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Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Impressions from Arles: Inquiry's Potential within Collegiality

by Donna Adair Breault

Abstract

The story of Van Gogh and Gauguin's work together offers interesting points to consider regarding collegial inquiry among educators. This manuscript uses their story, as well as the works of Dewey, Schön, and Sennett, to explore dimensions of collegial relationships and how collegiality may promote greater degrees of inquiry among teachers. It concludes that four levels of mutuality are prerequisites for upholding democratic ideals in a school that is a community of inquiry.

I want to challenge you to play with a relatively small idea and see the potential it holds in your professional relationships. This paper explores the story of Van Gogh and Gauguin's time together in Arles and the implications of their story in relation to our own professional relationships. The story and its analysis are like a "fish," as Virginia Woolf (1929, 5) so playfully described a thought, "One that entices with a bit of a tug, and upon retrieving it we must decide whether to hold onto it as it is or return it to the water where it may grow fatter and one day 'be worth cooking and eating.'"

By exploring the story of Van Gogh and Gauguin, I hope your interest is as piqued as mine was when I attended the "Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South" exhibit in Chicago. It was evident when viewing the paintings they completed during their two months together that the tensions between them affected their work. Further, the correspondence that flowed before, during, and after their collaboration indicated how their ideas, whether conflicting or otherwise, led each man to more complex ideas and helped him develop more fully as an artist. It is difficult to ascertain whether their similarities or differences played the biggest role in their evolution. The degree to which their collaboration was a positive force within their lives and works, though unknown, remains an exciting question to explore.

The challenges that Van Gogh and Gauguin faced—both dynamic and conflicting—parallel challenges often faced by educators in their professional collaborations. What happens when teachers and school leaders must work with individuals whose perspectives and assumptions differ from their own? The story of the Studio of the South offers valuable lessons about the potential and pitfalls inherent in collaboration and illustrates how collaboration can help educators become more reflective practitioners.

The Studio of the South

Admittedly, a two-month professional relationship that ends when one person cuts off part of his ear may not be the best model of collegiality. Nevertheless, a great deal can be learned by exploring Van Gogh and Gauguin's relationship.

In the early months of 1888, Van Gogh moved from Paris to Arles, a small provincial town in the southern region of France. He hoped to form a Studio of the South where a brotherhood of artists would come together and, through hard work and sacrifice, advance their individual work and influence the field of art. Van Gogh had no intentions of leading the studio. Instead, he hoped Gauguin, his senior in both age and reputation, would come to Arles to head this artistic community. Both Van Gogh and his brother, Theo, wrote to Gauguin proposing that he come to Arles. Though Gauguin held some reservations about going to Arles and had debts to settle in Martinique, he ultimately joined Van Gogh in October 1888 (Druick and Zegers 2001).

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The two men lived together in a yellow house Van Gogh had rented and spent much of their time painting portraits of men and women from the town and traveling around the area to paint landscapes. During the time Van Gogh and Gauguin were together, they completed 59 paintings in which they explored alternative styles and themes. In late December, however, the Studio of the South came to an abrupt end when Van Gogh, in a fit of emotion, cut off part of his ear and had to be hospitalized. The following day, on December 24, 1888, Gauguin left Arles for Paris (Druick and Zegers 2001).

The Importance of Inquiry

Despite the short and tumultuous nature of their work together, it is evident in the paintings, correspondence, and history of the Studio of the South that inquiry played a vital role in their work though the form it took differed significantly with each artist. Van Gogh approached his painting with emotion and spontaneity, while Gauguin took a rational and deliberate perspective. The differences between the two men actually presented some positive challenges for each. According to a number of art critics (Collins 2001; Druick and Zegers 2001; Silverman 2000), Van Gogh explored more varied elements of style because of the challenges Gauguin posed regarding perspective and paint-

ing from memory. Similarly, Gauguin developed greater understanding between art and life because of Van Gogh's ideas and intense reaction to the world around him. However, the professional growth they experienced while together has to be weighed in the context of the troubling aspects of their relationship. In a letter to his brother, Van Gogh described (in Collins 2001, 174) the tensions that emerged during their work, "Our arguments are terribly electric . . . sometimes we come out of them with

our heads as exhausted as a used up electric battery."

