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ABSTRACT

The "bear" sitting in the middle of the classroom, on the seminar table, or prowling around the edges of a discussion group arises from the subtext that is created whenever teachers and students interact with a curriculum, lesson, or topic. The situation in the postmodern classroom has been destabilized by the unprecedented intrusion into the school environment of societal issues that are increasingly complex and often contradictory. Teachers are no longer voices of unquestioned authority in student lives. There is the recognition on both sides of the education equation that the teacher/student relationship has become polarized and politicized. This paper examines the two sides of the equation: learner and teacher. Each section of the paper is centered on a particular text that illustrates some of the issues pertinent to the topic. The paper begins by defining the "postmodern" student, then examines the perspectives of both these students and their teachers. It continues with a discussion of ways in which the postmodern student might be taught, and concludes with thoughts relating to teacher education, and steps towards a new vision of schools and education. (Contains 29 references.) (ND)

Getting the Bear off the Table: Reaching and Teaching the Postmodern Student

Abstract of

GETTING THE BEAR OFF THE TABLE:
REACHING AND TEACHING THE POSTMODERN STUDENT

The big, brown bear sitting in the middle of the classroom, on the seminar table, or prowling around the edges of the discussion group, arises from the subtext created whenever teachers and students interact with a curriculum or lesson plan or topic. The situation in the postmodern classroom has been destabilized by the unprecedented intrusion into the school environment of societal issues that are increasingly complex and often contradictory. The traditional school context has evaporated. Teachers are no longer voices of unquestioned authority in student lives. There is the recognition on both sides of the education equation that the teacher/student relationship has become polarized and politicized.

In this paper, I examine the two sides of the education equation: learner and teacher. My thesis is that there has been a profound change in the realities of both. I approach the topic with the hope of locating some of the challenges for both positions in light of the contemporary cultural climate. Each section is centered on a particular text that illustrates some of the issues pertinent to the topic. I begin with an examination of both perspectives, and continue with a discussion of ways in which the postmodern student might be taught. I conclude with thoughts relating to teacher education, and steps towards a new vision of schools and education.

In the end, we are left with more questions than answers, but this should be seen as an opportunity for change and not a paralyzing dilemma. Given the diverse and dynamic environments that schools have become, I pose the following questions to myself and my colleagues as these questions seem more appropriate than expert advice or theoretical solutions. My hope is that these questions will stimulate thinking, and action, based in our present situations, centered on the students we encounter on a daily basis, aimed at insuring our mutual futures.

Who are the new students coming into our schools?

Where are they coming from? What do they bring?

Why do we want them in our schools?

Are they 'problem people' or people with problems?

What does it feel like to be a 'problem' in a society that prizes problem-solving?

What population in the school is most in need of *our* advocacy?

What can they teach us?

What are the stresses on both sides?

How are these students viewed by the adults in the school? Other students?

What specific curricular and co-curricular needs do they have?

How does the school attempt to meet these needs?

How do these students respond to our efforts?

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Thus do learning systems adapt, by transforming themselves, and thus does learning happen. Real learning is not something added, it is a reorganization of the system. New nets and assemblies occur, loops form, alternate pathways develop. The viewed world is different, and so is the viewer.

—Joanna Macy, World as Lover, World as Self

Our own life is the instrument with which we experiment with the truth.

—Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace is Every Step

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May, 1995

Getting the Bear off the Table:
Reaching and Teaching the Postmodern Student

Preface

This paper has evolved into an extended thought piece on the state of the students and the schools that are, in many cases, their primary care facilities. It is important to think of schools in this way in order to begin to recast our priorities and reconsider the future that we are creating. The emphasis that thinkers such as Nel Noddings and Jane Roland Martin put on humanizing school environments by introducing the ethics of care, Roland Martin's 'three C's of caring, concern, and connection, is not misplaced. Stimulated by the Soviet space successes, we revamped our science curricula in the mid-sixties. What will be the stimulus that stirs us to action this time? Teenage mothers? Teenage murders? Teenage homelessness? These thoughts are about the next generation, the inheritors of the education we are currently providing.

Introduction

The big, brown bear sitting in the middle of the classroom, on the seminar table, or prowling around the edges of the discussion group, arises from the subtext created whenever teachers and students interact with a curriculum or lesson plan or topic. The salient elements involved are the material, with its attendant cultural and historical baggage, the professional educator, with a distinct point of view and chronological perspective, and the students, with their various life histories and daily realities. The interaction of students and teachers with the other elements cannot be avoided. The other elements comprise what John Dewey calls the 'situation' which is inseparable from this interaction:

> The conceptions of *situation* and *interaction* are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, . . . (Dewey, 1938, 43).

The situation in the postmodern classroom has been destabilized by the unprecedented intrusion into the school environment of societal issues that are increasingly complex and often contradictory—a situation which Peter McLaren in his book, *Life in Schools*, calls a 'rubbing against the grain'. The traditional school context of an established social construct—which generated an unambiguous canon from which to teach a homogenous group of students—has evaporated. Teachers are no longer voices of unquestioned authority in student lives. There is the recognition on both sides of the education equation that the teacher/student relationship has become polarized and politicized.

The combination of these contexts creates a large body of information with a potential for conflict that stands in the way of successful educational interaction. Unless the situation is addressed—named and defined as the bear that it is by both parties—the classroom is at a standstill, and ultimately becomes a dishonest environment. Enlightened, truthful discussion and the use of relevant materials and methodologies may be the best vehicles to get the bear off the table and proceed with the educational enterprise.

In this paper, I will examine the two sides of the education equation: learner and teacher. My thesis is that there has been a profound change in the realities of both. I approach the topic with the hope of locating some of the challenges for both positions in light of the contemporary cultural climate, and to then discuss the effects of this climate on the interaction of the two positions in the 'heat exchange' of teaching and learning. I present current discussions of postmodern culture and school reform as lenses to examine the perspectives of student and teacher. Each section is centered on a particular text that illustrates some of the issues pertinent to the topic. I begin with an examination of both perspectives, and continue with a discussion of ways in which the postmodern student might be taught. I conclude with thoughts relating to teacher education, and a new vision of schools and education.

* * *

Any discussion of schools and education has enormous ramifications and implications for society at large. Ramon Cortines, Chancellor of the New York City public schools, sees schools as the infrastructures of cities (Cortines, 1995). Given our large urban populations, school can, by extension, be seen as the infrastructure of American society and as such, a forum for inculcating an awareness of what it means to be a citizen of a democracy.

> Viewing schools as democratic public spheres means regarding schools as sites dedicated to forms of self and social empowerment, where students have the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in an authentic democracy (McLaren, 237).

At present, school is not working very well for anyone, students, families, teachers or the larger culture. This is because our schools are not for, or about, children. True, there are isolated instances of excellent teaching in schools and some districts are strong. Still, school in its present form, primarily serves adult interests—a limited range of adult interests. John Dewey long ago saw a similar situation, and tried to address it by creating a new, child-centered school environment. Speaking about his new vision of what a school might be, he said with regard to the 'old' education:

> . . . the center of gravity is outside the child. . . . In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized (Dewey, 1900, 51).

Dewey's experiment has been lost in subsequent tides of school reform and changing demographics. Today, it seems that schools are more about teacher unions, college admissions, and the needs of the workplace—a far cry from creating future citizens.

The above observations are intended to highlight some aspects of the discord, and suggest possible approaches—not definitive solutions. Successful resolution of these issues can only come about with pressure from the top as well as the bottom. As parents and teachers become actively engaged in working for each student's success, colleges and testing agencies need to offer more options and fewer artificial barriers. At the same time, all the other levels of the educational schema, especially administrators and school boards, have to be primed for widespread reform. Ramon Cortines is on target when he advocates a responsibility for private schools to interface with public schools for the good of both student populations (Cortines, 1995). Independent schools can be productive change agents in the area of reform. Independent schools should be labs, developing strategies and techniques, and communicating them in effective ways. How these schools are grappling with cultural change can be of some relevance with regard to the public sector.

