Issue Twelve (Winter 1999)

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CAN'T ANYBODY TEACH THESE CHILDREN?
The Promise of Culturally Relevant Teaching

Gloria Ladson-Billings

Several years ago, I overheard a teacher in a predominantly African American community school say to one of her colleagues, "If the parents would just send us some kids with some values, we could teach them!" That teacher's words reverberated throughout my entire being as I asked myself, "Is this the way most of the teachers think about the students? And, if they do, what does this mean for what happens inside their classrooms?" I asked these questions because my own experiences as a student, a teacher, and a parent had helped me to realize how important it is for students to be in supportive environments with people who believe in their abilities and recognize their capacities. That teacher's negative words along with the mountains of research on how bad things are spurred me on to investigate the classrooms of successful teachers of African American students.

African American students continue to be under-served by our nation's public schools. The dropout rate for inner-city youth is 36 percent and rising. In some African American community the school drop out rate is almost 50 percent.

> *African American youngsters are twice as likely to be suspended from school as White youngsters* (Edelman, 1987).
>
> *African American students comprise 17 percent of the nation's public school population, yet 41 percent of the special education population* (Kunjufu, 1984).

The litany of African American students' educational failure is well documented and oft repeated. However, in the work that I do I wanted to ask a different kind of question. Instead of continuing to ask, "what is wrong with African American students' education," I ventured to ask, "what is right and what happens in those classrooms where teachers, students, and their parents 'get it right'?"

This paradigm shift was not an easy one. First of all, none of the education literature couples African American students with educational excellence. Instead, a computer search with the descriptor "black education" generates cross-reference such as "see, culturally deprived," "see, at-risk", "see culturally disadvantaged." The educational literature contains no language of excellence when it comes to African American students. Thus, my job became one of theory building and evidence seeking. I began a search for classrooms where African American students did well.

Because I was searching for a "new thing" I needed to search in a new way. The first step of my search was to find the teachers. Instead of using standardized test scores I elected to talk

with African American parents about their perceptions of who were the "best" teachers for their children. The parents had no trouble detailing who they thought were outstanding teachers and why. As a cross-check I also talked with principals and got their suggestions. In some few cases, I checked with other colleagues. Finally, I selected a sample of teachers who appeared on both the parent generated and principal/teacher generated lists. Nine teachers' names appeared on both of the lists. Eight of the teachers agreed to participate in the study. Five of the teachers are African American and three are White. The teachers' participation required several hours of interview, allowing me to observe in their classrooms without prior notice—any day, at any time, allowing me to video tape their teaching, and participating in a collaborative group to analyze their teaching practice. What I learned from those teachers formed the basis of what I have come to call "culturally relevant teaching." The three propositions that form the basis of my theory of culturally relevant teaching are: academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political critique.

Academic Achievement

No matter what else schools find themselves doing, promoting academic achievement is among their primary functions. At its best, academic achievement represents intellectual growth and the ability to participate in the production of knowledge. At its worst, academic achievement represents inculcation and mindless indoctrination of the young into the canons and orthodoxy of the old. However, the bottom line remains that the students are to learn something in school.

Despite the various arguments that suggest that African American students do not want to learn, the historical record clearly refutes that. From the days of slavery, African Americans have fought unceasingly to get an education. During the modern Civil Rights Movement education was one of the most pivotal issues of the struggle. James Meredity, Autherine Lucy, Charlayne Hunter, and the young high school students we came to know as "The Little Rock Nine" carried with them our deepest hopes and desires for freedom—a freedom achieved through intellectual excellence.

I recount these historical moments to provoke you to question the contemporary reversal we see in our schools, the apparent rejection of academic achievement. What has happened to convince African American students that there is no benefit in striving to achieve academically? At least three simultaneous phenomena are in some way explanatory. First, there is a rejection of intellect in the larger, so-called mainstream American culture. Americans are suspect of intellectual pursuits and people seen as "too smart." Popular culture critiques of Asian American students suggest that they are not "well-rounded" and study "too much." Even at the college and university level there is an increasing push toward careerism rather than helping students cultivate their intellectual life.

Second, I believe this reversal in African American students' quest for academic achievement is tied to their astute questioning of the material value of education. From the time Americans send their children to school, they have them reciting a mantra about going to school to get a good job. However, African American students can cite numerous examples of people they know who went to school and persisted, yet do not have a job (or have a job that is not commensurate with their level of education). The students' experiential observations are born out by the Labour Department's statistics.

Third, the reverse illustration—that African American students know and are aware of other African Americans who did not achieve in school or persist and are materially successful—also is a powerful challenge to the quest for academic achievement. Students participating in a consumer driven culture cannot block out the constant images of fast cars, fancy clothes, expensive jewellery, and local celebrity that can be a part of participation in illegal activity that rarely requires a diploma.

With these three factors operating simultaneously, teachers committed to the academic excellence of African American students face a formidable challenge. How do we get students to choose academic excellence in the face of competing perspectives? I would argue that this choice is made easier and more likely if teachers are able to develop the second proposition—cultural competence.

Cultural Competence – Caring about them:

Cultural competence refers to the ability of students to grow in understanding and respect of their culture of origin. In describing the alienating effects of education for African American students, Molefi K. Asante asserts that the longer European American students stay in the nation's schools, the more steeped they become in their own culture. Conversely, the longer African American students stay in the public schools, the more separated they become from their own culture. This separation or alienation occurs because so little of public education embraces African and African American culture. Indeed, much of what African Americans value culturally is de-legitimated in schools. Early studies of African American students by mainstream scholars were steeped in a rhetoric of cultural deprivation and cultural disadvantage. Many teachers and prospective teachers have little or no experience with African American culture. Thus, their perceptions are informed by the same media and educational research that insists on a notion of cultural deprivation.

For me, the way these images and perceptions work were exemplified when a European American graduate student came to see me about her work. She told me that she had worked with African American children in an all Black Catholic school in inner city New York. The student commented that her students asked her often why she did not have any children. She explained that she was not married and therefore not a mother. According to her, the students pointed out that she did not need to be married to have children. Her next comment to me was, "I understand that having children without being married is a part of their culture!"

Once I got the look of astonishment off my face, I began to explain to the young woman that prior to 1968, more than 75 percent of African American children lived in two parent households. Rather than uncritically attribute out of wedlock births to "culture," I challenged the student to look carefully at what social and economic changes had occurred since 1968 that might have contributed to this increase. Like so many other European American teachers, her notions of African American culture are ill-formed and distorted because of a lack of genuine contact with the African American community.

Another example of how these distortions occur appeared in a weekly community newspaper. The paper ran a front page story about the popularity of "Black culture." The entire article was about hip-hop, youth culture. Many of my White graduate students pointed out the article to me and told me how much they learned from it. However, in one of our class meetings, an

African American woman asked pointedly, "What other culture do you know would be defined by a bunch of 15-year-olds?" Her sharp question made the entire class pause and realize that the "commodified" Black popular youth culture is not the same as African American culture.

To help African American students become culturally competent, teachers need to understand core African American values. They need to recognize the way that students speak, interact, and are in the world, are fundamental building blocks for their academic success. Unfortunately, the insistence on juxtaposing academic achievement and cultural competence for African Americans obscures this notion.

More recently, in my classes I have been asking students to identify an African American adolescent male television character who exemplified academic achievement. The most common responses were, "Steve Urkel" of "Family Matters" and "Carlton Banks" of "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air." Most students agree that these characters are "cultural incompetents." Although they may be extremely smart or successful in school, no other African Americans want to be around them. Conversely, when the students are asked to think of "culturally competent" people in the popular culture, they often name rappers with a political edge, for example, "Public Enemy," "Arrested Development," and "Diggable Planets." They do not think of these same people as academic achievers (even when they are).

