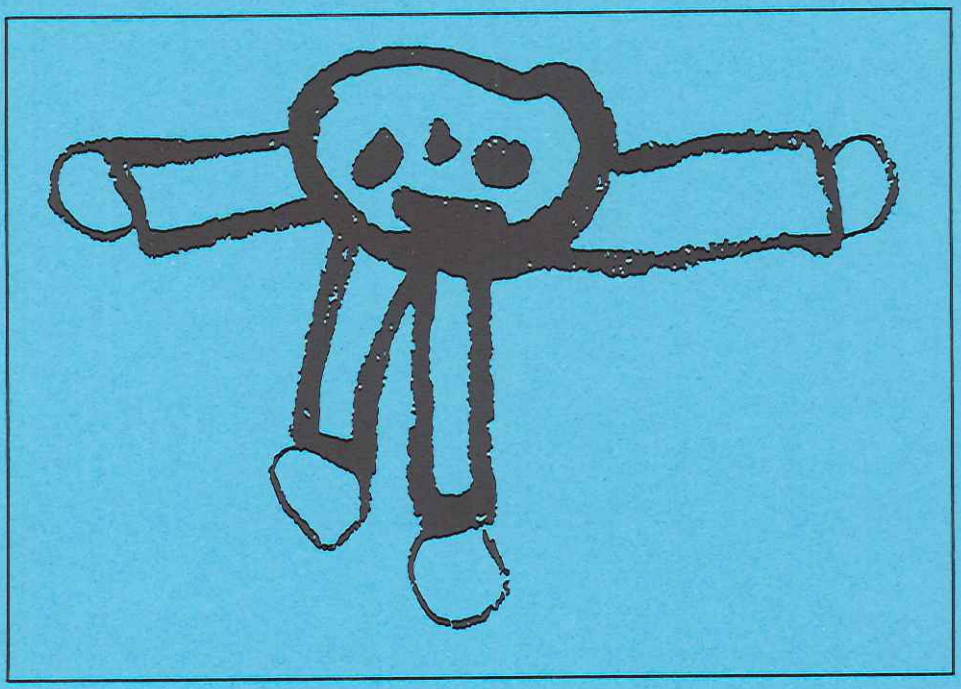
North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Bena Kallick

CHANGING SCHOOLS INTO COMMUNITIES FOR THINKING

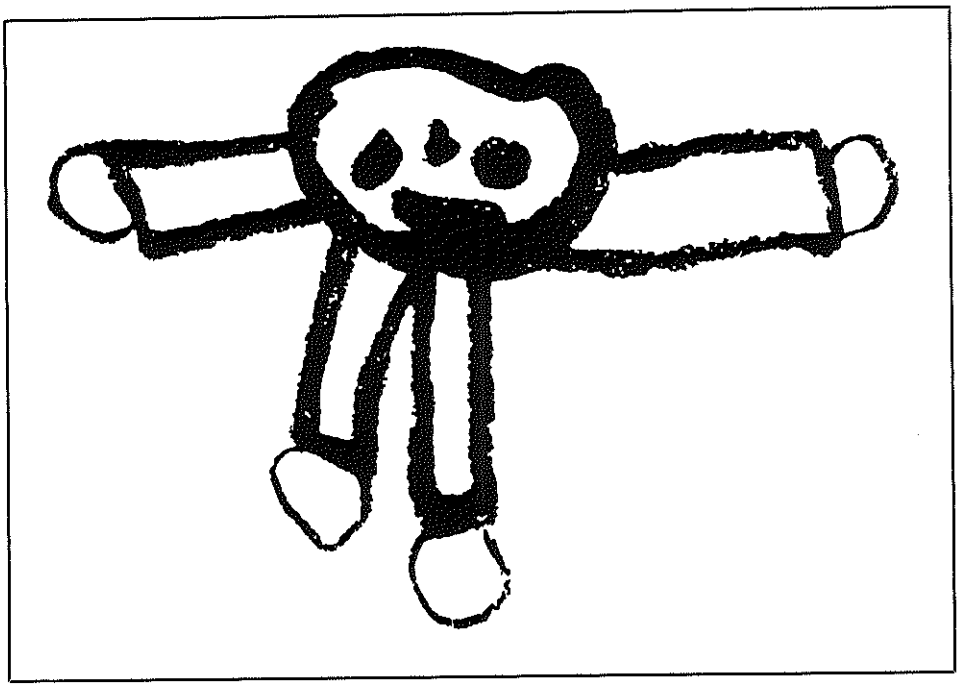
North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation

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



Bena Kallick

CHANGING SCHOOLS INTO COMMUNITIES FOR THINKING

Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Dakota
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Introduction

Vito Perrone
Schools are currently receiving almost unprecedented public attention. But the focus on school failures that filled the media for much of the 1980s is being replaced by a language of hopefulness, a growing belief that the schools can be transformed and large national goals realized. Accompanying the shift is the growing understanding that the narrow basic skills orientation of the past decade--that increased the use of basal materials, worksheets, and skill sheets; gave emphasis to a pedagogy of direct instruction and highly sequenced learning activities; and encouraged frequent fact-oriented testing--has been painfully limiting, fostering low levels of thought and considerable disinterest in school learning among students.

"Critical thinking" is now the order of the day, seen as a means of changing the intellectual character of the schools. But rather than being developed as an integral element of inquiry, whether the subject matter is history, literature or science, we now have a spate of critical thinking programs: separate courses of study filled with ordered steps accompanied by yet a new set of worksheets and puzzles. They are mostly additional skills programs disconnected from the surrounding context or from academic context.

Bena Kallick rejects such an approach. She argues persuasively, through her descriptions, of the need to construct communities of thinking: settings in which interpretation and complexity are the norm, and individuals are encouraged to express their differences of understanding while seeking common ground in the collective thought. For her, the school community itself needs to be a thinking community before there can be serious talk of a critical thinking curriculum. In this regard, Bena takes the context seriously.

Further, she understands and describes well the power of content, the narrative that makes

up the curriculum, and what it means for a teacher to keep questions open; to use instructional processes that encourage individual and group thought. Just as importantly, she offers many practical ways to move a classroom toward becoming a community of thinkers, where the values of interpretation are meaningful. This monograph gains its power, in fact, from the practical suggestions, all rooted in Bena's ongoing experience with teachers and schools.

One of the ways Bena assists teachers in considering the possibilities of an inquiry-oriented interpretive community in their classrooms is to help them experience such a community. Her teaching is directed toward such a purpose. And the case study she closes with makes clear what it all means.

What I like about the work, and the reason it is part of the monograph series, is that it acknowledges that *critical thinking* has a long history, that it was not just invented, that it is not another technology to be installed. This has been understood by teachers and school administrators who have worked over many years to establish an education of power, who see the importance of helping their students place themselves in a position to act on the world. Bena affirms such a view, acknowledging that teaching has important social as well as intellectual dimensions.

1

Building a Community for Thinking

Since 1970, Bena Kallick has directed a teachers' center, created a Children's Museum, and co-initiated an alternative high school. She has worked for many years as an advisor in classrooms. In 1981, she became an independent consultant to school districts. She has taught at Fairfield University, the University of Massachusetts Center for Creative and Critical Thinking, Union Graduate School, and Yale School of Organization and Management. Her work is published in the ASCD book, *Developing Minds*, edited by Arthur Costa.

In much of the professional literature on critical thinking, the dispositions indicative of a good critical thinker presuppose a learning environment in which it is already possible to take risks, ask questions, be open-minded and flexible. At the same time, thinking is seen as separable from its context, to be acted on by techniques, or by a prescribed curriculum, or by teaching tools which, when used properly, enable students to move from passive to active thinkers. The climate of the classroom is taken as a given.

Of course, when one believes that knowledge comes from a single authoritative source, then classroom discussion, problem-solving, and critical analysis have little pertinence. The body of knowledge is fixed and needs only to be transmitted to the learner. But if one believes as I do that knowledge is constructed socially, the collective understanding of people at a given point in time, then the classroom needs to be a place in which learners engage in the examination of knowledge as a regular part of their learning. It needs to be where collectively the goal is to inquire about how you know what you know--as well as how you can better inform what you know through active engagement with one another, with media (curriculum, text, film), with those outside the classroom, with one's self (self-observation), with experiences both in and out of the classroom. It needs to be a place of interdependent learners: a learning community.