I repeatedly return to the theme of schools and families. I do this partly in answer to the question of whose job it is to instill the basic values and behaviors that we want to see in our children. I do this in order to envision a form of school that is most likely to be effective in meeting the needs of a growing, and increasingly diverse population. It is no longer acceptable for schools to locate the blame for less than successful student outcomes on disintegrating families and decaying social environments. Schools must accept these factors as the reality of the situation and change tactics. In her book, *The Schoolhome*, Jane Roland Martin outlines the basic elements of a vision of school that seems more relevant for a greater

proportion of our kids. When this vision is combined with ideas from John Dewey, Howard Gardner, Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, and Ted Sizer, we have the beginnings of a new consciousness about the meaning and value of the school experience. I stress combinations of ideas, and strategies that involve partnerships, because the complexity of the issues render the possibility of one, universal remedy unlikely if not impossible. Different localities will need different responses. Much of the effectiveness of any response will arise from developing models that allow for customization to fit the particular schools and family populations.

My thinking has been stimulated by the evolving culture of my own school, and an awareness that similar changes were taking place on many independent school campuses. Books depicting the experience of what can be called non-traditional populations in contemporary private school environments such as *Black Ice* and *The Edwin Perry Story* remind me that in some ways, not much has changed since my own school days. As I thought about this, articles began appearing about changing student populations. Admissions officers are finding new full-paying families from non-traditional sources—Korean, and Saudi Arabian, for example. On the domestic side, rising costs are forcing middle-class families and even some 'legacy' families out of independent schools. With smaller percentages of middle-class families being represented, it has became harder to achieve economic balance in school populations—polarities have developed between full-scholarship and full-paying families. Intact middle-class families are the endangered species in independent schools at the same time that they are also succumbing to pressures in the larger society, as indicated by such data as McLaren reports: 'Teenage pregnancy is up 109 percent for whites and 10 percent for nonwhites since 1960' (McLaren, 8).

A 1992 in article in *Ideas & Perspectives*, a publication for independent school administrators and trustees, examined in more detail changes on the domestic front and concluded that:

> The aptitudes and attitudes of today's high school students—children of the baby boomers—may conflict with your upper school's traditional teaching methods. Most upper school teachers may find it difficult to make needed adjustments (ISM, 1992).

This article goes on to chronicle the effects that such factors as changing family structures, two working parents and the impact of electronic technologies are having on today's children. A more recent issue of this same publication adds increasing cultural diversity to the changing lifestyles in an article on projections for the next six years (ISM, 1993). Independent schools are already struggling to accommodate these changes in their student populations, and surging demographics portend a bleak future:

> . . . there are almost four hundred thousand children under thirteen in New York City whose parents both work, and fewer than a hundred thousand places for them in after-school and day-care programs (Cheever, 1995).

School environments are changing in ways that could not have been imagined when the present generation of teachers was being trained in the late sixties and early seventies. It is not too extreme to see that these future students might be coming into schools as 'disadvantaged', in some ways, as the populations that we are accustomed to defining with this label. Just as there will soon be no demographic 'majority' culture to teach to, all students will be coming into school environments with challenging backgrounds that will be unfamiliar to their teachers. It is important that we see these differences as just that, differences and not deficits. Schools and teachers will have to accommodate a wider bandwidth of student capabilities and potentialities. Howard Gardner's work on exploring multiple intelligences seems prescient in light of these changes. The playing field is shifting in unforeseen ways.

Given these global changes, it becomes clear that the issues are not limited to a particular ethnicity or economic class. On the one hand, the new populations of students are explorers encountering an unfamiliar terrain—a terrain whose inhabitants operate with a set of assumptions very different than their own. On the other side of the equation, incumbent students and their families cannot help but see this encroachment by these new populations as the harbinger of a changing society in which their position and status is less assured than before. The resulting anxiety plays out in many ways and must be acknowledged as schools try to reconfigure the terrain and provide room for all. Taking both sides into account, we see that it is not a question of single 'problem' people—we are all people with problems and there are challenges for everyone. Schools need to find ways to reconcile our traditional espousal of individual liberty with a need to see and understand the larger structures that govern all of us. The challenge is to imagine, and then create an educational environment that can accommodate our *changing* needs—one that addresses all of our predicaments.

* * *

What defines the 'postmodern' student?

Traditionally, cultures have valued their adolescents chiefly for their energy, their idealism, and their sense of hope. Maxine Greene would add that we value them for their potential 'usefulness' as well. But today's adolescents, born at the height of our Vietnam trauma, suckled on the last fruits of American imperialism, now slouch through the Bethlehem of the 'Information Age', resisting the imposition of 'traditional' values. Pulled in opposing directions by their parent's embrace of modernism and the irrational state of contemporary life, these teenagers reject reason in favor of anarchy, and counter optimism not with nihilism, but with apathy. It is telling that they are apathetic rather than nihilistic—seeing any course of action as doomed to fail. Apathetic by default, because resistance is unimaginable. Their natural curiosity is blunted by the belief that no topic merits the energy necessary to explore it. They won't even read the gloss, instead they'll hear about it from a friend or, more likely, catch it 'with film at eleven'. Flaubert might have been describing contemporary teens when he said, 'They find the annotations more interesting than the text. They set more store by the crutches than the legs' (Barnes, 74). Today's adolescents glide along on 'the transitory surface of life'. (See Larkin, 210, for a similar description of suburban youth.) Indeed, our teenagers' predilection for the medium over the message has percolated throughout the rest of the culture, we are more interested in the 'coverage' than we are in the subject. All too often the moral of the moment is lost amid 'expert' testimony and 'color commentary'. We, as individuals, have surrendered our powers of discrimination and evaluation to media middlemen. This distancing of ourselves from the heart of the matter is a signal aspect of

> . . . postmodernism's preoccupation with the signifier rather than the signified, with participation, performance and happening rather than with an authoritative and finished art object, with surface appearances rather than roots. (Harvey, 53)

We have lost our appreciation for subtlety and nuance, a feel for understatement, an expectation that personal inquiry will expose intriguing complexity. We see teenagers 'turning away from life, forsaking people for a life of passionate involvement with objects' (Coles, 366). They wear a melange of appearances easily, fluently, chosen from the generous sampling proffered to them in print and electronic media. Multiculturalism has been co-opted by fashion trendsetters even as it remains an anathema to school boards and districts. The wavelengths our kids are attuned to have reduced the polyphony of world cultures to a monaural teenage bandwidth. They are the marketing targets—'in the demo'—for MTV

producers and other purveyors of mainstream culture. David Harvey notes that these 'cultural producers' have become expert at using their technologies 'to re-emphasize the fleeting qualities of modern life and even to celebrate them' (Harvey, 59). Ironically, the more privileged of our adolescents are often the most timid, they may be cosmopolitan in their global awareness, but they shrink from real-life experience. As Julian Barnes cites Flaubert: 'Do not participate: happiness lies in the imagination, not in the act' (Barnes, 169). As a group, the current wave of high school students lacks a prevailing point of view. They possess instead an over-riding concern with surface and image. Although this self-consciousness is appropriate at this stage in the development of their emerging personae, the effects are intensified by the unrelenting images of 'success' reflected back at them by media marketeers. My private school students vacillate like Flaubert's Frederic Moreau, unwilling to risk action for fear of failure—of being wrong—of jeopardizing college and life options. They fear that there is too much at stake. They sense that it is a dangerous world, but they don't know that they have the resources and the capabilities to navigate it successfully. The idea that one learns more from one's failures falls on deaf ears. Pedagogies such as teaching writing as a process of revision, encounter resistance because for them, if it is not right the first time, well, why waste any more time on it?—they hurry on to the next assignment. The ideals of craft and pride-in-product do not register on these citizens of a throwaway culture. More importantly, they are not students who 'can feel respect for a wide range of people in this country not just for those who are eminently and visibly successful in an economic or a social sense' (Coles; 1992, 285). These teens are adept at a Flaubertian translation of human emotion into economic terms. They exemplify the outcomes Cornel West prophesied as a market economy becomes a market culture:

> . . . seductive images contribute to the predominance of the market-inspired way of life over all others and thereby edge out non-market values—love, care, service to others—handed down by preceding generations (West, 27).

