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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a different perspective for teaching and learning--the "thoughtful" perspective--as an alternative to the current technocratic perspective. The technocratic frame of reference implicitly proposes that any problem is amenable to programmatic definition and solution. The following three propositions are presented: one's perspective influences one's professional actions; the predominant perspective in teaching is currently technocratic; and the perspective of thoughtful teaching and learning is conducive to developing the schools we want. Six elements of the "thoughtful" perspective, offered as a counterpoint to the technocratic one, are described: (1) education's fundamental purpose is to release one's potential; (2) potential is tied to the power of the mind; (3) therefore, helping persons to understand the power of their own minds is a significant school endeavor; (4) thoughtful education includes human relationships; (5) advanced thinking goes beyond information that is given; and (6) leadership means creating and maintaining settings in which thoughtful work and human interactions are encouraged. A conclusion is that educators must consider the implications of failing to develop mind and human potential. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

What is Meant by the Term, 'Thoughtfulness in Schools'?

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Introduction

According to the conference program, one can find at least 18 acronyms for various educational programs in the descriptions of presentations[1]. Additionally, a number of other models/programs/systems are the subject of presentations. As a consequence, the existence of a paper on "thoughtful" schooling likely will be either embraced warmly by those suspicious of a technical-engineering cast to the conference or rejected out-of-hand by those comfortable with that cast.

I shall propose first, that one's perspective or frame of reference is markedly influential on one's professional actions; second, that the predominant perspective currently is technocratic; third, that the perspective of thoughtful teaching and learning is far more conducive to the schooling we want--if we would only think about it.

Point 1: Perspective Drives Action

Transparency #1: "White Bears" protocol (attached); the point of the transparency is that we bring perspectives on events and persons to any activity--parenting, teaching, learning, politics, etc. That frame of reference determines our actions with respect to the particular topic.

Transparency #2: Quote from José Ortega y Gasset (from Man and Crisis*): "We do not know what is happening to us and that is precisely the thing that is happening to us--the fact of not knowing what is happening to us."*

[1] The acronyms: 5-E, 3-P, CBAM, CCP, FIRST, ITE, MBTI, MGAP, OBE, REACH, SBCD, SBDM, SDDS, TAS, TLC, TQL, TQM, YOU.

Perspective: An overarching, integrative mental image of some complex phenomenon that includes values and attitudes, as well as factual knowledge. We have perspectives or frames of reference for all of our life endeavors, e.g., family, leadership, teaching and learning (if we're educators), politics, and so on.[2]

The point is that the image, the frame of reference, we hold drives our actions. It is immaterial whether we have examined carefully our perspective or not: Unconsciously-held assumptions are as potent as consciously-held ones. Unfortunately, many of us, not having mindfully considered our assumptions about quality schools and being caught up in the technocratic mentality of the age, are prone to believe that methods or programs, easily-acquirable technological "fixes," are the answer to the question of school improvement.

My second central idea is that we have accepted uncritically a far-reaching perspective that has marked influence on the business of schooling.

Point 2: The Ascendancy of Technique and the Decline of Education

The term "technocracy" is intended to convey the idea of a ruling or governing entity, in the same sense as "democracy" or "autocracy," etc. It is what Donald Schon (1987) refers to as the "technical-rational" perspective, and David Solway (1990) calls the "technological imperative," and what dozens of other thoughtful educators have referred to in various other terms, e.g., "managerial" (Cuban, 1988), "technocratic ideology" (Wirth, 1983), "the cult of efficiency" (Callahan, 1962), "technological" (Ellul, 1964), and so on.

Let me illustrate the problem by showing you a transparency about "Citizenship/Character Education" from a Utah school district, and asking, "What do we learn from this? *(See transparency attached: "Date taught/ Date mastered.")* How can we list as an objective something as comprehensive as these statements and then provide columns for marking "Date Taught" and "Date Mastered"?

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[2] The idea is closely parallel to Argyris' and Schon's idea of "theories of practice": "Theories of professional practice are best understood as special cases of the theories of action that determine all deliberate behavior" (1974/1992, p. 4).

Boulding puts it this way: "It is the image which in fact determines what might be called the current behavior of any organism or organization. The image acts as a field. The behavior consists in gravitating toward the most highly valued part of the world." (1956, p. 115)

For David Perkins, a mental image is a "highly integrated kind of knowledge." It is "any unified, overarchjing mental representation that helps us work with a topic or subject" (1992, p. 80).

In my judgment, this is a revealing example of the school mind in the grip of the prevailing technological perspective on teaching and learning. That it *is* a pervasive frame of reference for school people can be learned from the books I cited above.