Culturally relevant teachers know how to skilfully merge students' academic aspirations with their desire to remain themselves—to be culturally competent. One example occurred when one of the teachers in my study consistently used forms of Black English Vernacular ("Ebonics") as a bridge to American Edited English (AEE). The teacher would say to students, "we might say, "I be's here at 8:00, but the translation to the standard form would be, I always am here at 8:00." The teacher never told the students that the language with which they came was wrong or that American Edited English was right. Instead, she helped them to understand the relationship between the two forms of the language and assisted them in choosing the correct usage for appropriate circumstances.

Unfortunately, the school experiences of many African American students forces them to choose between academic achievement and cultural competence. Without seeing how these two are integral, students will continue to be forced to choose one over the other. Just as students with strong allegiances to African American cultural forms may reject the "nerd" image of academic achievers, the academic achievers may look down upon the cultural representations of Africans and African Americans. The third proposition, socio-political consciousness, may hold the key to merging the first two.

Socio-Political Consciousness – Teaching them to care

If students believe that personal achievement and a personal sense of cultural competence is adequate, it is likely that they will believe that personal success is only their responsibility. Socio-political consciousness is an attempt to develop in students a sense of mutuality and reciprocity toward others with whom they share cultural solidarity. It is designed to have them ask larger socio-political questions about how schools and the society work to expose ongoing inequity and social injustice. If they do not begin to ask these questions, they are vulnerable to reiterate positions that suggest that they "made it" by their own individual efforts and everyone else should do the same. This "blaming the victim" mentality is reminiscent of

rhetoric that argues that all individuals must lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. This ideology rarely recognizes that some begin with several pairs of boots while others barely have socks.

Once again, an example from my study with successful teachers of African American students is relevant. One teacher was frustrated with the students' seeming hostility toward their community. "I hate this community" said one boy. "I can't wait till I grow up so I can move away from here." Rather than scold or endorse the students, the teacher saw this as an opportunity for teaching the students about the political realities of their community "Do you hate your parents? Do you hate me? Do you have the church you attend? Do you hate the community centre? All of these are a part of the community. What you hate are the drugs, the crime, and the violence. These things have invaded the community; they are not the community."

To prove her point, the teacher got the class involved in a detailed historical investigation of the community. She pleaded with the local historical society to allow her into archives unavailable to the general public. She made photocopies of the photos and documents to allow her students to see how the community has grown and changed over time. Ultimately, the students came up with a land-use plan for a burned out strip mall that had become a haven for drunks, drug addicts, and prostitutes. The students presented their plan to the City Council and received a promise that their proposal would be given serious consideration.

This community involvement helped the students to understand that they were a part of something bigger than their individual concerns or classroom community. The work they did had more than individual payoff; it had community benefit. The teacher helped them understand that their families and community were counting on them to help restore the community to its former stature and be part of its more dynamic future. They needed to think collectively and communally to be able to do that. They could not be absorbed merely in individual success and personal aggrandizement.

Taken together, academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness forge a picture of what it means to be a culturally relevant teacher who is prepared to teach all the children. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to collect lots of data that supports my argument that there are teachers who can teach "these kids."

These teachers understand some basic principles about teaching that I believe are important for all teachers to incorporate in their teaching:

1. Our children are educable—90 percent of the children come to school capable of learning everything school has to teach them.
2. When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence.
3. When teachers provide instructional "scaffolding" students can move from where they are to where they need to be.
4. The focus of the classroom must be instructional.
5. Real education is about extending students' thinking and abilities. (our students get too much schooling and too little education)
6. Effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both the students and the subject matter. (concern about my prospective teachers lack of intellectual interest, e.g.

"hating to read", "scared of science", "math phobic" – how can they be good models of intellectual excellence?)

Finally, I need to make a pitch for why we must teach all of the children. As our population begins to age, we will need more and more young people who are prepared to enter the work force. The children in your classroom can grow up to be contributors to your community (and to your social security benefits) or they can grow up to be dependent and outside of the social and economic mainstream. They can go to Penn State or the state pen. And, we have an important role in assuring that it is the former, not the latter. We must remind ourselves that WE can and must teach "these" children.

THE POTENTIAL OF CRITICAL DIALOGUE IN AN ERA OF CHANGE

Betty Ash

July 4, 1998

Dear Jeff,

"So what?"

Well, you didn't use quite those words, but I got the message. I hadn't been happy with the Annual Statement of Growth that I had written this year. My comment to you and to Ron, when I reluctantly passed it along, was that it was a little cranky. I hadn't taken my own advice that it is best not to leave reflective writing to be done the night before a deadline and thus I knew there had to be a part 2 to this growth statement at some point in time.

You asked me to connect what I had written with the way I viewed the change process in schools and my role as a leader in that process. Hence the "So what?" Now, after four days of vacation, the fog is beginning to lift and I will attempt to answer your question.

To do so, I decided to re-read my Annual Statements of Growth for the past few years. What an interesting walk through time! In my final year as an elementary administrator I discovered that school was a place of tensions.

> In my first years as an administrator I held the belief that good planning and thoughtful implementation/evaluation practices should produce a trouble free system (i.e. school) wherein things progress according to plan from September until June. In such a way of thinking, any problems would be due to an error in the aforementioned practices. I grew to realize that the nature of our system is actually a very dynamic, human culture and that despite the best of planning, unanticipated situations may arise to throw things out of kilter. My next stage of belief was that if one were a perceptive person and a gifted problem solver, difficulties could be dealt with efficiently and all would be right in the world once more (Ash, 1994, p.1).

Hmmmm. What was I thinking?

To begin with, like many of the people with whom I worked at the time, I think I believed that I was working in a pretty good place, with a wonderful staff, an involved, supportive parent council, and an exciting, diverse, multicultural group of students. Yet even in this perceived haven of educational excellence, tensions existed. This was not necessarily a bad thing; in trying to work things through we were forced to begin to identify and discuss the values which underpinned the ways in which we functioned as educators. I reflected upon the writing of Larry Cuban's "Managing Dilemmas While Building Professional Communities" (1991).

> Cuban describes a problem as a "fairly routine, structured situation that produces some level of conflict because a desired goal is blocked." A problem can be worked through logically and a technical solution can be reached. However, a dilemma is described as "a conflict-filled situation that required choices because competing, highly prized values cannot be fully satisfied" (Ash, 1994, p.1).

Looking through the Cuban lens I began to see some of the competing values which existed in the school. I described them in this way:

- Consistency vs flexibility
- Tradition vs questioning
- Authority vs democracy…
- Process vs idea…
- Power vs empowerment
- Elementary vs secondary (issues of justice, equity)
- Discretionary judgement of teachers vs contrived or institutionalized collegiality (Ash, 1994, p.2).

I had begun to appreciate that conflicts or tensions within a school should be valued as a starting point for discussion and learning.

When I moved to a Junior High School, the values debates became a much bigger issue. Here was a school with a stated school change agenda. A small group of teachers had written a proposal two years prior to my arrival and funding had been garnered from the Manitoba School Improvement Project. The project had six strands to it with a staff member designated to take leadership for each piece. Another teacher had release time to head this leadership team.

The context of the school division at the time was one of promoting change as it pushed for movement toward a Middle Years philosophy. Despite a task force report, meetings with school staffs and with parent groups, what this meant to people was unclear. In my Annual Statement of Growth of 1995 I wrote, "There are teachers who approach the debate from many perspectives--the intellectuals, the evangelists, the zealots, the traditionalists, the cynics, the fearful, the fearless, the intuiters, the questioners, the quick fixers, etc.". There was tension around the question of "Whose agenda is this?" and "Where is this dialogue going to lead?"

My essential struggle is with the notion of change from the top down ... the province, to the division, to the visionary, charismatic school principal, to the teacher, versus the notion of beginning from the heart of education, that being the teacher, working soulfully with the children. It is within this context, where educators are continually reflecting upon their lifework, connecting it with the wisdom of colleagues, of parents, of researchers, of writers, and of the community of the world, that educational change takes place.