We are ideologically interdependent whether or not we are conscious of the mutual reciprocity flowing between our thoughts and actions.

Like Van Gogh and Gauguin, educators need to reflect on their work. Teaching, like art, is an opaque vocation. There are notions of what it means to teach and learn, but there are no set prescriptions to guide us. If we seek absolutes in teaching, we may very well find ourselves in the position of the mythical character Tantalus who while becoming thirstier and thirstier is subjected to waters continuously receding beyond his

reach (Dewey 1977a). As Dewey (1977b, 54) described, "All things that we experience have some meaning, but that meaning is always so partially embodied in things that we cannot rest in them. They point beyond themselves."

Our actions as teachers are guided by a number of factors: our understanding about the content; our recognition of developmental factors within and among our students; our previous experiences, both the successful and unsuccessful; model teachers we have seen; and perhaps even an intuitive awareness of how to handle specific situations. With these factors in mind, where does inquiry fit within our daily lives as teachers? How might colleagues help us to more effectively inquire about our work?

Dewey (1929) identified three reasons why inquiry is important for teachers. First, it liberates them by helping them to see new problems and devise new procedures through unique measures. Second, inquiry changes teachers' attitudes about their work. Reflective practice allows teachers to see their place within a complex system of variables that surface in their daily work. Problems are not seen in isolation. Teachers see their role beyond the confines of the four walls of their classrooms. Finally, he noted that teachers who inquire have at their disposal a far greater range of responses to the complexity they face each day. Thus, they become more flexible and see more possibilities within their work.

Dewey (1933) further argued that teachers should not inquire in isolation. It is through our association with others that we are able to form thoughtful habits. Our

thoughts and actions are inherently linked with those around us—with those who have come and gone in education as well as those yet to come. As such, we are ideologically interdependent whether or not we are conscious of the mutual reciprocity flowing between our thoughts and actions. To the degree that we recognize these connections and the potential to use them to better understand our work, we can grow professionally both as individuals and as a community of learners. Henderson (2001, 70) referred to a conscious relationship of mutual reflection as “multiperspective inquiry” where teachers explore the uniqueness of their own perspectives as well as the unique perspectives of others, and playfully explore how differences within and among those perspectives interact. He noted (2001, 71–72), “Through multiperspective inquiry, teachers become more attentive to the multiple dimensions of their work and to the thoughts and feelings of others.”

Van Gogh and Gauguin engaged in multiperspective inquiry during their time in Arles. For example, Van Gogh painted a picture entitled *A Memory of the Garden* in which he included his mother and sister standing along a garden path. In this painting, Van Gogh adopted many

of the artistic principles most often exhibited by Gauguin. Instead of painting spontaneously in front of the subject, Van Gogh painted the picture from memory—recounting the appearance of the subjects. In addition, the coarse texture that was often seen in his paintings as well as the depth of perspective evident through his use of orthogonal lines was replaced with a smoother painting and a flatter image. This painting by Van Gogh demonstrated a shift in his work from using his immediate emotions as the source of his artistic creation to using his imagination. Druick and Zegers stated (2001, 203), “The effort of executing *A Memory of the Garden* led him deeper into rather than out of himself.” Not only did his work on the painting result in a wonderful product, but also the process itself offered a sense of professional growth for him as an artist.