The community I have in mind might be described by a term Stanley Fish uses, "interpretive community."* An interpretive community, as I employ the term, is one where the active process of interpretation is used to give meaning to learning that is taking place. Meaning, in this place, isn't reducible to a single perspective but is open, ready to yield to multiple intelligences the way shadows yield to light. Take, for example, a class studying the American revolution. To begin with, the teacher selects the curriculum she teaches. And as she develops that curriculum in the

*Fish, Stanley, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Harvard University Press, 1980.

classrooom, a story of the revolution is told. Providing examples, analogies, texts and the like, she, in effect, presents a particular story, her story of the revolution, and the students in turn attempt to make sense out of it by imbuing it with their own associations, interpretations, and experiences. In this way each student begins to tell his own story about the content presented by the teacher. If we continue to use the metaphor of teachers and learners as storytellers, actively engaged in the construction of meaning of a story as they retell it, then it is possible that there will be many stories in the classroom at any one time. The interpretive community then becomes a place where these stories are told and retold, a place in which the exchange, questioning, and criticisms of one another's interpretations provides a theater for student performance. It is in this theater that creative and critical thinking can be developed and encouraged. When the teacher comes to evaluate the learning, she can base her assessment on the way the student has interpreted the story.

The counterpart of the above interpretive community is the more typical classroom in which the student is expected to retell the learning exactly as it was presented by the teacher. I bore witness to this kind of teaching and learning in a college classroom. A student had received a grade of C on an economics examination and was upset because she felt that she had studied the material. Her professor told her that indeed she had studied and comprehended the material, but she had not organized her studies in the same way that he had framed the questions for the test. *Her* "story" of the material did not match *his*. As a result, the value of her thinking, her ability to create a new interpretation of the lesson, or perhaps to refocus the significance of the story as she gave meaning to the lesson, went unacknowledged and unrewarded.

When I was working in an alternative high school, I gave tests that included these elements: some questions that I asked, because I thought there were some significant aspects of the subject that should not be missed, and some questions that the student asked and answered so that I knew what she thought it was significant to learn. In this way, I was able to help the student focus on my selections from the learning as well as focus on her selections from the

learning. In the interpretive community, a student who discovered a new edge of meaning would be important.

Clearly, if we are going to encourage students to accept that there is not one right answer but a variety of interpretations, then we need to create classrooms that provide some security regarding the kinds of questions they might raise publicly or in private:

Is there really a "right" answer or am I just second-guessing what the teacher thinks?

How will I be evaluated fairly? Are the criteria going to be apparent or will I just be at the mercy of the teacher?

Will judgments be made about me based on my race, my class, or my gender that may preclude my thinking from being acceptable?

In discussions, will the teacher protect me if I take a risk and my idea gets shot down? How protected is the environment for me to say what is on my mind?

Do I dare express what might be an irrational thought? One that might sound very different or off the mark to others? What will people think of me? Of my intellect? Will this affect my grades in this class? The way the teacher thinks of me? The way my group thinks of me?

Dare I express the negative? The dark side of the picture? Does the teacher/group allow for acceptance of the gloomy? The critical negative judgment?

Will I lose my peer group's respect if I participate seriously in a discussion? Suppose I need to disagree with another peer group member? What will that do to my status?

Will I get my chance to talk if I listen? or will everything start to build on someone else's ideas and my idea will never get a chance to surface?

If there is no answer to the questions that we raise, where am I? What do I really know? How can I trust my actions, my decisions? Is there nothing that I can hold on to as certain?

Developing the Emergent Possibilities

The answers to these questions are necessarily indirect ones. No amount of verbal reassurance (e.g., "It's okay to say what you are thinking") will serve any purpose without accompanying behavior on the part of the teacher. Moreover, it is essential that we attend to these dynamics, as they influence critical thinking in the classroom.

Since the establishment of any community begins with group formation, the ideal point of departure is early in the school year when questions about how to work together in a group arise. Through group discussions and activities, the environmental conditions that make it safe to take risks (such as open-mindedness, flexibility, recognition of the student as a source of knowledge) must be made visible to the students. These discussions are necessarily about the processes that maintain group functioning: feedback, constructive criticism, clarification, sensitivity to another's position. As one's critical or creative thoughts are worked out in community, the assumption is that one will begin to establish trusting and respectful relationships with others.

As we develop the classroom as interpretive community, specific social skills need to be identified and developed. For example, it is difficult to be influenced by another's perspective if you are not willing to listen to it carefully. So listening becomes a skill to be focused on and developed. It has been my experience that students often do not know what active listening (listening in order to give understanding to another's point of view) looks like. I usually generate a list with the students about how you know if someone is listening to you. In a fourth grade class recently, the list read as follows:

- *The person is looking at you.*
- *The person is nodding his head to show that he agreed or disagreed.*
- *The person asked questions to try to understand what I was saying.*
- *The person helped me think about why I was saying what I was saying.*
- *The person added to my ideas.*
- *The person referred to my ideas.*

Developing a consciousness for active listening is a positive step toward students paying closer attention to each other's perspectives.

In addition, teachers need to model good listening when they are facilitating a classwide discussion. Often the response you give to a student response is as significant as the question you asked in the first place! Following are a few critical responses that help to further a person's thinking:

A response that serves to clarify a person's thinking (such as, "Can you help me understand that a little better? What specifically do you mean when you say . . .").

A response that asks for examples.

A response that questions assumptions.

A response that seeks elaborations (such as, "You just said that the book was great--can you elaborate a bit on what you mean by great?").

Although those responses may appear to be a comment on the obvious, I have observed all too frequently that responses fall into other categories such as "good answer," or "that's a good point and I'd like to add." Often, too, the teacher responds by teaching (what the student says triggers the opportunity to make a "lesson" out of what was said), or just by moving on. Each of these responses has a place in the classroom. But here, in support of the interpretive community, the goal is to elicit the response that serves to further clarify a person's thinking.

In a workshop with teachers, I will often use the exercise of pairing people to talk about a problem. One person will be the speaker, the other will listen and limit responses to the kinds of responses listed above. The listener may try to clarify, check assumptions, ask for examples or elaborations. What the listener may *not* do is give advice, solve the problem for the speaker. The purpose is to draw the speaker's thinking out; to facilitate and clarify the speaker's thinking. When we debrief from that exercise, speakers usually attest to how clarifying it is for them to be left with their own thinking for a while. They appreciate the questions that force them to return to their own

thinking before they have to deal with another's ideas. On the other hand, the listeners often say that they felt very hampered by the limitation on response. They wished they could have given advice, they felt they would have liked to interact with the other person, they would have liked to build ideas together. As I reflect on those statements, I often transpose what I am hearing to what I know about the writing process. An author needs to hear how to stretch his own ideas; needs to reflect about his own work. In many ways, what I am suggesting is the opportunity for people to think through a first draft before getting suggestions for revision or additions.

As the group work deepens, the need to develop other social skills becomes apparent. Another skill that I have found significant to develop is the ability to question one another. Students and teachers practice asking questions that encourage rather than force people to become defensive. For example, people seem to respond better when they are asked "how come" instead of "why." They develop their thinking further if they are given a structure such as "Some people say (opinion 1) and others say (opinion 2) . . . What do you think?" because it allows them to understand that their response is within a range of possibilities. "Can you help me understand how you are thinking about . . . ?" feels dramatically different from "Why did you say that?"

As the interpretive community builds, the classroom becomes a micro-laboratory for exploring the meaning and value of ideas whatever the discipline. And knowledge is seen less as a body of information that is passed from teachers to learners than as an artifact of discourse.* When I think of the term artifact, in this regard, two levels of meaning are implied. The first is that we shape knowledge based on our social discourse in much the same way that we shape objects made of clay--we add, model, reconstitute, and interpret based on our perceptions and social understanding. Second, these artifacts are the reminder of an existing culture--in this instance of knowledge, a reminder of the result of normal discourse *to this point*. But, as with any object where additions are created, new interpretations change its shape and its value to the culture. For example, a clay piece from one generation may be considered of great aesthetic value; but

*See Bruffee, Kenneth A., "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" *College English*, Vol. 46, Number 7, November 1984, pp. 635-652.

as the significance of that time is overshadowed by new discoveries, so may the value of the artifacts. In the same way, the settled values of any discipline can be upended with new thinking. As we interpret what we know, we may place value on a new interpretation and displace the one currently in vogue. Knowledgeable groups study, make interpretations, and decide what constitutes "normal" in the discourse. The discourse in any given subject matter may be carried to the classroom by the teacher for further study.

When the teacher brings a course of study to the classroom, she must assume that there is knowledge in the room. Although students may not have specific knowledge of how to solve an algebraic equation, for example, they do have knowledge, from their own experiences, of analogies of either process or content to that algebraic problem. Knowledge, in its broadest sense, means that which is known. Being conscious of this existing knowledge is a necessary entry point for new learning to take place.

The Conversation of Mankind

But to be able to enter the interpretive community of thinking in any discipline, one must feel capable of constructing knowledge (providing new interpretation). Otherwise knowledge (as defined by immutable facts) becomes a barrier to critical thinking. How does one gain the necessary confidence to comfortably engage in an interpretive community?