Although I have set this up as a dichotomy, I realize that it is not. It ties to that whole notion of "pressure" and "support" that you and I have talked about when it comes to learning. Perhaps we require the pressure from the division or from the Department, or, in fact from each other to give us the nudge we need occasionally to examine our practice and to improve it. But where do we go from there? Do we simply attend a few inservices and embrace a new pre-packaged curriculum or bring in a speaker and adopt the latest version of "Ten Easy Steps To...".

I have done some reading and thinking about this. I decided to write a letter to Michael Fullan outlining my thoughts and questions. I have attached it for your perusal. Let's pick up this conversation again later.

Cheers,
Betty

February 18, 1998

Dear Dr. Fullan,

While flying to and from Ottawa recently, I read with interest your book entitled *The Meaning of Educational Change,* (1991). Having been involved with the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation Project, now known as the Manitoba School Improvement Project, for a number of years, I am intrigued by the research which is being conducted in this area.

It seems to me that in a clean and clear cut world (in which, of course, we do not live) there are a couple of ways of looking at change. There is the planned change to which you refer in your book (p. xii) wherein the provincial politicians, the department of education curriculum writers or the local district have developed a plan for the improvement of education and would like to see the plan implemented. You and your colleagues have done extensive research to examine the effects of change efforts on education, and despite refinements in attempts over

the years, the results you have found remain less successful than the reformers had hoped in many instances.

I have become interested in an approach to change that begins with individuals reflecting on their practice while at the same time entering into a dialogic relationship with others. "Reflection" could mean keeping journals or other records of critical incidents that occur on a day to day basis and examining themes which can be extrapolated from such records. It could mean trying to articulate and to examine the values which underpin the way in which the individual is making decisions. It involves devising some way of systematically examining one's practice and developing a language which will assist us in articulating and developing our notions of pedagogy.

By dialogic relationships I mean communication with others where there is an attempt by all to put their ideas on the table, to try to understand those ideas, and in so doing to attempt to transcend current understandings in a search of new knowledge. Dialogic relationships could include one's colleagues (Greg Clark, 1950), parents and students, people who represent a multiplicity of perspectives outside what we might traditionally consider the educational community, such as the perspectives of artists, musicians, writers...(Greene, 1995, p.382), and the silenced voices of minorities and the disenfranchised (Freire, 1997, p.306). A dialogic relationship also might be viewed as a conversation with the researchers and the writers of the present and the past.

I believe that this process may help educators to begin to examine their work in a different way, and together, to engage in constructing new and improved understandings of what it means to be a teacher in our rapidly changing world.

In your book you describe restructuring as:

> "school-based management; enhanced roles for teachers in instruction and decision making; integration of multiple innovations; restructured timetables supporting collaborative work cultures; radical reorganization of teacher education; new roles such as mentors, coaches, and other teacher leadership arrangements; and revamping and developing the shared mission and goals of the school among teachers, administrators, the community and sometimes students (see Harvey & Crandall, 1988; Elmore, 1989; Murphy)" (p.7).

My sense of what you were getting at here is an approach which enables teachers to wrestle a little more openly, more collegially, with the changes being proposed and the ways in which they might be developed and implemented in their schools and in their classrooms.

In her book, *The Work of Restructuring Schools,* Ann Lieberman writes:

> What has often been missing from the documentation of schools attempting important change is the web of interpersonal relationships that often dominate the change process; the interpretations that teachers and principals make of reformers' ideas and the consequent actions they take while learning about and creating their own ideas. Also missing has been an understanding of the critical importance of the kind of massive and continuous support needed to cope with the inevitable tensions of the change process (1995, p.7-8).

The "Restructuring" literature helps me to make the transition from thinking about change as something with which we must cope, which is imposed upon us by the world around us or the policy makers of the day, to a place in our thinking, our collaborating and our dialoguing that allows us to determine the direction we must head as we attempt to move beyond what we currently have to offer in our teaching of children today.

I think that we need to carve a space in teachers' lives that will allow them to set aside the problems and demands of the day, reflect upon what they have been doing in their work and seek out the voices of others in helping them to understand their work and to transform it. In April, 1995, I noted in my journal a comment made by a colleague as she talked about creating a supportive learning environment for children. She said, "Muscles provide a space for lungs to work; we need to provide a space for children to find freedom to work and to learn". In an institution dedicated to learning, how much space is created for educators to be learning?

Dialogue can create "spaces where multiple voices and multiple discourses intersect and interact" (Bakhtin, 1981 p.259-422, in Greene, 1988, p.129). Each participant brings to the dialogue their own reflections upon their lived experiences. What emerges from dialogue is partial, unfinalizable, always subject to modification and limited to particular contexts (Coulter, 1994, p.128).

Sharing perspectives on personal experience provides an opportunity for us:

> ...to envisage things as if they could be otherwise, or of positing alternatives to mere passivity. And it should remind us of the relationship between freedom and the consciousness of possibility, between freedom and the imagination - the ability to make present what is absent, to summon up a condition that is not yet (Greene, 1995, p.16).

We can create knowledge and see new possibilities which can transform our work and our world. Engagement in critical dialogue has the potential to inform and enrich the strategies which we select to improve our practice. Connecting the dialogue to an action plan, and developing the skills to move forward seem to be the next challenges. My question, Dr. Fullan is: How do we become "unstuck" when we hit the implementation dip(s) which may arise from a weakness in any one of these areas?

Yours sincerely,
Betty Ash

July 7, 1998

Dear Jeff,

I think it was more my aversion to simplistic solutions than my emerging awareness of the importance of dialogism in constructing knowledge that led me to want to involve all staff in discussion, discussion, discussion about what they believed about teaching and learning and why. I "felt" that it would be through these explorations that people would begin to think about

other ways of being and to feel the freedom to explore those ideas which began to make sense to them in the contexts of their own teaching and learning. It seemed logical that there would be a greater chance of a change in practice being successful if the person were given the opportunity to think ideas through and to develop a vision, within their own context, of how the change might improve learning for students. This necessitated ongoing dialogue and reflection in the school community as we examined what was working and what seemed not to be.

It also seemed logical to me, and of course it was a huge thrust of the division at the time, that we try to connect our front line work to the literature about education. As we involved more and more voices, our language about education would become enriched, and our practice more informed and effective.

Of course, these discussions, this open dialogue about educational issues close to our hearts, did make our lives more complicated. As we searched for a collective vision for our school and a common understanding about how that vision might be put into practice, it became clear that the goal was somewhat elusive. In my June, 1995, Annual Statement of Growth I wrote:

> Now, this is where the job (administrator) becomes interesting. This varied group of people has a strong desire to develop a common vision or direction for their school. I see this vision as being a completed jigsaw puzzle to which each individual brings one or many pieces. These pieces represent ideas, theories, research, experiences, feelings, values and so forth. But, as the jigsaw piece approaches the puzzle, the piece is altered in shape through the influence of other people and thus the vision also changes before our very eyes. The perspectives of the stakeholders change as the circles of influence overlap, and the puzzle is never done (p.1).

In hindsight, I expect there were some for whom this was quite frustrating, and, to some degree I think it may have slowed the change process.

In 1995, I didn't realize yet that the vision for the school needed to be a little tighter, or perhaps, that the vision needed to be reworked completely, by the entire staff. Despite new and broader leadership in the school change committee, there continued to exist a feeling that the project was the agenda of some, rather than of all, staff. We moved forward by supporting practices which were congruent with our core values and the direction we were heading. Structures, such as the timetable, were reorganized to provide time for dialogue, teaming, and chunked instructional periods. We also tried to maintain a balance between time for maintenance, "business" type discussions and for school development discussions focused on educational issues (Hopkins, 1997, p.2). Many of the dialogues were rich; some were not.

> If teachers are comfortable with critical dialogue, debate and uncertainty, then these are exciting and challenging times. If teachers feel forced to change beliefs, knowledge, and actions as a result of a change process, then they may react in any number of ways. They may choose to batten down the hatches and to avoid even examining ways in which to improve the teaching\learning process. In this scenario complacency is the enemy (Ash, 1996, p.2).