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Inquiry and the Role of Collegiality: Seeking Translucence

With the collective role of inquiry in mind, this paper refers to collegiality as a relationship that is established and sustained for the deliberate purpose of professional growth. While colleagues may play with ideas, they do so with the intention of achieving greater levels of understanding about their contexts and clarity regarding their perspectives. Like Van Gogh and Gauguin, when teachers work with colleagues, they move closer to their professional goals than they would have been able to had they worked alone. Teachers make a commitment to recognize and articulate the choices they make in their classrooms when they reflect with colleagues. They make public the reasons why they chose to teach a lesson a certain way, why they

handled the disruptive student one way as opposed to another, and why they concentrated on certain subject matter within the unit rather than another. By reflecting with colleagues, teachers begin to recognize the multiple decisions they make daily. By examining those decisions and the reasons why they made them, they are able to make connections and achieve a sense of translucence within their opaque work. They also have the opportunity to see how other colleagues deal with the same issues and how colleagues' views and beliefs differ. By seeing and challenging similarities and differences, colleagues can help each other explore more fully the complexity of their work and remind each other that there are no simple solutions to the challenges they face.

Teachers who inquire have at their disposal a far greater range of responses to the complexity they face each day.

Henderson's (2001) distinction between craft reflection and professional artistry may help to characterize more fully the depth of translucence in teaching. When teachers engage in craft reflection, they explore the nature of the act of teaching, including instructional strategies, classroom management decisions, and curricular choices. As such, they can find answers to specific needs and questions. Though craft reflection is an important part

of a teacher's professional development, it does not capture the full professional potential found within inquiry. Often the outcomes of craft reflection are technical or propositional. They are fairly transparent statements regarding choices in the classroom. Such outcomes are necessary, yet insufficient, for teachers to achieve their full professional potential or use the dynamic range of a collegial relationship.

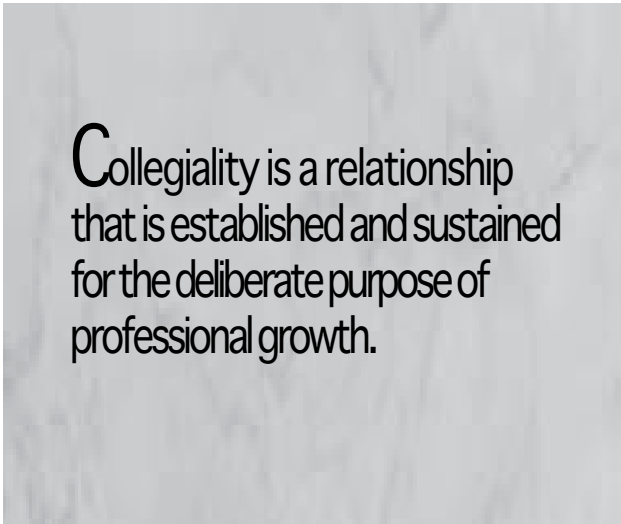
In contrast, when teachers work together to achieve professional artistry, they are seeking clarity regarding their work as a whole rather than merely seeking "an answer" to a specific dilemma. Professional artistry extends the reflective process beyond that which is observable within the classroom's four walls. It challenges teachers to explore the beliefs and assumptions that guide their choices as well as the dynamic contexts through which they work. Such exploration never produces an answer. Rather, it creates possibilities and potential—translucent outcomes. Colleagues who engage in professional artistry seek expression over statement, and clarity and meaningfulness over conclusions.

Dewey (1934) cited an example from Van Gogh that represented the distinction between craft reflection and professional artistry. He recounted a letter that Van Gogh wrote to his brother (in Dewey 1934, 85–86) about painting a picture of the Rhone River. In the letter, he described the colors he used in his painting, ". . . sky and river are the color of absinthe, the quays a shade of lilac, the figures leaning on the parapet, blackish, the iron bridge an intense blue, with a note of vivid orange in the

background, and a note of intense malachite.” Van Gogh’s recounting of the colors he used in his painting is consistent with the form of reflection seen in craft reflection. Later in the letter, Van Gogh moved beyond the technical recall of colors. He told his brother (in Dewey 1934, 86), “I am trying to get something utterly heart-broken.” Shifting from craft reflection to professional artistry, Van Gogh considered more than the use of color in the painting to explore the emotional implications of the motif. Likewise, teachers are more than the sum of their techniques. Though they can recall strategies by name and objectives as outlined within their state guidelines, they also achieve things that cannot be measured which fall under the guise of professional artistry. Colleagues serve as valuable resources for educators developing and reflecting upon the artistry of their work.