Kenneth Bruffee discusses this question in his paper, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" He refers to the fact that no student enters any discourse ignorant. Students have a wealth of knowledge based on their life experiences. As Bruffee states, "Every student is already a member of several knowledge communities, from canoeing to computers, baseball to ballet. Membership in any one of these communities may not be a resource that will, by itself, help much directly in learning to organize an essay or explicate a poem. But pooling resources that a group of peers brings with them to the task may make accessible the normal discourse of the new community they together hope to enter." In addition to the insight that students are members of communities such as sports or ballet,

teachers can see to it that their student's membership in communities such as racial and ethnic communities becomes a part of the useful knowledge base. The issue at hand is how to help the students make use of that experience so that it is a source for making analogies, transferring analytic knowledge from one subject to another, and becomes the basis for insight in a critical thinking discussion.

In my work with teachers, I have found that some techniques work particularly well to develop this confidence. One example is starting a discussion with what is already known. I recently engaged a group of teachers in a discussion about collaboration and cooperation in the following manner. I asked them to divide into two groups. Each individual group member was asked to list all the words they associated with their particular word (either cooperation or collaboration). This provided an opportunity for each individual to be in touch with their own experience of meaning for that word. I then asked the group to share their lists and compile one list that best reflected their sense of the meaning of the word. This provided an opportunity for the individuals to come to a collective understanding. We shared the two lists generated around the words and as a whole class we discussed our meaning of those words. Finally, I introduced the two concepts as they are being used in the context of group process. The group was comfortably able to conclude, after the presentation, that the processes described were "nothing new"--they were processes that they were somewhat familiar with in other contexts (as was realized through the exercise in word definition). This particular technique exemplifies the significance of building a new learning experience on the basis of prior experience. The word associations provided a basis for these teachers to allow what they already know about this subject to surface. The fact that they have not come to the situation ignorant significantly influenced the way they worked at the new learning about cooperation and collaboration as it might be used in the classroom context. They actively engaged in interpreting how these concepts can be usefully transferred to the classroom and realized that this classroom innovation would be "nothing new."

The above illustrates a way to use experience from outside of the classroom as the basis for generating a discussion in the classroom. It is also important to generate and use experiences that are shared in the classroom as the basis for reaching for outside sources of knowledge. These selections should serve as a springboard for the new learning. For example, I often start new classes with an exercise that asks students to choose someone in the room who they do not already know (or know very little about) to interview. I always suggest a few focusing questions for the interview that will relate to what will follow in our class work, such as "What are the objects you most value in your life" (this question is for a class that will deal with a study of social history in which objects tell a significant part of the story of people's lives). My instructions ask that each person be interviewed and that the person who conducted the interview introduce the interviewee to the group. The class spends 40 minutes conducting interviews and then another hour or more introducing each other. This atmosphere of relaxed time allows people to use the assignment instructively, but when necessary the time frame can be less extended and is adaptable to developmental considerations.

The value of the activity is that it immerses the group immediately in the process of interpretation. You see quickly enough that the kinds of questions you ask very much determine the kind of information you will get. Having to introduce an interview partner requires good listening. It requires understanding another's point of view and representing that perspective to the group. The person who is introduced gets to hear an interpretation of what he or she said in the interview, an examination of which provides insight into what happens to material as it gets interpreted. The members of the group are now connected to one another. They have a sense of the resources in the room. They know who is interested in what subjects. It is this base of knowledgeable individuals who will be the interpretive community as it is established over the school year.

As teachers experience this way of learning, they become more adept at designing classroom curriculum that engages students in the same way. This journal entry, written by a fourth grade teacher during a class I was

teaching that focused on the study of social history, is a case in point:

> *We started the day by reflecting again. I found that a lot of the ideas I had other people also had. The Judson House was a great example of actual physical things that are old and historical. I enjoyed seeing* things *while hearing stories about people as opposed to just listening and trying to imagine physical things. Both ways of passing down history are effective but I enjoy touching and feeling more than just listening. I try to teach that way too although it's not always possible. As I was standing there listening to the woman speak about the Judson's, esp. when she talked about their personal traits, my first reaction was "how does she know if so and so Judson was a brilliant lawyer and well respected in the community?" This made me think back to what Bena said about history being the art of interpretation and I wondered where this museum got all its information and not just this museum but any one--and now I'm thinking how did my college professor know all those fascinating stories about some of the early presidents and their families? Which brings me back to Bena's comment that teachers are storytellers . . . Children could write an account of an event in their lives that affected the history of their lives--something that if someone picked up in 100 years and read they could really get a sense of what that child was like and why this incident was important in his or her life. As Joyce would say, something that showed their real signature.*

Questioning the nature of authoritative sources, this teacher's exploration is a beginning--a disposition for critical thinking. Where does knowledge come from? she asks. How factual are facts? Is interpretation a valid/valued way of knowing? Is my point of view/critical event in my life a reliable way of knowing something about the culture? Is the fact that there are so many different events reported in this classroom an indication that one report is not representative of the whole story? Does the collection of events represented in this room constitute reliable

information? Suppose that I asked someone else, who was involved in my described event, to describe the same event. Would it be described in the same way? Why or why not?

As this exploration is pursued, the curriculum grows out to a widening circle of questions about events, history, and the social studies curriculum presented by the text and the teacher.

Building in Time for Reflection

If the interpretive community suggests that knowledge grows out of social interaction--and the normal discourse within the field--then one needs to spend time reflecting on this growing body of knowledge. Reflective time provides the opportunity to continually make sense out of where one is, as an individual, with the material.

Writing is often a useful tool for reflecting. Many classes use journals as a place where students can reflect about their learning, ask questions, respond to the class, and develop his or her own expression before being asked to engage with the group.

Another technique is known as the "whip." A circle is formed and each student takes a turn to reflect on learning. For example, the question might be asked, "What did you find was the most significant insight you gained from today's work? What was your strongest impression? What struck you as the most interesting thing you thought about today?" Each person's response is received without interruption or judgment. This is a time when students verbalize their learning and bring it to a higher level of consciousness. It is an opportunity for the individual response to learning to be made with respect for the individual's self-clarifying process. It requires a change in tone from active engagement with one another to acceptance of each point of view as it stands at that time. The circle serves as a continuation of the developing dynamic of the interpretive community as that community is strengthened by the fact that it is a group of individuals and that each individual contributes to create the group.

A classroom for teaching thinking needs to pay attention to continuity--to the flow of time and the continual emergence and re-emergence of the individual and group memory of learning

experiences. The class needs to find a way to continually pay attention to its own history--that of the group as well as the individual's. In this way, the class will be developing a sense of its own knowledge base--and each student's contribution to discussion will be a part of that sense. Students will be able to question one another based on a growing practice with the art of interpretation. Interpretation will be one of the key tasks of the classroom community--and each contribution to the interpretation of learning/text will enhance its meaning for the group.

2

Modeling for an Interpretive Community

> "de Man taught his students not to read like him, but like him, to read." Andrzej Warminski, "In Memorium to Paul de Man," in *The Lesson of Paul de Man*.

Although educators refer to modeling, and in some instances signify the *behaviors* teachers are expected to model, there is little discussion about modeling as it is integral to a teacher's whole classroom practice. Modeling is not merely a technique to improve specific lessons that teach for thinking, it is a way of being in the classroom.

Let us consider where the term comes from. In the literature regarding child development, a requisite part of growing up is adopting role models. Role models, in this sense, are people who represent characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes we admire. The role model serves as a symbol and example for who we are, what we need to do to be more of what we want to be, and who we might be in the future. A role model makes a significant contribution to the development of character. Role models are chosen from our fantasies of ourselves, our desires and motivations to discover ourselves, and our expectations of ourselves. We derive from our role models that which we are ready for and need at the time.

Teachers, as significant adults in the life of a developing child, are often role models. A student is placed with the teacher, not by choice, but by school system design. Since the student did not choose the teacher, nor the teacher the student, the potential of the relationship in terms of modeling needs to be established through trust. To the extent that teachers model the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of an intellectually curious learner, critical and creative in thought and action, teachers can be role models for students' thinking. But if a teacher is to be consciously aware of herself as a role model,

and to have some control over what she is modeling for her students, she must first be in touch with her own vision of self. It is only through consciousness of self, the recognition that she is present in the room at all times, that she can begin to interpret what this presence might mean to her students. This consciousness includes what drives her as an individual--who her role models are, why they were selected, why she does what she does, and what influence she expects it to have on others.

If, for example, a teacher feels that commitment to work should include the ability to use one's mind to seriously investigate a field of study, and to continually search for new meaning in existing ideas, as well as to invent new ideas, then her own work needs to serve as a model for those goals. One of the reasons teachers enter the profession of teaching is the desire to work in a way that will be socially useful: to have an influence both over the present generation and the next. This need to be of social significance directly relates to the concept of modeling. Every act of thought and behavior becomes the potential model from which students derive their own responses. The concept of modeling is thus larger than technique. It calls for the congruence between words and actions; between form and function; between what you are teaching and how you teach.