The challenges this generation of student presents to us run full circle. Leading a focus group of parents at the private high school where I teach, I have listened as different voices relate the same story: 'My child won't let me drop him at school in the pick-up—I have to let him off a block away'; 'My child doesn't want to be seen in the Lexus, I have to let her out a block away'. And I know that the silent voice in this group is the parent of the child who has been taking the city bus crosstown to school every day since fourth grade. These parents hear each other's words, but misread the commonality of their concerns. They are, in their own way, as confused as their children. All of these families are in our schools, these are our everyday

students, with needs as divergent as their situations. The world we are preparing our students for is far different from the one we adults knew.

* * *

> I share with my American generation an acute sense of dislocation and the equally acute challenge of having to invent a place and an identity for myself without the traditional supports. It could be said that the generation I belong to has been characterized by its prolonged refusal to assimilate—and it is in my very uprootedness that I'm its member. It could indeed be said that exile is the archetypal condition of contemporary lives (Hoffman, 197).

What is the perspective of these students?

The characteristics that I have delineated above are being manifested as these students begin to emerge from the inchoate darkness of early adolescence. Through their greater involvement with the larger world and interactions with peers, they become aware of sets of relationships outside the sphere of unconditional parental love. For many of our kids, the experience is similar to Eva Hoffman's description of the immigrant experience. What was true for Hoffman, coming to North America as an immigrant in 1959, is perhaps even more true for our students today. The multiplicities of the world they are about to enter defy description. They need help and guidance in navigating this critical path.

> I step into a culture that splinters, fragments and re-forms itself as if it were a jigsaw puzzle dancing in a Quantum space. If I want to assimilate into my generation, my time, I have to assimilate the multiple perspectives and their constant shifting. . . . From now on, I'll be made, like a mosaic, of fragments—and my consciousness of them (Hoffman, 164).

The truths that our students need to know are obscured, either by the frenetic, urban, up-tempo rhythms of their lives, or the searingly dull monotone of suburban life, or by the infinite isolation of a rural setting. The path of maturation and preparation for responsible adulthood lies ahead, and they feel pressures on all sides. But instead of truth, media serves up a series of jump-cuts linked by an art director's eye, pregnant with allusions to a future somewhere else, different and better than their now. The lucky individuals find, among these illusions, a reflection that matches, a surface that fits—a makeshift reality that will carry them through the adolescent passage. For others the real truths lie hidden and inaccessible,

camouflaged by a promise of the 'good life'. Until these verities are brought to the surface of their consciousness, perhaps through guidance of a mentor who can reveal the wizard behind the curtain, these adolescents lack the necessary tools to hammer out the armor for their quest. These truths are the real information that they need to know about themselves and their lives—to know that they are not alone in feeling dislocated, to know that it is a confusing time for all of us, to know that we are all seeking connection, looking for islands of stability in the fluid, unstable universe of postmodernism.

Adolescents are frightened by their growing bodies and burgeoning adult powers. Modern society tantalizes them, offering many of the freedoms of adulthood without the responsibilities. They are becoming free-standing individuals. They have the biological imperative to create, but feel instead a breaking apart of the world as they have known it—the center is not holding. They have begun the psychological separation from home and parents that will come full cycle when they create their own households, families, and circles of friends.

> It's by adhering to the contours of a few childhood objects that the substance of our selves—the molten force we're made of—molds and shapes itself. We are not divided..... Insofar as we retain the capacity for attachment, the energy of desire that draws us toward the world and makes us want to live within it, we're always returning. All we have to draw on is that first potent furnace, the uncomparing, ignorant love, the original heat and hunger for the forms of the world, for the here and now (Hoffman, 74).

But just at this moment, these young adults are in our high schools, frozen in the glare of life's headlights, reluctant to give up the luxury of black and white decisionmaking. They do not want to recognize or accept the fact that most adult decisions are choices between shades of gray, that the rare, clear-cut decisions are often shrouded in layers of compromise and negotiation.

> The reference points inside my head are beginning to do a flickering dance. I suppose this is the most palpable meaning of displacement. I have been dislocated from my own center of the world, and that world has been shifted away from my center. There is no longer a straight axis anchoring my imagination; it begins to oscillate, and I rotate around it unsteadily (Hoffman, 132).

Emerging teenagers share Kierkegaard's experience of the crowd as 'untruth', but they also find a warm security there with their peers. In a strange contradiction, they have inherited the apparatus of the Enlightenment project but they have no faith in its tenets of progress, the

existence of an orderly universe, or the idea that reason will save us. Still, they are not ready quite yet to stand up and scream 'I am!'. Their response to the fragmentation of all they see about them is a rejection of experience and a retreat into self-consciousness:

> What is excluded from their lives is any contact with people outside of their own realm or any interest in having such contact. I guess what I am thinking about is what George Eliot describes as 'unreflecting egoism', a kind of tug toward one's own thoughts and wishes that is not in any way impeded or thwarted by some countervailing tug toward others and their needs and concerns and difficulties (Coles; 1992, 276).

It is at this point that the contact with others that Robert Coles refers to is vital—particularly, contact with an adult. 'Given feelings, ideas, desires, which have nothing to do with one another, how can actions proceeding from them be controlled in a social or public interest? Given an egoistic consciousness, how can action which has regard for others take place?' (Dewey, 1916, 297). Whether within the family—or outside—an adult who can aid in 'piercing the presupposing experience' of adolescence is an important factor in the development of the postmodern student. This is the appropriate time in life for the maturation of a moral/ethical framework. How can we instill in them the capacity to make moral decisions in such a shifting, swirling universe of stimuli and information? How do we, as teachers and parents, enable them to accept, and assimilate, multiplicities and multiple points of view in order to assess them and arrive at a tenable position?

> There's a world out there; there are worlds. There are shapes of sensibility incommensurate with each other, topographies of experience one cannot guess from within one's own limited experience (Hoffman, 205).

To arrive at a conception of moral truth through the integration of an individual's psychological truth and the truth of his/her lived experience provides a solid base for that individual to successfully interact with others whose life-experience may be fundamentally different. In effecting this process, the importance of validating 'lived experience' cannot be overstated. But, that life experience must be brought into contact with the larger world.

Empowering the student to recognize the validity of his / her personal experience, establishes an ability to acknowledge the existence of equally authentic realities in the lives of others. This is perhaps the only means of combatting and controlling the intense, unrelenting flow of simulacra that is the hallmark of postmodern culture. We need to give our students the skills to accomplish their lives. Cooperative learning is not just for the workplace and

conflict resolution is not just for the playground fight; these are increasingly necessary personal tools for successfully navigating the contemporary landscape.

> There are paradigms throughout our culture that function deliberately to repress, to belittle other ways of being, and sometimes to make those alternative ways appear threatening, requiring censorship or prohibition or even a violent demise (Greene, 1993, 216).

The current challenge to moral development is the ability to include all legitimate points of view, and then, to distill those viewpoints that are appropriate to the question at hand. Students need to know where they stand, and then be unafraid to stand for what they believe. They must be made to understand the importance of knowing themselves, and honestly attempting to know each other—across the barriers of class, race, and ethnicity. We must find ways to negate disembodied cultural information that is presented outside the context of its native culture. The true 'ripoff' is the appropriation of a culture's artifacts and heritage without direct contact with members of that culture. Students must be able to recognize the enormous gulf between the empathy of 'walking in another's shoes' and the empty posturing that results when someone else's cultural information is used as trendy camouflage.

* * *

> The work of a teacher— exhausting, complex, idiosyncratic, never twice the same—is, at its heart, an intellectual and ethical enterprise. Teaching is the vocation of vocations, a calling that shepherds a multitude of other callings. It is an activity that is intensely practical and yet transcendent, brutally matter-of-fact, and yet fundamentally a creative act. Teaching begins in challenge and is never far from mystery (Ayers, 127).

What is the perspective of the teacher?