Sources of Inquiry: Rationality and Emotion

Both Van Gogh and Gauguin reflected throughout the painting process, and their inquiry took on different forms as shown on their canvases. Gauguin approached his painting rationally. He offered cerebral representations distilled according to the message he hoped to convey, and often the images took on mythical elements. Gauguin’s style of painting supported his highly abstracted interpretations of life. His brush strokes were light, and the perspective within his paintings was flat. As he painted his subjects from memory, he would subsume the real for the symbolic within his work (Collins 2001). For Gauguin, painting was a systematic and intellectual process. When he traveled to a new location—Martinique, Arles, or Pont-Aven—he first would strive to understand the people and surroundings. He wanted to under-



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stand what made each place and its people unique. He would begin by completing sketches of the people in their everyday lives before asking them to pose. In doing this, Gauguin hoped to “penetrate their true character” (Collins 2001, 60). Gauguin sought this period of initiation because he did not want to be “surprised by the motif” (Silverman 2000, 197). Though he inserted himself in the process, the personal connections he made were rooted in rationality rather than emotion. From these rational beginnings, Gauguin would then explore the emotional implications. As Silverman noted (2000, 207), Gauguin integrated imagination and mysticism with rationality creating a logical approach “bolstered by intuition.” He made an emotional connection with his subject through an intellectual context to create. He described this connection (in Silverman 2000, 1970) as “a sensation that leads me to a poetic state whereby the painter’s intellectual forces are dis-engaged.”

While Gauguin approached his painting from a rational position, Van Gogh approached painting emotionally. His work was explosive, coarse, and intense. He could not separate himself from his artwork. The deep orthogonal lines of his brushstrokes revealed the depth to which he explored his subjects through his own beliefs and experiences. Unlike Gauguin, Van Gogh was most comfortable working with a model and painting it rapidly and on the spot in an effort to capture the essence of reality at that moment (Collins 2001). Though Van Gogh painted quickly, inquiry was still a vital part of his creative process. He was guided by deeply held and personally forged beliefs about art including complementariness of color and subject, framing of subjects within the canvas, and relational interdependence of the objects represented (Collins 2001; Silverman 2000). These beliefs created patterns of significance that guided his frenetic efforts. In a letter to his sister, Van Gogh (1978, 369–70) noted:

But for the weaver, or rather the designer of the pattern or the combination of colors, it is not always easy to determine the estimation of the number of threads and their direction, no more than it is easy to blend the strokes of a brush into a harmonious whole. . . . All winter long, I have had the threads of this tissue in my hands, and have searched for the ultimate pattern; and though it has become a tissue of rough, course aspect, nevertheless the threads have been chosen carefully and according to certain rules.

By seeing and challenging similarities and differences, colleagues can help each other explore more fully the complexity of their work and remind each other that there are no simple solutions to the challenges they face.

Likewise, Van Gogh's inquiry was intense and spontaneous—guided by a deeply held system of beliefs that linked art to life and the condition of humankind. His complex and well-developed system of beliefs made Van Gogh's spontaneous reflection possible. After leaving Arles, Gauguin saw many of Van Gogh's paintings on display and wrote in a letter (in Collins 2001, 223), "Among those who work from nature, you are the only one who thinks."

According to Dewey (1934), spontaneous reflection is an act initiated by an emotional response to an idea; it is guided unconsciously by long and developed periods of activity regarding that subject or idea. Individuals operating from spontaneous reflection are working from more than mere hunch or an introductory understanding of the subject of their work; instead, they must possess a level of mature understanding regarding the content of their experiences. This maturity creates doors in which new experiences may enter one's total understanding. Dewey (1934, 72) stated, "Subconscious maturation precedes creative production in every line of human endeavor." Van Gogh described (in Dewey 1934, 72) this form of reflection in action in a letter to his brother, "Emotions

are sometimes so strong that one works without knowing that one works, and the strokes come with a sequence and a coherence like that of words in a speech or letter.”