Modeling is at the heart of who we are as individuals, and our personalities are built upon a series of identifications with significant others. Although research may inform us about the kinds of qualities people generally have in particular contexts, each individual needs to address the particularities of his or her own behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. In order to understand the significance of what she models, a teacher needs to make visible to herself those processes of thought and behavior that she reflects through her teaching. Teachers, in effect, need to be in a conversation with themselves. While it is difficult to stay self-aware, the more visible you become to yourself, the more able you are to model the behaviors you wish to see in your students. What teaches students about thinking is your own way of thinking and your way of thinking about their thinking. What teaches students about love of subject is your own love of subject. What teaches students about curiosity is your curiosity about your own ideas

as well as the ideas of your students. What teaches students to accept diversity is your willingness to allow for diversity in discussions. The way you as a teacher behave, attitudinally as well as with language and action, becomes a model for student behavior.

Modeling: Moral Frameworks

A fifth-grade teacher plans a lesson in which she is interested in generating ideas from the students (fluency). She is especially interested in having everyone contribute to the brainstorming process. She begins with a question. "What are the many ways that we can characterize a good story?" She stands at the blackboard and writes down the characteristics her students list. As she writes, she continually turns and makes eye contact with the contributing student. When there is a lull, she looks expectantly around the room allowing for the silences. She declines to interrupt the flow of thinking. As she moves about the room, she tries to make eye contact with students who she seldom hears from. When a student makes a judgment about another's contribution, she reminds them of the ground rules for brainstorming: no evaluative statements. She waits and watches, occasionally contributing a suggestion herself to keep the list in play. Before she calls for closure, she checks with the students to see if they have anything more to say.

After the lesson, she makes a copy of the list on the board. She promises the students that they will return to the list the following day. That evening, she studies the list. She wants to move the discussion toward making a comparison between the list of characteristics the students have generated with ones formed by literary critics. She wants the students eventually to develop a set of criteria for what they think makes a good story. Where appropriate, she clarifies the list with some descriptive words of her own. She also compiles a second list referring to material other than what she asked about. She adds to the list a few characteristics that were not mentioned but which she thinks are significant.

The next day, she returns with her work. She presents the material to the class, noting carefully wherever she made changes in the material. She shows the class their own list

and critically analyzes the changes she made, justifying why she did so. Finally, she talks about what she added to the list and why. She asks if the students want to add, change, or comment about her new list. A discussion ensues. She listens closely to the students' responses. In one instance, she feels that the point made about one of her changes is quite accurate. Rather than being defensive about the need to change her work, she makes the change and encourages the class to study the list for other changes. Finally, she shows the list of items that did not seem relevant for this task. She discusses the responses on that sheet, explains her thinking, and suggests that the items be put "on hold" for a few days while they develop characteristics of a good story. She promises that they will return to those items later for further discussion.

Let us examine the above example to see what modeling is taking place. First, the teacher is modeling a respect for the students' thinking. She is encouraging the students to generate a list of characteristics rather than lecturing them about it. She assumes that the students know stories and that knowledge will be a foundation for the class's understanding of literature. In addition, she has allowed time for students to do some thinking without judgment--encouraging them to take a chance on saying something that may not be quite on track. She models a seriousness in regard to the students' list by working on it that evening. She changes the list to clarify the thinking--she does not change the thought. She makes a judgment to do some work on the list so that the students can move closer to her goals, but she respects the work of the students. Whereas many teachers would consider the lesson on fluency "done" and might not use the list in a meaningful way, this teacher recognizes the need to use the students' work as the basis for the next activity. When she presents her work the next day, she shows that she studied their work. She refers back to their work and shows the changes she made and why. She makes the assumption that students know that stories reflect life and she encourages them to bring their life experience into the conversation. She uses her own life experience as well. She allows for the "off track" responses by saying that she will have the class return to that material. She shows that, while some material

leaves the track, it can still contribute to understanding. Finally, she is not defensive about changes in her work, which implies that the criticism is in the spirit of furthering understanding rather than competing for the best understanding.

From the perspective of the students, what might these examples mean? What are the "models" from which the students might derive their own direction? By encouraging students not to think like her but, like her, to think, she enables their work to enter into conversation with the work of "experts." She models curiosity by showing an interest in their thinking. Taking their work seriously, the teacher encourages her students to take themselves seriously and to see themselves as agents of teaching as well as learning. Responding to what her students bring her of themselves, she models respect for learning that comes out of experience as well as out of books. Going through the steps of generating ideas for a list, winnowing it, reshaping it, putting some items on hold, she models a process of ordering thought. Accepting the work of all without judgment, she models being democratic. Making judgments about the work in relationship to the task at hand, she models the critical mind. Taking the time to engage with the seemingly irrelevant, she models how to acknowledge the possibilities inherent in all thinking. In her open-endedness, she presents a model of authority that is at once reasonable and able to be engaged, that encompasses the authority of criteria generated by literary experts and the authority of classroom-generated criteria.

In the above, there is a congruence between attitude and behavior, between what the teacher has chosen to teach and how she is teaching. In counter distinction is the teacher who generates a list of characteristics about what makes a good story from the students and then proceeds to lecture about the six characteristics of a good story. She asks the students to think through a problem with her, but doesn't take the results into account. She knows technique (that she should generate a list from the students as a part of developing fluency in thinking), but disregards her own experience of what that technique produces. So she declines to use the students' work as the basis for a conversation with the experts. In effect, she declines to develop thinking as a construction of knowledge

--a conversation between teacher's thinking (as it represents a community of knowledgeable people) and the students' thinking (as it represents a knowledgeable community). Rather she uses the students' work as one exercise and the expert's work as the "real" material to be discussed.

What do this teacher's students derive from her modeling? That their work is not as important as the work of others, perhaps others who are not in the clasroom, and whom they might never meet. Perhaps that the teacher inhabits a community with "others" that they may not enter. That their group of peers is an insignificant community for learning because it includes none of those others. That since their teacher lacks respect for their thinking, they may be disrespectful of thinking too. That listing and brainstorming is "fun," an opportunity for them to say something, but not essential to the learning process. It is simply the spoonful of sugar that helps the lecture go down!

Too often, we lack awareness of the relationship between our processes and the content we teach. When we want to encourage more questions, we need to be open to the questioning process. We need to be able to enjoy questioning and not see it as an interference with an already established agenda. Please note, this does not mean that the teacher need respond to the questions immediately. It may be that the teacher indicates that these questions will be on hold for a while. It may be that the questions get reflected back to the students for their research. The critical point here is that the teacher either should take the questions seriously, or not ask for them. It is not the skill of questioning, in and of itself, that is crucial. It is the way that we treat questions--as a part of the inquiring mind--that is significant.

If a teacher wants to model an interest in what students are saying, a responsiveness to student thinking, then she cannot be selective about her willingness to respond. Students may have something on their minds that might appear to be "off track" but, if the teacher is working on responsiveness, a respect for what students bring to the classroom, then every act she takes when responding is critical.

As the above examples make clear, the only way to make visible what is taking place in the classroom is to examine it in detail. No

externally generated list of behaviors to look for would make fully visible the difference between the examples of classroom instruction. The only way that a teacher would be able to recognize the difference between the two would be through a form of research: call it self-observation.

The Art of Self-Observation

There are some necessary disciplines for self observation, each representing analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The disciplines are:

1. *Observing what is going on.* A teacher understands her own actions in the context of the classroom in order to know its influence. This requires the ability to describe a classroom event from more than one perspective. For example, the event could be described from the perspective of the *teacher*--what was I trying to teach? Were the students able to understand the material? How do I know that they were with me when I was teaching? What signs do I have of their engagement with learning? Or the event might be described from the perspective of a *single student.* What was Sally doing during the lesson? What did I observe about her behavior? What did she say during the discussion? What was going on for her? Or the event might be described from the perspective of a *group of students.* What was happening for the group of students I have identified as the "slow" math learners? Were they misbehaving? Did they seem to tune out on the discussion? Do they seem to do better when I provide "hands on" lessons? How do I know that they are more engaged or less engaged? Or the event might be described from the perspective of the *whole class.* How did I feel the tone of the whole class was? Did people seem to be involved with my discussion? Were students engaging with one another or were they only engaging with me? Was there a group phenomena such as resistance to the task? Was there competition between the boys and the girls? Was there competition between the good math students and the less able ones?

2. *Analyzing what is going on from more than one perspective.* For example, if, from the teacher's perspective, you feel that the lesson was not working, what hypotheses can you formulate about why that may be the case? Hypothesis one: the students are not ready for

this material. Hypothesis two: I did not present the material in a way that facilitated understanding. Hypothesis three: It is near Christmas and it is difficult to engage the students without giving them a chance to talk about the Christmas party--I should have reversed the order of my agenda today.