I also recognized that the context in which teachers were working was very difficult. They were becoming aware of the differing philosophies of colleagues, and this was unsettling for some. This uncertainty was compounded by edicts from the department which were often at odds with priorities of their own school division; the issuance of numerical marks for students in grades six and up is an example. All of this was occurring at a time of severe cutbacks to education including pay freezes and reduced staffing in school. It made me think about Linda Darling-Hammond's words:

> This can create a kind of Alice in Wonderland world in which people ultimately begin to nod blithely at the inevitability of incompatible event - a world in which educators cease to try to make sense of their environment for themselves as professionals or for their students (p.756).

To be honest, I was surprised that more staff did not fall prey to that, but instead accepted Duckworth's description of the world of teaching as "complicated, large scale, hard to define, and close to the soul" (1993, p.486).

By June of 1997, I knew that suddenly I would be handing over the reins of an unfinished school improvement initiative to a new administrator as I was moving elsewhere. A question from the incoming administrator pushed me to try to articulate the theme of the work we had been attempting to do. I summed it up by leaning on the divisional mission statement and saying that we were trying to develop a true "COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS".

However, a couple of bumps in the road had become obvious. One was an issue of respect and power. As teachers became more willing to articulate their views and more willing to take some risks in how they approached their teaching, there were pockets of friction emerging. Instead of listening to the ideas of others, engaging in the conversation and attempting to contribute to the building of new knowledge, some folks were driven to engage in what Denith (1995, p.57) describes as Bakhtin's notion of "authoritative discourse". Authoritative discourse seeks to have the last word and sets itself outside the limits of the dialogue. "It is important to combine a shared sense of direction with respect for individual differences" (Fullan, Lee & Kilcher, 1995, p.34).

We must also pay attention to such issues as gender, race, class and culture.

> If we don't learn how to listen to these voices, in truth we don't really learn how to speak. Those who do not listen, end up merely yelling, barking out the language while imposing their ideas. The one who is a student of listening implies a certain treatment of silence and intermediary moments of silence. Those who speak democratically need to silence themselves so that the voice of those who must be listened to is allowed to emerge (Freire, 1997, p.306).

The second issue was vision, and in hindsight I think that, in part, I may have confused articulating a vision with an abuse of power. I did not want to have to tell people what to do for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to create a democratic learning environment in the school. I remembered the words Judith had spoken in one of our Masters cohort sessions: "You cannot create a democratic learning environment unless you have experienced it. We need to find opportunities to be involved in this and to talk about it" (Journal #3, Nov. 1,1996). "I

morally could not promote a democratic and supportive learning environment for students and then behave in an authoritative manner with staff" (Ash, 1997, p.3).

Secondly, I continued to believe that unless teachers had worked through what they were going to change and why, the changes could be worse than ineffective. It would be better continuing with the tried and true than to attempt to implement my agenda and do so in a poor fashion.

Perhaps the real issue that I had failed to see was that the vision was never really owned by the entire staff. I came in believing that the job was to try to get more people to understand and become involved in this particular vision. I was prepared to allow people to bring their own interpretations to it, but I failed to realize that the whole thing needed to be revisited as an entire staff. This notion of the importance of a collective vision is supported in the research done for the Manitoba School Improvement Project as well as in the work of David Hopkins, University of Nottingham, 1997.

Upon arriving at my new school in July, boxes, containing everything from the original site of West Kildonan Collegiate, were piled to the rafters waiting to be unpacked. The major renovations, the gutting of seven classrooms and a gymnasium, the creation of new, state of the art science labs, computer labs, an art room and other improved teaching spaces were not completed until the end of January.

When I wrote my Annual Statement of Growth this year, I realized that my focus had suddenly switched from debates about educational theories to a dream about physical school improvements.

> Yes, this year my imagining has been about a school with a heating system that would work, or a day, sometime in the future, when a painter might be assigned to paint a wall or two. I dream of a time when some of the old lockers can be removed and the floor patched (replaced?) so that the hallways can be brightened by displays somewhat more reflective of our school. I remember the day the fish died of the extreme heat in the science rooms with the brand new heating system ... (Ash, 1998, p.1).

In a school struggling with issues of student and parental discontent related to the decision to relocate the school, complicated by year 1 of the Schools of Choice policy of our government, I was most unhappy with the slowness of the response of the system to what I considered to be our basic survival needs. Our existence as a school was being threatened. Part of what I thought was needed to ensure our survival was not within my control.

What I didn't write about, because I was feeling so frustrated with what was out of my control, was the wonderful way in which the staff worked in response to the context of restructuring into which we had all been thrown. A sense of urgency arising from the move provided pressure to restructure. The need was clear to people. In any event, almost without exception, the staff rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

One of the things that we took the time to do was to involve all staff in an evening/full day PATH planning process to develop a collective vision of where we wanted to be as a school in five years time. Though usually wary of what I consider to be the "quick and dirty" approach

to planning and decision making, my colleagues and I felt that this would be a helpful process in our situation. It would give staff located in the Centennial Wing, the Edmund Partridge Wing, The CVE and Special Needs staff from Seven Oaks Middle School and the staff of the Red River Alternative Program an opportunity to get to know each other and to talk. Whatever dreams we developed would give us a focal point around which to center our restructuring work.

A very concrete vision emerged and work began on a number of fronts to achieve our goals. A similar process was followed with students, with similar goals but with less success at this point in terms of having them engage in pursuing the goals. Parents were nominally involved as well.

I remain committed to the notion of dialogue around what we are doing and why. Again, the restructuring context made some of this easy because everything from timetable to report card format to assessment to awards was queried as the approaches had differed in the various schools from which staff had come. Time was both an enemy and a friend. We had some time to discuss, but not enough time to avoid making a decision and taking action. We did not have enough time to read, to research and to reflect, so some of our decisions were perhaps less sound than we would have liked, but we have begun. I have told people that I have felt that this year we were chasing a bus that was pulling away from the stop without us, but it didn't ever stop any of us from doing our darndest to catch up.
Next year we need to work on enriching the dialogue and connecting it to our action planning. It is in this place where theory meets practice that our renewal efforts are strengthened.

Well Jeff, thanks for the nudge ... speaking of pressure and support! Hope your summer is going well and that you have had lots of time for both your family and your books! See you in August.

Cheers,
Betty

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ADMINISTRATORS' RETREAT

Hecla, February 24-26, 1999

When the conference committee began planning for the annual administrators' retreat, we reviewed comments submitted to us following the 1998 retreat. In 1998, the theme of the retreat was "Democracy in Education". Gary Fenstermacher, the facilitator, guided our thinking by challenging us to examine the purposes of public schools in a democracy and to consider how voices representing the various interests of our school communities could be heard in any discussion related to developing school plans.

Gary also suggested that the Seven Oaks School Division was rather atypical in its approach to educational issues. When we asked him to elaborate on this statement, he mentioned four attributes that impress him each time he visits: people who are open, gracious, and committed to supporting students; people who are reflective about their work; people who grapple with ideas and perplexing issues; and people who demonstrate care in their dealing with students, parents, and with each other.

The planning committee accepted the challenges inherent in Gary's statements. We invited four colleagues to present their ideas/impressions about what professional commitment to students looked like in practice. We also invited three people to prepare responses to the following questions: "Is there a role for the public education system in shaping the priorities of the community?"

The texts of the presentations addressing the role for the public education system appear in this issue of *Teaching Today for Tomorrow.* The texts addressing the people's commitment and support of students will appear in the next issue. We hope that the ideas raised in these pieces and in Gary's appraisal of our school division stimulate conversation in our schools.

Does the public education system have a role in shaping the priorities of the community? What are our beliefs? What are our practices? What are our challenges? What are our possibilities?