Spontaneous Reflection and Professional Artistry

We may see spontaneous reflection more clearly when we consider Van Gogh’s analogy to the act of writing. Throughout our education, we are exposed to grammatical rules and stylistic principles. We see the application of these rules and principles to the degree that we read. Therefore, we have a certain degree of understanding about writing. Depending upon the degree to which we have attended to these experiences and engaged in the act of writing, we are each currently at some stage of development as a writer—a more mature stage than we once were but perhaps not as mature as we might become in the future. When we write, however, we do not necessarily articulate (internally or externally) rules of grammar and principles of style as our pens move across the pages. Rather, the rules and principles are part of an unconscious system of beliefs and understandings about writing that influence our work from behind-the-scene. Those rules and principles move to the surface—to a more conscious level—as we reread what we have written and make revisions. Similarly, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and other artists, would revisit their work by analyzing it in correspondence and conversations with friends, family, and other artists.

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Schön (1983) referred to this form of inquiry as reflection in action. According to Schön (1983, 6), reflection in action involves “appreciation, action, and reappraisal.” The practitioner enters a situation with a certain level of awareness of its nature based upon prior experience, and through the process of acting on the situation in a deliberate way, he or she gains even greater understanding. Schön warned, however, that technical rationality, or the imposition of standardized means to achieving an end, impedes reflection in action. Artists, as well as teachers, cannot approach a situation whereby an institution or their own approach to the work emphasizes objective technique over the subjective potential of a situation or subject. With this in mind, reflecting with a colleague can help a teacher or an artist focus on the process and its significance.

What does spontaneous reflection in the classroom look like? Teachers engage in spontaneous reflection when they negotiate the multitude of curricular and instructional decisions they face daily if those decisions are based on a solid philosophy about teaching and learning. How does the teacher deal with the issue of depth versus breadth? How does he or she reconcile the nonnegotiable presence of elements

such as Channel One television despite moral outrage about perpetuating a consumption ethic within formal institutions? What does the teacher do with the decontextualized list of vocabulary words that accompanies each story in his or her reading anthology? How does he or she transform dry and superficial information within a history text so that it's meaningful to students? A teacher's responses to these and similar issues may demonstrate spontaneous reflection if, and only if, that

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teacher has a firm grounding in his or her beliefs about teaching and learning and he or she is able to overcome the technical rational elements inherent within schooling. Collegial relationships can help teachers with this type of reflection.

Teacher inquiry, whether a single teacher or a group of teachers collaborating, may fall along a continuum of explicit and deliberate reflection like Gauguin's work or a more spontaneous and "on-the-spot" reflection like the work of Van Gogh. It is critical for teachers and administrators to recognize that in-

quiry takes on varied forms and provides opportunities in which these forms can be honored within the school's work. Though differences make collaboration a greater challenge—as was evident in the work of Gauguin and Van Gogh—the continuum of inquiry offers varied opportunities for educators to see their work in greater depth.

Mutuality as a Necessary Condition for Collegiality

What can we learn ultimately about collegiality and inquiry from Van Gogh and Gauguin's work together in Arles? I believe we can see the necessity of mutuality within collegial relationships, particularly when it is manifested within four elements of reflection: mutual visions, mutual respect, mutual sympathy, and mutual vulnerability.

Mutual Visions

Colleagues must hold *mutual visions* for the overall purpose of their work. Mutual visions, however, should not be confused with identical visions. Teachers do not have to share the same philosophies on the purpose of schooling to engage in collegial relationships. If teachers' visions about schooling are radically different, then the tensions that emerge within and through their interactions may pose more challenges than opportunities.

Different visions about the purpose of schooling or the nature of the learner could significantly affect the relationship between teachers. Consider, for example, two teachers working in a school that has both very poor and very affluent students. If

“Teacher A” believes that some families are poor because of laziness and poor choices, while others are wealthy because of hard work and determination, he or she will respond differently in collaborative situations than “Teacher B” who believes systemic injustice perpetuates inequalities in society. If these two teachers attempt to collaborate regarding curriculum decisions or distribution of resources, their very different visions about human nature and society may significantly hinder their ability to work together successfully.