3. *Making interpretations that lead to changes in the classroom and to test those changes against the action.* For example, if you feel that the reason for the "failed lesson" was that you needed to talk about the drug problem first, then you can test this hypothesis by talking about the drug problem and then returning to the lesson. Does the lesson work now? How do you know? There is a continual relationship between interventions for the purpose of solving a problem ("failed" lesson), action taken based on analysis of problem, and results of that decision.

4. *Making visible the thousands of decisions in the daily life of a classroom.* By making visible I mean being able to reflect (in a journal, with a colleague, with the students) about the teaching process, being able to articulate how and why you made the decisions you did, and being able to reflect on the meaning of your actions for your teaching practice.

Self observation helps teachers differentiate technique as simply technique from the use of technique as a part of modeling thinking and reasoning for students. Through self-observation, teachers can be more aware of their attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. In fact, the very process of self-observing is in itself a model for critical thinking. Note how the above process requires many of the skills for critical thinking such as analysis of different points of view, generating multiple hypotheses, collecting data as a source for making a decision, and finally, being aware of one's thinking.

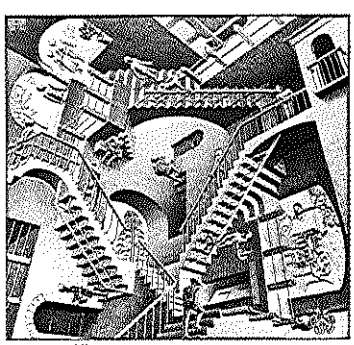
In every teaching act we are modeling something for students. If we are really committed to a classroom for critical thinking, then we need to be able to think critically about our practice as a model for thinking.

3

Reflective Thinking in an Interpretive Community

"Memory believes before knowing remembers."
William Faulkner, *Light in August*

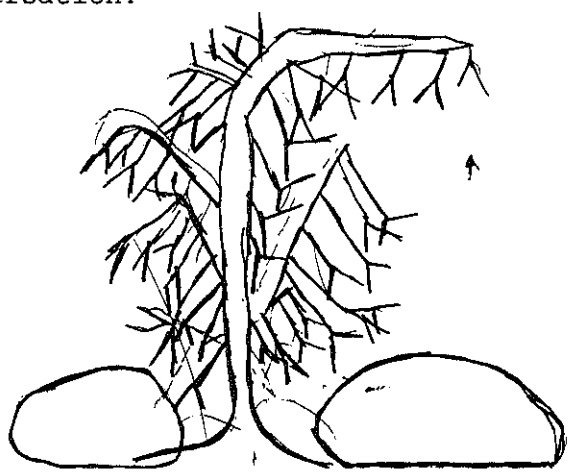
The concepts of *interpretive community*, a community of inquiry based on a social construction of knowledge and meaning, and of *modeling*, a process through which significant learning takes place, are based on a definition of consciousness that includes, but is larger than, aspects of cognition. Cognition has deep roots in unconscious mental activity. The interpretive community, in order to function fully, calls for a definition of consciousness that acknowledges the existence of a social and individual unconscious. It requires individual self-consciousness as well as group consciousness. Consciousness, therefore, includes knowledge in the world as it is given meaning through intuition as well as through language; through knowing from the senses as well as knowing from words; through searching for what is not known as well as what is known; through connections and associations that force us to confront our inner selves. It implies a state of mind that is dynamic.



There are always far more influences on the thinking process than we can name and touch. As a metaphor for thinking, consider Escher's optical illusion of men ascending and descending stairs. We know that the drawing contains a larger whole than we are capable of seeing all at once. In choosing to focus on the men going up the stairs, we are incapable of simultaneously seeing them also going down the stairs. Although the drawing contains both, through our focusing we select the figure and the ground. The same is true with thinking. As teachers, when we choose to focus on one aspect of thinking, we need to be aware that we are choosing the figure from a ground that is far larger than we can take in all at once. By virtue of our selection of what to look for, we have limited our view of what else is there.

Consciousness, for the purpose of developing an interpretive, critical thinking community, requires that we take on the task of continually defining and refining the figure and ground in light of self and community. An expanded definition of reflective thinking might serve as a way to imagine such a process. Dewey refers to the concept of reflective thinking and defines it as "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends. . ."* To expand "active, persistent and careful consideration" to continually defining the figure and ground, we might consider reflective thinking from two perspectives: the internal conversation and the external conversation.

*Dewey, John, *How We Think*, D. C. Heath and Company, 1933, p. 9.



The Internal Conversation

Self-knowledge is difficult to detail. It includes what you are thinking as well as how you are thinking. It includes ways of thinking that may not be visible to you consciously. And, in a classroom community, it includes knowledge of self in a group context. Students first need to know that it is "all right" to talk to one's self. An internal conversation is essential for the development of self-awareness. Below are some examples of how teachers can begin to develop the ability of their students to converse within themselves about what they know and their ways of knowing:

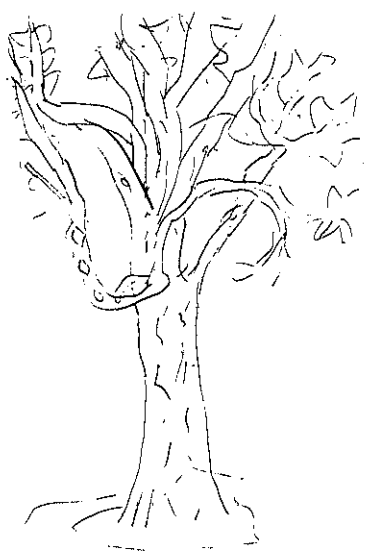
1. *Journal writing* is a familiar technique in the classroom. Teachers can engage students in conversation with themselves in the journal.

For example, write a letter to yourself, interview yourself, ask yourself why you did what you did, how you thought about a situation.

2. Allowing *individual reflective time.* This is a time in which the class is silent and individuals have a chance to think about what has been happening before they are asked to react.

3. *Listing connections.* An opportunity for students to individually list connections to what has been happening. Listing ways that the activities remind them of other activities or other incidences.

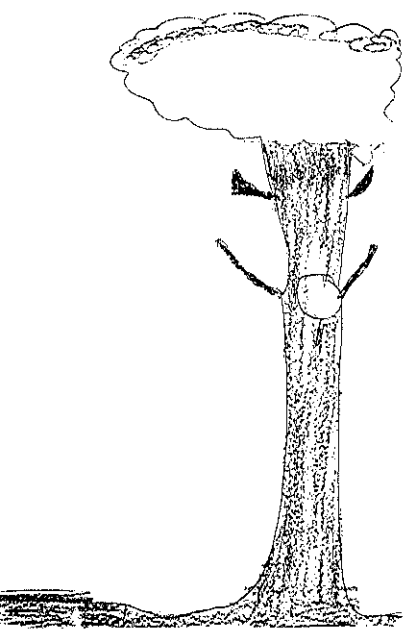
4. *Writing the process.* An opportunity for students to write how they went about solving a problem or where they are in the middle of some new learning or how they think they can best solve the problem before them. This kind of writing might be encouraged over a week or two so that students can see that setting out to solve a problem often transpires over time. Many experiences take place in and outside of the classroom that help solve a problem. Students might become more aware of the process of incubation in which you are not consciously trying to solve the problem but your mind continues to work at a pre-conscious level.



Developing strategies for students to have internal conversations is important. It is equally important, in the beginning, for the teacher to encourage the thinking without transforming it into something else. That means that in the beginning, when students are not certain what the teacher is asking for, teachers need to foster the spirit of self-inquiry by reading the material the student has generated. In the teacher's reading, she should keep the student's frame of reference but should feel free to stretch the student's thinking by asking questions, commenting on personal experiences that match the student's experiences, or by writing a few sentences of her own that reflect her own way of thinking about the same things.

The External Conversation

External conversations are significant because they give students an opportunity to learn from everyone in the room. They provide multiple perspectives on a given issue thereby multiplying the possibility for learning to take place. When students are asked to recall what



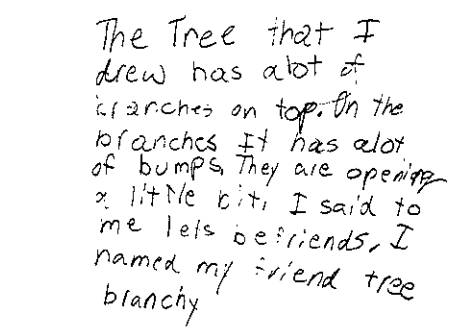
they learned that is new, they are given the opportunity to review the learning event. Students realize, in such exchanges, that the figure and the ground differs from person to person and group to group. That insight translates into the need to be clear, show evidence, and provide sources of information, for example, as a way to engage others in your thinking. And finally, the external conversation stimulates and confirms the internal conversation.

