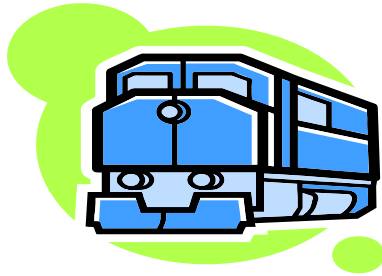


# Arrival

Notes from the 2005  
"Views on Understanding" Summer  
Institute, Harvard University  
Project Zero Research Center

By Jerry E. Fluellen, Jr.



*A Ph. D. student gained audience with the Zen master. He went on and on about all the books, articles, Internet searches, and lectures he had attended or given. The master poured tea as the student continued talking.*

*"Why are you still pouring tea?  
The cup is full!"*

*Replied the master, "You are like  
this cup. Overflowing.  
I can teach you nothing."*

Unlike the student of Zen, I came to 2005 Summer Institute of Harvard University's Project Zero Research Center as an empty cup.

So here I am sipping coffee on the sidewalk café of Au Bon Pain on Brattle Street, less than a block away from the Harvard Square Hotel where I will live for eight days and less than three blocks away from the Graduate School of Education. It is the eve of the institute and I have only questions.

They take the shape of me as empty cup.

Entry 7-20-05

*How might the average class become a culture of thinking? What is missing from our knowledge about cultures of thinking? What new questions will emerge from the PZ institute lectures in the plenary sessions, mini courses around the campus, and study group sessions in Larsen Hall?*

Standing at the door of Agazi Hall one hour before registration at 8:30 A.M., these are what my empty cup has become—a cup made of questions.

Like a child the night before Christmas, I slept little as I anticipated the first institute I had been able to attend since 1999. For three summers, 1997 to 1999, the PZ summer institutes had been the hallmark of ongoing study and refection on teaching well. They were my power point time outs for renewal.

Now after a bout with prostate cancer, long walks with God, and relocation last year from a successful career as a teacher in Philadelphia to a Literacy Coach in DC, I have returned to my summer home at Harvard Square.

This year, PZ institute plenary sessions will be on the former Radcliff campus. The quad of buildings stands behind me as I wait for the opening of registration.

Agazi had been the first president of Radcliff over 100 years ago so this building is named for her. Now Radcliff is part of Harvard though its presence around campus remains strong.

The door opens. I enter.

Still early, several volunteers are setting up the registration tables in the ballroom on the second floor. This room will become the gathering place, the watering hole for 300 scholars from all over the world during the next seven days as the institute arrives and departs.

Today will be the opening plenary with Lois Hetland, Steve Siedel, Howard Gardner, and David Perkins. I had worked with them when I was an apprentice faculty member here in 1999. In fact, I worked directly with David

Perkins and Daniel Wilson that summer in a study group for organizational intelligence.

Boiled down, the four speakers offered themes for the institute:

- ❖ Put the mask on yourself first as an educator.
- ❖ Synthesize ideas.
- ❖ Use a single frame in multiple ways.
- ❖ Create interdisciplinary lenses to take on deep problems

From Lois, we found out that we were 300 seekers from 35 nations and 29 states within the United States. With seven participants, the DC area had one of largest number of people attending—less than California or New York or Massachusetts, but more than other states or nations.

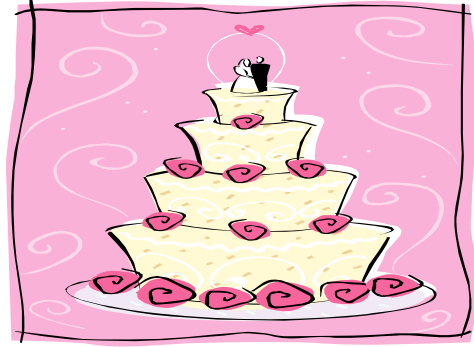
Joan Sobal and Janet Field were first rate co-facilitators for study group “N.” They facilitated our early look at our selves as learners and posed five questions about teaching for understanding. These were to serve as throughlines or reflection points throughout the institute.

We are “putting masks on ourselves” before returning in the fall to put masks on others.

Joan and Janet guided us through protocols designed to take us deep into Louise Gluck’s poem “Mitosis.”

After several rounds of exploring the poem, I had an early glimpse of “layers” as an organizing idea. We came to a deep understanding of the poem through layers of activities including reading the poem aloud twice and successively examining it for meanings with a specific set of intellectual tasks to construct meanings.

*Is not the entire summer institute organized in layers?*



At the afternoon reception, I met Janette from Dr. Carstarphen’s office during the opening reception in Agazi Hall. That meant two of the seven participants from the DC area are from the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Our paths never crossed before now and never crossed again during the institute. But I will make a point to stay in touch with her in DC.