The teenagers described above are a deep challenge for a generation of teachers who are already reeling from the loss of a 'normal' reality. The present generation of teachers grew up with what David Harvey describes as a 'Fordist' mentality, living the transition from Horatio Alger to *'Father Knows Best.* He charts our journey from a 'technical-scientific rationality' to the current state of 'pluralistic otherness'. We teachers are grudgingly giving up our ideas of progress and historical continuity. Harvey goes on to identify some of the 'tendencies' of this mindset and compares them with what he sees as the fluid, postmodern mindset of our

students: depth instead of surface; a sense of permanence that has been replaced by an omnipresent ephemerality; 'becoming' rather than 'being'; homogeneity versus diversity; operational rather than strategic management; collective bargaining versus local contracts; our paranoia rather than their schizophrenia. Harvey will also say that the student generation counters the teacher's sense of ethics with a predilection for aesthetics—form *over* function (Harvey, 340).

The teacher's worldview has evolved from an intellectual tradition which embraced the Kantian idea of an objective reality. Werner Heisenberg and others have undermined our belief in the possibility of maintaining that point of view. We now understand that the neutrality associated with that stance is an illusion—and if we fail to see this, there is the in-your-face reality of today's student demanding that we choose sides.

> The teacher performs a social function that is never innocent. There is no neutral, nonpartisan sphere into which the teacher can retreat to engage student experience (McLaren, 240).

The culture that shields the adolescent from real responsibility, creates a subculture of narcissism and self-indulgence—and this we have done rather well. We feel a sea change in the kids coming into our classrooms. They are bigger, often brighter, and more impatient to be on to the next thing. It is harder to like them, their needs are obscured by our mutual postmodern unease. How can we aspire 'to restore life to thought, and to build the wide range of literacies needed for full engagement with and participation in the modern world' (Ayers, 102). The postwar parent/teacher generation is a population that benefitted from the hard-won life successes of two or three generations of immigrants. Immigrants who, through industry and a puritanical work ethic, managed an upwardly mobile cultural standard that we have since taken for granted. While we have never gone without, the stories of parents and grandparents who did still haunt our lives. We believe in the idea of progress because we know that it made their lives, and then ours, better. The students, on the other hand, do not know these stories, or know them only as fairy tales. The teenage worlds are seamless; the situations they inhabit, they know as the norm, whether it be ghetto or suburb. As Coles notes, they are insulated by dint of class, as well as race, from encounters with people whose lives are very different from their own. When they are confronted by those whose situations are different, they react as though that difference is an exception, not recognizing that for large segments of the population, being different is a daily reality. Too often, we teachers lack training in classroom strategies that would enable the students to bridge these differences—to appreciate in an empathetic manner, that which they do not know. The lack of pedagogic

resources renders us mute, and the balance of power in the classroom shifts from the teacher's body of knowledge to the student's more limited experience.

Harvey sees our failed attempt, in the late sixties, to topple the hierarchies and create a countercultural utopia as the harbinger of the current, bewildering postmodernist mood (Harvey, p. 38). The meta-narratives that sustained us in our search for self evolved from the thinking of Marx and Freud. The works by Joyce and Eliot that could contain everything in a 'new' myth of possibilities, are now found to be inadequate as we, with our students, confront 'the multiplicity of forms and the multiplicities of form'. Is the net just empty holes sewn together?

* * *

> But one's conception of knowing and of the nature of what is known perforce lead one to a concern with how we impart knowledge, how we teach, how we lead the learner to construct a reality on his own terms (Bruner, 1962).

How can the post-modern student be taught?

The challenge of teaching the student described above is that the entire generation is moving away from us much faster than their predecessors. An analogy from the field of astronomy would be the high value of their 'red-shift'—that assimilation of data derived from spectrum analysis that indicates that a celestial body is moving away, rather than towards, the observer. I have mentioned the effect, or lack of effect, of 'Fordist' teaching on the postmodern student. There are other forces that must also be taken into account. In *Life in Schools*, Peter McLaren examines the larger societal structures and attitudes that work against successful student outcomes and school reform. McLaren joins Cornel West in critiquing the pernicious effects of a market-driven culture:

> We can achieve a pedagogy of transformation if we turn our teaching into an outrageous practice and a practice of outrage. If we can invent our pedagogics anew such that they are based on recovering dangerous memories from society's structural unconscious, from the Eurocentric archives of dead reason, then perhaps we can begin to build a project of recovering the lost particles of our dreams, dreams shattered in modernity's thralldom to the tight-fisted logic of consumer capitalism (McLaren, 299).

McLaren wants us to understand that what is happening to these red-shifted students is not accidental or unavoidable. He contends that there is, in schools, a political agenda that we as teachers must neutralize. In his concept of critical pedagogy, he takes aim at all of the assumptions that we insist on maintaining:

> . . . critical pedagogy is designed to agitate over-confidence and ideological comfort, to establish roadblocks to modernity's search for the natural sublime, to render as unsuitable a consensus of ideas and practices that permit anyone to suffer needlessly. Critical pedagogy is at odds with inaction and disembodiment (McLaren, 300).

McLaren is challenging our idea of linear progress in a way that I think is most appropriate. We Fordist teachers were taught and trained in the construct that one could identify career goals, and take fairly straightforward pathways to achieve them. It was assumed that these goals would be within the idealized societal norms that we all believed in. Or did we? Is it possible that those of us who were at the margins, on the fringes of mainstream culture, had no voice to register the fact that these goals did not address our needs? McLaren is correct in identifying issues of power that lie just below the surface of our conversations about remedying the current situation:

> The political space that education occupies today continues to de-emphasize the struggle for teacher and student empowerment; furthermore, it generally serves to reproduce the technocratic and corporate ideologies that characterize dominant societies. It is, in fact, reasonable to argue that education programs are designed to create individuals who operate in the interests of the state, whose social function is primarily to sustain and legitimate the status quo. This is not to suggest that critics have not put forth proposals for reforming education programs. The problem has been that when such proposals appear, teaching is often viewed as newly synonymous with 'executing' prefashioned methodologies and 'delivering' prepackaged curricula. The absurdity of this position is most evident in the development of programs that some school boards glowingly describe as 'teacher-proofed'. Teaching thus becomes stripped of its decision-making potential, including its ethical imperative to analyze and remediate existing societal and institutional practices (McLaren, 1).

Another author, Lisa Delpit, challenges the progressive methodologies that are so much the current vogue. She presents examples that illustrate how inappropriate these strategies can be for students whose home lives differ from, or are at odds with, the 'cultural capital', that the progressive pedagogies often tacitly assume. (See Delpit, 1988, 89, and Delpit, 1992, 146.)

Delpit prods us to critique all 'methods' in light of the needs of the specific students that we are trying to teach. She challenges us to come out from behind our training and be what the student needs us to be. McLaren and Delpit both see the teacher as one of the primary points of resistance in stemming the tide of neglect of students and schools.

* * *

If we take as a truth that life begins in the lived landscape, a return to that landscape, the past overlaid with the present, can be a starting point for the adolescent to awaken to the rest of his/her life. To effect this goal of awakening, the challenge becomes to enable diverse groups of students to move beyond their immediate life situations. To move from isolating self-consciousness towards social responsibility and, ultimately, self-realization—a state of being and awareness in which the students can truly hear each others stories and move forward together with a determination to work for change despite the burdens of history.

> There is not inherent opposition between working with others and working as an individual. On the contrary, certain capacities of an individual are not brought out except under the stimulus of associating with others (Dewey, 1916, 302).

To this end, I propose an approach that has enabled me to think more clearly about what is important in working with teenagers at this stage of their lives. In a class titled *World Art*, that studies a museum exhibit of non-western art, we take an ethnographic approach in establishing a perspective for repeated viewing of artifacts from another culture. Over time, I have developed an introduction to this process that elicits the student's own stories and opens them to 'hearing' one another's realities. The encounter with unfamiliar artifacts becomes a gateway to successful encounters with people different than themselves.