In my own practice, I've developed external conversations from the following group activities:

1. *A whip around the circle,* which is an opportunity for each student to reflect on learning at that time. Students can always pass if they do not wish to contribute. Some useful questions might be: Did anything happen that surprised you in this experiment, book, story, film, experience? What was the most useful thing you learned today? What is something you still feel curious about? What did you learn today that is new? In this process, the teacher asks only one question and each child reflects on the question and answers. The students are seated in a circle so that they can make eye contact with one another. As a result of using this technique, students have an opportunity to respond to what they are learning. In addition, it encourages students to select what was significant to them, rather than the teacher directing questions based on what was significant to her.

2. *Journal-sharing,* which is an opportunity for students to make a part of their journal public. They can choose any few lines they wish to read for the group. Students do not engage with each other's readings until everyone in the circle has had a chance to read. The journal sharing can also be from a single student, in which the student reads a part of his or her journal that raises a question that he or she would like the group to engage in a conversation around. Sharing journals in this way helps students test their ideas after they have had a chance to think them through in writing. Too often we ask students to respond to our questions. Once again, this is an opportunity for students to develop their own response to the classroom events. In addition, students listen to each other's thinking and learn from hearing more than one perspective.

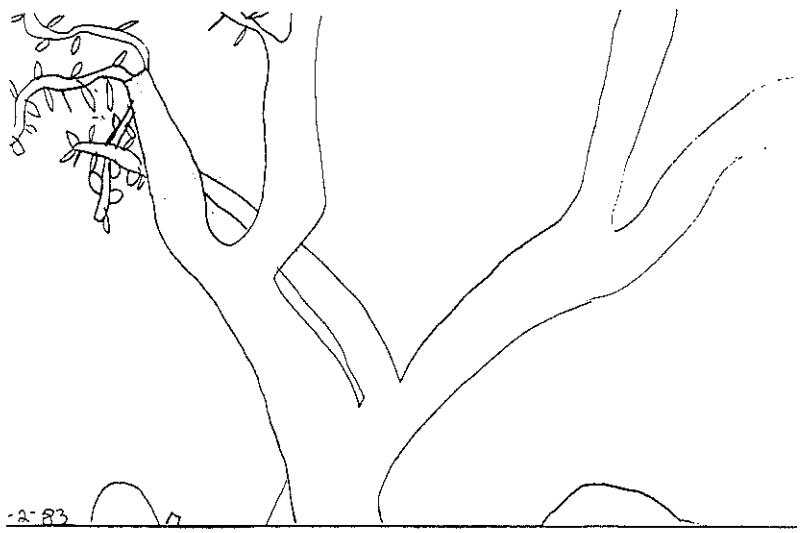
3. *Small group reflections,* where students are divided into small groups for the purpose of reflecting on a novel, story, science question. They are asked to have a conversation about a particular line or question or meaning and to report back to the whole group about what they think. It is especially useful to give each group newsprint and magic markers so that they can record their outcomes. The newsprint from each group can be placed up on the wall and a gallery created. Students can then move about the room and read each other's responses. If time allows, students might be asked to notice likenesses and differences on the sheets. They might be asked to analyze and interpret the sheets collectively--what are the statements the whole group is making? How does this reflect the thinking of this class? This technique moves students away from whole group to small group learning. When students are working in small groups, without teacher facilitation, they are entrusted with learning. They develop an authority over the material independent of the teacher. When they share this learning with other class groups, they, once again, have an opportunity to reconfigure their learning in light of the whole class response.



4. *Shared strategies,* where students are asked to detail the strategies that they used to solve a problem (either in the group or individually). These strategies are listed on the board so that students can see the different ways that people approach solving a problem. This technique provides an opportunity for students to recognize that there is more than one way to solve a problem. As students see different problem-solving approaches, they may broaden their own approach. Once again, students are exposed to the many ways in which people think, rather than the teacher's one best way.

The critical ingredient in developing the external conversation is to create an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable saying what they are thinking without the fear of peer or teacher judgment. This does not imply, however, that both peers and teachers cannot interact and dialogue with what is said. In some instances, the students might first want to have the opportunity to reflect and then might be given an opportunity to make a note of something someone else said that they would like to return to. These topics might be considered as the

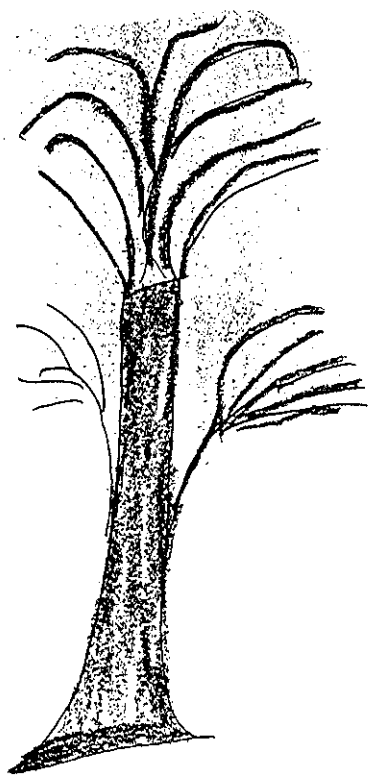
basis for the next day's discussion. Teachers need to be particularly sensitive in listening to the words and ideas of the students. These conversations are based on students developing a language for thinking. Subtle transformations of ideas or language can change the meaning of what a person is saying. It is often easy to assume that we know what someone means or says, and therefore we do not ask them to clarify. During reflective thinking teachers can serve as a model for listening by asking clarifying qestions, using the ideas that have been stated as the basis for one's own thinking (for example, "I agree with Jane when she said... because..."), and making eye contact with the person talking.



A Classroom Example

The teacher wants her fifth-grade students to move away from stereotypical representation of trees. She intends to start a unit to study different kinds of trees and she wants them to be more perceptive about what the characteristics of trees are. She starts by asking the students to take some time to draw a tree. She asks the students to keep these drawings, marking them "drawing number one." She then takes the students outside, with clipboards and drawing material, and asks the students to choose a tree that appeals to them and draw it. This time she places some

conditions on the drawing. Using Betty Edwards' strategy from *Drawing From the Right Side of the Brain*, she asks the students to study the tree carefully and then to draw it without looking at their paper. She has the students mark this "drawing number two." Everyone returns to the classroom and she asks the students to create a gallery of their drawings around the room, placing the first and second drawings side by side. A discussion ensues analyzing the drawings. Students are asked to reflect on their experience. She asks them to take out their journals and write. She guides their writing with the following kinds of questions. Was it more difficult to do one or the other? Why do you think so? Do you see a difference in the way you captured the essence of a tree in one or the other drawing? What do you consider to be some of the differences? Think about the way you went about doing the first and second drawing. If you had to describe how to draw a tree to someone else, how would you describe the process in order to get the best results?



Drawings are from Belvedere Castle, Central Park Conservancy, New York, NY.

After the students explore their own processes and products, she asks them to reread what they wrote and choose one or two lines that they would like to share with the group. The class shares and the teacher ends the lesson with a plan for follow up.

As should be clear from this example, the teacher is working with the students on developing their perception. She starts with a perception of the tree as it is internally remembered. She then takes them to the thing itself and asks them to study it closely. The second drawing will reflect that closer study, specifically editing out the possibility of drawing the tree from a stereotypical memory (through the instruction not to look at your drawing but to draw from your looking). When the students return to the classroom, rather than telling the students what they should have learned about trees, she allows them to reflect on their own processes. She encourages the students to think about likenesses and differences and leads them to self-perception. Ultimately, students are reflecting on the tree in order to study it further. And, because they are reflecting both individually and collectively, they will learn from their own experience as well as the experience of others.

Continued experiences in which students reflect on their knowing led one student to

comment, "I'm no longer surprised by what I know, but at how much better I am getting at telling everyone else my thoughts."

4

Educating a School District Toward Becoming a Community In Which Thinking Is Valued

> "They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great. Together, all together, they are the instruments of change." Keri Hulme, *The Bone People*

Just as the community of the classroom is encouraged, so must the community of the total school environment. Community, in this instance, embodies both a realization of the need for interdependence, and a place where critical and creative thinking is encouraged and valued, where individual participation is understood in light of what is in the best interest for the whole, and where education is valued at all levels. The process of educating a district toward becoming a community in which thinking is valued, and not just given lip-service, requires establishing a variety of relationships, each intricately interdependent. In a complex organization, it is often difficult to determine how to enter. Initial access to a school organization might be through a workshop session, a meeting with members of central office, or meetings with teachers. Once entering the organization, however, the first step is, as was stated by a community organizer, "Don't just do something, stand there!"

Entering a district to facilitate change is the work of an anthropologist: one must immerse oneself in the culture of the schools attending to their stated and unstated work ethics, educational belief systems, relationships within the schools as well as with the community.