Art historians (Druick and Zegers 2001; Collins 2001; Silverman 2000) believed that the different visions Van Gogh and Gauguin had about their time in Arles contributed to the breakdown in their relationship. Van Gogh had a quasi-religious sense about the work done at Arles, a place he saw as a permanent artist colony. He imagined Gauguin serving as the leader of this artistic order where artists not only improved their personal skills as painters, but also where the community of artists had a positive effect on the field of art. Van Gogh held this vision so strongly that he imagined parallels between the work of Gauguin and other artists with the work of Jesus and his disciples (Collins 2001). Prior to Gauguin’s arrival in Arles, Van Gogh even purchased 12 chairs—symbolic of the 12 apostles.

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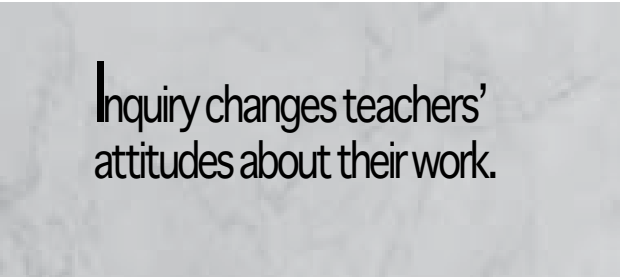
In contrast, Gauguin saw his time in Arles as a temporary commercial venture. He was motivated by what Van Gogh’s brother, Theo, an art dealer, could do for his career. The two men had two different sets of expectations—one intrinsically motivated with a religious zeal and the other extrinsically motivated for profit and professional advancement. Ultimately, the differences in vision were too great for the professional relationship to be sustained.

Mutual Respect

Colleagues also should have *mutual respect* for one another. Mutual respect involves an asymmetrical reciprocity—giving to one another without expecting the equivalent (or more) in return. Sennett (2003) compared this type of relationship to a musical quintet. When musicians in a quintet play together, some may have to “hold back” their instruments so they do not overwhelm the composition. These musicians understand that each of their fellow musicians plays a vital role in creating the music. Though some instruments may seem to bring more to the musical score, all the instruments are equally important to create the correct sound. Therefore, each member gives according to the quintet’s collective needs, not according to what he or she feels is deserved.

How might educators have mutual respect for one another? Consider a team of teachers in a middle school attempting to plan an integrated curriculum unit. Imagine that two of the teachers on the team have ten or more years of experience and graduate degrees. The other two teachers are in their first or second year out of their undergraduate preparation. In such a scenario, it would be easy to imagine the two more experienced teachers taking charge and controlling most of the planning. Mutual respect, however, would require all the teachers to understand that each member of the team has valuable insights to offer, and to provide opportunities for all voices to be heard and ideas honored.

Arrogance and insecurity are two pitfalls that hinder mutual respect. When a teacher considers himself or herself either less or greater than a colleague, the potential for collegiality is significantly hindered. In the work of the two artists, Van Gogh felt insecure about his work in relation to Gauguin's. During the time the two men worked together in Arles, Gauguin was invited to show his work at a number of prestigious exhibitions. In response to Gauguin's success, Van Gogh asked his brother to refrain from showing his work until he had completed 20 paintings. Then, he wanted his work shown only at his brother's apartment. He did not want to risk rejection by seeking art shows to display his work (Druick and Zegers 2001).



Inquiry changes teachers'
attitudes about their work.

Van Gogh's insecurities were made worse by Gauguin's arrogance. For example, Gauguin began to paint works whose subjects (e.g., sunflowers) were similar to Van Gogh's signature works. Van Gogh worried that Gauguin would show the world that he could outdo him even on his best work. Gauguin

painted a very denigrating portrait of Van Gogh toward the end of their time together in Arles. The image was painted as though Gauguin were above Van Gogh and looking down on him. In addition, he made Van Gogh look less than human by giving him an ape-like head with squinting eyes. He also included one of his own landscape paintings behind Van Gogh—making his images larger than life while Van Gogh's work was dwarfed in comparison (Druick and Zegers 2001).