We begin by embarking on a discussion about the stages of a journey—any journey—starting in the most mundane fashion. The students do not have to know the objective yet, and they are generally interested in exploring this idea once it becomes clear that we aren't doing anything else until this groundwork is completed. It is important that the class builds the journey model on their own terms and in their own language because we will be returning to this metaphor repeatedly in the course of our explorations. Most groups start out simply, by identifying the 'beginning/middle/end' format. But they can be prodded: What happens at the beginning? Isn't there something that comes before—planning, anticipation? What

about trips that come up suddenly, unexpectedly? Do certain stages get compressed or skipped altogether? Eventually, the group will come up with something resembling the following:

THE JOURNEY AS A METAPHOR
STIMULUS—*what prompts the journey?*
ANTICIPATION—*anxieties and excitements*
PLANNING—*where might it lead us?*
PREPARATION—*eliminating options/making choices*
SETTING OUT—*committing to the task*

.....

TRAVELLING—*a zone of its own*

.....

THE RETURN—*the most difficult task*
REFLECTION—*what just happened?*
MEMORY—*lived experience*

To deepen the impact of the metaphor, I call it just that, a *metaphor*, one that might be applied in various ways. We can see that the process of creating a drawing, or any work of art can be a journey, as can the learning of a new skill or hobby, a new friendship, or the reading of a book—the lens can be applied to many topics. Later in our conversations, it will become clear that as one grows and accumulates life experience, the journey becomes an upward spiral defining the locus of critical events in a life. This idea can be illustrated with examples from autobiography and adult lives. As Paul Simon says, we always return to the vital issues:

> What I've noticed as the years accumulate, is that inevitably we return to our early impulses and investigate them again in our maturity. And we see why it was that we had such a powerful reaction to- in my case- certain sounds, and why it is that I associate powerful emotions with certain sounds. Can I take those sounds and again express what I'm thinking now as a middle-aged person? —Paul Simon

Whatever the ultimate focus of the course, be it funerary objects from New Ireland, Hopi kachina, or Balinese shadow theater, we read John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* as much for the unconventional combinations of word and image, as for its power to make students question what they are seeing and the assumptions they are making. Also, Adrienne Rich's poem *Diving into the Wreck* is powerfully evocative as it parallels the journey of discovery that they are by this time committed to. When the timing is right, a reading of this poem can galvanize individual students to claim their voices, and can awaken the group to a sense of their individual and collective powers.

The central experience that the students and I are searching for in these early stages of discussion is one that we have all encountered. Each of us has had an encounter with multiplicity—a moment when one feels oneself adrift and oarless in a Sargasso Sea of indifferent, and perhaps, hostile strangers. I propose that this is actually a moment of self-realization, an encounter with the *other* that we generally keep private, and safely closeted, fearful of its power to upset our ideas of order and rationality. It is the moment that you physically feel as the click of a new synaptic connection. For a brief instant, you comprehend the enormity of your experience as a human being, and as an individual, in a completely new way—you are permanently changed. I am speaking here of that precise moment when we become intensely aware of our individual uniqueness, and, in the same instant, intensely aware of the commonality that links us with all humans who have come before, who will come after, and who share the planet with us right now. In *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey charts this phenomena on a larger scale. Dewey questions the idea of a mind, or 'consciousness' that is separate from an individual's experience of the world (Dewey, 1916, 293). While he chooses not to engage the issue of the separation in this instance, he goes on to present a model of the individual and society that is appropriate to the threshold that adolescents, at this moment in their lives, are poised to cross:

> What is taken for knowledge—for fact and truth—at a given time may not be such. But everything which is assumed without question, which is taken for granted in our intercourse with one another and nature is what, at the given time, is *called* knowledge. Thinking on the contrary, starts, as we have seen, from doubt or uncertainty. It marks an inquiring, hunting, searching attitude, instead of one of mastery and possession. Through its critical process true knowledge is revised and extended, and our convictions as to the state of things reorganized (Dewey, 1916, 295).

For adolescents, this cognitive moment is the gateway to adulthood, the first premonition of the freestanding adults we all become, from this threshold we move from late childhood towards a new horizon, an unknown territory that we yearn for despite the terror of its unknown possibilities. As Eva Hoffman so aptly writes '. . . for it was here that I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos' (Hoffman, 151). The simple black and white world of the child gives way to the complex landscape of adulthood.

To be invited to join in an exploration of this territory is an invitation that most adolescents will accept—some cautiously, some joyfully—because it speaks in some way to this period of burgeoning self-hood that they are experiencing. They are aware that there is

something more to the experience of being human. Hoffman speaks eloquently of this moment in her life:

> It is a sunny fall afternoon and I'm engaged in one of my favorite pastimes—picking chestnuts. I'm playing alone under the spreading, leafy, protective tree. My mother is sitting on a bench nearby, rocking the buggy in which my sister is asleep. The city, beyond the lacy wall of trees, is humming with gentle noises. The sun has just passed its highest point and is warming me with intense, oblique rays. I pick up a reddish brown chestnut, and suddenly, through its warm skin, I feel the beat as if of a heart. But the beat is also in everything around me, and everything pulsates and shimmers as if it were coursing with the blood of life. Stooping under the tree, I'm holding life in my hand, and I am in the center of a harmonious, vibrating transparency. For that moment, I know everything there is to know. I have stumbled into the very center of plenitude, and I hold myself still with fulfillment, before the knowledge of my knowledge escapes me (Hoffman, 41-2).

In the *World Art* class, we start with our own stories, the earliest recognition of our self-hood, that moment when we first felt completely unique as an individual being and in that same moment felt the communion of the human experience. The process may be difficult because the students are being asked—in school—to do something so unusual, so very non-scholastic. I am inspired by Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings and Jane Roland Martin, who want to put these questions at the core of our educational process in addition to the 'liberal arts' which so rarely engage these issues. Love, friendship, living an ethical and conscientious life—unlike algebra or the Federalists Papers, these topics are at the heart of our *daily* human existence. In thinking about these issues, we need to ask: What comes to us as received information, and what is truly experienced?

For adolescents, the sharing of these 'primordial memories' with their peers in a safely, and carefully constructed classroom environment, can be a powerful catalytic agent in the creation of 'an ethos of collective inquiry' (Ayers, p. 97). With patience and support, individual students can locate Hoffman's moment in their own lives. They can be encouraged and empowered to bring this experience into the present. For the adolescent, the earliest instance of this self-realization is still close to the surface of their memory. This moment can be seen as the beginning of the individuation process and the subsequent separation from the family—the child begins to construct her/himself by working with the *materiel* of lived experience. This moment can galvanize an individual to 'claim their voice'—to take control of his/her life.

> They wanted not isolation from the world, but a more intimate connection with it. They wanted to form their beliefs about it at first hand, instead of through tradition. They wanted closer union with their fellows so that they might influence one another more effectively and might combine their respective actions for mutual aims. . . . So far as their beliefs were concerned, they felt that a great deal which passed for knowledge was merely the accumulated opinions of the past, much of it absurd and its correct portions not understood when accepted on authority. Men must observe for themselves, and form their own theories and personally test them (Dewey, 1916, 294).

Dewey is describing the evolution of a democratic society, but again, his words are germane to the process the adolescent is undergoing at this moment of psychosocial development. Teenagers feel compelled to reject received information and demand the freedom to pursue the truth of their own lived experience. To engage students in becoming critical thinkers at this time in their lives, Dewey advises that: 'If attention is centered upon the conditions which have to be met in order to secure a situation favorable to effective thinking, freedom will take care of itself' (Dewey, 1916 304).

Together, as a class, we devote a great deal of time to locating this 'critical moment' in each person's life. At the start, this is a teacher-led discussion, as I must work hard providing samples and examples that allow each student a point of entry into the conversation. If I am doing a good job, I soon become a listener as the students talk to one another, sometimes heatedly, sometimes confessionally, sometimes reflectively, but always passionately—if I have done my job. To insure the relevancy of the discussion, I add information from the students' own lives. The journal/dialogue technique is very useful in this context as it allows students to have a safe way to converse with me. What they write in these journals is confidential and read only by me, unless they give permission for me to share it with the class. This enables me to inject some of their observations anonymously into our conversations with the aim of raising the whole group's consciousness. Sometimes this serves to make everyone aware that a member of the group may be feeling intimidated or uncomfortable challenging the assumptions of the majority opinion. Sometimes the anonymous authors will claim their words once they hear them read aloud, opening the discussion to wider horizons.

