speak, you feel it. I feel it. I feel I become bored and unhappy. I like being right there in the moment. I am also fascinated by the children's creativity, by the ideas that they've come up with. I love to begin a relationship with them that goes on throughout the year. In the course of that year, I see them kind of growing into themselves. They've been themselves all along, but they haven't necessarily been able to express themselves. I love to see them taking risks and testing out their ideas and speaking their minds. That's really a rewarding experience.
>
> Tamara

Many small interactions with a child over a period of time add up to gradual changes that are eventually noticeable. We watch carefully and listen intently to discover what the next step in learning should be for a particular child. Teachers work hard to find just those right moments which facilitate learning:

> I respect what children know and their eagerness

to know. I love finding things out and enjoy engaging children through content. The content, whatever it is, science, geography, provides something we can look at together. They say things, they ask questions, and I can watch and listen and find ways to hook them up with what they want to know and do. When I can make that link with a child, it's like turning on a light. The child suddenly sees so much and understands, not just one thing, but how the something she just *saw* is linked up with other *somethings*.

Kate

I watch a particular child for a few minutes at a time, or I study the interactions among members of a group. I invite colleagues who are free to do observations for me. I note who is being asked for help, and what response is given. I listen to language, and observe movement. Lately, I've added a refinement: I leave the room for a few moments, then slip back unobtrusively. This isn't meant to deceive, since the children know that I'm doing it. Its value lies in the fact that it gives me the opportunity to see things with a fresh eye, and with a little distance.

Alice

Assessing what or how much a child understands can only be achieved over a period of time during which we can see the child experience things in a variety of forms and we can help them make the connections. How we do this varies with each teacher:

There is a constant self-discovery in teaching. I'll explain something to a kid and I'll find in order to explain it, I will internalize it even more deeply in myself. I'll see connections that I hadn't recognized before. It's certainly true in mathematics. As I explain things to a first grader, as I try and get a first grader to discover things, we'll head into a whole lot of other parts of my being as I pull in this from growth or this from society, this from trucks on the street . . . golly knows what I'll bring in as some sort of simile.

Alan

Teaching affords the intimate experience of watching lives being lived, and lives taking shape. There are rhythms to our days, and cycles to the years. The process is endlessly fascinating, and never boring:

This business of cycles and returning . . . it

has a lot to do with the seasons. When I go up to the country, I like to walk the same paths again and again. It's a circular path that I take. I do it through all the seasons, and although I've been doing it for 10 years, I never get tired of it.

I discovered an apple tree last week that I didn't know was there. I had to laugh at myself, because I was throwing rocks at the apple tree to get some of the apples down. I tasted one that had fallen on the ground and it was so delicious. I had to bring some back. I had never seen that apple tree before even though I do that walk again and again. Well, in a way, teaching is kind of like that. Every year you have the seasons. The insect pictures go up and the praying mantises come in. The gingerbread house gets built, and the Valentine cards magically appear at just the right time. Somehow you get the eggs done, and roses come in and you sort them. With all of the same things that you do, there's so much variety within that, that each year, even though you're doing the same thing, it's different every time.

Lynne

Dan, because he is a principal in the school where he once taught, has an opportunity to see students over long spans of time:

Teaching is the most important thing to do on Earth, especially teaching young children in the primary years. One of the joys of teaching is the idea of time and recycling. I enjoy seeing the children of people I've taught when they come to school, as well as listening to the recollections of my former students. I regard those students who return to visit from junior and senior high school as my friends. A friend of mine who is a doctor said, "All we do is fix and repair the body mechanics. We just keep bodies alive. You teachers give them the reasons to live."

Dan

Teachers of young children need support because teaching is noted for its relatively low pay, low status, and lack of political power. Often our ability to think is considered on a level with the ages of the children with whom we work. It is an attitude that exists even among high school level teachers in the same school district. Many regard the teaching of young children as primarily caretaking. It is one of the reasons it is often more difficult for men who choose to work in this field. But despite counseling from parents and college teachers who think they should

be doing something more appropriate for their sex, many men persist in elementary teaching. Men, in a part of the profession traditionally dominated by women, have the opportunity to learn and come to value what we generally think of as *feminine virtues*: acknowledging the human need for warmth, recognition, and affection:

> The advantages of being male are hard to separate from the talents and interests that first led me into teaching. When a second grader learns to read in my class, after a frustrating year with a teacher down the hall, is it because I am a man or because my style of showing enthusiasm for reading happened to catch a child's interest? Or is it because that child just needed a year to grow into an awareness of written language? No one can say for sure. Nonetheless, I enjoy knowing that I have made a difference in children's lives, whatever the reason. I also like to imagine that my presence in the classroom is a quiet force for social change, that having a male teacher will enable young children of both sexes to imagine a broader array of possibilities for their own lives.
>
> Lee

Women, too, experience prejudice due to societal expectations, particularly in math and science, a viewpoint often reinforced in schools. But, with the help of sensitive teachers, children can have positive models for learning in these areas:

> In teaching, I felt that I could do a lot of good things for children. One important experience I had had to do with a snake. I never could stand snakes and couldn't even touch a bug. I hated all that. One day, the children in my class caught a snake and brought it to me. I didn't want to show them my fear, because I didn't want them to end up with the fears I had of snakes. So I felt I had to learn about snakes. This later extended to whatever the children wanted to learn about, and gave me an opportunity to learn about things as well. Before this, I had had no real incentive, nothing that I could be passionate about.
>
> Rhoda

Teaching is a consuming intellectual occupation; it affects all areas of our lives, perhaps because we share so intimately in the lives of others. We wonder about individual students, about curriculum areas, about special school events, about our relationships with parents, or about our ability to teach. If we happen to meet another teacher at a party or on an

airplane we can talk for hours, sometimes to the dismay of our companions:

I'm dreadfully curious, not only about things, physical phenomena, but about the way people handle situations. When I'm working with kids, or when I'm working with adults, I love watching that "aha." I love watching the eyes glow. It's something I've been working on with them for some time without saying it specifically to them. You know, you work around behind them and you present new things. You toss out clues. You want every way possible to avoid discovering it for them. You want to keep on tossing out little *noodges* and finally they say, "My God, that's it!" When that happens, I just feel such a sense of having done something very special for them, that I hope they can then do for others. Because, not only have they discovered something, but perhaps they've discovered HOW they discovered it. I love watching kids' eyes as they're deeply involved, seeing into their mental processes, trying to figure out how I can help them become something different, that whole thing of being a facilitator, of getting things started and supporting others while they get it together; then leaving them self-sufficient and self-supporting so I can move back and still be a resource, but able to be called in (and they know that I can be called in). Of course, they know that I might not be able to solve the problem.

Alan

What excites me, is to explore with children in such a way that, momentarily, I might be privileged to see as they do (or close). Without those thrilling and intimate moments, I'd be bored and frustrated. What teaching allows, is that I bring the sorts of things I've sketched and written about (anthropology, linguistics, living abroad and in the rural South) together in relationship with particular people . . . mainly children, but also parents and colleagues. What excites me is that I can weave them together, but in the context of the relationship between the children and myself. If I felt I were reduced to an instructional automaton, I'd leave. A robot can instruct, can dole out skills and facts. The teaching happens when I have the opportunity to respond, out of my particular relationship with the children, out of moments of co-participation, to their thoughts, feelings, flights of fancy; to their passion, with my own.

Ellen

Jessica, like Ellen, teaches in a small, New England town. She considers something she calls, "the principle of participation," to be at the center of her teaching:

> Something I call the principle of participation has been a notion I have used to think about myself as a teacher for years. Participation is the effect and process of entering into another's perspective, not simply understanding, but, briefly, living it. And living it in such a way that the other is aware of the effort and the perception, in such a way that a recognition takes place. The more I reflect on the high points of my experience as a teacher, and the ongoing, steady work as well, the more I realize that this action is essential to my work. I sometimes think that doing that is how I think, and I know that I have generated some of my most successful teaching gestures doing that. Why? And, is that all?
>
> Knowledge is what I'm after for my children. By which I do not mean the acquisition of facts, but rather the perception of value. As I have thought about participation, and its relation to my interest in the acquisition of knowledge by my students, I realize the word only expresses half the action. Participation, and then something else . . . reflection, distancing . . . something that gives room and allows me to incite my students to participate in an enlarged perspective, to give them room to create knowledge . . . a sense of worth, value, and their own participation in the world.
>
> Jessica

To give all our students a sense of worth in a society that often says not all are equally worthy is an important task. For Naomi, participation takes on a more political meaning, an active stance grounded in ideals of justice and caring:

> I have a vision of how things should be . . . a world based on love, on trust, on sharing. This admittedly idealistic vision, is also potentially radical because it implies the need for deep, fundamental societal change. Because my vision is based on love, the change that I see as necessary cannot be based on force or violence.
>
> Non-violent social change can take many forms. The course of action I see ahead of me lies with the schools and my future role as a teacher. I do not want to be a teacher in order to indoctrinate people with my version of reality, but to inspire people to think and to question all mythologies, to see the

world freshly for themselves. That is the kind of teacher I want to be, one who allows people to become aware of their own unique human potential. By so doing, I hope to, in a small way, open up their social human potential as well.

Naomi

As the only adults in our classrooms for the major part of the day, we must relate to students with understanding and patience in a variety of situations. Our relationship with our students determines the tone and atmosphere of our classrooms, so it helps if we think well on our feet and maintain a sense of humor. Gradually, through time and practice, we come to know when we are just getting by, and when we are really in touch with our students' learning. We try in as many ways as possible to nurture and sustain those moments where real learning occurs:

I like the way you have to do 10 things at once. That's a lot of fun for me. You might be teaching math, but you also have to bring to bear all the stuff that you learned in reading poetry or novels. You have to be an artist as well as be skilled in people-management. There are so many things!

The other thing I like is that feeling of being in the hub of this busy circle of kids all day long. I love that feeling of all this hum going on, all this stuff happening. You're not necessarily even talking to maybe one kid at a particular time, yet you know that some things you've set in motion, some things you're sort of managing, and some things are happening inside your head.

Ginny

Rather than just knowing cognitive levels and teaching techniques, we regard teaching as an art, an integration of a lifetime of learning with our work. We put a great deal of ourselves into our teaching, and as a profession it stimulates us to find out things on our own:

There are two big things that teaching makes possible for me. One is, as other people have said, that it gives me a reason to keep on learning all the things I want to learn. I don't ever have to be a finished person. I can keep gaining new interests. I can keep starting off with a new craft or trying out a new study or learning about a new area. I can always justify it by saying that it's going to improve my teaching. It's going to help my career. I can always go in and start on a new section of the books at Encore, because it's going to help my

> teaching. There's always that incentive to keep pushing myself and changing myself, because there's that reflection of what I learn in what I can teach. I really like that a lot. That's what is exciting about this year.
>
> Tamar

Teaching becomes exciting where there is some freedom to shape the setting and events in a classroom. Constraints in public schools often make it difficult for teachers to shape their classroom learning environments in ways they consider meaningful. For that reason, they either leave the profession, or find a setting that is more congenial.

Some teachers, however, are now learning how to apply for grants that bring badly needed funds to their school or district. Because the teachers rather than the administrators are the applicants, they can structure the grants to suit their particular needs. Utilizing community resources is another way of extending classroom learning. For example, knowing just where to find milkweed in order to collect caterpillars in the fall is a handy thing to know:

> I know then that I did some of my best teaching in that school. The three-year grant to integrate the arts into all areas of the curriculum allowed for risks and experimentation that was enlivening. I had a great deal of control over certain parts of the curriculum and could share my own interests in music, crafts, and global studies. We made many trips into the community and visitors came to us. The freedom to block out the day except for specialists, gave us a flexibility that we treasured; we could follow something to its natural conclusion, and disruptions were minimized.
>
> One of the memorable things that happened during that time was the construction of a passive solar house across the street from the school, directly in front of our classroom windows! We began to watch it being built, but that was not enough. After a few daily visits to the site, we met the owner, who was also the designer and builder. It turned out that he was very good at explaining building techniques to the children, so we joined with another class and documented the entire construction from start to finish. At the housewarming party for our new-found friend, we were able to present him a copy of our work, complete with photographs. During the making of the book, the children learned a great deal about the reasons for solar construction, even why he had chosen a passive system. Since the house was a prototype of others he hoped to build, it was

meaningful for him as well.

Karen

Teaching gives me a sense of things building, how what I know is built on years of learning from other people, and hearing other people's experiences, advice, and stories. I still have a friend who calls me up when there's a rainstorm saying, "You have to come over now, because that white oak tree that sprouts now, and doesn't need to have the acorns over winter, has shed its nuts all over." I've been there, headlights on, at 9:30 at night picking up those acorns. I really get a kick out of it, watching myself do that, thinking how many years I've been doing harebrained things like that. I love knowing about that white oak. There is a nice feeling about that kind of culture that has developed out of our practice of teaching.