Pat Isaak

I have been asked to comment on the question "Does the public education system have a role to play in shaping the priorities of the community?" from the perspective of my work with teacher organizations, both locally with the Seven Oaks Teachers' Association and provincially with the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Given that the role of teacher organizations has – out of necessity – become more and more political over the past several years, my comments will have a decidedly political slant.

One of the difficulties in framing a response to this question was in dealing with the dilemma of whether the public education system was shaping the community's priorities or the community was shaping the public education system's priorities. I came to the conclusion that both of these groups work so closely with one another that it is often hard to determine who, in fact, is shaping the agenda. As a teacher, this raises both concerns and opportunities, and I will attempt to address both from four viewpoints: our beliefs, practices, challenges, and possibilities.

What are our beliefs?

Teachers have always worked from the belief that public education must attempt to meet the needs of **all** children, regardless of race, academic ability, or socio-economic circumstance. We also hold that public education is about more than fostering the academic ability of students – it must also foster physical, social, emotional, and cultural development. Accessibility and opportunity must be the priorities, and these must be based on equity for all children.

In addressing the issue at hand, we must begin by addressing the question of whether or not our beliefs as teachers are consistent with those of the community we serve. Given the fact that the word "community" is used in a myriad of contexts, we must also understand what we mean by community.

The school and the classroom have become much more inclusive places than in the past, not only from the perspective of students, but also from the perspective of the community. We know that, for the most part, parents and people close to the school think that their own school is doing an excellent job, and that professionals who work in schools are seen as the most credible and respected source of educational information. However, many of these same people believe that "the school system in general" is doing a terrible job. On December 29, 1998, the former Minister of Education, Linda McIntosh, is quoted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* as saying: "As far as I'm concerned, it's deteriorated dreadfully since I went to school", in reference to her belief that the quality of public education is declining. Evidence has shown that the larger the scope of community, the more negative is the perception of public education. This begs the question: do we restrict ourselves to a very local view of community, or are we prepared to take up the challenges that are presented in the larger, global community?

What are our practices?

The practice of being a teacher has changed and expanded dramatically in the last 10 years. More and more, teaching practices are being controlled by government agendas and rigid prescriptions for program delivery. These restrictions lead to something that I have referred to as "teacher proofing"--that is, limiting the ability for teachers to adapt the program to the needs of their students. There is less individual freedom to teach, and larger class sizes with greater numbers of integrated students has meant an increased reliance on teaching assistants and paraprofessionals. In some areas, school divisions have hired non-certified personnel as substitute teachers, or to teach in areas such as counselling or vocational programs. As teachers, we are adamant that all children have the right to be instructed by certified professional teachers, and that these teachers must have the professional freedom to determine how best to meet the needs of their students.

What are our challenges?

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, there has been a trend toward expanding the role of public schools. Public schools have taken on roles and responsibilities in the lives of children and their families that were unheard of 20 years ago. We must ask the question: Is this expanding role for public schools sustainable?
On a pedagogical level, teachers are required to stay current on academic, social, emotional, often medical and psychological, and sociological issues. On a human level, can one group of workers be expected to expand their role without adequate supports and resources? The "new" issues in education have not been replacements; they have been add-ons.

On a political level, are public institutions and public service sustainable in an ideological climate of competition? What does it mean to "serve the public?" Governments at all levels have decimated the public service in the interests of fiscal restraint – "we must do more with less" they say. However, when the layers are peeled back, a startling reality is revealed. That is, the reality that democratically elected governments are not, in fact, driving the agenda or setting the priorities.

Who, then, is attempting to set the priorities for public education?

There is tremendous pressure from private industry to control curriculum, teaching resources, etc. Decisions about public education (and other public institutions) are not being made at the local, or even provincial level. We are well aware of bodies such as The Conference Board of Canada, the APEC Committee on Education, and the Business Council on National Issues – all of whom have well-articulated agendas on education. The APEC paper on education, for example, states that "The emphasis on education for itself or on education for good members of a community without a large emphasis on preparations for the future work are no longer appropriate". The reality for educators is that, whether we like it or not, we are in competition for the most fundamental principles of public education. If this corporate vision for education prevails in our community, will we be forced to shift toward training workers rather than educating citizens to meet the needs of business rather than society?

The business bodies to which I refer are far more powerful than lobby groups; they operate as de facto governments. As Heather jane Robertson once said: "It no longer matters who governs, it matters who rules". Public education is seen as the last untapped marketplace for private enterprise. The education industry has been estimated to be worth upwards of $700 billion to private business. Privatization of curriculum has already begun in Ontario. It won't be long before students are "serviced" with Disney, Microsoft, or Nortel curricula.

The challenge to public education is: Are we prepared to take on the **real** power brokers? Or are we better off to remain very localized and not fight the big battles? The answers to these questions will determine our will – both political and educational – to demand our rightful voice in determining the priorities for public education.

The dilemmas and contradictions around the issue of centralized control vs. local autonomy are key to understanding the relationship between schools and the community. The market-driven consumerism of the 1990s has fostered and promoted a "me first" attitude and a sense that individuals have – and should have – more power within the education system. However, if we wish to preserve an education system that is based in a sense of equity and community

values, then such a system will most certainly be in constant conflict with a society that values individualism above the common good. Is it reasonable to expect that public schools can accommodate a multitude of individual demands and still maintain a community focus?

Much of the education reform agenda is based on the concepts of uniform standards and measurable outcomes. Pedagogically, these concepts are not consistent with the values of child-centered learning and authentic assessment. Realistically, these concepts have proven to be nothing more than a thin veil for the real agenda – that is, using uniform standards and measurable outcomes as a means to sort students, teachers, schools, and communities. How far are we willing to go to protect the system that we value, and more importantly, is the system that is being created a system that we want to protect? If we are to retain the educational priorities that we value as a community, then public schools and public school teachers must have a voice in that discussion.

What are our possibilities?

If this part of my response appears brief or even flippant, my intent is quite the opposite. In fact, everything that I have said to this point I view as a possibility. Our beliefs are possibilities in the sense that, if we are to uphold and protect them, we must be prepared to confront any threat that is posed to those beliefs. Our practices are possibilities. Teachers are constantly changing, adapting, and enriching their practices to meet the ever-changing needs of our students and our communities. And perhaps most importantly, our challenges are possibilities in that, it is only through our determination to meet them that we will seize the opportunity to ensure that our voice is heard in the setting of priorities, both for public education and for the community.

Does the public education system have a role in shaping the priorities of the community?

Bob Minaker

My response would be – Indeed it does! That was the easy part! Defining that role becomes far more challenging. In the next eight minutes or so I will share some of my thoughts around this question. I thank my colleagues for offering their perspectives and I trust that our collective thoughts will be engaging for each of you this evening.

Our country, Canada, provides a partial backdrop for what I am about to share. Each province brought and brings to the federal union elements of diversity and commonality. It has been these same elements which have stirred both division and unity. The strength of our country has been its ability to maintain resilience despite dilemmas at hand. The federal government has had to find ways to promote provincial or regional uniqueness while still ensuring that the bond which unites us remains secure. This balancing of power and leadership is critical yet very complex.

Our public education system in Canada faces a similar, complex challenge. In each constituency there exists the elements of diversity and commonality. As we approach the next century we struggle with many competing interests that represent both danger and opportunity. The public education system must play a central role to ensure some semblance of balance in the minds and lives of Canadian citizens.

Allow me to share some thoughts from Gerald Caplan, in the Spring 98 issue of the CAP journal. He speaks of good schools, good citizens.

Caplan comments that society makes many demands on schools, not always wondering whether schools are capable of meeting those demands. Among the responsibilities schools have always been expected to play is instilling in students certain values as well as a predisposition to be active and responsible citizens. The question is whether in today's circumstances, those are realistic expectations. There is no universal agreement on what the appropriate values are for Canadians of any age. The Council of Ministers of Education in Canada has declared that "the future of our society depends on informed and educated citizens who, while fulfilling their own goal of personal and professional development, contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of their community and the country as a whole." However, they did not define their terms or reconcile the many different views Canadians hold about how proper development might take place.