Before I note the characteristics implied by that word technology and its cognates, I shall try to clarify a confusing definition problem. The machinery--computers, satellites, or circuit boards--spawned by technical thinking is not the issue. I am not a latter-day Luddite, bashing computers instead of stocking-frames. Rather, the issue of concern is the *style of thinking* or *mindset* or *frame of reference* induced and sustained in the name of technology.

This governing perspective--for it has come to be just that, as a number of commentators have pointed out (Postman, 1992; Solway, 1990; Wirth, 1983; Ellul, 1964)--directs our actions as we do schooling. The influence of perspective is powerful in any setting, as I noted at the beginning of this presentation. The reality of the subtle, pervasive, yet often-discounted influence of technical thinking is what guided me to the line from Ortega y Gasset as an introduction to my presentation.

The essence of this frame of reference is its implicit proposal that any problem is amenable to programmatic definition and solution. It provides a pattern for dealing with the world--in every aspect of our living, including of course the work of schools. The pattern advertises a series of steps: One first specifies a problem, then its solution (in the form of an objective, preferably behaviorally stated); next, one assembles certain techniques--means or methods--and finally, one "implements" the means--to achieve the objective.

At the risk of offending the reader, I repeat that the point of technocratic thinking is not its insistence on machinery, but rather the pervasive conviction that *any* problem--mechanical *or* human—can be cast in a certain mold which makes it susceptible of systematic solution. Recall the "Character Education" transparency. The Systematic Solution Syndrome is haywire because when technique is in the ascendancy, thoughtfulness is in eclipse. That's the very definition of "technique": A means or a manner or a mechancial skill--something not requiring thought. The condition of eclipsed mindfulness is, in Ortega y Gasset's words, "what is happening to us": We have allowed ourselves to become dependent on a mode of thinking and acting that deceives us as to the nature of reality. [3]

The technological mindset assumes that any human enterprise can, or ought to be, finished, brought to a successful conclusion. The standard language in

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[3] If this idea creates a species of trauma within the reader, the book he or she wants is Neil Postman's *Technopoly*. Whatever else it may cause in one, it certainly will cause thought about the pervasive influence of the technocratic imperative.

education is "the objective achieved." This kind of thinking (and its consequent action) helped NASA put men on the moon, allows complex processes, say, the manufacture of Patriot missile systems, to be accomplished, and gets intricate electronic units built that by and large do not fail. A notable feature of these efforts is that they can be designated as either successful or unsuccessful; a binary judgment can made about them: Achieved/not achieved.

But, for us educators the very future we *don't want* is a future of "finished" human beings, human beings "brought to a conclusion"--whether apparently successful or not. Releasing the potential of a human being is not comparable to, say, robot-welding a Buick LeSabre door panel. Ellul's observation on technological efficiency does not encourage educators: "What characterizes technical action is the search for greater efficiency. Completely natural and spontaneous effort is replaced by a complex of acts designed to improve [performance]" (1964, p. 20). Does that sound like anything you've heard of recently--perhaps in an in-service meeting; or in the district's curriculum book?

Welding a door panel is a determinate situation; even getting people on the moon is a determinate situation. Educating children, on the other hand, is inevitably an indeterminate situation. In the latter settings, human agency--in all its sublimity and perversity--rules supreme. That essential distinction between determinate and indeterminate is not made when one is in the grip of technocratic thinking. For example, every mail day brings to the desks of school people advertisements for some new program "specially designed," as the brochures inevitably claim, to train teachers and students in 23 thinking skills or some other currently hot curricular "need." The proffered training ("training" is certainly the right word) always matches my description of the technical paradigm for solving problems, above. So success-oriented are we, even--or, perhaps, especially--in educational matters, that the marketers of the programs often guarantee the acquisition of the "specific" and supremely important "skill" they are promoting. Whatever human accomplishments may be guaranteed legitimately by a training program, good thinking is not one of them.

As another illustration, consider the condition of teaching and learning at many schools: Isolated presentations of subject matter, lack of coherence within subjects, fact-acquisition rather than thoughtfulness, indoctrination rather than teaching (Adler, 1990) and reciting of previously-learned information. These notions, driven as they are by concerns for efficiency, coverage and measurable achiement, are technical. They characterize the program of studies in far too many schools and classrooms.

As a final validation of this idea, consider Gibboney's forthcoming report of a meticulous examination of some 34 educational reforms from 1950 to the present--reforms such as Open Schools, Individually-Guided Education, New Math, and

Effective Schools. Gibboney applied two criteria, consisting of two opposed frames of reference on teaching and learning, to the 34 reforms: One perspective is the technocratic; the other is Deweyan--holding intellectual and democratic elements to be of first importance in school reform. Gibboney finds that only five of the 34 reforms qualify as promoting intellectual and democratic ideals. The rest are almost uniformly in the technocratic camp. (See also Gibboney and Webb, forthcoming.)