Rhoda

By being open and sharing our experiences and feelings with the children in our rooms, we free them to do the same. Lynne is an artist and a writer, and encourages children in her room to express themselves through a variety of mediums. By sharing her writing with her class, she lets them know writing is not just something they do in school:

I read poetry to my second graders over the course of a whole year. As often happens, around February or March of that year, the children started to write poems. One kid did, and then she read her poems, and then somebody else picked it up. Another kid picked out a poem that she really liked, and read that. We started to talk about the book, *The Bat Poet*, by Randall Jarrell. I don't know if it's suitable for second graders or not, but they got a lot out of it. Jarrell's description of the animals both in poetry and prose are just so remarkable, so different in the two forms, yet so right on target. Children really appreciated that. While I was reading that book to them I went up to the country, and for the first time ever, walking around at dusk, which I don't usually do, I turned around and there were some deer standing there. All of a sudden, my senses were just tuned in to those deer. I got back to the cabin and I wrote a poem. Now I'm not a poet, and I don't often write poetry. I wrote a poem and then I worked on it a little bit, so I had two versions of the poem, or maybe three. I'm not sure whether I did it then or I did it later, but I also wrote a prose version of what happened. I went back to the school on Monday, and I read that to the

children, all of it. That way of integrating my personal life with my classroom life was very exciting and meaningful to me.

Lynne

In our classrooms, there is an energy and a sense of immediacy of life that is found in few other places. It is unusual to have work that allows one to be effective in such an intimate and positive way. Our work is with the whole person, to which we bring the fullness of our own experience and knowledge. It is significant that the words teachers use in speaking about life in classrooms are these: *excitement, satisfaction, challenge, feeling, aliveness, growth, change, cycle,* and *rhythm:*

I didn't stay in teaching. What was exciting about teaching for me got transformed and became other things that I do that are still related to children and to adults. There are lots of possibilities, challenges, and problems to be solved. The cycling of time fits my rhythm, my working rhythm very well: the changing of the seasons, the newness of each year, the break over summertime. The seasons are very much with you as a teacher, especially if you teach in a setting that lets the outside in to a certain extent. Even if you don't, you still feel it. You feel very close to the Earth, and to people. There's little that's hidden, it's right out there. Kids feel they're right out there. Parents and teachers also feel passionately about their children and their work. So teaching encompasses everything, including the natural world.

Edie

5

Hard Times
Anne Martin

To those outside the profession, teaching can appear to be an easy job: short hours, steady employment, and long summer vacations. Aside from the much-publicized concern about violence in the schools, and the issue of low pay (which has only recently come to national attention with the acute threat of a teacher shortage), not much is generally known about the difficulties inherent in the job itself, and the difficulties that are engendered by conditions within schools.

While the failures of schools are fair game for everyone, from the level of neighborhood gossip to scholarly journals and national reports, the role of teachers in that failure is perceived in a confusing variety of ways. Teachers are romanticized as heroic but ineffectual, pitied ("I don't see how you do it"), blamed for all of society's ills, generally ignored when it comes to drawing up school reforms, given constant advice and mandates. Lip service may be given on "Teacher Appreciation Day," but most of the time teachers feel neither appreciated nor really listened to in their concerns about the children they teach and the environment in which they work.

Teaching is a tremendously complex job which demands constant effort, patience, energy, thought, concentration, and dedication. It absorbs teachers absolutely during class hours and haunts them after school. The challenging problems of curriculum and children's needs insist on presenting themselves to be grappled with at any time of day and night, frequently even in dreams.

> Sometimes I long for a nine-to-five-job, one where I leave my job when I leave the office. Interactions with children and between children are so intense, the constant dynamic between child, subject matter, and teacher so involving, that it is impossible for me to stop thinking about my kids simply because it's five o'clock. In addition, I am keenly aware of the responsibility I bear as teacher. I take this job seriously. So when I take a shower I worry about Janie's writing (she's having trouble with endings) and think about where to get silkworms. Cooking soup for dinner I wonder

why Brandon is so angry and what should we do for Physical Education if it rains? Running in the morning, I try to figure out yet another way to help Jason get organized, and how to relate the spread of Islam in the Middle Ages to my fourth to sixth graders. And sometimes in the middle of the night I wake up feeling worried about not doing enough or knowing enough or being understanding enough.

Theresa*

*Except when quoted from already published material, teachers in this chapter are given pseudonyms.

Because teachers are working with growing people, there are never clear answers or conclusions, only further insights and more informed decisions. For conscientious teachers, this leaves room for continual self-questioning, doubt, and concern, some of which can lead to improved practice and some of which can be destructive. The way teachers deal with and learn to make use of these inner pressures depends not only on their particular personalities, training, and background, but also on outward circumstances.

Each school system, and each school within a system, has its own characteristics which strongly affect a teacher's work in the classroom. The atmosphere in a school building, the physical arrangement of a classroom, the character of a school staff and administration, the availability of supplies, the daily class schedule, can all work against teachers as well as for them. Often school buildings are in bad repair or were poorly planned in the first place, classrooms are overcrowded and under-equipped, materials are in short supply or virtually nonexistent, school personnel are too burdened to help each other or unable to do so for other reasons, class schedules break up the day into disjointed fragments, time is wasted on trivial administrative tasks, teachers are assigned large and difficult groups of children and left to "sink or swim" on their own.

For teachers who are already pushing themselves to the limit, trying to find effective ways to teach every child in their classes, the daily frustrations can become overwhelming. If external and internal pressures mount and there is no counter-balance of personal and professional support, teachers will feel increasing strain, exhaustion, anxiety, and sometimes anger both on their own behalf and on behalf of the children whom they care about and who, they feel, deserve better than what they are getting from the schools. Teaching then tends to become a debilitating, discouraging job rather than the stimulating, satisfying profession it could be.

New teachers, arriving with high hopes and little classroom experience, are often placed in the most

difficult schools, holding positions which tenured teachers have managed to escape. Under particular pressure to prove themselves to administrators, other teachers, parents, and children, they may find themselves not only working constantly just to keep their heads above water, but also suffering from much anxiety about their roles and how (or whether) they are fulfilling them:

> I worried over every piece of paperwork I got from Central Office, I worried about writing report cards, I worried about all the procedures I knew nothing about.

This particular teacher, in her first year in a public school in Fairbanks, Alaska, did not receive help from her principal. On the contrary, he impressed her by "his lack of support for his staff in the face of parental questions or opposition." Nor did she feel comfortable teaching a required curriculum that did not seem to connect with the children and their needs:

> I never realized what an important thing it was to know that your principal would go to bat for you if necessary. It is possible that he treated me differently because I was a first-year teacher. But I sincerely think that he had no good ideas of his own for dealing with kids, and so he took the parents' stand because he feared that he might make waves if he didn't.
>
> His philosophy of teaching and classroom management was very traditional. We were expected to stick to the standard curriculum to the letter. In first grade we had to teach something called Action Reading, which is a regimented, highly organized, follow-the-manual approach to teaching based on drilling skills for three-quarters of the year. While Action Reading had some merits, and I use a couple of things from it to this day, I hated teaching it as the only kind of reading program. But I had no choice--and many of my kids who were ready for real books from day one did not get enough of that. There was very little innovation in that school, and I believe it was because the principal and much of the staff had been there a long time and neither expected much from the other. People did no more than was required of them. That's fine in many other jobs, but not in teaching . . .

New teachers often enter the profession with impossibly idealized images of what teaching children means:

> Somehow I entered teaching with the mistaken notion that in order to be nurturing with children I had to be forever patient and understanding. Given the responsibility for controlling the emotional roller coaster of a kindergarten class, this self-expectation left me totally unprepared . . . I have talked with many female teachers who worked through the same unreasonable self-expectations in their first years of teaching. Classroom management is always a big issue for beginners, until they learn to define limits clearly and cultivate that special *presence* of the experienced teacher. Perhaps I was no different, no more burdened for being male. Nonetheless, I felt extremely overwhelmed by the feelings that raged through my classroom. My upbringing taught restraint and perseverance, two qualities that made me a poor model for channeling disagreeable feelings in constructive directions.
>
> Ron

Not all new teachers survive the ordeal of their first years, even when they have the desire and ability to become good teachers. Whether they make it may depend less on personal characteristics than on the balance of pressure versus support.

The physical setup of a classroom can be a crucial element in determining the kind of teaching that is possible. Some people might envision classrooms as calm, orderly places, equipped with books and learning materials, an environment designed for children to learn. This image may be far from reality. Ramona, who teaches seventh and eighth grades in a Philadelphia public school, "a converted panty hose factory," writes:

> I walked upstairs to the makeshift classroom (a corridor that was converted a few years ago to two temporary classrooms) where I meet my homeroom class. There is no door on my makeshift classroom. Kids running down the hall have torn it off twice in the last few months, and no attempt has been made to put it up again. This means that those students who sit in front of the doorway are distracted by anything that goes on in the hallway, students coming and going, teachers reprimanding children, etc. Noise is another problem; the class next door, which is not completely partitioned off, is often boisterous (to put it mildly), and whatever I do with my class must be adjusted to that fact.

In the same city:

> The first time I saw the building where I was

going to teach I was totally focused on meeting the exiting teacher and looking at children's work. I did not become conscious of the horrors of the building until I had worked there two or three days.

The building was a rented annex to the large school across the street. It was a one-story brick structure in the middle of a row of storefronts. Nothing identified it as a school--not even a number. I found myself telling people it was the nothing building between the laundromat and the rug store.

Inside, the building was divided in half by a wall. One side contained the lunchroom and a class. The other side had two classes. My space was the front of the two-class space. The children from both classes entered through my space. In turn, my children went through the other class to the bathroom and the lunchroom.

The building had been designed for use by men. I base this assumption on the fact that the girls' bathroom had one toilet. This was shared by 50 girls and all of the staff. There wasn't even a lock on the door when I first arrived. In the beginning I believed children had rights and I waited my turn for the bathroom. After a period of time I began to use my teacher power and moved children out of the way.

The open space determined the schedule for the day. It was necessary for both classes to do the same thing at the same time because of the noise problem. I found this very restrictive and began to look forward to those rare times when the other class was gone. The other problems included such things as a front door which didn't latch properly, making the building unsafe, windows that didn't open, an air-conditioning system which required repair every spring, and plumbing which broke down frequently.

I found out in a roundabout way that the principal was going to put a fourth class in our very crowded building. I was so distressed that I began contacting other teachers and parents for help and support. The principal was very angry that I should do such a thing. I felt that I was not getting through to the principal until I began to graphically describe what it would be like to go to the bathroom with the new class in the building. All of the girls and all of the staff would have to go through that class space to get to the one-toilet bathroom. The principal's response was that he had never thought about what the staff did for a bathroom. As a result of this conversation, the class was not placed in that space.

I was aware of the building every day for those five-and-a-half years. I alternated between being angry and being philosophical. But in the end I was resentful of the time and energy devoted to the problems--time away from children and teaching.

Phoebe

While urban school systems demonstrate the flagrant inequality of resources in our society, even relatively affluent suburban schools may create environments that present obstacles to learning:

My kindergarten classroom is actually not a *room* at all, but a designated area in an open-space building. Walking into the back door of the ground floor, you are immediately confronted by wide vistas of open space reaching across the whole floor and upward into irregular sharp-angled ceilings. The red-carpeted floor is littered with bulky, free-standing furniture in warring hues of blue, yellow, orange, green, and white, while the wallpaper tends to be an unlovely shade of mauve or orange. There are staircases so unfunctional that teachers have blocked them off with furniture, and platforms and pits so unfortunately placed that they become no-man's land because their use would disturb adjoining classes. In an unwalled primary area for about 200 children, there is constant noise and motion; the unceasing flow of voices and activities. (In the last few years, some ticky-tacky wallboard partitions have been put in as a visual, if not auditory, barrier between many of the classes, but not in my kindergarten area.)

In winter, lunchboxes, jackets, boots, and mittens overflow the awkward coat closets and are strewn haphazardly across the passage. It takes skillful jumping and weaving to make your way from my kindergarten area to the rest of the school. The overall impression is a painful jangling of colors, noise, and crowded space. The atmosphere is conducive to running, hanging on unnecessary railings, jumping down large carpeted risers that turn out to be hollow and reverberate with loud thuds at the lightest footfall. For children those are the constant temptations (thwarted daily by teacher prohibition), while adult visitors usually seem impressed by the *modernness* of the renovated building.

For a teacher, the physical setup is a continual source of frustration and exhaustion. There are no storage spaces except for inadequate movable cabinets; no counter space for displays; hardly any bul-

letin boards or blackboards; no nooks and crannies for special activities; not enough room for chairs, tables, or children (not even enough chairs, for that matter, since the original ones were so flimsy that they get broken every day and thrown out by custodians, but not replaced). Worst of all, there is no way ever to have silence, while at the same time every teacher feels chronic guilt at the ordinary classroom noises which are bound to disturb other classes. Group discussions are carried on against the perpetual din, and small voices drift away into the general clamor. How to teach "listening skills" when you can hardly hear anyone a few feet away from you?