The reality is that our children receive their information from a multitude of sources each day, not all of them by any means disseminating the same messages as those conveyed by schools. Indeed, children often see in the outside world reality in stark contrast to the one pictured in the classroom. Often, those most vocal about the importance of schools communicating proper values to students refer to some sense of honesty, truth, civility, social justice and cooperation, and a determination to combat violence, racism, gender inequality and environmental degradation. Yet in any day's newscast a student is as likely as not to find evidence of a world characterized by dishonesty, incivility, social injustice, harsh competitiveness, widespread violence, racism, sexism and a value system that almost invariably puts economic growth ahead of environmental sustainability.

This begs the question as to what values have in fact been reflected in Canadian history and what history is to pass on to our children. To add to this dilemma, some question whether the actual structure and function of schools make them credible institutions to instil a sense of social justice and democratic participation since many schools are perceived to be largely authoritarian, where children still learn that submission to authority is often a ticket to success. It is also well documented that children from advantaged backgrounds generally fare much better than those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

I would like to speak a little further about both credibility and realistic expectations. Caplan points out that schools are often expected to assume burdens when society at large can figure out no better way to deal with them: compensating for parental abuse, impoverished backgrounds or nutritional deprivation; conveying the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases; offering new models for conflict resolution; providing physical exercise: deterring drug and alcohol use; preventing suicides; building self esteem; repudiating racism and sexism: promoting cross cultural awareness. With each societal crisis the list grows but seldom does an item become deleted.

Schools can only achieve so much on their own, no matter how hard they work. Society at large must reinforce the school's work in developing the concept and the practice of multidimensional citizenship. This is obvious to those of us in schools and herein lies one of our major challenges. We must examine our resources both inside our schools and within our communities to ensure that we maximize our resources to optimize our successes.

Our public education system must play a central role in educating for democracy. Another equally important role for our schools today is that of fostering hope, a sense of optimism for the future. So much is possible when people believe it to be so and more often than not enthusiasm is contagious. Hard work? Yes! Essential work! Absolutely!

When I think of hope, I think of Sergiovanni's "Virtuous School." I share the following excerpt from "Moral Leadership, The Virtuous School." The virtuous school believes that, to reach its full potential in helping students learn, it must become a learning community in and of itself. It is therefore committed to developing a spirit of curiosity, inquiry and reflection that touches adults and students alike. The goal of the virtuous school is to create self-learners and self-managers. Each day, students depend a little less on their teachers and the school. Each day students rely a little more on their own convictions and resources. Each day, teachers rely a little less on their supervisors and administrators. Each day, teachers rely a little more on their own convictions and resources.

The virtuous school believes that every student can learn and it does everything in its power to see that every student does learn. Learning conditions that impede learning, no matter what their origins, are viewed as problems to be solved, rather than as conditions to be accepted.

The virtuous school seeks to provide for the whole student. Although it is essentially academic, it recognizes that problems of learning are systemic. Therefore, the virtuous school does not shrink from its responsibility to do everything in its power to attend to the developmental, physical and social needs of its students. Prime among its values is the ethic of caring and caring is viewed as a key to academic success.

The virtuous school honours respect. The virtuous school respects teachers by acknowledging both their professional commitment and their knowledge of craft. Teachers are free to decide for themselves what and how to teach and, in other ways, to express their own personal visions of teaching. Teachers respond to such acknowledgements by accepting responsibility for conducting themselves in accordance with the professional ideal. The virtuous school respects students by giving them the same consideration given to teachers, parents and other adults. The result is a pattern of mutual respect, involving teachers with teachers and teachers with students, that increases the likelihood that teachers and students will respect themselves.

In the virtuous school, parents, teachers, community and school are partners, with reciprocal and interdependent rights to participate and to benefit and with obligations to support and assist. It is recognized that the school needs the advice and support of parents if its work in teaching and learning is to be meaningful and effective. By the same token, parents need the advice and support of the school if their work in parenting is to be meaningful and effective.

Having shared this vision of a school community for students and educators and parents I remind myself that what we seek is excellence, not perfection. Striving for excellence can be invigorating while striving for perfection is demoralizing. I strongly recommend that we remain mindful of this as we continue to work to establish school goals and to articulate school plans for the coming year.

Does the public education system have a role in shaping the priorities of the community?

Alfred Wiebe

As I pondered this question, I came up with a variety of answers, but they all seemed obvious and trite, and then it occurred to me that in Seven Oaks we pride ourselves in taking risks and Maxine Green, in an article I was reading, encouraged educators to make their own meanings.

So I decided to take a risk and tell you three stories. As I tell these stories, I would like you to create your own meaning, but just in case you don’t get it right, I will tell you what these stories really mean.

In the late sixties as I was attending history classes at the University of Winnipeg, then United College, I was startled one day by the assertion of the professor that the Roman Empire was carried in the last few hundred years of its existence not by charismatic leadership, powerful armies or wise politicians, but by its dedicated bureaucracy. The bureaucracy was well educated, consistent and sustained the empire when its other institutions had become dysfunctional. What does this assertion, assuming it is correct, have to say to us in Seven Oaks in 1999?

My next two examples are taken from two plays: "A Man for all Seasons" by Robert Bolt and "A Miracle Worker" by William Gibson.

"A man for all Seasons" is the story of Sir Thomas Moore and Henry VIII. Sir Thomas is Henry’s chancellor. Henry is desperate for a male heir and wants Sir Thomas to support his legislation to divorce his present wife. This Sir Thomas feels he can not do. In the brief scene I want to read to you, Richard Rich has just left Sir Thomas and his family. Everyone present believes that Richard is a spy; Roper, Sir Thomas’ future son-in-law, tells Sir Thomas to arrest him and Alice, Sir Thomas’ wife, agrees. More continues

MORE: For what?

ALICE: He’s dangerous!

ROPER: For libel; he’s a spy.

ALICE: He is! Arrest him!
MARGARET: Father, that man’s bad.

MORE: There is no law against that.

ROPER: There is! God’s law!

MORE: Then God can arrest him.

ROPER: Sophistication upon sophistication!

MORE: No, sheer simplicity. The law, Roper, the law. I know what's legal, not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal.

ROPER: Then you set Man's law above God's!

MORE: No far below; but let me draw your attention to a fact…I'm not God. The currents and eddies of right and wrong, which you find such plain-sailing, I can't navigate, I'm no voyager. But in the thickets of the law, oh there I'm a forester. I doubt if there's a man alive who could follow me there, thank god…(He says this to himself.)

ALICE: (exasperated, pointing after RICH): While you talk, he's gone!

MORE: And go he should if he was the devil himself until he broke the law!

ROPER: So now you'd give the Devil benefit of law!

MORE: (roused and excited): Oh? (Advances on ROPER.) And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you – where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? (Leaves him.) This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast – Man's laws, not God's – and if you cut them down – and you're just the man to do it – d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (Quietly.) Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake.

Does this passage tell us something that we can use in Seven Oaks?

My final story from Gibson play "The Miracle Worker" deals with the story of how Annie Sullivan taught the deaf and blind Helen Keller to communicate. Helen Keller had been an exceptionally bright child who had started to speak at six months, but Helen became ill and lost her sight & hearing as a result of the illness. The central event of the play I want to recount occurs when Annie is hired to look after the twelve year old Helen. Helen, because the family felt sorry for her, has been allowed to do whatever she wants. Thus when everyone sits down for dinner, Helen goes from person to person taking food from everyone's plate. Annie is determined to stop this behaviour and asked the whole family to leave the room so she can teach Helen obedience. The play describes the conflict between Helen and Annie, which includes Annie physically restraining the out-of-control Helen and Helen flailing wildly about, throwing dishes and punching Annie, but at the end of the scene, Annie gets Helen to sit properly on her chair and fold the napkin. The family is very impressed with Annie's work, but Annie is not satisfied because although obedience is necessary, it is not enough. Annie is determined to make a breakthrough and have Helen understand. At the end of the play, Annie finally has her miracle when Helen utters the word "wah wah" at the appropriate moment.