Through the use of directed journal writing and firsthand exposure to the artifacts through ongoing museum visits, the students can discover, in the authenticity of their individual responses to the artifacts and each other, a commonality of experience that transcends cultural boundaries. We have created then, a platform for the examination of our own lives, and what it means to be here, in the last days of the century, facing the enormity of

the challenge before us without flinching. This inquiry is essential in developing a moral/ethical code that tolerates, if not celebrates difference.

> As a result of careful listening to alternative points of view, I have myself come to a viable synthesis of perspectives. But both sides do need to be able to listen, and I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process. . . .
>
> To do so takes a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment—and that is not easy. It is painful as well, because it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue (Delpit, 1988, 101).

The validation of personal experience and the realization that important elements are shared with others neutralizes our egocentric predisposition to reject the 'other'. We begin to find in other lives, parallels for what is happening in our own. This validation is vital for adolescents: 'An individual becomes rational only as he absorbs into himself the content of rationality in nature and in social institutions' (Dewey, 1916, 300).

For this class to succeed, I need to be learning as well as the students. I choose a topic that is new to me, and while I will have done background research, I will also have left something to be discovered along the way, with the class. The model of how I go about finding out more, how I process it and add it to what I already know—my lived experience—is a powerful teaching model. The students observe how I synthesize new information and previous experience. They observe as I restructure my own body of knowledge to accommodate new concepts. They see the teacher being a student. Also, I want them to be able to share in my excitement as I add another chapter to my own story—an important chapter about the time we are spending together and what we are learning from each other.

What my students and I are doing is discovering the culture of the class—this specific group of people. We are using the truth of lived experience to unearth a psychological truth which will hopefully lead us to the discovery of a concept of moral truth that we can all accept and adhere to. Thus, the only requirement for this course is the truth of the stories that each of us contribute at this moment in our lives. Through sharing these stories we are developing the skills that we will use to explore the individual paths that will lead to our collective

journey, completing the transformative sequence that takes us from self-consciousness to self-awareness, on to group awareness and social conscience, and ultimately, to personal growth and self-realization.

Finally, to respond to the question: *Can we instill in our students the capacity for moral decision-making in a swirling, shifting universe of stimuli?* Yes, I think that we can. 'We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment' (Dewey, 1916, 19). It may only involve putting in place an important element that many studies have noted: namely, the presence of one caring adult in the life of an adolescent. This presence goes a long way towards enabling the young adult to succeed despite environment and life situations. If we can remember as Emily Dickinson said, that 'The possible's slow fuse is lit by imagination', we will be mindful of the power of the imagination. Imagination, in this context, can be seen as an 'amplitude of mind', the ability to look beyond the possible and imagine a better future. We are going together to new possibilities. Our conversations with our students—our dialogues centered on the inclusion of each and every voice—will create a vision larger, and more powerful, than any of us would imagine on our own.

* * *

> The critical educator, however, is most interested in what Habermas calls *emancipatory knowledge*. . . . Emancipatory knowledge helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege. It also aims at creating the conditions under which irrationality, domination, and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action. In short, it creates the foundation for social justice, equality, and empowerment (McLaren, 179).

How can the post-modern teacher be trained?

In the postmodern era, we adults have lost much of the authority and governance that we formerly exercised in key aspects of teenagers lives. Adults as authority figures are often missing in their home lives and so, adolescents look to other sources for models and guidance. What Lisa Delpit calls explicit or 'direct instruction' is often supplied by the indirect channels of electronic media and peer relationships (Delpit, 1992, 146). The teacher's 'lived experience' together with a heartfelt commitment to the calling, and to the students, can make the interaction with students, a meaningful and potent learning experience for all involved. We need to emphasize that teaching is second only to parenting, to remember Dewey's 'best

and wisest' parent and to teach as we would want *our* own children taught. When everyone in the society values, and in some way, owns the responsibility for raising the next generation—when we recreate the lost communities of neighborhood and extended family, we will create avenues of access that reach our students.

Many teachers are uncomfortable with the added responsibilities that devolve from this situation. We are being asked to be much more than informational gatekeepers. As school communities change, teacher awareness needs to change as well. We teachers with our Fordist mentalities cling to a belief in 'stage' theories of adolescent development in which the creation, through education, of free and autonomous individuals is the highest goal. Maxine Greene offers a critique of this goal and the assumptions behind it, in her book, *The Dialectic of Freedom:*

> The problem with this highly cognitive focus in the classroom has in part to do with what it excludes. Also, it has to do with whether or not reasoning is enough when it comes to acting in a resistant world, or opening fields of possibilities among which people may choose to choose (Greene, 1988, 119).

We can no longer assume the role of 'teacher as technician' applying teacher-proof lesson plans to docile students. To prepare today's students for the world that they will face we need to 'complicate their thinking', we need to open doorways without guaranteeing what might lie ahead. For once and for all, we have to abandon the image of the omniscient teacher standing in front of the class. We need to teach cooperative learning with students and model collaborative teaching with colleagues. An experiential learning environment like Dewey's model of the school-as-laboratory still seems the best approach. A review of William Ayers' curriculum framework sets an appropriate standard for evaluating what each of us is needs to be doing for our students (Ayers, 94):

- Are there opportunities for discovery and surprise?
- Are students actively engaged with primary sources and hands-on materials?
- Is productive work going on?
- Is the work linked to student questions or interests?
- Are problems within the classroom, the school, and the larger community, part of student consciousness?
- Is work in my classroom pursued to its far limits?

Schools should plan on-going programs that address issues of difference, including class, race, and sexual preference. These are important conversations that need to take place at all

levels of the school community. It seems clear that techniques from ESL and gifted programs—techniques that assume difference among students and not sameness—need to be brought to the teaching of all students. When one value set cannot be assumed—other than the desire to be educated—teachers are forced to use different strategies to accomplish learning goals. Just as I would advocate exchange programs for students, I would advocate that all prospective teachers have some exposure to some of the techniques used by teachers who work with 'newcomers' and the children of immigrant populations. In addition to subject matter expertise, there are other skills teachers need to have to teach to these new student demographics such as training in conflict resolution and an awareness of the theories of multiple intelligences.

We need to question just what we are training our teachers to do. Mclaren is not, I think, being overly cynical when he challenges teaching to the status quo:

> When teachers, in their acceptance of the role of technicians, fail to challenge the ways in which educational curricula correspond to the demands of industry or the means by which schooling reproduces existing class, race, and gender relations in our society, they run the risk of transmitting to disadvantaged students the message that their subordinate roles in the social order are justified and inviolable (McLaren, 2).

Teachers need to believe that each person is the expert on his/her own life (Delpit, 1988, 101). We need to appreciate that the people with the problems may offer the best solutions. As William Ayers says, we need to 'reduce the distinction between school knowledge and personal knowledge' (Ayers, 55). We need to come to the encounter ready to learn ourselves, and facilitate the learning of our students. We as teachers need to commit to this re-envisioning of the learning dynamic, so that it is teaching *and* learning on all sides. Ultimately, we must 'choose to do something that enables the choices of others, that supports the human impulse to grow: 'Teaching as an act of hope for a better future' (Ayers, 24). This task must be accomplished in the diverse classroom of the next generation. Along with the need in schools for a diversity of effective teaching styles and assessment practices, just so, the *authenticity* of your direct one-to-one contact with someone or someone 'other' is essential in order for the contact to be mutually beneficial.