7-21-05

I am early once more, but the door to Agazi Hall is open.

Ahead of the crowd, I can get a seat on the front row again.

Today, David Perkins will speak on the topic “Understanding Understanding.” Because, I have been using the PZ teaching for understanding framework in my work with 5<sup>th</sup> graders, teachers, and principals in Philadelphia, it might seem like he was going to cover old ground. But because I was an empty cup, I had plenty of room to see “understanding” anew.

The day before, Joan and Janet had posed five throughlines for study group members to ponder during the institute. Among the five, these two stand out:

1. What is understanding?
2. How do we develop it?

Also, I added another two questions to the mix.

- ❖ *How does teaching for understanding differ from the scientific approach to standards?*
- ❖ *How might the two approaches converge?*

My cup of inquires was ready for David's talk.

*How do we educate for the unknown?*

That question synthesized David's insights.

He made it clear that participants were to come away with more than an understanding of understanding. He argued for teaching that wilds the tame—that challenges teachers and students alike to go beyond standards and curriculum to pose and solve deep disciplinary problems at all grade levels. Put more mildly, educating to the unknown is appropriate for Information Society Schools demanding knowledge workers who face complex problems stretching beyond conventional thinking. While there is a place for taming the wild with scientific approaches to curriculum such as the one underway in Washington, DC, wilding the tame—educating for the unknown-- needs to part of teaching efforts across the nation.

The idea is to strike a balance between teaching traditional disciplinary knowledge in an exciting way and teaching the unknown in an equally exciting way.

I took Tina Blythe's mini course on using protocols to make learning visible. It is a powerful technique I can use in my work with teachers as a Literacy Coach. We used a protocol to examine student work in depth and learned about a family of protocols with different purposes. Each protocol examined exploring student work in

depth. Whether judging or describing student work, teachers reflect on teaching as well.

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Joan and Janet continue to encourage us to think of a project we can do back home.

Our study group both reflected on the day and looked ahead to the end of the institute. Each study group member will become part of a team to design a project that incorporates PZ ideas into an educational setting in different sites around the world and in the United States. I am teamed with three other participants who do literacy work with high school teachers. Most members of my study group work with high school and middle school students.

7-22-05

I got to the auditorium for the plenary session with Howard Gardner, but someone had already beaten me to the front and center seat. I sat front and side.

Each night, I condensed a lot of notes in my journal book to few lines in an I-Book. That enabled me to face each new day of lectures, mini courses, and reflections as an empty cup, the previous day's work digested.

Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix-Mansila delivered the plenary session entitled "Interdisciplinarity."

Drifting back to my days as a Coordinator of PA LEAD Institute in Temple University's Human Development and Education Research Center. That was supposed to be an interdisciplinary center, but most of the professors and researchers were of the same ilk. And no one worked on joint problems. Each person or team worked on a singular project with little cross fertilization of ideas. But that was the 1980s. A lot has happened since then.

Howard and Veronica would update the idea of interdisciplinary.

First, they provided a standard: 7-23-05

- ❖ Be purposeful by focusing on a problem that demands knowledge from two or more disciplines.
- ❖ Know at least one discipline deeply.
- ❖ Integrate knowledge across two or more disciplines.

They provided four lenses to view types of interdisciplinary work:

1. Conceptual bridging
2. Comprehensive
3. Pragmatic
4. Interpretive

In summary, interdisciplinary work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has come to mean posing a problem that requires knowledge from two or more disciplines. If worked on as a team, each member must have a deep understanding of at least one discipline. Common trends from two or more disciplines integrate the knowledge needed for solution.

Finally, they gave lessons from their research on both good and bad examples of interdisciplinary work.

1. Good disciplinary work beats bad interdisciplinary work.
  2. Multiple interdisciplinary forms meet at multiple crossroads.
  3. Equal representation of two or more disciplines is not needed.
  4. Learn from expert models of disciplinary thinking before designing a project.
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Shari Tishman's Visible Teaching mini course posed many new questions as did the plenary with Howard and Veronica. In the case of the plenary, a few questions in my mind are these: *Does the GoodWorks project represent an example of interdisciplinary work? If so, which of the four types best describes it? Can a project be both conceptual and pragmatic?*

In the case of Shari's workshop, the chief question for my work as a Literacy Coach is this: *How might I help teachers to make thinking more visible in their classrooms?*

We had the afternoon off today. I took a three mile hike up Massachusetts Avenue to explore some of downtown Cambridge. Then, I rode the subway back to Harvard Square and spent the rest of the evening reading in the Harvard COOP bookstore.