As teachers, we love this story of the miracle worker who made a child understand when all believed that it was an impossible task.

So now that you have created your own meaning from these stories (well, in the last story the moral is obvious, isn't it?) let me suggest some possible meanings for the first two stories.

The story of the bureaucracy suggests to me that we have to remain steadfast in the case of political turmoil; we have the ability to keep the ship going even if our political masters change the direction with every changing wind of political opinion.
The story of Sir Thomas More suggests to me that it is our job to protect ourselves and our students from injustices perpetrated by those in power. We need to know what will protect us and use our strengths in our search for safety.

I hope these few words have challenged you to come up with your own answers raised by the questions at the beginning of this talk.

CAN A SIMULATION APPROXIMATE THE REALITIES OF TEEN PARENTING?

Theresa Gillespie and Susan Wersch

Abstract

Students taking part in a parent simulation for one weekend and teen mothers of real infants participated in this project. To validate the authenticity of the simulated experience, self-perception and perceptions of how others viewed the teenagers as well as lifestyle patterns and routines, were investigated. Teen mothers and the infant simulator parents experienced similar self-perceptions and perceptions of how others viewed them. The predictability of the infant simulator did affect the authenticity of the weekend parenting experience.

Statistics Canada numbers indicate an increase in the teen pregnancy rates in the last six years after a significant drop during the 70’s and 80’s (Petrie, 1998). Manitoba has the highest teen pregnancy rate in Canada and in 1994 – 95, more than six adolescents (age 15-19) became pregnant every day in Manitoba (Manitoba Children and Youth Secretariat, 1997). Teen pregnancy is portrayed as a significant social problem, worthy of television, radio and newspaper coverage. For example, headlines such as "Rising teen pregnancy rate a symbol of greater problem", "Teen pregnancies baffle experts", "Family services minister spends $370,000 to help pregnant teens" and "Education minister presents school trustees with $80,000 for pregnancy prevention" have been a regular occurrence for the past couple of years in the Winnipeg Free Press.

The Reality of Teenage Life

Adolescents who see themselves as facing limited life opportunities, often reorder their values and priorities as an adaptive response to the harsh condition of poverty that they endure. Males (1994) states that high rates of youth poverty precede high rates of teenage childbearing. Geronimus (1992) believes that in many disadvantaged areas there is cultural support for having children early in life. Poverty and lack of hope for the future manifest themselves in the low self-esteem of teen women who, between the ages of nine and fifteen, experience the phenomenon known as the "self-esteem slide" (Sadker & Sadker, 1995). Female adolescents with low self-esteem may feel valued in the mothering role that is generally honoured in Western cultures. Thus, mothering becomes a rite of passage into the adult world, making possible some measure of success for teen moms.

Today, while young people reach reproductive development at an earlier age, their cognitive development may not permit them to comprehend fully the consequences of their behaviour (McAnarney & Hendee, 1989). To understand that sexual behaviour may lead to pregnancy requires anticipation of the consequences of the behaviour and this is cognitively not possible as teens become sexually active as young as twelve years of age in today's society.

Petrie (1997) suggests that perhaps we should consider teaching children gradual sexuality. Adolescents must be aware of the options besides intercourse that are available and it does not matter who teaches them, parents or schools. In her book, Petrie describes interviews conducted with Virginia Johnson and William Masters on the CBC Newsworld series "Century". Johnson and Masters argue that parents want to control what their children learn about sex. They claim that parents have a fearful attitude toward sexuality, and they question whether parents are taking the responsibility of fostering real communication with their kids.

Family Studies programs are an established part of most provincial curricula and can provide information to schoolchildren and adolescents supplementing that already given by parents. However, these programs generally reach only a segment of the total school population and the need is apparent for all students.

A Preventative Approach

Education programs such as those designed around the family studies curriculum provide the opportunity for students to experience parenting vicariously, through simulating the demands of parenting prior to becoming a parent. A parenting simulation may be a preventative intervention against teen pregnancy and parenting. Recent technological developments made possible the parenting teaching tool known as the infant simulator (Baby Think it Over). This product was developed to help teenagers understand three important facts about infants: the demands of infants are unpredictable but nonetheless must be met promptly, they require a great deal of time and attention, and the responsibilities of parenting will change a teen's lifestyle profoundly and in a variety of ways.

The heart of the infant simulator is a microprocessor. This internal computer simulates the realistic cry of an infant at random intervals of fifteen minutes to six hours for feeding or care, 24 hours a day. Feeding the baby requires the parent to insert a probe into its back and hold it in place for up to thirty-five minutes. The probe is attached to a tamper-proof, non-transferable hospital bracelet worn on the teen's wrist.

The infant simulator microprocessor has several settings: easy, normal and cranky. It records neglect, abuse and the length of crying time before it is tended to by the student. When the infant simulator is returned, the teacher retrieves a reading indicating the neglect, abuse and/or minutes of crying. If there is an attempt to tamper with the microprocessor, this information will also be recorded.

The infant simulator and its effectiveness in simulating the demands of parenting have not been evaluated in a classroom setting in Canada. This research project examines if students are able to authentically experience the demands of parenting using the infant simulator. It is our hope that the infant simulator will prove to be useful in simulating the demands of parenting. Adolescents need to somehow get a clearer notion of what parenting involves and we chose this particular area of research because we see a need for programming in the area of family studies. (Smock, 1987)

The question of whether or not to become a parent is the most important decision in life. You can quit work, you can sell your house and move, you can get a divorce. But there's no such thing as an ex-child. It's a commitment that's worth examining before doing.

Methodology

To evaluate the effectiveness of the infant simulator, we compared weekend infant simulator parenting experiences of three grade 10 Family Studies students' with the parenting experiences of three young moms (under the age of 17). All the participants in the study are from the Seven Oaks School Division community in Winnipeg.

The teacher in charge of the adolescent parenting program in the Seven Oaks School Division approached the teen mothers to participate in our study. These adolescent parents were to be unmarried, still living at home, and caring for their first child, who was to be under the age of ten months. Teen mothers and their parent or guardian received information on the project, and signed consent letters before participating in the project.

Three female Family Studies students in grade 10 also participated. Family Studies is an option course that students have registered for and it can be assumed that they selected the course on the basis of their individual needs and interests. A limitation of our study is that we could not assume that the teens most likely to parent a child would choose the Family Studies course and be willing participants in the project.

In total, six students from the Family Studies course participated in the interview process and completed the weekend parenting simulation. Final selection of the three participants for this inquiry was determined by the audibility of the taped interview, their ability to communicate verbally, and completion of the three day parenting experience.

Even though only three students participated in the actual research project, all family studies students had the opportunity to experience the weekend parenting simulation. The infant simulators were used during class time for the students to familiarize themselves with the use and operation of the care key before taking the simulator home for the weekend. The microprocessor was programmed on the easy care setting, which determines the intervals between crying are from 180 – 360 minutes. The students knew this setting before they left for the weekend with the infant simulator.

Students selected the weekend that would be the least disruptive to them for their parenting experience. Employment schedules, social commitments, music lessons, athletic events, and family obligations were considered in selecting the weekend. Parents and students signed consent forms before the weekend because the simulation can be demanding and would most likely affect the family. Parents picked up their son/daughter and the "new infant" on Friday after school and drove them back to school on Monday morning after the weekend parenting simulation was over.

Students went home with as much information as possible about the infant simulator so the parenting experience would provide realistic and valuable learning opportunities for them. Clothing, bottles, diapers, carrying bed, and blankets were made available as accessories with the infant simulator. A resource package containing support material for the use and care of the infant simulator was provided. This resource package contained: care and operation of the infant simulator video, baby sitting breakout (4 hour limit on the baby-sitting services that could be arranged by the student parent in case of an emergency), camera to record five memorable experiences, a journal for personal reflection as a parent, family feedback forms, our weekend pager phone number in case of a technical emergency, and an information brochure on common situations that may occur with the infant simulator.