The whole thrust of a teacher's day is to battle the school setting into submission, to supply for the children the order, calm, security, and sense of purpose which they so badly need and which is so conspicuously lacking in the physical environment of the school.

Ruth

It seems self-evident that whatever the school setting or classroom arrangement children need books, pencils, paper, and concrete learning materials. However, in many schools, supplies are hard (or impossible) to get hold of, and teachers have to make extraordinary efforts to equip their classrooms, frequently spending considerable sums from their own salaries to buy what they need. Sometimes supplies actually are in the schools but under lock and key with no generally accepted procedure for giving teachers access to what they need. Under those circumstances, even the most ordinary materials acquire an aura of great value and desirability, so that teachers (as well as children) have to scheme to appropriate pencils, erasers, chalk, etc. Knowing the ropes in a school may include inside information on how to obtain necessary classroom supplies:

This morning, after signing in, I cornered the roster chairman, an old friend, who is also the person in charge of one of the two reading materials closets in the school. I got him to give me the key to the closet so that I could get a few books. I felt like a kid who had just been given the key to the candy cupboard, and ran to the fifth floor closet. As I went through the materials, my eye spied so many things I could use. There is such a poverty of materials in the public schools. Students have to share books, making it impossible to take books home for the most part, and often what we have is in poor condition. This situation has been

getting worse over the years that I have been teaching, and I consider it a serious problem. Then I thought how wrong it was for me to have access to the materials closet because I am friendly with the person with the key. What would I do if I did not know him? Too many things seem to be that way in the schools. Furtively, I took a few more books than I originally asked for, and then headed for my main classroom.

Ramona

The importance of the physical setup of the classroom, and the time it takes for a teacher to furnish the kind of classroom she wants, is not always recognized by administrators who shuffle teachers to different rooms, grade levels or even different buildings, as school population numbers shift. Eileen, who teaches in a small New England town, writes:

I am tired, tired of packing and unpacking my entire classroom, something I have had to do nine out of the twelve years that I have been teaching. I have had to spend too much time trying to remember what I still have, and where it is. Also, each classroom had a different layout, so there was no area consistency to help me remember.

As an elementary teacher in the primary grades, I am expected to create an environment where 20 or more students spend most of their day, comfortably living and working together in one room (how many of us spend even one whole day in the same room with one or two of our own children?). Having done that, I am expected to teach all subjects to children with a variety of abilities and learning styles. The planning and energy needed to create this environment and maintain it are not undertaken lightly. The materials I have in my room are not just books, paper, and pencils; many of them are things that I have purchased myself, or have collected over the years (things such as looms, scientific equipment, aquariums, cloth, and sewing materials, as well as the large classroom library of children's books). The last time I packed up my room for a move, it took 60 large moving boxes and three days. The contents in each of those boxes is essential to the kind of teaching I like to do; with a variety of materials, I can provide an environment that intrigues a variety of children. Those materials are my teaching tools, and I use them to create a community of learners.

In addition to the disruption caused by the physical move from one room to another, there are often re-

assignments of teachers to a different school, which means having to adjust to a new building, new staff, new group of parents, and a different community. Sometimes a whole school is broken up and merged with other schools, causing an abrupt break in familiar routines, and the loss of school traditions and personal relationships. Teachers and children are left at loose ends and have to start all over again to make new ties:

> Needless to say, things were polite but tense in the new school. Our previous staff of 15 was now in three separate buildings, and all were so busy setting up new classrooms and learning new procedures, that they lost regular contact with one another. In the buildings, as they were newly constellated, the usual willingness to share was suspended while all of us nursed our wounds. Gradually, new relationships were formed, and hoarded materials emerged from cupboards and closets. The children too were wary; best friends were separated simply because they lived on a different bus route on the other side of a line dividing the two schools. There were frequent quarrels on the playground until new friendships settled in. Even the building was in a state of disrepair, because major renovations were not yet finished. At one point, the workers went on strike while putting up windows in January! The school grounds looked like a battlefield with rubble and large equipment, and since they were roofing, there was the constant sound of hammers.
>
> The year was spent getting to know a whole new group of parents, who expected that traditions peculiar to their former schools would be continued. The staff didn't have the energy to do anything other than unpack, set up new classrooms and teach; the physical disrepair of the building was an appropriate reflection of our inner states. Several of us took to going on a brisk mile walk during lunch each day, which, although against district policy, was allowed that year. During that informal time, away from the building, we became friendlier.
>
> Eileen

Continuity--the opportunity to work with people for a long time so that you can get to know them well, to create class and school traditions, to build friendships among children and adults, to stay with projects on a long-term basis--is rarely considered a priority in school policy. In a society where fragmentation is increasing, where many children experience personal loss and separation in their own families, schools actually add to the discontinuity. Classes are broken up

every year into new groupings, friends are divided, social bonds cut. Each year brings a different teacher with a different teaching approach. New curricula may be tried haphazardly and quickly dropped again, to be displaced by quite different programs. Days are fragmented into small segments by specialist schedules and special services, and there are constant, mostly needless, interruptions:

> Time is stolen for children to line up--come in--go out--get books--sharpen pencils--get materials--go to the bathroom. They just settle down to listen or work when the principal makes announcements over the loudspeaker ("The Lost and Found is growing"). It is the time he phones to ask me to send my roll-book to the office. "While I have you on the phone," he says, "would you tell me . . ." It is also the time for fire drills, assemblies, rehearsal for a play, and cancel reading for a special assembly--cancel projects for a library lesson--cancel recess (inclement weather)--the science teacher is out, you'll have to keep your class during your prep time--hold your class until we call you for assembly, we're running a little late, but bring them quickly when we call. We have a substitute to make up the prep time you lost--I'll send him at 1:15.
>
> Kate G.

Even when the intention is to give children the special help they need, the resulting fragmentation of the day can make things more difficult for both children and teachers. The following is an account of how specialist services worked for a particular child and the whole class in a rural first/second grade:

> Alan was a seven-year-old who had the affect and body of a much younger child. He was relatively isolated within the class. He often positioned himself physically outside the group, played alone, and made comments in conversation that seemed bizarre to his mates, disconnected from the thread. Relationship was a difficult area for him. His relationships had a quality of stiltedness, and tended not to endure. His tentative inroads to relationships tended to come through work--through his interest in class-wide undertakings, his participation in small-group projects, and his interest in discussing his own work and the work of others.
>
> Alan had been identified prior to entering school as a "child at risk." By the time I got him in grade one, he was already identified for special ed and speech and language. This meant that he was out

of the room for two 45-minute periods, four days a week (special ed), and two half-hour slots per week (speech and language). His schedule meant that he missed Morning Meeting four times a week, and Afternoon Meeting twice a week. This meant that he was out of the room when much of the group forming and group sharing was going on, missing one of the activities which might most help him to develop a sense of membership. He contributed least to the class sharing because he was so infrequently there.

When he returned in the mornings, the children would be writing on various undertakings of their own, reading, and doing some independent or self-constituted group project work. Because the work was so self-directed, there wasn't a group he could just slip into. A lot was going on, and he'd missed the formation of it.

By far the most devastating effect was on his sense of belonging and his relationships with classmates. My sense was that he needed the *greatest* support possible in both forming individual relationships and finding his place in groups. What happened instead was that his removal from the room required him to make extra efforts to reconnect upon his return. For a child with such tenuous bonds, that is a superhuman demand.

Then there are the teaching questions. Each time Alan returned I was faced with the dilemma: should I interrupt what I'm doing to help him re-enter? Often he'd return when I was in a reading or writing conference with another child. Helping Alan re-enter would then mean breaking a thread with someone else. His fragmentation would become that of others. If I maintained the thread with others, Alan would be left to struggle it out with his limited resources. It was the sort of choice destined to make me feel I'd betrayed a child's needs whatever I did: the classic no-win situation. Day after day of this, and the temptation was strong to resent Alan, when he reappeared, for "creating" this bind.

This is the story of one child who had a particular kind of fragmentation in his day, which in some way became a break in the rhythm for the group and for me. Alan's story is embedded in a context in which the whole class went out half an hour a day to "specials": art, music, gym, library. It's a conjuring act to keep a rhythm going with all those interruptions--lunch, recess, specials, resource room, adaptive physical ed.--and the little bits of time that hang on the edges of them. Children in my room tend to take a piece of work and play with it, mess about, question, find some answers, question again,

record, share, and perhaps return to it again in a new way. This is what I *want* to encourage, and I find the children generally responsive and eager *if* they have sufficient time. Fifteen or 20 minutes is *never* enough time.

The rhythm of the day is the heartbeat of the class. When it beats in a steady, regular way, there's a comfort in the room that allows thought to flow. When that steady beat is lost to jerkiness, I see it in the unsettledness of the children, and in the discontinuous quality of their work.

Carol

Lack of continuity can be as destructive for teachers as for children. Kate, who described the constant interruptions in her classroom above, is an elementary school teacher who entered a large urban school system just as enrollment was beginning to decline. She therefore became vulnerable to sudden transfers, as school populations fluctuated and shifted. For 11 years, Kate was bounced around from school to school, often arbitrarily in the middle of the year, as though teachers are interchangeable cogs in a machine, and teaching a standardized process that is unrelated to human relationships and feelings:

I've learned from experience to go very slowly, to watch the children and others for clues. The room is usually stripped of meaningful material, but the closet is full of years of leftovers, yellowed paper, unused run-offs, and the old teachers' manuals. Too often I have been transferred in the middle of the year, and the dust and feelings of the old school are still with me as I enter the new. I am introduced to a myriad of names and faces; often it is several weeks before I can recall who they are. The reading system is new and different from what I have known, and the assumption is that, handed a teachers' manual, I will be able to go on where others have left off. I know I cannot teach material with which I am unfamiliar to children I do not know in a space where I feel out of tune. The children are wise; they know this. They watch me carefully for errors so that they can step in and take the lead. I know I will have a month of grace with them--sometimes only two weeks--and it is this time that must count. They are torn between wanting me to lead them and their desire to be free of authority. We are a fragmented unit thrown together, and unless we can create a bond of trust, good teaching and learning cannot occur.*

*Katelore Guerin, "Bounced around Teachers and Leftover Children," *Education and Urban Society*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (May 1985), pp. 285-6.

Of all the essential ingredients that help to make a classroom successful, perhaps the one most often lacking is sufficient time: time for teachers to give attention to children, time for children to learn and grow at their own pace, time for teachers to prepare materials and reflect on their teaching, time for teachers to get together and help each other, time for teachers and children to converse, to think about what they are doing and why they are doing it. In the hectic atmosphere of interrupted days, working in overcrowded classes with inadequate facilities, teachers cannot meet the demands made on them daily:

Kate again:

> There were 37 children in the class. One third had a bare smattering of English. As I look back, I remember my days filled with confusion. The class was two thirds Black and one third Indo-Chinese. The Blacks resented the Indo-Chinese, and all resented me who had come to be their fourth teacher for the year. The Indo-Chinese who, I discovered, spoke three different languages, were taken out together two hours a day to learn English. An aide came in to help me with reading for 45 minutes, but there was no time for us to plan what we would do. Children went out for special services at different times, and I felt like a stationmaster routing trains.
>
> The teachers were harassed and had little time for communication, so it was only by mistakes that I began to learn the rules. The office too was bedlam, records stacked as children transferred in and out, and secretaries tried to get help for children and families that had little means of communication. In spite of all, lots of good happened at that school because there were so many who cared, but how much light was turned out in children's eyes because of overworked facilities or people.
>
> At the end of each day, I would stop and make myself remember what was good, or the bad would overwhelm me. Broken windows repaired with tape, new heating pipes and weather stripping installed while I was teaching, bells, phones all added to confusion, not helped by clocks that functioned on their own time.

Kate's classroom clocks "that functioned on their own time" seem symbolic of the disregard schools often show for the needs of children and teachers. It is probably not a coincidence that teachers' classroom accounts so often mention the erratic behavior of school clocks:

We're going crazy! The clocks all over the school are broken and they keep announcing the time over the loudspeaker every 15 minutes. It's important but terribly disruptive. I feel fragmented.

They removed the clock over the sink months ago, ostensibly to fix it, and they haven't brought it back. Whenever I automatically glance over to see the time, I am faced by a blank circle. It always startles me, though I should be used to it by now, and it seems somehow fraught with Bergmanesque symbolism, thought I haven't figured out its significance.

A student was called on to read, and, as he began, the janitor came into the room asking, "Who wants the clock?" I had to think, then remembered that I had put in a request for a classroom clock back in September. I said the clock was needed here. He replied, "This corridor should never have been made into a classroom; it's a fire hazard." He left and I never saw the clock and wondered if this meant that I'd have to wait for another four months.*

*Lynne Strieb, *A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal* (Grand Forks, N.D.: University of North Dakota Press, 1985), p. 59.