Careful listening, questioning, and clarifying serve as a model for initiating a more thoughtful school community. In the following case example, I want to describe this process as it was worked through in a district where I was invited by the superintendent, in 1985, to create a participatory work environment in which teachers would be more included in thinking through the educational direction of the schools in which they work.

A Case Study

The school district which provides the context for this case is situated in an urban setting that typifies the socio-economic circumstances of most of our cities: many generations of immigration, a changing need in the workplace, wide economic differences within the community, and increasing pressure for schools to attempt to resolve class differences. The system is beset with problems such as:

-- *white flight from the public school system;*
-- *a diverse multi-ethnic and racially unbalanced school population of students;*
-- *a largely white teaching population, not representative of the student population;*
-- *a rapid turnover in leadership (seven superintendents in 10 years);*
-- *a politically diverse and very active Board of Education;*
-- *a teaching staff demoralized by continual changes in leadership style, failing students, unexamined expectations, and a national finger pointing to the teacher as the cause of school failure.*

A new superintendent seized the opportunity to establish his less autocratic leadership style by hiring me as a consultant, with money from a state grant, to develop a process by which the school system could allow for greater participation from its personnel. After a few days of interviewing school personnel, I analyzed the situation as follows: Although the top leadership had changed frequently over the past years, the *real* leadership had not. The real leadership rested with an assistant

superintendent, a person well known in the district, who had a reputation for working politically by placing his people in key positions and using his power to manipulate the system. His way of being in the district directly opposed the practices that the new superintendent was trying to engender.

Since I was being asked to open the district to increased participation, I recognized that this assistant superintendent, and the administrators who worked with him, would be key to any changes. I had many experiences working from a grassroots, "bottom up," approach. In this particular district, I felt the preferred approach would be to work with administration first. My interviews revealed a widely-held perception that administration was (1) controlling, (2) not responsive to teacher input, and (3) feeling threatened by public accounts of failing schools. There was no indication that either administrators or teachers had much faith in the possibility of increasing their participation. Furthermore, it was unclear what "increased participation" meant within the school operation. Since administrators are the gate-keepers of the system, they needed to be first to clarify their thinking about how increased participation might change boundaries, expectations, responsibilities, and accountability.

I initiated work with administrators at two levels: training and coaching. First, I provided a forum for dialogue and training, which emphasized the role of the leader in developing a school climate conducive to shared problem-solving and decision-making and, second, I provided coaches for the administrators to support them as they changed their work style.

The material of the workshops dealt with participatory management, situational leadership, and the role of supervision in the process of change. At the same time, the workshops offered the management group an opportunity to separate from the controlling forces of central office. The administrators, for the first time, attended meetings in which they were encouraged to interact with one another, exchange ideas, and be resourceful to one another.

In coordination with the workshops, coaching at the building level was offered to every administrator. Administrators, by choice, worked with a coach. Each arrangement was

individual. In some instances, the coach served as a source of feedback as the administrator changed his role to become more facilitative at faculty meetings. In other instances, the coach served as a sounding board for administrative/staff problem-solving. As issues arose in the centralized training sessions, the coach provided support, technical assistance, and follow-up at the school.

While the management group was being strengthened, central office administrators faced some heavy, difficult issues. They felt less in control of the building-level administrators. Principals were developing more autonomy with their staff. They were beginning to work more closely with the school faculty which frequently raised questions about central requirements and mandates. The assistant superintendent became restless about "giving away the store" (as he frequently framed the issue). The overriding question of the first year revolved around differentiating centralized decisions from school-based decisions. As I reflect back on that year, the questions for central office might be framed as: How much *replicability* is required across the district (meaning that each building must adhere to the same programs and policies)? How much *comparability* can be allowed (meaning that buildings will provide like curriculum offered in comparable but not same ways)? And how much *individuality* can be allowed (the school has an individual focus or theme separate from other schools in the district)?

By the end of the first year we identified these key areas of concern:

Administrators needed continued support in their role as instructional leaders. They were heavily focused on management in the buildings. They assumed responsibility for making certain that the buses left on schedule, the budget was in on time, the custodian maintained the building, and many other such management functions. They spent considerably less time with the quality of instruction in the classroom, their relationship to students, and general knowledge about curriculum. Although there was a marked difference in knowledge about curriculum and instruction between the elementary and secondary administrators (elementary being more knowledgeable), there was clearly a heavy balance in favor of time-efficient building management. If we were to

bring together a more thoughtful school community, the gaps of knowledge would need to be addressed. Administrators would need to know more about classroom operations; teachers would need to know more about building management.

Central office administrators were unclear about their expectations. They mirrored the building-level balance in that they *claimed* an emphasis on curriculum and instruction but, in fact, continued to make building-management type demands. The office of curriculum and instruction had particular problems. There were district-wide curriculum resource people who were accustomed to making decisions for the district. Their role had been strengthened over the years by the absence of building-level administrative participation. If the building-based administrators were to become better facilitators of a participatory environment, they would have to be more involved with curriculum and instruction, claiming some of the resource people's turf.

These key points raised some interesting problems. There was a tension around knowledge. Inclusion in decision-making required more knowledge for teachers and administrators about curriculum, instruction, and management. At this point, it might have been easier to arrive at a premature harmony within the district: people might have agreed to a few minor changes in the structure and continued business as usual. The problem of increased participation might have been handled in the same way that teachers do when they elicit students' responses and then disregard them. It is more difficult to confront the inequalities and allow them to be worked out so that they enrich the solutions.

Bringing Everybody to the Table

By the end of the first year, under some pressure to do so, we included teachers from each of the 17 school buildings in the district in our discussions. Teachers had become aware of our work with administrators, they knew of the superintendent's goal, and they knew there was funding to support the change. Although there were varying levels of mistrust, the only thinking that was really clear to the teachers was that their administrators were being prepared to work differently with them.

In the second year, we decided to create an opportunity for participation through building-

based school development committees. The committees would be determined at the building level, with guidance toward making them representative of the larger staff. These groups were, by intention, left loosely defined by central office. The concept was to provide an organizational framework that would encourage each building committee to begin to communicate with faculty in order to identify goals for school improvement. The goals could range from the simple need to paint the teacher's lounge with colors more cheerful to more complex matters of instruction. Each building was given a small grant to carry out what they wanted to do. The funding and coaching support sent another message from central office about its desire to decentralize its influence in order to create greater participation in school improvement at the building level.

At this point, our coaching priorities shifted from working exclusively with administrators to helping the school development committees learn how to work collaboratively. We found teachers carrying a history of frustration to the meetings. They found it difficult to listen to one another's point of view, interpret the needs of the school in light of the whole picture, and come to resolution about a direction for change. In addition, many administrators were not comfortable with their new role. They were not certain how to behave at the committee meetings. If they entered too frequently, the staff tended to see them as authoritative; if they entered less frequently, they often heard the group move in a direction that did not seem productive. They often felt the most knowledgeable about scheduling issues, for example, but did not want to overwhelm the meetings with their knowledge. Although the committees were working toward collaboration, the differences often precluded action.

Meanwhile, my work with central office shifted from restraining the central office from exercising their need to control the buildings to beginning a dialogue about how to establish appropriate criteria of acceptability for school-based decisions.

Altogether, this second year might be described as definitional. At all levels of the district, people were experimenting with a definition of participation. Questions frequently arose regarding: What is an apropriate school-based decision? When are we

asking for advice, when are we asking for a decision? What is the role of curriculum resource staff to the buildings? How does a building show accountability for its work? What is the role of the administrator in a school-based committee?

Time was always a constraint, but the committees created some imaginative solutions:

- *using some of the grant money for subs so that teachers could meet during the school day;*
- *using faculty meeting time or designated staff development time;*
- *at the secondary level, releasing the chair of the committee from one class period of teaching;*
- *at the elementary level, scheduling specials at the same time for committee members;*
- *using funds for pizza dinners to enhance after-school meeting time;*
- *meeting before school.*

From the perspective of building a community for thinking, we had initiated the first phase. I would characterize that phase thusly:

1. People were dialoguing across traditional hierarchical lines.
2. Multiple perspectives and differences were tolerated. The committees allowed for disagreement and did not seek early closure.
3. People spent a considerable amount of time trying to define their roles and responsibilities. With the absence of an established authority, groups were left to develop their own definition. As they interpreted their role, they were required to converse with the rest of the school community. This ongoing conversation forced a dynamic definition of action rather than a static, indisputable one.
4. Trust was building gradually by deed.
5. There was a state of disequilibrium in the district--a recognition that there were shifting political forces. Central office was perceived as more responsive but still not trusted. Administrators and teachers were taking more public risks in stating their position about education. As I reflect back on this tense moment in the history of change in this district, I have the image that people were venturing forth to test their influence and at

the same time waiting for the other shoe to drop.