A pager for the coordinating teacher was necessary due to the mechanical nature of the infant simulator. Students were aware that they are able to contact us on the weekend if there was an emergency. Mechanical breakdowns may occur due to batteries running low and care keys breaking. New batteries and/or rechargeable batteries were necessary for each of the weekends to avoid a mechanical breakdown. Care keys were periodically broken during the weekends even though class time was taken for students to practice using the key. We purchased a reconditioned microprocessor and additional key to ensure that any mechanical breakdowns did not prevent the infant simulator from going out on the next weekend.

Data Collection

Questions for the interview guides were selected after a series of practice interviews with ten semester one Family Studies students during September to December, 1997. From the practice interviews, we decided that the interview questions had to be rewritten to focus our inquiry. We did not gather data from the practise interviews as we used this time to perfect our interview techniques and test the audio taping equipment.

During the spring of 1998, in person interviews focused on lifestyle patterns and routines as well as self-perception and perceptions of how others viewed the parenting teens. We informed all participants at the onset of the interview that they could choose not to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Both researchers were present at the all the interviews. Susan Wersch asked the questions for the teen moms and Theresa Gillespie interviewed the students parenting the infant simulator. Transcriptions of the audiotapes were made and the tapes were destroyed on the completion of the project. We have concealed all names in order to protect the identity of the interviewees and their families.

Research Findings

We analysed the interview data through identifying and comparing six themes which became evident in the experiences of the teen mothers and simulated teen mothers. We cross-

referenced similarities and differences evident in the experiences of the teen mothers and simulated mothers. These are summarized in table 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1

Infant simulator mothers
Theme #1 - impact on lifestyle
Theme #2 - impact on personal routines
Theme #3 - infant simulator predictability
Theme #4 - parenting self-perception
Theme #5 - perception of simulator as mechanical baby
Theme #6 - interpretation of public perception

Table 2

Teen mothers
Theme # 7 - impact on lifestyle
Theme # 8 - impact on personal routines
Theme # 9 - unpredictable needs of babies
Theme # 10 - parenting self-perception
Theme #11 - real babies are not dolls
Theme # 12 - interpretation of public perception

Table 3

Six themes
Theme #1 vs. Theme # 7 - lifestyle routines
Theme #2 vs. Theme #8 - personal routines
Theme #3 vs. Theme # 9 - predictability
Theme #4 vs. Theme #10 - self-perception
Theme # 5 vs. Theme #11 – authenticity
Theme # 6 vs. Theme # 12 - public perception

There appeared to be a minor impact on the lifestyle routines of the students parenting the infant simulator compared to the teen mothers' lifestyle changes. For the one weekend, infant simulator mothers were willing to make minor changes in their routines such as rearranging their social time with friends. These minor changes did not come close to the sacrifices made by the teen mothers. Major sacrifices were made in the social lives of the teen moms and the babies' needs came first. Teen mothers did not have the option of being a mother only on a weekend that was convenient for them, unlike the infant simulator mothers who were able to pre-select the weekend that was least disruptive to them. The infant simulator did not impact lifestyle routines to the same degree as noted in the lives of the teen mothers. Personal routines such as showering and eating patterns were affected to a minor extent with the infant simulator compared to the major inconveniences of real babies. Students found it was easy to alter their personal routines because the baby required tending on a predictable non-demanding schedule. The microprocessor's easy care setting made it too simple for teens to adjust their personal routines. Teen mothers did indicate that there were major disruptions in their personal routines due to the unpredictable demanding schedule of infants. The infant simulator did not impact personal routines on the easy care setting compared to the unpredictable demands of real infants.

Teen mothers and the infant simulator mothers both perceived themselves to be real parents. The infant simulator mother's commitment was short-term (3 days) and the personal investment as a parent ended on Monday morning when they returned to school. There was no comparison to the lifelong commitment made by teen mothers.

Caring for a baby tended to attract attention to both the infant simulator mothers and teen mothers when they were out in public. The infant simulator mothers wanted to clarify to the public that they were not real mothers and this was not a real baby. Because they considered the infant simulator to be only a mechanical baby, they were surprised when they were approached by people who perceived it to be real. They were quick to explain that it was a mechanical baby, and that they were part of a simulation. In contrast, the teen mothers did not try to attract attention or explain their situation to others.

Infant simulator mothers perceived that the public was labeling them with the same negative stereotyping and labeling directed at teenage mothers. People thought they were too young to be parents and stared at them when they were with the infant simulator. They perceived that they needed to explain the school project in order to defend themselves against the negative stereotyping. Teen mothers had learned to live with the negative stereotyping and people's labeling of them as a burden on society (bad, lazy, unfit, too young, on social assistance, just having kids, a poor upbringing). Both the infant simulator mothers and the teen mothers wanted to defend themselves against the negative stereotyping of the teen parent stigma.

All three of the teen mothers had only missed one semester of school and were finishing their education. None of them were on social assistance and they were confident that they were taking good care of their children. Considerable family support was available for the three teen mothers we interviewed, as well as for the infant simulator mothers.

Unexpected Findings

The criteria for the teen mothers' participation in the project were that they were to be unmarried, still living at home, and caring for their first child under the age of ten months. Interviews were arranged by the adolescent parent program coordinator. It was our assumption prior to the interviews that the criteria had been met.

During the interviews, we discovered that two of the three teen mothers were married as well as living with their husbands and families. We did not anticipate that marriage, religion, and culture would arise in the research project, as we did not include any questions that focused on this aspect in our interview guide. Responses from two of the teen mothers indicated that the tolerance towards adolescent parenting is not widespread in their culture and that forced marriages are still practiced.

What we witnessed in our research project was in contrast to the statements made by Brown from Winnipeg Child and Family Services, (personal communication, July 1997). She spoke about the history of forced marriages in the 1950's and 60's as a response to teenage pregnancy. Brown felt that the pressure to marry as a result of teen pregnancy was no longer evident in today's society. This generalized statement was not supported in our research project, as religious and cultural influences were the underlying reason why two of the teen mothers had little choice in the decision to get married at seventeen years of age.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Self-perception and perceptions of how others viewed the teen mothers as well as lifestyle patterns and routines were investigated to validate the authenticity of the infant simulator. Our research project was successful in that it served to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the infant simulator.

Self-perceptions and perceptions of others about teen mothers and the infant simulator mothers were similar. Teen mothers and infant simulator mothers both perceived themselves to be real mothers. Caring for the babies also attracted attention to both the infant simulator mothers and teen mothers when they were in public. Infant simulator mothers also perceived the same negative stereotyping and labeling directed at teen mothers. The infant simulator was effective in providing a learning experience that involved role-playing, parent participation, and community education.

The predictability of the infant simulator did affect the authenticity of the simulated mothering experience. The simulator was programmed for the easy care setting (intervals between crying periods is 180 to 360 minutes) for all the weekend simulations and the students were aware of the setting. Infant simulator mothers were able to predict when the infant required care and therefore personal routines were not disrupted to any major extent.

We now recognize the limitations of the infant simulator and are in a position to modify and redesign learning experiences in order for students to more realistically experience the demands of parenting. To enhance the simulated parenting experience in the future we will ensure that students are not made aware of the care setting. The settings will be randomly assigned to cranky, normal, or easy. We feel that by putting into effect these

recommendations, the authenticity of the infant simulator parenting experience will more closely match the demands of real parenting.

Adolescents can participate in meaningful simulations in Family Studies programs which approximate the realities of parenting. We support the notion that all Canadian schools should provide compulsory Family Studies education to students within our school community in an attempt to address the issue of teen pregnancy and parenting. The infant simulator is a promising tool in programs addressing teen pregnancy prevention. However, its effective use will require carefully designed programs and continual evaluation.

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