The pervasive official clock, visible or not, disrupts class time and seems unconnected to the time pressures that weigh so heavily on teachers. Schools often appear to be organized in ways that misuse classroom time, leaving teachers dissatisfied with what they are able to accomplish. The larger the class, the less time there is for teachers to spend with individual children or small groups. For Sophie, teaching sixth grade in a New York City public school, an exceptional one in which real attention is given to meeting children's needs, the lack of time is still a constant problem:

I'm often frustrated by the fact that I have so few opportunities to work with kids in unhurried, uninterrupted ways. To help a youngster puzzle out some difficulty with a math concept, for example, takes some talking about, some trying out of things. The child has to feel challenged by problems, not discouraged or embarrassed, and has to have the sense that they're soluble, given enough time and attention. To build that sense, and to help with the figuring out, I have to feel free to think, observe. All that takes time, and it's very hard to put all the other concerns aside and focus on this one child at a given moment. It's always helpful, of course, to have other adults in the room as working partners; I have that sometimes and it does make a difference. But kids don't always schedule their special needs or problems to conform to the time

someone else is going to be in the room, and most of the time, I muddle through as best I can.

I'd love to be able to do a real editing job on a piece of writing with a child; I call it editing when I do it, but it's actually more like a quickie talk-over, and some corrections which I think need to be made. I'd like to have class discussions with kids--real ones, where views are exchanged, ideas questioned and probed. This is important because the children at this age, between 11 and 13, are just beginning to feel it's possible to do that--argue out ideas, put forth unpopular views, try to persuade others. It's not possible to do that with 30-odd children, sitting in a large circle. And while I do arrange to meet individually or in small groups with kids, it's invariably at the expense of something else: they have to give up gym or recess or something else they enjoy, or we have to try to eat lunch and talk at the same time--and finish it all up in 45 minutes.

The same kind of pressure is apparent during family conferences. For all the good reasons everyone already knows, genuine, open discussions with parents are an essential part of educating kids. It takes time to build confidence and trust in one another, and to exchange what we know about a child. Our family conferences are about 15 minutes long and take place twice a year--and we schedule twice the amount that's officially required. It's a kind of talk marathon for me, one set of families after another, for two or three hours at a stretch. There's no time for each exchange of ideas, or sharing information or making plans; it's a missed opportunity for drawing parents, in a genuine way, into the whole process of teaching and learning. Of course, again, I arrange other, additional meeting times--early in the morning or late afternoon. If I can't do any better, I have long conversations in the late evening--or at six in the morning, as in the case of a mother last year who worked very odd hours. Mostly it's an exhausting, unsatisfying business to try to work against the time constraints.

Class size is a serious problem for most urban school teachers. Sadly, class size is often much higher in schools populated by minority or poor people than in suburban and middle-class school districts. Thus children with the greatest needs often get the least teacher time:

Each year since the contract limit became 33, I had 35 or 36 first-graders on my roll. Many of them

were recent Asian immigrants who could not speak English. There was a chicken pox epidemic that year, and over the course of three months, 17 children got sick. I was surprised at the difference five fewer children could make on any day. It made it possible for me to survive the winter. When all the children returned, I felt panic and claustrophobia.

Phoebe

For the past four years, in my first grade, I've had 34 children in my class. An aide came for 40 minutes, three days a week, to give additional help to the Title I children. When she was absent, I had to change the morning's plans because no substitute was sent. Thirty-four first-graders and one teacher? That's ridiculous!

I have a great writing program, but think of how much more relaxed Writing Time could be if I had fewer children with whom I had conferences! The same with Quiet Reading Time and individual reading conferences. It takes so long to check homework and other papers; to keep anecdotal records up to date.

And the noise level! I work in a four-classroom pod with walls only at the ends of the pod. Each classroom was built for 25; each pod for 100. For nine years we had at least 33 children in each class (132 altogether). As our school population dropped, our principal realized that that was too many children, and he took one class away, leaving 99 children in the pod. But because there are no walls, it's still impossibly noisy. Though it's the sound of the children working, it builds and builds. Sometimes, when I ask my children to get quiet, they *are* already quiet. The sound is coming from next door. When people from the Central Administration visit our school, they eye the empty classrooms hungrily, wondering how they could best fill them. So far, our principal has protected us from that.

It's wrong and unfair for children to have to be herded together in such large classes, especially when it doesn't happen to children in private and suburban schools.

Lynne S.

Even when class size is manageable, there are school years so difficult that they shake the confidence of even experienced, competent teachers who have previously been successful in the classroom. These years of deep questioning can occur for a variety of reasons--an especially difficult group of children, extreme pressure from parents and/or administration, iso-

lation in a non-supportive school environment, personal problems outside of school, or a combination of factors. Whatever the causes, the teacher can feel helplessness, loss of control, depression, and mounting frustration that gets turned inwards towards the self and outwards towards the children and the school. It is hard for teachers to tell other people that they are having problems in the classroom. A teacher who is not managing well is usually overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and inadequacy which are not easy to share with others. Furthermore, an open admission of failure is at best extremely embarrassing, and at worst could lead to loss of the teaching position. Those administrators who equate classroom difficulties with teacher incompetence (no matter how well that competence has been demonstrated in other years) tend to respond by trying to fire the teacher if she doesn't have tenure, or transfer her if she does.

While there are undoubtedly a number of teachers who are not suited to the teaching profession, and who would be well advised to enter other fields, there are a much greater number of good (or potentially good) teachers who are in temporary difficulties and need help to extricate themselves. It may be precisely the most dedicated, self-critical teachers who are devastated when they find themselves teaching badly, and who react most strongly to the experience of a difficult year:

> Although it was over six years ago, it's still hard for me to think about that school year. I try to avoid remembering it because I hate re-experiencing those feelings of helplessness, desperation and anger. It started out as an ordinary, if challenging, year with a very difficult group of children, and it gradually changed into a daily nightmare for me. At some point, my steady concentration on the classroom, the intense stream of energy I was pouring into my work, got diverted by other concerns. Right then it was as though a thread snapped. I lost control of the classroom, lost my rapport with the children, lost the path of our learning. While I still liked invididual children and occasionally had good contacts with them, my relationship with the group became an adversarial one.
>
> That was the hardest thing for me. I had always considered myself sympathetic with children, an advocate for them. Now I was put in the position of their enemy, and I sometimes felt I hated them. As Roland threw violent tantrums, knocking down tables and chairs; as Belinda used foul language to defy me at every turn; as Nora made cutting remarks that undermined everything we did; as Richard spent the

whole day wandering around the room distracting everyone, I became increasingly overwhelmed by the difficulties. My response was to withdraw emotionally and become passive, which made the children more upset and angry. Their response was to draw together against a common enemy, a teacher. Sure there children who kept on working beautifully, creating wonderful science projects, artwork, and writing. But most of the day was chaos or battle, and I could stand neither of those alternatives to the productive working classroom I wanted (and used to have before).

Making myself face the classroom each day was a struggle. My only goal was to get through somehow. There was no help forthcoming from guidance or administration, though I appealed to both. And while my friends were sympathetic, they were not able to help me either. I don't think I told them the depths of my despair. I was too ashamed. My dreams were about school every night, and I woke up miserable. Towards spring, I periodically took sick leave days off. The year finally ended. Someone gave me flowers, and Nora remarked, "Is that for having to put up with us?"

I decided to take a leave of absence and wondered if I wanted to continue in teaching at all. I felt I had failed, and I was overcome with guilt. My self-confidence as a teacher had evaporated. All the good years vanished for me, in the face of that terrible one. (It didn't help that my principal blamed me and told me that my name was mud in the school community.) After two years of reading, writing, travel, reflection, I apprehensively ventured back into teaching--same school (with the same principal, who called me long distance to say he didn't want me back), same community, but a different grade level. From my first contact with a little girl who introduced herself to me and helped me set up the classroom, I fell in love with teaching all over again. The children were wonderful, the parents more than supportive, the classroom atmosphere warm, exciting, and productive. Mysteriously, I had recaptured the rhythm of teaching that I had lost, and my energy and enthusiasm were revived. I also had the regular support of a group of colleagues outside my school system.

I now have a positive reputation with parents again, and get lots of praise and respect from the administration, including the same principal who wanted nothing to do with me. I work hard and steadily, the classroom is going well, and visitors often come to observe my class and talk with me about teaching and children. I take my present

well-being at school with a grain of salt, knowing it could easily collapse again. But I hope I will never have to go through another year like that difficult one.

Ruth

Another teacher in a similar situation kept a journal of the first half of the school year. (For the second half, she managed to get a sabbatical.) The journal permitted Beth, a public school teacher in Massachusetts, to give vent to her feelings:

September

I am feeling so desperately unhappy. The reason is work. I find the children so unpleasant to be with. I see my world so terribly narrow and filled with only mentally exhausting concerns. There is nothing providing laughter and happiness. Nothing!

I thought about how narrowly focused my life is. That in and of itself wouldn't be bad if the focus were shedding light, helping me enjoy my life, providing creative satisfaction and success, recognition or . . . something! But no. I feel overworked, over-preyed upon by outside forces, and totally dissatisfied by relationships with the children. I know the culprits are eight, but I have no resolutions. I do not know how to change their behavior, how to make it less obtrusive. How to make their presence less negative to other students. Also, I am worn out by it and displeased about having to pass my time in their presence.

Teaching has stopped being fun!

I wouldn't mind the work--I actually could enjoy it if I felt that it were getting the kids somewhere. But it isn't! The noise level and disorder and physical abuse that goes on is amazing!

I keep feeling that I am inadequate. That anyone else could handle the situation better. I can't understand why I'm surrounded by such desperation. I keep having to work so hard, yet the hard work feels unrewarding.

October

Nothing has changed. I continue to be overwhelmingly depressed by the unpleasant situation in school. I am displeased by what is happening, by the scores of interruptions, by the number of people making demands on me and wanting my time, by the lack of organization and by the unpleasantness of the environment in general.

I want to enjoy my work and feel confident. The school is undisciplined, there is no one to share my

concerns. The classroom is unrewarding and the children's behavior debilitating. I have been teaching for 15 years and continue to feel inadequate. . . .

Whether things are going well or badly in a classroom, teachers tend to be isolated within a school. This sense of being alone with a group of children in a classroom, without the nourishing contact of talk, stimulation, and help from colleagues, is a steady burden on teachers that accumulates year by year. The most enthusiastic and capable teacher is vulnerable to burnout if he or she is expected to give endlessly, without renewal from people and stimuli outside the classroom:

It seems to be a given that teaching is an isolating profession. We each work separately in our own room, with our own class, with our own ideas and projects, living within the confines of our minds and the confines of our classroom walls.

My first-grade class and I have been doing a major project on whales. It is a wonderful integration of the curriculum areas. We do everything from writing and graphing to campaigning against whaling in the world. I have felt enriched by the children's feeling, thought, and expression, as well as by my new-found knowledge on the subject. As we learned about the killing of whales and experienced our deep connection to their beauty and grace, I began to see more fully how man interacts with his environment, with the world and other living things. It showed me our true interdependence.

But what does this have to do with isolation? Everything. My tendency is to share my excitement with others. I want to talk to other teachers, to exchange ideas. I want to let them know that something special is happening in my class. And ideally I'd like to collaborate, working jointly towards the same end. Strangely, in a profession where there exists no incentive to compete, teachers do feel competitive. I get the sense that while I am sharing my excitement with some, they become insecure, feeling like they should be doing something *better* than they are. Why can't they share my enthusiasm about my whale project? It doesn't make them look bad.

I feel very much alone in my work, alone in an environment full of people. And I too am guilty of creating my own separateness. My tendency to judge certain teachers as "not my type" or as someone who "just won't understand" instantly excluded many and leads me down the road to isolation.

There never seems to be the time to join with my colleagues and talk, or to work together. I make myself so busy that I rarely take the time to evaluate how better to use this precious time; perhaps more wisely spent socializing, eating lunch with, or simply chatting with a colleague and potential co-worker. While teachers are creating and allowing for connectedness and integration in the curriculum, we tend to abandon our personal sense of connectedness to others. The classroom provides space for the child to grow through relationships, coming together with others. But where does the teacher get to do this?

Robert, first grade,
public school

If it is hard to cope with teacher isolation in the best of circumstances, it is even harder to do when there is little recognition of teachers' needs and capabilities. The powerlessness teachers feel when demands on them grow beyond the ability to respond adequately is augmented by a political climate in which teacher autonomy is no longer respected. The view of teachers as replaceable cogs, reinforced by the unrealistic expectations of school systems, not only puts extra strain on teachers but can change teachers' behavior, acting as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Liz, an extremely well-qualified, thoughtful reading teacher in Philadelphia, is trying hard to meet school expectations and still meet children's needs with sensitivity. Caught in this tension, she sometimes finds herself reacting to children in unaccustomed ways:

Last week I put my hands on a student. I haven't done that for many years. But I was frustrated and he said something fresh to me and he was so puny and skinny I just grabbed him and shook him and I felt like I wanted to move my hands up to his neck and strangle him as I shook him, but instead I pushed him into a chair at a desk on the other side of the room and told him to sit there the rest of the period and not say another word. I called his mother that evening to tell her how disrespectful her son had been in class and how angry it had made me, and to ask her support in getting him to behave politely.