Teachers need to awaken a sense of competency and confidence in students facing the unknown challenges that lie ahead. When Buber says that 'you teach to keep the pain awake', I do not believe it is the relatively simple pain of an oppressive life situation, rather it is the deeper existential pain of the complete and total awareness of our human condition. 'To be

courteous and thoughtful and sensitive as a teacher is perhaps the biggest lesson any of us can offer students' (Coles, 281). For true teacher empathy to develop, there has to be a deep personal transformation in the encounter with the student's predicament. The teaching must move from the head to the heart of the teacher for the same to happen in the learner. (See Delpit, 1988, 101.)

Teachers who envision themselves as life-long learners, and 'start where the kids are', learning along with the students, become change agents. A teacher can come up with appropriate themes, and the topics under the theme, but the *way* that the material is explored, needs to be interactive—open to student input: 'Unless one does it for one's self, it isn't thinking' (Dewey, 1916, 303). In these postmodern times, how can we know what aspect of a topic is going to be most relevant and necessary for a particular set of students?

> *The 'spiral curriculum'.* If one respects the ways of thought of the growing child, if one is courteous enough to translate material into his logical forms and challenging enough to tempt him to advance, then it is possible to introduce him at an early age to the ideas and styles that in later life make an educated man. We might ask, as a criterion for any subject taught in primary school, whether, when fully developed, it is worth an adult's knowing, and whether having known it as a child makes a person a better adult. If the answer to both questions is negative or ambiguous, then the material is cluttering the curriculum (Bruner, 52)

At the site, faculties have to become learners and schools have to become learning institutions. A truly effective mentoring program for young teachers is one aspect of this charge. Not just one-on-one mentoring, but also, small groups of younger teachers, led by committed senior faculty, that mix departments or grade levels. Lightened first-year teaching loads, and release time or additional compensation for mentors, will enable meaningful mentor contact and participation in mentoring/support groups. These groups might visit each other's classes and meet, like SEED seminars, to discuss issues around teaching and learning. These groups could function as conduits for accessing the research on education which so often never gets into the hands of the practitioners.

Opportunities for interdepartmental contact should be encouraged and interdisciplinary teaching and planning instituted at every level of the school. Whenever possible, faculty meetings should be aimed at teaching issues, and less at the nuts and bolts of school life that can be just as easily communicated in bulletins and memos. Summer reading assignments can serve to focus faculty on issues specific to the site or larger educational issues. The information in the readings becomes a 'database'—a shorthand and common reference for future

discussions. As everyone becomes aware of what others in the school are doing, constructive discussions among colleagues become the lingua franca.

Ongoing teacher renewal coupled with professional development represents another important element in creating a healthy learning environment. Schools should look for ways to combine evaluation and professional development. This can be one approach to the 'professionalization' of teaching. Faculty evaluation must be seen as an opportunity for professional growth, non-evaluative classroom visits should become a habit and not a burden. Peer critiques can be avenues for teacher growth, and peer collaborations should be encouraged and supported. Teacher credentialling should place less emphasis on 'paper' achievement, and more on identifying individuals of good character, expertise in their fields and the personality traits that will enable them to be effective teachers at specific school sites. The teacher's career goal should be to enable successful student outcomes. Again, the goal is to develop a 'community of learners'.

Chancellor Ramon Cortines calls for productivity standards for teachers, administrators, and even chancellors—as one of the levers to force change in the profession. Unions need to raise the standards of members through some sort of meaningful evaluation, and realign their goals to insure that they not just protecting adults in the schools, but that they are protecting those adults who are directly contributing to successful student outcomes and vital school environments. Unions need to embrace and support the reforms that are appropriate to different populations in different locales.

* * *

Where to we go from here?

The future of American schooling requires the re-engineering of our cultural vision of education. Everyone in our society, not just parents, must become concerned about the education of our children. Rather than attempting to define or explicate a 'system' to which we as a nation should adhere, I would like to highlight some of the elements of an atmosphere that might sustain us as we attempt to re-invigorate the concept of school. The rationale behind this particular set of elements is the urgent need to rebuild the critical interfaces of student/teacher, and school/community.

Cost is a key issue and all of these suggestions are based on a *re-allocation* of resources, both financial and human. This re-allocation of resources requires a paradigm shift with regard to our current approach to public education. The impetus for this shift is to resolve, as

a society, that schools will be student-centered, first and foremost. Just as new scientific discoveries force us to redefine, reconfigure, and ultimately re-imagine our universe, we must undertake to re-imagine the education of our children. If we recall Dewey, we can see that the goal of education is still the same: to produce individuals who are capable of mastering the difficult, sensitive social skills, and critical thinking necessary for the maintenance of a democratic society. Mindful of Cornel West's admonishment about becoming a market culture, we should not confuse the urgent need for citizens to sustain our democratic society with the call for jobs and careers that serve only to support a labor-driven model of society. The goal of a capable citizenry precludes the inculcation of market-specific labor skills. This goal also precludes the class-based stratification of high and low status jobs, since every job is seen as necessary for the ongoing health of the society.

In 1988, James P. Comer proposed the idea of a national academy of education. Comer anticipated the current call for reform. His involvement in the New Haven, Connecticut public schools, beginning in 1968, proved to him that existing standards and pedagogies were not preparing students to be productive members of society. He was able to envision a framework for improving the educational environment:

> . . . I believe a National Academy of Education is needed. Its purpose would be to set national priorities, assess current research in education, learn how to implement approaches that work, identify areas for further study and allocate resources effectively. Such an academy must be free from the pressures of political expediency, and the interests of researchers must be balanced against those of educators (Comer, 48).

In 1995, New York City Chancellor of Schools, Ramon Cortines reiterates this idea of national standards, and would add the mechanism of 'guidelines' to help meet these standards. The mandate for the creation of guidelines would not specify what the guidelines should be. Cortines favors allowing individual districts and schools to pursue a variety of pedagogics and methodologies that accomplish the goal of enabling students to meet the requirements of a comprehensive national standard. Cortines envisions fluid methodologies that would prepare students for 'wider bandwidth' standards (Cortines, 1995). The standards themselves would be enlightened assessment tools that would measure not just what an individual knows, but what an individual knows how to do. In some fields the standards might be skills based, similar to the high-end apprenticeship programs of some western European countries, where theoretical knowledge and practical experience are brought together in a demonstration of complex problem solving. The new standards would test more than just one set of abilities,

and would require higher student performances at both the top and bottom levels than present assessment tools elicit.

The concept of a set of national assessment standards—perhaps a comprehensive test that assesses an individual's ability to restructure information to meet the demands of the immediate problem at hand—would help to stimulate school reform. One element in a comprehensive assessment might be a portfolio evaluation of X, Y and Z, where X = a conventional testing format that establishes what an individual knows; Y = would measure what an individual knows how to do with the knowledge s/he possesses; and both of these aspects would be supported by Z = the ability to work effectively with a diverse group of individuals to achieve Y+: something more than an individual would have been able to achieve working alone.

It has been said that a school shows most clearly and publicly what it values by what it chooses to assess. The assessment paradigm above is congruent with the environment that Jane Roland Martin creates in her model of the 'schoolhome', and might be achieved by applying the explicit guidelines Nel Noddings presents in chapter 12 of her book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools.* For both Noddings and Roland Martin, a universal appreciation of caring is the foundation for everything that takes place in the school environment; this central feature underscores the need for new forms of assessment. Noddings' guidelines can be summarized as follows:

- The main aim of education will be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people.
- Continuity will be a hallmark of the school experience for both students and adults.
- Emphasis will be on relaxing the impulse to control every aspect of the educational experience.
- Program hierarchies and the tracking of students will be eliminated, *all* forms of work and career will be validated and valued equally.
- The themes of care will be placed at the core of every school activity.
- Students will be taught that caring in every domain implies competence.

In his paper, *Rationale for Using Cooperative Learning,* Spencer Kagan supports the view of the changing student/family constellation that I have presented. Kagan cites such factors as children growing up with fewer siblings, the lack of 'prosocial' modelling by overworked parents, and the increased mobility of families through which children lose the long-term neighborhood and community support systems. Again, it was a similar formula that prompted Maria Montessori to establish her first schools in post-war Italy so that, in the

working parent's absence, the children would have ongoing contact with adults. This contact is as vital for the development of socialization skills as it is for academic skills-building. In this vein, James Comer, with his model of the school community, reminds us that schools are the arenas where the deficits of the larger culture have to be remedied.