Mutual Sympathy

Mutual respect is a prerequisite for *mutual sympathy*. One must first recognize the worth of one's self and others before learning to appreciate the value of different beliefs and/or talents within a relationship. When colleagues achieve mutual sympathy, they cannot remain passive toward the ideas of one another. While mutual respect may allow collaborating individuals to agree to disagree and continue to work together, mutual sympathy creates a necessity to learn from one another. In a letter to his brother, Van Gogh described this relationship as creative competition. He said (1978, 150), "I . . . find something animating in the thought that one works in one direction, the other in another, yet there is still mutual sympathy."

With mutual sympathy, the two experienced teachers working on the middle school team described previously would not just listen to their new colleagues and allow room in the planning process for each teacher to interpret the plans according to his or her style or beliefs. Rather, all four teachers would come to the planning process anticipating that they would learn from one another and what they learned would become a vital aspect of the outcome. This type of collaboration was described by Dewey (1916, 5) as the essence of communication and thus the essence of community:

Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and, in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified.

Though craft reflection is an important part of a teacher's professional development, it does not capture the full professional potential found within inquiry.

Mutual Vulnerability

Mutual sympathy is an achieved (albeit temporarily) state of interaction through which individuals can collaborate effectively at a particular point and time. Coworkers can come together within the context of a particular project—whether planning an integrated unit or working together on a committee—and can achieve a degree of mutual sympathy such as Van Gogh and Gauguin did in Arles.

But how can a school sustain this sense of active asymmetrical reciprocity? How can it become part of the cultural phenomenon of the entire school? This degree of mutuality requires yet another level of achievement: *mutual vulnerability*. Sennett (2003) offered another image that may clarify the potential of this cultural phenomenon—the Trobriander tribe and their rituals. According to Sennett (2003), Trobrianders would go to market festivals and purchase carved necklaces and bracelets. Throughout the festival, members of the tribe would offer these jewels to other tribe members in a ritual filled with humility for the giver and the receiver. Sennett (2003) noted that this ritual created a social obligation of giving to others with a humble spirit. It did not matter that some members were able to purchase and give nicer jewelry than others. The reciprocity within the ritual was asymmetrical. Each member of the tribe gave without expecting anything in return. Sennett (2003, 221) added, “A ritual exchange, particularly of this asymmetric sort, creates a more prolonged relationship; reciprocal speech acts become like threads woven into a cloth.”

The prospect of translating the rituals of the Trobrianders within the work of schools is exciting. Imagine teachers in a building constantly exchanging ideas in

which they are actively engaged, free from competition. This cultural phenomenon of mutual vulnerability forms the essence of a democratic community of learners within schools. As Dewey (1916) described in *Democracy and Education*, everyone would be focused on making the lives of others (teachers and, as a result, their students) better. Those with the most at stake in an era of accountability would move

away from operating under prescriptions and fear and instead maintain faith in the reflective capacities of their colleagues.

When teachers work together to achieve professional artistry, they are seeking clarity regarding their work as a whole rather than merely seeking 'an answer' to a specific dilemma.

A Small Fish

You have before you a small fish—an image of two men who worked together over 100 years ago in a small yellow house in Arles, France, whose work provides insights for art critics interested in post-impressionism and for educators exploring the potential of collegiality and reflection in schools.

Though the four degrees of mutuality—mutual visions, mutual respect, mutual sympathy, and mutual vulnerability—may seem elusive, we can always strive toward an ideal. As Dewey (1988) admonished, the essence of democracy (and a democratic community within schools) is predicated upon our faith in the capacity of human nature. We will not create a collegial community of inquiry until we articulate what that means to us (Dewey 1916). In summation, we can again turn to Dewey (1946, 59):

The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence and in the power of pooled and co-operative experience. It is not belief that these things are complete but that, if given a show, they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action.

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