By contrast, David Solway reminds us that "it is the sense of quest and the exactions of achieving an identity which are the . . . definitive meaning of education." (1989, p. 80) That is, schooling ought to contribute to personal growth, to individual development. As is frequently pointed out, the very word "education" suggests a "leading out of," as in the self led to greater and greater possibilities. But public education has, by and large, accepted a different frame of reference in which efficient problem-solving, coming to "closure," and providing unambiguous answers constitute the point of teaching and learning.

With that background, I'll now propose a particular perspective on teaching and learning, one that I call thoughtful. I intend that term of course to be a counterpoise to the term "technocratic." Then I will elaborate briefly on each of the six elements of the perspective.

Point 3: A Perspective on Thoughtful Schools

(a) The fundamental purpose of *education* is to release one's potential.

(b) A significant part of one's potential is bound up with the power of *mind*, the power we use as we create meaning for our life.

(c) Therefore, helping persons to create coherent personal meaning of the world, i.e., to understand the power of their own mind, is a significant school endeavor.

(d) Teaching and learning that foster personal meaning and thereby release potential are appropriately referred to as *thoughtful* teaching and learning, where "thoughtful" has a double meaning: Not only do the teacher and learner *consider subject matter*, but they are *considerate of each other*. Thoughtful school settings are humane and inviting as well as intellectual.

(e) Although thought *begins* with learning what is given, for example, the *names* of things in the world, its potential-releasing effects are most evident when it *goes beyond what is given*, when it creates relationships among ideas, when it infers or concludes (building on the information given). Advanced thinking is what we *may* do *after* observing something or after acquiring facts or basic knowledge.

(f) From these elements of the perspective there follows a central goal for educational *leaders* who are desirous of creating the high-quality (i.e., thoughtful) school: to envision, create and maintain settings in which thoughtful work and thoughtful human interactions–both adults' and students'–are encouraged. This is the task whether the leading is done by citizens, state legislators, superintendents, principals, teachers, or students.

Notes on the Perspective

(a) Purpose of Education. The idea of releasing potential is of course ancient. The wording here comes from John Gardner's excellent treatment of leadership, *On Leadership* (1990). What purpose could be more fundamental?

(b) Potential Involves Mind. Some of the provocative writers/educators who have influenced me in connection with this idea are Richard Mitchell, *The Gift of Fire* (1987); Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind* (1991); V. Ruggiero, *Saving Your Child's Mind* (1988); King and Brownell, *The Curriculum and the Disciplines of Knowledge* (1966).

Mitchell celebrates the power of mind to "make music out of the noise that fills life" (p. 26). Howard Gardner, who writes of multiple intelligences, notes that whichever "intelligence" is deployed, the goal is understanding and that means the work of the mind. The mind as it thinks is, in Ruggiero's words (p. 12), "the greatest human capacity, the foundation of human achievement, the hallmark of humanity. . . . Thinking is the foundation of all other skills." For King and Brownell, "through the development of the capacity to symbolize [i.e., the work of the mind], to bring the complex phenomena of the world into order, the child becomes independent of adults and of his peers" (p. 31). These are not trivial reasons for developing mind in learners in school--whether those learners are the formally designated pupils or teachers, administrators and other adults in the school.

(c) Schools and the Mind. It is the case in the late 20th century that the schools are asked to do far more than straight-forwardly "teach" subject matter. Children come to school with needs that occasionally seem to outweigh the requirements of the standard curriculum. In spite of that reality, however, given the overwhelming influence of the mind in anyone's life, any perspective on teaching and learning that does not foster conscientiously the making of coherent meaning is unfair to students. Isn't that what Jaime Escalante proved at Garfield High School? Finding himself in the worst-case scenario for high school teaching, he simply went about releasing the potential of Latino students. He did not make excuses, he did not yield to the initial wishes of his students' parents (who wanted him to cease "pushing them so hard," he did give up on their mental abilities while claiming that self-esteem came first, but instead fostered that esteem through *enabling* their mastery of

symbol systems. He has written that the greatest obstacle to good teaching and learning is a "poverty of faith in the ability of young people . . . " (1990).

How many teachers and administrators applaud Escalante without ever considering the connection between his school setting and theirs? His successful teaching in desparate circumstances was not a result of "implementing" curriculum, but of a single-minded (note the word) devotion to the growth of his students, *through the power of their minds.* He knew their potential and would not rest until he had given them the opportunity to begin to develop it. How is it with us who applaud, perhaps complacently, his achievement? Are we conscious of the lurking irony if we, in far less oppressive teaching situations, fail to exercise either the faith *or* the works that he did?