> The failure to educate these children makes ever harder the task of rectifying economic and social inequities. . . . Unless schools can find a way to educate them and bring them into the mainstream, all the problems associated with unemployment and alienation will escalate (Comer, 42).

The task ahead is to construct a vision that includes all of our predicaments and can accommodate our changing needs. The solutions can only be generated on-site with the participation of all constituencies. In order to achieve successful educational reform, pressure will have to come from the top as well as the bottom. To this end, colleges and universities have a significant role to fulfill. These institutions will have to be more responsive to different forms of student assessment, and acknowledge different student learning styles. These institutions will have to accommodate students who come to them with a broader set of skills than the simple mathematics of high standardized test scores.

In the reconfigured educational environment, new avenues of approach could be developed that would recast the school experience for every student and teacher, rendering it more humane and more relevant. Structures can be created that allow for student, and adult, transformations. Small schools and smaller class sizes would be a given. The idea of university-style 'houses' or 'schools within schools' would give students a sense of connection to the school site/experience, as well as giving teacher/administrators the opportunity to create school environments and curricula that engage students. 'Engagement' in this sense will mean creating, and stating, clear expectations of academic achievement and student behavior that are arrived at with an awareness of student/family needs and concerns. A redistribution of school tasks would allow the administrators to continue classroom teaching, ensuring that all policies will be approached with an authentic sense of student/teacher needs. Smaller environments and redefinition of teacher/administrator roles would allow increased teacher contact with families, which in turn would guarantee better understanding by teachers about student backgrounds and motivations, and clearer parent awareness of the schools expectations and goals. With smaller class sizes, teachers might even visit student homes for the first parent conference.

The continuity provided by mixed-grade advising groups, led by the same teacher over four years, would address the adolescent desire for connection, and allow students to experience rituals of growth and passage in a meaningful context. The symbolic enactment of the yearly cycle—as each year new students are welcomed into the group, and seniors graduate and are bid goodbye—would enable students to work through issues of isolation and separation in a supportive, caring context. The nucleus of the group would resemble a family in some ways, providing the setting for a series of powerful personal and group transformations during the high school years. Similarly, parent groups can be formed that might provide 'inservice' for families. Some schools have structured four-year sequences of parent conferences and focus groups that are designed to create a 'partnership' between the school and each family. Parent involvement, coordinated by the teacher/administrators, can vary with the needs and capabilities of the families at each school site. If these groups also cut across grade levels, parents can exchange ideas and support each other with regard to the social realms that lie outside the province and governance of the school. Finally, teachers need to take ownership of the entire school environment, not just their classrooms. Hallways and cafeterias need to be as physically and psychologically safe as the classrooms. The changed physical environment will invite different pedagogical approaches—teachers, and students, will be thinking again.

The hierarchy of school systems and school sites would be replaced by staff-run schools on the model of Central Park East in New York City. Teams of teacher/administrators would be engaged in every aspect of the school's management and operation. There would be no hierarchy of students—no 'tracking' of students. Heterogeneous classrooms with an emphasis on teamwork would be the rule. Able students would gain additional competency through helping their peers to master the material. Potent teaching techniques can be borrowed from ESL and gifted programs as we begin to teach to everyone in the room. The use of cooperative learning strategies enhances the student's awareness of how s/he learns, and the corresponding metacognitive element enables them to construct appropriate learning formats for themselves. Simple physical changes, like circled desks instead of rows where kids hide in the rear seats, can have a positive impact on student behaviors. Not only does everyone become more involved in the class, but a certain 'civility' is necessitated by face to face contact. The 'behind-the-back' behaviors that traditional classroom arrangements allow tend to evaporate in the fish bowl of the circular arrangement.

The situations of the 'latchkey' kids provide the basis for a strong argument in support of a longer school year, a longer school day, and longer class periods. An important platform for the teacher is simply to be able to spend more time with the students, and so, be able to know

them better over a longer period of exposure and contact. To this end, as much continuity as possible should be built into the school structure—infrastructures that maintain teacher/student connections during the four-year span of the high school experience. In the first case, a longer school year addresses one aspect of the need for continuity, and highlights the irrelevance that characterizes many of the traditional structures that prevents change in schools. There is no longer any need for the long summer vacations that were originally intended to permit teenagers to return to the family farm and help out with the harvests. Quite the contrary, ongoing exposure to academic and social challenges will better enable our students to internalize the new paradigms present in our re-engineered schools. In-depth student exchange programs, whether international or simply across town, or from an urban to a rural community, would offer new approaches to meaningful summertime programs that get students out of their lives and into the lives of others.

Finally, longer class periods, together with reconfigured classrooms, new student groupings, and team teaching techniques provide for the possibility of fully integrated interdisciplinary classes. If school days and periods are longer, and not compartmentalized, the flowing multiplicities of students backgrounds and competence are not segmented and disrupted—the time is always on-task, the day and the year are coherent. The habit of learning becomes a habit of life.

* * *

Epilogue

The concerns I have discussed are no longer the sole province of educational philosophers. At the 1995 NAIS National Conference, Robert Evans made a presentation entitled, *Home and School*, that gave voice to many of the topics raised in this paper. The presence of the bear was acknowledged and some of its characteristics detailed. Evans pointed out that while we may be be expecting more mature kids, we are not raising them. While he attributes most of the blame to societal pressures and less mature parents who value work and careers more than parenting, he was clear in calling for schools to step in and fill the void. For all three elements in the education equation—students, parents, and teachers—there are more demands and less support. Evans grants that there has been an intensification of the quantity and sophistication of what we want students to learn, but he is unambiguous—schools have to accept the fact that students are 'undernurtured' and move forward with effective strategies to meet their needs (Evans, 1995). Evans does not back away from the enormity of this

challenge. His is another voice for the 'collective redefinition of school'. He is in agreement with those proponents of public school reform who advocate fundamental systemic change as opposed to the 'micro-level' changes that many schools attempt. Evans proposes isolating a few basic principles that we can adhere to instead of generating long lists of details—lists that feed a tendency for teachers to feel inadequate. His principles echo much of what has been said:

- Teachers have to have more direct contact with students—keep students at the focus.
- Students need nurture *and* structure—acceptance and containing boundaries.
- Teachers have to model for parents—listen to parents but remember that you have the wisdom and authority that derives from seeing many students.
- Training for teachers should center on actualizing the broader concepts.

It is most important to note that Evans was speaking to an audience of private school personnel and describing the same problems that plague the public sector. The need for partnerships between the two sectors could not be more apparent. While my comments and suggestions above refer primarily to public schools, some independent schools might profit from the implementation of some of the strategies. All of our students are in the same predicament—all of them are at risk.

In the end, we are left with more questions than answers, but this should be seen as an opportunity for change and not a paralyzing dilemma. Having coaxed the bear off the desk, perhaps we can get him out of the room and the building. Acting locally, with an awareness of the global forces involved, each of us can begin to make change happen in classrooms, in schools, and in communities. Given the diverse and dynamic environments that schools have become, I pose the following questions to myself and my colleagues as these questions seem more appropriate than expert advice or theoretical solutions. My hope is that these questions will stimulate thinking, and action, based in our present situations, centered on the students we encounter on a daily basis, aimed at insuring our mutual futures.

Who are the new students coming into our schools?

Where are they coming from? What do they bring?

Why do we want them in our schools?

Are they 'problem people' or people with problems?

What does it feel like to be a 'problem' in a society that prizes problem-solving?

What population in the school is most in need of *our* advocacy?

What can they teach us?

What are the stresses on both sides?

How are these students viewed by the adults in the school? Other students?

What specific curricular and co-curricular needs do they have?

How does the school attempt to meet these needs?

How do these students respond to our efforts?

We work in the dark, we do what we can, we give what we have, our doubts become our passion, and our passion becomes our task. The rest is the madness of art.

—William James

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