The walk had given me think space. David posed this problem during the opening of his plenary lecture.

"Why are people in organizations so smart, but organizations so dumb?"

He explained research findings on both ineffective and effective organizations, pointing to three kinds of leaders.

The inhibiting leader in organizations finds a way to block ideas. This is a power over type. Such a leader may be process smart, but more often, than not is people dumb.

The conciliatory leader appears facilitative but does not give definitive direction. Such a leader may be people smart, but process dumb.

The facilitating leader collaborates with charges to solve problems. Such a leader is both process smart and people smart.

My effort as a first year Literacy Coach in DCPS was to empower teachers. It seems that is a facilitative style. Now, I want to work harder to make that style better.

I am to serve.

Similarly, my election to the school reform team at Woodson High School means working across many views to carve a direction for all.

The principle John Naisbitt gave in *Magatrends* over two decades ago applies to well run organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

"People affected by a change, must be involved in the decision making process." When people are not included in the decision making things go wrong more often.

David drove home his main point about excellent organizational intelligence in a story.

Once people in London were alarmed that both Robins and Titmouse birds were drinking the milk out of bottles on the doorstep almost as soon as they were delivered.

They put aluminum foil over the bottles, but soon a few robins and a lot of the titmouse birds learned to peck through the foil to drink the milk.

It seems robins are territorial. So the few who learned never shared their knowledge.

But the titmouse birds interchanged within flocks often. Soon all the titmouse flocks in London had the capacity to peck through the foil.

**Smart organizations share knowledge across the ranks.**

7-24-05

In the plenary, Howard described ideas from his new book: five minds of the future.

Later, I asked him if most of the ideas in his 18 books, particularly his work on intelligence, creativity and schooling were coming together in a grand synthesis, as represented in the model he gave us today.

As I understand presently, three of the five minds of the future do build on his best known works. The Disciplined Mind, Synthesizing Mind, and Creative Mind indeed drew on Gardner's old knowledge but was reordered at a higher level. The Respectful Mind and the Ethical Mind drew from new knowledge coming from the GoodWorks Project.

When released, his new book will represent a synthesis of Gardner's work. That may be why the Library of Congress already listed it as a forthcoming Gardner reader.

In all, he led me to put these questions in my cup:

*Given the No Child Left Behind Act, can Information Society Schools develop these five minds? Given the "flattening of the world" as described in Thomas Friedman's best selling, economics news book, can schools afford not to develop all five minds?*

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Both mini courses I attended dealt with research from the GoodWorks Project.

In brief, the GoodWorks Project is a nationwide study of excellence and ethics in difficult times. This project gave me what American philosopher Joseph Chilton Pearce once called a "metanoia," a fundamental transformation of mind.

So much of my work as an educational psychologist, Literacy Coach, and human being has been spent looking for the spiritual side of work. With its attention to both excellence and ethics, the GoodWorks project gives shape to my interest.

Thus, the post PZ project, I actually created was a proposal entitled "Educating for the Unknown." This broke away from my study group team. I had worked with them to design a professional development program about teaching for understanding. But the "Educating for the Unknown" (EfU) project deals with good works and reflective practice of Teacher Consultants in the District of Columbia Area Writing Project.

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Study Group N completed its set of presentations for tomorrow—the final day. Teams will have a round of visitations with another study group. Representatives of each team will take turns explaining each presentation to visitors.

7-26-05

Today we will graduate from the PZ institute. Lois Hetland will wave her magic wand in a few hours and 300 scholars will have completed the 2005 Harvard Project Zero Summer Institute: "Views on Understanding."

During our final plenary, David enacted stories about three visionaries, each representing a type. The take away questions in my mind were these: *How might the three visionaries become lenses for seeing leadership in DCPS? Which kind of visionary am I as a Literacy Coach? On what scale should my efforts be focused upon?*

This is the tenth anniversary of the institute as well as Lois Hetland's final year as its director. Howard surprised Lois with a scholarship to be given in her name to future participants in years to come. From somewhere in the world, a scholar will win the Lois Hetland Scholarship to PZ summer institute 2006.

After ten years of serving as the institute director, she is moving on to take a professorship at a Massachusetts institute of higher learning.

As Howard said she has been the antidote to Murphy's Law: "if anything can go wrong, it will."

"The Hetland law is 'if everything can go right, it will.'"

The institute itself is one of the few summer power points of renewal in which researchers and practitioners become the dancer and the dance.

For me it was time to arrive back home with a full cup to share and empty.

In his first year as a Literacy Coach for DCPS, Jerry wrote a series of monthly articles for educators at Woodson High School. This is the first article for the 2005-2006 school year.

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