There is some pressure on me at work, but it's not more than I've experienced before. I should be able to handle it. I guess I was pretty angry to work for four full months at fulfilling the new requirements for the Reading Lab under Option 4, and then be told in January that I was doing it all wrong. Option 4 is the system for cycling classes

and pacing according to the sub-district's schedule for the basic readers, while still using all the machines and workbooks from Prescription Learning, while following the new Mandated Curriculum, and teaching the skills on the old Levels Tests, while somehow working on the holistic anti-skills-approach Writing Process curriculum.

I come home and I work out a lesson plan that tries to do all these things with the kids who can't read very well and every year seem further and further from the national norms. I thought I had something acceptable put together--outside people were coming and looking at my class and smiling, saying how nice it was, and then some of the same outside people went to my colleague and told her she better give me an ultimatum on shaping up and coordinating my skill-of-the-week with the cooperating classroom teacher's skill-of-the-week, so the work in the lab would have more carryover for the children--which seems perfectly reasonable to me, though I wish they had told me to my face instead of having her explain it to me in a slightly patronizing way. So now I'm reframing my curriculum to establish a skill-of-the-week taught jointly by me and each of four cooperating teachers. A lot of this came down to me last Thursday, and Friday was the day I stopped myself from strangling the fresh kid, so maybe there's some connection, though I can't blame anyone but myself for losing control and using corporal punishment.

Anyway, that's a backdrop for why I seem to overcontrol when the day stretches ahead at breakfast time. I'm all keyed up not to lose my cool, not to holler at kids and turn red, or not to hurt anyone, or not to lose the important notes I made the night before that remind me what the skill is and what pages of the materials will reinforce the skills, and what group is coming to me each hour that day, and what new students who transferred in this week have to be placed in the lab and given folders with their lab materials, and oriented how to use the computers and the audiovisual machines.

Liz

Newly mandated curricula often mean that previous programs have to be dropped, no matter how interesting or successful they were, in order to substitute a standardized curriculum for a whole school system. Some of these new curricula may have been carefully based on a theoretical scheme, but turn out to be unworkable in actuality, or much narrower than previous programs. Others have been hastily thrown together without real thought to their relevance, intellectual depth, or connection to children's needs and developmental levels.

Eileen describes such a change in her school system from a science program (SCIS) that encouraged the use of hands-on materials and live animal studies to an arbitrary selection of "science" topics mainly dependent on paperwork to get across some data of questionable value:

> Last year, the school committee demanded that there be district-wide uniform science curriculum. Finally, in May, several teachers volunteered to work on a committee over the summer for which they would receive extra wages. So for two weeks in July, they spent each morning looking through catalogues, ordering books, bulletin displays, and filmstrips. The items received were then put in the sort of brown "under the bed" cardboard boxes found at K-Mart, and labeled according to grade level and topic to be covered. For the third grade, they chose the solar system, plants, animals, nutrition, and the weather. (One of the teachers confided that they had great difficulty finding things to put in the weather box.) Within each kit, as they are now called, is a teacher's guide with a scope and sequence chart copied from science textbooks, and copies of black line masters (booklets of worksheets to be reproduced on copy machines) also taken from science texts.
>
> All this was done purely in response to a school committee request for a uniform science curriculum for the newly consolidated grade schools. Now they have science kits for grades one through three, developed in two weeks by teachers spending their summer vacation copying out goals and objectives from a variety of already published teacher manuals, buying books, black line masters, bulletin board cut-outs, and filmstrips. When I first came to the district in 1973, they used the SCIS program. I remember a third-grade room filled with the sound of crickets coming from multiple small terrariums, each warmed with a light. Writing by students describing what they had observed in their terrariums was on the wall, along with drawings. When I asked about the SCIS kits, I was told it was too much bother to keep replacing missing or used equipment. Several times the live specimens would arrive too early or too late to be used, or, worse yet, get loose in the classroom.
>
> Since my former school had no SCIS kits, I was determined to salvage what I could find of the old ones in this school. In the janitor's supply closet, way back in the corner, I found what I wanted: enough plastic jars with lids, eyedroppers for each child, fish nets, magnifying glasses, and

small aquariums. I found a local biological supply place, and within the week we had snails, guppies, aquatic plants, and daphnea. We used no black line masters, but did see a movie and a filmstrip. Instead, we watched, talked, wrote, and sketched about everything that happened in those small, aquatic worlds.

At one time, that particular program was the science curriculum for first grade in that school. At my previous school, dinosaurs were the main topic in the spring of first grade. Now the mandated curriculum for first grade is camping. Part of it involves setting up a tent in the classroom, but not actually going on a class trip. Clearly something is amiss, and that is the active participation of both children and teachers in observing and learning something together. The present curriculum is reductionist and sterile in that it allows very little entry for what is readily observable in the classroom, and uses worksheets which predetermine correct responses. The worst part of this whole business is that children, like the school committee, think that this is science.

Teachers often feel that they are caught in a bind. On the one hand they are not trusted to choose their own curricula (nor of course to participate in forming educational policy) and on the other they are expected to perform heroic services for less pay and under worse conditions than most other professionals. The unrelenting pressure on teachers is bound to take its toll, both physically and psychologically: extreme exhaustion, discouragement, frustration, and anger. While these feelings may arise directly out of the strains of the job, they are perhaps deepest and most anguished when teachers are considering the damage to children who are deprived of the educational resources they need. Through their contacts with children and parents, many of whom are deeply troubled, teachers daily confront societal problems which extend far beyond schools: poverty, breakdown in family structure, lack of governmental support for those most in need, the violence of the times, threats to personal and national safety. The battle for humane, thoughtful, intelligent education may seem worthwhile as long as teachers can see some positive gains in the classroom, but nearly hopeless if political and social conditions work against everything that teachers are trying to do:

I sat at my desk and held my head in my hands, weary, wondering if I teach anything at all, or if I am doing something else here. Sometimes the ex-

tent of some of my students' problems weighs heavily on me, I fear, making me less able as a teacher.

Ramona

I knew how much the children needed--how often the "worst" classes had substitutes because the regular teachers couldn't take the daily battle. What comes through most poignantly to me is the vast inequity in what children need and what they receive, and what is expected of teachers and what is available to them.

Kate G.

I've felt so angry lately that I sometimes wonder if I should get out of the classroom for a while. I'm angry at the way children and teachers are treated. If society *really* wanted people to learn, we could do it. We know how to help children learn, how to teach. But so many things, in society generally and in schools specifically, work against teachers and children. I just don't believe that education is important in our country, though we say it is. And those who say it is important are usually not talking about educating everyone.

Lynne S.

6

Community and Collegiality: A Conversation Without an End

Lynne Strieb

> I need at least one other like-minded teacher to commune with. I don't want to be the only one [with my beliefs about children] in the school.
>
> Anne Martin

> Whatever the factors that first attracted me to teaching, I've been compelled to stay because I've found it progressively more stimulating and challenging. There have been a number of compromises along the way, but there are a couple of conditions which rank as absolutely essential to me. The first of these is working with colleagues with whom I have a shared philosophy of teaching and learning; who respect kids and find teaching them exciting. I'd find it impossible to work in a school where teachers were burned out or cynical or disillusioned.
>
> Alice Seletsky

> We need a lifeline. We need a person, or people, around us or at least accessible, with whom we have shared understanding. It is best if that lifeline is nearby, but it is tolerable even if there is distance, as long as communication can happen regularly. It's important to have someone with whom you can talk about everyday common occurrences. . . . It is comforting to be part of a community, to feel joined.
>
> Cecelia Traugh

> I spent four years developing some insight into teaching. I was fortunate to be in a school where the teachers worked as a team and where conversation was plentiful. I learned most from describing to others what I observed in the classroom about a child and then hearing and comparing this with what the other teachers had perceived. I found this give-and-take challenging and exciting. I had a heightened awareness of teaching and this increased consciousness allowed me to make more deliberated choices when I was working with children.
>
> Mark Miller

Essential for teaching is community, genuine community which is based on some piece of common ground and on some underlying foundation of trust. There are a wide variety of places which can serve as bases for community: life in the same building, the experience of teaching the same child or children, shared beliefs about children, or the fact that all teachers have students. But community is not given; it's a construct. The common ground has to be found and trust* has to be established.

One medium for such building is ordinary conversation. It is a powerful medium for teaching and learning, for teachers and children. We use conversation to make connections with people. It is in conversational give-and-take over time--speaking, listening, responding, absorbing, questioning, answering--that human relationships are formed. We use conversation to articulate our knowledge and to help others do the same. When we converse, we are doing more than sharing or setting out already formed ideas. In conversation we put our work out in front of us for a re-viewing; we put some distance between ourselves and all the classroom particulars in which we are immersed. This bit of distance allows us and our colleagues to begin to see the patterns and the relationships which exist between and among the details. In short, conversation is a way we have of creating knowledge.

Participants in a conversation must assume that they already share a common ground or believe that it is possible to find one. The habit of conversation enables people to realize what they hold in common. This common ground provides the starting place, a kind of setting, for conversation. However, saying that there is a need for a common ground is not saying that all participants in the conversation agree. Conversations bring together varied perspectives and allow for the exchange of ideas without confrontation. There may be disagreement and dissonance. Conversation does not always lead to consensus.

In its most effective form, conversation implies ease, mutuality, and respect for person and idea. These qualities enhance its back and forth rhythm and flow. Significant conversation relies on intimacy, not on mere politeness, and it requires trust. This intimacy and trust take time to build:

> It takes time to hear each other. . . . It takes time for trust to develop. For that to happen shared experiences have to occur, mistakes do have to happen, wrongs do have to be righted and forgiven and memories do have to be shared. Every environ has a rhythm and a pace, and that pace has to be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse individ-

*Pursuing the idea of how essential and fundamental trust is, we spoke of it as a state of being--as well as an ascribable quality. As a state of being, it is the necessary condition for the forward thrust of life; trust engenders hope of, and for, the future. It connotes a willingness to go forth and a faith that a gesture initiated will be completed. To be capable of trust is to be capable of giving and receiving--of opening one's self to others. . . . To be fully trusted by another person is to be fully valued. That trust entails regard, loyalty, honesty, and faithfulness and giving trust in return. To return trust is to be openly and unreservedly *present* and *accessible* to the other person. In full trust there is a free flow of feeling, expression, and thought.

Pat Carini--
Summary of
Reflection on
"Trust,"
November 1984

Teachers who contributed stories to the whole pool from which this monograph is drawn:

Philadelphia: Jessica Agre; Dorothy Ballard; Allen Banbury; Penny Brooks; Maia Brumberg; Judy Buchanan; Ginny Christensen; Ester Cristol; Kay Doost; Tamara Burke Davis; Maggie Funderburg; Mary Graham; Katelore Guerin; Lisa Hantman; Rhoda Kanevsky; Diane Klein; Helen Lamont; Jo Ann Levine; Carol Leckey; Goldie Lieberman; Tamar Magdovitz; Judy Mintier; Barbara Montoya; Edna Morris; Diane Natko; Cary Page; Peggy Perlmutter; Lee Quinby; Barbara Ruth; Susan Shapiro; Linda Shusterman; Lynne Strieb; Sherry Tatro; Cecelia Traugh; Josie Viviani; Betsy Wice; Katie Zimring.

Grand Forks: Jo Nelle Bakke; Kathleen Bakke; Roy Becker; Orvis Bergman; Patty Bogt; Dora Lea Elbert; Roberta Felton; Cathy Gershman; Donna Hansen; Mary Ingram; Marilyn Iverson; Bonnie Jacob; Everett Knitsvig; Barbara La Duke; Jeanette Lindquist; Evelyn Lizakowski; Pat McDowell; Bruce Morstad; Karen Napper; Cynthia Neuharth; Dan O'Shay; Lela Peterson; Donna Ritter; La Vonne Tennyson; Mary Underwood; Dianne Vivian; Nancy Wegener; Jan White; Martha Worner; Barbara Yancey; Charles Zick.

ual rhythms and timing of its members. It was agreed that interruption and hurry are the enemy of wholeness and completion. People need time to stay with things, to see them through and to return to them. We are talking about a community that gives full value to the imagination and a community in which the habit of conversation is valued. Conversation and the ability really to hear the other person *does* take time. One of the factors in this kind of genuine conversation is familiarity. Really to hear another, you have to have the opportunity to hear the person say a lot of different things in a lot of different contexts; otherwise, you may hear the words but not really be able to grasp the meaning.

It is important to establish that something can come up again and again for as long as people need to bring it up. This resurfacing of ideas in different contexts is what allows a child to make a genuine relationship to knowledge and to other thinkers. [And, allows the adult to do the same.]