By the end of the second year of this project, two major events contributed to the force for change. First, a full-time, secondary staff development person was hired. Her job description included technical support for secondary school committees. She was available as a coach, internal to the system. Her presence signaled a first step in institutionalizing the change. Second, a district-wide three-day staff development institute focusing on collaboration was offered at the end of the school year.

Since the institute served as a significant catalyst in the change of this district, I will describe some of the components in detail.

Collaborative Staff Development

Three building-level coaches and I were instructors for the course. This instructional staff was parallel to the hierarchy in the school system. As initiator of the project, I was more experienced with school systems than the other staff members, and was more involved with every aspect of the project. I was the only person who shared a working relationship with each of the other instructors. The other staff members had different levels of experience with teaching adults, working with group process, and working in school systems.

The first task in group formation for the instructional staff was to work on this inequality. And as we worked on the discomfort we each experienced with this issue, we recognized the parallel issues that the school development committees faced:

1. I was uncomfortable with my authority. I wanted to encourage participation, but at the same time, by virtue of knowledge and experience, wanted to guide the design. I felt uncomfortable asserting myself too much, and uncomfortable if I did not assert myself enough. This feeling parallels the feeling expressed by many administrators on the school development committees. They were afraid that if they participated too much they would dominate the group. If they participated too little the group would not have the benefit of their experience and wisdom.

2. I was mentor to the most inexperienced coach. We had worked together from the time she was a classroom teacher to her present career change as a consultant. She felt confident I would support her but felt insecure with the other group members. Since her relationship with me was that of mentor, she and I easily fell into a dependency relationship. This parallels the relationship many of the school development committee members were experiencing when they asked for the principal to take care of them--to make the decisions for them--to be the "good" parent.

3. The most experienced group-process theoretician had the least experience working with school groups. He had been a teaching assistant in a course in which I had been invited as a consultant. In addition, we shared a common theoretical framework from the Yale School of Organization and Management. The relationship between this coach and me was somewhat more intellectual, grounded in theory, and abstract (therefore inaccessible to the others). This created a pairing based on knowledge--a powerful force in a group. Many of the school development committees talked of such pairings between the principal, his goals for the school, and certain teachers who shared those goals and were already recognized as "expert" in the classroom.

4. The most experienced group-process facilitator, next to me, had worked in many situations and was recognized by me for his expertise. His knowledge of groups was based more on experiential knowledge than on book knowledge. He tended to work alone and wanted to work with an instructional group. A parallel to his interest in working with groups, seeking an opportunity to learn through the group, was seen in the school development committees. Many people entered the committees because they wanted the opportunity to practice--to practice working things out collectively, to practice group interaction skills.

The instructional staff met frequently to establish the agenda, illuminate its own group process, and reflect on the parallel processes within the school development committees. The staff effectively designed the course based on their group experience, on knowledge of the groups to be involved in the learning situation, and on knowledge from other teaching

experiences. Here are some highlights from the course design:

Setting a frame. We discovered a frame from David Seeley's book, *Education Through Partnership**, that proved to be conceptually useful. We introduced group collaboration as a struggle between mutuality and inequality. On the one hand, one enters a collaborative group with the belief that the individual will serve the group as well as the group serving the individual. In addition, one hopes that the work of the group will be richer and more meaningful as a result of mutually beneficial exchanges. On the other hand, there is always inequality in a group. The inequality might be reflected through gender, race, knowledge, use of silence, use of verbalization, or any other characteristic that serves to empower people. If a group is to be collaborative, then it must deal with that tension. The following three components of group work enhance the possibility for dealing with that tension.

*Seeley, David, *Education Through Partnership*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, DC, 1981.

Voice: Each group member needs to feel they have a voice in the group (not outside the group, but in the group). This voice can be verbal or non-verbal, but the group member must feel his or her capacity to be of influence to the group.

Choice: Each group member must feel able to either leave or stay in the group. The choice to stay should be consciously felt, as well as the choice to leave. Also, within the group there should be choices, such as the way the agenda is designed, the processes the group will work with, the time of the meetings, etc.

Loyalty: Each group member should feel loyalty to the group. If the member does not feel the group purpose worthy of their attention, they should not stay within the group. This implies not blind loyalty, but a willingness to help the group function to serve its purpose.

Community Building. We developed processes by which groups were formed in three ways: group as a whole (the entire institute), groups

of six, and groups of eighteen (three groups of six). Often people find themselves in workshop settings in which there is no way to know who is in the room. As a result, new bonds are not formed between participants. Our concern was to develop a more participatory school community--one in which communication was facilitated and a highly developed network of relationships would serve to support future work.

Writing provides time for thinking. We asked the participants to keep journals, especially making their learning visible to themselves through reflection. The journals were organized so that they described their experiences in the institute, the specific group skills that they were learning, and the connections they were making to their school committee work.

A conceptual frame for collaboration, the formation of groups to encourage dialogue and discussion, and a journal to reflect upon the learning provided a structure for the institute. The activities of the institute centered on ways to interpret collaboration through group experiences.

From the Institute Back to the Schools

As a result of the institute, people returned to school entering the third project year with new skills and understandings for their work on committees. In late fall, a publication from our summer work arrived in each school. This publication provided a picture of the ground we covered in the summer course. The participants recognized their efforts and were reminded of their learning; those who did not participate were included in the thinking of this group. In keeping with the spirit of building a community for creative and critical thinking, the document was one that encouraged contribution, interpretation, and dialogue. There were no cookbook recipes for group work.

The training design served as a significant intervention for the onset of the third year of this project. The most noticeable changes took place at the secondary level. Up until that point, high school staff had been having difficulty meeting as an interdisciplinary staff, engaging in questions for the good of the school. Their improved interaction and commitment to work on committee was evidenced

through their request for use of funds in the third year. Furthermore, the high school study, a study designated to look at the question of restructuring the high school, asked for assistance from me. As a result, I was able to set up a design for committee work that focused on participatory research. Each committee collected data specific to questions raised by faculty or parents. At all points of the research, from raising question to analysis of data to recommendations, faculty and administration participated in creative and critical thinking.

As I reflect back over the third year, the salient characteristics of change were:

1. A critical mass of teachers willing to participate and trust the school district's goal for increased participation and communication.

2. More teachers working on committees, more teachers offering staff development, more teachers leading school-based curriculum and instructional changes.

As the critical mass worked toward change, there was greater resistance among the entrenched. Administrators who were not comfortable with some of the changes became more fixed in their ways, creating a larger mismatch for their staff when the whole school district came to meetings. There were a few schools in the district that felt the mismatch so entirely that their committees have either stopped meeting or had little significance to the life of the school. This posed a dilemma for central staff--can you require collaboration? Is the requirement not antithetical to the belief? And, if you do not require similar governance structures within the schools, how can you develop central staff relationships that differ from school to school? Do the differences raise questions of equity?

Lessons Learned

This extended effort in one school district left me with these convictions:

Starting with administrators proved to be important. Administrators needed to be included from the start. Too often, they are asked to enact a state or local centralized vision. If schools are to become more responsive to their communities, the administrator needs to develop a vision of that school with its populace.

Words like collaboration, participation, shared leadership signal different meanings. They need to be interpreted in light of the community prepared to make use of them to signify action.

Representative councils can easily lose their representativeness. They need to learn how to work with the constituencies they represent in such a way that they are inclusive of their thoughts.

Coaching support external to the school organization plays an essential role in protecting the group as it tries to move toward decision-making based on a more well informed reasoning process.

Training for group skills is an essential ingredient for the success of collaborative committee work.

As the group strengthens its ability to work together, external coaching should be replaced with internal mechanisms for support and feedback within the group.

Schools are not organized for collaboration. There is little opportunity or time for teachers to plan together. As we call for more building-level autonomy schools will have to be structured with planning time.

No one has a successful formula for restructuring the schools. The question districts face is not one of imitation or replication but one of invention. Invention requires taking risks and school communities are under such enormous pressure for performance that risk-taking is not likely.

Knowledge is power; all school personnel need to be knowledgeable about the work of each other. Participation in work groups requires a knowledgeable membership.

When leadership is shared, the leader often feels a loss of power. Although the rhetoric states that when one gives away leadership, one gains more in the end, leaders often experience a loss of control. Distributing power takes time.

Changing schools to become more thoughtful communities requires a strong will to change the work environment so that there is allowance for imperfection, differences, trials and errors, and a celebration of the success of children and teachers.

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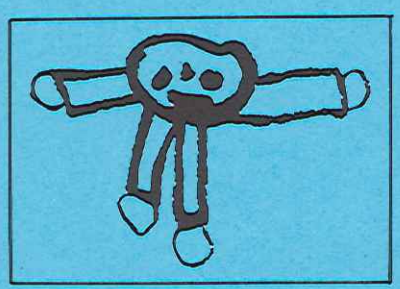

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