(d) Thoughtful More than Academic. Thoughtfulness is not simply intellective elegance. If the work of the mind is divorced from being *considerate of* others, thoughtfulness is an inaccurate descriptor for that effort. In Rex Brown's phrase, "thoughtfulness involves both the exercise of thought and a certain amount of caring about other thinkers in past and present communities" (1991, p. xiii). One is *invited* to use one's mind, to make meaning of the world, not *engineered* into the attempt (1984). The absence of humane relationships in school (and classroom) signals–by definition–the absence of thoughtfulness.

(e) Going Beyond What is Given. An insightful declaration of the great English scientist, Robert Hooke, is apropos despite its age: "It is the great prerogative of Mankind above other Creatures," he wrote in 1665, "that we are not only able to behold the works of Nature, or . . . sustain our lives by them, but we have also the power of considering [and] comparing them . . . " (1987). Although that phrase, "the power of considering," may be read superficially, reflection on it reveals the outline of an entire pedagogy for the public schools.

The idea of this element of the perspective is to treat the mind as more than a register or a storage unit. It is precisely this ability of the mind to "consider the works of Nature" (or any other works), to take the grasp of itself as it were, that is the ground of hope in the enterprise of teaching (a phrase from Ann Berthoff). And we have every right to be hopeful: Every one of us--every teacher, every student, every administrator--can go further "beyond what is given" than we have before now. We need only a thoughtful challenge.

Advanced thought depends on our willingness and ability to do more than simply *receive* something which is given. We must *consider* or *operate* on that something, we must think *about* it. While productive thinking obviously requires the "given," i.e., some content, the opposite does not hold true: teaching and learning *can* be stalled and not be taken beyond the naming or registering level. A vignette from Rex Brown illuminates this point:

> [A certain] teacher is good at driving the students back to the text again and again, and she is good at making them rely on their memories, but neither she nor the class seem to know what to do when it is time to move away from the information that is directly in front of them (1991, p. 21).

(f) Leadership Means Providing Right Setting. The good news is that we know how to create the high-quality school, the one that elicits thoughtful learning and thoughtful personal interactions: Rex Brown's study validates that assertion. In spite of that and in spite of the truth that there are Escalantes in most schools, we are not generally envisioning and creating this Jaime Escalantes in most schools, we are not generally envisioning and creating this kind of school. Part of the reason as to why we are not is that the technocratic mindset in the society at large generates pressures for programmatic, not mindful, solutions to knotty problems of teaching and learning. For instance, thinking "skills" come to substitute, inadequately, for thinking; work sheets take the place of understanding; and so on ad nauseam.

For many administrators and some teachers, the pressure to adopt technical solutions proves irresistible, so they dedicate themselves to the search for the One True Program that will finally solve the Reading Problem or the Discipline Problem or the Parent Communication Problem. Yet, in spite of the siren song of technique, the difficulty with such "solutions" is severe: They not only do not solve the problem, they actually *lessen* the likelihood of growth and development in the persons involved: One does not anticipate the release of human potential when what is asked is merely the "implementation" of a step-wise routine.

I occasionally try to imagine what might happen if we educators had the pedagogical equivalent of medicine's Hippocratic oath. Then we would pledge, as doctors do, *to do no harm* to those we serve. Is it possible that such a pledge might lead us actually *to consider* what it means when we fail to develop mind and thereby fail to release human potential?

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In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zemlya is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What color are the bears?

"There are different sorts of bears."

[The syllogism is repeated.]

I don't know; I've seen a black bear, I've never seen any others . . . Each locality has its own animals: if it's white, they will be white; it it's yellow, they will be yellow."

But what kind of bears are there in Novaya Zemlya?

We always speak only of what we see; we don't talk about what we haven't seen.

But what do my words imply? [Syllogism is repeated.]

Well, it's like this: our tsar isn't like yours, and yours isn't like ours. Your words can be answered only by someone who was there, and if a person wasn't there he can't say anything on the basis of your words."

--from an interview conducted
by the Russian psychologist,
A. R. Luria, 1976

	Date Taught	Date Mastered
Define personal integrity and find examples in own life.		
Understand sincerity as being fair, truthful, and genuine in word and actions.		
Demonstrate a humane attitude for all living things by showing compassion and empathy.		
Practice personal integrity in all aspects of life and understand there is a consequence for every decision and action.		

(From a curriculum of a school district in Utah)