Pat Carini

Conversation is the image for me of how the work of this school could get done. It is an image of weaving, the threads of which can be and are picked up and woven throughout the place. For me conversation contains particular content; it is not process alone. One profound reason for a school is to allow a set of ideas to develop. Conversation as an image helps describe how access to those ideas is provided and how their development continues. Conversation is in its nature fluid; it is not predetermined; there is "play" to it; it is not one way; it is not didactic. It "partakes of relationship." If it is imagined as ongoing and woven into all parts of a school, conversation becomes important because of its substance and because it can be presumed that deeper understandings develop.

Dirck Roosevelt

"Building communities through conversation," "sharing," "long-term engagement with ideas with a group of people"--while this may be the language used when one talks about schools and teachers, it frequently does not describe reality. More often, teaching is experienced as a solitary activity. It is done in a special location set apart from the rest of society. We are often so immersed in our own work that we have little time for mixing with others in the school or with the world outside their classrooms. The job can be so

North Bennington: Naomi Bindman; Allison Caldwell; Patricia Carini; David Carroll; Vince Corcoran; Susan Donnelly; Anne Fitzgerald; Jessica Howard; Elinor Koch; Helen La Mar; Dirck Roosevelt.

New York City: Cathy Jervis; Bruce Kanz; Diane Mullins; Donnie Rotkin; Alice Seletsky; Yvonne Smith; Lillian Weber.

East Grand Forks: Marcia Fettig; Myke Knutson; Janice Langemo; Marianne Sundin.

Ithaca, NY: Lyria Hailstork; Ann Halpern; Gwen Koehler; Virginia Simons.

Brookline, MA: Maria Cano; Mark Jacobson.

Cambridge, MA: Eleanor Duckworth; Brenda Engel.

Cambridge, NY: Mary DiSchino; Peg Howes.

Natick, MA: Janet Bossange; John Bossange.

Norristown, PA: Edith Klausner; Letta Schatz.

Putney, VT: Margaret Dale Ehrenberg; Ellen Schwartz.

Adele Baruch, *Syracuse, NY;* Julie Bates, *Swarthmore, PA;* Peggy De Santis, *Oakdale, NY;* Clarice Evans, *Allston, MA;* Darlene Johnson, *Manhattan Beach, CA;* Rose Marie Madsen, *Newton, MA;*

demanding that there is little time for contact with other adults during the day. "All you do is talk to children all day long. It would drive you crazy. Sometimes I don't talk to another adult for five hours."

However, the issue is more complex. As Alice Seletsky describes it, the relationship between student and teacher which she finds most supportive is one which has little room in it for additional adults: the rhythms which are established in a classroom can be broken up by an adult from the *outside*.

> There's also a provocative issue around the questions of collegiality and working partnerships between adults. It has to do with the fact that there are some things others can do better than I can. For the last two years, for example, a friend, who is also an artist and a teacher, worked with my kids several mornings a week. She accomplished wonderful things and it was a rich experience for me as well as for the children. But it meant, in a sense, sharing the children--giving up the kind of total responsibility I have for what goes on; and I was a bit reluctant to do it, even with someone whom I respect and like a great deal. It was a productive partnership, but there was a sense of uneasiness about sharing the room, sharing the kids, exposing my ways of teaching and working. I valued her participation, and will do it again that way next year, but there was a price to pay.
>
> It's a delicate and complex issue, and not easy to talk about. I think some of my strengths as a teacher comes from the fact that I live with the children, so to speak, all day long; it's a special kind of commitment. The other side of the issue, of course, is that there are others who know more about some things, and can teach them better than I do.

Schools as institutions in America often work against the establishment of collegial relationships and are not organized to take into account the creation and workings of a community in which each teacher's strengths are important. Thus, they are not settings in which conversation can grow. Lack of belief in the importance of community is seen in the divisiveness actually fostered in some schools, in teachers having no control over time, in the size of schools, and in top-down decision-making.

People within schools rarely say, "If teachers worked together . . ." Instead, situations are sometimes created which at their worst can set teachers against each other and which, at best, allow teaching to continue as an isolating activity:

Anne Martin, *Newton Centre, MA;* Jackie Martin, *Fairbanks, AK;* Mark Miller, *Portland, ME;* Carol Newman, *Charlotte, NC;* Carol Ouimette, *Minneapolis, MN;* Nancy Place, *Escondido, CA;* Karla Smart, *Fargo, ND;* Carol Griggs Travis, *Interlocken, NY;* Dorothy Welch, *Framingham, MA;* Karen Woolf, *Wenham, MA.*

I was finally placed in a kindergarten with a very traditional teacher who had taught in that room for several years. "I've heard you're quite good," the principal said to me when I arrived. "I'd like you to show her how to teach." I had no intention of going into someone else's classroom without her knowledge and telling her how to teach.

Darlene Johnson

When I entered teaching, I felt that I had to do it all alone. Any question, any sign of weakness might be considered an indication of failure.

Susan Shapiro

There is very little time in a school day or over a school year for the conversation necessary for building community:

> There is not one opportunity for teachers to sit down together and talk about those important things. I could never imagine that kind of conversation happening in my school. We never have any time. There's always a directive that has to be responded to or I have to be preparing for what's happening in the room with my 33 kids. There's always something that takes priority and there's no time to talk. Even when there is time set up for us, we're not used to talking together; we haven't established trust and so, it doesn't work.
>
> Rhoda Kanevsky

> That spring, however, it was announced that our building would no longer be an elementary school, and would instead become the new middle school for the district. The community went into a tailspin. Parents were upset at the loss of their town elementary school; teachers were bitter about the fact that it was their school that had to be closed, and were anxious about new teaching assignments. The elementary school would become the new middle school in the fall. . . . The closing seemed even more difficult because our staff development meetings had centered around the importance of relationships to learning and how those relationships among individuals build a community. We knew from our own experience that it took time and caring to enter into relationships with one another as colleagues and with our students. We would have to start all over again. . . . In the case of our district consolidation, there was only one afternoon meeting to dis-

cuss room arrangement and distribution of materials, nothing more. It was expected that teachers from three different buildings with three very different ways of doing things could come together and create a new school instantly.

Karen Woolf

The organizational complexities of large schools with many teachers and children, large classes, and unwieldy schedules make it difficult to find time to converse and make communities difficult to establish. Within any one school, many different styles, values, and beliefs may be represented. People can separate themselves from those with whom they do not agree. For many teachers, this is a way of protecting themselves. "You just close your door and do your thing."

Curriculum and expectations for classroom practice are formulated at the top level of administration, and staff development is often used to enforce directives. Traditional methods of staff development effectively keep people separated. Faculty meetings, which are often believed to be the most effective places for staff development, are usually held once a week and run by administrators or their designates. One person talks to many, with very little discussion. Experts from the outside, selected by the administration, are frequently hired for longer in-service education sessions. We are not only not responsible for our own learning, but our considerable knowledge is unrecognized or dismissed:

Often, staff development means telling teachers what to do and how to do it. They are herded from one end of town to the other, where they join with colleagues from several other schools to listen to "experts" tell them how to insure that all the items listed on the scope and sequence charts for their grade levels are "covered." The teachers are deluged with materials and schemes that guarantee success if properly "implemented." Certainly, this approach undermines anyone's ability to trust in her judgments.

Mary DiSchino

In an effort to sustain and encourage teacher growth, many school systems initiate in-service workshops. Usually, attendance is mandatory and for important meetings, we are released early from our classes so that we are more alert. A guest speaker, or a specialist in the system makes a formal presentation, followed by a period of questions and answers. On the surface, there is nothing unusual

about this. Presentations and workshops are given in many occupations, and their existence is taken for granted. It is rare, however, that one's heart or mind is touched in a way that has any lasting effect.

Karen Woolf

Last year, the Superintendent asked teachers to make goals and plans for their schools for this year. But, most of the school plans were rejected by administrators in sub-district offices and sent back to be revised according to their wishes. This year, when we were asked to do it again, teachers fell silent, refusing to participate. No one ever thought of asking us, what do you think is important? What do you think about the curriculum? What about pacing--does it work? Are the tests effective? They were most concerned about getting us to cover the curriculum.

Lynne Strieb

As these excerpts show (and as Anne Martin described in chapter 5), schools frequently run the risk of being collections of individuals connected primarily by top-down communications systems. However, the nature of schools can be otherwise, their possibilities otherwise. Schools are not made up of random collections of individuals. People within a school share broad purpose, and they share space. There are many natural places within schools which can support connection: talks over coffee, in hallways, in lounges, at meetings. In these places and in these ways, teachers come together to discuss shared issues, to commiserate, to rejoice.

On the other hand, much of the talk which naturally occurs in schools seems to have very particular qualities--of being on-the-run, of short-term encounters. It lacks continuity over time. It is polite, sometimes distant, and generally lacks intimacy. Circumstances allows teachers' talk to turn to gossip or complaint. Because it can be difficult to get beyond these qualities, talk does not always lead to the kind of conversation needed for strong collegiality. Yet, because school talk may contain the germ of possible conversation and is important for day-to-day survival in a school, it should not be discounted:

I made a contact with another eighth-grade teacher who teaches my section of Social Studies. He was abusive to students last year, swearing at them, and I asked him to stop. But now I approached him, trying to appeal to what I sensed was his interest in kids. I talked to him about the kids, to

see if I can get materials for them, praise him when the kids say they've enjoyed what they do in his class. Also I have found that some teachers need time to be able to work with other teachers before they can trust others.

Barbara Montoya

I try to be supportive, be specific. One teacher even said she'd gone to a psychiatrist to learn new ways of reaching children. But she was then unhappy because that isn't the way she is. She feels that way in her head, but it isn't comfortable for her. I told her how I get my class excited about books, and I lent her books. Time goes by and she doesn't use them, but still, a person like that is closer than one who isn't interested.

Peggy Perlmutter

I can't tell you how important the little daily contacts we have in passing are to me. It's especially important on days when my kids are restless and wild to discover in talking with other teachers that it's been the same throughout the school. Believe it or not, it makes me feel better when I learn that they've been having problems with their kids, too. I also learn so much about how other people do things, about curriculum, about my children's siblings. I get suggestions about how to solve problems--all in passing in the hall.

Lynne Strieb

When I taught second grade, one school had a 10-year celebration and teachers were asked to make some display of kids' work. I displayed the kids' stories and books they'd made. There were many comments from other kids and teachers, how very special the books were, how they'd never thought of doing that.

David Carroll

I went downstairs to lunch, stopping by my main classroom to leave things and get my lunch. The group of people I eat lunch with in the staff lunchroom are a friendly, joking bunch, not too gossipy, and sometimes there are interesting discussions, although they are never too serious. Today, because it is Friday when lesson plans for the following week are to be completed, I began talking about them to another ESOL teacher, a person I admire for his love of the students, dedication, and fairness. We told each other how we do our plans while another teacher listened. I remarked that a teachers' group

> I belong to recently dedicated an entire meeting to lesson plans, and that I had been amazed at all the different ways people do them. . . . We both need to revise our lesson plans daily and . . . We also write comments concerning our students in them. . . . Later, on my way out, another teacher stopped me and asked about a teacher aide we both work with, saying that he really did not find much for her to do. I told him some ways I work with her, and how important clear directions are for her. I was glad that we could talk about the aide without being critical of her. These are moments of positive communication.
>
> Barbara Montoya

The vision of the school and teaching community being described here is one built through conversation, sharing, and long-term engagement with ideas with a group of people. This is more than an idealized picture. In a variety of places and ways we have nurtured talk into real conversation. This change has enabled us to learn from colleagues, has enabled staffs to build cohesive relationships within schools, and has enabled us to establish professional groups and communities outside of schools. In short, we have learned how to come together, to become colleagues, and to develop communities. We realized that we needed collegial action for survival and that it would be helpful to articulate for each other our knowledge and understandings. What follows are examples of resulting conversations. Some span generations of teachers; some took place in schools or teacher centers; still other conversations cut across particular school faculties. They are as much about the sharing of words, as the sharing of materials and knowledge. The purpose of including them here is to hold up the possibility of meaningful talk among educators and not to prescribe "how to":

> Once, in my first year of teaching, I let a child kick me and spit at me and I did nothing about it. When I told people what I'd done, Susan was indignant. "You let him do that?" That opened the door to many important and enlightening discussions. I learned about anger, and other strong feelings and how to deal with them, including my own anger. Initially Susan gave me the words to use. They worked and I felt confident. Susan told me later that they weren't her words originally, but Lynne's-- . . . only Lynne got the words from Peggy!
>
> Lee Quinby

> When my oldest child was four and a half he went to the parent cooperative nursery where Peggy was the teacher. It was so hard for me to get three children dressed in order to take one child to school, but once I got him (them) there, I was so interested in what was going on that it was hard for me to leave. I learned a lot from watching Peggy, about the range of activities that children need, about specific activities which work across ages (and which I still use in my first- and second-grade classroom). I was intrigued, in general, by the way Peggy spoke to the children--how she gave them words when she needed them--and in particular by the kinds of questions she asked. They were simply phrases or questions. Not, "Why did you do that?", but "What did you do that made her angry?" "You may not hit. Use words." "What should you say if you don't like what she's doing? Say, 'Stop it. I don't like it!' And say it loudly, like you mean it."
>
> Lynne Strieb

> . . . There is something in the unbroken chain of these "words used by teachers" that seems really important. Not only do they launch the novice, they reflect a deep knowledge of children and children's need for personal safety and for a school setting they can trust. . . . This is a kind of teacher knowledge that needs to be more visible to teachers and to others.
>
> Pat Carini, November 1984

We come together within schools to work on issues that we have in common, e.g., Halloween parties, discipline issues, the lunchroom. More critically we come together to further our understanding of children. Informal contacts grow and the staff begins to work together to make school life better for the children and ourselves. In some instances, the school administration recognizes the value of these activities and carries out the suggestions we have or turns time usually devoted to administrative agenda over to us. What can happen in these circumstances is that energy is given to changing talk into genuine conversation:

> I began teaching in the 1960s in a small district. . . . During this time in education, there was a lot of focus on change. Teachers were considered a powerful resource. Consultants visited weekly and talked with teachers about how their classrooms worked and about what we were doing with kids. They were interested in what teachers thought and how they saw things. Teachers' voices were important at this time and we were valued. This was a

time of growth and change for me. Much of my direction and knowledge of learning theory came from these educators. They suggested books for us to read that focused on questions we had. We read constantly and asked them questions about better ways to teach.

Darlene Johnson

At a school where I worked, 80 percent of the staff was new, and in order to get to know one another, each week one person had to talk about his/her strengths as a teacher. This really helped to pull the staff together, despite all the differences.

I came in late and had no way of connecting with the other teachers. I was in a tough spot as a teacher, and the others wanted to help me. They agreed to do this at staff development meetings. They saw themselves meeting together to serve this need. The first few times were difficult. After that it became easier. They gave particular examples of what they know and do well. This gave me an idea of who to go to when I needed help in a particular area.

Carol Ouimette

Some of the teachers in the school where I teach have informal classes while some are traditional teachers. It's been important over the years for us to find times when we can work together. We have come together on important events--Halloween, school anniversaries, arts projects, other holiday celebrations. We have worked together on a schoolwide promotion policy, lunchroom, and discipline issues.

Lynne Strieb

There is a good feel among staff. There was a lunchtime meeting on Halloween and all staff were preparing to dress up. That happened last year. F. didn't but is game this year. . . . There's a cohesiveness about the staff. Due to lots of things, I think. The "Know Your Body" meeting, having concretely accomplished things; the refrigerator in the Teachers' Room, the purchase of the copying machine. There's an ownership about the school. That's very special. Other possibilities of gathering that staff are the District early childhood woman every other Friday, doing Prospect staff review (better to start with children's work). The CCNY Noyes Science workshops.* So things are coming together. I guess we know we're all here, a family, so it's best to work together, for something, for good. And that's happening.

Diane Mullins

*Given at The Workshop Center of the City College (New York) School of Education, these workshops provide elementary school teachers with experiences in "sustained investigative engagement with common phenomenon."

During those years, our staff held bimonthly meetings. Our discussions focused on the work of individual students, as well as issues in our teaching that were of interest. After several years of meeting regularly we were much more attuned to each others' strengths as teachers and were more comfortable supporting one another. That sense of community was certainly apparent to the students, and they enjoyed knowing that we were meeting to discuss their work. Parents were also involved in helping to run programs, and were appreciative of the changes that were happening in the school. In my old school people became upset with the math program. So we got together and decided on a format for a staff meeting, one in which we would share our experience with the math programs in our classrooms. It was such a moving meeting, it is hard to even summarize it. People thought back to their own childhood experiences with math. The result of the meeting was that people asked for different materials and ways of doing things. The meeting brought us together; we shared our feelings and also our feelings of inadequacy.

Karen Woolf

As teachers, we have much knowledge about children, materials, learning, and teaching, knowledge which is often unarticulated, frequently ignored, or thought not to exist by others in schools or in teacher education programs.* Part of the wonder of conversation among teachers is its capacity to draw out this knowledge, to make it public enough to share and develop, to enable it to become more obviously useful and powerful. The previous examples of teachers' conversation and community in this chapter illustrate this capacity. The teacher groups described below, however, recognize more explicitly their power to communicate knowledge about teaching and children.

Some of them, such as the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (PTLC) and the Boston Laboratory for Teachers (BLT), are collaborative, all responsibilities shared and rotated. Other groups have been established by persons who act as facilitators, with teachers deciding on topics to be discussed. In the Boston area alone, Bill and Sara Hull established the Children's Thinking Seminars; Eleanor Duckworth started the Moon Group at a seminar she taught at M.I.T., a group which has continued over a half dozen years; Claryce Evans began the Boston Teacher as Researcher Group, which later became the Educators' Forum.

These groups also have another potential. When institutions seem oblivious to what teachers want and need; when conversation between the institution and

*Other sets of conversation have grown out of the work done by teachers' centers. Teachers' centers were established in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though few developed fully--few states were willing to make the investment needed after initial start-up funding--some made a significant difference for teachers who participated. They are places where teachers come together to create materials for their classrooms, study, attend workshops on curriculum. Most important, teachers find them places where they are encouraged to carry out ongoing conversations. Those who run the centers created environments which foster conversation. They listen to what teachers say.

teachers seems impossible; when the tradition of top-down management is so strong that teachers' voices are not heard, teachers can nonetheless take some control of their professional lives in establishing communities which support their growth.

> Individual teachers can't know everything, and the group offers support for trying out new things.
>
> Judith Buchanan (PTLC)

> We can't imagine telling others, "This is what you should do." It must come from the inside. You can't impose it from the top down, from the administration. There can't be a requirement for a group. It wouldn't work. We are the owners of this group.
>
> Peggy Perlmutter (PTLC)

> I have felt like I was *coming home* when I came to TLC. I didn't have family and friends in Philadelphia. I felt like I was different. But in TLC I found the support for my teaching and the recognition that I was competent as a teacher. I learned that it's O.K. to take some years to get better at teaching. There's a lot of depth in what people say. There are no easy answers. People listen to each other. The processes evolved so that people who (were) are willing to share their knowledge and build knowledge, do so. I don't have to hold or take credit for every idea. Many come from the community.
>
> Our philosophy is to work from children's strengths and we also believe this in our relations to each other. At first I was afraid to present a child in staff review, but the process of doing so and the people in the group allow me to tap things in myself I didn't know were there. It allows me to realize I do know a lot about children, and this helps me.
>
> Judith Mintier (PTLC)

The Moon Group so-called started as a class, one activity of which was to observe and report observations of the moon. The resulting conversations, though not clearly about teaching, were about learning (the participant's own learning). Mary DiSchino describes its work and significance:

> We met. We talked. We tried different kinds of things. I participated, mostly by listening; I spoke little. It became more and more important as

time passed for me somehow to figure out what on earth the seminar meant in relationship to my work in the classroom. I did not recognize, at that point, the value of the time spent listening to one another and how that might affect what I did at work, or accept the process itself as a direct link needed for the growth I sought.

The time we spent at seminar listening to one another articulate our theories helped me focus on the *meaning* of what was being said. As time passed, the value of trying to make sense of what someone else was saying came increasingly to the forefront. Assumptions were readily held to close scrutiny. Eventually the need to examine what the children said more closely became imperative. . . . We invested hours in providing each of us the opportunity to try out various ways of communicating our hunches. Comparable attention needed to be given to the children's speculations.

The growth we experienced in Moon Group did not result from concentrated focus on the *problems* we were having in teaching. Actually, it was quite the opposite. We spent just about no time on those issues at all, at least not in the traditional sense. We did get together every week, initially, and every other week the second year, to do *brain exercises*, of a sort. We used our minds to think about a variety of issues, including classroom events, and looked into our own assumptions and understandings for explanations. Beyond that each of us had to then work at communicating these explanations in a way that others would be able to understand. These, then, seem to be the very basic *components* of our intellectual fitness program: seeing, examining, reflecting, and articulating.

Two members of the Educators' Forum describe their experience with their group:

The most important thing I've learned is that teachers can be resources for one another. I didn't realize it before. We found we could talk to each other, not just chatty talk. We could focus on a specific thing and keep at it until we were satisfied. It's like putting a frame around a special kind of experience and looking at that. You could bring the experiences you had in other areas to bear on this experience. We didn't need experts. When we started I was teaching kindergarten and I had a child who had leukemia. His mom wanted him to have a regular kindergarten experience. I wondered: How will I deal with death with five-year-olds? I knew I didn't want to pretend he would move away. I

wanted us to experience it in its full intensity. I brought it up in the group. How do I deal with the death of an animal? The death of a child is similar. You wait for the children, you answer their questions, you find appropriate books. The group reminded me that I could do that. I was able to deal with it in a way that was very rich. The family was supportive too. Being in the group has made me want to speak out more. I've become more aware of being controlled by administration. For example, if someone isn't on a committee that is going to affect the classroom, I complain. Teachers haven't been asked because we haven't said we want to be a part of things.

Rose Marie Madsen

When I started in the group I began to write about one student who puzzled me. I wrote lengthy descriptions of her and gave them to the group every two weeks. I presented her twice. I kept doing the writing. I scheduled time to reflect on her. That gave me a better sense of how I was handling her. It helped me to see her strengths. The questions of the group provided a close look at my teaching. It's not a support group. It's more an intellectual, responding group. My colleagues ask questions and get the presenter to ask herself questions.

It was fun to describe the student. The more I described her, the more I knew her. It was largely because I had a group who would read what I wrote.

Over time you get to know other teachers' themes and ways of approaching things. That familiarity helps build collegiality. One thing that has been nice is for me to get to know public school teachers better, since I teach in an independent school. We have common experiences and problems in teaching. I'm glad to find that out.

The group has also helped to build collegiality within my school. I've shared my writing with the staff.

Claire Neely

To illustrate the kind of conversation which can occur in a teachers' group, we have made a selection from one group's notes. In the fall of 1985, the members of the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, aware of the influx of new teachers into local school systems, set aside two of their fall meetings for "reflective conversations" about how to support them. They began the first meeting with each participant (experienced and new teachers) describing how they were treated as beginners. The chairperson summarized the themes common to all the descriptions. Partici-

pants then made suggestions about ways in which new teachers might be helped. The recommendations were later presented at a union conference and included in a letter to administrators in the Philadelphia School District. Following is an excerpt from that conversation, one which shows particularly how peoples' ideas can build on those of others:

Letta: Specialist jobs such as supervisors, reading specialists, math collaborators should include helping others, especially new teachers.

Diane: Someone in the school should be in charge of how children are placed in homeroom groups so that new teachers don't get taken advantage of.

Tamar: Don't dump the hardest kids on the new teachers. I find that reading and math specialists don't help new teachers because they have too many problems. They come to us new teachers last, with the guides, schedules, and textbooks.

Jessie: Perhaps one teacher could volunteer to be a buddy for a new teacher.

Lynne: The principal should do more than see that things run smoothly. The principal should also make sure that other people such as the reading and math collaborators do their jobs. I've heard about some schools in which they get no supervision. The principal must not abdicate authority.

Judy B.: I heard people say that 15 years ago they had supervisors who helped them. Now the new teachers don't. Has the administration cut out supervisory jobs? Are supervisors doing something else?

Lynne: I remember that before we had too many teachers, in the early sixties, say, the math and reading specialists and collaborators used to come into the classroom. Now they do staff development at faculty meetings. It might be good to find out exactly what they used to do when some of us felt there was support, and get back to that.

Tamar: Every school should have a list of basic supplies for each teacher (scissors, paper, a clock, pencil sharpener). New teachers should get these on the first day of school and shouldn't have to ask for them.

This year there was a new form in which principals were to list the needs of new teachers in my school. Such a form might be helpful if it went

directly to the new teacher, not to the principal. The principal shouldn't be the one to judge what I need.

Jessie: The principal should be responsible for seeing that the old teacher leaves supplies and materials in the room for the new teacher, and that other teachers don't take things from that room. Usually the room is stripped before a new teacher comes.

Kate: It's important to look at what is possible, what will work. New teachers should have time to get together to compare what's happening, to give and get support from each other. What doesn't work is to demand of principals that they do their jobs differently from the way they've been doing them.

Letta: I wish we could recommend that new teachers be treated with RESPECT. Last week's accounts brought up so many times when they were demeaned.

Rhoda: We should reaffirm that the whole school has a joint goal, that everyone is working together. The principal's goal is not to *get* the teacher or the kids. . . . It takes so much energy to undo the culture of "you're on your own and we don't care about you." In 1961 at least I felt that the principal was there on my side; that we had a joint responsibility. From what I hear from you new teachers, that's not true now. Maybe principals and teachers need to be in the same union bargaining unit so people aren't at each others' throats.

Jessie: What Letta said gets to the heart of the problem. Teachers aren't treated with RESPECT. It was refreshing to go to [the school where I'm working now] because I'm treated as a responsible adult, a thinking human being. In my new school, teachers can set up curriculum and decide such mundane things as when the children may take recess.

Rhoda: Maybe there could be a system for teachers to evaluate principals. One criterion for rating the principal would be "How does he/she treat new teachers?"

Jessie: I think that every administrator--principals, supervisors--all should be required to teach a class every few years so that they can remember what it's like.

Teachers quoted in these pages:

Philadelphia: Jessica Agre; Allen Banbury; Penny Brooks; Judy Buchanan; Ginny Christensen; Esther Crystal; Tamara Burke Davis; Katelore Guerin; Lisa Hantman; Rhoda Kanevsky; Diane Klein; Goldie Lieberman; Tamar Magdovitz; Judy Mintier; Barbara Montoya; Edna Morris; Peggy Perlmutter; Lee Quinby; Barbara Ruth; Susan Shapiro; Lynne Strieb; Sherry Tatro; Cecelia Traugh; Betsy Wice; Katie Zimring.

North Bennington: Naomi Bindman; Allison Caldwell; Patricia Carini; David Carroll; Susan Donnelly; Anne Fitzgerald; Jessica Howard; Dirck Roosevelt.

Grand Forks: Roberta Felton; Bonnie Jacobs; Evelyn Lizakowski; Dan O'Shea; Mary Underwood.

New York City: Cathy Jervis; Diane Mullins; Donnie Rotkin; Alice Seletsky.

Brookline, MA: Maria Cano; Mark Jacobson; Anne Martin.

Peggy DeSantis, *Oakdale, NY;* Mary DiSchino, *Cambridge, NY;* Clarice Evans, *Allston, MA;* Darlene Johnson, *Manhattan Beach, CA;* Edie Klausner, *Media, PA;* Rose Marie Madsen, *Newton, MA;* Jackie Martin, *Fairbanks, AK;* Mark Miller, *Portland, ME;* Carol Newman, *Char-*

Judy Buchanan, a member of PTLC, won the University of Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Award in November 1984. In her acceptance speech, she captured much of the feeling members of genuine teaching communities have about teaching and about their colleagues:

> Teaching can be an isolating profession, but it has not been that way for me. I have been privileged to work with colleagues who have shared their knowledge, caring, and commitment with me. My students have taught me a great deal over the years, especially about curiosity and persistence.
>
> This fall we had a monarch caterpillar in our classroom. It was my first real experience with the metamorphosis of a caterpillar. Our caterpillar had many problems and I would have given up on the whole process several times, but my students wouldn't give up.
>
> First, the caterpillar made its chrysalis laying flat on the jar lid, instead of hanging from the carefully placed twig in the jar. A teacher who knows a lot about insects came into the classroom and said, "Well--let's try to make it hang." And so she gently moved the still-wet chrysalis to a hanging position. We placed a net underneath it and left it on my desk.
>
> About a week later we noticed that the chrysalis had fallen into the net. So I thought to myself--well, that's the end of the caterpillar, but at least we can look at it under a magnifying glass. And we did. Then the teacher I team with suggested we glue it back onto the lid.
>
> At lunch several of us glued the chrysalis back to the jar lid with the rubber cement.
>
> The children were wonderful throughout this process. They observed the chrysalis very carefully and asked many, many questions about monarchs. We read a lot about monarchs--but of course the books say nothing about saving a fallen chrysalis.
>
> Another week passed--and then miraculously we had a butterfly!
>
> After several days of sugar water, we gathered outside in the sunshine to let her go.
>
> As she left the cage the children clapped--it was a wonderful moment.
>
> Alone, I never would have been able to get that caterpillar through its life cycle.
>
> It was the caring, the persistence, and the curiosity of my students and colleagues that made it happen.

When, for example, we can engage in collegial thought about shared interests; when we can support

lotte, NC; Carol Ouimette, *Northfield, MN;* Nancy Place, *Escondido, CA;* Letta Schatz, *Norristown, PA;* Ellen Schwartz, *Putney, VT;* Dorothy Welch, *Framingham, MA;* Karen Woolf, *Wenham, MA.*

each other in creating new understandings of children, classrooms, learning; when we trust each other enough to reach out for help in our efforts to learn and change and to offer support to others--we are on the way to making teaching a profession of a high order. It is, in large measure, from others that we gain a fuller understanding of our own potentials as teachers and of the possibilities teaching holds. The support of a trusting community can give us, as individuals, the freedom and the strength to grow and become.

7

Epilogue: Teaching as Art

Cecelia Traugh

This epilogue is philosophical and somewhat different in tone from much of the rest of this monograph. We acknowledge this difference but also affirm the relationship we have experienced between our teaching lives and the ideas discussed herein. This relationship can be described in several different ways: as reciprocal, as one grounding the other, or as running parallel. In any case, our experience affirms a strong relationship between these ideas and teaching. Each gives the other a fuller, deeper meaning. We understand our experience more fully as we come to understand some of these philosophical ideas; the ideas gain substance from the particulars we bring to them; what we do is informed, in part, by the ideas.

Teaching as art is concerned with wholeness and relationship. People are whole and continuous. Classrooms are whole and organic in their relationships. Knowledge is whole; it is essentially an act of human expression. In seeing wholeness, however, the parts must be kept in view. Classrooms, for example, are filled with individuals with their own purposes; however, they must also have some measure of unity of purpose, a larger context of meaning made up of the relationships between and among people and ideas.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty found art a valuable metaphor when discussing the human body. If we substitute *classroom* for *body* his statement helps clarify the idea of wholeness and relationship. "It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of co-variant terms."

M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Colin Smith, Trans.) (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

A. N. Whitehead helps us extend this idea a bit further. The part to whole relationship in which so much of art's meaning resides is found in the relationship a finite piece of work has to the infinite background of possibilities (the world, nature) out of which the piece is drawn by creative, human effort. "The work of Art is a fragment of nature with the mark on it of a finite creative effort, so that it stands alone, an individual thing detailed from the vague infinity of the background. Thus Art heightens the sense of humanity." This relationship is also found within the piece of work itself. Details, particulars, indi-

vidualities--all are contained within a piece as a whole. They exist in their own right; they appeal to deep recesses of feeling in their own right. They are the *backbone* of the whole. They are necessary for its understanding. The whole contains meaning in and of itself and confers meaning to its parts:

> The very details of its [great Art's] compositions live supremely in their own right. They make their own claim to individuality, and yet contribute to the whole. Each detail received an access of grandeur from the whole, and yet manifests an individuality claiming attention in its own right.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1933).

Within this view, teaching and learning come to be about meaning, and the tasks of teaching become more open-ended: holding the vision of the whole, of what could be; being the memory, the storyteller; finding the relationships and discovering the wholeness in seemingly disconnected pieces; describing a classroom so that its individual members and what they are about and its unity of purpose are both included.

In teaching as art, teaching becomes a statement of value. Choosing, preferring, and caring are at its heart. What is worthwhile is critical to teachers' thought and action. As valuing is an exclusively human ability, this possibility underscores the essentially human qualities which can be enacted by teaching.

Whitehead helps us think about what valuing can be. Described in the context of art it is the pulling out of a set of finite particulars from the infinite background: a work of art contains an individual's taste, style, and preference.

These ideas remind us that as a mode of expression, teaching is a series of acts of selection. When teaching is thought of in this way, classrooms can be recognized as being arenas for thought and the creation of knowledge.

Conceiving of teaching as art has room for imagining; it allows the possibility for acknowledging the power of humans to reach beyond themselves. Learning can then be envisioned as an adventure, an active process, taking the adventurous beyond the "safeties of the past." For Whitehead, "One incidental service of art to society is its adventurousness." Adventure is thought which has "run ahead of realization." It is a dream of things to come, but it "rarely reaches its predetermined end." Sometimes adventure acts within limits, but "sooner or later the leap of imagination reaches beyond the safe limits of the epoch, and beyond the safe limits of learned rules of taste. . . ." It creates a "real contrast between what has been and what may be."

Another way of thinking about Whitehead's idea of the role of art is to say that knowing can occur through the process of becoming. Talking about the body as an organ of perception and art as a way of seeing, Jamake Highwater describes a way of knowing available to American Indians who "look at reality in a way that makes it possible for them to know something by temporarily turning into it." He calls this "transformation," and goes on to say that it is a valuable way of "making realities." In Western culture, this visionary capacity is kept alive by children and by artists. "Implicit in that painterly vision," Highwater writes, "is the metaphor, if not the mystic reality, of knowing things by turning into them." A bit later he adds:

Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (New York: New American Library, 1981).

> The simultaneous point of view of primal art deals not with the "eye as a camera," so to speak, but with the "mind's eye" that consummates everything we know, imagine, feel, conceive, perceive, and dream about an object we are painting. Transformation lets us take our bodies with us into the visionary realm. Transformation relinquishes the point of view of the camera and provides us with the direct, physical contact with the *orendas* [life forces] which appear to us as visions, inspirations, intuitional insights.

What is known through transformation, for example, is not merely the appearance, nature, movement, and habits of an animal. What is known is the animal's essence.

Making art as a way of knowing works to discover and maintain the connection between the knower and the known. Aesthetic knowledge is based neither on the distance needed for *objective* knowledge nor on the use of objects to prove or disprove hypotheses. Instead it results from relatedness, from perceiving the object of attention from as many sides as possible, from centering attention on an object or person fully, from letting the object of attention speak for itself.

Recognizing *imagining* and *becoming* as ways to learn, teachers can allow them to children and perhaps recapture a bit of these modes for themselves. We can become dissatisfied with only knowing the outsides of children: their *behaviors*, and seek to understand children's thought, and to value the particular perspectives on life and the world that children provide. Teachers can also come to see children as totalities, not predicting how they will "turn out," but imagining them as the adults they will be, knowing that they will grow and change.

Teaching as art can make teachers craftspersons. Craft is discipline; it is the command of a medium which demands and grows out of skill. It requires practice, patience, and time. And, it is much more. Heidegger adds to our thinking about craft when he describes the craft in cabinetmaking. If the apprentice is to "become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood . . . this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft." Additionally, Heidegger says that "'Craft' literally means the strength and skill in the hands." Hands are the signs of our otherness, of our mutuality with others. ". . . the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others." In the hand, and the thought sustaining its every gesture, there is the conversation with one's self and with others that craft requires.

Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (J. Glenn Gray, Trans.) (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1954).

Teaching as a craft is about all these things. It is about "letting learn" and allowing slumbering shapes to come forward. It is about the converse you have with others and the converse you have with yourself--reaching out, looking within. It is about the recognition of human mutuality.

MONOGRAPHS BY THE NORTH DAKOTA STUDY GROUP ON EVALUATION

Coordinated by Vito Perrone

A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal by Lynne Strieb ($7.50)

A Syntactic Approach to College Writing by Norton D. Kinghorn, Lester Faigley and Thomas Clemens ($3.50)

Between Feeling and Fact by Brenda Engel ($5.00)

Changing Schools Into Communities for Thinking by Bena Kallick ($6.50)

Children's Language and Thinking: A Report of Work-In-Progress by Edith Churchill and Joseph Petner, Jr. ($2.00)

Critical Barriers Phenomenon in Elementary Science by Maja Apelman, David Hawkins and Philip Morrison ($5.00)

Evaluation as Interaction in Support of Change by Ruth Anne Olson ($3.50)

First California Conference on Educational Evaluation and Public Policy, 1976 edited by Nick Rayder ($2.00)

Researching Educational Practice by Loren Barritt, Ton Beekman, Hans Bleeker and Karel Mulderij ($7.50)

Speaking Out: Teachers on Teaching by Cecelia Traugh, Rhoda Kanevsky, Anne Martin, Alice Seletsky, Karen Woolf and Lynne Strieb ($7.50)

Teacher Curriculum Work Center: A Descriptive Study by Sharon Feiman ($2.00)

The Art of Seeing and the Visibility of the Person by Patricia F. Carini ($7.50)

The Assessment of Hands-on Elementary Science Programs edited by George E. Hein ($12.00)

The School Lives of Seven Children: A Five Year Study by Patricia F. Carini ($7.50)

❖ ❖

PRICE: As indicated; prices subject to change
HANDLING CHARGE: 15% for 1-10 copies; 10% for 11-30 copies; 5% for 31+ copies
CONDITIONS: All orders must be prepaid

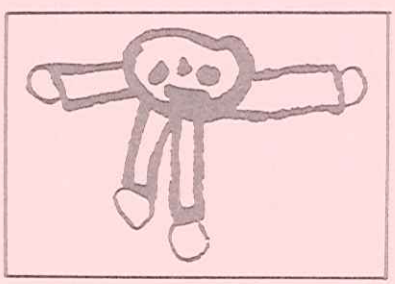
ADDRESS: North Dakota Study Group
Box 8158
University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, ND 58202

First published in 1986

North Dakota Study Group
on Evaluation, c/o Vito Perrone,
Center for Teaching & Learning
University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, ND 58202

Library of Congress Catalogue
Card Number 86-063026

Printed by University of
North Dakota Press



A grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, supplemented by funds from the Bush Foundation and the Follow Through project, as well as support from the Johnson Foundation, makes possible publication of this series

Editor: Arthur Tobier